Singing It Out: Riot Grrrls, Lilith Fair, and Feminism

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This essay analyzes two women-inspired music events, the riot grrrl movement and Lilith Fair, from a feminist rhetorical perspective to highlight their relationships with feminism and feminist activism. Drawing on feminist standpoint theory, muted group theory, and work that emphasizes the connections between the artistic and political, I rhetorically analyze the lyrics of one song from two riot grrrl artists (Bikini Kill and Sleater-Kinney) and two Lilith Fair artists (Sarah McLachlan and the Cardigans), highlighting the differences between the two movements while also emphasizing the value and need for both.

Introduction

Feminist theorists Cheris Kramarae and bell hooks state the importance of opening the realm of rhetorical analysis to the arts, especially when considering the ideas and values of groups that have traditionally been marginalized (Foss, Foss, and Griffin 47-49, 94). While examining the subcultures of marginalized groups, standpoint and muted group theories are important to keep in mind, as they call attention to the fact that traditionally these groups have been oppressed and silenced, and when individuals from these groups communicate, they do so from their own individual positions as members of such a silenced group. However, standpoint theory is also relevant for individuals communicating from positions of privilege. Standpoint theory seeks to develop a feminist theory of knowing that explicates ways of creating knowledge from the insights of women's experiences. As standpoint theorists such as Patricia Hill Collins, Dorothy Smith, Nancy Hartsock, and Sandra Harding draw upon and make salient lived experiences of those who are marginalized, they materially reorganize knowledge and information that was once historically organized in a different way (DeFransisco 30). One realm in which this can be done is the musical realm. The art of music is an integral part of both contemporary society and youth culture. Music has also played a vital role in feminist activism, from suffragist songs such as "Woman Rules You Still" and "Bloomer's Complaint" (Crew 20, 42) to the modern day riot grrrls movement and women's music festival events that include large activist components. In this essay I examine, through a feminist rhetorical analysis, some lyrics from both selected Ladyfest artists (i.e., Sleater-Kinney and Bikini Kill) that present women's experiences from a more resistant and overtly political standpoint and Lilith Fair artists (i.e., Sarah McLachlan and The Cardigans) that present women's experiences from a more mainstream

standpoint. First, however, I will give a brief background of standpoint and muted group theory, as well as the riot grrrl and Lilith Fair movements.

From a feminist standpoint, theorists such as Kramarae developed muted group theory within the field of communication, addressing issues of marginalized experience and how marginalized groups interact with a more dominant culture. Kramarae posited three central assumptions to muted group theory: 1) women perceive the world differently from men because of women's and men's different experiences and activities rooted in the division of labor; 2) because men are the dominant group in society, the male perception is also dominant while women's perceptions and systems of perceiving are seen as less competent; 3) and in order to become participating members in society, women must transform their perceptions and models of perceiving into terms of the dominant group (3). Because women, as well as other marginalized groups, have experiences that differ from the conceptualized [White, middle-class, Protestant, able-bodied, etc.] masculine norm, to better understand their experiences scholars must pay heed to their standpoints and the various ways they might be expressed, including through artistic means such as dance, music, visual art, and performance. In *Culture Works: The Political Economy of Culture*, Danielle Fox and Ann Beatrice Scott state the importance of both art and dance for a culture (Fox 22-23; Scott 107-108). Fox states art and the political economy are frequently seen as completely separate subjects with little association with one another and which are "pursued and practiced by people with very different interests" (22). Fox, however, argues that art and the political economy are inextricably linked, with art portraying the political values of a culture (or subculture), making it a political tool to transmit cultural values. It logically follows, then, that art can also be used as a tool of social change to transmit the values of a subversive subculture. Indeed, Scott discusses how "Black Dance" has been used both as a means of maintaining traditional black culture (although this is a simplification as there is no one black culture) and as a means of transmitting black cultural values into "mainstream" culture, even if this process at times occurs due to the mainstream culture appropriating black culture rather than an intentional transmission of black culture (108).

Other scholars have also found this link between the artistic and political. For example, John Downing, Tamara Villareal Ford, Geneve Gil, and Laura Stein demonstrate how dance and song, have historically served as acts of irreverence and formed the basis for some social movements (113). After discussing dance as a form of cultural resistance, Downing et al. continue to explain how guitar poetry, rock music, spiritual music, blues music, *nuevo cancion*, *rembekito* music, *corridos*, antiwar/antinuclear songs, reggae, rap music, punk music, etc. have been used to express the values of a non-dominant culture and to transform a dominant culture (115). Craig Lockard also makes this link upon examining popular musical styles in Southeast Asian countries. Lockard examines the content articulated in the popular

music, and finds that musicians who are popular in many Southeast Asian countries often "[articulate] the views of powerless citizens and [provide] a critical discourse on national and international affairs" (ii). For Lockard, these musical preferences become intrinsically linked with political and social movements, making them a medium through which culture and advocacy for social change is transmitted.

Several scholars have also examined various women's standpoints through woman-identified art. In her edited book *Intercultural Communication and Creative Practice: Music, Dance, and Women's Cultural Identity*, Laura Lengel, along with her contributing authors, discusses how women use creative processes to perform and create their own values in cultures that have been traditionally dominated by men. By giving themselves voice and allowing themselves the freedom to express themselves creatively, these women both make their own co-culture visible, but in the process of enacting their culture and making it visible, they are also creating their culture (3-5). Moreover, through their artistic practices, many of these women are able to resist oppressive social norms and work toward social change (10-11, 16-17). Similarly, Fiona Carson examines how women use feminist art forms as means of cultural resistance. Carson speaks about integrating domesticity and the private sphere into the public to portray and bring awareness to women's work, a woman's world, and woman-centered culture (26-8). Also exploring women's culture, Rebekah Farrugia goes on to expand this analytical framework to women deejays, examining how they are "positioned at the intersections of music, technology, and culture" and what they do with that positioning (236). As these scholars indicate, examining how the expressions of women's standpoints through artistic ventures interact with political and social realities is a rich area of study.

