

# **A Study of Female Representation in American Popular Music Festival Culture and Audience Perspectives of Current Trends in the Music Industry**

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## **Introduction**

When music festivals featuring both popular artists and more underground genres first appeared in the United States in the mid-twentieth century, they provided individuals with an opportunity to escape from reality and join a community of fellow music enthusiasts and admirers. These events, such as the Monterey International Pop Festival in 1967 and the original Woodstock Festival in 1969, influenced the entire North American music culture and moved the rock and alternative genres into mainstream attractions (A History of Music Festivals, 2013). American music festival culture has flourished since the millennium, with live concert ticket sales replacing much of the loss recorded music sales have experienced as digital music services gain popularity and dominance in the industry (Parker, 2013). Despite the overall enthusiasm for music festivals in the United States, there has been a rather noticeable concern among the most popular festivals that brings the relevant consciousness of the live event production industry into question: where are all the women?

This paper aims to explore how and why female performers are underrepresented in American popular music festival culture, as well as how festival attendees perceive the present gender imbalance in recent years. A literature review will survey sources that highlight this issue and will seek to provide evidence that a dissonance in gender representation actually exists, and is not simply a feminist call for expulsion of the patriarchy. The research and results from a survey distributed to attendees of recent American music festivals will then be evaluated to determine how a sampling of current audiences perceive gender trends in the music industry. This data will also be used to explore whether the issue is noticed by and considered important

to the attendees' enjoyment of music festivals. Finally, a discussion of these trends and personal observations will be presented to examine possible ways in which the challenge of low female representation in popular music festival culture can be addressed.

### **Literature Review**

This literature review will discuss major themes that accompany the unequal representation of women in American popular music festival culture and show how this severe underrepresentation has received attention on a global scale. The review will first focus on how the lack of female performers in popular music festivals has gained media attention in recent years, and how the public depiction of female musicians who have been asked to headline festivals focuses on an exaggerated "girl power" message that can demean female representation in the music industry as a whole. Additionally, the creation of female-exclusive festivals will be discussed, though recent festivals of the sort do not target a typical popular music demographic and have not shown significant success in the United States when compared to larger music festivals. Lastly, this review will analyze the performance lineups from 2010 to 2014 of the four largest popular music festivals in the United States, and demonstrate how they support the conclusions drawn by the media research.

### **Global Prevalence of Gender Inequality in Music Festivals**

While this paper focuses on female representation in specifically American music festival culture, the unequal ratio of male to female performers is a noticeable trend across the global music festival scene. According to an analysis of the 2014 lineups of the six major European music festivals presented in Alice Vincent's recent article for *The Telegraph*, all-female bands comprised only 3.5 percent of the total acts playing, while all-male bands made up 43 percent and male solo artists comprised 24.3 percent (2014). This article also mentions that when female solo artists are featured in festivals, "the same women musicians are appearing

repeatedly over the course of the summer, suggesting there are more playing than there actually are” (Vincent, 2014). This theme of booking an uneven amount of male and female performers has existed since the original formation of popular music festivals. As Abby Johnston discusses in her article for Salon.com, “the snubbing of women in booking major festival lineups is persistent and unfortunate, but nothing new” (2013).

Women often dominate the top popular music charts, but this success is not reflected in the number of women represented at music festivals. For example, Billboard’s Top 200 Artists of 2014 lists Taylor Swift and Beyoncé as the top two artists, with Katy Perry as number seven and Lorde as number eight. Despite this significant presence on the list, Lorde was the only female artist from this group to appear at any of the popular American music festivals in 2014. Additionally, her presence at three of the larger festivals was considered a second-tier headlining spot based on the lower location of her name in the official lineups, which are arranged hierarchically with headliners at the top followed by supporting acts. This illuminates the discord between popular music culture and the alternative or independent subcultures celebrated at several of the American music festivals. Many of the largest festivals, including Bonnaroo, Coachella, and Lollapalooza, were founded in the male-dominated alternative and indie scenes, and have only recently begun featuring more chart-topping acts (Wickman, 2013). As explained in Vincent’s article for *The Telegraph*, “the history of pop music is very male, and for women it’s hard to chip into that nostalgia which fuels commercial music festivals, the decades of a male-dominated industry” (2014).

**Marketing strategy.** According to a recent article written by Chris Lee and Todd Martens for the *Los Angeles Times* (2014), gender diversity is not completely ignored when booking lineups, but it certainly does not fall as a priority for festival organizers. This article features interviews with several festival and concert promoters in hopes of rationalizing why

women are not headlining festivals despite their success on the popular music charts. In his interview, Ashley Capps, founder of AC Entertainment (the organization that co-produces Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival), gave the following explanation:

If we feel we're getting too male-centric, we will try to address the situation, but it's usually last minute when we look at how this is balancing out. We go for the greatest artists available to play at any given festival. (Lee and Martens, 2014)

