

Gender, sexuality, feminism and Popular Music

- Theory- Butler, performance, intersectionality
- Masculinity
- Queer transgressions- Androgyny, genderqueers, sexuality
- Women in Pop

FEMINIST THEORY

- Gender as performance
- Your gender is constructed through your own repetitive performance of gender.
- Gender is a stylized repetition of acts, an imitation or miming of the dominant conventions of gender.
- Gender is an impersonation . . . becoming gendered involves impersonating an ideal that nobody actually inhabits
- The “traditional, “normative” gender binary is about perpetuating the ideology of heterosexuality.
- For instance, drag is not a secondary imitation that presupposes a prior and original gender, hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealizations
- Normative gender codes set up pathologizing practices and normalizing “sciences” in order to produce and consecrate its own claim on originality and propriety
- Heterosexual performativity is beset by an anxiety that it can never fully overcome....that its effort to become its own idealizations can never be finally or fully achieved, and that it is constantly haunted by that domain of sexual possibility that must be excluded for heterosexualized gender to produce itself
- Butler, Judith. *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge, 2011.
 - Social identities (and their supposed biological basis) are created by power ideologies.
 - Gender and ethnicity positions and assignments are acquired through domination and subordination.
 - Presenting 'women' (or men) as a coherent group performs a perpetuation of binary gender relations
 - Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe. "Post-Marxism without apologies." *New left review* 166 (1987): 79.

Intersectional feminism

- Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color." *Stanford law review* (1991): 1241-1299.
- The term “intersectionality” was coined by Critical Race Theorist **Kimberlé Crenshaw** in 1989
- My immediate response to the criminal charges against 2 Live Crew [Rap Group] was ambivalence: I wanted to stand together with the brothers against a racist attack, but I wanted to stand *against* a frightening explosion of violent imagery directed at women like me. (Crenshaw)
- My sharp internal division-my dissatisfaction with the idea that the "real issue" is race or that the "real issue" is gender-- is characteristic of my experience as a Black woman living at the intersection of racial and sexual subordination. (Crenshaw)

- Political imperatives are frequently constructed from the perspectives of those who are dominant in either the race or the gender categories in which women of colour are situated
 - The forces that cause injustice or inequality are not the same for all women, because forces of oppression (sexism, racism, classism etc.) intersect.
 - Intersectional feminism is feminism that advocates for the rights of people of different genders, races, class, sexuality and ability levels.the multi-layered facets in life that women of all backgrounds face...
 - "Oftentimes I'm asked by black women to explain why I would call myself a feminist and by using that term ally myself with a movement that is racist. I say, 'The question we must ask again and again is how an racist women call themselves feminists.'" (Hooks, Bell. "Ain't I a Woman Black Women and Feminism." 1981).
 - It is about transforming the image, creating alternatives, asking ourselves questions about what types of images subvert, post critical alternatives, and transform our worldviews- move away from dualistic thinking about good and bad.
- All musical performances are encapsulations of a gender system.
 - Music is dynamic and performed, music can therefore affect our notions of identity. It provides a forum through which we discuss, negotiate, and shape our identities
 - Musical traditions actively engender those individuals who participate in them.
 - Gender is intrinsic to our musical performances, and any musical performance is also a performance of gender
 - Music is an interesting and possibly radical, if not revolutionary, site in which new kinds of gender performances and gender identities can evolve
 - The performative nature of music and its ability to alter our state of consciousness allow for an interesting and possibly radical, if not revolutionary, site in which new kinds of gender performances and gender identities can evolve and which, eventually, may transgress the gender boundaries of any society.
 - 'subversive' identities demonstrating the constructedness of sex-gender-desire continuity will work to destroy its normative status, thus allowing all 'cultural configurations of sex and gender to proliferate' and become intelligible (i.e. not deviant)
 - Moisala, Pirkko. "Musical gender in performance." *Women & Music* 3 (1999): 1.

Gaga Feminism

- Gaga is a hypothetical form of feminism, one that lives in between the 'what' and the 'if': what if we gendered people according to their behavior? What if gender shifted over the course of a lifetime—what if someone began life as a boy but became a boygirl and then a boy/man? What if some males are ladies, some ladies are butch, some butches are women, some women are gay, some gays are feminine, some femmes are straight, and some straight people don't know what the hell is going on? (Halberstam 2012)
- Halberstam, J. Jack. *Gaga feminism: Sex, gender, and the end of normal*. Vol. 7. Beacon Press, 2012.

