

EXPRESS YOURSELF:
REFRAMING WOMEN'S
PARTICIPATION, AGENCY AND
POWER IN POPULAR MUSIC

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Reframing women's participation, agency and power in popular music

PhD by Publication by Lucy O'Brien



The Catholic Girls, 1980: left, Tina Moore, right, Lucy O'Brien.

Abstract

Spanning a 20 year period of publications (from 1995-2016), this research critically examines women's agency and participation in popular music since the 1920s, demonstrating how female artists have been marginalised by gender expectations, under-represented in the media and under-supported by major record labels. The project's core research questions are: how have gender norms silenced the history of women's achievements in popular music? What impact has this silencing had upon the gendered construction of the popular music canon? How does this silencing impact on the lived experience of women in the industry, and how have they negotiated these constraints? These questions are explored through a theoretical framework centred around Foucault's analysis of power relations in social contexts (Foucault 1990, 1991) and Butler's work on challenging gender categories (Butler 1999), to identify how in navigating **repression**, **troubling** gender restraints, and **becoming** empowered through experience, women find agency in the music industry.

Through interviews and participant observation as a music journalist, academic and punk musician, a methodology of feminist ethnography, textual analysis and grounded theory (data collected over time) was developed. Interviews with over 250 women in popular music enabled female performers and those working 'behind the scenes' to talk openly about their experiences, leading to the co-creation of a feminist ethnography and knowledge-making, and an intricate picture of how women have negotiated existing power hierarchies in the music industry. The research finds that the omission of female artists from popular music histories has created a distorted picture of the music canon, leaving out the integral role that women played in the development of 20th century genres like blues, rock, soul and punk. Women have developed strategies to remain visible in an industry that has a gendered culture of 'forgetting' and gained agency by disrupting 'rules' about image or genre conventions. By doing this individual performers have built a sense of self-expression and authorship. Ownership of their work gives them confidence both as performers and businesswomen – for instance, the research identifies the female band as a source of feminist empowerment. The thesis points to future directions for research in documenting women's progress as performers and industry workers, to challenge gender inequality in popular music.

Keywords: gender, popular music, agency, participation, music industry

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List of Publications

1. O'Brien, L. (2013) *She Bop: The Definitive History of Women in Popular Music, 3rd Edition*, London: Jawbone. Also *She Bop: The Definitive History of Women in Rock, Pop & Soul*, London & New York: Penguin (1995) and *She Bop II*, London & New York: Continuum (2002).
2. O'Brien, L. (1999) 'The Woman Punk Made Me' in: Sabin, R. (ed) (1999) *Punk Rock, So What? (the cultural legacy of punk)*. London: Routledge, pp. 186-198.
3. O'Brien, L. (2012a.) 'Can I Have a Taste of Your Ice Cream: Leeds post punk, feminism and the Yorkshire Ripper', *Punk & Post Punk*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 27-40.
4. O'Brien, L. (2012b) 'Madonna: Like A Crone' in: Jennings, R. & Gardner, A. (eds) (2012) *Rock On: Women, Ageing and Popular Music*. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp.19-33.
5. O'Brien, L. (2014) 'Not A Piece of Meat: Lady Gaga and *that* dress' in: M. Iddon, M. & Marshall, M. (eds) (2014) *Lady Gaga and Popular Music: Performing Gender, Fashion, and Culture*. London: Routledge, pp. 27-43.
6. O'Brien, L. (2016) 'I'm With The Band: Redefining Young Feminism' in: Adrian, A. & Warwick, J. (eds) (2016) *Voicing Girlhood in Popular Music: Performance, Authority, Authenticity*. New York: Routledge, pp.15-36.

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Acknowledgements

This PhD has had an interesting journey, from 1995, when friends and colleagues said to me after the publication of *She Bop*, ‘Shouldn’t you turn that into a PhD?’ Now 23 years later, along with additional chapters and articles, I am doing just that. A PhD by Publication is an amazing opportunity to reflect on one’s work, research and practice, and I have had some key mentors along the way.

Thanks, then, to Professor Dave Hesmondhalgh, who sat with me over a few cups of coffee at Goldsmiths in 2009 and said that a PhD by Publication was possible. Thanks to my wonderful colleagues Professor Martin James and Dr Paula Hearsom who took a similar journey from the music press to academia (and back again). They have been a constant source of support and inspiration. Thanks also to Professor Trevor Keeble who helped me launch this project, and enabled me to see the rich potential of the links between academia, writing and reflecting on one’s industry practice. And special thanks to my supervisor Professor Julie Doyle, for helping me to bring this PhD to fruition. Her guidance, support and enthusiasm have been crucial – definitely a ‘co-creation of knowledge’!

And a special dedication to my family: Dr Susan O’Brien and Peter O’Brien, for their unwavering encouragement and insight. Love and huge thanks to Malcolm Boyle, for his humour and perceptive feedback at each stage, and Erran and Maya, whose joyful appreciation of music and life is an inspiration.

Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed:



Dated: 23 November 2018

1. Introduction: Writing as punk, journalist and academic

I first became aware of the issue of gender inequality in the music business in 1984 when researching an article on women in rock for feminist magazine *Spare Rib*. I could count on one hand the number of women getting any coverage in the UK music press. From that point onwards, as a music journalist, I decided to focus on interviewing female artists whenever they came to London (where I was based), and began writing for NME, the biggest selling music weekly published by IPC. By introducing feminist critique into the magazine, I was consciously bringing a feminist project into the mainstream music press.

By the early 1990s I had built up a considerable archive of interviews, which formed the basis of *She Bop* (O'Brien 1995), a history of women in popular music centred around key questions such as, why is there no stadium-level female rock band? And, why are female artists marketed on visual appeal rather than their music? Spanning 20 years, from 1995-2016, the research has been iterative, starting with *She Bop* and reflected in subsequent publications. I have occupied multiple identities as a feminist, journalist, punk musician and researcher. My identity as a musician in The Catholic Girls, an all-girl punk band, gave me insider access to punk/Riot Grrrl scenes for research into female subculture, and also in identifying girl bands as a site of feminist empowerment (O'Brien 1999, 2012a, 2016). My work as a journalist led to guest speaker invitations during the 1990s for conferences like IASPM or university media/popular music studies courses, which then led to part time teaching from 2001-2010, and a full-time academic position at UCA from 2011.

Moving between journalism and academic research enabled me to reflect on my industry practice and recontextualise my work within a theoretical framework. It has sometimes been a challenge navigating from a journalistic style of writing (condensing information into short, direct sentences) to academic (writing with more formal, analytical phrasing). However, despite the difference in writing styles, both journalism and academia require investigative

research that substantiates a structured argument. My work as a writer and researcher has changed over time. In the 1980s and early 90s I was working for a weekly UK music press with roots deep in the countercultural underground, so my writing was driven by a sense of activist journalism. From the late 1990s this was augmented by an academic and historical analysis. It can be argued that my own history is a history of feminist work - moving from second wave activism as a young intern on the Spare Rib collective in the early 1980s, to embedding Third Wave and Riot Grrrl feminist ideas in the mainstream media in the 1990s, to reflexive academic feminist research in the 2000s.

My work has been created inside and outside the academy, negotiating the faultlines between two distinct cultural worlds of journalism and pedagogy. It also explores the tensions between second and third wave feminism, in areas such as image and sexual representation. Although my work emerged first from journalism, I always organised research around conceptual frameworks and many early features and book chapters set out to answer key questions around female performers' agency or their historical struggles in the music industry. As a result, from when *She Bop* was first published in 1995, my work was on university reading lists. Turning this work into a PhD marks the logical conclusion of a long period of deepening research, and is an acknowledgement of the way a new area of study can move from the margins of popular culture to help formulate feminist history in academia.

Direct access to the industry through interviews provided a rich source of primary data, a key part of reflecting on my body of work into gender inequality in the music business. Through interviews and participant observation I developed a methodology that incorporated feminist ethnography and grounded theory (data collected over time). My interviews (O'Brien 1995, 1999, 2002, 2012a, 2013) opened up fresh lines of enquiry, enabling female performers and those working 'behind the scenes' to talk openly about their work and experiences, leading to the co-creation of a feminist ethnography and knowledge-making. The research gave me an

intricate picture of how women have negotiated existing power hierarchies in the music industry.

