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"Under My Thumb:" The Perpetuation of Sexism in the Music of 1960s American Counterculture

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Abstract

While examining the sexual liberation movement that surrounded the American counterculture of the mid-twentieth century, numerous scholars have commented on the counterculture's perpetuation of gendered stereotypes, constructs, and double binds. Few, however, have substantially linked the counterculture's underlying sexism with its music. This paper explores how British and American musicians maintained, and, in some cases promoted, gender stereotypes and sexism by studying the rock and roll and folk music produced between 1964 and 1969. Through popular artists such as the Rolling Stones and the Beatles, and through more underground musicians such as Jefferson Airplane, this study uses the lyrics of the songs released during this five-year time frame to examine how the music of the 1960s counterculture portrayed its view and treatment of women. Moreover, this study assesses the accuracy of the rhetoric that has come to surround the counterculture movement of the 1960s that paints it in a light of equality, freedom, and progressiveness. By surveying and categorizing countercultural songs into four categories (possessive, objectifying, promoting abuse, and generally degrading/perpetuating stereotypes), this study contributes to a greater understanding of the sexism maintained by the counterculture of the 1960s and adds music as a new component to the existing discourse around the gender stereotypes, constructs, and double binds in the counterculture movement.

1. Introduction

Often, when the term "1960s counterculture" is mentioned, what immediately comes to mind is an image of young people, with flowers in their hair and smiles on their faces, wearing elaborate Victorian costumes, dancing under the San Franciscan sun. Through the construction of history in the decades that have passed since the 1960s, the counterculture has come to epitomize the concept of freedom, equality, and autonomy. Also known as "hippies," "flower children," or members of the "Woodstock Nation," this group of counterculture men and women that formed in the second half of the 1960s is, on the surface, widely considered the trailblazer for the subsequent social movements seen in the late-twentieth century, particularly feminism. However, by digging below the surface, it quickly becomes evident that the "feminist" movement within the counterculture is full of contradictions and double binds. Many scholars have already noted these hypocrisies by examining the counterculture's gender roles within communes, gender stereotypes depicted on concert posters and album artwork, and representation of women (or lack thereof) in countercultural underground newspapers. However, an important aspect of the counterculture movement remains unexamined for its sexist implications: its music. Perhaps one of the most defining parts of the counterculture, and arguably what the counterculture is most remembered for, is their music. The music that is associated with the counterculture movement was perceived as the voice of the movement, a public expression of their values and goals. Therefore, the importance of music to the counterculture cannot be overstated and the impact of their music on the culture itself and the generations that followed warrants careful examination.

2. Defining the Counterculture

Before diving into the content of the counterculture's music, a working definition of the "counterculture" and an explanation of the existing discourse around the counterculture's patriarchal tendencies needs to be provided. The counterculture that defined the late 1960s was mostly comprised of middle-class white youth, the majority of whom were male, who rejected "straight" society by embracing freedom of expression and self-definition.[1] They are characteristically known for their long hair and Victorian fashion choices, migratory tendencies (particularly to San Francisco), and affinity for consciousness-expansion through drugs, music and sex. Modeling themselves after the preceding Beat Generation of the 1940s and 50s, members of the counterculture aimed to redefine themselves by "dropping out" of mainstream society, detaching themselves as much as possible from the straight world. Many members of the counterculture lived communal lifestyles, sharing beds, food, drugs, sexual partners, and disdain for the mainstream society. Despite their contempt for the mainstream, however, the counterculture did not aim to rectify the straight world, but rather to avoid it and detach from it completely. This detachment is what set the counterculture apart from their counterparts in the emerging New Left, which was also comprised of mostly white middle-class males who opposed mainstream politics and society. Instead, the New Left was explicitly political and overtly activist, with a clear direction as defined in their 1962 Port Huron Statement. Occasionally the New Left and the counterculture did intersect, but in most cases, and for the sake of this study, the two were separate groups with separate motives and lifestyles. Thus, in recognizing the existing discourse surrounding the counterculture, this study will utilize a similar definition of the counterculture as used by Theodore Roszak in his 1969 book *The Making of a Counter Culture*, one that explicitly "excludes our more conservative young…our more liberal youth," and, "more importantly, it excludes in large measure the militant black young."[2] In other words, the definition of the counterculture that is used in this study includes the youth who turned on, tuned in, and, most importantly, dropped out.

If the counterculture was socially dissident but not politically active, then what was their goal, their solution to their disgruntlement? In the words of Bob Weir, they were looking for "self-generated enlightenment."[3] The counterculture sought liberation from cold, conformist, materialistic postwar America by indulging in emotions, imagination, sex, consciousness, expression, creativity and love. They desired true independence from the mainstream world, aiming to be as self-reliant as possible. While they may have been "counter" to the mainstream culture, they also developed a very rich and intricate culture of their own. Their psychedelic art and music, their underground newspapers like the *San Francisco Oracle*, their ritual-like tendencies with drugs and sex, their communal organizations like the Diggers and Hog's Farm, and their social gatherings from concerts at the Filmore to Love-Ins to Acid Tests all serve as testimony to the society they created for themselves. They were idealistic, romantic and optimistic.

