

THE UN'GATHERING OF THE TRIBES: PERFORMING,  
WRITING, AND REMAKING MASCULINE IDENTITY  
AT 1990S ALTERNATIVE ROCK FESTIVALS

A THESIS IN  
History

Presented to the Faculty of the University  
of Missouri-Kansas City in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

by  
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B.A., Eastern Illinois University, 1999

Kansas City, Missouri  
2013



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ABSTRACT

In the early 1990s, a number of up-and-coming American rock bands working in the so-called “alternative rock” genre coupled boyish sensitivity with aggressive sounds that fused punk rock, hard rock, and underground styles to create a genre that provided a thoughtful twist on the angry young man archetype. During this same period, a new wave of traveling all-day, multi-band rock festivals offered bands and audiences a venue for performing their new thoughtful alternative identities. Although Lollapalooza—the first major American alternative festival of the ‘90s—was initially successful in bringing together diverse groups from America’s alternative-aligned countercultures, musicians, fans, and journalists ultimately abandoned the festival when it traded passionate, high volume sensitivity for aggressive hyper-masculinity. As Lollapalooza’s popularity waned, new niche festivals such as the neo-hippie H.O.R.D.E. Tour, the all-female Lilith Fair, and the heavy metal Ozzfest emerged, splitting the

alternative rock audience and fostering environments where fans and bands could construct subgenre-specific identities. By challenging, rejecting, and remaking Lollapalooza-style alternative identity—using both the power of the press and the development and championing of new musical styles—bands, fans, and journalists helped create an array of (sometimes incompatible) alternative styles with their own notions of genre-appropriate masculinity.

When these various alternative “tribes” reunited at the Woodstock ’99 festival in Rome, NY, at the end of the decade, the event devolved into rape, riot, and arson. My investigation found that as journalists attempted to make sense of these tragic events, many blamed out of control masculinity and hyper-masculine nu-metal bands for fostering a dangerous culture at the festival. Although rock journalists have largely treated the events of Woodstock ’99 and the nu-metal bands associated with them as the result of an unfortunate, fleeting fad for hyper-masculinity in alternative rock, bands, fans, and critics continue to use gender to negotiate differences in both rock style and substance, suggesting that alternative rock’s gender issues are far from settled.

## APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences have examined a thesis titled “The Un’Gathering of the Tribes: Performing, Writing, and Remaking Masculine Identity at 1990s Alternative Rock Festivals.” presented by Daniel Gordon Fitzgerald, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

“Gotta find a way, a better way”—so sang Nirvana frontman and alternative rock icon Kurt Cobain during a blistering rendition of the band’s “Territorial Pissings” performed on *Saturday Night Live* in January 1992. The song was a defiant, if garbled, statement of purpose; Cobain metaphorically marking his territory. The song begins with bassist Krist Novoselic mockingly bleating the lyrical hook from the Youngblood’s hippie-era “Get Together” before Cobain switched on the distortion unleashing sheets of guitar feedback. In between calls for a “better way,” Cobain howled pseudo-profound aphorisms such as “Just because you’re paranoid, don’t mean they’re not after you” and “Never met a wise man, if so it’s a woman.” At the song’s end, the band completely demolished their gear, with Cobain using his guitar’s headstock to puncture every speaker on his side of the stage.<sup>1</sup> Cobain’s “better way” would, clearly, require a fair amount of destruction—of musical equipment, hippie-era utopian sentiment, and even conventional assumptions about masculinity in rock and roll. During *Saturday Night Live*’s customary show-ending send-off, Cobain, Novoselic and drummer Dave Grohl stood near the front of the stage and sloppily exchanged open-mouthed kisses. Cobain later explained that this stunt was the band’s attempt to rile “rednecks and homophobes.”<sup>2</sup> Confrontational

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<sup>1</sup> “Nirvana Territorial Pissings SNL '92,” YouTube video, Uploaded by wekwek1103, April 26, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3le03ZOXta0> (retrieved March 13, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> “Kurt and Krist making out.” YouTube video. Uploaded by JustCallMeFox, July 4, 2008.

performances like the one on *SNL* are part of the reason why Nirvana would eventually be credited as the band that “changed everything” in terms of rock culture.<sup>3</sup>

Nirvana didn't just assault America's television households in January 1992. The band also led alternative rock to the top of the American pop charts that same month. That January Nirvana's breakthrough second album *Nevermind* reached number one on the *Billboard* albums chart, moving Michael Jackson's much ballyhooed *Dangerous* out of the top spot. Journalists and rock critics would later commemorate this achievement as the moment when the self-styled “King of Pop” was “dethroned” as Nirvana put the “warrior purity back in rock & roll.” The band's commercial victory ushered in a “new order” of grunge and alternative rock. By toppling Jackson, Nirvana not only proved their own musical mettle, but they also vindicated the “back catalog of its antecedents, from garage rock to punk.”<sup>4</sup>

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[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AmChF\\_OfAjc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AmChF_OfAjc) (retrieved March 13, 2013); Charles R. Cross, *Heavier Than Heaven: A Biography of Kurt Cobain* (New York: Hyperion, 2001), 227.

<sup>3</sup> Chris Richards, "Nirvana's 'Nevermind' at 20: Change kept coming after album that changed everything," *Washington Post*, September 23, 2011, [http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-09-23/entertainment/35272675\\_1\\_pop-music-universal-music-record-industry](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-09-23/entertainment/35272675_1_pop-music-universal-music-record-industry) (retrieved December 11, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> *Rolling Stone's* list of 500 best albums of all time hailed Nirvana's “warrior purity” in their entry for *Nevermind* (ranked number seventeen between Bruce Springsteen's *Born to Run* and Bob Dylan's *Blood on the Tracks*-- "500 Greatest Albums of All Time: Nirvana, 'Nevermind'," *RollingStone.com*, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/lists/500-greatest-albums-of-all-time-20120531/nirvana-nevermind-20120524> (retrieved December 11, 2012). The use to conventionally masculine images of power and triumph to describe beating out the fey Michael Jackson is a clear example of how rock culture privileges and promotes a hyper-masculine vision of rock culture, even when commemorating a band who vocally questioned and lampooned masculinized rock culture--Seth Colter Walls, "He Never Made Me Moonwalk," *The Daily Beast*, June 25, 2009, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2009/06/25/he-never-made-me-moonwalk.html> (retrieved December 11, 2012).



By the album's twentieth anniversary, *Nevermind* and Nirvana's legend had become an established part of rock's historical narrative. In keeping with music industry convention, the album was re-mastered and re-issued in several elaborate deluxe packages for twenty-first-century fans. *Rolling Stone*, the closest thing rock culture has to a "paper of record," posited the album as alpha and omega. *Nevermind*, according to the magazine, both "sounded like the end of something (the 1980s? hair metal?)" and "the beginning of something ('alternative rock'? 'Generation X'?)."<sup>5</sup> According to the dominant narrative, Nirvana begat *Nevermind* which slew rock's past and begat alternative rock which saved rock and roll—until it fell out of favor and was no longer cool or exciting and therefore also suffered indignity and death itself.<sup>6</sup>

This cycle of creative triumph, death, and rebirth, in fact, appears in many of rock history's established narratives. Partly this trope has been durable because it provides a handy pattern for organizing a sprawling historical record that often focuses on individual bands/artists and their various genres. This emphasis on seemingly revolutionary aesthetic innovations often fails to investigate fully changes (or lack thereof) to the practice of making, selling, or

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<sup>5</sup> Jody Rosen, "Nirvana, *Nevermind* 20th Anniversary," *Rolling Stone*, September 27, 2011, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/nevermind-20th-anniversary-20110927> (retrieved December 11, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> This somewhat overwrought mythic cycle of creation, death, and rebirth has its roots in rock's earliest years. The Doo-Wop group Danny and the Juniors announced the genre's eternal nature in the single "Rock and Roll is Here to Stay" in 1958. Since then, rock has been declared dead and miraculously revived countless times. The Who addressed rock's great mystery of death and rebirth in their 1972 single "Long Live Rock" ("Rock is dead they say/Long live rock"). Neil Young's twin meditations on Elvis Presley's death and the Sex Pistols' rise "My My, Hey Hey (Out of the Blue)" and "Hey Hey, My My (Into the Black)" asserted that "Rock and roll can never die" despite the burn out and "rust" lying in wait for rock's performers. Kurt Cobain quoted this Neil Young song in his suicide note.

consuming rock music in the long term. This focus on personalities and sensational moments of media hype reflects the interests of rock history's authors and audience. Much of rock history is written by journalists, rock critics, musicians, and scene insiders—rather than professional scholars—for an audience of fans and self-styled “music nerds.” As a result, popular rock history has focused less on context and continuity, instead providing boosterish narratives chronicling the rise, fall, and redemption of popular bands and styles while ignoring those acts and styles which have fallen out of fashion or never attracted critics or so-called serious listeners.

The history of grunge and alternative rock certainly has reflected the same tendencies toward star-focused celebration and commemoration as rock history in general. As one cover blurb put it, the dominant narrative has often been “How Kurt Cobain and his Seattle cohorts changed the face of rock in the Nineties.”<sup>7</sup> These accounts often adhere to a “rise and fall” narrative where alternative burst onto the scene when Nirvana's success allowed alternative rockers to take over the record business until drugs and other excesses that came with mainstream success contributed to Cobain's suicide and torpedoed the genre. Not surprisingly, a number of these histories focused specifically on Seattle and its music scene, offering tantalizing insider information about the “real” history of grunge that can only be gained by studying the music's geographic source. Other histories have sought insights by investigating alt-rock's musical and subcultural sources. One fine example, Michael Azerrad's

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<sup>7</sup> *Guitar World Presents Nirvana and the Grunge Revolution*, eds. Jeff Kitts and Harold Steinblatt (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 1998).

2001 history *Our Band Could Be Your Life: Scenes from the American Indie Underground, 1981-1991* profiled thirteen 1980s independent rock acts that, the author argued, set the stage for Nirvana's (and alt-rock's) supposedly overnight success. Other histories in this style have likewise attempted to find the roots of alternative rock's success in overlooked genres. For example, a short history of the indie pop style known as "twee" published by indie rock taste-making site Pitchfork.com celebrated the indie pop bands beloved by "[h]appy pop geeks in love with all things pretty." This account—like many histories of lesser known rock happenings—attempted to bolster twee pop's relevance by linking it to a major, ultra-famous star. In this instance, the author asserts that the twee micro-genre was significant, in part, because "Kurt Cobain used to kind of be one of them."<sup>8</sup>

Depictions of rock musicians as artist-heroes commanding revolutionary forces of likeminded bands and fans do make some sense given that rock biographies, memoirs, and band profiles make up a large portion of the rock literature written for a popular audience. Many rock biographies are predictably heroic narratives of creative triumph despite personal hardship, peppered with anecdotes detailing wild times, intra-band squabbles, and interactions with other celebrities. Kurt Cobain has inspired several of the more nuanced alt-rock biographies. Charles R. Cross' *Heavier than Heaven*—officially sanctioned by Cobain's widow Courtney Love—examined the singer's troubled youth, enthusiasm for both art and music, ambivalence about his own stardom, and

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<sup>8</sup> Nitsuh Abebe, "Twee as Fuck: The Story of Indie Pop," *Pitchfork.com*, October 24, 2005, <http://pitchfork.com/features/articles/6176-twee-as-fuck/> (retrieved October 10, 2011).

battles with emotional and chronic physical pain which, according to Cross' account, contributed to Cobain's drug use and suicide. Similarly, the 2005 film *Kurt Cobain: About a Son* juxtaposed the singer's own musings from author Michael Azerrad's taped interviews with scenes from the places where Cobain grew up in order to create a somber portrait of the troubled artist as sensitive young man.

Rock memoirs and autobiographies have often presented trickier questions than even the most fawning rock biographies. Many of these works have served as venues for score-settling, atonement, or simple fond reminiscences. The 1996 documentary *Hype!* provided a platform for a number of Seattle's grunge-era scenesters to both celebrate their city and blame the media for exploiting their culture and ruining their music scene through overexposure. The oral histories *Grunge Is Dead* (2009) and *Everybody Loves Our Town* (2011) cover much of the same territory, though time has dulled much of the bitterness about the media and inter-band nastiness seen in *Hype!* Feature-length career retrospectives like Cameron Crowe's *Pearl Jam Twenty* (2011) as well as more modest documentaries like the 2001 Smashing Pumpkins television special *Graceful Swans of Never* have offered bands, managers, journalists, and even fans the opportunity to weigh in on individual artists' and bands' contributions to rock history, mixing personal remembrance with "just the facts" accounts of bands' careers.

These works of popular rock history often do a fine job relating the details of bands' early days, recording dates, performances, and the like. (Although,

many band biographies rushed to press in the wake of a band's sudden rise do contain striking inconsistencies and factual errors.) Nevertheless, because these histories are largely written for fans of a specific band or style, they engage in very little conceptual analysis or contextualization. In many cases, authors treat changes in rock culture trends as inevitable results of aesthetic cause and effect or obvious outcomes of new, potent talents arriving on the scene. Rock writers often obscure their own role in generating and promoting trends and their relationships with the myriad factions of bands and fans that all work to shape the many rock cultures that are active at a given time. Instead, these accounts have typically emphasized the role of the artist in engineering bold changes and establishing their own legacies while blaming the vagaries of the music industry and the fickle commercial music audience for unflattering instances of contradiction and ambiguity.

Because the grunge era and the alternative rock boom of the 1990s occurred relatively recently, historians and other scholars are just beginning to publish works on the topic in the second decade of the twenty-first century. The riot grrrl movement, in particular, has received increased attention in works like *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution* by Sara Marcus, *Girl Power: The Nineties Revolution in Music* by Marisa Meltzer, *Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism* by Alison Piepmeier. In addition, Kathleen Hanna donated her personal papers to NYU's Fales Library, providing future scholars with greater opportunity to study riot grrrl documents from 1989-1996. Taking a slightly different approach, social scientist Catherine Strong published

her study of grunge as memory in 2011, investigating the ways that people connected with and remembered their connections to the grunge phenomenon.

Often scholarly approaches to alternative rock have evaluated the music's relationship to social change or its role as one element of (often broadly defined) youth culture. Although these approaches have helped establish significant lines of inquiry in an emerging area of study, they do not always adequately address alternative rock on its own terms. In particular, scholars have typically evaluated alternative rock as it relates to youth culture, rebellion against so-called "straight" society, and social crisis. They often focus on the meaning of alternative rock within a broader socio-cultural context; these studies, however, at times overlook the fact that alternative rock performers, critics, and fans were all engaged in a discourse with a broader rock culture—one with its own conventions and assumptions related to class, race, gender, age, and identity. Without fully taking into account the internal debates within rock culture, scholars can miss some of the subtle contextual clues necessary for grasping exactly what a specific alternative expression means.

Although the discourse about the relationship between gender and indie/alternative music has continued to spark debate in the rock press, a seemingly fixed dominant narrative has emerged regarding '90s alt-rock, situating it firmly in the (settled) past. Grunge, riot grrrl, and other notable alternative styles have been enshrined as the objects of memory via retrospective documentaries, museum exhibits, and reunion tours. And

journalists and fans alike now regard the alternative moment as an inevitable stop on rock culture's march toward progress.

Nevertheless, the history of the 1990s alt-rock boom does provoke a number of questions, especially when it comes to the ways that alternative rockers played with their own identities on stage and in the media. What was alternative rock an alternative to, and what happened to cause bands, audiences, and critics to seek an alternative to "alternative" at the end of the decade? To what extent was alternative rock less a musical revolution than a revolution of identity and personal style grounded in a critique of earlier conceptions of rock masculinity handed down from the 1960s and '70s? How did the immediate reactions of rock journalists covering album releases and concerts help shape the larger view of alternative rock identity and gender performance?

It is my thesis that the rise of alternative rock in the 1990s coincided with a self-conscious debate about what constituted appropriate masculine identity within rock culture. With Lollapalooza, Perry Farrell attempted to create a venue for cultural exchange and the creation of a new alternative subculture—a subculture with its own notions of appropriate alternative rock masculinity. Although Lollapalooza was initially successful, critics, artists, and fans eventually abandoned that festival and the alt-rock masculinity that flourished there was too dominated by adolescent machismo to suit the needs of the self-consciously diverse alt-rock audience. Ultimately, the alternative subculture splintered into various tribes that, in turn, posited their own alternative visions of alternative identity. Over the course of the 1990s, mainstream journalists and rock critics

frequently attributed the disagreements between different factions of the alternative rock community to those factions' different ideas about alt-rock gender identity. In particular, journalists and commentators viewed the violent events of Woodstock '99 as a clear case of alt-rock masculinity out of control.

By the time that writers, fans, and bands established a consensus history of '90s alt-rock in the first years of the twenty-first century, they had largely settled on a romanticized conception of alternative rock that downplayed the genre's nihilistic and aggressive elements and celebrated its sensitive, thoughtful aspects. When critics did praise the raw power of bands like Nirvana, Pearl Jam, or the Smashing Pumpkins, they took care to distinguish it from the popular yet politically problematic hard rock, nu metal, and post-grunge trends that, according to the consensus narrative, killed alternative rock. Ultimately, critics and fans incorporated this softened view of alt-rock into the so-called indie or hipster aesthetic which began to distinguish itself from alternative in the mid-to-late '90s.

By studying how musicians, journalists, and fans contributed to this discourse, I hope to demonstrate that the American alternative rock boom of the 1990s was less a singular, revolutionary rock happening than a gradual, contentious process whereby a heterogeneous collective of bands, fans, and writers drew upon many different elements of rock-related youth culture to create a complex alternative rock aesthetic.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, I argue that gender issues—

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<sup>9</sup> A parallel but different flourishing of alternative rock also occurred in the UK, much of it under the umbrella of "Brit Pop." In fact, the rise of Brit Pop is often attributed to UK musicians' dissatisfaction with American alternative rock's massive popularity. American alternative bands



particularly the way that masculinity was imagined and performed—contributed greatly to the sense of alternative rock as something distinct from earlier rock and pop styles. Ultimately, changing ideas about gender within rock culture, including mounting dissatisfaction with aggressive masculine styles that were originally a significant element of alternative rock culture, contributed to the genre’s eventual decline in popularity.

In order to better understand the ways that alternative rock musicians, critics, and fans negotiated issues of gender in the 1990s, I focus on large, multi-act alternative rock concert festivals. I decided to study these rock fests because they served as sites of performance—both for the artists on stage and for the fans in the crowd performing their identities as alternative rockers. Moreover, the promoters and planners of these large festivals self-consciously tried to include a diverse cross-section of alternative bands working in a variety of alt-rock subgenres and styles. Therefore, these festivals provide an excellent opportunity for investigating the interactions between different groups of musicians and fans, as well as to see how rock critics made sense of different types of alternative rock identities in their reviews of concert events. Moreover, these festivals provided concertgoers outside of the urban centers and college towns where underground rock scenes flourished with an opportunity to participate directly in alternative rock culture—or, as in the case of Woodstock ’99, the extensive

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toured the UK and certainly were successful—and the UK rock press certainly covered the American scene. The UK scene at this time, however, was overshadowed by American alt-rock in the American press. In order to maintain a workable scope for my own study, I’ve I not examined the exchange between the American and UK alternative scenes; this issue, however, could provide a fascinating topic for further research.

media coverage allowed fans to experience alternative culture virtually as it was happening. Relatively few people saw Mudhoney performing during the early days of grunge in Seattle, attended the first riot grrrl meetings in Washington DC or Olympia, WA, or witnessed an Urge Overkill show at Lounge Ax in Chicago. Alternative rock festivals, however, allowed a greater number of people, including suburban teens, access to live alternative rock performances. In addition, the scope and scale of these festivals often spurred journalists to consider the larger meaning of so-called alternative rock at a particular time. As such, reviewers used their accounts of these shows to discuss larger issues related to rock culture and alternative rock's contributions to that culture.

These large alternative rock gatherings make excellent subjects for historical study because they were popular and therefore well-documented. In the course of my investigation, I have studied a wide variety of primary sources including recordings of festival performances (audio and video), photographs, concert ephemera (posters, programs, souvenirs), and interviews with performers and concert organizers (print and video). Moreover, I have used the extensive news and critical coverage of these festivals as a major source base. Daily newspapers, national news and general interest magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek*, as well as music-oriented outlets like *Rolling Stone*, *Spin*, and MTV News all covered rock fests like Lollapalooza, Lilith Fair, and Woodstock '99, resulting in a wealth of print material. Of course these materials offer some challenges given that they do not merely document events as they happen. In fact, journalists' reviews and editorials often represent some of the first history

written about any happening within rock culture. Moreover, rock journalism's "gonzo" heritage has often celebrated the rock critic's role as an active participant shaping taste and events. In order to counterbalance the influence of journalists and their editorializing, I have also examined the body of musical and material culture associated with alternative rock, including hundreds of studio recordings and bootlegs, album art and packaging, promotional images, official merchandise, sheet music and instructional material for budding alternative guitarists, and even musical equipment marketed to alternative rock fans.

I have considered this large, varied source base using a number of approaches. I used both gender theory and performance theory to guide my analysis of how bands and fans performed alternative masculinities and how critics understood and represented these performances. I have used reception theory to consider rock festivals as historical texts. Like other historical texts, the festivals' meanings are not necessarily inherent to them, but instead were created within the relationship between the festival—those who produced it, performed at it, participated in it—as well as those who wrote about it. Moreover, I have also relied on the technique of close reading borrowed from literary studies to interrogate the lyrics and statements made by alternative rock musicians, as well as the accounts written by the journalists covering them. I have also similarly "read" non-text print culture, photos, videos, and recorded music in an attempt to deconstruct these materials and reveal the ways that they both contributed to and commented on rock culture.

I begin by examining the touring Lollapalooza festival—from its origins in 1991 until its hiatus after the 1997 summer concert season. In this chapter, I consider the origins of alternative rock identity and Lollapalooza founder Perry Farrell’s canny decision to create a festival celebrating both his own band Jane’s Addiction and the burgeoning alternative rock subculture. I argue that, in its early years, Lollapalooza provided fans, critics, and musicians with a space wherein they could forge a distinctively alternative rock identity, in part by using this high profile setting to critique and transform existing rock culture tropes. Eventually, artists, journalists, and fans alike began to question whether the wildly successful festival was truly as inclusive and alternative as advertised. When festival critics openly griped about Lollapalooza “pretend[ing] to be alternative” when “in reality [it was] just another facet of the mass cultural exploitation scheme,” they essentially were trying to reframe and reclaim an alternative rock identity that had become synonymous with the festival<sup>10</sup> Just as gender and masculine performance played a key role in helping Lollapalooza’s bands shape notions of alternative identity, critics used gender to argue that Lollapalooza had lost its way by excluding women and relying too heavily on lineups featuring hyper-masculine hard rock bands.

In my second chapter, I investigate the festivals which emerged in the wake of Lollapalooza’s success. I focus on three fests—the H.O.R.D.E. Tour, the Lilith Fair, and Ozzfest—each of which catered to a specific niche found within Lollapalooza’s so-called “alternative nation.” I argue that each of these

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<sup>10</sup> Jon Bains, "Steve Albini (Big Black, Rapeman, etc)," *Obsolete.com*, <http://obsolete.com/convulsion/interviews/convulse/bigblack.html> (retrieved March 3, 2013).

festivals—with rhetorical assistance from journalists and rock critics—challenged and expanded upon Lollapalooza’s conception of alternative identity as fundamentally young, sensitive, and male. The bands of H.O.R.D.E. embodied an alternative identity that fused 1960s-era hippie culture with a can-do attitude of self-reliance and personal mastery which was decidedly masculine—and also more adult than Lollapalooza’s rebellious emoting. Lilith Fair offered a wildly successful, conventionally feminine alternative to the supposedly macho climate of Lollapalooza. Lilith’s artists shared the same sensitive temperaments as many of Lollapalooza’s biggest names, but journalists often overlooked these similarities and focused on the differences between Lilith’s softer folk-pop aesthetic and Lollapalooza’s roaring guitar rock. The heavy metal festival Ozzfest was, at least superficially, the least like Lollapalooza in terms of genre and intended audience. Up-and-coming Ozzfest performers like shock rocker Marilyn Manson, however, used their festival appearances to fuse heavy metal sounds with subject matter and identities not unlike those on stage at Lollapalooza. The success of these three festivals demonstrated that alternative rock fans were seeking venues that better fit their specific niche interests and identities.

