

Out of the Shadows: Breaking the Gender Barrier in Rock Journalism, from the 1950s to
2010

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Elizabeth M. Weinstein

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by
ELIZABETH M. WEINSTEIN

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Marilyn Greenwald
Professor of Journalism

Gregory J. Shepherd
Dean, Scripps College of Communication

Abstract

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The historical plight of female journalists in the United States (in print, broadcast, and traditionally male-dominated arenas of journalism such as sports reporting) has been well documented. The vicissitudes of the American female rock journalist, however, have received comparatively little critical attention or analysis. This thesis is a collection of biographical accounts, obtained through in-person, telephone and e-mail interviews, with a diverse set of American women who write about, or have written about, music for a living. The central question asked in this thesis is: What personal characteristics and experiences helped these particular women excel in a historically male-dominated profession?

Nearly every woman reported some form of struggle to fit into the “old boy’s club” of rock journalism, ranging from mild discomfort at being one of the few female faces in boardrooms full of male colleagues, to snide remarks from editors, publishers and band members. Some women said they struggle to fit into a culture that revolves around hard partying and an encyclopedic, obsessive preoccupation with rock-and-roll statistics. To succeed in the industry – and to cope with any challenges that arise in the process – the women interviewed were conscious of adopting a role, or persona, - such as “big sister” or “mother hen,” that helped their coworkers and article subjects better relate to them. This thesis also discusses the importance of mentorship for women in the field,

the rise of online journalism (and with it, greater access for women), and the future for women in rock journalism.

Approved: _____

Marilyn Greenwald

Professor of Journalism

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Mel and Sherry Weinstein.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	v
Dedication.....	vi
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Related Literature	7
Chapter Three: Historical Background	20
Chapter Four: Married to Rock-and-roll: Jane Scott, Grandmother of Rock Journalism	28
Chapter Five: Digging Through The Archives of Women’s History: Ann Powers, Rock Anthologist	52
Chapter Six: A Critical Distance: Ellen Willis, Rock’s Resident Scholar, Observer and Cultural Critic	70
Chapter Seven: Funny Girl: How Jancee Dunn, a Class Clown from New Jersey, Became a <i>Rolling Stone</i>	86
Chapter Eight: Brave New Media World: Journalism, Gender and Rock in the Age of Digital Media.....	110
Chapter Nine: Conclusion	133
Bibliography	141

Chapter One:

Introduction

*[Why] is every girl with an active interest in music and the rock 'n' roll lifestyle automatically a groupie? Why can't I be a rock star?*¹

– Lindsay Eanet, *College Jeopardy!* contestant, February 2010

On February 5, 2010, a University of Missouri School of Journalism senior named Lindsay Eanet began a weeklong adventure as a contestant on “*Jeopardy!* College Championship. She lost in the semi-finals but walked away with a 10,000 dollar prize, and a bit of notoriety – and empathy – from female rock journalists. When Eanet, one of fifteen students nationwide to take part in the televised game show championship, was asked about her future career goals by host Alex Trebek, she responded that her dream is to become a rock journalist – a dream that was inspired partly by the 2000 hit movie, *Almost Famous* (an autobiographical tale by former rock journalist Cameron Crowe). Trebek said, “Oh, so you want to be a groupie?”²

Instantly, the blogosphere lit up with commentary about Trebek’s statement. Within minutes, rock journalist Jessica Suarez took to the micro-blogging site Twitter to express her anger. “Girl on college Jeopardy said she wants to be a music jouro. Alex: So you want to be a groupie? She explains again. Alex: So a groupie,” she wrote.³ And, another post ten minutes later: “Wow, she just swept the ‘band names’ category and Alex said, ‘Remember what I said earlier.’ Guys, female music writer = groupie,” she added, with more than a hint of irony.⁴ The day after, reporter Annie Zaleski posted a diatribe on

the blog of the alternative weekly paper, *The Saint Louis Riverfront Times*, and titled her entry “Alex Trebek Thinks I'm a Filthy Slut?”⁵ She wrote:

Music journalism is – and always has been – a male-dominated profession, with mastheads dominated by men. That's a fact. But to say that female music journalists are groupies is beyond ignorant, and condescending to those of us who work in the business.... Trebek making a flippant statement on national TV perpetuates the nasty stereotype that women are only in music journalism to have sex with musicians. It negates those of us who love music, enjoy thinking about music, enjoy consuming music and like discovering amazing new bands.⁶

It is hard to believe that in 2010, women still face such discrimination and stereotyping in any career path. Or is it?

When I posted a call for help with this project on Girl Group, an electronic listserv and Yahoo! group for female music journalists, more than a dozen women responded, and were more than willing to candidly share their stories with me. One woman, a freelance music writer in New York City, named Emily Zemler, for instance, shared some particularly disturbing insights into the gendered nature of music journalism. She described working for a jazz music publication and being one of three women in the office (out of twenty-five employees). She struck up a platonic friendship with the magazine's circulation manager, who was married with children, and often lunched with him. “Whenever my editor pissed me off, which was frequently, I would go into the circulation manager's office to talk. I found out later the entire office thought we were having an affair and used to discuss it behind our backs,” she said in an e-mail exchange. “This, of course, doesn't suggest that I was well respected for my writing or editing abilities in that office,” she added.⁷

As a music journalist, Zemler is often sent on the road with various bands, to cover their live shows – in these situations, she said, she is “generally the only female around,” and that “the main obstacle for [women] is the assumption that anyone working in music (with the exception of a publicist, assistant or [merchandise] girl) will be male.⁸ She has even walked into interviews with male bands and had to explain that she was not there to sleep with them – she was there to report on them.⁹ Worse, when she worked for an alternative weekly newspaper in New Jersey, the publisher “would ask me every time I interviewed a band whether I had ever hooked up with one of their members,” she said. “When he sent me on Warped Tour for three weeks, he...emailed me frequently to ask for stories on who I was hooking up with on tour. The truthful answer was ‘no one,’ but he didn’t believe me.”¹⁰

Why, in an era when women are told they can be anything they dream of – doctors, lawyers, entrepreneurs, scholars, and so on – why would anyone assume that women who write about music are merely hormonal groupies with notepads? And why would editors of reputable publications allow these stereotypes to live on? Zemler suggested that the “rules of professionalism” that govern other industries are often “ignored and manipulated” in music and music journalism. This happens, she explained, because being a music journalist involves attending parties and concerts for a living, and drinking with musicians and other journalists at these events.

So much has changed in the print media industry over the past five years, fueled, in large part, by the enormous growth and increased usability (and accessibility) of the Internet. An economic recession and the availability of instant news online 24/7 have left newspapers and magazines in dire straights. It is tempting to think, “With everything

going on in the world, and with print media facing such challenges, is a paper about the obstacles facing women who write about music even relevant anymore?" Then, stories like those of Lindsay Eanet surface, and it becomes clear that even though so much has changed in the print media industry, so much remains the same. Women are still struggling, even in 2010, to make it – and be taken seriously – as music journalists.

This thesis is a collection of biographical accounts, obtained through in-person, telephone and e-mail interviews, with a diverse set of American women who write about, or have written about, music for a living. One overriding theme that emerged through these conversations is that to succeed in a historically male-dominated field like music journalism, women who want to break the glass ceiling often do so by assuming roles – consciously or unconsciously – like the “grandmother,” the “mother hen,” or the “little sister,” around their workplaces and in interview situations. Another theme that emerged is that, while women have come a long way in breaking down the gender barrier in music journalism, there is still much work yet to be done. In a 2008 article in the journal *Women and Music*, Ann Powers, the pop critic for the *Los Angeles Times* (see chapter four) asked the question, “So what is a feminist pop critic?” A feminist pop critic, she wrote, is a “party starter who sometimes has to be a spoilsport. A dreamer who stands up to demons in the dark. An ordinary fan in a very strange position. A spy in the house of love.”¹¹

The thesis is organized by medium – newspaper, magazine, and new media – and begins with a concise history of women who write about music, and a literature review of what else has been written on the subject. The following chapters focus on individual women, who were chosen through a combination of research and word of mouth recommendations. Former newspaper rock critic, Jane Scott, of the *Cleveland Plain*

Dealer, for instance, was chosen because she is often credited with founding rock journalism – without Jane Scott, this thesis would not be possible. Scott worked at the *Plain Dealer* from 1952 to 2002, interviewing rock stars and reviewing concerts longer than anyone else in this thesis and Scott achieved cult figure status in Cleveland, Ohio, and beyond.

Another chapter highlights the high profile career of the late Ellen Willis, known and revered in music journalism circles for her thoughtful commentaries on rock in the *New Yorker*. Willis brought an intellectual approach to her work and her 1992 book, *Beginning to See the Light: Sex, Hope, and Rock-and-Roll* – a collection of her essays and music criticism – has given hope to young, intellectual women who aspire to be rock journalists. The *New Yorker* provided Willis with a platform for her literary, introspective critiques on rock-and-roll.

One woman inspired by Willis's writing is Ann Powers, who was chosen for this project because she literally wrote the book on women in music journalism – *Rock She Wrote: Women Write About Rock, Pop and Rap*. Through her books and her position as pop music critic at the *Los Angeles Times*, Powers has also influenced the careers of many up-and-coming female rock journalists, and is arguably the most visible working female rock journalist in the mainstream press, as of 2010.

Author and magazine journalist Jancee Dunn was chosen for this thesis because she worked on the staff of *Rolling Stone* magazine for over a decade, and chronicled her experiences there in a humorous, popular memoir, *But Enough About Me: A Jersey Girl's Unlikely Adventures Among the Absurdly Famous*. *Rolling Stone* has been considered a

“bible” for rock journalism, and the “holy grail” for aspiring rock journalists, since it’s founding in 1967.

Finally, the last chapter of the thesis explores the brave new world of Internet journalism, and features interviews with a diverse cross sampling of female bloggers, Web editors, staff reporters and freelance writers. Some of the journalists interviewed for the last chapter migrated from print to online journalism out of necessity, while others have begun online careers right out of college. Some have years of experience under their belts, and others, only a few years into their young careers, are hoping to hang onto their jobs in what has become an unpredictable industry. These Internet rock journalists – Daphne Carr, Jalylah Burrell, Jessica Robertson, Amy Phillips, Katie Hasty, and Evie Nagy are all members of the Yahoo! listserv, Girl Group, founded by Carr in 2003, and they responded to a post seeking interviewees for this thesis. They represent the future of rock journalism, and have bravely shared their experiences of gate crashing the “boys club” that has been, and in many ways still is rock-and-roll journalism.

¹ Lindsay Eanet’s *Jeopardy!* blog,

<http://www.jeopardy.com/minisites/collegechampss26/videoandblogs/blog/?blog=leanet>. (accessed March 1, 2010).

² Mike Conklin, “Alex Trebek Hates Women,” *The L Magazine* blog, posted February 11, 2010.

<http://www.thelmagazine.com/TheMeasure/archives/2010/02/11/alex-trebek-hates-women> (accessed March 1, 2010).

³ <http://twitter.com/JessicaSuarez>, February 10, 2010.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Annie Zaleski, “Alex Trebek Thinks I’m A Filthy Slut?” *The Saint Louis Riverfront Times* blog, posted February 11, 2010.

http://blogs.riverfronttimes.com/atoz/2010/02/alex_trebek_jeopardy_l_magazine_lindsay_eanet_college_jeopardy_groupies_music_journalism.php (accessed March 1, 2010).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ E-mail interview, Emily Zemler, January 18, 2010.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Chapter Two:

Related Literature

The historical plight of female journalists in the United States (in print, broadcast, and traditionally male-dominated arenas of journalism such as sports reporting) has been well documented. The vicissitudes of the American female rock journalist, however, have received comparatively little critical attention or analysis. Like sports reporting, rock criticism is a historically male-dominated area of journalism, founded and shaped by luminaries such as Hunter S. Thompson, Lester Bangs, Greil Marcus, Jon Landau and Dave Marsh. From the late 1960s on, they wrote irreverent, thought-provoking, and entertaining features for music magazines such as *Rolling Stone* and *Creem*, and were the founding fathers of rock journalism. They did not, however, cultivate the profession alone. From the beginning, women have played a role, albeit a less visible one than their male counterparts, in shaping the field of rock journalism. Women have written and edited for *Rolling Stone*, *Creem*, *Spin* and the like, although rock historians and scholars have largely ignored their contributions to the field.

“A tightly woven old-boy network still exists throughout music journalism,” wrote Liz Evans in her 1997 book, *Girls Will Be Boys: Women Report on Rock*. “Undoubtedly, the 90s has seen a change in the gender balance within rock and pop. Women have integrated themselves and girls with guitars don’t get gasped at anymore, but you can’t argue with 30 years worth of male dominated rock culture, and you can’t pretend that five or six years is all it’s taken for women to catch up.”¹²

Gender continues to inform careers both in rock-and-roll and in journalism: Women who choose careers in rock journalism, then, face similar, yet unique obstacles as

women in other areas of journalism, such as political and sports reporting. In rock journalism, as in most areas of journalism (and other career fields), women have had to break down glass ceilings, endure treatment as “others,” or outsiders, and prove themselves worthy members of an unspoken, but understood “boy’s club.” To date, however, only three books on the market specifically focus on the lives and careers of female rock journalists: *Rock She Wrote: Women Write about Rock, Pop and Rap*,¹³ is an anthology of published articles by American female rock journalists, compiled by female rock journalists Evelyn McDonnell and Ann Powers. *Girls Will Be Boys: Women Report on Rock*, by Liz Evans, is an anthology of published articles by mostly British female rock journalists. Both books, published in 1995 and 1997 respectively, offer introductory essays on women in rock journalism, but little information is revealed about the actual experiences of female rock journalists in the field. *Electric Ladyland: Women and Rock Culture*, by Lisa L. Rhodes (2005)¹⁴ takes a more scholarly approach and examines women in all facets of rock-and-roll between 1965 and 1975, from music magazines’ treatment of female musicians to the evolution of the groupie to the women who wrote about rock-and-roll during those years.

Books about women in journalism in general are more plentiful: *Women and Journalism* (2003),¹⁵ by Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner, Carole Fleming, analyzes the roles and experiences of women journalists in the United States and Britain. *Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism* (2002),¹⁶ by Maurine Hoffman Beasley and Sheila Jean Gibbons offers first-hand accounts by female journalists over a wide span of time. *The Girls in the Balcony: Women, Men, and the New York Times* (1992),¹⁷ by Nan Robertson, tells the story of female journalists at one major newspaper.

She Said What?: Interviews with Women Newspaper Columnists (1993),¹⁸ by Maria Braden, features interviews with thirteen female newspaper columnists, from advice columnists to foreign correspondents. *Up From the Footnote: A History of Women Journalists* (1977),¹⁹ by Marion Marzolf provides historical context on women's roles in American newsrooms, as does Kay Mills' *A Place in the News* (1990).²⁰ Kathleen A. Cairns's *Front-Page Women Journalists* (2003)²¹ presents the biographies of four newspaperwomen, and *Women on Deadline*,²² by Sherry Ricchiardi and Virginia Young, includes question and answer style interviews with nine women journalists of different specializations, from sports to features. *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*, by Susan J. Douglas (1994)²³ describes one woman's (the author's) complicated relationship with the mass media (including music, with a chapter entitled "Why the Shirelles Mattered") through a gender studies lens. *Gender in the Music Industry*, by English scholar Marion Leonard, features chapters on the lack of female rock journalists at key music publications in the United States and the UK, and media coverage and treatment of female musicians, independent music and the riot grrrl movement.²⁴ And journalist Marisa Meltzer's *Girl Power: The Nineties Revolution in Music*²⁵ covers everything from riot grrrl to the Spice Girls and Britney Spears, providing a critical analysis of what the nineties meant for music and women.

Books about women in conventionally male professions also address issues similar to those facing female rock journalists. *A Kind of Grace: A Treasury of Sportswriting by Women* (1994),²⁶ by Ron Rapoport, is a collection of writing along the lines of *Rock She Wrote*, and *Lady in the Locker Room: Uncovering the Oakland Athletics* (1993),²⁷ by Susan Fornoff, is the author's first-hand account of the male-dominated arena of sports

journalism. *War Torn: Stories of War from the Women Reporters who Covered Vietnam* (2002),²⁸ by Tad Bartimus, Tracy Wood, Kate Webb, Laura Palmer, Edith Lederer, and Jurate Kazickas devotes chapters to nine women who covered the Vietnam War. And finally, *Women in Comedy: The Funny Ladies from the Turn of the Century to the Present* (1986),²⁹ by Linda Martin and Kerry Segrave, tells the story of pioneering women in another historically male-dominated field – comedy.

A few women rock journalists have published memoirs. Gerri Hershey's *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: The True, Tough Story of Women in Rock* (2001)³⁰ focuses on female musicians, but includes numerous details about Hershey's own experiences as a rock journalist covering such artists as Janis Joplin. Former *Rolling Stone* reporter Jancee Dunn puts a humorous spin on her adventures – or misadventures – in rock journalism in *But Enough About Me ... A Jersey Girl's Unlikely Adventures Among the Absurdly Famous* (2006). Ellen Willis's *Beginning to See the Light: Sex, Hope, and Rock-And-Roll* (1992), chronicles her experiences and takes a more scholarly approach to rock (and cultural) criticism.

Journalists, Roles and the "Other" Phenomenon

In their 1996 book, *The American Journalist in the 1990s*, David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit provided a statistical portrait of the average American journalist in the 1990s. They found that in 1992, US journalists were no more likely to be female than a decade earlier, and that same year, the average number of years in journalism for men was fifteen and twelve for women.³¹ “Still likely to be male, in a newsroom where 3 in 10 were women and about 1 in 10 was a minority, the reporter's median age in 1992 was

34,” they found.³² Further, they found a tendency for women to be less likely than men to want to stay in newspaper journalism.³³

Weaver and Wilholt also are known for their theory of journalistic role conceptions. In *The American Journalist in the 1990s*, they divided journalist role conceptions into four different clusters of functions: interpretive/investigative, disseminator, adversarial, and populist mobilizer. The interpretive/investigative role included investigating government claims, analyzing and interpreting complex problems, and discussing public policies in a timely way. The disseminator function included getting information to the public quickly and avoiding stories with unverifiable facts. The adversary function included being constantly skeptical of public officials; and the populist mobilizer function included developing interests of the public, setting the political agenda, letting ordinary people express views, and entertainment.³⁴ Rock journalism, then would fall under the populist mobilizer role, since music is a form of cultural entertainment, and female rock journalists often adopt (unknowingly or knowingly) an entirely different set of functions, or roles, specific to the individual, but informed by gender (i.e. a grandmotherly persona to young male rock stars, or the kid sister of every rock band in America), to help them fit in and advance in the field.

In their 2004 book *Women and Journalism*, Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner, and Carole Fleming write that women journalists “present a paradox. Their presence as professional writers and presenters of news is now commonplace, yet they continue to be marked as ‘other,’ as ‘different’ from their male colleagues.” Further:

In print news, official rhetoric proclaims that a journalist’s gender is irrelevant. However, while maleness is rendered neutral and male journalists are treated largely as professionals, women journalists are

signified as *gendered*: their work is routinely defined and judged by their femininity. We find that women have not achieved equality either in several ‘serious’ fields or news such as politics and business or in the highly popular or lucrative area of sports news.³⁵

The authors also argued that a “glass ceiling” effect is still in place in journalism for women. “The phrase ‘glass ceiling’ refers to an invisible barrier to promotion that women experience in many professions. We argue that it has not yet been shattered,” they wrote³⁶. This, they hypothesized, could be a byproduct of the overwhelmingly male culture of newsrooms. In 2002, women occupied only one-third of the U.S. journalism workforce – the same number that occupied the journalism workforce in 1982.³⁷ Women in newsrooms are often seen as humanizing forces – in tune with readers’ needs, more people-oriented than issue-oriented, and interested in putting news into context, they explained, and this extends into sports journalism, a field that is perhaps the most blatantly divided along gender lines.³⁸

[T]he general notion that women reporters should be confined to writing about women for women has carried over into sports,” they wrote. “Not surprisingly, the secondary status of women’s sports results in secondary status for those who report on them – invariably women.”³⁹ Women sports reporters have also faced difficulty in gaining admission into locker rooms and stadium press boxes, and when they have gained admission, they have often had to confront sexual harassment. In many respects, the challenges female rock journalists have faced mirror those faced by sports journalists, from the “locker room” atmosphere of the backstage arena to the assumption that any woman interested in writing about music must be a groupie. Similarly, just as female sports writers are expected to write about female athletes, female rock journalists are often expected to write about female musicians.⁴⁰

It could be argued that hegemony is still at work in journalism, and in particular, rock journalism, making the ‘glass ceiling’ difficult to break. The theory of hegemony,

(originally proposed by sociologist Antonio Gramsci), “refers to the means by which the ruling order maintains its dominance,” wrote Pamela J. Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese in *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content*. “Media institutions serves a hegemonic function by continually producing a cohesive ideology, a set of commonsensical values and norms, that serves to reproduce and legitimate the social structure through which the subordinate classes participate in their own domination.”⁴¹

Further, Shoemaker and Reese quote Todd Gitlin, adding that hegemony is systematic, but not necessarily or even usually deliberate.⁴² “The notion of hegemony that I am working with is an active one: hegemony operating through a complex web of social activities and institutional procedures,” wrote Gitlin in *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*.⁴³ “Hegemony is done by the dominant and collaborated in by the dominated.”⁴⁴ American rock journalism was essentially the creation of a small group of young men, and many of these same men (including Jann Wenner, founder of *Rolling Stone*), while older now, remain at the helm of their publications and help, intentionally or not, to maintain a culture of masculinity in rock journalism.

Women’s Membership in the Boy’s Club of Rock Journalism

Rock-and-roll emerged as a popular form of music in the mid-1950s, but rock criticism in the United States did not develop until well into the 1960s, wrote Kembrew McLeod in a *Popular Music* article. “On a very basic level, rock criticism in America developed its vocabulary from the one-or-two-line record reviews found in *Billboard* or *Cashbox*, two major music trade papers that still exist.”⁴⁵ The first American popular

magazine devoted entirely to rock music was *Crawdaddy!*, founded by Paul Williams, who at the time was a seventeen-year-old freshman at Swarthmore College.⁴⁶ The magazine featured articles on the hottest bands and musicians of the day, but it wasn't until the following year that rock writing as a serious offshoot of magazine journalism truly kicked into gear. In 1967, a young, twenty-one-year-old Berkeley drop-out named Jann Wenner, with a group of young cohorts, borrowed 7,500 dollars and set up shop in a second floor loft on Market Street in San Francisco, with the goal of creating a publication of "quality" and "class" – rock-and-roll's version of *Time Magazine*.⁴⁷ They named the magazine *Rolling Stone*, after the lyrics of a popular Bob Dylan song. Publisher Barry Kramer founded *Creem Magazine* shortly after, in 1969, in Detroit, but neither *Creem* nor *Crawdaddy!* would ever top *Rolling Stone*'s influence on rock music journalism and American popular culture.

Like the founders of these institutions of American rock journalism, most of the names on their mastheads were male. "Rock journalism, despite being a child of the Civil Rights era, continues to promulgate this 'separate but equal' ideology," wrote rock critic Devon Powers in a *PopMatters* column. "Rock writers are overwhelmingly white and male – a fact that is unfortunate, but explained by the fact that ours is a society where music is integral to our socialization, and indeed helps us understand who we are as racial and gendered beings."⁴⁸

"The field of rock journalism in North America is still dominated by men. Because of their key role in distributing influential ideas to a wide audience, what and whom rock critics write about is significant," wrote McLeod in a *Pop Music and the Press* essay. ... "In 1999, the number of female editors or senior writers at *Rolling Stone*

hovered around a whopping 15 percent, at *Spin* and *Raygun*, roughly 20 percent.”⁴⁹ In 1990, Robert O. Wyatt and Geoffrey P. Hull surveyed one hundred ninety-five music journalists (who worked in newspapers and magazines), and came up with a composite picture of the “average” music critic: a thirty-six-year-old college-educated male with thirteen years of experience in journalism, and more than nine years in music journalism.⁵⁰ How and why does this happen? In *Popular Music*, McLeod explained his theory:

Rock critics often get new writing jobs because they know someone who can help bring them to the attention of a particular editor and often, writers become editors who then add to their roster of writers critics with whom they are friendly. ...The way business is done within the rock critic establishment resembles the classic ‘old boy network’ more so than most types of contemporary businesses, and the music industry as a whole also runs by these ‘who knows who’ networking rules.⁵¹

Davies expanded on the “boy network” that McLeod described, noting that women who want to enter the field “must conceal their femininity” and “use the same sexist discourses as male journalists to distance themselves from the type of women the music press despises – working class women or women perceived as some kind of threat.”⁵² Examples of women who successfully resist doing these things – and gain respect as rock journalists – she added, are rare.⁵³

Over the last few decades, female rock journalists have infiltrated the old boy’s network, but their contributions are still given less weight than the contributions of their male coworkers. The contents pages of 1993’s *The Best of Rolling Stone: 25 Years of Journalism on the Edge* offer an indication of how history views female rock journalists; only four of the 37 articles compiled in the book were written by women.⁵⁴

“Women have been writing about music almost since the birth of rock criticism in the 1960s,” McDonnell wrote in the introduction to *Rock She Wrote*. “Yet, disregarded by many of the makers of the rock criticism canon, their history is largely hidden. Women critics have only sporadically infiltrated bookshelves stocked with Marcus, Christgau, Marsh, and Frith.”⁵⁵

“[A]fter nearly two decades of writing about rock music, I’ve encountered plenty of turbulence – that of the skies and highways, and of the soul,” wrote veteran *Rolling Stone* reporter Gerri Hirshey in the opening of her book, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: The True, Tough Story of Women in Rock*. “The road can be an especially bumpy ride for a sex conditioned by human history to stay at home. As a rheumy-throated bass player once scolded me when I flipped open a notebook long past the midnight hour, ‘Honey, you’re line of work ain’t natural.’”⁵⁶

If there is a common thread that runs through the biographical narratives woven by rock journalism’s female pioneers, it is one of struggle: the struggle to fit into what is largely a man’s world; the struggle to be taken seriously as a writer; and the struggle to balance a family life with the rowdy tour buses, backstage parties, and late-night concerts and deadlines that symbolize the rock-and-roll writer lifestyle. In *Rock She Wrote*, Evelyn McDonnell described the years of 1975 to 1985 as “a Renaissance period of female rock criticism, a time when talents and philosophies flowered.”⁵⁷ Dozens of women, including Daisann McLane, Deborah Frost, and Gerri Hirshey, wrote prolifically for major music magazines:

Implicitly or explicitly, most of these women were trying to shift criticism’s focus and approach without landing in a gender pigeonhole. For many, this meant acknowledging their subjectivity. The harpooning of

the great white whale of objectivity was, after all, the goal of New Journalism, and no one was better prepared to do that than women, who had been told all their lives that their views couldn't possibly represent anyone else's.⁵⁸

For the most part, women rock reporters blend in well with their surroundings, but sometimes busting myths and stereotypes becomes part of the job description. "When I started out in rock journalism," Liz Evans wrote, "I was 22 years old, and comparatively naïve. In on-the-road situations, surrounded by musicians and roadcrew, where the only other females were actively, shamelessly seeking sex, I felt distinctly uncomfortable."⁵⁹ Evans went on to describe a "grey area of groupie and girl reporter, which still persists in the minds of some of the more sexist (and usually American) male musicians."⁶⁰

The most recent addition to the literature on female rock journalists is Rhodes's *Electric Ladyland: Women and Rock Culture*, a social and cultural history of women in all facets of rock-and-roll. "The women who were musicians, music writers, and groupies between 1965 and 1975 had two things in common: the double standard and a love of music," she wrote. "All of these women, solely because of their sex, faced obstacles that men in the same endeavors did not. Yet they were still influential participants in the music scene during that era."⁶¹

In a chapter devoted specifically to female rock journalists, she wrote:

The 1960s and 1970s were some of the most contentious years in American social and political history. The struggle waged over the representation of women musicians in the American periodical press is but one example of this fractiousness. ...[G]ender and sex roles were undergoing tremendous change, as was the nature of rock music. Music journalists were at the vanguard of this 'bargaining'....Rock writers often acted as interpreters or analysts of these artists' work for everybody else. The fact that most of these journalists were men also influenced both the contents and the approach to those in the profession.⁶²

Rhodes chose to focus on the careers of two female rock journalists: American Ellen Willis and Australian Lillian Roxon. No study to date, then, has focused on a wide cross-section of American female rock journalists of different backgrounds and generations, from the 1960s to the present.

