

Girl Guitars:  
Negotiating Gender through Instrument Design, Mediation, and Use

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by

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## Abstract

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Musical instruments have a long history of being 'gendered' (for example, flutes have traditionally been considered 'feminine' while tubas have been 'masculine'). Since its surge in popularity in the 1960s the electric guitar has, likewise, been viewed as a 'masculine' technology. For the past ten years, guitar manufacturers have tried to encourage females to play the guitar by manufacturing 'girl guitars,' acoustic and electric models designed specifically for and marketed to females. My thesis examines ways in which gender is both negotiated and reinforced through the designs of the guitars and the images used in girl guitar advertisements. It also considers whether or not girl guitars have given women further access to the creation of rock music. By looking at the designs, marketing schemes, and uses of girl guitars, the study evaluates the extent to which masculine ideologies surrounding the electric guitar have altered due to the creation of girl guitars.

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## Introduction

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As a musical instrument, a technology, and a commodity, the guitar has long been infused with social codes. According to Steve Waksman, the instrument is “ideal for representing the culture that embrace[s] it.”<sup>1</sup> Throughout his book, Waksman is concerned with the “ways in which the electric guitar has been integrated into a diverse set of existing musical contexts, and the ways in which the electric guitar has reshaped those contexts, and has created new fields of knowledge within the history of popular music.”<sup>2</sup> While the “existing musical contexts” of the guitar have been diverse, they have also been highly gendered. For the past one hundred years, guitar players, manufacturers, designers, retailers, and teachers have been almost entirely male. To be a part of the existing musical contexts of the guitar meant either being male or, for females, learning to navigate the system as a minority and an outsider.

In the past ten years the guitar has been, once again, placed into a new context. A handful of guitar manufacturers are now creating guitars designed for (and sometimes by) females. The creation of ‘girl guitars’ began in the mid-1990s and continues today. While Daisy Rock Guitars is the only manufacturer who calls itself “The Girl Guitar Company,” leading guitar makers Gibson and Fender have also contributed to the production of girl guitars by integrating product lines and marketing plans into their companies. Luna Guitars has taken a different approach to the creation of girl guitars. Although they use similar design specifications as companies which design and market

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1. Waksman, *Instruments of Desire*, 3.

2. *Ibid.*, 10.

specifically to females, Luna chooses to pursue a more 'inclusionary' approach. Their guitars are designed for females, but they are not marketed specifically to females. So even though they are not, by definition, a girl guitar company, Luna Guitars warrant consideration in the scope of my thesis.

The manufacturing and marketing of girl guitars has been a highly contested topic since the inception of Daisy Rock Guitars in 2000. This has never been more apparent than at the 2002 Summer National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) Trade Show. While visiting the Fender booth, Daisy Rock founder Tish Ciravolo was confronted by a Fender executive and it quickly became a yelling match. The Fender executive was offended by Daisy Rock's claim that guitar manufacturers do not design for the needs and desires of female guitarists. Ciravolo defended her belief that guitar manufacturers had overlooked females as a market. The debate got extremely heated and Ciravolo was eventually escorted out.<sup>3</sup>

The sometimes heated debate surrounding girl guitars is a clear sign that they are a site in which gender is contested. As demonstrated by this incident, the creation of girl guitars represents a shift in the gender boundaries within popular music which have been present for almost one hundred years. Girl guitars also reflect and represent social codes, sometimes enforcing and, at other times, rejecting societal norms. By studying the design aspects, media representations, and uses of the instruments, I argue that some constructions of gender have been dismantled through the creation of girl guitars. But there are also gender stereotypes and ideologies that are strongly reinforced

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3. Watson, "Tish Ciravolo Interview."

through their creation. Comparing and contrasting the manufacturers' target audiences, instrument designs, and media representations can shed light on the ways in which gender is still a problematic category that is upheld while also being questioned by the separation of 'girl' guitars and 'regular' guitars.

I began my thesis by looking at the Web sites for each of the companies that manufacture girl guitars. As I will discuss in the "Mediation" and "Use" sections of my thesis, the Internet plays a vital and irreplaceable role in the dissemination of information about girl guitars. Especially in the case of Daisy Rock Guitars, their Web site is used as a marketing tool, a sales portal, a community building forum, and a warehouse of all information associated with the company. Where in the past a company may have kept a book of press clippings, the Daisy Rock Web site has links to almost every review, product release, print advertisement, giveaway, and celebrity endorsement the company has had since its inception. It also has links to hundreds of Daisy Rock affiliated artists' Web sites, pictures of Daisy Rock guitar owners, and videos of Daisy Rock players using their guitars. Because each of the manufacturers' Web sites is used for so many different purposes, the information mined from the pages is present in each section of my paper.

YouTube was also a powerful resource as it allowed me to observe many performances of guitar players who use girl guitars. Even though I was unable to attend any concerts where girl guitars were used, I was able to view many live performances, music videos and homemade productions of various artists with varying levels of skill

and popularity. The ability to watch these videos allowed me to consider musical genre and the physical performance of the artists as aspects of how girl guitars are used.

Paul Théberge, in *Any Sound You Can Imagine*, provides a general framework for analyzing material products of musical culture.<sup>4</sup> In order to grasp relationships and illuminate shifts in musical practice, he could not study industries, uses, technologies, or techniques as individual entities to the exclusion of the other areas. By studying all of the pieces as a whole, as is commonly done in the field of cultural studies, he could draw connections that he could not have made without including all of the parts.

Théberge's book is separated into three distinct "schemes of analysis and presentation": design/production, mediation, and consumption/use.<sup>5</sup> These schemes are derived from Dick Hebdige's extended essay "Object as Image: The Italian Scooter Cycle."<sup>6</sup> In "Object as Image," Hebdige looks at the motor scooter and its relationship to consumerism in the post-war period. He considers the motor scooter "not as a singular object but several objects existing at distinct 'moments'."<sup>7</sup> Each of these "moments" (design/production, mediation, and consumption/use) is both independent from other moments and also related to other moments. This approach is extremely useful in avoiding a deterministic argument which claims that a technology's meaning is set and is the same throughout history. At the same time, the structure of Hebdige's argument allows for a "network of relationships."<sup>8</sup> By viewing the interrelatedness of the

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4. Théberge, *Any Sound You Can Imagine*, 8.

5. *Ibid.*, 9.

6. Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light*, 9.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, 10.

relationships, theories on the macro-level can potentially be constructed out of the “moments.”

Following on the heels of Hebdige and Théberge, my thesis will also be organized by the “moments” of design, mediation, and use. Additionally, I will also draw upon social constructivism for further defining my approach. In *The Social Construction of Technological Systems*, Bijker, Hughes, and Pinch outline a model for discussing technological artifacts.<sup>9</sup> They focus their study on the artifact of the bicycle in the 1880s and, in doing so, they discuss the type of narrative that they wish to avoid. First, they adapt a “multi-directional model” instead of the linear approach taken by most accounts.<sup>10</sup> Instead of adopting a model where the bicycle comes into existence in a certain year, they recount the multiple changes and failures that took place during its creation. There is no notion of ‘progress’ or inevitability of design as there is in most narratives. Another difference in the social constructivist approach is that failed models are viewed as crucial and telling moments within the narrative.<sup>11</sup> Non-users’ views of the bicycle are also taken into consideration in recounting the narrative.<sup>12</sup> Overall, Bijker, Hughes, and Pinch are able to construct a narrative surrounding the bicycle that locates it historically and socially, but creates a much more fragmented, conflicted and, in my view, more accurate view of the bicycle.

Social constructivism is not, however, without limitations. In *The Network Society*, Darin Barney outlines some of the main sites of contestation over the

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9. Bijker, Hughes, and Pinch, *Social Construction of Technological Systems*.

10. *Ibid.*, 28.

11. *Ibid.*, 22.

12. *Ibid.*, 32.

methodologies inherent in social constructivism.<sup>13</sup> First, some consider constructivism to view technologies well at the micro level but, because of its relativistic and localized situation, the positions viewed at the micro level have no way to apply to the macro level.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, positions examined within a specific time and place may not easily be transported into other situations.<sup>15</sup> Lastly, Barney argues that constructivism does not allow for ways in which to compare and contrast attributes from separate societies.<sup>16</sup>

Even with these issues in mind, I believe social constructivism will be a valuable tool as I construct a narrative about girl guitars. The methodologies inherent in the work of Bijker, Hughes, and Pinch call for a deeper analysis of technological artifacts. As

Barney says:

Thus, a viable critical theory of technology must affirm what constructivism has taught us: that crude technological determinism is untenable; that technological encounters are deeply political; that the possibility of contestation, contingency and heterogeneity is always present in technological encounters; and that we must pay strict attention to local differences in technological outcomes.<sup>17</sup>

In order to construct a more accurate representation and conceptualization of girl guitars, I feel I must keep social constructivism close at hand.

Barney continues by defining four areas in which to analyze a technology: the “essence or spirit of technology, technical design, situation, and use.”<sup>18</sup> For Barney, “situation” is defined as the “social, political and economic aspects of the *contexts* in

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13. Darin Barney, *Network Society*.

14. *Ibid.*, 42.

15. *Ibid.*, 43.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*

which technologies and their use are situated.”<sup>19</sup> Although Hebdige does not create a separate category for “situation,” it seems to be inherent and interspersed within his work. He tells the narrative of the motor scooter within a framework of post-war consumerism and, thus, includes “context” as defined by Barney. While I do not plan on separating “situation” from Hebdige’s categories of “design/production,” “mediation,” and “consumption/use,” I wish to stress that “situation” is self-evident and pivotal within all of these areas.

The first chapter of my thesis, “The History of Females, Guitars, and Genre” provides an overview of situations leading up to the 1990s when girl guitars were first conceptualized. Chapter 1 discusses theories of why females have been largely absent as guitar players for the past one hundred years. The increased size of guitars, the regulation of female participation in particular genres, and the relative absence of female guitarists in rock music all, most likely, impacted the use of guitars by females.

Chapter 2, “The Changing Times,” continues the work of situating the creation of girl guitars in a social context. The creation of girl guitars was, no doubt, impacted by many aspects of the social, political, and economic climate of the United States in the 1990s. But the visibility of female musicians, especially of female guitarists, and the changing approaches of marketing to female consumers were crucial in forming a foundation for the creation of girl guitars. I theorize that, without such social changes, girl guitars would never have come into existence.

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19. *Ibid.*, 54.

In chapter 3, "Design," I outline the designs of each of the four major girl guitar manufacturers. As each company's designs are impacted by the structure of the business, I also relay some of the most pertinent facts about the histories and goals of the manufacturers. By comparing and contrasting the approaches of Daisy Rock, Luna, Gibson, and Fender, I am able to identify ways in which gender is both contested and solidified by the design choices of each manufacturer.

The marketing and advertising approaches of Daisy Rock and Gibson are the subject of chapter 4, "Mediation." By narrowly focusing the scope of the mediation of girl guitars to print advertisements that appeared in music industry magazines, it becomes clear that girl guitar manufacturers are in a constant struggle to overcome 'masculine' identities and images normally associated with the electric guitar. Although Daisy Rock and Gibson claim to have every intention of 'liberating' female guitarists, their advertisements tend to reinforce gender ideologies.

In the final section of my thesis, "Use," I discuss the changing nature of the transmission of guitar techniques and skills. I also evaluate the range and abilities of guitarists sponsored by girl guitar manufacturers. Although I find that the artists represent a wide range of genres and ages, some genres and skill levels are more highly promoted than others. I also identify patterns in the sounds produced, mainly the use of a 'clean' sound that lacks distortion or reverberation. These shared characteristics help define areas in which female guitar use has, so far, failed to overcome past ideologies.

By identifying common themes that emerge throughout the design, mediation, and use of girl guitars, it is obvious that the guitar is still highly gendered as 'masculine'.

It is my hope that the recognition of the continued reinforcement of gender ideologies in each 'moment' of girl guitars allows girl guitar manufacturers to reevaluate their choices. I also suggest that, while increasing the number of females who play the guitar is the first step toward unraveling masculine ideologies, the sounds produced by female guitarists and the ways in which they portray themselves physically also participate in dismantling ideologies. More action is still needed to make female guitarists as prominent and socially acceptable as their male counterparts.

## Chapter 1 – The History of Females, Guitars, and Genre

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### The Guitar as a Parlor Instrument

In *The Art and Times of the Guitar: An Illustrated History of Guitars and Guitarists*, it is easy to see the long standing relationship between females and the guitar.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the book, females are shown playing the guitar; in fact, a large portion of the images in the book are of females. Most of the images show them indoors actively strumming the guitar and sometimes singing. A few of the images are of females outdoors leading small ensembles of musicians. According to the author, female guitarists were abundant in France, Italy, and the Netherlands during the seventeenth century. After a slight waning period in the eighteenth century, the guitar once again became a popular 'parlor instrument' across Europe in the nineteenth century. Throughout the 1800s, the guitar migrated into the parlors of North America where it was thoroughly used and enjoyed by female, as well as male, players. As the book progresses through time, women are noticeably present and almost always central figures in the images.

The presence of female guitar players throughout the first nine chapters of the book makes their absence in the last chapter, which discusses images of the guitar created after 1915, even more pronounced. In the tenth chapter, there is not a single image of a female playing, or even holding, a guitar. The entire chapter is full of male guitarists such as Bob Dylan, Elvis Presley, The Beatles, Jimi Hendrix and Woody Guthrie.

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1. Grunfeld, *Art and Times*.

While it is understandably difficult to include all guitarists after 1915 within a single chapter, the complete exclusion of female guitarists is obvious and poignant.

Although female guitarists are present in many images with the guitar before 1915, it is difficult to find more information about the history of females and the guitar. There have been many books published recently documenting the history of the guitar, but most only feature a few sentences about female guitar use. For example, David Evans discusses guitar use in the Deep South region of the United States during the late 1800s and early 1900s and mentions that many bluesmen “had mothers and sisters who played the guitar and had some influence on their early musical development in a family setting.”<sup>2</sup> He comments that the repertoire of guitar music during the period included “sentimental” songs that “especially appealed to women” and highlights the sentimental recordings of Lulu Jackson in the 1920s.<sup>3</sup> But that is the extent of his focus on female guitar use during the time period and location.

Likewise, in his account of electric guitars, André Millard states that women have always been a part of the history of guitars “as exemplars of the genteel and civilizing aspect of music for the middle class.”<sup>4</sup> He notices that women have often been used in guitar advertisements, but Millard goes no further in examining or documenting female guitar use. This scattered description of female guitar use before 1915 throughout multiple guitar histories makes the images within *The Art and Times of the Guitar* even more arresting.

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2. Evans, “Guitar in the Blues,” 20.

3. Ibid.

4. Millard, *Electric Guitar*, 24.

Because there are so few records of female guitarists, even in the nineteenth century when a large portion of guitarists are said to be female, the best evidence of their guitar use (besides their presence in images) comes from the interpretation of guitar manufacturer records. As early as 1852, Martin categorized the size of their guitars by designating each one with a number.<sup>5</sup> An 1854 ledger displays the sizes and models of Martin's offerings at the time. Size  $\frac{1}{4}$  and  $\frac{1}{2}$  were the smallest, followed by sizes 5, 4,  $3\frac{1}{2}$ , 3,  $2\frac{1}{2}$ , 2, 1 and 0 growing progressively larger. Sizes  $2\frac{1}{2}$  and 2 were considered "ladies' models" and, according to the ledger, they were very popular. Johnston, Boak and Longworth state, "The importance and tastes of Martin's female customers can be gauged by the fact that the four highest models are shown in the price list only in size 2."<sup>6</sup> Even though 'full size' 1 and 0 guitars were in production at the time, they were not as common as the smaller guitars billed for female use.

The first Martin ledger to include size 00 guitars is dated August 1, 1873. Today's traditional (and much larger) 000, OM and D sizes did not come into production until 1902 and later.<sup>7</sup> The latest Martin Guitar Catalog demonstrates that the smallest guitar included in Martin's main line is size 0; the days of the size 2 and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  are long gone.<sup>8</sup> Martin's ledgers make it clear that the sizes of their guitars grew larger throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s while trimming the smaller sized guitars out of production. As visually demonstrated in *The Art and Times of the Guitar*, female guitar use most likely diminished during the same time period until few female guitarists remained. It is

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5. Johnston, Boak, and Longworth, *Martin Guitars: A Technical Reference*, 8.

6. Ibid.

7. Vintage Guitars Info, "Vintage Martin Guitars and Ukes," 1995-2009, <http://www.provide.net/~cfh/martin.html#size>.

8. C.F. Martin & Co., Inc., "C.F. Martin & Co., Inc. Guitars," 2009, <http://www.martinguitar.com/>.

not clear whether the larger size prompted fewer females to buy guitars or if a decrease in sales of smaller guitars warranted the change. Either way, Martin ledgers are evidence of a possible correlation between the gender of guitar players and the size of guitars manufactured.

### **Females and Genre**

Throughout the past one hundred years, there have been female guitar players, albeit in small numbers, who play in a wide variety of styles and genres. But it is important to note that females have been more noticeably present in some genres than in others. Fabian Holt considers genre categories in American popular music and the impact of categorization.<sup>9</sup> Because music is a product of social interaction, the way music is grouped and categorized “has implications for how, where and with who people make and experience music.”<sup>10</sup> Creating genres not only separates different types of music, but it also places a piece of music in a group according to similarities. The naming and dividing of genres “enables certain forms of communication, control and specialization into markets, canons, and discourses.”<sup>11</sup> But even with the far-reaching implications of genre, it is difficult to define specific genres. As they are directly related to constantly changing societies, genres tend to change over time and can be understood differently in a variety of locations.

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9. Holt, *Genre in Popular Music*.

10. *Ibid.*, 2.

11. *Ibid.*, 3.

Nevertheless, Holt provisionally lists nine genres (each with at least three sub-genres) to which he believes most current music belongs: blues, jazz, country music, rock, soul/R & B, salsa, heavy metal, dance, and hip-hop. He is quick to point out that these genres are meant only as “tools” and are not definitive by any means.<sup>12</sup> He also explains that he considers ‘pop music’ as having a different social structure than these nine genres because of its focus on mass media and celebrity. Where the nine listed genres have musical cultures, pop music is “less a musical than a social issue.”<sup>13</sup>

The genres which Holt includes are all “identified not only with music, but also with certain cultural values, rituals, practices, territories, traditions, and groups of people.”<sup>14</sup> At the same time, genre can be manipulated and regulated by the corporate music industry in order for artists’ music to sell in a broader market. Many artists have ‘crossover’ hits that are marketed in multiple genres. One of the struggles with genre, admits Holt, is that it is both positive and negative for an artist to fit within more than one genre. Music artists attempt to create an ‘original’ sound, which leads them to disregard genre categorization. At the same time, the popular music industry relies on genre to market similar artists to targeted consumers.<sup>15</sup> But even with the problematic nature of categorization, genre is an important aspect of music that has telling ramifications on females and guitar playing.

Out of the categories considered by Holt, the electric guitar has traditionally been a primary instrument in blues, jazz, country, rock, and heavy metal. While blues,

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12. *Ibid.*, 15.

13. *Ibid.*, 17.

14. *Ibid.*, 19.

15. Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures*, 52.

jazz and country are deeply rooted historically, rock and heavy metal only became generally recognized genres during the past fifty years. There is little information about female jazz guitarists, but there have been visible female guitarists in the blues and country idioms. Blues guitarist Memphis Minnie found considerable popularity in the 1920s and 1930s. Later, in the 1950s, Etta Baker, Beverly Watkins, and Peggy (Lady Bo) Jones also enjoyed success playing the blues guitar. During the same period, Mary Ford (wife of Les Paul) and Maybelle Carter (of the Carter family) were both accepted and extremely visible country guitarists. But female guitar players such as these were not the norm during the period; instead, most women who participated in the music industry tended to be vocalists and were commonly accompanied by men.

Even while the overnight popularity of the electric guitar in the 1960s surged guitar sales to all-time high levels, female guitar use was not commonplace.<sup>16</sup> In fact, electrifying the guitar further coded the guitar as a 'male' technology and "strengthened the male bias of public performance during the twentieth century."<sup>17</sup> Shortly after gaining widespread popularity, the electric guitar eclipsed the acoustic and became the 'standard' version of the guitar. According to Steve Waksman, "The electric guitar is now simply 'the' guitar, it is the normal presence of the guitar in popular music, while unamplified instruments have been displaced as the province of traditionalists or individualists who want to assert their separation from mainstream tastes."<sup>18</sup> But even while the electric guitar was gaining its status as 'the' guitar in the 1960s and 1970s, few

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16. Millard, *Electric Guitar*, 3.

17. Waksman, *Instruments of Desire*, 13.

18. *Ibid.*, 279.

female electric guitar players could be found. In the 1970s, a few female guitar players did produce successful careers in a variety of genres. Bonnie Raitt became one of the most popular blues slide guitarists of all-time, Joni Mitchell led the way as a singer/songwriter who utilized unique guitar tunings, and Emmylou Harris was beginning her career as a country singer and guitar player. But, notably, all three of these popular female guitarists play mainly acoustic instruments. Also, none played rock or heavy metal music.

A handful of female rock electric guitarists did manage to gain popularity in the 1970s and 1980s. Fanny became the first all-female rock band to release a full album on a major record label in 1970 and had two hit rock songs in the following years.<sup>19</sup> A few years after the success of Fanny, the Runaways, featuring Joan Jett and Lita Ford, formed in 1975 and Poison Ivy of The Cramps also made headway in the underground rock scene. Nancy Wilson and her sister, Ann, formed the rock band Heart in 1980 and had a string of hit songs. During the same period, there were no highly successful and visible female heavy metal guitarists. When guitar music magazine *Mojo* released its list of the “100 Greatest Guitarists of All Time” in 1996, only three women made the cut.<sup>20</sup> Women’s absence from rock music and the electric guitar, the genre and instrument of most guitarists on the list, was highly apparent.

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19. Fanny Official Web site, “About Fanny,” <http://fannyrocks.com/about-2/>.

20. Rocklist.net, “Mojo – 100 Greatest Guitarists of All Time,” June 1996, <http://www.rocklistmusic.co.uk/mojo.html>.

## Females and Rock

To recognize why there have been so few female guitarists, first it must be understood why there are so few females in rock music. As I stated before, the electric guitar has been a primary instrument in more than one genre. But it has risen to prominence in rock music to a degree that is unparalleled in other idioms, and the players of the electric guitar have become 'guitar gods' to an extent that has not been replicated in other genres.

Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie were among the first to address this issue.<sup>21</sup> By comparing and contrasting the stipulated genres "cock rock" and "teenybop," they theorize how rock expresses male sexuality and how it wields control. In the article, Frith and McRobbie suggest that rock's blatant performance of male sexuality creates an environment that many girls find "unfamiliar, frightening and distasteful" because of their understanding that sex is "something nice, soft, loving and private."<sup>22</sup> Throughout the article, the electric guitar is discussed as a phallic symbol; the use of the electric guitar then became synonymous with the performance of male sexuality. Although the article is now considered to be problematic because of its essentialist descriptions of cock rock and teenybop and of female desire, it laid a foundation which many have used to discuss the nature of sexuality in rock music.

In her study and analysis of rock band Led Zeppelin in 2001, Susan Fast considers the work of Frith and McRobbie as both beneficial and a hindrance to the discourse surrounding rock music and, particularly, rock bands such as Led Zeppelin. She

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21. Frith and McRobbie, "Rock and Sexuality." Originally published in 1978.

22. *Ibid.*, 374.

acknowledges that while the “traditional view of these music cultures as sometimes overt and crude celebrations of machismo and as perpetuating patriarchal values” is sometimes correct, alternate views which have been disregarded in music scholarship also deserve consideration.<sup>23</sup> She believes it is wrong to consider Led Zeppelin’s music and performances to be exclusively for and about males. From her own personal experiences, Fast considers that Led Zeppelin can be viewed as a source of strength to female participants, a strength which both male and female spectators are able to appropriate. She also emphasizes that Led Zeppelin can be a “source of erotic pleasure for women,” a view that is not commonly theorized and understood within music scholarship.<sup>24</sup> While Fast’s work does not attempt to explain the lack of female musicians in rock music, it allows for alternative interpretations of rock music from the point of view of the (gendered) audience member and fights to include the interpretations of female spectators.

Marion Leonard has also extended the discourse of sexuality in rock music based on the theories of Frith and McRobbie.<sup>25</sup> Leonard points out that the meanings within rock music (and all music) are not fixed, and they can change depending on the viewer or listener.<sup>26</sup> But she also agrees that rock music is considered a masculine expression and attempts to explain why this is so. Leonard concentrates on the production, representation, and reinforcement of rock music aesthetics and ideologies by the music industry and the media. She notes that the rock canon, which is created and enforced by

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23. Fast, *In the Houses of the Holy*, 168.

24. *Ibid.*, 184.

25. Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry*.

26. *Ibid.*, 26.

record companies “in attempts to capitalize on old product,” privileges male performers.<sup>27</sup> This is reinforced by “aesthetic judgments made by musicians and critics” that are decidedly male.<sup>28</sup> Along with this, popular media commonly represents female musicians as outsiders to the rock world. ‘Women in rock’ has become a familiar term, separating female from male performers. Leonard also finds that the media often “present female performers as both notable and a topic for debate.”<sup>29</sup> Women rockers are portrayed by media as a passing fad by, every few months, commenting on the “resurgence of women in rock.”<sup>30</sup>

As a sociologist in the UK, Mavis Bayton conducted extensive interviews with female musicians in varying stages in their careers to help answer the question of why there are so few female musicians in rock music. She began her work in the 1970s, did the majority of the interviews during the 1980s, and then conducted follow-up interviews in 1995 and 1996. Her main focus was on why and how women musicians were excluded from the making of popular music. Especially important to Bayton was the exclusion of women from playing the electric guitar. Bayton’s work offers insights into the gendered nature of the electric guitar as it stood in the mid to late 1990s, the same time period when the first girl guitars were conceptualized.

Bayton states that there is no physical reason for why females do not commonly become lead guitarists. Instead, she describes the constraints facing women who wish

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27. Ibid., 27.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., 34.

30. Ibid., 35.

to become a part of a band by diving them into “material” and “ideological” spheres.<sup>31</sup>

Each constraint is grounded in the comments and experiences of female musicians.

Material constraints reported by Bayton’s interviewees include “lack of money, lack of access to equipment and transport, spatial restrictions – both in terms of ‘public’ and ‘private’ space, lack of time, and the ‘policing’ of female leisure.”<sup>32</sup> The lack of female guitar players also plays a significant part for future generations as there are no ‘role models’ for younger female guitarists. While Bayton argues that all of these play a part in explaining the lack of female guitarists, the constraint she finds most effective is “the hegemonic masculinity of rock music-making” and the associated “hegemonic femininity...which encourages young women to spend a lot of time on their physical presentation of self and the pursuit of the boyfriend.”<sup>33</sup> Even the physical representations of the ‘ideal’ guitar player (such as having short fingernails, having muscles, and being sweaty) go against what she considers the ideologically ‘ideal’ female representation. With ideological constraints leading the way, all of these barriers have combined to keep females from being a part of the rock world and playing the electric guitar.

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31. Ibid., 188.

32. Bayton, *Frock Rock*, 188.

33. Ibid.

## Chapter 2 – The Changing Times

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### What Made Girl Guitars Possible?

With seemingly so few females playing the electric guitar by the late 1980s, it is somewhat surprising that girl guitars came into existence only ten years later; guitar manufacturers would have never created girl guitars without a reason to believe that females would purchase the products. While many social aspects of the 1990s impacted the future of the electric guitar, there are a few I consider fundamental to the production of girl guitars in 1997 and beyond. Throughout the 1990s, female musicians held an increasingly prominent position in popular music. Females in music had more solidarity and visibility than in previous generations which, in turn, gave even more females the courage to pick up instruments and form bands. During the same period, advertising and marketing schemes began to individuate consumers by gender. While this has been done throughout history, products in the 1990s were directed toward female consumers at an unprecedented rate.<sup>34</sup> Both the increased visibility of female musicians and the changing consumer culture were infused with the ideological manifestations of third wave feminism, an approach to feminism distinctly different from the feminism of previous generations. While there are many other causes and effects that led to the creation of girl guitars, they assuredly would not have come about without each of these pieces being in place.

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34. Johnson and Learned, *Don't Think Pink*, 1.

### Prominent Female Musicians

Although there had been a few prominent female rock guitarists before, Riot grrrl created an unprecedented space for female participation. Riot grrrl was loud, often angry, and included a large number of females as musicians and as audience members. Many Riot grrrl bands used their music as a platform to encourage feminist discourse, often offering alternative perspectives of gendered identities. The movement created a community where females could feel safe to experiment and to confront gendered stereotypes such as the 'masculine' nature of the electric guitar.<sup>35</sup> The Riot grrrl movement provided images of female musicians and, most importantly for girl guitars, accounts of females playing electric guitars and participating in rock music bands.<sup>36</sup>

The Riot grrrl 'scene' or 'movement' emerged around 1991 in Olympia, Washington and Washington, D.C. and quickly spread mainly across the United States and throughout the U.K. Started by female-centered bands in the 'underground' indie music scene, Riot grrrl promoted sexual awareness and feminism.<sup>37</sup> Following in the 'do-it-yourself' tradition of the punk scene, Riot grrrl allowed females with little or no musical background to participate in the creation of music. It also had ties to 'queercore,' an underground rock music movement that combined 'queer' and 'hardcore' cultures.

Even though many bands participated in Riot grrrl, it is somewhat difficult to name the groups involved. Bands such as Babes In Toyland and Bikini Kill quickly gained

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35. Nehring, *Popular Music, Gender, and Postmodernism*, 153-63.

36. For more information about Riot grrrl, see Raha, *Cinderella's Big Score*; Roger Sabin, *Punk Rock: So What?*; and Kristen Schilt, "A Little Too Ironic."

37. Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry*, 115-6.

recognition and popularity, but they sometimes avoided the Riot grrrl label to avoid being pigeonholed as a “novelty or specialty item.”<sup>38</sup> Riot grrrl also became a term in which to encompass any and all female rock bands active in the early 1990s including groups like Hole, L7, Liz Phair, Joan Jett, Veruca Salt, and P.J. Harvey.<sup>39</sup> But even with the problematic nature of the Riot grrrl label, many of the bands often identified as Riot grrrl shared certain aesthetics and beliefs.

Visually, Riot grrrl was different from mainstream music in many ways. Extreme interaction with the audience was commonplace; it was not unusual for musicians to stop playing in order to talk to the crowd and interact with hecklers. Often, female audience members were privileged and males were asked to move to the back. The performers also “challenged traditional images of female display” by wearing clothes meant to shock and “confront gender conformity.”<sup>40</sup> Many wrote ‘derogatory’ slogans on their bodies; Bikini Kill would write words such as ‘SLUT’ to label themselves and to question the language used to describe females.

The media was extremely important in the Riot grrrl scene. The use of underground zines not only promoted bands and shows, but also provided commentary on issues facing females. Rape, sexual harassment, gender roles, and sexuality were all discussed openly. Many different and, often, contradicting opinions were voiced. Zines were a source of connection between cities where Riot grrrl was active, creating a Riot grrrl network. The goal of many in the Riot grrrl movement was to promote female

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38. Nehring, *Popular Music, Gender, and Postmodernism*, 160.

39. *Ibid.*, 160-3.

40. Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry*, 121.

empowerment and create a feminist “revolution.”<sup>41</sup> The mainstream press, such as *US Today*, *LA Weekly*, and *Elle* also reported on Riot grrrl, giving publicity to female musicians that were outside the norm of pop music. The presence of Riot grrrl musicians in the 1990s was crucial to creating a space for more females to participate in all levels of the music industry and rock bands in particular.<sup>42</sup>

Not long after the Riot grrrl movement reached its peak, mainstream female musicians also banded together to create the first all-female touring festival, Lilith Fair. In 1996, when Canadian artist Sarah McLachlan proposed to have Paula Cole as the opening act on her upcoming tour, promoters resisted. McLachlan persisted and also added other female acts to her tour. After successfully touring in 1996 with other female headliners, “Lilith Fair: A Celebration of Women in Music” was born the following year, earning \$16 million to make it the top grossing touring festival of 1997.<sup>43</sup> Lilith Fair was on tour for three years, each year featuring some ‘staple’ artists and many new additions. Over two million tickets were sold over the course of three years and one dollar from each ticket was donated to charities that support issues that affect women.<sup>44</sup> Although all featured performers were female, the show was meant for a ‘mixed’ audience and not just for females. This aspect of Lilith Fair was different from the Riot grrrl movement, which was primarily geared toward female audience members. Many headliners were guitarists, albeit mostly acoustic, such as Tracy Chapman, Jewel, Shawn Colvin, Sheryl Crow, and Chrissie Hynde of The Pretenders. Lilith Fair gathered so

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41. Ibid., 130-1.

42. Nehring, *Popular Music, Gender, and Postmodernism*, 157.

43. As a festival that took place in the United States, the currency is listed in U.S. Dollars.

44. Carson, *Girl's Rock*, 60.

many female artists that a second stage and then a “Village Stage” that featured less well-known artists were added to the tour. Lilith Fair will, once again, be going on tour in 2010 with a line-up of artists including acoustic guitar players Brandi Carlile, Colbie Caillat, and Emmylou Harris.<sup>45</sup>

Also in the mid 1990s, British pop group the Spice Girls was becoming a global phenomenon. The most successful ‘manufactured’ female pop group to date, the Spice Girls were placed together in order to capitalize on the success of all-male pop groups of the time while also appealing to a male audience.<sup>46</sup> “Wannabe,” their first single, was the biggest selling debut single ever and was number one in the charts of thirty-two countries.<sup>47</sup> Each member – Posh Spice, Scary Spice, Baby Spice, Sporty Spice, and Ginger Spice – was hand-picked to represent a female ‘type’. But even though the Spice Girls had manufactured images, they also presented positive messages of personal control and strength.<sup>48</sup> Their slogan, “Girl Power,” resonated with young girls around the world. “Girls can help a guy with his bag, have painful tattoos as Geri, or do sit-ups like Melanie C. But it is also standing up for your rights and dignity and having control over your life.”<sup>49</sup> Instead of supporting ‘bra burning’ (as associated with second wave feminism), Baby Spice proclaimed, “Of course I’m a feminist. But I could never burn my Wonderbra. I’m nothing without it!”<sup>50</sup> Even though none of the Spice Girls members

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45. Lilith Fair, “Lilith Fair Web site,” [www.lilithfair.com](http://www.lilithfair.com).

46. Sinclair, *Wannabe*, 4.

47. Dibben, “Representations of Femininity,” 343.

48. Lemish, “Spice World,” 25.

49. *Ibid.*, 21.

50. *Ibid.*, 26.

played an instrument, they facilitated 'pro-female' ideologies and encouraged young girls to participate in popular music production and consumption.

The visibility of females in the music industry throughout the 1990s, both as musicians and as representations of feminism, created role models for other females to follow. When Mavis Bayton compared her interviews of female musicians from the 1970s to those she conducted in 1995 and 1996, she noticed a large difference between the two groups. "Feminism, then, has profoundly affected the outlook of contemporary young women, giving them self-confidence, high expectations, and determination. They *expect* to be treated equally in a way that my generation did not."<sup>51</sup> Without this general change in ideology, coupled with the prominence of successful female musicians, girl guitars would not exist.

### **Marketing Today**

Throughout history, females have bought products. As long as there have been advertisements and marketing schemes, females have been a target audience. But the 1990s brought about a large scale change in marketing and advertising tactics. In 1991, the Academy of Consumer Research began holding a bi-annual conference on gender, marketing and consumer behavior.<sup>52</sup> This, it seems, was a first step toward further understanding women and men as consumers.

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51. Bayton, *Frock Rock*, 208.

52. Moss, *Gender, Design and Marketing*, xvii.

Within a few years, both academic and non-academic literature echoed the Academy's attention to gender in consumer behavior. In the United States Library of Congress catalog, there are forty-six books under the heading "Women Consumers." Some of the titles include *Marketing to Women: How to Increase Your Share of the World's Largest Market*; *Why She Buys: The New Strategy for Reaching the World's Most Powerful Consumers*; *Wonder Woman: Marketing Secrets for the Trillion-Dollar Customer*; *Don't Think Pink: What Really Makes Women Buy—and How to Increase Your Share of This Crucial Market*; *Marketing to the New Super Consumer: Mom and Kid*; and *How to Get Rich Selling Cars to Women*. The oldest book that suggests the power of the female consumer and particular strategies to target this group, *How to Market to Women: Understanding and Reaching Today's Most Powerful Consumer Group*, was published in 1994. The sheer volume of books written on the subject within the past fifteen years suggests a major shift in the value and attention given by businesses to female consumers.

Many of these books begin by addressing the question of why businesses should pay more attention to female consumers. In *Don't Think Pink*, authors Lisa Johnson and Andrea Learned cite the following statistical evidence as reasons for creating a gendered marketing approach:

1. Women's incomes over the past three decades have increased sixty-three percent after inflation to more than one trillion dollars a year.
2. Women earn fifty-seven percent of bachelor degrees, fifty percent of law degrees, forty percent of MBAs and forty-six percent of medical degrees.
3. In the United States, women earn half or more of the household income, own forty percent of all businesses, and control fifty-one percent of all private wealth.
5. Along with having considerably more wealth than in recent decades, females also make ninety-five percent of all buying decisions in a household including

fifty-seven percent of consumer electronics and fifty percent of all new vehicle sales.<sup>53</sup>

By identifying the rising stature of females within recent years, Johnson and Learned ascertain a need for marketers to focus their attention on females as consumers. This increased awareness of gendered marketing and product design in the mid to late 1990s was crucial to the development of girl guitars. To a larger extent than ever before, it established a market for products directed toward female consumers.

While many social aspects of the 1990s likely affected instrument manufacturing, gendered marketing approaches, third wave feminism and the increased prominence of female musicians (and of female guitarists in particular) were crucial to the creation of girl guitars. For the first time in nearly one hundred years, instrument manufacturers viewed females as potential guitar buyers and users. Even though the guitar was still saturated with masculine ideologies, they had reason to believe that females would purchase guitars if the instruments were designed and marketed with the qualities and desires of female customers in mind. The combined social aspects of the period were undoubtedly crucial to the design, marketing, and use of girl guitars.

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53. Johnson and Learned, *Don't Think Pink*, 6-9.

## Chapter 3 – Design

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### Martin and “Women in Music”

In 1997, a voluntary group of Martin Guitar Company employees formed a committee to discuss the lack of female guitar players. The committee included members from almost every facet of the company and over eighty percent of the group was female.<sup>1</sup> With their combined knowledge of guitar manufacturing, the committee conceptualized the Martin Guitar Company’s first acoustic model designed for females labeled “Women in Music.” Headed by singer/songwriter and Martin clinician Diane Ponzio, the committee discussed their desire to release a Martin guitar designed to meet the needs of female guitarists. Instead of creating a guitar resembling the traditional Martin dreadnought, the model they designed featured a slotted headstock and a small 00 sized body.<sup>2</sup> All on the committee were concerned about creating a high quality guitar that was smaller than the average Martin guitar in the body and neck.

The 00-16DB Limited Edition model was released at the 1997 Winter NAMM Trade Show and all ninety-seven models were sold within two days. The success of the 00-16DB was followed by an equally successful rosewood model of the same dimensions and design, the 00-16DBR. In 1998, Martin followed by releasing the first women’s signature model, the Joan Baez 0-45, as well as its first women’s stock model.

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1. Johnston, Boak, and Longworth, *Martin Guitars: A Technical Reference*.

2. Diane Ponzio, “Martin 00C-16DB Guitar,” January 1997, <http://www.folkblues.com/guitars/00C-16DB.htm>.

The 00C-16DB was similar to the original 00-16DB, but it had a rounded 'Venetian' cutaway, a spruce top and mahogany back and sides, and was available with electronics.

Even after the success of Martin's "Women in Music" models, the production of the models was short-lived. Today, there are no longer any guitars designed for females in the Martin product line. Martin has, however, continued to make artist signature models for artists such as Roseanne Cash, Judy Collins, Shawn Colvin, Linda Ronstadt, and Nancy Wilson. Since Martin first introduced the "Women in Music" series, a handful of guitar manufacturers have followed suit by building girl guitars of their own. Daisy Rock, Luna, Gibson, and Fender have all created guitars designed for female use that share many characteristics with Martin's "Women in Music" models.

### **What Makes a Girl Guitar**

When designing guitars specifically for females, manufacturers tend to agree on what changes should be made. In order to be labeled a girl guitar, the guitar is most often modified in the thickness and width of the neck, the contour of the body, the weight, the electronics, and in style and color.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, there is no standard neck, contour, weight, or style that all girl guitars meet. Designs can range dramatically even within a single manufacturer. This is not generally surprising considering that there are a variety of females who may consider playing a girl guitar. But the design decisions made by each manufacturer can help to give a representation of the company's goals, opinions, and perceived target audience.

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3. Daisy Rock Guitars, "Daisy Rock Home Page," 2008, <http://daisyrock.com/>.

When it comes to girl guitars, color is a controversial topic. Daisy Rock's Director of Sales, Tommy Norton, spoke to me about the importance of guitar color choices. He claimed that his first weeks at Daisy Rock were "an education" in the needs and desires of female guitarists.<sup>4</sup> According to Norton, females are more particular about color options than their male counterparts. By observing female focus groups testing new guitar models, he learned quickly that "not only are there various shades of fuchsia, but there are hues within the shade."<sup>5</sup>

Because of the attention to detail he noticed in female guitar players, Norton also stressed the importance of having many color options to meet the expectations of a variety of female guitar players. As with other products designed for females, many of the guitars are offered in pink<sup>6</sup>. In fact, Daisy Rock owns the rights to the color "Atomic Pink," and many Daisy Rock models are offered in the color. The Squier Hello Kitty is available in pink and the Gibson Les Paul Vixen is available in coral. The exception to the 'pink rule' is Luna Guitars; only the Neo Series has a pink option. The other six models are available in a variety of earth tones, which more closely aligns with Luna's mythological and Henna-based designs. While there are female guitar players who want a pink guitar, there are others who do not. When I tallied the number of color choices available on Daisy Rock electric guitars, I was somewhat surprised to find that pink was not much more prominent than other colors. Five electrics are available in pink, four in

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4. Tommy Norton, interview by author, Toronto, Ontario, August 24, 2009 (see appendix).

5. Ibid.

6. The last ten years have seen a wave of pink colored products marketed toward females. Computers, coffee makers, cell phones, cameras, vacuums, and microwaves can all be found in pink. One example is the *Miss Army Knife*, a pink version of the *Swiss Army Knife*. A short list of products can be found at <http://www.thefrisky.com/post/246-pink-product-overload-thats-what-women-want/P7/>.

black, four in green, and four in white. Guitars are also available in purple, red, yellow, silver, and blue. The same is true for other companies that manufacture girl guitars. Pink is an option, but it is far from being the only option. At the same time, many of the guitars have 'feminine' aesthetics such as sparkles and 'girly' images such as butterflies and hearts.

Daisy Rock has often expressed its concern with manufacturers who "take a normal guitar and paint it pink," making it clear that they consider color to be only one aspect of the composition of a girl guitar.<sup>7</sup> While some manufacturers have fallen prey to this, most have made multiple physical changes to their guitars beyond color. The phrases 'slim neck profile' and 'slim and narrow' have become catch phrases that many use to describe the necks of girl guitars of various thickness and width. The width of the fingerboard of a girl guitar can be up to a tenth of an inch narrower than an average fingerboard. While this may not seem like much, it can easily change the entire feel of an instrument. The same is true about the thickness of the neck of a girl guitar. They tend to be much thinner than the average guitar to make them easier for a person with small hands to grasp.

Depending on the model, girl guitars can weigh up to half as much as a 'regular' guitar. Lighter woods, less electronic components (knobs, pickups, toggle switch options), and thinner bodies are just a few of the ways that manufacturers reduce the weight. Instead of having flat backs, some of the guitars also feature contoured backs

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7. Tommy Norton, interview by author, Toronto, Ontario, August 24, 2009 (see appendix), and Watson, "Tish Ciravolo Interview."

that more easily form along a female figure. At the same time, there are girl guitar models that weigh as much or more than 'regular' guitars and do not have a contoured back. Even though there are a wide variety of weights and body shapes, all girl guitar manufacturers state that they make light-weight guitars that easily fit a female frame.