As previously stated, music is an important part of social culture, and has played an important role in activism, and more specifically, feminist activism. Coline Jenkins-Sahlin states, "Virtually all social and political movements have spawned music. It intensifies feelings and attitudes, infuses pride, and strengthens a sense of purpose in its followers" (12). Additionally, integrating aspects of popular culture with feminist activism is important for developing and maintaining a strong base of young feminist activists. Of course, just as multiple types of feminism exist, multiple types of women's music exist, and not all woman-created or woman-centered music necessarily give the same messages. For instance, riot grrrl music and the Ladyfest music festival spurred by the riot grrrl movement face criticism for being too political and potentially socially isolating, while Lilith Fair music festivals and artists like Sarah McLachlan and Alanis Morissette face criticism for not being political enough. Jodie Horn illustrates this sentiment by stating:

> While its [sic] frustrating that the burgeoning third-wave feminism of the early '90s underground gave way to poetaster acts like Jewel and Sarah MacLachlan, and while

> it pains me that I have to discount everything Morissette has since said and done to maintain this belief, I still hold that *Jagged Little Pill* is pure feminist punk rock... Compared to the riot grrls, Morissette's lyrics were mild, but that's why she got radio play and consequently earned entrance into my father's collection and my life. (para. 6)

In light of the above claims, I am interested in how artists from both of these camps construct gender and feminist activism. Below I give a brief background of the riot grrrl movement and Ladyfest music festivals it spurred, as well as the Lilith Fair music festival, before I engage in a feminist rhetorical analysis of selected songs by selected artists from both of these two camps. While solo-artists like Ani DiFranco and Joan Jett, who espouse feminist ideals and created their own record labels due to the sexism they experienced in the music industry, would also provide an interesting component to this study, I am focusing this essay on women's music that is more movement-based and inclusive of multiple women artists. The movements create spaces that, consistent with standpoint and muted group theories, generate opportunities for multiple women's voices and experiences to be told via song.

Riot Grrrls and Ladyfests

The riot grrrl movement is part of the third wave feminist movement that began in the early 1990s, but at times also seems closely linked ideologically with the second wave feminist movement due to its sometimes emergent foci on universal female identity and separatism, which I demonstrate in my analysis (Rosenberg and Garofalo 80-81). The blurring of these wave boundaries problematizes the dichotomy created by the wave analogy as a metaphor for the women's movements. Even though the riot grrrl movement is most well known for its feminist punk music, riot grrrls also supported a subculture of zines, art, political action, and feminist activism, all encompassed in a do-it-yourself (DIY) ethic. Riot grrrl bands, artwork, and activism commonly addressed issues of rape, domestic abuse, sexuality, and female empowerment (Schilt 6).

Riot grrrls build off of the punk movement from which their own movement branches. Many sections of the punk movement already used a political model of collage-based, photocopied handbills and booklets as a way to bring awareness of and participation in leftist politics and alternative subcultures. However, women oftentimes felt excluded from these scenes, even though they related to the larger, music-oriented subculture. When attempting to become involved with the punk movement at the local level, these women felt as though the men leading the punk movement allowed them little voice. As a result, women decided to make their own fanzines, music, and art to allow their own voices to be heard and to represent their own interests (Raha and Gordon 153-5). Recognizing the power of language

and how empowerment can be achieved through language use, riot grrrl bands engaged in actions to reclaim traditionally derogatory words (such as cunt, bitch, dyke, and slut) at the same time men in the punk movement and audiences who were resistant to their music and messages called them these very words. To reclaim these words, riot grrrls would frequently proudly write, in lipstick, these words on their bodies to invalidate the offensive power of the words (Raha and Gordon 204, 206).

Contemporary media, though, did not know how to take the riot grrrl movement, regularly misunderstanding and inaccurately portraying the intentions of the bands and women involved in the movement. Sharon Cheslow, a writer/musician/historian/performance artist states, "There were a lot of very important ideas that I think the mainstream media couldn't handle, so it was easier to focus on the fact that these were girls who were wearing barrettes in their hair or writing 'slut' on their stomach" (Mondotrasho), while Colin Tucker, a member of two different riot grrrl bands (including Sleater-Kinney) said:

> I think it was deliberate that we were made to look like we were just ridiculous girls parading around in our underwear. They never used to do serious interviews with us, they misprinted what we had to say, they would take our articles, our fanzines, and our essays and take them out of context. We wrote a lot about sexual abuse and sexual assault for teenagers and young women. I think those are really important concepts that the media never addressed. (Mondotrasho)

These issues with media representation (that portrayed the riot grrrls as both silly and immoral while dismissing the serious issues they were attempting to address) contributed to the fracturing of the riot grrrl movement, as a very political movement became depoliticized (Mondotrasho). However, the movement does leave behind a rich legacy of outspoken, empowered women and their art.

One such legacy of the riot grrrl movement is the independently organized and community-based Ladyfest music festivals. Ladyfest music festivals are multi-faceted, not-for-profit (with any collected proceeds going to charities) global music and arts festivals for women artists that feature bands, musical groups, performance artists, authors, spoken word and visual artists, and workshops. They are organized by volunteers and utilize all ages, as well as independent spaces to encourage and inspire a diverse community to come together in celebration of talent on local, national, and international levels. Men are more than welcome to attend Ladyfest events and join in the process of organizing the festivals. Moreover, submissions from men and women who work together are welcomed. Still, women must play the dominant role in organizing and structuring the festival (Monem 44).

The first Ladyfest event took place in Olympia, Washington, in August

2000. Key organizers for the event included riot grrrl musicians Sarah Dougher, Cat Power, Neko Case, and Teresa Carmody. The riot grrrl band Sleater-Kinney, whose song I analyze below, was also a key organizer and prime motivator for holding the first ever Ladyfest (Monem 42-4). While these grassroots women's music festivals seem to be dwindling in the United States, though still intermittently taking place, Ladyfest events proliferate at the international level, including in Ireland, the United Kingdom, Germany, Finland, and Mexico (Monem 172-3).