In my final chapter I investigate the media’s response to the rapes, rioting, and fires during the violent implosion of the Woodstock ’99 festival in Rome, NY. I argue that coverage of these events, both in the mainstream and rock press, was influenced by the decade-long discourse about masculine identity-making and performance that shaped how journalists, critics, and fans understood

alternative rock throughout the 1990s. I posit that coverage of the shocking events at Woodstock '99 exposed the deep fault-lines in '90s rock culture. Ultimately, Woodstock '99 was understood as a failure of the more aggressive strains of alternative rock masculinity. In light of this failure, critics and rock historians eventually reframed the narrative of alternative rock in the 1990s to downplay the genre's more aggressive tendencies while highlighting those alternative elements seen as the roots of the emerging softened, non-confrontational indie aesthetic.

## CHAPTER 2

### 'DO YOU HAVE THE TIME TO LISTEN TO ME WHINE': PLAYING WITH ALTERNATIVE MASCULINITY AT LOLLAPALOOZA IN THE 1990S

When promoters in 2003 attempted to relaunch Lollapalooza—the 1990s' foremost travelling festival of alternative music and culture—one rock critic mused that “an awful lot has changed since 1991.”<sup>1</sup> In the intervening years, travelling festival tours like Ozzfest, Lilith Fair, H.O.R.D.E., and the Van's Warped Tour—as well as the emergence of annual American multi-day destination festivals like the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival and Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival—had created “a nation of jaded-megaconcertgoers.”<sup>2</sup> In fact the challenge of restarting Lollapalooza as a multi-act tour in 2003 proved too great, and the event was cancelled. The festival was reborn in 2005 as a multi-day destination event near the lakefront in Chicago's Grant Park where it endures today, drawing huge crowds and garnering largely positive reviews.

Following its successful reboot, Lollapalooza has enjoyed a great deal of celebration and commemoration in the media. Journalists from *USA Today* and *CNN* to *Rolling Stone* and *Spin* covered the festival's twentieth anniversary in 2011, mostly advancing an uncomplicated narrative that explained how Jane's

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<sup>1</sup> D. Parvaz, “Lollapalooza: Then and Now,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, August 22, 2003, <http://www.seattlepi.com/ae/music/article/Lollapalooza-Then-and-now-1122434.php> (retrieved January 13, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*; The multi-day destination festivals operated in the same way as long-running UK events like Reading and Glastonbury—a wide variety of acts on multiple stages with marathon schedules. Frequently concertgoers camped at the concert site and could attend festival events around the clock. Essentially, these festivals operated like a yearly Woodstock.

Addiction singer Perry Farrell started the festival in 1991 as both a farewell tour for his band and a showcase for a burgeoning alternative rock culture, thereby “open[ing] Pandora's box for the freaks and geeks of alternative culture to step out from dark nightclubs into broad daylight in all their tattooed, pierced glory.”<sup>3</sup> For all its seeming tidiness, this narrative does raise some questions. Where did all of these alternative bands and fans come from in the first place? What was “alternative rock” and alternative to? Although rock fans and bands have, at times, challenged the idea that “Alternative” was actually a genre (and not just a marketing category), journalists have largely ignored these issues when penning their celebratory anniversary write-ups of Lollapalooza and its happy history of the freaks inheriting the earth.

I argue that although the consensus history of Lollapalooza has suggested that a fully formed “alternative” identity was simply waiting in the wings for Lollapalooza, contemporary accounts of the festival have indicated that alternative rock identity was hardly fixed in the early 1990s. I have based my analysis on a variety of concert and album reviews, news features, interviews, recordings, and live performance footage. These sources show that Lollapalooza—and alternative identity in general—developed and changed over time.

I begin my investigation by charting Lollapalooza’s initial gathering of underground acts belonging to loosely affiliated subgenres—eventually grouped

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<sup>3</sup> Korina Lopez, “Lollapalooza: When back then was now,” *USA Today*, August 3, 2011, [http://www.usatoday.com/life/music/news/2011-08-01-lollapalooza-memories\\_n.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/life/music/news/2011-08-01-lollapalooza-memories_n.htm) (retrieved April 13, 2012).



together as “Alternative”— in 1991. I then trace the emergence of a recognizable alternative rock aesthetic rooted in sensitive, wounded-seeming (usually male) singers leading guitar-based rock groups in performing ironic, angsty songs of rebellion and personal catharsis. I conclude by demonstrating how newer hypermasculine alt-rock bands favoring volume, angst, and rebellion ultimately supplanted the more sensitive altrockers, alienating both critics and audiences and prompting the tour’s decline and revealing deep divisions within the alternative rock audience.

### **Generation X, Grunge Hype, and the Invention of Alternative Rock**

The label “alternative rock” or “alt-rock” has long vexed fans, rock critics, and even bands themselves—in part, because the term’s “catch-all” nature allowed seemingly unrelated performers, styles, and audiences to be lumped together.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the still contested meanings of “alternative rock” and “alternative music” among fans are readily observed at crowd-sourced websites like *Urban Dictionary*, where the definition for “alternative rock” included everything from level-headed descriptions of the genre’s roots and “do-it-yourself” ethos to musings about how something popular could still be called “Alternative.” A number of the posters at *Urban Dictionary* griped that “alternative” was mostly “useless” as a genre tag because people used it as a

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<sup>4</sup> British “alt-rock” veteran Robert Smith of the Cure complained to *Spin* in 2005 that every time his band visited the states they “had a different tag,” only becoming “alt-rock” sometime “post-’85.”; Mark Spitz, “Robert Smith,” *Spin*, November 2005, 66.

“catch-all phrase categorizing whatever music dorky high school kids listen to.”<sup>5</sup> Rock critics and other industry insiders’ definitions have echoed these fan-sourced descriptions. According to the established critical narratives, “‘alternative’ is basically a meaningless term” that included a “variety of musical styles” united by their position “outside of the mainstream.”<sup>6</sup> Many critics have understood “alternative rock” as a descriptor for “post-punk bands” that emerged as new wave “began to die out” in the early 1980s.<sup>7</sup> Music industry executives and other tastemakers, however, eventually began to use the term to label “music that hasn’t yet achieved a mainstream audience,” but demonstrated “the potential to reach a wider audience” because it demonstrated “real strength, real quality, real excitement” and was “socially significant” unlike the pop “Pablum” of artists such as Whitney Houston.<sup>8</sup> Given this broad understanding,

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<sup>5</sup>“Alternative Rock,” *Urban Dictionary*, <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Alternative%20Rock&defid=3178387> (retrieved April 13, 2012). The “dorky high school kids” definition was added by user “djangoshootsfirst” on July 10, 2008. *Urban Dictionary* collects user-generated dictionary definitions for slang, neologisms, and pop culture terms. The culture of *Urban Dictionary* tolerates a good number of in-jokes, insults, and ironic/snarky definitions posted for comedic effect.

<sup>6</sup>Stephen Thomas Erlewine, “explore music... American Alternative Rock/Post-Punk,” *Allmusic.com*, <http://www.allmusic.com/explore/essay/american-alternative-rock--post-punk-t578> (retrieved April 12, 2012); “explore music...Alternative Pop/Rock,” *Allmusic.com*, <http://www.allmusic.com/explore/style/alternative-poprock-d367> (retrieved March 15, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Thomas Erlewine, “explore music... American Alternative Rock/Post-Punk,” *Allmusic.com*, <http://www.allmusic.com/explore/essay/american-alternative-rock--post-punk-t578> (retrieved April 12, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Peter Watrous, “POP/JAZZ; Rock by Any Other Name Is ‘Alternative,’” *New York Times*, July 15, 1988; The quoted passages are attributed to Mark Josephson, Executive Director of the New Music Seminar speaking in 1988.

“Alternative”—with a capital “A”—emerged as less a style than a sensibility, a marker of identity constructed in relation to other genres and personas.<sup>9</sup>

Alternative rock became part of the larger cultural consciousness at same time as journalists and other writers began covering mounting intergenerational tensions caused by the supposed problem of disaffected, disconnected “twentysomethings” rejecting Baby Boomer values. In fact, writers often treated grunge and alternative rock as key components of so-called Generation X identity, comparing ‘90s rock trends to those of the ‘60s and ‘70s in order to understand how Gen X differed from previous generations. A 1991 *Time* article mused that directionless “twentysomethings” were incapable of making decisions—a generational failing which colored the way that they created art and culture. With “few heroes, no anthems, [and] no style to call their own,” this younger generation was united only by their rejection of workaholic “yuppie lunacy” created by “self-centered, fickle, and impractical” Baby Boomers who created little more than a legacy of “drugs, divorce and economic strain.”<sup>10</sup> *Time*’s writers asserted that “[d]own deep, what frustrates today’s young people...is their failure to create an original youth culture.”<sup>11</sup> The magazine concluded that these wayward twentysomethings only managed “a bland

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<sup>9</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* identified at least one instance of “Alternative Rock” as early as 1975 via a list of specialized radio formats in *Billboard*. Similarly, “Alternative Music” appeared in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* in 1978, though in a non-rock context. Both entries note that “Alternative” connotes music that is “unorthodox or outside of the mainstream” and non-commercial. In short, alternativeness is defined in relation to the mainstream, commercial music industry.

<sup>10</sup> D.M. Gross and S. Scott, “Proceeding with Caution,” *Time*, July 16, 1990.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

imitation of the past.”<sup>12</sup> In fact, the authors quote an expert—a sociologist—who claimed that twentysomethings were so culturally inept that they “don’t even seem to know how to dress.”<sup>13</sup>

*Time*’s wary profile of this younger generation was but one volley in an ongoing debate about the fate of a generation regularly portrayed as a disaffected, unsettled “other.” In 1992, an *Atlantic* feature by authors Neil Howe and William Strauss characterized young people or “Thirteeners”—for the thirteenth generation—as a “mélange of scared city kids, suburban slackers, hungry immigrants, desperate grads, and shameless hustlers.”<sup>14</sup> Imagining the entire generation as a single, desperate young man, Howe and Strauss mused that “all he sees is an enormous obstacle, with him on one side and everything he wants on the other.” Wondering “what’s that obstacle?” they concluded— “[t]hose damn Boomers.”<sup>15</sup> Even less charitably, a 1993 *Newsweek* editorial by self-described “lawyer and bureaucrat” David Martin lambasted the “spoiled, self-indulgent, overgrown adolescents” of Generation X, calling them “the Whiny Generation.” Martin bristled at Xers charges that his Baby Boom generation was responsible for “all the troubles of the world.” He urges the “whiners” to “accept cold, hard reality,” to “move out of [their] parents’ houses,” and “start working.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, “The New Generation Gap,” *Atlantic Monthly*, December 1992, <http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/issues/92dec/9212genx2.htm> (retrieved April 9, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> David Martin, “The Whiny Generation,” *Newsweek*, November 1, 1993, 10.

Only then would the generation “whose biggest achievement to date is something called grunge rock” be able to claim the same power and privileges as the more established Boomers.<sup>17</sup>

Rock critics, including Gen X rock critics like Jim DeRogatis and Michael Azerrad, employed similar Boomers versus Xers language when making sense of alt-rock’s relationship to other, earlier rock styles. For DeRogatis, alt-rock “was all part of the glorious noisy continuum” stretching from Buddy Holly through the Troggs, James Brown, and the “Baby Boom canon” to eventually include bands as varied as the Sex Pistols, Public Enemy, and Wilco. Moreover, he asserted that ‘90s alternative rock was “something special” because it gave the “mere seventeen million members of Generation X” a “moment in the sun” before being “eclipsed” by the Baby Boomers and their “snot-nosed progeny in Generation Y.”<sup>18</sup> In this reading, alt-rock provided Generation X with an opportunity to contribute to rock’s legacy before being swallowed by the inevitable march of demography. Azerrad—though less fond of the Boomers versus Xers rhetoric that DeRogatis employed—also emphasized continuity, particularly alternative rock’s connections and indebtedness to earlier underground rock scenes, such as punk, hardcore, and American college rock. He made the case that underground bands such as Black Flag, Husker Du, and the Minutemen built the networks and established the audiences that provided a

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Jim DeRogatis, *Milk It: Collected Musings on the Alternative Music Explosion of the '90s* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2003), xx.

springboard for bands like Nirvana who took Alternative to the mainstream.<sup>19</sup>

Alternative was not a new development within the underground rock culture of independent labels, self-financed tours, and fanzines; it was, however, something of a new phenomenon within mainstream rock culture, challenging and eventually displacing previously dominant styles in pop and rock music.

Record buyers clearly embraced Nirvana and “grunge”—the name given to the specific riff-oriented, “sludgy” sub-genre of alternative music they and similar, often Seattle-based, bands made. In addition, grunge—and alternative rock in general—soon inspired significant media hype, both in the rock press and in non-rock culture outlets. *Rolling Stone* proclaimed Seattle “the New Liverpool” on the cover of their April 16, 1992 issue. *Vogue* ran a grunge fashion editorial in their December 1992 issue. Eager for more information about the new “grunge subculture,” *New York Times* reporter Rick Marin contacted Sub-Pop records to get the inside story. Grunge’s ethos of subcultural subversion made the mainstream news when Megan Jasper, an employee at the record company, knowingly supplied the journalist with a list of phony slang terms. *The New York Times* article credulously cataloged fake slang terms like “lamestain” and “whack slacks” in their “lexicon of grungespeak,” the paper’s supposedly authentic

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<sup>19</sup> Michael Azerrad, *Our Band Could Be Your Life: Scenes from the American Indie Underground 1981-1991* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2002) traces the careers of a number of notable American underground bands who presaged, influenced, and even participated in the 1990s alternative rock boom. Azerrad makes a strong case for continuity between the so-called “college rock” scene and the post-Nirvana alternative explosion.

example of a youth trend “coming soon to a high school or mall near you.”<sup>20</sup>

Thomas Frank, a cultural critic at *The Baffler*, eventually exposed this “grunge hoax, mocking the *Times*’ gullibility and sneering at the paper’s rush to “rip off the Seattle kid’s doings” by drumming up evidence for the “(nonexistent) grunge movement.”<sup>21</sup>

Shenanigans aside, much of the press, many alternative rock musicians, and the genre’s numerous boosters all agreed that grunge/alternative performers did represent a real alternative to conventional rock. In particular, journalists noted that alt-rock performers largely embodied a sensitive, self-aware style of masculinity that differed from the macho rock god norm. In a 1993 feature titled “Rock’s Anxious Rebels,” *Time*’s Christopher John Farley asserted that, “[a]lternative musicians are a far cry from the strutting, white-male rockers of decades gone by” because they “tend[ed] to be antisexist, pro-tolerance and pro-underdog, whether it’s animals or humans.”<sup>22</sup> In short, alt-rock men were a gentler, more thoughtful breed of rock star.

Even alt-rock merchandise reflected this new style of rock identity.<sup>23</sup> Smashing Pumpkins main man Billy Corgan’s iconic “Zero” shirt—and the

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<sup>20</sup> Rick Marin, “Lexicon of Grunge: Breaking the Code,” *New York Times*, November 15, 1992, Section 9, Page 1.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Frank, “Harsh Realm, Mr. Sulzberger!” *Baffler* #5 (1993) reprinted in *Commodify Your Dissent* (New York: Norton, 1997), 203-06.

<sup>22</sup> Christopher John Farley, “Rock’s Anxious Rebels,” *Time*, Monday, October 25, 1993, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1825138-3,00.html> (retrieved January 11, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> The alternative rock boom inspired an array of new merchandise, everything from grunge-specific musical equipment to, to school supplies decorated with “grunge” graphics.

replicas sold to fans—served as an identity-making act of sartorial self-nullification.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Sub-Pop, the record label home of Nirvana and other alternative bands (e.g., Mudhoney and Tad), sold t-shirts emblazoned with the word “Loser.” Successfully re-appropriating the characterization of “Gen Xers” as unmotivated “slackers,” the trope of the “Loser” spread rapidly across alternative culture. Songwriter Beck Hansen scored a top-ten hit in 1994 with the song “Loser” featuring the chorus “I’m a loser, baby/So why don’t you kill me.” Eventually, the neologism “Lollapaloozer” appeared in reviews and news items about the rock festival, thereby linking ironic “loser”-dom with a major site of alternative performance and identity.<sup>25</sup>

### **Bringing the “Tribes” Together**

When singer Perry Farrell started Lollapalooza in 1991 as way to make the farewell tour for his band Jane’s Addiction seem special, he also hoped the tour could function as a “culture-spanning celebration” that would bring up-and-coming bands to the fans in out of the way locations far from the urban areas where alternative rock flourished.<sup>26</sup> Given this desire, Farrell’s plan seemed like an attempt to establish a summit where various representatives of the *Atlantic’s* twentysomething “mélange of scared city kids, suburban slackers, hungry

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<sup>24</sup> Rock lore claimed that Corgan’s Zero shirt was inspired by/pilfered from the Zero Skateboards logo. This logo, in fact, bore a striking resemblance to the motifs employed by the German avant garde arts collective the Zero Group in the 1950s and ‘60s.

<sup>25</sup> The coinage appears as early as the August 1992 issue of *Spin* in the “*Spin’s* Exclusive, All-Inclusive Guide to Lollapalooza ’92” feature.

<sup>26</sup> “History: Lollapalooza,” *Lollapalooza Official Website*, <http://www.lollapalooza.com/history/> (retrieved April 12, 2012).



immigrants, desperate grads, and shameless hustlers” might meet to compare notes.<sup>27</sup>

The first Lollapalooza did offer concertgoers a diverse lineup of bands—Jane’s Addiction, Nine Inch Nails, Butthole Surfers, the Rollins Band, Siouxsie and the Banshees, Violent Femmes, Living Colour, and Ice T with Body Count. Moreover, the festival provided bands an opportunity to play larger venues with broader audiences than they would have normally played on their own.<sup>28</sup>

Although, package tours were not rare in 1991—that year MTV reported that many acts had banded together on similar multi-band bills in order to survive the perils of a slumping concert industry—Lollapalooza was unique in that Farrell did not stake the festival’s fortunes on a niche audience but, rather, courted “all kinds of different people from neighborhoods not like their own.”<sup>29</sup> <sup>30</sup>

Lollapalooza’s self-consciously “diverse” lineup, provided the festival’s talent pool with stages where they could explore and perform their identities, often in ways that emphasized the performers’ thoughtfulness and desire to transcend existing socio-cultural boundaries. A video recording of Jane’s Addiction’s performance at Lollapalooza 1991’s tour-ending stop on August 28, 1991 at King County Fairgrounds in Enumclaw, Washington, revealed a striking

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<sup>27</sup> Howe and Strauss, “The New Generation Gap”

<sup>28</sup> Marley Brant, *Join Together: Forty Years of the Rock Music Festival*, (New York: Backbeat Books, 2008), 199.

<sup>29</sup> Mark Blackwell and Jim Greer, “All Day Sucker,” *Spin*, October 1991.

<sup>30</sup> “MTV Year in Rock 1991 (part 1 of 7),” YouTube video, uploaded by 1BigBucks1, May 26, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4eyGhYxpQYE> (retrieved January 12, 2012). Original air date, December 20, 1991.

example of the ways in which Lollapalooza's performers played with identity.<sup>31</sup> In this clip, shot by Jane's Addiction's crew, vocalist Perry Farrell took the mic and asked the crowd if they'd like to hear a joke. He told the crowd that he had "found out a good use for black people; you can hollow them out when they're dead...make them into wet suits." The crowd booed, and Farrell feigned shock that the crowd did not appreciate his (ironic) racist joke. Rapper Ice T joined Jane's on stage, accompanied by Ernie C., the guitarist in his band Body Count. T glowered at Farrell and stalked the stage, looking menacingly into the camera as Jane's Addiction maintained a lurching heavy metal groove which slowly revealed itself as a reworked version of Sly and the Family Stone's 1969 track "Don't Call Me Nigger, Whitey."<sup>32</sup> Farrell and T exchanged the song's confrontational lyrics until the tempo increased and a rush of discordant guitar propelled the song forward. Farrell cried "I'm proud to be a..." and gave a fascist salute. T responded with a black power salute and the line "Say it loud..."<sup>33</sup> Playing at hyper-masculine identity, Farrell ironically adopted with the trappings of white supremacy. T responded by blending hip-hop aggression with black power racial pride.

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<sup>31</sup> "Jane's Addiction - Don't call me... - Lollapalooza 91," YouTube video, uploaded by sac71837, June 7, 2006, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7A9\\_f1X8XLY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7A9_f1X8XLY) (retrieved January 12, 2012). An on-stage video of Jane's Addiction and Ice-T performing at King County Fairgrounds, Enumclaw, WA on August 28, 1991. The videographer is unknown, but likely was someone affiliated with the Jane's Addiction camp or an entertainment news outlet like MTV.

<sup>32</sup> Sly and the Family Stone, *Stand!* Epic Records, BN 26456, CD, 1969.

<sup>33</sup> This exchange juxtaposed the right-wing/Nazi sentiment of "Ich bin stolz, ein Deutscher zu sein." ("I'm proud to be a German.") with James Brown's 1968 Black Power anthem "Say It Loud — I'm Black and I'm Proud." A brief list of German language "words to avoid" because of their racist, fascist implications can be found at [http://german.about.com/library/blvoc\\_avoidAUSL.htm](http://german.about.com/library/blvoc_avoidAUSL.htm).

Not only did these two singers combine and complicate pre-existing material and established cultural signifiers as a way to comment on race, but both men also employed stock masculine identities to emphasize their points. By invoking Sly Stone, Farrell and T juxtaposed his anti-racist, thoughtful rock masculinity with their own race-baiting, hyper-masculine performances to highlight the irony of their act. Moreover, with his close-cropped hair, black button-down, suspenders, and shiny black latex or leather pants, Farrell's appearance suggested a kind of avant garde or New Wave reworking of stock Teutonic (and Nazi) types, not too unlike the robotic, almost fascist image crafted by the electronic "Krautrock" band Kraftwerk in the 1970s. Farrell's version of proud, racist white manhood hinted at arty European-ness and an affinity for a technocratic future.<sup>34</sup> Ice-T, in contrast, appeared in the stereotypical "uniform" of the urban gangbanger—ball cap, dark glasses, gold chains, and an Oakland Raiders jersey. Where Farrell punctuated his performance with spastic, robotic dancing, T coolly swaggered across the stage.

At the end of the performance, both men broke character to ironically tango together across the stage, suggesting not only that racism required "two to tango," but also hinted that hyper-masculine displays of racial superiority were—as suggested by the semi-mythic origins of the tango—a dance where both partners are men. As the pair ended their performance with embraces and peace signs to the audience, they attempted to dispel drama with visible signs of

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<sup>34</sup> The meaning(s) of this performance can be further complicated given Farrell's Jewish identity as described in Brendan Mullen's *Whores: an Oral Biography of Perry Farrell and Jane's Addiction* (Cambridge, MA : Da Capo Press, 2005 ), 1-3.

affection and camaraderie, suggesting that this racist masculinity they had just knowingly performed should rightly be discarded, giving way to peacefulness and brotherhood. Lollapalooza provided a stage for reconciliation and the creation of new masculine ideals that countered and complicated mainstream depictions of Gen X men as “slackers” and losers” who could not live up to prevailing notions of manhood.

Lollapalooza performances, however, were not the only venues where male alternative rockers reconstructed masculine identities and challenged dominant gendered assumptions. Alternative songwriters also used their lyrics to lay claim to feelings and behaviors often considered off limits to mainstream males, singing about personal trauma while critiquing conventional macho masculinities. For example, the lyrics of Pearl Jam’s “Jeremy” provided a narrative of a troubled boy who retreated into a fantasy of power and control. The lyric related that “King Jeremy/the wicked/ruled his world”—the ambiguous lyric that suggested Jeremy was both himself a wicked ruler and victim of “the wicked”—to compensate for a “daddy” who “didn’t give affection” and a “mommy” more concerned with what she was wearing than her son.<sup>35</sup> In a similar vein, the lyrics to the Smashing Pumpkins’ “Disarm” hinted at the emotional cost of childhood trauma and abuse. Pumpkins’ frontman Billy Corgan sang of being “a little boy/so old in [his] shoes,” made to “disarm” the listener “with a smile,” repeating a cycle of abuse and neglect. After all, “what’s a boy supposed to

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<sup>35</sup> Pearl Jam, “Jeremy,” *Ten*, Epic Records, CD, 1991.

do?”<sup>36</sup> Unlike the character sketch of Pearl Jam’s “Jeremy,” Corgan has claimed that “Disarm” was “close to [him], as a writer” and “one of the most important songs he ever wrote for [himself].”<sup>37</sup> In fact, he claimed that it directly related to his own childhood and prompted members of his own family to contact him about the events suggested in the song’s lyrics.<sup>38</sup>

Alternative rockers not only embraced their “sensitive sides” but they also used their lyrics to mock macho masculinity. For instance, in the song “In Bloom” Nirvana’s Kurt Cobain lashed out at a caricature of the macho rock fan who “likes all our pretty songs” and “likes to shoot his gun” but who “knows not what it means.”<sup>39</sup> To perform alternative rock masculinities, alt-rockers not only had to embrace their sensitive sides, but they also had to keep their conventional manliness in check, often by employing irony and humor.