By seeking out the "greatest artists," festival producers hope to attract the largest audiences, therefore bringing in a more significant profit (Lee and Martens, 2014). While many festivals are promoted as a celebration of music and an opportunity for those with a musical passion to come together, these events also follow a specific business model and must make decisions based on the factors that will encourage individuals to purchase tickets. One festival promoter, who chose to stay anonymous for fear of offending potential attendees, provided the following possible marketing explanation for why so few female headliners are currently booked:

Where the girls go, the guys follow. It's terrible stereotyping, but the people leading the charge in going to see concerts are women. And women don't want to see other women. They tend to want to see men perform. The audience is fueled by females. (Lee and Martens, 2014)

If all American music festivals are targeting young, female audiences and following this rather heteronormative assumption that women would prefer to see male musicians on stage, the gender balance in music festival culture is unlikely to change in the near future. The Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival is a common example of attracting a young, female audience with its California location and high opportunity to spot celebrities, and its history of female representation adequately matches this marketing ideal. Only one female solo musician and two female-fronted, mixed-gender groups have headlined since 1999 (Lee and Martens, 2014).

Additionally, according to Forrest Wickman's article written for *Slate Magazine*, a total average of just over 15 percent of the musical acts booked by Coachella are fronted by female performers (2013). A more detailed evaluation of recent lineups compiled by the four largest American music festivals, including Coachella, will be discussed later in this review.

**Media treatment of female headliners.** When women do have the opportunity to headline music festivals, the media often describes their performances in terms of amazement, saying they are "great girl power moments" and chances to "give women the boost they need, both inside the music business and elsewhere" (Phillips, 2011). While this language is encouraging from a radical feminist perspective, treating female headliners as overly special cases can be perceived as discounting the widely-believed need for gender equality. Vincent's article for *The Telegraph* notes this difference in language by saying, "When it comes to mindfully representing women with the right message, music is out of date in comparison to art and literature" (2014). Aside from the actual language used to describe successful women in the music industry, female musicians are often featured for more traditionally feminine factors other than their raw talent, such as beauty and fashion. For example, the all-female experimental rock group Warpaint, who has played supportive spots at several festivals in the past few years, admitted in a recent interview that "the group appears in 'more fashion spreads than most dude bands,'" which draws attention away from the group's actual pursuits (Lee and Martens, 2014).

### **Creation of Female-Exclusive Festivals**

The underrepresentation of women in the American music industry as a whole has led to the creation of female-exclusive music festivals, such as the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival and Lilith Fair, though neither event has received significant mass appeal or success when compared to larger festivals.

**Michigan Womyn's Music Festival.** The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, also known simply as Michfest, was founded in 1976 by nineteen-year-old Lisa Vogel. The week-long event, which takes place in the Michigan woodlands each August, features only female musicians and artists and promotes complete liberation from perceived societal patriarchy through various interactive workshops and community events. Though Michfest is intended to celebrate all women, it tends to attract more radical feminists and does not greatly appeal to younger mass audiences with its annual lineups and activities. Audience numbers typically range anywhere from 3,000 to 10,000 female attendees. The festival has faced significant conflict throughout 2014 for its exclusion policies on transgendered performers and attendees (Goldberg, 2014).

**Lilith Fair.** Lilith Fair was an all-female music festival that toured North America each summer from 1997 to 1999. The festival was co-founded by Canadian singer-songwriter Sarah McLachlan and her manager at the time, Terry McBride. Each year, Lilith Fair featured a rotating roster of popular musicians such as Sheryl Crow, the Dixie Chicks, Lauryn Hill, and Bonnie Raitt. While the festival was founded to showcase female musicians, McLachlan made it very clear Lilith Fair was meant celebrate their music more than their gender by saying, "We're just here to put on a great musical show and I think any social or political issues are secondary, although very important, because it is a music festival first and foremost" (Freydkin, 1998). The festival received significant success for its time and raised millions of dollars for various women's charities during its three-year duration. An attempt to revive the festival was made in 2010 with a rather impressive lineup featuring a larger variety of successful female musicians from different genres, but sluggish ticket sales caused several of the tour dates to either be canceled or moved to smaller venues. Producers blamed the recession as well as poor media

advertising for failure of the revival and no attempts have been made since to restore a similar kind of female-exclusive musical event (Lederman, 2011).

## Evaluation of Recent Lineups at Four American Popular Music Festivals

The following sections will provide foundational information concerning the four largest popular music festivals in the United States: Austin City Limits, Bonnaroo, Coachella, and Lollapalooza. Each festival's official performance lineups from the last five years will be evaluated in terms of comparing the number of female and male performers listed in the first 20 spots. Official lineup publications are arranged to feature headlining acts at the top of the list, followed by sub-headliners and supporting acts, as demonstrated below in Figure 1. By examining the first 20 acts listed, these charts will observe which solo artists and groups festival producers consider most attractive to festival audiences as well as which performances are most likely to encourage more profitable ticket sales.

