

Reflective Essay

Women's music embraces the idea that women possess the skills and talent to control their own music network. Beginning in the 1970's, this network served as an outlet for women artists to express themselves, speaking about topics historically silenced, such as domestic abuse and same-sex relationships. With this community's support, women sought to increase their self-esteem by improving their skills in numerous domains. After viewing the documentary, *Radical Harmonies* (2002), which explores the Michigan Women's Music Festival, I hoped to learn more about this groundbreaking festival. The documentary includes archival images of talented women artists, producers, and engineers, along with first-hand accounts from festival attendees discussing a range of topics.

The documentary sparked my interest in understanding how this festival creates a safe space and a life-changing experience. Fortunately, Dr. Rodgers gave our class an opportunity to research a topic of our interest as it relates to the course objectives. We were asked to engage 6-10 scholarly and primary sources, and analyze significant issues of women, gender, power, and identity, to see how social inequalities influence popular music. I aimed to gather a diversity of sources to obtain a full understanding of how this space plays an essential role in improving women's opportunities in the industry.

The range of sources strengthened my argument as I obtained a variety of perspectives. I found primary sources such as the feminist news journal, *Off Our Backs*, and the magazine, *Herizons*, which is composed of informative anecdotes from festival attendees. I also used a photograph of the work crews and *Radical Harmonies* as primary sources. These served as important tools in achieving a deeper appreciation of the feminist movement as I could explore its successes and struggles with my own eyes. In addition, I gathered scholarly articles from

journals including *The Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* and *The Journal of Music and Gender*, which shaped my knowledge regarding the history and the festival's mission.

Furthermore, I examined recent articles and interviews from NPR to discover how women artists of an earlier generation have impacted popular music today.

There were several strategies I developed through in-class activities and assignments, such as evaluating sources from assigned journals, books, and websites, along with writing an annotated bibliography. Following a class visit and an interactive lecture with Women's Studies librarian Yelena Luckert and Performing Arts librarian Steve Henry, I discovered sources from McKeldin Library's research port using databases including Academic Search Premier and JSTOR. One strategy I used was adding "AND" in between key words to obtain the most accurate results by filtering out unrelated sources. Also, I examined the bibliographies of credible sources to lead me to other related articles and authors. Through this strategy, I successfully found *Off Our Backs* and *Herizons*. These first-hand accounts are crucial as women's music has been left out or misrepresented in traditional histories; these primary sources represent women speaking for themselves, limiting any biases that authors may hold. Overall, the help from the librarians positively impacted my research experience as they were able to simplify the process into a few basic steps, making the task less overwhelming.

It is extremely important to evaluate an author's credentials to identify any biases that may hinder one's complete understanding of the topic. In addition, it is necessary to situate the author's work in a historical and cultural context to be aware of how values, practices, laws, or technology impacted women's experiences and opportunities at the time. When selecting credible sources, journals discovered through the library's research port are reliable, but I was hesitant when selecting articles from feminist magazines. However, after examining the history,

progress, and reviews of the magazines, I felt confident in my selections. Furthermore, as I became more familiar with the names of significant figures within the festival, I determined a source's credibility based on the artists interviewed.

Humanities courses, particularly ones in women's studies, emphasize questioning biases in authors' perspectives and in how histories are written. With the guidance and encouragement of the librarians, my professor, and my peers, I have achieved these goals. I plan on using these skills throughout the rest of my academic and professional career. Furthermore, I realized that it is important not to get frustrated if valid sources do not show up immediately as it takes several attempts to find quality information. Even though the process was tedious and stressful at times, it was worth it in the end because I improved my research skills tremendously.