Title
A Woman's Place: Lesbian Feminist Conflicts in Contemporary Popular Culture

Author
Pruett, Jessica Lynn

Publication Date
2021

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

A Woman's Place: Lesbian Feminist Conflicts in Contemporary Popular Culture

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Culture and Theory

by

Jessica Pruett

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Jonathan Alexander, Chair
Professor Victoria E. Johnson
Professor Jennifer Terry
Professor Christine Bacareza Balance
Professor Sora Y. Han

2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my committee chair, Professor Jonathan Alexander, for his intellectual generosity, faith in my abilities, and extensive feedback on previous drafts of this work. His enthusiasm for teaching, writing, and learning is infectious, and I have been lucky to witness it for the last six years.

I would also like to thank my committee members, Professors Jennifer Terry, Victoria E. Johnson, and Christine Bacareza Balance. Professor Terry's mentorship has made me a better teacher and sharper thinker, and she has worked tirelessly to provide me with opportunities to develop my work and grow as an academic. Professor Johnson's feedback on previous drafts of this work has been invaluable, and her research expertise has deepened my own writing and thinking on media and popular culture. Professor Balance's generous feedback and guidance gave shape to my dissertation, and her own work made this project seem possible.

Financial support was provided by the University of California, Irvine, the James Harvey Scholarship, and Michigan State University's Special Collections.

VITA
Jessica Pruett

2014	B.A. in English and Women & Gender Studies, Arizona State University
2016	M.A. in Culture and Theory, University of California, Irvine
2021	Ph.D. in Culture and Theory, University of California, Irvine

PUBLICATIONS

"Lesbian Fandom Remakes the Boy Band." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, vol. 34, 2020, n.p. https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2020.1865.

"Lesbian One Direction Fans Take Over Tumblr." In A. Cho, A. McCracken, I. Neill Hoch, and L. Stein (Eds.), *A Tumblr Book: Platform and Cultures*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020, pp 194-200.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A Woman's Place: Lesbian Feminist Conflicts in Contemporary Popular Culture
by
Jessica Pruett
Doctor of Philosophy in Culture and Theory
University of California, Irvine, 2021
Professor Jonathan Alexander, Chair

Feminist theorists have chronicled lesbian feminists' role in developing a theoretical and political foundation for the academic fields of gender studies and queer theory. Many queer theorists have critiqued lesbian feminists' rigid policing of lesbian identity, noting that this often resulted in the exclusion of women of color, trans women, and sex radicals from lesbian communities. However, there is little work that chronicles the political, racial, and gender diversity among lesbian feminists. As a result, lesbian feminism is frequently depicted as a social movement solely comprised of white, cisgender women, erasing the major political, theoretical, and cultural contributions that women of color and trans women made to these communities. Such depictions fix lesbian feminism's political legacy and minimize its significance to contemporary social movements.

"A Woman's Place" traces the relationship between lesbian feminist history and contemporary popular culture in the U.S., illuminating lesbian feminism's influence on the queer and feminist political movements of today. This cultural history draws from my archival research at the Lesbian Herstory archives, the June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives, and ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, along with the special collections at Michigan State University and Smith College. In addition to archival research, my methods include textual analysis, political economic analysis, and ethnographic interviews. Through critical readings of letters, newspapers, and organizational documents chronicling major political conflicts from lesbian feminist history,

I argue that the persistent tension and disagreement within lesbian feminist communities was a mark of their political diversity. I contrast these historical conflicts with contemporary depictions of lesbianism in popular culture, which circulate and reinterpret lesbian feminist political legacies. Using a range of examples, including an indie pop band, an Amazon original television series, and a viral Instagram account, I analyze how lesbian feminist conflicts over race, gender, and sexuality play out in contemporary contexts. I argue that the political questions and concerns animating lesbian feminism remain relevant for queer and feminist thinkers and activists today, particularly regarding the persistence of a gendered division of power and the importance of building alternative social and economic institutions for women. Focusing on this history of collaborative struggle helps to both illuminate our political present and map a path forward for the future.

Introduction: From the Lesbian Past to the Queer Future?

> It is imperative that we build our own media. No serious political movement in history has ever relied on the communications of its oppressor. Without our own media we are without voice.
>
> –Rita Mae Brown, "The Shape of Things to Come"

On January 31, 2019, the premium cable channel Showtime announced that it was rebooting the original series *The L Word.* The show's initial 2004-2009 run, which was helmed by showrunner Ilene Chaiken, had been praised as heralding a massive shift in how lesbians were depicted on television; though it tended toward soap opera-like storylines, *The L Word* was the first television drama to focus on the lives of lesbian, bisexual, and queer women. Over the span of six seasons, the show both sparked and addressed debates about queer women's sexualities, featured numerous celebrity cameos, and amassed a devoted and active fan base that extended into the digital realm through show-sponsored fan fiction contests and *OurChart.com*, a social networking website based on the series. When the beloved series' reboot was announced nearly 15 years after its debut, numerous media outlets published articles celebrating the show's return. Much of this writing reflected on the show's enduring impact on televisual depictions of lesbians, referring to the series' original run as a groundbreaking "seismic event"[1] for lesbian viewers and a high-water mark for lesbian visibility on television. *The L Word*'s sexy, glamorous depiction of lesbianism in sunny Los Angeles had certainly made a lasting impression on queer and lesbian viewers, many of whom wondered how the show's reboot would reckon with its legacy.

While *The L Word* would go on to shape subsequent televisual depictions of lesbianism, the series was also an attempt at grappling with lesbian historical legacies. In particular, the

[1] Wortham, Jenna. 2020. "'The L Word' Was a Trailblazer. Can a Reboot Keep Up With the Culture?" *The New York Times Magazine*, Feb. 12, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/12/magazine/the-l-word-was-a-trailblazer-can-a-reboot-keep-up-with-the-culture.html.

original series set out to reject popular associations of lesbianism with the politics and aesthetics of lesbian feminism. Some critics considered this to be one of the show's most significant representational interventions; prior to *The L Word*'s 2004 premiere, one *New York* magazine writer enthusiastically forecasted that the show would destroy stereotypes of lesbians as "decked out in fanny packs, tool belts, Birkenstocks, ear cuffs, and bolo ties, as we revel in our man-hating, tofu-eating, mullet-headed, folk-music-loving, sexless homebody glory."[2] Such celebrations of *The L Word*'s fashionable, attractive cast rely on its distance from a form of lesbian feminism that prized downwardly mobile aesthetics, rejected the fashion industry, and centered a critique of the patriarchy in its political ideology.

Although the show's post-Trump reboot sought to right many of the original series' representational wrongs, particularly regarding the show's history of rampant and unapologetic transphobia, *The L Word*'s second iteration ultimately did not make significant changes to the glossy, pro-consumerist aesthetic that has marked the series since its inception. Throughout this dissertation, I return to popular cultural phenomena like *The L Word*: media texts that attempt to articulate something about contemporary lesbian identity, which ultimately do so by staking out a particular relationship to lesbian feminist politics. By depicting a version of lesbian life that was emphatically consumerist, *The L Word* made the case for a contemporary lesbian identity that disavowed lesbian feminism's anti-capitalist leanings. Like *The L Word*, many (though not all) of the media texts that I analyze construct their own versions of contemporary trans, queer, and lesbian identity by disavowing lesbian feminist political legacies. I ask what version of lesbian feminism is imagined through these disavowals, and return to major moments of conflict in lesbian feminist history to more fully explore both its shortcomings and its value in the present

[2] Bolonik, Kera. 2004. "Not Your Mother's Lesbians." *New York Magazine*, Jan. 2, 2004. https://nymag.com/nymetro/news/features/n_9708/.

day. In particular, I trace the lesbian feminist activist, creative, and theoretical work of trans lesbians and lesbians of color, while also reckoning seriously with the ways in which racism and transmisogyny shaped many lesbian feminist communities, businesses, and organizations. While shows like *The L Word* may reject certain components of lesbian feminism, I argue that they often replicate the racism and transphobia that shaped many white, cisgender lesbians' articulations of lesbian feminist politics.

I. Background

My dissertation draws upon queer theoretical work that acknowledges the effects of structural racism and misogyny on one's experience of sexuality. Although few queer theorists have framed lesbian feminism as a potential site of radical resistance and imagination, scholars including Ann Cvetkovich and Sharon Holland have complicated one-dimensional depictions of lesbian feminist politics during the 1970s. My project would not be possible without the work of Ann Cvetkovich, whose thinking on lesbian counterpublics helped me to imagine a mode of queer theorizing that attends primarily to lesbian cultural and historical phenomena, instead of either attempting to theorize sexuality without gender or focusing primarily on gay men. Cvetkovich's rejection of the notion that the terms lesbian and queer are "mutually exclusive—that the queer, for instance, is the undoing of the identity politics signified by the category lesbian, or that lesbian culture is hostile to queer formations" (2003, 11) is foundational to my project's rethinking of lesbian feminist political legacies and their significance in contemporary contexts. Her nuanced work on lesbian feminist culture and politics has shaped my belief that it is possible to attend to lesbian feminism's very real history of transphobia while also analyzing what was radical and even revolutionary about lesbian feminist politics.

My dissertation's relationship to feminist and queer theory has also been shaped by the work of Sharon Holland. In *The Erotic Life of Racism*, Holland suggests that queer theory's move away from a feminist focus on ethics casts feminist theory as backward and outdated. Holland also critically analyzes queer of color critique's use of Black lesbian feminist theory, arguing that much of this work has failed to engage the diversity of Black lesbian feminism in generative ways (2012, 53). Although Black lesbian feminist thought is often positioned as being counter to liberal ideology, Holland notes that not all of this work is fundamentally anti-normative. Holland's work informs my approach to so-called "lesbian feminist politics," in that I presume that the many political ideologies, actions, and actors that are included within this phrase represent a multiplicity of political viewpoints. While I refer to various lesbian feminist political and cultural organizations throughout this project, I do not understand them to represent one particular, singularly radical political vision.