Each of the manufacturers has used different techniques to reach female consumers. But they have all followed the same basic principles of what features a girl guitar should have. When considered alongside post-modernist and post-structuralist discourse, the design choices made by girl guitar manufacturers can become problematic. Since the early 1990s, it has been widely questioned whether or not gender can adequately define a specific group. Judith Butler regards gender as a performative attribute that does not necessarily align with sex. Butler encourages people to "consider gender, for instance, as *a corporeal style*, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where '*performative*' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning."<sup>8</sup> In this context, gender can no longer be attributed to an essential 'base' from which to measure identity. The creation of gender exists within the repeated acts that are culturally associated with masculinity or femininity.<sup>9</sup> Because gender is a product of repeated acts, the physical body where the acts are performed can no longer be ignored. Butler states, "This 'body' often appears to be a passive medium that is signified by an inscription from a cultural source figured as 'external' to that body. Any theory of the culturally constructed body, however, ought to question 'the body' as a construct of suspect generality when it is figured as

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8. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 177.

9. *Ibid.*, 180.

passive and prior to discourse.”<sup>10</sup> In this context, the body becomes a site of the performance of gender and the contestation of gender takes place upon the physical body.

Gender is not only contested on the physical body of the performer, but the contention is also imposed onto the body of the instrument used by the performer. As Steve Waksman makes clear, “The instrument is used to invest the body of the performer with meaning, to confer upon it a unique identity whose authentic, natural appearance works to conceal its reliance upon artifice and technology.”<sup>11</sup> Because of the connection between the musical instrument and the performer’s body, the instrument “carries certain associations that are inscribed onto the body of the performer.”<sup>12</sup> It becomes necessary, then, to consider the codes inscribed onto the electric guitar as they are interrelated to the codes on the body of the performer.

The creation of the ‘girl guitar’ category is problematic for the very reasons Butler and Waksman address. The common design elements of the girl guitar conflate sex with gender, and suggest that these standardized elements represent the needs of all ‘girls’. Feminists such as Butler have attacked the concepts of ‘girl’ and ‘woman’ because they do not accurately embody the diversity present within the categories. The creation of girl guitars seems once again to group ‘girls’ together and generally ignores the differences within the group. Girl guitars are usually smaller in size and lighter than a ‘regular’ or ‘boy’ guitar – attributes that ascribe assumptions about physical strength to

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10. *Ibid.*, 164.

11. Waksman, *Instruments of Desire*, 5.

12. *Ibid.*, 6.

the notions of 'girl' and 'boy' as sex. At the same time, girl guitar manufacturers modify the shapes, colors, and numbers of pick-ups and knobs on girl guitars. By creating a 'girl' guitar which is modified both physically and aesthetically, the girl guitar creates an ideal standard of what is 'feminine'. The 'feminine' image created and perpetuated by girl guitars has a tendency to represent sex and gender as one in the same, not as social constructs, but as concrete entities made up of physical needs and fixed aesthetic desires.

### **Making Comparisons**

It is impossible to consider the design aspects of girl guitars without comparing them to guitars that are not labeled as being 'for girls'. While there have been many styles, shapes, and sizes of electric guitars throughout history, the Fender Stratocaster and the Gibson Les Paul have set the standard in guitar design. As the best selling, most often replicated and most highly recognizable electric guitar models, they represent the best point with which to compare girl guitars. Even this comparison, though, can be problematic. There are over fifty models of Fender Stratocaster, each with varying specifications, currently in production. Discontinued, past models, and custom Strats also have different specifications from current models. The same is true for the Gibson Les Paul; there have been such a wide variety of specifications within the model that it is difficult to pin down exact numbers for comparison.

The Fender American Standard Stratocaster was re-released in January 2008. While slightly different in finish from the iconic Stratocaster from the 1960s through the

1990s, the neck thickness and width, body contour, electronics, and weight have remained relatively unchanged. Thus, I feel I can safely use the current American Standard Stratocaster as a point of comparison.

In order to compare girl guitars to the Les Paul, I will consider two versions of the Les Paul that are currently in production: the Les Paul Traditional and the 2008 Les Paul Standard. The Les Paul has always been known for the full-bodied tone that comes from using a solid piece of mahogany with a maple cap. Of course, the solid body also caused the Les Paul to be extremely heavy, anywhere from eight to eleven pounds depending on the model.<sup>13</sup> In response, Gibson began 'weight relieving' the Les Paul in the 1980s by drilling a few holes in the body. Then, in 2008, the Les Paul underwent an extreme overhaul.<sup>14</sup> The neck now features an asymmetrical profile that is thicker on the bass side and thinner on the treble side to better fit the natural form of a hand. But the largest difference, and the most controversial aspect to Les Paul enthusiasts, is new chambering in the body of the guitar. The new Les Paul is heavily carved out (similar to a piece of Swiss cheese) to reduce weight and increase resonance inside the body.

The Gibson Les Paul Traditional, released in the 1990s, has all of the features of Les Paul models released in the 1990s and before.<sup>15</sup> Even though the Les Paul Traditional is weight relieved, it is almost identical in weight, thickness and width of the neck, and contour of the body to previous Les Paul models.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the Les Paul

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13. Gibson Customer Service, e-mail message to author, November 20, 2009.

14. Gibson Guitar Corporation, "2008 Les Paul Standard," <http://www2.gibson.com/Products/Electric-Guitars/Les-Paul/Gibson-USA/2008-Les-Paul-Standard/Features.aspx>.

15. Gibson Guitar Corporation, "Les Paul Traditional," <http://www2.gibson.com/Products/Electric-Guitars/Les-Paul/Gibson-USA/Les-Paul-Traditional/Features.aspx>.

16. Gibson Customer Service, e-mail message to author, November 20, 2009.

Traditional will serve as a solid point of reference with which to compare girl guitars before 2008. It is also necessary, though, to keep in mind the large changes in the Les Paul design in 2008. Weighing between six and nine pounds, the 2008 Les Paul Standard will be an effective tool with which to compare girl guitars to 'regular' guitars sold after 2008.<sup>17</sup>

### **Daisy Rock Guitars**

In 2000, Los Angeles bass player Tish Ciravolo founded Daisy Rock Guitars as a division of Schecter Guitars. Her first concept for a guitar design was created from a yellow daisy that her daughter drew (see figure 1, page 41).<sup>18</sup> She fashioned a design for a guitar out of the sketch, which she gave to her husband, Michael Ciravolo, president of Schecter Guitars. Ciravolo's goal was to create guitars that would fit young girls physically as well as inspire them to play by using fun designs and colors. The original daisy design was a solid body electric guitar and featured a lightweight body and narrow neck to better fit a young female frame. Beyond the physical elements of the design, the largest noticeable difference in the Daisy guitar was its shape and style; it had a bright yellow daisy-shaped body, pearloid daisy inlays on the neck, and a leaf-shaped headstock.

After six months of designing a mock-up of the Daisy guitar in the Schecter Custom Shop, it was sent to the Schecter factory in Korea to create the first prototype.

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17. Ibid.

18. Watson, "Tish Ciravolo Interview."

Upon completion of the prototype, Ciravolo had a meeting with a public relations professional and devised a plan on how to introduce Daisy Rock Guitars into the marketplace. She created a press kit that included one sheet of information on Daisy Rock acoustics and another on Daisy Rock electrics, which was sent to magazines including *Teen*, *ROCKRGRL*, and *Jane*. Notably, Daisy Rock's first press kits were all sent to mainstream 'girl' magazines and not to music media, the traditional starting points for new musical instrument promotion.

The first feedback Daisy Rock received was from Jane Forte of *Teen*, who wanted to use the guitars in a photo session of prom dresses. The second call Ciravolo received was from Carla DeSantis of *ROCKRGRL*. *ROCKRGRL* had an upcoming conference and DeSantis asked Ciravolo to display the guitars at the conference. While there, Ciravolo met Courtney Love, lead singer and guitarist of the band Hole, and Love agreed to autograph the daisy prototype.<sup>19</sup> With positive feedback from *Teen* and the *ROCKRGRL* conference, as well as from fellow musicians and music industry professionals, Daisy Rock ordered 300 guitars and received them in early December of 2000. The first company to carry Daisy Rock Guitars was the online instrument retailer, Musician's Friend. Within the first few weeks of posting Daisy Rock Guitars on the Web site, Musician's Friend sold eighty guitars. Ciravolo realized very quickly that she had a market for girl guitars.

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19. In 1999, Hole was nominated for three Grammy Awards including Best Rock Album, Best Rock Song, and Best Rock Vocal Performance by a Duo or Group making them one of the most celebrated female-fronted punk rock bands in history. As a prominent female guitar player, Love was an obvious choice to sign Daisy Rock's first guitar prototype. Besides promoting feminist ideals in her songs and images, Love was also known for giving away an electric guitar to a female audience member at the end of each performance. At the same time, Love's alleged behavior on and off stage (including alcoholism and drug abuse problems) make her a controversial choice for a company marketing guitars to young girls.

Within a few years, Daisy Rock Guitars outgrew its home at Schecter Guitars. In 2002, Ron Manus, Executive Vice President of Alfred Publishing, stumbled across Daisy Rock Guitars on the Internet and contacted Ciravolo about creating a 'girl guitar' method book.<sup>20</sup> The partnership blossomed and in 2003 Alfred Publishing became partners, distributors, and minority owners of Daisy Rock Guitars. Daisy Rock offices are now housed in a section of the Alfred Publishing building in Van Nuys, California and Daisy Rock also has a large fully staffed warehouse in upstate New York. With the changes, Daisy Rock also opted to move its manufacturing to China and Indonesia instead of Korea to cut down on manufacturing costs. With the power afforded by partnering with Alfred Publishing, Daisy Rock has been able to expand its campaign worldwide. They now sell girl guitars in the UK, France, Japan, Canada, and many countries in Latin America.

Even with a small staff, Daisy Rock has a relatively large product line that is split into two separate markets: Daisy Rock Girl Guitars and Debutante by Daisy Rock.<sup>21</sup> The Daisy Rock Girl Guitar line is meant for females above the age of ten while the Debutante line is intended for young girls between the ages of six and nine. The Daisy Rock line includes the Rebel Rockit Series, the Stardust Series, and the Rock Candy Series of electric guitars as well as the Pink Label, Bangles: Signature Model, and the Siren. Overall, the Daisy Rock Girl Guitar line includes thirteen different models (although some are only slightly modified versions of one another). They also carry three models

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20. Musical Merchandise Review, "Daisy Rock Girl Guitars: Not Just Pretty, Not Just Pink," April 11, 2007, <http://www.mmmagazine.com/>.

21. Daisy Rock Guitars, "Daisy Rock Home Page," 2008, <http://daisyrock.com/>.

of bass guitars, six acoustic or acoustic electric models, as well as accessories such as guitar cables, guitar straps, picks, an amp, guitar cases, apparel, purses and totes. The Debutante line includes seven models of electric guitars and one model of acoustic guitar.<sup>22</sup>

Daisy Rock's first model, the Daisy, was a short scale electric guitar with an unusual body shape. While the scale of guitars is not highly standardized across the industry, the Daisy guitar was designed to be smaller than average to better fit the hands and frame of a young girl. It was 22.5 inches in scale and featured a slim neck profile. It also used basswood for the body to make the guitar lighter than average. Ciravolo wanted to make the guitar aesthetically attractive for young girls and offered the guitar in four colors: Dreamy Daisy Yellow, Awesome Blue, Purple Daisy, and Pepper Mint (pink). Soon after the success of the short scale Daisy guitar, the model was also turned into a full-scale version (called the Daisy Artist Guitar) and a bass guitar. The next guitars to enter the Daisy Rock product line were the Butterfly, Heartbreaker, and Star (see figure 1). All featuring the same scale and dimensions as the Daisy, these guitars were also designed to be aesthetically pleasing to young girls. Each had its unique body shape, came in bright colors, and was released in short scale, full scale, and bass models.

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22. Ibid.



Figure 1. Daisy Rock's first four models: the Daisy, the Butterfly, the Heartbreaker, and the Star (Images from <http://daisyrock.com/>)

Although the guitars sold well, Daisy Rock struggled to gain the respect of many music industry insiders because of the guitar's non-traditional shapes and colors. While the guitars were viewed as a good entry-point for young girls who wished to learn the guitar, there was a general consensus that Daisy Rock guitars were 'toys' and were not meant for 'serious' musicians. In January of 2003, the direction and focus of Daisy Rock was slightly modified with the release of the Stardust Series of full-scale guitars that had large bodies similar to a Gibson ES-335 (see figure 2). Intended from the outset for females aged in their late teens and above, the Stardust Series represented a change in the company's target audience. Instead of primarily designing guitars for young girls, these guitars featured traditional styles that would appeal to an older and wider variety of females. At the same time, the full-scale Stardust Series continued Daisy Rock's

mission to provide females with guitars that were light weight, had thin necks and were available in 'fun' colors.



Figure 2. Daisy Rock's Stardust Retro-H De-Luxe, the Rock Candy Custom, and the Rock Candy Pink Label (Images from <http://daisyrock.com/>)

The Rock Candy Series was released in January of 2004, and quickly became Daisy Rock's best selling electric model (see figure 2). By the end of 2004, the Rock Candy had received spectacular reviews in *Guitar One* and *Guitar Player* magazines, which were echoed in *Guitar World* and *Guitar Buyer* in 2006. Musician James Blunt and actresses Lindsay Lohan and Penelope Cruz, and Marla Sokoloff were all pictured with the model within a little over a year of its release.<sup>23</sup> All of the Rock Candy Series models

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23. Ibid.

look very similar to a Gibson Les Paul and feature the same scale and types of woods.<sup>24</sup> But the differences between the Rock Candy and the Les Paul are dramatic. A Les Paul Traditional weighs between eight and eleven pounds; the Rock Candy weighs closer to seven or eight pounds. The neck of the Rock Candy is also very different from the Les Paul. It has a nut width of around 1.63 inches compared to the Les Paul's 1.695 inches. While the Les Paul retails for \$3,899, the Rock Candy sells for between \$229 and \$519.<sup>25</sup>

As I will discuss shortly, in 2006, Gibson Guitars released the Les Paul Goddess and Vixen and the SG Goddess, guitars designed specifically for professional and semi-professional female guitar players. The Goddess and Vixen models used high-end woods and parts, achieving a level of quality that other girl guitar manufacturers had not yet attained. To retain their title as "The Girl Guitar Company," Daisy Rock now had the need to expand their line and market to include semi-professional and professional female guitarists.

In winter of 2007, Daisy Rock released their first handcrafted guitar manufactured in the United States, the Rock Candy Pink Label (see figure 2). Daisy Rock partnered with well-known luthier John Carruthers to create the design and opted for 'professional' quality parts. While the average guitar in the Daisy Rock Girl Guitar line costs between \$300 and \$500, the Rock Candy Pink Label's retail value is \$2,999.<sup>26</sup> Only available in Candy Apple Pink, the Rock Candy Pink Label is a drastic departure from the

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24. The Rock Candy Classic has a maple, bolt-on neck similar to a Fender Stratocaster whereas the other Rock Candy models have set mahogany necks like a Les Paul.

25. Daisy Rock Guitars, "Daisy Rock Home Page," 2008, <http://daisyrock.com/>, and Gibson Guitar Corporation, "2008 Les Paul Standard," <http://www2.gibson.com/Products/Electric-Guitars/Les-Paul/Gibson-USA/2008-Les-Paul-Standard/Features.aspx>. All guitar prices are listed in U.S. Dollars.

26. Daisy Rock Guitars, "Daisy Rock Home Page," 2008, <http://daisyrock.com/>.

rest of the Daisy Rock lineup because of its price point and the quality of its parts and woods. The Pink Label also has greater sonic versatility than other Daisy Rock models, featuring two volume knobs and two tone knobs. Even though the company knows that there is not a large market for a bright pink, high-end guitar designed for females, having the Pink Label guitar is extremely important for Daisy Rock's image.<sup>27</sup> As a company that has always had to defend the quality of its products to the rest of the music industry, the Pink Label demonstrates that Daisy Rock's guitars are not 'toys'. It also shows Daisy Rock's ability to meet the needs of more than one type of guitar player.

While the company provides an array of short-scale models for young girls, the focus of Daisy Rock has always been on providing all females with guitars designed especially for them.<sup>28</sup> It is the official guitar of the Grandmother's Cool Rock Club as well being highly visible and involved in the Girl Scouts of America.<sup>29</sup> The company plans on expanding its product line even more in the future to include a wider variety of female guitar players.

### **Guitar Standardization**

According to Steve Waksman, even when the electric guitar was first conceptualized "there was an idea about how a guitar should look – with a certain type

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27. Tommy Norton, interview by author, Toronto, Ontario, August 24, 2009 (see appendix).

28. Ibid.

29. Watson, "Tish Ciravolo Interview."

of curvature in the body, and sound holes placed in a particular arrangement.”<sup>30</sup> It is safe to say that the unusual body shapes of Ciravolo’s first designs were outside the realm of the look and feel of a ‘normal’ guitar. Even though the original designs were popular in the general public, they were not widely accepted by music industry professionals.

While Daisy Rock has continued to make guitars with slim necks, bright colors, and lighter weights, their move away from non-traditional body styles hints that there are aspects of a guitar that the music industry considers as fixed. Out of the very few Daisy Rock models that have been discontinued, almost all have non-standard body styles. The Daisy, Butterfly, Heartbreaker, and Star are no longer available in full-scale models, only in short-scale and only in limited color choices. Even more telling, the bodies of all full-scale models now look like traditional guitar bodies, and only a handful of models in the Debutante line have non-traditional shapes.

Karin Bijsterveld and Marten Schulp point out the difficulties of introducing innovative instruments into classical music.<sup>31</sup> They suggest that the reproduction of familiar sounds and sights in the classical music hall has become much more important than the creation of new works or instruments. Both the instruments and the repertoire have become standardized. Bijsterveld and Schulp attribute this standardization to many factors and to the activity of several different groups of people. The musicians reinforce ideologies by refusing to play with newer, more innovative instruments because they “know how to handle the peculiarities of their instruments and consider

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30. Waksman, “California Noise,” 680.

31. Bijsterveld and Schulp, “Breaking into a World of Perfection,” 649-674.

such a mastery to be a part of their artistic and professional identity.”<sup>32</sup> The institutionalization of classical music, audience expectations and passing down of musical traditions from teacher to pupil also play their roles.

But even with such strong traditions in place, some innovative designs have made their way into classical music culture (such as the open-holed flute). Bijsterveld and Schulp point out three key factors that make the introduction of new instruments or innovations possible: changes in the instrument to better fit tradition, the use of language to change tradition to better fit the instrument, and the use of the instrument by well-recognized and respected musicians.<sup>33</sup> The tactic most often employed is to modify an instrument so that it appears similar to previously established and accepted instruments.

Comparable to the reports of normalization in classical music, Steve Waksman mentions that questions have arisen about “whether the electric guitar has become so normalized, so entrenched in the mainstream of popular music, that it now fulfills a principally redundant musical and social role, promoting the continual reenactment of the moves and sounds that initially brought it to such a position of centrality.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, having an electric guitar that *looks* like an electric guitar becomes of the utmost importance because it plays a crucial role in recalling the visual and sonic references from the history of rock music. Daisy Rock, then, changed the body styles of their guitars to visually meet the standards of what the music industry and most guitar players

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32. Ibid., 654.

33. Ibid., 667.

34. Waksman, *Instruments of Desire*, 283.

consider to be the ‘authentic’ electric guitar while retaining the less visually obvious changes. By better fitting the tradition, the guitars could be more widely accepted.

It is important to note, however, that while Daisy Rock changed the shapes of their guitars to more closely resemble that of a ‘normal’ guitar, they have continued to release guitars in a variety of colors. Flipping through a Fender catalog, you find that most guitars are offered in relatively few colors. The majority of the guitars are offered only in neutral tones such as white, black, shades of natural wood tones, and various dark shades of red.<sup>35</sup> Models such as the Buddy Guy Standard Stratocaster with white polka dots are far from the norm.<sup>36</sup>

The exact opposite is true of Daisy Rock guitars; few are offered in a natural wood finish. According to retailers, Daisy Rock guitars are sometimes more difficult to sell because the guitars are not available in a ‘wood’ finish. Some consumers are reluctant to even hold the guitars until they are reassured that the guitars are, in fact, made of wood.<sup>37</sup> Thus, it becomes a compromise between what the music industry and seasoned guitarists accept as ‘the guitar’ and what females, especially young girls unfamiliar with the guitar, will find attractive. Daisy Rock has reverted its guitars back to ‘normal’ body shapes, but they have retained their unconventional use of color.

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35. At different times, there have been a variety of finishes available on Fender guitars. In the 1950s, Fender started a “Custom Color” line using paints from Du Pont, the same company supplying paint for General Motors and other prominent car companies of the day. Around 1980, Fender featured an “International Colors” selection including bright red, white, yellow, blue, and orange. These types of colors have always been discontinued relatively quickly, making them even more valuable as vintage pieces today. The Fender Custom Shop also creates guitars in endless colors and designs; sometimes their designs, such as the Hawaiian themed “Aloha Strat,” are then released as limited edition models but never go into full production. For more information, see Bacon and Day, *Fender Book*.

36. Fender Musical Instruments Corporation, “Buddy Guy Standard Stratocaster,” *Fender Products*, <http://www.fender.com/products//search.php?partno=0138802306>.

37. Mike Smith (pseudonym), interview by author, Ottawa, Ontario, October 8, 2009 (see appendix).

## Luna Guitars

Yvonne de Villiers was a professional stained glass artist before becoming the founder and owner of Luna Guitars in Tampa, Florida. De Villiers' mother had been a prominent bass player in Florida for over thirty years and had strong ties to Tampa-based guitar company, Dean Guitars. In the early 2000s, Dean Guitars contacted Yvonne de Villiers and asked her to create inlay designs for some of their soon-to-be-released models. De Villiers found that the techniques used in stained glass were almost identical to that of the aesthetic aspects of guitar design. Although she enjoyed working on guitars, de Villiers did not consider forming her own guitar company until 2003. During that time, de Villiers' mother, who was petite in stature, was attempting to learn to play the six string acoustic guitar. According to de Villiers', her mother struggled immensely trying to create barre chords because of her small hands.<sup>38</sup> De Villiers soon approached Dean Guitars with the idea of creating a line of guitars for females featuring lighter bodies and smaller, thinner necks. As a professional stained glass artist, she envisioned these guitars as a "vehicle for art or as a blank canvas" using mythological and henna-based designs.<sup>39</sup> Dean Guitars gave de Villiers free reign to develop her idea and connected her with luthiers, manufacturers, and companies that could help her realize her goal.

