"Timeless" rock masculinities: Understanding the gendered dimension of an annual Belgian radio music poll

Frederik Dhaenens[a]

[a]*Department of Communication Sciences, Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium*

E-mail: frederik.dhaenens@ugent.be

"Timeless" rock masculinities: Understanding the gendered dimension of an annual Belgian radio music poll

This article explores the gendered dimension of De Tijdloze Honderd (the Timeless Hundred), an annual Belgian radio music poll organized by public broadcasting radio station Studio Brussel. Female artists have been consistently underrepresented in the poll of all-time favorite songs. Drawing on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of ten editions of the program throughout its history, this study set out to assess gender disparity in the Timeless Hundred and explore how the three most "timeless" male acts negotiate hegemonic masculinity. I argue that the Timeless Hundred inadvertently reiterates the belief that "timeless" popular music is chiefly the product of men who rock, despite the presence of masculinities that undermine a hegemonic masculine rock ideal. Particularly the gendering of rock music, processes of canonization, and the creation of a collective memory have co-constructed music polls that lack fair gender representation. I conclude by emphasizing the importance of public initiatives that expose these structural dynamics and help to reimagine popular music's history as truly inclusive and representative.

Keywords: popular music; rock music; radio music poll; canonization; masculinities

Introduction

Every New Year's Eve, public broadcasting radio station Studio Brussel, a popular Dutch-speaking Belgian station that plays pop, rock, and alternative music, airs the annual radio show "De Tijdloze Honderd" ("the Timeless Hundred"). Organized for the first time in 1987, the program presents the hundred best songs of all time, based on a station-organized music poll. In response to the 30th edition in 2017, RoSa vzw, a Belgian civil society organization that archives and fosters knowledge on gender and feminism, called out the poll's underrepresentation of women. In a move to persuade listeners to vote for female artists, RoSa vzw took various initiatives to promote artists such as Aretha Franklin and Amy Winehouse (RoSa vzw 2018). The initiatives may be the reason why the 2018 edition featured 14 songs by female artists or bands with female members.

Nevertheless, the Timeless Hundred remains a space where male artists thrive. Its gender disparity is not an isolated phenomenon. Many other music polls produce the same disparity (Catherine Strong 2010; Ralf von Appen and André Doehring 2006). To comprehend the gendered dimension of music polls, it is necessary to study this gender disparity against the backdrop of the sociocultural and historical context of an annual radio music poll. I focus on the relation between genre and masculinity, as the Timeless Hundred is known for its rock songs. Studies on rock music culture (David Crider 2014; Marion Leonard 2007; Diane Railton 2001; Mimi Schippers 2002) demonstrated how artists, music journalists, radio DJs, or fans favor a particular configuration of rock masculinity, often interpreted as a form of hegemonic masculinity (Raewyn Connell 2005). It refers to a pattern of masculinity that is constructed as superior to women and to men who perform masculinities that do not fit the hegemonic masculine ideal (cf. infra). At the same time, scholars (Stan Hawkins 2016; Taylor Martin Houston 2012; Michael Ramirez 2012; Schippers 2002) described how artists and audiences within diverse rock cultures have questioned a hegemonic rock masculinity and/or embodied alternative masculinities.

To explore then what kind of masculinities are configured in and through the radio poll, this study set out to, first, assess gender disparity throughout the history of the Timeless Hundred and, second, explore how the program's three most "timeless" male acts negotiate hegemonic masculinity. To this end, I used a mixed-methods approach that enabled me to collect and interpret quantitative and qualitative data from ten editions of the radio program.

Literature review

Hegemonic masculinity and the music industry

One of the most visible examples of gendering in popular music culture is the discursive construction of rock vis-à-vis pop music. Even though there is nothing essentially male about

rock or female about pop music, a rock ideology emerged that constructed both genres as gendered and articulated rock as superior to pop (Schippers 2002; Sheila Whiteley 2000). The norms, values, and ideas expressed in the rock ideology became pervasive in contemporary popular music culture, illustrated in the widely shared perception of pop as "allegedly slick, prefabricated, and used for dancing, mooning over teen idols, and other 'feminine' or 'feminized' recreations" (Norma Coates 1997, 53). Rock, by contrast, has been considered authentic, original, innovative, and emotionally honest (Ian Biddle and Freya Jarman-Ivens 2007; Coates 1997; Whiteley 2000). The repeated association of rock culture with men has also resulted in the configuration of an idealized rock masculinity (Crider 2014; Leonard 2007; Railton 2001; Jacqueline Warwick 2015). Inspired by Connell's work on masculinities (2005), several scholars (Pauwke Berkers and Merel Eeckelaer 2014; Crider 2014; Francisca Mullens and Patrizia Zanoni 2019; Schippers 2002) used Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity to describe this pattern of rock masculinity.

Connell (2005; 2014) provided a theory on gender relations that identified multiple patterns of masculinity that have hierarchical relationships with one another. The first pattern is hegemonic masculinity. It refers to "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell 2005, 77). Even though few men meet the normative standards of hegemonic masculinity, the pattern remains hegemonic due to various discursive strategies that persuade people to accept or consent to unequal gender relations (Connell 2005; James W. Messerschmidt 2012). An important role is played by men engaging in complicit masculinity, the second pattern of masculinity. Connell (2005) used the term "complicity" to refer to the relations between men who practice and embody hegemonic masculinity and men who do not fully practice hegemonic masculinity but whose supportive and aspirational practices consolidate patriarchy. Men who

engage in complicit masculinity can profit from the hegemonic gender order, "without the tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy" (2005, 79). Another way to underscore the superiority of hegemonic masculinity is by juxtaposing it with subordinated masculinities. Subordination refers to the symbolic and material subordination of men in the gender order, based on their non-normative gender expression and/or sexual identity (Connell 2005, 80).

