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# **Record Label Promotional Decisions and Artistic Personas: The Importance of Gender and Sexualization**

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Many scholars and commentators have acknowledged sexism in the music industry, but very little systematic research explores patterns of gender preference or discrimination in popular music worlds. Interviews and interpretive or ethnographic work suggests a gendered glass ceiling exists, supported by gendered stereotypes and practices, but little direct research exists on the behaviors of record label personnel. This paper fills these holes by examining the degree to which record label promoters favor men or women as a group, and whether or not it matters if these artists are sexualized. The analysis suggests that, counter to expectations, promoters favor women as a group, and that both male and female artists receive a promotional boost for emphasizing a sexualized persona that counts double for women, but that these patterns differ significantly within genres and by race.

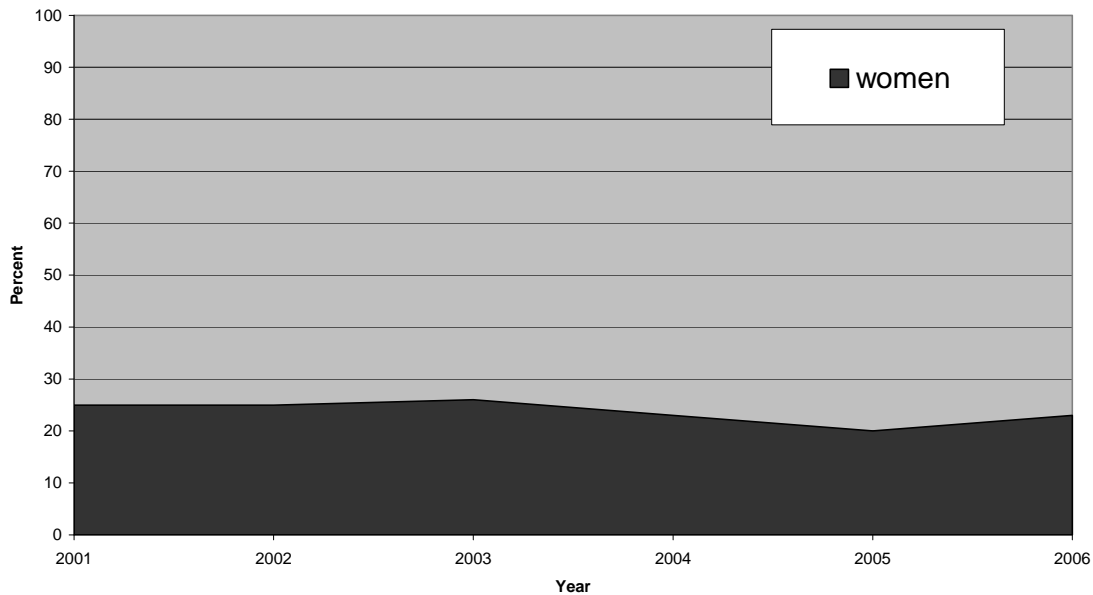
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Most popular music artists are male, and most DJs, promoters, agents, managers, producers, technical workers, lighting, sound, and road crews – you name it – are also overwhelmingly male (Bayton 1998: 7-8; Clawson 1999b). The jobs with the most power and prestige are held by men, and the artistic roles with the least amount of power and prestige tend to be pink collar (Bayton 1998; Carson et al. 2004; Coulangeon et al. 2005). Though much of this paper can generalize to women in all of these various musical roles, here I focus specifically on why there are so few successful female popular music performers.

