



HELL

**FEMININITY AND
LIBERATION
IN GLAM METAL**

DEVIL

No.1

**Look What the
Cat Dragged In**

HE- DEVIL

A zine by Levi Volpe

To mom and dad, without whom this project wouldn't exist at all. I owe you both for always encouraging me to be “me” without compromise.

Thank you to Ash, Iggy, Darlie, Nat, Sascha, and so many other friends from all over – you know who you are – for your endless enthusiasm for my project and all your support when I felt like tearing my hair out over it.

Of course, thank you to the amazing Angela Riechers for always pushing me outside of my comfort zone as a designer – and for the nudge with the title of this zine!

And last but not least, big thanks to Gen, Olivia, and Ria for modeling the shirts for me. You're all rock stars in my eyes.

Glam metal was renowned in the 1980s for its emphasis on male heterosexuality, despite the overtly feminine physical dress of its performers. With the potential to produce a stage for people of all genders and sexualities to find empowerment and liberation, a revival of glam in our socially progressing world is possible through the genre openly embracing itself as a safe haven for personal expression.

LOOKS AT KILL

In my dad's pale yellow home office surrounded by dusty tax documents and filing cabinets, eight year old me had a revelation. My mom (always cooler than she likes to admit) dusted off the family CD player, sat my six year old sister and me down, and played Def Leppard's "Hysteria" for us. A devotee of hard rock in the early 80s, she saw the likes of the Ramones and even Def Leppard themselves in concert as a teenager, her collection of albums neatly shelved behind us and waiting to be discovered. My sister couldn't have cared less at the time, but to me hearing the album was everything; the heavy sound which I loved even as a toddler combined with the androgynous, long-haired look of the band was unlike anything I had ever seen. Over the years I became a dedicated disciple of heavy metal and all music from the 1980s, growing out my hair and learning guitar and bass to play along with my favorite musicians.

As a queer man, my relationship with metal music and its community has always been a unique one. While my straight peers value masculinity and authenticity above all else, I've always found an appreciation for the campiness, homoeroticism, and performativity often present in the genre, especially when unintentional. For someone like me who has never found real belonging in cis gay circles, metal became a safe haven; my desire to express femininity as a trans man became a non-issue even to those outside of the metal community when subscribing to the trends and standards of metal culture. To me, metal (particularly the glam subgenre) represents an alternative and empowering form of masculinity. There's no doubt surrounding the sexuality or gender identity of its most prominent stars, yet their nonconformity is accepted and even encouraged by many fans, which I see as something to strive for.

Now more than ever are teenagers and young adults like myself redefining the meanings of gender and sexuality, calling into question the visual tenets of 80s glam metal that value outrageousness and deliberately breaking the mold. Of course glam could never be in the exact form or quantity that it existed in the 80s, but something where women, queer people, and intersections of those identities can have the power to make it something all their own just as I have. This thesis is a love letter – a trashy, problematic, lipstick-stained love letter – to glam and its performers, and an open door to anyone with the potential to find liberation and belonging in it.



LOOK WHAT THE CAT DRAGGED IN



"I just remember sitting in a fucking cowboy bar surrounded by fucking rednecks in Grass Valley [California] and I'm wearing like yellow pants with the black stiletto boots and some leather jacket and no shirt and my hair all freaked out and Vince is like the same and Tommy's the same, and just fucking sitting there, man. And people are like, "Hey, man, what's your fucking trip?" "I'll tell you what our fucking trip is, man, we're a rock 'n' roll band!"

—Nikki Sixx, Nöthin' But a Good Time



"The early 80s? Come on! You had disposable income and you didn't need to wear a condom — that right there gets you through a holiday weekend in style."

WHAT'S in a NAME?



In the case of glam metal, it's the whole deal. Also called hair metal or even just 80s metal, these labels are used interchangeably to refer to the specific genre of commercial pop-metal and hard rock that dominated the charts for the better part of the 1980s. Metal scholars define it primarily through its image rather than its sound, hence the labels denoting the style over substance of its musicians. I've chosen to use "glam metal" to refer to the genre, preferring its emphasis on the look and attitude of the bands as a whole.

