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Too Much Too Young: Popular Music Age and Gender

Sheila Whiteley

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Too Much Too Young investigates how age and gender have shaped the careers and images of pop music stars, examining the role of youth and youthfulness in pop music through a series of themed case studies.

Whiteley begins by investigating the exploitation of child stars such as Brenda Lee and Michael Jackson, offering a psychoanalytic reading of the relationship between child star and oppressive manager, and looks at the current glut of boy- and girl- bands and stars in the mold of Britney Spears to examine the continuing fatal attraction of stardom for adolescents.

Whiteley then considers the star images of female singer-songwriters Kate Bush, Tori Amos, and Bjork, whose 'little girl' voices and characterization by the media suggests a girlish feminitity which is often at odds with the intentions of their musical output. She then moves on to explore the rock/pop divide as it affects the image of male performers, considering why male stars usually fall into the category of 'wild boys' such as Kurt Cobain or Jim Morrison, or 'nice boys', like Cliff Richard, The Monkees, and Wham!

Whiteley ends by asking what happens to stars who set so much store by manipulations of youthfulness when they begin to age, and points to stars like Robbie Williams, Kylie Minogue and Cher to demonstrate that it is possible to achieve iconic pop status even without dying young.

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