The Billboard charts suggest that a gendered “glass ceiling” exists in music, as charting female stars hover around 25% of total hits in any given period. Between 1940 and 1990, women accounted for an average of only 16% of number one hits, rarely reaching above 25% for any quarter during that 50 year time period (Dowd 2005: 113-14). Female instrumentalists are exceedingly rare: found in only 6.6% of bands in the Rolling Stone Top 100 between 1967 and 1987 (Clawson 1999a: 101). When only solo artists are considered the statistics are slightly less daunting. For example, female solo artists accounted for 30% of the number one hits between 1940 and 1958 (Dickerson 1998: 28). By the new millennium the numbers remained roughly the same as they had been 60 years earlier. The below chart shows the proportion of the top 100 artists that have been female between 2001 and 2006, measured by those artists receiving the most airplay:

Percentage of female artists or groups with at least one female member on Top 100 Artist Charts, 2001 - 2006



The chart shows that, out of the top 100 artists ranked by radio airplay on all major formats and all major radio stations, the proportion of female solo artists or groups with at least one female member fall somewhere in between 20% and 26% for all years. When one considers the inroads women have made in other fields since the 1940s, these numbers are startling. Why has so little changed, and why are there so few women?

Literature on female musicians points toward discrimination. A common story found in the literature is that popular music is the place and space for the performance of masculinity and performances by men, with limited opportunities for the performance of femininity or performances by women. Gender stereotypes are a defining feature of some musical genres. In fact, Walser (1993: 109-110) points out that the *purpose* of the heavy metal rock music was to reproduce hegemonic masculinity: until the mid-1980s the cohesion of heavy metal as a genre “depended upon the desire of young white male fans to hear and believe in certain stories about the nature of masculinity.”

Women that do enter this masculine territory have frequently complained about offensive comments about their music or personal life made by media. In her interviews of female popular musicians, Evans (1994: ix, 4) noted that:

the topic of public image aroused unanimous disapproval and in most cases sheer anger. Every single woman I spoke with dismissed her media depictions as prejudiced, insulting, even damaging.

....

Rock has always celebrated the more romantic side of insanity, encouraging its quirky eccentrics in their agonizing struggles to create. Outcasts who find solace in the delirium of their art are more than welcome in the world of popular entertainment, but usually only in they are male. Female artists who function left of center are often treated with scorn, ridicule, and ignorance.

The romantic myth of the insane artist is a powerful cultural representation and foundational component of artistic talent; insanity in this context is often related to attributions of talent resulting from thinking processes that cannot be fully understood by the non-talented (Becker 1982), resulting in collective amazement surrounding how a song, play, statue, or painting was created by the delirious genius. This myth is gendered, however, as these positive connotations of insanity are reserved for male artists. The excerpt above, for example, generalizes from media commentary on the “mental decrepitude” of Tori Amos’ work because of her lyrics and presentation style: somewhat like Jerry Lee Lewis had done, Tori would often sit at the piano with her legs spread and undulate to the rhythm of the music as she played, while her lyrics often centered on issues of sexuality. She was pilloried for this performance style. But Ozzy Osbourne, on the other hand, was glorified in *The Rolling Stone* with the title “Prince of Darkness” for antics such as throwing pig intestines at his audiences, biting the head off of a bat, and later biting the head off of a dove (Evans 1994: 5; Sullivan 2004). Tori was vilified as mentally disturbed by the media for being “alive” while she performed, while Ozzy was glorified as the dark “insane genius” for behaviors that could support commitment to a mental institution.

A second and related story is that women are categorically excluded by some version of a “no girls allowed” rule. Women are “out of sight, out of mind, and out of bands” (Walser 1993:

110) Researchers addressing sex segregation in popular music place great weight on the gendered peer culture of adolescence that operates to exclude many girls from developing their interests in popular music performance (Bielby 2004; Clawson 1999a). Girls that grow up to pursue a pop music career still find themselves excluded from bands by those relying on masculine genre-definitions (Walser 1993). Goldie and the Gingerbreads, The Runaways, Heart, Alanis Morissette, Sleater-Kinney, and Lucinda Williams have been shut out of meaningful participation in music worlds and treated as a joke or novelty rather than “real” musicians that could “really play” (see generally Gaar 2002). Paula Cole wasn’t permitted to tour with Sarah McLachlan because promoters didn’t consider *two* women a feasible concert billing as a general rule (Carson, Lewis, and Shaw 2004: 150). Tena Clark was “pissing a lot of guys off” at her label by being successful at her job (Dickerson 2005: 140). As Caffey from the Go-Go’s put it, “basically no one wanted to know about us, and they literally laughed at the idea of an all female band.... I guess ‘cause we formed our own band, wrote our own material, and played all the instruments, maybe they thought it would never work” (Gaar 2002: 228).