Popular media culture has reproduced this gender hierarchy as it has the material and symbolic means to represent ample exemplary figures of hegemonic masculinity to large audiences (Tim Carrigan et al. 1985; Elizabeth Fish Hatfield 2010; Connell 2005). The music industry is no different, characterized by an "overwhelming and entrenched inequality" (Strong and Sarah Raine 2019, 1). To this day, many producers, managers, and other industry workers are men (Leonard 2016; Mullens and Zanoni 2019; Strong and Raine 2019; Whiteley 2000). This disparity has consequences for women aspiring to a professional career in the music industry. Women in the music industry have had to adapt to masculinist modes and homosocial environments of working while negotiating the gendered assumptions co-workers had about the women's competencies, status, and ambitions (Leonard 2016; Mullens and Zanoni 2019).

Such a sociocultural climate where gender inequality persists inevitably affects the way artists are treated. Female artists face structural and symbolic barriers as they navigate an industry where established ideas about artistic genius have been articulated as masculine, where artists are expected to engage in masculinist modes of entrepreneurial labor to self-promote their work, and where gender bias intervenes in the process of evaluating artistic work (Leonard 2016; Diana Miller 2016). Similarly, the industry perpetuates the gendered expectations for pop and rock artists. Pop stars are discursively constructed as feminine "because of their reliance on spectacle," while "rock stars are believed to eschew mere showmanship in favour of 'true' artistry, in accordance with conventionally masculine attributes" (Warwick 2015, 333).

Consequently, women have been nudged to perform as vocalists in mainstream pop genres, while men have been encouraged to master an instrument and form a rock band (Mary Ann Clawson 1999; Leonard 2007). Male artists who do not desire to embody this masculine ideal and/or who aspire to be a pop vocalist or perform in a boyband have often been discursively constructed as ambiguous in their negotiation of normative masculinities and as subordinate to the archetypical rock stars (Biddle and Jarman-Ivens 2007; Schippers 2002).

Unsurprisingly, male rock artists have contributed to safeguarding hegemonic masculinity. Through lyrics and performance styles, they have repeatedly (sexually) objectified women and underscored their heterosexuality and sexual prowess (Mavis Bayton 1997; Matthew Bannister 2006; Sam de Boise 2014; Railton 2001; Warwick 2015). This has not stopped artists from performing alternative rock masculinities that (deliberately) undermine hegemonic masculinity. Hawkins (2016) wrote about Bruce Springsteen and Kurt Cobain as illustrations of rock stars who complicated normative codes of masculinity underpinning hegemonic rock ideologies. Hawkins demonstrated how the artists provoked rock's conventions and society's heteronormativity through opaque lyrics and videos that enabled queer readings and through the imagery of homosocial and homoerotic intimacy. Houston (2012) and Ramirez (2012) located alternative masculinities within indie rock music, where male musicians also felt encouraged to engage in acts of homosocial intimacy, disrupt gendered dress codes, and express their emotions publicly. Houston (2012) argued that this configuration of a rock masculinity can be seen as a deliberate strategy to reject a hegemonic masculinity mainstream society has projected on male artists.

However, a hegemonic masculine ideal changes over time. Expressing emotions may not be something that has been associated with a traditional idea of masculinity—which assumes the suppression of emotions in favor of rationality—but emotions have been mobilized by men to sustain gender inequalities (de Boise and Jeff Hearn 2017). De Boise's (2014) study

into emo, a subgenre within rock music, demonstrated how expressive lyrics that emphasize the male singers' emotional vulnerability, insecurity, and pain reiterated unequal gender relations. Instead of producing equal gender relations, these feelings were used to denounce women as women were depicted as intentionally cruel for inciting these emotions in men. Emotions can thus be deployed to preserve a patriarchal gender order.

Canonization

Besides industry professionals and artists, music journalists, historians, and media co-create and benefit from a hegemonic rock ideology and rock masculinity. A key practice has been the preservation of a rock canon, formed by journalists, critics, and historians to challenge the initial dismissal of rock music in favor of classical music. Rock acts were canonized by relying on Romantic notions of what good art should be, such as artistic autonomy, innovation, or authenticity (Vaughn Schmutz and Alison Faupel 2010; Strong 2010). These Romantic principles were used selectively. Whiteley (2000, 8) pointed out how female artists have innovated in terms of lyrics and themes rather than engaging in "sonic wizardry." Nonetheless, only "masculine" innovation in terms of sound and music has been valorized. Although creating a rock canon was intended "to make rock history intelligible" (Leonard 2007, 28), the repeated circulation of predominantly male artists underlies the assumption that being "male" is just part of what rock music is about, despite the fundamental role of female rock artists and female audiences in rock music culture (Mary Celeste Kearney 2017).

In the music press, historical contributions of female artists to rock culture have been marginalized, belittled, or measured by the achievement of male artists within similar genres (Coates 1997; Kearney 2017; Leonard 2007; Kembrew McLeod 2001). Further, male artists who embody the archetypical rock and roll lifestyle have been glorified, while female artists who do the same have been victimized (Berkers and Eeckelaer 2014; Leonard 2007). Similarly, radio stations have been susceptible to the logics of the rock canon. Crider (2020) explored

whether the airplay for female singers on American broadcast radios increased between 2010 and 2016. He found that women were still underrepresented despite an increase in airtime and number of songs with female vocalists. The only radio formats featuring more women than men were those that played Top 40 music. In the formats focusing on alternative rock music and active rock music, the number of female acts and the amount of airtime increased only slightly. Crider concluded that rock radio formats imagined their audiences as men who prefer to listen to men who embody a hegemonic rock masculinity. Following Berkers and Eeckelaer (2014), the practices employed by the music press and radio can therefore best be described as acts of complicity masculinity that preserve the idea of the rock canon as quintessentially male.