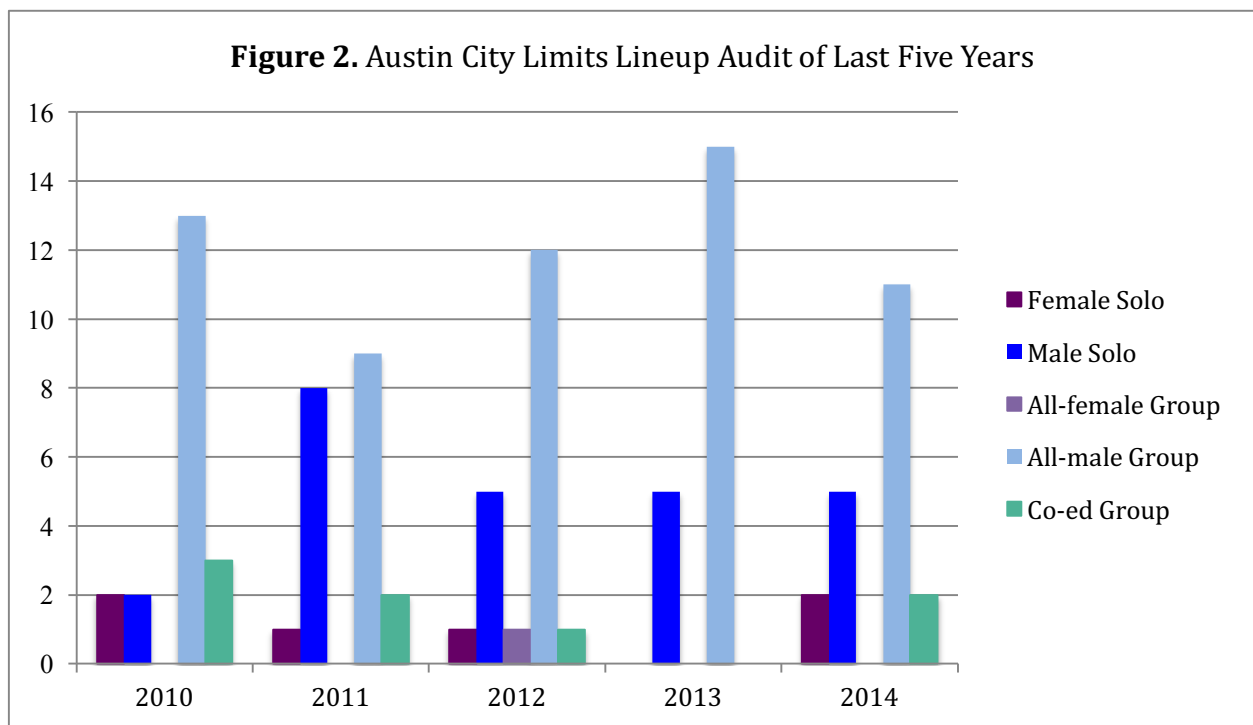
**Figure 1.** Example of Conventional Performance Lineup Layout

The image shows a stylized graphic of the Lollapalooza 2014 lineup. At the top, it says "AUGUST 1-3, 2014 • GRANT PARK, CHICAGO" and "Lollapalooza" in a large, colorful font. Below the title, the lineup is organized into three categories indicated by brackets on the right:

- Headliners:** EMINEM • OUTKAST • KINGS OF LEON
- Sub-Headliners:** ARCTIC MONKEYS • SKRILLEX • CALVIN HARRIS  
LORDE • THE AVETT BROTHERS • FOSTER THE PEOPLE
- Supporting Acts:** ZEDD • SEBASTIAN INGIROSSO • KREWELLA • NAS  
ABOVE & BEYOND • CHILDISH GAMBINO • BROKEN BELLS • SPOON  
THE HEAD AND THE HEART • CAGE THE ELEPHANT • YOUNG THE GIANT  
CHASE & STATUS • INTERPOL • LYKKE LI • CHANCE THE RAPPER  
PHANTOGRAM • CUT / COPY • FLOSTRADAMIUS • FITZ & THE TANTRUMS  
GROUPLOVE • CHVRCHES • THE GLITCH MOB • PORTUGAL THE MAN  
GRAMATIK • CHROMED • DARKSIDE • THE 1975 • DIMITRI VEGAS & LIKE MIKE  
REBELUTION • GLEN HANSARD • JENNY LEWIS • MANCHESTER ORCHESTRA  
GESAFFELSTEIN • JOHN BUTLER TRIO • FLUME • MARTIN GARRIX • AFI  
J. RODDY WALSTON & THE BUSINESS • THE KOOKS • TROMBONE SHORTY & ORLEANS AVENUE  
RUN THE JEWELS • THE AIRBORNE TOXIC EVENT • RUDIMENTAL • PHOSPHORESCENT  
DUKE DUMONT • LONDON GRAMMAR • THE TEMPER TRAP • IGGY AZALEA  
JOACHIM GARRAUD • BOMBAY BICYCLE CLUB • WHITE DENIM • TYPHOON • Z-TRIP  
WARPAINT • KATE NASH • KODALINE • SANDER KLEINENBERG • VANCE JOY • LUCIUS  
BLOOD ORANGE • RICH HOMIE QUAN • PERRY/ETTY VS JOACHIM GARRAUD • DELTA RAE • RAC  
JAGWAR MA • PARQUET COURTS • GTA • JHENÉ AIKO • TEMPLES • SMALLPOOLS • JUNGLE • KINGDS  
NONONO • WILDCAT! WILDCAT! • PAPA • GEMINI CLUB • THE DISTRICTS • VIC MENSA • CRIZZLY  
BONIBA ESTÉREO • FRANCISCA VALENZUELA • BLEACHERS • INTO IT, OVER IT. • HEROBUST • COURTNEY BARNETT  
SAN FERMIN • ROYAL BLOOD • RATKING • BEAR HANDS • ROADKILL GHOST CHOIR • MEG MYERS • KAUSEA  
BRILLZ • BRONZE RADIO RETURN • THE SO SO GLOS • CASH CASH • JACOB PLANT • LINDSAY LOWEND • JOYWAVE  
BEBE REKHA • DESERT NOISES • BETTY WHO • JON BAPTISTE AND STAY HUMAN • BENJAMIN BOOKER • FLY GOLDEN EAGLE  
DUGAS • CRASS MAMMOTH • THE LAST INTERNATIONALE • WALLPAPER • JOHNNYSWIM • CARDKNOX • CHARLIE HIRSCH  
BAGHEERA • SPACE CAPONE • OF VERONA • ANNA LUNDE • HIGHLY SUSPECT • PLASTIC VISIONS • OYINDA • ROCKY BUSINESS