¹² Liz Evans, *Girls Will Be Boys: Women Report on Rock* (London: Pandora, 1997), xiv-xv.

¹³ Evelyn McDonnell and Ann Powers, *Rock She Wrote: Women Write About Rock, Pop* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1995).

¹⁴ Lisa L. Rhodes, *Electric Ladyland: Women and Rock Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

¹⁵ Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner and Carole Fleming, *Women and Journalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁶ Maurine Hoffman Beasley and Sheila Jean Gibbons, *Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism* (Pennsylvania: Strata Publishing, 2002).

¹⁷ Nan Robertson, *The Girls in the Balcony: Women, Men and The New York Times* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1992).

¹⁸ Maria Braden, *She Said What?: Interviews with Women Newspaper Columnists* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993).

¹⁹ Marion Marzolf, *Up From The Footnote: A History of Women Journalists* (New York: Hastings House, 1977).

²⁰ Kay Mills, *A Place in the News: From the Women's Pages to the Front Page* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1988).

²¹ Kathleen A. Cairns, *Front Page Women Journalists, 1920-1950* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2003).

²² Sherry Ricchiardi and Virginia Young, *Women on Deadline: A Collection of America's Best* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1991).

²³ Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Times Books, 1994).

²⁴ Marion Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007).

²⁵ Marisa Meltzer, *Girl Power: The Nineties Revolution in Music* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2010).

²⁶ Ron Rapoport, ed., *A Kind of Grace: A Treasury of Sportswriting by Women* (Berkeley: Zenobia Press, 1994).

²⁷ Susan Fornoff, *Lady in the Locker Room: Uncovering the Oakland Athletics* (Illinois: Sagamore Publishing, 1993).

²⁸ Tad Bartimus, Tracy Wood, Kate Webb, Laura Palmer, Edith Lederer, and Jurate Kazickas, *War Torn: Stories of War from the Women Reporters who Covered Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2002).

²⁹ Linda Martin and Kerry Segrave, *Women in Comedy* (New Jersey: Citadel Press, 1986).

³⁰ Gerri Hirshey, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: The True, Tough Story of Women in Rock* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2001).

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- ³¹ David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, *The American Journalist in the 1990s: U.S. News People at the End of an Era* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1996), 8-9.
- ³² Ibid, 57.
- ³³ Ibid, 113.
- ³⁴ Ibid, 137-140.
- ³⁵ Chambers, Steiner, and Fleming, *Women and Journalism*, 1.
- ³⁶ Ibid, 10.
- ³⁷ Ibid, 84.
- ³⁸ Ibid, 111.
- ³⁹ Ibid, 112.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Pamela J. Shoemaker, and Stephen D. Reese, *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content* (New York and London: Longman Publishing Group, 1991), 194.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1980), 10.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Kembrew McLeod, “*^{1/2}: A Critique of Rock Criticism in North America,” *Popular Music*, 20:1 (2001), 48.
- ⁴⁶ Robert Milliken, *Lillian Roxon: Mother of Rock* (Australia: Black, Inc., 2002), 160.
- ⁴⁷ Robert Sam Anson *Gone Crazy and Back Again: The Rise and Fall of the Rolling Stone Generation* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981).
- ⁴⁸ Devon Powers, “More Than Words: Musings on Music Journalism: Black Like Me,” *PopMatters*, <http://www.popmatters.com/music/columns/powers/040825.shtml> (accessed June 9, 2005).
- ⁴⁹ Kembrew McLeod, “Between Rock and a Hard Place: Gender and Rock Criticism,” in Steve Jones, *Pop Music and the Press*, ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 93-94.
- ⁵⁰ Robert Wyatt and Geoffrey Hull, “The Music Critic in the American Press: A Nationwide Survey of Newspapers and Magazines,” *Mass Communication Review*, 17 (1990): 38-42.
- ⁵¹ McLeod, “*^{1/2}: A Critique of Rock Criticism in North America,” 56-57.
- ⁵² Helen Davies, “All Rock-and-Roll Is Homosocial: The Representation of Women in the British Rock Music Press,” *Popular Music*, 20:3 (2001), 316-317.
- ⁵³ Ibid.
- ⁵⁴ Robert Love, ed., *The Best of Rolling Stone: 25 Years of Journalism on the Edge* (New York: Doubleday, 1993).
- ⁵⁵ McDonnell and Powers, *Rock She Wrote: Women Write About Rock, Pop*, 6.
- ⁵⁶ Hirshey, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: The True, Tough Story of Women in Rock*, 2.
- ⁵⁷ McDonnell and Powers, *Rock She Wrote: Women Write About Rock, Pop*, 13
- ⁵⁸ Ibid, 14.
- ⁵⁹ Liz Evans, *Girls Will Be Boys: Women Report on Rock*, xvii.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid.
- ⁶¹ Rhodes, *Electric Ladyland: Women and Rock Culture*, xi.
- ⁶² Ibid, 89.

Chapter Three:

Historical Background – Women and the Culture of Rock: Pop Stars, Fans, Groupies, and...Journalists?

To understand the role that women journalists play in the arena of rock-and-roll, it is valuable to first examine the roles women have played, historically, in rock-and-roll in general: behind the scenes, at the microphone, as music fans who drive the music, and as depicted in the music press. Though women have figured significantly in rock-and-roll from its formative years – the 1950s – to the present, their contributions to the field have largely been dismissed and devalued by scholars, historians and the rock music press. In a 2001 article in *Popular Music*, Kembrew McLeod wrote that despite an onslaught of popular female musicians at the turn of the 21st century, “the music industry remains one of the most unequal industries within contemporary North America.”⁶³ Gender inequity is visible in all facets of the music industry, starting within the bureaucratic structure of record labels themselves. “One of the few places where one can more consistently find women is within publicity departments, but these jobs are typically viewed as falling within the lower rungs of the business.”⁶⁴

Female musicians face similar obstacles. When many people think of rock-and-roll, they conjure up images of rebellious young men with long, scraggly hair and sweat-soaked clothes, playing their hearts out in bands, with their electric guitars blaring, and macho behavior in full force. In other words, they picture Mick Jagger’s swagger, Elvis Presley’s hip gyrations, and Led Zeppelin’s hard-rock antics. This gendered view of rock-and-roll, however, is simply historically inaccurate according to Brenda Johnson-Grau, who compiled a list of some of the most influential women musicians, organized by

decade, for an article in Steve Jones' anthology, *Pop Music and the Press*.⁶⁵ In the 1950s there were Big Mama Thornton, and Etta James, for instance. The 1960s: Brenda Lee, the Shangri-Las, and the Dixie Cups. The 1970s: the Carpenters, Heart, Gladys Knight and the Pips, and Donna Summer, among others.

“The history of rock ‘n’ roll shows us that the presence of women has been continual and constant, yet the pop press routinely eliminates or underplays the contributions of women musicians,” Johnson-Grau wrote. “Their presence on the charts or in the clubs is deemed unusual because rock ‘n’ roll has come to be routinely defined as a naturally male-dominated art form.”⁶⁶ Hard-rocking women musicians like Patti Smith, Grace Slick and Joan Jett are rarities in the rock and pop world – they broke the mold and earned the respect and adoration of the masses, including men. No woman, however, has come closer to rock-god status than Janis Joplin.

“Victim, visionary and Valkyrie, [Janis] Joplin was dubbed ‘the first pin-up hippy girl’ and ‘first major girl sex symbol in rock.’ She expressed the confusion of a woman raised with the repressive sexual codes of the 1950s, yet embracing the bewildering lack of boundaries that came with the 1960s hippy counter-culture,” wrote Lucy O’Brien in *She Bop II: The Definitive History of Women in Rock, Pop and Soul*:

The first white women to negotiate the explosive, murky depths of psychedelic rock ‘n’ roll, Joplin made up the rules and suffered for it. ...Her brief, fiery four-year career symbolized the most extreme dilemma for women in rock ‘n’ roll – how to compete with men, yet not lose a valuable sense of self.⁶⁷

Joplin drank, swore, partied and took drugs like the best of the male rock stars – she indulged fully in the stereotypical rock-and-roll lifestyle, and it was her downfall. She died in 1970 of a heroin overdose. Joplin was an anomaly in that she was viewed as “one

of the boys.” Most of the time, when female musicians are written about in the music press, they are treated as separate from men, and not always equal.

When a female musician sells a lot of records or captures a sizeable following, the press often depicts her as an “other,” or someone extraordinary – a phenomenon. This was particularly true when Lilith Fair, a music festival named after the biblical Adam’s rebellious first wife, took America by storm in the summer of 1997. Pop singer-songwriter Sarah McLachlan, frustrated from years of trying, unsuccessfully, to get her music heard on male-dominated Top 40 radio, organized an extensive summer festival tour made up entirely of female musicians, including Jewel, Sheryl Crow, Tracy Chapman, Lisa Loeb, and the Indigo Girls. A slew of magazine covers resulted with headlines such as “Women of Rock” (*Rolling Stone*), “Galapalooza” (*Time*), and “The Girl Issue” (*Spin*).⁶⁸ Lilith Fair gave the music press the perfect excuse to lump together into one category of rock - women’s rock - a group of very different women, with very distinct musical styles. “Not only portrayed as unusual and antipathetic to rock-and-roll’s essence, women musicians who do make it to the front of the stage are undermined and made extraordinary by being compared only to other women, as if the history of rock and pop has been played out in different rooms with all participants wearing gender-specific headphones,” Johnson-Grau wrote.⁶⁹

The above phenomenon was evident in some of the press coverage Lilith Fair received at the time. Take, for instance, the opening paragraph of *Newsweek*’s article on the festival:

Call us insensitive, but when we first heard about Lilith Fair we had one reaction: run. A six-week tour opening July 5 and made up entirely of female singer-songwriters and female-led bands, Lilith Fair, at first glance,

has the touchy-feely feminist vibe of a grown-up slumber party in the woods. There will be girl-friendly artsy-craftsy booths (pottery, handcrafted jewelry) and corporate sponsors donating money to girl-friendly charities... [H]eadliner Sarah McLachlan is one of the most unabashedly sensitive artistes in the business: her new single, 'Building a Mystery,' from her forthcoming album 'Surfacing,' contains enough dark/light imagery to occupy a literature class at Bard College. 'I just thought it would be so great to offer a forum for women in music to get together and create some sort of community,' says McLachlan. This isn't entertainment - it's therapy.⁷⁰

In the article, writer Yahlin Chang not only focused on the "otherness" aspect of the performers, but made the assumption that because the tour included only women, it could only be lightweight, yawn-inducing and overtly-sentimental. The *National Review* took things a step further with their review of the festival and used Lilith Fair to launch into a discussion (or diatribe) on modern femininity. David Klinghoffer wrote:

A woman is trying to smoke a cigarette but with inelegant results; the piercing in her tongue keeps getting in the way. Another woman parades by with a baby suckling at her bare left breast, as if to say: 'See my baby! See my breast!' Behavior like that falls short of ladylike, and you will definitely come across the likes of it if you visit Lilith Fair.⁷¹

Later in the article, Klinghoffer concluded that unlike some of the Lilith Fair audience members, the singers themselves "were remarkably feminine... [E]very singer I watched had the personal qualities that any traditional-minded father would be delighted to see in his daughter."⁷² Natalie Merchant, for instance, first wore her hair in an "adorable bun, but then she untied it and let it fall down around her shoulders in such a way that all the (not many) men in the audience were united in a collective sigh of longing;" and Sarah McLachlan, her hair short and blond, "is a pixie, a sprite...Miss McLachlan left the stage with a girlishly energetic little skip."⁷³

Condescension and sexism aside, at least one of the performers found the frenzy of media attention itself to be disconcerting and unwarranted. In a 2004 interview with *The Columbus Dispatch*, Jewel, looking back on the event, said:

I thought the fuss that was made over [Lilith Fair], as if women in music was something new, that was embarrassing, you know? I was on my first record. Most of us were on our first records at that time, which is a spit in the wind compared to women who have had very long, successful, creatively viable careers, like Joni Mitchell or Ricki Lee Jones or Sarah Vaughan or Josephine Baker. Women in music have been around, and better than us, for a long time. I certainly didn't think it was anything new, and I thought it was a little bit blasphemous to make such a big deal out of it, as if we were inventing something.⁷⁴

In addition to creating and perpetuating the stereotype of the woman musician as “other,” music journalists (often male) tend to view female musicians through a gender-specific framework: female musicians are seldom considered to be as credible, or authentic as male musicians; female musicians are generally written about as women first, musicians second; and oftentimes, their work is ignored altogether. In a *Popular Music* article, Helen Davies found that this is not only the case in America, but in England as well. “[T]he notion of credibility, which is of vital importance to the ‘serious’ rock music press, is constructed in such a way that it is almost completely unattainable for women,” she wrote.⁷⁵ To be viewed as credible, a performer’s music has to be viewed as “intelligent and serious,” because masculinity is associated with the cerebral, and femininity is associated with the physical.

As was evident in the *National Review* write-up of Lilith Fair, (which described Natalie Merchant’s and Sarah McLachlan’s hair, and feminine good looks, instead of their music), “[w]hen women are mentioned, they are nearly always represented

primarily as women, rather than as musicians.”⁷⁶ The same thing happens in interviews, where female musicians are often asked about their love lives, their families, and other subjects “which stress their femininity.”⁷⁷ Further, interviews with female musicians “almost always begin with a description of her appearance and clothing,” and “[w]omen are often described as being physically small and childlike – always ‘girls’, never ‘women’ – perhaps in order to further differentiate them from men.”⁷⁸ Finally, according to Davies, British music critics employ “a range of tactics to obscure and denigrate the work of female artists. Perhaps the most common way in which music journalists treat female performers is to ignore them completely. This attitude is particularly noticeable in retrospective writing on rock history, which often obliterates any trace of all but a token few women.”⁷⁹

In *Electric Ladyland: Women and Rock Culture*, Lisa L. Rhodes studied several publications, including *Rolling Stone* and the *Village Voice*, for their coverage and treatment of female musicians between 1965 and 1975. Of *Rolling Stone*, she wrote:

It is not my intention to detract from the successes and achievements of *Rolling Stone*. Rather my project is to reveal the Achilles heel of this music journalism ‘god’ and those who created it. The men who were in charge of the creation and publication of *Rolling Stone* had one glaring area of journalistic sloppiness, inattention, and rancor: women. ...Stereotypical sexist clichés abounded in *Rolling Stone*’s depictions of women from 1967-1975....[T]hese stereotypes were a none-too-imaginative collection of the usual suspects: women as housewives, mothers, sisters, dolls, and whores.⁸⁰

If female musicians face difficulties earning respect and credibility, so do their fans – especially female fans. “In a world of sex and drugs and rock ‘n’ roll, women’s role was to provide the sex,” wrote Diane Railton in a *Popular Music* article. “A constant

image of fans of [pop] music is of a girl or young woman, screaming, out of control, totally absorbed in the bodily experience. And the image that is produced time and again is not usually of *one* girl but of a heaving, screaming ‘mass’ of femininity.”⁸¹ This was especially prevalent at an Elvis Presley or Beatles concert, Christopher R. Martin wrote in the *Journal of Communication Inquiry*:

One of the most interesting social developments in the United States in 1956 was the behavior of hundreds of thousands of mostly white, middle class girls, who screamed, danced, and sobbed to the point of ‘enthralment,’ ‘near-hysteria,’ ‘mass hysteria,’ or ‘pandemonium,’ according to several newspaper and magazine descriptions. Elvis Presley, with his 1956 national debut, was the chief cultural site for this type of youthful expression.⁸²

Further, Martin explained, in the mid-1960s, the definition of rock-and-roll went through a transformation, and the movement’s “essential qualities were coded in terms of aggressive male sexuality, while androgynous, romantic rock-and-roll – most often the domain of young women—was increasingly marginalized. Women were left to attend to music that was not *real* rock-and-roll (*e.g.* teenybopper music) or they could participate in aggressive male rock-and-roll only as objects.”⁸³

“The music press views all teenage girls, and indeed often all women, as teenyboppers,” wrote Davies. “The disparagement of teenyboppers and their music is another way in which the press marginalizes women.”⁸⁴ The term “teenybopper,” according to Davies, is a derogatory way of describing a young teenage girl who keeps up with the latest fashions, trends, and popular music. “Moreover, the term ‘groupie’ is often used by the music press to refer to all female fans, and this is part of its constant definition of women in terms of their sexuality. ...[The] music press assumes that women

fans of both teenybop and serious rock music are motivated by their sexual attraction to the performer.”⁸⁵ Groupies, historically, are female fans (never male fans) who either sleep with rock stars or fantasize about sleeping with rock stars. Often, though, any woman who works in, or shows interest in, the music industry, is slapped with a groupie label, and women of the music press are no exception.

⁶³ Kembrew McLeod, “*^{1/2}: A Critique of Rock Criticism in North America,” *Popular Music*, 20:1 (2001): 56.

⁶⁴ McLeod, “*^{1/2}: A Critique of Rock Criticism in North America,” 56.

⁶⁵ Steve Jones, *Pop Music and the Press*, ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002)

⁶⁶ Brenda Johnson-Grau, “Sweet Nothings: Presentation of Women in Musicians in Pop Journalism,” in Steve Jones, *Pop Music and the Press* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 202.

⁶⁷ Lucy O’Brien in Steve Jones, *Pop Music and the Press*, 99-100.

⁶⁸ Steve Jones, *Pop Music and the Press*, 208.

⁶⁹ Johnson-Grau in Steve Jones, *Pop Music and the Press*, 210.

⁷⁰ Yahlin Chang, “Quiet Grrls,” *Newsweek*, June 30, 1997.

⁷¹ David Klinghoffer, “Music: Fair Lilith,” *National Review*, September 14, 1998, 70.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Elizabeth Weinstein, “Multifaceted Jewel Goes Where Her Interests Lead,” *The Columbus Dispatch*, July 5, 2004.

⁷⁵ Helen Davies, “All Rock-and-Roll Is Homosocial: The Representation of Women in the British Rock Music Press,” *Popular Music*, 20:3 (2001): 301-306.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 302.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 303.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 302.

⁸⁰ Lisa L. Rhodes, *Electric Ladyland: Women and Rock Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 50-54.

⁸¹ Diane Railton, “The Gendered Carnival of Pop,” *Popular Music*, 20:3, (2001), 323-327.

⁸² Christopher R. Martin, “The Naturalized Gender Order Of Rock-and-roll.” *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 19:1 (1995), 53-54.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁸⁴ Davies, 2001, “All Rock-and-Roll Is Homosocial: The Representation of Women in the British Rock Music Press,” 311-312.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 312-315.

Chapter Four:

Married to Rock-and-Roll: Jane Scott, Grandmother of Rock Journalism

On a rainy winter afternoon in Cleveland, Ohio, in 2005, an elderly man stepped outside of his apartment complex to smoke a cigarette. “Don’t let her bedazzle you, now,” he exclaimed, with a wink, to a young woman on her way to see his neighbor, Jane Scott. At eighty-six-years-old, Jane Scott (known affectionately as the “World’s Oldest Teenager”)⁸⁶ still has that effect on people. During her fifty-year career as a rock journalist for the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* – she was hired in 1952 and retired in 2002 – she worked her charms on the world’s biggest rock stars and their fans (her reading public) alike.

“Please excuse the mess,” she warned on this particular day in February as she opened her apartment door to reveal a living room cluttered with stacks of newspapers and magazines (many of which included articles written about her), bookcases lined from wall to wall with records, compact discs, and books, and countless rock-and-roll memorabilia collected over years on the job. On the wall hung an oversized, framed, black and white poster of the Beatles, the group of British musicians who in the late 1960s changed the course of rock-and-roll music in America, as well as the course of Scott’s life and career.⁸⁷

In the field of rock journalism, Scott is an anomaly in several respects. According to rock journalist and scholar Robert Christgau, “the locally beloved, nationally obscure” Scott was the first rock journalist at a daily newspaper.⁸⁸ Writing into her early eighties, she also became the oldest rock music critic on a daily metropolitan newspaper.⁸⁹ Finally, in addition to being the first, and then the oldest in her field, she was a woman in an area

of journalism that was, and arguably still is, disproportionately crowded with young male reporters.

In 1990, Robert O. Wyatt and Geoffrey P. Hull surveyed 195 music journalists who worked at newspapers and magazines, and came up with a composite picture of the “average” music critic: a thirty-six-year-old, college-educated male with thirteen years of experience in journalism and more than nine years in music journalism.⁹⁰ Further, “[o]ne can get a quick sense of how men dominate the rock journalism establishment by glancing at who is listed as a senior writer or senior, associate, assistant, or contributing editor on the mastheads of major rock magazines like *Rolling Stone*, *Spin*, and *Raygun*,” wrote Kembrew McLeod in *Pop Music and the Press*.⁹¹ “In 1999, the number of female editors or senior writers at *Rolling Stone* hovered around a whopping 15 percent, at *Spin* and *Raygun*, roughly 20 percent,” he added.⁹²

“Unlike many of her peers, most of whom are males in their 30s, she never takes herself too seriously,” Gregory Stricharchuk of *The Wall Street Journal* wrote in a profile in 1987.⁹³ She was, however, taken seriously – most of the time – by the people she worked with, the rock musicians she interviewed, and the fans for whom she wrote thousands of articles.

For Scott, it did not hurt that Cleveland was, from the beginning, closely associated with the burgeoning rock-and-roll movement. Alan Freed, a disc jockey on Cleveland’s radio station WJW, is credited with coining the term “rock-and-roll” in 1951 on his show. “He called it rock-and-roll because ‘it seemed to suggest the rolling, surging beat of the music,’” according to a brief biography on the Rock-and-roll Hall of Fame’s Web site.⁹⁴ Freed’s Moondog Coronation Ball in 1952 became known as the world’s

first rock-and-roll concert.⁹⁵ Later, in 1986, Cleveland was chosen as the site of the Rock-and-roll Hall of Fame and Museum, which is still there today.

During her career, several major newspapers and magazines ran articles about Scott, including *Rolling Stone* and the *Wall Street Journal* article mentioned above, but only when she retired in 2002 did the media report extensively on her career. Furthermore, most of these articles focused on her age and made little mention of her gender. What follows is the story of a female pioneer who through luck, pluck, and most importantly, a strong determination to succeed against the odds, became the grandmother of American rock journalism.

Ticket to Ride: The British Invasion and the Woman Who Saw the Future of Rock

“My philosophy of life,” Jane Scott began, seated on an oversized green chair in her living room, “I was a Girl Scout growing up, and I never forgot ‘Be Prepared.’ I’d be prepared because I was first.”⁹⁶ Scott was referring to her serendipitous entry into the world of rock journalism: a 1964 Beatles concert. A poster of the foursome, a reminder, hung prominently on the wall behind her.

Scott, a 1937 graduate of Lakewood High School, in Cleveland, and a 1941 graduate of the University of Michigan (where she studied English and drama), was hired by *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* on March 24, 1952, which, coincidentally, was just three days after Alan Freed’s Moondog Coronation Ball at the old Cleveland Arena. The event went down in history as the world’s first rock music concert.⁹⁷ She was hired as a society assistant, covering the goings-on of Cleveland’s social elite. For the job, she was given a “little blue book” that contained the names and telephone numbers of everyone her editors deemed “important,” and those were the only people she was allowed to call for

her stories. “When you start at a big paper...I had to go into the Society department, and that’s dreadful,” she said. “It’s dreadful if you grow up with a feeling that everyone is God’s child....It wasn’t interesting at all.”⁹⁸

Scott soon moved onto writing and editing simultaneously for the *Plain Dealer*’s “Senior Class” section, which was geared toward senior citizens, and the “Teen Page,” which was aimed at Cleveland’s youth. This dual role earned Scott the unofficial title of “pimples to pensions” reporter.⁹⁹ For the “Teen Page,” Scott relied on an army of more than ninety teenage correspondents to report to her on events at their schools and in their communities. On September 15, 1964, the buzz centered around four young British men – John Lennon, Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr and George Harrison – the Beatles. Scott attended their concert at Public Hall and literally saw (and heard) her future. Her “Teen Page” gradually morphed from a listing of teen dances and sporting events into a rock-and-roll music page. “After I saw the Beatles that one time in 1964...I knew that’s where [the “Teen Page”] was going to go. The editor was grateful I got that Beatles stuff and wanted me to include more stuff about the Beatles,” she said.¹⁰⁰

“I never before saw thousands of 14-year-old girls all screaming and yelling,” she told the *Plain Dealer*’s John Soeder. “I realized this was a phenomenon. ...The whole world changed.”¹⁰¹ When the Beatles returned to Cleveland two years later in 1966, Scott again covered the event. “To Jane’s amazement, no one else at the *Plain Dealer* had signed up to cover the Fab Four’s news conference,” wrote David Segal in a *Washington Post* article, “so she headed down to the Renaissance Hotel [sic]¹⁰² and realized she had found a beat that eclipsed all others.”¹⁰³ “No one kept going with it like I did. I saw it and I knew. I was a teen editor, and I was trying to put things in [the newspaper] that the

kids would care about, and I knew right then that what they really cared about was the Beatles and the new rock sound,” she explained. “I was the only woman from the *Plain Dealer* who went down to interview [the Beatles].”¹⁰⁴

Decades later, Scott recalled the incident with clarity. Gaining admission to the press conference was no easy task; even the Beatles’ manager was initially denied access:

It was at the hotel downtown [the Cleveland Sheraton]. They had an interview [press conference] there. I went there to interview them and so did somebody else, but the people in charge said ‘No, we have all we need there.’” A local television personality... however, was there and was bringing the Beatles to their performance. He said, ‘You have to have Jane Scott...and Brian Epstein [the Beatles’ manager]. You cannot have an interview without them here.’ They opened the door and we got in. I had to be talked in, but so did Brian Epstein. It was wonderful.¹⁰⁵

Once inside, then forty-something Scott made a beeline for then twenty-something Paul McCartney, but so did all of the other reporters – mostly male television reporters who obstructed her view with their bulky microphones and video cameras – so instead, she approached Lennon to talk. She asked him, “‘How’s it going?’ He said, ‘Well, it’s not as good as it was. Who said it’s going to last forever?’ I wrote that down. It’s still lasting. He was wrong, its still going because no one was like the Beatles, and still isn’t quite like them.”¹⁰⁶

Plain Dealer reporter Michael Heaton, who worked with Scott on the rock beat in the late 1980s and early 1990s, grew up reading Scott’s byline in the *Plain Dealer*. When she covered the Beatles in 1964 and 1966, no one predicted that a new kind of journalism would emerge as a result, he said:

She like invented rock journalism. When the Beatles came to Cleveland...the *Plain Dealer* was like, ‘Okay, what’s this thing happening? There’s some band from England coming that all the kids are

talking about. Give it to Jane Scott. Jane Scott at that time was covering senior citizens and whatever they called the teen beat. The editors at the *Plain Dealer* in 1963 just thought those were unimportant beats, and Jane was sort of this middle-aged reporter who they gave this stuff to.¹⁰⁷

The Beatles and the new rock sound, then, helped pull Scott from the ghettos of society reporting and into the brighter lights of rock-and-roll. “She realized the significance of what rock-and-roll was going to do in this country and this culture, and she took it and wrote it for all it was worth, to her own benefit and to her career, but also to the benefit of the readers of the *Plain Dealer*,” Heaton added. “She really invented rock criticism. There wasn’t a beat like [rock] prior to that.”¹⁰⁸

A Hard Day’s Night: A Ride on the Up Escalator

When Scott turned the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*’s “Teen Page” into a rock-and-roll page, she had little opposition – she was clearly onto something, but more importantly, she was onto something that few of her colleagues cared as deeply about as she did at the time. “Hard as it may be to believe today, the Beatles were often dismissed by cultural commentators of the time as nothing more than a fad that would vanish within months as the novelty wore off,” wrote Richie Unterberger in a brief biography of the Beatles on *allmusic.com*.¹⁰⁹

Anastasia Pantsios, a rock critic for *The Cleveland Free Times*, worked with Scott at the *Plain Dealer* in the 1980s, and then again in the 1990s and early 2000s. Before then, when she was a college student at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland in the early 1970s, she was an avid reader of Scott’s work. “Looking at Jane Scott, I thought, ‘Wow that’s really cool that she’s doing it.’ I thought that until I got a little more into the business and saw how she was really treated,” Pantsios said. “Jane started out as

a society reporter. She basically got to do the rock beat, not because they thought she would be good at writing about rock-and-roll or anything like that, but because basically, in the 1960s, writing about rock music was still considered writing about nothing. It was not taken seriously by the grown-ups.”¹¹⁰ She continued:

Jane kind of lucked out because the ‘real’ writers are going, ‘I would not stoop to go to a Beatles press conference,’ and she’s going ‘Send me, send me!’ And they’re all rolling their eyeballs, going, ‘Yeah, yeah, we’ll send her. It’s a woman’s beat. It’s silly. It’s a bunch of screaming teenage girls. I mean they were taken far less seriously than the Backstreet Boys were taken a couple of years ago. ...It was probably another five to six years after that before any papers starting having regular rock beats.’¹¹¹

According to Robert Christgau, Scott was the first and only rock reporter until about the early 1970s, when rock criticism in daily newspapers sprung from almost nonexistent to “epidemic.”¹¹²

After the Beatles concerts in the 1960s, music quickly took over Jane Scott’s life and career, as she reviewed one concert after the next each week and sometimes several shows in one evening. She also landed interviews with almost every major performer who came through Cleveland. Several months after the first Beatles concert in Cleveland, the Rolling Stones played at Public Hall in November 1964. “I loved the raw, relentless rhythm, Mick Jagger’s raspy voice and Keith Richards’ riffy guitar on such songs as ‘It’s All Over Now’ and ‘Time is On My Side.’ You could tell the Stones had the talent to become one of the all-time bands,” Scott wrote in 1995, looking back on the event.¹¹³

Other performers she covered alone in the 1960s included Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Aretha Franklin, Sonny and Cher, The Who, The Doors, Led Zeppelin, and The Beach Boys. About Janis Joplin, she later wrote:

Janis Joplin, the white-hot mama of the blues, took the Music Hall stage in 1969 like a Boeing 707....