Lilith Fair

Unlike the Ladyfest music festivals, the Lilith Fair music festivals did not stem from a political movement. Rather, they stemmed from women musicians' frustrations with the way their tours and shows were being promoted (Lilith Fair DVD). In 1996, women musicians Sarah McLachlan and Paula Cole faced resistance to touring together from the corporate music community due to the fact that they are both women. The corporate music community did not believe that multiple women artists touring together would be able to fill concert venues and bring in substantial income. From this experience, McLachlan conceived the idea of a multi-woman touring music festival, and she coordinated the first Lilith Fair Women's Music Festival in 1997 (Lilith Fair DVD). Nettwerk Music Group's Dan Fraser and Terry McBride, as well as New York talent agent Marty Diamond, assisted McLachlan in founding and coordinating the tour (Childerhose 21-6). The tour took place in the summers of 1997, 1998, and 1999, consisting solely of women solo-artists and women-led bands, many of whom are prominent musicians (e.g., Sheryl Crow) who were frustrated with the ways women were being treated by the corporate music community (Lilith Fair DVD). Unlike the grassroots-initiated Ladyfest festivals that featured more local talent and coordination, Lilith Fair was a music tour of well-known, diverse women artists who were touring in a more "traditional" or "corporate" way.

McLachlan states that she named Lilith Fair after the mythological and/or biblical figure of Lilith, who was said to be Adam's first wife, before Eve. Lilith wanted equality and when Adam denied her equality, she left him to engage in her own pursuits. Believing that this story represents an ideal of what women musicians are striving to attain, McLachlan wanted to bring about more awareness of Lilith's story as well as claim women's excellence within the music realm (Lilith Fair DVD; Raha and Gordon 225). While the riot grrrl movement and both riot grrrl and Ladyfest music focused on a particular type of music (i.e., punk), Lilith Fair included a wide variety of artists, from folk singers like Jewel and the Indigo Girls, to popular artists like Sixpence None the Richer, to hip hop artists like Queen Latifah (About Lilith Fair). While Lilith Fair did receive some criticism and garnered sexist nicknames such as "Breast-fest," "Girlapalooza," and "Lesbopalooza" (Raha and Gordon

225), the tour raised over ten million dollars for women's charities throughout North America and demonstrated just how successful women artists can be when given the opportunity (Childerhose 80). Moreover, Terry McBride, one of the Lilith Fair founders, confirmed in an April 25, 2009, Twitter post that Lilith Fair would be reinstated in 2010. Details for a two-week European tour are in progress and the North American tour took place from June to August, 2010 ("About Lilith Fair" 2010).

Method

In this piece, I use a feminist rhetorical lens to analyze lyrics from both selected Ladyfest artists (i.e., Sleater-Kinney and Bikini Kill) and Lilith Fair artists (i.e., Sarah McLachlan and The Cardigans). Specifically, I examine the target audiences of the artists and address how these artists uphold and/or challenge traditional gender norms, what types of feminist values they might be subscribing to, how they construct women's experiences, as well as how they construct feminist ideologies and incite feminist or political activism.[1] By examining these artifacts in conjunction with feminist theory and examples from other scholars, my goal is to give a clear view of how these woman-identified subcultures might use creative processes to preserve their own culture and to resist a more dominant culture, both in subtle ways and modes that might potentially lead to social and political rebellion.

The riot grrrl bands I examine are Bikini Kill and Sleater-Kinney. Bikini Kill was one of the predominant and founding bands in the riot grrrl movement (Monem 23; Raha and Gordon 203-4). Moreover, Bikini Kill became more popularly recognized than most riot grrrl bands due to a passing reference made to the band in the popular 1999 movie *10 Things I Hate about You*, which in some ways made the members of Bikini Kill poster girls for the riot grrrl movement. Sleater-Kinney not only was a predominant force in the riot grrrl movement itself, but also a predominant force in organizing the first ever Ladyfest musical festival, which I will discuss in more depth at a later point in this essay (Raha and Gordon 234-36). While I would ideally pick songs that were performed at the first Ladyfest event, the grassroots nature of the Ladyfest festivals makes it quite difficult to determine which songs were performed. No compilation CDs exist for these music festivals, as they do for others. However, both Bikini Kill and Sleater-Kinney performed at the first Ladyfest event, and the songs I have chosen are current for the time period of the music festival. Furthermore, I specifically selected songs

1 I conceive of gender as social framework or social construction that guides, and due to society's patriarchal structure at times binds, women's experiences. Women can step out of the accepted gender norms, however, and challenge the construction of gender and the patriarchal structures in which they are based. Moreover, women can challenge these concepts even as they perform accepted gendered norms. The various standpoints from which women come gives rise to a myriad of different experiences women have and different ways in which they perform gender in both traditional and subversive ways.

that explicitly engage in gender construction of some sort (i.e., Bikini Kill's "Rebel Girl" and Sleater-Kinney's "Modern Girl"). As Jodie Horn quotes Alison Wolfe, lead singer of the riot grrrl band Bratmobile, saying, "[the riot grrrl movement] was never meant for the cheerleaders, it was never meant for the mainstream" (para. 2). Therefore, neither Bikini Kill nor Sleater-Kinney has a mainstream target audience. Rather, they have a target audience of politically savvy young women, as well as some young men, who are tired of gender oppression, who are interested in leftist politics and who want to, in riot grrrl style, "fuck with the system."

To represent the Lilith Fair artists, I examine Sarah McLachlan and the band The Cardigans. Just as Sleater-Kinney was a prominent organizing force in the creation of the first Ladyfest event, so was McLachlan the founding organizer of Lilith Fair, making her a prime musician to examine (Childerhose 21-26). I also examine The Cardigans, a woman-led band who participated in the first Lilith Fair. The Cardigans are a prime band to analyze due to their widespread popularity in the pop music world with hit songs like "Lovefool" (Childerhose 98). As a woman-led band, The Cardigans, are constructed similarly to the riot grrrl bands, creating an interesting point of comparison. The Lilith Fair music festivals did release compilation CDs of selected songs from the concerts, which aided in my selection of artists and songs. In addition to the popularity of the artists and McLachlan's key role in organizing Lilith Fair, I also selected artists who performed at the first Lilith Fair music festival and who performed original songs[2] at the festival that contained notions of gender construction. The songs I analyze are McLachlan's "Building a Mystery" and The Cardigans' "Been It."