At the bottom, it says "TICKETS AT LOLLAPALOOZA.COM". The graphic is decorated with various icons like a camera, a microphone, and a city skyline.

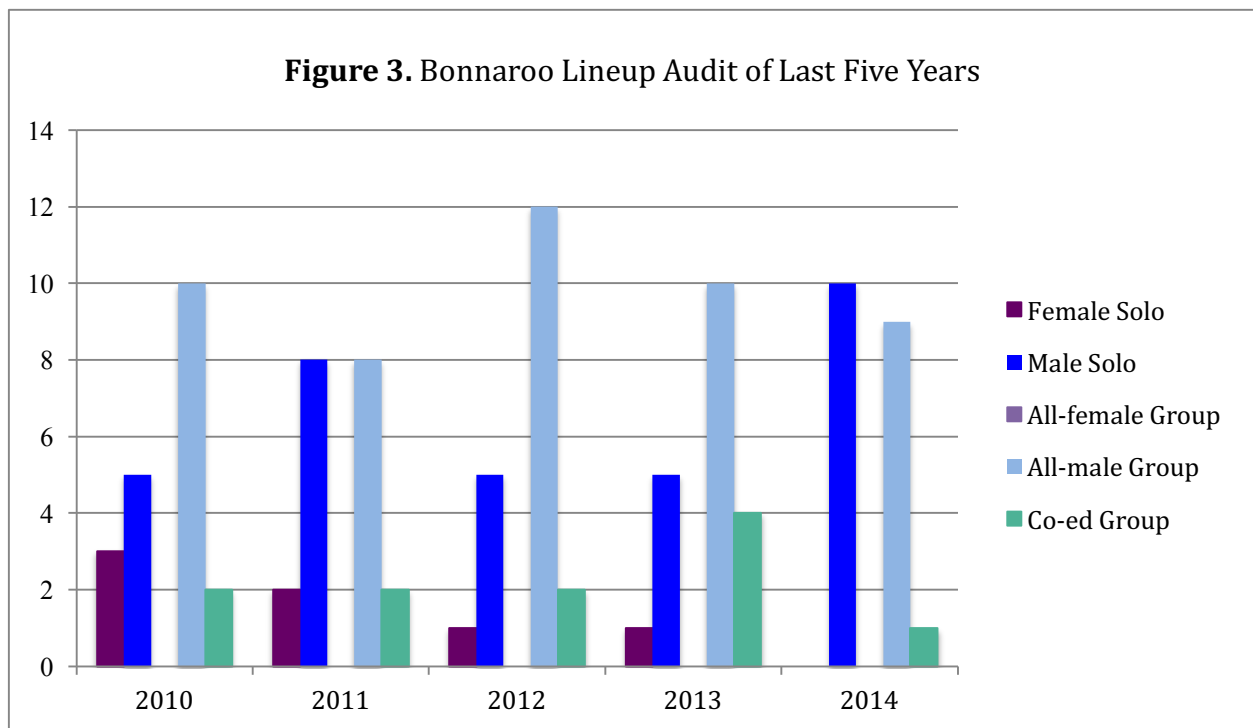
**Austin City Limits Music Festival.** The Austin City Limits Music Festival is a six-day music festival that takes place over two weekends each October at Zilker Park in Austin, Texas (Austin City Limits Music Festival, 2014). The festival was originally founded by C3 Presents in 2002 as a one-weekend festival, but high attendance and lack of space in the area led to the creation of a second weekend. Austin City Limits significantly influences the Austin economy, and the cooperation between C3 Presents and the Austin Parks Foundation has led to millions of dollars worth of donations for improvements to the city parks (Coppola, 2012).