Popular music is a £4 billion-a-year business in the UK in which men hold 67.8% of the jobs, and the majority are in managerial positions. Men also dominate music publishing, the area where musicians profit most. According to the performing rights society PRS for Music, only 13% of their 95,000 songwriters are female (Dunbar 2017). Also for 2017 Leeds and Reading Festivals less than 10 per cent of the performers were women, and none of these were headliners. Despite the music industry signing up to UK Music's Equality and Diversity Charter in 2012, a great deal of work still needs to be done in addressing the issue of gender equality.

My academic research over time has addressed gendered challenges in the music industry such as lack of women's voices, the representation of women, and discriminatory institutional structures. The project's core research questions are: how have gender norms silenced the history of women's achievements in popular music? What impact has this silencing had upon the gendered construction of the popular music canon? How does this silencing impact on the lived experience of women in the industry, and how have they negotiated these constraints? I have explored these questions through a theoretical framework centred around Foucault's analysis of power relations in social contexts (Foucault 1990, 1991) and Butler's work on challenging gender categories (Butler 1999), to identify how in navigating **repression**, **troubling** gender restraints, and **becoming** empowered through experience, women find agency in the music industry.

Sharing knowledge of women's achievement is a vital part of building a sustainable industry. In the early 1990s at the time of the first publication of *She Bop* (O'Brien 1995) there was minimal discussion of women's contribution to popular music history and how gender impacted on the experiences of women in the industry. Apart from McClary's *Feminine Endings* in 1991, Green (1997), Whiteley (1997), Bayton (1998), and Reddington (2007) were published after 1995. Exploring in detail the spaces women have to manoeuvre - whether onstage, in the studio or in the record

company boardroom, and their strategies for agency within those spaces - my research has contributed over time to questions of agency and power within the music industry.

My research findings have also made a significant contribution to music journalism and the academic field of gender and popular music studies, helping to shift the discourse from female performers as token heroines and the essentialist 'Other' (McClary 1991) to in-depth study of women's experience as performers and those working in record companies, the music press, promotion, management, song publishing and studio production. Through this work I have contributed to a rewriting of popular music history and a deeper understanding of how women negotiate power relations to reshape their futures in the industry.

2. Research contextualisation: Literature Review

What follows is a critical exploration of academic literature from popular music studies, sociology and cultural studies that has informed my research, and which my own research has contributed to. The main academic field I am contributing to is popular music studies, because in the early 1990s there was a specific lack of focus upon gender. Because my research spans a 20 year time period (1995-2016) this literature review is both a retrospective analysis of the research that has informed my work and an identification of the gaps in research across that period. For instance, women's everyday practice as performers and industry personnel, women in punk/Riot Grrrl subcultures, and the experiences of all-female bands. The academic literature is discussed in three main sections: popular music studies; the construction of a feminist history; and the gendering of authorship and agency.

Popular music studies: a historical overview with focus on gender

The field of popular music studies emerged in the early 1980s, with the foundation of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) and the journal *Popular Music*. From the outset popular music studies has been interdisciplinary, with contributions mainly from sociology, musicology, and cultural and media studies. Popular music is defined as commercially orientated recorded sound in a hybrid of styles. Quantified through sales, charts and radio airplay, it often involves mass distribution (Burnett 1996, Shuker 2008). Before the 1980s analysis of popular music was fragmentary, partly because popular music was considered low mass culture and of little interest to musicologists. Adorno for example, delineated a division between popular music and 'serious' music, arguing that the former was standardised distraction from 'the mechanised process of labour to which...(the) masses are subject' (Adorno in Frith and Goodwin 1990: 305).

Frith and Goodwin's *On Record* was a foundational text that defined popular music studies, including sociological research into subculture and the processes of pop production, and musicology critique linking music meaning

to formal textual analysis (Frith and Goodwin 1990). In the 1990s cultural and media studies research deepened understanding of target audiences and the way that music was central to people's identity formation (Shuker 1994, 2008; Negus 1992, 1996). Since 2000 the field has broadened, with a move away from the Anglo/American axis of early research to a pluralist and internationalist focus on questions of ethnicity and the politics of identity (Hesmondhalgh and Negus 2004, Bennett, Shank and Toynbee 2006). Although this work ensured the validity of popular music studies, questions of gender were marginalised in a more general focus on industry economics or ideologies of authenticity versus commerce (Negus 1999, Moore 2001), and there was a gap in research on women's experience as producers and consumers of popular music.

Some of the initial findings of feminist work in popular music studies showed how musical meaning was gendered, with musical forms and genres defined as masculine or feminine (Frith and McRobbie 1990, McClary 1991), and how women were excluded from music-making and music education (Green 1997). Green's main focus was classical, but my book *She Bop* was the first fully-comprehensive feminist history of popular music, from the early 1900s-1995 (O'Brien 1995), with updated editions (2002, 2013), and was an explicit intervention in the male focus of popular music studies during this time. The next section explores how histories construct a musical canon that favours men, and why my work was a response to this inequality.

Feminist contributions to popular music history

Key feminist work on popular culture as a site of gender representation and power emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, exploring the implications of a popular market for feminism in film and TV (Marshment and Gammon 1988), women's magazines (Winship 1987), fashion and youth culture (McRobbie 1994), and music video (Kaplan 2017 [1990], Schwichtenberg 1992). This engagement with pop culture signalled a shift from a second wave feminist approach that viewed mass culture with suspicion, as essentially oppressive and patriarchal (Rowbotham 2014 [1973], Brownmiller 1986 [1975], Dworkin

1981), to a third wave feminism that embraced popular culture as a potentially empowering representation of multiple identities (Walker 1995, Brooks 1997, Baumgardner and Richards 2000). My work links the two approaches, exploring tensions within and across these multiple feminisms, particularly in areas like gender and representation. Although there is potential for feminist ideas to be represented in popular music, at the heart of popular culture, the objectification of female bodies in videos and promotional material continues to undermine their power as musicians and artists (O'Brien 1995, 2012a, 2012b, 2014).

Morgan identifies three main theoretical approaches in feminist historical discourse: women's history (defined by its subject matter and not necessarily including a feminist perspective); feminist (questioning patriarchal structures of power); and gender (relations between women and men, and analysing how concepts of gender can reinforce unequal power relations) (Morgan 2007: 5-12). Since the 1990s poststructuralist theories of identity within gender history have critiqued essentialised male/female binaries, arguing that the category of 'woman' was a cultural construct. Many contested that this 'disappeared' women's everyday struggles (Morgan 2007: 14). Lesbian, black and Third World histories added further interpretations, critiquing heteronormativity or the notion of a univocal women's experience, arguing for a politics of difference. While drawing from gender history, in questioning gender as a construct within music performance for instance (O'Brien 2014), my work is situated mainly in the theoretical approach of feminist history, prioritising women's voices and contributing to an understanding of power and women's everyday experiences within the music industry.

History is discursively constructed in three ways: through periodisation (discrete blocks of time that provide a framework for collective memory processes); social analysis (study of the lived experience of different social groups); and theories of social change (Morgan 2007: 1). My research incorporates all three approaches, particularly periodisation and the study of lived experience. Women's history in popular music has been affected by a range of exclusions in different parts of the industry – from musical training

and production, to band networks on local music scenes. Gendered power relations are enacted within spaces like the studio, onstage, and the record company boardroom, limiting women's career progression. Routine exclusion from music press front covers also means that female artists are left out of the canon. Kitch's (2006) study of popular journalism as a history source for a mass audience can be applied to the role of music media in constructing a male canon, with magazines an important site of identity formation. The canon tells a single authoritative account of a popular music past where artists are positioned in order of importance and innovation. The Beatles, Beach Boys and Nirvana enshrine the white male guitar band as the normative model (and pinnacle) of achievement (Von Appen and Doehring 2006, Schmutz 2009). Special issues and 'Best Of' lists reinforce male canon narratives, whilst silencing women through omission. As Foucault argued: 'silence and secrecy are the shelter for power' (Foucault 1990: 101).

A feminist critique, that is a recognition that women's insubordination to men is socially constructed (Bell 2010, Hannam 2006), has allowed room to uncover what was concealed. In the early 1990s feminist history provided a way of finding a hidden female canon, decentring the male subject. In her history of gender and music education, for instance, Green discovered that women were barred for centuries from orchestras and musical training in cathedral schools. This created a tradition of musical patriarchy that is still learned and socialized through education, with gender divisions in instrument tuition and the school classroom embedded from childhood (Green 1997). Green's work illuminated the classical sphere, while in terms of popular music Gaar (1993) looked at the experience of women in rock from the 1950s-1990s, focusing mainly on North American rock n' roll and rap. Bayton's (1998) sociological study focused on female instrumentalists from the 1970s-1990s, and Reddington (2007) researched punk musicians between 1976-1984 – though work in this area was still quite marginal.

