# Gender, Rage, and Age in Alanis Morissette's "Reasons I Drink"

*Karen Fournier*

**Abstract:** *Alanis Morissette's recent single, "Reasons I Drink" (2019), provides a powerful critique of the erasure of middle-aged females in rock. In this song, the singer-songwriter recounts how she has found peace in middle-age by coming to terms with various negative behaviours that shaped her youth. In the video, she strips away the mythologies surrounding female youth in a narrative that is populated by troubled characters who represent younger incarnations of herself. These characters gather at a therapy session led by the middle-aged artist, in the role of the therapist/sage. This paper will examine the song and video through the lens of Helene Moglen's 2008 feminist concept of "transaging" – a concept that nods towards queer theory to describe the dysphoria that can exist between a woman's perception of her age (driven by memories of youth) and society's perception of the aging female body (driven by a woman's embodied appearance). According to Moglen's theory, the middle-aged self is an amalgam of the various self-states experienced by women at different points their lives. Moglen suggests that women can remain relevant in a culture that privileges youth by shifting focus away from futile attempts to recreate youth and towards critical reflections on the ways in which youthful states have contributed to middle-age identities. Themes explored in Morissette's song and video therefore provide productive and fruitful avenues for other ageing women to explore in popular culture, and the commercial success of this recent song demonstrates that there is a market of women for whom this narrative will resonate.*

**Keywords:** *Alanis Morissette; popular music; gender; female rage; ageism; Helene Moglen; transaging*

## Introduction

After an eight-year hiatus from the recording studio, Alanis Morissette released her ninth studio album, *Such Pretty Forks in the Road*, on July 31, 2020, marking almost exactly 25 years since the release of her breakthrough album, *Jagged Little Pill*, on June 13, 1995. In the earlier album, Morissette's frank and uncensored depictions of female coming-of-age angst propelled her to fame at the age of twenty-one and prompted some in the popular music press to characterize her as the archetypal 'angry young woman'. This description has also informed scholarly studies of her early work. Kristen Schilt, for example, notes that "anger, which had hitherto been male territory, had a very female voice in Morissette's lyrics" and she argues that, by 1995, Morissette "was suddenly being hailed as a new feminist heroine" because she modelled public displays of rage to other women (Schilt 2003, 10–11). This reading of Morissette's work has become a yardstick against which her entire oeuvre has been measured and, in some cases, unfairly criticized in the popular press. Reviews of her recent studio album provide examples. The *New Musical Express* (*NME*), for example, notes that although her latest work, *Such Pretty Forks in the Road* "might not fizz with exactly the same visceral anger as on that seminal record, […] there's still an urgency and rawness to Morissette" (Daly 2020), while a review in *The Guardian* laments the fact that "there is nothing as thrillingly angry as [the 1995 single] 'You Oughta Know' on the artist's newest album" (Mongredien 2020). A review in *Pitchfork* is similarly lukewarm when it describes the album as "vulnerable, sedate, [and] ballad-heavy" and claims that "most of those ballads are unobtrusive" – in other words, that the album seems low-key (St. Asaph 2020). A *Rolling Stone* critic credits ageing for the perceptions of Morissette's more muted expressions of emotion when he writes that she "became an overnight superstar because she was jilted and angry and she thought the world ought to know [… but] now that she's older,

she seems to have reconciled some of her demons and the embers of her angst have been replaced by generalized anxiety and depression" (Grow 2020).

