

1.1 Misogynism in music press and punk feminism in the 1980s

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× ~~Abstract~~

The present research emphasizes on the bias gender representations in the rock press in 1980, and how sexism was executed by language stereotyping, a factuality that transcended time and geographies. To prove this hypothesis and the *modus operandi* of the gatekeepers within groups and institutions, the methodology consisted of both a quantitative and qualitative content analysis with a gender perspective of a sample of 35 magazines: Rolling Stone (U.S), NME (UK), and Vibraciones (Spain) in 1980. In that scenario, the empowerment of a pioneering punk generation of females favored inclusive representations of gender breaking with current sex-gender stereotypes. The interviewees: Exene Cervenka and Alice Bag in the US, Gaye Black and Gina Birch in the UK and Loles Vazquez in Spain demonstrate how their resilience allowed them to overcome the obstacles of a patriarchal and androcentric music industry.

Keywords: gender, music press, punk feminism, stereotypes, 1980.

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Introduction

The current research emphasizes the role of music press in the invisibility of women in the pop and rock music industry, and how today it is still difficult to break gender stereotypes and be marketed equally. The period of study is focused between 1975-1985, both in the US (California), U.K and Spain, in order to establish a comparative between societies and provide with a deeper study of behaviors and its effects. The analysis of gender bias is crucial to understand the discriminatory impact. The research is focused on the precocious, and pioneer, generation of women in the punk subculture born in the late 50's and 60's. The aim is to understand how their contributions have been erased from music history and to what extent is the media responsible for misogynic paradigm. Byerly (1999, p. 99) refer to this pattern as "...persistent problems of omission, stereotyping, and trivialization of women's lives in media content..."

The social and economic context in which these women started their careers is relevant to understand how decisions about their bodies were made and what were the canons of femininity dominating the music industry. Women maintained a secondary position in society where they had to claim an identity, deconstruct traditional stereotypes that came along from a patriarchal society -perpetuated in rock music- and overcome obstacles like sexual aggression, exploitation, unfair pay, condescension, and exclusion.

The study expands previous research by the author: *How pop music influenced young women's fashion in Spain in the late 70's and 80's* (Bronsoms, 2017). In that paper, one of the objectives was to prove the sociological implications of music industry influence in the fashion choices within a generation in Spain, illustrating a common pattern in other capitals of the world. In addition, the author's research proved the media's influence on cultural inputs like street art, movies and music videos. The research proves that women in the pre internet era, with their attitudes, corporal aesthetics, sexuality and style were defining their fashion through music. Music served the fashion industry in the construction of identities and individualities.

Gender and music were the subject on the foundation of *Animals de rock & roll* (Bronsons, 2007). The book is formatted as a series of interviews with key figures in the multi-formed post hippy culture in Spain. The 1970's zeitgeist in Spain introduced new artistic trends, defining how women used body aesthetics, such as hair and garment styling, to claim the glamour. That movement could not be synthesized with the reductionist slogan of sex, drugs, and rock'n'roll, because its texture was far more complex.

Both studies did only scratch the surface of a powerful and rich subject. A transformative critical thinking was shaping through learning about dress and identity. Women were learning how their body could serve as a means of communication expressing obedience or rebellion to social norms within predetermined social and cultural contexts defined by time and place.

Although the presence of women in music is an indisputable fact, the proportion of women performing live music is not representative of the number of women in the music industry or even in the world. Women's roles in the media in the 1970's were relegated to music journalism, which represented a minority, often excluded from popular discourse. The male dominated and often misogynistic media field, driven by a patriarchal society, has made the contributions of the artists in rock music invisible. "Perhaps the most common way in which journalists treat female performers is to ignore them completely" (Davies, 2001, p. 302).

The quest for more answers has become the object of study of the present PhD research.

Theoretical framework of the research

At a theoretical level, and through the feminism theory (Millett, 2017; Hooks, 2000; Mulvey, 1975), we have positioned the subject as the main agent in the constitution of their gender identity (Butler, 2002; Lauretis, 1989), and how socially, this gender assignment, entails a series of roles and stereotypes (McLeod, 2002; Quin, 1996). The importance of dress and appearance in the subcultures was approached with an ethnological angle (Albertine, 2017; O'Brien, 2018, 2012). Leblanc (2008), debates how to reconcile the identity encoded as masculine, with the rebellion of women against gender stereotypes admitting that in the punk scene women and femininity were not entirely welcome.

There were also outlined the references in the analysis of the gender representation (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011) that allow us to provide a categorization of gender stereotypes with variables focused on visual elements and in the gaze of the interpreter and the recipient of the same. It was also revealing and fundamental the work of categorization of stereotypes carried out by the specialists in gender and communication, Franquet, Luzón and Ramajo (2007) as well as Lagarde (1996):

**This perspective recognises the diversity of genders and the existence of women and men as an essential principle in the construction of a diverse and democratic humanity. The gender perspective gives a different name to known things, makes hidden facts evident and gives them other meanings. (Lagarde, 1996, p. 13).*

The sources considered included Indicator's Manual (GISM) prepared by UNESCO (2014) to evaluate the sensitivity in media content which cites the media as responsible for the opinion formation about gender equality and gender-based stereotypes. Other sources included the *Manual sobre Género en la investigación* (European Commission, 2009)² and *The Sager Guide, Sex and Gender Equity in Research* (Heidari, et al., 2016)³ prepared by the Committee of Gender Policy of the European Association of Science Publishers.