As Figure 2 shows, the number of female headliners in the past five years, either solo or as a part of a group, has been noticeably low. The presence of pop sister duo Tegan and Sara in 2012 marks the only presence of a headlining all-female group in recent performance lineups. Most notably, the 2013 headliners comprised only male performers, even excluding any bands with both male and female members. All-male groups have consistently dominated the lineups, with male solo artists occupying second place (Austin City Limits Music Festival, 2014).



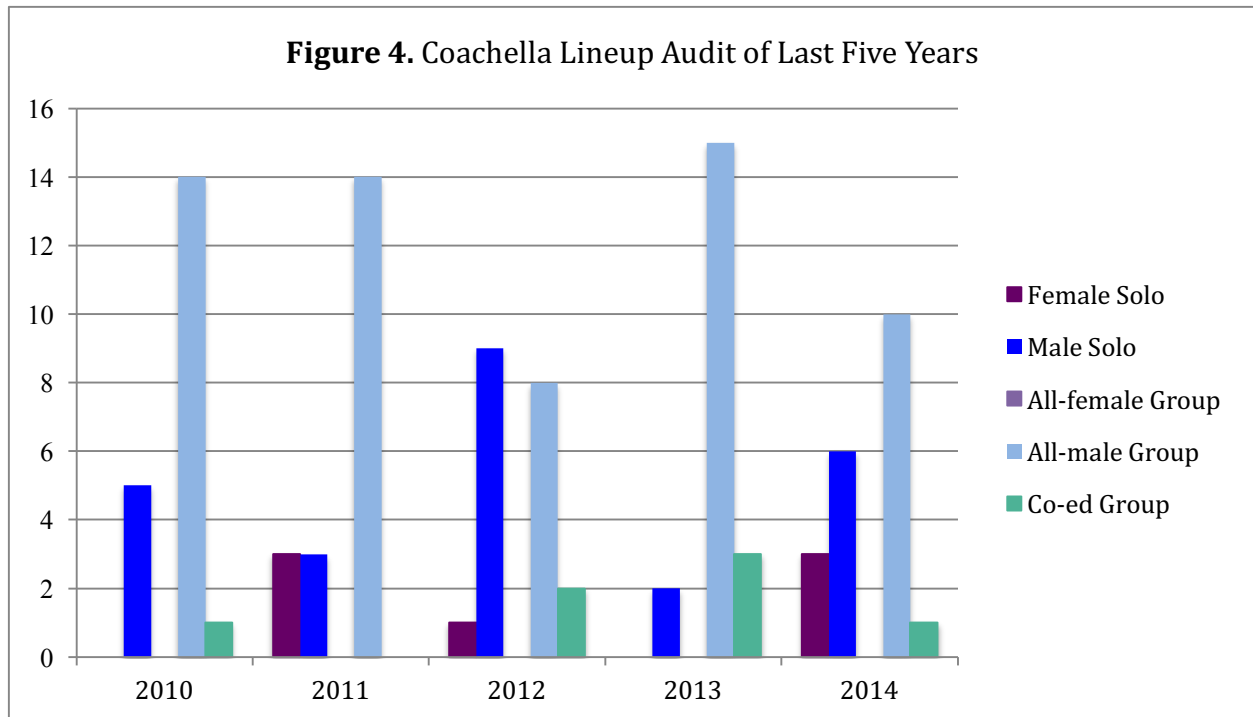
**Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival.** The Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival is a four-day music festival that takes place annually in June at Great Stage Park in Manchester, Tennessee. The festival was founded in 2002 and is produced by Superfly Presents and AC Entertainment (Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival, 2014). According to Leigh Buchanan's *Inc. Magazine* interview with the four Superfly Presents founders, all of whom are male, Bonnaroo attracts over 80,000 fans each year with a target demographic of individuals between the ages of 18 to 34. The festival has sold out tickets nearly every year since 2002 and has always been profitable for both the company and the local economy (Buchanan, 2011).



As shown in Figure 3, an all-female group has not been featured as a Bonnaroo headliner in the past five years, and the number of female solo headliners has actually decreased consistently each year. Charity Rose Thielen, violinist and vocalist for the indie folk band The Head and the Heart, was the only female musician included in the top 20 performers on the 2014 Bonnaroo list of headliners. Either male solo artists or all-male groups have had the most

presence in recent years with a fairly low amount of co-ed groups performing as well (Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival, 2014).