The degree of hostility and disrespect toward women suggests that female artists were discouraged and treated as tokens as a general rule, and this can also be seen in the ways female artists have been promoted. Promoters in charge of artists’ careers sometimes used token female musicians to display the dominance of one label by another. Dickerson (1998: 127) reports that, in the 1970s, payola (bribery) in the recording industry

affected women in music because it involved record companies paying off radio programmers to play certain records. Invariably, those chosen records were by male artists, unless on rare occasion the record companies... decided they wanted ‘their bitch’ to do battle with a competitor’s ‘bitch.’

In this example, promoters are placing bets on female performers in order to establish gendered relationships between each other, using their ‘bitches’ as tools for displays a

status hierarchy between men, much like players interact in the ‘status bloodbaths’ of Balinese cockfighting (Geertz 1973: 436). This example shows how individuals placed in charge of the careers of female musicians, who are paid by these female musicians out of record contract advances and revenues, use these opportunities to serve their masculinity and their egos rather than to serve the careers of the women for whom they work. By framing promotion in a way that symbolically pits token women against each other as contestants in the sport of symbolic dominance of men by other men, this practice divides women who, like Paula Cole and Sarah McLachlan, might themselves wish to collaborate with each other.

### **Research Design, Methods, and Data**

#### *Research Questions*

The degree to which such extreme examples frame promotional experiences of female artists as a group is largely unknown, though these examples are all suggestive of a continuing pattern of discrimination against female artists by record label promotional personnel. There is little direct evidence on whether or not promoters favor men as a group, as most information on the behavior of label personnel is relayed through the artists interacting with them. This project looks at promotional decisions directly, by examining allocation of promotional funds to male and female artists by label personnel. Furthermore, understanding discrimination when it is as widespread as it arguably is in this case – where female artists experience discriminatory treatment from multiple individuals in various roles throughout the lifespan of their professional careers – introduces the difficult task of identifying specifically from where that discrimination comes. This paper addresses exactly that issue by isolating a particular employment decision

and assessing gender differences in that particular employment decision. Specifically, given the history cited above, I expect that:

1. record label promoters will favor men over women on average.

However, I also expect that artists will be heavily sexualized in ways that differ significantly by gender. Artists are often sexualized as one part of a successful marketing strategy, to a presumptively heterosexual audience. Men are marketed to women as “imaginary boyfriends” and women to men as potential sex objects (Dickerson 1998; 2005). Sexual scripts embedded in these strategies are made explicitly heterosexual through gendered sexuality: women are expected to be mesmerized by the sexual power of male artists, perhaps even fainting under power of the artist’s sexual gaze, while men are drawn toward the alluring vortex of female sexuality that compels them into sexual activity. Beyond these qualitative differences in sexualization, sex appeal is seen as an optional promotional boost for men, whereas women are more or less required to emphasize a sexualized persona to be successful. Gaar (2002: 296- 317) discusses this trend in the context of women’s music festivals where non-sexualized artists like Tracy Chapman and The Indigo Girls first achieved popular recognition after being ignored by major labels. Thus, I also expect that:

2. emphasis of a sexualized image will be most important for women than men,  
and
3. sexualized women will be promoted more than women who do not emphasize sexuality as a part of their artistic persona.

In the analysis below I focus on how these relationships differ by genre, race, the kind of artistic entity (band or soloist), and whether or not the artist has been previously successful on the popular music charts.