Postfeminist theory influenced some history work in the field of popular music studies in the early 2000s. Defined as a hybridisation of mainstream media and consumer culture (Genz and Brabon 2009: 5), a 'frontier discourse' that

allows for multiple meanings (Mann 2009: 208), or a post-colonial, anti-imperialistic culture (Brooks 1997), postfeminism is a contested concept within the field of popular music and too vague an approach when researching an industry that has consistently marginalised women's endeavour. Nehring argued, with reference to Riot Grrrl, that postfeminism nullified resistance (Nehring 1997), while I examined how it compromised feminist history (O'Brien 2014). There is a danger that critique of patriarchal structures disappears when the debate shifts from equality to focus on the individual (Roiphe 1994, Walter 1999, Denfield 1995). Postfeminism has the effect of a-historicising and creating a culture of forgetting. When younger artists do not acknowledge their influences, periods of women's history are rendered invisible (O'Brien 2014). Exploring feminism within a postmodernist framework is more effective. In the same way that it can act as a 'process of intellectual decolonisation' (hooks 2006: 194) for theories on race and representation, postmodernism's critique of essentialism opens up ways of rethinking gender history from multiple perspectives. This is pertinent for an industry in which music genres are so clearly gender marked. Racism and the stereotyping of women of colour in particular genres (eg. the blues mama, the foxy R&B chick, the soul diva) is a huge issue in the music industry, as is the unacknowledged depth of their contribution to the formation of popular music styles. Focus on that is beyond the scope of this project, but for me will be an important area of further research.

Gender and music genre

Record labels set up working practices to produce identifiable products, distributing 'staff and resources into divisions according to socio-cultural identity labels' (Negus 1998: 359). For example, on Capital Records the 'urban' division has sub-labels like Block Entertainment, where rap and R&B is marketed to a socio-cultural demographic that is predominantly young, urban and ethnic, while their Harvest label sells progressive rock to an older, white male 'heritage' market. There is an analogy to Adorno's theory of the culture industry and standardisation, in that record companies have different production lines, like a factory model (Adorno 1990). Negus argues that

genres are constructed markets working within recognisable codes (Fabbri 1982, Frith 1996), so that creativity is a process strategically managed by the industry, with music corporations pursuing diverse interests within a portfolio management model. Genres are not static, though marketable visual and musical codes lead to a reduction in risk-taking. There is a tendency to 'build walls within which creativity can be contained' (Negus 1998: 377). This process militates against female creative expression, or restricts options for female artists (eg black women are channelled into singing soul rather than rock), because they are seen as a riskier investment within the music industry. Shuker echoes this view that although genre codes are fluid, the margins of difference, particularly for major label artists, are small. He argues: 'genres are accorded specific places in a musical hierarchy by both critics and fans' (Shuker 2008: 121). This has led to a popular music canon that is characterised by a set of value judgments that privilege 'Western, white, male...cultural work' (ibid: 132).

Research on the construction of gender and genre is important for breaking down stereotypes in the field. Frith and McRobbie's 1978 essay 'Rock And Sexuality' was foundational in its analysis of popular music as the aesthetic form that accompanied young people's learning of sexual behaviour. They argued that masculine 'cock rock' was seen as progressive and feminine teen pop conservative and repressive (Frith and McRobbie 1990). Though simplistic, this hypothesis offered starting points for investigation into the gendering of music genre.

McClary (1991) built on the analysis of gender construction with research revolving around the classical music notion that a piece ending on a 'weak beat' is characterised as feminine, whilst a decisive ending is considered masculine (McClary 1991: 9). She follows this dichotomy in minor/major chords and romantic/rationalist traditions before applying it to popular music with a study of Laurie Anderson's 'neutral' electronic avant garde approach, and the way Madonna expresses the tension between categories of male and female in the unresolved endings of the song 'Like A Prayer' (McClary 1991: 164). McClary's essentialist position of gender marking in music was echoed

by Whiteley's edited collection *Sexing The Groove* (1997), with essays exploring the marginalisation or stereotyping of women in rock music: Cohen (1997), for example, looked in detail at how the 1990s Liverpool band scene excluded women, while Sanjek (1997) noted how the absence of vinyl recordings meant that prominent female rockabilly stars were written out of pop history. Whiteley (2000) also focused on genre in case studies of female artists, such as the way Janis Joplin used the blues in performance, and how Patti Smith and k d lang's androgynous imagery created dynamic spaces within genres like rock and country. Though these studies offered textual analysis of gender and genre, more empirical research into women's experiences of the music industry was needed, and my work (O'Brien 1995, 2002, 2013) responded to this gap by showing in practice how genre coding affected women's choices within the industry.

Authorship and agency

In order to understand the absence of women from discourses of popular music Foucault's theories of power as a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions (Foucault 1990) can be applied to the power relations of the music industry. One of the primary means of agency is through authorship, ie ownership and recognition of one's creative self within the industry. Historically this has been an embattled arena for female artists.

The author is a central figure in fields of musicology and music criticism, embodied by the musician who is able to express a private universe. This romantic 'art rock' concept emerged in the late 1960s with canonical male groups like The Beatles, and led to the conflation of authorship and authenticity in popular music discourse (Frith 1983, Shuker 2008). The notion of an individual creative source for pop cultural texts is easily disputed however, because the music industry involves collaborative working at every level. Songwriting is often a joint effort between performers and production teams. These collaborations are legally recognized and economically rewarded and then buttressed by scholarship, journalism and fan media. Authorship becomes a feminist issue when male producers and musicians

'hold a privileged place in the economic and cultural valuing of creativity' (Negus 2011: 609) and women have to fight to gain recognition and reward for their efforts.

Agency can be defined as the power people have to shape their experiences and their lives, 'the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act' (Ahearn 2001:112). To understand power in the music industry it is helpful to return to Foucault's definition of power as a network (Foucault 1990: 93). Though power in the social relationships of patriarchy is one-sided, it can still be contested. Foucault argues that where there is power there is resistance (ibid: 95), and disrupting 'rules' about image or genre conventions is fundamental to strategies of female agency within popular music (Bayton 1998, Burns and LaFrance 2002, Marcus 2010). It is not just about rebellion – a sense of self-expression and authorship gives female artists confidence as businesswomen. Burns and LaFrance's textual analysis of lyrics and performance revealed the ways women express both restriction and resistance (Burns and LaFrance 2002), but more research was needed into why they felt disempowered. My work on subcultural scenes like punk and post-punk examined this, showing how women developed new methods of self-representation outside the major label network (O'Brien 1999, 2012a).

Much 1990s and 2000s research focused on strategies of escape and Foucauldian resistance (Cohen 1997, Bayton 1998, Leonard 2007, Reddington 2007), but by the 2010s there was a different cultural landscape for a fourth wave feminist generation of musicians for whom the 'escape/resistance' model (Bayton 1998, Whiteley 1997) was less relevant. A growing body of feminist history and memoir provided a rich context for young musicians who felt more empowered (Albertine 2014, Brownstein 2015, Gordon 2015, Thorn 2014). My research shows how the work of their foremothers (O'Brien 2016) and crucially, its visibility, has given young female performers a sense of their own feminist futures in popular music.

Representation of the female body: control and agency

Women's agency within popular music depends on the freedom they have to express themselves. Often the female artist's private self is in conflict with the mediation of her public self. As a 'docile body' in the major label machinery she is subject to a disciplining of the body that 'explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it' (Foucault 1991: 138). This is apparent in the make-over; for example, rapper Missy Elliot slimming down and normalising her visual image for a commercial audience in the 2000s. Butler's theories of performativity and gender are useful in this context. The body is not a passive instrument awaiting the 'enlivening capacity' of immaterial will - agency is a succession of complex decisions made within a set of power relations (Butler 1999). Much feminist critique of the hypersexual portrayal of women in videos and publicity material presumes consensus that this disempowers women (Bayton 1998, Bordo 2003, Reddington 2007). However Butler takes issue with the demand for a coalition, asking: 'what sort of politics demands that advance purchase on unity?' (Butler 1990: 20), arguing that the universalising of women's experience produces new forms of hierarchy and exclusion. In the mid-1990s there was a gap in research on how women managed 'troubling' day-to-day power relations in the industry, such as negotiating with stylists on photo shoots, or pushing for the sound they wanted in the studio. Exploring how women assume control of self-representation *over time* in both subcultures and mainstream pop is key to understanding their sense of agency within popular music (O'Brien 2012, 2013, 2014). In the next section I will discuss how I gathered data for my research.