What actually is glam metal? Primarily catering to women's desires while also drawing from the visual language of the queer community, glam metal is built on a foundation that is open for experimentation and molding by marginalized

meet
glam's

PARTIERS HARDEST

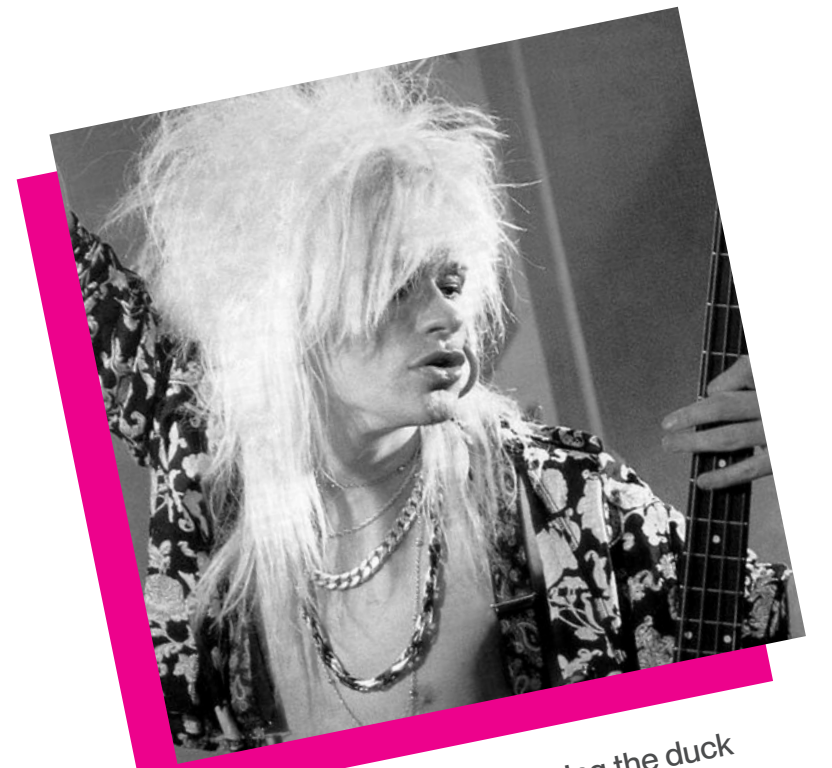


groups, especially with our modern society's rapidly evolving understandings of gender and sexuality where it is ripe to destabilize ideas of heteromascularity in metal scenes. But in terms of music, it was a genre that arguably drew more inspiration from pop music than it did from its heavy metal and hard rock parents, made essentially to be played on car radios with the windows down. Such "parents" included KISS, Van Halen, and even Judas Priest in the late 70s that used extravagance and showmanship as their main draws. The main difference, however, was the appearance of the band members. Exclusively dominated by men (except a very

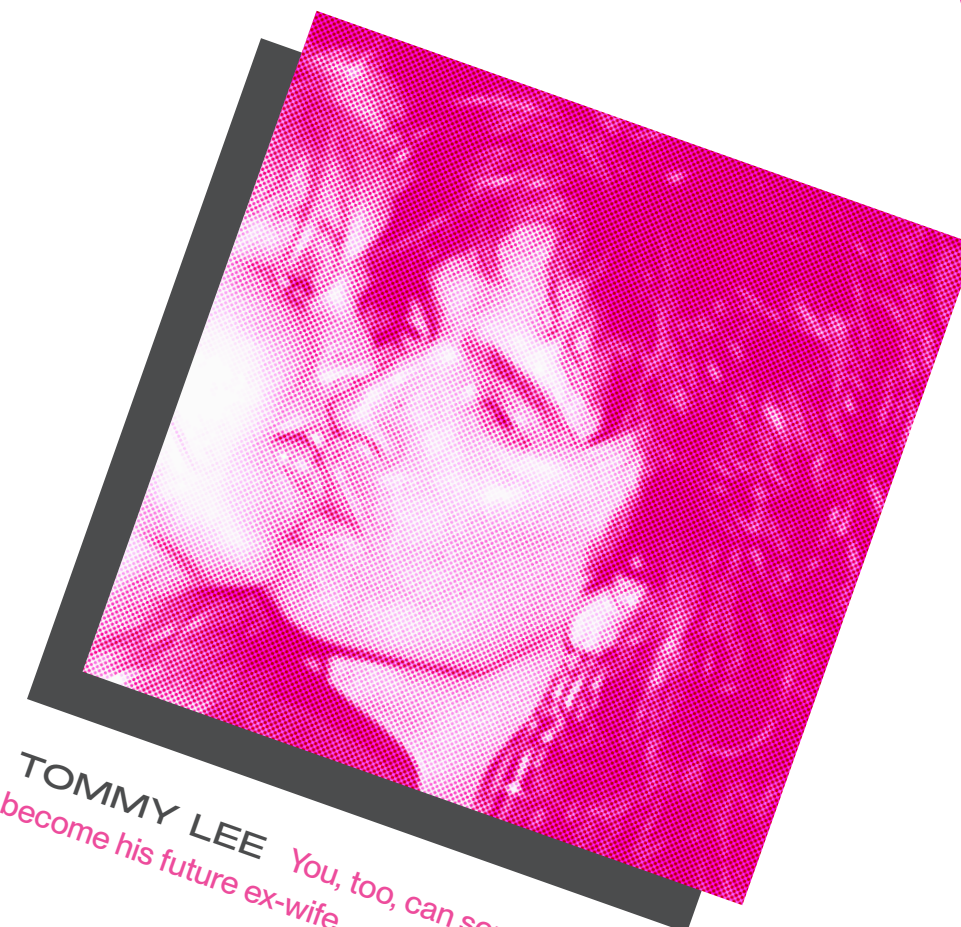
small handful of female musicians), these performers androgynously styled themselves with objects and behaviors typically associated with women – jewelry, heavy makeup, and "feminine" clothes like fishnets, crop tops, and scarves. As its synonym "hair metal" might suggest, glam stars also adopted the long, "big" hair worn by women during the decade. To the uninitiated or outside culture, the more extravagant acts like Poison were often mistaken for women, such as on the cover of their debut record "Look What the Cat Dragged In." There are many explanations and analyses of this phenomenon; being able to have copious sex with fans and shocking audiences enough to keep drawing crowds being the biggest among them, as Klypchak among others suggest. The most important aspect of glam to inspect is how its male performers adopted these female signifiers, inadvertently rocking the boat of social and cultural expectations surrounding gender roles.



