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# Feminist Music of the 21st Century

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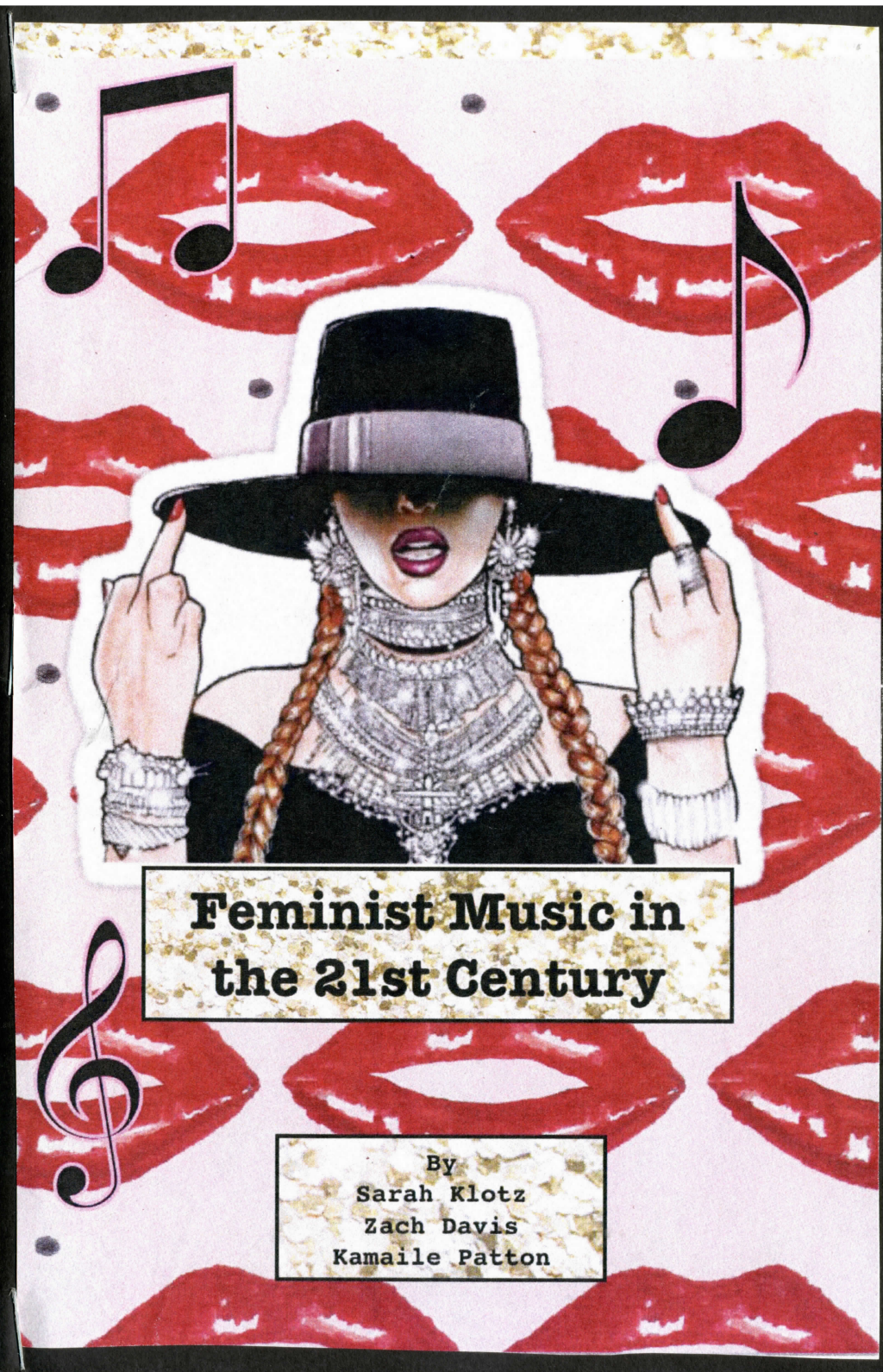