In thinking about the relationship between contemporary and historical forms of queer life, community building, and political organizing, my research also engages with the work of queer theorists whose writing interrogates the notion of queer temporality. My project's analysis of queer temporality and futurity is particularly influenced by Elizabeth Freeman and José Esteban Muñoz, both of whom ask how queer attachments to the past can be mobilized in service of a more livable future. In *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories,* Freeman identifies "pastness" (2010, 9) as a hallmark of queer affect, arguing that it can be used as a means of resisting commodity time. My dissertation's relationship to lesbian feminist history is shaped by Freeman's contention that not all "pastness" is regressive. Instead, I focus on lesbian feminist histories of anti-capitalism, trans activism, and antiracist organizing that can be used as road maps for contemporary resistance movements. This project also engages with José Esteban

Muñoz's conceptualization of the relationship between the past, present, and future for queer subjects. In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, Muñoz brings together the works of historical and contemporary queer artists using an analytical approach that he describes as "a backward glance that enacts a future vision" (2009, 4). Through my analyses of Sandy Stone's work at Olivia Records, the rise and fall of Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, and the anti-capitalist origins of the feminist bookstore movement, I hope to take such backward glances. In *Cruising Utopia,* Muñoz describes this analytical work not as a simple unpacking of the past, but as "a critical deployment of the past for the purpose of engaging the present and imagining the future" (116). Likewise, my engagement with lesbian feminist history is not meant to evoke nostalgia for a different (or better) time in lesbian politics, but to clarify the current state of lesbian identity, politics, and communities, and to imagine alternative forms of queer and lesbian life for the future.

This project thinks through lesbian relationships to popular culture, with a focus on the influence that lesbian feminist political legacies have on those relationships. While many theorists have analyzed queers people's engagement with and representations in popular culture, few have unpacked lesbians' particularly fraught relationship with popular culture. Here again Muñoz's work has been formative for my own analysis. In *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics,* Muñoz proposes that for queers of color, disidentification is a mode of identity enactment that works on, with, and against the dominant culture. In his analysis of disidentificatory performances, Muñoz charges that queer performance is about "the powerful and charged transformation of the world, about the world that is born through performance" (1999, xiv). My research takes seriously Muñoz's claim that certain ways of engaging with popular culture can simultaneously work on, with, and against harmful dominant ideologies

about race, gender, and sexuality. My analysis of media texts also draws on the work of Amy Villarejo, whose book *Lesbian Rule: Cultural Criticism and the Value of Desire* focuses on representations of lesbianism in documentary films. Villarejo's work resists a representational analysis of these films that declares their depictions of lesbianism to be either positive or negative, instead attending to the conditions of possibility that enable these instances of lesbian visibility. When lesbianism becomes visible, Villarejo argues that there is always a political trade-off in the balance, prompting the question, "at what cost?" (2003, 4). My use of historical analysis to unpack and contextualize contemporary media texts shifts focus from the "positive" or "negative" qualities of these representations to their historical, political, and economic origins.

II. Research Focus

My dissertation traces the relationship between lesbian feminist history and contemporary popular culture in the U.S., illuminating lesbian feminism's influence on the queer and feminist political movements of today. Through an analysis of letters, newspapers, and organizational documents chronicling major political conflicts from lesbian feminist history, I argue that the persistent tension and disagreement within lesbian feminist communities was a mark of their political diversity. I contrast these historical conflicts with contemporary depictions of lesbianism in popular culture, which circulate and reinterpret lesbian feminist political legacies. This research draws from the work of scholars like Finn Enke and Emma Heaney, who reinterpret lesbian feminism's political legacy by challenging received wisdom about the meaning of lesbian feminist politics in the 1970s and beyond.

Using a range of examples, including the work of the band Tegan and Sara, the Amazon original television series *Transparent*, a viral lesbian Instagram account, and lesbian Tumblr fandom of the boy band One Direction, I analyze how lesbian feminist conflicts over race,

gender, and sexuality play out in contemporary contexts. My project brings together these objects in order to analyze the relationship between popular culture, lesbian feminism, and commodification while simultaneously exploring the gendered, racialized, and classed scripts at work in these mobilizations of lesbian feminist history and theory. Each chapter engages with the question of lesbian feminism's relationship to popular culture by marking a moment of conflict over the subject and meaning of lesbian feminist politics. I argue that the political questions and concerns animating lesbian feminism remain relevant for queer and feminist thinkers and activists today, particularly regarding the persistence of a gendered division of power and the importance of building alternative social and economic institutions for women. Focusing on this history of collaborative struggle helps to both illuminate our political present and map a path forward for the future.

III. Value

Feminist theorists have chronicled lesbian feminists' role in developing a theoretical and political foundation for the academic fields of gender studies and queer theory. Many queer theorists have critiqued lesbian feminists' rigid policing of lesbian identity, noting that this often resulted in the exclusion of women of color, trans women, and sex radicals from lesbian communities. However, there is little work that chronicles the political, racial, and gender diversity among lesbian feminists. As a result, lesbian feminism is frequently depicted as a social movement solely comprised of white, cisgender women, erasing the major political, theoretical, and cultural contributions that women of color and trans women made to these communities.

This project documents the lesbian feminist political interventions of trans lesbians and lesbians of color, who have largely been erased from histories of the lesbian feminist movement. By focusing on understudied perspectives and experiences within lesbian feminist communities,

this research expands academic understandings of lesbian feminism's political impact and historical significance. My research also questions the assumption that lesbian feminists were predominantly trans-exclusionary by highlighting instances of organized community support for trans women in lesbian feminist history. I argue that when lesbian feminist politics and communities are depicted as being uniformly transphobic, the work done by lesbian trans women and their allies is erased.

My dissertation responds to the claim—articulated in works like Bonnie J. Morris's *The Disappearing L: Erasure of Lesbian Spaces and Culture*—that contemporary queer theory has an unacknowledged debt to lesbian feminism. Such texts argue that trans politics in particular work to erase the significance of lesbian feminist history, thereby obscuring that history's foundational importance to contemporary queer life. By revisiting sites of lesbian feminist political conflict, I interrogate this notion of queer theory's debt to an idealized lesbian past. My analysis of these conflicts foregrounds the work of lesbian feminist activists, theorists, and artists who complicate politically one-sided depictions of lesbian feminist history. This expanded view of lesbian feminist culture and politics enables a rethinking of the relationship between queer theory and lesbian feminism.

IV. Research Objectives

One of this project's primary objectives is to trace the relationship between lesbian feminist political history and citations of lesbianism in contemporary popular culture. I say citations, rather than representations, to emphasize the ways in which many of these pop cultural texts' depictions of lesbianism rely on references to political ideologies and cultural objects associated with earlier eras in lesbian history. The band Tegan and Sara, for instance, does not ever mention lesbianism in their early albums. Nevertheless, many reviews of their work

referenced women's music festivals as a means of signaling the band's lesbian appeal. I connect pop cultural moments like this to lesbian feminist history using cultural studies methodologies including textual, political economic, and audience reception analysis. This analytical work underscores the fact that many contemporary texts reiterate a flattened, homogenized version of lesbian feminist history.

This project is critically concerned with broadening queer and feminist theorizations of lesbian feminist politics. Drawing on archival documents from Smith College's Women's Music Archives, Michigan State University's Special Collections, USC's One Archives, the Lesbian Herstory Archives, and the June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives, I reconstruct some of the most infamous political disagreements in lesbian feminist history, and analyze the diverse ideological positions of the women involved in these conflicts. The resulting accounts of these conflicts center the stories of women who were often marginalized in lesbian feminist communities and political organizing, primarily trans women and women of color. My interpretations of these historical moments challenge politically one-dimensional depictions of lesbian feminist politics. Finally, I contextualize the relationship that both lesbian feminist history and pop cultural citations of lesbianism have to contemporary social movements, including Black Lives Matter, Moms 4 Housing, and the trans rights movement. My discussion of these movements highlights their critical differences from the mainstream LGBT rights movement in the U.S., and provides a political context for my analyses of contemporary media texts. I position these social movements as understudied inheritors of some of lesbian feminism's most radical political legacies.

V. Chapters

In my dissertation's first chapter, "Sounding Out: Olivia Records and the Politics of Lesbian Separatism," I begin my reevaluation of lesbian feminist political histories with an

analysis of one of the women's music movement's most well-known record labels. As the most successful record label in women's music, Olivia Records was at the center of some of lesbian feminism's most infamous political conflicts. For the first four years of its existence (from 1971-1974), Olivia Records exemplified what many lesbian feminists saw as the core tenets of women's music: the label was run by a collective of lesbian feminists, worked exclusively with women, and made folk music inflected with lesbian feminist themes. Beginning in 1975, Olivia began to actively seek out women of color to record and work with; this was after making its name by releasing a series of folk albums by white women in 1974 and 1975. Sandy Stone, a trans woman with extensive sound engineering experience and deep ties to the Bay Area's lesbian feminist community, also became part of the Olivia Records collective during this time period. By 1977, Stone was the focal point of a debate about trans women's right to exist within lesbian feminist communities.

Using a series of monthly newsletters sent to Olivia Records distributors, along with the "letters to the editor" pages of several lesbian feminist newspapers, I trace consumers' and distributors' reactions to the record label's evolving political mission from 1975-1978. These same documents track the lesbian feminist community's response to Stone's work there. When framed as part of the broader history of Olivia Records, the backlash to Sandy Stone's employment reveals the co-constitutive nature of racism and transphobia within lesbian feminist communities. Using these insights about the gendered and racialized construction of "women's music," I examine the career of the Canadian indie-pop band Tegan and Sara. Through my analysis of Tegan and Sara's attempts to break into the pop genre, I highlight the ways in which the political legacy of women's music has shaped listeners' expectations for the band's work.