Within one year, Yvonne de Villiers connected with manufacturers in China and worked up prototypes of her designs. The debut of Luna Guitars took place at the

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38. Tom Watson, "Yvonne de Villiers of Luna Guitars Interview," October 4, 2007, <http://www.modernguitars.com/archives/003819.html>.

39. Ibid.

NAMM Trade Show in January of 2004 as a part of the Dean Guitars booth. Even though de Villiers had not done any market research to find out if there would be a demand for her products, the reaction at the NAMM Trade Show was overwhelmingly positive from both males and females. Even though her intention was to design guitars that would be comfortable for females, the support from males encouraged her to consider her guitars as “androgynous” and “gender neutral.”<sup>40</sup> She uses images that she considers to be meaningful to a variety of people; this includes dragonflies, phoenixes, dragons, figures such as Lord Byron, and images like the Lady of Shalott inspired by a Tennyson poem. The heaviest Luna guitars weigh seven pounds and all feature slimmer necks than a ‘regular’ guitar.

Luna guitars are now distributed by more than two hundred dealers in the United States and are also distributed in the UK, Italy, Germany, China, and Russia. They can also be bought online directly from the Luna Web site. Today, Yvonne de Villiers’ stated goal is to design “inspired quality instruments that are physically comfortable, aesthetically engaging, and spiritually nourishing.”<sup>41</sup> The company regularly participates in the work of charity organizations such as MusiCares, the Ophelia Project, and Vitamin Angels. They also sponsored Dayton, Ohio’s Rock and Roll Camp for Girls in 2008.

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40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

### Luna Designs and 'Tinkering'

The Luna Guitar line is extensive, with seven full-sized guitar series, an electric 'mini' series, fourteen acoustic guitar series, and ukulele, mandolin and bouzouki offerings. They also have four lines of electric basses and two acoustic basses. Yvonne de Villiers' first focus when she began the company was the acoustic guitar, and they still sell more acoustics than electrics.<sup>42</sup> Both the acoustic and electric models, though, have features that are uncommon in electric guitar manufacturing because of de Villiers' background as an artist and not as a musician.

Two guitars in particular display characteristics that are unique, especially in guitars originally designed for female use. One acoustic model, the Aurora Imagine, comes with damp erase markers so the guitar player can add their own artwork to the body of the guitar (see figure 3). The electric Neo Your Space has a removable pick guard and paper templates so the player can create their own custom pick guard. The customizability of these guitars speak to a tradition of technological 'tinkering' that normally excludes females, making the Aurora Imagine and the Neo Your Space unique and possibly even groundbreaking.

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42. Ibid.

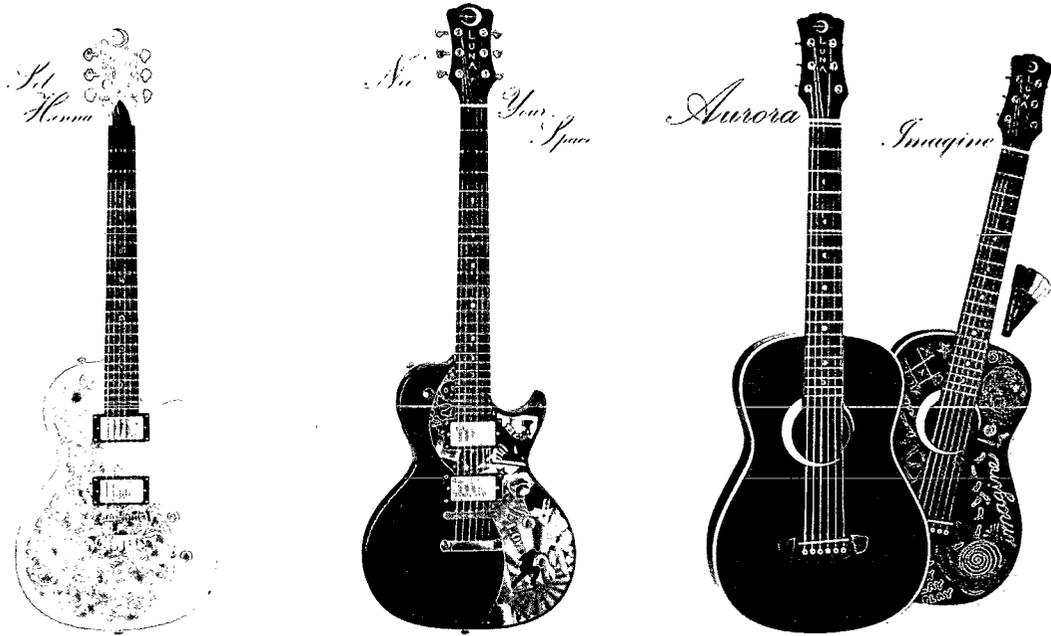


Figure 3. The Luna Sol Henna, Neo Your Space, and Aurora Imagine  
(Images from <http://www.lunaguitars.com/>)

Throughout the history of the guitar, guitar players have been making physical and sonic modifications to the instrument. This tendency to ‘tinker’ has been especially strong in the history of the electric guitar. According to Steven Gelber, tinkering began with “the desire to carve out a distinctly masculine sphere within the increasingly isolated, feminized space of the late Victorian suburban home.”<sup>43</sup> Radio, hi-fi systems, and the guitar all became sites where men could retreat from an increasingly ‘feminized’ space and participate in a culture that was distinctly masculine.<sup>44</sup> Steve Waksman notes that, after 1967, *Guitar Player* magazine “gave regular advice to readers on a range of technical practices, as well as constructing a supporting ideology surrounding the value

43. Gelber, “Do-It-Yourself,” 73.

44. See Keightley, “Turn it Down,” 149-77.

of technological endeavors.”<sup>45</sup> As the readers were almost entirely male, the ideologies instilled became even more polarized as masculine. Artists such as Eddie Van Halen modified their guitars to fit their own personal styles, both physically and sonically, as a way of “asserting manhood through the combined forms of sound and technology.”<sup>46</sup> Waksman asserts that tinkering is as much about the “fortification of manhood” as about carving out a unique musical niche.<sup>47</sup>

Because the ability to modify the look and sound of a guitar is ideologically slated as a masculine endeavor, Luna’s ‘do-it-yourself’ style guitars can be viewed as a step towards the redefinition of tinkering. The Neo Your Space and Aurora Imagine feature slim neck profiles and light bodies designed for female use *and* encourage customization and creativity on the part of the (most likely female) user. Even though the customization offered is merely visual, it is not impossible to imagine a female guitarist, after creating her own artwork for the pick guard, taking it one step further and modifying the electronic components of the guitar.

It is also important to note that Daisy Rock guitars, Luna guitars, and the “Women in Music” Martin models have all been designed primarily by females. In the music instrument industry, mainly composed of males, having female guitar designers can be shocking and, even, frustrating. Not only are they designing guitars for females who have been largely unwelcome in rock music, but the female designers are infringing upon a culture of ‘tinkering’ with technologies that has long been considered as a safe

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45. Waksman, “California Noise,” 677.

46. *Ibid.*, 689.

47. *Ibid.*, 676.

haven for males. Because of this, the girl guitar designer can be as much of a point of contention as the creation of the guitars themselves.

### **Gibson Guitar Corporation**

The Gibson Guitar Corporation was first formed in 1902 in Kalamazoo, Michigan using the name and blueprints of mandolin designer Orville Gibson. The innovation of Gibson's mandolin designs, coupled with aggressive marketing, made the Corporation the top selling mandolin manufacturer of the World War I era.<sup>48</sup> Gibson released its first electric guitar in 1935, a Hawaiian-style hollow-body, and followed by releasing the "Super Jumbo" that is still an iconic guitar in country music today. But Gibson did not see the bulk of its success until 1952 when it released the Les Paul, the company's first solid-body electric guitar. The demand for the Les Paul grew steadily throughout the 1950s and 1960s. By 1965 Gibson hit record production, shipping over 100,000 instruments in one year.<sup>49</sup>

In 1969, Gibson was bought out by Ecuadorian company ECL. The company struggled through the 1970s and early 1980s and was finally bought out by current owners Henry Juszkiewicz and David Berryman. The new Gibson Guitar Corp. began purchasing other instrument companies and re-released many of their most popular guitar designs as 'vintage' models. Gibson now manufactures many different types of musical instruments and equipment including pianos, drums, digital effects pedals, and

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48. Gibson Guitar Corporation, "Gibson History," [http://www.gibson.com/press/press\\_history.asp](http://www.gibson.com/press/press_history.asp).

49. Ibid.

amplifiers. Baldwin, Chickering, Dobro, Epiphone, Goldtone, Oberheim, Slingerland, Steinberger, and Wurlitzer are among the brands currently controlled by the Gibson Guitar Corporation. The company is now based out of Nashville, TN, although there is also a Gibson Europe and a Gibson Japan. There are twenty-five divisions of the company with offices in Austin, London, Beverly Hills, New York, Orlando, Paris, Seattle and various other locations across the globe.<sup>50</sup>

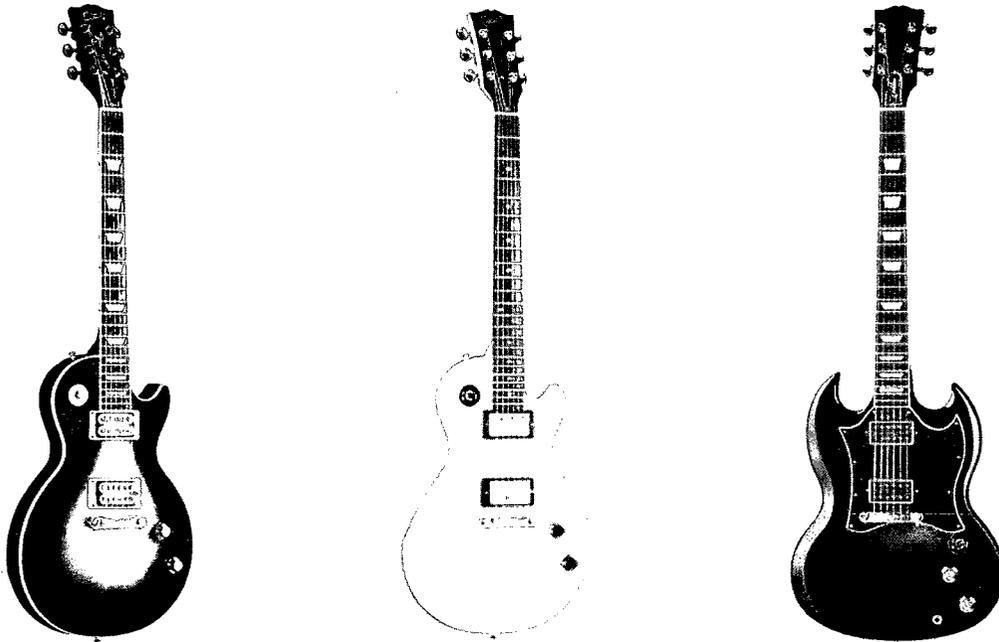


Figure 4. The Gibson Les Paul Goddess, Les Paul Vixen, and SG Goddess (Images from <http://guitars.musiciansfriend.com/>)

In January of 2006, Gibson unveiled their new line of electric guitars designed and marketed to females.<sup>51</sup> Three guitars were released as a part of the Goddess line:

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50. For a more detailed history of the Gibson Guitar Corporation, see Bacon, *50 Years of the Gibson Les Paul*; Carter, *Gibson Electric Guitar Book*; and Ingram, *Gibson 175*.

51. Electric Guitar Review, "Powerful & Pretty - Gibson Introduces Les Paul Goddess," January 26, 2006, <http://www.electric-guitar-review.com/2006/01/26/powerful-pretty-gibsons-les-paul-goddess/>.

the Les Paul Goddess, the SG Goddess, and the Les Paul Vixen (see figure 4). While other Gibson models such as the Casino, Firebird, Emperor Regent, and Explorer have used distinct and whimsical names to garner attention, the Goddess and Vixen were the first Gibson models whose names carried 'feminine' connotations.

Throughout history and across many cultures, goddess archetypes have represented magical powers and natural forces. Although the concept of the 'goddess' can refer to females with both harmful and beneficial powers, images from Greek mythology such as Aphrodite are common in Western society. Today, the goddess is often associated with love, beauty, and virginity. The 'vixen,' on the other hand, is a term used to refer to a female that is sexually attractive, cunning, and, often, promiscuous. By labeling the guitars as the Goddess and Vixen, Gibson guitars reinscribed two distinct categories through which females could participate in guitar culture. Both highly sexualized terms, female guitarists had the familiar choice to either become 'virgins' or 'sluts'. Either decision had clear implications connoting polarized feminine behaviors.

Marketed as "not just prettier versions of their standard counterparts," the Gibson Goddess and Vixen feature small and light mahogany bodies, thin profile necks, and finishes designed to be attractive to females.<sup>52</sup> Just like the original Les Paul and SG, the Goddess and Vixen have a scale of 24.75 inches and have twenty-two frets. Both Goddess models and the Vixen model weigh between six and seven pounds. In 2006 when the Goddess line was introduced, the typical Les Paul weighed between eight and

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52. Ibid.

twelve pounds. The SG has always been considerably lighter than the Les Paul, weighing in at around seven pounds.

According to Gibson, the Goddess and Vixen models were lighter than regular Gibson models because they used only the lightest pieces of mahogany for the bodies of the guitars. In order to lighten the girl guitar guitars further, Gibson only included one volume knob and one tone knob on the body of the guitars. While some Gibson models feature the same electronic set-up, most have four knobs in total.

As with other guitars created for females, Gibson chose to use a completely different color palate for their girl guitars than with other models. The Les Paul Goddess and SG Goddess were available in Ice Burst (white), Sky Burst (blue), Rose Burst (red), Ebony, and Violet Burst (purple). The Violet Burst and, a far second, Sky Burst were normally used as the display models and were featured in all of the advertisements. According to one well-placed consultant, the Les Paul Goddess was especially popular and sold well at retail music stores. The colors were popular with male and female guitar players alike.<sup>53</sup>

The Les Paul Vixen has a very different look from the Goddess models, with pastel colors and a matte finish. From the beginning, the Vixen was the 'ugly duckling' of the Gibson line and received poor reviews from most who viewed it. Sales were also poor for the model with only a few hundred sold in all of Canada in its first year of existence.<sup>54</sup> It was available in Corona Yellow, Caribbean Blue, Coral, Ebony and Red. With almost identical specifications as the Les Paul Goddess, the Vixen's negative

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53. Mike Smith (pseudonym), interview by author, Ottawa, Ontario, October 8, 2009 (see appendix).

54. Ibid.

reviews were almost entirely based on the available colors. It was, coincidentally, the only Gibson guitar designed for females that was available in a hue of pink (coral), and advertisements featuring the Vixen showcased this color.

Besides the weight and colors, Gibson also considered aspects of the neck to be crucial in creating guitars for females. Both the Goddess and Vixen models feature “slim-tapered profiles,” although there are differences between the Les Paul and SG models.<sup>55</sup> The Les Paul Goddess and Vixen, interestingly, have a nut width of 1.695 inches just like the Les Paul Traditional and Les Paul Standard. The SG Goddess, on the other hand, is quite a bit thinner at the nut than the SG Standard. The SG Standard has a nut width of 1.695 inches whereas the SG Goddess is only 1.625 inches wide at the nut. This smaller nut width is similar to the average of Daisy Rock Guitars.

I can find no definitive reason why Gibson made the decision to alter the nut width of the SG Goddess and not the Les Paul Goddess and Vixen. Perhaps they felt that the change would be too distinguishing to keep the Les Paul Goddess and Vixen easily within the family of other Les Pauls. The decision could also be a statement about the target audience of the Les Paul Goddess and Vixen. As they were targeting professional female guitar players, many of whom were already accustomed to the dimensions of the normal Les Paul neck, they may have decided to forego any major changes other than the weight and color. The SG, on the other hand, was always known for being somewhat light. Therefore, the neck dimensions and color were the obvious avenues to pursue when creating an SG for females.

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55. This is found all over on the Gibson Web site on many different types of guitars. In some places it is referenced as a throw-back to the '60s style necks and in others it is the “modern” style.

One of the largest differences between the average Daisy Rock girl guitar and a Gibson girl guitar is the price. While the average Daisy Rock guitar costs between \$300 and \$500, the Gibson Vixen retails for \$1,429 while the Goddess is sold for \$2,499. Aimed at meeting the needs of professional female guitar players, the Goddess and Vixen easily fall within the price range of other Gibson guitars. In fact, there are many Les Paul models that cost thousands more than the Goddess and Vixen.

In mid-2007, after a little more than a year on the market, the Goddess and Vixen were both discontinued. While poor sales are most likely the reason for the termination, it does not tell the entire story in this situation. The Les Paul Goddess actually sold relatively well for a new Gibson model and was receiving rave reviews from players and retailers alike.<sup>56</sup> But, at the same time, the company was on the verge of a major design change to its new models. In 2005, Gibson subsidiary Epiphone released the Epiphone Les Paul Ultra to strongly positive reviews. The first Les Paul to be fully chambered, the Les Paul Ultra weighs between 5.5 and 7 pounds. It features dual volume and dual tone knobs and a scale of 24.75 inches just like the Les Paul Standard. But unlike the Standard, the nut width is 1.65 inches. It also has a 'slim tapered' neck like the Goddess and Vixen. Lastly, it has a contoured back instead of a flat back like most Les Paul models. Even with a product endorsement by Heart guitarist Nancy Wilson and all of the design aspects of a girl guitar, the Les Paul Ultra has never been billed as such. Instead, it is advertised as being a good option for guitar players who are small in stature or who prefer a lighter weight Les Paul.

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56. Mike Smith (pseudonym), interview by author, Ottawa, Ontario, October 8, 2009 (see appendix).

In 2008, after the success of the Epiphone Les Paul Ultra and Gibson Les Paul Goddess, Gibson began chambering all new Les Paul models beginning with the 2008 Les Paul Standard. With a weight of six to nine pounds, the new Les Paul Standard differs from the Les Paul Goddess only slightly in physical design. Epiphone has also released the Les Paul Ultra II, an updated version of the successful first model. While Gibson obviously did not find it worthwhile in some respect to continue designing and marketing guitars to females, they continue to make their guitars lighter. The continuation of the Les Paul Ultra also signals that Gibson has not completely abandoned the idea of creating guitars with design modifications normally associated with girl guitars.

### **Fender Musical Instruments Corporation and Squier**

Fender Musical Instruments Corporation (FMIC) was founded in 1946 by Leo Fender in southern California. The first real success of the company came with the release of the Telecaster guitar in 1951, “the first solid-body Spanish-style guitar to be commercially mass-produced.”<sup>57</sup> The same year, Fender introduced the Precision Bass guitar, one of the first successful amplified bass guitars. The Stratocaster was added to the lineup in 1954 and quickly became one of the most sought-after electric guitars on the market. After a decade of strong sales, Leo Fender sold his company to CBS in 1965

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57. Fender Musical Instruments Corporation, “Fender History,” 2010, [http://www.fender.com/support/fender\\_history.php](http://www.fender.com/support/fender_history.php).

due to his declining health. Sales remained high, but “a lack of commitment and real understanding of music and musicians by CBS gradually became apparent.”<sup>58</sup>

In the 1980s, CBS underwent extensive restructuring, selling off many of its non-broadcast media entities. Then-Fender President William Schultz gathered a group of associates and bought FMIC from CBS in 1985, though no buildings or machinery were included in the sale. Schultz and his colleagues quickly established factories in Corona, California and Ensenada, Mexico. Like Gibson Guitar Corp., Fender Musical Instruments Corporation began a period of expansion and acquired companies such as Gretsch, Jackson, Tacoma, and Groove Tubes among others. Fender also opened satellite facilities in England, France, Germany, Mexico, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and Japan.<sup>59</sup>

As a brand within the FMIC, Squier has had its own distinct history. Fender began experiencing intense competition from Japanese manufacturers who were blatantly copying Fender designs in the 1980s.<sup>60</sup> In order to compete with the replicas, Fender decided to create their own Japanese-based manufacturing operation to build ‘vintage’ Fender models. These Fender replicas became known as Squier JV (“Japanese Vintage”) models. Squier had originally been the name of a Michigan-based guitar and violin string manufacturing company that was acquired by Fender in 1965. The Squier name was removed from the strings not long after the company was obtained by Fender, and the

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58. Ibid.

59. For a more detailed history of the Fender Musical Instruments Corporation, see Bacon and Day, *Fender Book* and White, *Fender: The Inside Story*.

60. Fender Musical Instruments Corporation, “The Squier Story,” [http://www.squierguitars.com/news/index.php?display\\_article=99](http://www.squierguitars.com/news/index.php?display_article=99).

name stayed dormant until Fender needed a label for their newly manufactured Japanese vintage models.

During the 1990s, Fender continued to hone its approach toward having both Fender and Squier lines without competing against itself. As less expensive versions of Fender models, Squier was marketed as the brand for beginning guitarists. Fender continued to mainly release replicas of vintage Fender models under the Squier name, but also released a few 'original' lines under the title. In 1996, the Vista Series was released; it included the Venus, a guitar first designed in collaboration between the Fender Custom Shop and Hole guitarist Courtney Love. The Squier Jagmaster was also released at the same time, which remains one of Squier's top performing instruments.<sup>61</sup>

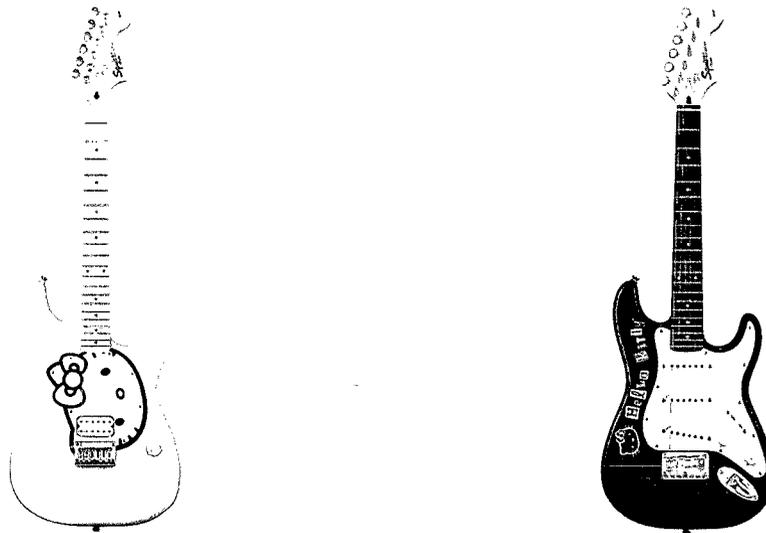


Figure 5. The Squier Hello Kitty Stratocaster and Hello Kitty Mini.  
(Images from <http://www.squierguitars.com/>)

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61. Fender Musical Instruments Corporation, "The Squier Story,"  
[http://www.squierguitars.com/news/index.php?display\\_article=99](http://www.squierguitars.com/news/index.php?display_article=99).