Since Lilith Fair consists of more mainstream women artists and contains a greater diversity among the types of women artists, one should not be surprised that they have a much broader target audience than the very well-defined riot grrrl audience. Lilith Fair artists seem to be interested in targeting their music toward anyone who enjoys women's music. However, many of the artists do make a point of saying they particularly want their music to reflect women's experiences, making such experiences reflected in the artists' songs a somewhat more specific target audience (Lilith Fair DVD), in addition to making their songs a prime vehicle of standpoint theory.

Riot Grrrl Songs

Bikini Kill's "Rebel Girl"

Within this song about a woman, sung by women, literally no space for men exists. The last verse of the song states, "Love you like a sister always/ Soul sister, rebel girl/I really like you, I really love you/I really wanna be your

2 In addition to musical artists' own original songs, several songs performed at Lilith Fair were either collaborative works among various participating performers or folk songs that were sung collaboratively among the Lilith Fair performers.

best friend/ Come and be my best friend/You, rebel girl." The line "In her kiss, I taste the revolution" appears before this. These lines encompass multiple relationships among women: friends, sisters, and potential lovers. Regardless of whether these lyrics discuss a platonic love or a romantic love (or both, as feminist scholars like Adrienne Rich seek to blur the distinction between the two) no spaces for relationships with men exist here (349). Relationships with men are not forbidden, they are simply not relevant enough for the rhetors to mention. In this sense, Bikini Kill puts forth the idea of a woman-centered world, similar to what many separatist and radical cultural feminists were advocating during the second wave of the feminist movement (Tong 45-48). Here, Bikini Kill creates a space and culture for women and resists, though not explicitly, a man-centered culture that seeks to impose itself on women's culture. The form of this resistance comes in the lack of acknowledgement of a man-centered culture that dominates over woman-centered culture. However, although Bikini Kill creates only a space for women in "Rebel Girl," as I discuss below, Bikini Kill is also engaging in a potential accommodation of a man-centered culture.

"True" radical cultural feminists who are separatists generally hold the belief that a woman's culture with its "essential" focus on nurturing, caring, and interconnection is superior to a more aggressive, war-prone man's culture (Tong 45-8). Therefore, to these feminists, the aggressive and predominantly separatist style portrayed in Bikini Kill's "Rebel Girl" lyrics is not a "true representation" of a woman-centered culture (Orbe 16). What these feminists would deem as accommodations to patriarchal values are somewhat subtle in the lyrics, yet present nonetheless. For example, phrases like "Queen of the Neighborhood," "Queen of the World," and "holds her head up so high" reflect the reification of hierarchical norms present in a patriarchal culture that advocates of a truly woman-centered culture strive to resist, as they do an emphasis on competition. An emphasis on competition is present in the "Rebel Girl" lyrics with phrases such as "She's got the hottest trike in town." The very title of the song "Rebel Girl" and the multiple references to "the revolution" in the song might also invite Bikini Kill's listeners to think of a physical, brutal, and violent revolution. Moreover, the aggressive vocal and musical style of Bikini Kill reinforces aggressive readings of their lyrics.

Yet Bikini Kill still leaves an opening for what radical cultural feminists would deem a "true" woman-centered culture in their lyrics. The song, in fact, is about a woman-to-woman relationship. The last verse that contains the lines "Love you like a sister always/Soul sister, rebel girl/I really like you, I really love you/I really want to be your best friend" is fully representative of what a woman-centered culture might look like, with the focus on multiple and interwoven woman-to-woman relationships. Additionally, the phrase "In her kiss, I taste the revolution" invites listeners to consider that the revolution will be an emotional revolution of love, rather than a physically violent revolution, making the "rebel girl" a rebel against violence and hierarchy.

When listening to Bikini Kill perform "Rebel Girl" (see link in Appendix A), one can tell that the musicians have a level of energy that is evidenced in a seemingly aggressive and confrontational style. With both their vocal styling and militant drumbeat in the background, Bikini Kill invites its listeners to attribute an aggressive stance to the band. Yet the high energy level and vocal styling could also invite listeners to attribute playfulness, fun, and passion to the band and the song lyrics, negating the potentially violent and aggressive interpretation of the band and song. This does not, however, negate the confrontational nature of the band or the band's call for revolution. Rather, it means that the band is calling for a revolution that is not physically violent but instead subverts mainstream culture with shock value and the re-appropriation of dominant ideologies, such as reclaiming words like "slut" and "dyke," consistent with the philosophy of the riot grrrl movement.

Overall, the lyrics from Bikini Kill's "Rebel Girl" portray strong, powerful women, with strong and powerful being defined in many ways as what is considered the norm by patriarchal standards. "Rebel Girl" also creates room for "traditional" women's values as well, by focusing on sisterhood and other woman-to-woman relationships, even though this representation of an Amazonian, woman-/woman warrior-centered society brings a viewer to recognize that this is not the society in which we live. Still, Bikini Kill does not leave their audience without a direction in which to go. They might be ambiguous about which set of cultural values to adopt (even though this is a false binary), but the message that they want the audience to go start a revolution, particularly a gender revolution, is clear. These lyrics create a space for social resistance, protest, and revolution.

Bikini Kill's "Rebel Girl" expresses both feminist and leftist sentiments and comes from a woman's standpoint. Since the riot grrrl movement was predominantly a white, middle class movement, one might presume that "Rebel Girl" voices the standpoint of such women, even though women of other class and racial backgrounds are not necessarily excluded. Through "Rebel Girl" Bikini Kill voices women's experiences of having multiple relationships with one another and resisting patriarchal norms, experiences which are often given little heed in a patriarchal society.