Alternative rock masculinity was not simply a case of undercutting conventional masculine power fantasies with vulnerability and ironic self-awareness, however. During the 1990s, alternative rockers were working within (and in response to) constructions of masculinity established by earlier alternative and underground rock scenes. As scholar and musician Matthew Bannister has argued, the US hardcore scene, a precursor of alternative rock,

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<sup>36</sup> Smashing Pumpkins, “Disarm,” *Siamese Dream*, Virgin Records, CD, 1993.

<sup>37</sup> “Smashing Pumpkins Webisode #4 – Disarm,” uploaded by PumpkinsMediaMilitia, March 8, 2012, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=XUhmz\\_al2xl](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=XUhmz_al2xl) (retrieved March 10, 2012).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Nirvana, “In Bloom,” *Nevermind*, DGC, CD, 1991.

masculinized the practice of being in a rock band by treating it as work (emphasizing the technical and physical skill needed to set up and tear down for gigs) and celebrating the do-it-yourself ethos as a path to power, autonomy, and authenticity.<sup>40</sup> This hyper-masculine hardcore work ethic, however, also required musicians to eschew commercial softness in order to achieve “purity,” prompting some artists to chafe at the conformity required by hardcore’s “stringent rules” about musical style and masculine identity.<sup>41</sup> For example, Dinosaur Jr.’s Lou Barlow “loved hardcore,” but felt he “wasn’t powerful enough...to really make it” as a member of the hardcore scene.<sup>42</sup> In fact, several of the first bands who influenced and helped establish the American alternative rock scene before Nirvana—the Replacements, Dinosaur Jr., Husker Du—were bands who failed to maintain hardcore purity, opting to embrace a broad range of musical influences and even to pursue commercial success.<sup>43</sup>

Although many bands, critics, and fans were ambivalent about the strict rules associated with hardcore, many alt-rock bands did retain some of that scene’s concerns about purity and authenticity. In fact, musicians and audiences were aware enough of alternative’s preoccupation with authenticity that the issues became somewhat of an inside joke. In 1994, Portland, Oregon singer-songwriter Todd Snider had a minor hit with the jokey “Talkin’ Seattle Grunge

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<sup>40</sup> Matthew Bannister, *White Boys, White Noise: Masculinities and 1980s Indie Guitar Rock*, (Burlington, VT : Ashgate, 2006), 93-98

<sup>41</sup> Matthew Bannister, *White Boys, White Noise*, 95

<sup>42</sup> Quote comes from Azerrad, *Our Band Could Be Your Life*, 350, but brought to my attention by Matthew Bannister, *White Boys, White Noise*, 95

<sup>43</sup> Matthew Bannister, *White Boys, White Noise*, 95

Rock Blues” which skewered the alt-rock boom with the satirical tale of a group who needed a “gimmick” to “fit in on the Seattle scene” and therefore “decided to be the only band that wouldn’t play a note.” “Silence,” Snider smirked, was “music’s original alternative.”<sup>44</sup> The song’s narrator went on to describe his silent band’s rapid rise to stardom and their eventual downfall because they refused to compromise their artistic vision. When the song’s imaginary band was invited to play *MTV Unplugged*, the band remains committed to their “art,” going “right out there and refus[ing] to do acoustical versions of the electrical songs that we had refused to record in the first place.” “Then,” the narrator noted, “we smashed our shit.”<sup>45</sup> Clearly, Snider was poking fun at the supposedly self-serious alternative rockers (“When we play we stare straight down at the floor...How pensive ...how totally alternative”) and the music industry and press’s rush to find and exploit the next big thing.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, this song did hint at a more serious commentary, especially given that Snider borrows a lyric from Nirvana’s “Smells Like Teen Spirit” (“I feel stupid and contagious”) and the song’s opening line (“Hey, hey, my, my/rock 'n' roll will never die”) suggests the first line of Neil Young’s “My My, Hey Hey” which Kurt Cobain famously quoted in his suicide note.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Todd Snider, “Talkin’ Seattle Grunge Rock Blues,” *Songs for the Daily Planet*, MCA, CD, 1994.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid; Neil Young, “My My, Hey Hey (Out of the Blue),” *Rust Never Sleeps*, Reprise, CD, 1979. Cobain’s body was discovered at his Seattle home on April 8, 1994. It is believed Cobain took his own life on April 5th or 6th. The contents of his suicide note were made public not long after his death; a recording of his widow Courtney Love reading excerpts from it, including the Young quote (“it’s better to burn out than to fade away”), was played at a public vigil in Seattle on April 10, 1994. The text of his suicide note can be found online at

Of course, Snider was not the only person who examined how ideas of purity and authenticity shaped alt-rock masculinity. Rock critic Dave Marsh found in Cobain's suicide note a number of warnings about "selling out," which, he reasoned, "really means displaying personal inauthenticity."<sup>48</sup> Marsh found an analog for alt-rock's obsession with authenticity in the 1960s folk movement, which later filtered into rock and eventually the punk movement through rock's "shaky and querulous alliance" with "the student left" in the 1960s.<sup>49</sup> Cobain "and lots of kids like him" inherited a rock tradition which offered no hope of freedom but rather a "dare"—"Can you be pure enough, day after day, year after year, to prove your authenticity, to live up to the music? In short, can you prove you're not a fake and keep on proving it, without respite? And if you can't, can you live with being a poseur, a phony, a sellout?"<sup>50</sup> Cobain's death made him the "voice of a generation" because it was proof of an intense struggle with the irony that "[p]roving you're not a fake doesn't make you feel real."<sup>51</sup> With this reading Marsh mostly reinforced Cobain's self-critique from his suicide note—"The worst crime I can think of would be to rip people off by faking it... Sometimes

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[http://kurtcobainssuicidenote.com/kurt\\_cobains\\_suicide\\_note.html](http://kurtcobainssuicidenote.com/kurt_cobains_suicide_note.html).

<sup>48</sup> Dave Marsh, "Remembering Kurt Cobain," *DaveMarsh.us*, 1995, <http://davemarsh.us/?p=342> (retrieved March 11, 2012,).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.



I feel as if I should have a punch-in time clock before I walk out on stage.”<sup>52</sup>

Cobain died trying to reconcile his self-image with the authenticity requirements of an alt-rock identity.

Although he never performed at Lollapalooza, Kurt Cobain did serve as a kind of patron saint of sensitive male alt-rockers, influencing the performances and general mood at the festival—especially on the 1994 tour following his suicide. One reviewer wrote that the singer’s “ghost” “hung over Lollapalooza...like a threatening storm cloud” that year.<sup>53</sup> In fact, Cobain’s widow Courtney Love appeared at a handful of the dates on the 1994 tour as a special guest of the Smashing Pumpkins. One reviewer noted that her short solo sets were “strong moment[s],” quite possibly “the absolute highlight of the 10-hour festival.”<sup>54</sup> She “stunned” while performing songs that, in the words of the Pumpkins’ Billy Corgan, took the audience to “Planet Sad.”<sup>55</sup> Courtney Love fit in among Lollapalooza’s sensitive rock boys because she functioned as a surrogate for the late Cobain. As the singer’s widow, she functioned as living proof of the singer’s suffering in the face of fame and worldly pressures. If alternative rock identity-making was matter of life and death for the Nirvana

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<sup>52</sup> “This is the actual contents of Kurt Cobain's ‘suicide note’,” Kurt Cobain’s Suicide Note, [http://kurtcobainssuicidenote.com/kurt\\_cobains\\_suicide\\_note.html](http://kurtcobainssuicidenote.com/kurt_cobains_suicide_note.html) (retrieved April 15, 2012).

<sup>53</sup> Tom Moon, “A High Point: Courtney Love Sings,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 02, 1994, [http://articles.philly.com/1994-08-02/entertainment/25841418\\_1\\_lollapalooza-kurt-cobain-nirvana](http://articles.philly.com/1994-08-02/entertainment/25841418_1_lollapalooza-kurt-cobain-nirvana) (retrieved March 2, 2012).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

singer and his peers, then Lollapalooza's was an appropriate site for public mourning and catharsis.

Perhaps influenced by the Cobain "storm cloud," critics and performers alike framed the performances at Lollapalooza '94 as calculated assaults on macho rock conventions and bids for authentic, sensitive alt-identity. For example, at one Lollapalooza '94 date, Billy Joe Armstrong of pop-punkers Green Day spent the band's set, as one reviewer put it, "sending up classic-rock clichés," urging the audience to raise their lighters and "pretend it was Woodstock" as the band "expressed the contradictions of successful alternative rock" by inviting audience members onstage to sing "hackneyed 80s anthems."<sup>56</sup> This critic argued that Green Day's "accessible pop-punk songs that prepared the audience for fun" were sneakily complicated, noting that the band's "lyrics about being bored, unemployed, apathetic, and disillusioned" "embraced the stereotypes that plague[d] the Lollapalooza generation."<sup>57</sup> At this same show, the Smashing Pumpkins' Corgan gave a performance that similarly subverted the conventions that treated male stars as conquering heroes and objects of veneration and lust. Corgan, according to the reviewer, was hardly a conventional rock god. When speaking to the audience, the Smashing Pumpkins singer sounded "insecure about his success" and "misunderstood by his audience." "But when he sang," the critic noted, "he transformed the slippery spirit of the

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<sup>56</sup> Strauss, "Lollapalooza, as Usual, Goes Its Own Way," *New York Times*, August 8, 1994.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

alternative nation into easy-to-grasp slogans.”<sup>58</sup> The writer suggested that these complicated, ambivalent performances were a significant way that bands like Green Day and Smashing Pumpkins both mocked, co-opted, and redefined the stereotypical images of the so-called “Lollapalooza generation.” In doing so, these performers reinforced their positions as self-aware sensitive alt-rockers and provided their audiences with a language and an example that they could use when performing alternativeness themselves.

### **Forging a New “Alternative Nation”**

The “spirit of the alternative nation,” as one critic put it, on display at Lollapalooza garnered almost as much press as the performers on stage.<sup>59</sup> In fact, rock journalist Simon Reynolds credited Lollapalooza with consciously “reinvok[ing] the ‘60s sense of rock as a counterculture, in defiance of today’s perception of rock as a leisure industry.”<sup>60</sup> One *New York Times* reviewer noted that Lollapalooza’s performers “b[roke] down the wall” erected by the swaggering “untouchable stars” of the previous two decades.<sup>61</sup> A writer for *Spin* argued that “[a]ny sense of a Lollapaloozan community must come not from the musicians, but from the kids in the audience.”<sup>62</sup> Given this concept of Lollapalooza as a

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Simon Reynolds, “POP MUSIC; A Woodstock for the Lost Generation” *New York Times*, August 04, 1991, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/08/04/arts/pop-music-a-woodstock-for-the-lost-generation.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm> (retrieved March 10, 2012).

<sup>61</sup> Neil Strauss, “Lollapalooza, as Usual,” *New York Times*, August 8, 1994.

<sup>62</sup> Mark Blackwell and Jim Greer, “All Day Sucker,” *Spin*, October 1991.

communal countercultural movement, critics established the festival's performers less as untouchable heroes and more as approachable, relatable peers. This understanding downplayed conventionally masculine achievements such as dominance and success. At Lollapalooza, the alt-rockers on stage were working through personal issues and forging new alternative identities in the same way as the kids in the crowd.

Moreover, critics noted that Lollapalooza offered concertgoers ample opportunity for performing their own "alternative" identities. The tour was an event where "the audience is also an attraction," where teenage and twenty-something fans gathered to "test their self-image as a community."<sup>63</sup> Although one might expect that an alternative audience creating their identity within the context of a self-consciously diverse travelling rock festival would be anarchic and uncouth, journalists largely depicted the denizens of "alternative nation" as a rather conventional bunch who simply favored edgy fashion. One writer found the crowd to be largely polite and good natured, interested only in a "mildly anarchic" good time where "mosh pits...epitomized a kind of civility, a completely ritualized form of sweaty communalism" without "threat of violence or the effort of transgression."<sup>64</sup> Another journalist concluded that for all the politeness on display—possibly "the result of growing up in suburbia or the general influence of political correctness"—Lollapalooza '93 might as well have taken place "in the

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<sup>63</sup> Pareles, " Lollapalooza, Tattoos and All," *New York Times*, June 21, 1993.

<sup>64</sup> Watrous "At Lollapalooza, Rites of Rock Are Civil," *New York Times*, July 15, 1993.

1950s.”<sup>65</sup> According to many journalists, the first few years of the Lollapalooza tour were less a “travelling bacchanal” than a hip “annual convention” offering a “chance for urban and college-town culture to visit the suburbs” and for alternative youth to “show off a new hair color or navel ring to their semi-alienated, ticket-buying peers.”<sup>66</sup> If any serious rebellion and transgression took place among Lollapalooza’s audiences, those reviewing the concert largely ignored it to instead advance a placid vision of the festival.

### **“Testosterone” and “Estrogen” On Stage and In Print**

Depictions of Lollapalooza that emphasized alternative rock’s connections (however ironic or ambivalent) to classic rock and suggested continuity between alternative teenhood and adolescent experiences in earlier decades helped advance the largely positive coverage of the festival that was the norm during Lollapalooza’s first few years. In addition, this coverage was correct to some extent in portraying Lollapalooza as simply a change in fashion rather than a wholesale structural change to the way that rock and roll operated as both a business and a culture. Although the festival provided an opportunity for bands working in previously underground genres, Lollapalooza did maintain many of rock music’s existing standards. For example, the majority of Lollapalooza performers were young, charismatic bands using electric guitars, bass, and

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Neal Karlen, “Lollapalooza Love Story,” *New York Times*, July 11, 1993, <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/07/11/style/lollapalooza-love-story.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm> (retrieved January 12, 2012). — calls Lollapalooza the “convention of her generation”; Jon Pareles, “POP REVIEW; Lollapalooza Coming of Age as an Institution,” *New York Times*, July 6, 1995, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/07/06/arts/pop-review-lollapalooza-coming-of-age-as-an-institution.html> (retrieved January 10, 2012). — describes Lollapalooza as a “chance for an urban and college-town culture to visit the suburbs.”

drums to back singers performing material they wrote themselves—a rock and roll convention that became the norm for groups in the 1960s. Not only were most of Lollapalooza’s acts conventional rock bands, but the majority of Lollapalooza’s acts were either all-male or fronted by men—another entrenched rock and roll norm dating back to the genre’s earliest years.

In fact, male performers dominated Lollapalooza’s stages, leaving female-fronted bands a distinct minority.<sup>67</sup> Male performers outnumbered female performers each year during the tour’s initial run between 1991 and 1997, with only one or two female-fronted bands (out of eight or nine acts) performing on the main stage each year. Moreover, female-fronted bands were only rarely depicted as the “faces” of Lollapalooza. As Emma Anderson—lead singer for Lush, Lollapalooza 1992’s lone female-fronted act on the main stage—noted, the music at Lollapalooza ’92 was “heavy and male-oriented.”<sup>68</sup> As such, women on the bill were either overlooked or treated as mostly novel presence included in the spirit of self-conscious diversity.<sup>69</sup> For example, when *New York Times* critic John Pareles included a brief description of a set by Lush in his review of a Lollapalooza ’92 tour date, he used feminizing language, noting that Lush’s songs “envelop[ed] the listener” with strummed guitar chords and “airy vocals” to

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<sup>67</sup> The opening segment of “*Spin*’s Exclusive, All-Inclusive Guide to Lollapalooza ’92” from the magazine’s August 1992 issue included a quote singer Emma Anderson of the UK band Lush “disavow[ing]” any pressure related to being “the only women on the tour.” She also concluded that the tour was “about what’s going on musically in America.”

<sup>68</sup> “*Spin*’s Exclusive, All-Inclusive Guide to Lollapalooza ’92,” *Spin*, August 1992.

<sup>69</sup> Female performers appeared more often on Lollapalooza’s second stage, which was typically reserved for up-and-coming or more experimental artists. Nevertheless, male performers still outnumbered female performers in this venue.

produce “atmospheric” sounds that left the audience “unmoved” until the “ethereal folk-rock” gave way to only “semi-ethereal punk-rock.”<sup>70</sup> Women may have been welcome at Lollapalooza, but the festival clearly belonged to its harder rocking (yet thoughtful) male stars.

Female performers did eventually make inroads at Lollapalooza 1995. That year three of the eight main-stage slots were filled by female-fronted groups if Sonic Youth was counted. (Sonic Youth was co-fronted by Thurston Moore and Kim Gordon.) A total of four different female-fronted acts played the main stage in 1995 because the UK band Elastica took over a number of dates for Sinéad O'Connor who left the tour because she was pregnant.<sup>71</sup> In fact, this female-focused lineup prompted *Chicago Sun-Times* critic Jim DeRogatis to conclude that “Lollapalooza '95 was clearly fueled by estrogen” unlike its testosterone-powered predecessors.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, some artists and critics suggested that the presence of more female talent on the main stage may have helped Lollapalooza attract more female talent overall. For instance, Sinéad O'Connor asserted that she joined the Lollapalooza '95 lineup, in part, because Courtney Love’s band Hole was on the bill.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Pareles, “Lollapalooza, a Day Full of Sound and Fury,” *New York Times*, August 11, 1992.

<sup>71</sup> The main stage performers for Lollapalooza '95 included Sonic Youth, Hole, Cypress Hill, Pavement, Sinéad O'Connor, Beck, The Jesus Lizard, The Mighty Mighty Bosstones, with either Elastica or Moby filling in for O'Connor once she left the tour. Additional information about this and other Lollapalooza tour lineups has been compiled at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Lollapalooza\\_lineups\\_by\\_year](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Lollapalooza_lineups_by_year).

<sup>72</sup> Jim DeRogatis, “Women Power Lollapalooza '95; Alternative Rock Show Packs Wallop of Sound,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, July 17, 1995.

<sup>73</sup> MTV News, “[ARCHIVES] LOLLAPALOOZA 1995 OPENING DAY SEGMENT AND MORE...” YouTube video, uploaded by cultureoutofcontrol, September 18, 2008,

In fact, Courtney Love and her band Hole loomed largest of all the female acts at Lollapalooza 1995, partly because Love's performances were not unlike those of emotionally raw male alternarockers like Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder and the Smashing Pumpkin's Billy Corgan. Rather than boring her audience with "ethereal folk-rock" a la Lush, Love, according to one critic, "taunt[ed]" her audience, "ricochet[ing] from pain to rage, playing mourner, victim and avenger."<sup>74</sup> Interestingly, this same critic wrote about Lollapalooza's other female stars in more conventionally feminine terms. For example, she described Sinéad O'Connor's mellow, artful set as "lullabies and lessons" that proved the singer was "no-longer the shaven-headed banshee she was in the 1980s."

Despite a few instances of praise, journalists, on the whole, were critical of Love's confrontational demeanor. A writer for *Entertainment Weekly* noted that not only was the singer "belligerent as ever on stage," but she also "work[ed] overtime behind the scenes to puncture the summer carnival's cozy atmosphere."<sup>75</sup> Love's already "less-than-savory reputation" was further sullied by feuding with her fellow artists and participating in a fist fight with Bikini Kill's Kathleen Hanna (who was backstage as a guest of the band Sonic Youth on the opening date of Lollapalooza '95 in George, WA).<sup>76</sup> Rather than describing

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-gmfnOhjGY> (retrieved February 9, 2012).

<sup>74</sup> Jon Pareles, "Lollapalooza Coming of Age," *New York Times*, July 6, 1995.

<sup>75</sup> Ethan Smith, "Love's Hate Fest: Courtney Love causes trouble at Lollapalooza – a rundown of Hole's lead singer's shenanigans on the road," *Entertainment Weekly*, July 28, 1995, <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,298095,00.html> (retrieved March 3, 2012).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid; This article detailed Love's run-ins with her fellow performers and noted the long-standing animosity between Love and Hanna. In fact, Love's band Hole included a song mocking



Love's confrontational behavior as emblematic of the spirit of the Lollapalooza generation, journalists singled her out as an unpredictable wild card whose "hate fest" "disgusted" her fellow musicians and audience members alike. One article quoted a supposed "devoted fan" of Love's who complained that the singer "made a complete slut of herself" by behaving badly at the festival.<sup>77</sup>

Journalists deemed Love a chaotic presence at Lollapalooza '95—unlike Lollapalooza 1994 when her guest spots during select Smashing Pumpkins performances helped dispel the gloom that had settled over alternative nation following her husband's suicide. She behaved belligerently, confronting her fellow performers and even "wading" into the crowd to "tear" an offensive shirt with Cobain's picture on it from an audience member, becoming "slut" and a bully in the process.<sup>78</sup> In short, the press and fans alike condemned Love for confrontational performances that were not too unlike those of as Lollapalooza's male stars. In particular, critics, fans, and other performers objected when her antagonism was more than simply part of her act. Love's bad behavior off stage marked her as distinctly unladylike.

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the Olympia, WA rock scene on their 1994 album *Live Through This* ("Well, I went to school in Olympia/Where everyone's the same"). Hanna was a fixture on the Olympia scene, having attended Evergreen College and launching the Riot Grrrl movement there.

<sup>77</sup> Smith, "Love's Hate Fest"

<sup>78</sup> Neil Strauss, "POP REVIEW; In Lollapalooza, Stage Is No Barrier" *New York Times*, July 31, 1995, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/07/31/arts/pop-review-in-lollapalooza-stage-is-no-barrier.html> (retrieved February 3, 2012).

### **“Recycled Hormones” and “Rebellion by the Numbers”**

Following the supposedly “estrogen fueled” Lollapalooza '95, Lollapalooza returned to its default mode as a male-dominated affair in subsequent years. Later versions of Lollapalooza, however, mostly showcased bands less inclined to promote the sensitive, thoughtful style of alt-rock masculinity performed by many of the bigger stars on the first four tours. The festival’s 1996 version of incarnation certainly boasted a heavier bill than previous festivals, including multi-platinum heavy metal stars Metallica as the headliner. At first glance, this decision looked like a savvy business move given that Metallica was an incredibly popular band in 1996. No doubt promoters were looking to maximize profitability. Moreover, Perry Farrell had turned over control of Lollapalooza to music industry executives in 1995 and was no longer involved in maintaining the festival’s alternative pedigree.<sup>79</sup> In fact, Farrell had become so tired of the politics and money involved with running alt-rock’s flagship festival that he wished Lollapalooza “would go away,” not for himself but “for everybody” given “the whole way the system works.”<sup>80</sup> Farrell went into competition against Lollapalooza in 1996 with the utopian, rock-meets-electronica ENIT festival that offered concertgoers a free vegetarian buffet and promised a tree-planting

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<sup>79</sup> Neil Strauss, "Rocking His Own Way, After Lollapalooza," *New York Times*, July 10, 1996, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/07/10/arts/rocking-his-own-way-after-lollapalooza.html> (retrieved March 11, 2012).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

ceremony to commemorate each date—in short, he planned a festival that seemed to be the polar opposite of the Metallica-led Lollapalooza '96.<sup>81</sup>

Farrell was not the only one wary of the new business-minded, heavy metal incarnation of Lollapalooza. Local police tried to keep the tour out of their towns fearing that its lineup of "loud guitar bands [like] Metallica" would threaten the security of their communities—a far cry from the mellow suburban atmosphere journalists attributed to the tour in the first half of the '90s.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, journalists reported that the tour was "abandoned by some alternative-rock fans turned off by the show's heavy-metal headliner."<sup>83</sup> Sales for Lollapalooza '96 were much slower than the previous year with Sonic Youth as the headliner. According to the show's organizer Marc Geiger, "a lot of the alternative kids don't want to go because they've been formatted to death by alternative radio and told Metallica is uncool."<sup>84</sup> To Geiger's chagrin, a large contingent of the alternative-identifying community was not willing to accommodate Lollapalooza's reinvention as a hyper-masculine "scary freak show."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> ENIT was actually a spin-off based on Farrell's similarly named series of post-Lollapalooza parties that accompanied the 1995 tour. ENIT's initial year as a standalone festival suffered from cancellations. And logistical problems plagued the handful of dates that did go on. Many tree-plantings never materialized. The free buffet was nowhere to be found at many dates.

