"That's the Way I've Always Heard It Should Be": Baby Boomers, 1970s Singer-Songwriters, and Romantic Relationships

Judy Kutulas

On August 4, 2003, Dick Ebersol of NBC placed the winning bid of $50,000 at a charity auction to learn the identity of the preening playboy featured in Carly Simon's 1973 hit, "You're So Vain." For thirty years, the "mystery" (Simon's word) of which of her many paramours was the song's inspiration prompted a "nationwide guessing game." A Los Angeles disc jockey asked his listeners to vote; their choice was the musician (and Simon's former lover) Kris Kristofferson. On the club circuit, the comedian Martin Mull joked that maybe "Carly will write another one about me." Mull was not in the running as the song's inspiration, but the surprise backup singer Mick Jagger was a common guess, as were Warren Beatty, Jack Nicholson, Cat Stevens, and James Taylor, each of whom had been linked to the singer.[1]

The public obsession with the origin of "You're So Vain" reflected a society—and a generation—confused about love. The 1960s were years of social turmoil, but it was only in the 1970s that ordinary people assimilated once-radical ideas into their personal lives. By then, traditional authority had lost its influence, especially over the younger generation, driving them toward a host of new experts with real-world credibility. Simon and her ilk, singer-songwriters who wrote autobiographical songs and lived in the public eye, provided middle-class youths with some compelling models of modern gender, romance, and sexuality. "Joni Mitchell is the woman who taught your cold English wife how to feel," Emma Thompson's character tells her husband in the 2003 film *Love Actually*. Like Thompson's character, a lot of American youths in the 1970s learned from singer-songwriters to think differently about love.[2]

Members of the baby boom generation (Americans born between 1947 and 1964) were raised to conform, but to varying degrees the many "revolutions" of the sixties altered their personal trajectories. White, college-educated, middle-class boomers, who were economically privileged and able to experience more prolonged periods of personal exploration, were disproportionately affected by the so-called Age of Aquarius. What the

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[1] On the song and the intrigue, see Sheila Weller, *Girls Like Us: Carole King, Joni Mitchell, Carly Simon—and the Journey of a Generation* (New York, 2008), 364–74, esp. 368. Loraine Alterman, "Martin Mull's Fabulous Furniture," *New York Times,* June 3, 1973, p. 157; Stuart Werbin, "James Taylor and Carly Simon: The *Rolling Stone* Interview," *Rolling Stone,* Jan. 4, 1973, p. 36. The charity auction is cited on Carly Simon's Web site, http://www.carlysimon.com/vain/vain.html.

[2] *Love Actually*, dir. Richard Curtis (Universal Pictures, 2003).

historian Bruce J. Schulman has characterized as "the great shift" of the 1970s was a series of shifts for middle-class youths, conducting them away from traditional markers of adulthood, such as family and career. Many middle-class boomers chose not to replicate the families in which they were raised. They married later, had fewer children, and were more likely than previous generations to spend at least part of adulthood alone. Many also failed to match their parents' standards of living, whether by choice or economic circumstances. Instead, those young people who represented the traditional promise of American society began to seek their status and identity through their lifestyle choices. The counterculture, sexual revolution, and the women's movement offered tempting freedom for the individual, but balanced against that freedom was the reassurance of the well-trod path to middle-class success. Defying norms, being radical and free, meant rejecting more socially validated choices. Nowhere did the welter of social norms and individual desires collide more sharply than with sexual and romantic options. The once nearly automatic progression of intimacy that began with dating and ended with sex only within the confines of a marriage lost its cultural weight and moral authority. Without that traditional arc to anchor one's personal life, middle-class youths were left to puzzle out their romantic identities.[3]

Middle-class boomers were both the instigators and the victims of unprecedented sexual change; they were members of the class that traditionally defined standards but were simultaneously most restricted by them. Typically, societies pass along sexual norms "in a thousand unseen and unspoken ways." Yet no less an expert than the anthropologist Margaret Mead noticed that in 1970, disjuncture ruled: "The experience of the young generation is radically different from that of their parents." If old beliefs lost their influence, she concluded, youths "must develop new styles based on their own experience and provide models for their own peers." In 1973 Robert C. Sorensen noted that "generational chauvinism is strong among adolescents. . . . A majority of adolescents consider their personal values to be superior to those of older people." The pollster Daniel Yankelovich plotted the dispersion of new sexual attitudes that began with "forerunners" on college campuses, spread across campus communities in the early 1970s, and reached noncollege youths by the middle of the decade. He described a shift "from universally held prescriptions of what is not appropriate behavior . . . toward looser, freer codes," from legally defined marriages to more casual sexual encounters. Eventually many Americans embraced these behaviors, but until the new sexual attitudes percolated in from the margins, those college youths in the pivotal position of going first often had to improvise their sexual values.[4]

[3] Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York, 2001), xvi. On changing family roles, see Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968–1980* (Chapel Hill, 2007). On the sexual revolution, see John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York, 1988), 301–25; and David Allyn, *Make Love, Not War: The Sexual Revolution; An Unfettered History* (New York, 2000). On the women's movement and sexuality, see, for example, Barbara Ehrenreich, Elizabeth Hess, and Gloria Jacobs, *Re-Making Love: The Feminization of Sex* (Garden City, 1986), 39–73. On traditional social messages about love and marriage, see, for example, Jessica Weiss, *To Have and to Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom, and Social Change* (Chicago, 2000), 15–47.

[4] Lillian B. Rubin, *Erotic Wars: What Happened to the Sexual Revolution?* (New York, 1991), 5; Margaret Mead, *Culture and Commitment: A Study of the Generation Gap* (Garden City, 1970), 28–29; Robert C. Sorensen, *Adolescent Sexuality in Contemporary America: Personal Values and Sexual Behavior, Ages Thirteen to Nineteen* (New York, 1973), 59. On new sexual attitudes among baby boomers, see Daniel Yankelovich, *New Rules: Searching for Self-Fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down* (New York, 1981), 88; Daniel Yankelovich, *The New Morality: A Profile of American Youth in the Seventies* (New York, 1974), 9–11; and Weiss, *To Have and to Hold,* 171.

At a time when the American Psychiatric Association still classified homosexuality as a mental illness and sex manuals distinguished between vaginal and clitoral orgasms, the sexual establishment held little credibility for many educated young people. David Reuben's famous 1970 sex manual, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sex but Were Afraid to Ask,* for example, suggested that if a man wanted to "renounce" his homosexuality, "he has every chance of becoming a happy, well-adjusted heterosexual," with psychiatric intervention. Yankelovich's "forerunners," moreover, resisted society's power to judge their sexual choices. They saw morality more as a personal matter than a social one, bounded by what Yankelovich called "harmful" and "harmless" sexual practices rather than "right" or "wrong" ones. Liberation, the buzzword of 1970s social movements, situated sexuality within a larger discourse of individuality and freedom. Sexual liberation required the casting aside of inhibitions, be they socially or individually imposed. Alex Comfort's 1972 bestseller, *The Joy of Sex,* used, its publisher claimed, "humor, honesty and directness" to communicate the emerging sensibility, replacing the usual clinical tone of sexual advice books with a cookbook metaphor that emphasized sensual pleasure. Its famous pictorial section, "The Art of Making Love," visually equated sexual liberation with hippie style as a bearded man in a flower-bedecked shirt and boots and a young woman with underarm hair engaged in various sexual practices. *Joy of Sex* was different in every way from previous sex manuals, and it sold like none ever had.[5]

Joy of Sex was a best seller because popular culture was the venue where increasing numbers of younger Americans encountered social innovation. Middle-class boomers' lives were coterminous with television, which imposed powerful norms of behavior and desire onto their childhoods. By the time they had reached their young adulthoods, however, middle-class boomers who caught glimpses of the more enticing ideas circulating on the cultural margins were no longer pacified by television's didactic stories. The counterculture accelerated longer cultural trends. Science, secularism, and a declining faith that moral absolutes existed undid many long-standing customs and values. Music was the most fully realized part of the countercultural experience, a language and common set of references aimed particularly at middle-class boomers. "Accessibility," the *Village Voice*'s Robert Christgau noted, "was its sweetest secret." Rock and roll played in the background for "all their rites of passage," as the music scholar Mary Harron observed, linking personal moments with shared sounds. It undermined authority, loosened inhibitions, and dramatized peer experiences. One musician pointed out its cultural advantage as "the first reflections of social change": "You can record an album today and have it on the shelves in a week or two, which gives you immediacy and flexibility." Popular music had unique cultural power to influence American youths.[6]

[5] D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters,* 312, 324; David Reuben, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sex but Were Afraid to Ask* (New York, 1970), 162; Yankelovich, *New Rules,* 88. On liberation, see Schulman, *Seventies,* 78–101; David Frum, *How We Got Here: The 70's; The Decade That Brought You Modern Life—For Better or Worse* (New York, 2000), 99–105; and Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (New York, 1983), 88–98. Alex Comfort, *The Joy of Sex: A Gourmet Guide to Love Making* (New York, 1972), 4.