Sleater-Kinney's "Modern Girl"

Sleater-Kinney does not overtly reference a political movement in the same way as Bikini Kill does with the phrase: "I wanna revolution!" Instead, Sleater-Kinney embeds a more subtle call for political movements in their lyrics to "Modern Girl." As Maria Raha and Kim Gordon state, "Sleater-Kinney's political sentiments seem more an intimate conversation than a call to action (which makes the injustices they describe all the more heartbreaking)" (236). With the lines, "I'm sick of this/Brave new world," Sleater-Kinney references Aldous Huxley's book *Brave New World*, in which

pills are used to regulate human emotions and behavior (54), which is not unlike the consumerist world Sleater-Kinney constructs in "Modern Girl." The chorus of "Modern Girl" is:

> My whole life
>
> Was like a picture
>
> Of a sunny day
>
>
> My whole life
>
> Looked like a picture
>
> Of a sunny day

The chorus feeds into the modern, brave new world theme of the song. With this chorus, Sleater-Kinney invites their listeners to view the world in general, and the modern girl's life specifically, as something that is artificially created. Just as a photo fails to represent a complex and dynamic reality, so does the modern girl's life in the brave new world fail to reflect complexity and fluidity.

Due to the subtle references to capitalism (in which the protagonist attempts to buy away her emotions) and the ways the modern girl is removed from the rest of the world in the lyrics, Sleater-Kinney also invites listeners to view this brave new world as the ideal of a perfect, picturesque suburbia, an ideal of "the American dream" that in reality does not exist because the nuances of reality are so much more complex than a snapshot of a sunny day. Sleater-Kinney makes subtle references to capitalism and invites listeners to view capitalism as creating distance between the modern girl and the reality of the rest of the world. With the lines, "I took my money/And bought a TV/TV brings me/Closer to the world," and "I took my money/And bought a donut/The hole's the size of/The entire world," Sleater-Kinney illustrates how the modern girl distances herself from the real world at the same time she believes she is drawing herself closer to it. While she believes using her money to buy a television is bringing her closer to the world, it actually filters and mediates her experiences with the world rather than allowing her to interact directly with the world. Similarly, she purchases a donut, potentially to alleviate the hunger of which she speaks (even though a donut has little nutritional value to fully alleviate hunger), and views the emptiness of the donut's hole as the size of the entire world. As she views the donut hole as representative of the entire world, the modern girl invites listeners to view the world as empty. She also seems to "buy into" the notion of the world shrinking and coming together through globalized market practices, again not recognizing the nuances and complexities of transnational trade and trade relations.

In many ways, Sleater-Kinney's modern girl is much like the modern

girl of Lenina Crowne in Brave New World (Huxley 44). For instance, while Sleater-Kinney's modern girl soothes herself and manages her emotions through buying material items, Lenina also seeks to soothe herself and manage her emotions through the use of the drug "soma" (Huxley 77). By intertextually referencing Lenina to knowledgeable listeners, Sleater-Kinney invites these listeners to think about John the Savage, who resisted the brave new world (Huxley 218). Given the song's ending, which I will discuss momentarily, the idea of seeing the modern girl transform from *Brave New World's* Lenina into John the Savage has some merit.

As in "Rebel Girl," Sleater-Kinney does not explicate a male presence. To a heteronormative society, the repeated phrase "My baby loves me" indicates a male presence. However, as I have previously demonstrated, the riot grrrl audience is not the standard, mainstream, heteronormative audience, allowing for this phrase to be taken in more ambiguous terms, potentially indicating a male **or** a female lover. Regardless of her lover's gender, a strong existent patriarchal and capitalist presence pervades the modern girl's world, as she focuses on money and material items to bring her happiness and fill her emptiness. Additionally, Sleater-Kinney constructs the modern girl to appear as very passive. Throughout the majority of "Modern Girl," the modern girl feels a handful of emotions and buys things. Other than that, she does very little and takes very little action. She just spends her time living in her surreal picture of a sunny day world. The modern girl does not break this cycle until the last verse of the song. In this verse, she states, "I took my money/I couldn't buy nothin'/I'm sick of this/Brave new world." The modern girl finally feels an emotion she is not able to buy away, and the emotion is anger.

In this final verse, Sleater-Kinney's listeners who are familiar with *Brave New World* are invited to see the modern girl shift from Lenina into the embodiment of John the Savage, who is sick of the brave new world and does everything in his power to overturn or escape it. This is where Sleater-Kinney calls its listeners to political action. In the performed version of the song (see link in Appendix B), the bands' intonations support this call. Throughout the song, the lead singer sings the verses in a relatively level, monotone style. However, upon coming to this last verse, the lead singer gains momentum and incorporates multiple vocal levels, making the modern girl's anger apparent to listeners. To further emphasize these levels and this anger, background singers join in and sing some of the lyrics, particularly helping with placing emphasis on the anger. This change in the band's intonations invites listeners to believe that when the modern girl says she's "sick of this brave new world," that she will do something about it, perhaps even begin the revolution Bikini Kill is calling for in "Rebel Girl."

In addition to analyzing "Modern Girl" solely in terms of Huxley's *Brave New World*, the same argument is still applicable for audiences who are not familiar with Huxley's work. The modern girl can still be seen as falling into the emptiness of the brave new world's consumerist culture until she finally

rebels against it at the end of the song, when she says she's "sick of this brave new world." Ironically, it is at this point that the modern girl truly enters, and begins to struggle with, the brave new world because she has become more consciously aware of its false pretenses.

"Modern Girl" obviously represents a woman's standpoint, and like "Rebel Girl" this is presumably, though not necessarily exclusively, a white, middle class woman's standpoint as well. The consumerist nature of the song further supports the idea that it is more representative of a middle class woman's standpoint. Sleater-Kinney voices the struggle many modern women face with consumerist culture, particularly as they are targeted by a plethora of advertisements selling products to them so they can "improve themselves" by looking "better," "younger," and "slimmer." While the brave new world paints an idealistic sunny day picture of life, in which women with the help of modern cosmetic technology should not age, the struggle that goes on behind the picture to keep up with the sunny day image makes the women who Sleater-Kinney represent sick of the brave new world.