Music polls

A hegemonic rock ideology also had a profound impact on fans and audiences, which can be discerned in music polls of all-time favorite songs and albums (Leonard 2007; Strong 2010). A music poll can be described as a "simple voting mechanism that provides a ranking of songs at a particular point in time as determined by those who take part in the process" (Liam J. A. Lenten and Jordi McKenzie 2018, 51). Although music charts show what music audiences consider worthy of purchase, Lenten and McKenzie (2018) argued that polls reveal what music audiences like, whether or not it was paid for. Polls also provide insight into the value audiences ascribe to music long after they discovered the bands or songs, which allows grasping which acts and songs are considered "timeless". A poll can thus counter an expert approach to assessing what music is worth remembering and undermine the music press's celebration of a hegemonic rock masculinity and the cultural superiority of rock music.

Yet, voters are often guided by the media organizing the polls (Leonard 2007). Rarely do audiences start from scratch, as they are given options (e.g., lists, drop-down menus). Audiences are also nudged into choosing artists that fit the profile of the particular medium, thereby excluding lesser-known songs or genres outside the medium's scope and taste culture.

Leonard argued that the desire to vote for something that has a chance of making it to the final list may even reinforce the role of the rock canon since it remains the prime source from which to select when all-time favorite songs are chosen.

One may assume that "older" audiences are responsible for the hegemony of rock music, but Strong's (2010) study of music polls organized by Australian radio station triple j complicated that assumption. She noticed a difference between the station's annual poll of the audiences' favorite songs of the past year and the annual poll of the audiences' all-time favorite songs. Whereas the lists based on the past year featured more diversity in terms of genre, ethnicities, and gender, the all-time favorite lists were chiefly based on the white male rock canon. Since the target audience of triple j is predominantly young, Strong concluded that young audiences had internalized the canon too. She argued that they "have not only remembered and come to believe in the importance of the songs and artists included in the classic canon, but also have internalized the reasoning that is used by critics, journalists and other cultural commentators when called upon to justify their choices" (127).

Whereas contemporary popular music culture is characterized by a postmodern attitude toward "old" and "new" styles and genres and increased opportunities for non-white, non-heterosexual, and female artists, polls of all-time favorite artists and records seem relatively undisturbed by these transformations. Following Will Straw (1997), many people seem to prefer a stable popular music canon that does not need to be revised. This attachment to particular rock songs can be seen as an engagement with cultural heritage and collective memory created around the music. José Van Dijck (2006) studied the practices of voting for and listening to the Top 2000, an annual radio program aired on Dutch public radio. She underscored the mnemonic and formative function of popular music. For audiences, music evokes memories and co-constructs a self and social identity. Through participating in a national music poll, listeners share their personal and collective memories. The result is a collection of songs that is part of

a collective memory; through the processes of voting, sharing, and playing the music on national radio, the collection becomes part of a community's cultural heritage. Therefore, the predominance of male artists may also be an unintended consequence of a collective celebration of particular artists or songs, which nonetheless sustains gender inequality in popular music culture.

Method

To interpret the configurations of masculinity articulated in and through the Timeless Hundred, I developed a constructivist research design that employs a mixed-method approach (Margarete Sandelowski 2000). I collected quantitative and qualitative data to fulfill the study's two purposes. To assess the program's gender disparity, I started with a descriptive quantitative analysis of a sample of ten editions of the Timeless Hundred. When the research was conducted, 31 editions were broadcast. To decide which editions were included, I selected the first and last editions. The other editions were selected by a systematic sampling procedure that guaranteed they were evenly spread over the program's timespan. The following editions were included: 1987, 1991, 1995, 1998, 2002, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2016, and 2018. For each edition, a separate file was created, containing the following information for all hundred songs: ranking, name of the act, title of the song, the year the song was released, and gender identity of the artist or band members. To categorize the act's gender composition, three categories were created: "exclusively female acts", "mixed acts", and "exclusively male acts". For each category, subcategories were developed. The first category consists of "female solo artists" and "all-female bands". The second category consists of "bands with a frontwoman", "bands with both frontmen and frontwomen", "bands with a female band member", and "male acts whose song features a female guest vocalist". The third category consists of "male solo artists" and "all-male bands".

The data were used to describe the gender distribution of each edition and to compare the gender distribution of all the editions in the sample. Next, the data were used to assess the success and "timelessness" of acts and interpret the data in relation to the gender identity of the artists. For this study, I define "success" as the ability of a song to make it into the Top 10 and to secure a top spot for at least a few editions, whereas "timelessness" is the ability of an act to have more than one song in a single edition and several songs across several editions. Besides, I created a Top 21 with the program's most timeless acts. Their ascribed timelessness is based on the total number of songs listed in the sample of ten editions.[1] The Top 21 also features the genre fitting the act best, which enabled a reflection on gender and genre.

Last, the three most popular male acts became the subject of a qualitative analysis. I explored whether audiences voted for artists that support or embody a hegemonic masculine ideal by analyzing how the three most popular acts (i.e., the Rolling Stones, U2, and Radiohead) have negotiated hegemonic masculinity through their music, lyrics, and stardom. Even though the Timeless Hundred features many other artists, these bands represent music that time and again has been liked the most by the audiences.