The rich culture that blossomed from the counterculture movement is evident most explicitly in its art, including paintings and drawings, music, and literature. As noted in her book *Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties Counterculture*, historian Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo clearly divides the feminine motifs that emerged within the counterculture: the sexually promiscuous tease, the innocent and childlike virgin, the magical goddess, and the earth-mother.[4] Lemke-Santangelo explains that these images of countercultural women manifested from the counterculture's male-dominated underground art and newspaper scene as well as mainstream media.[5] In other words, these images of countercultural women were not created by or for countercultural women. They were manifested by males for males and by the mainstream for the mainstream. The media of the straight world intentionally depicted countercultural women as either naïve victims or sexually promiscuous vamps to feed into the mainstream's fear of the growing counterculture. Therefore, as Lemke-Santangelo maintains, "Uncomfortable with the notion of female agency, straight adults characterized some hippie women as wayward or deviant and others—the majority—as unwitting victims…lured into the counterculture by predatory males." Moreover, women were kept strictly on the periphery of the story of the counterculture movement, evident in novels such as *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* and films such as *Easy Rider*, where "women, quite literally, were along for the ride as sexy, accommodating, and alternately wide-eyed and streetwise hand-maidens to men's quest for on-the-road freedom."[6] The result was, and continues to be, an inaccurate depiction of hippie women that devalues their role in the counterculture and their autonomy over their story.

Similarly, the counterculture's own portrayal of its women also pushed them into the periphery of the story, as evident in their underground newspapers, radio stations, art, and comic books. When women were mentioned or depicted in these settings, they were heavily objectified and overtly sexualized, "all the while, male artists, editorial staff, and readers maintained that these images were revolutionary, intended to offend and challenge mainstream moral sensibilities" at the expense of their female counterparts.[7] If these degrading and stereotypical images of countercultural women were justified as participatory in sexual liberation, then who exactly was the "free love"

movement intended to liberate? The answer is, plainly and obviously, countercultural men. Though her views are controversial among countercultural scholars, one of whom claims that her critiques are "exaggerated and monocular,"[8] author Nadya Zimmerman asserts in *Counterculture Kaleidoscope: Musical and Cultural Perspectives on Late Sixties San Francisco*, "for women (and girls), their contribution to the 'free love' ideology *had* to be their bodies," then countercultural women really had little sexual liberation at all, and that, "'Free love' offered women a familiar double bind. Sexual hedonism had become an important countercultural marker of freedom, of 'dropping out' of the mainstream, and women had to embrace it or their cultural allegiance would be questioned."[9] However, this argument would likely be heavily disputed by the women of the counterculture movement as it applies modern feminist thought to a time where such ideology did not yet exist. Rather, it would be more accurate and effective to understand how the women of the counterculture contributed to the movement from the women themselves. Thus far, many scholars have only examined hippie women through historical methodology or through the accounts of countercultural men. To fully understand how the women of the counterculture movement interacted with their own portrayal in the art of the counterculture, these women's personal stories and experiences must be recorded. Gaining the women's voices, however, requires another research project entirely on its own.

What can be understood in this study, however, is the countercultural male's perspective on their female counterparts, how they viewed the female's role in the creation of the counterculture, how they told the female's story through their own perspectives and media, and how that story telling influenced how the counterculture continues to be remembered. To accomplish this, the discourse on this subject must be extended past the visual art and literature of the counterculture to include the musical. As Lemke-Santangelo argues, "Counterculture music, composed largely by and for young men, not only relegated women to its physical margins, it replicated the superficial images and stereotypes contained in graphic and print media."[10] Thus, the music created by the counterculture is just as important as, if not more so, its visual products. To study the counterculture's music is to study its deliberate message to both insiders and outsiders. The next section will examine these messages in the lyrics[11] by studying original songs released by white male countercultural musicians between 1965 and 1970, focusing on artists from the San Francisco Bay Area and the United Kingdom.

3. The Music

3.1 "Run for Your Life" by the Beatles

Perhaps the most appropriate starting point for assessing the reach of sexist messages from countercultural music is with the most popular and wide-reaching band of the past half century: the Beatles. These Liverpudlian musicians have long stood as the most popular rock band in the world with, particularly in the 1960s, a mostly young female fanbase. Their witty charisma, legendary musical talent, and artistic innovation incited a consumerist hysteria long-since fabled as "Beatlemania." There is no doubt that the Beatles held immeasurable influence over the minds of the youth in the 1960s (and, for what it is worth, every subsequent generation since), both in the UK and the US. Moreover, their intense relationship with their obsessive audience makes for a unique case study as they possessed the hearts and minds of their young female fanbase through their music.