[6] Robert Christgau, "How the Rock Audience Got Too Big for Its Own Good," *Village Voice,* May 2, 1977, p. 46; Mary Harron, "McRock: Pop as a Commodity," in *Facing the Music: A Pantheon Guide to Popular Culture,* ed. Simon Frith (New York, 2004), 192; Tracy Hotchner, "Stereotypical Sexism Still Seen, but Not Heard," *Los Angeles Times,* May 26, 1974, p. L18. On the social importance of rock and roll, see, for example, David P. Szatmary, *Rockin' in Time: A Social History of Rock-and-Roll* (Upper Saddle River, 2007), 190–218; and Richard Flacks, *Youth and Social Change* (Chicago, 1971), 61–66. By the mid-1970s, music was the largest grossing form of entertainment in the country. See Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock 'n' Ro*ll (New York, 1981), 4–5.

Music's influence on young people grew more powerful as performers became public figures and role models—the people, the critic Jon Landau explained, who "stand for all our fantasies." The Beatles broadened the musical conversation beyond the stereotypical *American Bandstand* assessment of whether or not a song had a good beat and was danceable. By the time their *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album came out in 1967, thoughtful listeners interrogated lyrics, discerned musical influences, and identified with performers' intentions and values. Social commentary and anti–Vietnam War songs added politics to the mix. The growing number of subgenres within rock (including Motown, psychedelic, and bubble gum) and the rise of rock critics and a rock canon made it difficult for listeners to listen in a cultural vacuum. To discuss music knowledgably and make informed musical choices required knowledge of performers and the critical reception of songs.[7]

By the 1970s, musical celebrity had become an integral component of this process, enabling listeners to situate their favorite performers—and by extension, themselves—in broad social, artistic, and political trends. Magazines and newspapers illuminated musicians' life-styles, and professional critics offered authoritative opinions about the relative value of different singers and songs. Founded in 1967, *Rolling Stone* would become, its editor promised, a forum for music and "the things and attitudes that the music embraces." Its pages focused on musicians' ideas, opinions, and creative processes. *Rolling Stone*'s gossip column, "Random Notes," reported on musicians' marriages, break-ups, and public appearances. It functioned, ultimately, as "a glossy life-style publication" full of celebrity news. *People* magazine, launched in 1974, broadened the audience for rock gossip, granting musicians the kind of public attention once given only to movie stars. By the decade's end, Christopher Lasch decried the attention paid to style for its "eclipse of achievement," but a culture of celebrity gave young people greater access to musicians' lives just as they were in the process of defining their own life-styles.[8]

The growing sophistication of discourse about music and musicians also reflected an unexpected turn of events: "Rock and roll had lasted," wrote Ellen Willis in her *New Yorker* column, "Rock, Etc.," "and we had not grown out of it." Middle-class boomers continued to devote their free time and discretionary income to records and concert tickets well into their twenties, making them "advertisers' most desired demographic segment." But it was more than economic clout that gave them influence. Older listeners manifested "deeper" tastes, Jon Landau said, as evidenced by their preferences for albums over singles and FM rather than AM radio. For this generation, the breakup of the Beatles in 1970 was a critical musical turning point, symbolic of the cultural fragmentation that the country had experienced. Afterward, the "middle-class, college-educated, elitist brigade," one reporter noted, "seemed to crash all at once." Tempted by their "loads of

[7] Jon Landau quoted in Robert Sam Anson, *Gone Crazy and Back Again: The Rise and Fall of the Rolling Stone Generation* (Garden City, 1981), 81. The Beatles, *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (LP record; Parlophone PMC 7027; 1967). On the Beatles, see, for example, Michael R. Frontani, *The Beatles: Image and the Media* (Jackson, 2007).

[8] Jann Wenner, "Editor's Note," *Rolling Stone,* Nov. 9, 1967, p. 2; Harron, "McRock," 193. For more on *Rolling Stone*'s evolution, see, for example, Steve Chapple and Reebee Garofalo, *Rock 'n' Roll Is Here to Pay: The History and Politics of the Music Industry* (Chicago, 1977), 158–67. On rock criticism more generally, see, for example, Steve Jones and Kevin Featherly, "Re-Viewing Rock Writing: Narratives of Popular Music Criticism," in *Pop Music and the Press,* ed. Steve Jones (Philadelphia, 2002), 19–40. On *People* magazine, see, for example, Curtis Prendergast and Geoffrey Colvin, *The World of Time Inc.: The Intimate History of a Changing Enterprise,* (vol. III, New York, 1960–1980), 433–40. Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York, 1978), 59.

disposable income," record companies rushed to provide them with lucrative Beatles replacements. Discovered by Paul McCartney and initially promoted by the Beatles' Apple Corps, James Taylor was, a *New York Times* reporter proclaimed, the "first superstar of the seventies." He "launched a new era in rock," another reporter said, and was "widely imitated" because of it, providing a "reassuring, almost therapeutic tonic for the somewhat frayed nerves of a generation in this country that had just gone through the sociopolitical turmoil and upheaval of the late 1960s." What he lacked, however, like the singer-songwriters who followed him to stardom, was traditional rock authenticity. [9]

Critics, in fact, saw singer-songwriters' popularity as evidence of rock's decline. Their music lacked the raw energy or electric power of hard rock; their songs were lyric-driven, appealing to the intellect but without the social commentary of folk or protest rock, and they were autobiographical rather than rebellious. The rock establishment thought singer-songwriters were "'wimpy,' 'navel-gazing,' 'narcissistic,' and worse," as one critic later noted. Willis called them "upper-class brats," performers with the wrong class backgrounds to be rebels. But they resonated with middle-class boomers who were "creeping out of post-adolescence toward some kind of proto-adulthood" and, as a *Saturday Review* writer opined, were hungry for "artists who personify themselves." Rebellion was a powerful motivating force for teens, but as middle-class youths moved toward adulthood, the "prosaic details" of their lives took precedence. The music commentator Chuck Klosterman dubbed their fascination with singer-songwriters the "Carly Simon principle," arguing that the bond between singer and audience was forged by the performer's ordinariness. Simon and other singer-songwriters offered a resonant "espoused reality" that the audience could use to "construct . . . meaning." Listeners appreciated that they could "hear reality" in singer-songwriters' tunes. This was a narrower but no less substantial version of authenticity for the all-important white, middle-class record buyer. [10]

[9] Ellen Willis, "Rock, Etc.," *New Yorker,* Feb. 26, 1972, p. 79; Jon Landau, "Performance: But I Was So Much Older Then," *Rolling Stone,* Sept. 30, 1971, p. 42; Ken Barnes, "Top 40 Radio: A Fragment of the Imagination," in *Facing the Music,* ed. Frith, 18; Bruce Pollock, *By the Time We Got to Woodstock: The Great Rock 'n' Roll Revolution of 1969* (New York, 2009), 147. On FM radio, see Christopher H. Sterling and Michael C. Keith, *Sounds of Change: A History of FM Broadcasting in America* (Chapel Hill, 2008), 150–53. On the percentage of income that Americans spent on recreation in the early 1970s, see U.S. Office of Management and Budget, *Social Indicators, 1973: Selected Statistics on Social Conditions and Trends in the United States* (Washington, 1973), 180. Susan Braudy, "James Taylor, a New Troubadour," *New York Times Magazine,* Feb. 21, 1971, p. 28; Robert Palmer, "The Pop Life: Taylor; After the Turmoil and the Wanderlust," *New York Times,* April 8, 1981, p. C24; Robert Hilburn, "New Taylor Album a Step Back Up," *Los Angeles Times,* June 18, 1974, p. D8. For the association of the singer-songwriters with the slightly older audience, see Barnes, "Top 40 Radio," 18.

[10] Stephen Holden, "Singer-Songwriters Spin Their Tales," *New York Times,* April 3, 1988, p. 83; Willis, "Rock, Etc.," *New Yorker,* Feb. 26, 1972, p. 79; "Talk of the Town: Taylor at Midnight," *New Yorker,* Nov. 25, 1972, p. 37; Burt Korall, "James Taylor: Sunshine and . . . ," *Saturday Review,* Sept. 12, 1970, p. 83. John Lennon once scolded Joni Mitchell for being "overeducated" even though she had less formal education than he. See Alice Echols, *Shaky Ground: The Sixties and Its Aftershocks* (New York, 2002), 211. On music critics' penchant for harder rock, see Jones and Featherly, "Re-Viewing Rock Writing," 19–40; Bradford Martin, "Cultural Politics and the Singer/Songwriters of the 1970s," in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s,* ed. Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge, Mass., 2008), 128–33; and Norma Coates, "(R)evolution Now? Rock and the Political Potential of Gender" in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender,* ed. Sheila Whiteley (New York, 1997), 50–64. Grant S. McClellan, *American Youth in a Changing Culture* (New York, 1972), 193; Chuck Klosterman, "The Carly Simon Principle: Sincerity and Pop Greatness," in *This Is Pop: In Search of the Elusive at Experience Music Project,* ed. Eric Weisbard (Cambridge, Mass., 2004), 259, 261. On the phenomenon of the Carly Simon principle for pop music, see Dave Hickey, "Love Only Knows," in *Stars Don't Stand Still in the Sky: Music and Myth,* ed. Karen Kelly and Evelyn McDonnell (New York, 1999), 177–81. Robert Hilburn, "Soothing Sounds in Taylor Album," *Los Angeles Times,* April 25, 1971, p. T40.