### *Dependent Variable – Payola Promotional Payments*

The dependent variable is a manually-coded indicator that measures whether or not an artist received payola promotional payments, specifically, it indicates whether or not a particular song appeared in the exhibits to the payola settlements. Payola is a valid indicator of those records that are overproduced or heavily promoted. Payola itself is promotional support. It is a measure of how much “faith” the record label has in the success of a particular artist. Under the payola system, record companies can be expected to pay up to the increase in profits expected from playing the record (Coase 1979: 308). The fact that a record company will pay large amounts of money to induce airplay is concrete evidence that the company expects large revenues from that particular album. But as mentioned previously, payola is a strategy used to influence which artists radio stations choose to play from the pool or recorded artists receiving at least *some* promotional support. Thus, payola can also be used as an indicator of the degree of promotional support artists receive from other sources.

### *Independent Variables*

The independent variables in this analysis are both gender and sexuality. Gender was manually coded as male, female or mixed by visiting the AMG artist page and making a visual attribution of gender based on the artist pictures provided. This visual attribution was clarified or reinforced by reading the artist biography and noting the masculinity of femininity of the artist’s name. It is important to note that “gender” in this case represents an attribution of gender that may or may not fit artists’ anatomical body parts or personally-held gender identities (Kessler and McKenna). I am using my own attribution of gender as a proxy for the attributions of gender that record label promoters may make about the same individuals. In the overwhelming majority of cases gender attribution was unambiguous, however, some artist pages did not have

enough information to make a reliable attribution. Many artist pages, for example, consisted of the group name, album cover, sometimes with a link to purchase the album, along with AMG ID tag and no other identifying information. These artists were coded as missing.

The sexy variable was coded using a set of moods assigned to each artist by professional coders at All Music Guide, [www.allmusic.com](http://www.allmusic.com). Artists described as “sexy” or “sexual” were assigned a value of 1 on the “sexy” indicator, while artists with moods listings that did not include one of these two terms were assigned a value of zero. Artists without any moods were coded as missing. The AMG writers making these labeling decisions are “knowledgeable experts in music, movies and games today, with broad and lengthy experience in the entertainment media industry [that] strive to provide editorial content that is balanced and informed.” (see [http://allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll?p=amg&sql=32:amg/info\\_pages/a\\_faq\\_content.html](http://allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll?p=amg&sql=32:amg/info_pages/a_faq_content.html)). These writers decide which adjectives describe which artists, however, the exact process by which their expertise bears upon their descriptive choices is unknown. Because of this, great care must be taken when interpreting the meaning of results using this variable. While it does show patterns in treatment of artists that industry experts label as sexy, it does not necessarily follow that the label describes the same things for different artists. For example, a pattern that shows sexy female artists are treated differently than sexy male artists may mean that artists the reader understands to be sexy are treated differently by gender, or it may mean that “sexy” means something different for male and female artists based on how AMG coders assigned these labels, or – more likely – it may mean a combination of these two. This data is limited in that it cannot tease out these important differences, thus the coding of sexuality must be substantively discussed beyond the operationalization discussed here in this methodological appendix.

### *Control Variables*

*Genres* of music tend to be more or less gendered as well: both rap (Dowd forthcoming: 252; Emerson 2002: 116) and heavy metal (Walser 1993) are known for being less hospitable to women, while many successful country artists have been female (Dickerson 2005: 128). Gender stereotypes are a defining feature of some musical genres. In fact, Walser (1993: 109-110) points out that the *purpose* of the heavy metal rock music was to reproduce hegemonic masculinity: until the mid-1980s the cohesion of heavy metal as a genre “depended upon the desire of young white male fans to hear and believe in certain stories about the nature of masculinity.” The romantic myth of the ‘insane’ artist is a powerful cultural representation and foundational component of artistic talent in “rock” music.

Other genres have been more hospitable to women. The more democratic organization of these alternative labels has facilitated active debates on issues of gender at a time when issues of gender were still not taken seriously by the majors. At Rough Trade, for instance, musicians and non-musical staff openly debated the propriety of Sonic Youth’s 1985 “Flower” 12-inch single on the grounds of gender. This single featured the poem “Support the power of women, Use the Power of Men, Use the word fuck, The word is love,” which some individuals at Rough Trade found offensive on the basis of gender (Hesmondhalgh 1997: 269). Employees also debated whether or not to associate with the Steve Albini band “Rapeman.” Rapeman’s album, called “Two Nuns and a Pack Mule” (a description of one of Albini’s pornographic magazines), was controversial because some believed it condoned male violence against women while others claimed the shock value of Albini’s in-your-face politics had the opposite intention and effect. In both of these instances, gendered messages were taken seriously and all viewpoints were heard and debated rather than simply accepted as a part of rock and roll.