In December of 1965, the Beatles released what would become one of the most popular records of their career: *Rubber Soul*. This album was one of the most popular records of its time, quickly climbing to the top of the U.S. pop charts after its release, staying at number one for a lengthy six weeks while remaining on the charts for well over a year at sixty-three weeks.[12] *Rubber Soul* represented a turning point in the band's career, a marker of their transition from a pop band to innovative artists. As Beatle scholar Mark Lewisohn articulates, "*Rubber Soul*, was acclaimed then and now, and quite rightly so too, as both a high quality product and a major turning point in the group's career…*Rubber Soul* has proved a durable and very necessary platform between the impeccable pop music of *Help!* and the experimental ideas of *Revolver*."[13] Moreover, this record was regarded as the first "complete" album, the first record intentionally designed to be listened to as a whole.[14] In other words, the significance of *Rubber Soul* cannot be understated as it was, according to the Beatles' producer George Martin, the first rock album meant to be a work of art.[15] As the first "complete" album, designed with the intention to be listened to as a whole, the order of the songs on the record was part of what made the record so important. The UK version of the album begins with the catchy and comedic "Drive My Car," followed by the somewhat more sobering "Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)." While the US version of *Rubber Soul* was not constructed by the Beatles, thus rendering the order of the songs nearly irrelevant, this version does conclude with the same haunting song as the UK version.

Prominently placed as the last song on both versions of *Rubber Soul*, "Run for Your Life" is as threatening as misogynistic rock songs come:

> Well, I'd rather see you dead, little girl
> Than to be with another man
> You better keep your head, little girl
> Or you won't know where I am
>
> You better run for your life if you can, little girl
> Hide your head in the sand, little girl
> Catch you with another man
> That's the end little girl
>
> Well, you know that I'm a wicked guy
> And I was born with a jealous mind
> And I can't spend my whole life
> Trying just to make you toe the line
>
> You better run for your life if you can, little girl
> Hide your head in the sand, little girl
> Catch you with another man
> That's the end little girl
>
> Let this be a sermon
> I mean everything I've said
> Baby, I'm determined
> And I'd rather see you dead
>
> You better run for your life if you can, little girl
> Hide your head in the sand, little girl
> Catch you with another man
> That's the end little girl
>
> I'd rather see you dead, little girl
> Than to be with another man
> You better keep your head, little girl
> Or you won't know where I am
>
> You better run for your life if you can, little girl
> Hide your head in the sand, little girl
> Catch you with another man
> That's the end little girl[16]

Musically, this song is often overlooked by Beatle scholars because it sounds like any other typical pop-rock tune.[17] Therefore, unfortunately, little commentary is made on this track in the majority of Beatle academia outside of the song's origins. Written by John Lennon, "Run for Your Life's" refrain, "I'd rather see you dead little girl, than to be with another man," was taken from an Elvis Presley song released a decade prior, "Baby, Let's Play House."[18] Presley, however, had taken the song from a Nashville musician, Arthur Gunter, who had written the song based on a country tune "I Want to Play House with You," written by Eddy Arnold in 1951.[19] The extended roots of Lennon's track are important to note because they indicate that the song's abusive lyrics are not unique to Lennon or the Beatles. In fact, the origin of "Run for Your Life's" refrain dates back to nearly fifteen years prior to the Beatles recording their song.

However, Lennon's "Run for Your Life" is different from older songs with the same sexist tropes because, as already noted, it was released on one of the most popular Beatles records and, therefore, would have had a much farther-reaching audience than Presley, Gunter, or Arnold's version. Secondly, Lennon's version of the song is considered to

be far more threatening than the older tracks. As Steve Turner writes in *The Beatles A Hard Day's Write: The Stories Behind Every Song*, "Gunter's song was one of devotion. He wanted the girl to move in with him and the line which took John's attention was an indication of the depths of his feelings for her; not a threat. However, in John's mouth the lines become threatening."[20] Similarly, Hunter Davies maintains in *The Beatles Lyrics: The Stories Behind the Music* that Lennon "was attracted to the intensity of that kind of love, and the jealousy that could lead him to wish someone dead."[21]

At this time in the Beatles' career, Lennon and McCartney were still developing their skills as song writers. Under pressure to write and record songs quickly, they often searched for inspiration from other musicians, as seen here in Lennon's influence from Presley, as well as other tracks on *Rubber Soul*, such as the Bob Dylan inspired "Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)."[22] Rubber Soul is also a notable album because it is the second Beatles record comprised of only original tunes; besides *A Hard Day's Night,* all of the band's previous albums included covers of other popular songs. Moreover, many of the songs written for *Rubber Soul* were some of the first of Lennon and McCartney's songs where their lyrics were intended to hold and convey a deeper, more poetic meaning that went beyond their former "boy meets girl" themed songs. Part of Lennon and McCartney's growing pains as song writers included the difficulty of articulating personal emotions and conveying authentic feelings. Accordingly, some scholars attribute Lennon's sexist lyrics in "Run for Your Life" to his amateur writing skills at the time. As Turner and Davies argue, Lennon was attracted to the kind of love and devotion depicted in Presley's song and he wanted to replicate that affection in a tune of his own. However, the result is a lyrically threatening and musically mediocre song. If Lennon was attempting to write an endearing love song, "Run for Your Life" had the opposite effect.