The chosen literature has provided the framework to illustrate the role of media as gatekeeping⁴ actors in framing and excluding women's participation. "Gatekeepers are those who, very often, mediate not just between artists and audiences, but between artists and opportunity" (Hooper, 2019, p. 137). The herstory of women in music journalism and photography helped to fulfill the blanks and reinforced the argument that feminist empowerment and their struggle was crucial to vindicating the right of women to be present in the music discourse.

2. Available at: https://www.csic.es/sites/www.csic.es/files/manual_de_genero_en_la_investigacion.pdf

3. Available at: <https://researchintegrityjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s41073-016-0007-6>

4. Gatekeeper is used in communication to name the person, group or institution that has control over the information and, therefore, it has the ability to decide what is published or broadcast, in what form and in what quantity. In press this figure is represented by the director and editors-in-chief. jefes. <https://www.marketingdirecto.com/diccionario-marketing-publicidad-comunicacion-nuevas-tecnologias/gatekeeper>

Methodology: objective, hypothesis and research questions

Media imposes certain ideological and exclusion frames, deriving, in the case of women, in a concealment of their contributions and the consequent invisibility in the history of music. The mechanisms and strategies to legitimize this messages of the media, as socializing agents-builders-reproducers of meanings, discourses, and stereotypes, we use the terms agenda setting and framing. These messages, apparently natural, are encoded and elaborated carefully crafted constructions, leaving nothing to chance. The media, as Orozco (1994) states, acts as a mirror, a window, and a construction of the reality but they also mediate, since they are systems of signs that must be read critically, instead of reflections of a reality that as an audience we must accept.

We have approached the object of study with a gender perspective based on a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of three of the most iconic music publications in each country in the year 1980. At the same time, a political and social context of the era of study 1975-1985 in the U.S, U.K and Spain, was also stated.

Rolling Stone (U.S.), NME (U.K.) and Vibraciones (Spain) were chosen for this analysis. The criteria adopted on the choice of publications was determined on the personality, fashionableness and contemporary ideology of the magazines.

In brief, the content analysis helped us to categorize the presence-absence of women in rock music discourse and was the principle to substantiate the following hypothesis.

H1: The responsible in women's discrimination of the mainstream music were the gatekeepers. The methodology adopted to support such assertion was a quantitative analysis of texts and images of the sample of 35 music magazines segmented by journalistic genres. Ex: report, interview, record review, concert review, as well as a qualitative approach in order to reinforce with examples the extent of the manipulation performed over the creativity of the female artists.

H2: Gender bias enacted by the music press was proved by the analysis of stereotypes. Stereotypes are the frames of reference that the music press has established to spread its hegemonic socializing-structor-reproducing discourses of meanings. A specific method for the measurement of stereotyping in images and text was designed taking in consideration variables: vicarious mentions, females portrayed predominantly individually, in a group, in a small picture on a record sleeve. It was also considered if they were depicted passively, objectified, fragmented, or if their faces were purposely hidden, or represented with eyes shut, emphasizing aspects of their public or private life.

A comparative analysis of the presence and prominence of the artists was also taking in consideration. Finally, all the entries were registered by journalistic authorship as well as comments and remarks that were to be analyzed.

H3: The interviews proved how resilience helped punk women fight and oppose the press exclusion driven by gatekeepers who boycotted their careers and goals.

A qualitative analysis of the opinions of 5 female players of the pioneering punk subculture was carried out to corroborate how their feminist empowerment endured them to overthrow barriers and demolish the gender stereotypes in a patriarchal and androcentric music industry.

In the selection of the participants three criteria were established: gender, validity of their activity during the punk movement (1975-1985) and geographic location.

At the same time four axes were purposely chosen to apprehend the magnitude of the discrimination:

- * *Details about the context of the beginning of his career*
- * *Equal opportunities and visibility of their music*
- * *Obstacles in the performance of their career*
- * *Identity and empowerment*

The interviewees are the following:

- * Exene Cervenka, 1956 co-founder of X in Los Angeles in 1976.
- * Alice Bag, 1958 co-founder of The Bags in Los Angeles in 1977.
- * Gaye Black, 1956 Bass player The Adverts (1978-1979) in the U.K.
- * Gina Birch, 1955 Co-founder of The Raincoats in 1977 in the U.K.
- * Loles Vázquez, 1965 Founder of Las Vulpes in Spain in 1982.

Results

The interviews, as a qualitative method, have allowed us to justify how the music press, and the industry, tackled the female artists in the punk genre based on the lack of visibility and prominence they have obtained in mainstream magazines. Drawing upon direct sources has allowed us to measure the ostracism applied to this music genre. The ethnographic task of recover the life-stories of those five female punk musicians, in the three different countries during this period, will reveal us how they turned their personal struggles into a political movement. The interviewees testify to the importance of this pioneering scene and how their feminist empowerment and their resilience allowed them to overcome the obstacles of a patriarchal and androcentric music industry.

