

# Creativity, Gender and the World of Rock: Music Groupies and the Othering of Women

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While sustained academic interest is relatively recent, the complex and thorny relationship between gender and the creative has long underscored important debates. The key issue is the struggle over the control of cultural production.



Music simultaneously shapes, reflects, maintains and offers opportunities for the contestation of social order and social identities.







Masculine style and form of  
rock music  
Nature and means of production run predominantly by men  
Contributions of women excluded from mainstream rock  
music press  
Practices of fandom gendered

### The Patriarchy of Rock

Hegemonic  
masculinity

Heteronormativity

Homosociality

A key identity in the creative industries circulates around marketplace roles: producer/consumer, artist/audience, musician/fan. How do these intersect with gender?



A fan can be understood simply as someone who has developed a special type of relation with the object of their admiration (e.g. music artist(s), genre), which is characterised by a focused and highly involved interest (O'Reilly, Larsen and Kubacki 2013)







Fan cultures replicate broader social and cultural hierarchies, at the bottom of which sits the most excluded, improper or deviant fan i.e. the dysfunctional fan (Thorne 2011). Very often these fans are gendered female and labelled 'groupies'.

The label 'groupies' is almost exclusively applied to female fans and is largely used in a derogatory manner. Groupies are caricatured and "treated like a punch line to a never ending joke that only the boys are in on" (Forrest 2010)







This paper explores how women have been 'othered' and excluded from creative production in rock music, through the use of the label of 'groupie'.