But backstage before the show – before she tore the hall apart with her opener, ‘Piece of My Heart’ – she kept her distance. I and the other reporters present kind of sidled up to her, as she stood aloof in her black sequin cape, black velvet bell-bottoms, gold-colored blouse and an amazing bevy of bracelets and beads.

But she was in a non-media mood.

‘No, no interviews!’ she said.... ‘I’m sweaty, tired, and stoned,’ she said, taking a swig from a bottle labeled Southern Comfort. I talked to Peter Albin, bassist with Joplin’s band, Big Brother and the Holding Company, instead. He said Joplin would be leaving Big Brother in December to form a new band. She did.¹¹⁴

Scott also went backstage when Hendrix played the Music Hall in March 1967.

“He had a date on each arm, each cuddling up for attention. One of the crew whispered that the two women were sisters,” she wrote.¹¹⁵ The night before the concert, she interviewed him at the old Otto’s Grotto, a nightclub in the old Statler Hotel. She noticed that when he signed autographs, he did so with his right hand, even though he was left-handed and played guitar left-handed. “Years later, I asked his father [why] – he came to the Rock Hall – he said, ‘Jane, if you were black and you were in Mississippi or someplace, and you told your school that you were left-handed, they’d as much as say ‘Go to hell, get in there with the right-handers.’ That’s the way they treated him. He had to learn right-handed,’” she said.¹¹⁶

Though she was usually at least twenty years older than the stars she interviewed, she partied with the best of them. “I love parties,” she said:¹¹⁷

The Who are the best party-givers. They were the ones that invited the press to their place after the show – we were personally invited – it was for the media...[at] Swingos [Keg and Quarter]. It was wonderful. That was the time that [Keith Moon] came in a regular policeman’s outfit...and

he had handcuffs....[He handcuffed Kid Leo of WMMS FM to a blonde girl he did not know]. They were the friendliest.¹¹⁸

Scott recalled being at a Led Zeppelin show on July 20, 1969, the night that Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. “[The band] mentioned it there that night,” she said. “They played ‘Dazed and Confused’ and everybody looked up at the sky. Two years later [Led Zeppelin] wrote ‘Stairway to Heaven’ and said, ‘If only I’d written that first.’”¹¹⁹

“She would give everybody a fair shake, and by virtue of that she ended up catching a lot of people who went on to become superstars as they took their first step on the up escalator,” said the *Plain Dealer*’s pop music critic, John Soeder.¹²⁰ Terry Stewart, president and chief executive officer of the Rock-and-roll Hall of Fame and Museum, added:

Everybody knew Jane. Not that Jane liked everybody, but she was one of these writers that had a way about her that made almost all the artists very comfortable with her.... She was genuine. She was real, She had a great affection for the artist and the music, and she was a different demographic than most of these people saw. They were used to seeing the young kid that’s either just out of journalism school or never went to college.¹²¹

With each big interview she landed, Scott witnessed her star rise and it was not long before she was a household name in Cleveland and a favorite with bands all over the world.

Eight Days A Week: An Older Woman in A Younger Man’s World

Throughout her career as a rock journalist, Scott’s gender and age worked both for and against her. Two years after she created the rock music beat at *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, the first ever rock music magazine – *Crawdaddy!* – was founded by teenager Paul Williams in Boston.¹²² A year later, in 1967, college dropout Jann Wenner

created *Rolling Stone* in San Francisco, and in 1969, Barry Kramer started *Creem Magazine* in Detroit.¹²³ These magazines, created and staffed mostly by young men, established a sort of canon of rock journalism – an edgier, often irreverent type of critical writing that bore little resemblance to the articles and reviews Scott filed regularly for the *Plain Dealer*.

“When I was doing it, remember, they were kids. They were in junior high,” Scott said of her average readers. “They didn’t have cars, they couldn’t get a car, and their parents were not so eager to drive them to that rock concert, so they couldn’t go. I thought I was the eyes and the ears of people who would have loved to have been there.”¹²⁴ From grand concert halls to smaller music clubs, wherever the Cleveland youth of the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s reveled in their music of choice, Scott was right beside them. They got to know her articles and her memorable persona. No matter what the occasion, she always wore her trademark square, bright red-framed glasses, dyed her hair platinum blonde, and carried a large purse stuffed with promotional materials, a snack for during the show, and earplugs. She also wore her backstage passes pinned to her shirt so she did not lose them and headed backstage before every concert to swipe a set list. “She was kind of a rock star in her own right,” commented Soeder. “She is a very colorful character. ...She always made a point of mingling with fans at a concert.”¹²⁵ A common tactic for Scott, in her articles, was to interview audience members for their reactions to the concert. She recalled only one instance where a young concertgoer derided her for her age:

One time there was a girl who sat in the first row....She was very good looking and she dressed like Lord & Taylor, and she was in the first row. A little bit snooty I thought toward other people. She came up to me and

said, ‘Are you covering this?’ I said, ‘Yes I am, very glad to meet you.’ ‘And do you really *like* Bob Seger?’ What would someone my age be doing liking someone that age. I had just read that day before in the *Plain Dealer* an article about bullying, and since that was a bullying statement, making me feel I was so old and all that. ...I said, ‘Oh, you’re so right, we do like each other. Of course, you know, we used to be lovers.’ She knew I was a reporter by that time. ‘I hate to tell you this, because you’re so young, but that doesn’t always last.’ ... The look on her face was worth anything I ever said.¹²⁶

Most of the time, teenage concertgoers were respectful of the colorfully dressed middle-aged woman with the reporter’s notebook in her hand – after all, she had the power to put their names in the paper, and she often did. “If you want people to read you, you have got to know what they like, and you’ve got to write about and go to things that they like,” Scott explained. “You don’t have to love it yourself, but you have to appreciate what they like in it and be aware of what is in it..”¹²⁷ According to Pantsios of *The Cleveland Free Times*, this approach earned Scott some snickers from the emerging rock music press:

I think she was looked at with some sort of indulgence by these people because she didn’t really write as a music critic. She came from a reporter background, and consequently, a lot of what she wrote was less analyzing the music, which is what these young male hotshots thought they were doing, as opposed to reporting who was there, what they did, what they said, what it looked like. She was very fond of interviewing audience members at shows for instance. It got to be kind of a standing joke about Jane Scott putting down where everybody went to high school.¹²⁸

The Plain Dealer’s Michael Heaton made a similar point:

When *Rolling Stone* came to sort of its power in the 1970s, rock criticism was about analyzing the music and saying ‘this is good’ and ‘this is bad.’ Jane was really about introducing the concept to people who wouldn’t otherwise know about it. So she was more like an informational sort of writer. ...Some people might criticize her, saying, ‘Oh, she was just a flack for rock-and-roll,’ but rock-and-roll needed a flack at that time.

People didn't know what it was and they didn't know what it could be. Before people understood the impact it was going to have, Jane was there sort of helping it give birth in America.¹²⁹

Scott, for her part, was adamant her gender was never an issue, and she was treated fairly throughout her career. Furthermore, such criticism of her work did not bother her because her job was first and foremost to report on what she saw and heard, sparing readers her personal views. "As I say, you're not there to write about what you like," she said. "You write for your audience. ...Always, wherever I go, whenever I go to a concert, I talk to the young people. They're the ones who decide who's going to be big or not. They're going to go to the concert or they are not. ...They know so much that you don't know because they are just living it and you're not."¹³⁰

In May 1979, *Rolling Stone* ran a profile on Scott that hinted at the national rock press's true opinion of her. "Jane Scott – amateur handwriting analyst, Sunday school teacher, oft-engaged single woman and palm reader – is the pop/rock writer for Ohio's largest daily newspaper, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*," wrote reporter Lee Abbott. "She's also known throughout the music business as rock journalism's oldest teenybopper."¹³¹

The word "teenybopper" did not paint the most flattering portrait of Scott, who was in her fifties at the time the article was published. It is generally a derogatory term used to describe a young teenage girl who keeps up with the latest fashions, trends, and popular music.¹³² The *Rolling Stone* piece also quoted an anonymous record company publicist on his opinion of Scott:

She's a relic, an anachronism....I mean, you've got this great rock town that's broken so many acts and is virtually ruled by FM radio, and you've got this woman running around asking Ted Nugent what kind of feathers

he wears. The bottom line is that she cares, but I keep asking myself why these clowns don't get a serious rock critic.¹³³

“There were a lot of people who at first didn't respect the beat, and then when the beat was established, who didn't respect Jane, because she didn't have what cool, hard rock critics thought were the chops to do what she was doing,” said Heaton. “But she brought her own talents to the beat, and you think about the stories that she wrote – just the volume of words that she wrote about how many bands, it's unbelievable.”¹³⁴

Regardless of what the *Rolling Stone* magazines of the world thought of Scott, one thing was clear: the bands loved her. “I worked in San Francisco covering music for the *Examiner*. Everybody I'd talk to, they'd say, ‘You're from Cleveland, right? How's Jane?’ She knew everybody,” said Heaton, who currently writes a column for the *Plain Dealer* entitled “Minister of Culture.”¹³⁵ In an April 7, 2002 tribute to Scott in the *Plain Dealer*, Soeder wrote:

‘Where's Jane?’

It was never ‘Hi!’ Or ‘How's it going?’ Over the years, whenever I would show up instead of you-know-who to review a concert or to cover some other music-related event, people were visibly disappointed. They always greeted me by inquiring about my infinitely more esteemed colleague.

I tried not to take it personally. Hey, so it goes when you're basking in the shadow of a living legend.¹³⁶

In the same article, Soeder continued:

A few months back, I did a phone interview with Ray Davies of the Kinks. The first words out of his mouth were: ‘Is Jane Scott still there? Please give her my regards.’ John Mellencamp more or less said the same thing (minus the British accent) when I met the heartland rocker aboard his tour bus in 2000.¹³⁷

In so many ways, Scott stood apart from other rock critics: she was an older female who had a distinctive fashion sense about her; even her interview technique differed from the hard-hitting, innately critical and oftentimes cynical approaches of other rock critics such as Lester Bangs (*Creem*), Greil Marcus (*Rolling Stone*, *The Village Voice*), Jon Landau (*Rolling Stone*) and Dave Marsh (*Creem*). Scott's approach, intentional or not, was often that of a caring mother or grandmother. She asked bands about their families and their children. She offered to read their palms and to tell their fortunes. Sometimes, she even analyzed performers' handwriting to ease them into an interview. She was able to warm to even the most egoistic and potentially threatening of performers simply by treating them as human beings rather than rock gods. "She had met all these rock-and-roll superstars over the years, but the interesting thing was she always talked about them as if they were the folks next door," Soeder said. "She had that ability to kind of penetrate or crack through whatever pretense an artist might try to put up as a shield during an interview."¹³⁸

"She was like their mom," Heaton added:

She has this persona that's kind of like, she does this soft-spoken kind of grandma, kind of doddering thing, but really, she could use that to effect to get somebody to warm up, to get somebody who wasn't in the mood to give an interview – 'Well I'm going to give it to this poor old woman' – or if there's some big bouncer who's not going to let her backstage to see something, she'd use it then and get backstage. She's extremely smart and very crafty.¹³⁹

On November 12, 1998, Scott and Soeder interviewed Billy Joel backstage at Gund Arena before his concert. At the time, Joel was planning to take a break from rock

and try his hand at classical music. Soeder recalled the experience, pointing out their differences in approach:

We were both sitting there with Billy Joel, and I started out by asking just a bunch of what I, in retrospect, would describe as fussy questions about his decision to go into classical, and more music-oriented questions. Jane kind of let me do my thing, and then, when it was her turn, she just casually piped in and started asking about his daughter, Alexa (with Christie Brinkley). It was remarkable, because you could kind of see Billy's whole demeanor change. He went from being a musician responding to my questions, which he had probably heard many times before, to being a proud father and connecting with Jane on a much more human level.¹⁴⁰

"Alexa is left-handed, a real advantage in piano playing, and she has perfect pitch," Joel reported to Scott. The item appeared in her "Backstage Pass" column later that week.¹⁴¹

"She became a favorite with a lot of musicians because I think they saw that she tried to be fair with everyone," noted Pantsios.¹⁴²

I've known writers over the years who were almost pathologically afraid of being thought uncool, and it never bothered Jane. She always took each person at face value...It's why she sometimes got in the presence of people that other people couldn't, because they didn't see her as predatory....And also the sheer novelty of having this older woman back there, a lot of people thought that was fun and cute.¹⁴³

One of the problems Pantsios and other female rock journalists faced was fighting "the perception that the reason you're doing this is to get to the musicians because you want to be a groupie," Pantsios said.¹⁴⁴ Scott insisted that this was never a problem for her. "I wasn't very pretty-pretty. I'm average looking. I was good enough to get by, but I wasn't the type, ...[the bands] all knew I was their mothers' age," she said. No matter who she interviewed, though, Scott made it a goal to "develop a friendliness" with that person. "It's completely asexual," she explained. "As a reporter you get to know them as a person

if you can. It's not always easy but it's very valuable.”¹⁴⁵ Abiding by this philosophy, she rarely turned down party invitations – prime opportunities to interact with her subjects. When Lou Reed left the Velvet Underground and embarked on a solo career, for example, he threw a party for the media. “I was the only one who showed up,” Scott said. “He never forgot that. They don't forget those things....Lou became sort of a good buddy of mine.”¹⁴⁶

Scott's hip grandmother persona was particularly helpful when she interviewed the foul-mouthed rap group the Beastie Boys in the 1980s. Before their concert at Public Hall on March 23, 1987, they called Scott for a scheduled telephone interview. “I did not like the Beastie Boys,” she said. “I didn't think they were very good. They were just kind of average or nothing...and they used the “F” word every sixth word. I pretty much just thought, you know, you don't have to do that. It's not such a tremendous achievement to be able to use that word.”¹⁴⁷ Fed up with their swearing, she told the group about the time she interviewed a similarly foul-mouthed band, the Mentors, and even they did not curse like the Beastie Boys. It worked. “They realized I wasn't easily shocked when I told them I had interviewed the Mentors, a band whose song titles were so obscene they couldn't be printed in a family newspaper,” she wrote in an August 30, 1995 *Plain Dealer* article.¹⁴⁸ As Cleveland-based rock singer Michael Stanley told Paul Stanley of the *Associated Press*, “It was always great to see the most hard-core, hardened rock musicians revert to ‘Yes ma'am' and ‘No ma'am' when Jane was in the room.”¹⁴⁹

Don't Pass Me By: The Senior Queen of the Mosh Pits

Around the time of the Beastie Boys interview, in the late 1980s, rumors began to spread around Cleveland that the *Plain Dealer* was looking to replace sixty-seven-year-

old Jane Scott with a younger, fresher rock reporter. It also just so happened that a reporter from *The Wall Street Journal*, Gregory Stricharchuk, was following Scott around at the time for a profile in that newspaper. He included it in his story, which ran March 24, 1987, noting that when Scott's coworkers at the *Plain Dealer* caught wind of this rumor, one hundred twenty-six of them signed a petition for the editors to reconsider. Local FM radio station WMMS also rallied behind Scott.¹⁵⁰

“People got very upset,” Pantsios recalled. “People started calling the paper, petitioning the paper, calling the editors off the hook.”¹⁵¹ A local women's group also signed a petition, and there was a general uproar among readers, according to Scott, who also wrote a letter to the editors of the *Plain Dealer*, explaining her position. The gist of the letter, she said, was:

“Let's face the facts. The facts are that you have two people doing classical music, and one tenth of all records sold in Cleveland are classical...The ordinary guy in the street isn't going down to hear the symphony.” I said, “However rock outsells it ten to one – it's the biggest selling thing there is...There needs to be more than one person doing it. I think you are ready to have another person there. I'm glad you have him there. The two of us can work together and share things because there's enough for both of us.” ...I never was taken off of it.¹⁵²

A younger reporter – Heaton – was brought in to supplement Scott's work, but she retained her job until her voluntary retirement in 2002. “Armed with nothing more than good cheer, a pen and a note pad, she's been splashed with beer, accidentally singed by smokers and jostled in mosh pits. And she stalked the greats,” wrote *The Washington Post's* Segal in a 2002 article. “Rock bands, punks, metalheads, grunge acts and teenyboppers all knew that if they came to Cleveland, there'd be a visit and some gentle, if perplexing, questions from a kindly lady of a certain age.”¹⁵³

In the 1970s, she covered everyone from Bruce Springsteen – one of her favorites – to Elton John, the Jackson 5, Fleetwood Mac, Linda Ronstadt, Diana Ross, Neil Young, Carly Simon, Cat Stevens, Jackson Browne, the Eagles, Pat Benatar, James Taylor, Lynyrd Skynyrd, and Kiss. About the Springsteen show, she reflected: “Springsteen's 1975 show at the Allen Theatre was memorable. He stood like a pirate, with a cap over his eye and a ring in his left ear, pulling us all into fascinating stories of his youth. I reviewed this show and, over the objections of skeptical editors, predicted Springsteen would be a superstar. Lucky for me, Bruce came through.”¹⁵⁴

Music had to change with the times, Scott explained, and she had to roll with the changes.¹⁵⁵ In the 1980s, Live Aid, in Philadelphia, was the concert at which to be. More than 100,000 people, including Scott, attended. She later wrote of the event, which featured Paul McCartney, the Who, Elton John, Queen, the Cars, the Four Tops and the Beach Boys:

On July 13, 1985, the promoters of the all-day trans-Atlantic concert beamed a plea for African famine relief by satellite from Wembley Stadium in London and JFK Stadium in Philadelphia....I wouldn't have missed Live Aid for the world. The memory of Joan Baez opening the show with 'Amazing Grace' and an estimated 101,000 of us singing 'I once was lost but now am found; was blind, but now I see' with her is still with me.'¹⁵⁶

During the 1990s, Scott covered everything from grunge rock, country and rap music to boy and girl bands. In 1992, when she was seventy-two, of one of her favorite performers, Lyle Lovett,¹⁵⁷ she wrote: “You can't help but love Lyle Lovett. Not if you have any hankering for country, jazz, blues, big band swing or gospel. And if these music styles of his don't move you, Lovett's dry wit might. He proved to be a comedian, too, at

a packed Palace Theater concert Wednesday night.”¹⁵⁸ Interviewing Paula Abdul in 1991, she discovered that the popular singer and dancer was a dog lover who owned three pugs: Ricky, Fred and Ethel, which were named after her favorite television show, *I Love Lucy*.¹⁵⁹

When Alanis Morissette played at Public Hall in 1996, she gave a “searing” performance, Scott wrote in her review: “She didn't allude to the four Grammy Awards she won last week, including best album (‘Jagged Little Pill’) and best rock vocalist. Nor did she refer to sales of ‘Jagged Little Pill’ (5 million copies and counting). She didn't have to. She proved why she earned her success with 16 songs, including three new ones and two sets of encores. At times she had the intensity of Janis Joplin.”¹⁶⁰ In 1997, heavy metal shock rocker Alice Cooper, sober for fifteen years, told Scott that he had become a “health freak” and an avid golf player. He added that he planned to use boa constrictors as props on stage at his upcoming concert. “All of them are deaf. Yes, I know. Parents tell me they’re the luckiest ones at the concert!” he joked with Scott.¹⁶¹ Finally, in 2001, a year before her retirement, Scott found herself in a position many a teenage girl would envy – hanging out with popular boy band ‘N Sync at a sound check party before a concert. “One girl asked if ‘N Sync would blow her a kiss. Justin Timberlake blew her one through his fingers, then so did JC Chasez, Joey Fatone, Chris Kirkpatrick and [Lance] Bass,” she wrote.¹⁶²

When Scott retired in 2002, the media covered it extensively. Tributes filled the pages of the *Plain Dealer*, *The Washington Post*, the *Associated Press*, *The Independent* (London), *Birmingham Weekly*, *National Public Radio (NPR)*, the *Toronto Star*, and *Rolling Stone* were just some of the publications that ran stories on Scott. Heaton, who in

1987 was brought in to share the *Plain Dealer*'s rock beat with Scott, said Scott's longevity in the field was remarkable. In 1991, he moved from the rock beat to the Sunday magazine to write general features. "[Scott] outlived everybody who ever worked with her," he said. "They get tired of it after a while. It's a grind. People think it sounds like a lot of fun, but after a while it can be challenging to keep up your energy and enthusiasm for it. That never flagged with her."¹⁶³ Further, Heaton noted that it was "not uncommon to see Jane at 2 a.m. at her desk at the *Plain Dealer*, hammering out a review. It didn't hurt that she was single. She never married. She was married to rock-and-roll."¹⁶⁴

It is possible that when it came to men, Scott looked for that same soul-penetrating connection she found in music. "There's nothing like music," she said with a wide smile. "There's a song you love and it brings people together. It brings people into groups to go to places to see things, and you may hate it or you may love it."¹⁶⁵ That is why she cited "Black Water" by the Doobie Brothers as her favorite song. "We were at the Blossom Music Center [in the 1980s], they were playing it, and for some reason, that song, it just got to people. People stood up and they all put their hands on each other's shoulders, right across the line. I said we had a sense of oneness with the band...it was a feeling of sharing something we loved so much," she said.¹⁶⁶

Despite numerable marriage proposals, Scott consistently chose the single life over the married life. "Anyone can get married. I've been asked at least four times," she said.¹⁶⁷ She turned the men down, she explained, because "It just was not a soul thing, together. ...[T]he best kind of man you will ever marry is a wonderful conversationalist." At eighty, Scott began dating a man seriously and he passed away six years later, in

October 2004. They went to concerts, played Scrabble and solved crossword puzzles together, and most importantly for Scott, spent hours at a time talking. “We were very close. It was the closest thing I ever had. We were inseparable,” she said, nibbling on a custard dessert, which was his favorite.¹⁶⁸

If she were to do it all over again, beginning again in 2005 as a rock journalist, Scott predicted that things might be more difficult for her – especially as a woman in the still male-dominated world of rock journalism. “If I hadn’t had this early start, I would have the same thing that everybody else had – I’d have to fight for my space and everything like that. It’s just by luck that I got there first, ...if I hadn’t seen the Beatles. I’m sure other people saw them, too, at the *Plain Dealer*, but they didn’t hang onto it. They didn’t write about it like I did.”

“There’s nothing as important as love – the love for what you are doing, If you love what you are doing, you are blessed. ...I consider what I have is love, and I’m just grateful that I was able to get it,” she concluded. “I was just lucky.”¹⁶⁹

On May 9, 2009, Scott celebrated her ninetieth birthday, surrounded by friends and family at a private party in Lakewood, Ohio.¹⁷⁰ She currently lives in a skilled nursing facility in Lakewood, but ventures out, on occasion, when her favorite rock stars from decades past return to Cleveland to perform.

⁸⁶ John Soeder, “Rock Writer Jane Scott Retires after 50 Years at *The Plain Dealer*,” *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, April 4, 2002.

⁸⁷ Interview, Jane Scott, February 7, 2005

⁸⁸ Robert Christgau, “A History of Rock Criticism” in *Reporting the Arts II: News Coverage of Arts and Culture in America. National Arts Journalism Program Journal*, 2003, 140-143. <http://www.najp.org/publications/research/reporting2/index.htm>, (accessed February 27, 2005).