My dissertation's second chapter, "Making Herstory: Lesbian Anti-Capitalism Meets the Digital Age," begins with an archival image that was widely circulated on social media from 2015-2017, which features the lesbian feminist folk singer Alix Dobkin wearing a t-shirt that reads, "the future is female." This chapter analyzes the t-shirt's second life as a viral feminist clothing item, along with its history as part of a fundraiser for New York City's first feminist bookstore, Labyris Books. Tracing the phrase's journey from the its origins at an anti-capitalist, lesbian feminist bookstore to its contemporary home at the LA-based feminist graphic design studio Otherwild, I analyze the relationship between lesbian feminist political histories and millennial feminist business practices.

Marizel Rios, a Latina writer and activist, and Jane Lurie, a white lesbian filmmaker, founded Labyris Books in 1972. The two women decided to open a bookstore following their participation in the 1971 5th Street Women's Building takeover, an event where women's liberation activists took over an abandoned building in New York's Lower East Side and used it to offer social services to women in the community. Working in solidarity with the contemporaneous squatters' movement, the women of the 5th Street takeover called attention to the city government's abandonment of the residents of the Lower East Side and challenged the very concept of private property. After opening Labyris Books, Rios and Lurie found themselves in the paradoxical position of being anti-capitalist small business owners. They envisioned the bookstore as a movement space where women could gather, organize, and learn about sexism, racism, and homophobia. In this chapter, I contextualize the contemporary popularity of the phrase "the future is female" by tracing the phrase's historical origins in lesbian feminist organizing. Through an analysis of archival materials and close readings of media coverage surrounding the phrase's contemporary circulation, I argue that "the future is female" is

representative of the fraught relationship that contemporary lesbian, feminist, and queer subjects and politics have to lesbian feminism.

My third chapter, "'A Gathering of Mothers and Daughters': Race, Gender, and Trans Inclusion at Michigan Womyn's Music Festival," critically analyzes the music festival's fraught political history, focusing on trans women and women of color's interventions in Michigan Womyn's Music Festival's policies and structure. While popular discourse about Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (henceforth MWMF) has often been dominated by the festival's "womyn born womyn" policy, archived promotional flyers do not feature this language until 1992, the year after Nancy Jean Burkholder's ejection from the festival because of volunteers' suspicion that she was trans. By 2000, the policy no longer appears on the festival's promotional flyers.

This chapter uses that discrepancy as the starting point for a more thorough account of the festival's confusing relationship to trans politics —although MWMF's founder Lisa Vogel repeatedly stated her intention that MWMF be attended by so-called "womyn born womyn," the highly publicized political struggles that this intention sparked underline the extent to which the festival was both attended by and considered culturally relevant to people across the gender spectrum, trans women among them. My research evaluates MWMF's political history through an analysis of these struggles over the festival's meaning. I link MWMF's "womyn born womyn" policy to women of color's critiques of the festival, one outcome of which was a Womyn of Color tent. This tent was often cited in defenses of the festival's trans-exclusionary policy, with some drawing a parallel between women of color's desire to have a space free of white women and MWMF's exclusion of trans women. By recounting the history of trans women's participation in MWMF and linking their exclusion to the festival's racial politics, I

complicate existing narratives about MWMF's transphobia. I examine one such narrative in the form of Jill Soloway's *Transparent*, an Amazon original series which features an episode that references the festival's trans inclusion controversy. By putting the messy history of trans politics at MWMF in conversation with *Transparent*'s depiction of the festival, I highlight how well-meaning attempts to depict lesbian feminist transmisogyny sometimes replicate trans-exclusionary messages about trans women's status as outsiders in lesbian communities.

My final chapter, "Beyond One Direction: Lesbian Feminist Fandom Remakes the Boy Band," flips the structure used in previous chapters by focusing primarily on a contemporary lesbian cultural phenomenon. Although straight women (and, to a lesser extent, gay men) are frequently acknowledged as fans of boy bands in academic writing on fandom, lesbians and other queer women are typically absent from theorizations of boy band fandom. Nevertheless, boy bands often do have sizable lesbian fanbases. Lesbian fandom of the British-Irish boy band One Direction congregated primarily on Tumblr; this fandom constituted a queer community space that exposed the boy band as a site of lesbian erotic and creative energy. One manifestation of lesbian One Direction fandom was the drag king performance group known as Every Direction, which maintained an active Tumblr page in addition to performing live drag king renditions of popular One Direction songs. My interviews with the group's members, along with a content analysis of lesbian Tumblr fandom of One Direction, illuminate the significant creative output of this understudied fan community.

This data acts as a record of the lesbian One Direction fan community that congregated on Tumblr during the band's heyday, as well as an intervention in scholarly theorizations of queer fans and fan practices. My analysis of lesbian Tumblr fandom of the boy band One Direction demonstrates how these digital fan practices work with and on lesbian feminist

political and cultural legacies. Specifically, I examine how this fandom interacts with the legacy of the women's music movement, which I argue has had a lasting impact on popular conceptions of lesbian musical preferences in North America. Through this research, I contend that lesbian One Direction fandom constitutes a contemporary queer political intervention that reworks the lesbian feminist political tactics and priorities explored in previous chapters.

Chapter 1

Sounding Out: Olivia Records and the Soundtrack of the Women's Music Movement

I. Introduction

"What's with Lesbians and folk music?" So begins a post on the subreddit actuallesbians, a lesbian-focused community on the social network and discussion website Reddit. The post, written in 2017 by a since-deleted user, reads, "Indigo girls, Julie Schurr, Nicole Reynolds, etc. What gives? Why do lesbians and folk music seem to be such a thing? Is there a cultural piece that I'm missing here?" The question, with its allusion to a specifically lesbian cultural context for the appreciation of folk music, is a thought provoking one. What *is* with lesbians and folk music? The answer lies, at least partially, in the women's music movement of the 1970s, through which lesbian feminists created their own musical sound and scene.

The women's music movement made a lasting impact on lesbian music in the U.S.; although few contemporary lesbian musicians directly claim the movement as an influence, it continues to shape public expectations for their musical careers. Definitions of women's music as a genre are difficult to find and often wildly inconsistent: while some tie it to a particular folksy sound and accompanying acoustic guitars, others insist that women's music is simply music that is by and for women. Most definitions note that in this case, "women's" stands in for lesbian, a linguistic quirk that can be found in many lesbian feminist cultural productions of the time. This music's connection to the lesbian feminist politics of the 1970s is inescapable and crucial to recognizing the broader political goal of women's music: full scale revolution.

Women's music was just one element of lesbian feminists' efforts to create a women's culture, complete with its own literature, music, and businesses. The creation of jobs, meeting spaces, and media for lesbians intersected with lesbian feminists' efforts to establish separatist

communities, in which women could be financially, socially, and emotionally independent from men. A full-scale political revolution could only occur when a critical mass of women chose to direct their energies solely toward other women, and the creation of a lesbian feminist culture would help to facilitate this redirection of energy. This sentiment was famously articulated in the Radicalesbians' essay "The Woman-Identified Woman," which the group distributed during its 1970 takeover of the Second Congress to Unite Women; the essay reads, "It is the primacy of women relating to women…which is at the heart of women's liberation, and the basis for cultural revolution." Thus for many of the women involved in women's music, the political stakes amounted to nothing less than the total overthrow of the heteropatriarchy. This contributed to the high level of conflict within the women's music movement; every detail of every album was the site of a potential disagreement, because everything was political. Distribution policies, sound mixing, pricing, lyrical content, and live shows were all important components of the music's political orientation.

As the largest and most successful record label in women's music, Olivia Records was at the center of many of these conflicts. For the first several years of its existence from 1973-1975, Olivia exemplified what many lesbian feminists envisioned as the core tenets of women's music: the label was run by a collective of lesbian feminists, worked exclusively with women, and made folk music inflected with lesbian feminist themes and imagery. Because of its status as the most well-known record label in women's music, Olivia also played a large part in defining what the genre was, and during the record label's first three years the racial identity that Olivia cultivated for women's music was a white one. The label's first two album releases, Meg Christian's *I Know You Know* (1974) and Cris Williamson's *The Changer and the Changed* (1975), were both

made by white lesbian singer-songwriters; the success of these albums would quickly make Olivia Records one of the leading voices in women's music.

Beginning in 1975, Olivia began to actively seek out women of color to work with and record. At the same time, the record label also began working with sound engineer Sandy Stone, a trans woman with extensive engineering experience and deep ties to the Bay Area's lesbian feminist community. By 1977, Stone's work with Olivia Records was the focal point of a series of debates about trans women's right to exist within lesbian feminist communities. Although the backlash to Stone's work with Olivia is often discussed as part of the history of lesbian feminists' exclusion of trans women (Drucker 2018, Riedel 2019), its connection to the record label's attempts at racial diversification has largely been left unexplored. Using a series of monthly newsletters sent to Olivia Records distributors, along with unpublished personal letters and the "letters to the editor" pages of several lesbian feminist newspapers, I trace consumers' and distributors' reactions to the record label's evolving political mission from 1975-1978. These same documents track the lesbian feminist community's response to sound engineer Sandy Stone's work there. When framed as part of the broader history of Olivia Records, the backlash to Stone's employment reveals the co-constitutive nature of racism and transphobia within lesbian feminist communities. This reframing also contextualizes the attacks on Stone as part of a concerted effort by trans-exclusionary lesbian feminists to achieve ideological dominance within these same communities. This chapter gives credit to the trans women and women of color whose work shaped the sound and culture of women's music, and connects this understudied history to the works and careers of contemporary lesbian musical artists.