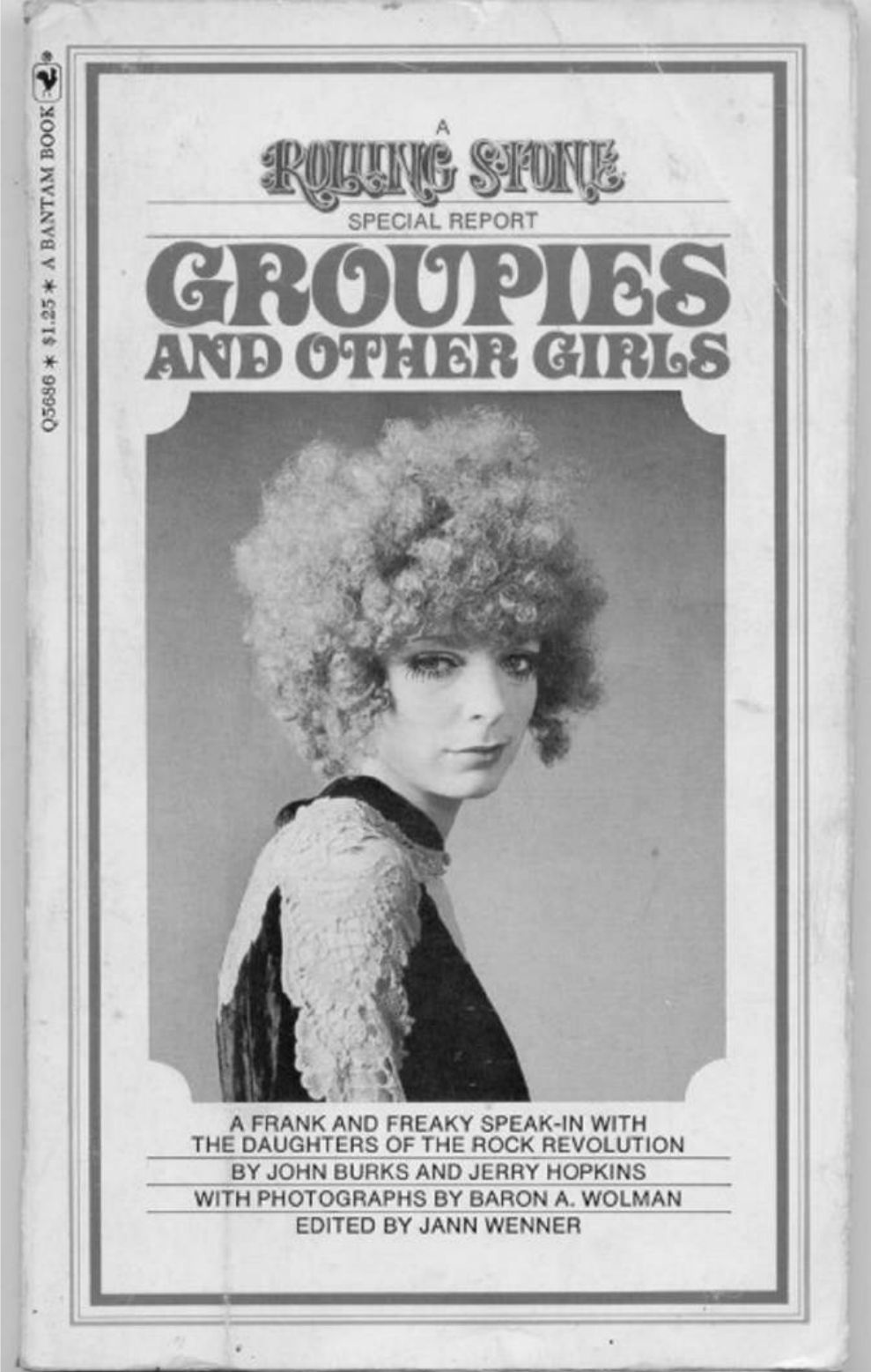


## **Stereotyping and Gendering**

A dominant representation exists that portrays groupies as an 'othered', more extreme type of female fan who seeks intimate emotional and/or sexual relations with musicians.

The female gendering and stereotyping of groupies is rooted in a cover article of the Rolling Stone in 1969.

“She got her man. He was the cat they were *all* after and *she* got him! In the groupies place in the culture of rock and roll that makes her *something*. She was already something: She had already balled 17 (or 36 or 117) musicians - four (or 12 or 25) of them real stars, names *everybody* in the U.S. and England would know - but now her status was elevated again. She had scored with this cat the first night he was in town. She *might* get him for a whole weekend. He *seemed* to dig her, you know; you can’t always tell, but he did seem to. *Wow!*”