<sup>82</sup> Neil Strauss, "THE POP LIFE; Lollapalooza? No Thanks, Towns Say," *New York Times*, June 6, 1996, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/06/06/arts/the-pop-life-lollapalooza-no-thanks-towns-say.html> (retrieved March 11, 2012).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

By 1997, critics declared that Lollapalooza was nothing more than “recycled hormones” and “rebellion by numbers” with acts simply filling their “niches.”<sup>86</sup> These “fading thrills” were also reflected in sagging ticket sales.<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, Lollapalooza’s organizers were committed to showcasing heavy rock bands such as Tool and Korn whom critics dubbed purveyors of “testosterone and frustration,” “self-doubt and fury.”<sup>88</sup> According to some accounts, the surly audience for this final year of Lollapalooza’s first run heckled bands who attempted positivity or musical eclecticism. The crowd rallied around “antisocial band of the moment” Korn who “channeled resentment against male adolescent nemeses—boredom, abusive adults, vicious high school peers, dull authorities and unattainable women.”<sup>89</sup> Unlike the Lollapalooza 1994 act Green Day who also sang of being “bored, unemployed, apathetic, and disillusioned,” critics described Korn’s songs as “whipsaw[ing] between puerility and rage” rather than cleverly “embrac[ing] the stereotypes that plague[d] the Lollapalooza generation.”<sup>90</sup> Although the bands of Lollapalooza 1997 shared many of the same concerns as their earlier counterparts, the tone of their male-oriented guitar

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<sup>86</sup> Jon Pareles, “Lollapalooza’s Recycled Hormones: Rebellion by the Numbers,” *New York Times*, July 14, 1997, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/07/14/arts/music/1997lolla.html?gwh=FA41045A553CAD8D1F849F2B699126F2> (retrieved January 13, 2012). The headline for this article this article includes the tagline “From grunge to power pop, a festival fills expected niches.”

<sup>87</sup> Ibid; Pareles notes that “fewer than 12,500 tickets were sold out of 27,500.”

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid; Neil Strauss, “Lollapalooza, as Usual, Goes Its Own Way,” *New York Times*, August 8, 1994.

music was not quite the same as Jane's Addiction, Pearl Jam, or the Smashing Pumpkins' version of male-oriented guitar music. In short, these new bands failed to foster "just the right wrong attitude"<sup>91</sup>

### **Seeking an Alternative to "Alternative"**

Lollapalooza's waning popularity corresponded with the rise of several new specialized travelling music festivals. The H.O.R.D.E. Tour featured "jam bands" that focused on instrumental improvisation and embraced retro hippie aesthetics. Perry Farrell's own ENIT Festival also harkened back to the hippie era, sporting an eclectic bill featuring rock, jazz, roots, and electronica performers which one journalist reported "seemed to take [the audience] back to the Age of Aquarius."<sup>92</sup> Lilith Fair catered to female performers and fans. Ozzfest provided a venue for specifically for heavy metal performers. Even the heavy bands that defined the final year of the Lollapalooza's initial run got their own festival in 1998, Korn's rock and rap Family Values tour. Seemingly, alternative rock's flagship festival could no longer accommodate the much touted "diversity" of alternative performers and the increasingly niche audiences they attracted.

Once Lollapalooza was dominated by a single hyper-masculine style of alternative rock identity, audiences split, seeking festivals that better served their identities. Many artists embodying the more sensitive, fey, and even smirky

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Jim Farber, "Enit Festival: A Perry Tale Come True Earth-friendly All-nighter Next To The Garden State Parkway Offers Something Truly Different," *New York Daily News*, August 19, 1996, [http://articles.nydailynews.com/1996-08-19/entertainment/18026033\\_1\\_enit-festival-new-orleans-jazz-festival-farrell](http://articles.nydailynews.com/1996-08-19/entertainment/18026033_1_enit-festival-new-orleans-jazz-festival-farrell) (retrieved April 9, 2012).

styles of rock masculinity retreated back to the cities and college towns that had long been home to the insular indie rock underground. The remaining popular “alternative rock” artists were increasingly likely to draw inspiration from unhip sources like heavy metal, gangsta rap, horror films, and classic hard rock than from the punk, experimental, and college rock underground which launched the alternative rock boom. Without a credible underground rock pedigree, Lollapalooza lost its cultural cachet, prompting critics and fans alike to reject the fest in favor of new festivals which offered a more defined group identity.

In its earliest years, Lollapalooza had hoped to “open people’s minds to alternative music” and inspire them to think about “politics, the environment, and the future,”<sup>93</sup> Critics and journalists asserted that this cultural exchange created opportunities for communal alternative identity-making that, in turn, made the festival appealing to both performers. Interestingly, Lollapalooza’s greatest successes coincided with its performers and audiences’ willingness to actively interrogate and reform rock culture’s tradition of hyper-masculinity, positing a more sensitive kind of angry young manhood as the rock ideal. When the festival shifted to focus on more conventionally macho types of heavy rock or loud guitar bands that were less adept at balancing rage and thoughtfulness, the festival faltered and lost its alternative identity. As Lollapalooza developed a reputation as a festival for “white, male, guitar-based hard rock band[s]” with an audience of guys in sports cars the bikini clad girls,” rock critics complained that the tour had

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<sup>93</sup> Neil Strauss, “ROCK REVIEW; Bikinis, A Sign Festival is Aging,” *New York Times*, June 29, 1996, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/06/29/arts/rock-review-bikinis-a-sign-festival-is-aging.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm> (retrieved January 23, 2012).

become staid and unadventurous.<sup>94</sup> Of course, male-fronted guitar bands played a major role in Lollapalooza and alternative rock in general from the very beginning. Nevertheless critics, however, soured on these types of bands once they seemingly embraced conventional, macho constructions of rock masculinity. Lollapalooza was viably alternative as long as it showcased bands self-consciously sensitive bands that knowingly tweaked rock conventions. Once critics and audiences viewed the festival as synonymous with predictable displays of masculine angst to the exclusion of other alternative styles, they lost enthusiasm for the tour. Without the play of different identities in a single space—or at least a believable illusion of diversity—Lollapalooza was, as critic Neil Strauss put it, “conceptually dead,” an unhappy “Woodstock for a generation that doesn’t like coming together.”<sup>95</sup>

The fact that a number of multi-act festivals emerged in the wake of Lollapalooza’s fairly swift rise and fall raises a number questions about the changing nature of alternative culture. How did these new tours make sense of rock masculinity? What types of alternative identities did these tours offer their participants? How did critics respond to the narrower foci of more theme-oriented tours like H.O.R.D.E., Lilith, and OzzFest given their enthusiasm for Lollapalooza’s early anything goes ethos? In short, how did the fractured “Alternative Nation” go about creating an alternative to alternative?

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

### CHAPTER 3

#### BUILDING A MYSTERY: HOW GENDER ISSUES AND IDENTITY POLITICS FRACTURED THE 1990S ALTERNATIVE ROCK FANBASE

As multi-act, rock-oriented festivals went, Woodstock '94 looked a lot more like a super-sized Lollapalooza than the original Woodstock's "three days of peace and music." In fact, pop punkers Green Day were taking a break from the 1994 Lollapalooza when they gave one of the Woodstock '94's most memorable performances, engaging the audience in a good-natured, if bratty, mud fight. During the fracas, Armstrong gleefully declared, "This isn't love and peace. This is fucking anarchy." He then dropped his pants to moon the crowd.<sup>1</sup> The media's focus on alt-hitmakers' provocations ultimately overshadowed any solemn celebration of Woodstock's past. Moreover, Woodstock '94 was so focused on younger performers that veterans of the original 1969 Woodstock who returned for the 1994 festival were largely relegated to supporting slots.<sup>2</sup> Woodstock '94

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<sup>1</sup> "Green day live at Woodstock 94 part 2," Dailymotion video, uploaded by Alex Taylor, October 8, 2006, [http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xa2xt\\_green-day-live-at-woodstock-94-part\\_news](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xa2xt_green-day-live-at-woodstock-94-part_news) (retrieved January 22, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Paul Verna, "'Woodstock '94' Set Emphasizes Modern Rockers," *Billboard*, October 15, 1994, 14. Of the roughly 68 main-stage performances at Woodstock '94, thirteen acts were either Lollapalooza veterans or would eventually perform at Lollapalooza during before that festival went on hiatus after the tour's unsuccessful 1997 outing. Moreover, an additional eight Woodstock '94 main stage acts came from the alternative rock ranks, sharing the airwaves with Lollapalooza bands on alternative rock radio playlists and MTV's alt-rock programming. Moreover, the official Woodstock '94 concert album ignored many Woodstock-era performers. According to *Billboard*, "Notable for their absence from "Woodstock '94" were such prominent members of the Woodstock generation as Santana, the Band, and the Allman Brothers Band. Santana and the Band appeared at the original festival, and the Allmans formed in the aftermath of the summer of '69."



included only six acts from the original 1969 festival on its main stages—and none in coveted end-of-day headlining slots.<sup>3</sup>

To some extent, Woodstock '94 represented high-tide for Lollapalooza-style alternative culture—a moment of unity and seeming mainstream dominance that would soon give way to a period that rock critics would later view as the beginning of the end of alternative rock's popularity. In his year-by-year reexamination of alternative rock for *The Onion's AV Club*, critic Stephen Hyden described 1995 as the year that “the superficial aesthetics of alternative music—down-tuned guitars, downbeat melodies, frowny-faced (but still telegenic) stars—had been fully absorbed by corporate starmakers.”<sup>4</sup> A 1998 *Spin* article claimed that alternative rock and its signature Lollapalooza festival fell out of favor when Lollapalooza's "ideal of bringing together different sub-cultural tribes" was torn apart by the inevitable "schisms" that undermine “white-male-dominated countercultures.”<sup>5</sup> Just as “the hippies split over civil rights and feminism, Aquarian solipsism, and heavy metal,” *Spin* claimed that the hippies' alternative rock heirs could not hold their own diverse factions together.<sup>6</sup> Why, though, were “white-male-dominated countercultures” doomed to fail? Was the

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<sup>3</sup> Even a generous reckoning of original Woodstock performers at the 1994 festival comes up short in comparison to the 1990s alt-rockers. In addition to the six original 1969 acts, three more individual Woodstock alumni, Jefferson Airplane's Jorma Kaukonen and Jack Casady and the Grateful Dead's Bob Weir of the Grateful, participated in the Band's performance. Bob Dylan was biggest 1960s icon to appear at Woodstock '94. He did not participate in the 1969 festival.

<sup>4</sup> Steven Hyden, "Whatever Happened to Alternative Nation Part 6: 1995: Live, Bush, and Alanis Morissette take the pop path," *Avclub.com*, December 14, 2010, <http://www.avclub.com/articles/part-6-1995-live-bush-and-alanis-morissette-take-t,49004/> (retrieved February 8, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

alternative audience divided cleanly along gender lines? What styles of masculinity replaced the brash, confessional angst of Lollapalooza's guitar slinging angry young men? To what extent did journalists help create the idea that Lollapalooza and alternative rock in general was in decline?

I assert that bands, journalists, and audiences flocked to new rock festivals like H.O.R.D.E., Lilith Fair, and Ozzfest because these new festivals catered to niche interests more effectively than Lollapalooza's diverse, big-tent approach—partly because they offered audiences identities other than alt-rock's adolescent *sturm und drang*. Specifically, I cite reviews, articles, and interviews which show that these new festivals provided a space for alternative rock identity-making outside of the dominant alternative mode of angry-but-sensitive boyishness that had ruled Lollapalooza's early years and then gave way to a macho style of hyper-aggressive alt-rock.

In this chapter I will examine three different touring festivals—the H.O.R.D.E. Tour, Lilith Fair, and OzzFest—that offered an alternative to the emotionally-raw angry young men of the so-called Alternative Nation. I found that although many of the styles on display at niche alternative rock festivals were indebted to Lollapalooza-style alternative rock, each of these events developed an aesthetic and an identity that differed from the alternative consensus. H.O.R.D.E. promoted relaxed, self-possessed hippie masculinity. Lilith Fair championed a hushed, welcoming folk pop femininity. And the metal-focused Ozzfest showcased number of young bands which fused alternative-rock's angsty preoccupations with heavy metal aggression and theatricality.

## **The H.O.R.D.E. Tour and Classic Rock Masculinity**

In 1992, John Popper, the singer and harmonica-player for Blues Traveler, wanted nothing more than to create a Lollapalooza-style opportunity for his own band Blues Traveler and for his friends' similarly minded East Coast jam bands. His concert creation, H.O.R.D.E. (Horizons of Rock Developing Everywhere) achieved modest success before becoming a major summer concert draw, attracting sell-out crowds and garnering (often rapturous) critical attention. What accounted for the festival's mid-1990s success? Journalists and H.O.R.D.E. performers alike reasoned that concert-goers fed up with Lollapalooza's increasingly macho atmosphere and an alternative rock scene that had ceased to provide novelty or authenticity, had found in H.O.R.D.E. an alternative venue that matched their tastes, sensibilities, and values.

In fact, the success of H.O.R.D.E.'s relaxed alternative rock can best be understood within the context of an ongoing debate about masculinity and music found in rock critics' narratives. Convinced that only virile young men in urban bohemia could express unvarnished emotion with artistic daring, journalists griped about the wave of alternative rockers who had followed Nirvana's success. Critics suspected the new bands of cashing in and co-opting the underground. They also criticized Lollapalooza for taming music to suit a new audience of suburban teens, girls/ women, and uncool adults from the straight world. And when Lollapalooza's promoters switched to harder and louder bands in an effort to recapture rock's virility, the festival failed to appease the press or appeal to established alternative rock audiences. H.O.R.D.E., being largely

disconnected from the Lollapalooza-style alternative rock scene, provided critics and audiences with the possibility of a new more relaxed, more adult alternative rock identity and a different conception of rock masculinity.

Unlike Lollapalooza where passion and personality often trumped musical “chops,” musicianship played a key role in identity making at H.O.R.D.E. In fact, the festival’s founder John Popper insisted that the only overriding concept for his festival was “if you play good live, then we’d like to have you.”<sup>7</sup> Journalists also advanced this narrative that H.O.R.D.E. bands demonstrated exceptional musical prowess—what one writer called the tour’s “loose-limbed extended instrumental aesthetic.”<sup>8</sup> Critics praised H.O.R.D.E.’s diverse lineups where “inventive” harmonica soloists could share the stage with “guitar jam masters.”<sup>9</sup> According to one journalist, the bands of H.O.R.D.E. shared a bill where “all value[d] folk music and the blues” and most were capable of “extended jamming” employing “unusual instrumentation.”<sup>10</sup> In short, these musicians—unlike the alternarockers of Lollapalooza—demonstrated a conventionally masculine technical mastery over their instruments while working in styles assumed to be honest and

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<sup>7</sup> MTV News, “Popper Talks Pumpkins and The H.O.R.D.E. Connection,” *Mtv.com*, April 23, 1998, <http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1426253/popper-talks-pumpkins-horde-connection.jhtml> (retrieved November 5, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Dan Deluca, “Allman Bros. Lead Horde Tour to The Mann,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 26, 1995, [http://articles.philly.com/1994-08-26/entertainment/25841978\\_1\\_allman-brothers-band-elizabeth-reed](http://articles.philly.com/1994-08-26/entertainment/25841978_1_allman-brothers-band-elizabeth-reed) (retrieved November 5, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> “[I]nventive” comes from Roger Catlin, “H.o.r.d.e. Tour Gives Wrong Band Top Billing,” *Hartford Courant*, August 17, 1995, [http://articles.courant.com/1995-08-17/features/9508170110\\_1\\_chan-kinchla-black-crowes-samurai-blues-traveler](http://articles.courant.com/1995-08-17/features/9508170110_1_chan-kinchla-black-crowes-samurai-blues-traveler) (retrieved November 20, 2012). “guitar jam masters” comes from Deluca, “Allman Bros. Lead Horde Tour to The Mann,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 26, 1995.

<sup>10</sup> Catlin, “H.o.r.d.e. Tour Gives Wrong Band Top Billing,” *Hartford Courant*, August 17, 1995.

unpretentious. In general, the bands at H.O.R.D.E. played a more conventional type of rock music rooted in blues, boogie, and other styles cribbed from so-called classic rock. Although Lollapalooza's alternative rockers like Jane's Addiction, Nine Inch Nails, Green Day, and the Smashing Pumpkins also borrowed from the classic rock canon, these bands blended classicist sounds with more traditionally underground sub-genres such as glam, punk, and goth in order to achieve novel styles understood as either expressions of personal vision or attempts to subvert rock culture's status quo—if not queering it outright like glam rock, these groups certainly called into question the rock establishment's values and standards as in much the same way as punk did. In contrast, the bands on the H.O.R.D.E. bills largely played it straight when it came to rock and roots music, using it as canvas for musical exploration rather than a way to explore youth and rock culture identity.

John Popper's emphasis on in-concert demonstrations of instrumental ability at H.O.R.D.E. represented a—likely intentional—challenge to the alternative worldview. Scholar Matthew Bannister has argued that, within rock culture, demonstrations of instrumental mastery have long served as a way for—largely male—musicians to compete with each other for dominance. He also argued that the roots of alternative rock's amateur aesthetic lie in subverting the pompous mastery-oriented rock masculinity found in popular 1970s classic rock. In this light, the H.O.R.D.E. bands' overt displays of instrumental prowess not only marked them as “the real deal” as musicians in the classic rock tradition, but it also marked them as real men who rejected the alternative rock ethos that

valued subversion instead of mastery.<sup>11</sup> In fact, when one journalist weighed John Popper's "virtuoso" harmonica playing against the less complicated harmonica stylings of his Black Crowes tourmate Chris Robinson, the latter "sounded infantile" in comparison.<sup>12</sup> An inability to compete instrumentally essentially unmanned the less-skilled Robinson. Although critics sometimes mockingly dubbed the H.O.R.D.E. bands "noodlers" who could be ranked according to their "wank factor," critics rarely questioned the bands' musical prowess or the authenticity it conferred.<sup>13</sup>

The emphasis on instrumental skill and showy, free-form jams at H.O.R.D.E. often meant that bands focused less on lyrical content and hit songs that served as both seemingly autobiographical expressions of personality and mission statements for youth culture at large. As such, the jam bands of H.O.R.D.E. embodied a more emotionally reserved—and perhaps conventionally masculine or manly—style than that attributed to their alternative rock counterparts. In the early- and mid-1990s journalists characterized alternative rock performers like Kurt Cobain (Nirvana) and Eddie Vedder (Pearl Jam) as being "at the forefront of a new generation of American singer-songwriters"

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<sup>11</sup> Jason Cohen and Michael Krugman, "Hippies al Dente," *Spin*, August 1995, 24.

<sup>12</sup> Tom Moon, "Roots-rock H.o.r.d.e. Festival Finds Substance Amid Celebration," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 26, 1995, [http://articles.philly.com/1995-08-26/entertainment/25709978\\_1\\_horde-blues-traveler-mark-sandman/2](http://articles.philly.com/1995-08-26/entertainment/25709978_1_horde-blues-traveler-mark-sandman/2) (retrieved November 5, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Cohen and Krugman, "Hippies al Dente," *Spin*, August 1995.

whose work “reflect[ed] the alienation and anger of a generation of young people... who feel they have been shortchanged by the American Dream.”<sup>14</sup>

Critics, however, did not parse the lyrics of H.O.R.D.E. bands for similar insights into the psyche of America’s young men. For example, Jim DeRogatis, in his *Rolling Stone* review of two albums by H.O.R.D.E. veterans the Spin Doctors and the Dave Matthews Band, discussed the bands’ “free-flowing improvisation” and “lazy, elastic groove[s]” and not the content of their songs. When he does briefly mention the albums’ lyrics, he dismisses them as “typically banal.” In fact, he claims that the Spin Doctors’ song “She Used to be Mine” sounded like something “lifted from the men’s room at Wetlands, New York’s hippie rock club.”<sup>15</sup> Lines from the song such as “There she goes, on down the beach/Just like the moon, she’s out of reach” and “She used to be mine/’Til I saw her with another man” certainly fit into the longstanding tradition of relationship songs wherein a male singer explained how his woman did him wrong. DeRogatis, like many critics, dismissed these sentiments as too conventional to

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Hilburn. “He Didn’t Ask for All This” *Los Angeles Times*, May 1, 1994, [http://articles.latimes.com/1994-05-01/entertainment/ca-52475\\_1\\_pearl-jam-concert](http://articles.latimes.com/1994-05-01/entertainment/ca-52475_1_pearl-jam-concert) (retrieved December 15, 2012). Hilburn made a point to emphasize the ways in which Cobain and Vedder differed—their songs, their bands essentially part of different takes on the same disillusioned worldview. Moreover, he and the editorial staff at the *LA Times* played up Vedder’s reluctance to accept his role as a conquering rock hero with both the article’s title and the selection of quotes from Vedder who “says softly” that “People think you are this grand person who has all their shit together because you are able to put your feelings into some songs” when in reality Vedder himself felt that he was merely “treading water” and was in no position to save anyone who was “drowning.”

<sup>15</sup> Jim DeRogatis, “Spin Doctors, You’ve Got to Believe in Something/Dave Matthews Band, Crash,” *Rolling Stone*, February 2, 1998, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/crash-19980202> (retrieved January 10, 2013).

warrant analysis. In doing so he contributed to a critical consensus that jam bands' grooves, not their words, were the source of their appeal.

Partly, this review was simply an example of a broader discourse within rock criticism regarding what makes a band "relevant" or "important." Rock critics (and their audiences) have long debated whether or not rock criticism has paid undue attention to artists' lyrics when assessing artistic and social-cultural merit.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, DeRogatis is partly adding heft to his less-than-positive review of these albums by writing off the lyrics as predictable and banal. Nevertheless, this analysis also hinted that these bands possessed such skill that they did not need to rely on any youth culture cult of personality or hip social messages to win over their audience. In that way they were free of gimmicks and pretense; these bands were simply authentic, mature musicians practicing their craft. In gendered terms, these were self-reliant, self-possessed men rather than the victimized and alienated adolescent-seeming singer-songwriters fronting Lollapalooza-style alternative rock acts.

This distinction between mature, capable, and content manhood and angry, angsty, and uncontained boyishness represented the core difference between the H.O.R.D.E. bands' aesthetics and that of the Lollapalooza acts. Many alternative rock hitmakers and top-tier Lollapalooza touring acts at times presented themselves as survivors/victims of emotional trauma caused by

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<sup>16</sup> For example, this profile referenced below praises critic *Baltimore Sun* critic J.D. Constantine for being the rare critic "who writes about the music" unlike the "snobby, trying-to-impress-other-critics writers at *The Village Voice* and *Spin*." Steven Ward, "The not-so-hip J.D. Considine: A music critic who writes about music," *Rockcritics.com*, May 2000, <http://rockcritics.com/2013/01/31/from-the-archives-j-d-considine/> (retrieved January 10, 2012).



familial failings, religious emptiness, societal shortcomings, and institutional indifference. A brief survey of these band's lyrics—from top-selling albums and heavy rotation hit singles—confirmed this gloomy, battered worldview. In “Terrible Lie” Nine Inch Nails Trent Reznor sang to God “I'm all alone in a world you must despise/Hey God, I believed that promises, your promises and lies.” Pearl Jam's “Jeremy” told the story of bullied boy who lashed out violently because “Daddy didn't give affection” and “mommy didn't care.” The Smashing Pumpkins' singer Billy Corgan has explained that the band's breakthrough hit “Today” was actually about his own struggle with suicidal feelings. The song's refrain of “Today is the greatest day I have ever known” was actually an ironic line about his (unrealized) decision to kill himself because, as the song's verses explain, he “wanted more/than life could ever grant” and was “Bored by the chore/Of saving face. For the bands of Lollapalooza, rock music was often serious, cathartic business.

Conversely, H.O.R.D.E.'s acts actively cultivated images as carefree party bands—and critics largely reinforced this notion that the jam bands were mainly interested in a good time. In particular, journalists branded H.O.R.D.E. as a “hippie” festival, a spiritual heir to the legendary 1969 Woodstock gathering, noting the tour's '60s spirit and suggesting that H.O.R.D.E. offered “a return to the days of Woodstock and the Monterey Pop Festival,” a “traveling circus of off-the-wall music and anything tie-dyed.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Eric Feber, “Back to Woodstock? No, Just the H.O.R.D.E.,” *The Virginian-Pilot*, August 31, 1996.