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- ⁸⁹ David Segal, "And the Beat Goes On; Jane Scott, the Oldest Living Rock Music Critic, Rolls into Retirement at 83," *The Washington Post*, May 7, 2002. Retrieved from Lexis-Nexis on February 27, 2005.
- ⁹⁰ Robert O. Wyatt and Geoffrey P. Hull, "The Music Critic in the American Press: A Nationwide Survey of Newspapers and Magazines," *Mass Communication Review*, 17, (1990): 38-42
- ⁹¹ Kembrew McLeod, "Between Rock and A Hard Place: Gender and Rock Criticism," in Steve Jones, *Pop Music and the Press* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 93-94.
- ⁹² *Ibid.*
- ⁹³ Gregory Stricharchuk, "Jane Scott Knows Her Rock 'n' Roll, Even if She is 67," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 24, 1987.
- ⁹⁴ "Alan Freed, non-performer," <http://www.rockhall.com/hof/inductee.asp?id=107> (accessed March 3, 2005).
- ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁶ Interview, Jane Scott, February 7, 2005
- ⁹⁷ Soeder, "Rock Writer Jane Scott Retires after 50 Years at *The Plain Dealer*."
- ⁹⁸ Interview, Jane Scott, February 7, 2005.
- ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰¹ Soeder, "Rock Writer Jane Scott Retires after 50 Years at *The Plain Dealer*." *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*.
- ¹⁰² In an August 28, 1995 article, "Talking 'Bout Her Generations; From the Beatles to The Who, From Aretha Franklin to Led Zeppelin,' '60s Artists Left Their Signatures on Rock 'N' Roll History.; And Jane Scott Was There to Tell Us About It," in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Scott wrote that the press conference was at the old Hotel Cleveland Sheraton on August 14, 1966.
- ¹⁰³ Segal, "And the Beat Goes On; Jane Scott, the Oldest Living Rock Music Critic, Rolls into Retirement at 83," *The Washington Post*.
- ¹⁰⁴ Interview, Jane Scott, February 7, 2005.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁷ Telephone interview, Michael Heaton, February 11, 2005.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*
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Chapter Five:

Digging Through The Archives of Women's History: Ann Powers, Rock Anthologist

On a Saturday morning in November 2009, three renowned rock critics, Ann Powers, Lucy O'Brien and Holly George-Warren, sat on an auditorium stage at Case Western Reserve University, in Cleveland, Ohio, to discuss the life and legacy of one of rock's most powerful female voices, Janis Joplin. Their panel discussion, titled "New Perspectives on Janis Joplin," was part of the Rock-and-roll Hall of Fame and Museum (and Case Western Reserve University's) "Kosmic Blues: The Life and Music of Janis Joplin: The 14th Annual American Music Masters Series," a weeklong retrospective on singer, who died of a drug overdose in 1970, at the age of twenty-seven. "She often stands alone in the field of rock-and-roll because she's a woman," Powers told the crowd.¹⁷¹ "Janis was often the only girl in the room."

*"Piece of My Heart" – Falling in Love ... with Rock-and-Roll*¹⁷²

Powers, whose rock journalism career began when she was a teenager in Seattle, in the late 1970s, is no stranger to the "only girl in the room" phenomenon. Currently the rock and pop critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, Powers got her start writing about music for her Catholic high school newspaper. "I was totally into rock and into music since I was nine and I always knew I wanted to be a writer," she said.¹⁷³ At the age of fifteen, while working at her first job selling German sausages at the Food Circus at the Seattle Center amusement park, she discovered Seattle's New Wave and punk-rock scene.¹⁷⁴ Powers was not simply content to be a music fan, though, like so many other teenagers. She wanted more:

I wanted a reason to be there...Having a notebook or having a tape recorder gives you a reason to be there. It also makes you not be interpreted as a groupie or just a fan or an extraneous person. For women, especially girls, young girls, it's often assumed if you're hanging out and you want to be around a band it's because you want to sleep with them or you just want to be their dog, basically, and that obviously didn't make me feel comfortable, and so I quickly figured out that if I had a notebook and I had an assignment, I would have a reason to meet musicians and to talk to them and also just to write about music.¹⁷⁵

One of the bands Powers admired was a local New Age band called The Cowboys. "They were just horrible, I'm sure, but at the time I thought they were fantastic. They had this manager who...for whatever reason he took a shine to me. I think he was amused by this sixteen-year-old girl who had so many opinions about music," she said.¹⁷⁶ The manager had a friend, Carrie Jacobs, who at the time was an editor at an alternative Seattle newspaper devoted entirely to rock music, *The Rocket*, and before long, Powers was the teen correspondent for the newspaper (which folded in 1987), interviewing artists such as the Go-Go's, Jane Wiedlin and Joan Jett. From the beginning, she found herself writing about female artists – the result of "a little bit of stereotyping" – but she didn't mind, she said, because she was interested in writing about female artists.¹⁷⁷

As an undergraduate, she majored in English at the University of Washington, and never took a journalism class. She did, however, become the music editor for her college newspaper, and became torn between careers in academia (specifically literature and poetry), and rock criticism. Ultimately, rock criticism won. After a couple of years at the University of Washington, Powers decided to move to San Francisco, where she enrolled at San Francisco State

University, and then worked for several years at the *San Francisco Weekly*, writing primarily about music. While there, she met a fellow female rock journalist and kindred spirit, Evelyn McDonnell.

In 1991, Powers was approached by a publisher and asked if she was interested in writing a book. Powers proposed a book about female rock journalists and invited McDonnell on board with her. The result, published in 1995, was an anthology of articles by female rock journalists, titled *Rock She Wrote: Women Write About Rock, Pop and Rap*. She gives equal credit to McDonnell, and said they came up with the same idea around the same time, and decided it made sense to collaborate.¹⁷⁸

“A Woman Left Lonely” – Writing the Book on Female Rock Journalists

“This book is the record of a search; the literal process of digging through archives and tracking down old bylines, but also a metaphorical quest for a history and a community,” McDonnell and Powers wrote in the preface to *Rock She Wrote*. “When we began working together...we discovered an affinity – political, aesthetic, and personal – that we hadn’t found among the male critics who surrounded us.”¹⁷⁹

In 1995, “women in rock” (i.e. the surge in popularity of female recording artists) was a popular topic in the mass media. In fact, “women in rock” was considered a cultural phenomenon. For the first time in years, women musicians (both solo and group acts) were dominating radio station play lists, music television stations such as MTV and VH1, and concert arenas across the country. The Spice Girls, a group of five trendy female British pop singers, inspired young girls with a message of “girl power.” Canadian rock singer-songwriter Alanis Morissette shocked the world with an unabashedly angry break-up song, “You Oughta Know,” and (by 2005) sold thirty

million copies¹⁸⁰ of her album, *Jagged Little Pill*. Folk-pop singer-songwriter Sarah McLachlan created an all-female touring festival, Lilith Fair, which was so successful it landed on the cover of *Time* magazine and sparked a media frenzy.¹⁸¹

Several books about women in rock were also published around this time, including the first edition of Lucy O'Brien's *She Bop: The Definitive History of Women in Rock, Pop and Soul* (1996), Gillian G. Gaar's *She's a Rebel: The History of Women in Rock & Roll*, (1992), Andrea Juno's *Angry Women in Rock* (1996), and Barbara O'Dair's *Trouble Girls: The Rolling Stone Book of Women in Rock* (1997). The nineties movement of women in rock even inspired a rock song, "Crochet," by Julie Ruin, also known as Kathleen Hanna of the bands Bikini Kill and Le Tigre: "You make me wanna go away...you make me wanna crochet!...just another book about women in rock...you killed the thing," Hanna vented.¹⁸² "When *Rock She Wrote* came out there was sort of a wave of attention to women in music that it was a part of, which was good and bad, because in some ways it became just another book," McDonnell lamented. "I think in some ways it really got lumped into a trend."¹⁸³

Rock She Wrote, however, was not just another book about women in rock. It explored what in 1995 was virtually uncharted territory – the experiences and challenges of women who wrote about rock music for newspapers and magazines. Further, it highlighted the work of writers who had long been ignored, and began a conversation that continues today. In fact, in a 2005 interview, McDonnell said that the book had generated several recent media requests and that there seemed to be renewed interest in the topic.¹⁸⁴ At the time of the book's release, Powers was building her career as rock journalist, and had grown accustomed to being a token female in an enduring boy's club.

Working on *Rock She Wrote*, Powers began “discovering a personal version of the link between women’s liberation and the love of rock ‘n’ roll”—which she soon realized had been written about by such forebears as Ellen Willis two decades before.”¹⁸⁵ The book features an introduction by McDonnell, a conclusion by Powers, and more than sixty excerpts and re-published articles by female rock journalists such as Jaan Uhelszki and Lisa Robinson (*Creem* magazine), Susan Brownmiller (*Rolling Stone* magazine), Danyel Smith (*Spin* magazine), and the late Willis (the *New Yorker*). “Both of us felt such a project was a feminist act itself: a way of breaking into the canon and restoring the women who belong there to their rightful place,” the editors wrote in the book’s preface. “The need for this book was reinforced when a number of rock histories and collections were published and women authors were notably MIA.”¹⁸⁶

Many of the women included in the book had benefited from what McDonnell termed a “Renaissance period of female rock criticism, a time when talents and philosophies flowered” between 1975 and 1985, and then later during the early-to-late 1990s resurgence of women in rock as a pop culture movement.¹⁸⁷ In the late 1970s and early 1980s, on the heels of the American feminist movement and New Journalism, “most of these women were trying to shift criticism’s focus and approach without landing in a gender pigeonhole,” McDonnell wrote:

The harpooning of the great white whale of objectivity was, after all, the goal of New Journalism, and no one was better prepared to do that than women, who had been told all their lives that their views couldn’t possibly represent anyone else’s.¹⁸⁸

The women in rock “movement” of the 1990s also gave female rock journalists more opportunities to have their voices heard and read. An entire section of *Rock She*

Wrote, in fact, entitled “Wimmin, Grrls, Queens, and Divas,” showcased the work of female journalists writing about female subjects. “Women have often written about the types of music ignored by men,” McDonnell wrote in *Rock She Wrote*. “In particular, whether it’s because it’s what they’re interested in, because they feel obligated to provide a sympathetic ear, or because male editors think it’s what they should do, women often write about women artists.”¹⁸⁹ Powers also noted:

One of the reasons why I think there were a lot of women music critics who were successful, around my age [forty-one] – there was a whole generation of them – is because that was a moment when women in rock was considered very interesting, the early 1990s, that moment when all of us came forth and started our national careers or kind of really established ourselves nationally... Women in rock was a hot topic, and there was a sense, I think, amongst a lot of editors that you had to have women writers to be able to have sort of an equal complement to the women artists who were so interesting, and very often, I would say almost every time a ‘women in rock’ piece got assigned, a think piece, you know, or a general overview of women in music, one of us would write that piece. I think the impulse on the part of editors both male and female was a perfectly good one: I don’t know if was, ‘women understand women better,’ or ‘we’re talking about feminism, we’re talking about gender issues, we should really make sure we get a woman writer for this.’ But it’s definitely a categorical phenomenon. It’s just real.¹⁹⁰

“Get It While You Can” – Forging A Career in Newspapers, and Magazines

For Powers, a self-described feminist, her interest in writing about women in rock overlapped neatly with the public’s desire to learn more about women in rock. “I wanted to write about feminism and what it meant to be a woman in rock, so it was the right fit for me,” she said, “but I definitely think that my biology, as it were, happily coincided with my interests and helped my career.”¹⁹¹

In 1992, while at work on *Rock She Wrote*, Powers was seriously considering pursuing a career in academia (and had begun work on a Ph.D. in cultural studies at the University of California, Berkeley), when she received a telephone call from Jon Pareles, the chief pop music critic at the *New York Times*, who was familiar with her work. “He was like, ‘Do you want to come work for *The New York Times*?’ And that’s just something you don’t say no to, so that’s when I moved to New York,” she said.¹⁹² At the *New York Times*, Powers often touched on women in rock and exposed the irony and double standard inherent in magazines that treated “women in rock” as a genre – women musicians have been a part of rock-and-roll since its inception, and are therefore nothing new, and lumping all female musicians together into a gender-based category can do more harm than good. In a 1994 *New York Times* article entitled “When Women Venture Forth,” for example, she wrote:

[The] ‘women in rock’ article has become its own journalistic subgenre, appearing in nearly every major and minor publication, while record companies are signing female artists by the bushel and quickly packaging them as the next post-feminist phenomenon....And although female artists grow huffy at being lumped together, they know they now receive the kind of attention that only the rare female legend (usually a singer, usually beautiful and exceptionally talented) earned in earlier times. As offended artists and jaded critics incessantly point out, the presence of women in rock has been surprising the unobservant virtually since the music was invented. And in 1994, some kind of critical mass has been reached.¹⁹³

Six months after arriving at the *Times*, she was drawn to the bohemian allure of a competing paper, the *Village Voice*, and accepted a position there as an editor. She said:

I was so dedicated to the idea of alternative journalism and that world, and I was friends with a lot of people who worked there....Initially, I was not the music editor. I was the feminist editor as a matter of fact. They had

this weekly column that was about a half page about feminist issues and I edited that for a while. Then, when [former music editor] Joe Levy left...I took over.¹⁹⁴

Ultimately, in 1997, she decided to return to writing about pop music for the *New York Times*, where she remained until 2001, when she chose to move back to her birthplace, Seattle, for personal reasons. Her parents were nearing their eighties (her father died in early 2005), and she wanted to be nearer to them. In addition, she and her husband Eric Weisbard planned to adopt a child, which was easier for them to do in Seattle than New York. “I loved working for the *Times* but was getting somewhat burned out on reviewing concerts three-four times a week,” she explained. “I was having a lot of health problems...and began to suspect that the high-stress NYC lifestyle was contributing.” She had consulted with the Experience Music Project, a music museum in Seattle, on and off for several years, and when she was offered a job as a curator at the museum, she took it, uprooted and moved back home.¹⁹⁵

She had also published her second book, *Weird Like Us: My Bohemian America*, in 2000 – a memoir and love letter to the bohemian lifestyle. It is not specifically about music, although music made its way into the book. Powers, now forty-five, admitted that it took her years – until she was well into her thirties – to admit that rock journalism was her calling. She said:

The idea of being a professional music critic was just anathema. It just didn't seem like you could do that as a career. There weren't very many opportunities, almost all the role models are men, and it didn't seem sensible, or whatever, and we didn't get necessarily a lot of encouragement. I've always had encouragement as a writer, and I should say, oftentimes, from male editors, but it just didn't seem like a very logical career or a very stable career, so it took me a long time to even kind of admit that that's what I was doing with my life.

...Before then, I always felt like I had to go on and write about other things, more serious things than music. That's one of the reasons why my book, *Weird Like Us*, is not a music book. I thought I should write a book that was about culture, bigger picture culture.¹⁹⁶

In 2005, Powers, co-authored a book with singer-songwriter-pianist Tori Amos, entitled *Tori Amos: Piece by Piece*, a conversational biography/autobiography of the artist, known for her confessional songs, dynamic piano playing and cult following. "I feel like in a way, it's a feminist project from start to end – two women, in dialogue, going back and forth, both of them in charge, neither of them in charge, very non-hierarchical in a way," she said of the project.¹⁹⁷ Several months after the release of *Piece By Piece*, Powers left the Experience Music Project to accept a job (still based in Seattle) as a senior critic and West Coast correspondent at *Blender* magazine. "I feel like I'm doing what I was meant to do in life, again. It's a very narrow skill, reviewing, but I'm a natural at it," she said.¹⁹⁸

Working at *Blender*, she said, was "complicated" – unlike some of her colleagues, she had a mostly positive experience.¹⁹⁹ "Other women that I know, who are writers, had trouble dealing with *Blender*, both as readers and as workers, but for me, because the two editors that I worked with – Craig Marks and Rob Tanenbaum – were old friends of mine and were very protective of my work. I was able to work with them and not feel oppressed, or anything like that. I felt supported and nurtured."²⁰⁰ In 2006, however, Powers decided to return to her prior role as newspaper critic – this time as pop music critic for the *Los Angeles Times*.

"It just turned out to be an incredible opportunity, really, to put myself back on the radar, and to reconnect with the scene in a way that, at a magazine like *Blender*, you

can't do, she said, like writing for a general audience – a reader who is not necessarily a music geek, but has an interest in reading about music.²⁰¹

“Hesitation Blues”: On Rock Journalism’s High Dropout Rate for Women

Few would understand the struggles of female musicians in rock-and-roll better than female rock journalists, who have faced their own similar struggles to be taken seriously and treated as equals. Just as singer-songwriter Patti Smith dropped out of the rock music world for more than a decade, McDonnell and Powers, in their research, found that an alarming number of women who began their careers in rock journalism eventually left the field to pursue other things. McDonnell wrote in the book:

With the exception of [Lisa] Robinson, [Jaan] Uhelski, and [Deborah] Frost, most of the women who wrote in the sixties and seventies have all but quit rock criticism; some write maybe one review a year. Their reasons for leaving are as diverse as their subsequent pursuits (academia, punk rock, law, family), but they sound a similar tone: As women get older, they become less interested in the music....Of course, that means either the male critics who stuck with it are stunted adolescents (a charge some current and former critics specifically level), or they found something in music that grew with them. Or women were shut out of the field in ways that were so subtle, they've rationalized them away. Or all of the above.²⁰²

“It was a real eye-opener for a lot of people,” McDonnell said of *Rock She Wrote*. “I think it got really good reception. We also helped revive some careers...I think we helped Ellen [Willis] out. Jaan Uhelski returned to music criticism after not doing it for like ten years, because of that book. It’s great for the field to have her back!”²⁰³ “I remember there was a party for the book at CBGB Gallery [in Manhattan],” added Powers, “and there were all these women there from different generations meeting each

other, and I remember it felt, it was so rewarding in that moment, to have brought all these women together.”²⁰⁴

McDonnell, Powers, and others have referred to rock journalism as a “boy’s club,” an oasis for many male audiophiles that is sometimes intentionally, though often unintentionally, discriminatory toward women. In the process of researching *Rock She Wrote*, they began to formulate theories as to how and why this happens. “There is a way in which a woman has to prove herself serious that a man doesn’t. That’s always been and remains a problem. That condescending attitude comes from publicists, musicians, editors, promoters, etc., though obviously not from everyone,” McDonnell remarked. “Also, speaking authoritatively about music is very much a male thing, and boys don’t easily let women into the club. I particularly encountered that at the music magazines.”²⁰⁵ McDonnell described writing for music magazines such as *Rolling Stone*, *Spin*, and *Blender* as “the apex of careers” for most rock journalists.²⁰⁶ They are also the most difficult places for women to break into because of their boy’s club mentalities. “The men hang out. They’re friends. They have lunch together. They go out to drinks together. They have a network, a social network that women play a tangential role to,” McDonnell said.²⁰⁷

Indeed, one route of gaining entry into the boy’s club is to date one of the boys. Most women who date other rock critics do not do it for this reason, she added, but nonetheless, romantic relationships provide greater access to the otherwise exclusive social network. Powers, who married rock journalist Eric Weisbard, agreed that her relationship “probably helped me penetrate – to use a bad word – some of those circles.”²⁰⁸

Exclusion and gender-bias are not only prevalent in the workplace, but also in on-the-road situations. Interviewing was a problem for Powers when she was just beginning her career, she said, because of the male-female dynamic that occurred when female reporters interviewed male subjects. Even with bands she was not interested in sexually, “there was a notion that here I am a woman, so I must [be attracted to them] on some level,” she explained. She was more comfortable at first interviewing female subjects, because “I was able to empathize more directly because you have that kind of girl connection, and you use that as an interviewer.”²⁰⁹ With time, her outgoing personality – “I’m very talkative, as you might have noticed,” she said with a hearty laugh²¹⁰ – helped Powers overcome many of the obstacles that presented themselves along the way. One of the greatest challenges, she said, was defining her role in interview situations:

I think that was actually a big problem for me – not exactly being clear of my role. Internally, I just wasn’t always quite sure of who I was in relation to these people – especially the men. With women artists, that role... was the empathizer, sister figure. In fact, the people that I have befriended, who are artists, have tended to be women. Actually, as I get older I tend to befriend more men, again because that kind of sexual dynamic isn’t as strong. I’m just not playing that card, they’re not playing that card, whatever.²¹¹

Powers has made a career of trying to understand the complicated gender dynamics of rock-and-roll. She described rock journalism as a “pleasure field,” or an industry based on people’s love and enjoyment of music. She explained:

I think one thing that happens when you get into the pleasure fields or cultural areas, or places where people are having their fun (whether it’s music, or sports is another example of this), the idea that you’d want to change the rules – people can easily respond by saying, ‘Oh, that’s such a drag. Why don’t you just shut up. We’re just having fun here....I think the fact is that if you are a feminist

and you are bringing up uncomfortable topics, there is a strong temptation among the men who are in power to not want to deal with those topics because they are implicated, so they get dismissed.²¹²

According to Powers, it does not help that most magazines are categorized, for advertising and marketing purposes, as men's magazines, because in general, women are not perceived as consumers of music. Powers explained:

I think there's a way in which, when your ideal reader is a man between the ages of 18 and 25, or even if you up that demographic to, say, 35, the idea that that reader would want to primarily read a female byline is just not acceptable. There's still a very strong sense of, kind of, men want to read men and women want to read women, just as you hardly ever see a male byline in a women's magazine....I think music is gendered in a strange way, because popular music is a generator of and a filter of fantasies of your identity....I think there is a sense that the male rock critic can explain or empathize with that male reader more, because it is already about gender.²¹³

One way to change these assumptions, then, is to place women in positions of editorial power at music publications. "So much of what being a woman in pop music and a woman in rock and a woman music writer is about stealth action – moving under the radar, getting your agenda in under the radar, because it's a patriarchal scene, but it's porous," Powers said.²¹⁴ "The trick is balancing your 'out there' politics that you always want to own, with the ability to work within contexts where those politics might be derided, and finding a way to make them work anyway. You have to be used to a lifetime of abuse, basically," she added with a laugh.

Powers described herself first and foremost as a critic, rather than a feature writer or interviewer – a role she said she inhabited as a kind of "impasse, in a way."²¹⁵ Even

when tasked with reviewing an artist whose appeal she does not understand, she said she tries to get inside the head of the fan sitting next to her, screaming his or her head off.²¹⁶ Oftentimes, she said, she has found that her best reviews were those of performers whose music she did not understand or enjoy, such as 1990s and 2000s rock band Creed. “Scott Stapp obviously thinks he deserves to be a rock god,” she wrote in her September 2000 article on the band:

At the Garden, in a gleaming white shirt and leather hip-huggers that would have delighted his idol, Jim Morrison, Mr. Stapp made so many heroic moves, it seemed as if this was his qualifying routine for the frontman Olympics. He pranced and crouched and swept his arms heavenward, straining his enormous baritone, a foghorn warning all contenders to watch out for his wake. The Garden audience clearly supported his victory bid. Roaring along so enthusiastically that Mr. Stapp could regularly take microphone breaks and let them take over songs, Creed’s fans reached their zenith on ‘Higher,’ which rivals Santana’s ‘Smooth’ as the people’s song of the moment.²¹⁷

Still, in her position at the *Los Angeles Times*, she said, “I constantly get letters...that accuse me of being either a ‘hairy-legged feminist’... or a ‘panting, lusty, middle-aged crone who can’t keep her hands off [pop star] Adam Lambert.’”²¹⁸

Ultimately, though, Powers said her gender helped, more than hurt, her career, an experience she acknowledged was uncommon in her line of work. After all, she has made her name writing extensively about women and gender issues in music, and when editors invited women to write articles for their magazines to fill an unspoken “female” quota.

She explained:

Some people I know, certain people have badmouthed me and said, ‘Oh, she never would have gotten that job at the *Times* or she never would have gotten those breaks if she weren’t a woman.’ And I’m like, ‘Well, okay, fine, I’ll take it.’ I don’t feel bad about that. I think

I've been up to the task, every job I've ever been given. I do think it was good timing for me. Had I been trying to break into the field ten years earlier I'm sure it wouldn't have been as easy.²¹⁹

"I mean, why it was me, why was I the chosen one or one of the chosen ones?" she continued. "That's a question for the gods. I'm lucky, and maybe some of it has to do with talent."²²⁰

Rising through the ranks at music magazines, she acknowledged, has never been easy, especially when "in most of the jobs I've had there's been a male figure who I absolutely love and adore who has been a mentor to me, who is above me in years and in power, and who completely righteously and rightfully does not want to relinquish that power," she said.²²¹ She said she is excited to be able to mentor a new, upcoming crop of young female rock journalists and be the sort of rock writing mentor she never had. "I get to finally be that old geezer on the block," she said with a laugh.²²²

"Light Is Faster Than Sound" – Writing About Rock in Digital World

The changing culture and role of print journalism in the "digital" age of the late 1990s and 2000s has been well documented. "Everywhere we look, commentators are sounding the death knell for print journalism. Many newspapers are disappearing, while others (like the venerable *Christian Science Monitor*) move almost exclusively to online formats," wrote S. Elizabeth Bird in a 2009 journal article in *Journalism*.²²³ "Newsday cuts its workforce by 5 percent; the Tribune Co. is pondering bankruptcy; newspaper revenues dropped by over 18 percent in the third quarter of 2008. And so on," she continued.²²⁴ According to the advertising expenditures listed by the Newspaper Association of America, by the third quarter of 2009, newspaper revenues dropped

twenty-eight percent, from about thirty-four million dollars to about twenty-four million dollars.²²⁵

Rock journalism is no exception. According to Powers, the boom of Internet journalism is a mixed blessing for women who want to write about rock. “For a young writer today, there is tons of opportunity to write. There’s less and less opportunity to make a living writing,” she said.²²⁶ “And the opportunity to make a living writing doesn’t have a lot of room for serious inquiry.” She continued:

Its all about Web hits, so if you want to do deep work you have a few choices: You can align with the academy – there’s really great stuff happening in popular music studies in many universities in the country, and I think that’s a growth industry. You can try the conventional way, and if you’re sub-cultural – like, if you’re an indie rock person pretty exclusively – you can probably work at places like [Web-based music magazine] *Pitchfork*. It doesn’t pay a lot, but it’s there. And there are women doing that work.²²⁷

Every few years, Powers said, someone will suggest she edit a follow-up to *Rock She Wrote*. She has not dismissed the idea yet and admits such a book is long overdue. For one thing, the “women in rock” movement has made a strong resurgence. In the summer of 2010, Lilith Fair is scheduled to make a comeback, featuring an all-star cast of established and up-and-coming female musicians.

“I welcome Lilith Fair back,” Powers said with a smile.²²⁸ I’m at a period in my life where I really don’t believe you have to be loud to be revolutionary. I think loud is great, and it’s important for girls – especially young girls – to know that they can be loud, but it’s really not the only way to say things that change the world.” On November 3, 2009, Powers posted a note on her *Facebook.com* page, a social networking Web site on

which she has more than two thousand “friends,” or other users with whom she is connected. She wrote:

This is a fascinating moment for women in pop, one that's tough to navigate as a critic, musician or fan. There's so much possibility and there are so many problems. I guess it's pretty much like life for women in general. But Lilith's return can only do good, as far as I can tell.²²⁹

She concluded: “There's a whole new generation of girls who will now find out what it's like to be on that field with only sisters as far as the eye can see. I'm bringing [my daughter], for sure.”²³⁰

¹⁷¹ Panel discussion at the Rock-and-roll Hall of Fame and Museum and Case Western Reserve University's 14th Annual American Music Masters: “Kozmic Blues: The Life and Music of Janis Joplin, Ann Powers, November 14, 2009.

¹⁷² All subheadings are taken from titles of Janis Joplin songs.

¹⁷³ Interview, Ann Powers, May 27, 2005.

¹⁷⁴ Ann Powers, *Weird Like Us: My Bohemian America* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2000), 28-29.

¹⁷⁵ Interview, Ann Powers, May 27, 2005.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Interview, Ann Powers, May 27, 2005.

¹⁷⁹ Evelyn McDonnell and Ann Powers, *Rock She Wrote: Women Write About Rock, Pop* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1995), 1.

¹⁸⁰ <http://www.amazon.com/Jagged-Little-Acoustic-Alanis-Morissette/dp/B0009WFF0Y>, accessed May 14, 2010.

¹⁸¹ Lucy O'Brien, *She Bop II: The Definitive History of Women in Rock, Pop and Soul* (London: Continuum, 2002), 259-275.

¹⁸² <http://www.skaponk.com/lyrics/1650> (accessed July 11, 2005).

¹⁸³ Interview, Evelyn McDonnell, May 17, 2005.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ McDonnell and Powers, *Rock She Wrote: Women Write About Rock, Pop and Rap*, 1.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 13.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 14.