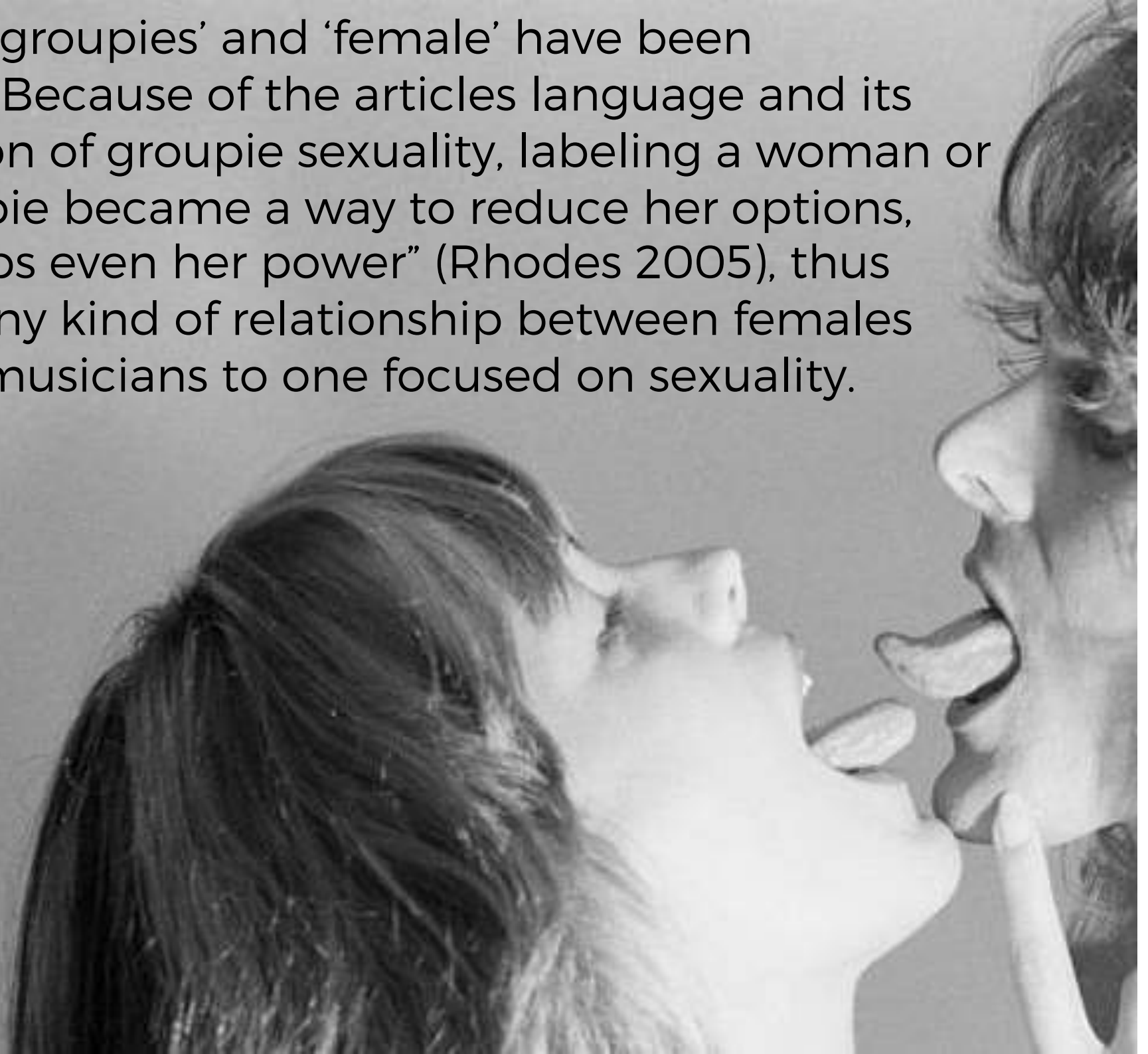
The article portrayed groupies as pathetic creatures to be pitied, but at the same time, a crucial part of rock culture. This media construction of groupies continues as evidences in films such as *Almost Famous* (2011)



The very gendered nature of this singular and dominant representation of groupies has blinded us to the more empowering aspects of transgression regarding women in rock. Of course, acknowledging groupiedom as an empowered position for women in rock culture would have threatened the emerging discourses of rock as a site of masculinity.



The terms 'groupies' and 'female' have been conflated. "Because of the articles language and its construction of groupie sexuality, labeling a woman or girl a groupie became a way to reduce her options, and perhaps even her power" (Rhodes 2005), thus reducing any kind of relationship between females and male musicians to one focused on sexuality.