3. Methodology and methods

In order to explore key questions about gendered power relations in the music industry I have engaged with a wide range of data: analyzing texts that have been produced by female performers, along with my observations on the way women's power is constituted in performance and behind the scenes in record companies. The data includes **oral interviews** and **written text** in the form of memoir, biographies, music history, magazines, newspapers, fanzines, record sleeve artwork; **auditory data** on CDs, vinyl, lyrics; and **visual data** such as videos, live performance, clothes, make up, hairstyles, TV shows, films, exhibitions. I also observed **spaces and locations** such as backstage, hotel rooms, record company offices, photo shoots and live venues.

I will explain the research methods, considering the protocol, challenges and benefits of each in relation to my work. Table 1 shows a list of research publications for this study, along with the data that has been gathered and methods used. My research employs a qualitative approach because it involves a study of how meanings are made through lived experience and forms of representation, and is a way of exploring multiple perspectives in a wider social context. Bryman has identified this as interpretivist, an understanding of society through 'an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants' (Bryman 2008: 366). This concept is useful for focusing on the world of the female artist within the music industry. The business is built on highly social exchanges and a sophisticated network of informal relationships, so a qualitative approach is an effective way to gather information, along with examination of the way gender is constructed through visual and textual data. Within that methodology I used two overarching methods: grounded theory and feminist ethnography, and deployed three further methods as part of the overarching methods: interviewing, participant observation and textual analysis.

Table 1: Data gathered and methods used

PUBLICATIONS	DATA	METHOD
<p>O'Brien, L (1995) <i>She Bop: The Definitive History of Women in Rock, Pop and Soul</i>, London and New York: Penguin.</p> <p>Also (2002) <i>She Bop II</i>, London and New York: Continuum.</p> <p>(2013) <i>She Bop: The Definitive History of Women in Popular Music, 3rd Edition</i>, London: Jawbone.</p>	<p>Producing/analysing primary data: 250 interviews.</p> <p>Videos, live performance, record company offices, clothes, CDs, vinyl, lyrics, exhibitions, biographies, magazines, newspapers, TV shows, films, fanzines, record sleeve artwork.</p>	<p>Interviewing (key informants/snowballing technique)</p> <p>Participant Observation (PO)</p> <p>Textual Analysis (TA)</p>
<p>O'Brien, L (1999) 'The Woman Punk Made Me', in <i>Punk Rock, So What? (the cultural legacy of punk)</i> R. Sabin (ed), London: Routledge</p>	<p>Eight interviews.</p> <p>Rock weeklies (1975-1981), CDs, vinyl, diaries, clothes, live performance.</p>	<p>Interviewing (key informants/purposive sampling)</p> <p>PO</p> <p>TA</p>
<p>O'Brien, L (2011) 'Can I Have a Taste of Your Ice Cream: Leeds post punk, feminism and the Yorkshire Ripper', in <i>Punk and Post Punk</i>, Intellect Journals Vol 1</p>	<p>Nine interviews.</p> <p>CDs, vinyl, lyrics, memoir, Leeds architecture, court documents, government census report, local history, newspapers, fanzines.</p>	<p>Interviewing (key informants/snowballing technique)</p> <p>PO</p> <p>TA</p>
<p>O'Brien, L (2012) 'Madonna: Like A Crone', in <i>Rock On: Women, Ageing and Popular Music</i>, R.Jennings and A. Gardner (eds), Farnham: Ashgate</p>	<p>Four interviews.</p> <p>Videos, live performance, CDs, album artwork, lyrics, exhibitions, magazine photo shoots, TV shows, films, press interviews.</p>	<p>Interviewing (key informants/purposive sampling)</p> <p>TA</p>

Table 1: Data gathered and methods used

PUBLICATIONS	DATA	METHOD
O'Brien, L (2014) 'Not A Piece of Meat: Lady Gaga and <i>that dress</i> ' in <i>Lady Gaga and Popular Music: Performing Gender, Fashion, and Culture</i> , ed. M. Iddon and M. Marshall, London: Routledge	Four interviews. TV shows, visual art, exhibitions, videos, films, science fiction, online blogs.	Interviewing (purposive sampling) TA
O'Brien, L (2016) 'I'm With The Band: Redefining Young Feminism', in <i>Voicing Girlhood in Popular Music: Performance, Authority, Authenticity</i> , A. Adrian and J. Warwick (eds), New York: Routledge	Nine interviews. Live performance, rock memoir, online blogs, CDs, vinyl, TV shows, films, newspapers, magazines.	Interviewing (purposive sampling) PO TA

Grounded theory

Identifying the strategies for women's agency and participation in popular music were formed over a 20 year period of data collection, so grounded theory is a key method in my research. Corbin and Strauss define this as qualitative research for the purpose of constructing theory grounded in data collected over time: 'Data are collected by a variety of means, most frequently interviews and observations. Any written, observed, recorded material can be used, including videos, drawings...memoirs, Internet postings and historical records' (2015: 6). My research demonstrates grounded theory in the cumulative nature of the knowledge acquired (from O'Brien 1995 to 2016).

The challenge of this approach is assembling meaningful and reliable data when one's position as a researcher shifts and evolves over time. Dimitriadis discusses his use of grounded theory in researching hip hop. He sees a shifting perspective as part of the evolution of hip hop research, the struggle of scholars to consolidate a space of inquiry where they 'would productively work the very distinction between "inside" and "outside" academia' (Dimitriadis 2014: 34). Dimitriadis makes his own social location as a researcher visible, noting how his changing role as researcher, volunteer and staff person affected what he was able to see and how he reported it: 'Hip hop has been a vehicle for the destabilization of traditional kinds of academic authority, including those around discipline and discursive genre' (2014: 36). My study of marginalised female subcultural groups like punk, Riot Grrrl and rap MCs parallels Dimitriadis' experience as a hip hop researcher. Grounded theory allows for adjusting the framework for interpretation of data as one's research evolves and if one occupies a multiplicity of positions. At different points I was working as an academic, journalist and performer, and this meant continual re-evaluation of the research material.

Grounded theory also works well with a feminist ethnography perspective, where participants are in a more equal power relationship with the researcher than the traditional model of authoritative questioner and passive interviewee. As Martinez Perez et al noted in their study of the health implications of

genital modification in Zambian migrant women in Cape Town: 'grounded theory involves people as active agents in the research process, and data (is) created through an interactive process by both researcher and participants. Data and theory are, thus, co-constructed' (Martinez Perez et al 2015: 2). The expertise and feminist perspective articulated by my interviewees made them active agents in the research process, from singer Eartha Kitt (O'Brien 1995) to female band The Wharves (O'Brien 2016).

An important aspect of grounded theory is the concept of sensitivity, a nuanced understanding of the field and the role participants play within that. This grew over the course of research, particularly when I did follow-up interviews with artists like Siouxsie Sioux, and Skin from the band Skunk Anansie, to see how their perspective of the industry had changed over time (O'Brien 2012b, 2013). As Gilbert suggests, professional knowledge can enhance sensitivity: 'The more familiar the observer is with (the field) the greater the accuracy of observation' (2008:167). Sensitivity involves a feminist approach, conducting interviews in an ethical manner and being aware of one's subject position within the interview.

Feminist ethnography

Ethnographic research entails long periods of time in a field as part of a community (Bryman 2008: 402-3) and is a method that can be applied to all my research outputs, particularly *She Bop* (O'Brien 1995, 2002, 2013). My access as a journalist yielded data, and feminist ethnography provided a useful academic framework for the research. At times it was a challenge switching from journalistic writing (which involves simplifying complex ideas) to academic discourse (more formal and analytical), but music journalism involves research into scenes and subcultures, thereby offering a way to combine the two approaches. Feminist ethnography is significant because it documents women's lives which were previously seen as subsidiary to men's (Bryman 2008: 422). O'Brien (1999), for example, presented a detailed study of 1970s female punks at a time when 'official' histories of punk lionised male

groups like the Sex Pistols and The Clash and female bands were virtually ignored.