¹⁸⁹ McDonnell and Powers, *Rock She Wrote: Women Write About Rock, Pop and Rap*, 15.

¹⁹⁰ Interview, Ann Powers, May 27, 2005.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

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- ¹⁹³ Ann Powers, "Pop View: When Women Venture Forth," *The New York Times*, October 9, 1994. Retrieved from Lexis-Nexis July 7, 2005.
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- ¹⁹⁹ Interview, Ann Powers, November 14, 2009.
- ²⁰⁰ Ibid.
- ²⁰¹ Ibid.
- ²⁰² McDonnell and Powers, *Rock She Wrote: Women Write About Rock, Pop and Rap*, 16.
- ²⁰³ Interview, Evelyn McDonnell, May 17, 2005.
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- ²⁰⁶ Interview, Evelyn McDonnell, May 17, 2005.
- ²⁰⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁰⁸ Interview, Ann Powers, May 27, 2005.
- ²⁰⁹ Ibid.
- ²¹⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹¹ Ibid.
- ²¹² Ibid.
- ²¹³ Interview, Ann Powers, May 27, 2005.
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- ²²⁰ Ibid.
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- ²²³ S. Elizabeth Bird, "The Future of Journalism in the Digital Environment," *Journalism*, 2009. 10(3): 293-295. Retrieved from Sage Publications December 30, 2009. <http://jou.sagepub.com>.
- ²²⁴ Ibid.
- ²²⁵ The Newspaper Association of America. Retrieved from <http://www.naa.org/TrendsandNumbers/Advertising-Expenditures.aspx> on May 22, 2010.
- ²²⁶ Interview, Ann Powers, November 14, 2009.
- ²²⁷ Ibid.
- ²²⁸ Ibid.
- ²²⁹ Ann Powers. (2009, November 3). "Spontaneous thoughts about the return of Lilith Fair." [Facebook post]. Retrieved from www.facebook.com/#/note.php?note_id=196676946619 on April 18, 2010.
- ²³⁰ Ibid.

Chapter Six:

*A Critical Distance: Ellen Willis, Rock's Resident Scholar, Observer and Cultural Critic*²³¹

If you ask female (or male) rock journalists to identify the person who has most influenced their writing, the late Ellen Willis will likely be among the first to be named. In the introduction to an article by Willis in the anthology *Rock She Wrote: Women Write About Rock, Pop and Rap*, the book's editors, Evelyn McDonnell and Ann Powers, wrote: "As one of the most prominent female rock critics of the sixties and the only one whose name continues to be evoked as part of the genre's pantheon, Ellen Willis pioneered a personal yet highly intellectual critical approach."²³² The first pop music critic for *The New Yorker* in the late sixties and early seventies, Willis was the lone female member of a group of early rock journalists, including Robert Cristgau (*Rolling Stone, The Village Voice*) and Greil Marcus (*Rolling Stone, Creem, The Village Voice*), who are often credited with inventing the genre.

"Like her peers...Willis thought that rock 'n' roll was as worthy of serious discourse as literature," wrote McDonnell in an introductory essay in *Rock She Wrote*. "Inspired by New Journalism as well as critical theory, her analyses of how musicians shape and reflect culture never seemed academic or dry. Willis saw rock 'n' roll as a metaphor for world events, and criticism as a way of drawing out its poetic subtexts."²³³

In May 2005, Willis came to Ohio University as part of the English department's annual Spring Literary Festival. On the last day of her visit, she relaxed on a sofa in a hotel lobby and recounted tales from her years as a rock journalist – how she was drawn into the world of rock-and-roll, how gender and feminism informed her writing, and why

she ultimately left the field to write about politics and teach journalism courses at New York University.

In print and in person, Willis's personality was that of the classic scholar and observer. A reserved and soft-spoken intellectual, she paused often in conversation, as though to let her thoughts marinate before completing them. At the same time, she was a woman of great conviction who was unafraid to make public her (often controversial) opinions on matters such as abortion and foreign policy. Willis, whose rock music columns appeared in *The New Yorker* from 1968 to 1975, was in many respects an unlikely candidate to revolutionize rock journalism. In fact, she stumbled on the career choice almost by accident after reacquainting herself with an old junior high school friend. Willis did not share many of her contemporaries' hard-partying, club-hopping, rock-and-roll lifestyle; unlike many star-struck journalists, she had no desire to follow bands cross-country or to interact on a personal level with musicians. In one column she confided to readers that "[sitting] in a confined space for three hours is not my idea of how to relate to a rock band."²³⁴

Willis was introspective and deeply interested in the changing political climate of the 1960s, and was one of the first writers to intellectualize rock-and-roll, using the music as an entry point into a greater cultural conversation. Her articles on musicians such as Bob Dylan, Janis Joplin, The Who, and her favorite group, the Velvet Underground, dug beneath the surface of the lyrics, melodies and personalities, to the core, and the lasting impact, of the music. For Willis, the music was inextricably intertwined with notions of gender, sexuality, politics and freedom, and her exploration of these topics opened the door for other writers – particularly female writers – to follow in her footsteps.

That's The Story of My Life: Radical Rock Beginnings

Ellen Willis was born in New York City in 1941, the daughter of a policeman and a homemaker. Both her parents were former radicals who had been members of the Communist Party in New York in the 1930s.²³⁵ She graduated from Barnard College in 1962 with an A.B. degree and then went on to the University of California at Berkeley to begin graduate school. After dropping out of Berkeley, she headed back to New York in 1965 to begin a freelance writing career. Initially, her work appeared in *Mademoiselle*, *Fact Magazine*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*.²³⁶ Around this time, Willis became involved with the Free University of New York, which Lisa A. Rhodes, in *Electric Ladyland: Women and Rock Culture*, described as “a radical alternative school that was a place to think, learn, and commiserate with others who were interested in the more countercultural side of the arts and the life of the mind.”²³⁷

While there, she became reacquainted with an old junior high school friend, Robert Christgau, and they became romantically involved. At the time, Willis said, Christgau “had just actually quit a daily reporting job and become a freelance writer. I looked at him and thought, ‘Hmm, I could do that.’ He became a rock critic before I did, writing a column for *Esquire*. In any case, he was extremely self-conscious about the cultural importance of rock-and-roll in a way that I wasn’t at all at that time, so he sort of turned me onto this.”²³⁸ Christgau spoke in depth about their relationship, which lasted from 1966 to 1969, in a 2001 interview with Barbara O’Dair of *Salon.com*:

Ellen was my first serious girlfriend after college, *well* after college. I had a long dry spell. I'd actually gone to junior high school with her and later ran into her. I was asked to write a story about the Free University for *Commentary*... She was working for *Fact*, Ralph Ginzburg's magazine. And she was at the free university trying to meet guys. I was in love with

her soon enough. She didn't really know that much about pop but she understood it, I would say, inside of 15 minutes. We started developing this theory of pop together – which we were going to write a book about, only we broke up first.²³⁹

Unlike other rock critics who became wholeheartedly immersed in the rock-and-roll scene, Willis studied and admired it from a cautious distance. A lifelong fan of the music, it had never occurred to her that pop music was even a topic worth writing about before conversations with Christgau and her Free University friends. She explained:

I started listening to rock more or less at its inception. I was in junior high school. This was my music, and I think the thing that happened in the 60s was that there started to be this self-consciousness about music. ...Although I loved the music I never questioned the idea that it was sort of something below the radar of what you want to take seriously, which sort of meant implicitly that a lot of the things that I was most obsessed with that were bound up with my love for this music and its immediacy and its sensuality and its message of freedom, really was all about the unspeakable and the unacknowledged. Suddenly this started to become a subject of cultural importance.²⁴⁰

In 1966, Willis and Christgau worked together on the staff of *Cheetah*, a music and pop culture magazine that only published eight issues before folding. Willis wrote on an eclectic range of topics for the magazine, including a column on zoos, science fiction book reviews, and a music piece about a 1968 benefit concert for Huntington's disease, which had claimed Woodie Guthrie's life a year earlier.²⁴¹ Her first big music article was a piece on Bob Dylan, which originally ran in *Commentary* in 1967.

The Dylan article probed the life and music of one of rock-and-roll's most elusive figures, and in the process, established Willis's literary, scholarly approach to pop music. "In six years Dylan's stance has evolved from proletarian assertiveness to anarchist angst to pop detachment," she wrote. "At each stage he has made himself harder to follow, provoked howls of execration from those left behind, and attracted an ever-larger, more

demanding audience.”²⁴² After the article appeared in *Cheetah*, Jacob Brackman, a young staff reporter at the *New Yorker*, read it and brought it to the attention of his editor, William Shawn. Shawn then called Willis and offered her a regular column on pop music, called “Rock, Etc.,” in the magazine. She accepted and went on to write the column for seven years:

In terms of what I covered it was fairly eclectic, just kind of whatever I happened to be interested in that was going on at the time. My style was personal and also sort of oriented a lot toward the social context of the music, because what I was interested in, I wanted to criticize pop music and the way one actually listened to it. I sort of looked on criticism as basically an extension, a public extension, of the conversation you might have with your friends about music and the way in which we listen to and process pop music, taking in a lot of things that were outside the frame in the way of the music itself.²⁴³

I'll Be Your Mirror: Early Chronicler of Rock

Over that seven-year period, Willis wrote a total of fifty-five columns for the *New Yorker*. The topics of her columns varied, but her trademark tone, a blend of the personal and erudite, was consistent. For the most part, William Shawn gave Willis leeway in deciding which types of music to write about and the style in which she wrote about it. She said, however, that there were some arguments.

One of the things that I had to do was to convince Shawn...that you couldn't just review pop music the same way you would review a classical concert. First of all, the same kind of distance didn't apply, because your relationship to the music was as a fan. It didn't mean that you couldn't be critical, but a fan's kind of criticism, I looked on fandom as somebody who has a certain kind of erotic relationship with the music and performers. It was just sort of a different kind of relationship than the traditional critical one.²⁴⁴

Renowned film critic Pauline Kael, whom Willis cited as a writing influence, was writing for the *New Yorker* at the same time. Kael employed a similar approach in her film

reviews, blending a personal voice with the ability to place films in a greater cultural and sociological context. According to Willis, “I was much more personal and colloquial than Shawn was really comfortable with, but he, for the most part, let me have my way, though I did have a lot of fights with him....Unbeknownst to me at the time, Pauline Kael was having the same kind of fights with him.”

Most of the time, Kael and Willis won, and their literary yet populist brand of criticism was allowed to flourish. For example, in a February 21, 1970 column, Willis wrote of rediscovering the dichotomy of innocence and experience through her then-current music preferences – the Velvet Underground’s third album, “The Velvet Underground,” and the Beatles’ “Abbey Road:”

A deepening sense of incipient disaster is making many of us turn inward – less in an attempt to evade external reality than in a renewed appreciation of the simple pleasures we have taken too much for granted....And it is not surprising that the rock records that have meant the most to me lately are very much concerned with childhood, innocence, world-weariness, and rebirth.²⁴⁵

In a March 3, 1973 column, she analyzed her changing feelings toward singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell. “Joni Mitchell’s fourth album, ‘Blue,’ converted me from a well-wisher to a fan,” she proclaimed.

I had always liked her, but we had never really connected. Her image tended to stand between me and her music. I saw the gentle, soft-spoken, fair-haired folk singer, the classic old lady, the Muse to numerous folk-rock *machers* who had to encourage her to overcome her shyness and record – the compleat hippie chick, in short – and I was looking for other models....Then came ‘Blue.’ What hit me first was that the freaky voice had found its purpose. Before it had just been *there*; now Joni was controlling it, using it to express an exploratory urgency that her lyrics confirmed.²⁴⁶

Unlike Joni Mitchell, rock star Janis Joplin instantly won Willis over. After Joplin's death, Willis wrote a lengthy essay about her, analyzing her life and death from a feminist perspective:

Joplin belonged to that select group of pop figures who mattered as much for themselves as for their music;...She was also the only woman to achieve that kind of stature in what was basically a male club, the only sixties culture hero to make visible and public women's experience of the quest for individual liberation, which was very different from men's.²⁴⁷

Willis praised Joplin for helping to change people's notions of attractiveness and cited her as the reason she resolved, "once and for all, not to get my hair straightened."²⁴⁸

Further, she puzzled over and offered an eloquent insight into why men were as drawn to Joplin's music as were women:

[U]nlike many other female performers whose acts were intensely erotic, she never made me feel as if I were crashing an orgy that consisted of her and the men in the audience. When she got it on at a concert, she got it on with everybody.

Still, the songs she sang assumed heterosexual romance; it was men who made her hurt, who took another little piece of her heart. Watching men groove on Janis, I began to appreciate the resentment many black people feel toward whites who are blues freaks. Janis sang out of her pain as a woman, and men dug it. Yet it was men who caused the pain, and if they stopped causing it, they would not have her to dig.²⁴⁹

Venus in Furs: Crashing the Boy's Club of Rock Journalism

When Willis had begun writing for the *New Yorker*, one of the first things Shawn asked her was whether she would be willing to go by "E. Willis" instead of Ellen Willis, because, in Shawn's opinion, the magazine already had too many female bylines. "I said, yes, I would mind! So he said, 'Oh, okay,' and didn't bring that up again," she said with a laugh.²⁵⁰ At the time, the number of women writing about pop music for a national audience was small, at best. "When I was there, there were hardly women doing it at all,"

she said. That did not turn her away, however, because “the way I had grown up I was pretty used to being one of the few women who did various things. I always sort of had the ‘exceptional woman’ thing. It was only after I got involved with feminism that I thought about how peculiar that was, and realized what was going on.”²⁵¹ She used her feelings of otherness and being an outsider to her advantage. “Willis saw through the sexual politics of rock ‘n’ roll in ways that were nothing short of visionary,” wrote Evelyn McDonnell in *Rock She Wrote*. “Her awareness of her position as an outsider led her to observations that expressed the changing relations of men, women, and culture.”²⁵²

Early in her career at the *New Yorker*, Willis became close friends with a secretary at the magazine, Karen Durbin, who was herself trying to break into rock journalism. “There was a huge amount of sexism at the *New Yorker*, which as a [freelance] writer I was sort of shielded from,” she said. “She said she was so envious of me when she first met me, but she went on to do great things [including editing for the *Village Voice* from 1975 to 1988, and becoming editor-in-chief of the *Voice* in 1994].”²⁵³

As a freelance journalist, Willis escaped, for the most part, the sexism that then existed in journalism, and rock journalism in particular.

Freelance magazine journalism was much more open to women because they didn’t have to hire you and they didn’t have to pay you very much, so I didn’t feel seriously discriminated against in that particularly way, and it’s also hard to tell anyway because you just have these individual relationships with magazines and editors and you can’t tell if they are screwing you or treating you different than somebody else.²⁵⁴

In addition, Willis said she did not face much sexism in her dealings with bands and musicians because she kept such dealings to a minimum, preferring to keep her distance

from the makers of the music she loved and analyzed. “My way of dealing with it was avoidance,” she explained.²⁵⁵

I was not at all interested in hanging out with musicians. I didn’t find them interesting. I found them overbearing and annoying. I basically wanted to relate to the records and concerts. I didn’t really want to relate to them.... I feel like for a lot of the rock critics, some of whom have had their own bands, that was almost why they wanted to write about it, to be able to be on the team in some ways. I didn’t see it that way at all. I saw it as subject matter. I was a fan of this music long before I wrote about it. When I was a fan I had no thought of mixing with the performers.²⁵⁶

As for the other rock journalists she associated with, she described them as “a very mixed bag...mainly people who shared the same intellectual concerns.”²⁵⁷ They were also almost exclusively men: Greil Marcus and Dave Marsh of *Rolling Stone*, Richard Goldstein of the *Village Voice*, and of course Robert Cristgau, with whom she was living. Unlike her friends, Willis said she “didn’t think of being a rock critic as like *the* thing – it was just one thing that had fallen into my lap that I had the opportunity to do...but it was not my central preoccupation in life.”²⁵⁸

By the end of the 1960s, Willis had become immersed in the burgeoning women’s liberation movement, and used her writing as a vehicle for talking about it. When asked if she considered herself a feminist, her answer was an emphatic “Well, yes I do!”²⁵⁹

I think before the women’s movement I was very aware that there was discrimination against women, particularly the double standards of sexual morality I really resented. So what was the revelation to me about the women’s movement was realizing, ‘Oh, I see. You can do politics about this. You can change this.’...For me, feminism is fundamentally a movement about extending democracy to women in all its aspects – culturally, legally, economically, sexually.²⁶⁰

In *Electric Ladyland: Women and Rock Culture*, Lisa A Rhodes wrote of the importance of Willis’s work from a gender studies perspective:

Willis's articles in the *New Yorker* reflect her role as female gadfly in the rock-journalism community and that gender was only one aspect of her analyses. She was just as likely to pan a female artist as a male one. Her integrity and honesty are evident in her work and the success she enjoyed in the field. That said, the history of articles on women musicians would have been more one-sided and superficial had she not written what she did. Her membership at such a crucial time in the almost entirely male fraternity of rock writers was one of the decisive steps in women's entry into the field.²⁶¹

Throughout her career, Willis consistently sought out female singers worthy of her admiration and critical attention. In the title essay of *Beginning to See the Light*, she lamented: "For those of us who crave music by women who will break out of traditional molds, write and sing honestly about their (and our) experience, and create art so powerful that men and the society in general will have to come to terms with it whether they want to or not, the seventies have offered scant comfort."²⁶² She named a few women, including Joni Mitchell, Yoko Ono, Ms. Clawdy and Patti Smith, who satisfied her craving for feminist music of quality, but went on to wonder why she was not as interested in women's music as she believed she should be: "[W]hy did I like so little of the women's-culture music I had heard?"

The feminist music scene had two main tendencies. One was a women's version of political folk music, which replicated all the virtues (simplicity, intimacy, community) and all the faults (sentimentality, insularity, heavy rhetoric) of the genre....The other tendency actively turned me off: it was a slick, technically accomplished, rock-influenced but basically conventional pop....What disturbed me most about both brands of women's-culture music was that so much of it was so conventionally feminine.²⁶³

Further, she made the assessment that "[l]istening to most rock-and-roll was like walking down the street at night, automatically checking out the men in my vicinity: this one's okay, that one could be trouble, watch out. Listening to most feminist music was like

taking a warm bath.”²⁶⁴ What she was searching for was a middle ground, or something that would neither make her wary nor let her relax completely.

Still, Willis noted that it was almost expected that she and other female rock journalists would have an inherent interest in writing about anything that had to do with women in rock. “People, as soon as they pigeonhole you, if somebody is interested in feminism, kind of ask you to write on feminism and the same things over and over again. And also the issue of women in rock - I can’t tell you how many times [I’ve been asked to write about women in rock],” she said,²⁶⁵ adding:

There also is a kind of attitude that women are authorities on women and women’s issues but they’re not authorities on foreign policy. The main things I’ve been writing about for the last few years have to do with war and terrorism, [but] you don’t see editors calling me up and asking me to write about what I think about the war in Iraq.²⁶⁶

New Age: From Punk Rock to Politics

In the 1970’s Willis developed a fascination with the emerging punk rock scene, embodied by one of her favorite groups, the Velvet Underground. In her 1992 book, *Beginning to See the Light: Sex, Hope, and Rock-And-Roll*, she wrote: “The Velvets were the first important rock-and-roll artists who had no real chance of attracting a mass audience. This was paradoxical.”²⁶⁷ As for her attraction to the band’s punk rock, often death-themed anthems, she concluded:

What it comes down to for me – as a Velvet fan, a lover of rock-and-roll, a New Yorker, an aesthete, a punk, a sinner, a sometime seeker of enlightenment (and love) (and sex) – is this: I believe that we are all, openly or secretly, struggling against one or another kind of nihilism. I believe that body and spirit are not really separate, though it often seems that way. I believe that redemption is never impossible and always equivocal. But I guess that I just don’t know.²⁶⁸

Ultimately, it was this fascination with punk rock that led Willis to quarrel with her editor and end her *New Yorker* column in 1975:

I left town, I was living in Colorado working on this anti-war project. I sort of kept up with the column but I stopped doing it regularly. Later, I was back in New York and I got very interested in the whole fringe area of New York music that led to punk...I wrote a column. It didn't run when it was supposed to. So finally I [asked] Shawn, 'Are you going to run my column?' and he said 'Well, no.' So I said, 'Why?' He said, 'I'm really tired of reading about these same bands that you're writing about and I want you to cover a wider range of stuff.' And I said, 'Well, I'm not really interested in covering a wider range of stuff.' So after that I stopped writing for them.²⁶⁹

With the end of her "Rock, Etc." column, Willis began to focus on her emerging passion for feminism, civil rights, peace and political issues rather than rock-and-roll. In August 1975, she wrote an article for *Rolling Stone* on a controversial rape case. The article, a sprawling, five-page spread entitled "Rape On Trial," was about the national scandal surrounding the rape of a woman named Arlene Hunt.²⁷⁰ Soon after, she was named a contributing editor and was given a column, "Alternating Currents." Although *Rolling Stone* was then the country's premier music magazine, most of the columns and articles Willis wrote for the magazine were not about music. She used her column to filter the events of the day through her own experiences. In one 1976 column, for instance, she used a book, *Is There Life after High School?* to launch into memories of her own high school years. "I couldn't charm boys because I feared and resented them and their power over my life; I couldn't be sexy because I saw sex as a mine field of conflicting, confusing rules that gave them every advantage," she mused. "Desperate to win the game but unwilling to learn it or even face my feelings about it, I couldn't really play, except in

fantasy; paradoxically, I was consumed by it much more than the girls who played and played well.”²⁷¹

Head Held High: Transitioning to Academia

Willis was offered a job as a staff writer at the *Village Voice* in 1979 and moved up the ladder to a senior editor position. Then, in 1990, she transitioned into academia, where she remained until her death in 2006. For Willis, a writer who always preferred to keep a critical distance from her subject matter, entering the world of academia seemed a logical career move. “It was almost a practical leap because at the time I was a senior editor at the *Voice*, [and] the *Voice* was extremely free and a good place to work and it was starting to become much more corporatized,” she explained. “I thought going into academia was another way of supporting my own writing and might give me more of an opportunity to really concentrate on my own work.”²⁷²

She taught journalism and directed the Cultural Reporting and Criticism program at New York University, and freelanced for publications such as the *Nation*, *Dissent*, and *Salon*.²⁷³ She looked back fondly, though, on her years in rock journalism:

[T]here were a group of us who were trying to understand mass culture, and rock-and-roll was our vehicle and our entry point into figuring that out....The thing about rock criticism is that you got to sort of really invent the genre, because rock-and-roll was really considered junk and there were no articles on it except for columns saying rock-and-roll causes juvenile delinquency....For me and Bob [Christgau] and other people, we were also working out our ideas about journalism in the context of learning about rock-and-roll.

In helping to invent the genre, Willis opened the door for a future generation of aspiring women writers to enter the field, many of whom are featured in this thesis. In addition to writing a large volume of articles, she published three collections of essays: *Beginning to*

See the Light: Sex, Hope, and Rock-and-Roll (1992), *No More Nice Girls: Countercultural Essays* (1993); and *Don't Think: Smile!: Notes On A Decade of Denial* (1999).

In 2001, Willis returned briefly to the subject she had left behind years ago: rock-and-roll. Fittingly, she wrote an article for *Salon.com* about Bob Dylan, who was also the subject of her first major piece of rock criticism, and once again, she tackled the issue of his shifting musical and political identity, only this time in the context of his latest album, “Love and Theft.” She wrote:

From the earliest years of his career Bob Dylan has had a passionate impulse to obliterate his personal identity. That passion has, at various times, been reflected in his biographical mythmaking, his allergic reaction to his celebrity, his flirtations with religion, his compulsion to confound the expectations of his audience by constantly transforming his persona.²⁷⁴

Further, she concluded:

It's seductive stuff, at moments as compelling as anything Dylan has ever done. And yet I find myself resisting. Something is missing, as it was in "Time Out of Mind": the irony Dylan once used to undercut his romanticism and his I-am-America self-importance -- and not least to befuddle the audience that had taken his latest posture too literally. Since you can't get away from yourself, not really, at some point you have to come to terms with that or become delusional.²⁷⁵

Though she moved onto other topics decades ago, the article suggested that music, and the desire to write about it, would always be at Ellen Willis's core.

²³² Note: Ellen Willis died November 9, 2006, less than a year after I interviewed her.

²³² Evelyn McDonnell and Ann Powers, *Rock She Wrote: Women Write About Rock, Pop* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1995), 419.

²³³ *Ibid*, 8.

²³⁴ Ellen Willis, “Rock, Etc.: Musical Events,” *The New Yorker*, July 10, 1971, 58.

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- ²³⁵ Lisa A. Rhodes, *Electric Ladyland: Women and Rock Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 90.
- ²³⁶ Ibid, 91.
- ²³⁷ Ibid, 92.
- ²³⁸ Interview, Ellen Willis, May 13, 2005.
- ²³⁹ Barbara O'Dair, "A Conversation with Robert Christgau," *Salon.com*, <http://dir.salon.com/ent/music/int/2001/05/09/xgau/index.html?pn=3> (accessed May 30, 2005).
- ²⁴⁰ Interview, Ellen Willis, May 13, 2005.
- ²⁴¹ Rhodes, *Electric Ladyland: Women and Rock Culture*, 93.
- ²⁴² Ellen Willis, *Beginning to See the Light: Sex, Hope, and Rock-And-Roll* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press, 1992), 3.
- ²⁴³ Interview, Ellen Willis, May 13, 2005.
- ²⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁴⁵ Ellen Willis, "Rock, Etc.: Songs of Innocence and Experience," *The New Yorker*, February 21, 1970, 112.
- ²⁴⁶ Ellen Willis, "Rock, Etc.: Joni Mitchell: Still Travelling," *The New Yorker*, March 3, 1973, 104.
- ²⁴⁷ Willis, *Beginning to See the Light: Sex, Hope and Rock-And-Roll*, 62.
- ²⁴⁸ Ibid, 63.
- ²⁴⁹ Ibid, 64.
- ²⁵⁰ Interview, Ellen Willis, May 13, 2005.
- ²⁵¹ Ibid.
- ²⁵² McDonnell and Powers, *Rock She Wrote: Women Write About Rock, Pop and Rap*, 8.
- ²⁵³ Ibid.
- ²⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁵⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁵⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁶⁰ Ibid.
- ²⁶¹ Rhodes, *Electric Ladyland: Women and Rock Culture*, 108.
- ²⁶² Willis, *Beginning to See the Light: Sex, Hope and Rock-And-Roll*, 95.
- ²⁶³ Ibid, 97-98.
- ²⁶⁴ Ibid, 99.
- ²⁶⁵ Interview, Ellen Willis, May 13, 2005.
- ²⁶⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁶⁷ Ibid, 113,
- ²⁶⁸ Ibid, 124.
- ²⁶⁹ Interview, Ellen Willis, May 13, 2005.
- ²⁷⁰ Ellen Willis, "Rape on Trial," *Rolling Stone*, August 28, 1975, 38-39, 79-81.
- ²⁷¹ Ellen Willis, "Alternating Currents: Memoirs of a Non-Prom Queen," *Rolling Stone*, August 26, 1976, 25.
- ²⁷² Ibid.
- ²⁷³ Rhodes, *Electric Ladyland: Women and Rock Culture*, 95.
- ²⁷⁴ Ellen Willis, "The New Talkin' World War III Blues," *Salon.com*, October 8, 2001, http://archive.salon.com/ent/music/review/2001/10/06/love_theft/index.html (accessed June 4, 2005).
- ²⁷⁵ Ibid.