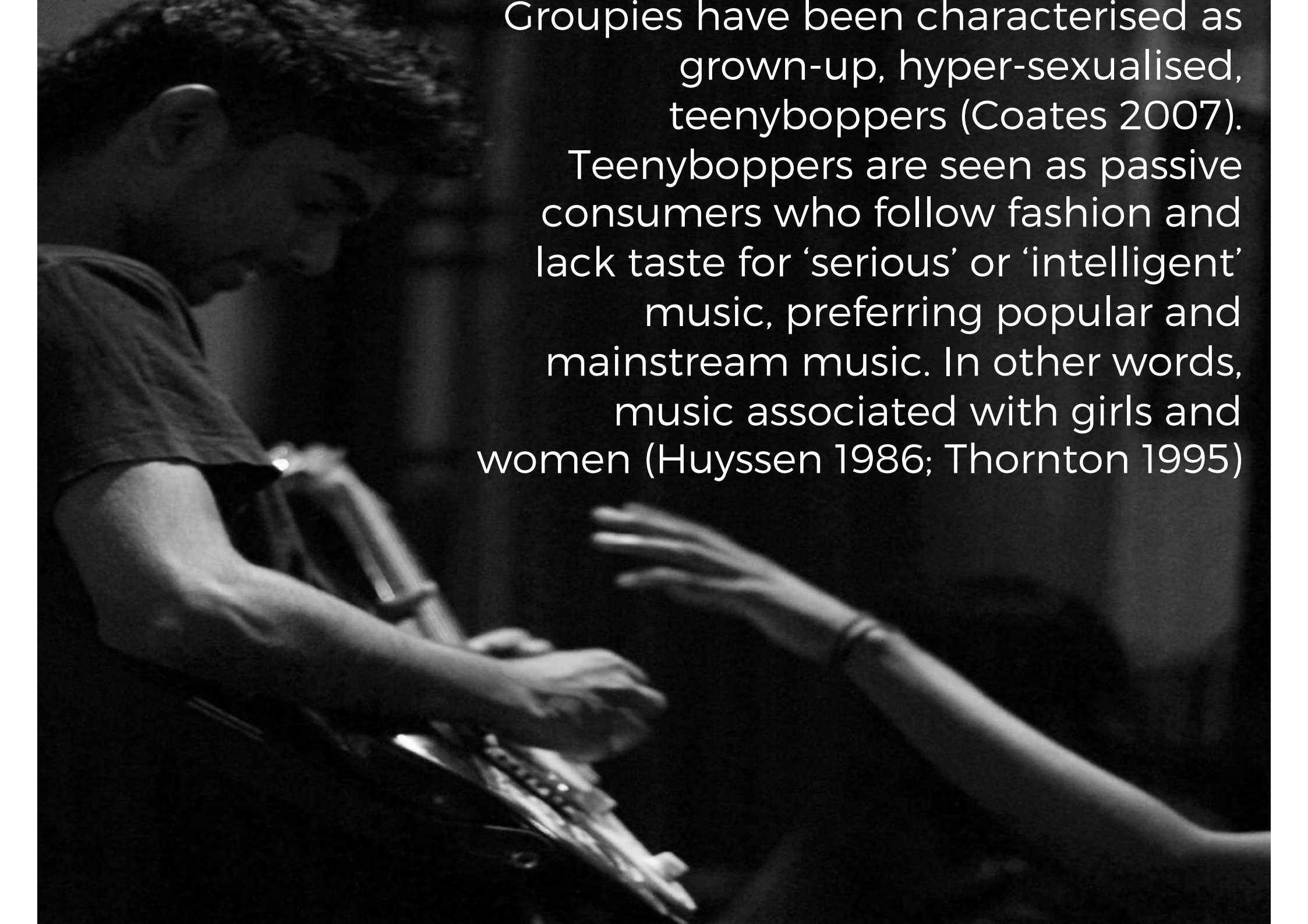




## **Stigmatizing as Inauthentic Fans**

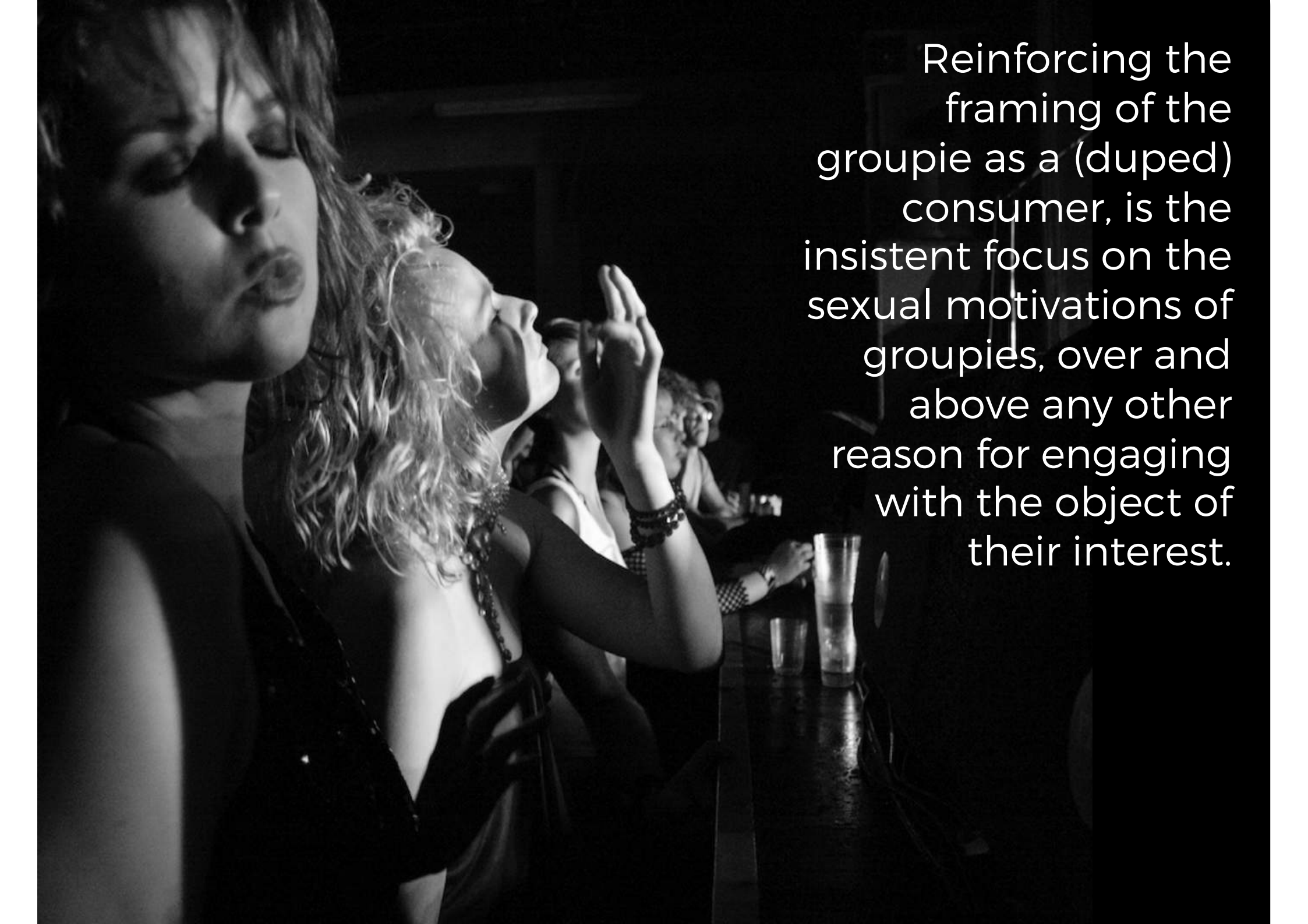
Davies (2001) argues that the notions of 'credibility' and 'authenticity' which are important in serious discussions of music, are constructed in such a way that they are almost completely unattainable for women. A key mechanism is the reframing of groupies as 'inauthentic' consumers rather than 'proper' fans.





Groupies have been characterised as grown-up, hyper-sexualised, teenyboppers (Coates 2007).

Teenyboppers are seen as passive consumers who follow fashion and lack taste for 'serious' or 'intelligent' music, preferring popular and mainstream music. In other words, music associated with girls and women (Huyssen 1986; Thornton 1995)



Reinforcing the framing of the groupie as a (duped) consumer, is the insistent focus on the sexual motivations of groupies, over and above any other reason for engaging with the object of their interest.





Being a groupie is a way  
in which fans can  
demonstrate their  
devotion, appreciation  
and love for the musical  
creations of the  
musician. "The music is  
what moved me, and  
everyone I found  
interesting was tied to  
music somehow. I was  
just naturally drawn to  
them"

(Patti D'Arbanville)



In the heavily masculine gendered world of rock, there were few opportunities for women to be anything other than fans. Some groupies were able to use their artistic abilities to negotiate their way through this gendered field to the inner circle, but this simultaneously makes them a threat to the homosocial status quo.