Ann Oakley first devised a model for feminist ethnography in 1981, arguing that the standard survey interview is a process that privileges the interviewer and puts the interviewee in a position of inferiority. Seeing this as inconsistent with feminism when women interview other women she advocated a framework built on reciprocity and a non-hierarchical relationship (Oakley 1990). This model has evolved so that currently there is not a single coherent definition of feminist ethnography. As Shrock (2013) discusses, it involves multiple practices. She examines the limitations of Western feminist ethnographers who assume a universal 'women's experience' that erases power differentials – for instance, essentialising third-world women as the 'other'. Referring to the rescue narratives that have historical precedence under colonialism, she asks whether outsiders should represent groups to which they do not belong. However she also asserts: 'we must continue to engage in it with the hope that we can learn something from the telling of "untold stories"' (Shrock 2013: 50). While my experience as a former punk was beneficial for research it was important to remain aware of my own subjectivity. Corbin and Strauss define subjectivity as purposeful selection of data: 'Even basic description involves purpose and audiences and the selective eye of the viewer...' (2015: 60). Female punk participants didn't necessarily see themselves as oppressed or define themselves as feminist. Singer Siouxsie Sioux, for instance, was fiercely individualist and uneasy about being portrayed as a 'victim' within a punk world that was also violent and challenging for male musicians, and I took this into account when interpreting the data (O'Brien 1999).

The telling of untold stories is key to my research, the project of making women's invisible history visible. There has been a long tradition of female ethnographers doing this in a way that was reflexive and literary, for instance Mead, Zora Neale Hurston, and Elsie Clews Parsons. Giving voice to women whose contribution has been ignored helps them to make meaning out of their life experiences and helps to create the counter-canon (Shrock 2013: 55).

Feminist ethnography has evolved from the study of how women are oppressed, to second wave Foucauldian emphasis on how women have used strategies of resistance. This has thrown up another challenge - the danger of reading resistance strategies romantically. Shrock refers to Abu-Lughod's work with Egyptian girls and their acquisition of Western consumer goods. Resistance strategies may not lead to women's liberation, and 'may in fact not even reflect "real" agency if women are only entering into a new relationship with a different form of power' (Shrock 2013: 56). For my research I was aware of romanticising resistance in the work of pop artists like Lady Gaga (O'Brien 2014), who may have been using tropes of defiance as a marketing strategy.

The tensions in feminist ethnography need not undermine the research, however. Fields sees this ambivalence as part of the process, and not antithetical to feminist solidarity. After all, she argues, 'feminism is borne of conflict and stories of tension and political struggle' (Fields 2013: 495). Davids investigates more fully the idea of feminist solidarity in her study of right wing Mexican female politicians. 'How could I feel solidarity and empathy for women who...vigorously embraced such traditional representations of femininity, which in turn represented the dominant power relationships? Are conservative women cultural dupes?' (Davids 2014: 51).

Davids was frustrated by how elite women entering the male bastion of politics were subject to its disciplining mechanisms, promoting dominant discourses around femininity and motherhood. The concept of female solidarity is explored in my research, particularly with issues like hyper-sexualisation in videos and photo shoots (is it empowering? who has agency?) (O'Brien 1995, 2014, 2016). But my work also observes how women have negotiated existing power hierarchies and the spaces that the subjects have to manoeuvre. This, surely, is at the core of ethnographic knowledge-making.

a) Interviewing

In order to understand women's experiences of the music industry I undertook over 250 interviews with female artists across 20 genres of popular music. Shuker (2008) defines the latter as commercially orientated recorded sound in a hybrid of styles. Interviewing is an excellent way to collect qualitative data, with three main techniques that can be employed. Firstly **standardised**, where the same interview schedule and list of questions is used with each interviewee. This is useful for quantitative data, ie carrying out a survey with a questionnaire. The second technique is **semi-standardised**, where the interviewer asks major questions each time but is also free to pursue follow-up questioning (Gilbert 2008: 136). This is an effective technique in qualitative research, and the one I have most frequently adopted. For O'Brien (1995) for instance, I asked two key questions, 'How do you express yourself?' and 'What obstacles, if any, have you faced as a woman in the music industry?', before probing for further information with each interviewee. The third approach is **non-standardised**, or unstructured. This takes the form of a guided conversation, and is useful in life history interviews or as a way to capture multiple perspectives (O'Brien 1995, 2016).

My priority with interviewing was to get a sense of women's experience historically in the music industry. What has been crucial to the gathering of credible data is my insider access as a journalist and musician. The question of access is important in an ethnographic study: 'Just because you have gained access to an organisation doesn't mean that you will have an easy passage...securing access is in many ways an ongoing activity' (Bryman 2008: 408). For most interviews I stated that this was for a book or research project and if I was interviewing a well-known artist I sometimes did a 'research bargain', where I negotiated a dual purpose with the PR and the artist – I interviewed African star Miriam Makeba for instance, for both a women's magazine and academic output (O'Brien 1995). My work as a journalist ensured access to PR and management gatekeepers, but didn't automatically guarantee time with artists. The music business is a closed setting where artists are protected and access has to be regularly negotiated.

A significant outcome from the interview work for O'Brien (1995) was the creation of an oral history. Bryman defines this method as 'a largely unstructured interview in which the respondent is asked to recall events from (their) past and to reflect on them' (2008: 696). A way of creating a 'history from below' and adjusting the bias of an over-represented dominant culture, the interview is used to drive historical enquiry (Davies 2011: 471). In ethnographic research life history interviewing is very useful for the long-term study of a particular field. Buitelaar (2014), for instance, reflected on agency in formulating life plans in her study of Fatima Elatik, a Moroccan Dutch town councillor. When they first met in 1999 'Elatik's agency chiefly related to the performative power of self presentation', but during a follow-up interview in 2008, Buitelaar found herself an 'equally vocal interlocutor in a discussion about personal development' (2014: 35). My oral history practice followed a similar trajectory. Aware of their public status, young female artists can present a mediated, performative 'self' for the interviewer. Returning to subjects after five or ten years there would be a change in tone, and a shift in our researcher/interviewee relationship. Partly because of their changing sense of self and a growing trust in me as a writer, women like Tori Amos, Sinead O'Connor and Natalie Cole evaluated experience in conversations that became equal co-creations of knowledge, and part of building a feminist ethnography (O'Brien 1995, 2013, 2016).

Life history work was vital with older performers like Eartha Kitt and Nina Simone. I conducted unstructured interviews in which they were asked to recall past events (O'Brien 1995). I also used photo elicitation: Gracie Coles, a trumpeter with the 1940s Ivy Benson Band, recollected tours in detail while looking at her photo album, and swing singer, Lita Roza, discussed photographs of her performing for WW2 troops. Both women enjoyed freedom and job satisfaction during the war, but were sidelined by the music industry when male musicians returned to the workforce. Their life story work illuminated less well-researched areas of women's popular music history. Meaning was composed in the memory of their life experiences. Our interviewer/interviewee relationship prompted reflection and interpretation, as an act of joint composure or 'collaborative remembering' (Norrick 2005: 1). In

her study of British war veterans Pattinson (2011) found that some women were wary of a feminist interpretation of their work, whereas in my research older women were as outspoken about perceived sexism as my younger interviewees. 'In the 1950s it was difficult for women in general, but particularly brown-skinned women,' recalled Eartha Kitt, 'Record companies thought I was strange' (O'Brien 2013: 48). Sometimes in life history work narrators can be vague with details (Pattinson 2011, Norrick 2005), but what was striking in my research was the relative absence of uncertain memory. Interviewees' recollections had the emotional charge of testimony. In many instances their open-ness was a result of our intersubjectivity – my role as a trusted music writer and theirs as music performers allowed for a mutual understanding of subject identities. Another challenge in oral history work is the well-rehearsed 'frozen narrative' (Pattinson 2011: 258) of someone who has been interviewed many times before on a particular topic. In my research many interviewees were reflective and emotional, as if voicing memories for the first time.