"Run for Your Life" falls into two of the sexist categories used in this study: possessive and promoting abuse. The song's lyrics maintain a sexist mindset popular in the mid-twentieth century that allowed men to view their partners as their property. This song perpetuates this view by threatening the women the song is directed towards, telling her that she will be dead if her partner catches her with another man. In other words, the main character of the song believes he has the authority to dictate who his partner sees and does not see, and that he is entitled to threaten her if she disregards his orders. He owns her and can control her life. Whether or not Lennon is singing from personal experience, whether he views himself as the main character singing to his own partner or he intends only to tell a common story, is irrelevant. The point is that he perpetuates this message, a message already used three times by other artists in the previous fifteen years, a message no doubt sung far before Gunter and Arnold. Moreover, the band chose to place the song at the end of what would become a top pop album. "Run for Your Life" was the first song recorded for the record, meaning the Beatles held on to it through the recording and production process of *Rubber Soul*. And yet, they intentionally used the song as the last tune on the album. As already highlighted, *Rubber Soul* was the first record intended to be listened to in its entirety, the first "complete" album. By placing "Run for Your Life" as the last song on the record, the song hangs in the air like a final threat to their fans, the hostile mood unable to be lightened by any following song, or, as Ian MacDonald argues, "a lazily sexist song lyric unmitigated by any saving irony."[23]

There was little backlash to the lyrics of "Run for Your Life" at the time of its release, perhaps understandably considering it was a typical song for the era that replicated already existing sexist tropes. The Beatles never performed "Run for Your Life" live.[24] Therefore, the song cannot be assessed for its impact on live audiences. It did evoke a reaction from singer Nancy Sinatra, however, who wrote a response to the tune in 1966 where she reverses the genders: "Well, I'd rather see you dead, little boy, than to see you with another girl/You better keep your head, little boy, or you won't last in my world."[25] Moreover, the misogynistic message of "Run for Your Life" gained more attention as the years passed and feminist movements developed. For example, in 1992, an oldies station in Ottawa, Canada announced that they banned the song after receiving complaints from female listeners who remarked that the song promoted violence against women.[26] There are a few notes to be underlined here: 1) Out of *all* the resources found for this study that comment on Lennon's "Run for Your Life," none were written by women. Many Beatle scholars ignore "Run for Your Life" in their work, and some of those that do comment on it briefly mention its sexist lyrics only to dismiss them as ironic, a joke, or implicitly retracted by Lennon years later when he claims "Run for Your Life" was "a glib throwaway song,"[27] though there is no evidence to suggest that Lennon ever explicitly renounced the song's sexist lyrics. Moreover, he even repeats similar possessive sentiment in later songs like "Jealous Guy," released in 1971. 2) The only reactions to the sexist nature of the song were made by women, and these reactions did not receive nearly as much attention as the song itself or the record on which it appeared. And 3) the two aforementioned points are telling of just how inherent sexism is in Western society, how easily it goes unnoticed. In his article "Murder, Apologism, and the Beatles," Alex Cowan connects the dots perfectly:

> "Run For Your Life' is, ultimately, a jaunty pop song about sexual violence and abusive relationships, and while it can (and should) be contextualised, such a process shouldn't come at the expense of problematising what is a hugely troubling topic in pop music history. The question 'How and why can this song exist?'

> prompts more profitable thought about the musical nature of pop/rock music in the '60s, and its social frame of reference. Musically, 'Run For Your Life is unremarkable, which is partly what makes it so dangerous…'Run For Your Life's simplicity is entirely conscious. Simplicity gives pop songs their staying power (see also: 'Blurred Lines'), and the song's catchiness has undoubtedly influenced fan responses…The reason I would propose for this uncomplicated musical setting relates also to the presence of aggressive masculinity as a music/lyrical 'topic' in popular music, made acceptable, or even noble, through its simplicity of sentiment and expression. It is a simple song from a simple man, expressing plain (and, through this simplicity, *justified* [emphasis original]) desire…"

The conclusion here is that the Beatles' "Run for Your Life" was and continues to be an indication of the inherent sexism in rock music and the perceived fear of challenging such sexism at risk of diminishing the importance of the roots of rock music. The song is simple and catchy, revitalizing old blues and country tropes rooted in deep social histories. As Cowan continues, the Beatles' song could not be challenged in its day because it was a product of its time, simply replicating old sexist themes rather than inventing them:

> "If Lennon's intent is parody, then, it does not come across very well: the musical simplicity and associated earnestness do nothing to problematise the lyrical topic evoked, but in fact solidify the associations the lyrics make between blues and country formulations of aggressive masculinity. 'Run For Your Life', then, is a performance of gender, channeled through musical and lyrical topics with deep social histories. Arguably more significant, though, is the fact that this performance was, and still is, allowed to take place. Defenders of the song have used the fact that gender relations in the 1960s were (on the surface) very different to what we're used to now as a way of absolving the lyrics of their problematic content. Defenses of this sort are based in part on an unwillingness to compromise one's status as a 'Beatles fan' by questioning the moral integrity of one's musical idols on an inability to question their own enjoyment of the music based on what it says about past and contemporary gender relations."[28]

Likewise, some say that "Run for Your Life" still cannot be challenged, half a century later, because it has grown to be part of the rock canon. Cowan argues, however, that it should be challenged, that the more distance placed between challenging problematic issues and writing them off as part of history, the more inherent and implicit the issues will continue to be.[29] Recognition of society's deep rooted history in sexism is the first step in challenging that sexism, and, sometimes, that means listening critically to society's favorite musicians and acknowledging artists for their problematic lyrics.