Analysis of gender and rock in the Timeless Hundred

Quantitative findings

Table 1: Song count by gender composition and edition

Edition	Exclusively female acts		Mixed acts				Exclusively male acts		
	Female solo	All-female band	Front-woman	Front-men and women	Female band member	Female guest vocalist	Male solo	All-male band	Total
1987	2	0	0	3	3	1	34	57	100
1991	3	0	0	3	2	1	31	60	100
1995	4	0	3	1	2	1	20	69	100
1998	1	0	4	2	4	2	23	64	100
2002	1	0	4	2	4	2	16	71	100
2005	1	0	4	3	6	2	9	75	100
2009	1	0	2	2	3	1	15	76	100
2012	1	0	0	2	4	1	14	78	100
2016	2	0	0	3	2	0	19	74	100
2018	6	0	2	5	1	0	14	72	100

First, songs by exclusively male acts outnumber the combined number of songs by mixed acts and exclusively female acts, with little variation among years (see Table 1). The share of songs performed by mixed and exclusively female acts represents a mere annual average of 10.9 songs versus 89.1 songs by exclusively male acts. The combined number of songs by exclusively female and mixed acts has increased slightly from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, with a peak of 16 songs in 2005. From 2009 on, the number has dropped to less than ten songs, with seven songs in 2016 as the lowest in all analyzed editions. It took a widely published action by RoSa

vzw (2018) to bring this disparity to the attention of the public. This act of raising awareness and Studio Brussel's radio DJs suggesting female musicians may have resulted in the increase in female artists in 2018. Although a total of 14 songs does not top the edition of 2005, having six songs by female solo artists is nonetheless a record-high. Yet, compared to the 86 songs that are either performed by a male solo artist or an all-male band, 14 songs make for a lukewarm victory. Especially since none of the 14 songs are performed by all-female bands while eight songs are performed by mixed acts.

Second, female solo artists or bands with female musicians rarely managed to be successful in the polls. Only exclusively male acts populate the Top 10 of each edition, except for 1995. During that year, The Cranberries' "Zombie" (1994) reached ninth place and The Smashing Pumpkins' "Disarm" (1993) seventh place[2], but they only held their high-ranked positions for one year. In contrast, Deep Purple (10 times), Led Zeppelin (10 times), Nirvana (8 times), and Queen (7 times) managed to have a single song in the Top 10 for numerous editions.

Third, the data indicate that mainly exclusively male acts have achieved the status of timelessness. Whereas U2, Metallica, Radiohead, and the Belgian band dEUS have had several of their songs in more than one edition (see Table 2), only one exclusively female solo artist succeeded in having more than one song in a single edition as well as across several editions: Sinéad O'Connor. "Troy" (1987) almost made the Top 10 but had to settle for thirteenth place in 1991. Even though the song has achieved a steady presence, it has failed to rank among the Top 30 from 2002 on. "Nothing Compares 2 U" (1990) ranked 45th in 1991 but disappeared from the poll after 1998.

Table 2: Top 21, based on the total of songs listed in the sample

Act	Total number of songs listed	Gender composition	Genre
U2	36	All-male band	Rock
The Rolling Stones	32	All-male band	Rock
Radiohead	31	All-male band	Alternative rock
dEUS	30	All-male band	Alternative rock
Dire Straits	26	All-male band	Rock
Metallica	25	All-male band	Hard rock, heavy metal
The Doors	24	All-male band	Psychedelic rock
Led Zeppelin	21	All-male band	Hard rock, heavy metal
Pearl Jam	21	All-male band	Grunge
Pink Floyd	20	All-male band	Progressive rock
The Beatles	18	All-male band	Rock, pop
R.E.M.	18	All-male band	Alternative rock
Bruce Springsteen	18	Male solo artist	Rock
David Bowie	18	Male solo artist	Glam rock
Nirvana	18	All-male band	Grunge
AC/DC	17	All-male band	Hard rock, heavy metal
Neil Young	17	Male solo artist	Rock
The Sisters of Mercy	16	All-male band	Goth rock

Act	Total number of songs listed	Gender composition	Genre
Pixies	15	Band with frontmen and frontwomen	Alternative rock
Prince	15	Male solo artist	Pop/funk/rock
Deep Purple	15	All-male band	Progressive rock

Fourth, the voting audiences favor all-male bands. Whereas none of the editions features an all-female band, all-male bands are the main fabric of the poll (see Table 1). They even became more important over the years. Where male solo artists accounted for 34 and 31 songs in respectively 1987 and 1991, their annual number has decreased to less than twenty from 2002 on. The annual total number of songs by all-male bands, however, has increased to more than 70 songs from 2002 on, with a record-high of 78 songs in 2012. Table 2, in particular, demonstrates the popularity of all-male bands in the poll. There are only four solo artists in the Top 21 while, except for Pixies[3], 16 bands consist of only men.

Last, Table 2 illustrates the dominance of rock genres. Many acts in Table 2 represent a rock genre considered popular when they released their songs or albums: the emergence of rock in the 1960s; the diversification into various subgenres, such as psychedelic rock, progressive rock, and hard rock and heavy metal during the late 1960s and 1970s; new wave and gothic rock in the late 1970s and early 1980s; alternative or indie rock and grunge in the 1980s and 1990s. I acknowledge that to appear in the table, the artists had to have been active before the mid-1990s. This means that the impact of (relatively) new popular artists (e.g., Muse, Coldplay) or genres (e.g., electronic dance music) cannot yet be fully assessed. Similarly, it looks like Fleetwood Mac has the potential of becoming a household name anew. The band, fronted by both male and female artists, was one of the few in the 2018 edition with four different songs.

Yet, these few examples of transformation do not mitigate the fact that the Timeless Hundred is generally dominated by rock music and all-male rock bands.

Qualitative findings

Based on the quantitative findings and literature on gender and rock music (Bannister 2006; de Boise 2014; Schippers 2002) one could argue that the timeless Hundred offers an abundance of rock acts sustaining hegemonic masculinity. Yet, such a statement needs to be substantiated by qualitative research that explores in depth how the rock acts negotiate hegemonic masculinity. In this section, I discuss the results from a qualitative analysis of the rock masculinities represented by the poll's three most timeless acts (i.e., the Rolling Stones, U2, and Radiohead).