In January of 2006, Squier introduced the Hello Kitty Stratocaster, the Hello Kitty Mini electric guitar, and the Hello Kitty Acoustic. All three models are available in pink or black and feature the iconic Hello Kitty image on the front of the guitar (see figure 5). With thin necks, light agathis bodies, and retail prices of under \$250, the Hello Kitty Fender and Mini are designed as beginning guitars for young girls. They are a perfect example of the Squier position that “Squier is the launching pad for beginners, pointing intermediate and advancing guitarists toward their ultimate goal—owning a Fender!”<sup>62</sup>

### **Corporate Culture**

When comparing and contrasting the four main girl guitar manufacturers, there are many clear differences. It is interesting to note that the two large companies, Gibson and Fender, have discontinued many of their girl guitar products whereas the two smaller companies, Daisy Rock and Luna, have thrived. After only a year and a half on the market, Gibson discontinued its entire girl guitar line. Fender still sells its Squier electric girl guitars, but it discontinued the acoustic models at the end of 2008 after only two years on the market. Fender also formerly featured a girl guitar Web site where girl guitar users could meet, share pictures of themselves playing their guitars, and read journal entries from female guitarists such as Lisa Loeb and Kim Shattuck.<sup>63</sup> The Web site closed in early 2008. Sales at Daisy Rock, on the other hand, doubled every year for

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62. Ibid.

63. Fender Musical Instrument Corporation, “Fender Hello Kitty website,” <http://www.fenderhelloworld.com/> (accessed April 20, 2009; site now discontinued).

the first five years of its existence.<sup>64</sup> Luna has also grown enough in the past few years to add a full-time National Sales/Product Manager to the company. The successes of the small companies stand in stark contrast to the relative failures of girl guitar models within larger companies Gibson and Fender.

Keith Negus discusses the workings of large record companies such as Sony Music Entertainment and Warner Music Group, stressing that they are in a constant struggle to have bigger profit margins while facing “considerable uncertainty about the success of the products that they distribute.”<sup>65</sup> The desire to reduce the number of failures dominates and affects every aspect of the business. One way that these record companies attempt to gain control is by playing a large role in constructing and maintaining genres. The company itself is split into units according to musical genre, and each unit must jockey for position and for resources. Staff in each unit must produce ‘sure-fire hits’ while also searching for the ‘unknown’ artists, genre or audience that could give them an edge over other units.<sup>66</sup> A main effect of the desire to reduce failure is the constant restructuring of employees and any units that are considered expendable. Negus states:

In many cases, change is simply introduced for the sake of change, the rationale being ‘it’s not working, we must change it’. The alternative option is to cut the ‘under-performing’ unit or label from the portfolio. The decision to make these changes may well be irrational and have little base in any clear reason or logic, but it can be rationalized and understood through the idea of ‘cultural change’.<sup>67</sup>

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64. Watson, "Tish Ciravolo Interview."

65. Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures*, 32.

66. *Ibid.*, 49-52.

67. *Ibid.*, 79.

Thus, if the record company believes that a cultural change has taken place outside the company (or is likely to take place in the future) they have no qualms with changing employees, genres, or units within the company to match that culture.

It would be wrong to generalize that record companies and music instrument companies are similar in all aspects, but there do seem to be some pertinent similarities between the two. When conducting research for my thesis, I found it rather difficult to reach employees at Gibson or Fender that had knowledge of their company's involvement in the creation of girl guitars. I was transferred, put on hold, and never received return phone calls. At one point, I did reach a Gibson employee who worked in the Marketing Department and promised to be a strong source for my research. But when I tried to reach him again a few weeks later, I was told that he was no longer a Gibson employee. I interviewed another former Gibson employee a few months later and mentioned the ordeal to him. He was not surprised in the least and commented that most Gibson employees stay at the company for less than three years. Therefore, I would be hard pressed to find any current employees that had knowledge of the girl guitars released in 2006.<sup>68</sup>

When asked about the discontinuation of the Gibson Goddess and Vixen models, the same employee struggled to explain the reasons why the company made the cut. Sales of the Gibson Les Paul Goddess, he claimed, were most likely meeting or exceeding expectations. The explanation he found most likely was that the company's focus and resources shifted in 2007 to the release of the chambered Les Paul and, in the

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68. Mike Smith (pseudonym), interview by author, Ottawa, Ontario, October 8, 2009 (see appendix).

meantime, the Les Paul Goddess was thrown by the wayside. Based on these comments, it seems likely that the restructuring and competition between units within the Gibson Guitar Corporation is similar to that of most major record companies. At the same time, it may be true that Gibson sensed a cultural change away from girl guitars and modified their portfolio to meet this change.

My experiences with Gibson and Fender were very different from my interactions with Daisy Rock Guitars. Although Daisy Rock sold almost 25,000 guitars in 2008, it remains a modest company with only around twenty full-time employees.<sup>69</sup> Because of this, all employees play a large role in many aspects of Daisy Rock business. Product development, promotion, sales, public relations and artist relations are all overseen by owner Tish Ciravolo and co-owner Ron Manus. Although there is a hierarchy and each employee is assigned a specific job, employees are expected to participate in all aspects of the company. Also, employees associated with the company tend to stay with the company for longer periods of time. Thus, it is relatively simple to interact with staff members that have knowledge of the company's goals, statistics, and structure.

I met Tommy Norton, Daisy Rock's Director of Sales, at the Music Association Industries of Canada (MIAC) Trade Show in Toronto, Ontario in the fall of 2008. I soon found out that, not only is he the Director of Sales, but he also designed the Daisy Rock Siren, is one of Daisy Rock's main liaisons with industry and professional music magazines, and participates in test runs of most of Daisy Rock's prototypes. He took the

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69. Tommy Norton, interview by author, Toronto, Ontario, August 24, 2009 (see appendix).

time to speak with me in person, and he also gave me his personal email address in case I needed any further information for my thesis. Other Daisy Rock employees were equally gracious with their time and information.

According to Negus, different corporations cultivate different kinds of corporate culture. The corporation's distinct identity, in turn, allows them different kinds of control and access to particular markets.<sup>70</sup> I found this particularly evident within the smaller manufacturers of girl guitars. Tommy Norton mentioned one main difference he noticed between Daisy Rock and larger girl guitar manufacturers. He stated:

There have been a lot of people painting the guitar pink. But it doesn't seem like anybody's really interested in taking the time to work on designing guitars for women. They want the market share. They want to paint it pink and sell a bunch of them, but none of them are really [designed for females]. We are passionate about what we do because it all trickles down from Tish. She's extremely passionate about the company, about the vision. And it just goes through all of us.<sup>71</sup>

Luna Guitars owner, Yvonne de Villiers, also is quick to draw a distinction between her company and other, larger, instrument manufacturers. In a 2007 interview, she asserted, "We've had our own booth for the last two [NAMM] shows, which also carries the Luna vibe. Definitely non-corporate. You walk in and it doesn't feel like you're at a trade show."<sup>72</sup> To both companies, the corporate culture of large instrument manufacturers is recognizable and negative, and both Luna and Daisy Rock see themselves as positive alternatives. They both feel that, because of their own distinct corporate cultures, they are able to gain access to a market that larger companies have

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70. Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures*, 63-82.

71. Tommy Norton, interview by author, Toronto, Ontario, August 24, 2009 (see appendix).

72. Watson, "Yvonne de Villiers of Luna Guitars Interview."

been unable to reach. If they are correct, corporate culture may be partly to blame for the demise of girl guitars at Gibson and Fender. And then, perhaps, it is right for Daisy Rock and Luna to assume that their successes have been contingent upon their original goals; both began creating comfortable and fun guitars for their female family members and only began selling their guitars for profit later.

## Chapter 4 – Mediation

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### Narrowing the Focus of Mediation

When asked why they create girl guitars, manufacturers have two common responses. First, they wish to break down any ideology that “marginalizes, isolates, or inhibits women from the joy of making music.”<sup>1</sup> The second related response is that they wish to empower musical women.<sup>2</sup> While manufacturers attempt to dismantle sexist ideologies and empower females through their designs, gender identities are also enforced and contested through the mediation of girl guitars. Mediation can include any action or intermediary process that takes place between the manufacturing and use of the guitars such as the creation of girl guitar focus groups for product testing, the organization of girl rock camps and concerts featuring female performers by girl guitar manufacturers, and the promotion of girl guitars through more traditional channels of advertising and marketing.

Of course, mediation can only be separated from design and use in theory; in fact, every time a girl guitar is represented or displayed to the public, it could be considered an instance of mediation as well as use. As can be expected, the amount of information one could collect on the mediation of girl guitars is seemingly endless. In order to narrow my focus of the mediation of girl guitars, I will concentrate solely on marketing tactics used and print advertisements created by girl guitar manufacturers.

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1. Watson, "Tish Ciravolo Interview."

2. Gibson Guitar Corporation, "The Gibson Les Paul Goddess rocks with Agent Provocateur," *Gibson Lifestyle: Features*, June 8, 2007, <http://www.gibson.com/en-us/Lifestyle/Features/GodessRocks/>.

The marketing approaches and advertising campaigns of these companies reflect social trends of the late 1990s and beyond. While girl guitar companies have successfully used Web sites as tools to reach and interact with target audiences, Daisy Rock and Gibson print advertisements represent the difficulties girl guitar manufacturers face when trying to reach their target audiences with traditional advertising means. In girl guitar marketing plans and print advertisements, gendered ideologies are always present.

### **Selling To Female Consumers**

As stated in chapter 2, there was an increased focus on marketing products to female consumers beginning in the mid-1990s. Countless guides were published on the subject giving instructions on how to reach the female market. While these books address different issues related to consumption of goods by females, many of them follow a similar formula. Once females are taken seriously as a market for goods and services, many of these books lightly touch upon feminist discourse. In *Marketing to Women*, author Martha Barletta spends one page debating whether gender is 'nature' or 'nurture' and suggests that evidence supports the conclusion that gender is biologically and genetically inherent.<sup>3</sup> Where non-academic books on the subject, such as *Marketing to Women*, have a tendency to gloss over feminist theory almost entirely, academic research rightfully lends considerably more time to the subject. But the outcome is the same; gender is usually considered as a biological trait in order to

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3. Barletta, *Marketing to Women*, 16-20.

continue with the argument that specific tactics can be used to market products to females.<sup>4</sup>

After loosely establishing the argument that gender is inextricably tied to biology or sex, these books then continue by making generalizations about the characteristics most often associated with being female or male. In *Marketing to Women*, Barletta states the following 'key differences' between females and males:<sup>5</sup>

<b>Females</b>	<b>Males</b>
<b>Better peripheral vision</b>	Focused, sharp vision
<b>More acute sense of smell, taste, hearing</b>	Less acute sense of smell, taste, hearing
<b>Articulate and express emotion frequently</b>	Do not show emotion frequently
<b>Pick up on details and nuances</b>	Less observant of details and nuances
<b>Synthesize contextually and holistically</b>	Synthesize and disembed analytically
<b>Person oriented</b>	Object oriented
<b>Socialize by talking</b>	Socialize by doing
<b>Excel in language skills</b>	Excel in mathematics, abstract principles
<b>Not mechanically inclined</b>	Mechanically inclined

Table 1. Barletta's key differences between males and females

There are slight variations from book to book, but all follow the same general guidelines; females are billed as being inherently more perceptive, sensitive and verbal than males. Men, on the other hand, are deemed inherently superior to women in

4. Moss, *Gender, Design and Marketing*, 6-7.

5. *Ibid.*, 26-33.

mathematical, physical, and technological endeavors. These books then encourage marketers to use their knowledge of these 'female' characteristics to create products and advertisements targeted toward a female audience.

One of the most potent examples of feminist theory that these books implicitly dismiss is Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, which I have already discussed on pages 33 and 34. By ignoring arguments such as Butler's, books like *Don't Think Pink* and *Marketing to Women* (and companies who follow similar marketing models) place limits upon consumers. Females are grouped into a single category and labeled with specific traits and characteristics, leaving marketers who follow the principles outlined in these books to miss the varied nuances within the group. Such assumptions leave little room for changes in behavior and do not explain differences in 'gendered' behaviors in specific times and places. Although marketing based on gender difference is problematic in these aspects, it is extremely unlikely that girl guitars would exist today if there had not been an increased emphasis on marketing to female consumers in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Not only are these female 'characteristics' reflected in girl guitar advertisements, but they can also be seen in the choices made in the designs of girl guitars.

*Don't Think Pink* defines three ways to reach women as a market. The simplest tactic, which the book calls the "visible" approach, is to label the product 'for women' thereby separating the product from others that are not gender-specific.<sup>6</sup> The next option, the "transparent" approach, is to market the product in a way that "works with

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6. Johnson and Learned, *Don't Think Pink*, 26.

women's information gathering and purchasing processes.”<sup>7</sup> The last option is a “hybrid” approach where an established brand creates a product within their existing line and markets only the specific product as being ‘for women’. All three approaches can be used for women in general or for targeted groups within the population (single women, businesswomen, moms, Hispanic women, etc.), and all are used extensively in the marketing of girl guitars.

Daisy Rock is the most obvious example of the visible approach in marketing girl guitars to females. As Johnson and Learned mention, “When products like golf clubs or bike seats present an innovation for women, in an industry where the standard has been shorter or smaller versions of the men’s line, a visible, women-specific campaign helps highlight the change.”<sup>8</sup> Early on, Daisy Rock adopted the slogan, “The Girl Guitar Company,” and targeted its designs and marketing based on gender. Daisy Rock owner Tish Ciravolo often refers to all guitars not designed for females as ‘boy’ guitars, clearly separating Daisy Rock from all other guitar brands.

Daisy Rock’s Web site is also a great example of the depth to which the company stresses the visible marketing approach.<sup>9</sup> Not only is the Web site visually stunning with a variety of colors and shapes, but many of the pages within the Web site feature videos of performances by female guitarists that begin when the pages are opened. The home page offers a plethora of opportunities for visitors to connect with the company and with others interested in Daisy Rock. Visitors are encouraged to share their stories about

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7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., 31.

9. Daisy Rock Guitars, “Daisy Rock Home Page,” 2008, <http://daisyrock.com/>.

owning a Daisy Rock guitar, to sign up for the company newsletter, and to interact on Twitter, the Daisy Rock YouTube channel, Facebook, and MySpace. The site also allows for feedback, asking visitors to write reviews of the guitars. When viewed in the context of a gendered marketing approach, the Daisy Rock Web site appeals to a female's heightened senses, emotional responses, and predisposition towards socialization. While the Web site does include guitar specifications, the details are not highly promoted. This also fits the female profile in gendered marketing approaches as females are considered to be less technically inclined than males.

Luna Guitars has become the epitome of a transparent marketing approach. Johnson and Learned believe that the transparent approach "will become the rule," far outnumbering businesses who follow the visible approach.<sup>10</sup> They state that the main key to transparent marketing is "all about making great changes in your product and marketing that are inspired by women, but appreciated by [male and female consumers alike]."<sup>11</sup> Instead of targeting consumers based on gender or attempting to serve the needs of all ages, cultures, and backgrounds, the transparent approach recommends marketing products to a targeted group within the general population.

Luna has done exactly this by designing guitars that meet all of the general characteristics of girl guitars while marketing the guitars to a certain type of customer. Luna is aware that guitars with mythological scenes, henna, dolphins, and dragonflies target customers with a particular style. Instead of attempting to sell the guitars to all users, Luna focuses their marketing efforts on customers that appreciate New Age

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10. Johnson and Learned, *Don't Think Pink*, 35.

11. *Ibid.*, 37.

aesthetics. At the same time, Luna undeniably targets female consumers. Similar to Daisy Rock, the Luna Web site appeals to multiple senses at once.<sup>12</sup> A video of female guitarist Vicki Genfan begins as the home page opens and other female guitarists can be seen within an opening montage of images. No male guitarists are featured on the home page. The site features testimonials from Luna guitar players, a forum where visitors can interact, and links to Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube. It also has a link to Luna owner Yvonne de Villiers' personal blog where you can learn more about her life, her designs and inspirations, and interact with her personally. There are even links to e-cards featuring images used as artwork on some of the guitars. As with the Daisy Rock Web site, the Luna Web site provides sensory stimulation and opportunities to interact and communicate. The focus is most definitely 'person oriented'.

As previously established brands, Gibson and Fender both followed the hybrid marketing scheme with their girl guitar lines. Each kept their previous designs and marketing plans relatively unchanged while creating a line of guitars specifically for females. In the short span of their existence, Gibson girl guitars did not have an associated Web site. Fender, on the other hand, did create a Web site especially for the Squier Hello Kitty.<sup>13</sup> The site encouraged Hello Kitty guitar users to upload photos of themselves holding and playing their guitars. It featured a 'journal entry' section where stars such as Lisa Loeb would write about their songwriting processes and lives as professional musicians. The site also had a link where visitors could take guitar lessons.

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12. Luna Guitars, "Luna Guitars Web site," <http://www.lunaguitars.com/index.php>.

13. Fender Musical Instrument Corporation, "Fender Hello Kitty website," <http://www.fenderhellokitty.com/> (accessed April 20, 2009; site now discontinued).

As with Daisy Rock and Luna, the Hello Kitty guitar Web site was designed to be highly interactive, emphasized socialization, and encouraged the expression of emotional responses.

### Locating Space for Female Guitarists

The nature of advertising has changed quite a bit in recent years with companies often moving away from print, radio, and television advertising and, instead, focusing on the Internet and non-traditional forms of proliferation.<sup>14</sup> Girl guitar companies have followed this example almost exclusively and rely heavily upon the Internet for marketing and sales. For example, the majority of Daisy Rock sales are directed from their Web site instead of the guitars being purchased directly from retail locations.<sup>15</sup> This kind of dependence on non-traditional advertising is common with girl guitars.

When Daisy Rock created their first press kit in 2000, they did not send any to ‘traditional’ music magazines. Instead, the press kits were sent to ‘girl’ magazines ROCKRGRRL, *Teen*, and *Jane*. Daisy Rock soon became associated with *Girl’s Life* magazine, the magazine associated with the Girl Scouts of America, and many other brands that target female consumers – Pantene Pro-V, the Oxygen television channel,

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14. There has been a recent trend for large instrument manufacturers to rely mainly on celebrity product endorsements and Internet ads instead of print or media advertisements. For example, Gibson runs very few ads in newspapers or magazines anymore. I have only been able to find two Gibson television commercials released in the past four years. I scanned every issue of *Guitar Player* and *Guitar One* magazines issued in 2007 and 2008 and only found three Gibson advertisements. But Gibson products are handed out to performers before almost every music award show making the guitars extremely visible to millions of viewers. I also often see a Gibson advertisement banner on MySpace, a good demonstration Gibson’s new advertising techniques. The pages of *Guitar Player* and *Guitar One* are still filled with ads, but the companies featured are relatively small and do not share Gibson’s recognisability.

15. Tommy Norton, interview by author, Toronto, Ontario, August 24, 2009 (see appendix).

and the movie *Blue Crush* (about the lives of a group of female surfers). I have discovered one radio commercial and one television commercial for Daisy Rock, both of which ran on the Disney Channel. Besides these rare instances, Daisy Rock marketing has focused almost entirely upon product endorsements by celebrities, Web site hits, event sponsorships, and product endorsements in female-centric magazines.

Throughout my research, I was unable to locate a single print, radio, or television advertisement for Luna Guitars. Instead, they seem to rely solely upon their Web site, event sponsorships, and product endorsements by professional and semi-professional guitarists. Besides the Hello Kitty line Web site, I was also unable to locate any advertisements for Fender's girl guitars. Gibson also focused almost entirely upon non-traditional marketing techniques to draw attention to their girl guitars.

When *Any Sound You Can Imagine* was published in 1997, Paul Théberge made the case that music magazines "organize the internal and external relation of the music instrument industry, influence technical innovation and diffusion, define the meaning of new technologies for the consumer, and affect the life of amateur and professional musicians."<sup>16</sup> In 2009, I spoke with Tommy Norton, Director of Sales at Daisy Rock, and he commented on the continued importance of music magazines. He stressed that the opinions expressed in magazines such as *Guitar One* and *Guitar Player* continue to be highly valued by musicians, industry professionals, and even guitar novices.<sup>17</sup> As it was in 1997, music magazines continue to organize, influence, define, and affect all aspects of guitar cultures and those who participate in the cultures. As much of the space within

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16. Théberge, *Any Sound You Can Imagine*, 94.

17. Tommy Norton, interview by author, Toronto, Ontario, August 24, 2009 (see appendix).

these magazines is dedicated to advertisements, the ads themselves also contribute to the overall message, meanings, and ideologies created and reinforced by the magazines.

Because of the demonstrated importance of music magazines, they are often the first location in which new instruments and related products are advertised. Music magazines are one of the few locations where companies who manufacture musical instruments and accessories can reach an audience made up almost entirely of musicians. Yet, besides occasional product reviews, girl guitars are not generally advertised or found within the pages of guitar magazines. According to Théberge, along with carrying extreme importance in music circles, music magazines have become an increasingly masculinized space.<sup>18</sup> This is, evidently, a product of the readership of the magazines; it is almost exclusively male.<sup>19</sup>

The masculinity of music magazines has left girl guitar companies with little room in which to advertise their guitars to musicians and music industry professionals. When Daisy Rock placed advertisements in *Guitar Player*, *Guitar One*, and *School of Rock* magazines in 2005 and 2006, they found that the advertisements did not impact their sales in any way.<sup>20</sup> *ROCKRGRL*, one of the few music magazines especially for females, published its final issue in November of 2005. Without any publications or locations that reach a large number of experienced female musicians, girl guitar advertisements are located in places that reach female consumers in general. While this may reach a few practiced guitarists, it also attracts many females who have little or no experience as

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18. Théberge, *Any Sound You Can Imagine*, 122.

19. Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry*, 39.

20. Tommy Norton, interview by author, Toronto, Ontario, August 24, 2009 (see appendix).

musicians. It is possible that this lack of a 'feminized' or 'un-gendered' space for experienced female guitarists is partly to blame for the failure of professional models of girl guitars.

### **The Electric Guitar, Female Images, and Sexuality**

Within academic discourse, the guitar (the electric guitar in particular) has often been referred to as a source of sexual power. Frith and McRobbie were some of the first to suggest that the guitar had the ability to become a phallus, signifying male sexuality.<sup>21</sup> Waksman also makes the case for the guitar as a phallus with guitarists such as Jimi Hendrix, Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page. In hard rock and heavy metal, Waksman argues that the electric guitar became "rock's favorite mode of phallic display, with the electric guitar as a privileged signifier of white male power and potency."<sup>22</sup> This signification developed out of the relationship between white and black men where white men "sought to appropriate what they perceived to be the potency of black men."<sup>23</sup>

With Jimi Hendrix in particular, Waksman notes that Hendrix often intentionally used "the most obviously phallic of poses" during his performances such as when he played the guitar behind his back with "the neck of his instrument protruding through his legs like a surrogate penis, surrounded by his large black fist."<sup>24</sup> In such scenes, the electric guitar "allowed Hendrix to display his instrumental and, more symbolically, his

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21. Frith and McRobbie, "Rock and Sexuality," *On Record*, 374.

22. Waksman, *Instruments of Desire*, 5.

23. *Ibid.*, 244.

24. *Ibid.*, 188.

sexual prowess.”<sup>25</sup> It was through the symbols and codes attached to the sights and sounds of electric guitar that Waksman believes Hendrix came to personify a sexual ideal.

I believe the electric guitar can be understood as a phallic symbol within images of females as well as males. By appropriating the electric guitar as a phallic symbol, females are able to appropriate ‘sexual prowess’ and power as well. It comes as no surprise, then, that images of females holding electric guitars have become commonplace. By featuring an electric guitar in the image (especially when holding the guitar in a phallic pose), the image can signal a high level of sexuality.

Each of the music retailers I interviewed commented that females are routinely portrayed as sex objects in the pages of music magazines. When I inquired further about the meaning of ‘sex object’, one retailer elaborated that beautiful women were often pictured wearing lingerie or even less clothing while posing with electric guitars in provocative ways in music magazines.<sup>26</sup> Although each of the music retailers noted a general decrease in this trend, they commented that it is still not uncommon to find scantily-clad women posing with guitars in music magazine advertisements.

When searching for examples of recent images of ‘sex objects’ in music magazines, I found that the images were incredibly easy to find. In 2008, *Guitar World* published an article called the “Top 20 Hottest Female Guitarists.” In it, *Guitar World* writers and editors “decided to disregard musical skill and technique entirely in lieu of

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25. Ibid.

26. Mike Smith (pseudonym), interview by author, Ottawa, Ontario, October 8, 2009, and Doug Fenton, interview by author, Lincoln, Nebraska, July 6, 2009 (see appendix).

judging these players strictly on their aesthetic merits.”<sup>27</sup> The article was so popular that the magazine issued a second installment. The magazine also has a section of their Web site dedicated to the “Girls of Guitar World,” which features images of barely-clothed females posing provocatively with guitars.<sup>28</sup> Obviously also highly successful, the third installment of the “Best of Girls of Guitar World” was released in January of 2010.

Images of scantily-clad women holding guitars and posing in provocative ways are not only a part of music magazines, but have also proliferated through popular culture. In November 2002, pop star Christina Aguilera posed naked on the cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine holding an electric guitar. More recent examples include commercials for *Guitar Hero*, a popular video game first released in 2005. In 2008, model Heidi Klum was featured in a commercial promoting the game wearing lingerie and playing the guitar (controller). The following year, *Victoria's Secret* and *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit cover girl Marisa Miller shot a similar *Guitar Hero* commercial.

Images of females posing with guitars are also often included in soft pornography magazines such as *Playboy*. In 2007, *Guitar World* even drew a visual connection between the images common in both types of magazines by featuring *Playboy* founder Hugh Hefner and his three girlfriends holding guitars on the cover of their 2007 Buyer's Guide. Their 2010 Buyer's Guide also features *Playboy* bunnies in bikinis posing suggestively with guitars.

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27. Future US, Inc., "Top 20 Hottest Female Guitarists, Pt 1," *Guitar World*, November 18, 2008, [http://www.guitarworld.com/top\\_20\\_hottest\\_female\\_guitarists](http://www.guitarworld.com/top_20_hottest_female_guitarists).

28. Future US, Inc., "Girls of Guitar World," *Guitar World*, <http://www.guitarworld.com/articles/girls%20of%20guitar%20world>.

Out of the countless images I viewed of females and electric guitars, I found that the vast majority of images featured models with little or no experience actually playing the guitar. With such a proliferation of these types of images, even images of female guitar players are often portrayed in a sexual manner. As is the case of *Guitar World's* "Top 20 Hottest Female Guitarists," the guitar players are portrayed sexually instead of being judged by their skills as guitarists. As demonstrated by these images, the electric guitar has overwhelmingly become valued as a sexual symbol and not as a technology or musical instrument in images featuring women. Even in the hands of a skilled female guitarist, the instrument's sexual codes are difficult to overcome.

One aspect that the majority of these images have in common is that they are featured in masculine spaces. When found in music magazines and soft porn magazines, images of females wearing lingerie posing with electric guitars are meant to be visually consumed by male viewers. When images of lingerie and swimsuit models holding or playing guitars enter pop culture (as in the *Guitar Hero* commercials), the target audience and the meanings of the images become more ambiguous. It seems likely, though, that these kinds of pop culture ads target heterosexual male consumers that are encouraged, through repeatedly viewing similar images, to interpret the female as a sex object.

### Advertisements and Soft Porn

Throughout history, advertisements have used sexuality as a tool to gain an audience's attention. In recent years, this has meant an ever increasing appropriation of the codes of soft pornography within mainstream advertisements. Most feminist critiques of print advertisements draw distinctions between hard core pornography and soft porn and pin-ups where hard core pornography focuses on the "enactment of sex" whereas soft porn and pin-ups place emphasis on erotic posing.<sup>29</sup> I have found few examples of criticism relating hard core pornography to contemporary mainstream ads, but there are countless critiques that discuss the similarities between soft core and pin-up images and advertisements.<sup>30</sup>

In the past, soft porn has normally been accepted as a masculine space and the images within the space were meant to stimulate straight men.<sup>31</sup> According to Annette Kuhn, "The photograph speaks to a masculine subject, constructing woman as object, femininity as otherness."<sup>32</sup> While advertisements featuring overt male sexuality are no longer uncommon, "sex in advertising is predominantly about *female* sexuality."<sup>33</sup> Thus, there have been many feminist critiques of advertisements within the past fifty years.<sup>34</sup> While there have been some changes in the portrayal of females in advertisements in recent years, generally attributable to the increased role of females in marketing and

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29. Mey, "Making Porn into Art," 96.

30. See Cortese, *Provocateur*; Kuhn, *Power of the Image*; Paasonen, Nikunen, and Saarenmaa, *Pornifiction*; Reichert and Lambiase, *Sex in Advertising*; and Rosewarne, *Sex in Public*.

31. Epley, "Pin-ups, Retro-chic and the Consumption of Irony," 47.

32. Kuhn, *Power of the Image*, 31.

33. Rosewarne, *Sex in Public*, 73.

34. Reichert, *Erotic History of Advertising*.

advertising fields, there is still considerable reason to view print advertisements as catering primarily to a male gaze. Blair states:

The imaging of women in mass media may have 'come a long way' in its ability to eliminate the masochism of women forced to view themselves through male eyes, but such discussions of image and spectatorship often overlook an arena in which there is still much analytical work to be done and political change to be made: the glossy world of print advertising.<sup>35</sup>

Blair believes that print advertisements continue to rely on codes established in soft pornography and pin-ups to establish and maintain meaning within the ads.

Although soft porn and pin-ups have undoubtedly changed over time, many of the symbolic references have remained. Mey argues, "While the technical qualities of images may have radically improved, their themes, motifs and stereotypes, have become even more repetitive."<sup>36</sup> Mey and others identify specific codes that commonly cross over between soft porn and mainstream advertisements.

The first 'staple' of soft pornography that Kuhn addresses is "woman on her own":

Her eyes are closed, she faces away from camera, but her body is wide open. The photograph pretends to be a candid shot, pretends she is unaware that the camera is there...The spectator sneaks a look at her enjoyment of an apparently unselfconscious moment of pleasure in herself: the Peeping Tom's favorite fantasy.<sup>37</sup>

Kuhn notes how the facial expressions, body positioning, and composition of the shot all play a role in creating meaning within the image. When assessing the sexual content of outdoor advertisements, Lauren Rosewarne also deems facial expression as one of the

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35. Blair, "Selling the Self," 20.

36. Ibid.

37. Kuhn, *Power of the Image*, 29-30.

key indicators of sexuality. She finds that women in ads often wear expressions of “sexual ecstasy” with their eyes closed, mouth open, and head thrown back.<sup>38</sup> Other common expressions that cross between advertisements and soft porn include ‘suggestive’ smiles and ‘bedroom eyes’. Both Rosewarne and Leena-Maija Rossi also consider moist red lips as sexual signifiers that have become commonplace in both soft porn and modern advertisements.<sup>39</sup>

Body positioning is also crucial in contemporary advertisements that mimic soft porn. Often, the images center on a woman’s legs, groin, and breasts, or buttocks, the parts “generally concerned with sexual function.”<sup>40</sup> Kuhn suggests that by concentrating on feminine parts, the images subscribe to the notion that “sexuality equals femininity.”<sup>41</sup> Reichert stresses that clothing is one of the clearest examples of sex in advertising. He notes that women in advertisements often “wear open or low-cut blouses that expose cleavage as well as mini-skirts and tight fitting clothing that display the body.”<sup>42</sup> Rossi also believes that clothing in advertisements such as “black, red and lacy underwear drawing attention to the breasts, the buttocks, and the pubic areas” are heavily coded references to soft porn.<sup>43</sup>

When many of these codes appear within the same advertisement, the female in the image is considered to be ‘sexually charged’. And when the image also features an electric guitar, giving the female within the image additional ‘sexual prowess’, the image

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38. Rosewarne, *Sex in Public*, 91.

39. Rosewarne, *Sex in Public*, 93, and Rossi, “Outdoor Pornification,” 134.

40. Rosewarne, *Sex in Public*, 76. Also see Kuhn, *Power of the Image*, 38, and Rossi, “Outdoor Pornification,” 127.

41. Kuhn, *Power of the Image*, 38.

42. Reichert, *Erotic History of Advertising*, 33.

43. Rossi, “Outdoor Pornification,” 134.

becomes even more complex. While most girl guitar advertisements do not feature images of females steeped in the codes of soft porn, the advertising campaign for the Gibson Goddess line drew many similarities to images seen in soft porn that are hard to overlook.

### **The Gibson Goddess and Agent Provocateur**

In June of 2007, Gibson announced that they would be partnering with lingerie boutique Agent Provocateur to advertise the Les Paul Goddess.<sup>44</sup> Throughout the month of July, all Agent Provocateur retail locations across the world (in cities such as Los Angeles, New York, London, Paris, and Berlin) featured mannequins wearing lingerie and holding Gibson Goddess guitars in their storefront windows. Along with the press release, Gibson and Agent Provocateur provided an image of a female wearing a black bra, underwear, black stockings, and black stiletto pumps standing with her legs spread and holding a purple Les Paul Goddess (see figure 6). With long flowing hair and red lips, the cartoon-style female looks provocatively at the invisible camera. On the ground next to her is a pink amplifier, although there is no chord attaching the guitar to the amp.

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44. Gibson Guitar Corporation, "The Gibson Les Paul Goddess rocks with Agent Provocateur," *Gibson Lifestyle: Features*, June 8, 2007, <http://www.gibson.com/en-us/Lifestyle/Features/GodessRocks/>.



Figure 6. Image that accompanied the Gibson Goddess and Agent Provocateur press release

This image, along with the placement of the Gibson Goddess line in Agent Provocateur store windows, is an example of the difficulties girl guitar companies face when trying to market their products. The cartoon image displays a female who meets many of the codes of soft porn. The long flowing hair, large red lips, blushing cheeks, and inviting expression encourage spectators to view the image in a sexualized manner. Wearing high heels, long black stockings, and lingerie, the image also stylistically resembles soft porn. Lastly, the musicianship of the woman in the image is not accentuated. The electric guitar within the drawing is obviously nothing more than an accessory; the guitar is not even plugged into the amplifier.

If Gibson was, indeed, targeting semi-professional and professional female guitarists with the Gibson Goddess line, this method of advertising seems unlikely to

reach the intended audience. Instead of accentuating the playability of the instrument, Gibson's partnership with Agent Provocateur stressed the sexual codes attached to the electric guitar and to the female playing the instrument. Other than for its ability to imbue the user with powers of sexual prowess, the ads did little to demonstrate the *uses* of the guitar. For female guitarists wishing to be taken seriously as musicians within the male dominated music industry, the Gibson Goddess ad campaign may have discouraged rather than encouraged possible female buyers.

### **Gibson Print Advertisement**

To market the SG Goddess, Gibson Guitars created an advertisement featuring Leo, a guitarist in the all-female band Jaggedy Ann (see figure 7).<sup>45</sup> The advertisement was not, as far as I can tell, displayed in any magazines or public sites. Instead, it was available on Gibson's Web site as a downloadable desktop background. At first glance, the ad appears to be completely appropriate for a manufacturer who intends to 'liberate' females through the creation of girl guitars.

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45. Gibson Guitar Corporation, "Backstage Pass: SG Goddess Wallpaper," <http://www.gibson.com/backstage/goddess1280.htm>.

**Pure rock and roll style.**

**Gibson**  
BURST

SG GODDESS

Special slim mahogany SG body  
Narrow-nut, slim taper, '60s-style neck  
Madagascar heather ebony fretboard  
Translucent 490R & 498T humbuckers  
Available in Rose Burst, Sky Burst,  
Ice Burst, Violet Burst, or Ebony

Leo of Jaggedy Ann, with the new SG Goddess, Las Vegas, 2006.  
www.jaggedyann.com

Figure 7. SG Goddess advertisement

When viewed in relationship to images of male guitar players, the image of Leo has many similarities. She wears tight black clothes that are not necessarily fashionable. She is alone on stage, just as many images of male rock guitarists before her. There is no male figure in the image, which promotes female self-exploration and independence; she is seemingly in complete control of her own actions and in control of the guitar as a technology. Leo is on stage and not represented in the home, a position not commonly held by females in advertisements. Also, Gibson is inviting females to purchase an expensive, technical item that does not serve a function in the same way as a washing

machine or an oven. Many viewers would consider this advertisement as pro-female because Leo is subverting codes usually reserved for males.

While the ad can easily be interpreted as an image of female liberation, it can also be viewed as a heavily sexualized image that shares many codes with soft porn and pin-ups. The left half of the image is blacked out and the right half shows Leo on stage. She is kneeling on the ground with her legs spread holding the guitar upright. Her eyes closed and facing away from the camera, Leo has a look of ecstasy on her face and her lips are slightly parted. She has long flowing dark hair and heavy eye makeup, wears a tight black printed t-shirt, short shorts, fishnet stockings, and pink, black, white, and gray leg warmers.

Similar to the description of soft porn images supplied by Annette Kuhn, Leo seems unaware that she is being photographed and is finding pleasure in herself. The ad is mostly black with a streak of light drawing attention Leo's face with her heavy makeup, open mouth, and closed eyes giving the impression of sexual bliss. Next, the viewer's eyes are drawn down the length of the guitar as if it is an arrow pointing to her crotch as a symbol of difference and femininity as sexuality. Fitting into Reichert's idea of sexualized clothing, Leo is wearing a tight shirt that emphasizes her breasts and short, tight shorts. Viewed in the context of the relationship between soft porn and advertisements along with past images of females posing with electric guitars, the image of Leo is unnervingly similar to those that are normally directed toward male spectators.

The SG Goddess advertisement becomes even harder to separate from soft porn and pin-up codes because of its method of distribution. As a downloadable desktop wallpaper, the image is meant to be displayed on a person's computer and continuously viewed. Rosewarne states, "The basic idea of a pin-up is to provide an inexpensive, mass-produced image of a woman for a man's viewing pleasure."<sup>46</sup> Along with sharing many of the codes of soft porn and pin-ups, the SG Goddess advertisement is a mass-produced image available for placement in a prominent (yet, at the same time, private) position. Where posters and calendars held this position before, I would argue that the computer desktop can now function in a similar way.

The Gibson ad also relates to the problematic relationship between technology and females. Paul Théberge discusses an ad for Aphex MIDI interfaces that features a nude female who is part human and part machine.<sup>47</sup> According to Théberge, the ad draws upon themes of "the woman as machine, the need for human 'feel,' and the call for increased control over technology, overlaid with a distorted yet nonetheless seductive image of female sexuality."<sup>48</sup> He refers to Andreas Huyssen's analysis of the female robot in the film *Metropolis*, where Huyssen considers the robot to be a product of the long standing tradition of the "male gaze and...the male need for domination and control."<sup>49</sup> Because of the historical context of the relationship between females and technology, the Gibson ad becomes slightly more problematic.

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46. Rosewarne, *Sex in Public*, 125.

47. Théberge, *Any Sound You Can Imagine*, 124.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

While Leo is not half human and half machine, the placement of the cord in the ad can be viewed in a similar fashion. It is connected to the guitar, curves next to Leo's leg, and then disappears into the image as if the cord was plugged in to Leo's crotch. The cord is the link between the woman and the machine where the technology becomes literally connected to the source of feminine sexuality.

Lastly, the Gibson ad also falls within traditional discourse of separating an object into two opposed aspects – the 'feminine' and the 'masculine'. The language used in the ad upholds the division between female and male consumers, which can be viewed as a "denial or dismissal of the 'female' and the 'feminine'."<sup>50</sup> Dick Hebdige considers how ads can be created to target either males or females based on the language and the images used in the advertisement. He finds that 'male' objects are billed as functional, scientific, and useful while 'female' objects are decorative, aesthetic, and gratifying.<sup>51</sup> Hebdige claims, "Relations of dominance/subordination inscribed in the sexual division of labour are transposed so that engineering is perceived as superordinate and necessary (masculine/productive), styling as secondary and gratuitous (feminine/non-productive)."<sup>52</sup>

The slogan in the Gibson ad, "Pure rock and roll style," places the girl guitar firmly in the realm of femininity by highlighting aesthetic and stylistic dimensions instead of technical elements. There is no mention of the sounds produced by the guitar in the entire advertisement. While the ad mentions the kinds of wood used and the

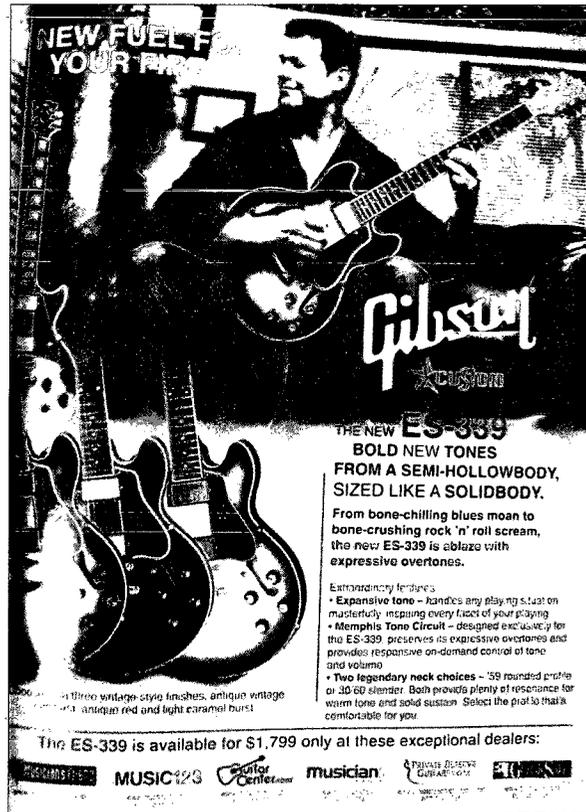
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50. Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light*, 87.

51. *Ibid.*, 86.

52. *Ibid.*

types of humbuckers, the stress is on slimness, specialness, colors available, and the translucence of the humbuckers.



**NEW FUEL FOR YOUR FIRE**

**Gibson**  
CUSTOM

**THE NEW ES-339**  
**BOLD NEW TONES**  
**FROM A SEMI-HOLLOWBODY,**  
**SIZED LIKE A SOLIDBODY.**

From bone-chilling blues moan to bone-crushing rock 'n' roll scream, the new ES-339 is ablaze with expressive overtones.

Extraordinary features:

- **Expansive tone** – handles any playing style on masterfully inspiring every facet of your playing
- **Memphis Tone Circuit** – designed exclusively for the ES-339, preserves its expressive overtones and provides responsive on-demand control of tone and volume
- **Two legendary neck choices** – '58 rounded profile or '30 60 slender. Both provide plenty of resonance for warm tone and solid sustain. Select the profile that's comfortable for you.

Three vintage-style finishes, antique vintage or modern, antique red and light caramel burst.

The ES-339 is available for \$1,799 only at these exceptional dealers:

MUSIC 423 Guitar Center musician PRIMA DESIGN GIBSON

Figure 8. Gibson ES-339 advertisement

When compared to a 'male' advertisement by Gibson that was used shortly after the Goddess ad, the 'female' ad is relatively empty of explanation and writing in general (see figure 8).<sup>53</sup> Even though the SG Goddess and Vixen were marketed to professional and semi-professional female guitarists who own other guitars, the ad assumes a naïve user. The ad for the ES-339, on the other hand, is obviously targeted toward guitarists

53. The advertisement used was printed in the January 2008 issue of *Guitar Player*. Photo taken by author.

who have previous knowledge of guitars and, most likely, own other guitars by using the slogan “New Fuel for your Fire.” After viewing the two advertisements side by side, therefore, it is not difficult to imagine that some professional female guitarists could find offense with the un-technical language of the Gibson Goddess advertisement when paired with the simplified design of the guitar.