3.2 "Under My Thumb" by The Rolling Stones

While the Beatles' "Run for Your Life" may not have elicited immediate reaction from male artists that denounced its sexism, it did influence other male musicians to write songs stemming from the same misogynistic trope. Just like Lennon was inspired Presley's song, Mick Jagger was inspired by Lennon's. Five months after the release of *Rubber Soul*, the Rolling Stones released *Aftermath* in the spring of 1966. Though this record is laden with sexist songs, one in particular stands out for its sustained popularity for the past half century: "Under My Thumb." As Rob Sheffield notes in his novel *Dreaming the Beatles: The Love Story of One Band and the Whole World,*

> "One of Mick's signature tricks was to make the lyrics nastier as his voice got girlier—hence a song like 'Under My Thumb,' where he tarts it up like a brazen showgirl over Brian Jones's fey marimba, adopting an outrageously swishy voice to mock his own craven terror of female power…it's obvious where Mick got the idea: John's 'Run for Your Life,' which came out five months earlier, going for the same butch/femme vocal ironies. But it's also obvious Mick does the trick better. Both songs are satires of rock misogyny, though both could also be heard as the real thing (with the singers as confused as anyone else). Yet 'Under My Thumb' is stronger in every way…Unlike John, Mick is enough of an authentically cold-blooded bitch to commit to the role."[30]

"Under My Thumb" is the pinnacle of rock misogyny because of its catchy melody, degrading lyrics, and continued popularity. Though it can be considered similar to "Run for Your Life" in multiple ways, including its reuse of old blues and country tropes and its simple and hypnotic tune, "Under My Thumb" differs drastically from the Beatles'

song because of its intense popularity. *Aftermath* made the US charts in 1966, peaking at number two for two weeks while remaining on the charts for a total of fifty weeks,[31] "Under My Thumb" has been played in concerts almost 500 times since 1966. The Stones themselves have played the song more than 150 times, the last live performance being in February 2019. Forty-five other artists have covered the tune, playing their versions live more than a total of 300 times. Furthermore, "Under My Thumb" only grew in popularity over the decades, hitting a record of being performed 54 times in 1981, with a recent return in popularity as it was performed nearly 30 times in 2018 alone.[32] Bearing in mind the song's lyrics, these statistics are surprising:

Under my thumb
The girl who once had me down
Under my thumb
The girl who once pushed me around

It's down to me
The difference in the clothes she wears
Down to me, the change has come
She's under my thumb
And ain't it the truth babe?

Under my thumb
It's a squirmin' dog who's just had her day
Under my thumb
A girl who has just changed her ways

It's down to me
Yes it is
The way she does just what she's told down to me
The change has come
She's under my thumb
Ah, ah, say it's alright

Under my thumb
It's a Siamese cat of a girl
Under my thumb
She's the sweetest, hmmm, pet in the world

It's down to me
The way she talks when she's spoken to
Down to me, the change has come
She's under my thumb
Ah, take it easy babe
Yeah

It's down to me, oh yeah
The way she talks when she's spoken to
Down to me, the change has come
She's under my thumb
Yeah, it feels alright

Under my thumb
Her eyes are just kept to herself
Under my thumb, well I
I can still look at someone else

It's down to me, oh that's what I said
The way she talks when she's spoken to

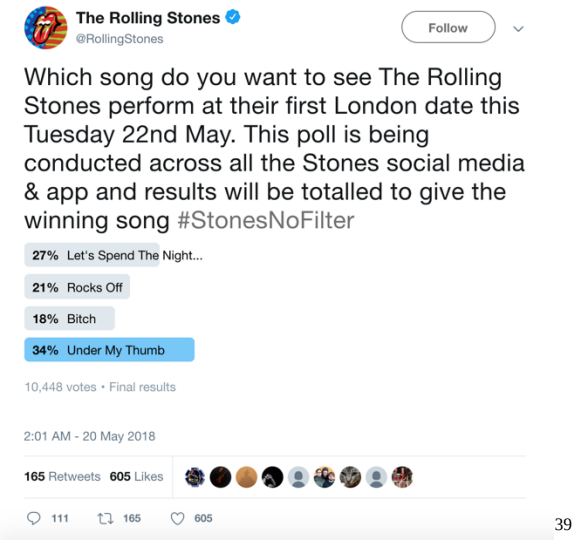
Down to me, the change has come
She's under my thumb
Say, it's alright

Say it's all
Say it's all
Take it easy babe
Take it easy babe
Feels alright
Take it, take it easy babe[33]