Their popularity in the poll is no surprise. Each band holds an authoritative position within rock music. The British band the Rolling Stones, who reinterpreted American music genres such as Black rhythm and blues, have even been dubbed "the greatest rock 'n' roll band in the world" (Helmut Staubmann 2013, 4). The voting audiences seem to prefer the period during which the bands became household names in rock music. Take, for instance, the Irish band U2. Even though U2 has released music throughout the 2000s and 2010s, the band is mostly liked for the songs released in the 1980s, during which they became leading artists in classic rock. Similarly, British band Radiohead started with bridging grunge, alternative folk, and progressive rock, while slowly transforming their sound to encompass synths, electronic beats, and soundscapes from the end of the 1990s on. Yet, the songs that made the polls are all from the band's first three rock-oriented records, demonstrating the power of the rock canon.

However, a dominant position in rock music culture does not imply that they support or embody a hegemonic masculine ideal. Hegemonic masculinity implies the construction of a pattern of masculinity that is superior to other masculinities and femininities. Equally important is that what is discursively constructed as hegemonic may change over time (Connell 2005). A certain pattern of rock masculinity that was hegemonic in the 1960s may have been

reconfigured by artists in the 1980s and 1990s. With an annual poll of all-time-favorite songs, however, various discursive constructions of masculinities are juxtaposed in one list. In Western contexts, for instance, explicit sexism and homophobia are no longer tolerated or seen as part of a hegemonic masculine ideal, and men are allowed to express emotional vulnerability. That does not mean that gender equality is achieved if an 'old' pattern has been replaced by a new pattern that reproduces the same gendered dynamics (de Boise 2014). An understanding of a band's engagement with masculinity should therefore be interpreted in relation to the context in which it was articulated.

The Rolling Stones have often been associated with practices, norms, and values that support a patriarchal gender order. Various scholars (Jack Burton 2007; Whiteley 1997) wrote about the band and argued that the lyrics are sexist, misogynist, and/or busy expressing (hetero-) sexual prowess, macho imagery, dominance, power, and sexual aggression. In "Angie" (1973), Mick Jagger's character asks a female partner to accept that their relationship is over. The female character seems to have no agency in the matter, as he decides for both of them. These gendered norms and values were further highlighted in the way the band's two most famous members, Jagger and Keith Richards, were represented as rock stars. Whereas Richards has been described as the paradigmatic male rock star—the white guitar player who is unselfconscious, authentic, unkempt, and focused on his music and exhibiting his talents (Warwick 2015), Jagger's star image is more ambiguous as he subverted conventional codes of masculinity through acts of gender-bending and hinting at bisexuality. Yet, close readings of Jagger's performances revealed how he mimicked both Black and queer culture in his sound, dancing, clothing, or make-up (Judith A. Peraino 2015; Whiteley 1997), demonstrating how white heterosexual men have been allowed to transgress without risking their sociocultural status. Jason T. Eastman (2013) interpreted these representations of masculinity in relation to the band's engagement with rebellion and independence, which challenged a hegemonic ideal

17

of masculinity in the 1950s organized around long-time commitments in terms of work and family. However, these new articulations of masculinity did not undermine a patriarchal gender order. Rather, they co-constructed a new normative rock and roll ideal, which became a hegemonic rock masculinity throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

This pattern of masculinity is challenged by bands like U2 and Radiohead. Looking at U2, scholars (Sean Campbell 2013; Lynn Ramert 2009) have pointed out the sometimes contradictory ways the band has dealt with gender and sexuality in songs and stage performances. Bono has assumed different personalities on stage over the years. In the 1980s, Bono had a less outspoken personality, as he was more concerned with emphasizing the seriousness of the band's politics and music. During the 1990s, however, Bono played with several personalities in his music and on stage that exaggerated, mocked, and subverted traditional ideas about rock music and masculinities. Campbell (2013) stressed that, in contrast to rock culture in Anglo-American contexts, the alternative masculinities (e.g., performing in drag) and the blurring of pop and rock music was certainly new and subversive in Irish rock music culture. Furthermore, traditional ideas of masculinity are also challenged in the bands' songs included in the Timeless Hundred. As most of the songs deal with political themes, masculinity is expressed through articulating antiwar, antiviolence, and antihate stances rather than defending the necessity of war and machismo. In the songs that explore gender relations between men and women more explicitly, U2 represents conflicted yet egalitarian relationships. In "With or Without You" (1987), a song about the end of a relationship, Bono is unable to imagine a future either with or without the female character. The song shows how both parties desire different things, incapable of truly connecting but equally unable to let go. Challenging rigid gendered stereotypes through embodiment and songs and representing an egalitarian perspective on relationships are essential practices in subverting patriarchal and hierarchical

gender relations. From that perspective, U2 has at least engaged in some practices to provoke a dominant hegemonic masculine ideal.

The Radiohead songs included in the poll were engaged in deconstructing hegemonic masculinity. Songs like "Karma Police" (1997) and "Paranoid Android" (1997) explore the role and impact of mass media, information technologies, and authoritarian and fascist politics. These songs do not provide easy answers or unequivocal statements but rather hold up a mirror to modern society. Each character Thom Yorke performs embodies a particular fear or desire toward technological innovation and its political appropriations, resulting in songs that evoke moral panic and technological optimism. Through the lens of masculinity theory, the songs stage authoritarian male characters who claim a moral high ground to discipline others, only to briefly discover they too are victims of the same oppressing gendered norms and values. The only Radiohead song in the Timeless Hundred that explicitly addresses gender and sexuality is "Creep" (1992). Yorke embodies a male character smitten with a girl he considers beautiful but is afraid to approach. The character considers himself "a creep, a weirdo," an insecure man who feels unworthy of desiring this particular woman. He does not despise the female character for not noticing him but rather turns his gaze inward where he has internalized an unattainable and suffocating ideal, which can be described as hegemonic masculinity. Instead of finding the tools to deconstruct this ideal, he endures the pain it causes, highlighted in the song when he belts that she is running out the door to the sound of a raging electric guitar. Radiohead's songs may not offer an alternative to the way society is governed—which includes the discursive power of hegemonic masculinity—but they lay bare the pain and suffering these normative discourses cause.