### **Daisy Rock Print Advertisement**

Perhaps surprisingly, some of Daisy Rock’s advertisements share many of the same characteristics as Gibson ads. Throughout 2005 and 2006, Daisy Rock placed ads in magazines including *Guitar Player*, *Guitar World*, and *School of Rock*. One of their main ads featured guitarist Bec Hollcraft as the focal point (see figure 9).<sup>54</sup>

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54. The advertisement used was printed in the January 2006 issue of *Guitar World*. Image taken from Daisy Rock Web site, <http://daisyrock.com/node/4458> (image no longer available).

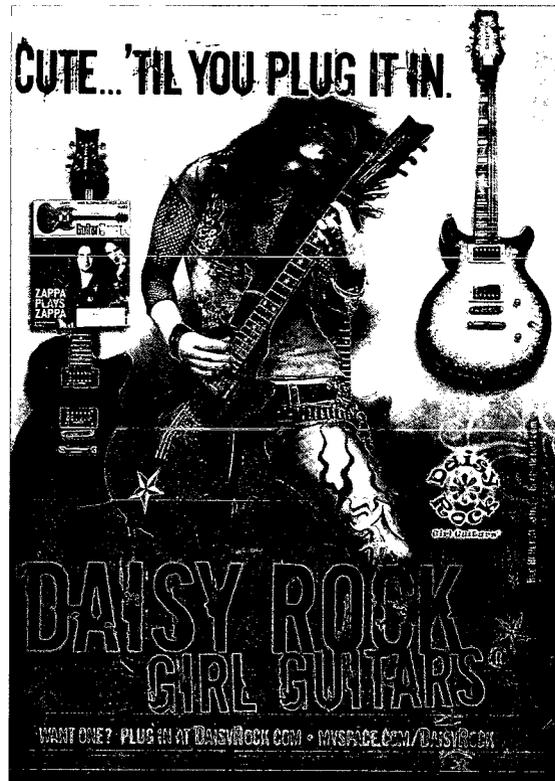


Figure 9. Daisy Rock advertisement

In it, she stands with her legs spread widely and her eyes closed facing away from the camera. Her long dark hair with red highlights swings across her face. She wears tight fitting printed jeans, a green printed t-shirt with a purple fishnet shirt underneath, and strums a black electric guitar with a pink star. Like the soft porn and Gibson ads, she seems caught in a private moment where she is finding pleasure in herself. I would, again, argue that she can be viewed as performing in a male fantasy for a male spectator; this point is made even more pronounced considering that the readership of guitar magazines is decidedly male.<sup>55</sup> In this context, Daisy Rock is flaunting gender difference to exclude male consumers as customers and, at the same time, attempting

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55. Théberge, *Any Sound You Can Imagine*, 122.

to receive their approval. The ad pronounces loudly that the guitars are “Daisy Rock *Girl* Guitars” (made for females and not males) and that the guitars should be viewed as guitars and not toys through the slogan “Cute...’Til You Plug It In.” At the same time, the ad gives no technical information whatsoever; in fact, there is little information at all. While male spectators may consume the image visually, it can be assumed from the lack of technical information that the ad is not created to sell guitars as technologies. While Daisy Rock may feel like it is sending a message to male consumers that girl guitars are both aesthetically and technically strong, the composition of the ad invites males to consume the female within the image alongside the intended message.

To me, it is curious that Gibson and Daisy Rock advertisements have a similar look and feel. The guitarists in both their ads are represented as typical ‘guitar gods’ with their legs spread widely, their eyes closed, alone in a moment of bliss. Even the guitarists’ long hair and tight clothes recall the famous images of Jimmy Page in his ‘guitar god pose’. Therefore, these images perfectly represent the struggle of girl guitar manufacturers to fit into the music industry while also attempting to create a space for female electric guitarists to be a much larger and accepted part of the industry.

On one hand, because women are not generally viewed as ‘guitar gods’, these images support the idea that there is a place for women in rock music. At the same time, these images reinforce the ideology that women cannot be groundbreaking electric guitarists and can only be a part of rock music by recreating the symbols and images constructed by men. The simplicity of the ads also fortifies the argument that females are not as technologically savvy as males and will buy guitars mainly for their

aesthetic values. Instead of encouraging females to create their own images and sounds (in lieu of upholding standardized sounds and images created by males), Gibson and Daisy Rock advertisements can be viewed as further perpetuating male ideologies surrounding the electric guitar. Especially when placed in guitar magazines with a male readership, these images arguably do little to empower musical women.

### **Different Perspectives**

While I have concentrated on Gibson and Daisy Rock ads from the point of view of male spectators because of the advertisements' relationships to other images, the sexual codes present within the ads, the methods of distribution, and the locations of the ads, I am well aware that different readings of the ads are possible. In film studies and in cultural studies, it was quite common to view images only through the 'male gaze' up until the 1980s. But the field has expanded significantly to include a diverse range of spectator points of view. Jackie Stacey states, "Within feminist criticism, the politics of location is also making its mark: increasingly issues of ethnicity, class, sexuality and nationality are being placed on the agenda."<sup>56</sup> Such work emphasizes the context of the viewer, realizing that individuals are socially constructed and the meanings of images vary between particular viewers because of their past experiences and associations. It is also true that the meaning of an image can change for the same individual upon different viewings. While it may seem that the range of interpretations available makes it impossible to draw any valid conclusions about the meaning of an

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56. Stacey, *Star Gazing*, 34.

image in general, Stacey argues that the “relationship between the image and identity is seen to be one of negotiation and process, during which there are apparent moments of fixity within a larger picture of transformation.”<sup>57</sup> Because of these moments of fixity, themes and common identifications can emerge.

The most obvious technique employed to establish the interpretation of images by individuals is through conducting ethnographic research. As in the work of Stacey, Radway and Ang, the cultural and national location of the individuals interviewed largely determines the results of the study.<sup>58</sup> Age, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and nationality all play a role in creating meaning within images to different individuals.

While I cannot offer any definitive conclusions without further research, I find Stuart Hall’s work on encoding and decoding to be extremely useful when theorizing different audiences by which girl guitar ads might be viewed today. Hall argues that the meanings of texts are established through negotiation between the reader and the text. He finds that the images can be decoded into dominant, negotiated, or oppositional positions.<sup>59</sup> I would argue that, in the case of images of women provocatively posing with guitars, the male gaze is the dominant position, and one in which “the codes are so common that they become ‘naturalized’.”<sup>60</sup>

Hall explains that the negotiated position “accords the privileged position to the dominant definitions of events while reserving the right to make a more negotiated

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57. *Ibid.*, 73-4.

58. Stacey, *Star Gazing*; Radway, *Reading the Romance*; and Ang, *Watching Dallas*.

59. Hall, “Encoding/decoding,” 128-38.

60. *Ibid.*, 128.

application to 'local conditions'."<sup>61</sup> While the dominant position suggests that women posing with electric guitars are meant to be consumed by heterosexual males, the images may be interpreted differently for homosexual females. From a negotiated position, a homosexual or bisexual female may identify the sexual codes within the images meant to stimulate male viewers and interpret the image from within her "local conditions."

For spectators in oppositional positions, Hall claims, "He/she detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference."<sup>62</sup> In the case of girl guitar ads, there are many individuals and groups that may view the images from an oppositional position. From the position of a fan of Jaggedy Ann, the meaning of the Gibson SG ad featuring Leo may be influenced by the viewer's experience at a Jaggedy Ann concert or connection to a particular Jaggedy Ann song. On the other hand, aspiring female rock guitarists may identify with the image and aspire to someday gain as much popularity and publicity as Leo. Besides experiential differentiations, a wide range of interpretations are also possible based on age, race, and nationality. Spectators such as these will most likely break down the dominant codes within the ads and then create new meanings for the advertisements that fits within a different vantage point. These types of positive associations with the ads are easily within the realm of possibility. At the same time, I believe it cannot be ignored that Daisy Rock and Gibson print ads encourage viewers in

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61. *Ibid.*, 137.

62. *Ibid.*, 138.

a dominant position to interpret the ads in much of the same way as soft porn and pop culture ads featuring female guitarists suggestively posing with electric guitars.

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## Chapter 5 – Use

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### Learning the Electric Guitar

There is no doubt that more females are buying electric guitars today than there were even ten years ago.<sup>1</sup> But, as every musician knows, the instrument alone does not make the player. Becoming a skilled guitar player takes time, practice and access to the tools necessary for learning. Paul Théberge suggests, “If learning is, indeed, a *social* process, then the factors influential in determining not only *who* has access to musical knowledge and skill, in the first place, but *how* that knowledge is transmitted need to be addressed.”<sup>2</sup> Even if females are more apt at being guitar owners today, this does not necessarily mean that they have more opportunities to become proficient guitar players.

According to Mavis Bayton, one of the struggles females face when trying to learn the guitar is the methods in which guitar theory has traditionally been transmitted.<sup>3</sup> Most electric guitar players have learned to play lead guitar by continued practice with friends, with older brothers, and by emulating riffs and styles of famous (male) guitarists. In order to learn to play lead guitar, a female would need to be accepted in the male-dominated sphere of guitar method diffusion. As mentioned in chapter 4, music magazines have also been a source of information for budding guitarists. Théberge notes that “musicians’ magazines, user groups, and networks are

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1. Tommy Norton, e-mail message to author, February 10, 2010.

2. Théberge, *Any Sound You Can Imagine*, 173.

3. Bayton, *Frock Rock*, 84-6.

overwhelmingly male in their orientation, and, with the male domination of popular musical practice overall, it thus becomes difficult for women to gain access to either technical knowledge or practical skill.”<sup>4</sup> Hence, getting guitars into females’ hands is only half the battle for girl guitar manufacturers. If they really wish to see more female guitar players, they must also help females gain access to guitar knowledge and skill.

While most electric guitar knowledge and skill continues to be possessed by males, there are a few signs that the trends are slowly changing. As stated in chapter 3, Steve Waksman mentions that the question has been raised as to whether or not the guitar has become “so normalized, so entrenched in the mainstream of popular music, that it now fulfills a principally redundant musical and social role.”<sup>5</sup> The number of people taking formal lead guitar lessons and attending rock camps in the past decade may well be evidence of the normalization of guitar technique and skill. Instead of learning how to play from your older brother or best friend, there has recently been an increase in the number of people taking formal guitar lessons.

Each of the guitar retailers I interviewed for my thesis mentioned drastic increases in the number of people taking guitar lessons at their stores in the past ten years.<sup>6</sup> Most of the guitar retailers I spoke to belonged to large chains of music stores and reported that the increase in lessons was happening in an overwhelming majority of the branch locations. While they noted increases in both male and female students, the guitar retailers were especially cognizant of the increased number of female students

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4. Théberge, *Any Sound You Can Imagine*, 185.

5. *Ibid.*, 283.

6. Doug Fenton, interview by author, Lincoln, Nebraska, July 6, 2009; Jesse Greene, interview by author, Ottawa, Ontario, August 21, 2009; and Mike Smith (pseudonym), interview by author, Ottawa, Ontario, October 8, 2009 (see appendix).

learning to play the guitar. Although it would take more data to make any conclusive statements, the reported increases in guitar lessons through music retail stores suggests that guitar technique and skill is now often learned in a formal classroom setting.

Robert Walser also discusses the institutionalization of electric guitar technique and claims that the technical lead guitar skills of heavy metal guitarists influenced by classical music, such as Randy Rhoads and Eddie Van Halen, prompted guitarists to seek out training in institutional settings.<sup>7</sup> Because of this, many heavy metal guitarists have backgrounds in classical guitar performance. Walser also points out that there are many similarities between heavy metal guitarists and classical composers of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Not only do both sets of musicians stress virtuosity in their compositions, but “the reigning values of metal guitar include a valorization of balance, planning, and originality; a conservatory-style fetishization of technique; and occasionally even a kind of cultural conservatism.”<sup>8</sup> These commonalities can help to explain why guitar technique seems to have reached a new level of normalization and institutionalization within the past few decades.

Both Daisy Rock Guitars and Luna Guitars have also participated in ‘girl rock camps’, events where females can gather and learn how to play rock instruments. Daisy Rock, in particular, has been instrumental in developing and sponsoring a variety of rock, songwriting, and guitar camps for young girls. At these events, girls are encouraged to learn rock instruments, meet other girls who are interested in playing music, and form bands with other girls at the camps. When a girl guitar company

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7. Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 84.

8. *Ibid.*, 99.

sponsors a girl rock camp, their instruments are almost exclusively used and promoted above all other instrument manufacturers throughout the event. Besides allowing attendees to use and purchase girl guitars during the event, there are often multiple girl guitar giveaways where attendees can win girl guitar merchandise and instruments.

Today, there are hundreds of girl rock camps, mainly in the United States and Canada, although numbers are increasing around the world. There is even a “Girls Rock Camp Alliance,” an association formed to help set up and provide support for girl rock camps.<sup>9</sup> While most of the camps are for young girls, there are rock camps where women can learn to play the electric guitar, bass, keyboards, and drums. The presence and success of these camps also signals a change in distribution methods of rock music skill and technique. Along with taking individual electric guitar lessons, females can now learn to play rock instruments in formally arranged groups.

The Internet has also been a site for the transmission of guitar skills and techniques. There are numerous Web sites that offer lessons and YouTube has hundreds of videos on the subject. The Gibson and Fender Web sites each offer links to guitar lessons on the web, and when the Fender Hello Kitty Web site was still functional it also had a link where site users could access lessons. Because of the availability of this information on the Internet, anyone who has access to a computer can learn to play. Females, especially, benefit from this method of transmission as they can bypass the ‘boys club’ and teach themselves to play. With the increased number of optional paths

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9. Rock ‘N’ Roll Camp for Girls, “Girls Rock Camp Alliance,” <http://www.girlsrockcamp.org/supporters/grca>.

to learn lead guitar, females have more access to guitar skills and technique than ever before.

### **Girl Guitar Users and Genre**

As discussed in chapters 1 and 2, female guitarists have been more accepted and visible in some genres than in others. While there have been a few notable female guitarists in the blues and country idioms, females have been virtually absent from mainstream rock and metal genres. In the 1980s and 1990s, more females were able to break into rock music in the underground scene, but they still did not garner large-scale mainstream success. Throughout the past fifty years, female guitar players have been most evident as singer/songwriters in the folk tradition. Acoustic guitarists such as Joni Mitchell and, more recently, Sheryl Crow and Tracy Chapman have been extremely prominent. But, as is normal in the singer/songwriter tradition, the guitar is mainly important as accompaniment and does not normally show much virtuosity on the part of the player. Few singer/songwriters are known especially for their guitar playing talents.

Of course, the design of the instrument can influence the genres in which the instruments are played. Before 2010, no girl guitars had a tremolo bar and active humbuckers for high output.<sup>10</sup> Common design aspects in electric guitars designed for heavy metal use, girl guitars were simply not built for that specific genre. Almost

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10. Lori Linstruth has a Luna Andromeda with these features, but the Andromeda is only available for purchase as a bass model on the Luna Web site. The electric guitar used by Linstruth is evidently a custom model.

certainly, the reason why girl guitar manufacturers had not created heavy metal girl guitars before is the comparative lack of females in the genre. At the same time, this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Creating guitars built for other genres and not for heavy metal can send the message that females are not *meant* to play heavy metal music. Daisy Rock Guitars released the first metal-oriented girl guitar in January of 2010, the Rock Candy Xtreme.<sup>11</sup> It is currently the only girl guitar on the market with all of the necessary design aspects needed to create lead guitar lines in heavy metal music. At the same time, the body of the Rock Candy Xtreme features soft edges and a shape similar to that of a Gibson Les Paul. When compared to other guitars that are commonly associated with hard rock and heavy metal music, such as the Gibson Explorer and Flying V, the Rock Candy Xtreme has gentle curves more commonly associated with femininity. For female guitarists wishing to create a heavy metal image, the Xtreme may not meet their expectations. But the presence of the Rock Candy Xtreme offers the suggestion that females can, in fact, play music in a variety of genres.

Most girl guitars, unlike the Rock Candy Xtreme, are built for versatility. Like the Fender Stratocaster, which is commonly used in rock, pop, blues, country and other genres, most girl guitars can be used in many genres. When I asked Doug Fenton, a veteran in the music industry, about genre and female guitar use, he stated, “The older women are playing folk music. The little girls are playing pop and the college-age girls are playing angry music.”<sup>12</sup> While this is a generalization, it is likely that age plays a factor in the genres in which girl guitars are used and not used. Throughout my

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11. Daisy Rock Guitars, “Daisy Rock Home Page,” 2008, <http://daisyrock.com/>.

12. Doug Fenton, interview by author, Lincoln, Nebraska, July 6, 2009 (see appendix).

research, I discovered that each girl guitar manufacturer seems to have found an audience with players from certain genres more than others. With the exception of the Squier Hello Kitty, each girl guitar company has sponsored artists by supplying them with free merchandise. This, in turn, encourages interest from guitarists who wish to play in the same style as the sponsored artists. When considering the genres and ages of the sponsored artists and current girl guitar users, some clear patterns emerge.

### **Gibson, Luna and Daisy Rock Use**

During the short existence of the Gibson Goddess line, Leo of Jaggedy Ann was the company's most highly promoted artist. Jaggedy Ann gained attention when they won the U.S. World Battle of the Bands and were soon opening for bands such as Heart and George Thorogood.<sup>13</sup> Their first album, *Boiling Point*, was produced by AC/DC drummer Phil Rudd and was released not long after the Gibson Goddess and Vixen entered the market. Clearly in the rock genre, their songs feature repeated electric guitar riffs and accentuated lead guitar solos. The video for their first single, "Shot of Gasoline," was filled with shots of cars at a racetrack and, as is common in rock videos, focused on the sexuality of the females in the video.

The promotion of Leo as the face of the Gibson Goddess began a trend. Almost every artist I discovered who played a Gibson Goddess belonged to a rock band and was between twenty and thirty years old. It is not uncommon to see Cat de Casanove of the English band, McQueen, with a Gibson girl guitar. Abby Gennet of the New York City

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13. Jaggedy Ann, "Jaggedy Ann Official MySpace Page," <http://www.myspace.com/jaggedyann>.

based band, Slunt, also plays a Gibson Goddess SG. All three bands have female lead singers, have highly sexualized images, and play similar styles of rock music.

Interestingly, the 'ugly duckling' Gibson Les Paul Vixen has become the most highly sought after of the Gibson Goddess line. Pop star Katy Perry often plays different colors of the model during her shows. After the guitar was featured in the background on her "I Kissed a Girl" video, many began trying to discover the make and model of the guitar.<sup>14</sup> Perry and Gibson even partnered to do a giveaway of a custom Les Paul, a replica of the coral colored Les Paul Vixen.<sup>15</sup> While Perry's music does not quite enter the realm of rock, she is also in her mid-twenties and has a sexualized image similar to that of the guitar players in Jaggedy Ann, McQueen, and Slunt. The Gibson Goddess line, therefore, is still clearly a vehicle for a certain age and type of musical expression.

Luna Guitars, too, have attracted a certain type of guitar player. As Luna is not marketed as a girl guitar company but rather as a 'gender friendly' manufacturer, Luna sponsors both male and female artists. In 2008, Luna created a custom guitar especially for David Cook, one of the finalists on the hit television show *American Idol*. They also sponsor fellow *American Idol* contestant Jason Castro. Even though there are male artists present, the majority of Luna artists are female. The first artist that appears when opening the Luna Web site is Vicki Genfan. In 2008, Genfan won *Guitar Player* magazine's Guitar Superstar competition, making her the first female to ever win the

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14. Les Paul Forum, "She kissed a girl, and slings a Les Paul," 2008-2009, <http://www.lespaulforum.com/forum/showthread.php?t=151708&page=4>.

15. KatyPerryUK, "Win a Custom Pink Gibson - Katy Perry," March 20, 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lleEOgu6cZM>.

prize. Notably, she was one of only two acoustic guitar players in the competition.<sup>16</sup>

Known for drumming and harmonic tapping on the guitar, Genfan employs over thirty different open tunings to create unique sounds.

Another artist who is commonly featured on the Luna Web site is Lori Linstruth, a progressive metal guitarist originally from California. Linstruth gained popularity in the late 1980s as the lead guitarist in the metal band Warbride.<sup>17</sup> She currently resides in Holland where she is the manager for progressive composer Arjen Lucassen. Although her music is distinctly different from that of Vicki Genfan, they share some similar traits. Both are over the age of thirty and are seasoned musicians. Neither plays music that fits easily into 'popular' genres commonly heard on the radio. They also share a high level of proficiency on the guitar. With players such as Genfan and Linstruth as sponsored artists, Luna tends to attract players who are mature, consider the guitar as an artistic outlet, and play music in genres that are less commercialized than that of Gibson of Daisy Rock.

Daisy Rock Guitars has an extensive list of sponsored artists. The company has adopted a mandate to reach out to as many different cross-sections of females as possible, and the list of sponsored artists is a reflection of this desire. The first artist sponsored by Daisy Rock was Wanda Jackson, the "First Lady of Rockabilly" and one of the first female rock music performers, who was recently inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.<sup>18</sup> Nancy Wilson of Heart, The Bangles and Lisa Loeb have also been

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16. Vicki Genfan, "Vicki Genfan Web site," <http://www.vickigenfan.com/>.

17. Guitarontheedge.co.uk, "Lori Linstruth," <http://www.guitarontheedge.co.uk/linstruth.html>.

18. Wanda Jackson Enterprises, "Wanda Jackson Web site," <http://www.wandajackson.com/>.

adamant supporters of Daisy Rock. Blues guitarist and reigning “Miss Harris County Texas” Ruthie Bram has been featured in most of Daisy Rock’s recent guitar demonstration videos. One of the newer additions to the sponsored artist pages is the band Eyes Set to Kill, a hard rock/heavy metal band from Phoenix, Arizona.

Still, some genres have been more highly promoted by Daisy Rock than others. One of the most visible Daisy Rock artists is pop star Avril Lavigne. During her most recent tour, she used the Daisy Rock Pixie Acoustic in Pink Sparkle and also owns the Daisy Rock Siren. Many pop artists affiliated with the Disney Corporation such as Hillary Duff, Miley Cyrus, Lindsay Lohan, and Jonnie and Brookie have also been sponsored by Daisy Rock. When scanning through the list of Daisy Rock artists, many characteristics are common to the majority. They are overwhelmingly Caucasian, many are under twenty years old, very few are technically advanced guitarists, and the vast majority of the artists play commercially viable pop music. Most also choose to play an acoustic guitar instead of an electric.