The lyrics tell an obviously violent story of a man's contempt for female autonomy, causing him to force her into submission. This unhealthy relationship, to say the least, ends with the man on top, in smug domination. An article on the Rolling Stones fittingly titled "Under My Thumb" that appeared in the underground feminist magazine *Off Our Backs* in 1972 states, "This song describes a girl who made the unfortunate mistake of attempting to rule a man. She eventually not only loses control, she is also fittingly punished by being forced to submit to this ruthless domination." Moreover, the article continues to comment on the metaphors used in the song to describe the female character, "She is never described in human terms, but rather in terms of animal metaphors. She is referred to as a 'squirming dog who's just had her day' and a 'Siamese cat of a girl.' Both terms have connotations which suggest domesticity…by the song's end she is the 'sweetest pet in the world.'"[34] The lyrics are inarguably degrading, refusing to acknowledge the female character as human. Moreover, the lyrics are overshadowed by the song's catchy melody and Jagger's tendency to slur his words as he sings, making them almost unintelligible.[35] In comparison to the Beatles' "Run for Your Life," which can be reasoned to be a confession of affection turned violent, the Stones' "Under My Thumb" is full of hatred with no mitigating affection present to alleviate the abusive lyrics.

When asked about the song, both then and now, members of the Stones seem unconcerned with its misogynistic overtones. For example, when Mick Jagger was asked by interviewer Jonathan Cott in 1978 why so many of the Stone's late-sixties songs were spiteful towards women, Mick cut him off, interjecting that "Most of those songs are really silly, they're pretty immature. But as far as the heart of what you're saying, I'd say…any bright girl would understand that if I were gay I'd say the same things about guys. Or if I were a girl I might say the same things about guys or other girls. I don't think any of the traits you mentioned are peculiar to girls. It's just about people."[36] Here, Jagger is deflecting the accusation that his songs may have sexist messages by saying he would sing the same abusive words about men if he were gay. This does not have the effect Jagger may have been going for, however, because it only paints him as sexist *and* an abusive partner. By claiming that gender is irrelevant for his abusive lyrics, Jagger is only revealing his need for asserting dominance in any relationship. Furthermore, in the same interview, Jagger dismisses the sexist nature of his songs by claiming, "It's easy for me to write that kind of song because my talent seems to lie in that direction, and I can only occasionally come up with a really good love song — it's easier to come out with the other side of the coin. So I choose what I do best, that's all."[37] To Jagger, it seems, his sexist songs like "Under My Thumb" are simply telling of his certain skillset as a songwriter, and that any misogynistic message perceived from his songs are not his responsibility.

The point here is that, like Lennon with "Run for Your Life," there is no evidence that Jagger has any regret for writing and distributing songs that perpetuate abuse towards women. This is easier to claim with Jagger than Lennon because Jagger continues to perform "Under My Thumb" to this day. As mentioned before, the Stones' live performance of "Under My Thumb" has actually spiked in recent years, not declined. Interestingly, this is in part due to audience demand for the song. On their latest tour, No Filter Tour in Europe in 2018, the band released a poll on their social media asking fans what song they wanted to see the band play.[38] The fans replied and the band obliged:



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The reasoning for the song's recent spike in performance is only partially at the hands of the voters, however. The Stones were the ones responsible for choosing the options for the poll in the first place. Only one of the options of songs, "Rocks Off," does not explicitly promote abuse or objectification of women. If the Stones understood how many of their songs were problematic, perpetuating sexist messages and abusive behavior, they easily could have chosen different songs to include on the poll. Not all of Jagger's songs talk negatively of women. Why, then, did he hand pick three of his most sexist songs for this poll?

Perhaps the answer can be found within Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo's theory, noted earlier, that the counterculture's music was produced for and by males. While the rock and roll industry has certainly grown to include more female artists since the 1960s, it remains male-dominated as the old phrase "sex sells" still rings true. A music genre that has its roots deeply entrenched in misogyny, it may be that rock and roll can never fully abandon traditional sexist tropes, which could explain why emerging musicians continue to cover the Stones' "Under My Thumb" and the Stones chose to continue performing sexist songs in their current tours. Jagger's apparent indifference in his interviews to the effects of the messages his sexist songs convey underlines how his main priority is making music that sells and, as sex continues to sell, then he may not feel compelled to abandon the songs that brought him to and continue to maintain his iconic fame.

While the Beatles' "Run for Your Life," and the Rolling Stones' "Under My Thumb," share many differences, particularly in the timeline of their reception, a common theme is uncovered from both their case studies: It is not about whether or not the musicians mean the messages they convey in their music, whether they intend for their lyrics to be taken literally, satirically or ironically. The problem is the fact that they replicate and perpetuate the messages in the first place. In both cases, these two songs were written by unapologetic men who felt the need to assert their masculinity through their music. More simply, both bands were comprised of all males that wrote controlling songs about women. To further this discussion, it is time to look at a third case study, this time featuring a band with a strong female lead-singer: Jefferson Airplane.

3.3 "Come Up the Years" by Jefferson Airplane

As a San Franciscan band, Jefferson Airplane represents a different side of countercultural music than the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. Jefferson Airplane was physically located at the heart of the counterculture, living in the Haight-Ashbury before and during the Summer of Love in 1967. Unlike the Beatles and the Stones, Jefferson Airplane performed at the large music festivals that would come to characterize the counterculture, such as the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967 and the Woodstock Music and Arts Fair in 1969. Also unlike the Beatles and the Stones, Jefferson Airplane's popularity has somewhat declined over the past half century as their psychedelic music becomes an often forgotten piece of the rock canon. On the surface, Jefferson Airplane is vastly different from the previous two bands mentioned, comprised of American hippies rather than British former-teddy-boys, especially with their lead female singer. Dig a little deeper, however, and it becomes apparent that Jefferson Airplane shares some common roots with the Beatles and the Stones. All three bands derive their unique sound from older jazz and folk musicians. All three

replicate common sexist tropes in some of their songs. For Jefferson Airplane, one of these songs is "Come Up the Years."