II. Defining the Sound of Women's Music

Lesbian feminism's legacy continues to impact lesbian musicians in a variety of ways, one of which is the expectation that lesbian musicians primarily work within the genres of folk or the singer-songwriter. The strong association between women's music and folk music is not reflective of the reality that women's music was inspired by a range of musical genres, among them funk and soul. During its emergence in the early 1970s, women's music positioned itself against the popular music industry, which many lesbian feminists saw as yet another manifestation of the patriarchy. This opposition to popular music was propelled by the proliferation of sub-genres of rock music throughout the 1970s; despite the expansion of rock's sound to include arena, punk, and art rock, American rock music remained dominated by white men, and popular themes in rock music during the 1970s often reflected the misogyny of the music industry at large.

The women's music movement evoked folk music's association with political seriousness, drawing on the legacy of the American folk music revival of the 1960s. During the folk music revival, white musicians like Bob Dylan and Peter, Paul and Mary positioned themselves as countercultural messengers who used music to signal their solidarity with the civil rights and anti-war movements. Early women's music drew on this association between folk music and political seriousness, while also relying on cultural feminist ideas about women's inherent feminine essence to justify the use of folk music in particular as a tool for feminist music-making. Subsequently, folk music was touted by some as the *only* fitting genre for women's music, as its focus on lyrical content and soft musical accompaniment were said to reflect an appropriately feminine sensibility. This acoustic interpretation of folk music was unique to women's music at the time, as many musicians who became popular during the earlier

folk music revival began incorporating drums and electric instruments into their compositions during the late 1960s.

However, there were also women working within women's music who resisted the claim that folk music was uniquely suited to the transmission of lesbian feminist politics. While some lesbian feminists attempted to trace a primarily white musical lineage for women's music, locating its roots in the political folk music of the 1960s,[3] Black feminists drew attention to the proscriptive nature of these claims. In a 1988 interview, the musician Linda Tillery speaks directly to this connection between race and genre, saying, "The music that I grew up with and that I understand most is music created by my ancestors, my family. Blues, rhythm and blues, and jazz are part of our tradition, and I resent the fact that anyone would say these are not good idioms for women" (Pollock, 18).

Although many white lesbian feminists saw the folk music revival as a precursor to women's music, Black women working within women's music were often influenced by diverse musical genres rooted in Black American history and politics. During the 1950s and 60s, gospel, soul, and R&B music played a key role in mobilizing the civil rights movement. Most major American record labels officially set up Black music divisions in the early 1970s, seeking to make inroads into soul and funk music; despite this attempt at commodification, many Black musicians who were signed to these record labels continued to make profoundly political music. In his work on Post-Civil Rights popular music, Mark Anthony Neal notes that artists as diverse as Sly and the Family Stone, Gil Scott-Heron, and The Temptations all "lodged their 'musical protest' while recording for decidedly mainstream (i.e., White-controlled) record labels including

[3] Although folk music's contemporary legacy in the U.S. is primarily associated with white musicians like Dylan, the 1960s folk music revival drew direct inspiration from Black musicians like Leadbelly and Odetta. Historian Eileen Hayes (2010) writes, "In other words, the 'white' folk style from which so many women's music enthusiasts seek to distance themselves draws on black traditions" (65).

Epic, Atlantic, and RCA" (2017). While white lesbian feminists' disdain for the musical mainstream was often expressed through an opposition to male-dominated rock music, Black popular music in the mid-late 70s often expressed overtly political messages, despite its major-label affiliation. Even disco, which broke into the American mainstream in the late 1970s after originating as a subcultural phenomenon within Black, Latino, and gay nightclubs, often had a political subtext; songs like Donna Summer's 1975 hit "Love to Love You Baby" centered women's sexual pleasure in a way that few songs in pop music did at the time, and the out gay singer-songwriter Sylvester's 1978 disco album *Step II* went certified gold. This range of influences is present in the music of many women of color who worked within women's music, including the gospel and soul influenced a-capella group Sweet Honey in the Rock, the funk and R&B stylings of Linda Tillery, and the work of jazz and classical pianist Mary Watkins.

Regardless of the musical genres in which it took inspiration, women's music's intentional remove from the male-run mainstream music industry remained a constant within the movement. Within women's music, the so-called "mainstream" music industry was often held up as the antithesis of everything the movement was working toward, a realm where women's images and entire careers were shaped and controlled by men for their own profit. Over time, this historical opposition has solidified into a popular association between lesbians and a preference for the musical margins over the mainstream. In the eyes of many music critics and consumers, the term "lesbian pop star" appeared to be an oxymoron, especially given lesbians' penchant for anti-consumerist aesthetics, political songwriting, and the folk music sound. These associations have shaped the career of the Canadian musical duo Tegan and Sara, one of the most visible representations of a "lesbian" band to emerge in North America in the early 21st century.

III. Tegan, Sara, and the Paradox of the Lesbian Pop Star

Judging by the critical reception of their last five studio albums, Tegan and Sara have now been on the verge of a mainstream breakthrough for over a decade. The twin sisters' musical debut famously took place at Calgary's "Garage Warz" competition in 1998—they won, and subsequently recorded and independently released their debut album *Under Feet Like Ours*. A year later, they were signed to Neil Young's *Vapor Records*, through which the band would go on to release six albums over a span of sixteen years. Beginning with their fourth album—2004's *So Jealous*—critics repeatedly framed Tegan and Sara as moving ever-closer to breakthrough success as pop musicians; this narrative has, to varying extents, served as the lens through which *So Jealous* and the band's four subsequent albums were viewed. Crucially, this break*through* was also consistently framed as a breaking *away* from the band's supposed indie-folk roots, highlighted as they often were through critics' endless stream of references to Ani DiFranco, Indigo Girls, and Lilith Fair. Reviews of *So Jealous* for both Pitchfork and The AV Club approvingly cite the album's movement away from the indie-folk sound of the group's previous work, with Pitchfork's Marc Hogan crediting co-producers John Collins and David Carswell with helping to "turn Tegan and Sara's early Lilith Fair folk into Alanis Morissette-style pop/rock" (2005).

Hogan is far from the only critic to cite Lilith Fair in his description of the band's early work; this is a well-worn connection that, alongside references to DiFranco, pops up in reviews of almost every album that the group has made. Famously founded by Sarah McLachlan in 1997, Lilith Fair was a travelling music festival with an all-woman lineup which, though more mainstream in scope than the women's music festivals that originated in the 1970s, drew on the political and cultural legacy of the women's music movement. In reviews of the band's work, references to Lilith Fair are often used to mark Tegan and Sara's connection to women's music

and, by association, their lesbianism. In one sense, reviewers were right to suggest that Tegan and Sara owe some of their success to the legacy of women's music; as Mary Celeste Kearney points out in "The Missing Links: Riot Grrrl—Feminism—Lesbian Culture," a number of lesbian artists who found mainstream success in the late 1980s, including KD Lang, Melissa Etheridge, and Tracy Chapman, owed a debt of gratitude to the women's music movement for "setting the stage for later feminist music-making" (1997).

However, a few crucial differences between Tegan and Sara and musicians like Lang and Etheridge help to clarify their respective relationships to women's music and its folk-tinged legacy. The first is generational: while Lang, Etheridge, and Chapman all made their musical debuts in the late 1980s, Tegan and Sara's recording career wouldn't begin until over a decade later, when the twins were still teenagers. While their predecessors began their careers during the twilight years of women's music, the Quin sisters came of age during the heyday of the Riot Grrrl Movement in the 1990s. Riot Grrrl, a feminist social movement and musical style pioneered by young women, was much more closely associated with punk rock than it was with folk music or the singer songwriter; it is this more aggressive musical genre that Tegan and Sara claimed as an influence in the band's early years, rather than the musical stylings of Meg Christian or Holly Near. Although women's music and Riot Grrrl share an antagonistic relationship to the male-dominated mainstream music industry, Riot Grrrl's links to punk and rock music speak more directly to Tegan and Sara's early musical sound. However, as the band's career progressed, the Quin sisters came closer and closer to producing full-on pop music.

The politics of this shift in genre are ultimately more complex than a simple selling-out. While both members of the band have long been out as lesbians, the group's first openly gay lyrics debuted on 2013's *Heartthrob*, an album that is widely regarded as their first foray into

radio pop. Tegan and Sara's transition into pop music was accompanied by their increasingly political public image, and during this time the sisters became particularly vocal about issues affecting trans women and girls. When the band announced the opening of the Tegan and Sara Foundation for LGBTQ girls and women in 2016, marketing materials emphasized the foundation's focus on trans women in particular, pointing out that while LGBTQ women as a whole experience disproportionate levels of poverty, trans women of color "often experience these issues even more severely due to racism and homophobia" (Quin). In 2017, the queer-friendly clothing boutique Wildfang partnered with the Tegan and Sara Foundation to release a T-shirt line declaring "the future is fluid." The slogan was imagined as a trans-inclusive response to a ubiquitous line of t-shirts declaring "the future is female" that circulated widely in the U.S. around the time of the 2016 presidential election. Tegan and Sara appeared in advertisements for the Wildfang clothing collaboration, and promotional videos featured various trans and queer people talking about their gender and sexual identities. This clothing line, along with its perceived resistance to the rallying cry of "the future is female," angered some of the band's fans, many of whom accused Tegan and Sara of "selling out" their lesbian roots, both by making pop music and espousing a trans-inclusive queer politics.

IV. Olivia Records and the Separatist Struggle

These questions about the musical sound and political commitments appropriate to lesbian musicians date back much further than Tegan and Sara's musical career. Specifically, debates about the band's relationship to musical genre and queer politics link them to earlier controversies surrounding Sandy Stone's work at the women's music label Olivia Records. Through their contributions to the genre of women's music and their impassioned defense of

trans women's right to exist in lesbian communities, the women of Olivia Records paved the way for later debates about the relationship between lesbian feminist politics and music-making.