Alice Bag was the singer and founder of The Bags in Los Angeles in from 1977 till 1981. She is considered a pioneer of the California punk scene. Her real name is Alicia Armendariz and she was born in Los Angeles in 1958. Armendariz, self-managed her career and confronted gender stereotypes identifying with the queer movement and the Mexican cultural identity. She defines herself as a philosopher, writer and documentarian from the punk scene⁵.

Punk in its origins was not sexist, it entailed a period of opportunities for a strong and creative woman; it enshrined diverse and unapologetic genre representations, but when these voices reached the mainstream channels, they were progressively erased as co-creators of the punk scene. Being a feminist was an empowering motive encouraging many young women to make their way as professionals within the music industry.

5. Available at: <https://alicebag.com/women-in-la-punk>

Exene Cervenka was born Christene Cervenka in 1956 in Chicago and founded the punk rock band X with John Doe in Los Angeles in 1976. She is a singer, composer, guitarist and poet. Rolling Stone awarded their album "Los Angeles" # 24 of the 100 best albums of the 80's and #286 among the 500 of all time. Cervenka had a successful career influencing widely other musicals styles like punk rock or folk-rock. Her lyrics are considered contemporary poetry books. Cervenka has created other bands: *The Knitters*, *Auntie Christ*, *The Original Sinners* and she still active with her band X.

In her opinion:

**The Californian punk scene was a group of very independent rebels. Exene did not feel objectified because she did not represent a model of a sexualized woman. Conciliation of career and motherhood compatible led to feelings of guilt due to the idealized perception of motherhood in a patriarchal society. In her opinion, the feminist label was a condition that created certain discomfort with her tribe.*

Gaye Black was born in Bideford (U.K.) in 1956. She is considered one of the first female icons of the punk rock era for her role as bass player in the British band The Adverts founded in 1976. The pressure of the press made her abandon her professional career in 1979. Gaye Black was trained in graphic design, became a manager in social services and today she is a painter.

**Punk was a mentality, 'a way of being in the world'. The sexist business cultures of the music industry, the gatekeepers, tampered with her aspirations causing her to abandon her career. Gaye Black evokes a non-identification of the feminine gender. These alternative punk femininities boycotted the conventional male gaze stereotypes and replaced them with more androgynous representations, promoting the normalization of new, more inclusive gender identities.*

Gina Birch was born in Nottingham (U.K.) in 1955. She was the bass player and founder with Ana da Silva of the postpunk female band The Raincoats, in the UK in 1977 till 1984. Her band gained visibility and recognition back in the 1990 for being the opening act for the group Nirvana and recording an album. Birch is a composer and filmmaker, producer, author of video installations and painter. She has directed 'She punks', a documentary that brings together more than 20 female pioneers of the punk scene. 57

**Punk recognized their peers by sharing an unmistakable sense of community, commitment and belonging to their tribe in which women felt protected and empowered to carry out their professionalization in a more inclusive environment: 'it was a clan brimming with creativity, anarchy, ideas and courage'. The inclusion of women in punk did not reach all levels of the industry or the media.*

Loles Vázquez is from Bilbao (España) and was born in 1965. She was the singer, bass player and founder of the first Spanish all-female punk rock band Las Vulpes in 1982 dissolved in 1985. They were stigmatized for the scandal and court case of the performance of the song 'Yo quiero ser una zorra' back in 1984. Her work as a pioneer has not been recognized. Loles holds a Degree in Tourism, and assistant to Nursing, she still musically active and defines herself as self-taught. Currently she prepares a book with music

**Nothing was going to truncate my will to express myself musically and creatively, it was not a question of gender, of virtuosity or skill but commitment. The exclusion of the patriarchy of rock and the stigmatization she suffered forced her to abandon her career. Women in the music sector had to negotiate gender norms, confront the glass ceiling, and be condemned to subordination and concealment of their cultural production.*

Conclusions

The total words in the three magazines accounted: 1,211,545 and the total of photographs published in 35 magazines 1,887. The percentage of women words accounted for only 151,533 (12.5%) and the photographs amounted to a 16%.

The answers of the interviews have offered conclusions in line with the starting hypotheses: gender bias executed by the gatekeeper in mainstream music press favoring women's discrimination, boycotting their

careers and goals. In return, resilience helped punk women resist and fight the iniquity. Some feminist referents in history, not only in music, offered them perspectives of transformation, which bolstered to redefine their agency identifying with a punk feminism. The D.I.Y ethos in the punk subculture, led to the normalization of new, more inclusive gender identities for these female musicians facilitating its acceptance in masculinized work environments. Finally, the sexist business cultures of the music industry obstructing conciliation and shielding discrimination in contracts were factors of abandonment of their careers. As a recapitulation, empowerment helped them break stereotypes and combat sexism.

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6. Madonna's acceptance speech "Woman of the Year, Billboard Women in music" in 2016. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6Xgbh2E0NM>