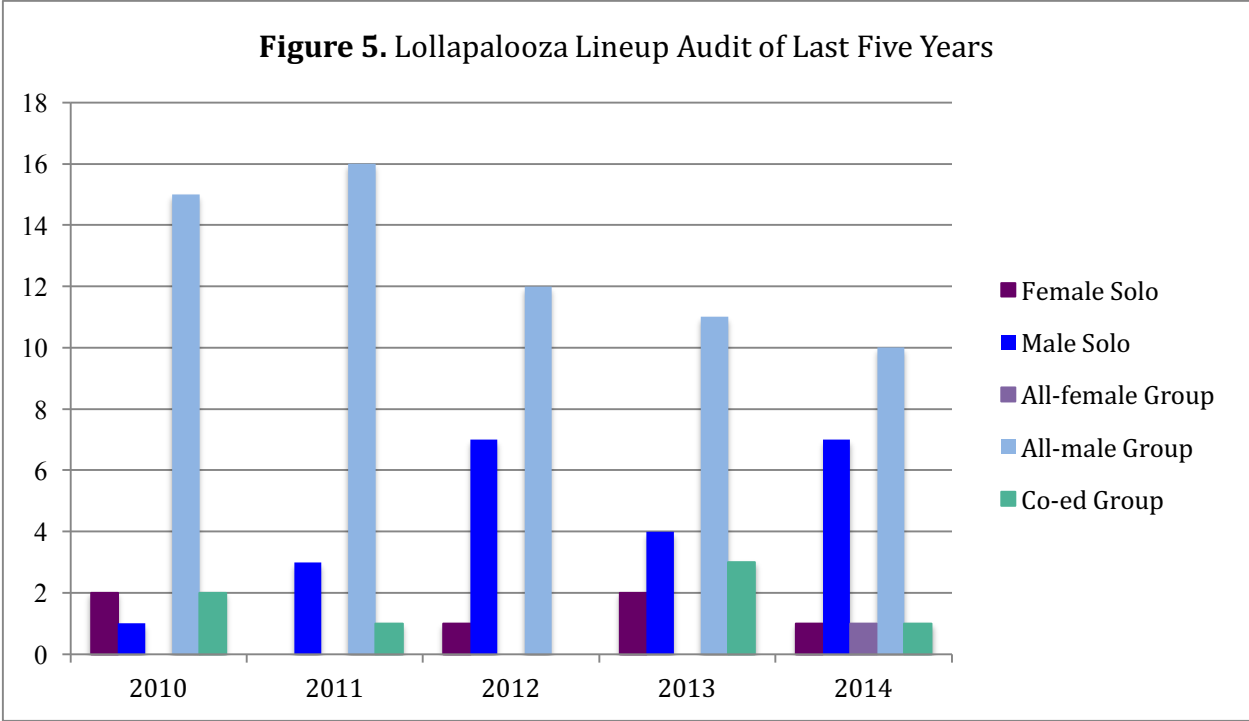
**Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival.** The Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival is a six-day music festival that takes place over two weekends each April at the Empire Polo Club in Indio, California. The festival began in 1999 and is produced by Goldenvoice, a subsidiary of AEG Live (Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival, 2014). Coachella is considered the largest music and arts festival in America in terms of both audience size and profits, bringing in a total of 579,000 attendees over the six days and more than \$78.3 million in 2014 (Waddell, 2014).



As Figure 4 demonstrates, Coachella has not featured any all-female groups as headliners in the past five years. Additionally, the festival failed to include any female solo headliners in either 2010 or 2013, and the number of groups with both male and female performers has stayed consistently low each year. It should be noted, however, that there were

an equal number of female and male solo artists at the 2011 festival (Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival, 2014).

**Lollapalooza.** Lollapalooza is a three-day music festival that takes place annually in August at Grant Park in Chicago, Illinois. The festival was originally founded in 1991 and ran annually through 1997 as a touring music festival around the United States and Canada. In 2005, event production firm C3 Presents, the same company that produces Austin City Limits, took over the festival and located it permanently in downtown Chicago (Lollapalooza, 2014). Lollapalooza brings in over 100,000 people each day and earned around an estimate of \$15.3 million in 2013 (Mann, 2014).



As Figure 5 shows, only six female soloists have been featured as headliners at Lollapalooza in the past five years, and the only all-female group to receive a higher spot recently was electronic dance music sister duo Krewella at the 2014 festival. Groups with only male members have consistently dominated the Lollapalooza performance lineups, though it

should be noted that female solo artists outnumbered male solo artists in headlining spots at the 2010 festival (Lollapalooza, 2014).

## **Review of Festival Attendee Survey**

### **Methodology**

This study aimed to gather information regarding the behaviors and attitudes of individuals who have attended at least one large-scale popular music festival in the United States. Based on the review of media attention to the female representation in popular music festival culture as well as personal observations and perceptions of the research, a survey comprising fifteen questions was distributed online to address the following research questions:

**Research Question 1.** What specific attributes determine whether individuals choose to attend particular American popular music festivals?

**Research Question 2.** Do festival attendees notice and/or show concern for the unequal representation of female performers in American popular music festival culture?

### **Sampling and Distribution**

In order to examine the behaviors and attitudes of festival attendees, an online survey link was shared via social media and email during the months of October and November in 2014. The survey link was primarily shared on personal social media pages and the official Facebook pages for several large-scale popular festivals, though the link was also distributed through email as several participants passed along the survey to fellow festival attendees. This sampling frame and method of distribution was chosen as the most efficient method of circulating the survey because of the convenience of the online platform and easy accessibility to reach larger numbers of people in a wider area range. The main concern for this sampling frame and method of distribution was its ability to reach a wide demographic, as several immediate contacts on the researcher's channels are college-aged. Additionally, social media

posts tend to get lost in an overwhelming news feed, requiring the use of eye-catching posts for the survey to be noticed.