Purposive sampling

A technique developed during the course of research was purposive sampling, that is targeted interviewing on the basis of emerging theoretical focus, to achieve saturation. While 250 interviews were conducted for O'Brien 1995, in later outputs fewer interviews and purposive sampling were more effective. In O'Brien 2014 for example, the focus was mainly textual analysis of Lady Gaga's meat dress, the use of meat in feminist visual art, and documentation of second wave and 'postfeminist' responses to the dress, so art historian Griselda Pollock and young blogger Eve Barlow were interviewed to record contrasting viewpoints. Purposive sampling was also used in O'Brien 2016 to revise research into female bands (Bayton 1998), with selected artists and promoters providing the insight needed into the current scene (O'Brien 2016).

b) Participant Observation

Defined as 'prolonged immersion of the observer in a social setting' (Bryman 2008: 257), this method provided a rich source of data, through analysis of the way men interact with women, and behaviours by women within particular environments. Observing women at gigs, backstage and in record company offices involved what Pink defines as participant sensing: joining in "'ordinary" everyday practices, including eating, drinking, walking...in a shared physical environment' (Pink 2009: 67). I would add dancing and gig going to those shared sensory research practices. For instance, watching the female 'mosh pit' during early 90s Riot Grrrl provided insight into women's new-found agency as active participants in rock culture (O'Brien 2012a, 2016).

In privileging the visual over other senses, the term participant observation needs further definition within music culture research, as the ethnographer is more participant *listener* than observer: 'A significant portion of ethnographic writing is based more upon what was heard in the field than what is seen there. And often what is reported as the 'seen' are in fact observations of people conversing, singing, listening, speechmaking – noise-making' (Forsey 2010: 563). This is evident with my research into the way women perform live, for instance, and use voice or instruments to express agency (O'Brien 1995, 1999, 2012a, 2016).

c) Textual Analysis

Some female performers and fans can be unreflective about their practice – Riot Grrrl bands, for instance, engaged in a 'media blackout' in the early 1990s for fear of being misrepresented, so textual analysis of their albums and fanzines provided valuable insight into the subculture (O'Brien 1995, 2016). As Cofield and Robinson argue, it is the raw material of Riot Grrrl texts that is the source of their subcultural power (Cofield and Robinson 2016). Analysis of existing media products reveals a great deal about the way female artists are positioned by record companies and the music press. Methods such as data triangulation, an approach used in documentary research where 'everything must be checked from more than one angle' (Hammersley 1998: 199), were useful for exploring the question of ageism in popular music. Videos, press

shots and lyrics were analysed to assess what is meant by 'age appropriate', and whether women are rendered invisible after a certain age (O'Brien 2012b.). Textual analysis also offered a new dimension to my research for O'Brien (2012a, 2016). Female rock memoir, for instance, can be interpreted as second wave feminist musicians reflecting on their practice. A significant contribution to feminist history, this literature also inspires young women to create their own music culture.

Summary

The overarching methods of grounded theory and feminist ethnography in the research enabled me to re-examine histories of popular music and rewrite them from a feminist perspective. They also provided data on how female artists have developed strategies for agency over time, negotiating with or openly resisting industry power relations, and in so doing, creating space for themselves to be seen and heard.

4. Research findings: Repression, troubling and becoming

My work provides empirical research into the complexities of power relations and networks for female performers and music industry personnel. It contributes to the analysis of gender and sexuality within many fields, particularly popular music studies. Analysis of the research identifies three main themes: 1) **repression** of histories and subjects, in the exclusion of women from popular music history, industry power networks and the male canon; 2) **troubling** by women of categories like gender and sexuality in an effort to overcome obstacles created by those categories; and 3) a sense of **becoming**, i.e. women growing and questioning their identity formation within the power relations of the music industry; and expression of oneself, or selves, with a developed sense of agency.

Key concepts by Foucault and Butler work together for this project, because Foucault offers a clear framework for distributions of power in the music industry, while Butler's theories enable a close reading and 'troubling' of the gender distinctions in that industry.

Foucault offers a model of analysis that enables dissection of the micro-politics of power, in a way that is relevant to a feminist perspective on the music industry. As Sawicki argues, Foucault's analytic of power 'supported feminists' insights about the need to analyze the politics of personal relations and everyday life' (Sawicki 1991: 10). Rather than defining power as residing in monolithic systems, he defines it as a set of relations. This is applicable to the music business where record labels function like interconnected villages, all involved in practices of selling and marketing artists/bands. Foucault's theory that power is exercised rather than possessed (Foucault 1990: 94) offers a way to interpret multiple strategies in the way female artists are represented, and the way they choose to represent themselves. The hypersexualisation of women in music videos, for instance, is a contested area, with female performers having to negotiate complex power networks of music marketing and promotion.

Butler applies Foucauldian theory with in-depth analysis of the interplay of gender and power, particularly in her notion of performativity. Rather than being essential biological categories, 'male' and 'female' behaviours are constructed within systems of power (Butler 1990: 12). Female artists, from Dusty Springfield to Lady Gaga, often perform an exaggerated version of femininity, for example (O'Brien 1995, 2014), that satisfies the normative codes of record company marketing whilst simultaneously offering a subversive reading by a gay audience. Drawing on Foucault's idea that where there is power there is resistance, Butler's theory of gender trouble and her exploration of the way gender categories can be disrupted (Butler 1990: 171) shows how women gain agency by troubling representation of masculine and feminine roles both in the music they make and their visual image (O'Brien 2002, 2014). Her critical attention to the body as a medium through which the gendered subject is brought into being, or made to 'matter' is useful for an analysis of female resistance the workplace (Cohen and Tyler 2010) - in this instance the music industry workplace where strong female artists are often viewed as problematic (O'Brien 1995). Conforming to normative notions of image is a prerequisite to selling records, so female artists need to be restrained if they refuse to follow gendered codes of performance.

Just call me gentleman: restraint of women in popular music

Foucault's repressive hypothesis can be applied to the way women are restrained within the music industry (Foucault 1990). Repression subdues women through a production of power that administers silences (i.e. excluding female artists from the canon) and has the function of prohibiting: for example, the idea that a woman playing an instrument makes her less sexy (O'Brien 1995: 231). Power resides in the way individuals are held in place by the rules of an organisation. The distribution of power is not constant, but can be stabilized by a lack of variety (in terms of rules or activities) and based in different manufacturing spaces (Foucault 1991: 141). Focusing on the way power operates within the enclosed spaces of the music industry, my research looked at how women have been 'written out' of everyday business decisions and in the long run, official histories. Through interviews with female

participants active from the 1930s to 2013 (O'Brien 1995, 2002, 2013), I created a historical account of women's experience in the music industry. As popular music is a broad medium, it was important to cover a range of genres, from blues and swing to rock, rap and world music, to show the scale of women's achievements in music, and to illustrate the extent to which they had been excluded from the canon (O'Brien 1995, 2002, 2013).

Gathering interview data over a 20 year period (O'Brien 1995, 2002, 2013) presented a strong case for a female canon of popular music, and the knowledge that women were innovators in all genres. Rock histories begin with early 1950s rhythm and blues (Gillet 1983, Stambler 1989, Clark 1998) or the 1930s delta bluesmen (Shaar Murray 1989), but my research via specialist US archives (O'Brien 1995) revealed that the earliest popular music stars were 1920s vaudeville blues singers like Ma Rainey, Lucille Hegamin, Sippie Wallace and Bessie Smith. These women were photographed and feted by audiences all over North America, but after their heyday were relegated to obscurity. I showed that from vaudeville blues onwards, women were at that nexus of artistry and the pop mainstream. Female artists, for instance, often popularised new music technologies – from Billie Holiday reworking standards for the first juke-boxes in the 1940s, to Imogen Heap using internet vlogs to collaborate with her fans in the 2000s. My research (O'Brien 1995) also showed how girl groups emerged from a cluster of DIY indie labels to play a key part in the formation of 1960s pop. Major labels tended to channel female artists into supper club jazz or novelty tunes, but '60s DIY labels gave young women the freedom to sing with power and passion about teen-girl concerns.

By showing how women have excelled my research contributes to a reworking and rewriting of musical history. My work for *She Bop* has been cited in 204 studies on aspects of feminist popular music history, and gender and music genre (including Green 1997, Bayton 1998, Whiteley 1997, 2000, Burns and LaFrance 2002, Reddington 2007, Leonard 2007, Warwick 2007, Shuker 2008, Stras 2010). Whiteley, for instance (2000: 68) drew on my blues research in her exploration of Janis Joplin's influences, while Green cited my

book in her discussion of how genre governs female performers' mode of delivery (1997: 41), and my industry research and Riot Grrrl work informed Bayton's analysis of women's resistance to industry norms (1998: 5, 75).