Olivia Records was founded in 1973 by members of the radical lesbian feminist collectives known as The Furies and Radicalesbians. Both collectives, formed in the early 1970s, were crucial to the development of lesbian feminist politics in the U.S. from 1970-1973. Radicalesbians was formed in New York in 1970; the group initially came together in response to homophobic remarks made by the National Organization for Women's co-founder and president Betty Friedan. Radicalesbians member Rita Mae Brown moved from New York to Washington D.C. in 1971, and became one of the founding members of The Furies later that year. The Furies lived communally, participated in the D.C. Women's Liberation Movement, and published and distributed a lesbian feminist newspaper entitled *The Furies*. Although the group disbanded in 1972, former members of both Radicalesbians and The Furies would go on to found Olivia Records together at the suggestion of the singer-songwriter Cris Williamson, who met the women after one of her own live shows and suggested that they start a record label (Baumgardner 2011).

Olivia's first album, Meg Christian's *I Know You Know,* was released in 1974. Members of the Olivia Records collective began talks with Sandy Stone that same year, and she began officially working with the group in May 1976. Stone, a former child prodigy who graduated high school early and had a background in medical research, began her music career as an engineer at various recording studios in New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles in the late 1960s and early 70s. During this period, Stone worked with Jimi Hendrix; Crosby, Stills, and Nash; and Van Morrison, among others. Years later, after leaving the Los Angeles based recording studio The Record Plant and opening her own electronics store in Santa Cruz, Stone

was approached by the women of Olivia Records, who asked her to work on an album with them. In a 1995 interview with Susan Stryker, Stone speaks to the difference between her experiences working with The Record Plant and Olivia Records, saying, "…everything I had done had been with the best musicians in the business. Now I had to adjust to the fact that I was doing something else, that I was making music and politics at the same time" (Stryker 2016). The change was a welcome one, and although Stone originally struggled with Olivia's lack of interest in artists' musical expertise, she was inspired by the group's commitment to collective living and political music making.

Stone's first project with Olivia was as a sound engineer on the Bay Area rock band BeBe K'Roche's first album. Less than a year after Stone began working with Olivia, three women in San Francisco's lesbian feminist community began circulating a flyer that outed Stone as a trans woman and excoriated Olivia Records for working with her. This was followed by a series of letters that were published in lesbian feminist newspapers, the most significant of which appeared in *Sister: A West Coast Feminist Newspaper.* In the June/July 1977 issue of *Sister*, an open letter to Olivia Records bemoaned the collective's decision to work with Stone; it reads, "We feel that it was and is irresponsible of you to have presented this person as a woman to the women's community when in fact he is a post-operative transexual [sic]" (Barry et. al. 1977). 22 women in total signed this letter, among them lesbian feminist folk singers Alix Dobkin and Maxine Feldman, along with Michigan Womyn's Music Festival co-founder Lisa Vogel.

Through a letter of response published in the same issue of *Sister*, the Olivia Records collective rejected the notion that Stone brought a kind of "male privilege" with her into women's spaces (Women of Olivia 1977). Letters debating Stone's work with the collective, and the role of trans women in lesbian feminist communities more broadly, continued to appear in

lesbian feminist newspapers in the following months. In more recent interviews, Stone has reported that Olivia Records received hate mail, some of which contained death threats aimed at Stone herself, during this period of time. In May 1978, Stone left the Olivia Records collective. In Olivia's monthly newsletter to distributors, the collective wrote, "The reason for this has nothing to do with the grand issue of transsexuality, but because we are all having real hard problems working together, and we came to a mutual agreement that we should stop" (Berson 1978). In an August 2014 interview with trans historian Cristan Williams, Stone suggested that her exit from the collective was the result of a variety of pressures, among them the hate mail directed at her and Olivia Records, the threat of a boycott due to her work with the collective, and the expectation that she would build all of Olivia's musical equipment for an upcoming tour (Williams 2016). Janice Raymond published her book *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male,* which contained extensive personal attacks on Stone, the following year. Stone's response, an essay entitled "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," was published in 1991, and would go on to become a field-defining work in trans studies.

V. Historicizing Lesbian Feminist Transphobia

Raymond's attack on Stone, and Stone's brilliant response, have since become pivotal texts in trans studies and queer and feminist theory. *The Transsexual Empire* became a foundational trans-exclusionary radical feminist text shortly after its publication. In it, Raymond argues that transsexual identity is rooted in patriarchal gender stereotypes and props up the male medical establishment. For Raymond, the patriarchal origins of trans identity become particularly clear when focusing on the subject of lesbian feminist identified trans women. In "Sappho by Surgery: The Transsexually Constructed Lesbian Feminist," Raymond claims that trans women are male colonizers in lesbian feminist spaces, attempting to redirect women's

energy toward men and acting as sleeper cells for the patriarchy (Raymond 1994). She uses Stone's work with Olivia Records as an example of this behavior. Raymond blames the controversy over Stone's work with Oliva—a controversy that was started by opponents of trans women's inclusion in lesbian feminist spaces—on Stone herself, and suggests that Stone occupied a position of power throughout the ordeal.

In "The Empire Strikes Back," Stone responds to these claims by challenging the very terms of the trans inclusion argument, questioning why cisgender feminists like Raymond and her mentor, Mary Daly, were for so long the primary source of feminist theorizing about trans identity (1991). Stone counters Raymond's claim that trans women divide and disrupt lesbian feminist communities with the suggestion that trans identity might instead act as a productive disruption to the patriarchal gender binary. Ultimately, Stone calls for a trans counter-discourse that links individual accounts of trans people's lived experiences to the need for collective action and change. The 1991 publication of "The Empire Strikes Back" would go on to inspire numerous other foundational works in trans studies, among them Leslie Feinberg's *Transgender Liberation* in 1992 and Susan Stryker's "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage" in 1994.

Stone and Stryker are part of an extensive lineage of trans women who resisted Raymond's depiction of trans women as intruders in women's spaces. Published as a pamphlet within a year of *The Transsexual Empire*'s publication, Carol Riddell's "Divided Sisterhood: A Critical Review of Janice Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire*" zeroes in on the hypocrisy of Raymond's claim that trans women are divisive forces in lesbian feminist communities. Riddell notes Raymond's particular hatred of trans women in the women's movement, writing, "the very tiny number of trans-sexual women in the women's movement are quite well integrated into their

women's groups…We only become visible as a result of attacks from women who see trans-sexualism as an abstract problem which they can abstractly regard as an extension of patriarchy" (150). Riddell goes on to address the Sandy Stone/Olivia Records controversy, pointing out that the women at Olivia who worked with Stone had no complaints about her; rather, it was women who had never met Stone who began petitioning for her to be removed from the collective. Arguing that trans women "can be, and are, integrated into women's spaces" (153), Riddell closes by condemning the fundamentally exclusionary logic of feminists like Raymond. While Raymond claims to value women's unique creative powers, Riddell identifies the divisive, gatekeeping intentions of Raymond's rhetoric as fundamentally male, writing that "men…exist in a world of *exclusion*" (2006, 156).

Work like Riddell's resists one of Raymond's fundamental claims: that trans women are inherently *outsiders* in lesbian feminist communities, that there are few of them, and that when they are present, they act as intentionally disruptive provocateurs. Accounts from trans women living and working within lesbian feminist communities do not prove that these spaces were unproblematic feminist safe havens of acceptance—they were not—but instead show that trans women took part in the various political struggles within lesbian feminist communities, because they were part of these communities. Trans-exclusionary feminists like Raymond have long tried to make their own ideological commitments appear dominant within lesbian feminist politics; unfortunately, this strategy has proven to be an insidiously effective one over time.

Thus when lesbian feminism is discussed in contemporary queer and feminist media, there is often an assumption that the lesbian feminist political and cultural organizations of the 1970s were both violently trans-exclusionary and solely populated by cisgender women. Retrospective coverage of Stone's work with Olivia Records bears this out. Much of this

coverage distills Stone's time working with Olivia—during which she was praised by members of the collective as "the Goddess-sent engineering wizard we had so long sought" (Berson 1977)—to the letters calling for her ejection from Olivia Records, and Raymond's subsequent publication of *The Transsexual Empire*. This shorthand—to refer to Stone's work with Olivia Records is to call up the memory of lesbian feminist transphobia—effectively erases all of the work that Stone did with the collective, often inadvertently confirming Raymond's contention that Stone could never have been a real member of that community at all.

A 2018 interview with Stone on the website Broadly, the feminist sister site of Vice Media, begins, "Before pioneering transgender studies in academia, Sandy Stone was a member of the legendary lesbian music collective Olivia Records—and the target of vitriol from early trans exclusive feminists" (Drucker 2018). Although the following interview paints a rich and complicated picture of Stone's time in lesbian separatist communities, the article's lede primarily associates Stone's work at Olivia Records with the transphobic hate that attempted to force her out of the collective. Nevertheless, Stone's recollections of this time resist any neat separation of her work with lesbian feminist communities from her work as a pioneer of transgender theory. When asked about her "path to trans identity," Stone describes recognizing herself as a girl from a young age, although she was never drawn to rigidly binarized, traditionally feminine behaviors. Stone remembers, "The girls that I was hanging out with as a girl, in my fantasies, were climbing mountains and swimming rivers and hunting critters in the woods." She describes finding this kind of community among lesbian feminists, saying, "Later, after I did transition, I discovered that in fact, there *were* women like that and I wound up hanging out with them. I hung mainly with a group that called itself the Amazon 9, all of whom were lesbians and liked hiking, hanging out in the woods, swimming." Stone's story of coming out and finding community with

a group of lesbian feminists speaks to the potential for unexpected resonances between transgender theory and activism and lesbian feminist communities and politics. Here, lesbian feminism's refusal to accept stereotypically feminine behaviors as "natural" speaks to Stone's early questioning of the gender binary, which she would later articulate so influentially in "The Empire Strikes Back." These resonances urge us to explore the convergences between transgender studies and lesbian feminist history and politics.