### **Sounds and Skills of Girl Guitar Sponsored Artists**

After taking into account the variety of artists sponsored by girl guitar manufacturers, it is obvious that the guitars are intended for use in a wide range of genres. At the same time, girl guitar players continue to play the acoustic guitar more than the electric. According to Tommy Norton, Daisy Rock sells twice as many acoustic

guitars as electric guitars.<sup>19</sup> Luna also follows this pattern, selling more acoustics than electrics. It may not be a coincidence that Gibson, the only girl guitar manufacturer to sell only electric girl guitars and to only promote rock guitarists along with the guitars, discontinued its girl guitar line so quickly. Daisy Rock, on the other hand, sponsors a large number of pop artists who play the acoustic guitar and has been very successful. Luna also uses an acoustic guitarist, Vicki Genfan, as a key figurehead of the company.

Another pattern surfaces while watching many hours of performances by various girl guitar sponsored artists; even the electric guitar players have a tendency to produce a clean sound with little feedback. Very few use effects pedals and most do not make changes to the sound of their instrument between or during songs. Steve Waksman points out the importance of the sound an instrument makes by referring to Jacques Attali's *Noise: the Political Economy of Music*, arguing that "for Attali, instruments contain the possibility of reorganizing musical practice."<sup>20</sup> To do this, though, "the instrument must, in a sense, be reinvented lest it merely reproduce the existing terms of domination through the regulation of noise."<sup>21</sup> Thus, it becomes extremely important for the sound of the girl guitar to be reinvented; only through the reinvention of the sounds created by the guitar can the existing "terms of domination" be restructured.

The electric guitar is a sonically diverse instrument, capable of creating a seemingly endless array of sounds. For many, this is a large part of the appeal of the electric guitar. When girl guitar sponsored artists play the electric guitar, though, a

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19. Tommy Norton, interview by author, Toronto, Ontario, August 24, 2009 (see appendix).

20. Waksman, *Instruments of Desire*, 12.

21. Ibid.

majority do not take advantage of the wide variety of sounds available. They instead have a tendency to adjust the sound only using the toggle switch standard on most girl guitars and to set amplifiers to produce low levels of feedback and distortion. Because of this, their guitars produce a standardized sound.

Some would say that certain guitar effects have also been used to the point of becoming standardized. Feedback and distortion, along with tremolo and wah-wah pedals, have been used excessively in rock music for decades. So even if girl guitar sponsored artists chose to utilize a variety of effects, they would be hard-pressed to reinvent the sound of the electric guitar in any new ways. As mentioned in chapter 3, many of the most famous guitarists made drastic modifications to their instruments in order to achieve a particular new sound. B.B. King, Stevie Ray Vaughn, Les Paul, and Eddie Van Halen all created signature sounds by tinkering with their guitars. This culture of tinkering is still almost exclusively a masculine endeavor, and I am not aware of any female electric guitar players known for a particular signature sound.

Because of the wide range of sounds already normalized through repeated use, the most obvious way of reinventing the sound of the guitar is through tinkering (commonly referred to as 'modifying' or 'modding' in guitar circles today). By becoming active participants in instrument creation instead of passive consumers of standardized products, female guitarists may extend the realm of the electric guitar beyond strict gender classification.<sup>22</sup> By first overcoming one ideology (the masculine culture of

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22. Steve Waksman claims that the 'feminized' nature of consumerism, in part, caused the masculine culture of tinkering. According to Waksman, "The construction of consumerism as a passive 'feminized'

tinkering or modifying), female guitarists may then be able to surmount the masculine ideologies of playing the electric guitar. Perhaps along with offering girl rock camps, girl guitar manufacturers could also provide lessons on guitar modification. By giving young girls the tools to participate in modding culture, the gendered nature of both tinkering and the electric guitar could be called into question.

While altering the electric guitar through modification may begin the task of reforming gendered ideologies, the sound produced by the guitar is also contingent upon the skills and choices of the player. Another striking element that emerges when considering artists sponsored by girl guitar companies is the range of technical abilities of the players. An overwhelming majority do not play lead guitar, instead focusing on their vocal abilities and using the instrument as accompaniment. Although there are some very skilled lead guitarists, they are far less numerous than those artists who follow in the singer/songwriter tradition.

According to Robert Walser, “virtuosity – ultimately derived from the Latin root *vir* (man) – has always been concerned with demonstrating and enacting a particular kind of power and freedom that might be called ‘potency’.”<sup>23</sup> Because power of any kind is traditionally accepted as a masculine trait in Western society, potency and, therefore, virtuosity are inherently masculine as well. Steve Waksman also views the masculine nature of virtuosity to be one obstacle females encounter and suggests, “If virtuosity has long functioned as a means of fortifying musical manhood, then the rejection or

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activity placed a burden upon men to demonstrate their active relationship to objects of consumption.” Waksman, “California Noise,” 677.

23. Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 696.

redefinition of virtuosity might work to open a greater space for female participation.”<sup>24</sup>

This, of course, was a part of the punk movement that was continued by Riot Grrrls in the early 1990s. The ‘do-it-yourself’ culture present in the Riot Grrrls scene encouraged females with little or no musical ability to participate in the creation of music.

While I agree with Waksman that not requiring skill as a musician may allow more females to take part in music production, the rejection of virtuosity also reinforces the ideology that only males have the physical and mental capabilities needed to become virtuosic guitar players. The rejection of virtuosity also limits female guitarists’ abilities to play in certain genres. Where a lack of skill is acceptable in some underground scenes, mainstream heavy metal and hard rock in particular have become synonymous with virtuosic guitar playing. Without becoming proficient lead guitarists, female musicians will continue to be left out of these genres. Becoming a studio musician will also be beyond reach. A rejection of virtuosity altogether would go only part way toward restructuring the existing terms of domination.

I find Waksman’s idea of redefining virtuosity equally problematic. Even if the term “virtuoso” has masculine roots, the word has changed since it was used in sixteenth and seventeenth century Italy. “Virtuoso” was first used to describe any scholar, musician, artist, or architect who had a high level of skill.<sup>25</sup> Later, emphasis was placed on a virtuoso’s level of theoretical training and not pure technical ability. When opera and the instrumental concerto gained popularity in the eighteenth century, any

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24. Waksman, “California Noise,” 691.

25. Owen Jander, “Virtuoso,” *Oxford Music Online*, [http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/29502?q=virtuoso&search=quick&pos=1&\\_start=1#firsthit](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/29502?q=virtuoso&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit) (accessed January 14, 2010).

musician who pursued a solo career could be regarded as a virtuoso or virtuosa.<sup>26</sup> This included female musicians, mainly sopranos, who had exceptional abilities and training. The presence of the feminine term “virtuosa” in itself is evidence that the expression extended beyond its masculine roots to include exceptionally gifted female artists.

Even if Walser is, in fact, correct that the term is still unequivocally masculine, language is used to describe and understand society. The only way to redefine virtuosity as anything other than masculine is to include more females within the definition. Instead of rejecting virtuosity, more female electric guitarists must become virtuosic. As more female guitarists achieve a high level of skill on the instrument, the term would evolve to include females in the definition. Instead of rejecting technical skills or waiting for the definition of virtuosity to change on its own, female guitarists must train to become virtuosic. In order to completely change masculine ideologies attached to the electric guitar, females must be present, creative *and* competent as guitar players.

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26. Ibid.

## Chapter 6 – Conclusion

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In various discourses surrounding the electric guitar, contestation over the gendered nature of the instrument seems to be hitting a new stride with the creation, mediation and use of girl guitars. Manufacturers view females as a largely untouched market for guitar sales, yet they have struggled to invite females to play the electric guitar without reinforcing gender stereotypes and cultural norms. While Daisy Rock, Luna, Gibson and Fender have all attempted to break down the power structures inherent on the body of the guitar to different degrees, none have succeeded in altering the masculine associations attached to the instrument completely. In fact, I believe that the opposite is true – girl guitar manufacturers have typically solidified and reinforced gender stereotypes through their designs and advertisements. By redesigning guitars both physically and aesthetically, manufacturers consider gender and sex to be one and the same instead of considering gender as socially constructed and performative.

It is also problematic that guitars made for females are almost always marketed as ‘girl’ guitars. Following on the heels of Riot Grrrls and the Spice Girls, girl guitars continue the tradition of using the label, ‘girl’. Not only does this term group all females into one group despite differences such as age, race, and ethnicity, but it could be viewed as an ideological constraint. This term indicates that females are not ‘women’, but ‘girls’. The feminine is thereby ideologically bound to being childlike and immature, unable to reach full adulthood and function independently. When Daisy Rock began manufacturing guitars in 2000, their goal was to create instruments for tween and teen

females. Thus, the term 'girl' somewhat defined the target audience. But girl guitar manufacturers have not altered the language to refer to a broader female clientele even as their target audience has changed. In fact, Daisy Rock changed the name of its line aimed at tweens and teens to Debutante, a name that also has gender, class and age connotations, while reserving the Daisy Rock Girl Guitar line for 'adult' consumers.

Mavis Bayton states that women are less likely to enter a band because they are expected to enter into marriage and raise a family.<sup>1</sup> By using the term 'girl' instead of 'woman', manufacturers can be viewed as perpetuating this ideology. Girls are usually unmarried and do not have children of their own. According to common stereotypes, only girls have the freedom needed to be a part of a band and play an instrument. When females ideologically become 'women' by marrying and having children, they are no longer able to participate in the lifestyle necessary to be a professional musician. Thus, by labeling the instruments as 'girl' guitars, manufacturers could be seen as implying that guitars are made for girls who are single and unattached and not for women who have ties that might keep them from participating in the lifestyle of a professional guitar player. 'Women' must choose between motherhood and a career whereas 'girls' do not.

Lastly, the creation of girl guitars publicly separates 'girl' and 'regular' guitars. All guitars not labeled as girl guitars can now be viewed as the sole property of males. While manufacturing girl guitars invites females to play the guitar, it also separates females from males. By creating a separate female space in which to make music, girl guitars could be regarded as further alienating females from the male dominated music

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1. Bayton, *Frock Rock*, 33-5.

industry. In this light, girl guitars encourage and support the exclusion of females from the mainstream music industry. Creating 'feminine' instruments suggests that females are not, nor are they meant to be, a part of the dominant culture.

While the category of 'girl guitar' is problematic in many ways, it also brings contestation of gendered identities (both female and male) and the imbalance of male and female rock musicians to the forefront. As Mavis Bayton states, the largest barriers women musicians face are ideological, and the exclusion of women in the music industry creates a self-fulfilling prophecy of further exclusion.<sup>2</sup> The more females are seen playing the electric guitar, the more accepted it will become for females to play the electric guitar in the future. In this sense, even as girl guitars reinforce gender ideologies, they also succeed by questioning male domination of the electric guitar. Perhaps by separating 'girl guitars' from 'boy guitars' today, there will be a day when we no longer need to rely on separation to validate that females can also play the electric guitar.

As seen in a 2008 interview with The Donnas guitarist Allison Robertson, many of the codes attached to the electric guitar described by Bayton have yet to lose their cultural significance. Robertson stated:

I've felt like people assume that I'm a cocky, in-your-face type of person just because I play guitar, which isn't the case. It definitely says to people that you're a warrior, that you're manly. It's like owning a chainsaw and being a girl. It's something that people aren't expecting and it screams that you're willing to try something.<sup>3</sup>

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2. Ibid., 40.

3. Uhelszki, "Allison Robertson of The Donnas."

If this is still true for Robertson over a decade after Martin Guitars first released its first “Women in Music” model, it stands to reason that the design, mediation, and use of girl guitars alone is not enough to cause an immediate upheaval in ideologies surrounding the electric guitar.

As stated in chapter 5, only in the past few decades have the majority of females had access to instruction in advanced guitar technique. The number of female guitarists has grown, but most still do not play lead guitar. The problem remains: how can a female play lead electric guitar without losing her ‘feminine’ identity or becoming ‘hyper-feminine’ to draw focus upon gender difference? How can she navigate through the male-dominated images and symbols and be accepted by both female and male audience members? What can she do to be viewed as a virtuoso guitar player and not a *female* virtuoso guitar player? The predicament is especially exaggerated in rock music where some prominent male guitarists have presented themselves as ‘feminine’ or ‘androgynous’.

Today, one female lead guitarist in particular seems to be successfully mediating gender and genre boundaries. Twenty-five year old Australian Orianthi Panagaris first drew the attention of the guitarist Steve Vai at the age of fifteen and has since played alongside many top guitar players. After playing with Carlos Santana in 2005, he remarked, “If I were going to pass the baton to someone, she would be my first choice.”<sup>4</sup> But Orianthi did not gain widespread public recognition until 2009 when she was asked to join Carrie Underwood’s band and perform at the Grammy Awards. Within

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4. “Badass Female Guitarist – Orianthi,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXf8oJq049w>.

a few hours, the Internet was buzzing with people searching for Orianthi's name. A few months later she auditioned for Michael Jackson's "This Is It" tour and was chosen as his band's lead guitarist. Even though the tour never took place because of Jackson's untimely death, the tour's rehearsal videos were released as a documentary that entered theatres in October of 2009. Orianthi's solo album, *Believe*, debuted at the same time and the first single off of the album, "According to You," quickly reached the charts.<sup>5</sup> As of January 30<sup>th</sup>, the single had risen to number twelve on the U.S. Hit Radio Weekly Top Forty; Orianthi was also featured as a guest on the program for the week.<sup>6</sup>

Besides being a female guitar virtuoso, one of the first striking features of Orianthi is her performance style and image. Sometimes she wears shirts that show her midriff and high-heeled boots, but she is seen most often performing in tank tops or t-shirts and jeans. She could just as easily be attending a university lecture as playing the guitar in front of thousands of people. When compared to the flamboyant outfits worn by many 'guitar gods', Orianthi's style could be labeled ordinary. Her clothing is feminine, but it is not exaggerated. Her performance style is also unique when compared to other virtuoso guitarists. She stands with her feet shoulder width apart and her weight on one leg. Slightly leaning back, she bobs her head from side to side with the music. The nodding of her head, along with slightly bending back further when reaching for notes high on the guitar's neck, is the only movement she makes while performing. It may not be as interesting to view as performances by guitarists such as

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5. Orianthi, "Orianthi Web site," 2009, <http://www.orianthi.com/>.

6. Dees Entertainment, Inc., "Hit Radio 01-30-2010," *rick.com*, <http://www.rick.com/show/hit-radio-01-30-2010>.

Eddie Van Halen, but watching Orianthi does little to recall images of masculine performance styles.

While viewing Orianthi's performances, another aspect that emerges is her versatility. In 2007, she played at Chicago's famous Crossroads Guitar Festival with a set-list full of blues songs. She also opened for Steve Vai in 2007 and performed a variety of progressive and hard rock songs. By appearing alongside Carrie Underwood, Orianthi gained access to mainstream country music. Her appearances with Prince and Michael Jackson raised her status within mainstream pop music. Of the eleven tracks on her own album, ten are mainstream pop songs and one is a progressive rock instrumental. It is disappointing that her album does not represent the musical diversity present in her past live shows, but it does not diminish the importance of her instrumental contributions. Although Orianthi's album does not fully make use of her ability to move easily through genres, it does succeed in making virtuosic lead guitar playing accessible to millions of tween and teenage girls. Paired with her feminine, yet accessible image and performance style, she gives the impression that any young female has the ability to pick up the electric guitar and become technically skilled without over-emphasizing gender. Her popularity will, no doubt, guide many young girls to playing lead guitar in the future. If Mavis Bayton is correct, the importance of having female guitar players as role models for younger generations cannot be stressed enough.<sup>7</sup>

My research on girl guitars has led to a wide variety of areas that require further study. According to Suzanne Cusick, one of the tasks of a feminist musicologist is to

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7. Bayton, *Frock Rock*, 61-2.

rescue women from obscurity and give them their rightful place in music history.<sup>8</sup> From what I can tell, little work has been done to document women's experiences in the field of instrument manufacturing and repair. I would also like to see more research conducted in the marketing of musical instruments, especially of the electric guitar, to female consumers. During my research, I found evidence that female guitarists were included in Fender electric guitar advertisements as both professional musicians and as students during the 1950s, suggesting that the electric guitar was not quite so thoroughly masculine at its inception. By studying the advertisements and the women featured in the ads (such as Mary Kaye of the Mary Kaye Trio), we may find that females are not absent in the history of the electric guitar and of rock music and have no need to be absent in the future.

More work can undoubtedly be done to expand our understanding of the mediation of girl guitars. The majority of Daisy Rock guitars are purchased online and not at retail locations. The Internet is also used as a community building forum where girl guitar owners (and female guitarists in general) can interact with one another. More research is needed to realize the role the Internet has played in creating a space for female guitarists to buy instruments and accessories, learn techniques and skills, and build relationships with girl guitar manufacturers and other female guitarists. Likewise, further investigation into the recent development of girl rock camps could lead to a better understanding of the ways in which guitar technique is disseminated today.

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8. Cusick, "Gender, Musicology, and Feminism," 471-98.

Lastly, I would like to see an in-depth analysis of girl guitar users. Instead of relying on data and observations concerning artists sponsored by girl guitar manufacturers, interviews with ‘average’ girl guitar users could verify or dismiss my original findings about genre, sonic qualities commonly produced by female electric guitarists, and virtuosity. These interviews could also lend insight into the choices of girl guitar users – why they choose to play girl guitars instead of ‘regular’ guitars, how they feel they are perceived by others while using girl guitars, whether they play the guitar individually or with a band or group, and how they learn guitar skills and techniques.

When manufacturers began creating girl guitars ten years ago, music retailers had doubts about the viability of females as a market for guitars and about the staying power of guitars designed specifically for females.<sup>9</sup> But the number of female guitarists has grown considerably in recent years, forcing music retailers to take notice. According to Tommy Norton, females represented only four percent of guitar sales in 2000. By 2007, the female share of sales had grown to fourteen percent.<sup>10</sup> While more females are playing the electric guitar today than before the inception of girl guitars, there is no way to tell if girl guitars caused the change to any degree. It is more likely that many elements – the creation of girl guitars, the normalization of guitar ideologies, the changing role of women in popular music, ideological manifestations of third wave feminism, and the changing nature of advertising to females – have combined to give females greater access to the electric guitar.

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9. Mike Smith (pseudonym), interview by author, Ottawa, Ontario, October 8, 2009 and Doug Fenton, interview by author, Lincoln, Nebraska, July 6, 2009 (see appendix).

10. Tommy Norton, interview by author, Toronto, Ontario, August 24, 2009 (see appendix).

At the same time, the increased number of female guitar players, no doubt, impacts the position of girl guitar manufacturers within the music retail industry. The heated debates generated during Daisy Rock's early years have lessened considerably and girl guitar manufacturers seem to be earning more respect from associates. The industry's gradual acceptance of girl guitars was accented at the 2010 Winter NAMM Trade Show where Daisy Rock was noted as one of the Association's "Best in Show." When explaining why Daisy Rock deserved the recognition, panelists reasoned, "There is an entire market out there for girls, and they want to play. Tish is the first to really go after that market. Many others have followed. She supports her dealers. This is a really, really fine company."<sup>11</sup> If the male-dominated music retail industry is ready to place such an honor on a company that manufactures guitars for females, perhaps there will be room for even more females in the music industry in the future.

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11. Music Inc. Magazine, "Best in Show Delivers Top Gear From NAMM," January 20, 2010, [http://www.musicincmag.com/News/2010/100105/100120\\_bis.html](http://www.musicincmag.com/News/2010/100105/100120_bis.html).

## Appendix

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### Girl Guitar Interviews

For my thesis, I conducted interviews with five individuals with a range of expressed opinions pertaining to girl guitars. I drafted a series of questions for individuals with particular backgrounds – girl guitar manufacturers, musical instrument retailers, and girl guitar users. All interviews were confidential, and participants had the option of either being named or remaining anonymous. Especially in the case of girl guitar manufacturers, these personal accounts of company goals, statistics, marketing plans, and future projects filled in many of the gaps left unfilled by Web sites.

#### Interview 1 – Tommy Norton

Interviewed in Toronto, Ontario on August 24, 2009

Tommy Norton is the current Director of Sales at Daisy Rock Guitars. He has been with the company for two years. Before joining Daisy Rock, Norton was the Manager of West L.A. Music in Los Angeles, California, a popular retail music store. He also worked for Fender for five years, giving him a strong background in guitar retail sales.

#### Interview 2 – Mike Smith (pseudonym)

Interviewed in Ottawa, Ontario on October 8, 2009

Mike Smith is a former Product Manager with a major instrument manufacturer. In 2005 and 2006, he was in charge of visiting retail locations across Canada and promoting new

merchandise. Smith is currently a Store Manager at a large music retail operation. When I met with Smith, he had just given a presentation at a national meeting about recent increases in music lessons.

#### Interview 3 – Doug Fenton

Interviewed in Lincoln, Nebraska on July 6, 2009

Doug Fenton is a Co-Owner of Dietze Music, a chain of music retail locations in Lincoln and Omaha, Nebraska. For over forty years, Fenton has been the Manager of the Pro Shop at Dietze Music where he sells guitars, amplifiers, and music recording equipment.

#### Interview 4 – Jesse Greene

Interviewed in Ottawa, Ontario on August 22, 2009

Jesse Greene is a Sales Associate at the Ottawa Folklore Centre in Ottawa, Ontario, and a prominent blues guitarist in the Ottawa area. She has been teaching guitar lessons for over ten years, mainly to female students. She advocates playing girl guitars to her students, and believes that smaller, lighter guitars can be extremely beneficial for female guitarists. At the same time, Greene often plays 'regular' guitars in order to be better accepted as a guitarist.

#### Interview 5 – Jeremy Parksburger

Interviewed in Toronto, Ontario on August 24, 2009

Jeremy Parksburger is a Product Specialist for Yorkville Sound in Toronto, Ontario. He has been working for the company for one year. As a player of 'regular' guitars, Parksburger is adamant that girl guitars are 'toys' and are unnecessary. He believes that females, by and large, do not want to play guitars designed especially for them.

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