My research presented an intricate picture of industry networks through interviews with women who had worked in different decades across A&R, song-publishing, marketing, management and production. 'I thought everybody liked me. Now looking back, a lot of people resisted me or ignored my progress. That was strategic,' recalls Ethel Gabriel, a successful A&R producer at RCA Records from the mid-1940s to 1980 who, despite producing over 2,500 records, never got the promotion she deserved (O'Brien 1995: 398). The closed environment of the record company office is a protected place where women know their place. The studio too is an exclusive space where the energy of female musicians is contained by producers and other personnel. Through my interviews many 'backroom' women were given a voice for the first time about how they were sidelined or obstructed. 'July 1975. The date is etched on my brain,' says Mimi Jordan, a pioneer in music publishing, about the day she was fired from Decca Records in New York. 'I was let out first because I was a woman. They gave me no advance notice' (O'Brien, 1995: 413). Frances Preston, CEO of BMI and voted in 1990 by *Ladies Home Journal* as one of America's '50 Most Powerful Women', found that she had to disappear her sex to gain acceptance. 'Whatever makes you feel comfortable. Just call me gentleman,' she would say as the sole woman on an executive board (ibid: 415).

Whereas much academic research on gender and popular music in the 1990s centred around textual analysis (McClary 1991, Whiteley 1997, 2000, Burns and LaFrance 2002) my original contribution to research on power structures of the gender hierarchy is in women's testimonies, giving voice to them through interviews. They expressed hurt, dismay, anger and incredulity about how much their working lives had been controlled, with pressure to keep silent about perceived injustice (O'Brien 1995). Disciplinary punishment is a correction, and keeping one's place in the hierarchy involves reward (Foucault 1991: 179). The contrasting scenarios of Mimi Jordan (a woman who

consciously mentored younger women within the company, and who was fired) and Frances Preston (careful to 'disappear' her gender in meetings, and promoted) demonstrate the system of correction and reward, and how that can lead to the static power relations of a male-dominated industry.

My research (O'Brien 1995, 2012b, 2014) demonstrates how female performers are subject to this disciplining particularly in terms of visual image, as an individual body 'becomes an element that may be placed, moved, articulated on others' (Foucault 1991:164). As the female artist moves through the production process, from signing the record deal to promotion and touring, she has people advising what she should wear, how she should sound and how she should behave. She learns to regulate her music and performance in order to 'pass' through each stage. Interventions - whether discipline by industry staff or self-discipline by female artists - reinforce the status of the dominant power.

Performers have a highly developed and nuanced language in terms of their visual representation. It is something to be negotiated on a daily basis, becoming a distraction from their main work of making music. Singer Suzanne Vega said: 'There's always what we call the Cleavage Question. How much to show, when to show it, if at all' (O'Brien 1995: 204). Miki Berenyi, lead singer with the band Lush, said how during a magazine photo shoot the male photographer asked her to 'lean forward'. Two words that are loaded with significance. She refused and was admonished, told she was not playing the game (O'Brien 2016: 22). This is an example of the micro-physics of power; tactics and acts of cunning located in the 'little things'. Disciplining the female body involves the fussiness of inspections - the *Daily Mail* magnifying the wrinkles on Madonna's hands to show her ageing process (O'Brien 2012b: 28), and the intricate process of the make-over, where a woman's wilder edges are groomed by the record company. Disciplining has the effect of disassociating power from the body, with the female artist continually reminded of her place. 'No guns. No bombs. We're good,' a Virgin Megastore merchandise manager said after Madonna in the early 2000s turned from the political comment of her *American Life* album back to disco (O'Brien 2012b:

26). Even though Madonna spoke a rhetoric of artistic control, she concluded after 35 years in the business that she had been treated like a 'doormat' (O'Brien 2018). My 2012 work on Madonna and the industry has been cited in studies on ageing, gender and popular culture, such as Petersen, on the representation of older Madonna (2017), and Haworth and Colton's study of post-menopausal creativity (2015: 18, 151).

Tearing it down: troubling gender in popular music

Repression and disciplining have the cumulative affect of muting women's voices and achievements. Judith Butler's theory of gender trouble explores how people question notions of gender within social contexts (Butler 1999). A significant area of my research addresses how women have used 'troubling' to overcome the restraints of performing gender in popular music, particularly within punk scenes (O'Brien 1998, 2012a). The commercial music industry places restrictions on female performers through its marketing codes, but women have found a way to 'trouble' these categories through subcultural resistance. Early subcultural critique in popular music studies paid scant attention to the contribution of women on music scenes. Hebdige (Frith and Goodwin 1990) for example, identified punk as a signifying practice (a movement concerned with the process of meaning construction rather than the product) but did not consider gender difference in his analysis. McRobbie pointed out this gap in subcultural research asking, 'What is the nature of girls' leisure? What access to these spheres and symbols do women have?' (McRobbie in Frith and Goodwin 1990: 67).

My research (O'Brien 1999, 2012a) revealed how for women punk and post punk was not just relegated to their leisure time or a modification of their boyfriends' signifying practice. Central to their work lives as musicians, writers and visual artists, it gave them a sense of agency through the invention of a new visual and musical language – artist Linder Sterling, for example, spoke in detail about how she used montage and cut-up of porn magazines and women's weeklies for the Buzzcocks' record sleeves. Promoter Liz Naylor

spoke of how symbolically women were 'destroying the established image of femininity, aggressively tearing it down' (Naylor in O'Brien 1999: 183).

Punk women also embodied place and space, physically locating themselves at the centre on stage and in the audience at gigs (O'Brien 2012a). My research here is multidisciplinary, drawing on Sara Ahmed's work on terrorism, for example. In the same way that the American flag became a 'sticky sign' of patriotic comfort in the US during the 2003 Iraq war, the post-punk gig became a sign of collective resistance and comfort in Leeds in the early 1980s when serial killer Peter Sutcliffe was at large and there was an after-dark curfew for women. The research shows how punk offered women multiple strategies for resistance in the music industry, troubling ways of singing, playing instruments, and visual representation (O'Brien 1999, 2012a). The significance of this research is demonstrated by both studies being cited in 70 sources from sociology, women's studies, tourist studies, youth studies, post-punk and politics, including Bennett (2006), Cogan (2012), Downes (2012), Dunn (2014, 2016), Kearney (2013), Long (2014), Sharp and Nilan (2015).

From music hall to Grace Jones, the use of androgyny or gender play as a strategy of resistance has been prevalent (O'Brien 1995). Artists like Annie Lennox appropriated 'the man in the suit' not just as an act of impersonation, but also an embodied statement that they too could access symbols of male power and business for themselves. The suit was a declaration of authority and worth within an industry that habitually devalued women. I examined the intersections with cross-dressing, lesbian sexuality and identity formation, including ethnographic research into the experience of being gay within an industry that equated out-lesbianism with 'commercial suicide' (O'Brien 1995: 257). The use of male disguise as a way of troubling gender categories has also been used to humorous effect, as in the use of false beards by artists like Laurie Anderson and Peaches (O'Brien 2012b: 20). Cross-dressing offers a displacement of the male subject – it is not just turning the tables or internalising masculine norms. Parody sets up a dissonance and creates the possibility of new unacknowledged cultural forms. This research (O'Brien

1995, 2014) has informed discussions of the queering of popular music (Hawkins 2015).

Express yourself: becoming a woman in the music industry

Drawing on Simone de Beauvoir's concept that one is not born, but rather *becomes* a woman, Butler argues that 'woman' itself is a term in process, a becoming, 'an ongoing discursive practice....open to intervention and resignification' (Butler 1990: 45). This can be applied to the music industry where, because of the way women's sexuality is used to sell products, female performers are in a continual process of transforming their bodies and identities. If gender is the repeated stylization of the body, women's relationship with their bodies as gendered subjects is acute. Artist Barbara Kruger's concept 'Your body is a battleground' is relevant here (McQuiston 1997: 144). In this process the record company has a supervisory role and the public occupy positions of surveillance. According to rock singer Skin: 'Pop music is such a visual art form. Every flaw is analysed' (O'Brien 2012b: 31).

My ethnographic research and textual analysis finds that women develop a sense of agency in the music industry over time, both in their visual image and their music, working with the mediated version of themselves (O'Brien 1995, 2012b, 2013, 2014). Madonna is important to the discussion because she studied the 1980s music industry in order to understand how it worked, and how to situate herself within a power matrix in which 'bodies are placed in a little world of signals to each of which is attached a single, obligatory response' (Foucault 1991: 166). Madonna's body has become a body of knowledge (for herself and the public) that she has reflected on and positioned through film and photography over and over again (O'Brien 2012b, 2013). I argued (O'Brien 2014) that female pop performers often find a way to critique their exploitation as commodities, reflecting their experience or their trauma back to the industry. Madonna, for example, replaced the Monroe icon of the *True Blue* era with the trailer trash porn look of 1992's *Erotica*, and Debbie Harry depicted herself with skewers through her face for the cover of *KooKoo*, her solo album after Blondie.