BRET MICHAELS Rock 'n' roll's nicest guy... and biggest sex machine.



C.C. DEVILLE Pioneering the duck face before it was cool. Or womanly.



TOMMY LEE You, too, can someday become his future ex-wife.



"People didn't know whether to fuck us or fight us."

The demand for masculinity, heaviness, and authenticity is strong enough in today's metal scene, but for fans in the 80s, it was even more so. All of these ideologies directly counteracted the elements of glam – features drawn from femininity or the female experience were considered unacceptable and inherently lacking in substance, not to mention how its wild popularity with women further discredited it. Straight males in the 80s metal scene took glam performers' aggressively feminine presentation as a threat to heterosexuality and the authenticity of the genre, as evidenced by

retaliations like the sticker reading "No Glam Fags! All Metal! No Makeup!" on MX Machine's thrash record "Manic Panic." According to Walser, many male heavy metal fans viewed glam metal musicians as "poseurs," actively denouncing androgyny as "real men don't wear makeup." Violence toward glam was more than just written; Rikki Rockett stated that "people didn't know whether to fuck us or fight us," noting how many fights the band actually got into as a result of their looks – and the cocky, hypermasculine personalities and behaviors of glam's stars certainly didn't help.

Backlash from fellow straight men caused glam metal musicians to put significant effort into asserting their masculinity in other ways, using several tactics to assure there could be no doubt to the public that they were in fact very heterosexual men. Some artists took on masculine visual concepts in their music videos and live shows such as bikers, gangsters, and cowboys to balance out their image. But most prominent was the womanizing, objectifying lyrics of their songs. De Gallier summarizes it well: "There was plenty of room for visual experimentation, but lyrically, it was all about the power of the penis." Warrant's "Love In Stereo" describes two women swarming over the main character, insisting on a threesome; Enuff Z'Nuff's "Hot Little Summer Girl" depicts in detail the attractiveness of a woman's summer body;

hot little summer girl

**"There was plenty
experimentation,
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**of room for
but lyrically, it
power of the penis."**





Dokken's "Young Girls" details the singer's undying love for, well, young girls. Klypchak notes how using women as objects was another common theme. In the music videos I studied, I found this present in Mötley Crüe's "Girls, Girls, Girls" set at a strip club which ends with the musicians' sexual ownership of the women, and Poison's "I Want Action" where only the women are undressing in a game of strip poker; objectifying women was the norm in the 80s, and by adhering to these norms, glam metal bands asserted their masculinity. Overcompensating for their

feminine appearances through sexual conquest, their heterosexuality is reclaimed, however performative it may appear. Nikki Sixx of the Crüe has admitted himself that these were efforts for them to appeal to men as well as women.

Even with its staunch critics, glam metal experienced great success among both female and male fans, its musicians churning out multi-platinum records yearly. Despite its problematic elements, these fans were able to participate in and use glam to achieve self-exploration, community, and empowerment.

"The Bible lists the seven sins that God hates the most – and sex isn't one of the seven!"



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This project was completed as partial fulfillment of the requirements of DESN 402, Senior Studio II, in the Graphic Design Program, The University of the Arts, Philadelphia, PA, Spring 2023.