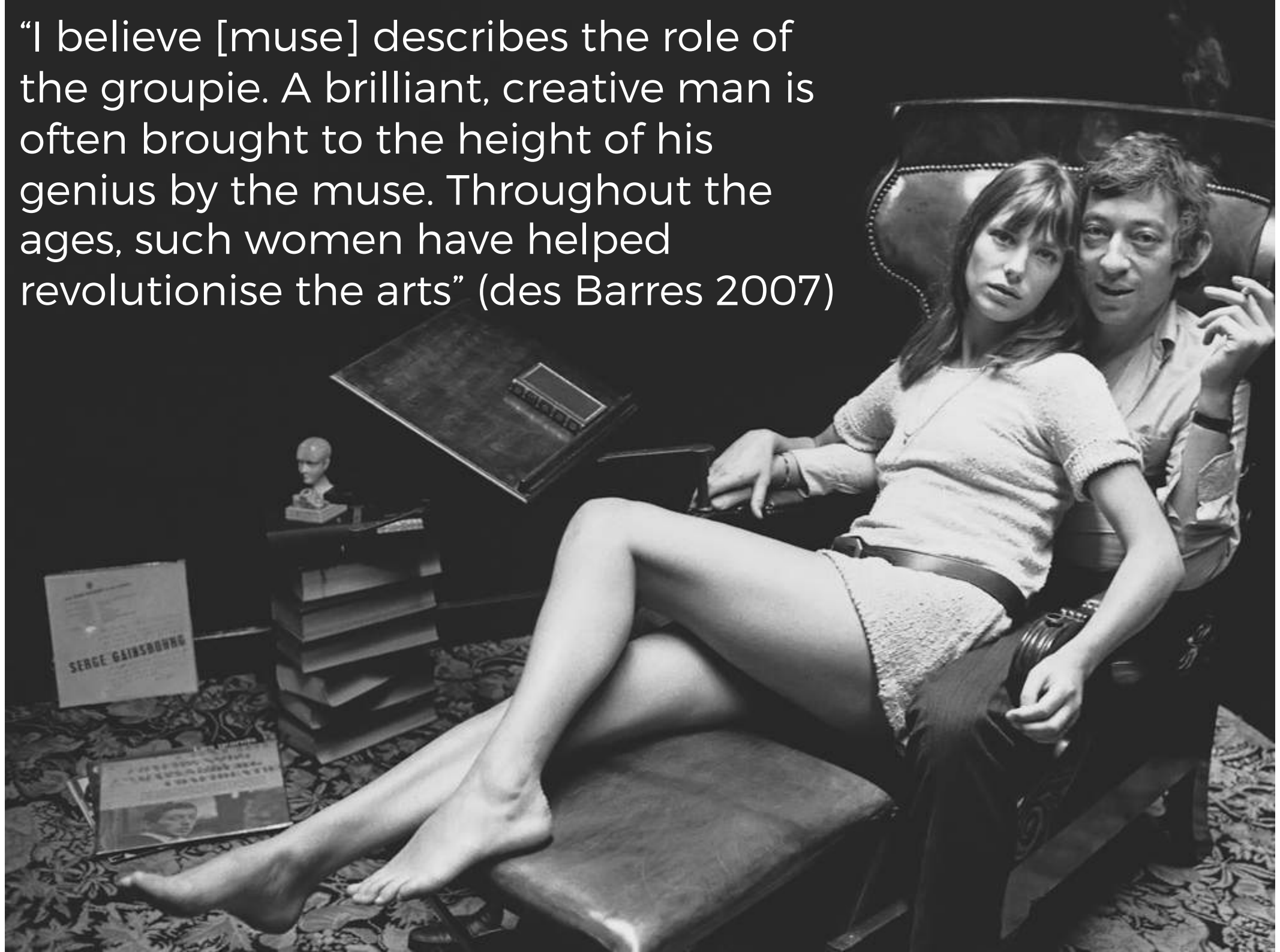
## **Reinforcing and Entrenching Stereotypes**

When femininity becomes intertwined with fandom, femininity is magnified. The dominant representation of groupies magnifies cultural assumptions about women as sex objects and as passive consumers of mass culture.





