

Public Abstract

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Title:RECONSTRUCTING GENDER, PERSONAL NARRATIVE, AND PERFORMANCE AT THE MICHIGAN WOMYNS MUSIC FESTIVAL

This dissertation is an ethnographic study based on seventeen years of field research at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, a thirty-two-year-old, week-long event that features only women performers and relies on an all female staff who produce the event for an audience of women and their children. The author includes extensive descriptions of the event and the culture that has been created around the event, as well as the author's own personal experiences as a participant. Additionally, the author has included a number of personal experience narratives (oral stories) collected through primary and secondary research about festival participant's experiences with regard to their own body consciousness, especially of open nudity in a remote location at an event with a pro-feminist culture. The author examines these narratives as folkloric texts and as components of the festival's unofficial, but prevailing, discourse. The narratives are also investigated in juxtaposition with more mainstream taboos against female nakedness in contemporary Western society. Key chapters also include an examination of the theories and methodologies of participant-observation ethnographic research and an extensive survey of the body of scholarship that has been produced concerning the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival itself since the 1990s. The dissertation is of relevance to scholars in Folklore, History, Ethnographic Studies, Women Studies, American Studies, Sociology, and Ethnomusicology. Additionally, participants in the culture of women's music and women's festivals will also find this dissertation of interest.