Angela Riechers, faculty advisor
Michael Schnaidt and J Johnson, critics



**FEMININITY AND
LIBERATION
IN GLAM METAL**

THE DEVIL

No.2
Makin' a Mess

THE DEVIL

A zine by Levi Volpe

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MAKIN'



A

MESS



"We use, but we get used, too. We do! Women use us as much as we use them. It's a totally honest exchange."

—Rikki Rockett, American Hair Metal

"There's as many male groupies as there are female groupies, it's just that the female groupies are magnified because they have tits and an ass. The male rock & roll groupies are hipper than the female ones, but the female ones will do things to you that you just wouldn't want the males to do."

—Chip Z'Nuff, American Hair Metal

because

GLAM

introduced a feminine visual style to heavy metal, a previously male-dominated scene was soon flooded with women attending live shows and participating in its fan culture. Even self-proclaimed glam haters such as Exodus's Gary Holt admitted to attending glam metal concerts because of the sheer number of women present. With musicians that participated in the same activities as them – doing their hair, wearing makeup, and buying cute clothes – it was an easy connection. Glam metal musicians welcomed women at their shows for the potential for sex backstage after the concert, but women used this invitation to foster their own communities and develop their own uses for the musicians of glam. Glam metal also offered methods of exploration in terms of patriarchy and power for its male participants as well – including the overlooked queer men whose stylistic contributions were unknowingly appropriated in the genre.

"It's a slumber party on the road, except we don't wear no pajamas!"





'tarts,' there to be used



Women's newfound existence in metal spaces was more complex than just raw attraction. Walser makes the comparison to female fans of Elvis in the 50s – these fans used him to make like-minded friends and explore their own desires, rather than just being sent into a mindless frenzy by his dance moves. De Gallier notes that glam metal was the advent of the “male slut,” where glam musicians were advertised by their record labels and fan magazines as “‘tarts,’ there to be used” rather than controlling macho men. This distinction is key; though glam metal stars made attempts to seem masculine and powerful, women ended up finding ways to objectify the femininity of these musicians and in some ways, replicate

the same “usage” that the men expressed towards them. The female gaze is a much less catered-to subject than its inverse, especially in the 80s, making glam a rare source for women to enact their desires.

One example is female fans' activity of collecting posters, photos, and centerfolds or pin-ups of their favorite male musicians found in fan magazines. The glam boys in these magazines were intentionally posed smiling and in bright, fun environments, removing any threat of masculinity and appealing to the female gaze. Of course glam stars weren't the only ones to have their photos decorating the bedroom walls of teenage girls – the likes of Leif Garrett, Donny

Osmond, and John Stamos were “safer,” less controversial objects of adoration. Glam pinups offered a taste of the wild side and an element of rebellion against concerned parents to girls who sought that experience, while still taking place in the curated, controlled photoshoot environments that allowed for safe adoration. Their typical masculine dominance removed, they were free to be objectified. Here's an example caption from one magazine, *Hot Metal Centerfolds*:

“We really thrive on the word 'sleazy.' Everybody has groupies, gets drunk, does drugs. Everybody has wild sex. We're just very honest. We admit it.”



*"Mouth, hair, legs, the rear.
Mainly the mouth, though."*



*"If I wanna plaster lip-
stick on my face and use
a whole can of hairspray,
that's what I'm gonna do!"*

similar to *Playboy* centerfolds that are more sexual than they are actually informational. These pin-ups could then be traded and discussed with other fans.

Empowerment was also to be found behind the scenes for female glam fans. Journalist Katherine Turman explains how many of the club bookers, band managers, publicists, and journalists on the Sunset Strip were women. In a similar vein, it was often sisters, friends, and girlfriends who designed the outfits and did the hair of a band when they were first getting their start in the scene – almost always free of charge, motivated by their expertise and passion for the genre. While the bands themselves were male-dominated, often it was passionate women who helped make them possible at all.



"Hot Metal Centerfolds presents this very special POISON SECTION for all of you, the readers of this jam-packed mini-poster mag!! In this issue, we feature group shots of the sizzling, sweltering band [Poison] that you, the fans, chose as one of your favorites. We've also managed to get solo shots of each band member – in action or posing for our cameras!! The Poison Invigorating Info is a must read and we even gathered personal facts on the four glam rockers which offer a different perspective on the individual personalities that make up this hot outfit!! Most importantly, this magazine is crammed with as many full-color shots of C.C., Bobby, Rikki and Bret as possible. That's the important thing – the pinups!! Enjoy them!!"