The Carly Simon principle was most compelling in the way that it altered the romantic narrative in popular music. Singer-songwriters rewrote the formulaic love story, one predicated on the idea of soul mates who realized their natural attraction only in the last act or verse. Marriage constituted the happily-ever-after ending to these stories, neatly supporting what traditional experts and authorities advocated: saving sex until after the wedding. Censorship guaranteed only limited circulation for stories that challenged the formula. Occasionally bad boys or girls shook things up (and were punished); however, the socially sanctioned path remained one of ever-greater intimacy, the last step of which was marriage. Well into the 1960s, mainstream American music reinforced these conventions. "We could be married; and then we'd be happy," sang the Beach Boys in "Wouldn't It Be Nice." When Brian Wilson wrote those lyrics in 1966, though, the sentiment was already out of date. Donald Horton found that in the mid-1950s, fully 83 percent of all popular songs were about love, with the largest number focused on "courtship." By 1969, that number had shrunk as more songs about romance focused on "newer values," particularly autonomy, in relationships. "In barely two decades," notes the historian Stephanie Coontz, "marriage lost its role as the 'master event' that governed young people's sexual lives. . . . Premarital sex became the norm." As mores evolved, the traditional cultural representation of marriage no longer matched some young Americans' feelings and experiences.[11]

So when Carly Simon included what one reviewer called a "haunting, ambivalent song about marriage" ("That's the Way I've Always Heard It Should Be") on her first solo album in 1971, it struck a nerve, offering a narrative that was simultaneously modern and familiar. Simon situated her song within feminism and self-actualizing movements with lines such as "soon you'll cage me on your shelf, I'll never learn to be just me first, by myself." The performance, by contrast, was hesitant and fragile, conveying uncertainty. In the end she surrendered to the cultural weight of tradition, even though she could not reconcile what she saw around her with "the way I've always heard it should be." The critic Robert Christgau remembered that he "almost stopped the car to cheer" the first time he heard the song on the radio. It was not the sentiment as much as the voice that surprised him, "a woman questioning marriage because marriage so often destroys love." Even though he later called that voice a "ruling-class honk," the song triggered an epiphany for him, the realization that women shared men's fear that marriage "ties you down." Simon's song was thought provoking, challenging listeners to reconsider what they had always heard and believed about marriage.[12]

The birth control pill and the sexual revolution eliminated most practical reasons for young people not to engage in premarital sex. A May 1970 Gallup poll indicated that three quarters of all college students no longer believed it was important to marry a virgin. Five years later, even the question seemed so quaint that pollsters reframed it, asking

[11] Brian Wilson, "Wouldn't It Be Nice," performed by the Beach Boys, *Pet Sounds* (LP record; Capitol, T-2458; 1966); David R. Shumway, *Modern Love: Romance, Intimacy, and the Marriage Crisis* (New York, 2003), 90–100. On the changing romantic narrative in popular music, see, for example, Donald Horton, "The Dialogue of Courtship in Popular Songs," *American Journal of Sociology,* 62 (Fall 1957), 569–78; and James T. Carey, "Changing Courtship Patterns in the Popular Song," *ibid.*, 74 (Fall 1969), 720–31. Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York, 2005), 247.

[12] Carly Simon, "That's the Way I've Always Heard It Should Be," performed by Carly Simon, *Carly Simon* (LP record; Elektra EKS-74082; 1971); Charles Michener, "The Pop and Op Sisters," *Newsweek,* March 13, 1972, p. 90; Robert Christgau, "Carly Simon as Mistress of Schlock," in *Any Old Way You Choose It: Rock and Other Pop Music, 1967–1973,* by Robert Christgau (Baltimore, 1973), 291–93, esp. 291.

about sex before marriage. Robert C. Sorensen notes in his 1973 book, *Adolescent Sexuality in Contemporary America,* that 72 percent of the teens that he surveyed knew their parents opposed sex outside of marriage, but did not see the need to marry to have sex. The sexual revolution and the counterculture validated a new understanding of intercourse as a satisfying yet transitory physical pleasure rather than an expression of marital intimacy or procreation. Free love was attractive in theory, perhaps, but middle-class teens had few glimpses of how it might work in practice except what they saw in popular culture and, particularly, in the world of rock music. "By 1969," one critic recalled, "the rule book of decorum was basically out the window." Stories about groupies, the female fans who sexually serviced male musicians, provided, the *Rolling Stone* editor Jann Wenner claimed, "an index of emerging contemporary values in the United States." Disc jockeys and magazines fanned rumors of musicians' wild nights and drug-fueled excesses. Songs such as the Rolling Stones' 1967 release "Let's Spend the Night Together" teased teens' sexual imaginations. Even a casual rock music listener understood that many musicians, as James Taylor so crudely put it, equated what ordinary people called "dating" with "fucking." As middle-class teens went off to college and jobs, life generally did not imitate rock music culture, but many aimed to find a comfortable middle ground between older rules and the sexual lives that musicians modeled. Yet the Rolling Stones' lyrics provided as little insight into that middle ground as did songs about marriage. Singer-songwriters, by contrast, offered mature, realistic portraits: the critic Loraine Alterman said of Gordon Lightfoot that he wrote not of "the loves of boys and girls but of men and women."[13]

The emergent women's movement also challenged the free-love ideal expressed in late 1960s music, especially for the middle-class young women who were best situated to benefit from legal gender equality. The counterculture, the feminist critic Ellen Willis argued, "defined freedom for women almost exclusively in sexual terms," gauged by their availability to men. The hippie chick permeated television, AM radio, and movies as one of the few counterculture stereotypes to attain instant mainstream credibility. She was objectified, gyrating uninhibitedly—without her bra—to acid rock. She was Goldie Hawn on *Laugh-In* or Janis Joplin on stage, happily transgressing her parents' morality and pleasing young men in the process. In rock, she was all too often the groupie, who confirmed the outrageous sexual behaviors of male rock stars. Although enticingly rebellious, free love offered women little control over their own sexuality. Young women flocked to free clinics and college health services for prescriptions for the birth control pill, but tempered their eagerness for sexual independence with concerns about reputation and exploitation. While they saw few models of female-defined sexuality on television or in the movies, many heard a version of what they longed for on the radio.[14]

The opening track of Carole King's acclaimed 1971 album, *Tapestry,* was "something different," expressing a mature, female-centered vision of love. Heretofore, one critic

[13] "Students in Poll Reject Virginity as Criterion for Choosing Mate," *New York Times,* May 21, 1970, p. 40. On the sexualizing culture, see Allyn, *Make Love, Not War*; Sorensen, *Adolescent Sexuality in Contemporary America,* 341; Pollock, *By the Time We Got to Woodstock,* 126; "When We Tell You What a Groupie Is, Will You Really Understand?," *New York Times,* Feb. 12, 1969, p. 80; Werbin, "James Taylor and Carly Simon," 41; Loraine Alterman, "Old Dan's Records," *New York Times,* Dec. 10, 1972, p. D38.

[14] Ellen Willis, "Rock, Etc.," *New Yorker,* Oct. 23, 1971, p. 170. On the groupie phenomenon, see, for example, Lisa L. Rhodes, *Electric Ladyland: Women and Rock Culture* (Philadelphia, 2005), 135–213. For the most famous and complex feminist commentary on hard rock, see Karen Durbin, "Can a Feminist Love the World's Greatest Rock and Roll Band?," *Ms.,* 3 (Oct. 1974), 26. On the feminist critique of love and sex, see Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967–1975* (Minneapolis, 1989); and Ehrenreich, Hess, and Jacobs, *Re-Making Love,* 67–73.

Carole King's iconic *Tapestry* album cover, photographed in her home, modeled a new earthy and ordinary image for young women. © *Jim McCrary 1971.*

noted, "straightforward, assertive sexuality was not a legitimate style for women." King started with a forceful piano melody and a "raunchy" first line, "I feel the earth move," a euphemism for female orgasm. The song was about "los[ing] control, down to [the] . . . very soul." Its rhythm mimicked an orgasm too, building to a climax and then slowing languidly. The album was an unexpected success, selling more copies than any preceding it, garnering critical acclaim and four Grammy awards. Women loved the album and bought it, forcing the industry to reassess their second-class status as music consumers more concerned with pretty-boy pop singers than "serious" artists. Women heard and saw a peer in King, someone who dressed like they did, had what *Time* magazine called a "Canarsie twang," and represented a "way of living" that was "worlds apart" from their mothers'. She seemed "genuine," individual, outside the "male-dominated culture," full of "emotional honesty and authenticity," reviewers noted. The album "touch[ed] the elusive

common nerve . . . and really affect[ed] people on a personal level." *Tapestry*'s critical and financial success encouraged other female singer-songwriters and gave them cultural space to express a distinctive female point of view through music.[15]