By centering "anger" in their reviews of Morissette's recent album (through its alleged absence in comparison to her early work), music critics continue to respond to, and reinforce, gender norms surrounding public displays of anger by women. In her study of the sexism faced by women in American politics, Rebecca Traister has argued that an angry woman is typically understood as "a perversion of both nature and social norms. She is ugly, emotional, out of control, sick, unhappy, unpleasant to be around, unpersuasive, irrational, crazy, infantile. Above all, she must not be heard" (Traister 2018, 51). Traister's comments arise from her observations of such public figures as Hillary Clinton, Nancy Pelosi, Kamala Harris, and Michelle Obama, and she argues that, to have a successful career, a woman must suppress her anger. She notes that women who occupy multiple sites of oppression (whose identities reside at the intersections of race, gender, and age, for example) are subjected to greater policing of their rage because its expression will transgress both gender norms and social expectations surrounding race and/or age. The same holds true in popular music, where male anger and aggression is so permissible and pervasive that it rarely calls the attention of the popular press. Schilt notes that rock is redolent with expressions of male anger against ex-lovers, but she argues that what made Morissette unique in 1995 was that she exposed how women might feel about betrayals in their personal relationships. Rock's aggression is coded as male, so when a woman who is admitted into rock's sphere engages in anger, she must be called out (Schilt 2003, 13). I contend that anger has been weaponized by critics against Morissette, as it has been against female politicians and public figures, to diminish her potential role as a 'new feminist heroine' for middle-aged and older female fans who find few representations in the popular press. Her fame, and the potential it provides to reach other older women who 'must not be heard', makes Morissette a target for the press, where her age is used to silence the anger that she expresses in her latest album – an anger that reflects her experiences as a middle-

aged woman who muses on her long and challenging career in the music industry.

The following analysis will expose how the intersection of sexism and ageism informs critical denials of 'rage' in Morissette's current work, and how she has responded in this work. I will argue that Morissette's latest album, *Such Pretty Forks in the Road*, marks the latest stage in a personal journey that has propelled Morissette through various life-choices and turning-points, as its title suggests. Like all her work, the album engages in many topics across its various tracks, but I will focus on the lead single, "Reasons I Drink," because it deals most explicitly with the topics of ageing and female rage. I will divide my analysis into two parts to tackle how these two themes are represented in the song and to offer thoughts about how Morissette resists conventions of gender and ageing in this song. In the first part of this chapter, I will appeal to feminist theory and social psychology to reclaim the rage that is denied to Morissette by critics of her latest album and to illustrate how Morissette expresses rage in "Reasons I Drink." The analysis will begin with a close reading of the song's lyrics, their vocal performance, and the music that supports both. This portion of the analysis will demonstrate how Morissette becomes what Simon Frith would describe as the protagonist of the song who is "controlling the plot, with an attitude of tone and voice" and how that mixes with "the character of the singer as star, what we know about them or are led to believe about them through their packaging and publicity." (Frith 1996, 198–199). While the anger that I perceive in this song draws a direct line back to her earlier work and therefore serves as another example of female rage, the topic of ageing is not an explicit feature of this song. Instead, ageing is foregrounded in the music video, whose protagonist is the middle-aged Morissette. Carol Vernallis notes that "the music-video image […] attempts to pull us in with a sense of experience as internally felt rather than externally understood" (Vernallis 2004, 177). In the case of "Reasons I Drink," the harm that results from the youthful behaviours recounted in the song's lyrics become inscribed on Morissette's body and draw the ageing female listener into a shared narrative about the price that we pay for our youthful excesses. My analysis of the video will focus on the interrelationship of lyrics, music, and image to

show how the song comes to challenge the conventional binary framework of ageing, where the male gaze that dominates the music industry within which Morissette has built her career is complicit in separating desirable young women from their older, unwanted counterparts. Using Helene Moglen's theory of ageing (outined in the 2008 essay, "Ageing and Transageing: Transgenerational Hauntings of the Self"), I will show how "Reasons I Drink" offers a more liberating representation of female ageing, and one that continues to afford women access to a breadth of emotional expressions, including the rage for which older women are particularly sanctioned.

## Reclaiming Female Rage in the Song "Reasons I Drink"

In a recent *Guardian* interview, Morissette explained that "Reasons I Drink" was written to reflect her experiences of "work addiction, love addiction, and food addiction", each of which she has used to cope with the pressures of fame and her experiences in the music industry (Barlow 2020). The song narrates the inner turmoil experienced by a female protagonist who attempts to reconcile the perils of addiction with the benefits and comfort that they provide at challenging times in her life. Musically, this turmoil is expressed in stark contrasts between intimate, confessional verses and strident, defiant choruses. Its two verses are constructed as statements of cause-and-effect, where the opening lines describe a suppressed emotion (for example, in the first verse: "I tell everyone I'm fine even though I am not") while the closing lines show how that repression is channeled into various kinds of addictive behaviours (for example, "I've been working […] since I was single digits"). Morissette performs each verse in the lower register of her chest voice, which give the verses a sense of intimacy as she discloses each addiction and its source in her life. She is accompanied by a sparse piano vamp, or repeated rhythmic figure, during the verse, allowing the listener to focus on the singer's confessional without the distraction of competing musical parts. Morissette explains that this section of the song is meant to reveal a "very deep, profound sadness and vulnerability" or a melan-