The good vibes at H.O.R.D.E. offered concertgoers and bands a place to perform a redefined authentic identity and experience excellently-performed, supposedly “honest” music “for the soul” while having a good time divorced from the “self-conscious” expectations of alternative rock which left bands “like deer frozen in the headlights,” looking “like they have the weight of the world on their shoulders.”<sup>18</sup> From this point of view, H.O.R.D.E. offered uncomplicated, upbeat fun that embraced established styles of countercultural consciousness but that wasn’t problematized by alternative rock’s dour, ironic (and politically correct) worldview.<sup>19</sup> According to tour mastermind Popper, Lollapalooza attendees went to that festival “expecting something you’ve seen before.” H.O.R.D.E.’s bands, conversely, played both “music for your soul” and “[m]usic to get drunk and scam on the opposite sex with.”<sup>20</sup> H.O.R.D.E., per Popper, didn’t offer (and fail to achieve) artistic novelty so much as experience—spiritual and carnal.

If Lollapalooza was a place to work through emotional pain in the mosh pit while hoping for cutting edge sounds, H.O.R.D.E offered concertgoers the opportunity for calmer pleasures like recreational inebriation and sexual conquest with a groovy, well-executed soundtrack. To some extent, both festivals largely

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<sup>18</sup> Bob Guccione, Jr. “Rage Against the Machine: Alternative Godfather Perry Farrell Still Can’t Get No Satisfaction,” *Spin*, April 1996, 84.

<sup>19</sup> H.O.R.D.E.’s impresario John Popper felt so strongly about the problem of supposed political correctness in pop music that he penned the song “Hook” (from Blues Traveler’s 1994 release *Four*) to air his grievances. He griped that “this MTV is not for free/It’s so PC it’s killing me” while lauding the power of a musical “hook” to transcend the failing of lyrics to fully convey his emotions.

<sup>20</sup> Marcus Errico, “Happy H.O.R.D.E. Goes Home,” *E! Online*, August 31st, 1996, reposted at *Bluestraveler.net*, [http://www.bluestraveler.net/info/media/media\\_display.php?pub\\_id=51](http://www.bluestraveler.net/info/media/media_display.php?pub_id=51) (retrieved November 8, 2012).

assumed and catered to a primarily male audience with each festival's conception of masculinity defining the different trills and titillations on offer—moshing, freaks, and ear-splitting alternative rock at Lollapalooza, immersive jams, mild psychedelia, and hippie fantasy at H.O.R.D.E. Lollapalooza offered angry young men a space for raging against a complicated and often bleak present; at H.O.R.D.E., with its promised revival of the imagined hippie past, things weren't nearly so hard. Instead, denizens of this "Woodstock without the mess" could remain calm and confident as they tuned in, switched off and chilled out.<sup>21</sup>

This "post-hippie" atmosphere, according to many journalists, not only offered fans "classic rock's answer to Lollapalooza" but it also provided a venue for transforming (reforming?) their surly rock personas.<sup>22</sup> For example, *Chicago Tribune* rock critic Greg Kot noted that the good vibes of H.O.R.D.E. helped Black Crowes lead singer Chris Robinson to shed his "pouty, confrontational presence" and become "the picture of hippie benevolence: bearded, barefoot and emaciated, with patches on his flared jeans and a twirl in his dance steps."<sup>23</sup> Robinson wasn't the only rocker who transitioned from adolescent mope to

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<sup>21</sup> Gina Arnold, "It's Woodstock Without the Mess/H.O.R.D.E. tour sweeps toward Shoreline," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 1, 1995, <http://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/It-s-Woodstock-Without-the-Mess-H-O-R-D-E-tour-3025707.php> (retrieved November 8, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Chauncey Hollingsworth. "Mongrel H.o.r.d.e.: Fest Cross-breeds Classic Rock With Reggae, Twang," *Chicago Tribune*, August 18, 1995, [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1995-08-18/entertainment/9508180066\\_1\\_black-crowes-blues-traveler-melody-makers](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1995-08-18/entertainment/9508180066_1_black-crowes-blues-traveler-melody-makers) (retrieved November 22, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Greg Kot, "H.o.r.d.e. Bands Indulge In Spontaneity Of Jams," *Chicago Tribune*, August 21, 1995, [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1995-08-21/news/9508210163\\_1\\_horde-dave-matthews-band-rock-song](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1995-08-21/news/9508210163_1_horde-dave-matthews-band-rock-song) (retrieved November 22, 2012).

mature artist on stage at H.O.R.D.E. Reporting on alternative rock stars (and Lollapalooza veterans) the Smashing Pumpkins joining the 1998 H.O.R.D.E. tour, MTV News noted that the band's decision to play H.O.R.D.E. was “viewed as an acknowledgment of the stylistic departure of their new album, ‘Adore,’ from past records.”<sup>24</sup> Pumpkins lead singer Billy Corgan had said that he viewed *Adore* as an opportunity “to go as far as far away from the grandiose” aspects of their earlier bombastic alt-rock sound,” and a move to H.O.R.D.E. represented a way to rebrand his band.<sup>25</sup> Whereas the band’s earlier multi-platinum alt-rock hits *Siamese Dream* (1993) and *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness* (1995) were characterized by massive sheets of distorted guitar, thundering drums, and Corgan’s angst-filled lyrics, *Adore* was a largely hushed affair that featured acoustic textures, atmospheric synthesizers, and burbling drum machines. Corgan—employing a smoother, softer vocal style—sang lyrics that addressed issues of mortality, regret, and loss. Clearly, the band was distancing itself from its early identity as brash, sensitive-and-angry alt-rockers in favor of a more mature image—and joining H.O.R.D.E. helped them cultivate a new image. Clearly, journalists and performers alike both viewed H.O.R.D.E. as a venue where musicians could remake their identities.

Despite H.O.R.D.E.’s hippy-era aesthetic and emphasis on mature musicianship for its own sake, John Popper did not necessarily intend the festival

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<sup>24</sup> MTV News, “Popper Talks Pumpkins and The H.O.R.D.E. Connection,” April 23, 1998.

<sup>25</sup> “Adore: Documentary (Part 1),” YouTube video, uploaded by xyumachinexyumachine, December 16, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDwXwTbyuNg> (retrieved September 26, 2012).

to be an entirely relaxed enterprise. Of course, the name H.O.R.D.E. itself brings to mind conquering barbarian throngs—an association not lost on journalists who frequently employed puns like “Mongrel H.O.R.D.E.” when titling articles and crafting headlines.<sup>26</sup> In fact, in an article commemorating the tour’s twentieth anniversary, Popper explained how the tour was inspired by Attila the Hun.<sup>27</sup> He imagined each band’s fans as individual “armies” merging into a single “hippie gang” and descending upon “a town in the Midwest” and devouring “[a]ll the food in the area.”<sup>28</sup> This martial, consumption-oriented vision of a hippy rock tour was vastly different than Perry Ferrell’s all-inclusive initial vision of Lollapalooza as a “come as you are” venue for cultural and social exchange.

Journalists, band mates, and fellow musicians all confirmed Popper’s competitive, alpha-male vision. Blues Traveler’s guitarist Chan Kinchla credits Popper’s “obsessive” nature with providing the “fire” the band needed to succeed.<sup>29</sup> Chris Barron, a childhood friend of Popper’s and the lead singer of H.O.R.D.E. band The Spin Doctors, described him as “a great emperor” who acted as a “the dean of [their] school of music.”<sup>30</sup> Popper’s peers recalled the

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<sup>26</sup> Hollingsworth. “Mongrel H.o.r.d.e.,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 18, 1995.

<sup>27</sup> “H.O.R.D.E. Stories: John Popper’s Name Suggestion and H.O.R.D.E. 2013,” *Relix.com*, May 8, 2012, <http://www.relix.com/features/2012/05/08/h-o-r-d-e-stories-john-popper-s-name-suggestion-and-h-o-r-d-e-2013> (retrieved November 8, 2012).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Julian Rubinstein, “First a Band. Then a Summer Festival. Next, the World?” *New York Times*, August 11, 1996, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/08/11/arts/first-a-band-then-a-summer-festival-next-the-world.html> (retrieved November 5, 2012).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* Rubinstein also saw Popper’s struggle with his weight as a sign of his willfulness—“But his inability to stick to a diet reflects his willful nature: he wants it all.”

singer's drive evident in his efforts to name his festival. Page McConnell of H.O.R.D.E. veterans Phish recalled that Popper took charge of the festival from its very conception, organizing planning sessions and insisting on the H.O.R.D.E. name above any of the jokey suggestions made by his fellow musicians. Popper was "driving the boat" in terms of planning H.O.R.D.E while McConnell and his Phish bandmates didn't want "to take it so seriously as Horizons of Rock Developing Everywhere" but they "weren't up for a fight" and were "happy to be part of it and...enjoyed hanging with all those guys" in the other bands.<sup>31</sup> In short, McConnell and many of the other H.O.R.D.E. performers were more comfortable with a non-confrontational, relaxed attitude more in keeping with H.O.R.D.E.'s laidback hippie image.

Nevertheless, Popper, as the tour's de facto leader, served as the hype man and savvy entrepreneur who directed H.O.R.D.E.'s founding and growth. And in doing so, he served as an alternative to alternative rock role models such as Perry Farrell. Farrell often emphasized that his Lollapalooza tour was more than simply a way for his band Jane's Addiction to play bigger venues. He promoted his tour as a site of cultural exchange and discovery, and publically lamented changes which placed emphasis on profits rather than musical exploration. Popper, conversely, was unapologetic about his conquering vision. Popper demonstrated that an alternative festival could succeed by employing more conventional business practices. Running a successful alternative rock festival didn't require Lollapalooza-style commitment to youthful idealism and

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<sup>31</sup> "H.O.R.D.E. Stories," *Relix.com*, May 8, 2012.

sensitive multiculturalism. You could be an unapologetic capitalist—and even a tie-dyed Mongol invader—while still enjoying left-of-the-dial bands.

### **Lilith Fair and the Rise of Folk Pop Femininity**

Like H.O.R.D.E., Sarah McLachlan's Lilith Fair—named for Adam's rebellious first wife in medieval Jewish legend—also offered concertgoers an alternative to Lollapalooza-style masculinity. Like H.O.R.D.E. founder John Popper, McLachlan started Lilith partly as a means to assert greater control over her touring schedule while creating opportunities for her friends and other likeminded musicians. McLachlan did not couch her decision to create a new tour in tongue-in-cheek barbarian metaphors, however. Instead, she posited Lilith as a necessary alternative to dominant music industry practices that privileged male performers and male audiences while questioning the audiences' willingness to sit through two female performers on the same concert bill.<sup>32</sup> McLachlan started Lilith following a successful co-headlining tour with Paula Cole in 1996 that disproved the argument that audiences would shun any tours focused on female performers. In fact, at least one of these McLachlan/Cole dates served as a test run for Lilith, featuring a number of the acts that would eventually grace the stages at Lilith in 1997.

Lilith was not simply McLachlan's attempt to succeed in a hostile music business climate. She also saw Lilith as an opportunity to directly challenge the macho rock culture embodied by Lollapalooza—especially those later

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<sup>32</sup> Michelle Goldberg, "The Lilith Fair Quiet Grrrls," *Salon.com*, July 11, 1997, <http://www.salon.com/july97/entertainment/lilith970711.html> (retrieved February 22, 2012).

incarnations of Lollapalooza that embraced a greater number of heavy metal and hard rock performers. Clearly, women were underrepresented at Lollapalooza and at other alt-rock festivals. Perhaps, she reasoned, women weren't playing Lollapalooza because they were uncomfortable sharing the stage with hard rockers. McLachlan herself quipped that if "[she] saw Metallica on a bill, [she'd] say no" to joining.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, she wondered if a kind of "reverse sexism" within alternative rock culture had also marginalized many "introspective singer-songwriter men."<sup>34</sup> In short, McLachlan argued that by stacking the schedule with hyper-masculine hard rockers, Lollapalooza's promoters effectively scared off artists working in other styles, helping to ensure Lollapalooza's masculinized heavy metal homogeneity.

Perhaps contrary to McLachlan's experience with sexist attitudes within the music industry, many rock critics and other journalists lauded Lilith Fair upon its arrival, hailing it as a welcome alternative to the aggression on display at male-dominated festivals. In particular, mainstream news outlets and music-focused publications alike touted Lilith's commercial and artistic success. One *New York Times* journalist claimed that McLachlan's merging "two 1990's phenomena: the surging commercial fortunes of female songwriters and the summer package tour as reinvented by the Lollapalooza Festival" into what he called a "niche-marketer's delight" was such a good idea it was "stunningly

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.



obvious” and practically “inevitable.”<sup>35</sup> *Time*’s lengthy feature on Lilith praised the festival as a much needed respite from Lollapalooza and its ilk. Lilith’s female focused gathering reinvented the “outdoor alternative-rock show” with its “teeming, churning mosh pits” populated by “muscular bare-chested frat boys” with “clomping Reeboked feet.”<sup>36</sup> They hailed the festival’s inaugural dates in 1997 as a the “fresh and invigorating” debut of a “new sound” that parted the summer concert season’s “usual sea of masculinity” made up of “strutting macho megatours, draining weekend-long rock festivals, [and] sweaty dance clubs throbbing with testosterone-filled techno.”<sup>37</sup>

Lilith’s crowds were “more considerate, less boisterous,” with performers “marvel[ing] at how attentive listeners were.”<sup>38</sup> Photos and video footage of both Lollapalooza and Lilith did confirm the former’s roiling mosh pits and the latter’s rapt, seated audiences. For example, crowd shots included in a 1997 MTV News report on the supposedly “back to its roots” 1997 version of Lollapalooza showed several shots of an active, enthusiastic audience milling about, loudly singing the

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<sup>35</sup> Jon Pareles, “Cheers for Self-Determination (and Dumping Bad Partners) at All-Female Festival,” *New York Times*, July 7, 1997, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/07/07/arts/cheers-for-self-determination-and-dumping-bad-partners-at-all-female-festival.html> (retrieved February 22, 2012).

<sup>36</sup> Christopher John Farley, David E. Thigpen, et al., “Galapalooza! Lilith Fair,” *Time*, July 21, 1997, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,986728,00.html> (retrieved October 18, 2012).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Pareles, “Cheers for Self-Determination,” *New York Times*, July 7, 1997; Jon Pareles, “POP REVIEW; With Love And Roses, Sisters All,” *New York Times*, July 18, 1998, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/07/18/arts/pop-review-with-love-and-roses-sisters-all.html> (retrieved October 18, 2012).

tour's praises, and even tearing up seats during a set by the band Korn.<sup>39</sup>

Concert footage of a performance by singer-songwriter Shawn Colvin during the 1997 Lilith Fair documented a much different atmosphere at that festival.

Audience members sat calmly in folding chairs and, for the most part, watched the performance attentively.<sup>40</sup> Of course, comparisons between the experiences at masculine-coded rock festivals versus feminine-coded ones relied heavily on conventional, essentialist ideas about active masculinity and demure femininity.

Additionally, journalists focused on the feminine qualities to be found in the folk pop style that dominated the Lilith stages. Rock critics (a mostly male bunch) portrayed the performances at Lilith Fair as feminism reinvented as "sisterly advice and group therapy" where the crowd not only cheered for hit songs "but also for lines about self-determination and about dumping bad partners."<sup>41</sup> The *New York Times*'s Ann Powers asserted that the performers at Lilith primarily performed a type of "[s]ympathy" that allowed "fans to apply its messages about love and understanding to their own lives."<sup>42</sup> She reasoned that this particularly feminine musical style differed from more conventional (masculine?) rock music by "[e]mphasizing the voice and the gentle give-and-

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<sup>39</sup> MTV News, "Korn: Lollapalooza News Clips 1997," YouTube video, uploaded by Oildale79, February 23, 2011, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KY\\_v1U5XFRY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KY_v1U5XFRY) (retrieved January 10, 2013).

<sup>40</sup> "Shawn Colvin = Wichita Skyline," YouTube video, uploaded by newcolvinfan, April 7, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEoPtS8ISnl> (retrieved January 10, 2013).

<sup>41</sup> Pareles, "POP REVIEW; With Love And Roses," *New York Times*, July 18, 1998; Pareles, "Cheers for Self-Determination," *New York Times*, July 7, 1997.

<sup>42</sup> Ann Powers, "POP REVIEW; Extolling Femininity, Gently," *New York Times*, June 22, 1998, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/06/22/arts/pop-review-extolling-femininity-gently.html> (retrieved October 18, 2012).

take of ensemble playing” while eschewing the “instrumental virtuosity” and “catharsis” often found in rock—for instance the extended jams of H.O.R.D.E. performers or the full-volume pathos on display at Lollapalooza.<sup>43</sup> Another article went as far as to suggest that Lilith and the folk pop sound favored by most of the tour’s performers was part of a cleansing, redemptive movement in popular music, offering fans a “life preserver” after years of alternative rock’s “stoking” the audience’s “cynicism” and “anger.”<sup>44</sup> Citing the Lilith performers’ “healing music, devoid of irony and flush with optimism,” this piece declared, “macho is out; empathy is in.”<sup>45</sup> Employing gendered language, these journalists all attempted to establish Lilith as fundamentally different from male-dominated alternative rock festivals—partly because of the lower volume and more sedate musical styles and partly because the festival’s focus was on feminine-coded values such as empathy and understanding.

Not all journalists embraced the redemptive promise Lilith Fair’s “coffeehouse pop” with all of its “comforting warmth” and “sugary froth.”<sup>46</sup> For example, one *Spin* critic’s review of a July 5, 1997 Lilith Fair date plainly noted that the festival “sends out essentialist messages about sexual identity” that relegated performers to a metaphorical “kitchen” of “nurturing” music and “passive” performances that, she felt, undermined the gains made by performers

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Farley, “Galapalooza!” *Time*, July 21, 1997.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

like Aretha Franklin, Janis Joplin, and Joan Jett. The festival's focus on female singer-songwriters, according to the reviewer, seemed to suggest that women could not compete with men when it came to harder rocking styles and were best served by sticking to appropriately feminine styles. This criticism, however, was not particularly popular with *Spin's* readers who returned fire in the magazine's letters to the editor section.<sup>47</sup> One female reader charged that not only had the magazine's coverage of summer festivals made festivals "sound like a complete waste of time," but the critic simply missed the point of Lilith.<sup>48</sup> Another woman argued that unlike aggressive female performers like Patti Smith, Courtney Love, and L7, "Lilith's women don't try to be boys or compete with men on men's terms," but rather made "music that may be solely female."<sup>49</sup> Perhaps more damningly, another woman charged that *Spin's* critics were indulging the same kind of nostalgia practiced by *Spin's* rival *Rolling Stone*—but instead of pining for the *Rolling Stone's* beloved hippie era, *Spin* "expose[d] [its] wrinkles when [its] writers ponder, 'Where Have all the Female Punks Gone?'"<sup>50</sup> The letter writer also suggested that the reviewer was ill-prepared to recognize Lilith's charms given that her review made it "blatantly obvious that she was desperately seeking a rogue's gallery of Patti Smith wannabees."<sup>51</sup> Judging from this exchange in the

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<sup>47</sup> Evelyn McDonnell, "Lilith Fair: The Gorge Amphitheater, Gorge, Washington, July 5, 1997," *Spin*, September 1997, pg 64.

<sup>48</sup> Michele Suchomel, "Going Postal: Live Evil," *Spin*, December 1997, 33-37.

<sup>49</sup> Sherri Scribner, "Going Postal: Rock Her World," *Spin*, December 1997, 33.

<sup>50</sup> Darrin Keene, "Going Postal: Rock Her World," *Spin*, December 1997, 33.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

pages of *Spin* critics and fans did not necessarily agree on purpose and meaning of Lilith, in part because concepts of acceptable rock femininity were as contested as conceptions of rock masculinity.

Such squabbles aside, journalists and artists alike feted the Lilith Fair as an artistic and commercial triumph that helped establish female performers as a significant, distinctive force in the music business. If alternative rock masculinity had, according to its critics, gotten out of control at Lollapalooza when that festival shifted toward highly masculinized heavy metal and hard rock styles, then many journalists and artists reasoned that Lilith's stylized folk-rock femininity was a much needed antidote. Of course, the style of femininity on display at Lilith was defined, in part, by its founder Sara McLachlan's taste for dreamy folk pop and by journalists seeking to play up the festival's gentle, nurturing atmosphere in order to better serve their narratives which often focused on Lilith as a profoundly different type of festival in comparison to its male-dominated counterparts. Moreover, stories of Lilith's success fit nicely with a larger rock culture narrative hailing the surging popularity of the "Women of Rock."<sup>52</sup> The legacy of radical riot grrrl feminism, alternative rock's relative openness to female performers, and the wild success of kid-friendly feminism like the "Girl Power"

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<sup>52</sup> *Rolling Stone* famously hailed the "Women of Rock" on the cover of their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue in 1997 (Nov. 13, 1997, issue #773), linking the celebration of three decades of publication with a popular 1990s trend towards greater recognition and popularity for female performers. The cover featured three generations of female rockers embodied by Tina Turner, Madonna, and Courtney Love. Of course, treating "women in rock" as a novelty or something other than the norm suggests a kind of second-class-citizenship. In fact, the on-going controversy over sexist views of women's place in rock culture informed the Seattle-area alternative weekly *The Stranger's* parodic "Men Who Rock" feature in 2012 which is available at <http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/men-who-rock/Content?oid=14913816>.

brand touted by UK pop stars the Spice Girls all contributed to a rock culture climate that was increasingly open to female performers as the 1990s wore on. In short, if the male-dominated alternative rock trend that sparked excitement in the early part of the decade was fading, then, perhaps, journalists saw an opportunity to craft a new narrative using an argument which relied on a gendered binary to celebrate the new rock femininity as a separate, corrective force against stale, problematic rock masculinity.

### **Ozzfest, Marilyn Manson, and Nu Metal Masculinity**

Ozzy Osbourne's heavy metal festival Ozzfest was established as a festival for those concertgoers who wanted more hard rock than Lollapalooza offered. Although some journalists have speculated that Osbourne founded his festival in 1996 simply because Lollapalooza's promoters denied him the opportunity to perform at their festival, Ozzfest eventually become an established, influential event lasting well into the first decade of the twenty-first century.<sup>53</sup> From its inception, Ozzfest served as a proving ground for up-and-coming metal bands, with many side-stage bands using the festival to build a fan base and ascend to metal scene dominance. Moreover, when Lollapalooza folded in 1998, Ozzfest provided an outlet for high-concept masculinized angst which had existed on the fringes of Lollapalooza but was unwelcome at H.O.R.D.E. or Lilith.

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<sup>53</sup> Mark Fisher, "Ozzfest's 'Freefest' rolls into area Aug. 24," *Times West Virginian*, August 15, 2007, <http://timeswv.com/ticket/x681654436/Ozzfest-s-Freefest-rolls-into-area-Aug-24>. (retrieved October 30, 2012).

Although Ozzfest marketed itself as a festival for metal fans, the crowd at Ozzfest was far from homogeneous. In fact, one journalist identified no fewer than three different crowds at Ozzfest in 1997—a single unit of “hardcore punks and metalheads” whose subcultures had “long since merged,” a Goth-tinged group known as “Spooky Kids” who followed performer Marilyn Manson and resembled “slightly angrier versions of what we used to call Cure fans,” and “old-school Ozzy Osbourne supporters” made up of “beefy guys ready to lift busty girls onto their shoulders at the first power ballad.”<sup>54</sup> Tellingly, this journalist assumed that the Ozzfest audience was overwhelmingly male, with the only women mentioned being the “busty women” atop the shoulders of the “old-school” Ozzy fans. The critic suggested that the audience was made up metal versions of the same disparate groups found at Lollapalooza and other festivals—one group of hyper-masculine “angry young men,” another of angsty, sensitive young men, and then a group of conventionally masculine concertgoers looking to have a good time. Maleness was perhaps the only point of unity among the concertgoers given that not all of them were members of the same sub-cultural groups.

The music performed by Ozzfest bands was predominantly aggressive and hyper-masculine. Subtle differences between the various metal styles on stage, however, reflected significant differences in the ways that musicians and fans performed metal identity. For example, in 1997—Ozzfest’s second year, but its first as a cross-country touring festival—the bill boasted fourteen acts on its

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<sup>54</sup> Weisbard, “This Monkey’s Gone,” *Spin*, July 1998.

first and second stages. Tour founder Ozzy Osbourne headlined all dates, first performing a set of his classic solo material and then closing each night with a performance by reunited heavy metal pioneers Black Sabbath, Osbourne's first band. Certainly these sets appealed to Ozzy fans, fans of classic heavy metal, and young audience members interested in seeing legendary performers, perhaps for the first time.