*Race* was added to the models as a control because the relationships between gender, sexuality, and promotion are expected to vary by race. Along with gender, race is a primary axis of power in contemporary society. It is also of special relevance in music because of the close association genres categories have had with race (Collins 2000; Frith 1981, 2000; hooks 1992). The association of an artist's race, gender, and sexuality with promotion will be different in a genre where white artists are the minority than genres where black artists are the minority, for example, and it will be different for white and nonwhite artists because of the patterns of power dynamics by race that exist in all areas of social life.

Categories of race included standard categories used in the updated racial designations as used in the General Social Survey that were later analytically reduced to the categories white, nonwhite, and mixed. Race was coded in the same manner as gender: initial attribution of race was made based on skin color and other physical attributes, while clothing, proper names, and other biographical information. When AMG pages did not offer pictures, sometimes artist webpages or myspace pages provided the necessary visual cues. However, attributions of race presented additional coding issues not present with gender. While gender is based on anatomical differences that are usually not readily apparent, persons are required to unambiguously signal their membership in one or another category before social interaction can commence to such a degree that gender attributions have a great degree of reliability. In other words, I can trust that my own attribution of gender will be similar to others' without a need to empirically test this assumption. This situation applies to race in some cases, as I can comfortably proceed on the assumption that most people would label Madonna as "White", but social interaction does not break down when the race of one of the participants is ambiguous to the same degree as it does with gender. Because more variation of socially constructed racial categories is *interactionally*

permitted in this way, the boundary lines upon which attributions are made are not as clear. Thus, coding errors are a potential problem with race as I cannot be sure that my labeling of a particular artist as “Hispanic” will not be differently coded as “White,” “Black” or “Asian Pacific Islander” by someone else, for example. To test the coding of race, intercoder reliability tests will be conducted to estimate the degree of coder variability.

*Group type* was included as part of the control because of the multiple sources that stress how the role of the solo vocalist backed by male instrumentalists or solo singer with acoustic guitar and session backups is the most common and accepted roles for women, while all female electric guitar players or all-girl bands experience are often not taken seriously. Group type was coded via a similar process as race and gender. Single artists were coded as soloists and entities with two or more members were coded as a band. When artist were female or included female members, the roles women filled are noted for explanatory purposes (e.g., female keyboardist, female vocalist).

*Track record* was included in the analysis because the literature states that having a previous hit makes an artist a more likely candidate for aggressive promotion by their label, both because previous success shows that an artist is capable of producing a hit single, and because record label strategies include a fair amount of repetition. The variable was coded as the number of hit songs on the Billboard Top 100 charts the five years prior to the song in question. For songs in the dataset first played in 2003, this variable would measure the number of hits the artist had in the years 1998-2002. This variable . all non-positive values coded at zero. Default value was zero.

*Analytic Strategy*

The statistic most appropriate to the determination of whether men or women are more likely to receive promotional support is logistic regression, as the “payola” dependent variable in all models is a dichotomous one. Results are reported as the predicted probability of an artist receiving promotional support given conditions specified by the variables included in the model. I test whether gender impacts the probability of receiving promotional support, and whether the relationship between gender and the probability of receiving promotional support differs for artists that are or are not sexualized. These relationships are discussed while controlling for the impact of race (white or nonwhite), group type (band or solo artist), and track record (number of charting hits for each artist in the 5 years prior to observation).