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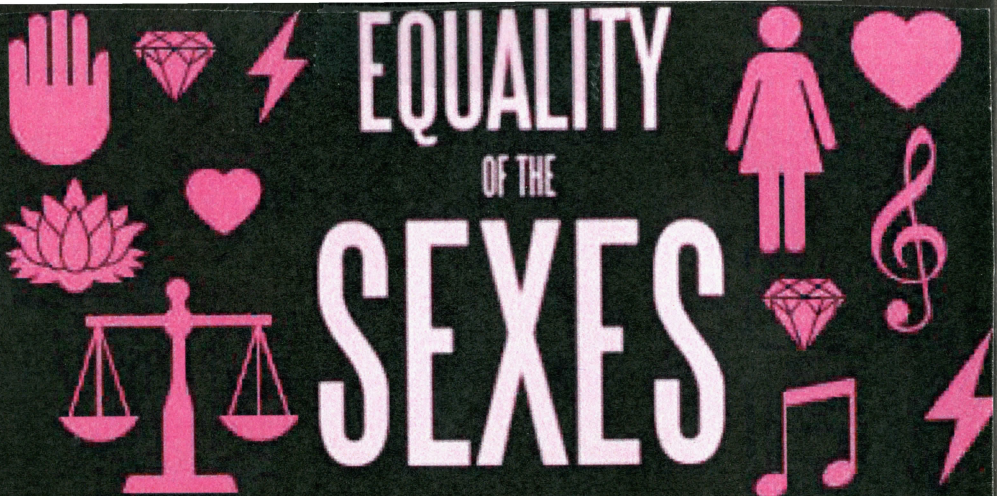
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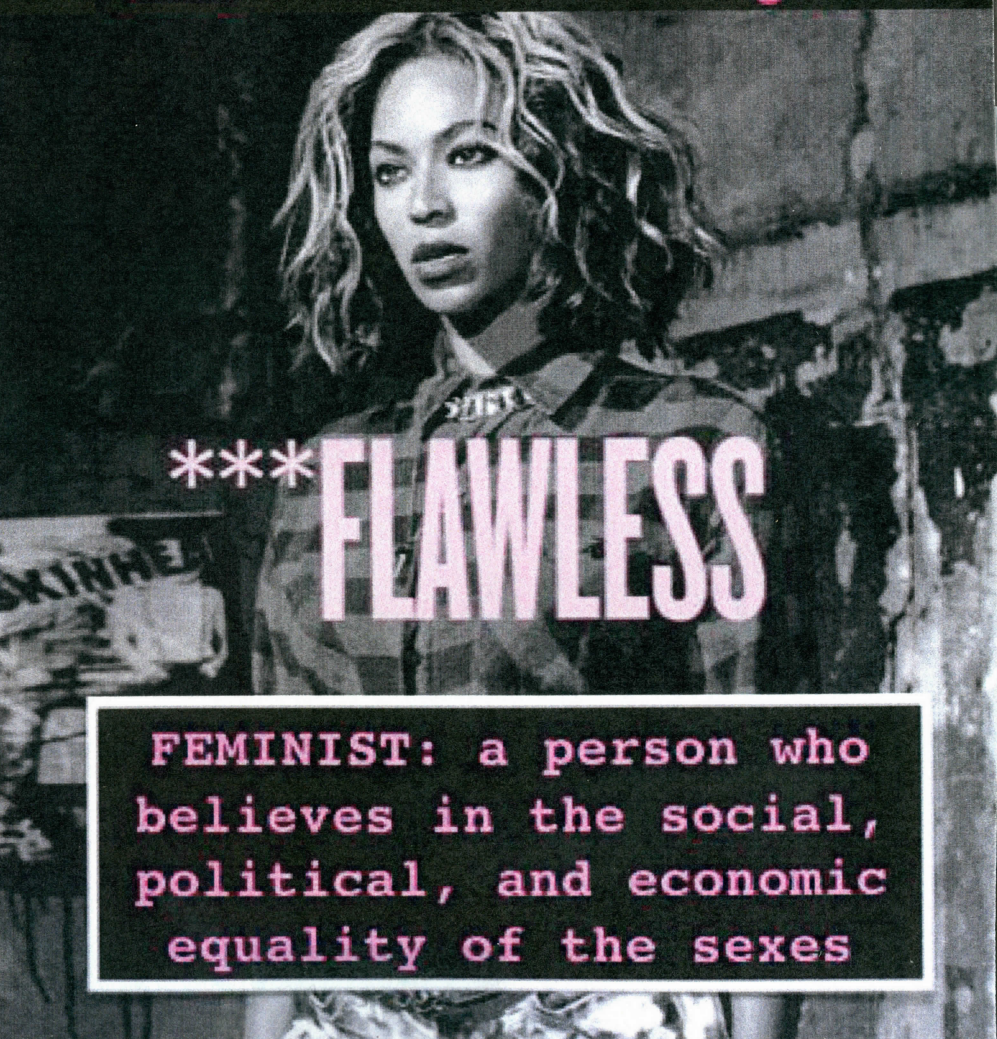
**Feminist Music in  
the 21st Century**