After *Tapestry,* the "sexual politics of consumer marketing" enhanced women's status as performers and audience. "*Billboard* magazine recently reported the most significant upsurge in female record sales since the popularity of hard rock groups," the *Los Angeles Times* noted in 1973. "Women's music sells," *Time* concluded a year later. The percentage of top-selling albums recorded by females jumped from single to double digits in the early 1970s and accounted for more than one quarter of all top fifty singles recorded in 1971. Record companies scrambled to create appropriate marketing campaigns aimed at women. An advertisement for Joni Mitchell's 1970 *Ladies of the Canyon* recounted the story of the fictional Amy Foster, twenty-three years old and "incredibly down" over a recent breakup. Listening to the album, Foster is consoled and reassured because "there was someone else, even another canyon lady, who really knew." Simon's producer distributed copies of "That's the Way I've Always Heard It Should Be" to receptionists and secretaries at radio stations, figuring that "once women heard it, we had a shot." The first beneficiaries of the women's movement—young, well-educated, and well-off white women—purchased female singer-songwriter music because it offered them an authentic female voice and "an alternative to the romance 'script.'"[16]

That alternative accessibly fused free love, the counterculture, and second-wave feminism. Female listeners could hear joy, independence, and rebelliousness when Simon declared, "Daddy, I'm no virgin" (from the song "Waited So Long") and pure delight when she told of a lover who "used to make me moan in bed" (from the song "Carter Family"). Her music legitimated the release from sexual convention that *Joy of Sex* promised. She moaned the tagline of "I've Got to Have You," written by her then-lover Kris Kristofferson, communicating something "so primal and so private that it takes your breath away," the *Rolling Stone* reviewer opined. "Oh honey, you turn me on," declared Mitchell in "You Turn Me On, I'm a Radio." In each of these songs, the woman was the subject, not the object, modeling her own sexuality: her feelings, her delight, her satisfaction. The *New York Times* called Simon "the prototypical, high-achieving urban baby boomer—liberal, 'liberated' and determined to have it all." Her songs were the "pop music equivalent of

[15] Durbin, "Can a Feminist Love the World's Greatest Rock and Roll Band?," 26; Jon Landau, review of *Tapestry* by Carole King, *Rolling Stone,* April 29, 1971, p. 40; Carole King, "I Feel the Earth Move," performed by Carole King, *Tapestry* (LP record; Ode SP-77009; 1970); "King as Queen?," *Time,* July 12, 1971, p. 52; Robert Christgau, "Carole King: Five Million Friends," in *Any Old Way You Choose It,* by Christgau, 176; Robert Hilburn, "Carole King's New Role as a Singer," *Los Angeles Times,* May 22, 1971, p. A6; Mitchell Cohen, *Carole King: A Biography in Words and Music* (New York, 1976), esp. 35. On the success of *Tapestry,* see Martin Strong, *The Great Rock Discography* (1994; New York, 1998), 440. On the music industry's assumptions about women, see, for example, Judy Kutulas, "You Probably Think This Song Is about You," in *Disco Divas: Women and Popular Culture in the 1970s,* ed. Sherrie Innes (Philadelphia, 2003), 173; Theodore Gracyk, *I Wanna Be Me: Rock Music and the Politics of Identity* (Philadelphia, 2001), 169–71; Coates, "(R)evolution Now?," 52–53; Arlene Stein, "Rock against Romance: Gender, Rock 'n' Roll, and Resistance," in *Stars Don't Stand Still in the Sky,* ed. Kelly and McDonnell, 221; and Jon Savage, "The Enemy Within: Sex, Rock, and Identity," in *Facing the Music,* ed. Frith, 143. On the impact of *Tapestry,* see Judy Kutulas, "'I Feel the Earth Move': Carole King, *Tapestry,* and the Liberated Woman," in *Impossible to Hold: Women and Culture in the 1960s,* ed. Avital H. Bloch and Lauri Umansky (New York, 2005), 261–78.

[16] Barbara Rowes, "Women's Sound Knocks the Double Standard," *Los Angeles Times,* July 15, 1973, p. 48; "Rock 'n' Roll's Leading Lady," *Time,* Dec. 16, 1974, p. 66. On Simon fashioning herself like Carole King, see Weller, *Girls Like Us,* 343. Chapple and Garafalo, *Rock 'n' Roll Is Here to Stay,* 273. The advertisement for Joni Mitchell's *Ladies of the Canyon* appeared in *Rolling Stone,* May 14, 1970, p. 14. On the marketing plan for Simon's record see Weller, *Girls Like Us,* 350. Stein, "Rock against Romance," 219.

the diaries of Anaïs Nin or Erica Jong's autobiographical novels," meaningful snippets of sexuality for young women with few other compelling female perspectives on romance.[17]

Meanwhile, female performers' much-publicized biographies and the ways the music establishment talked about them offered a short course in feminist consciousness-raising, revealing a common experience of objectification. At the top, the music business was almost exclusively male. Until pushed to change, *Rolling Stone* employed women as secretaries and office managers, not record reviewers or reporters. While female singers tried to express their independence and modernity, the musical establishment saw and heard primarily their sexuality. The magazine "tortured" (her word) Mitchell by designating her its "Old Lady of the Year" for 1971 and charted her romantic relationships with male singers. One *Rolling Stone* interviewer opened an article by envying Simon's nursing son's access to her breasts. Another noted that she had been sexualized and then proceeded to sexualize her further. Like Mitchell, Simon was "offended" when reporters "ask[ed] about my various affairs" and she wished her record company would have chosen a "more ordinary, mundane shot" for her *Playing Possum* album cover than the celebrated one of her in a black teddy and boots. "There was no free love," Mitchell recalled. "It came with great strings attached. It was free for men, but not for women, same as it ever was." One did not have to be as famous as Mitchell was to concur with her assessment.[18]

Female listeners connected with the vulnerability that female singer-songwriters represented. Polls from the era demonstrate that women were more reserved and cautious about their sexuality than were their male peers. In 1975 only half as many female as male first-year college students agreed with the statement "sex is okay if people like each other." Although some women still married at a young age, the majority did not and many intended to have sex lives before marriage, which required them to negotiate their own ways through the stereotypes of virgin brides, sexual teases, and horny hippie chicks. They wanted to feel liberated, but not exploited, to achieve what *Ms.* magazine called "love between equals." "For men, the point of the sexual revolution was, above all, more sex," Barbara Ehrenreich, Elizabeth Hess, and Gloria Jacobs concluded in *Re-Making Love,* but if women were to benefit truly from the sexual revolution, they needed to "redefine" heterosexuality to accommodate their needs and desires. Emboldened by the women's movement and their new power as single consumers, "ordinary women" reshaped the sexual revolution in the 1970s by expecting respect, equality, and pleasure from their partners.

[17] Carly Simon, "Waited So Long," performed by Carly Simon, *No Secrets* (LP record; Elektra EKS-75049; 1973); Simon Brackman and Jacob Brackman, "The Carter Family," performed by Carly Simon, *ibid.*; Carly Simon, "I've Got to Have You," performed by Carly Simon, *Anticipation* (LP record; Elektra EKS-75016; 1971); Joni Mitchell "You Turn Me On, I'm a Radio," performed by Joni Mitchell, *For the Roses* (LP record; Asylum SD-5057; 1972); Stephen Davis, "Carly Simon's Second,"*Rolling Stone,* Dec. 23, 1971, p. 66; Stephen Holden, "Carly Simon's Emotion-Laden Self-Portrait," *New York Times,* May 3, 1987, p. H23. On Mitchell as "a West Coast Erica Jong," see Robert Christgau, review of *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* by Joni Mitchell, http://www.robertchristgau.com/. On women's changing cultural expectations, see, for example, Ehrenreich, Hess, and Jacobs, *Re-Making Love,* 74–102.

[18] On Mitchell as "Old Lady of the Year" in 1971, see "It Happened in 1970," *Rolling Stone,* Feb. 4, 1971, p. 44. For the chart of Mitchell's relationships, see "Hollywood's Hot 100," *Rolling Stone,* Feb. 3, 1972, p. 27. Michelle Mercer, *Will You Take Me as I Am: Joni Mitchell's Blue Period* (New York, 2009), 6; Mark Rosin, "Carly Simon Letting Her Mind Flow," *Harper's Bazaar,* 106 (Nov. 1972), 110; Ben Fong-Torres, "A Session with 'Fired Up' Carly Simon: 'Oh My Gosh, Here's This Body Again,'" *Rolling Stone,* May 22, 1975, p. 10. On envy toward Simon's nursing son, see Charles M. Young, "Carly Simon: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Roast Beef Hash," June 1, 1978, p. 42. On sexualizing Simon, see Fong-Torres, "A Session with 'Fired Up' Carly Simon," 9. On *Rolling Stone,* see Robert Draper, *Rolling Stone Magazine: The Uncensored History* (New York, 1990), 217–20. "Joni Mitchell: Woman of Heart and Mind," prod. and dir. Stephanie Bennett (episode of *American Masters,* ex. prod. Susan Lacy), WGBH Boston (PBS, April 3, 2003); Echols, *Shaky Ground,* 219.