choly about certain experiences or events in her life (online interview in *Pitchfork*, September 2020). In the second verse, for example, the singer lashes out at a "sick [music] industry" that Morissette has openly faulted for the abuse that she has endured through a career marked by overwork, predatory recording contracts, body shaming, sexual assault, and, most recently, the theft of $5 million by her business manager, Jonathan Schwartz, who was charged with embezzlement in 2017.

As the song moves through the pre-chorus and into the chorus, Morissette shifts to her upper vocal register, which highlights her narrator's growing anxiety and ambivalence as she ponders the daunting prospect of facing life's challenges without the support of her various emotional crutches. She testifies that "nothing can give reprieve like they [i.e., her addictions] do," and the physical exertion required to sing this line in her head voice echoes and reinforces the mounting tension in the song. The vocal performance is loudest and most forceful in the chorus, in which the narrator competes for attention in a mix that now comprises the guitar, keyboards, and drumkit. "Here we are!" she announces at the beginning of the chorus, which describes the emotional high that she experiences each time she engages with one of her addictions. The song reaches its melodic climax in the chorus on the words "rapture" and "helpful," to suggest that the singer is disinclined to abandon the short-term benefits afforded by her addictions despite the long-term damage they inflict on her physical and emotional well-being. As the chorus concludes, the lyrics unravel into a series of vowel sounds that become embedded into the instrumental mix. At this point in the song, the narrator appears to have escaped into an altered state of consciousness, consistent with the "high" that she describes in each verse. However, the voice quickly descends during this musical passage and returns to the original lower register in preparation for the reappearance of the verse. In each case, the vocal line descends in register to suggest that the singer's high is fleeting and that it is inevitably interrupted by the "profound sadness" of the narrator's reality. At the end of the song, the listener remains unsure about its outcome: does this narrator manage to kick her addictions, or does the song merely serve to point out how

the stress of modern life often prompts people to seek escapist pleasures that can never be fully abandoned?

Because it tells a tale of personal challenges and the negative behavioural responses that they engender, "Reasons I Drink" might seem to foreground depression more than anger (consistent with critic's observations about the seeming lack, or tempering, of anger in her recent work). I would argue however, that these two emotions are often closely aligned, and that repressed rage can manifest as depression (among other things). Causal links between internalized anger and depression in women have been theorized most famously by Freud (1917), whose essentialized reading of gender has since been contested, but whose interpretation of depression as repressed rage has been adapted to studies of female rage by feminists and social psychologists. Judith Butler (1995) has suggested that subordination by gender and sexuality creates what she describes as a "melancholy" that serves as the public face of an internalized anger experienced by oppressed subjects whose behaviours are socially prescribed and circumscribed. Butler builds on Freud's definition of melancholy as "the unfinished process of grieving [...] in which [a] lost object is incorporated and phantasmatically preserved in and as the ego" (Butler 1995, 166). She proposes a gendered reading of melancholia in which women grieve versions of themselves that are denied to them because of social mores that restrict gender expression and regulate gendered behaviours. According to Butler, "in the 'normal' constitution of gender presentation, the gender that is performed is constituted by a set of disavowed attachments [and] identifications that constitute a different domain of the 'unperformable'" (Butler 1995, 177). In this gendered reframing of "melancholy," Butler argues that women internalize and grieve unperformable aspects of themselves (like anger, which is strongly coded as male). Denied emotional expressions become supplanted by passive emotional expressions coded as female. Through this interpretive lens, the "deep, profound sadness" described by Morissette as central to "Reasons I Drink" can be understood as melancholy, or as the grief that she experiences for her repressed anger. On its surface, "Reasons I Drink" seems antithetical to Morissette's more famous song, "You Oughta Know", which is infused with anger, but I would argue that

the current song is a paean to the angry young woman who has been preserved in the singer's ego, but whose anger has been repressed.