By  
Sarah Klotz  
Zach Davis  
Kamaile Patton





# EQUALITY OF THE SEXES



\*\*\***FLAWLESS**

**FEMINIST:** a person who believes in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes

We teach girls to shrink themselves, to make themselves smaller  
We say to girls: "You can have ambition, but not too much  
You should aim to be successful, but not too successful  
Otherwise, you will threaten the man"  
Because I am female, I am expected to aspire to marriage  
I am expected to make my life choices Always keeping in mind that marriage is the most important  
Now, marriage can be a source of joy and love and mutual support  
But why do we teach girls to aspire to marriage  
And we don't teach boys the same?  
We raise girls to see each other as competitors  
Not for jobs or for accomplishments, which I think can be a good thing  
But for the attention of men  
We teach girls that they cannot be sexual beings in the way that boys are  
Feminist: a person who believes in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes.



# A Brief History of Feminist Music

Women's music is music by women, for women and about women. In the late 60s and early 70s, many realized that there was very little positive women's images in the music industry, so women set out to change that. They began writing heavily political songs about their bodies and women's rights. At the same time, out of the separatist movement came a genre of music by, for and about lesbian feminists. Famous musicians of this time included performers such as Cris Williamson, Meg Christian, and Margie Adam; African-American musicians included Linda Tillery, Mary Watkins, and Gwen Avery; activists such as Bernice Johnson Reagon and Holly Near also contributed to the movement. Earlier (and probably more familiar) influences included Janis Joplin, frontwoman Grace Slick of Jefferson Airplane, Joni Mitchell, Carly Simon, Carole King, Stevie Nicks, and Suzi Quatro. "These women made powerful, household names out of themselves through hard work and sheer talent in a male-dominated music scene, rising above the typical women roles in rock as groupies or muses, subservient to men in music". After this early time period came the most recognizable era of Feminist music in history: The Riot Grrl era of the 1980s. The band Bikini Kill was heavily influ-

ential in getting the riot ball moving and drew inspiration from the zine Riot Grrl. Tobi Vail, member of Bikini Kill, explained, "One of the ideas we were working within Bikini Kill was that if girls started bands, it would transform culture—and not just empower them as individuals, but change society. It would not just put them in a position of power, but the world would actually change. As a young girl who was frustrated by a lack of women in music who called themselves feminists, I saw a need to change that". Here, zines (used for advertisement) and music began to quickly gain attention from the public eye. Some of the goals of these zines and music was to resist against the roles, expectations, and oppression of sexism within the punk scene and in mainstream society; making growing up as a girl a shared experience instead of an isolated one; and encouraging girls to avoid becoming passive cultural consumers. Though whether we have lost these empowering feminist attitudes in mainstream music today is up for debate, there is not questioning that feminist music of the past empowered all women to find a voice true to their selves.