## **Results**

Analysis on the entire sample (not shown) supports that proposition that females are more likely than males to receive payola promotional support. Overall, being female is associated with a 53% increase in the odds of being promoted relative to men. Women that are also described as sexy have the greatest likelihood of receiving promotional support by gender and sexuality. Being female and described as sexy is associated with an increase in the odds of being promoted relative to non-sexy men of 2.96 times. But male “sexy” artists also receive a promotional boost: the odds of being promoted for male artists described as sexy are 80% greater than the odds of being promoted for male artist that are not described as sexy. Thus, sexualization is an important dimension for both male and female artists but seems to have more of an effect on female artists. Being in a band and having a previous hit are both associated with an increase in the odds of being promoted, but addition of controls to the overall model does not change the relationships between gender, sexualization, and the odds of being promoted.

I expected these odds would change significantly when differences by genre were taken into account, so the remainder of this analysis looks at these relationships separately for the 10 formats in the sample. Table 1 reports the predicted probability of receiving promotional support estimated from the logistic regression of whether or not an artist received payola promotional payments on gender and on sexualization for each format.

**Table 1. Probability of Receiving Payola Promotional Support per Format by Gender, For Artists Receiving Radio Airplay 6/02 - 10/04**

Format	Gender and Sexuality			
	Male	Female	Not Sexy	Sexy
Top 40 (Contemporary Hits) n=2683	2.76%	3.36%	2.77%	3.39%
Adult Contemporary n=1850	1.91%	1.69%	<b>1.59%</b>	<b>3.88%**</b>
Active Rock n=5137	<b>0.98%</b>	<b>4.58%***</b>	<b>0.97%</b>	<b>3.66%***</b>
Alternative n=7577	<b>0.90%</b>	<b>2.69%***</b>	<b>0.86%</b>	<b>4.46%***</b>
Hot Adult Contemporary n=2638	2.83%	3.30%	<b>2.63%</b>	<b>5.11%**</b>
Mainstream Rock n=4959	<b>0.92%</b>	<b>3.07%**</b>	<b>0.93%</b>	<b>2.24%*</b>
Rhythmic n=3982	1.53%	2.16%	1.68%	1.61%
AAA (College Radio) n=7014	0.69%	0.23%	0.58%	1.07%
Urban n=3860	0.64%	1.09%	0.64%	1.01%
Urban Adult Contemporary n=2358	1.13%	1.36%	0.95%	1.69%

Reference category = “male” and “not sexy” Significant effects are flagged in bold.

\* p = <.10 \*\* p = <.05 \*\*\* p = <.01

Looking across the rows for each format in the left-hand panel, it is apparent that the association of gender with the probability of receiving payola promotional support does indeed vary widely by genre. In most genres, being female is associated with an increased likelihood of receiving payola payments as it was in the larger sample. For many, the difference is only a ½ of one percent boost for women in the predicted probability of receiving support. But in Active Rock, Alternative, and Mainstream Rock the magnitude of gender differences is striking: women were much likely to be promoted than men. In active rock, for example, being female is associated with an increase on the odds of receiving promotional support of 4.84 times relative to men, an increase of 3.6 percentage points on Table 1 in the predicted probability of receiving promotional support. The results for Alternative and Mainstream Rock are similar to Active Rock. However, in Adult Contemporary and AAA (College Radio), being female was actually associated with a decreased probability of receiving promotional support. In Adult Contemporary, the odds of receiving promotional support are 11% less for women than for men, and in AAA the odds of receiving promotional support are 67% less for women than for men. Thus, it seems that the slight promotional preference for women does not extend to all formats overall. But nonetheless, these numbers show that record label promoters are not excluding or disfavoring women as a group.

Looking at the right-hand panel of Table 1, sexualized artists in this sample had a greater probability of being promoted than artists that were not described as sexy in all formats except for Rhythmic. However, there are likely significant differences between men and women on the association between sexualization and the likelihood of promotion. To explore the interaction between gender and sexuality, Table 2 reports the predicted probability of receiving promotional



support estimated from the logistic regression of whether or not an artist received payola promotional payments on the interaction between gender and sexuality for each format.