The song's verses present the female listener with plenty to identify with and rage against, but the rage simmers in these sections of the song, and in place of an explosive release in the chorus, the narrative turns towards a description of how rage might be channeled elsewhere. A 2008 study of career women by two emotion theorists classifies rage as a "status emotion" available to dominant members of society (that is, white males) and denied to those whose identities mark them as subordinate. Data within this study leads its authors to conclude that, while white male anger tends to be perceived as a normal and objective response to adverse external circumstances, "the derogated status of angry women appeared to be due to the degree to which their behavior was seen as internally motivated – in particular, to the perception that they were out of control" (Brescoll and Uhlmann 2008, 273). Women who display anger at an external incident or occurrence that warrants their rage transgress the lower status that they inhabit relative to their white male counterparts, who can engage freely in their rage. The response to this transgression of status is to pathologize female rage, which will manifest in other ways. The tendency for women to redirect their anger, often into self-destructive behaviours, is well documented by social psychologists who examine the personal costs of repressed female rage. A 2013 study of anger expression in a sample of 239 white female subjects reveals that, while male rage is socially accepted, "women suffer anger in silence, or maladaptively divert it to indirect means of expression which become transformed into other pathologies such as bulimia, self-cutting, and substance abuse, or health problems such as hypertension, coronary heart disease, or obesity" (González-Prendes, Praill, and Kernsmith 2013, 122). In response to repressed female rage or melancholy "Reasons I Drink" illustrates how that rage can be redirected through reference to the pathologies of alcoholism, in the title and first verse, and overeating, in the second verse. While these two emotional substitutes are referenced directly in the song, "Reasons I Drink" also suggests that female anger can be stifled by other harmful activities that

are described in the lyrics, notable among which include overwork and overspending.

"Reasons I Drink" can be interpreted as a song about the self-harm that arises in response to inhibitions placed on female expressions of rage. It opens a window onto the social norms that stifle the 'angry young woman' who burst on the scene in 1995 and, following Butler, it explains how women might grieve their anger by redirecting repressed rage into the addictive behaviours described in the lyrics. While the narrator might list several reasons to drink, primary among them is the one reason that remains unstated in the song: namely, the melancholy felt by someone who must suppress a pathologized female anger or risk infantilization by a society that derides female rage. As the song reveals, this melancholy emerges as a set of addictions that enable the protagonist to grieve her angry younger self. Fans know that Morissette is middle aged, but the song neither references her age nor requires a middle-aged performer to make the song meaningful. Access to the "status emotion" of rage, as described by Brescoll and Uhlmann (2008), is denied to women of *all* ages, which means that the song could be performed convincingly by a woman in her teens or twenties, especially when we consider the prevalence of self-harming and addictive behaviours among younger women. One purpose of my recuperation of Morissette's rage has been to challenge critical misrepresentations of her current work and to assert that rage continues to infuse some of her songs. Another purpose will be to consider how the theme of repressed rage might align with the representation of age and ageing in the song's music video, where visual references to youth coexist and interact with references to Morissette's ageing self, and where the repressed anger of the song's lyrics and Morissette's performance can be read both as sexist and ageist.

## Representing Female Ageing in the Video "Reasons I Drink"

While "Reasons I Drink" is non-specific in its representation of female age, the music video centers the topics of gender, age, and ageing, and