Lilith Fair Songs

Sarah McLachlan's "Building A Mystery"

Sarah McLachlan's song "Building a Mystery"[3] has a very different feel than either Bikini Kill's "Rebel Girl" or Sleater-Kinney's "Modern Girl." While Bikini Kill makes an outright call for revolution and Sleater-Kinney subtly references revolution, McLachlan makes no such calls or references. Instead, McLachlan seemingly focuses more on personal issues, even though we know from the women's liberation movement that "the personal is political" (Shaw and Lee 6). "Building a Mystery" seems to be solely about a heterosexual romantic relationship, and makes little reference to outside contexts. Particularly when compared to the explicit call for revolution in "Rebel Girl," McLachlan's "Building a Mystery" seems apolitical.

Furthermore, while Bikini Kill and Sleater-Kinney construct a world in which men are not necessarily present, a man dominates the world of McLachlan's song. McLachlan sings about a lover, a mysterious man to whom it is difficult to get close. In the chorus, McLachlan sings:

> Cause you're working
>
> Building a mystery
>
> Holding on and holding it in
>
> Yeah you're working

3 Sarah McLachlan's "Building a Mystery" also has several fascinating spiritual aspects that would make for a rich rhetorical analysis, but that are beyond the scope of this essay.

Building a mystery

And choosing so carefully

With these lines, McLachlan constructs a version of masculinity that is dark and brooding. This is a man who intentionally creates a mysterious persona to keep anyone from getting close to him. He works diligently and carefully at creating this image by consciously choosing what to share with the world, holding his emotions, and "hold[ing] back [his] tears." As McLachlan sings, this man is "A beautiful fucked up man." McLachlan invites her listeners to see him as detached, as representing the "sturdy oak" dimension of Deborah David and Robert Brannon's dictates of masculinity, focusing on stoicism and toughness[4] (in Shaw and Lee 131, 133). The man McLachlan constructs believes he can deal with his emotions and problems himself, and he definitely does not need the help of a woman.

While McLachlan does not explicitly engage in a construction of femininity, she does implicitly construct a notion of femininity in relation to her construction of masculinity. While the man in her lyrics is aloof, McLachlan constructs an image of a woman who is relentlessly infatuated with this man. She longs for both him and connection with him, leaving her little time or energy to focus on anything else. Despite his aloofness and faults, this woman believes her lover is a beautiful man, and yearns to have him share intimate feelings with her. McLachlan invites her audience to view this woman as someone who needs a man to complete her, and who plays into the idea (and music video theme) Sut Jhally explicates in *Dreamworlds 3*: that a woman's world falls apart when a man is not present[5].

In many ways, McLachlan's constructions of masculinity and femininity can serve to reify traditional notions of masculinity and femininity (e.g., the idea of the brooding, emotionally unavailable man and the ever-patient woman waiting for him and yearning to establish an emotional connection with him). Yet in some ways McLachlan also invites her listeners to disrupt these traditional constructions of gender. For example, by actually complaining about her persona's lover and calling him "fucked up," McLachlan problematizes the very notion of masculinity she constructed. By opening up her persona in this song to discuss issues she and her lover have, McLachlan

4 David, Deborah S. and Robert Brannon. Eds. The Forty-Nine Percent Majority: The Male Sex Role. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1976. 13-35.

5 In Dreamworlds III, communication researcher Sut Jhally presents data from the analysis of a plethora of music videos, and from this analysis arises the theme that a woman's world falls apart when a man is not present, and the only thing that can make her world right again is a male presence. Women of music videos often have emotional and psychological breakdowns when men leave to depict their dependence upon a male presence. While the dependence on a male presence is not quite so explicit in "Building A Mystery," McLachlan still references this theme.

creates a space for consciousness-raising, which is a politically-oriented activity. In fact, consciousness-raising was a major catalyst of the women's liberation movement (Shaw and Lee 3). While McLachlan does not explicitly incite political action, by creating a space for consciousness-raising, she opens up a space for political actions, an opening that she invites her listeners to see.

With this song, McLachlan reflects many women's experiences. She displays the voice of a woman who struggles to maintain emotional intimacy with a man who is difficult to connect with because of his continuous presentation of a masculine persona. Despite the binary and status quo gender constructions that exist in the song, many women feel a bond with the lyrics because they represent their life experiences and struggles with relationships. This portrayal of their experiences is important for both consciousness raising and standpoint theory. Standpoint and muted group theories are based on less powerful groups expressing their experiences and positionality, which McLachlan does for many women in "Building a Mystery," even if its not overtly political and acknowledging of these women's positionalities.

The Cardigans' "Been It"

Just as a man dominates the lyrics of McLachlan's "Building a Mystery," so does a man dominate in the Cardigans' song "Been It." The premise of the song is a woman catering to a man who does not appreciate her. Nina Persson, the lead singer of the Cardigans, represents this woman's persona when she sings:

> I've been your mother, I've been your father
>
> Who can ask me for more
>
> I've been your sister, I've been your mistress
>
> Maybe I was your whore
>
> Who can ask me for more

This woman was also this man's "personal pro," she "made [his] bed" (perhaps in her role as mother), and she "tried to educate [his] childish heart." Despite all this woman has devoted to this man, she still says, "I'm never better than your latest plan."

Through this persona that Persson creates, the Cardigans construct a notion of femininity that involves the continual giving of a woman to a man, regardless of whether or not her efforts are reciprocated. In this case, the Cardigans make it apparent that her efforts are not reciprocated, considering she is never better than his latest plan and therefore not nearly as worthy of his time and affection as he obviously is of hers. This notion of femininity traces back to the "cult of true womanhood," which was based on embodying ideals of piety, purity, and domesticity, including putting one's man's and children's needs above her own, regardless of the circumstance (Shaw and Lee 432-433).