As Graham Nash, one of Mitchell's lovers, noted, "women of Joan's generation raised the bar of how men should treat women and how women should treat themselves." No longer pining for marriage or preoccupied with their virginity, some young women sought autonomous sexual and romantic arrangements that still offered them some security. They sought relationships.[19]

The term "relationship" was just beginning to refer to specifically sexual situations in the 1970s. It was elastic, a *Rolling Stone* article noted, covering "anything from living together to going steady to just messing around." A 1973 book on youth sexuality explained that young people "frequently" used the term to describe their encounters with the opposite sex. It implied, the author continued, "sexual activities and other modes of communication" without "formality or ritual." It could end in marriage, but more often it produced a temporary period of monogamy. Cohabitation achieved "recognition . . . as a phenomenon in American life" in 1980, a representative from the U.S. Census Bureau reported when his agency began tracking it. Couples had previously lived together without being married, but generally secretly, whereas in 1974 about half of all U.S. college students saw nothing wrong with couples living together without being married. Middle-class youths, who traditionally had a longer period of freedom before fully assuming adult responsibilities, were best positioned to experience serial monogamy, but it was middle-class women more than their male peers who saw the advantages of the relationship. Feminism legitimated female sexual desire, providing a new perspective on sexuality; but "women's lib," observed Loraine Alterman, "put people off" with its "excessive pedantry and zeal." Thus it was not feminist theory that gave shape to the etiquette of the relationship so much as "songs for the new woman," music that "hits both the heart and the mind."[20]

Mitchell, Simon, and Carole King presented feminist-inspired portraits of romance without the contentious edges of feminism. Simon thought of herself as "a new kind of woman, very strong, very, very liberated, independent," yet conceded that her "conditioning" sometimes undercut her autonomy. Mitchell recognized that "to fully be myself in the world" required disturbing the peace. She articulated her ideal relationship in the lyrics of "All I Want": love that would "bring out the best in me and in you too," while acknowledging that a man might not approach a relationship with her same expectations. In "Woman of Heart and Mind," for example, she expressed a desire for "affection and respect, a little passion, and you want stimulation, nothing more," tacitly recognizing "that her lover will not give her all she wants," the reviewer Timothy Crouse observed. Her two early 1970s albums, *Blue* and *For the Roses*, offered, the *New York Times* reviewer said, "a mind's eye view of Miss Mitchell's lives and loves," that benefited from her maturity and experience. She was "no longer the innocent," but an adult who "had her share of downs as well as ups." "Men as well as women can relate to Mitchell's songs," the critic Loraine Alterman thought, but her work had "a special meaning to all women who are caught in

[19] Eric Dey, Alexander Astin, and Willam Dorn, *The American Freshman: Twenty-five Year Trends, 1966–1990* (Los Angeles, 1991), 21; Karen Durbin, "What Is the New Intimacy?," *Ms.,* 7 (Dec. 1978), 78; Ehrenreich, Hess, and Jacobs, *Re-Making Love,* 74; Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love, and Eroticism in Modern Society* (Stanford, 1993), 1; Weller, *Girls Like Us,* 294.

[20] On the more colloquial definition of relationship, see Joe Klein, "Growing Old Absurd," *Rolling Stone,* June 30, 1977, pp. 61–62. Sorensen, *Adolescent Sexuality in Contemporary America,* 113; Dey, Astin, and Dora, *American Freshman,* 21. On the use of the cohabitation question in the U.S. census, see Jerry Cohen, "Marriage Survives a Decade of the 'New Morality,'" *Los Angeles Times,* Jan. 14, 1979, p. 20; Loraine Alterman, "Songs for the New Woman," *New York Times,* Feb. 11, 1973, p. 156. On second-wave feminism and sexual liberation, see Echols, *Shaky Ground,* 109–28.

the basic dilemma of knowing they must realize their own potential at the same time they still want to find . . . love." Hearing their songs, examining album covers, and reading stories about female singers' personal lives, middle-class young women saw their more public peers constructing satisfying and attainable versions of liberation.[21]

To the attentive reader of cultural symbols, this new woman was discernibly distinct from the feminist, which added to her allure. Feminists performed anthems of feminism, such as Helen Reddy's 1972 "I Am Woman" and founded their own record labels, such as Holly Near's Olivia Records. In the popular imagination, they hated men and were lesbians; the stereotype of the feminist as unattractive and angry already existed. King, Simon, and Mitchell liked men but still challenged them. They embodied the most socially attractive feminist traits: independence, self-reliance, and sexual confidence. Simon in particular represented a merger of the expressiveness of the women's movement and the license of the sexual revolution; she spoke to both men and women, albeit sometimes for different reasons. Within popular culture, the feminist quickly assumed unpleasant characteristics, but liberated female singer-songwriters pleased men while still asserting their own desires.[22]

Autonomy facilitated the new woman's liberation, and Mitchell's, King's, and Simon's songs and stories legitimated some women's lifestyle aspirations. The security that marriage traditionally offered women was first and foremost economic. A husband was necessary, Beth L. Bailey has written, as "the base of the pyramid" on which women could construct their comfortable domestic lives. For increasing numbers of college-educated women, however, a husband was no longer quite so vital to their economic future. Just as the sexual revolution freed men from having to marry women with whom they slept, so too did the women's movement provide more women with the economic wherewithal to buy what they wanted. By 1980, less than one third of never-married twenty-five-year-old women lived with their parents. As they moved out on their own, their choices—in cars, furnishings, clothes, and hairstyles—tangibly signified their autonomy and thereby their sexual freedom. Female singer-songwriters provided a set of visual and aural clues to domestic freedom that blended the hippie life-style, feminism, and the traditional womanly domestic realm.[23]

Mitchell's, Simon's, and King's songs and biographies were part of a growing woman-centered culture influenced by mainstream feminism and new demographic realities. Single, college-educated working women represented an emerging market segment, one whose members were both unprepared for independent living and culturally conditioned to insecurity. A profitable new culture tempted them with realizable visions of freedom. The struggling-to-be-liberated woman was the star of Erica Jong's novel *Fear of Flying* and sitcoms such as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *Rhoda*. She could be seen on the cover

[21] Joni Mitchell, "All I Want," performed by Joni Mitchell, *Blue* (LP record; Reprise MS-2038; 1971); Joni Mitchell, "Woman of Heart and Mind," performed by Joni Mitchell, *For the Roses;* Werbin, "James Taylor and Carly Simon," 41; Echols, *Shaky Ground,* 210; Timothy Crouse, "Records: *Blue,*" *Rolling Stone,* Aug. 5, 1971, p. 42; Don Heckman, "Pop: Jim Morrison at the End, Joni at a Crossroads," *New York Times,* Aug. 8, 1971, p. D15; and Loraine Alterman, "Joni's Songs Are for Everyone," *Ibid.* Jan. 6, 1974, p. A-27.

[22] On Helen Reddy, see Susan Lydon, "And Now Here's Helen Reddy," *Ms.,* 2 (July 1973), 26–28. On Holly Near, see Elizabeth Fishel, "Holly Near: Putting Politics to Music," *ibid.*, 5 (Oct. 1976), 31–36. On feminists' attempts to create a separate musical culture, see Gillian G. Gaar, *She's a Rebel: The History of Women in Rock and Roll* (Seattle, 1992), 115–64.

[23] Beth L. Bailey, *Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (1988; Philadelphia, 1989), 75. On the impact of women's economic independence on their romantic choices, see Ehrenreich, Hess, and Jacobs, *Re-Making Love,* 196–98. James A. Sweet and Larry L. Bumpass, *American Families and Households* (New York, 1990), 83.

of Simon's album *Hotcakes* or heard on Mitchell's *Blue*. Although a male reviewer for the *New York Times* predicted that *Blue* would be "the most disliked of Miss Mitchell's recordings," its theme—relationships—and Mitchell's willingness to expose her joys and sorrows made the album popular and compelling. Ellen Willis saw it as a breakthrough for the singer, revealing her to be something more than "the compleat hippie chick"—"a woman pursuing her female identity" with "a blend of romanticism and stoicism." Simon's, Mitchell's, and King's autobiographical songs suggested how the modern woman might straddle the line between feminism and romance, independence and desire. Listening to the songs and talking about the singers helped young women who had the money and freedom to be on their own construct liberated life-styles.[24]

Powerful though this peer culture was for its participants, those outside of it saw and heard female singer-songwriters differently. If Simon offered middle-class women a public model of new sexuality, she was also, one commentator said, the object of men's "dirty thoughts." Like the *Rolling Stone* interviewer who fixated on her breasts, many men regarded her as "'foxy'—sensual, with-it, blessed with legs that go on forever," a woman who radiated not personal liberation, but an enticingly scary über sexuality. Middle-class women chose to incorporate mainstream aspects of feminism into their world views because it broadened their life choices. Men, by contrast, viewed feminism as a challenge to their traditional privilege. At the same time that women moved from being object to subject on the periphery of rock culture, men solidified their hold on its center. The 1970s have been stereotyped as the era of "sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll," a decade-long orgy presided over by the hedonistic "cock-rocker." Although the reality was more complex, the fantasy was a seductive escape for men threatened by feminism, and it encouraged them to imagine a world where men ruled, women provided comfort and pleasure, and feminism could be ignored or demeaned. Female singers made inroads in the music business of the early seventies, but cock rockers dominated the charts, and no one better epitomized the style than the Rolling Stones. When the band's lead singer, Mick Jagger, agreed to sing backup on Simon's song "You're So Vain," she recalled that he was more familiar with her album covers than her music.[25]

Female singer-songwriters could coexist with cock rockers and function as a subject for women and an object for men, but young men traditionally identified with the subject/hero in popular culture and not the object of female desire that Taylor and other male singer-songwriters sometimes seemed to be. Certainly men listened to their music, however, as *Time* magazine reported "girls generally outnumber the boys by 2 to 1" at James Taylor concerts. The kind of man that Taylor represented was female-defined, the perfect male counterpart to the liberated woman. Alan Alda and the talk show host Phil Donahue represented this much-vaunted new man in popular culture, engaged as they were by feminism, eager to educate other men, and, most of all, as "sensitive and equal"

[24] Erica Jong, *Fear of Flying* (New York, 1973); Judy Kutulas, "Liberated Women and New Sensitive Men: Reconstructing Gender in the 1970s Workplace Comedies," in *The Sitcom Reader: America Viewed and Skewed,* ed. Mary M. Dalton and Laura R. Linder (Albany, 2005), 217–25; Heckman, "Pop," D15; Ellen Willis, "Rock, Etc.," *New Yorker,* March 3, 1973, p. 104.