Stone describes her time with the Amazon 9 as revelatory, saying, "I discovered…that you could be a woman without stereotyping anything, without encountering traditional cis female culture at all." Stone's interactions with the Amazon 9 are seldom, if ever, discussed in accounts of her time with Olivia Records, perhaps because this pushes back against the popular transphobic framing of Stone as an interloper in the lesbian feminist community. This framing has become so pervasive that it is now replicated in nearly all accounts of Stone's involvement in Olivia Records, whether those accounts are intentionally trans-exclusionary or not. Despite the nuances of Stone's account of her work with Olivia Records, most references to her work with Olivia follow the formula evidenced in the lede of Broadly's interview: Stone's work with Olivia is acknowledged as important, but what follows this is an immediate discussion of the transphobic attacks on her and her subsequent exit from the collective. This is not the *wrong* way to discuss Stone's work with Olivia—these attacks were, by Stone's own account, violent, traumatic, and a significant factor in her decision to leave the collective. What is noteworthy is the predominance of this narrative to the exclusion of all others, and the ways in which it forecloses a discussion of Stone's role within and importance to the collective.

One 2017 Buzzfeed article begins with a recounting of Olivia's late-1970s recruitment of Stone, who was at the time an experienced and talented sound engineer. Author Morgan Page

writes, “Though it took some effort to convince her at first, Stone eventually joined the collective…But word travels fast in feminist circles, and when some fans of Olivia Records found out that Stone was trans, all hell broke loose.” The article then pivots to a discussion of Raymond’s subsequent publication of *The Transsexual Empire*. Although this framing of Stone’s time with Olivia Records makes sense within the context of both of these articles, which attempt to identify and analyze contemporary transphobia within feminist politics and activism, a shift in focus which prioritizes Stone’s actual work at Olivia and acknowledges the many women who supported her can illuminate new and important elements of this history. Furthermore, a return to archival documents recording the transphobic backlash to Stone’s work with Olivia Records sheds light on the extent to which a small minority of lesbian separatists who *were* trans-exclusionary managed to rewrite the history of lesbian feminist politics such that their political ideology appears to be dominant during this time period in lesbian feminist communities.

VI. Lesbian Feminist Conflict in the Archives

The open letter protesting Stone’s employment at Olivia, published in the June/July 1977 issue of *Sister*, was printed alongside the Olivia collective’s response defending Stone. The letters provide a stark picture of a movement at odds with itself. Although the original open letter to Olivia might appear to provide evidence of lesbian feminism’s inherent transphobia, Olivia’s response makes it clear that this was by no means the sole, or even dominant, ideology about trans women circulating in lesbian feminist communities at the time. Instead, the collective’s attempts to shield Stone from transphobic attacks and assert her role as part of a broader lesbian feminist community illuminate the extent to which many cisgender lesbian feminists were willing to fight for trans women’s inclusion in women’s spaces during the 1970s.

In the open letter to Olivia, Stone is referred to as "a post-operative transexual [sic]" and "a man without a penis" (Barry et. al. 1977). In their response, the Olivia collective critiques this focus on "sex reassignment surgery," noting that "…although a great deal of attention is usually focused on the surgery itself, it is not generally understood that the process of sex reassignment is a long, grueling and painful one, requiring years of hard work prior to surgery, and that this too-well publicized step is merely the confirmation of a process that has already gone to near completion by that time" (Women of Olivia 1977). Although this explanation of what is now commonly referred to as "bottom surgery" is marked by the vernacular of its time, Olivia's description of medical transition anticipates and refutes Janice Raymond's depiction of "reassignment surgery" as being freely doled out to anyone who asks by willing and powerful doctors. Furthermore, the Olivia collective's defense of Stone highlights the fact that trans-exclusionary feminists' focus on trans women's genitals and surgical status not only misunderstands the reality of medical transition, it also replicates essentialist, misogynistic discourses that reduce the entirety of women's identities to their bodies and genitals.

Although the Olivia collective recognizes Stone's trans-ness as a part of her identity and history, this is put into conversation with the many and varied identities and life experiences of all of the women in the collective. They write,

> In evaluating whom we will trust as a close ally, we take a person's history into consideration, but our focus as political lesbians is on what her actions are *now*. If she is a person who comes from privilege, has she renounced that which is oppressive in her privilege, and is she sharing with other women that which is useful? Is she aware of her own oppression? Is she open to struggle around class, race, and other aspects of lesbian feminist politics?

The original open letter to Olivia frames Stone's transness as *the* singularly important vector of privilege; in it, Stone's work with Olivia is described as "a transexual [sic]…taking work away from women who have to struggle to gain access to these skills and whose opportunities are

extremely limited" (Barry et. al. 1977). Despite its initial claim that the writers' primary issue is not with Stone's trans identity itself but rather Olivia's supposed concealment of Stone's transness, the open letter goes on to describe Stone's history of "white male privilege" as a sort of original sin. In their response, the Olivia collective refuses to spectacularize Stone's trans identity. Instead, the collective articulates their process for determining whether any woman qualifies as a "close ally," asking that *all* women, including those who authored the open letter to Olivia, consider their own level of privilege. This is a particularly relevant recommendation given the whiteness of many of the open letter's authors. While Stone's theoretical access to male privilege supposedly prevented her from identifying as a woman, white lesbian feminists' access to privilege was often left unexamined. Worse, the open letter to Olivia correlates transphobia with antiracist practice, writing that accepting Stone as a woman would be akin to accepting "a white woman with dyed skin as a Black woman." The Olivia Records collective's response rejects this logic, suggesting that the women attacking Stone engage in a process of self-reflection regarding their own access to privilege and capacity to oppress other women.

The women of the Olivia Records collective were not the only ones defending Stone. Olivia's status as the most successful and well-known record label in women's music meant that many lesbian feminists felt a sense of ownership over Olivia, regardless of whether they were artists, distributors or simply fans. That sense of community ownership led to vociferous debates in many lesbian feminist newspapers and journals following the "Open Letter" exchange. However, rather than confirming the open letter's claim that Stone's presence at Olivia harmed the women's community, many of these discussions were overtly supportive of both Stone and Olivia Records. When women did come forward to disparage Stone, they were often met with

serious resistance from other lesbian feminists. One example of this dynamic occurs in the November and December 1977 issues of the lesbian feminist magazine *Lesbian Connection*.

An article entitled "An Open Letter to Olivia Records" appears in the magazine's November 1977 issue. The open letter's author, Candace Margulies, frames this letter as a response to Olivia's defense of Stone. Margulies's letter rehashes many of the talking points found in the original open letter to Olivia Records, while also covering some of the trans-exclusionary critiques that would later be made by Raymond in "Sappho by Surgery." Specifically, she claims that Stone's presence at Olivia prevents genuine connections between women, writing, "Stone is preventing all of you from discovering your own, female evolution. Bringing a transsexual into Olivia keeps you and me one step further from ourselves" (Margulies 1977, 4). Although this letter was treading familiar ground, it was the subject of extensive discussion in the following month's *Lesbian Connection*. The magazine's "Letters" section was often a space for heated community debate, as was the case in many lesbian feminist magazines. The December 1977 issue features 16 letters from readers, 11 of which are in response to Margulies's open letter. Of those 11 letters, 9 are supportive of Stone's work with Olivia Records, and some even criticize the editors of the magazine for publishing Margulies's open letter at all.

One letter writer from Milwaukee identifies the synergy between right wing Republican and trans-exclusionary feminist rhetoric and ideologies, writing, "I am sorry, but her letter is a carbon copy of the filth and lies perpetuated by Anita Bryant." The letter writer's reference to Bryant, an anti-gay activist and spokeswoman for the Florida Citrus Commission who infamously spearheaded the "Save Our Children" campaign in 1977, is apt given Olivia's release of the landmark protest album *Lesbian Concentrate* that same year. Bryant's appearance here

underscores the link between anti-trans sentiment and racial segregation in women's music. Although Bryant is most famous for her antigay activism, scholars like Gillian Frank point out that the Save Our Children campaign drew direct inspiration from conservative efforts to re-segregate suburban schools. In fact, many of the Save Our Children campaign's chief architects were also key figures in Florida's antibusing campaigns during the early 1970s. Similarly, the campaign waged against Stone's employment at Olivia Records drew energy from the contemporaneous resistance to Olivia's attempted desegregation of women's music. The Milwaukee-based letter writer's comment also anticipates the political alliance that conservatives and trans-exclusionary feminists would go on to form around their shared anti-trans beliefs; Janice Raymond's work was cited approvingly in a 2015 report by the right-wing Family Research Council advocating conversion therapy for trans people (O'Leary and Sprigg).

Other letter writers express admiration for what Stone's detractors framed as her "choice" to become a woman. Not only did many of *Lesbian Connection*'s readers not view Stone as a threat or an interloper, some of them went so far as to assert that her transness made her *more* of a lesbian feminist. One letter writer from Dayton, Ohio writes, "to be male and become female and love women is the greatest expression of true lesbianism there is." Another letter, this one from Greensboro, North Carolina reads, "Those of us who were born female cannot, I'm sure, cherish our womanhood as profoundly as do those to whom it comes later on in life." One letter writer from Eugene, Oregon attempts a more humorous approach; her letter reads, "…even Jews allowed people to convert. Women can be big enough to accept a convert. I thought we were out to convert the world!"

Many letter writers take a similar approach to that of Olivia Records, suggesting that the trans-exclusionary feminists threatening to boycott Olivia think about their own access to

privilege and power. A letter from Iowa City, Iowa reads, "If we are to cut out transsexual women, why not also women that have had any heterosexual relationships, white, middle-class women, and even women with children, especially male children?" The descriptors "white" and "middle class" fit many of the open letter's signatories, who asked Stone and the women of Olivia Records to engage in a process of self-reflection and community critique to which they themselves refused to be subjected. While the open letter's signatories utilized their claim to a shared female experience as a weapon against trans women, Stone's allies revealed this to be the experience of very particular (white, cisgender) women, rather than all of them. This conversation was part of a broader feminist reconceptualization of the relationships between identity categories and power relations, led primarily by women of color, that was taking place at the time.