Written by Marty Balin and Paul Kantner in 1965, "Come Up the Years" was one of the band's earliest original songs.[40] It first appeared on their debut album, *Jefferson Airplane Takes Off*, released in 1966. At the time, this album was considered by the Bay Area underground magazine, *Crawdaddy*, to be "the most important album of American rock issues this year: it is the first lp to come out of the new San Francisco music scene."[41] As an original song, "Come Up the Years" stood out on the album to many listeners as a beautiful, enchanting tune:

> I ought to get going
> I shouldn't stay here and love you
> More than I do
> Cause you're so much younger than I am
> Come up the years, come up the years
> And love me, love me love me
>
> A younger girl keeps hanging around
> One of the loveliest I've ever found
> Blowin' my mind, stealin' my heart
> Somebody help me 'fore I fall apart.
>
> I ought to get going
> I shouldn't stay here and love you
> More than I do
> Cause you're so much younger than I am
> Come up the years, come up the years
> And love me, love me love me
>
> The things she's doing keep turning me on
> And I've been happy to go right along
> I know it's time that I said goodbye
> I know I can't leave no matter how hard I try
>
> I ought to get going
> I shouldn't stay here and love you
> More than I do
> Cause you're so much younger than I am
> Come up the years, come up the years
> And love me, love me love me[42]
>
>

An overwhelming majority of listeners, fans of the band and music critics alike, adore this song. As one anonymous fan posted on a online music forum, "Side two [of *Takes Off*] opens with the utterly gorgeous 'Come Up The Years,' which emerges as the album's finest track. This lilting, innocent love ballad, with its indelible melody sung so sweetly by Balin, encapsulates the gentle bliss of the early Haight period—that feeling of wishful expectancy at the start of something brand-new."[43] This sweet sentiment echoes the reception of the song in its day. Covering the Airplane's debut album in a three-page spread in *Crawdaddy*, Tim Jurgens argues, "'Come Up the Years' belongs to Marty…The lyrics, as in all his songs, are straightforward, about everyday feelings and problems that we have; you'll find their sentiment in just about any Top 40 song. But Balin writes about them completely seriously because he knows our lives depend on it."[44] Jurgens was right, the number of songs during this period that portray the same story told in "Come Up the Years" is overwhelming. For example, take the Beatles "Little Child" (1963), the Grateful Dead's cover of "Good Morning Little School Girl" (1967), the Lovin' Spoonful's "Younger Girl" (1965), even the 1967 Broadway musical *Hair's* "Donna" and Jefferson Airplane's later songs "Young Girl Sunday Blues" (1967) and "Martha" (1967), just to name a few. In numerous songs from different sectors of countercultural music, a common theme appears: an adult man's infatuation with an underage girl.

The fetishization of underage girls, particularly the stereotypical school girl image, is not unique to countercultural rock and roll. Just like the roots of the possessive, objectifying theme in "Run for Your Life" can be traced back years before Lennon wrote his song, the infantilization of women has deep roots in the jazz, blues, and folk music that influenced members of Jefferson Airplane.[45] For example, some of Marty Balin's favorite rock and roll records as a child included Elvis Presley and Little Richard,[46] both of whom have their fair share of pedophilic songs as well, like Presley's "Young and Beautiful" (1959) and Little Richard's "Baby Face" (1958). Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo's stereotypes of hippie women offers an explanation for this recurring theme. These songs represent the highly prevalent image of countercultural women as innocent, naïve, and childlike, showing how women were perceived as "young nymphs and vamps, both sexually available and insatiable…seemingly innocent and pure, were always ready to be shown a good time."[47] With "Come Up the Years," Jefferson Airplane was making a name for themselves by replicating already popular sexist tropes, the male infatuation with young girls, in a "new," psychedelic way. And, as Jurgen noted in 1967, Jefferson Airplane would see their growing success, sparked by their debut album, in the following years.