Discussion

The persistent gender disparity in the Timeless Hundred is far from unique as the findings are consistent with former studies on gender-related trends in charts and polls. Alan Wells' (2001) quantitative study on the *Billboard* Top 50 annual album charts between 1985 and 1999 debunked the claim made in the popular music press that female artists outnumbered male artists in the late 1990s. Even though female artists secured positions at the top of the charts, the charts featured more albums by male than female artists and more hits for male than female artists. Building on Wells' work, Marc Lafrance et al. (2011) looked at the *Billboard* Top 40 single sales between 1997 and 2007 and found the number of hit songs by male artists continued to exceed the number of hit songs by female artists.

The studies by Wells (2001) and Lafrance et al. (2011) did demonstrate the ability of female artists to score hits. Lafrance et al. even found their findings indicating that "women chart less frequently but–when they do chart–they chart higher than men" (566). This form of success does not apply to the songs by exclusively female or mixed acts in the Timeless Hundred. They are practically absent in the poll's upper regions. This difference can be attributed to the distinction between a chart and a poll. Whereas a chart is based on sales figures and shows the commercial quality of an act, a poll reveals what audiences assess as great or timeless music. Similar to Strong's findings (2010) on the underrepresentation of female artists in triple j's Hottest 100 of All Time and von Appen and Doehring's analysis (2006) of 38 polls and lists of all-time favorite albums, audiences who vote for the Timeless Hundred have most likely internalized the rock canon and rely on it to estimate what qualifies as timeless music. This allows understanding the precarious presence of female artists in the timeless Hundred. On the one hand, women are expected to perform rock music to be included in the poll. On the other hand, the audiences treat female rock artists similarly to how the music industry and media have treated female rock artists: as less impactful than male artists and as temporary fads

20

(Leonard 2007; Schmutz and Faupel 2010). Remarkably, most of the songs by female solo artists were in the poll for only one edition (e.g., Alanis Morissette's "Ironic" (1996)).

The Timeless Hundred's association with rock music must also be seen against the backdrop of the program's origins. The Timeless Hundred was launched in 1987, the year Studio Brussel became a national radio station. In the 1980s and 1990s, the station was mainly associated with (alternative) rock music (Dirk Hermans 1995; Gert Keunen 2018). The Timeless Hundred's first editions testify to that, featuring songs from rock genres popular at the time. In 2000, the station rebranded itself and tried to shed the "alternative rock" label by playing non-rock genres such as hip-hop and electronic dance music (Kristof Demasure 2000). In time, it embraced a more postmodern attitude toward popular music consumption, occasionally also programming mainstream pop songs. Studio Brussel's subsequent shifts in brand image and taste cultures did not affect the Timeless Hundred very much. The recent editions reaffirm the popularity of all-male rock bands. Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit" (1991) was ranked first in several editions in the 2000s, while Pearl Jam's "Black" (1991) became a Timeless classic in the 2010s. Running for more than thirty years now, the Timeless Hundred has gradually created its own canon with mostly guitar-based, all-male rock bands, which serves as an authoritative reference for current and future audiences participating in the poll. It illustrates what Leonard (2007) wrote about canonization: once a canon is constructed, it is hard to deviate or innovate.

This does not imply that the bands and songs in the Timeless Hundred all express or support hegemonic rock masculinity. The qualitative findings illustrate that, even though each studied band had to negotiate hegemonic masculinity, not all represent themselves or their songs as fitting the pattern of hegemonic rock masculinity. Radiohead and U2 have embodied masculinities that can be described as alternative or non-normative. They, for instance, represent the theme of failure in their work—the inability to make a relationship work, engage

in a meaningful conversation with women, and/or challenge heteronormative, authoritarian, or fascist politics. Nonetheless, even though the Timeless Hundred juxtaposes diverse and contradictory ideals of masculinity, including alternative masculinities, the program itself cannot escape the pattern of hegemonic masculinity. Voting for bands that subvert gendered ideals and practices may alter and diversify what is generally understood as rock masculinity, but it does not change the fact that audiences consider timeless music to be rock music (predominantly) performed by men.

The music industry has played a key role in gendering popular music practices in binary, hierarchical, and exclusionary ways, including the establishment of a hegemonic masculine ideal in rock music culture and the articulation of rock music as superior to pop music. Popular media like the music press and radio have contributed to the perpetuation of this pattern of hegemonic masculinity, thereby co-creating taste cultures and musical canons that lack fair gender representation while celebrating the artistry of male rock bands. Following Strong (2010), we assume that young and old audiences have become accustomed to the idea that timeless music is the product of men who rock, despite noting transformations in the embodiment of masculinities in the history of rock culture, with popular acts like U2 and Radiohead diverging from hegemonic masculinity in their music and on-stage performances. We may thus understand the persistent gender disparity of a music poll of all-time favorite songs as the result of a confluence of several factors, including a radio station's original's rock identity, the music press's celebration of all-male rock bands and hegemonic rock masculinity, and audiences' internalization of a rock canon.