During the 1970s, Black lesbian feminists developed cultural and political institutions of their own, both in response to their exclusion from predominantly white lesbian feminist institutions and independently of them. One such group was the Combahee River Collective, whose famous Black feminist statement was first drafted in April 1977. That year also marked the release of the first issue of *Azalea, A Magazine by Third World Lesbians*, which was produced by the Salsa Soul Sisters.[4] These spaces fostered political and theoretical debates that both intersected with and surpassed those taking place in predominantly white lesbian feminist communities. In a section entitled "What We Believe," the April 1977 draft of the Combahee River Collective Statement reads, "We have a great deal of criticism and loathing for what men have been socialized to be in this society…But we do not have the misguided notion that it is their maleness, per se—i.e., their biological maleness—that makes them what they are. As Black

[4] The Salsa Soul Sisters were the U.S.'s first organization dedicated specifically to lesbians of color; the group was initially formed in 1974 as an alternative to discriminatory gay and lesbian bars.

women we find any type of biological determinism a particularly dangerous and reactionary basis upon which to build a politic." The statement's initial draft was written just two months before the "Open Letter to Olivia Records" would be published in the June/July issue of *Sister*.

Although the "Open Letter" exchange marked the beginning of the public conflict over Stone's presence at Olivia Records, the collective also resisted the transphobic backlash to Stone's employment behind the scenes. Olivia received a large amount of feedback from distributors on a range of topics both before and after the "Open Letter to Olivia Records" was published in 1977; this was part of the collective's business model, and distributors' feedback was encouraged by the community-oriented guiding ethos under which the collective operated. Distributors were told to think of themselves as equal partners in Olivia Records, and many of them contacted Olivia regularly regarding everything from administrative hiccups to serious political concerns.

This is the context within which distributor Lori Holmes wrote to Olivia Records on April 20, 1977, just a few weeks after receiving a letter[5] from the Olivia collective defending Sandy Stone. Holmes spends the bulk of her letter marveling at the idea that the women of Olivia would ever hire Stone in the first place, writing, "Surely you knew that many, many wimmin would not support the hiring of a transsexual by a wimmin's recording company! And to attempt to conceal that fact, for whatever reason, was a totally outrageous move!" She later warns the collective of the damage that has been done to their reputation, writing, "…right now, with the current onslaught of outrage against Olivia, I see that you have very few options." Holmes goes on to suggest that Olivia is no longer a women's record label by virtue of the fact that Stone is part of the collective. Finally, she responds to the Olivia collective's concern that Stone not be

[5] This letter was mailed to all Olivia Records distributors, and used much of the same language as the collective's "Open Letter" response.

objectified in these discussions, writing, “quite frankly, I am more concerned with the survival of the wimmin’s community than with Sandy’s personal welfare.” By itself, Holmes’s letter is hardly noteworthy. In fact, its language closely mirrors that of both the “Open Letter” and the informal flyer that preceded it, calling to mind Stone’s claim in a later interview that much of the transphobic hate mail received by Olivia during this time utilized similar language and appeared to be part of an organized campaign to oust her from the collective (Williams 2016).

Olivia Records co-founder Ginny Berson’s response, printed on official Olivia Records letterhead, is dated May 18, 1977. At stake in this disagreement is not just Olivia’s reputation, or even Stone’s employment with Olivia Records, but the story of lesbian feminism in this particular time and place; Berson’s response attempts to reclaim that story from those who sought to write Stone and her supporters out of it. Berson disputes Holmes’s contention—one that can also be found in the “Open Letter”—that news of Stone’s trans identity caused a massive outcry in lesbian feminist communities, writing, “There is no current onslaught of outrage against Olivia that I am aware of. Most of the communication we’ve had on the subject has been positive and supportive of Olivia.” Here, Berson effectively refutes a rhetorical tactic used by trans-exclusionary feminists throughout this conflict and others like it, wherein the outrage of a small, insular community of women is overstated and referred to as being representative of a much larger group’s views. Holmes’s letter relies heavily on this tactic, and she often claims not to be personally opposed to Stone’s work with Olivia, but simply concerned for the collective’s reputation amid such overwhelming public outcry against them. Berson’s response to this concern highlights the reality that there was no such massive outcry, because many lesbian feminists supported Stone’s work with Olivia.

Berson also addresses Holmes's claim that the survival of the "wimmin's community" as a whole is more important than Stone's personal welfare, writing, "Since you don't consider Szndy [sic] a woman that makes sense. But I do. And the survival of the women's community depends totally on our ability to take care of each other—to provide for each other's personal welfare." Here Berson articulates a vision of lesbian feminist community building rooted in an ethics of community care, rather than the policing of other women's bodies. Furthermore, Berson's response suggests that the policing of trans women's bodies in particular actively *hurts* the women's community that it claims to protect by isolating and endangering some of that community's most marginalized members. Although Holmes and other trans-exclusionary separatists warned Olivia that they would withdraw their support should Stone continue to work there, Berson's letter closes by inviting that outcome. She writes, "I don't know what you're [sic] optionsare [sic], except that it is not an option for you to distribute Olivia Records and not consider us an all-women's record company." This statement responds not only to Holmes's contention that Stone's work with Olivia negated their claim to being a women's record company, but also to the broader argument that any lesbian feminists who worked with and/or supported trans women were "male identified" and thus not truly representative of lesbian feminist politics. Throughout their defense of Stone, the Olivia Records collective resisted the notion that the singular vision of lesbian feminist communities and politics articulated by trans-exclusionary feminists was reflective of all lesbian feminists' reality.

VII. Racial Diversification at Olivia Records

Although the fight over Stone's work at Olivia Records was certainly incited by the trans-exclusionary lesbian feminists involved in protesting her employment, conflicts over the record label's racial diversification had also been brewing for at least a year before the open letter's

publication. In her response to Lori Holmes, one of Berson's chief contentions is that Stone's work on the Teresa Trull concert—the event that many of Stone's opponents identified as sparking this conflict—was not the cause of the subsequent attacks on Oliva Records. Berson's claim would later be echoed in other statements from collective members at Olivia: the Teresa Trull concert, and Stone's work with Olivia, was merely an excuse to disparage Olivia Records. Berson writes, "Stone became an issue because there are several women who have been out to get Olivia for quite a while, for not being separatist enough…but have never been able to muster any outside support for their position." This qualm over a seemingly small detail—whether the Teresa Trull concert was truly the moment that set off this conflict—actually marks a major political question that has largely been left unexplored in histories of Olivia Records. Berson's claim that the women protesting Stone's work with Olivia had long disparaged Olivia for not being "separatist enough" is noteworthy in the context of the music that Olivia Records released from 1976-1978, the years during which Stone worked as a member of the collective. Stone's work with the collective coincided with a concerted effort by Olivia Records to record albums by women of color. Stone worked as a sound engineer on two of Olivia's first albums by women of color: first on a collaborative poetry album by Black poet and activist Pat Parker and white poet Judy Grahn in 1976, and then on the second solo album by Black jazz and rock musician Linda Tillery in 1977. Both of these albums were a departure from Olivia's previous discography, which was predominantly white and folk-leaning. Bonnie J. Morris identifies this racial diversification as the product of "processing and community feedback," through which Olivia records "became an intersectional voice" (2018). In 1978, Olivia Records coordinated The Varied Voices of Black Women tour, featuring Linda Tillery, Mary Watkins, Gwen Avery, and Pat Parker. Archival documents from this period in the record company's history display a

resistance to racial diversification on the part of many Olivia Records distributors; this was often expressed as a concern over some aspect of male influence in the music-making process.

Olivia's monthly distributor newsletter documents this resistance on several different occasions, one of which was the release and distribution of Linda Tillery's 1977 album. Before working with Olivia, Tillery had a long career as a musician in the Bay Area. She began as the 19-year-old lead singer of the San Francisco rock band The Loading Zone in 1968. Two years later, Tillery released her first solo album with RCA Records; although the album's sales were low, it earned her two Bay Area Jazz Awards. She worked as a session musician throughout much of the 70s, providing backing vocals and sometimes playing the drums; Santana and Boz Scaggs are among the many musicians she collaborated with during this time. Tillery's first contact with Olivia Records was in 1975, when she came on as a producer for the electric rock band BeBe K'Roche's album. Tillery was excited to work with other women; in a 1997 interview, she remembers, "I was quite happy to be in an environment where I could observe other women in the creative process and also in the administrative process because all of my experience up to that point had been working with men" (Post 1997).

Shortly after the BeBe K'Roche album was finished, Tillery joined the Olivia Records collective as a full-time employee; a distributor newsletter from September 1976 notes that Tillery "will be working with us to find Third World women to record and work with Olivia" (Olivia Records Distributor Newsletter #7). The March 1977 distributor newsletter discusses plans to record Tillery's album, noting the record label's "high priority on recording third world women" (Olivia Records Distributor Newsletter #12). When it came time to distribute Tillery's self-titled album later in 1977, Olivia's distribution strategy differed from their approach with previous albums. Although in the past the record label had refused to work with "one-stops,"

wholesalers that offer albums from various different distributors to record stores and chains, Olivia opted to work with one-stops in select cities when distributing Tillery's album. The September 1977 distributor newsletter describes this strategy, noting that the collective's priority in utilizing one-stops was "to make sure [Tillery's] record is available to Black women who don't frequent the stores where most of our records are" (Olivia Records Distributor Newsletter #18).