## **Descriptives**

Of the 58 survey participants, 70.7 percent identified as female ( $n = 41$ ), 27.6 percent identified as male ( $n = 16$ ), and one respondent identified as transgender (1.7%). Most participants fell within the age range of 21 to 35 (77.6%,  $n = 45$ ). Over half of the respondents are either currently completing or have completed a bachelor's degree (56.9%,  $n = 33$ ) in a variety of majors, while ten participants chose to pursue an even higher education (17.2%) and 15 participants are working on either a high school diploma or an associate's degree (25.9%). Just over half of the participants have been to a popular American music festival somewhere in the range of two to five times (51.7%,  $n = 30$ ), and 32.8 percent of respondents have only been to a festival once ( $n = 19$ ). Many of the respondents also identify themselves as feminists (60.3%,  $n = 35$ ), using the definition of someone who actively pursues the rights and equality of women.

## **Results**

The following section will discuss the results determined from the survey and relate them to the broader perception of female representation in popular music festival culture as established in the Literature Review.

**Research Question 1.** The first research question asked what specific attributes determine whether individuals choose to attend particular American popular music festivals. Survey participants were asked several questions concerning the importance of specific factors as well as musical preferences to create an idea of the process attendees go through before making festival plans.

**Important factors.** Participants were asked to consider particular factors listed in a Likert scale format and give a level of importance to each factor ranging from not important to extremely important. Overall, the majority of participants ranked the lineup of performers as extremely important when deciding whether to attend a particular festival (81%, n = 47). Factors that most respondents also considered as either fairly important or extremely important include festival ticket prices (82.8%, n = 48), the presence of a community atmosphere at the festival (70.7%, n = 41), location of the festival (67.2%, n = 39), and the availability of friends to attend the festival with them (63.8%, n = 37). Participants gave overwhelmingly middle-ground responses when ranking the importance of available transportation to the festival, the reputation of the festival, and the presence of a wide variety of genres. Finally, nearly all participants gave no preference or little to no importance to the equal representation of male and female performers at the festival (91.4%, n = 53).

**Musical preferences.** When asked what general genres of music individuals prefer to listen to at music festivals, survey participants named alternative (72.4%, n = 42), indie (70.7%, n = 41), and electronic (53.4%, n = 31) as the most enjoyable. On the opposite end of the spectrum, blues (13.8%, n = 8), country (19%, n = 11), and jazz (19%, n = 11) were the least chosen options of the 14 possible genre selections. Respondents were also asked if they have a preference for particular genders of solo performers or group acts, to which 69 percent of participants said they have no preference (n = 40).

**Research Question 2.** The second research question concerned whether festival attendees notice and/or show concern for the unequal representation of female performers in American popular music festival culture. Most participants said they had never consciously noticed a significant difference between the amount of female and male headliners at the festivals they attended in previous years (65.5%, n = 38). The 20 participants who had noticed a

significant inequality in the gender of headliners (34.5%) were also asked to name the festivals where they had noticed the difference, and the four largest festivals previously discussed in the Literature Review (Austin City Limits, Bonnaroo, Coachella, and Lollapalooza) were mentioned multiple times. About 30 percent of participants (n = 17) believe music festival coordinators should put greater consideration into balancing the number of male and female performers each year, while 31 percent of participants (n = 18) did not have an opinion or preference on the matter. Interestingly, 11 of the 16 total male survey participants said music festival coordinators should not put greater consideration into equalizing the number of male and female performers.

***Female-exclusive music festivals.*** The survey asked participants about their awareness of smaller, female-exclusive music festivals, such as the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, in the United States. Most respondents were not aware that any such festivals exist (82.8%, n = 42), which is not surprising, considering that the primary demographic of survey respondents does not match that of the target audience found at such festivals.

Participants had very interesting responses regarding their opinions on whether a larger-scale popular music festival featuring only female performers would be successful in the United States. Over half of the participants believed a festival featuring current, popular female musicians would be well received (56.9%, n = 33). One participant stated, "I think a strong feminist action like creating an all-female pop music festival would garner attention as long as it was supported by significant American females." Another respondent said such a festival could be a great idea, but "representation at festivals is directly linked to female representation in the music industry as a whole, so that's a whole different issue that needs fixing."

Nearly a quarter of the survey participants believed a female-exclusive popular music festival would not be successful or is not necessary in the United States (24.1%, n = 14).

Multiple participants commented that music festivals “should be more about the music than gender,” since most individuals who attend festivals “look for quality in a show over quantity of a gender.” Other participants addressed the negative implication of feminism in an all-female music festival, calling the idea “fairly sexist” and “feminism that is moving in the exact opposite direction that society needs to go.”

Several survey participants gave mixed responses to the idea of an exclusively female popular music festival. One participant said that while a festival that showcases the talent of female performers is a great idea, “one also has to consider whether an all-female music festival on a large-scale would marginalize female musicians further, instead of showing that they have every right to be on the same bill as equally talented male performers.” Another respondent mentioned “it just depends on the climate of the music in the country at the time.” Overall, while the idea of a music festival featuring only female musicians sounds enticing, these participants believed it would not be the most effective way of equalizing the representation of male and female musicians in American festival culture.