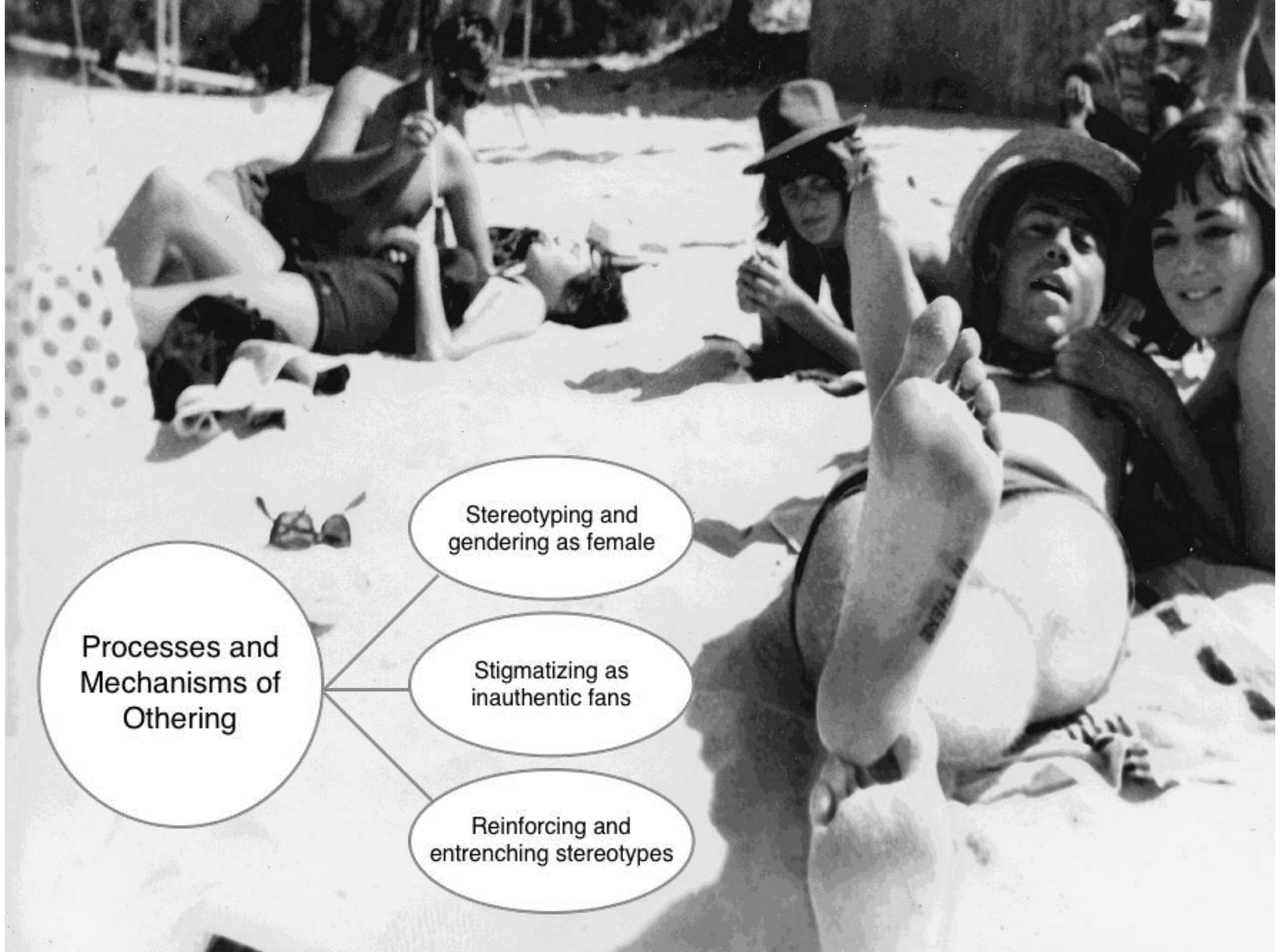
“I believe [muse] describes the role of the groupie. A brilliant, creative man is often brought to the height of his genius by the muse. Throughout the ages, such women have helped revolutionise the arts” (des Barres 2007)



While alternative representations of groupies (Larsen 2014) empower by challenging the hegemonic and repressive view of groupies, they also reinforce the gendering of the groupie as woman by magnifying cultural assumptions about femininity.







Processes and  
Mechanisms of  
Othering

Stereotyping and  
gendering as female

Stigmatizing as  
inauthentic fans

Reinforcing and  
entrenching stereotypes