their potential intersection with rage. In watching the video for the first time, I was struck at how much it echoed the positive and creative performance of ageing that was proposed by the literary theorist Helene Moglen in her 2008 essay, "Ageing and Transageing: Transgenerational Hauntings of the Self". Drawing upon her own experience of ageing, and one that resonates with me, Moglen observes that, despite the corporeal reality of her present, past selves remain available to her through youthful memories of herself. After one notable encounter with her own ageing image in the mirror, she concludes that "in our reflections, [ageing subjects] glimpse the familiar self we have prepared ourselves to see and a shadow self that is alien and unknown" (Moglen 2008a, 298). Moglen proposes that a conventional conception of ageing as a chronological experience separating younger and older selves only gives us a fraction of the story about the actual experience of ageing – and, she notes, perceptions of age as points on a historical continuum merely reinforce the diminishing privileges afforded to us as we move through time. From her own experience, she contends that the experience of ageing is actually more nuanced, and she argues for a description of ageing, rooted in psychoanalytic theory, that emerges from relationships between various self-states drawn asynchronously from across the lifespan of the ageing subject. One's present identity is understood in Moglen's theory as an amalgam of past identities which are stored in, and recuperated from, the psyche (2008a). But unlike the subject whose sense of self, or "ideal ego," is born at the moment that they gaze upon themselves for the first time in Lacan's mirror, the ageing subject in Moglen's mirror glimpses a corporeal self that she must reconcile with her memories of past self-states that she views in in her mind's eye. As Moglen's subject ages, her identity becomes moored by traces of past selves that are reflected on the surface of her ageing face, each of which provides an interpretative framework for the otherwise alien aspects of that ageing image: put differently, certain aspects of the ageing face bear the traces of their origins in the past while others cue the reality of the present. The process of ageing is therefore marked in Moglen's theory by an initial sense of alienation from the ageing self and its eventual incorporation into the psyche as a modified version of the past (Moglen 2008a). The cycle of alienation

and incorporation repeats across the lifetime of the subject as she seeks to interpret each new ageing self-image. The ageing subject therefore becomes richer, not diminished, over time as she fuses older experiences with those in the present. Moglen (2008a) uses the term "transageing" to describe this process not only because it resists the rigid states of 'young' and 'old' that mark the conventional age binary (and therefore proposes a spectrum of ageing identities), but also because it posits that transgenerational self-states work together to create the ageing self across permeable boundaries that are transitional, or that shift and change as we move through time. In this reconceptualization of ageing, the subject reclaims the agency to determine possibilities for her ageing self, and her performance of ageing will be guided by unique memories of past experiences of her younger selves that are preserved for posterity in her psyche.

"Reasons I Drink" provides an example of the mirror at work. Directed by the Los Angeles filmmaker Erin Elders and released on 27 February 2020, the video introduces Morissette as a facilitator who interacts with younger versions of herself at an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meeting. Before the music begins, the singer walks towards a large folding table in a non-descript church hall, pours herself a cup of coffee from a large urn, and joins the group that awaits her in the center of the room. The blazer that she wears signals her status as the meeting's facilitator while her reading glasses suggest that she is a middle-aged woman. As the song unfolds, the viewer is introduced to other members of the meeting, among which include three younger versions of the singer, each played by Morissette dressed in an outfit that points to a particular time in her life. One of these versions appears in an oversized white shirt and dark eye make-up, recalling the 21-year-old version of the singer who appeared in the video of her breakout song, "You Oughta Know". Consistent with the fame lavished on Morissette after the release of this song, this version of the singer is primped by make-up artists, pursued by a music executive who implores her to sign a contract, pestered by fans for her autograph, and interviewed on television. Another variant of Morissette, from the same era in the singer's life, wears a red knit cap and multi-coloured winter scarf that

recalls her appearance in the video "Ironic". She rebuffs a priest who moves his chair beside her to offer a comforting hand and turns away from a reporter who approaches her for an interview. Through these actions Morissette hints at unwanted intrusions of the press into her life and also reveals her conflicted relationship to Catholicism, which she describes another the song from the same period, "Forgiven", from her first album. A third, and older, version of Morissette appears in the guise of a disheveled new mother in her thirties who, like the real-life singer, appears to struggle with post-partum depression away from the public eye. She nurses a baby who is whisked away by a nurse and later appears with two older children. Each of Morissette's youthful iterations links a particular time in her life with a specific addiction chronicled in the song. She drinks and is medicated because of the challenges of motherhood and, as the video shows, because she is expected to leave her children reluctantly in the care of a nanny when the demands of motherhood clash with the demands of her career. She works obsessively as a 21-year-old with a thirst for fame but discovers that she can never satisfy the demands of the music industry, so she seeks validation in overspending and overeating.