### **Discussion**

The media research in the literature review and festival attendee survey results provide several important insights to this study of female representation in the American popular music festival industry. The media has provided significant evidence that a gender imbalance exists in music festival culture, regardless if the lack of female headliners is intentional or coincidental. Despite this noticeable imbalance, a common theme throughout all of the findings suggests the quality of festival performance lineups is considered more important than gender equality among the performers. While this is not a particularly surprising assumption, it demonstrates the lack of the music industry’s reluctance to respond to relevant concerns in American society. Just over 60 percent of the survey respondents identified themselves as feminists, suggesting



their awareness that the overarching gender inequality issue exists. Many would assume that women would show more enthusiasm for addressing gender representation problems, but when looking at the survey results, over 70 percent of the participants were women, and only a small number of those individuals showed serious concern for the representation of female musicians at music festivals based on their responses. The survey results demonstrate that festival attendees believe female representation in the music industry is definitely important, but not the biggest priority when compared to simply enjoying good music.

### **Explanations for Gender Inequality in Music Festival Culture**

As discussed in this paper, there are several possible explanations for the lack of representation of female musicians in American popular music festival culture. One possibility could be that festival audiences are too devoted to music itself to care much about whether gender is equally represented in the lineup. Many people argue that a passion for music should not revolve around the gender of the performers, but instead around how the music actually affects individuals. This assumption leads festival coordinators to pay more attention to what artists and genres are considered more popular instead of whether the presence of male or female performers is equal. Keeping this kind of marketing mindset creates a larger profit, which is ultimately required for a festival to stay afloat in the music industry.

Another basic explanation could be linked to whether certain musicians are even available to perform at the scheduled festival, especially since more successful female artists who dominate the popular music charts have been headlining their own tours instead of performing on the festival circuit. Nonetheless, if festival coordinators are booking lineups based solely on marketing toward young, female audiences who want to swoon over the heteronormative idea of “cute guys with guitars,” the influential female musicians who have

made a name for themselves in the music industry will continue to be overlooked when compiling performance lineups.

The celebrated genres at the largest American music festivals can also be considered a possible explanation, as several festival producers choose to showcase more alternative and indie musicians who do not compete on the same popular music charts that are commonly dominated by women. This explanation then questions the apparent lack of talented female performers in these more “challenging” genres, which is untrue when looking at the women who are consistently booked at music festivals. Female solo artists, such as Janelle Monáe and Banks, as well as groups with female leads, such as Haim and CHVRCHES, have been touring many of the recent festival circuits and achieved significant success in their respective genres, yet none has earned a headlining spot in an American music festival.

### **Challenges With This Study**

Though this study brought attention to an evident issue in the American popular music festival industry, there were certain challenges with completing the research. Because the popular musical festival industry has evolved fairly recently in the span of American history, little scholarly research has analyzed trends and challenges within the field as it is considered an area of current mass art culture. This created challenges for conducting historical research on the festival industry as well as finding unbiased information about the festivals in the media.

Additionally, in order to obtain more primary sources for the literature review, attempts were made to contact the major American music festivals discussed (Austin City Limits, Bonnaroo, Coachella, and Lollapalooza), several smaller festivals, and each of their event production companies. Most of the organizations chose not to respond to questions concerning their processes of compiling festival lineups, and those that did stated most of their booking

information is unable to be released “for business reasons” (T. Fell, personal communication, September 30, 2014).

Finally, the participant sampling for the survey of festival attendees was fairly limited due to the available reach at the time of distribution and inability of a wider audience to locate the survey. Though the survey provided valuable input about why individuals choose to attend certain festivals and what dominates the conscious perception of female representation in the music festival industry from an audience viewpoint, results may have swayed differently with a larger sampling.

### **Conclusion**

This study aimed to explore how female performers are represented in American popular music festival culture, as well as whether festival attendees or producers notice or show concern for the gender imbalance. The lack of representation of female musicians in headlining spots is extremely noticeable when examining recent festival performance lineups and researching media attention to the matter. Despite this rather apparent issue, gender inequality falls lower on the priority list to festivalgoers and event producers when compared to the quality of the music or potential profits, both monetary and emotional, that can be earned by booking certain performers. While many individuals recognize that the issue is unfortunate and should be addressed in some way, few make actual efforts or suggestions in order to encourage greater numbers of talented female headliners. Whether a performer is male or female probably should not make a difference, but awareness of gender inequality in the United States and worldwide makes the issue imperative. The presence of a female headliner should not be treated as a special case; it should receive the same amount of attention as any other headlining musician at a festival regardless of gender. While altering the state of the music industry as a whole would be time-consuming and challenging, simply offering talented female performers

more headlining spots would still bring in a large profit and audience. Based on the survey results from this study, much of the audience would probably not even realize the exchange of some male performers for more female musicians, and those who are aware of the current gender imbalance would take notice. By demolishing gender inequality in American popular music festival culture, every attendee and event producer would be able to enjoy festivals for their main purpose: the love of music.

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