The Cardigans also use their lyrics to construct masculinity in a very specific way. With their lyrics, they construct a notion of masculinity that plays into the notion of the eternal bachelor, a man who still acts like a boy. With the phrases "Baby boy/Your face is pretty and your life's a toy/Master man/I'm never better than your latest plan," the Cardigans invite their listeners to perceive this man as someone who is focused on only his own desires and who likes to seek thrills and be in control. However, this man is not serious about his life, his future, and his relationships. When Persson sings "Superstar/I've tried to educate your childish heart," the Cardigans further invite their listeners to engage in the perception of this man as a childish and selfish boy, concerned only with himself.

While the Cardigans seemingly construct masculinity and femininity in very patriarchal ways in their song "Been It," they also invite their listeners to view these constructions being deconstructed. The very title of the song, "Been It," suggests that Persson's persona has been all of these things (i.e., mother, father, sister, mistress, whore, educator, personal pro, etc.), but is no longer, reminiscent of the slang phrase "been there, done that." By both calling the man in the song "Poor donee" (one who is in the state of receiving from another) and by Persson's singing "What are you gonna try to be/Where are you gonna go without me now?" the Cardigans suggest to the listeners that despite his seemingly independent facade, this man is quite dependent upon this woman and all she gives him, and he will be lost now that she no longer is present to care for him. This woman disrupts the traditional feminine ideal that the Cardigans have constructed for her when she finds empowerment to leave this man. Still, the Cardigans leave the outcome of this woman's empowering act ambiguous, as Persson ends the last verse by singing, "You know what number to try, when to cry." Although the protagonist has taken steps toward empowerment, she still might go back to this man, and his bed, if he calls her crying. However, while this is an option the Cardigans invite their listeners to consider, it is not necessarily the only potential outcome they present. It is also possible the woman will stand by her act of leaving and let the "poor donee" figure out how to do things on his own.

Like McLachlan, the Cardigans make no outright call for, or subtle references to, overt political action. Yet with their song, they, at least in some ways, disrupt the patriarchal constructions of femininity and masculinity that they portray. When the woman in the song leaves the man, she is engaging in an act of empowerment, which if taken on a grand social scale would create a social revolution. As Naomi Wolf comments in *Beauty Myth*, "The [beauty] ideal…served a political end. The stronger women were becoming politically, the heavier the ideals of beauty would bear down upon them, mostly in order to distract their energy and undermine their progress" (3). Therefore, if women put as much energy into politics as they do into attempting to attain beauty ideals, they could revolutionize the world. Similarly, women could make

innumerable social and political leaps and bounds if they put their energy into political missions or redressing salary imbalances rather than caretaking for men who do not appreciate the care. Also, when Persson calls the man in the song "poor donee," she subtly engages in a gender role reversal. With this line, the Cardigans invite listeners to see the man as dependent upon a woman, when historically many women have been dependent upon men to fulfill the "bread-winner" role (Shaw and Lee 619). So while the Cardigans are not explicitly political, they do show some alternatives to traditional notions of gender, which implemented on a large scale would create social and political revolution. Furthermore, by pointing out the excess in which this woman takes care of this man, the Cardigans invite their listeners to see this excess and its faults, leading them to potentially create alternative visions of femininity and masculinity.

As McLachlan expresses some women's experiences and standpoints without overtly acknowledging their positionalities or presenting political implications in "Building a Mystery," so do the Cardigans in "Been It." The Cardigans, and specifically Personns, presents the voices of multitudes of women who have engaged in under-appreciated caretaking behaviors for a man. While this is by no means representative of all women's experiences, it is representative of many women's experiences (Shaw and Lee 6), and is an aspect of these women's lives that is not oft brought into the public sphere. Therefore, artists like the Cardigans are taking a very important step by highlighting these women's experiences and standpoints.

Conclusion

Overall, the songs I analyze by riot grrrl bands are more overtly political and are more resistant of both heteronormative and patriarchal standards than the Lilith Fair songs. Yet both movements, if one wishes to consider the multi-year Lilith Fair tour a movement, are political events. Artists from both of these camps engage in creating woman-identified music[6], and as a woman-identified musician from the 1970s states, "I feel more at ease with the phrase 'women-identified music' by which I mean music which is consciously derived from the uniqueness of one's experience as a woman and which speaks to certain life values that celebrate and liberate. This music is by virtue of its very existence a political statement" (qtd. in Petersen 205). The standpoints and women's experiences these different types of music portray are very different, yet they are all women's experiences, and therefore worthy of being voiced. Rather than chastising these artists for either being too political and too feminist or not political or feminist enough, we should look to what they each have to offer. As Horn states, more mainstream women's music with a feminist bent opened up entryways into feminism for her, as it surely did for countless others (para. 6). From my own experience growing up in rural

6 Banks, Nancy and Sally Banes. "The Women Identified Music of Margie Adam." The Reader 31 (October, 1975): 25.

central Illinois, I was far from the punk or riot grrrl scene. Yet I was still able to connect with strong and empowering words from eminent women artists like Alanis Morissette, Melissa Etheridge, Sheryl Crow, and Liz Phair, even if these words are not always completely radical and revolutionary. In some ways, these words might have had more of an impact *because* they were not completely radical and revolutionary; instead, they talked about what could have been my own life experiences, which were somewhat mundane. These artists met me where I was with my own experiences in their songs, providing an avenue for future political and feminist growth.

Both Lilith and riot grrrl/Ladyfest events also create a space for women's collaboration and community. As I mentioned in my analysis of Bikini Kill's "Rebel Girl," radical cultural feminists, particularly during the second wave, often sought separatist women's communities (Tong 45-48). While these events are not that exclusive, as they welcome the presence of supportive men, they do provide a space for women to freely exchange ideas without a completely dominating patriarchal influence. The Lilith Fair artist community particularly strives to develop a sense of women's community and nurturing among the various artists, as well as collaboration. Having this space for women's collaboration creates room for a political space.