The first two thirds of the video tells the story of a conventional AA session, but as the narrator performs the bridge and the final chorus, the session goes awry. The camera pans across Morissette's three youthful selves and we find them engaged in various scenes of mayhem. One version of the 21-year-old Morissette is pursued by a trio of fans while the 30-something mother attempts to break up a fight between her two older children. The pages of the recording contract that a young Morissette signed earlier in the video are tossed about as the middle-aged Morissette, in her role as the counsellor, stands and surveys the havoc from the center of the room. Sara Ahmed (2017) explains how ageing, and the accumulation of lived experience, teaches women to suppress their rage and how this suppression can trigger a cathartic response like the one depicted at this turning-point in the video. Ahmed notes that

> it is from difficult experiences, of being bruised by structures that are not even revealed to others, that [women] gain the energy to rebel.

> It is from what we come up against that we gain new angles on what we are against. Our bodies become our tools; our rage becomes sickness [and as we age,] we begin to feel the weight of histories more and more; the more we expose the weight of history, the heavier it becomes. We snap. We snap under the weight; things break (Ahmed 2017, 255).

The climactic scene in "Reasons I Drink" is one of chaos and catharsis, or a release of the pent-up rage that lies behind the addictions described in the song's lyrics. But, curiously, these expressions of rage are observed by the middle-aged facilitator who opts against participating in them. She walks unscathed through the mayhem as if she is in dream. By contrast, her youthful self-states are troubled and unsettled: they are the ones who list their pathological responses to the societal pressures they face and who ultimately snap. They turn to the middle-aged Morissette for the advice that her life experience might bring. Her appearance in the video is calming and she provides an assurance to these transgenerational selves that they will survive their youthful troubles to find the emotional stability that she has found in middle age. In its representations of female youth as despondent and self-doubting and of middle age as stable and secure, "Reasons I Drink" therefore upends conventional messaging about female ageing that foregrounds youth as the ideal variant of the female self. Instead, it tells a more liberating kind of story about female ageing that prompts a reassessment of the stereotypes and exclusions implicit in ageist dismissals of women.

"Reasons I Drink" also gives us an example of how female ageing might cue empowerment through the empathy can arise from identification with others. The video is framed by scenes that signify Morissette's existence as a middle-aged woman in the present: her appearance starts the narrative and her exit concludes it. This is the version of Morissette that is 'real' in comparison to the imagined versions of her younger self who emerge and interact in the middle of the story. As noted, these versions narrate various life challenges, as if to entertain 'what if' questions about choices made by the narrator's younger selves as they stood at various forks in the road during her life. One youthful ghost seems

to raise the question about how her career might have taken a different path if she had known better than to sign a predatory recording contract. Another speculates on how her mental health might have been spared if she had defiantly shunned the media during the height of her fame. The third ponders the negative impact of her career on her capacity to serve as a mother to her children as they are taken away by a caregiver or as they fight for her limited attention. If we read their presence in the video through Moglen's metaphor of the mirror, these characters represent younger variants of the singer who present themselves as memories etched on the face of the present (the concept of the mirror is described in Moglen 2008a and 2008b). They remain available to Morissette through her recollections of their actions and the feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and – importantly – rage that these actions engendered in the past. But it is also significant that these self-states are imagined, unreal, disembodied, and ghosts. By the end of the video, we discover (alongside Morissette) that the events portrayed in the AA meeting and the characters engaged in the video's narrative exist solely in her mind. As we return to the therapy circle after the climax of the narrative, we can see that Morissette's momentary daydream was triggered by similarities that she perceived between her younger self-states and women in the therapy circle. These shared identity markers prompt recollections of past self-states, and these recollections fuel the empathy that Morissette's facilitator feels for those who suffer. This empathy – a product of years of life experience – makes Morissette the 'good' therapist that we assume her to be in this story.