What's interesting about this is how the language and visual strategies echo pin-ups of women created for the male gaze. As Kurennaya emphasizes, the adjectives used like "sweltering" highlight the sexual appeal of the musicians posing suggestively for the cameras and playing their instruments. The "Invigorating Info" is just information such as the height and weight of each band member,

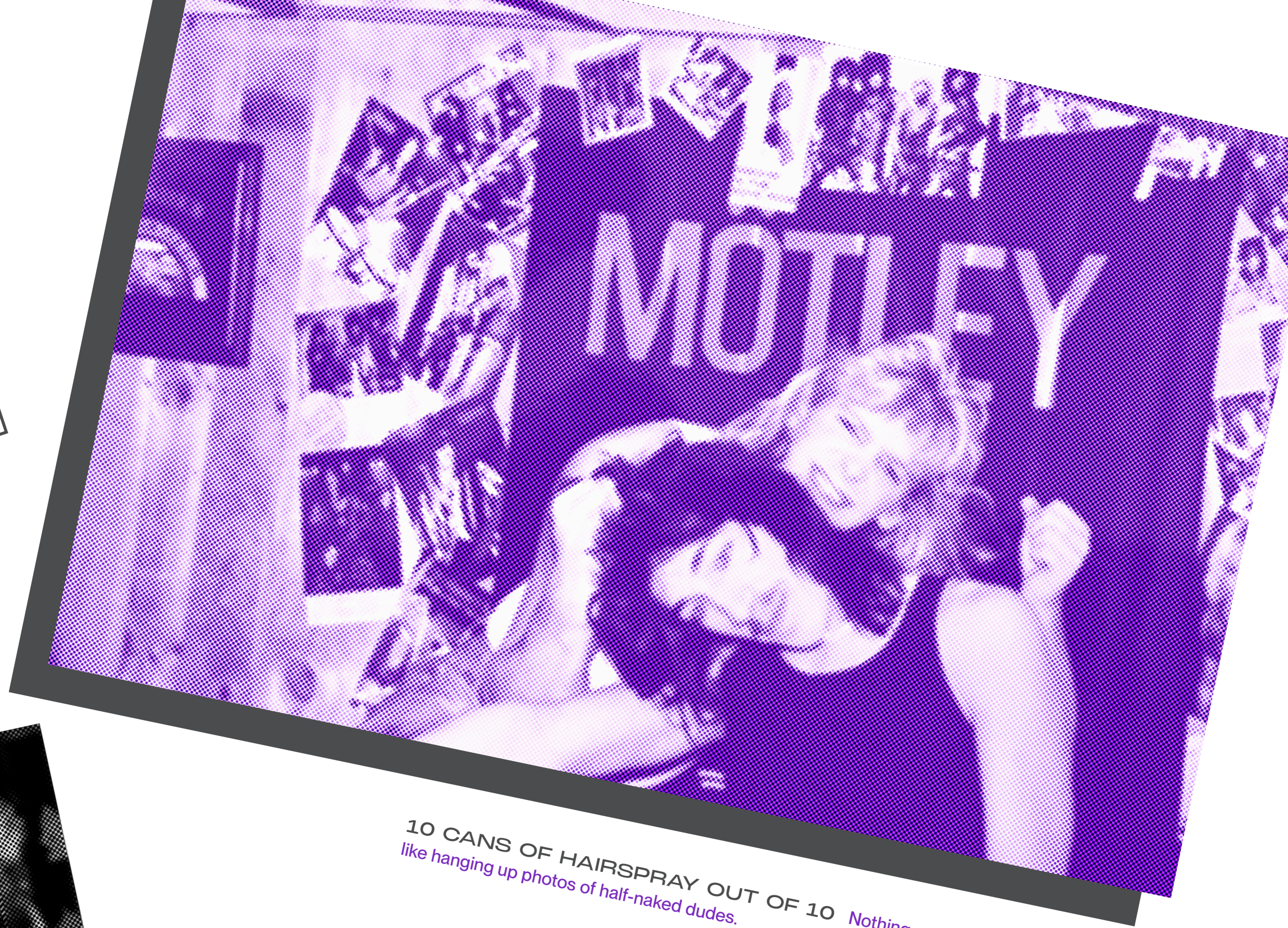


rate my BED-ROOM

3 CANS OF HAIRSPRAY OUT OF 10 We're not too sure about the rest of the decor...but the Def Leppard poster rules.



10 CANS OF HAIRSPRAY OUT OF 10 Nothing says straight male bedroom like hanging up photos of half-naked dudes.



6 CANS OF HAIRSPRAY OUT OF 10 We're getting a funny feeling that she really, really likes Bon Jovi.



"We're
not

GAY

or anything..."