While *Jefferson Airplane Takes Off* was only mildly successful, making the Billboard chart for 11 weeks, peaking at 128, their next album, *Surrealistic Pillow*, released in 1967 just in time for the Summer of Love, was their real claim to fame, landing them on the charts for 56 weeks and peaking at number 3.[48] The major difference between the two albums is the lead female singer. Signe Anderson was originally the lead female singer for the Airplane, up until October 1966 when she left the band. Her story of leaving the Airplane is one heavily laden with gendered obstacles. At first, after having her first daughter in 1965, she felt she could not be both a singer and a mother (for example, she was often forbidden from bringing her daughter to her shows), and thus said she wanted to leave the band.[49] She stuck with the Airplane, however, for another year, until she was kicked out of the band because, as Balin stated, her husband was "embarrassing."[50] In her own words, however, Anderson says she decided to leave on her own accord, "I never wanted to leave, but I had another priority, my husband and my child. People always think that sounds really corny and dumb. They say, 'But you were finally making it.' And I say, 'If you have nothing left when you've gotten there, then why bother to take the journey?'"[51]

Regardless of the reasoning, Anderson left Jefferson Airplane in October 1966. She formally passed the torch on to Grace Slick at one of her last performances, between October 14 and 16.[52] It was at one of these shows that Jefferson Airplane would play "Come Up the Years" for the last time.[53] Grace Slick arguably made the band what they are remembered for today, which means that, if "Come Up the Years" was not played during her time with the Airplane, it could be argued that the song no longer holds significance to the story of the band. However, the foundation of Jefferson Airplane's popularity in and influence on the counterculture lies with their first album, and, with the few reviews that exist of *Takes Off*, "Come Up the Years" is often cited as one of the most important songs on the record because it "boasted a sophisticated lyrical outlook and progressive instrumental arrangements that belied the musicians' brief time together."[54] In other words, "Come Up the Years" is an example of Jefferson Airplane's best work, an early example of their lyrical and musical talent. As seen with "Run for Your Life" and "Under My Thumb," "Come Up the Years" uses simple and catchy melodies to mask a problematic lyrical message that uses themes borrowed from older folk and jazz tunes. Thus, it is yet another example of how deeply rooted rock and roll is in sexism.

As mentioned before, Jefferson Airplane is notably different from the Beatles and the Rolling Stones because the band does have a female member, and an incredibly strong and influential one at that. Both Anderson and Slick had powerful voices, and both sang with intoxicating and remarkably passionate fervor. Some may argue that, simply by having a female in the band, nonetheless as the lead singer, Jefferson Airplane was inherently safe from being overtly sexist. Making such a claim, however, would undermine the ability of women to participate in perpetuating sexism as well. Unfortunately, as powerful as Slick was, her demeanor played right into the existing stereotypes of countercultural women. As Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo states, "Female performers not only had to make music that appealed to male audiences, they had to look like goddesses, earth mothers, wild young chicks, or sultry, seductive vamps. The ideal, personified by Jefferson Airplane's Grace Slick, was a heady, unforgettable combination of radiant, unobtainable beauty and raw sexual energy."[55] Slick's participation in the stereotypes of countercultural women begs the long-argued question of whether or not women can be sexist and if their self-sexualization is a form of empowerment or simply a perpetuation of gendered oppression. This argument deserves deeper exploration through feminist theory in a study entirely of its own. Moreover, with the continued development of feminist theory, particularly since the 1960s, the answers to such questions should be carefully examined so as to avoid presentism.

4. Conclusion

By examining these three case studies, the purpose of this study has been to explore the sexist trends in the music of rock and roll artists and the unfortunate indifference towards sexist messages of the average listener. Each song, in its unique way, has shown important aspects of the sexism perpetuated by countercultural music. "Run for Your Life" represents an extremely possessive mindset many men had, and still have, towards women while exposing the lack of female perspective in the rhetoric surrounding the Beatles. Meanwhile, the Rolling Stones' "Under My Thumb" shows the continued acceptance of misogynistic messages in rock and roll music as its popularity has sustained over time as well as the artists' apathy towards the impact their sexist lyrics may have on their audience. Finally, "Come Up the Years" sheds light on the popularity of objectifying underage girls in rock and roll music while perpetuating the stereotype that countercultural women were child-like and should be treated as such. Together, all three songs are examples of how simple, catchy, and hypnotic music can mask degrading and violent messages, allowing the audience to hear the music without really listening to the lyrics, and thus accept the songs without awareness of the messages conveyed in them. Further, the acceptance of these songs and the sexist tropes they replicate both in the 1960s and today unveil how inherent sexism is in rock and roll music, how the messages in these songs have long gone largely unnoticed.

The solution is not to erase the story of these songs, to eradicate any trace of them or the stereotypes they reproduce. Instead, an apt approach, as simple as it may seem, is to listen to these songs. Not just hear them, but listen to them, to the lyrics, to the story they tell, to the feeling conveyed through the combination of the music *and* the words. To truly claim that the tropes portrayed in these songs, and the countless others like them, are no longer accepted in today's society, they must first be recognized and contextualized. The songs deserve to be questioned, the artists directly challenged, not to renounce or scrutinize them but to understand their underlying causes, whether it be fear of feminism, the need to assert toxic masculinity, or both. Only by giving the music of the counterculture movement the careful study it deserves can the counterculture's underlying sexism truly be exposed. More significantly, such sexist rock and roll music needs to be understood as a product of its time as the lyrics of such music represent, in complicated ways, the pervasive sexism in the counterculture of the 1960s that is often overlooked in recalling the movement's story. Thus, the story of the counterculture needs to be rewritten because the rhetoric that has come to surround it has grown too idealistic over the past half century. This time, the story of the counterculture needs to be written with the voices of its women and with awareness and acceptance of its problematically sexist side. Only then can the counterculture be understood more comprehensively.

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