Finally, it is also important to recognize the broader implications of the disassociation of ageing from the body in this narrative. While it might be true that the middle-aged Morissette is actually *more* corporeal in this narrative than her ethereal psychic ghosts, their presence in the narrative shifts the locus of ageing to the mind, where Morissette can construct different versions of herself from remembered self-stages – versions that assist in her empathy for the other characters who appear alongside her in the video. This aspect of the video illustrates one of the central contributions of Moglen's theory (outlined in 2008a and elaborated in 2008b): that by engaging, reinterpreting, and assimilating the

wide array of "who we used be" as we age, we can replace the script that tells women to feel shame about the disintegration of their bodies with a script that celebrates the ageing woman as a vibrant, multi-layered being deserving of attention for the various experiences that she has endured and that she can share (Moglen 2008a).

## Intersections of Age and Rage in "Reasons I Drink"

I began this chapter with the assertion that 'anger' was an oversimplification of Morissette's early work, which exhibits an emotional depth that resists a single label. At the same time, the omnipresence of 'rage' as a marker in descriptions of Morissette's early music makes its alleged absence in critiques of her current work noteworthy. My analysis of the lyrics and aspects of their performance demonstrates that rage lies behind the various addictions enumerated in her recent song, "Reasons I Drink". I would like to conclude with some observations about how that rage informs the video and, specifically, how it intersects with gender and age in the visual narrative.

Writing for *Rolling Stone* in 2020, Kory Grow argues that Morrissette's rage has been tempered by her ageing, and that she has reconciled some of the "demons" with which she struggled in her youth. The video "Reasons I Drink" challenges this assessment, however, as Morissette continues to project her rage through the memories embodied and performed by her youthful selves. The reading offered here invites us to consider Moglen's view of ageing, which defines ageing as an ongoing process informed by what she describes as prior "self-states". In particular, Moglen's theory of age and ageing can be used to explain the video's final moments, when Morissette appears to awaken from a daydream that had been populated by her raging younger selves (Moglen 2008a and 2008b).

As the video draws to its conclusion, Morissette stands in the middle of the room with her coffee cup in hand and, as the mayhem vanishes in an instant, she faces a group of strangers who encircle her. Three are dressed in clothing that trigger youthful associations in Morissette's

mind, but these three women are not phantoms from her past. They are strangers. The confusion written across their faces implies that they have witnessed the release of rage that Morissette imagined for the youthful selves in her dream. As with the fractured self-image that appears in Moglen's mirror, this youthful rage remains recognizable in the ageing face that meets the shocked gaze of the AA meeting's participants. Morissette's youthful anger remains evident on her face as an "image of the past" that continues to inform the older version of Morissette whose psyche drives this narrative. The message in the video thereby complements the message in the song: that women of all ages rage, but that female rage (which is taboo for women of all ages) must be increasing repressed as women age. As the reactions to Morissette's rage illustrate at the end of the video, the need to repress rage is particularly true of older women who engage with that "status emotion" and who thereby risk losing the authority that they might have accrued over the course of their careers (Brescoll and Ihlmann, 2008). I would argue that the title of Morissette's recent album and lead single both point to rage as an emotion that lurks within the female psyche and whose repression leads to other kinds of behaviours. Morissette looks back at the various dilemmas, or "forks in the road", that she faced over the course of her career, and many of these are performed in "Reasons I Drink". In looking back at younger iterations of herself, Morissette recognizes the anger that she felt at moments when she was exploited by the music industry or stripped of any power to make her own decisions. As a woman, she is denied the status emotion of rage, the repression of which she diverts into other kinds of behaviours that continue to have their impact on the 'real' Morissette who appears as the facilitator in the video. To suggest that rage is absent from her current work is to reinforce a binary model of female ageing in which older women are reduced to silent shells of their former youthful selves.

While the distinction between 'anger' and the more anodyne descriptions of Morissette's latest album might seem semantic on their surface, I would argue that the terms are used strategically in the popular music press to foreclose on the possibility of the 'angry *older* woman'. And why might that be? Simply, anger draws the kind of attention that would otherwise be denied to an older performer in an industry that

privileges female youth and beauty. By denying that Morissette's current work is infused with anger (among other emotions that are equally represented across her extensive body of work), the media reinforces the stereotype of the female artist who should 'age gracefully' into the obscurity afforded by retirement.

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