[25] Young, "Carly Simon," 42; Joyce Haber, "The Wit and Wisdom of a Foxy Lady," *Los Angeles Times,* May 4, 1975, p. W25; Robert Pattison, *The Triumph of Vulgarity: Rock Music in the Mirror of Romanticism* (New York, 1987), 111–37. On "cock rock," see Sheila Whiteley, "Little Red Rooster versus the Honky Tonk Woman: Mick Jagger, Sexuality, Style, and Image," in *Sexing the Groove,* ed. Whiteley, 67–99; and Simon Frith and Angela McRobie, "Rock and Sexuality," in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word,* ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (New York, 1990), 371–89. On Simon and Mick Jagger, see Werbin, "James Taylor and Carly Simon," 36.

as Joni Mitchell might want them to be. Taylor functioned as a "romantic hero" for some women; however, male critics blasted him for lacking "the brazen flash of a Jagger." He "incurred the wrath of the hard rockers" because he was perceived as a sensitive man. In an infamous 1971 piece, the critic Lester Bangs fantasized about eviscerating Taylor with a broken Ripple bottle. Bangs thought Taylor was "a spoiled rich kid" who "sang like a wimp." Robert Christgau conceded that while Taylor was "intelligent and liberal and good," he seemed to be "leading a retreat" away from rock as well as masculinity. Taylor's presentation of himself as an ordinary guy in sympathy with the new woman challenged the hedonistic rock fantasy that was pitched at men.[26]

A mainstay on the college circuit, Taylor's male fans tended to be like him: thoughtful, comfortable, and willing to identify themselves at least partially with the new man. The musical establishment that critiqued him, by contrast, was composed of men who fancied themselves as rebels. As the critics made clear, male singer-songwriters often skated too close to the sensitive stereotype to make them male cultural heroes; in addition, their class backgrounds excluded them from the true bad-boy status that was necessary to complete the fantasy. At the height of the singer-songwriter movement (1973), Taylor, Paul Simon, Jim Croce, and Jackson Browne were all settled into the most traditional kind of relationship of all, marriage. They wrote songs to their children, shunned the more circus-like elements of the concert arena, and lived "quiet—even middle class" lives.[27] They were all-too-real musical reminders of men's declining power.

Yet Taylor and other male singer-songwriters actually had far more in common with harder male rockers than most male critics noticed. One female reviewer thought that male privilege was so engrained in Stephen Stills that he had trouble seeing beyond his "tortured adolescent soul . . . [to] anyone else's point of view." Indeed, male singer-songwriters often focused their music on the ways that women's new sexual assertiveness threatened them. In the song "Ready or Not," Browne refashioned the story of meeting his wife into a cautionary tale about a woman's connivance at a man's expense. It began at a bar, where he was "trying to get into her jeans." She followed him home, cooked him dinner, and "the next thing I remember she was all moved in and I was buying her a washing machine." She is pregnant and Browne's sense that he has been tricked is palpable. The temptress was a recurring image in male singer-songwriter music—a prostitute or woman at a bar who was so sexually enticing that she took away a man's agency, whether she lured him into "a room where you do what you don't confess" (as in Gordon Lightfoot's song "Sundown") or "make[s] it easy for a man to fall" (as in James Taylor's "You Make It Easy"). Like those of other male singers, Lightfoot's and Taylor's songs expressed

[26] "Faces in the Crowd," *Time,* June 24, 1974, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,944913,00.html. On Taylor's male fans, see, for example, "Music Mailbag," *New York Times,* June 20, 1971, p. D26. Cameron Crowe, "Joni Mitchell: The *Rolling Stone* Interview," *Rolling Stone,* July 26, 1979, pp. 47, 15–16. On the concept of the new man, see Herb Goldberg, *The New Male: From Macho to Sensitive but Still All Male* (New York, 1979); Schulman, *Seventies,* 176–85; and Ehrenreich, *Hearts of Men,* 126–32. Rosin, "Carly Simon Letting Her Mind Flow," 111; Holden, "Singer-Songwriters Spin Their Tales," 83; John Rockwell, "'Sweet Baby James' Grows Up," *New York Times,* Aug. 14, 1977, p. 12; Loraine Alterman, "James Taylor, the Quiet Superstar, Lives Happily Ever After," *Ibid.,* June 23, 1974, p. 130; Lester Bangs, "James Taylor Marked for Death," in *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung: The Work of a Legendary Critic; Rock 'n' Roll as Literature and Literature as Rock 'n' Roll,* ed. Greil Marcus (New York, 1987), 53–81, esp. 62; Greil Marcus, review of *One Man Dog* by James Taylor, *Creem* 4 (Feb. 1973); Robert Christgau, review of *Mudslide Slim and the Blue Horizon* by James Taylor; Christgau, *Any Old Way You Choose It,* 12.

[27] Alterman, "James Taylor, the Quiet Superstar, Lives Happily Ever After," 130.

nervousness about feminism's impact on their sexual privilege, but their presentation of themselves as victims did little to undercut their too-sensitive reputations.[28]

Male singer-songwriters existed in a genre dominated by women and in a space that critics regarded as feminized. Consequently, they sometimes struggled to redeem their status as real men. They laced their interviews with symbols of rebelliousness, expletives, stories of their sexual exploits and their drug habits. When a *Rolling Stone* reporter interviewed the newlyweds Simon and Taylor, she talked about feminism and he called her "a piece of ass," adding that "if she looks at another man, I'll kill her." Taylor's two stays in a mental institution became the centerpiece of his biography, as did his heroin habit and his dysfunctional family. He was much less likely to talk about the summers he spent on Martha's Vineyard. But the most potent element of the male singer-songwriters' constructed public identities was wanderlust. They borrowed what Ellen Willis called "a familiar folk metaphor" to enhance their masculinity, yet the outcome turned out to be less gendered than middle class. Rather than running away, they sought the broadening experiences of travel that, by the 1970s, were a rite of passage for middle-class youths. Within these songs, the romantic "pain of geographic separation" undercut any rebellious elements that wandering symbolized. Wandering songs resonated best with audiences that had the means and opportunity to purchase backpacks and Eurail passes or spend semesters abroad. Beyond a rather privileged circle, the theme reinforced the image of the male singer-songwriter as weak and emasculated.[29]

