What if, when you’re doing research about male-dominated fields and the sexism therein, the women you speak to say there is no sexism? Dorothy E. Smith, Ann Oakley and many other feminist scholars emphasise the need to listen to women’s words. They argue that doing so enables us to highlight how sexism shapes our lives and how existing theories ignore women’s experiences. It allows us to write new theories. However, what counts as sexism is disputed and perceived differently by different women. It can also be wielded in subtle ways that obscure its origins in the gender hierarchy. During my PhD research here in Women’s Studies, I set out to uncover women’s experiences as hard rock and metal fans including experiences of sexism, barriers to participation and resistant practices. I was startled that, in spite of other academic accounts of the genre’s sexism, my participants depicted hard rock and metal as less sexist than a generalised ‘mainstream’. In this paper I examine how this contradiction between my expectations and women fans’ descriptions of their experiences might be understood. I ask, what does it mean to be reflexive about our research data, honest to our research participants and fight sexism? I argue that when we put aside feminist preconceptions we can rethink old orthodoxies. In the case of metal, listening to women’s words provides new understandings of how culture can enable spaces in which an awareness of our gender can drop away, as well as a greater understanding of how a notional ‘equality’ works.