Chapter Seven:

Funny Girl: How Jancee Dunn, a Class Clown from New Jersey, Became a Rolling Stone

Rock journalist Jancee Dunn learned at a young age about the power of laughter. A self-described geek, her ability to crack a good joke earned her a spot, however tenuous, at the popular kids' lunch table in her Chatham, New Jersey high school. Years later, as a reporter for *Rolling Stone* magazine, she learned, through trial and error, that the most effective way to open an interview with an uncooperative celebrity was to rattle off a "fun fact" – a humorous, gossipy tidbit about the celebrity's life that he or she had never heard before. Her approach – make them laugh, grab their attention, and then, if you must, go for the kill – earned her respect from both colleagues and the personalities she profiled.

Dunn's road from editorial assistant to star reporter at *Rolling Stone* was not always smooth, however. Navigating the gender terrain of the notoriously macho music magazine took determination, self-deprecation and adaptability, all of which Dunn possessed in bulk. In a sense, she laughed and charmed her way to the top. "I look like your cousin or your friend, and that definitely would put people at ease," she said in a telephone conversation, between working on freelance assignments and promoting her 2006 memoir, *But Enough About Me: A Jersey Girl's Unlikely Adventures Among the Absurdly Famous*. "The name of the game, of course, is to get people to be comfortable so that they'll open up to you and talk to you."²⁷⁶

However, Dunn, who worked at *Rolling Stone* from 1989 to 2001 (though her name remained on the masthead as a contributing editor through 2006), was more than

just likeable – she was scrupulous about her research. “The days leading up to an encounter are always a typhoon of feverish preparation as I assemble a phonebook-sized dossier and pore over it, memorizing every detail of my subject’s life from birth onward,” she wrote in a *Salon.com* essay.²⁷⁷ She also did whatever it took to stay in her employer’s good graces. “I loved that job more than anyone else did. That was really what helped me. When I got it, I was so grateful. I worked late. I filed. I answered phones. I did whatever it would take,” she said. “I found that I was really earnest and people wanted to help me.”²⁷⁸

Something to Reach For: From Jersey Teen to the Eighties Rock Scene

In 1981, fifteen-year-old Dunn set out on her first unsupervised road trip. The most popular girl in her class, Cindy Patzau, had invited her to see a concert at Haverford College in Pennsylvania. The band playing that night was the Hooters, and the concert had a life-altering effect on Dunn. “The crowd began to cheer. Then: Out went the lights. My pulse surged crazily. *I could do this every night*, I thought, ping-ponging with excitement. *Every night of my life*,” she wrote.²⁷⁹ Dunn, a music fan who devotedly thumbed through *Rolling Stone* every month, was in her element. Little did she know that in a matter of years, she would go from front row to backstage, interviewing celebrities for her dream job as a staff reporter at *Rolling Stone*.

Growing up, a number of things set Dunn apart from her peers. First, there was her name. Her father and grandfather, both named J.C. Dunn, proudly spent their working years at the department store JCPenney. “I was supposed to carry on the family legacy as J.C. Dunn the Third,” she wrote. “When I surprised my parents by being female, they hastily cooked up the name Jancee (remember, it was the sixties).”²⁸⁰ Her mother was a

former Southern beauty queen from Citronelle, Alabama, who fed her three daughters and their friends unusual after-school snacks, like sugar sandwiches. Further, unlike her peers, Dunn was unabashedly close to her family and harbored little desire to escape from them or from New Jersey. After high school, she attended the University of Delaware, where she studied English, but moved back home – seventeen credits shy of graduating – and never returned to college. Instead, she interned briefly at *New Jersey Monthly*, and then got a job at an advertising agency in Cranford, New Jersey as a proofreader for medical advertisements – a job she found less than fulfilling.

One evening, in 1989, at a Halloween party, Dunn met a young woman who worked in the marketing department of *Rolling Stone*. She peppered the woman with questions about her job and then, on a whim, asked if she could send along her resume. A few weeks later, Dunn was called in to interview for an editorial assistant position at the magazine. She stayed up all night before the interview – fraught with nerves – and studied up on the history of rock-and-roll, just in case anyone quizzed her. “Walking into the chaotic office wreaked havoc on my few remaining nerves. It resembled a college dorm, with a rabbit warren of offices, all of which had a stereo, with different music blaring from each one,” she wrote.²⁸¹ In keeping with the casual vibe of the office, her interview consisted of a series of “personality” questions – what did she do for fun, what was the last trip she took, what were her top five favorite albums and why did she want the job? Her internal monologue at the time went as follows:

Give me the job. I want it more than the others do...For Christ's sake, give me the job, because I have never had anything even vaguely interesting happen to me in my entire life. The only distinction I have ever received was being named Class Clown in high school. I know that I don't belong here. I saw some of the girls exchange looks when

they saw my perm. I am average in every way. But I know just enough to be aware that I am average.²⁸²

Robert Love, the editor who interviewed Dunn, did not see her that way, and, to her amazement, he offered her the job. Upon accepting it (and the 18,000 dollar a year salary that went along with it), she entered a brave new world – a whirlwind of booze, music, parties, deadlines and celebrity encounters.

“We expensed our bar tabs. Can you imagine?” Dunn recalled with an easy laugh. “Because we were technically on the job, we would go to shows and roll over to restaurants and bars and then back to another show, and it was all taken care of. I mean, it was heaven on earth when you are twenty-two years old.”²⁸³ *Rolling Stone*’s founder and editor-in-chief, Jann Wenner, befriended a number of the stars featured in the magazine, so it was not uncommon for Dunn to walk past the hottest musicians of the day on her way to the restroom. “For a certain period of time, you couldn’t lift up your shoe without, like, Sting walking by,” she explained. Work, at times, seemed like a succession of glamorous parties:

It was kind of a heady time. We were encouraged to sort of live the rock-and-roll lifestyle. We still had to get our work done. We were all very motivated. It was weird because they wanted you to be laid back, but motivated too, so you had to get your work done. Sometimes people were there really late. Sometimes we had parties and we’d never go home. We’d never end up going out because it was so much fun in the office.²⁸⁴

Rolling Stone, then, was not unlike the popular kids’ lunch table at Dunn’s high school. This time, however, the popular kids were rock stars and the reporters who told their stories. As usual, Dunn employed her sense of humor to help her assimilate into this new

culture of cool. “The second I stepped through the doors of *Rolling Stone* as a real employee,” she wrote, “I wanted to shake off my old personality like the rigid husk of a cicada. But how could I cultivate a new, hip persona when I lived with my parents in a New Jersey suburb and wore black leggings as pants?”²⁸⁵ Her main duties were to file documents, answer telephones and transcribe editors’ interviews. Her first assignment, after she had worked at the magazine for a year, was to conduct a ten-minute telephone interview with Mary Tyler Moore, which she uncomfortably fumbled her way through. Her second assignment was an interview with a very cranky Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols. She met him in his New York hotel room for the interview and the first words out of his mouth were, “I hate your mag.” Unfazed, she noticed that his room service tray contained a large container of milk. Sarcastically, she said, “Wow. Milk. Pretty punk rock.” It broke the ice and she got her interview.²⁸⁶ Before long, Dunn became one of *Rolling Stone*’s star interviewers, amassing enough comical and enlightening encounters with the rich and famous to fill a memoir – literally.

Just Because I’m A Woman: Rolling Stone’s Gender Divide

When Dunn began working at *Rolling Stone* in 1989, one thing was immediately obvious: There were very few female reporters and editors. “There were a bunch of editorial assistants who were women, but they weren’t writing for the magazine,” she said. “The women were all concentrated more in the photo area – all the photo editors and assistants, they were all women – but the writers were predominantly men.”²⁸⁷ As a result, Dunn, without many female role models to set an example for her, learned to carve her own path. She was inspired less by her coworkers than by female journalists long-deceased – novelist and journalist Willa Cather and 1950s talk show host Virginia

Graham were Dunn's heroes.²⁸⁸ At *Rolling Stone*, she looked up to editor Susan Murcko, who "never talked down to the kids," and writer Gerri Hershey, who "avoided all the clichés of rock journalism," but hesitated to call anyone at *Rolling Stone* a mentor, per se.²⁸⁹ "It was a little daunting not to have role models – not to turn to someone and say, 'I want to be you,'" she said. "When you're young, you always want to know what your next step is, and there were a few editors who were women, but not a lot of writers, and it was a little bit intimidating."²⁹⁰

Staff meetings sometimes turned awkward for Dunn when her male coworkers, knowing that sex sells magazines, would pitch suggestive cover lines to accompany "cheesecake," or pictures of scantily-clad women. One of *Rolling Stone*'s best-selling, precedent-setting covers, according to Dunn, featured actress Jennifer Aniston, on her stomach, naked bottom in the air, wearing nothing more than a strategically placed sheet.²⁹¹ As a result, it took years for Dunn to work up the courage to pitch stories at staff meetings:

My real regret is that my male colleagues around me, they really felt more entitled, and they would pitch things all the time. They would pitch stories. I was absolutely intimidated to pitch stories. I didn't pitch anything major for like two years, because I was scared. I thought that my opinion wasn't valid. I was my own worst enemy, and I do find that a lot with women even now.²⁹²

Dunn was not alone in feeling isolated. It was an experience shared by several other women at *Rolling Stone* – decades earlier – who helped carve the path for writers like Dunn.

Though *Rolling Stone* was founded in San Francisco in 1967, and came of age, so to speak, during the women's movement and sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, it

quickly earned a reputation as a “boy’s club.” Two histories of the magazine – *Gone Crazy and Back Again: The Rise and Fall of the Rolling Stone Generation*, by Robert Sam Anson²⁹³, and *Rolling Stone Magazine: The Uncensored History*, by Robert Draper²⁹⁴ – depict Rolling Stone as a difficult environment for women at best, and, at worst, a hostile workplace for female rock journalists. For instance, Anson wrote that when the magazine was starting out, publisher-editor Jann Wenner preferred that women answer the office telephones and bring him his coffee, no matter what their position at the magazine.²⁹⁵ According to Draper, “It was difficult for a female employee to contemplate the *Rolling Stone* experience without thinking of opportunities withheld; of the business manager who habitually brushed up against their backsides; of the accountant who urged staffers to lean out their windows so as to witness a woman performing oral sex on him in the parking lot.”²⁹⁶ When Wenner hired a woman, Marianne Partridge, in 1974, to work as copy chief, several male staffers reacted by asking, “What does she look like? Does she have good legs? Does she have big tits?”²⁹⁷

“There were a lot of women there. They were all secretaries,” Partridge said of her introduction to the magazine. “They had master’s degrees....I’m a feminist and certainly was a feminist then. It was outrageous, frankly – I mean, it was shocking.”²⁹⁸ She took several young female editorial assistants under her wing and, with Wenner’s blessing, promoted them to copy editors and researchers. One of those women was Sarah Lazin, who had joined the *Rolling Stone* staff in 1971 as an editorial assistant. “I did all kinds of things, but no writing, and no editing, because that’s not what girls did,” Lazin explained. “Women didn’t write about rock-and-roll, or we weren’t publishing women who wrote about rock-and-roll. It was very definitely a boys club.”²⁹⁹ Lazin said that after

Partridge came in and started a much-needed copy department, “That’s when we started to get in higher positions of power to edit copy, to work with it.... It was a huge women’s revolution there and it had its own unique qualities, but it went fairly smoothly as things go. We had to prove ourselves all over again.”³⁰⁰ According to Anson, “The final barrier fell when the women, led by copy chief Marianne Partridge, staged a successful sit-in in Wenner’s office, ending forever what had been the tradition of all-male editorial conferences.”³⁰¹

When Dunn accepted her job at *Rolling Stone*, more than a decade later, she was aware of the magazine’s reputation, but chose not to read the books by Anson and Draper because, “I honestly didn’t want to know. I felt like I knew a lot about the magazine’s history, but my self-confidence was so fragile at that point....It would have been completely self-sabotaging had I read [them].”³⁰² Instead, she entered the office with an open mind and the acceptance that there would be things she would not like and could not change – like pictures of scantily clad actresses on cover spreads. “I knew it wasn’t *Bitch*³⁰³ magazine,” she explained. “So what am I gonna do? I would vacillate between being outraged and just thinking, ‘This is a business and they want to sell magazines.’”³⁰⁴ Further, she added, “I was careful...not to get in that trap of, ‘Oh, God I’m being held down.’ It ends up being a way to justify your own lack of motivation. I just didn’t want to be that way even though it was fairly true. I just really tried to be adaptable and keep moving.”³⁰⁵

The Company You Keep: Famous People’s Kitchens and Other Adventures

Dunn’s first cover story, an interview with then-up-and-coming independent singer-songwriter Liz Phair, appeared in the October 6, 1994 issue of *Rolling Stone*.³⁰⁶ In

analyzing the musician's breakthrough success that year, Dunn wrote:

Phair's lyrics were, to put it mildly, not for the timid. Lyrics that gave new meaning to the question 'Can I be frank for a moment?' Lyrics that brought forth a collective ooh-wee from a titillated rock press, which seized upon her generous use of the word 'fuck' and phrases like 'I'm a real cunt in spring/You can rent me by the hour.'³⁰⁷

"I was just dying to profile her," Dunn said of Phair, "so I went after that big time."³⁰⁸

Throughout her career at *Rolling Stone*, she wrote a lot about female musicians. She was assigned to cover women more often than men, but she also sought out interviews with women because she was "a fan" and "just more interested in the female artists."³⁰⁹ Her next cover story was an in-depth interview with Melissa Etheridge in *Rolling Stone's* June 1, 1995 issue.³¹⁰ "Her road to true success...was paved by nights singing Barry Manilow tunes in cocktail lounges," Dunn wrote. "Etheridge's homespun appeal, however, and her confessional, straight-from-the-heartland songs have made her a working-class hero, as Springsteen and Bob Seger were before her."³¹¹ Other famous females interviewed by Dunn include Alicia Keys, Aimee Mann, Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen, Cameron Diaz and Jewel. Her interview with Jewel took the form of a cozy pajama party in the singer-songwriter's hotel after one of her 1997 shows – the ideal female bonding experience. In her cover story on Jewel, Dunn wrote:

Jewel peeps around the hotel door. 'Are you wearing pajamas?' she asks me. 'Good. Come on in.' Although she has occupied the room for mere hours, it looks like she's lived here for weeks. There's debris everywhere: tapes, clogs, teary notes from fans, jars of vitamins. She has changed from her black pants and shiny shirt to a pair of red plaid pj's, and she pads around the room barefoot, singing, 'It's delightful, it's delicious.'...She turns off the lights, fires up a candle, grabs her guitar and plops down on a chair. Strumming away at our makeshift slumber party, she begins to tell the story of her 22 years.³¹²

Her favorite, and most memorable interviews, however, were with older musical legends Madonna, Dolly Parton and Loretta Lynn – all of which are described in humorous detail in her book.

“When I heard I was going to have a sit-down with arguably the most famous person in the world, you can best believe I hotfooted to the health food store and bought two bottles of Calms, particularly after one of the people at her record company advised me not to act afraid, because she smells fear, like a dog,” Dunn wrote of her interview with musical icon Madonna,³¹³ whom she interviewed at her Maverick Records office in Los Angeles. Terrified nonetheless, Dunn shook the singer’s hand and opened her interview with a question designed to catch her off-guard. “I just read an interview in which you complained about your adult acne,” she told Madonna. “What a load of shit! That’s just something you say to make us feel better about ourselves.”³¹⁴ It worked – Madonna cracked a smile. Later in the interview, Madonna confessed to Dunn that despite her fame, she felt insecure “every five minutes.”³¹⁵ Dunn also asked Madonna if she could use her restroom, and she took the opportunity to raid the cabinets, discovering that Madonna used Fracas perfume, geranium-scented water, La Mer face lotion and was reading *The Hypochondriac’s Handbook*.³¹⁶ Dunn had a characteristic, observant way of characterizing the celebrities she interviewed – capturing their spirit in a descriptive sentence or two. Of Dolly Parton, for instance, she wrote:

Everywhere Dolly Parton goes, she sings. She’s somewhere in her sizable Nashville production company. But where? Then you hear it: an old hymn – ‘Peace in the Valley’ – echoing down the hallway, that silk ribbon of a soprano along with the tap-tap-tap of her insanely high heels, a uniquely Dolly blend of sex and scripture. ‘Well, hello,’ she chirps, a big grin on her face that says, ‘I know, I know, just take it all in.’³¹⁷

Dunn warmed up to Parton by dropping hints of her own Southern roots, opening the interview by telling Parton about the “most delicious meat and threes” she had just eaten. “That’s the kind of food I grew up with, and you just can’t get it in New York,” Dunn lamented to the country singer.³¹⁸ Once Parton opened up, Dunn made it her mission to talk herself into the apartment Parton kept near her office. She knew that Parton still snacked on Velveeta cheese (a staple from her working class Southern childhood), and she questioned her about it:

‘I heard that you still like Velveeta,’ I said, raising a skeptical eyebrow. ‘I have to say that I don’t believe you. First of all, you have a child-sized waist. And secondly, at this point in your career you’ve got to have a personal chef.’

She was indignant. ‘I do!’ she hollered. ‘You want me to show you in my apartment next door? I fried up some SPAM yesterday morning.’³¹⁹

By being affectionately sarcastic, Dunn worked her way into Parton’s kitchen, where the star showed her a ceramic pig filled with bacon grease that she kept in her refrigerator at all times, and offered her a slab of Velveeta cheese for her airplane ride later that day. Dunn put the cheese in her freezer to store away as a memento.

A year later, she found herself in country music icon Loretta Lynn’s kitchen, where the musician and the journalist baked peanut-butter fudge together. “Loretta Lynn has had enough concentrated joy and pain for ten lifetimes, but she still possesses that resilient mountain spirit, blunt sense of humor and tenacious love of life that make their way into so many of her songs,” she wrote in her article. “When you are around her, you cannot help but feel uplifted.”³²⁰ The experience of spending a day with Loretta Lynn had a lasting impact on Dunn. In a *Salon.com* essay, she wrote of an “imbalance between

what I know about celebrities and what I know about my own family,” which she first noticed after her interview with Lynn. They talked “at glorious length about her hardscrabble life as a coal miner’s daughter,” and Lynn revealed that as a child, she used to eat fried squirrel. When Dunn told this fact to her mother, she was surprised by the response:

My mom slapped a platter onto the counter. ‘Well, what the hell do you think I used to eat? Dad would take a shotgun out into the woods.’ This amazed me. At this point in my life, why hadn’t I heard that story? I knew the basic elements of my mother’s early years but rarely thought to press for details. Would I be able to write my own mother’s biography? ...I could give an hourlong lecture on Loretta Lynn’s background, but there were glaring gaps in my own family lore³²¹.

Dunn then proceeded to sit down and “interview” her mother for the first time, in the same manner in which she had just interviewed Lynn.

Halos and Horns: The Female Experience and the Art of Bonding

At *Rolling Stone*, Dunn was the go-to girl for interviews with female celebrities, along with male celebrities who were otherwise difficult, or challenging, interviewees. “I kind of filled a niche where the [female] artist would definitely be more comfortable with me – someone who looks a little bit like them, looking back at them – than a guy,” she explained.³²² A pop star who is regarded as a sex symbol might hesitate to open up to a male reporter, for fear he might objectify her in print, might not have the same concern about a female reporter such as Dunn. “I tried with everyone, even in a feeble way, to at least discover what makes them tick,” she said. “Even with certain female rappers – they were really glad to see me. The common female experience, you can’t beat it.”³²³

Ironically, some women actually requested that male reporters interview them, because, she explained, “They’re used to twining them around their fingers a little bit, particularly

for a certain strain of nerdy rock journalists. They get taken in more easily than you would expect, which is kind of funny – ‘She really likes me!’³²⁴

Most of the time, though, when *Rolling Stone* wanted to land an interview with a popular female artist, they put Dunn on the case. “Sometimes *Rolling Stone* would send me because I seemed to be softer and more approachable [than other journalists], and they would have me try and move in for the kill – gain trust,” she said. “My gender worked both for and against me.”³²⁵ When she interviewed Eve for a 2003 *Rolling Stone* article, for instance, Dunn was able to tap into the power of the shared female experience to help the rap star reveal her inner demons. She asked Eve, “What exactly happened when you were having a nervous breakdown?” Eve answered, “For me it was more panic attacks. I had a couple of them, just from being stressed. And panic attacks, you just cry, you’re out of breath and it’s overwhelming – sometimes to the point where you think you can’t even take it.”³²⁶

In a 2003 interview with pop singer Christina Aguilera, she asked about the first time she made out with a boy. “I think I was an early make-outer,” Aguilera disclosed. “I was either five or six, and I had, like, a full-on. My mom totally caught me on the front porch with this boy that lived a couple of houses down. It was very cute and flirtatious and funny and young, but it wasn’t no little peck.”³²⁷ Sitting down with singer-songwriter Alanis Morissette, Dunn asked her, “What effect do you think being a woman has had on your music?” Morissette replied:

It’s had a profound effect. I find so many gifts in some of the most painful things that I’ve experienced. Having been born and raised in a patriarchal society — all of that I’ve channeled into my art. All of the things I was encouraged not to be, whether I was angry or complex or emotional — all these things that women have had people roll their

eyes about — all that stuff I felt like I wasn't allowed to be, I just channeled into my songs.³²⁸

Chances are Morissette might not have felt as comfortable expressing those sentiments to a male reporter.

When Dunn was sent out to interview a male musician or an all-male band, she came prepared with a bag of tricks up her sleeve, just in case they doubted her musical knowledge or journalistic capability. Appropriately, in a chapter in her memoir entitled, “How to Jolly Up a Surly, Hungover Band During an Interview,” she offers hard-won nuggets of wisdom, such as: “As soon as the group is settled and their handlers have scurried to dispense energy drinks and aspirin, immediately name-check their tuba ‘n’ bass concept album that was released only in Germany, so that they know that you Get Them.”³²⁹ This was particularly useful with all-male bands that acted like they would rather be anywhere other than talking to her. “I definitely got into this habit where I would bust out a few obscure facts about their music right away so that they would not make assumptions about me,” she explained. “I would mention engineers who put their album together or influences they had that stretched back to the ’50s or ’60s... so that they would take me seriously.”³³⁰ When band members – particularly the lead singer – acted aloof, she employed a mind game of her own:

*Pay attention only to the drummer. Laugh uproariously at his jokes. Stare with dumbfounded awe as he offers up his philosophies. Shake your head and say things like, ‘I never thought about it before, but you are absolutely right – drumming is a metaphor for life!’ ...As the puzzled but excited drummer blossoms under your admiring gaze, his other band mates, particularly the heretofore-mute sunglasses-wearing lead singer, will at first be confused, then annoyed. Finally, their competitive spirit will take over and they will enthusiastically jockey for attention, offering amusing anecdotes about groupies and telling off-color jokes. Do not use any quotes from the drummer.*³³¹

The technique was usually effective, but not always. Sometimes she had to throw all of her scripted remarks and questions out the window during an interview, such as when she met with Scott Weiland of the Stone Temple Pilots, just after he was released from rehab for heroin addiction. His rehabilitation attempt had been less than successful and he spent the majority of the interview trying to persuade Dunn to get high on heroin with him. She refused.³³² Soul singer Barry White turned on the charm and attempted to seduce Dunn when she visited his hotel room, in 1995, for a question and answer session. When she arrived, she found a banquet table stacked with bottles of champagne and bowls of caviar, and he greeted her with “a friendly, lingering kiss on the mouth, despite our never having met.”³³³

Finally, while interviewing actor Ben Affleck in Los Angeles after his very public breakup with singer and actress Jennifer Lopez, Dunn herself became part of the story.³³⁴ “Usually gregarious, he is incredibly closed off on this particular day. He won’t make eye contact, and there are uncharacteristically long silences before he speaks,” she wrote.³³⁵

The article continued:

‘You caught me at the tail end of a life spent entertaining the press, and I’m a little bit weary of it, having been betrayed hundreds of times,’ he says. ‘But don’t worry. I’ll warm up.’ He looks at the floor.

OK, then. Who gets the ring? ‘That’s a ballsy way to start,’ Affleck says with a brittle laugh. ‘There was no ring. It was a fraud perpetrated on the American public.’ He won’t reveal the reason why the two split. ‘I haven’t had conversations with my close friends about this relationship.’

Dunn worked her sense of humor but Affleck did not bite. Instead, he complained that the media was largely to blame for his break-up. Dunn told him she was not convinced, and

he offered to prove it to her. He drove her to a local Mexican restaurant where they sat down at a table outside. Moments later, a photographer arrived at the scene – a valet likely tipped him off. “See the guy in the truck, in the pink shirt?” he asked her. “That took three seconds. That’s good stuff. You’ll be the ‘unnamed female.’”³³⁶ Once the photographer started to lose interest, Affleck suggested that he and Dunn leave the restaurant holding hands. “He puts his arm around me, and the guy moves closer,” she wrote. “‘You’re too stiff,’ he says in my ear. ‘Gotta loosen up.’ I assume a guilty expression as we run into the car. I’m J.Lo for the day! Damned if it isn’t exciting!”³³⁷ The following day, local tabloids launched a bidding war over the photographs of Affleck and the “unnamed woman.” The winning magazine published the photographs, which they bought from the photographer for eleven thousand dollars.

The Great Pretender: Out of Print and Into the Spotlight

One afternoon in 1996, Dunn’s friend Tina, an executive at MTV, invited her to lunch to discuss a new project the popular nonstop music video television network was launching – a new channel called M2 (later changed to MTV2). “They were searching for a female on-air personality who had a decent knowledge of music,” she wrote in *But Enough About Me*. “The list of New York-based lady rock journalists is a concise one, so my name inevitably came up.”³³⁸ Dunn had appeared on television before to promote her articles from *Rolling Stone*, but being in front of the camera made her uneasy. Nonetheless, she auditioned for the role. “My lips were trembling. My smile was a ghastly, grinning skull. ... This was supposed to be a hip new channel, and I sounded distressingly like Bob Newhart,” she wrote.³³⁹

After the audition, one of the producers at MTV2 called to tell her that she got the

job. She kept her job at *Rolling Stone* and filmed her MTV2 segments twice a week. On the air, she frequently fumbled her words, but her bloopers, jokes and encyclopedic knowledge of every musician she interviewed won over viewers and MTV executives alike. She kept her part-time vee-jay job until 2001 – she was thirty-six-years-old when she left. “I was actually the oldest female vee-jay ever at Viacom,³⁴⁰” she said. “Can you imagine? And I loved it. MTV gets a lot of flack [for their portrayal of women], and I’m going to sound like a real company person, but I don’t work there anymore. They were really supportive of me.³⁴¹” Despite fluctuating between clothing sizes six and eight, Dunn said no one ever commented on her appearance or suggested she lose weight. “I really have no body issues. I’m just not one of those people,” she explained. “I’ve never gone on a diet in my life. I love to eat and I just don’t think about it. I thought, ‘I wonder if I am going to have body issues at MTV,’ but I didn’t, because I taught people how to treat me.” She never stressed out about her weight, and, most importantly, never talked about it on the job. When she drank too much beer or ate too much pizza the night before a taping, her wardrobe and make-up consultants would often notice, and comment – “Oh, she ate a lot of carbs – we can’t close her pants!³⁴²” In typical fashion, she laughed off such comments and got on with the show. “I didn’t want to be judged by my body and I really did find that if I wasn’t stressing about that stuff, neither would anyone else,” she said. “It worked for me.”³⁴³

One morning, in 2001, Jann Wenner called Dunn into his office at *Rolling Stone* and told her that Wenner Media and Disney had formed a partnership, and as a result, Wenner-owned *Us* magazine would make regular appearances on Disney-owned *Good Morning America*. He asked Dunn if she would consider being *Good Morning America*’s

Us correspondent. She hesitated, but not for long. “When Jann wanted something, he was the most charmingly persuasive person on earth. At the same time, of course, I was pleased that he thought of me,” she wrote.³⁴⁴ Her mother also encouraged her to take the job. “Jann may have been a controversial figure in the publishing world, but he could do no wrong in the eyes of my mother, who had on two separate occasions sent him thank-you notes for being so good to her daughter,” she wrote.³⁴⁵ Dunn accepted the job and appeared on *Good Morning America* for a year.