Defying the symbolic power of the canon of the Timeless Hundred may thus require structural initiatives to raise awareness of the canon's gender disparity and to sway audiences to consider female artists who have been neglected by the Timeless Hundred. RoSa vzw's call to action (RoSa vzw 2018) was such an attempt, and it may have had an impact on the 2018

edition of the Timeless Hundred. The initiative, which received regional public attention, comprised a self-curated public Spotify playlist of 500 songs by female artists and the distribution of buttons with drawings of female artists. The 2018 edition was effectively marked by the entry of works by Aretha Franklin, Nina Simone, and Amy Winehouse. Remarkably, the entry of soul artists also challenged the hegemony of rock. As argued above, the Timeless Hundred did not change as much as Studio Brussel. Acknowledging the hegemony of rock genres in the program, it remains to be seen whether soul artists will consolidate their position as timeless artists and open up the poll for music outside the realm of the rock canon.

It would be short-sighted to assume that audiences vote for men simply because they are men. Many respondents' choices are based on personal taste and memory. Others will point to their knowledge of the Timeless Hundred's program conventions and canon. Radio professional Stijn Van de Voorde, who found RoSa vzw 's initiative to get more women voted into the Timeless Hundred "patronizing," further argued that during the early years of rock music, fewer women were making "great" music due to "fewer chances" and "the spirit of the times" (Kim Van De Perre 2018). Yet, publicly downplaying the importance of initiatives that seek to challenge a music poll's gender disparity can only be read as an act of complicit masculinity. It also makes us aware that a radical transformation of music polls can only happen when the gendered dimensions of canonization, music polls, and rock music are taken seriously by all actors involved, including the music industry, music press, radio stations, music historians and audiences. To this end, a call to vote for female artists is an essential means of raising awareness of how said actors knowingly or unknowingly contribute to inhibiting a truly diverse popular music culture. It is a call to participate in reconstructing the Timeless Hundred, and other music polls, as dynamic and self-reflexive sites that are open to reimagining its own history and the history of popular music.

[1] Each time the same song was listed in another edition, it was counted as a separate song.

[2] Dolores O'Riordan was the lead singer of The Cranberries while D'arcy Wretzky was the bass player of The Smashing Pumpkins.

[3] Pixies does not have a single front person, as both Black Francis and Kim Deal share that role.

Disclosure statement

The authors reported no potential conflict of interest.

Notes on contributor

Frederik Dhaenens (PhD) is Assistant Professor at Ghent University, where he teaches courses that deal with media, (popular) culture and diversity. His research is situated within the field of critical media studies and cultural studies, with an interest in the representation of LGBTQ identities and masculinities in popular film, television and music culture.

ORCID

Frederik Dhaenens: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1497-6592

References

Bannister, Matthew. 2006. *White Boys, White Noise: Masculinities and 1980s Indie Guitar Rock.* Aldershot: Ashgate.

Bayton, Mavis. 1997. "Women and the Electric Guitar." In *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, edited by Sheila Whiteley, 37–49. London: Routledge.

Berkers, Pauwke and Merel Eeckelaer. 2014. "Rock and Roll or Rock and Fall? Gendered Framing of the Rock and Roll Lifestyles of Amy Winehouse and Pete Doherty in British Broadsheets." *Journal of Gender Studies* 23 (1): 3–17.

Biddle, Ian and Freya Jarman-Ivens. 2007. "Introduction." In *Oh Boy! Making Masculinity in Popular Music*, edited by Freya Jarman-Ivens, 1–17. New York: Routledge.

Burton, Jack. 2007. "Dude Looks Like a Lady: Straight Camp and the Homo-social World of Hard Rock." *FORUM: University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Journal of Culture and the Arts* 4. Accessed June 1, 2019. http://www.forumjournal.org/article/view/580

Campbell, Sean. 2013. "From 'Boys' to 'Lads': Masculinity and Irish Rock Culture." *Popular Musicology Online* 2. Accessed June 1, 2019. http://www.popular-musicology-online.com/issues/02/campbell.html

Carrigan, Tim, Raewyn Connell, and John Lee. 1985. "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity." *Theory and Society* 14 (5): 551–604.

Clawson, Mary Ann. 1999. "Masculinity and Skill Acquisition in the Adolescent Rock Band." *Popular Music* 18 (1): 99–114.

Coates, Norma. 1997. "(R)Evolution Now? Rock and the Political Potential of Gender." In *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, edited by Sheila Whiteley, 50–64. London: Routledge.

Connell, Raewyn. 2005. *Masculinities* (2nd Ed). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Connell, Raewyn. 2014. "The Study of Masculinities." *Qualitative Research Journal* 14 (1): 1–14.

Crider, David. 2014. "For Those (Men) About to Rock: Rock Radio and the Crisis of Masculinity." *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 21 (2): 258–271.

Crider, David. 2020. "Of 'Tomatoes' and Men: A Continuing Analysis of Gender in Music Radio Formats." *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 27 (1): 134–150.

De Boise, Sam. 2014. "Cheer up Emo Kid: Rethinking the 'Crisis of Masculinity' in Emo." *Popular Music* 33 (2): 225–242.

De Boise, Sam and Jeff Hearn. 2017. "Are Men Getting more Emotional? Critical Sociological Perspectives on Men, Masculinities and Emotions." *The Sociological Review* 65 (4): 779–796.

Demasure, Kristof. 2000. "Nostalgie is slechte raadgever bij nieuwe Studio Brussel." [Nostalgia is a bad counselor at Studio Brussel.] *De Morgen*, September 1, 41.

Eastman, Jason T. 2013. "The Hegemonic Masculinity of the Rolling Stones." In *The Rolling Stones: Sociological Perspectives*, edited by Helmut Staubmann, 175–200. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Hatfield, Elizabeth Fish. 2010. "'What it Means to be a Man': Examining Hegemonic Masculinity in Two and a Half Men." *Communication, Culture & Critique* 3 (4): 526–548.