*the
real
deal*

*the
copy
cat*

If glam metal appealed to women's desires, would it not also apply to queer men? Where are they in these discussions? Vastly overlooked, only a small handful of my research acknowledged them at all – a huge oversight considering the contributions of queer culture on heavy metal's visual style. In the early 80s, Judas Priest frontman Rob Halford began using biker attire, leather, and bondage wear onstage which quickly became a staple of Priest's image. A then-closeted gay man, his usage of these artifacts was explicitly a queer one, drawing from their queer masculinist associations to

express his sexuality in a way that would be hidden to dominant heterosexual culture but a nod to his own community. When other metal bands began to copy this style for their own performances including glam acts like Mötley Crüe, L.A. Guns, and Skid Row, the queer connotation of these styles became lost and eventually replaced with a macho heterosexual one. Glam musicians co-opted queer symbology for themselves, "employing its power but removing most of its threat," as Clifford-Napoleone quotes.






color, joy, and



All of this considered, even for the straight male stars themselves, glam metal allowed space to break away from male expectations and allow for color, joy, and fun to be found. Even Mötley Crüe, arguably some of the worst perpetrators of chauvinism in glam, described the genuine entertainment they got from

inventing increasingly effeminate and elaborate outfits to distinguish themselves from their competition. As much as they upheld the patriarchy in most other areas of their lives, at the same time, glam metal styles poked holes in these structures – if not for themselves, then for their fans.

fun



"I hate it when other bands say they don't give a shit about image. What a pile of poop that is!"

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**FEMININITY AND
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IN GLAM METAL**

THE DEVIL

No.3

**The More
Things Change**

HE- DEVIL

A zine by Levi Volpe

Glam metal was renowned in the 1980s for its emphasis on male heterosexuality, despite the overtly feminine physical dress of its performers. With the potential to produce a stage for people of all genders and sexualities to find empowerment and liberation, a revival of glam in our socially progressing world is possible through the genre openly embracing itself as a safe haven for personal expression.

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE



"To understand us in the beginning, it may sound kind of silly to you now, but I thought what we were doing was social comment. I never cared about shock rock for the sake of shock rock. I thought it was boring, to be honest."

—Blackie Lawless, Nöthin' But a Good Time

"Girl audiences are fickle. The year we came out, we were cool. Then they decided they loved Skid Row. Then Warrant. Now it's Mark Slaughter. It gives bands a way in, but those fans don't stay with you."

—Kip Winger, American Hair Metal

"What the hell did you expect? Did you think people would continue buying this prepack-aged product forever?"



PERFECT INSTANT

in glam metal started to wane in the early 1990s. It's generally agreed that the rise of grunge with its frank authenticity put an end to the age of artifice and extravagance, though other factors such as a highly oversaturated market added to its eventual demise. The claims its opponents made over the years began to ring true for everyone – glam metal musicians were simply talentless hacks dressing up as women, with getting laid being their sole motivator.

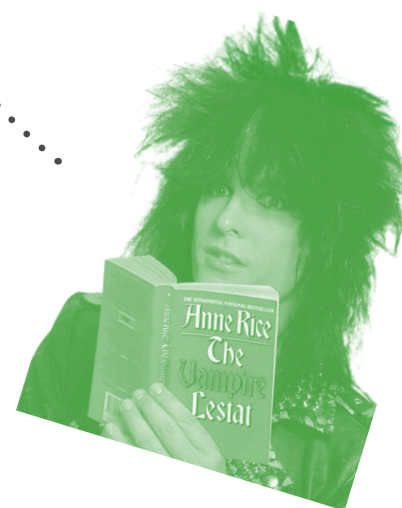
where are they NOW?