Wenner was, and still is, a controversial figure in the publishing industry – gossip web logs such as *Jossip.com* and *Gawker.com* routinely chronicle his idiosyncrasies (such as his insistence that his employees keep their desks immaculate). Draper and Anson portray him as alternately fickle and loyal, tyrannical and supportive, resolute and hotheaded, fiercely independent and obsequiously star struck. He used drugs, was prone to fits of “awfulness,”³⁴⁶ was at times insensitive to his female employees, and all the while, exceedingly charming. “I know you hear the stories that he was crazy and volatile, and he was – I watched him be mean to others – but to me, he was absolutely lovely,” Dunn explained. “One of my friends called me and said, ‘You made Jann look like a Care Bear in the book,’ because he was a Care Bear to me. Are you puking yet?” she said with a laugh.³⁴⁷ Dunn’s ability to blend in with any crowd served her well when it came to Wenner. “He’s definitely a volatile guy and he’s no stranger to tearing up peoples’ stories right in front of them.... But he really has this charisma,” she explained. “A lot of people work there for a really long time. They have to be thrown out of there. It’s because there is something about him.”³⁴⁸ She continued:

I had the advantage of not working with him too closely. I would do good work for him, he'd wave at me from afar, but he was the one who got me the job on *Good Morning America*. It was because he liked what I did and thought, 'Oh, you'd be great on TV.'... He does quiet things behind people's backs that you would never read about because it doesn't make good copy.... He's an autocrat, no doubt about it, and if you don't like his way, you're in a lot of trouble. But I had no illusions that I was going to go in there and make a big difference with my vision. I was used to working with a group of people. He is the boss and he'll let you know that the second you arrive. He called me 'Dulcey' for the first couple of years, and I answered. God knows I answered.... But there's a nice side to him too. If he believes in you, he will really support you. Writers that he liked, they would roll in at noon and he wouldn't care. He'll do a lot for you if he thinks you are talented.³⁴⁹

A self-declared feminist, however, Dunn was no shrinking violet – especially when it came to money. She never shied away from asking for what she deserved, salary-wise. “I learned from a young age – my father beat it into my head – to take care of myself,” she said. “No one is going to do it for me – not a husband – nobody.”³⁵⁰ Therefore, she became “notorious at Wenner Media for shaking people down for money, because I think it's very important.”³⁵¹ She asked for raises until she got them, and now takes pride in coaching other women on the art of asking for money. “I found, particularly among females, if you're going to sit around and wait for someone to recognize you and give you a raise, you're going to die of old age,” she explained. “The worst they can tell you is no, but I've found that a lot of times they didn't tell me no.”³⁵²

Once, after Dunn found out she was about to be promoted to an assistant editor position at *Rolling Stone*, she drafted a letter to her boss, requesting that her salary be raised to fifty thousand dollars a year. One of her editors, Karen Johnson, walked by, looked over her shoulder, and changed the “fifty” to “sixty.” “I turned it in and I got the

sixty,” she said. “I guess how I stood apart from other people is I knew from day one, going in, not to be afraid to ask for promotions and for money – to be relentless about it.”³⁵³

In time, Dunn grew weary of the rock-and-roll lifestyle – the parties, the drinking, the drugs, and the pressure to always be (or at least appear) hip. After a bad experience involving an almost-overdose of cocaine and too much to drink, Dunn had an epiphany. “It hit me: Being hip was a full-time job, and I was only a part-timer,” she wrote in her book. “I was a geek, with a healthy dose of Old Lady. ‘Twas ever thus, and I couldn’t keep pretending forever.”³⁵⁴ She stopped the hard partying and reconnected with friends and family. Also, over time, her relationship with Wenner began to change. “There comes a time when he churns through you and tosses you aside,” she explained:

He definitely woke up one day and thought I was too expensive, referring to my earlier conversation about shaking him down for money. And that was an odd thing because I had worked for him for 16 years....No one...has lifetime immunity. The nature of magazines is the nature of Jann. He churns through new information – new this, new that.³⁵⁵

Dunn continued to write occasional pieces for *Rolling Stone*, but decided to devote her time to other pursuits, like contributing articles to *O: The Oprah Magazine*, *New York magazine*, *Harper’s Bazaar* and other publications. As for *Rolling Stone*, “I outgrew them a little bit and they outgrew me. “My [musical] tastes have changed too. I listen to jazz now and classical – right on schedule for turning forty – all the clichés,” she said, with a laugh.³⁵⁶

In 2008, following-up on the success of *But Enough About Me*, Dunn published her first work of fiction, titled *Don't You Forget About Me: A Novel*,³⁵⁷ about a thirty-

eight-year-old woman who finds herself unexpectedly divorced, moves back in with her parents, and takes a trip down memory lane, music and all. Then, finally, in 2009, she published a collection of short non-fiction stories, called *Why Is My Mother Getting a Tattoo? And Other Questions I Wish I Never Had to Ask*,³⁵⁸ about her humorous relationships with her family, and the question of whether or not we ever really grow up. In addition, she contributes regularly to publications like *O: The Oprah Magazine* (where she writes a monthly ethics column), *The New York Times* (where she writes features on home and garden and style), and *InStyle*. In a January 11, 2010 blog post, titled “Celebrities: just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in,” she wrote about the experience of interviewing singer Whitney Houston for *InStyle* after taking a reprieve from celebrity and music profiles. She wrote:

Let me tell you, for all she has been through, she looks great. As I have written before, I always have some banter prepared up front. This time around, her assistant told me that her favorite perfume was Jo Malone's grapefruit. As it happened, I had some in my purse, so I whipped it out and said, 'don't you love it? I could bathe in this stuff.' Well. We were off and running.³⁵⁹

Just like Dunn.

²⁷⁶ Telephone interview, Jancee Dunn, August 31, 2006.

²⁷⁷ Jancee Dunn, “Head in the Stars,” *Salon.com*, http://www.salon.com/mwt/feature/2006/08/22/celeb_mom, August 22, 2006 (accessed September 10, 2006).

²⁷⁸ Telephone interview, Jancee Dunn, August 31, 2006.

²⁷⁹ Jancee Dunn, *But Enough About Me: A Jersey Girl's Unlikely Adventures Among the Absurdly Famous* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 8.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 16.

²⁸¹ *Ibid*, 66.

²⁸² *Ibid*, 70.

²⁸³ Telephone interview, Jancee Dunn, August 31, 2006.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid*.

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- ²⁸⁵ Jancee Dunn, *But Enough About Me: A Jersey Girl's Unlikely Adventures Among the Absurdly Famous*, 78.
- ²⁸⁶ Ibid, 86-87.
- ²⁸⁷ Telephone interview, Jancee Dunn, August 31, 2006.
- ²⁸⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁸⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁹⁰ Ibid.
- ²⁹¹ Ibid. Photo appeared on cover of March 7, 1996 *Rolling Stone*.
- ²⁹² Ibid.
- ²⁹³ Robert Sam Anson, *Gone Crazy and Back Again: The Rise and Fall of the Rolling Stone Generation* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1981).
- ²⁹⁴ Robert Draper, *Rolling Stone Magazine: The Uncensored History* (New York: Doubleday, 1990).
- ²⁹⁵ Robert Sam Anson, *Gone Crazy and Back Again: The Rise and Fall of the Rolling Stone Generation*, 18.
- ²⁹⁶ Robert Draper, *Rolling Stone Magazine: The Uncensored History*, 217.
- ²⁹⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁹⁸ Telephone interview, Marianne Partridge, May 12, 2005.
- ²⁹⁹ Telephone interview, Sarah Lazin, July 12, 2005.
- ³⁰⁰ Ibid.
- ³⁰¹ Robert Sam Anson, *Gone Crazy and Back Again: The Rise and Fall of the Rolling Stone Generation*, 256.
- ³⁰² Telephone interview, Jancee Dunn, August 31, 2006.
- ³⁰³ *Bitch* magazine, a feminist response to pop culture, was founded in 1996.
- ³⁰⁴ Telephone interview, Jancee Dunn, August 31, 2006.
- ³⁰⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁰⁶ Jancee Dunn, "That Girl," *Rolling Stone*, October 6, 1994. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier.
- ³⁰⁷ Ibid, 42-43.
- ³⁰⁸ Telephone interview, Jancee Dunn, August 31, 2006.
- ³⁰⁹ Ibid.
- ³¹⁰ Jancee Dunn, "Melissa Etheridge takes the long hard road from the heartland to Hollywood," *Rolling Stone*, June 1, 1995. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier.
- ³¹¹ Ibid.
- ³¹² Jancee Dunn, "Cosmic Girl," *Rolling Stone*, May 15, 1997. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier.
- ³¹³ Jancee Dunn, *But Enough About Me: A Jersey Girl's Unlikely Adventures Among the Absurdly Famous*, 54.
- ³¹⁴ Ibid, 58.
- ³¹⁵ Ibid, 59.
- ³¹⁶ Ibid, 60.
- ³¹⁷ Jancee Dunn, "Dolly Parton," *Rolling Stone*, October 30, 2003. Academic Search Premier.
- ³¹⁸ Jancee Dunn, *But Enough About Me: A Jersey Girl's Unlikely Adventures Among the Absurdly Famous*, 140.
- ³¹⁹ Ibid, 141-2.
- ³²⁰ Jancee Dunn, "Honky-Tonk Woman," *Rolling Stone*, May 27, 2004. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier.

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- ³²¹ Jancee Dunn, "Head in the Stars," *Salon.com*, http://www.salon.com/mwt/feature/2006/08/22/celeb_mom, August 22, 2006 (accessed September 10, 2006).
- ³²² Telephone interview, Jancee Dunn, August 31, 2006.
- ³²³ Ibid.
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- ³²⁶ Jancee Dunn, "Eve," *Rolling Stone*, October 30, 2003. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier.
- ³²⁷ Jancee Dunn, "Christina," *Rolling Stone*, June 26, 2003. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier.
- ³²⁸ Jancee Dunn, "Women in Rock: Alanis Morissette," *Rolling Stone*, October 31, 2002. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier.
- ³²⁹ Jancee Dunn, *But Enough About Me: A Jersey Girl's Unlikely Adventures Among the Absurdly Famous*, 1.
- ³³⁰ Telephone interview, Jancee Dunn, August 31, 2006.
- ³³¹ Jancee Dunn, *But Enough About Me: A Jersey Girl's Unlikely Adventures Among the Absurdly Famous*, 1-2.
- ³³² Ibid, 89-93.
- ³³³ Ibid, 181.
- ³³⁴ Jancee Dunn, "Barry White," *Rolling Stone*, February 9, 1995. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier.
- ³³⁵ Jancee Dunn, "A Hollywood Ending," *Rolling Stone*, April 1, 2004. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier.
- ³³⁶ Ibid.
- ³³⁷ Ibid.
- ³³⁸ Jancee Dunn, *But Enough About Me: A Jersey Girl's Unlikely Adventures Among the Absurdly Famous*, 129.
- ³³⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁴⁰ Viacom owns MTV and MTV2.
- ³⁴¹ Telephone interview, Jancee Dunn, August 31, 2006.
- ³⁴² Ibid.
- ³⁴³ Ibid.
- ³⁴⁴ Jancee Dunn, *But Enough About Me: A Jersey Girl's Unlikely Adventures Among the Absurdly Famous*, 185.
- ³⁴⁵ Ibid, 186.
- ³⁴⁶ Robert Draper, *Rolling Stone Magazine: The Uncensored History* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 144.
- ³⁴⁷ Telephone interview, Jancee Dunn, August 31, 2006.
- ³⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ³⁵¹ Ibid.
- ³⁵² Ibid.
- ³⁵³ Ibid.
- ³⁵⁴ Jancee Dunn, *But Enough About Me: A Jersey Girl's Unlikely Adventures Among the Absurdly Famous*, 213-14.
- ³⁵⁵ Telephone interview, Jancee Dunn, August 31, 2006.
- ³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Jancee Dunn, *Don't You Forget About Me: A Novel* (New York: Villard, 2008).

³⁵⁸ Jancee Dunn, *Why Is My Mother Getting a Tattoo? And Other Questions I Wish I Never Had to Ask* (New York: Villard, 2009).

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Chapter Eight:

Brave New Media World: Journalism, Gender and Rock in the Age of Digital Media

“Most simply, journalism no longer dominates the mediascape as *the* source for helping a society learn about itself. Instead, journalism has become part of a holistic mix of media elements that intentionally or unintentionally provide people with varied glimpses of the world around them.”³⁶⁰ – Dan Berkowitz

According to Claire Suddath, in her 2009 *Time* magazine article, “A Brief History of the Internet,” the Internet was officially born Feb. 28, 1990, when various computer networks were connected and information was exchanged between them using web browsers and hyperlinked text.³⁶¹ At some indefinite point between the mid-1990s and the late 2000s, however, the Internet became more than a place for people around the world to exchange information in a quick and informal manner – the World Wide Web became, for many, a brand new way of life.

Before the advent of the Internet, print and broadcast media were a primary source of news, information and entertainment for the public. The Internet boom changed everything. According to Kurt Cable, of *TechNewsWorld*, “During the 1990s, as the World Wide Web first began taking shape, designers were torn about which medium the Web was most like. Was it more like a magazine, a newspaper, radio or television? In fact, it was like all of them ... and none of them.”³⁶²

Further, he wrote, the Web “could mimic the characteristics of other media, from the telegraph and telephone to 3-D worlds,” and “could make it possible to combine these media in ways that no one could have imagined when the first Web browsers appeared. This fluidity of media became the first, most obvious, threat to existing media organizations.”³⁶³ With so much information available with the click of a computer

mouse, and more and more people acquiring computers and access to the Internet, print news organizations began to slowly suffer the consequences of a continuously shrinking readership, and, as a result, advertising revenue loss. One Web site, *Paper Cuts*,³⁶⁴ was created in 2007 with the sole purpose of keeping track of newspaper layoffs and buyouts. As of January 2010, the site had tracked 2,256 lost newspaper jobs around the country.

According to S. Elizabeth Bird, in a 2009 *Journalism* article,

We can all agree that today's digital environment has transformed the print-based, one-way nature of journalism. Research shows that fewer people than ever read print newspapers, and young people who once could be expected to become newspaper readers as they matured, no longer do. They may be still interested in news, but their 'news habit' is completely different. People used to set aside specific times in their days to 'keep up' with the news – perhaps reading a morning paper, and/or watching TV news broadcasts later. The arrival of 24-hour cable news started eroding that habit; the online environment has transformed it.³⁶⁵

The advent of online culture has also revolutionized the way people listen to and write about music. Before the Internet, learning about and listening to music was an involved process. Music magazines like *Rolling Stone* and *Spin* offered fans reviews and recommendations, and it was necessary to go to an actual record store or mall to purchase a tape or compact disc after reading about it. That disc would then be played, often in its entirety, on a boom box or Walkman. That changed with the introduction of the iPod – a tiny digital music player and storage device - and the music downloading service iTunes, by Apple Computers, in 2001. In a *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* article about technical developments of the past decade, Adrian McCoy wrote, “People were able to load the tiny players with their favorite music and listen to their own personally created playlists

anywhere. As the decade advanced, Apple added bells and whistles to the iPod, including the ability to watch and record videos.” He added:

In 2003, Apple opened the iTunes store, allowing people to legally download songs for 99 cents from the Web. Five years later, it was the largest music retailer in the United States. The store's offerings expanded beyond music, offering movies, TV show episodes, podcasts and games.... [The] concept of downloading a song instead of buying a CD moved out of the college dormitory and into the mainstream.

“How many people buy full albums anymore? They just want one song. It’s easy, it’s quick, let’s take it and go,” said Jessica Robertson, an editor at *AOL Music*.³⁶⁶ She added:

The focus in the 60s, 70s and maybe even 80s (to some degree) was the whole album....The one thing that you defined your week or your month or your year by was the new Beatles album. Now it’s, ‘Katy Perry has a hit. I’m going to download it for ninety-nine cents and I have no idea what else is on her album, but I like this one song.’³⁶⁷

Savvy music consumers began to read and write blogs about music, in addition to, or instead of print music magazines, and to chat online with other music fans using these blogs, music news sites, message boards and social networking sites. In a 2008 *Columbia Journalism Review* essay, Alissa Quart wrote:

Music and journalism were once lodestones of both daily life and collective experience—the newspaper, unfolded and read on the way to work on the subway or commuter rail; the LP, spun in bedrooms and dens, or the cassette tape played in the car those nights when everyone sang along, back when everyone knew the lyrics. Those lodestones are going or gone. The music industry and the news industry were both once the foundation of mass culture. That monoculture is shattering, for better or worse, into "minor cultures"—many different and splintered communities, served by many different sources of music and news. Both industries have lost buyers. Yet both have gained audiences in the last five years.³⁶⁸

A new generation of music journalists – including many women – who have grown up in an Internet-driven culture, are beginning their careers at online music publications, rather than trying to work their way up on print publication mastheads. They also utilize the Internet to connect with one another, and, at times, offer support and guidance. What follows are some of the experiences of a sampling of women, who are trying to make it as rock journalists in this brave new media landscape.

Daphne Carr, Girl Group

When thirty-one year old music journalist, critic and ethnomusicologist Daphne Carr first started her journalism career, after graduating from New York University in 2001, she turned to the Internet to vent her early frustrations. She moved to Philadelphia, wrote for *Philadelphia Weekly* and other publications, and was struck by the fact that most of her music journalism colleagues were male. “I was experiencing enormous anxiety about being one of the only female music critics in Philly,” she said.³⁶⁹

“Being a woman is actually a really easy way to get your foot into the door of a lot of publications, because of the subconscious or conscious desire for affirmative action,” she added. “But it’s certainly not something that once you’re in the door, helps you at all. I’ve been assigned so many stories and told to my face, ‘I’m so glad that we finally have a female writer.’”³⁷⁰

A male friend and fellow journalist named Jason Gross suggested Carr create a listserv (an electronic mailing list) to connect with other female music journalists around the world. She launched Girl Group, a listserv for women who write about music, in October 2003, through Yahoo! Groups, and within one month, it had more than one hundred members. The group’s description reads:

The Girl Group was created as a forum to talk about the challenges of writing, editing and general career advancement as a woman working in the arts media. It hopes to offer thoughtful advice and support for the furthering of women who already are or would like to become professional music writers, and to as serve as a space to critique current writing and music trends.³⁷¹

As of February 2010, the group had grown five-fold, with more than five hundred members. “People tend to talk more about careers and feminism and writing than they do about music,” said Carr, who now resides in New York, where she is completing a Ph.D. in ethnomusicology at Columbia University.³⁷² “It’s more of a professional organization. That’s where it’s sort of settled in the last few years...I’m really proud to say that a lot of the women, especially here in New York, have gotten jobs through Girl Group.”³⁷³

Before creating Girl Group, Carr said she avoided writing stories about female musicians because she did not want to be viewed as a one trick pony who only wrote about women. She dreaded the annual “women in rock” issues published by many mainstream music magazines, and “didn’t want to be shoved an Ani DiFranco CD and told, ‘You’re a girl. You write about this.’”³⁷⁴

Through her interactions on Girl Group, though, her perspective shifted. “For me it was just one of those great things to meet a bunch of men and women who were challenging the dominant history, saying it’s possible to write about women without talking about the goddamn year of women in rock,” she said.³⁷⁵ “Every day is the year of women in rock and you might as well just get used to it. It’s normal. It’s not exceptional, and I think that’s the most important thing about Girl Group for me – in my world – there’s only female rock critics.”³⁷⁶

Girl Group has become particularly relevant in the last few years as a forum to discuss the changing field of rock journalism. Members discuss things they are working on, post job openings, solicit advice, and request contact information for various artists they are trying to interview. They share their daily struggles, observations, and often just discuss interesting items in the news that relate to music, gender and journalism.

Carr, who has written for such publications as *Stop Smiling* magazine, *Paper Thin Walls*, *LA Weekly*, *The Village Voice*, *Venus* magazine and the popular online music news site *Pitchfork*, has gradually decreased her Girl Group responsibilities in the last few years, encouraging active group members to help keep the listserv going strong. She has also cut back on writing for music publications – print and online – to focus on her graduate studies and other projects. For instance, she wrote a biography of alternative rock band Nine Inch Nails, *Nine Inch Nails' Pretty Hate Machine (33 1/3)*, which was published in April 2010, and is wrapping up her doctorate dissertation (at Columbia University) – the topic is "Regimes of Value for Czech Popular Musicians in the Digital Era." In 2006, she served as editor for *Da Capo Best Music Writing 2006: The Year's Finest Writing on Rock, Hip-Hop, Jazz, Pop, Country, & More*, and has edited annual editions of the anthology through 2010.

When it comes to rock journalism she said, "I think that's been officially democratized by the Internet. The print industry that was around it, I think, is no longer going to be able to support it. I see the future of music writing to be primarily online and primarily through impassioned amateurs."³⁷⁷

Despite the seemingly endless opportunities the Internet provides to impassioned amateurs who want to write about music, Carr said she has concerns about the future of

rock journalism as a profession, and the stylistic and logistical changes the online format has forced upon writers and consumers. “Online music journalism is more driven by taste-making than it is by critical discourse, and the other side of that is that music journalism is shifting from long format investigative journalistic pieces or critical pieces to more conversational pieces that offer continuous conversations because of their ability to have instant dialogue,” she said. “The tone of that type of writing has got to be a lot different.”³⁷⁸ Further, she said, a lot, if not all online writing is done on a volunteer basis (meaning unpaid), which makes it challenging for a writer to earn a living off freelancing solely for online publications.³⁷⁹

“What I believe is happening is that as the places for well-paid, legitimate, prestigious writing opportunities dry up, the people who are getting those opportunities are people who are somehow, and I say this in a gendered meaning, grandfathered into jobs,” she explained. “If fifty people are applying for one gig, they’re going to pick the person who is most qualified.”³⁸⁰ She continued:

The competition and the stakes are a lot higher, and editors, along with anyone involved in the industry, won’t take chances on unknown voices or voices people perceive to be outside of the mainstream – that mainstream, of course, being synonymous with white heterosexual males.... It’s a last hired, first fired kind of thing. So the folks who are the icing to the editorial process are cut first. I think that a lot of times editors look at women’s stories or women’s voices as the icing on the cake – not the cake.³⁸¹

Ultimately, Carr said she has had to come to terms with the fact that online journalism might not be her medium. “My tone is not a light, funny, Internet tone, and I have a really hard time writing in that style for the Internet,” she said.³⁸²

Jalylah Burrell: Freelance Writer, Graduate Student, Blogger

Twenty-nine-year-old Girl Group member Jalylah Burrell graduated from Spellman College in 2002 with a degree in English, and continued her studies at New York University, earning a master's degree in Africana studies, in 2007, all the while aspiring to write about her true passion: rock and hip-hop music. While in graduate school in 2004, she started a music blog called "She Real Cool,"³⁸³ which attracted the attention of online music publications, and launched her career. "Starting out as a graduate student, I didn't have any clips," she said. "To get my foot in the door, I had to go through online publications. Honestly, blogging helped a lot.... A lot of [writing] gigs I got [were] from people who would read my blog, who thought that I had an interesting voice, and offered me an opportunity to write."³⁸⁴ She started writing for online music publication *Prefix*, and has since written for other online and print publications including *VIBE*, the *FADER*, *XXL Magazine*, the *Village Voice* and the *Portland Mercury*. Like Carr, Burrell has found online music journalism to be a challenging career path. "It can be a frustrating road to follow. I can't say right now that this is something I could sustainably do for the length of my career," she said.³⁸⁵ As of February 2010, she was enrolled in Yale University, working on a Ph.D. in African American Studies, while continuing to freelance.

Throughout her young writing career, and particularly when writing about hip-hop online, Burrell has been sensitive to issues of gender inequality. "The tone and the tenor of online discourse is so damn juvenile and hyper-masculine, that I'm wondering to what extent it harms our situation as much as it helps it," she said, with exasperation. "I can't engage. I can't engage in a lot of the conversations.... In some of the popular hip-

hop blogs, there's a lot of bombastic, obnoxious, offensive talk that is supposed to be tongue-in-cheek."³⁸⁶

When covering concerts, Burrell said she typically takes a "tentative" approach, and has never once ventured backstage at a show. "I don't care if I have a backstage pass or not – I won't go back there for fear of being perceived groupie-ish," she said.³⁸⁷ And when writing articles, she makes "a concerted effort" to use gender neutral language, because "I remember reading these [music] magazines voraciously as a younger person, and knowing that they weren't speaking to me, even by their choice of pronouns."³⁸⁸ Despite all these obstacles, she continues to write, she said, because "I just love music.... I just love the opportunity to listen to so much music live, by some of the best players."³⁸⁹

Jessica Robertson, AOL

Girl Group member and *AOL Music* editor Jessica Robertson, said she "fell into rock journalism" while studying at Middle Tennessee State University and planning for a career in the business side of the music industry. "I wanted to go into A&R and work at a record company, and, interestingly enough, I was told by a professor of mine that I worked for that I would never make it because I wasn't a man, which, I couldn't believe he said that. I thought he was kidding," she said.³⁹⁰ The professor's comments didn't deter her, but the more she studied the industry, she said, the less she liked it. Growing up, she had always loved to write, and had subscriptions to *Rolling Stone*, *Spin*, and "every other piece of music journalism I could get my hands on."³⁹¹

While in college, she began freelancing for *The National Scene*, and, thanks to a connection through one of her writing mentors, landed an internship at *Rolling Stone's* online division, *RollingStone.com*, the summer before her senior year, which she loved.

Then, after she graduated in 2005 with a degree in music business, she applied for a job at *RollingStone.com* and was hired as an assistant editor, where she worked for a year and a half, until her editor, Bill Crandall, took a job at *AOL Music*. He then offered Robertson a job as managing editor of AOL's online music publication, *Spinner.com*.

In the last five years, Robertson said she has witnessed a dramatic shift of content from the printed page to the Web. "I think if anyone wants to be a music journalist, they should start online. And any publication that wants to survive, they have to be able to survive online as well," she said. "I was fortunate enough to start [my career] online, and therefore I understand it."³⁹² During the time she worked for *Rolling Stone*, "there wasn't a lot of vested interested in online content at all," she explained. "For [*Rolling Stone* editor] Jann Wenner, the magazine is his baby.... I don't think he really saw online as a viable outlet for his content.... We just kind of ran [the website] as a mini-magazine, really."³⁹³

At *Spinner.com*, Robertson writes and edits music news, and works with a stable of freelance writers. She sees the Web as empowering to female rock journalists, and limiting at the same time. "[The Internet] has made it easier to be a passionate fan of music that just happens to be female," she said. "Anybody can write about music at this point. It makes female music lovers feel safer in a way. And also, because so many publications are dominated by male mastheads, it allows more access."³⁹⁴ Nonetheless, she added, the freelance world is "incredibly competitive," and "there are more male writers out there than there are female writers. Is that because of the system in place that we've built? Or are female writers maybe not as active?" she asked, and continued.³⁹⁵

Everybody's experience is different. I've been incredibly fortunate to have the mentors I've had and have the editors I've had. I've had the same editor for six years.... He's incredibly open-minded and generous... I've never really experienced any obstacles because of my gender. However, it is a very corporate environment here. You're in the boardroom – it is largely male.... Whether it's truth or my own perceived reality, I have to be careful what I say or how I say it, and how much I assert myself. And if I assert myself, if it's going to be heard and taken into consideration, or not.”³⁹⁶

In addition, Robertson said that whenever an article about a female singer-songwriter is pitched at the magazine, it is “automatically handed over to me.”³⁹⁷ And when the staff works on developing lists (like the saddest songs of all time) for the website, she notices, and voices, when female artists are left off the lists, intentionally or not. She said, “I feel like we have to play gatekeepers sometimes to make sure that unintentional, unconscious sexism isn't happening.”³⁹⁸

Despite loving her job, Robertson said that like many journalists right now, she worries about what the future will hold, and about what new, flashier website will crop up and draw readers away from her site. In fact, the day before her interview for this thesis, she was called into an all-staff meeting, where layoffs were announced (her job was safe). “I'm a little nervous about the future of rock journalism,” she admitted.