**Table 2. Probability of Receiving Payola Promotional Support by Gender, Sexualization, and Format, For Artists Receiving Radio Airplay 6/02 - 10/04**

Format	Gender and Sexuality			
	Male, Not sexy	Male, Sexy	Female, Not sexy	Female, Sexy
Top 40 (Contemporary Hits) n=2683	2.67%	3.36%	3.31%	3.42%
Adult Contemporary n=1850	1.79%	3.85%	1.08%	3.90%
Active Rock n=5137	0.93%	<b>2.65%*</b>	<b>3.30**</b>	<b>7.50***</b>
Alternative n=7577	0.81%	<b>3.33***</b>	<b>1.54*</b>	<b>6.38***</b>
Hot Adult Contemporary n=2638	2.65%	<b>4.71*</b>	2.53%	<b>5.52*</b>
Mainstream Rock n=4959	0.89%	1.69%	<b>2.54%*</b>	<b>4.44%***</b>
Rhythmic n=3982	1.57%	1.37%	2.37%	1.95%
AAA (College Radio) n=7014	0.68%	1.07%	<b>0.16%**</b>	1.08%
Urban n=3860	0.62%	0.73%	0.71%	<b>1.48%*</b>
Urban Adult Contemporary n=2358	1.11%	1.17%	0.60%	2.56%

Reference category = “male, not sexy.” Significant effects are flagged in bold.

^ Italics suggest cautionary interpretation due to significant effects by race.

\* p = <.10 \*\* p = <.05 \*\*\* p = <.01

The overall pattern in Table 2 suggests an additive association between gender, sexualization, and the probability of receiving payola promotional payments. Female artists and sexy artists have a greater likelihood of receiving promotional support that counts more for

female, sexy artists. This pattern is seen in Top 40, Active Rock, Alternative, and, to some extent, Urban, though it is clearest in Active Rock and Alternative. In Active Rock, for example, the odds of receiving promotional support are 2.89 times greater for sexy male artists compared to non sexy male artists and 3.63 times greater for non sexy females compared to non sexy males. Yet female artists that are also described as sexy have a 7.50% probability of receiving promotional support, the largest probability in the chart.

The patterns by genre fall into three general categories. First, the magnitude of the results in Active Rock and Alternative in both Tables 1 and 2 is a curious and interesting pairing. Active Rock has been one of the genres most unfavorable to women, as Walser (1993) and others have written, while Alternative music has been one of the genres most favorable to women, especially women who play instruments beyond the acoustic guitar (Clawson 1999b). Yet in these data, women and sexy women have a clear promotional “bump” in both cases. Second, in addition to the pattern exemplified by Active Rock and Alternative, Adult Contemporary and Hot Adult Contemporary exhibit patterns that suggest the real effect is for sexy artists, male or female. In both categories non sexy females are slightly less likely to be promoted than non sexy males, yet men and women both are more likely to be promoted if they emphasize a sexualized persona. Lastly, only AAA and Urban fit my expectations for the general effects of gender and sexuality: that is, that an emphasis on sexuality would be required for women to be successful at all relative to men. These are the kind of numbers you would expect if that theory were true in an aggregate sense. Both Urban and AAA underpromoted women. In AAA, non-sexualized women have a chance of receiving payola promotional payments that is less than 1/5 of one percent, yet sexualized women were the most promoted category. The pattern is the same in Urban.

Some interesting patterns were discovered regarding the controls. In Top 40 and Adult Contemporary, the results resembled those of Active Rock and Alternative when only nonwhites were considered. In those formats, the promotional preference for females and sexy female artists was only significant for nonwhites. White women – sexy or not – are promoted no more than men. In Alternative, nonwhite sexy female artists had a 12% chance of being promoted, a huge percentage compared to the 1-3% average for most formats in chart. It also begs for an explanation. Regarding group type, it is difficult to make predictions using the models because there are so few female bands that useful predictions can't be had. However, it is noteworthy that female bands generally weren't promoted, even the few female bands that made it onto station playlists. Only Alternative and Top 40 had enough cases to run predictions on all categories. Alternative seems to comport with an overall preference for females, but the numbers show that this preference is really a preference for sexy artists as soloists over bands. In top 40, there are no preferences by group type. Regarding Track Record, the variable was significant in some genres, although generally all artists benefited from track record in the same manner.