# Mitski

To those who don't know Mitski, you're missing out. This lo-fi rocker writes songs that, refreshingly, speak not to the empowered, in-control side of ourselves, but the lonely, bleeding heart reality of our day-to-day lives. Mainly, she speaks of the broken, imperfect actuality of teenage lives. Half-Japanese, half-white, Mitski lived in thirteen different countries throughout her childhood, so she knows what it feels like to have an untraditional adolescence, be an outsider, to want. A wonderful song that perfectly encapsulates her whole vibe is "Townie". While she empoweringly proclaims, "***I'm not gonna be what my Daddy wants me to be***", she also describes her infuriating, exhausting encounters with teenage boys, their arrogance, and lack of respect for women. She cries that "***I think I've had enough/ But he wants a finale and I came prepared/And we're not going back/And I've tried sharing and I've tried caring/And I've tried putting out/But the boys, boys, boys keep coming on/For more, more, more/And change, change, change is gonna come, but/When, when?***". This cry for change resonates with all who have ever dealt with coercion, sexual assault, or just the self-involved sexism of teenage boys. Another incredibly powerful song of Mitski's is "Happy". This song tells the story of a girl who is metaphorically dating 'Happy', but it keeps leaving her. The most powerful lyrics of the song are "***Well I told him I'd do anything to have him stay with me***

***/So he laid me down, and I felt Happy come inside of me/He laid me down, and I felt happy/Oh if you're going, take the train/ So I can hear it rumble, one last rumble/And when you go, take this heart/I'll make no more use of it when there's no more you***". This song is for anyone who has dealt with an abusive or unsatisfying relationship, but finds themselves unable to let go. In addition, it is for anyone who finds themselves battling with mental health. However, though her music may be one of a kind and appreciated widely, this does not save Mitski from misrepresentation and sexism. She would like everyone to know that even though her music seems "totally confessional, or so honest and raw, and 'it just pours out of her'", this removes her own agency from her music. "Even when I'm writing and performing it, [people say], 'Oh no, she has no control over it, it overcomes her. Why is it so hard to understand that my brain is in my control?'" This idea of a woman not being in control of her emotions is not a new stereotype. Mitski may stay away from the public eye, but unfortunately even that can't save her from some toxic sexism in the music industry. Overall, the important themes and connection that Mitski's music provides makes her an unforgettable modern feminist influence in the music industry.



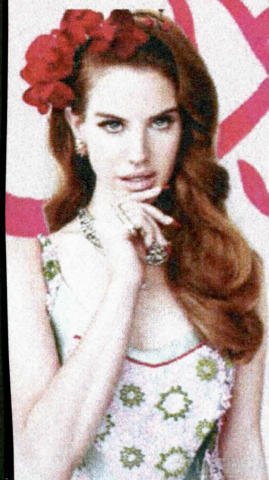
## Not-So-Feminist Artists...

Not all female artists advocate feminist ideals in their lyrics.



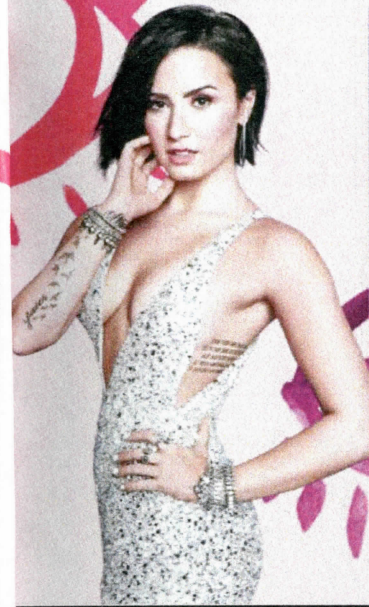
"'Cause I just wanna look good for you, good for you  
I just wanna look good for you, good for you  
Let me show you how proud I am to be yours  
Leave this dress a mess on the floor  
And still look good for you, good for you"  
-“Good For You,” Selena Gomez

“Dear future husband  
Here’s a few things  
You’ll need to know if you wanna be  
My one and only all my life  
Take me on a date  
I deserve a brake  
And don’t forget the flowers every anniversary  
'Cause if you’ll treat me right  
I’ll be the perfect wife  
Buying groceries  
Buy-buying what you need”  
-“Dear Future Husband,” Meghan Trainor