trying
his
best



family
man

loveable
clown

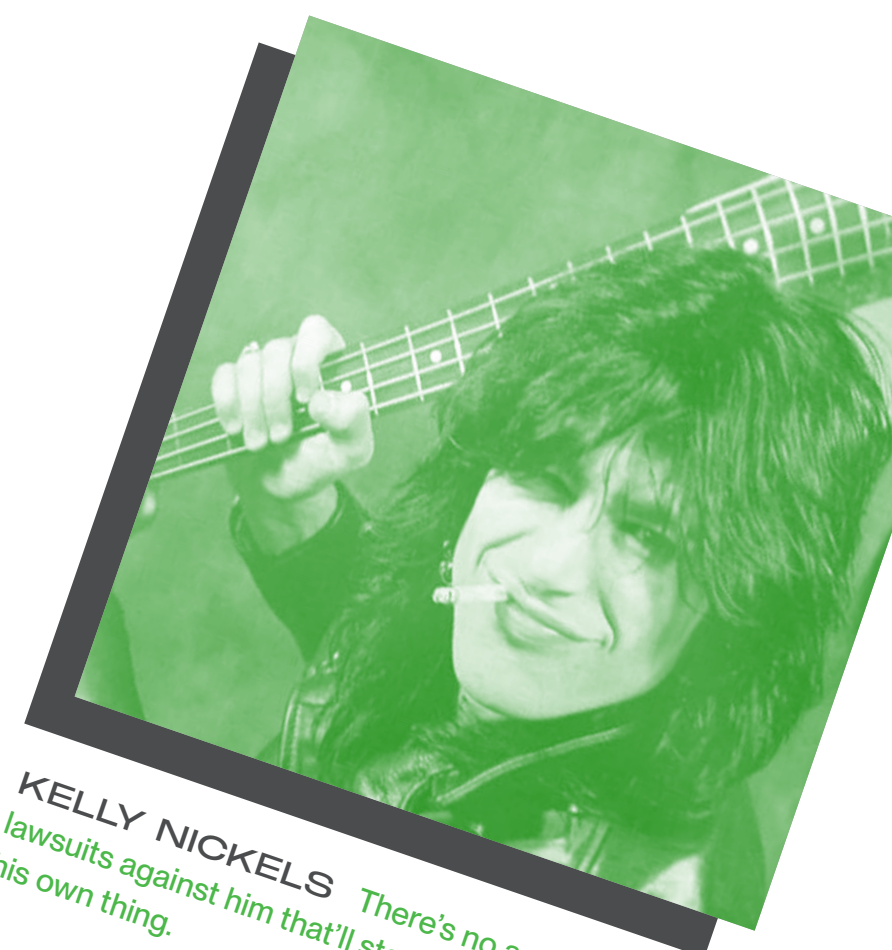


In recent years, the former stars of glam metal have begun to make reappearances in music, film, and TV. Mötley Crüe, Poison, L.A. Guns, Def Leppard, Skid Row, and several others are currently playing everything from small local shows to sold-out stadium tours in numerous countries. Reality TV programs inspired by the success of *The Osbournes* such as *Tommy Lee Goes to College* and *Ex-Wives of Rock* portrayed glam's stars in everyday settings, showcasing their struggles with sobriety, relationships, and life post-fame. Mötley also co-authored an autobiography recounting their time in the band, *The Dirt*, which was also adapted into the eponymous 2019 film.

As Kummer notes, these examples serve as efforts to rebrand glam's performers as family-oriented, relatable, grown up, and/or "loveable clowns." Attitudes and behaviors acceptable in the 80s have been modified to integrate with modern values – Mötley no longer does their signature "Titty Cam" at concerts, and glam concerts in general are more toned down and family friendly.



VINCE NEIL When not singing horribly out of tune, he's writing solo albums that are promptly forgotten.



KELLY NICKELS There's no amount of lawsuits against him that'll stop him from doing his own thing.



DAVID LEE ROTH Like Vince Neil, he can't carry a tune. Unlike Vince Neil, he respectfully bowed out.



Contemporary bands have emerged emulating the style, attitudes, and sound of 80s glam metal. The most prominent example might be Steel Panther, a group that parodies the genre just as much as it expresses sincere love and appreciation for it; as drummer Stix Zadinia put it, "I like to say that we are dead fucking serious about not being dead fucking serious." They put on energetic shows, adopt glamorous stage names, and lovingly play into glam personas – former bassist Lexxi Foxx would often use a hand mirror to reapply his makeup onstage during a performance. While their lyrics do still feature the sexism and homophobia of their 80s counterparts, it is often done in a humorously self-aware way to exaggerate the lyrical content

"I like to say that we are dead fucking serious about not being dead fucking serious."



from their inspirations. "Community Property," Panther's parody of the 80s metal ballad, opens with "If you were a hooker, you'd know I'd be happy to pay / If suddenly you were a guy / I'd be suddenly gay." On a much more explicitly queer note, Clifford-Napoleone draws attention to early 2000s act Pink Stéél which was fronted by two gay men. With song titles like "I'm Coming Out, All Over You," "We Fight for Cock!" and "Open Wide for Pride," the duo

open
wide
for
pride

openly embraces the camp, raunchy lyrics of glam metal while co-opting (or really, reclaiming) the genre's imagery to express their own sexualities. As glam's former stars mold their images to fit more in line with modern cultural shifts, the generations that grew up after the height of glam metal have started to craft their own interpretations and truths of the genre.