Rock journalism has changed so much since its inception. We don't have a *Creem* magazine anymore, and I don't even know that we have an online equivalent. Really, everything is shifting to online, which is exciting, but also sort of disheartening, because everything that is published online has to be in such small, easily digestible chunks. I don't know that it really allows for thoughtful, however many thousand words Q&As that *Rolling Stone* used to do. It's all about how short you can make it, how punchy you can make it. You have to get to the point really quickly because people don't want to read a lot of text. They get overwhelmed by that on their screen. Words scare people, and that scares me.³⁹⁹

Still, she continues to hold out hope. “Who’s to say a new form of rock journalism can’t be born and thrive,” she said.⁴⁰⁰

Amy Phillips, Pitchfork

Perhaps the most well-known and influential online music magazine – the closest thing to *Rolling Stone* or *Creem* magazine today – is *Pitchfork*. It began as a tiny startup website, fashioned in the style of a do-it-yourself print zine, before the big Internet journalism boom, in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1996, by a recent high school graduate and independent music fan – named Ryan Schreiber.⁴⁰¹ Now, *Pitchfork* describes itself as “the essential guide to independent music and beyond, and is widely regarded as the music world’s primary tastemaker.”⁴⁰² As of February 2010, the site (now based out of Chicago, Illinois) was boasting more than two million unique visitors each month and 350,000 visits each day.⁴⁰³ It has thrived according to *Wired* magazine’s Dave Itzkoff, because “like the indie bands that are its lifeblood, *Pitchfork* has found its own way to thrive in an industry that is slowly being niched to death: It influences those who influence others.”

Twenty-eight-year-old Girl Group member and *Pitchfork* news editor Amy Phillips began working for the website in 2005, after freelancing for them first. Notably, of the eight full-time staff members who run the site, Phillips is the only woman. Her gender, though, she said, has “been an advantage for me in my career, more than a hindrance.”⁴⁰⁴ Phillips began writing about music professionally while a student at Columbia University (she earned her undergraduate degree from there in 2003). An internship at the *Village Voice* early in her college career opened doors for her later on.⁴⁰⁵ “I really, truly owe my career to [then-music editor] Chuck Eddy at the *Village Voice*,”

she said. “He really believed that a 19-year-old girl’s opinion about music was just as valid as a 50-year-old guy’s opinion about music.”⁴⁰⁶

Phillips said she has always wanted to be a rock journalist. When she was in junior high school, in Philadelphia, for instance she chose to shadow the *Philadelphia Enquirer’s* music critic for her eighth grade career day. Music journalism is “pretty much all I’ve ever done. I don’t know how to do anything else,” she said with a laugh.⁴⁰⁷ After college, when she was working full-time as freelance rock journalist for various publications, she often suspected that editors were giving her assignments “because they wanted more girls [writing for] their magazines.”⁴⁰⁸ Now, she frequently gets “called to be on radio shows and panel discussions all the time because they want another girl.”⁴⁰⁹

Phillips said that being one of the only women in her office (aside from interns) does not bother her, and her colleagues are more than respectful, though it is “kind of a bummer” that she does not have more female colleagues.⁴¹⁰ She has received her share of vitriolic letters and critical posts about her on Internet music message boards, which she said she probably would not have received if she were male, but insists she has never been victimized for her gender. Though there was that one time, she recalled after a moment of thought, that a promoter at 2007 music festival South by Southwest stuck his hand up her skirt and grabbed her bottom.⁴¹¹ Thankfully, that “had never happened before,” she said.⁴¹² And there was that other time, during an interview, when an (unnamed) band once asked her if she had ever been in a threesome.⁴¹³ For support and advice over the years, she has turned to fellow Girl Group journalists Daphne Carr, *Los Angeles Times* pop music critic Ann Powers, and longtime role model, former Philadelphia-based freelance rock journalist (and Girl Group member) Sara Sherr. “My

favorite writer growing up was...Sara Sherr,” she explained. Sherr “would cover all the cool bands for the local papers... I wanted to be like her when I grew up. And now we’re friends.”⁴¹⁴

In terms of print versus online journalism, Phillips said *Pitchfork* is “in a really, really privileged position, in that we got on that train very early and stuck it out. We have been established as a reliable source of information about music. We’ve been really lucky to be growing and succeeding at a time when a lot of publications – Internet and print – aren’t doing as well.” The Internet, she added, has made the points of entry into a rock journalism career easier. “You don’t have to go through some system of knowing all the right people in New York, or going to the right schools,” she explained. “The strength of your writing has to stand out more than who you know or what gender you might be.”⁴¹⁵

Another perk of the Internet, she added, is that when you are writing an article online about a band or a song, “what you’re writing about, it’s just a click away from hearing it. That’s something that you don’t get with print. You can say, here’s this awesome song, here’s what I have to say about it, and you can listen to it while you are reading what I’m saying.”⁴¹⁶ In addition, you can watch an accompanying video on *YouTube* or *Pitchfork TV*, and “that creates a level of involvement with the music and with the writing that wasn’t there with print.”⁴¹⁷ The downside to Internet journalism, she said, is “the constant fight to be first – to break news and get the scoop.... It’s a constant deadline.”

Pitchfork’s main demographic, according to Phillips, is “obsessive music fans” like herself – “people who really want to discover new bands, to know everything about what’s going on with their favorite bands, [and] to hear new music first.... I love that my

job is keeping up with my favorite bands – being paid to actively engage in what’s going on with music.”⁴¹⁸

Katie Hasty, HitFix

One website that follows a similar model as *Pitchfork*, but aims for broader mainstream appeal, is *HitFix*, which launched in late 2008. *HitFix* provides “insider entertainment news...without the pesky gossip,” and reports on the film, television, and, of course, music industries.⁴¹⁹ Girl Group member Katie Hasty was brought on board as managing editor in early 2009, after she was a casualty of a round of layoffs at her former employer, *Billboard.com*. The opportunity to work for a startup publication excited Hasty, who is a native of Kansas, but now resides in New York City, because it “presented a new challenge of building a brand of journalism – building a brand of breaking news about music on a brand new platform.”⁴²⁰ It was a detour – to say the least – from what Hasty set out to pursue when she graduated from journalism school (Northwestern University) in 2004:

It’s kind of like my career moves have taken me, hilariously enough, away from what appealed to me initially, which was long-form, critical journalism, and now it’s 500 words or less features and news writing. Which is fine – it’s a job and it pays consistently. But for me it also reflects on how people consume music journalism on the whole.⁴²¹

Before joining *HitFix*, Hasty served as an online editor and columnist for *Billboard Magazine* for nearly five years, and contributed articles (often long-form, critical pieces), to music magazines such as *Stop Smiling* and *Venus*. One of the major differences between writing for print and online publications, she said, is that, in print journalism, everything is measured by a story’s column length; online, there is no such

thing as column length, and the importance (and popularity) of a story is measured by how many people click through it – a site’s traffic patterns. “The traffic levels indicate that people want their news, and they want it fast, and they want it in bite size forms. Sometimes they want it in list form,” Hasty said.⁴²² In addition readers of *HitFlix* and other online music publications want to be able to read articles on the site while doing several other tasks on their computers simultaneously. “We’re spending eight hours a day at a computer,” Hasty said of the typical nine-to-five worker, adding:

We’re multitasking with IM [instant messaging] going on, and reading a news story, while also getting [our] actual work done and emailing. There really isn’t a lot of room in our brain to really sit down and consume lengthy passages as to why an album is great, or why this single music video is perfect, or what are the social implications of this artist doing this in the news. You just pump it out and move on.⁴²³

Compounding this multi-tasking mentality is the fact that Internet broadband speeds are constantly increasing, which means consumers are able to access more media at once, and quicker than ever. As a result, Hasty said, “a lot of people use [user-generated video website] YouTube as their radio station.”⁴²⁴ Also, she added, for music lovers seeking a new music fix, there are seemingly endless places to get one. She remembered once upon a time falling in love with a band or two at a time, but now, with so many options everywhere, anytime, “it’s more like passing lust now, instead of falling in love [with new music].”⁴²⁵ She cited a theory proposed by rock journalist Christopher Weingarten, who wrote, in a *Village Voice* article, that, as of 2009, “bands have an official life span of about nine months dating from the launch of their MySpace pages, thanks to the comically accelerated, DSL-enhanced hype cycle.”⁴²⁶

One positive outcome of the rise of Internet journalism, Hasty said, is she has had the opportunity to work with more women – and women in positions of power. The CEO and co-founder of *HitFix* is female (Jennifer Wilhelmi Sargent), and many of Hasty's coworkers at *Billboard.com*, she said, were female – though she noted very few were in positions of power.

Hasty said she occasionally experiences incidences of sexism on the job, especially while out in the field reporting. “If you are a girl [reporter] and you go to a small indie rock show, someone assumes you are somebody's girlfriend, or you're with the band,” she said.⁴²⁷ And when performing in her own band, “Numbers and Letter,” in which she writes music and sings, she has received condescending comments referencing her gender. “I've found myself carrying out my own amp or guitars, and people are like, ‘That looks heavy, why isn't your boyfriend taking that out?’ Or, ‘Are you a groupie?’”⁴²⁸ There is an unspoken assumption, she explained, in rock journalism, that “behind every great woman there must be a great man.”⁴²⁹

She has found success regardless, thanks to her broad knowledge base and her lifelong passion for music. “Just being able to speak the language, and being able to keep up, is really important,” she said. “That's how people show their colors. That's how people show their expertise.”⁴³⁰ It is even more important, she added, to have a sense of humor in this line of work:

I don't play a lot of hardball in my journalism. I try to have a lot more sense of humor about it. With pop culture and music, people get very defensive about what they love. Sometimes, it's just good to step back and be like, ‘Hey, we're just enjoying this, right?’⁴³¹

All the recent industry changes, she admitted, make laughter difficult at times, though:

Seeing print [journalism] go down the toilet not only made me kind of sad for the future of print rock journalism, but it also made me sad because you also saw people get really competitive. You saw a lot of people who should be full-time writers or staff writers suddenly have to hustle all the time because they are only freelance, and can't afford to take a 25,000 dollar a year job.⁴³²

All that “hustle” has taken some of the fun out of the relentless research, writing and staying on top of the newest music Hasty said she used to thoroughly enjoy. She no longer spends every spare moment scouring music blogs like she used to, instead choosing to make her own music or work on something else. “I’m not hating on the industry,” she said with a laugh, “but there’s a definite line in the sand of work and play now...which is [a] personal change that I’ve seen with the advent of new technologies and the speed at which journalism lives today.”⁴³³

Evie Nagy, Billboard

San Diego-bred and New York-based writer and editor Evie Nagy entered journalism in a roundabout manner – she studied politics and Spanish as an undergraduate at Princeton (from which she graduated in 1998), then went on to earn a master’s degree in education administration, planning and social policy from Harvard University in 2002. After seven years working in the field of higher education (at Harvard), Nagy decided to live abroad for a year, in Istanbul, Turkey. While there, in 2003, she began blogging about her travels, and was instantly hooked. She particularly loved writing about music, and decided to start freelancing for local publications upon her return to Harvard. In 2005, she decided to earn a second master’s degree, from New York University, in cultural reporting and criticism.⁴³⁴

One difference between higher education and arts journalism that she immediately took note of, she said, was the gendered nature of the latter. She explained:

We had a cohort of twelve people [in our program], and there was one other music writer in our group - the other [music writer] was a guy [named David]. Everybody else wrote about different things, like food or television or art... For some reason, [program director Susie Linfield] and the other faculty members always remembered that David wrote about music. They were like, 'David's the music writer.'... They never remembered that I did. Even though that was all that I had done outside of the program. Every single piece, practically, that I'd ever had published, that I ever talked about publishing, or that I ever talked about...was music writing.⁴³⁵

She thought a great deal about the reasons she was taken less seriously as a music writer.

"Usually, when things happen, I don't automatically assume that there's a gender bias involved in it," she explained, "and for this, for some reason, that was totally how I analyzed it. People in journalism don't think of women as rock critics."⁴³⁶ She theorized this might have something to do with "the whole idea of specialization," adding:

I think that women have to work a lot harder to earn the title of expert at something. I think women get plenty of credit for being really sophisticated thinkers, and really smart, and really intellectual, and really good writers...but when it comes to becoming an expert on a cultural topic, for some reason, there is some kind of cultural bias, that, unless it's a very gendered kind of thing, like food...women are kind of just dabbling.... It's more accepted for women to be generalists.⁴³⁷

While at New York University, she landed an internship at *Billboard* magazine, and when she graduated in 2007, was offered a job there as associate editor of special features.⁴³⁸ "My job is technically with the print magazine," she said, "but now probably fifty percent of what I do is for [*Billboard's* website] *Billboard.com* because (a) that is where all the investment is in, so there's a lot more work to do there, and (b) because I

know that if I don't get my hands dirty on that side, then I'm going to run out of experience that is going to be useful after a while."⁴³⁹ Interestingly, many of Nagy's coworkers at *Billboard*, she said, are female, and this has made a big difference. "It's a lot harder to feel not taken seriously when more than half your staff is women," she said.⁴⁴⁰ Nagy is involved in a lot of music critic circles, and said the gossip lately among her rock critic friends has centered on the news that some of *Billboard's* biggest print magazine competitors, including *Rolling Stone* and *Spin*, had undergone layoffs in the last couple of years. "One of the things that came up," she said, "was that they laid off their last female editors."⁴⁴¹

She agreed with Amy Phillips that the Internet has "given a lot more women [rock journalists] opportunities to be part of the conversation," but noted that, even in the world of Internet writing, "it's still the same people who are considered the best, and it's still almost all men, with a few exceptions."⁴⁴² Like many of her colleagues, Nagy has been affected professionally – and personally – by the changes facing the field of journalism. "I do a million things outside my job description now because you have to," she said. "We had a few layoffs last year, so we have fewer staff... and you just really have to be as useful as possible and use your time as well as possible."⁴⁴³ There have been salary freezes in her company, and Nagy, who is thirty-three, married, and looking to start a family someday, said she worries about the stability of her job and chosen career field. "People just don't rely on music journalism in the same way that they used to – especially criticism – because of the Internet," she explained. "There are so many blogs – so many people making their own assessments."⁴⁴⁴ Yet, she said she holds onto "a much more optimistic view than people who have been in [music journalism] longer and seen it

change.”⁴⁴⁵ She added: “I feel like things will turn around...but they might have to get worse before they get better.... I feel like, if I am still doing this five years from now, I’m going to be so lucky. I’m just holding onto it for as long as I can.”⁴⁴⁶

³⁶⁰ Dan Berkowitz, “Journalism in the Broader Cultural Mediascape,” *Journalism*, 10(3) 2009, 290. Retrieved from SAGE Publications: <http://jou.sagepub.com> at OhioLink on June 22, 2009.

³⁶¹ Claire Suddath, “A Brief History of the Internet, *Time* magazine, January 28, 2009. <http://www.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1874608,00.html> (accessed January 27, 2010).

³⁶² Kurt Cable, “The Rise and Fall of Traditional Journalism (5-part series),” *TechNewsWorld*. <http://www.technewsworld.com/story/67030.html> (accessed January 2, 2010).

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³⁶⁴ <http://graphicdesignr.net/papercuts>

³⁶⁵ S. Elizabeth Bird, “The future of journalism in the digital environment,” *Journalism*, 10(3) 2009, 293. Retrieved from SAGE Publications: <http://jou.sagepub.com> at OhioLink on June 22, 2009.

³⁶⁶ Telephone interview, Jessica Robertson, January 14, 2010

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Alissa Quart, “In Media Res: Music Lessons: What Journalists could learn from Kid Rock, Lil Wayne, and Bon Iver,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, November/December 2008, 20.

³⁶⁹ Telephone interview, Daphne Carr, July 8, 2005.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/girlgroup/>

³⁷² Telephone interview, Daphne Carr, October 10, 2008

³⁷³ Ibid.

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³⁷⁵ Ibid.

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³⁹⁰ Telephone interview, Jessica Robertson.

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Chapter Nine:

Conclusion

Though the experiences of the women interviewed for this thesis are as unique as the stories they write and edit for myriad publications, several common threads have emerged from their biographical narratives. Nearly every woman reported some form of struggle to fit into the “old boy’s club” of rock journalism, ranging from mild discomfort at being one of the few female faces in boardrooms full of male colleagues, to snide remarks from editors, publishers and band members. Some women said they struggle to fit into a culture that revolves around hard partying, late nights of networking at bars, and an encyclopedic, obsessive preoccupation with rock-and-roll statistics.

To succeed in the industry – and to cope with any challenges that arise in the process – the women interviewed were conscious of adopting a role, or persona, that helped their coworkers and article subjects better relate to them. Jane Scott, for instance, endeared herself to even the most jaded rock stars by presenting herself as a quirky, loveable, grandmotherly figure – a kindly older woman who read rock stars’ palms before launching into questions about their songwriting process, and asked questions about their families and children before critiquing their guitar prowess in print. The late Ellen Willis approached rock criticism as she did other scholarly pursuits, and maintained a critical distance from the musicians (and music) she wrote about. Instead of immersing herself in rock-and-roll culture, she stepped back and used rock music as a launching pad to discuss and analyze greater social, political and cultural themes. Willis also said she was first turned on to rock journalism by a boyfriend – rock journalist Robert Christgau – and

although she ultimately became respected and revered on her own terms, and went on to inspire a new generation of women rock journalists, the connections she made early on through Christgau likely helped her become established.

One of the women who cited Willis as an inspiration was Ann Powers, who also admitted that her marriage to fellow rock journalist Eric Weisbard probably helped her become more known in otherwise exclusive rock journalism circles. Early in her career, Powers – who has an infectious laugh and a warm, non-threatening demeanor – took on an empathetic, sister figure role when interviewing musicians – particularly female musicians. Jancee Dunn, on the other hand, perfected a technique that worked most of the time for her in interview situations: armed with a sharp sense of humor and a hint of perfectionism, she spent hours before every interview researching very obscure facts about an artist, and then surprised the artist with this esoteric knowledge. She also found any common ground she could with whomever she was interviewing, and used facts about herself to help break the ice.

There seems to be a constant push and pull for many of the women interviewed for this thesis. On the one hand, they identify as feminists and want to be taken seriously as music journalists, regardless of their gender. On the other hand, they acknowledged that their gender can work to their advantage, helping them score interviews with men and women who for whatever reason feel more comfortable opening up to a woman in an interview setting. Dunn, for example, found herself holding hands and giggling with actor Ben Affleck in public during an interview – as part of an a social experiment – and was listed as Affleck’s “unnamed female” in a celebrity tabloid photo caption. Such a situation would probably not have happened if Dunn were male. Dunn, and almost every

woman interviewed, also acknowledged that editors were more likely to assign articles on female musicians to them, rather than their male coworkers. This was not always a problem, however, because many of the women said they particularly enjoyed writing about other women and bringing more attention to their music.

To break the glass ceiling, female rock journalists – like females working in any historically male-dominated career field – often have to walk the walk and talk the talk to blend in with – and be taken seriously by – their male co-workers. This means drinking with the boys, memorizing rock history statistics, and even adopting a critical, “masculine” tone in their writings. Other times, female rock journalists, like Jane Scott, take the opposite approach, creating a unique, often distinctly feminine, persona that helps them stand out, memorably, above the rest. Because men make up a disproportionate percentage of rock journalism editors, reporters, and even interview subjects, it is essential for an aspiring female rock journalist to develop a comfort with being one of the lone female voices in the room – and to know how to pick her battles wisely. Women continue to face greater challenges and bigger obstacles than men do when establishing themselves as respected rock journalists, so a thick skin is a job requirement. Also important is the ability to cater to male readers, editors, colleagues, and musicians, while staying true to oneself.

Many of the twenty-and thirty-something women who are beginning their careers and writing for online publications have run into challenges achieving a work-life balance, and have suffered from the economic realities of trying to make it in a rapidly changing industry. Fearing job loss, they are working longer hours and taking on

increasing responsibilities at work – from live blogging around the clock to shooting video to accompany stories online – for the same (and sometimes, smaller) paychecks.

Thanks to technology, these women are finding it easier to connect with each other to share information and support one another – building on a tradition of established women rock writers mentoring younger women rock writers. In an article in the journal *Women & Music*, “A Spy in the House of Love: In Memory of Ellen Willis: Three perspectives on feminist rock criticism,” Powers wrote of the influence Willis had on her and numerous other aspiring women rock journalists:

Realizing what the pop life and the feminist life shared is what made me able to conceive of myself as a feminist pop critic in the first place. The late, great Ellen Willis – the most significant feminist critic of rock’s classic era who was a columnist for the *New Yorker* from 1968 to 1975 – always talked about both music and politics in terms of the power of pleasure.⁴⁴⁷

Evie Nagy cited Willis as the main reason she applied to New York University’s Cultural Reporting and Criticism graduate program.⁴⁴⁸ Many of the younger journalists interviewed in the previous chapter cited *Rock She Wrote: Women Write about Rock, Pop, and Rap*, the seminal book by Powers and McDonnell, as providing inspiration to pursue a career in rock journalism.

Powers has said she enjoys the role of mentor for younger journalists, and, in a March 21, 2006 post to Girl Group, Powers wrote, on the topic of mentoring, “I do try to mentor people now but...it’s often via email and occasional coffees. It’s great to cultivate mentor-mentee relationships, but they tend to be more effective on a day-to-day basis when they arise organically – most often, when you work in an office together.”⁴⁴⁹ One such mentor-mentee relationship has developed between Powers and Carr, who count one

another as friends, and recently collaborated as co-editors for *Best Music Writing 2010*, which will be published in October, 2010 by De Capo Press. In the true spirit of mentorship, both women put out calls for writing submissions on Girl Group, encouraging women music journalists to share their best articles.

Mentoring is particularly important for aspiring female rock journalists in the tough economic climate of the late 2000s. Since the mid-to-late 2000s, print journalism has undergone significant changes. As newspaper and magazine circulations decreased (and consumers began to turn to the Internet as their primary source of news), many print publications lost advertising revenue and as a result, had to reduce the size of their publications, and cut back on staff. According to *Paper Cuts*, a blog that keeps track of print media layoffs, more than 160 newspapers, large and small, daily and weekly, shut down altogether (or stopped publishing a print edition – going Web-only) between 2007 and 2010.⁴⁵⁰

Fewer pages to fill and shrinking budgets are forcing editors and publishers to make sacrifices across the board. As a result, arts (including music) criticism “in most national magazines, in nearly all newspapers around the country, and even in the arts weeklies has become shorter in length and lighter in tone—where it has survived at all,” according to David Hajdu in a *Columbia Journalism Review* article.⁴⁵¹ From the beginning of 2007 to the middle of 2008, approximately 25 percent of the staff jobs in arts journalism were eliminated, according to Douglas McLennan, the director of the National Arts Journalism Project and the editor of the aggregation site *Arts Journal* (*artsjournal.com*).⁴⁵² Worse, he added, the “work these critics used to do has been replaced by wire-service copy or by freelance pieces, or it has gone away entirely.”⁴⁵³

The Internet has helped level the playing field, in a sense, by giving women rock writers more opportunities to have their voices heard, and by providing supportive online communities for women looking for advice, role models and sometimes, a place to vent. More opportunities for publishing, and networking, however, do not necessarily translate into paying work, or greater respect – yet.

The trajectory of music journalism has begun to mirror that of the music industry itself. Bands and musicians who release albums in the 2000s are rarely able to achieve the career longevity of their predecessors from decades past. Independent – and even chain record stores – have been replaced by compact disc aisles in big box stores and digital music downloading services such as iTunes. Consumers no longer rely on radio station disc jockeys to create compelling music mixes, thanks to the simplicity of creating – and sharing – homemade music playlists through iTunes and other software applications. Further, print music publications must compete for readers’ attention amidst the noise of online music publications, blogs, listservs and discussion forums. While the Internet allows everyone the opportunity to voice their opinions, the excess and availability of voices floating in cyberspace makes it that much more difficult for aspiring professional music journalists (male or female) to find loyal, longtime readers, like Jane Scott once did for her *Cleveland Plain Dealer* articles. After nearly fifty years of women fighting to break down the glass ceiling in rock journalism – and making great strides - it seems the bottom is falling out of the field, leaving women particularly vulnerable. Which begs the question: After all these years, has rock journalism passed women by?

One positive benefit of the Internet is that it facilitates and expedites the spread of information, making it easier for female rock journalists to compare notes and battle scars

with other women who they would otherwise never encounter in their daily or professional lives. Listservs like Girl Group allow users to quickly share information with one another, and it is not uncommon for members to post pleas for help making contact with difficult-to-reach celebrities and publicists – and to receive responses (and publicists’ phone numbers) from other members within minutes. Such online support systems are already helping women overcome obstacles in their careers and are even helping women find and land jobs in rock journalism. In addition, the more women like those interviewed in this thesis take to the Internet to write thoughtful critiques on rock-and-roll, the more they will become respected by male rock journalists and regarded as equals. Female rock journalists could also utilize the Internet as a platform to expose any sexism they encounter while on the job.

Ann Powers said she continues to hold out hope for the future of women in rock journalism, noting that historically, whenever a new technology is developed, women are often involved early on. “There were women in the music industry very early on, doing things, running labels. Every phase you can see this happening. It seems like when the field is new and unsettled, women can find a way in.”⁴⁵⁴ Unfortunately, it is hard for women to maintain these positions, but Powers hopes “maybe that can change, since we are going through the first major technological shift since the feminist movement.”

There will always, she added, be a need for music criticism – whatever form it takes in the future. “While people want peer-to-peer recommendations, and they want to be able to talk to each other, that’s not all they want,” she explained. “They still want experts and consistent voices who can carry them forth and through a particular artistic

field.”⁴⁵⁵ Thanks to women like Scott, Willis, Dunn, and, of course, Powers, more and more of these expert voices may very well belong to women.

⁴⁴⁷ Ann Powers, “A Spy in the House of Love: In Memory of Ellen Willis: Three perspectives on feminist rock criticism.” *Women & Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture*, Volume 12 (2008), 40-43.

⁴⁴⁸ Telephone interview, Evie Nagy.

⁴⁴⁹ Ann Powers, comment on Girl Group, posted March 21, 2006, <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/girlgroup/message/3014> (accessed April 14, 2010).

⁴⁵⁰ <http://graphicdesignr.net/papercuts/closed/> (accessed March 27, 2010).

⁴⁵¹ David Hajdu, “Critical Condition: Can Arts Critics Survive the Poison Pill of Consumerism?” *Columbia Journalism Review*, January/February (2009), 49-52.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁴ Interview, Ann Powers, November 14, 2009.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

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