Subtle genre-specific differences would have been apparent to audience members witnessing these performances, however. The classic late-1960s and 1970s Black Sabbath lineup made its name performing an early form of heavy metal which married blues-based forms to thundering drums, droning, sludgy guitar riffs, and eerie, often occult-themed vocals.<sup>55</sup> Osbourne's solo material, much of which was first released in the 1980s, relied on a poppier, crisper, speed-oriented sound shared by a good deal of that decade's commercially successful metal bands.<sup>56</sup> The other bands on the 1997 Ozzfest bill also reflected the variety of sub-styles within the heavy metal genre. For example, Marilyn Manson and Type-O Negative both augmented their heavy metal with keyboards, synthesizers, and darkly theatrical lyrical and performance flourishes

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<sup>55</sup> Early heavy metal or proto-metal had its roots in late '60s psychedelia. Bands as such as the Jeff Beck Group, Blue Cheer, and Led Zeppelin have all been considered early metal bands. The creation of the term "heavy metal" has sometimes attributed to the band Steppenwolf whose "Born to Be Wild" included a reference to "heavy metal thunder."

<sup>56</sup> Osbourne's 1980s solo material did retain some of the traits of his Sabbath-era music, in particular the fixation on theatrical horror movie imagery. Musically, however, the sound was brighter and clearer, anchored by the virtuoso performances of Osbourne's string of top-tier speedster guitarists Randy Rhoads, Jake E. Lee, and Zakk Wylde. Osbourne's solo material also featured a noticeable amount of electronic keyboard textures, yet when Osbourne toured in the 1980s keyboardists were rarely seen on stage. Instead the touring keyboardists performed from the side or even beneath the stage so as not to undermine Osbourne's metal credibility among his guitar-hero-worshipping audience.



borrowed from the goth subculture. Pantera, conversely, was a macho, no-frills, thrash-influenced “groove metal” band which relied on churning, chugging rhythms and shouted vocals to convey heaviness.<sup>57</sup> The 1997 tour also included the a number of up-and-coming metal bands such as Fear Factory and Powerman 5000 who borrowed liberally from electronic and industrial music to craft throbbing, glossy sci-fi soundscapes. Although all of these bands were nominally metal bands, they certainly did not all perform the same types of heavy metal music. Subsequent Ozzfests became even more stylistically diverse as the tour incorporated hip-hop influenced rap-metal/nu-metal bands like Limp Bizkit and Linkin Park during the later 1990s and early 2000s. In many ways, “heavy metal” simply served as an umbrella descriptor for a number of rather different bands in the same way that “alternative” served as a big tent genre at Lollapalooza.

Despite the number of diverse performers on the bill at various Ozzfests, mainstream and rock journalists alike focused much of their attention on Marilyn Manson. Although Marilyn Manson’s so-called Spooky Kid fan base was characterized as just a “thin sliver” of the Ozzfest audience, coverage of Manson himself at times overshadowed the rest of the performers on the Ozzfest bills.<sup>58</sup> In part, Manson drew attention because his self-consciously shocking

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<sup>57</sup> Pantera had its roots as a glam metal band with lead singer Phil Anselmo singing at the upper reaches of his vocal range, in keeping with the conventions of the popular glam metal style that reigned in the mid-1980s. In the late 1980s, however, the band was inspired by the burgeoning thrash metal scene and slowly shed its glam trappings. Critics generally recognize Pantera’s 1990 album *Cowboy’s From Hell* as both the debut of their definite sound and a genre defining document of the band’s groove metal style.

<sup>58</sup> Weisbard, “This Monkey’s Gone,” *Spin*, July 1998.

performances and carefully constructed persona courted controversy, making him an intriguing journalistic subject. For example, *Time Magazine* branded Manson's music a "toxic brew" of "occultism, suicide, torture, greed and mindless celebrity worship."<sup>59</sup> Yet, even when dismissing his performance as "inane rebellion" and a "cry for attention" from "a twisted loser ineffectually stealing from everyone he can," critics still devoted considerable space to parsing his "Goth genderfuck" identity, noting which elements of his act were borrowed from earlier performers.<sup>60</sup> Even the mainstream news organ *Time* lauded Manson's "natural-born showman[ship], "dark charisma," and "knack for sensationalistic imagery" in its 1997 feature.<sup>61</sup>

Manson didn't make the news simply because of his shocking music and performance; journalists also spent considerable time analyzing his relationship with his audience and the ways that he served as an avatar for and inspiration to America's angry young men. *Time's* writer noted that Manson, "fascinate[d] alienated teenage males" in particular.<sup>62</sup> This journalist had apparently internalized rock culture's belief system which posited rock music—especially underground and alternative rock—as an antidote to "bland middle-class normality" and the "sanitized mainstream" that dominated pop culture.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> David E. Thigpen, "Music: Satan's Little Helpers," *Time*, February 24, 1997, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,985963,00.html> (retrieved October 25, 2012).

<sup>60</sup> Weisbard, "This Monkey's Gone," *Spin*, July 1998.

<sup>61</sup> Thigpen, "Music: Satan's Little," *Time*, February 24, 1997.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

Manson's "death-rock music," he argued, offered the Goths who made up his "suburban youth cult" the "power" to "[strike] a blow against conformity" while "[repulsing] their parents."<sup>64</sup> Although the writer recognized that Manson traded in fantasy—"[f]antasy... [that was] as vital to rock as fake blood is to a horror movie"—he suggested that Manson's connection to his fans stemmed from his authenticity. With other rock stars, "the makeup comes off when they go home," but Manson was "real," his act an integral part of his identity.<sup>65</sup>

If *Time* found Manson to be "real"—at least for his fans—Manson himself, in a *Rolling Stone* interview the same year, admitted that he intentionally twisted the truth during interviews in order to create a "shell" that protected what he described as his "vulnerable" core.<sup>66</sup> Despite coverage that positioned Manson as a "complete anomaly," a singularly "complex" frontman unique in "current landscape of reluctant rock stars," the singer, by his own admission, was, in fact, not terribly unlike the sensitive alt-rock boys who blustered and snarled as a way to protect and project their vulnerability.<sup>67</sup> Manson simply colored his songs with more horror movie imagery and a darker sonic pallet than alt-rock peers like Eddie Vedder and Billy Corgan.

Manson's realness—his ability to perform hurt, sincerity, and rage in a way that appealed to his audience of misfit angry young men—made the singer a

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Neil Strauss, "Marilyn Manson's Beautiful Nightmare," *Rolling Stone*, January 23, 1997.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

fitting avatar for heavy metal's transitional phase in the post-Lollapalooza era.<sup>68</sup> As the concerns about the unruly masculinity of Lollapalooza's later years and the variety of metal styles on offer at Ozzfest demonstrated, rock identity—and with it rock masculinity—was in flux during the second half of the 1990s. If H.O.R.D.E. and Lilith Fair represented attempts to refine and control adolescent-style alternative rock masculinity by either directing it into virtuoso musicianship or by replacing it altogether, alt-rock's shift toward and combination with heavy metal provided a new outlet for the angst and energy that powered the grunge explosion and Lollapalooza's ascent to the top of the concert calendar heap. In fact, fusions of heavy metal, alternative rock, and hip-hop became increasingly popular in the late 1990s and early 2000s, as evidenced by a number of so-called nu metal bands—including several Ozzfest veterans—scoring hit singles on MTV and alternative rock radio and racking up gold and platinum sales figures. By the end of the 1990s, bands playing this new sensitive-yet-enraged form of metal had become so popular that, like performers at H.O.R.D.E. and Lilith before them, they were able to organize their own travelling multi-act festivals, including the Family Values (1998-99, 2001, 2006-07), Anger Management (2000-05), and the Metallica-meets-nu-metal Summer Sanitarium (2000, 2003) tours devoted to their specific niche of alt-metal identity.

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<sup>68</sup> Marilyn Manson had at least one foot in the world of alternative rock from early on. Nine Inch Nails mastermind Trent Reznor mentored Manson early in his career and produced his first album. Smashing Pumpkins leader Billy Corgan assisted Manson in creating his 1998 glam-rock-influenced album *Mechanical Animals*. Manson toured with Courtney Love's alt-rock hitmakers Hole, co-headlining the "Beautiful Monsters Tour" in 1999. In many ways, he helped bridge the gap between the worlds of Lollapalooza and Ozzfest.

In part, these nu-metal acts distinguished themselves from the established heavy metal bands by singing about their personal trauma and emotional turmoil in unvarnished terms.<sup>69</sup> They embraced personae which marked them as victims and introspective young men while also ironically outlining their fantasies of power and domination. For example, Jonathan Davis, front-man for popular nu-metal rap-rockers Korn, stated that he specifically drew on his rock star fantasies, feelings of victimization, and fears about emasculation when writing his lyrics. In a 1998 interview with *Spin*, he explained that his song "Reclaim My Place" is about "'how I thought I'd become a rock star and not get picked on anymore...but my band still calls me a fag."<sup>70</sup> A similar tension between victimization and power was evident, though perhaps explained less eloquently, in the lyrics of the band Limp Bizkit's hit "Break Stuff." On this track vocalist Fred Durst raged "I feel like shit/My suggestion is to keep your distance 'cause right now I'm dangerous"—a fairly standard example the types of threats and posturing found in hard rock (and also hip-hop) lyrics. The next two lines, however,

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<sup>69</sup> Not to say that heavy metal bands never discussed emotional pain or similar issues before the advent of nu-metal. For example, the band Metallica—who enjoyed some crossover success with the alternative rock crowd—often sang about personal, political, and psychological issues. The most popular and commercially successful forms of heavy metal in the decade before the emergence of nu-metal frequently routinely focused on fantastical/occult subjects and hedonistic depictions of the "sex, drugs, and rock and roll" lifestyle. In fact, in the mid-1980s the now infamous Parents Music Resource Center formed to investigate and attempt to control these types of lyrics. Mainstream critics of heavy metal in the 1980s and early 1990s did make the connection between metal lyrics and emotional pain; these arguments, however, focused on "subliminal messages" within metal music as a possible cause of teen suicide. For example, the families of two teens who killed themselves sued the metal band Judas Priest and their label CBS Records in 1990 alleging that hidden messages on their records prompted their sons to commit suicide. The details of the Judas Priest case are available from the *New York Times* – Larry Rohter, "2 Families Sue Heavy-Metal Band As Having Driven Sons to Suicide," *New York Times*, July 17, 1990, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/07/17/arts/2-families-sue-heavy-metal-band-as-having-driven-sons-to-suicide.html?src=pm> (retrieved February 3, 2013).

<sup>70</sup> Neil Strauss, "Please Love Them: They're Korn," *Spin*, November 1998, p 84.

contextualized this aggression, explaining that “We've all felt like shit/And been treated like shit.” In short, the song’s speaker appealed to a common sense of self-loathing and victimhood to, as the lyrics put it, “justify rippin' someone's head off.”

Of course, many popular Lollapalooza-style alt-rock bands also used their lyrics to work through fears of victimization and feelings of self-loathing. These alt-rock bands, however, were less likely to use their personal gripes or feelings of inadequacy to justify random violence against anyone who crossed them by being the unfortunate “[f]irst one to complain.” If anything, many alt-rockers approached their anger with ironic distance, commenting on their ineffectiveness. Billy Corgan mused that “despite all [his] rage” he was “still just a rat in a cage.” Eddie Vedder simply pushed away those who attempted to control or co-opt him, venting that “this”—his art, his identity—“is not for you,” then musing that his refusal will lead him to “end up alone like [he] began.” When Kurt Cobain snarled that he would “come back as fire” to “burn all the liars,” leaving “a blanket of ash on the ground,” he did so in character, assuming the voice of actress Frances Farmer. And even then, he undercut these threats in the verse with a chorus which pined, “I miss the comfort in being sad.” Nu-metal acts like Korn and Limp Bizkit, in contrast, hardly indulged such passive-aggressive tactics. When Eddie Vedder, for example, vented his spleen in song, he sneered that he’d “rather starve than eat your bread” and simply rejected the system his supposed tormentors offered him. Korn’s Jonathan Davis expressed a similar disgust with a world that was a “disgrace.” However, instead of merely refusing to deal with

his adversaries, Davis calls his challengers out, insisting that they “bow down” because if “[y]ou want[ed] to fuck with [him]” you had best “come on” and “fucking play.” By fusing macho metal, hip-hop swagger, and alt-rock miserablism, nu metal bands like Korn and Limp Bizkit created a new kind of angry young masculinity that owed a debt to both Lollapalooza and Ozzfest.

### **The Alternative Nation in Decline**

When Lollapalooza debuted in 1991, critics raved that it was an innovative attempt to bring together disparate elements of the rock culture underground and proof of a new, vital source of rock identity. By the second half of the 1990s, however, critics, performers, and audiences were all fleeing Lollapalooza in search of an alternative to the apparent “alternative” monoculture and the supposedly macho masculine style that had come to dominate that festival. Of course, shifting musical tastes and pop culture trends also contributed to the move away from Lollapalooza. Nevertheless, critics and artists frequently couched their dissatisfaction with the alternative rock mainstream in gendered terms. They seemingly wanted more alternatives and fewer angry young men.

Rock critics, of course, weren’t alone in their ambivalence about the role that angry young men played in ‘90s alternative culture. Television and film also demonstrated some uneasiness about angry young men—and older men acting like angry young men. MTV’s animated series *Beavis and Butthead*—first airing between 1993 and 1997—focused, in part, on rock culture’s complicated relationship with violent, disaffected adolescent males. Created by Mike Judge,

the series follows the adventures of the cruel, dim-witted title characters as they set fires, destroy property, and abuse animals. Although the show's main characters were clearly violent dolts, they also demonstrated a savant-like ability to unnerve and expose their stupid, naïve, and conniving friends, neighbors, and peers.

*Beavis and Butthead's* creator and voice talent often reserved his deepest insights into the angry alt-boy mindset for the unscripted segments wherein Beavis and Butthead watched and commented on a mix of popular and obscure music videos, judging whether the bands “rock” or “suck” and lampooning the general absurdity of rock video clichés and tropes. The pair often mocked common video images like shots of breaking mirrors, tight close-ups of band members' exaggerated facial expressions, and “videos where it's all out of focus and it's all blurry and blobby and a bunch of art crap.”<sup>71</sup> According to Beavis and Butthead, videos rocked when the music was loud and when the videos featured destruction and “chicks.” They didn't approve of just any display of masculine aggression, however. While watching the video for the band Live's “I Alone,” the duo assessed lead singer Ed Kowalczyk's posturing in front of the camera, snickering that “he's, like, trying to be scary and all heavy and intense and stuff.”<sup>72</sup> Clearly, Butthead thought Kowalczyk was anything but threatening.

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<sup>71</sup> “Beavis & Butthead/Filter - Hey Man, Nice Shot,” YouTube, Uploaded by kos tas, January 30, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=umlfo-TOclk> (retrieved April 9, 2013). Unfortunately, royalty and copyright issues have prevented many of *Beavis and Butthead* video commentary segments from being included in the series DVD sets. Fans have, however, uploaded many of these “lost” segments to YouTube.

<sup>72</sup> “checking you out beavis!!!” YouTube, Uploaded by eيدرfreddie, May 26, 2009, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzGQj\\_17Twc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzGQj_17Twc) (retrieved April 9, 2013).



In fact, Judge's keen eye for these kinds of rock culture distinctions—differences between ridiculous poseurs and authentic rockers, between the truly “rocking” and the comically derivative—and his ability to express his observations using a satirical version of rock culture's native language provided much of the show's ironic power. Not only did *Beavis and Butthead* skewer the supposed nihilism and vapidness of rock-obsessed teenage boys, but the show also presented his main characters as keenly aware of rock media's crass attempts to cash in on their dimwitted slacker audience. The show's leads regularly grouched about “those videos where you don't even remember it right after you saw it” and snidely remarked that particularly arty videos must be “buzz clips[s]”—joking about MTV's own “Buzz Bin” collection of alternative videos singled out for heavy rotation. When the pair watched the video for Nirvana's “Smells Like Teen Spirit,” Beavis asks seemingly obvious questions about Seattle and teen spirit to which Butthead replied “Dude, If you don't know I'm not gonna tell you, dumbass”—echoing and ridiculing underground rock culture's obsession with insider knowledge. Beavis and Butthead may have been, as the show's own credits put it, “dumb, crude, thoughtless, ugly, sexist, self-destructive fools,” but Mike Judge portrayed them as at least partially self-aware when it came to the culture that pandered to them.

Ambivalence about male anger and rebellion also appeared on the big screen during the 1990s. Two popular 1999 films—*Fight Club* (based on the 1996 novel by Chuck Palahniuk) and *American Beauty*—depicted adult male characters attempting to break free of their workaday suburban lives by adopting

adolescent-style rebellious personae. Although both films did glamorize their protagonists' rejection of conformity and newfound commitment to authentic living at points, the films also showed the negative consequences of adults acting like "angry young men."

In *Fight Club*, an unnamed protagonist (Edward Norton) physically battled his second personality, the violent, flamboyantly rebellious Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt). Together, the pair formed the titular fight club where disaffected office workers can reclaim their manhood from an emasculating advertising-driven culture by engaging in wild, bare-knuckle brawls. Durden eventually transformed the network of fight clubs into a terrorist organization bent on turning their shared anti-consumerist, anti-corporate beliefs into worldwide revolution. Norton's protagonist ultimately defeated his Durden personality by turning a gun on himself and inflicting a non-fatal wound. The film ended ambiguously with shots of office buildings exploding and collapsing as the terrorists' bombs go off—all set, music video style, to the song "Where is My Mind?" by alt-rock originators (and Cobain favorite) the Pixies.

*American Beauty* explored many of the same issues as *Fight Club*, though in a less apocalyptic matter. In this film, middle-aged protagonist Lester Burnham (Kevin Spacey) was dissatisfied with his job and his superficially perfect suburban life. In an attempt to reclaim an authentic identity, he began stating his mind in brutally honest fashion, alienating his wife and daughter. About to be laid off, he blackmailed his boss for a considerable amount of money which he used to finance an adolescent fantasy lifestyle—purchasing a 1970s muscle car,

hanging out in the garage listening to rock music, smoking marijuana, and lifting weights in an attempt to impress one of his daughter's teenage friends. Through a series of coincidences and misunderstandings, Burnham's new path of teenage-style masculine bravado ultimately destroyed his family and prompted a closeted gay neighbor to murder him. In voiceover at the end of the film, Burnham explains that he isn't "pissed off" after dying given all the beauty he was able to experience during his "stupid, little life."

In both *Fight Club* and *American Beauty* adolescent-style masculinity can be a significant force for personal transformation, but if unchecked it leads to wanton destruction. Not unlike *Beavis and Butthead*, both of these films offered up sexual titillation, violent mayhem, and loud music as a way to escape a corporate-controlled, advertising-driven American culture which supposedly made men dumb, soft, and unhappy—a point of view not too different from the lyrics of alternative rockers like Kurt Cobain, Eddie Vedder, and other authenticity-minded angry young alt-rockers. Nevertheless, the filmmakers behind *Fight Club* and *American Beauty* seemed to suggest that destructive, nihilistic masculinity can have dire consequences. What alternatives to angry, revolution-minded adolescent masculinity, then, were American audiences considering?

In part, the boom in niche rock festivals were an attempt to find an alternative to (or in OzzFest's case a concentrated dose of) Lollapalooza's masculinized adolescent angst. This fragmentation seemingly undid what some critics considered to be Lollapalooza's greatest legacy—what *Spin* called its

celebration of “pop’s return of the repressed” after a decade of mainstream dominance exemplified by 1980s stars like Madonna and Bruce Springsteen.<sup>73</sup> No longer united under Lollapalooza’s banner of sub-cultural exchange, fans and bands forged new styles of rock masculinity within their own sub-genre-specific settings. Following Lollapalooza’s decline, the hippies of H.O.R.D.E., the earth-mother folk poppers of Lilith, and the alt-metal acts at Ozzfest were no longer united in common alternative purpose. By the end of the 1990s, the various tribes of the so-called alternative nation no longer had much in common. When the Woodstock ’99 festival (July 22–25, 1999 in Rome, NY) attempted to reintroduce these groups to each other in a single celebration of counterculture akin to the successful 1969 and 1994 Woodstock festivals, the differences between the groups were obvious. Ultimately, the 1999 “gathering of the tribes” failed to live up to the Woodstock brand’s reputation for “peace and love,” devolving instead into violence and riot that was blamed, in part, on the emergence of new styles of rock masculinity incompatible with Woodstock’s hippie-era ideals.

Given the divisions between the different “tribes” of alternative rock fans, would a successful Woodstock-style “gathering of the tribes” be possible in the future? Could the competing notions of rock identity coexist? Would rock audiences be able to accommodate an increasingly metal-influenced version of angry young man masculinity as rockers in an alternative rock culture which

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<sup>73</sup> Weisbard, "This Monkey's Gone," *Spin*, July 1998.

embraced both frothy folk-pop feminism and relaxed hippie positivity as alternatives to the adolescent guitar-meets-angst of early '90s alt-rock?

CHAPTER 4  
"JUST GIVE ME SOMETHING TO BREAK": VIOLENCE, MASCULINITY, AND  
YOUTH CULTURE IN THE MEDIA RECEPTION OF WOODSTOCK '99

On the final night of the Woodstock '99 festival in Rome, New York, organizers interrupted the festival-closing set by the Red Hot Chili Peppers so that firefighters could extinguish several large bonfires raging near the stage. The Chili Peppers soon resumed their performance and launched into a warp-speed rendition of Jimi Hendrix's "Fire." As the band played, concertgoers rekindled the bonfires using the "peace candles" distributed by an anti-violence group. Young men and women danced around the raging infernos—when they were not overturning cars or looting vendor booths. In the days following the festival, local and national news reports disseminated fiery representations of a festival descending into hellish chaos along with sensationalized reports of rioting and looting. These initial reports, however, could not agree upon the reason for this violence. Some blamed the crass commercialization of late 1990s youth culture. Others blamed poor planning and greedy promoters. Some journalists blamed the message of the music itself. Moreover, these accounts became increasingly complicated and gender-focused once young women came forth with allegations of sexual assault and rapes at the festival. Ultimately, some rock journalists and critics linked the sexual violence at Woodstock '99 to the hyper-masculine aesthetic of the popular rap-rock or nu-metal subgenre that became synonymous with Woodstock '99.

What accounts for the different understandings of the Woodstock 99 mayhem by journalists? Who or what did journalists blame for the violent end to the concert? What informed their interpretations of the causes of the rioting? Although Woodstock '69 continues to generate scholarship among youth culture researchers, Woodstock '99 and the rap-rock trend closely associated with it have remained outside their critical purview.<sup>1</sup> Instead, when scholars have addressed 1990s youth culture, they have typically examined underground “scenes” such as riot grrrl or cultural movements such as hip-hop.<sup>2</sup> More popular histories of 1990s rock culture are often Whig-ish in their optimistic narrative of inevitable rock progress led by pioneering cult artist leaders and overlooked underground bands.<sup>3</sup> So far, scholars have neglected the opportunity that Woodstock '99 provides for a broader examination of cultural concerns about

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<sup>1</sup> The overwhelming majority of scholars writing about American youth culture and social change will make at least a passing reference to the original Woodstock. Moreover, the memory of Woodstock is routinely refreshed by popular works such as Pete Fornatale's *Back to the Garden: The Story of Woodstock* and *Woodstock: The Oral History* by Joel Makower, Michael Lang and Joel Rosenman (both released in 2009, in time for the festival's fortieth anniversary). Woodstock also often serves as rhetorical shorthand for the 1960s counterculture in academic works like Douglas Brode's *From Walt to Woodstock: How Disney Created the Counterculture*, published by the University of Texas Press in 2004.

<sup>2</sup> In the past few years, the riot grrrl movement, in particular, has received increased attention in works like *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution* by Sara Marcus, *Girl Power: The Nineties Revolution in Music* by Marisa Meltzer, *Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism* by Alison Piepmeier. In addition, Kathleen Hanna donated her personal papers to NYU's Fales Library, providing future scholars with greater opportunity to study riot grrrl documents from 1989-1996.

<sup>3</sup> For example, a memory boom has cropped up around the late Nirvana frontman Kurt Cobain, including Charles R. Cross' sizable official biography *Heavier Than Heaven*, a number of documentary films, a planned Hollywood biopic, and a special museum exhibit titled *Nirvana: Taking Punk to the Masses* opened at the Experience Music Project in Seattle in April 2011. Very little of this Cobain material, however, provides a thorough critical analysis of his image and work. Popular histories such as Greg Prato's *Grunge Is Dead: The Oral History of Seattle Rock Music*, Marisa Meltzer's *Girl Power: The Nineties Revolution in Music*, and Kaya Oakes' *Slanted and Enchanted: The Evolution of Indie Culture* take a similar approach to historicizing—and subsequently lionizing—individual '90s “scenes.”

youth violence, masculinity, and rock culture at the end of the twentieth century. But even more importantly, they have failed to consider the historical and historiographic significance of its reception by the media whose published accounts have become part of the historical record upon which historians will eventually rely. These journalists' contradictory, contending, and competing interpretations of Woodstock '99—and their infusion of intertextual references—revealed often gendered tensions within 1990s rock culture specifically and American culture more generally.