"Black hair is a requirement to be in this band. And you have to be insane."



Possibly the most interesting discovery I made in my research was finding the niche, current-day online communities of teenage and young adult fans entirely dedicated to glam metal, with most of them sharing content daily or almost daily. With many of their following counts numbering in the thousands, they upload their own scans of 80s photographs and magazines, post memes and thirst content of their favorite stars, dress up in glam styles, and attend the revival tours for glam metal bands. These legions of fans were an invaluable resource to me, not just providing dozens of unseen photographs that I used in this thesis but serving as first-hand proof that glam can

still appeal to youth culture today. As Kurennaya suggests, this appears to be guided by a desire to stand out from their peers by subscribing to "alternative" styles; in addition to this, though, I feel that glam is an invitation to a niche community that is able to challenge norms of gender and sexuality in a unique way. As I scrolled through these communities on Tumblr, Instagram, and Pinterest, I realized that virtually all of these adolescent fans were female, queer, nonbinary, or other similar intersections of marginalization. Their "usage" of glam metal boys is almost exactly the same as their 80s counterparts – these fans form a community with one another to discuss the styles and



personalities of their idols, providing a safe, like-minded space to explore their unique identities and attractions. In my research I made note of countless posts expressing envy of a musician's outfit, hair, and/or androgynous look, with several commenters expressing the same thoughts. For female and queer fans, the presentation of 80s glam stars is foreign enough (today's popular musicians don't dress this way for the most part) to pique interest, but similar enough (containing both queer-coded and traditionally female visual signifiers) for them to find common ground with it and create the desire to rework it.

"I'll always be remembered as the first to open this category for women as hard rockers. And that will make me live forever."

This opens a discussion of how new, progressive fans of glam metal reconcile with the ugly side of its original incarnation, regardless of how much affirmation and belonging can be found within it. Tommy Lee spent six months in prison for assaulting his then-wife Pamela Anderson, Jani Lane experienced lifelong substance abuse issues from his sexual assault by a still-unknown member of another metal band, Sebastian Bach's infamous "AIDS kills fags dead" shirt, not to mention the countless women who were negatively impacted by glam's misogynistic lyrical content and ideals. The harm from these incidents over the decades can't simply be

CAN ROCK BE NON- SEXIST?

brushed over, no matter how much potential it has in new, modern forms. Walser gives an interesting response to the question of "Can rock be nonsexist?": of course it can't, since the foundations of rock and metal as they exist now were built on power imbalances between men and women, and that context can never be separated from the genre. However, he proposes, it can be antisexist – and I find this to be extremely applicable to glam metal's revival in its current and potential fans.





The real answer lies in the power of the marginalized to make space for themselves.

It's already happening!


The real answer lies in the power of the marginalized to make space for themselves. Of course misogyny and homophobia were rampant in 80s glam, but women and queer people have been able to reinterpret and recontextualize those old signals into a source of pride. Being an androgynous man (or not identifying as a man at all) is now cool rather than shameful or something that needs to be overcompensated for. Women who own their sexualities are now considered powerful rather than just groupies or sluts. As noted in Walser, fan magazine *RIP* published in the 80s regularly included fan letters decrying sexism and homophobia. This showed the heightened awareness of glam fans – even then – to perceptions of gender and gender roles, fighting for these groups to have the ability to participate in glam. For those who are “different” as expressed in musical tastes, gender identity, or sexuality, the styles of glam metal can serve a visual solution for these

anxieties. The original wave of glam metal already had the ability to empower all, but current fans have the cultural resources to create an even more affirming space, and they are already doing so.

A revival of glam metal isn't only possible in today's world – it's already happening, a space carved by the hands of passionate young women and queer people determined to make their voices heard in the glitz and glamor. As a queer man, heavy metal as a genre has never been a genre made for people like us, but nevertheless it has completely shaped my relationship with my gender identity and sexuality over the course of my life. It's my hope that we can continue to break down these barriers of what we can and can't do, even through the commodification and re-appropriation of our oppressors. And naturally, we'll all look fabulous while we do it.



"Our songs are gonna last forever..."



"This is a response to what Vince Neil, lead singer of Mötley Crüe, said on MTV, that 'Groupies are real sleazy, and all they wanna do is fuck your brains out.' Well, maybe that's true, but there are some of your female fans that just want to meet you and tell you how they feel about your music. Remember, those so-called 'sleazy' girls made you and Crüe who you are today. All bands should respect their fans.

Without us, you'd be nothing."

—Fan letter from Mary M, *Circus* magazine
June 1987

credits

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