In Top 40, Hot Adult Contemporary, Rhythmic, Urban, and Urban Adult Contemporary having a previous hit had no impact on the likelihood of being promoted. In Adult Contemporary and Alternative having a previous hit had a slight positive effect on the likelihood of promotion that was shared by all categories. Interesting results are found in Active and Mainstream Rock. In Active Rock, having previous hits benefits everyone in the sample except for sexy females. For them, having a previous hit does not impact the likelihood of promotion. In Mainstream Rock, results were similar to active rock, but more pronounced. Here, having a previous hit benefited only male artists, especially if they were sexy. For sexy female artists,

having a previous hit actually worked slightly to their detriment rather than in their favor or not at all. While it may seem from these figures that female artists are not being given “credit” for their previous successes in the manner that men are, it is noteworthy that sexy females often had a much higher average number of past hits. It could be that the relationship of previous hits to likelihood of promotion is a curvilinear one that plateaus near the average hits for sexy female artists, who tend to have the highest number of previous hits.

## **Discussion**

This study provides clear data that show record label promoters are not excluding or disfavoring women as a group. This statement has some important caveats and limitations, however. Payola is a particular kind of promotional support which may vary by any of the analytical categories in this analysis to a greater or lesser degree. I expect, for example, that more variation in the degree of promotional support will exist by genre when payola is used as the measure of promotional support rather than when promotional support is measured by whether or not the company released a promotional video for the single at issue. While country artists make less videos than Top 40 artists in an aggregate sense, they are more likely to have a promotional video made – comparatively speaking relative to Top 40 artists – than they are to receive payola.

Second, this project focuses on particular players in an artists’ career, but there are many important milestones in an artists’ career before the actions of record company promoters and radio station programmers become relevant. As suggested collectively by Hirsch (1972), Bennett (1980), and Clawson (1999a), an artist must more or less progress through the following stages: 1) desire to be a popular musician, 2) act on that desire, 3) acquire an instrument, 4) learn

how to play, 5) get together with fellow musicians, 6) get involved in the local music scene, 7) get gigs, 8) build a local audience, 9) attract major label record label scouts, 10) get a record contract, and 11) release an album. It is only after this point an artist then needs to do the following before she can get a hit on the charts: 12) get production and distribution sufficient to build a national audience, 13) receive adequate tour promotion, 14) get radio airplay, 15) get good critical reviews, and of course, 16) get lucky. The situations that artists encounter and choices that artists make along these first 11 steps can explain why there are so few female popular music stars, and, indeed, could entirely explain the gender disparity seen at these later career stages. Because I have found that women are not disfavored as a group, this may indeed be the case. For instance, a large amount of the disparity could be explained by the large gender disparity between the pool of adolescent potential musicians and those who actually engage in popular music-making. This project focuses on the pool of musicians that have somehow weaved their way through these first eleven steps, a group already heavily skewed in favor of male musicians, to ask whether this group loses proportionately more male or female artists in subsequent career stages. These data suggest this group loses proportionately more male artists. This is important because these data examine the group of people most closely analogous to the “bosses” of these popular music stars.

These data suggest a mixed bag of hope and frustration for scholars interested in inequality. That record label promoters favor female artists means that more female stars will appear on the charts. This is especially important in music where semiotic constructions of identity can have huge collective force for progressive change. But it must be remembered that artists are products as well as workers. Advantage in terms of a preference for female products does not readily translate into advantage for female *workers*, but simply gives them more roles to

fill. Some sense of the legitimacy, aura and power of the rock star may transfer to female artists appearing on the charts, but the unequal power dynamics of labels and their artists suggests that female artists and other artists in subordinated social positions would feel the brunt of gendered and sexualized power dynamics on the job.

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