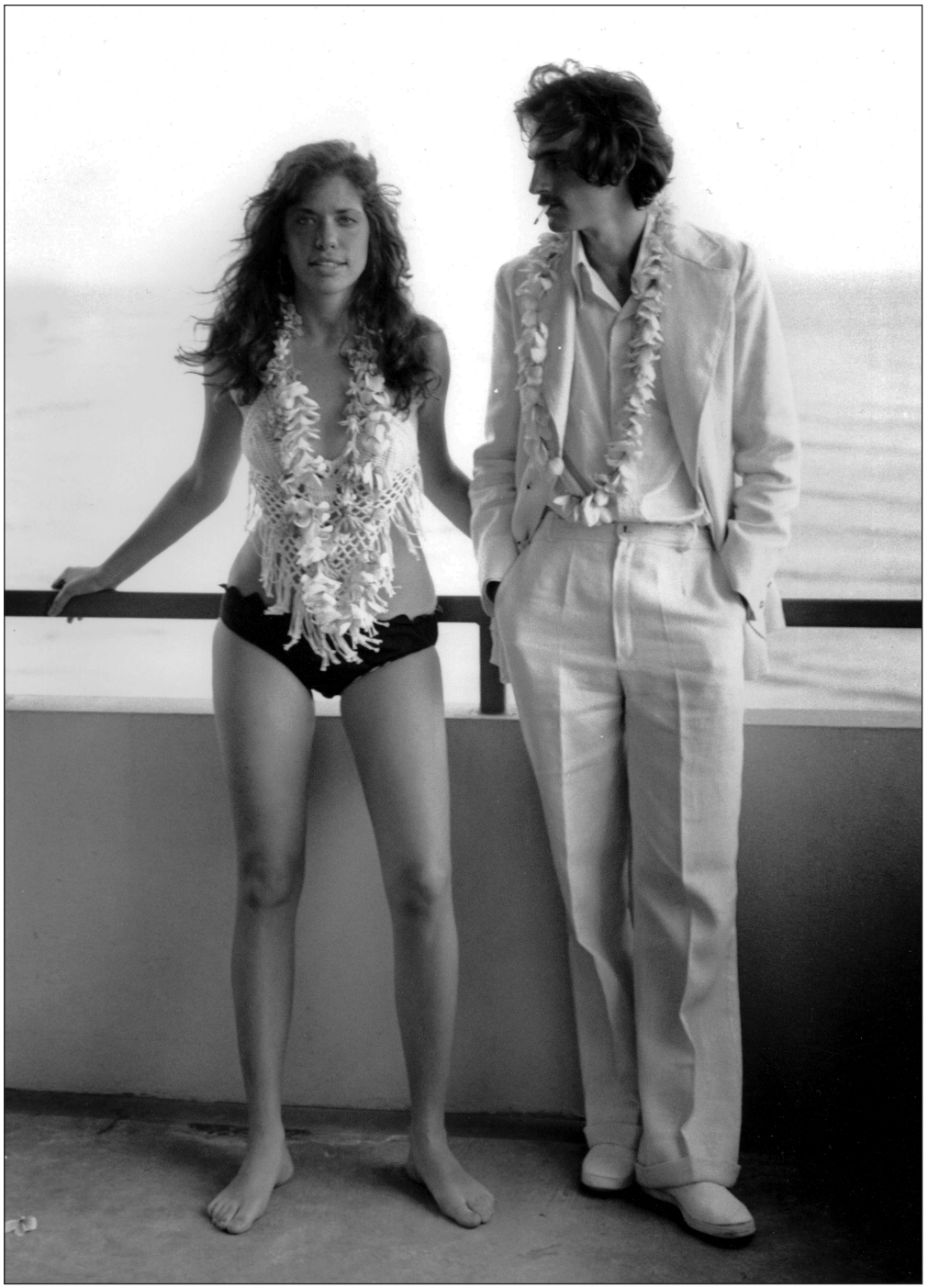
The troubadour that Taylor best represented was read as self-absorbed just as easily as rebellious. In his famous essay on the "Me Decade," the journalist Tom Wolfe noted that young Americans' ability to "go off on their own" was crucial to their journeys of self-discovery, whether they visited the Esalen Institute or attended an Erhard sensitivity training seminar. Travel was its own form of actualization, shaping identity and expressing independence. The point of any of these endeavors was to build a better human being, one liberated from the past and separate from others' expectations. But the same obsessive narcissism that pervaded the middle-class pursuit of liberation and autonomy also inhibited the ability of the class members to construct successful relationships. Although relationships enhanced the individual, met his or her physical and emotional needs, and provided a nurturing environment, the self-absorption that was implicit in their 1970s manifestations discouraged permanence.[30]

Unlike marriage, usually associated with "happily ever after," the relationships that singer-songwriters—both male and female—sang about were transient. "Love emerges and it disappears," Paul Simon explained in the song "I Do It for Your Love." Movies, later in the decade, such as *Annie Hall* and *The Way We Were* embellished the notion that love did not have to last forever to be meaningful, but singer-songwriters offered the first real cultural renderings of mature love's impermanence. In Carole King's 1970 classic "It's

[28] Loraine Alterman, "Steve Stills: A Male Chauvinist?," *New York Times,* Sept. 10, 1972, D37; Jackson Browne, "Ready or Not," performed by Jackson Browne, *For Everyman* (LP record; Asylum SD-5067; 1973). On Jackson Browne's "Ready or Not," see Bill Flanagan, *Written in My Soul: Rock's Great Songwriters Talk about Creating Their Music* (Chicago, 1986), 338. Gordon Lightfoot, "Sundown," performed by Gordon Lightfoot, *Sundown* (LP record; Reprise MS 2177; 1974); James Taylor, "You Make It Easy," performed by James Taylor, *Gorilla* (LP record; Warner Brothers BS-2866; 1975).

[29] Werbin, "James Taylor and Carly Simon," 41; Willis, "Rock, Etc.," *New Yorker,* March 3, 1973, p. 104; Christgau, "Carole King," 176.

[30] Tom Wolfe, "The 'Me' Decade and the Third Great Awakening," *New York Magazine,* Aug. 23, 1976, http://nymag.com/news/features/45938/.



Carly Simon and James Taylor on their honeymoon in 1972. They talked to reporters from *Rolling Stone,* but he nearly hijacked the interview with stories of his drug use and his jealousy. *Stuart Werbin, "James Taylor and Carly Simon: The* Rolling Stone *Interview,"* Rolling Stone, *Jan. 4, 1973, p. 35. Courtesy petersimon.com.*

Too Late," the relationship simply ceased to be meaningful to either partner, prompting its end: "something's wrong here, there can be no denying, one of us is changing or maybe we just stopped trying." "There was hardly an under-thirty soul in the Western hemisphere," a *Washington Post* columnist observed, "who couldn't hum at least a few bars of 'It's Too Late.'" Other songs followed. "What came between us," Jim Croce wondered in "These Dreams," "maybe we were just too young to know." Gordon Lightfoot observed in "If You Could Read My Mind": "I don't know where we went wrong but the feeling's gone and I just can't get it back." Teen music was riddled with breakup songs, but it clearly distinguished bad dating situations from those that culminated in "the chapel of love." In the singer-songwriters' music there were no perfect matches or soul mates and even a song with a title such as "Forever My Love" (written by Carly Simon and James Taylor) acknowledged the sheer unpredictability of romance: "time alone will tell us, lovers born in May, may grow bitter and jealous, faded and gray."[31]

The "ruinous self-pity" that was implicit in these songs made critics smirk, but the music also conveyed a fundamentally changed understanding of love. Along with no-fault divorce (another 1970s phenomenon), the songs presupposed that perfectly nice people might not stay together forever, erasing the cultural stigma of failing at romance and, thereby, legitimating being alone. Breakup songs soothed and reassured. Like the fictional Amy Foster, who felt better about her breakup after listening to *Ladies of the Canyon,* those listeners who placed "It's Too Late" or "If You Could Read My Mind" on the turntable sought affirmation of their choices. Breakup songs also nicely complemented the self-actualizing culture by encouraging reflection and growth. Joni Mitchell was "able to face her disappointments in love," noted Robert Hilburn, "and deal with them in an instructive way in song." Singer-songwriters' breakup songs encouraged young people to learn from their mistakes, make the most of their time alone, and then try again at love.[32]

Whether about pairing up or breaking up, however, the music of singer-songwriters often contained a clear but unacknowledged gendered subtext. The relationship was culturally understood to be women's domain, something women wanted and had the power—thanks to feminism—to expect of men. Thus the relationship was theirs to maintain. In "You Turn Me On, I'm a Radio," Mitchell recited what her lover did not like: "weak women [because] you get bored so quick . . . [and] strong women, 'cause they're hip to your tricks." Her "All I Want" veered from her desires to what she could do for a lover, ending with "I want to make you feel better, I want to make you feel free." "Are you . . . holding some honey who came on to you?" she wondered of a suspender-clad musician who sounded suspiciously like her one-time lover Taylor in "See You Sometime." Indeed, by the time the song was released, Taylor was with Carly Simon, who recited the details of his past in her song "No Secrets." Male singer-songwriters, by contrast, fell into relationships more accidentally and fell out of them just as easily when

[31] Paul Simon, "I Do It for Your Love," performed by Paul Simon, *Still Crazy after All These Years* (LP record; Columbia PC-33540; 1975); *Annie Hall,* dir. Woody Allen (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1977); *The Way We Were,* dir. Sydney Pollack (Columbia, 1973); Carole King and Toni Stern, "It's Too Late," performed by Carole King, *Tapestry;* Jim Croce, "These Dreams," performed by Jim Croce, *Life and Times* (LP record; ABC Records ABCX-769; 1973); Gordon Lightfoot, "If You Could Read My Mind," performed by Gordon Lightfoot, *Sit Down, Young Stranger* (LP record; Reprise 6392; 1970); Alex Ward, "Carole King: Creativity in a Cautious Comeback," *Washington Post,* March 9, 1976, p. B5; Carly Simon and James Taylor, "Forever My Love," performed by Carly Simon, *Hotcakes* (LP record; Elektra EKS-1002; 1974).

[32] Paul Nelson, "Pinin' Simon: Still Slick after All These Years," *Rolling Stone,* Dec. 4, 1975, p. 57; Robert Hilburn, "Joni Mitchell's New Album: *For the Roses,*" *Los Angeles Times,* Nov. 21, 1972, p. D12.