It is my thesis that the decade-long discourse about masculine identity-making and performance that took place (often quite openly and consciously) within '90s rock culture, not only shaped the festival itself but also reporters' perceptions of it. This textual analysis is based on newspapers, magazines, online, and video coverage, as well as concert albums and documentary festival footage produced by news journalists to rock reporters who reflected a broad spectrum of media—both in the mainstream and the rock-focused and underground press. I argue that this coverage revealed that Woodstock '99 was, in fact, a critical flashpoint that exposed the deep fault-lines in the rock-based youth culture of the 1990s.

I will begin with an examination of the ways in which the media struggled to create a coherent narrative of Woodstock '99 and how they ultimately failed to arrive at a lucid explanation for the violence. Second, I will demonstrate that the media's different interpretations of the festival echoed the cultural diversity of Woodstock '99. And finally, I will explore the ways in which Woodstock '99



reflected the fractured nature of late '90s youth culture, particularly concerning issues of masculine identity and performance. Ultimately, this conflict over the meaning and aesthetics of alternative rock led to the construction of a new narrative of the 1990s that privileged the strains of alternative rock seen as the roots of the emerging indie aesthetic while diminishing rap-rock's dominance of late-1990s alternative culture.

### **Struggling to Frame the Narrative**

No journalists denied that Woodstock '99 ended with fires, riots, and looting, leaving the site reeking of "smoke, garbage and human waste."<sup>4</sup> The media did, however, struggle to agree upon a description of the festival and to reach a consensus about the factors and forces that had contributed to the riot. Most of the initial media responses came from mainstream news and entertainment journalists writing for a general audience, rather than for a youth-oriented rock audience. As a result, much of the initial Woodstock '99 narrative simply attempted to describe the event and provide an explanation of the riots. Nevertheless, these journalists often provided conflicting accounts of the festival.

In the first few days following the festival, journalists could not even agree about overall atmosphere at Woodstock '99. *The New York Times* characterized Woodstock '99 as a "virtually flawless weekend" that erupted into rampage and riot "without warning" when a Mercedes "went up in flames."<sup>5</sup> This vision of

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<sup>4</sup> Alona Wartofsky, "Woodstock '99 Goes Up in Smoke," *New York Times*, July 27, 1999, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/daily/july99/woodstock27.htm>, retrieved November 2, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Zielbauer, "Woodstock Festival Faces a Bad Hangover; What Began With Peace, Love and Music Ends in Fire, Rampage and Loot," *New York Times*, July 27, 1999,

“peaceful young people listening to music under sunny skies” who suddenly became violent because of an auto fire did not fit with the assessment of MTV’s Kurt Loder who described the festival to *USA Today* as “like a concentration camp” with “waves of hatred bouncing around the place.”<sup>6 7</sup> Complicating both the sunny *New York Times* account and Loder’s hyperbole, self-described “Woodstock Survivor” Jeff Stark described a grueling and tedious festival and mused that his fellow concertgoers “look[ed] happier on pay per view” while wondering how “any Woodstocker would have found the energy” to riot on Sunday night.<sup>8</sup>

In a story that was more nuanced than most, the *New York Times* sought to explain the underlying causes of the riot. The paper suggested that the festival’s high prices, squalid conditions, and poor planning had angered the crowd and sparked the disaster.<sup>9</sup> Although the paper was willing to consider that the show’s promoters had profited by commercializing Woodstock’s legacy, it could not fully accept the notion that conditions at the festival fully explained the riots. For example, the article provided a choice quote from festival organizer

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<http://www.nytimes.com/1999/07/27/nyregion/woodstock-festival-faces-bad-hangover-what-began-with-peace-love-music-ends-fire.html> (retrieved November 5, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Paul Zielbauer, “Woodstock Festival Faces a Bad Hangover”

<sup>7</sup> Ann Oldenburg, “MTV’s Loder Flees Out-of-control Fest,” *USA Today*, July 27, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Jeff Stark, “What a Riot: Diary of a Woodstock Survivor.” *Salon.com*, July 27, 1999, <http://www.salon.com/entertainment/music/feature/1999/07/27/woodstock/> (retrieved October 12, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Paul Zielbauer, “Woodstock Festival Faces a Bad Hangover”

John Scher, wherein he argued that “[a] \$4 bottle of water doesn't cause a kid to start a fire or turn over a car.”<sup>10</sup>

Journalists also attempted to understand the festival by suggesting that that “each era gets the Woodstock it deserves,” in this case a “nasty and violent” gathering for rowdy fans of raucous bands.<sup>11</sup> The pieces that compared Woodstock '99 to the original 1969 Woodstock festival, however, did not simply condemn the 1999 event while lauding the original concert. Writing for *The New York Times*, Neil Strauss acknowledged that the memories of the original Woodstock were colored by what he called the “Goodstock” myth—an account of the original event that ignored the deaths, injuries, and logistical issues that plagued the 1969 festival.<sup>12</sup> Despite the fact that some journalists acknowledged the myths surrounding original Woodstock, Woodstock '99 was still held up to this “Goodstock” standard. As Paul Zielbauer wrote in *The New York Times*, the violence at Woodstock '99 was particularly galling because the festival “was not supposed to be just another concert but a summoning of 1969, when the 500,000 people gathered in Bethel, N.Y...and did not rampage when the music stopped.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> David Gates and Devin Gordon, “This Has Been Surreal: THE BUZZ, Back to the Dystopian, Rage-Spewing Garden,” *Newsweek*, August 09, 1999, <http://www.newsweek.com/1999/08/08/this-has-been-surreal.html> (retrieved January 15, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Neil Strauss, “'69 or '99, a Rock Festival Is a Combustible Mix,” *New York Times*, August 8, 1999, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F07EEDB1F31F93BA3575BC0A96F958260&pagewanted=1> (retrieved October 12, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Paul Zielbauer, “Woodstock Festival Faces a Bad Hangover”

Furthermore, journalists demonstrated considerable ambivalence about the festival's contribution to the countercultural legacy of the original Woodstock. They ironically noted that Woodstock '99 was sponsored by major corporations and held on a decommissioned US Air Force base venue, implying that this new Woodstock was at odds with the original festival's hippie values.<sup>14</sup> Comedy Central's mock news program *The Daily Show*, for example, skewered the crowd's supposed rage, attributing to rioters an ironic quasi-Marxist motive as host Jon Stewart quipped "take that capitalist table" over footage of young men tossing a folding table into a bonfire.<sup>15</sup> Although this joke assumed that the audience was at least partially familiar with the on-going discourse about rock culture's fraught relationship with capitalism and commercialism, it did not take seriously the possibility that the rioters were expressing authentic anti-capitalist frustrations.

Although Woodstock '99 clearly did not live up to the spirit of the original Woodstock for most journalists, they did find an apt 1960s-era comparison for Woodstock '99 in the notorious Altamont Free Festival held at the Altamont Speedway in northern California on December 6, 1969.<sup>16</sup> Altamont achieved infamy based on reports that the Hell's Angels—hired to provide festival security by the Rolling Stones—murdered teenager Meredith Hunter during the Stones'

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<sup>14</sup> Jeff Stark, "What a Riot: Diary of a Woodstock Survivor."

<sup>15</sup> Headlines - The Price is Riot," *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (Comedy Central, July 26, 1999), <http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/mon-july-26-1999/headlines---the-price-is-riot> (retrieved November 2, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Tom Sinclair, "'Stock Dividends" *EW.com*, August 5, 1999, <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,84569,00.html> (retrieved January 10, 2011).

headlining set. As a result, the Altamont Free Festival gained a reputation as “the end of the Sixties” in rock lore. By connecting Woodstock ‘99 with Altamont’s iconic example of the “the implosion” of the 1960s, journalists placed the 1999 festival within a historical context that provided their audience with a convenient framework for understanding it as an example of rock’s dark side.<sup>17</sup>

After at least four women went to the police with allegations of rape and sexual assault during the festival, the post-Woodstock ‘99 narratives shifted to focus on issues of gender and sexuality to explain the riot.<sup>18</sup> Neil Strauss’ August 8<sup>th</sup> *New York Times* piece asserted that the violence at Woodstock ‘99 was motivated by “testosterone, intoxication, arrogance, boredom and repression” and provided evidence of the “combustibility” “between women and men.”<sup>19</sup> Eyewitness testimony provided to the *Washington Post* emphasized the physical vulnerability of one “very skinny” sexual assault victim in comparison to her “big, brawny” attackers and the boisterous crowd “cheering them on.”<sup>20</sup> Moreover, this same article specifically mentioned that these mosh pit rapes occurred during sets by rap-rock (or nu-metal) bands Korn and Limp Bizkit thereby linking these

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<sup>17</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, (New York: Bantam, 1987), 406. Gitlin’s history of the 1960s provides a conventional pro-counterculture view of the decade’s events. Gitlin includes Altamont in his litany of late-1960s troubles (riots, assassinations, etc.) which he dubs “the implosion” of the hopeful ‘60s.

<sup>18</sup> Alona Wartofsky, "Police Investigate Reports of Rapes at Woodstock," *Washington Post*, July 29, 1999, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/daily/july99/woodstock29.htm> (retrieved November 2, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> Strauss, "'69 or '99, a Rock Festival Is a Combustible Mix"

<sup>20</sup> Wartofsky, "Police Investigate Reports of Rapes at Woodstock"

musical groups with the allegations of widespread sexual violence that eventually earned Woodstock '99 the title of "Rapestock."<sup>21</sup>

Although the various Woodstock '99 media reports did agree that the festival ended in disaster, these reports failed to explain the causes of the riots and sexual assaults. In the face of this seemingly inscrutable event, Lance Morrow, for example, simply blamed the riot on the "single, violent mind" of the "mob," a spirit he dubbed the "the Doofus of Mayhem."<sup>22</sup> For Morrow, violence was "normal" and "expected" when large crowds gathered to be "hosed down with vehemently moronic music...Garbage in, garbage out."<sup>23</sup> Despite their best efforts, journalists were unable to frame a narrative that provided the festival with a clear meaning. The media suggested that unpredictable mob behavior, a crass and commercialized rock culture, and unchecked masculine aggression all contributed to the festival-ending violence. Some journalists eventually identified sexual violence as the primary problem at Woodstock '99, though they remained at a loss to explain why it happened. As we shall see, rock journalists ultimately attempted to make sense of Woodstock '99 sought answers in the aesthetics and politics of the rap-rock trend closely associated with the festival.

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<sup>21</sup> Robin Rothman, "Politics of the Pit: Where Do We Go Now? The Aftermath of Rapestock," *Village Voice*, November 2, 1999, <http://www.villagevoice.com/1999-11-02/news/politics-of-the-pit> (retrieved October 4, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Lance Morrow, "The Madness of Crowds," *Time Magazine*, August 9, 1999, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,991691-1,00.html> (retrieved October 3, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

## Varieties of Performance and Perception

Another explanation for why journalists and commentators had a difficult time assigning meaning to the festival was the sheer diversity of the Woodstock '99 experience. Although in the aftermath of the riot journalists had linked Woodstock '99 with the rap-rock genre—already stigmatized as socially undesirable—the festival actually played host to a wide array of musical styles. Over the course of the three-day festival, over 90 different musical acts performed, representing musical genres ranging from country to hip hop, from electronica to heavy metal. Veteran artists like country legend Willie Nelson and funk pioneer James Brown played to the same general audience as rap-rockers Limp Bizkit and the heavy metal band Megadeath.

The layout of the festival grounds reflected the diversity of both performers and concertgoers, while also complicating attempts to tidily categorize the Woodstock '99 experience. To accommodate the large number of bands, the festival was organized so that performances took place simultaneously on two main stages—one east, one west—situated on opposite sides of the festival grounds. The festival also included a “rave tent” where electronica artists performed at all-night dance parties. Given this layout, no single concertgoer, or journalist, could attend all of the performances.

Judging from the available audio and video documentation of Woodstock '99—both in official documents and in bootleg concert recordings and user-posted videos available on online sites like YouTube—the festival offered concertgoers many opportunities to attend performances that suited their

individual tastes. Audience members who wanted to “jump up and down” with performers in evil clown make-up chanting “Fuck the World,” could attend the Insane Clown Posse’s set. Or concertgoers could mellow out and sing along with alternative-pop singer-songwriter Alanis Morissette’s hippie-grunge hit “Ironic.”<sup>24</sup>

The official concert documentary showcased the festival’s musical diversity. The film included single-song performances by 29 acts in roughly chronological order—an eclectic mix of performances that included artists as diverse as singer-songwriter Sheryl Crow, rapper DMX, and electronic duo the Chemical Brothers. The film also included selections by the aggressive rap-rock bands like Insane Clown Posse and Limp Bizkit that the mass media had blamed for the festival’s violent atmosphere. In addition, the film also devoted considerable time to capturing the audience’s participation in the festival. During performances by rap-metal bands such as Korn, Limp Bizkit, and the Insane Clown Posse, the camera frequently panned over the crowd—described in the documentary’s opening sequence as “Inked Pierced + Ready to Rock”—revealing masses of young men moshing, crowd surfing, and pumping their fists. Frequent images of aggressive young men suggested that these concertgoers attended Woodstock ’99 in order to take part in these sorts of hostile displays. In contrast, Elvis Costello’s comparatively sedate performance clip included fewer

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<sup>24</sup> *Woodstock ’99*, DVD, directed by Allen Newman, Carol Dodds, et al., (New York: Epic, 1999).



wide shots of the audience, instead providing repeated close-ups of rapt young women mouthing the words to the bittersweet ballad “Alison.”<sup>25</sup> <sup>26</sup>

A few of the performances included on the DVD attempted to connect the 1999 festival and the late-1960s Woodstock-era. The documentary’s first performance featured rhythm and blues pioneer James Brown, who enjoyed great popularity in the 1960s but did not perform at the 1969 festival. The hard rock band Creed performed the Doors’ “Roadhouse Blues” with the Doors’ guitarist Robbie Krieger who, like Brown, enjoyed substantial success in the late 1960s, but did not perform at Woodstock. The Red Hot Chili Peppers likewise provided a tenuous musical link to the late 1960s. The band closed the festival with a tribute to the late Jimi Hendrix by performing a cover of “Fire,” a song he performed at the first Woodstock.<sup>27</sup> This particular nostalgic exercise, ironically, became one of the most iconic performances of Woodstock ’99 when many news reports included footage of the band in their coverage of the fires and riots that ended the festival.

The film also revealed the festival’s connection to with the legacy of the original Woodstock festival. During the opening titles, a graphic reading “Woodstock 69” appeared on screen, and the numeral six then rotates until the

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<sup>25</sup> *Woodstock ’99*, DVD.

<sup>26</sup> Ironically, Costello himself was regarded as an “angry young man” during the early part of his career in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Tangentially associated with the burgeoning UK punk scene, Costello was known for his nervy lyrics and aggressive, brittle sound. Costello did court controversy. He infamously used a racist slur during an argument with Ray Charles, and his lyrics were sometimes interpreted as misogynist. Costello, like many UK punk musicians, occasionally attracted a racist, skinhead fanbase; Costello himself, however, participated in the punk-leaning Rock Against Racism movement.

<sup>27</sup> *Woodstock ’99*, DVD.

title reads “Woodstock 99.” After this title change, the Woodstock bird logo appeared along with the legend “3 more days of peace and music.” Moreover, the images used in the film’s opening sequence included a number of nude concertgoers (mostly women), as well as various depictions of marijuana use, suggesting that Woodstock ’99 provided concertgoers with the same opportunities to transgress confining social norms as the 1969 concertgoers enjoyed. The titles further contextualized these images as part of the larger Woodstock culture through the use of tie-dye-style psychedelic visual effects and musical cues evoking Jimi Hendrix’s iconic performance of “The Star Spangled Banner” at the original festival. The filmmakers also juxtapose images of young revelers with those of older Woodstock ’99 attendees who have styled themselves in typical hippie garb. In this way, the film attempted to make sense of the festival’s diversity by suggesting that the rock fans of 1999 were the inheritors of 1969’s hippie legacy.

The official concert albums, released in October 1999, also reflected the festival’s diversity. This document, however, suggested that the festival’s audience may have been divided on issues of taste. Epic Records released the Woodstock ’99 concert album as a two-CD set, organizing the music by genre rather than in the chronological order in which performers had played at the concert. Thus, the first disc included performances by heavier rock, metal, and hip-hop performers, including the marquee rap-rock acts Limp Bizkit, Korn, and Kid Rock. This first disc also included a brief recording of an announcement about the fires and violence that interrupted the Red Hot Chili Peppers’ set at the

end of the festival. The second disc includes an eclectic mix of pop, electronic, alternative rock, and even big band music.<sup>28</sup>

The organization of the albums provided listeners with two entirely different Woodstock '99 experiences. The first disc echoed the media's characterization of the festival as a chaotic celebration of heavy music, even linking these bands to the fires and destruction with the inclusion of the untitled announcement. The second disc, however, complicated this representation by including Woodstock '99 performances that better reflected the actual diversity of the festival's lineup, providing an eclectic space for musicians who didn't fit into the aggressive, hypermasculine rap-rock aesthetic. Tellingly, each disc of this set was also available as a separate individual album, suggesting that the albums' producers recognized that the competing versions of Woodstock '99 might appeal to two different audiences—audiences not interested in the other Woodstock '99.<sup>29</sup>

### **Music and Masculinity in the 1990s**

Many of the media responses to Woodstock '99, at least in part, blamed the festival violence on the aggressive style of masculinity on display at the festival. Magazines like *Rolling Stone* and *Spin* portrayed Woodstock '99 as a sexualized wasteland where "packs of shirtless, sweaty guys" swarmed passing women and demanded that they bare their breasts before being allowed to

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<sup>28</sup> Various artists, *Woodstock '99*, CD, with Kid Rock, D M X, Jewel, et al., (1999: New York, Epic).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

continue on their way.<sup>30</sup> The *Village Voice* writer Robin Rothman declared Woodstock '99 “a breeding ground for a male-dominated mob mentality, where girls...weren't equals who could hold their own, but fresh meat to be poked, prodded, and sometimes penetrated.”<sup>31</sup> Comedian Jon Stewart described Woodstock '99 as a “frat party turned riot.”<sup>32</sup> Even the official documentary film *Woodstock '99*, released in October 1999, commented on the sexualized atmosphere at the festival through an extended interview segment with one concertgoer who complained about pervasive calls of “Show us your tits” and urged his fellow concertgoers, “Show us your brains.” The filmmakers, in fact, juxtaposed the audio from this interview with scenes of concertgoers tearing down a mural wall and mugging for the camera, linking the rioters “stupid” vandalism with sexual aggression and the objectification of women.<sup>33</sup>

Although, some coverage of Woodstock '99 did condemn sexism and the objectification of female concertgoers, documentation of the festival also demonstrated ambivalence about the sexualized atmosphere at Woodstock '99. Many accounts that seemingly condemned the sexualized atmosphere of the festival also sensationalized that same atmosphere, perhaps providing a vicarious thrill for their readers. For example, Jeff Stark's withering July 27<sup>th</sup> reaction piece for Salon.com, describes how two women willingly “peel[ed] off

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<sup>30</sup> David Moodie, Maureen Callahan, and Mark Schone. "Don't Drink the Brown Water," *Spin*, October 1999. 104-05.

<sup>31</sup> Rothman, “Politics of the Pit”

<sup>32</sup> "Headlines - The Price is Riot," *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*.

<sup>33</sup> *Woodstock '99*, DVD.

their tops,” baring their breasts and allowing men—who behaved “as if they've never seen a naked woman in their lives”—to “pull out their cameras and click a few frames.” The “women appear[ed] to enjoy the attention.”<sup>34</sup> Stark’s coverage, though largely condemnatory, did offer readers an opportunity to imagine the sexual thrills that topless women offered to male Woodstockers.

Moreover, the *Woodstock '99* documentary—despite the inclusion of the critical “show us your brains” interview—likewise played up thrills that semi-nude women provided, both to concertgoers and the documentary audience. For example, one segment features a male voiceover repeating the word “breasts” as the camera cuts to a series of topless women. And if these images proved too subtle, the filmmakers also included a shot of a man standing in front of two topless women holding a sign declaring, “Boobs make me happy.”<sup>35</sup> Although, this sexualization of female concertgoers seems questionable given the allegations of sexual assault associated with Woodstock '99, the filmmakers’ footage of smiling semi-nude women depicted them as comfortable and willing to be filmed. Some fleeting images of female crowd surfers did show a few fleeting images of women struggling to cover themselves as they move over the crowd.<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, the film’s presentation scantily-clad women hinted at the

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<sup>34</sup> Jeff Stark, “What a Riot: Diary of a Woodstock 99 Survivor.”

<sup>35</sup> *Woodstock '99*, DVD.

<sup>36</sup> *Woodstock '99*, DVD.

filmmakers' ambivalence about male fans' objectification of female concertgoers, as well as the sexism ingrained in rock culture.<sup>37</sup>

Many rock journalists singled out the rap-rock band Limp Bizkit and their front-man Fred Durst as particularly responsible for encouraging the violent, hyper-masculine atmosphere at Woodstock '99.<sup>38</sup> In the late 1990s, Durst had become something of a poster-boy for rap-rock's hyper-masculine "swaggering stance," a performer who "rallied the opposition" against calls to "mellow out."<sup>39</sup> According to Durst's Woodstock '99 stage banter, mellowing out is "what Alanis Morissette had you motherfuckers do."<sup>40</sup> Durst, however, was not alone in playing up the confrontational, hyper-masculine aspects of rap-rock. For example, the band Korn appeared on the cover of *Spin*'s November 1998 issue in gorilla suits because they were being presented as declaring "guerrilla war" on "wuss rock."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> In response to the violence at the festival, some artists called for providing safe spaces for women at concerts. The Beastie Boys' Adam Horowitz urged musicians in the audience at the 1999 MTV Video Music Awards to use their positions in the music industry to ensure "the safety of all the girls and the women that come to our shows," and his band established "women only" sections at concerts; "Beastie Boys get award at MTV awards 1999," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=icYCTiyuhSs>. Riot grrrl pioneer Kathleen Hanna (who was dating Horowitz in 1999; the couple are current married) blogged about this event on September 7, 2010, stating "This clip is total punk rock/performance art to me. I mean, getting up at a totally superficial fake hugs bullshit event like this and being vulnerable and talking about something REAL is no fucking joke. We left 5 minutes after this because it was so far beyond the "who farted?" feeling, it felt like people were gonna kill us"; <http://kathleenhanna.wordpress.com/2010/09/07/proud-to-be-associated-with-you>.

<sup>38</sup> Jeff Stark, "What a Riot: Diary of a Woodstock 99 Survivor."

<sup>39</sup> Charles Aaron, "Trend of the Year: Rap-Rock Mooks," *Spin*, January, 2000. 88-89.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Spin*, November 1998.

Summing up 1999's major rock trends, *Spin* asserted that that year, "rap-metal clowns" like Durst gave "rock an ugly makeover, angry-white-guy style."<sup>42</sup> Openly questioning the ways masculine identity was performed within the alternative rock community, *Spin*'s writers compared Kurt Cobain's 1994 statement that "The future of rock belongs to women" to what they identified as the "mook" ethos of "Women Keep Your Distance, unless, of course, you're a porn star, groupie, or topless."<sup>43</sup>

The notion that Woodstock '99s was a riotous "sock hop for the children of the corn" that "captured...this total dissatisfaction and anger and confusion in young men...expressed by all the heavy white rap-rock" successfully entered the culture, in part because it fit with existing cultural understandings about young men.<sup>44</sup> <sup>45</sup> These concerns about moronic youthful masculinity played into on-going cultural concerns about boys that had emerged over the course of the 1990s. Popular book titles such as *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons From the Myths of Boyhood* and *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys*, as well as the work of anti-sexism activist Jackson Katz, raised concerns that the culture of boyhood was emotionally damaging to young men. Taken as a whole, their discursive works argued that society's "unwritten Boy Code" "places boys in

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<sup>42</sup> Aaron, "Trend of the Year: Rap-Rock Mooks," *Spin*, 88.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>44</sup> Lance Morrow, "The Madness of Crowds." Morrow compares the Woodstock '99 attendees to the cult of demonic children in the 1977 Stephen King story and 1984 film *Children of the Corn*.