Research on how women gain agency in the music business led me to Lady Gaga, a female artist who in the early 2000s attempted to 'trouble' ideas of gender and sexuality in her work. My case study of Gaga shows how women become feminists through their experience of the industry (O'Brien 2014) and has been cited in key studies on sex, gender and the sociology of fame (Deflem 2016), and the queering of popular music and video (Hawkins 2015). I explored how she appeared at the 2010 MTV Awards wearing a couture meat dress and gave a garbled message to the media - a mixture of animal liberation, gay rights and, oh, 'we're not just a piece of meat' (O'Brien 2014: 28). Although there is a rich tradition of using meat in feminist performance art Gaga did not mention her influences. This was a disappointing example of postfeminist 'forgetting', a lack of acknowledgement of a vibrant feminist history. However, two years later she posted on social media honest reflections about her struggle with eating disorders, and performed onstage in an unflattering meat corset (O'Brien 2014: 41). This was part of Gaga's 'becoming' a woman in the industry, and re-evaluating her past.

Reflecting on one's artistic journey can create a sense of agency and authorship. Women are often situated within a Foucauldian power matrix in which sexuality is policed through self-examination and questioning (Foucault 1990: 98). One of the main disciplinary processes for a female artist is the interview, where her actions and motivations are scrutinised, and where she can be found wanting. Female performers tend to be asked about their looks and personal lives rather than their music. My interviews (O'Brien 1995, 1999, 2002, 2012a, 2013) opened up new lines of enquiry for the subject, making the process liberating rather than disciplining. Questions like, 'How you express yourself?' and, 'What obstacles have you faced?', gave women ownership of and reflection on their creative process.

My research into female singer/songwriters shows how a sense of authorship leads to full expression. They are now a dominant force in the folk/neo-soul arena with artists as varied as Joni Mitchell, Carole King, Tori Amos, Erykah Badu and Lauryn Hill. Like female novelists, a solo woman with a guitar and songs was not reliant on a complex network of band relations - even though

they faced hurdles getting music recorded (major labels often had just one token female singer/songwriter), they could build a following via live gigs and independent labels. I also drew original links with female rappers and black American women's literature. Novels like Toni Cade Bambara's *Gorilla, My Love* and Toni Morrison's *Jazz* used idioms of street soul and jazz, cadences that influenced the work of early 1990s rappers like Queen Latifah, MC Lyte, and Nefertiti who referenced 'womanist' themes and presented alternative models of black female identity (O'Brien 1995, 2002, 2013). This black feminist solidarity was distinctive, given the heterosexual male focus of much rap.

My analysis shows over time how women benefit from the input of other women – 'Each one, teach one,' said Sony VP of Black Music and A&R Vivian Scott (O'Brien 1995: 401). When asked to consider solo female stars for the *Voicing Girlhood* collection (Warwick and Adrian 2016) I felt their achievements had been well-documented, so opted instead to focus on the influence of female bands (O'Brien 2016). Although a driver of cultural change in terms of gender politics, girl bands are an under-researched area in popular music. Girl bands are defined as groups of young female musicians who share songwriting and performing duties, as distinct from female vocal groups who project an image of popular teen-girl culture (O'Brien 2016:15). Previous studies (Bayton 1998, Leonard 2007, Reddington 2007) argued that female bands worked in an embattled space of subcultural resistance. Through primary interviews with current bands, promoters and bloggers, my research updated studies on female rock musicians to show a changing picture. Girl bands using the internet can bypass major labels to get their music heard, and online media has created a space for 'girl music' (O'Brien 2016), making bands less reliant on the traditional music press for publicity.

My research shows that female bands will be an important source of innovation in shaping the future of the industry, their visibility in male-dominated genres breaking down traditional modes of music-making. In previous decades female rock bands like The Runaways and Girlschool were depicted as novelty acts copying men (O'Brien 2016). As Butler cautions, in

the struggle for liberation 'we might adopt the very models of domination by which we were oppressed' (Butler in Morgan 2007: 199). However, rather than performing 'men' artists like Joan Jett were resignifying the rock guitar and destabilising the notion that only a male body has the technical skill and the tunes. They also illustrated the durability of the girl group, and created a space for younger women to come forward. My research (O'Brien 2016) shows the flexibility and range of the girl band, from Haim (harmonic rock) to Warpaint (lush instrumental indie) to Sleater-Kinney (post-Riot Grrrl activists), to younger, ground level bands like Skating Polly, Dolls, and Goat Girl. Through a reinterpretation of second wave feminism, girl bands can be seen as a potent source of feminist consciousness-raising and activism (O'Brien 2016). They are part of an emerging culture, alongside the established male rock networks, that is bolstered by a feminist network of bloggers, promoters and booking agencies (Loud Women, SafeGigs4Women, Get In Her Ears etc). My research (O'Brien 2016) identified a new cultural discourse in the form of female memoir that supported this growth (Albertine 2014, Brownstein 2015, Gordon 2015, Thorn 2014), demonstrating how the work of women in the music industry can be a 'site of permanent open-ness and resignifiability' (Butler in Morgan: *ibid*). Sawczuk built on this research in his study of female rock memoir (Sawczuk 2016), whilst my work on girl bands has also been reviewed by Downes (2012) and O'Meara (2017).

5. Conclusion: Documenting issues of gender and power

In 2018 over 45 international music industry conferences and festivals signed up to Keychange, an initiative launched by music charity PRS Foundation to achieve a 50/50 gender balance across festival line-ups by 2022. This initiative is a direct challenge to overpowering male dominance within the music industry, and counters the truism that there is a scarcity of female talent. 'There are plenty of women stepping up. They are not being given opportunities to grow their careers,' said singer Shirley Manson (Madden 2018). Academic research makes an important contribution to this challenge, providing evidence of women's talent and achievement, and also highlighting areas of gender disparity. My research (from 1995-2016) has both initiated and contributed to a growing understanding of how gender influences women in popular music. It demonstrates how female artists are disadvantaged in popular music, showing that through the dominant discourse of male musicianship, women's achievements in the history of popular music have been silenced. I have analysed the impact this silencing had upon the gendered construction of a popular musical canon and upon cultural perceptions of female creativity and authorship.

In addition to the exploration of how gender power relations limit women's participation in popular music, my research has shed important light on the ways in which women are engaged in continual negotiation with the power relations of the music industry, whether as performers or industry workers. It is through this negotiation they build strategies for agency and authorship, and create spaces within which to manoeuvre. My work also shows that the omission of women from popular music history means there are a lack of role models for new female performers, and this has an inhibiting effect on women's achievement.

Through a detailed analysis of women's work in the popular music industry, and their negotiation of power relations, my research contributes to a feminist history of popular music, making women's music practice visible in a wide range of genres. It shows the strategies that female artists and women

working behind the scenes have created to produce agency within a business that marginalises them. It also reframes and contributes to feminist discourses about popular music – in work on the female band as a site of empowerment, for example (O'Brien 2016) or hypersexualisation in music videos (O'Brien 2012b, 2014). Overall my research shows that a woman's place in the industry is continually contested, with female artists engaged in a constant (and often creative) process of 'becoming' and identity formation, as a means of negotiating institutional structures of power that are gendered.

Future research directions

Further research is needed into the visibility of female-identified performers, not just on festival bills, but across radio programming, streaming channels and in the music press. The career progression of female artists should be monitored, along with the impact of a growing feminist culture within popular music in the form of memoir, blogging, and live performance. It is vital to build an accurate picture of gender discrimination, not just onstage but within record companies, whilst at the same time documenting achievement, so women are not marginalised in popular music histories.

For the business to survive it needs to appeal to more diverse audiences, and this can be done through challenging dominant power structures. Research on gender in popular music studies fuels a critical discourse and adds to the cultural context for change. In giving voice to marginalised female artists, demonstrating the significant contributions of women to the history of popular music as songwriters and artists, and in critically examining how gendered power relations are reproduced, negotiated and contested by women in the music industry, my research has contributed to that cultural change. For that I am glad.

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Appendix I: Works submitted