MASCULINITY

- Frith, Simon, and Angela McRobbie. "Music and sexuality." *On record: Rock, pop, and the written word* (1990): 371-389.

Young women and men learn how to be feminine, masculine, and heterosexual through listening to rock music, and observing the clothes, bodily gestures, and general performance of rock musicians as they perform gender, sexuality, and music.

For Western adolescents, rock is the medium for simultaneous expression and construction of conventional notions of masculinity and femininity, and situates performer and audience along

clearly established gender lines. Males are participants and females are passive consumer, listeners. Musically there is a distinction between

'cock rock'- explicit, crude, aggressive expression of male sexuality. 'Performers are ... dominating and boastful and they constantly seek to remind the audience of their prowess, their control'.

Musically, "'cock rock"... takes off from the sexual frankness of rhythm and blues but adds cruder male physicality (hardness, control, virtuosity)' Rock = masculine

Teeny bop= femininity

romanticised image of the 'boy next door', sad thoughtful, pretty and puppy like. The teen idol's persona radiates 'self-pity, vulnerability and need' while, in the lyrics themselves, 'what is needed is not so much someone to screw ... as someone to support and nourish the incompetent male adolescent as he grows up'.

These crude dichotomies tend to oversimplify the complexity of rock'n'roll's impact at any one time. Yet it nevertheless highlights the point that, via the music, **multiple masculine stances** are invariably being served

50's rock and roll in Australia

- Elvis Presley's submissive 'Teddy Bear' with the threatening machismo of 'Baby, Let's Play House';
- The privately gay Little Richard peppered his act with 'camp' exclamations, squeals of ecstasy and exaggerated eye-rolling, as well as spectacularly choreographed disrobing, rather like a female strip-tease artiste.
- Dancing, record-buying, growing and grooming one's hair, selecting and assembling a brightly coloured bricolage of exotic clothing and so on were hardly the sine qua non of desirable maleness.
- In such a society, close attention to fashion, style, song and dance had invariably remained women's domain. Men who gravitated towards such obsessions were previously regarded as effeminate, and often execrated and physically abused as 'sissies', 'fags' and 'poofs'.
- The highly feminised inflections of fashion, music and dance possibly provided a small breathing space from the limiting and, at times, suffocating grip of conventional masculine mateship
- Masculinity is 'a house of many mansions'. Masculinism -- the dominant, accepted public mode of being 'manly' -- is undergoing divergent stresses. It is a site of contradictory tensions and expression, so was rock'n'roll culture itself.
- Although commonly regarded at the time as an undoubted fount of public disorder and private sexual licence -- that is, of heightened male aggression and female promiscuity -- closer examinations of rock'n'roll reveal it as a diverse cultural expression, embodying themes of sentimentality and vulnerability almost as often as aggression
- Evans, Raymond. "'So tough'? Masculinity and rock'n'roll culture in post-war Australia." *Journal of Australian Studies* 22.56 (1998): 125-137.

ANDROGYNY

David Bowie

Prince

Boy George

Genderqueer

Ahnoni

Shamir

Syd tha Kid

SEXUALITY

- Gay or queer artists- Village People, George Michael, Freddie Mercury,
- Queer music which celebrates its queerness- Big Freedia (Bounce Music)
- Straight artists appropriated by the gay community- ABBA, the Weather Girls ("It's Raining Men")

Women and pop music

- Popular music is seen as faddish, common, uneducated, ingratiating, it is neither timeless nor transcendent, it's tainted by the marketplace, it's accessible, it's not of the mind, rather it is the undervalued, and in this case often dancing, body. (Cook)
- Popular music research sometimes internalizes the "second-class" feminized status of pop. Some scholars and critics may dismiss groups and individuals like N-Sync, Britney Spears, or Madonna (Cook)
- fear of dealing with female desire and female consumption, of valuing women, and especially girls, as thinking, knowledgeable consumers and critics who have enormous power in the commercial and aesthetic marketplaces (Cook)
- Cook, Susan C. "" RESPECT (find out what it means to me)": feminist musicology and the object popular." *Women & Music* 5 (2001): 140

Reflection topics:

- Gender as performance
- Intersectional feminism
- Masculinities in rock
- Sexuality and pop music
- Women in pop
- Transgressive gender performances
- Butler, Crenshaw, hooks

Reflection Questions:

- ❖ When is popular music a powerful reinforcer and legitimator of hierarchical arrangements?
- ❖ How can popular music be used to deconstruct gender dichotomies, allowing gender differences and variations to be appreciated and understood?