One downfall of both riot grrrl/Ladyfest events and Lilith Fair is that while they give voice to women's experiences, they do not necessarily give voice to all women's experiences. The riot grrrl movement, for instance, was predominantly a young, middle-class white women's movement. Women of color and of lower-class statuses might not have been intentionally excluded from the movement, but (perhaps due to the white middle-class basis of punk culture) they had little representation in the movement nonetheless (Klein 224). Similarly, artists taking part in the Lilith Fair tours were also predominantly white women. Some musicians like the black hip-hop artist Queen Latifah[7] participated in Lilith Fair, but the norm was still white women performers.

While neither of these movements is without its faults or legitimate critiques (e.g., the inclusion of more women of color), I believe it is more helpful to view them as counterparts than oppositional forces. The overt political orientation and "in-your-face" style of the riot grrrl movement brings something to the table that Lilith Fair artists do not; yet Lilith Fair artists bring women's music to the mainstream and relate to women's personal experiences in ways that the riot grrrl movement does not. After all, the personal is political. Although Kristen Schilt claims Lilith Fair artists have appropriated riot grrrl politics predominantly for the sake of increased revenue, this is not necessarily true (5). Both of these camps open up a space for feminism, even though these feminisms do not necessarily look alike. Instead of counter-

7 Queen Latifah also participated in the Native Tongues music movement that sought to reclaim Black music from perceptions of violence and the degradation of women (Niesel 244).

positioning these movements against one another, we should explore what we can get out of both of these movements, and how we can build upon these movements to create even more outlets for a diversity of women, their experiences, and their feminist activism. As Karen Petersen states:

> For women (and men) it is important that women-identified musicians are highly visible and that we hear them create music that critically reports on the lives of women. Despite occasional and befuddled romanticism about women's collective musical unconscious, it is true that there is no more powerful, mountain-moving music than a song, perhaps even a popular song, sung at the right time by the right people. (211)

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Appendix A

Bikini Kill "Rebel Girl" Song Lyrics

That girl thinks she's the queen of the neighborhood
She's got the hottest trike in town
That girl she holds her head up so high
I think I wanna be her best friend yeah

Rebel girl, rebel girl
Rebel girl you are the queen of my world
Rebel girl, rebel girl
I think I wanna take you home
I wanna try on your clothes

When she talks, I hear the revolution
In her hips, there's revolution
When she walks, the revolution's coming
In her kiss, I taste the revolution

Rebel girl, rebel girl
Rebel girl you are the queen of my world
Rebel girl, rebel girl
I know I wanna take you home
I wanna try on your clothes

That girl thinks she's the queen of the neighborhood
I got news for you, she is!
They say she's a dyke, but I know
She is my best friend

Rebel girl, rebel girl
Rebel girl you are the queen of my world
Rebel girl, rebel girl
I know I wanna take you home
I wanna try on your clothes

Love you like a sister always
Soul sister, rebel girl
I really like you, I really love you
Come and be my best friend, you rebel girl

Please be my rebel girl

To hear song, visit: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaPEhnkB_dA

Appendix B

Sleater-Kinney "Modern Girl" Song Lyrics

My baby loves me
I'm so happy
Happiness makes me
A modern girl
I took my money
And bought a TV
TV Brings me
Closer to the world

My whole life
Was like a picture
Of a sunny day

My whole life
Looked like a picture
Of a sunny day

My baby loves me
I'm so hungry
Hunger makes me
A modern girl
I took my money
And bought a donut
The hole's the size of
The entire world

My whole life
Looked like a picture
Of a sunny day

My whole life
Was like a picture
Of a sunny day

My baby loves me
I'm so angry
Anger makes me
A modern girl
I took my money
I couldn't buy nothin'
I'm sick of this
Brave new world

My whole life
Was like a picture
Of a sunny day

My whole life
Looked like a picture
Of a sunny day

To hear song, visit: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOM107PIxV8

Appendix C

Sarah MacLachlan's "Building A Mystery" Song Lyrics

You come out at night
That's when the energy comes
And the dark side's light
And the vampires roam
You strut your rasta wear
And your suicide poem
And a cross from a faith that died
Before Jesus came
You're building a mystery

You live in a church
Where you sleep with voodoo dolls
And you won't give up the search
For the ghosts in the halls
You wear sandals in the snow
And a smile that won't wash away
Can you look out the window
Without your shadow getting in the way?

You're so beautiful
With an edge and charm
But so careful
When I'm in your arms

Cause you're working
Building a mystery
Holding on and holding it in
Yeah you're working
Building a mystery
And choosing so carefully

You woke up screaming aloud
A prayer from your secret god
You feed off our fears

And hold back your tears, oh
Give us a tantrum
And a know it all grin
Just when we need one
When the evening's thin

You're a beautiful
A beautiful fucked up man
You're setting up your
Razor wire shrine

Cause you're working
Building a mystery
Holding on and holding it in
Yeah you're working
Building a mystery
And choosing so carefully

Ooh you're working
Building a mystery
Holding on and holding it in
Yeah you're working
Building a mystery
And choosing so carefully

Yeah you're working
Building a mystery
Holding on and holding it in
Yeah you're working
Building a mystery
And choosing so carefully

You're building a mystery

To hear song, visit: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLzjNBFcw08

Appendix D

The Cardigans "Been It" Song Lyrics

Baby boy
Your face is pretty and your life's a toy
Master man
I'm never better than your latest plan
Poor donee
what are you gonna try to be
where are you gonna go without me now

I've been you mother, I've been your father
Who can ask me for more
I've been your sister, I've been your mistress
Maybe I was your whore
Who can ask me for more

Superstar
I've tried to educate your childish heart
I made your bed
And I was in it when your faith was dead
Poor donee
What are you gonna try to be
Where are you gonna go without me now

I've been you mother, I've been your father
Who can ask me for more
I've been your sister, I've been your mistress
Maybe I was your whore
Who can ask me for more

Sweetiepie
I'm you personal pro, you know
You know what number to try when to cry

I've been you mother, I've been your father
Who can ask me for more
I've been your sister, I've been your mistress
Maybe I was your whore

I've been you mother, I've been your father
Who can ask me for more
I've been your sister, I've been your mistress
Maybe I was your whore
Who can ask me for more

To hear song, visit: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5jeo6Kcdv8