Hawkins, Stan. 2016. *Queerness in Pop Music: Aesthetics, Gender Norms, and Temporality*. New York: Routledge.

Hermans, Dirk. 1995. "Opperhoofd Jan Schoukens: 'In Limburg scoren we het laagst'." [Chief Jan Schoukens: 'We Score the Lowest in Limburg'.] *Het Belang van Limburg*, December 19, 30.

Houston, Taylor Martin. 2012. "The Homosocial Construction of Alternative Masculinities: Men in Indie Rock Bands." *The Journal of Men's Studies* 20 (2): 158–175.

Kearney, Mary Celeste. 2017. *Gender and Rock*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Keunen, Gert. 2018. "The Zone in Between: The Principled Realm of Alternative Mainstream in Flanders." In *Made in the Low Countries: Studies in Popular Music*, edited by Lutgard Mutsaers and Gert Keunen, 15–25. Abingdon: Routledge.

Lafrance, Marc, Lara Worcester, and Lori Burns. 2011. "Gender and the Billboard Top 40 Charts between 1997 and 2007." *Popular Music and Society* 34 (5): 557–570.

Leonard, Marion. 2007. *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Lenten, Liam J. A. and Jordi McKenzie. 2018. "The Times They Are A-Changin': On the Ephemeral Nature of Music Polls." *Economic Record* 94 (304): 51–63.

Leonard, Marion. 2016. "Girls at Work: Gendered Identities, Sex Segregation and Employment Experiences in the Music Industries". In *Voicing Girlhood in Popular Music: Performance, Authority, Authenticity*, edited by Allison Adrian and Jacqueline Warwick, 37–55. New York: Routledge.

McLeod, Kembrew. 2001. "★: A Critique of Rock Criticism in North America." *Popular Music* 20 (1): 47–60.

Messerschmidt, James W. 2012. "Engendering Gendered Knowledge: Assessing the Academic Appropriation of Hegemonic Masculinity." *Men and Masculinities* 15 (1): 56–76.

Miller, Diana L. 2016. "Gender and the Artist Archetype: Understanding Gender Inequality in Artistic Careers." *Sociology Campus* 10 (2): 119–131.

Mullens, Francisca and Patrizia Zanoni. 2019. "'Mothering the Artist': Women Artist Managers Crafting an Occupational Identity in the Flemish Music Industry." *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* 22 (1): 7–26.

Peraino, Judith A. 2015. "Mick Jagger as Mother." *Social Text* 33 (3): 75–113.

Railton, Diane. 2001. "The Gendered Carnival of Pop." *Popular Music* 20 (3): 321–331.

Ramert, Lynn. 2009. "A Century Apart: The Personality Performances of Oscar Wilde in the 1890s and U2's Bono in the 1990s." *Popular Music and Society* 32 (4): 447–460.

Ramirez, Michael. 2012. "Performing Gender by Performing Music: Constructions of Masculinities in a College Music Scene." *The Journal of Men's Studies* 20 (2): 108–124.

RoSa vzw. 2018. "Nooit meer een #Tietloze." [Never Again a #Tietloze.] Accessed February 1, 2019. https://rosavzw.be/site/gender-in-de-pers/hot-topics/977-de-tietloze

Sandelowski, Margarete. 2000. "Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Sampling, Data Collection, and Analysis Techniques in Mixed-Method Studies." *Research in Nursing & Health* 23 (3): 246–255

Schippers, Mimi. 2002. *Rockin' Out of the Box: Gender Maneuvering in Alternative Hard Rock.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Schmutz, Vaughn and Alison Faupel. 2010. "Gender and Cultural Consecration in Popular Music." *Social Forces* 89 (2): 685–707.

Staubmann, Helmut. 2013. "The Rolling Stones in Sociological Perspectives." In *The Rolling Stones: Sociological Perspectives*, edited by Helmut Staubmann, 1–20. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Straw, Will. 1997. "Sizing up Record Collections: Gender and Connoisseurship in Rock Music Culture." In *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, edited by Sheila Whiteley, 3–16. London: Routledge.

Strong, Catherine. 2010. "The Triple J Hottest 100 of All Time and the Dominance of the Rock Canon." *Meanjin* 69 (2): 122–27.

Strong, Catherine and Sarah Raine. 2019. "An Introduction." In *Towards Gender Equality in the Music Industry*, edited by Sarah Raine and Catherine Strong, 1–11. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Von Appen, Ralf and André Doehring. 2006. "Nevermind the Beatles, Here's Exile 61 and Nico: 'The Top 100 Records of All Time:' A Canon of Pop and Rock Albums from a Sociological and an Aesthetic Perspective." *Popular Music* 25 (1): 21–39.

Van De Perre, Kim. 2018. "Gaat 'De Tijdloze' mee met zijn tijd?" [Is the Timeless Hundred Keeping Up with The Times ?] *De Morgen*, December 31, 18.

Van Dijck, José. 2006. "Record and Hold: Popular Music between Personal and Collective Memory." *Critical Studies in Media and Communication* 23 (5): 357–374.

Warwick, Jacqueline. 2015. "Midnight Ramblers and Material Girls: Gender and Stardom in Rock and Pop." In *The Sage Handbook of Popular Music*, edited by Andy Bennett and Steve Waksman, 332–345. London: Sage.

Wells, Alan. 2001. "Nationality, Race, and Gender on the American Pop Charts: What Happened in the '90s?" *Popular Music and Society* 25 (1/2): 221–231.

Whiteley, Sheila. 2000. *Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity and Subjectivity.* London: Routledge.

Whiteley, Sheila. 1997. "Little Red Rooster v. The Honky Tonk Woman: Mick Jagger, Sexuality, Style and Image." In *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, edited by Sheila Whiteley, 67–99. London: Routledge.