Carly Simon did not like the sexualized cover of her *Playing Possum* album (1975), but the image did become a popular poster among college men. © *Norman Seeff Productions.*

the open road called or a temptress showed up. They were less aware of their partners' needs and more cavalier. "That's what you get for loving me," said Gordon Lightfoot in "For Lovin' Me." Men retained their privilege, power, and fantasies even in the face of a perceived feminist assault.[33]

Still, the liberated woman represented by female singer-songwriters rebounded from a bad relationship stronger and without guilt. Traditional pop music taught women that the appropriate response to a man who betrayed her was helplessness. "Why don't you be a man about it, and set me free?" begged Diana Ross and the Supremes in "You Keep Me Hangin' On." Female singer-songwriters provided another model—a forceful and angry one. The refrain of "You're So Vain" practically invited women to sing along, taunting a man with his own ego: "you probably think this song is about you, don't you?" It is not a song of wistful longing or passivity; it made clear that the singer had retained her self-esteem. Its sassy attitude and what Ellen Willis called the "good-humored nastiness" in Simon's voice helped make the song so popular. Simon's response echoed the message of assertiveness training, a 1970s self-help ideology particularly aimed at teaching women to articulate their needs and feelings. The assertive woman could take care of herself and could negotiate a gendered reality that did not intrinsically benefit her. Of course, in the

[33] Joni Mitchell, "All I Want," performed by Joni Mitchell, *Blue;* Joni Mitchell, "See You Sometime," performed by Joni Mitchell, *For the Roses;* Gordon Lightfoot, "For Lovin' Me," performed by Gordon Lightfoot, *Lightfoot!* (LP record; UA Records UAS-6487; 1966).

process, she learned to accommodate a stalled feminist revolution that left her responsible for her own emancipation.[34]

The feisty voice of the liberated female singer-songwriter soared during the early 1970s but became quickly muted, just as the women's movement encountered its first challenges. Female performers were at the top of the charts for only a few years. King was unable to replicate the success of *Tapestry;* Mitchell "just couldn't stay in that lonely *Blue* place" any longer. Already an uncomfortable public performer, Simon felt increasingly constrained by her image. Critics pronounced her 1975 release, *Playing Possum,* "rawly and elegantly all about sex," including a cover that Sears, Roebuck, and Company banned. Meanwhile, male singer-songwriters artistically reclaimed the right to frame romantic experiences as they saw them. Divorce influenced two popular 1975 albums, Bob Dylan's *Blood on the Tracks* and Paul Simon's *Still Crazy after All These Years*. Simon allowed an assertive woman to liberate him in "Fifty Ways to Leave Your Lover" while Dylan represented himself as the victim of an aggressive woman. He sounded what the columnist Anna Quinlin called the "self-pitying cry of a wounded male chauvinist," which grew louder as the decade progressed. One *Ms.* writer likened his complaint to a popular movie, the phenomenon of "the unmarried man" to be pitied for bearing the personal cost of modern feminism. The retreat of the female singer-songwriters presaged the failure of the equal rights amendment and the 1980s backlash against women, simultaneous with the reassertion of more traditional masculinity. The 1982 tongue-in-cheek bestseller *Real Men Don't Eat Quiche* skewered the sensitive man that Taylor represented as wimpy, weepy, and unattractive.[35]

As the women's movement came under assault and traditional masculinity began to revive, oil politics and the globalization of the marketplace eroded middle-class economic optimism. In 1977 Jackson Browne issued his most successful album yet, tellingly titled *Running on Empty,* filled with allusions to truck stops and cocaine. Minus the strong female voice, singer-songwriters became a little too self-absorbed (Mitchell thought them "maudlin") or more concerned with their immediate gratification than their inner growth. In the song "Have a Good Time," for example, Paul Simon chose pleasure: "I should be depressed, my life's a mess, but, ah, what the hell." Such hedonism meshed with the fantasy realm of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. New styles of music emerged—disco, punk, arena rock, and heavy metal—to better capture the public mood of the second half of the decade.[36]

The music industry bifurcated during the second half of the 1970s. Disco was as commercially successful as singer-songwriters had been, but the music appealed to more mar-

[34] Lamont Dozier, Brian Holland, and Edward Holland, "You Keep Me Hangin' On," performed by the Supremes, *The Supremes Sing Holland-Dozier-Holland* (LP record; Motown MS-650; 1966); Carly Simon, "You're So Vain," performed by Carly Simon, *No Secrets*; Willis, "Rock, Etc.," *New Yorker,* March 3, 1973, p. 105. On assertiveness training, see, for example, Manuel J. Smith, *When I Say No, I Feel Guilty: How to Cope; Using the Skills of Systematic Assertive Therapy* (New York, 1975).

[35] Mitchell quoted in Mercer, *Will You Take Me as I Am?,* 158. Weller, *Girls Like Us,* 446; Carly Simon, *Playing Possum* (LP record; Elektra EKS-1033; 1975); Bob Dylan, *Blood on the Tracks* (LP record; Columbia PC-33235; 1975); Paul Simon, "Fifty Ways to Leave Your Lover," performed by Paul Simon, *Still Crazy after All These Years;* Anna Quindlen, "Relationships: Independence vs. Intimacy," *Los Angeles Times,* Nov. 28, 1977, p. 36; Lindsy Van Gelder, "An Unmarried Man," *Ms.,* Nov. 8, 1979, pp. 51–53, 73–75. On the 1980s backlash against women, see, for example, Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* (New York, 1991). Bruce Feirstein, *Real Men Don't Eat Quiche: A Guidebook to All That Is Truly Masculine* (New York, 1982).

[36] Jackson Browne, *Running on Empty* (LP record; Asylum 6E-113; 1977); Mitchell quoted in Echols, *Shaky Ground,* 214. Paul Simon, "Have a Good Time," performed by Paul Simon, *Still Crazy after All These Years*. On 1970s economics, see Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York, 2006), 53–70.

ginalized working-class, gay, African American, and Latino audiences and therefore failed to gain the respect of the music establishment. Male critics continued to define authenticity narrowly, reflecting their own class, racial, and gender biases. They preferred—and promoted—rebellious punk rockers and artists such as Bruce Springsteen, whom Jon Landau called "the future of rock and roll." Springsteen fused singer-songwriter tropes with traditionally masculine themes that he characterized as "cars and girls." His songs addressed men's declining privilege and the many ways that society trapped men and limited their options. In his song "The River," the main character did not enjoy the newfound pleasures of a relationship but suffered the class-bound consequences after "I got Mary pregnant": "a union card and a wedding coat." Springsteen's wandering trumped Taylor's; he was "born to run." Women were, one scholar noted, "signifiers of domesticity" to Springsteen, individuals to be "captured and then placed in the home," where the grind of daily life would wear them down. Singer-songwriters represented the broader possibilities of middle-class life in 1970; Springsteen showed how the bleak economic landscape of the late 1970s limited an individual's choices.[37]

As the values of the counterculture, the sexual revolution, and the women's movement spread throughout the culture more broadly, the musical tastes of a particular segment of baby boomers began to matter less. Although singer-songwriters still generated a respectable amount of income, they could not compete with the louder, more visual acts that began to fill arenas in the late 1970s or with bands that could produce a throbbing club beat. Their minimalist style did not speak to people for whom liberation was a flamboyant life-style identity. Yet it was equally true that the values that singer-songwriters represented had achieved enough mainstream status that they were expressed more broadly across the culture. The dispersion of the new views that Daniel Yankelovich predicted had come to pass. By the late seventies "the rage for self-fulfillment . . . had now spread to virtually the entire U.S. population." The psychologist Eleanor Macklin observed that by 1979, older people asked "if it's okay for the kids to do it, why not us?" By the end of the eighties, cohabitation, divorce, and sex outside of marriage were widely accepted norms with clear social etiquettes. A large cross section of Americans experienced relationships.[38]

At the same time, the gender contradictions that singer-songwriters often failed to acknowledge remain in American society. Girls grow up today with the promise of more than forty years of feminism encouraging them to look toward their futures and achieve. Consequently, through the college years they out-perform their male peers academically. A host of contemporary female singers dissect relationships and the gender roles within them. Yet for all their success, those new role models are often sexualized, and many claim for themselves the right to be mesmerizingly sexy to men rather than the right to be strong or powerful. Stories of public infidelities from John Edwards to Tiger Woods reinforce the message that men have more sexual freedom and feel less sexual responsibil-

[37] On disco, see, for example, Alice Echols, *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture* (New York, 2010). Anson, *Gone Crazy and Back Again,* 231; Szatmany, *Rockin' in Time,* 262; Ed Ward, Geoffrey Stokes, and Ken Tucker, *Rock of Ages: The Rolling Stone History of Rock and Roll* (New York, 1986), 524; Jon Landau, "Growing Young with Rock and Roll," *Real Paper,* May 22, 1974, http://beatpatrol.wordpress.com/2008/09/07/jon-landau-growing-young-with-rock-and-roll-1974; Bruce Springsteen, "The River," performed by Bruce Springsteen, *The River* (LP record; CBS PC-236854; 1980); Gareth Palmer, "Bruce Springsteen and Masculinity," in *Sexing the Groove,* ed. Whiteley, 103–4.

[38] Yankelovich, *New Rules,* 5; Cohen, "Marriage Survives a Decade of the 'New Morality,'" 20. On the social acceptance of cohabitation and greater social tolerance for sex outside of marriage, see Peter N. Carroll, *It Seemed like Nothing Happened: America in the 1970s* (1982; New Brunswick, 1994), 282–83.

ity. Boys, after all, will be boys. If girls' peer culture encourages achievement, boys' peer culture lingers in the fantasy world of guitar heroes. The social rules of relationships have evolved over time, but music continues to reflect both the individual promise and gendered limits of modern romance.