“He used to call me poison  
Like I was poison ivy  
I could’ve died right then  
'Cause he was right beside me  
Jim raised me up  
He hurt me but it felt like true love  
Jim taught me that  
Loving him was never enough  
This is ultraviolence  
Ultraviolence  
Ultraviolence  
Ultraviolence  
I can hear sirens, sirens  
He hit me and it felt like a kiss”  
-“Ultraviolence” Lana Del Rey

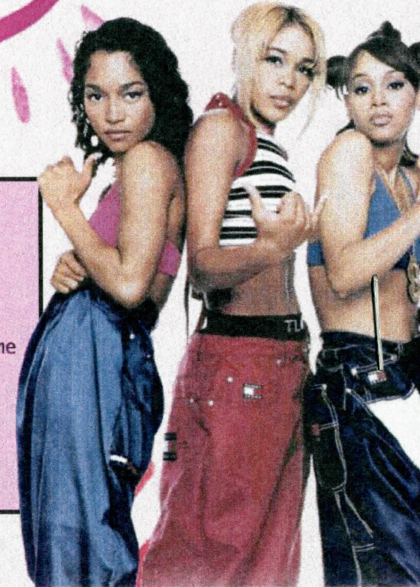
## vs. Feminist Artists!!



“I used to hold my freak back  
Now I’m letting go  
I make my own choice  
Bitch, I run this show  
So leave the lights on  
No, you can’t make me behave  
So you say I’m complicated  
That I must be outta my mind  
But you had me underrated  
Rated, rated  
What’s wrong with being, what’s wrong with being  
What’s wrong with being confident?”  
-“Confident,” Demi Lovato



“So no, I don’t want your number  
No, I don’t want to give you mine and  
No, I don’t want to meet you nowhere  
No, I don’t want none of your time and  
No, I don’t want no scrub  
A scrub is a guy that can’t get no love from me  
Hangin’ out the passenger side  
Of his best friend’s ride  
Trying to holla at me  
I don’t want no scrub”  
-“No Scrubs,” TLC



“I’m bigger than my body  
I’m colder than this home  
I’m meaner than my demons  
I’m bigger than these bones”  
-“Control,” Halsey

**SOME FEMALE ARTISTS  
ARE BETTER AT  
SUPPORTING FEMINIST  
IDEALS THROUGH THEIR  
LYRICS THAN OTHERS**



YEAH, YOU CAN'T *PIN ME DOWN*  
NOW I GOT YOUR BACK UP  
WHAT DO YOU NOT LIKE?  
DO YOU THINK I'M STUCK-UP  
CAUSE I'M ALWAYS PICKING  
FIGHTS

YOU MIGHT THINK I'M ONE THING  
BUT I AM ANOTHER  
YOU CAN'T CALL MY BLUFF  
TIME TO BACK OFF, *MOTHERFUCKER*  
DO YOU REALLY WANT ME TO  
WRITE A *FEMINIST ANTHEM?*

*Can't Pin Me Down*

MARINA & THE DIAMONDS



*BO\$\$*  
FIFTH HARMONY



WORKING FOR MY MONEY  
'CAUSE THAT'S WHAT MY MOMMA TAUGHT  
ME

SO YO ASS BETTA \$HOW ME \$OME

RESPECT

BO\$\$

MICHELLE OBAMA

PUR\$E \$O HEAVY GETTIN' OPRAH DOLLAS



*POWER*  
LITTLE MIX



Baby, you're the ma  
But I got the, I got the, I got the powe  
You make rai

But I'll make it, I'll make it, I'll make it showe  
You should know, I'm the one who's in contro  
I'll let you come take the wheel, long as you don't forge



Who got the power  
I got the, I got the powe  
I got the, I got the powe

*GIRLS OF THE 21ST CENTURY*

WON'T LISTEN TO MEN

THEY FORGE THEIR OWN PATH









GIRLS JUST  
WANNA HAVE  
FUNDAMENTAL  
HUMAN RIGHTS

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