<sup>45</sup> Aaron, "Trend of the Year: Rap-Rock Mooks," *Spin*, 90.

a 'gender straightjacket'" that "hardens" them, teaching boys to be tough, "cool," rule-breakers who hide their feelings and fears behind violent, macho masks.<sup>46</sup>

The idea that boys acted out violently because they had to repress un-masculine emotions gained wider appeal in the wake of a number of high-profile high school shootings, particularly the April 20, 1999, shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. Journalists and cultural commentators linked the Columbine shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold's spree to "savage music," violent video games, and "the chemistry of cruelty and cliques" that prompted the boys to seek violent revenge against the "jocks and cheerleaders" who made up the school's "social elite" and denied them popularity and acceptance<sup>47</sup> This revenge fantasy motive that journalists ascribed to Harris and Klebold was not too different than *Spin's* claim that Woodstock '99's rap-rock fans rioted to demonstrate their opposition to a feminized alternative rock culture that supposedly denied them their rightful privileged position in rock culture.<sup>48 49</sup>

*Spin's* claim that rap-rock fans raged because they felt marginalized seems prescient now, given that bands like Limp Bizkit and Korn largely enter the

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<sup>46</sup> William S. Pollack, *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons From the Myths of Boyhood*, (New York: Random House, 1998), xxiv-xxv.

<sup>47</sup> Nancy Gibbs, Julie Grace, S.C. Gwynne, Maureen Harrington, David S. Jackson, Jeffery Shapiro, and Richard Woodbury, "The Littleton Massacre:...In Sorrow and Disbelief," *Time Magazine*, May 3, 1999, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,990870-1,00.html> (retrieved January 13, 2011).

<sup>48</sup> Aaron, "Trend of the Year: Rap-Rock Mooks," 88-90.

<sup>49</sup> Jonathan Davis, front-man for rap-rockers Korn, stated that he specifically drew on his rock star fantasies, feelings of victimization, and fears about emasculation when writing his lyrics. In a 1998 interview with *Spin*, he explained that his song "Reclaim My Place" is about "'how I thought I'd become a rock star and not get picked on anymore...by my band still calls me a fag.'" (*Spin*, November 1998, p.84).



history of 1990s rock as examples of inappropriate male aggression and violence.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, rock critics blame them for “murdering” grunge and undermining “the gains alternative rock had made in the early ’90s” by “vomit[ing] up” the remaining bits of grunge with “the most rank, least edible chunks of metal and hip-hop.”<sup>51</sup> Where the formerly ferocious grunge rocker Kurt Cobain’s image has been softened and his thoughtful and sensitive aspects highlighted, Woodstock ’99 alumnus Fred Durst remains a convenient media punching bag. For example, in February 2011, the citizens of Austin, TX voted to rename their city’s solid waste department in his honor.<sup>52</sup>

Examining the media fallout that surrounded Woodstock ’99 can provide insight into the ways that rock culture engages with the culture at large. The sensationalized reporting of the rapes, riots, and fires played on mainstream fears about a rock culture that often intentionally constructed itself to shock mainstream society. Moreover, obvious—and expected—inter-generational tensions emerged from the comparisons between Woodstock ’99 and the original 1969 festival. The “Goodstock” narrative of peaceful hippies enacting cultural revolution at Max Yasgur’s farm has been fused to the popular memory of social

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<sup>50</sup> Steven Hyden, "Whatever Happened to Alternative Nation, Part 10: 1999: By the Time We Got to Woodstock 99," *Avclub.com*, February 22, 2011, <http://www.avclub.com/articles/part-10-1999-by-the-time-we-got-to-woodstock-99,52164/1> (retrieved February 22, 2011).

<sup>51</sup> Steven Hyden, "Whatever Happened to Alternative Nation, Part 9: 1998: You’re Either with Korn and Limp Bizkit, or You’re Against Them," *Avclub.com*, February 8, 2011, <http://www.avclub.com/articles/part-9-1998-youre-either-with-korn-and-limp-bizkit,51471> (retrieved February 8, 2011).

<sup>52</sup> Ross Luippold, "Austin Citizens Vote To Name Solid Waste Dept. After Fred Durst," *The Huffington Post*, February 11, 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/02/11/austin-solid-waste-fred-durst\\_n\\_822082.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/02/11/austin-solid-waste-fred-durst_n_822082.html) (retrieved February 12, 2011).

change in the 1960s. Journalists therefore could easily deride Woodstock '99 as an empty display of youth culture hedonism because the festival was not obviously connected to any narrative of social progress.

In addition to these predictable tensions—between mainstream culture and rock, between Baby Boomers and Generation X—the discourse surrounding Woodstock '99 also revealed intra-generational and inter-gendered tensions within rock culture. Not only had the alternative rock movement—including feminist artists working in subgenres like riot grrrl and grunge, as well the anti-“wuss rock” likes of Korn and Limp Bizkit—directly engaged questions about gender and rock culture masculinity over the course of the 1990s, but many figures aligned with the rock community also questioned the meaning and viability of rock culture itself.<sup>53</sup> In short, the meaning of rock culture, especially alternative rock culture, was up for debate. Woodstock '99 provides an opportunity to examine these tensions between various factions within rock culture, revealing that, rather than acting as youth-focused monoculture, 1990s rock culture was engaged in its own internal debates about commercialism, sexism, and masculinity.

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<sup>53</sup> In 1993, outspoken musician and recording engineer Steve Albini published the essay “The Problem with Music” in issue #5 of *The Baffler* wherein he outlined the financial and artistic perils faced by underground artists who signed with major record labels. For Albini, the music industry, both the major labels and the underground indies like Sub Pop who “made millions from selling off Nirvana” swindled bands into taking on major debts that served to enrich record executives. Albini’s essay was reprinted in the punk zine *Maximumrockandroll* and widely distributed on the internet. (Albini’s essay is available at <http://www.negativland.com/albini.html>.) *The Baffler*’s editor Thomas Frank similarly questioned the true revolutionary potential of any so-called counterculture based on consumerism and the commodification of dissent in his *Baffler* essay “Alternative to What?”

In recent years, rock critics and fans have attempted to make historical sense of the major shifts 1990s' alternative rock trends. Many of these projects have produced Whig-ish histories of underground "scenes" such as the riot grrrl movement or Seattle grunge bands. Artist biographies, along with box sets and documentary films, represent another major trend in 1990s rock history-making, with particular emphasis placed on critical favorites, cult artists, and overlooked 1990s indie artists. Reunion tours by beloved 1990s cult acts and retrospective "best of" lists also skew towards celebrating more obscure bands. Moreover, young bands participating in the ongoing 2010s revival of 1990s rock styles have cribbed sounds and fashions from left-of-the-dial subgenres like "shoegaze" and "dream pop" rather than resurrecting the rap-metal hybrid that dominated the charts in the latter half of the 1990s. Rap-rock's late-1990s successes are usually ignored by these popular rock histories because they do not fit in with current notions of "cool" and therefore do not merit much attention.

Moreover, the media's response to Woodstock '99 provides a lens through which scholars can view the difficult process by which meaning is assigned to multivocal event. The mainstream media was able to blame riots and rapes on "stupid," aggressive rock fans, in part, because this explanation drew upon contemporary concerns about the violent potential of seemingly "normal" young white men. This same explanation also served rock critics because denouncing rap-rock "mooks" and their fans provided the ultimate opportunity to marginalize the rap-rock subculture that was already in decline. By refashioning rock history in this way, rock critics could dismiss the hyper-masculine displays in the

Woodstock '99 mosh pits as an uncool aberration— with one critic going as far as to liken rap-rock's aggressive masculinity to the macho “with us or against us” posturing of George W. Bush's administration.<sup>54</sup> By examining the role that mass media and popular history play in the gendering of popular culture, we can better understand the complex, contested discourse surrounding events too frequently dismissed as merely the unfortunate outcome of “boys being boys.”

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<sup>54</sup> Hyden, "You're Either with Korn and Limp Bizkit, or You're Against Them "

CHAPTER 5  
EPILOGUE: IDENTITY, GENDER,  
AND ALT/INDIE CULTURE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

“Do all festival lineups EVER CREATED effing suck?” The culture and humor website *HipsterRunoff.com* posed this rhetorical question in January 2013 in response to the apparently underwhelming announcement of acts for the 2013 iteration of the Coachella festival.<sup>1</sup> Site editor Carles snarkily illustrated his hyperbolic, text-speak rant about disappointing music festivals with a fake Coachella ad from 1994 boasting a fantasy lineup of alternative rock heavy hitters including Lollapalooza alumni Pearl Jam, Nine Inch Nails, Green Day and Smashing Pumpkins. His point was that multi-day, multi-act festivals have become such a routine part of indie-leaning rock culture in the first decades of the twenty-first century that nothing seems exciting. In fact, a key factor defining indie identity for Carles was whether or not a person could still muster any excitement at all for mega-shows like Coachella. “Would u rather be a person who h8s lineups, or is like 'OMG WE HAVE 2 GO, BITCHES! #carpoolchella’.”<sup>2</sup>

As a genre, indie rock—which by the second decade of the twenty-first century had largely assumed alternative rock’s role as a big tent, quasi-underground genre for self-consciously edgy rock-inspired bands—had produced

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<sup>1</sup> Carles, “Do all festival lineups EVER CREATED effing suck?” *HipsterRunoff.com*, January 25, 2013, <http://www.hipsterrunoff.com/2013/01/do-all-festival-lineups-ever-created-effing-suck.html> (retrieved January 25, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

bands, fans, and rock writers just as preoccupied with the slippery nature of authentic indie identity and performance (often derisively described “hipster” culture) as alternative rockers were with the state of their alternative nation. The rock press and even mainstream news and culture outlets pondered the meaning of “hipsters” and produced lists of the “10 things that are killing indie music” regularly since the moment that indie culture hit the mainstream’s radar in the early 2000s.<sup>3</sup>

Not surprisingly, critics have often viewed indie identity through the lens of gender just as they did with alternative rock. In 2010 *New York Magazine* published a lengthy analysis of hipster culture and identity which argued that indie-aligned hipsterism first birthed the “relentlessly male” “White Hipster” subculture which “fetishized the violence, instinctiveness, and rebelliousness of lower-middle-class ‘white trash’” in the early 2000s. This mode of indie identity, the article asserted, fell out of favor around 2003, and gave way to the “feminized hipster” trappings of what the author termed the “Hipster Primitive”—a style rooted in “the sound and symbols of pastoral innocence.”<sup>4</sup> Seemingly, indie/hipster culture did not just assume alt-rock’s place in the rock marketplace; it also inherited alt-rock’s long-running discourse about masculine and feminine performance and identity.

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<sup>3</sup> Tom Hawking, "The 10 Things That Are Killing Indie Music in 2011," *Flavorwire.com*, September 21, 2011, <http://flavorwire.com/211210/the-10-things-that-are-killing-indie-music-in-2011/view-all> (retrieved March 2, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Mark Greif, "What Was the Hipster?" *New York Magazine*, October 24, 2010, <http://nymag.com/news/features/69129/> (retrieved January 16, 2011).

Of course the aging alt-rock stars of the 1990s did not simply disappear because their music was no longer fashionable and they were replaced in the popular imagination by PBR-swilling, skinny-jeans-wearing hipsters. Alt-rock bands who first achieved fame in the 1990s continued to tour and record and appear in the rock press. And perhaps fittingly, rock journalists contextualized these bands' advancing years and occasionally their waning creative powers using gendered language. Michael Stipe, singer for alt-rock pioneers R.E.M., "grew gracefully into the role of alt-rock elder statesman" by the time his band called it quits in 2011.<sup>5</sup> Critic Stephen Thomas Erlewine conjured images of a veteran laborer merely toiling away at his job when he described the lack of excitement in Pearl Jam's later work as the unfortunate triumph of the band's "journeyman tendencies" over the "desperate, searching confusion" that marked their best work.<sup>6</sup> When alt-country experimenters Wilco embraced a seemingly more mature, subdued sound over the course of the '00s, critics mocked them as "dad rock," prompting bandleader Jeff Tweedy to defend both dads and rocking in an interview with *Men's Journal* magazine.<sup>7</sup>

Not even the late Kurt Cobain escaped the indignity of being an aging rock star. A number of rock journalists have concocted alternate histories of the

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<sup>5</sup> Gil Kaufman, "R.E.M. And Nirvana: The Kurt Cobain/Michael Stipe Connection," *MTV.com*, September 22, 2011, <http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1671211/r-e-m-michael-stipe-nirvana-kurt-cobain.jhtml> (retrieved March 3, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Thomas Erlewine, "Pearl Jam, Yield," *Allmusic.com*, <http://www.allmusic.com/album/yield-mw0000031540> (retrieved February 17, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Brian Hiatt, "Wilco Rocks Steady," *Men's Journal*, November 2010, <http://www.mensjournal.com/magazine/wilco-rocks-steady-20121122> (retrieved February 17, 2013).

Nirvana singer's life had he not killed himself—usually as part of annual commemorations marking the singer's birth or death. These narratives have typically imagined the singer losing his original audience and remaking his sound, breaking up and then reforming his band, and maintaining a messy on-again-off-again relationship with his wife Courtney Love.<sup>8</sup> One of the more touching vignettes found in these counterfactual Cobain biographies comes from a 2007 blog entry by critic Alan Cross who imagined a sober, fatherly Cobain celebrating his fortieth birthday “with a quiet dinner at Pizza Hut” with his fourteen-year-old daughter Frances, the sensitive rocker's rage calmed by fatherhood and subsequent retreat into normalcy.<sup>9</sup>

These gendered critiques of aging rock stars and the imaginary middle age dreamed up for Kurt Cobain all reflected a dominant rock culture view of maturity and manhood which held that great rock music was made by young men not middle-aged fathers. Furthermore, good rock stars owed it to their audiences to age gracefully while not becoming too musically dull and thus too obviously old. When alt-rockers have continued to behave in the same brash, bratty

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<sup>8</sup> Chuck Klosterman, "What If Kurt Cobain Didn't Die?" *Spin*, April 2, 2009, <http://www.spin.com/articles/what-if-kurt-cobain-didnt-die> (retrieved April 8, 2009); Craig Hlavaty, "Kurt Cobain at 45: Where Would He Be In 2012?" *Blogs.Houstonpress.com*, February 20, 2012, [http://blogs.houstonpress.com/rocks/2012/02/kurt\\_cobain\\_at\\_45\\_where\\_would.php](http://blogs.houstonpress.com/rocks/2012/02/kurt_cobain_at_45_where_would.php) (retrieved February 17, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Alan Cross, "What If Kurt Had Lived?" *Exploremusic.com*, February 23, 2007, <http://exploremusic.com/home/TheMusicGeekBlog/tabid/1465/id/10598/m/2/y/2007/Default.aspx> (dead link). Alan Cross's blog post is no longer available at its original location. I rediscovered the text of the blog entry reposted in an archived version of the Guitar Jam forum at *Harmonycentral.com*—which may have been where I first read the piece as a HC member in 2007. This post is located at <http://www.harmonycentral.com/t5/Guitar-Jam/So-it-seems-that-15-years-ago-Kurt-Cobain-said-bye-bye/td-p/21890704/page/2> where the text of the blog was posted as a quote by user "finboy" (retrieved February 17, 2013).



fashion as they did during their 1990s heydays, they typically must seek absolution by entering rehab and publicly atoning for their actions.<sup>10</sup> If not, they risk becoming the subject of snide entertainment press articles with titles like “A Brief History Of Billy Corgan Doing And Saying Crazy Things” or “Courtney Love is Crazy, Her Daughter Agrees.”<sup>11</sup>

Although middle-aged alt-rockers struggling—and often failing—to maintain their fame and their cultural cachet has made for compelling tabloid fodder, some alt-era musicians have attempted to integrate their alternative identities with their identities as parents and spouses in less flamboyant ways. Given that softer, tradition-bound styles of alternative rock have sometimes been derisively termed “dad rock,” fatherhood can represent a perilous moment for musicians whose image is based on perceived edginess. For example, Ozzfest

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<sup>10</sup> On September 21, 2012 Green Day's lead singer Billie Joe Armstrong had a “meltdown” during his band's set at the IHEARTRADIO festival in Las Vegas when the show's producers asked the band to cut their set short to allow teen heartthrob Justin Bieber to take the stage. Armstrong swore at the producers over the house PA, defended his band's right to play based on the length of their career, and smashed his guitar before storming off stage. Two days later the band announced that Armstrong would enter rehab to treat his alcohol and drug dependency. Armstrong and his band returned from self-imposed exile in the spring of 2013 to resume promotion for the three albums they released in 2012. Armstrong explained his latest fall and redemption in the pages of *Rolling Stone's* March 14<sup>th</sup> issue where he appears on the cover. The band played a well-received set at 2013's South By Southwest (SXSW) festival/conference in Austin, TX which, according to many reviewers, proved that Armstrong was back on the right path. CNN on the “meltdown”: “Green Day Singer Getting Treatment for Substance Abuse,” *CNN.com*, September 24, 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/09/23/showbiz/green-day-substance-abuse> (retrieved February 17, 2013). Excerpt of the *Rolling Stone* interview: David Fricke, “Billie Joe Armstrong: The Rolling Stone Interview,” *Rolling Stone*, March 7, 2013, [http://www.rollingstoneme.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2592](http://www.rollingstoneme.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2592) (retrieved March 13, 2013). SXSW coverage: Jim Harrington, “Green Day at SXSW 2013: Billie Joe Armstrong back; band delivers glorious night of music,” *The San Bernardino County Sun*, March 16, 2013, [http://www.sbsun.com/cj\\_22805718/sxsw-2013-review-green-day-delivers-glorious-night](http://www.sbsun.com/cj_22805718/sxsw-2013-review-green-day-delivers-glorious-night) (retrieved March 17, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Josh Kurp, “A Brief History of Billy Corgan Doing and Saying Crazy Things,” *Uproxx.com*, June 13, 2012, <http://www.uproxx.com/music/2012/06/a-brief-history-of-billy-corgan-doing-and-saying-crazy-things/> (retrieved February 17, 2013); Alex Myers, “Courtney Love is crazy, her daughter agrees,” *Dailycaller.com*, April 13, 2012, <http://dailycaller.com/2012/04/13/courtney-love-is-crazy-her-daughter-agrees/> (retrieved February 18, 2013).

founder and heavy metal icon became a somewhat comical figure after the reality series *The Osbournes* (2002-05) portrayed him as a dottering pater familias. Osbourne later claimed that his disoriented behavior was a result of daily drug use.<sup>12</sup> The film *The Other F Word* examines the challenges 1980s and 90s punk rockers have faced as fathers seeing that there's "nothing really in the punk rock ethos that prepares you for being a dad." These musicians found that their commitment to rebellion often made it difficult for them to function as authority figures, especially for those men whose own parents were not present and did not serve as effective role models. Even Big Black and Shellac bandleader, recording engineer, and notoriously outspoken alt-rock tastemaker Steve Albini embraced domesticity. In 2010 he started a food blog cataloging the recipes he "made for Heather," his wife.<sup>13</sup>

Middle-aged alternative rockers aren't the only people still tinkering with alt-rock identity. Predictably, record labels, musicians, rock critics and fans continue to re-evaluate and re-contextualize alt-rock identity via an endless series of deluxe album reissues, '90s-inspired retro bands, commemorative articles marking significant anniversaries, and straightforward fandom blogs dedicated to remembering the 1990s alt-rock boom. Some fans, however, have appropriated alt-rock identity, stripped it of its '90s baggage, and reworked it to

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<sup>12</sup> Rick Fulton, "I was stoned every day while filming *The Osbournes*, admits Ozzy Osbourne," *The Daily Record*, May 4, 2009, <http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/entertainment/celebrity/i-was-stoned-every-day-while-filming-the-osbournes-1021128> (retrieved March 13, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Steve Albini, *mariobatalivoice*, <http://mariobatalivoice.blogspot.com> (retrieved March 13, 2013).

suit their own needs. The so-called “soft grunge” micro-trend began appearing on the social blogging site Tumblr in 2012.<sup>14</sup> In general, soft grunge bloggers have collected and reblogged images, video, and other digital ephemera that reflected their desire to create a “dark” persona that seemed both “arty” and “trashy.”<sup>15</sup> The soft grunge aesthetic has typically emphasized pastel colors and juxtapositions of conventionally sinister symbolism with conventionally girly signifiers. Many of these bloggers fixated on the late Nirvana frontman, reposting pictures of the singer alongside images of people with pink hair and soft-focus images of flowers and sunsets. In fact, other bloggers and internet trend hounds have mocked soft grungers’ appropriation of Cobain’s image, ridiculing their lack of “real” knowledge about 1990s alternative rock and creating their own jokey Tumblr pages and internet memes ridiculing soft grunge bloggers who they have assumed are uninformed teenage girls and therefore unworthy to claim a grunge identity.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Tumblr allows users to both post conventional, text-based blog entries as well as entries that are simply images, video, streaming audio, or links to other internet content. Tumblr users can reblog posts from other users, passing the content on to their followers. Image and video blogging and reblogging is a major part of Tumblr culture, occasionally resulting in micro-trends where users blog and exchange similar images that coalesce into an identifiable style.

<sup>15</sup> As of March 2013, the notoriously sarcastic culture site Urban Dictionary listed two dismissive definitions of “soft grunge” which explained the styles general elements while mocking those who embraced it. “Soft Grunge,” Urban Dictionary, <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Soft%20Grunge> (retrieved March 13, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Examples of the Soft Grunge Blogger meme are available at <http://memegenerator.net/Soft-Grunge-Blogger>. Like any identity lined to an active internet trend, the “soft grunge blogger” remains a contested identity; some people use the term as an insult while others have embraced it as an identity. Moreover, at [memegenerator.net](http://memegenerator.net), a number of users have turned the tables using the meme to mock those who would disparage soft grunge. For example, “Pink haired woman who listens to Nirvana turned me down—THIS WILL MAKE A BRILIANT MEME” (<http://memegenerator.net/instance/33884371>).

Over twenty years after Nirvana ushered alternative rock into the mainstream, alt-rock masculinity remains contested territory. Rock historians may have relegated hyper-masculine nu-metallars to the cut-out bin where they are treated as punch lines and minor musical footnotes. Nevertheless, concerns about masculinity and identity continue to color the ways that artists, journalists, and fans make sense of indie/hipster identities and indie/alternative music. For example, in 2011 electronic musician James Blake complained that the indie-aligned electronic music genre known as dubstep had been diluted by producers who “hit upon a sort of frat-boy market where there's this macho-ism being reflected in the sounds and the way the music makes you feel.” For Blake, this aggressive style of dubstep—derisively called “brostep” by disapproving listeners and critics—reduced the genre to a “pissing contest” of “who can make the dirtiest, filthiest bass sound.” He concluded that this approach was “a million miles away from where dubstep started” and resulted in music that would “appeal to women.”<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, massive, heterogeneous festivals featuring performers from the worlds of rock, indie, pop, hip-hop, and electronic dance music (EDM) have become a major site of rock performance and identity-making—so much so that they now seem predictable, perfunctory. Within the context of an expansive indie universe epitomized by genre-blending mega-shows like Coachella, Bonnaroo, Pitchfork, and the re-imagined Lollapalooza, these mega-shows seem like

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<sup>17</sup> Liz Pelly, "Interview: James Blake's dub soft-shoe," *The Boston Phoenix*, September 28, 2011, <http://thephoenix.com/Boston/music/127478-interview-james-blakes-dub-soft-shoe/?page=2#TOPCONTENT> (retrieved March 3, 2013).

obvious ways to bring diverse styles and people together. That such gatherings were once considered revolutionary (Lollapalooza '91) or even dangerous (Woodstock '99) seems a particularly distant memory. For all the attention 1990s alt-rockers paid to gender issues, they were hardly able to settle these matters within the context of alternative rock culture—let alone in rock culture or culture at large. Regardless, the stages of Lollapalooza did, if only briefly, introduce bands, fans, and journalists to a broader view of rock culture masculinity. In that light, Perry Farrell's dream of bridging gaps between different styles and subcultures was successful in that it opened people to the possibility of alternative identities and alternative ways of performing masculinity.

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## VITA

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Over the course of his professional career, Mr. Fitzgerald has focused primarily in the fields of technical writing and instructional design, creating documentation and training for adult learners in a variety of industries, including retail, law enforcement, education, and medicine. He began work toward his Master of Art in History at the University of Missouri-Kansas City in the Fall of 2009. After completing his degree, Mr. Fitzgerald plans to continue his career as a writer, both working as a training professional and pursuing of his own research interests.