Distributor backlash to the decision to use one-stops, even in this limited fashion, was swift. The following newsletter, written by Ginny Berson, features a section entitled "One Stops vs. No One Stops." Berson writes, "I must say, I've never been so happy in my life to hear so much disagreement from you all with an Olivia decision" (Distributors' Newsletter #19). She goes on to affirm that Olivia's preference is not to use one-stops wherever possible, chiefly because one-stops were typically run by men. In the November 1977 newsletter, distributor Mary Farmer worries at length about the ethical ramifications of using one-stops, writing, "Giving the record to the man (black or white) is not the way to get [Tillery's] music out" (Olivia Records Distributor Newsletter #20). Farmer goes on, writing, "Doing one-stops even on a limited basis is a dangerous precedent. Our distribution would no longer be women only." This back and forth about one-stops speaks to a broader ideological tension in lesbian feminist politics, between separatists who viewed gender-based oppression as the primary source of inequality, and those who viewed it as one among many, interlocking systems of oppression. For Farmer and other distributors, Olivia's sole reliance on women distributors was more important than a range of other political concerns, including the accessibility of Tillery's album to Black women. For many Black lesbian feminists, (white) lesbian separatism constituted an untenable demand that

Black men and boys, along with heterosexual Black women, disappear from their lives and political agendas.

In the December 1977 newsletter, distributor Sue Goldwoman reports on a meeting of Midwest distributors, noting that a number of the distributors were uncomfortable promoting Tillery's album at Black record stores and radio stations. She writes, "…we're anticipating somewhat of a lack of credibility when we approach Black stores and station [sic]. None of us is familiar with [Tillery's] past accomplishments, and although we're all determined to do some research on that, we were still feeling uncomfortable" (Olivia Records Distributor Newsletter #21). Although this is framed as a concern about credibility, Goldwoman's anxiety over the thought of interacting with Black communities and promoting a Black woman's record contextualizes her claim that the Midwest distributors were "feeling uncomfortable." Such comments also shed new light on distributors' supposedly ethical concerns over the use of one-stops. Although these concerns were expressed using the language of lesbian separatism and thus foregrounded an alleged commitment to women, that language was ultimately indicative of distributors' discomfort promoting the work of Black women.

Distributor newsletters also feature discussions about Gwen Avery, a Black singer and pianist. Like Tillery, Avery had deep roots in San Francisco's music scene by the time she began working with Olivia Records. Born in a small town outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Avery grew up singing in her maternal grandmother's speakeasy. She moved to San Francisco in 1969; Avery was 25 at the time, and quickly became involved in the city's local music scene as a singer for the rock band Full Moon. Avery's first interaction with women's music was as a performer at the 1974 Santa Cruz Women's Music Festival; soon after, she was introduced to the women of Olivia Records by her friend, the artist Marianne Boers. Avery began working with

the collective in 1975, and was often referred to as one of Olivia's up and coming stars (Doyle 2011). Avery's song "Sugar Mama" was featured on Olivia's 1977 album *Lesbian Concentrate,* which was released just five months before the publication of the infamous "Open Letter." Avery would go on to perform as part of The Varied Voices of Black Women tour in 1978.

In the same December 1977 newsletter report that discusses the promotion of Linda Tillery's upcoming album, Goldwoman also relates Midwest distributors' concerns about Avery. Goldwoman notes that the Midwest distributors talked at length about Avery following that year's Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, writing, "None of us were really wild over her music there." She goes on to analyze Avery's comportment at the festival, noting that the Midwest distributors were "confused and/or angered by the sexual 'star trip' she seemed to be on, the lack of respect for other performers (as when she got on stage when Teresa was singing), and the general level of attention-getting and 'acting out' behavior." The phrase "star tripping" carried a particularly negative connotation within the women's music movement, and its appearance in the Midwest distributors' report is one example of the racist connection that was often made between Black women performers and male identification. "Star tripping," the dynamic in which performers are treated as "stars" or celebrities within this cultural milieu, was associated with the male-dominated mainstream music industry by those within women's music.

An article in the November 1982 issue of *Ithaca Times*, entitled "Her Own Special Song: Women's Music Grows," encapsulates how many women within the movement thought about star tripping. Author Susan Graetz writes, "The paradox is that while women's music began when women started to reclaim lost powers, star-tripping means once again relinquishing those powers. Women sit in the audience passively letting the stars entertain them, delighting in gossip about these women…" (Graetz 1978). This description of the "star-tripping" dynamic effectively

captures how gendered discussions of star-tripping were within women's music, such that this was coded as a male (and therefore oppressive) behavior. Goldwoman's description of Avery as being on a "sexual star trip" thus constitutes an accusation that the singer was in some way "male identified," to use the parlance of the time. Following her description of Avery as "acting out," Goldwoman goes on to warn the women of Olivia, "We all felt pretty strongly about this and feel it may well affect future sales of Gwen's album in our communities." Although distributors' stated concern is that women in "our communities" (i.e. white lesbian feminist communities) will receive Avery's work negatively, the description of her appearance at the festival makes it clear that the distributors themselves have qualms about promoting her work. This logic mirrors Holmes's letter to Olivia about Sandy Stone, in that Holmes frames her personal hostility toward trans women as "concern" about *other* women's reception of Stone's work with Olivia. Goldwoman's mention of Avery received a searing response in the following distributor newsletter, in which two Olivia Records distributors from Philadelphia wrote, "Sexual Star Trip—Black peoples' music is a music of rhythm and movement- emotional and/or physical. It's not traditional white folkie romanticized music. Just because you can't get behind it you don't have to condemn it. Unless, of course, you are threatened by its exuberance." (Olivia Records Distributor Newsletter #22). Although this distributor response was prominently featured in the January 1978 newsletter, the Olivia collective's failure to respond directly to Goldwoman in defense of Avery was perhaps indicative of their level of commitment to her as an artist. In a 2011 interview with historian and radio producer JD Doyle, Avery said that despite her initial plans to produce an album with Olivia, she was eventually "…pitched out because I would move my hips, or lick my lips, on stage and it was too much for the women's community" (Avery 2011). In this same interview, Avery goes on to say, "I'm saying that the people that backed

Olivia, or had power, decided that was I guess unclean or indecent, or put them in the mind of Elvis Presley…" Avery's claim raises the possibility that Olivia Records never released an official response to distributors' racist feedback because (at least some) members of the collective felt similarly, and interpreted Avery's music and embodiment as sexual in a particularly masculine way. Olivia's responses to the attacks on Stone and Avery respectively are also illuminating; although the record label was immediately supportive of Stone upon the publication of the "Open Letter," racist backlash to Avery's work with Olivia was reprinted in distributor newsletters without comment.

These letters from distributors evince a pattern in which Black women's music, comportment, and general embodiment were associated with male values[6] and thus rejected. This pattern undergirds Berson's claim that the outcry against Stone was manufactured by "women who have been out to get Olivia for quite a while, for not being separatist enough." The accusation of being insufficiently separatist, or separatist in the wrong way, was disproportionately levied at Black women in Olivia newsletters; it follows, then, that as Olivia racially diversified, Olivia Records itself came to be seen by some (white) lesbian feminists as being not separatist enough. The association of Black women's work and behavior with maleness is also linked to the hate mail that Stone remembers receiving at Olivia Records after the publication of the "Open Letter" in April of 1977. In an interview about the campaign to oust her from Olivia Records, Stone recalls, "We'd get a letter and the letter would attack one of our albums because of the way that it was engineered and mixed. There were very clear ideas of what constituted a 'male' mix and a 'female' mix, which nobody had ever heard of before. What

[6] Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp (1993) identify the belief in distinct male and female values, and the subsequent superiority of female values, as pervasive in lesbian feminist communities. In these contexts, male values include "an emphasis on hierarchy, oppressive individualism, an ethic of individual rights, abstraction, violence, and competition" (42).

it came down to was that 'male' mixes had drums, which was linked back to 'throbbing male energy'" (Williams 2016).

This association of drums with maleness is prescient given Olivia's racial and musical diversification at the time of the Open Letter. As Olivia began to work with artists who were not the white singer-songwriters that the record label had become known for, different musical styles, including those that utilized drums and electric guitars, appeared on Olivia Records albums. Olivia Records released four full-length albums by solo artists in 1977; of those four albums, only one—Trish Nugent's *Foxglove Woman*—did not feature drums. The remaining three albums—Linda Tillery's self-titled album, Meg Christian's *Face the Music,* and Teresa Trull's *The Ways a Woman Can Be*, all utilized drums. Tillery, who is famously a drummer as well as a vocalist, produced the drums on her own album, and played the drums on both Christian and Trull's albums. That these letters described drums as having "throbbing male energy" is doubly significant given the Olivia newsletters' documentation of the association between Black women performers and maleness. This dynamic has also been documented by Eileen Hayes, who notes that many of the Black women musicians she interviewed for her book *Songs in Black and Lavender* expressed frustration with a pattern in which "musical genres adopted by women of color, which often incorporated a wider range of musical styles…were deemed to fall outside the boundaries of 'women's music'" (2010). Thus the backlash against Stone was not only an expression of trans-exclusionary feminist sentiment, but also an attempt to push back against Olivia's racial diversification and the expansion of women's music beyond the genre of folk.

VIII. Conclusion: Women's Music in the 21st Century

Much like the lesbian feminist politics to which it was connected, women's music waned in popularity throughout the 1980s and 90s. By 1988, Olivia Records became Olivia Travel, a cruise line for lesbians. The late eighties emergence of lesbian musical artists who achieved mainstream success, including Tracy Chapman and Melissa Etheridge, was indebted to the legacy of women's music even as it resisted the genre's fundamental opposition to participation in the male-run music industry. Although the women's music movement undoubtedly came to an end in the U.S. long before Tegan and Sara's emergence in the early aughts, its legacy nonetheless went on to profoundly influence the band's career. In fact, the contours of the controversy among lesbian feminists over Olivia Records' employment of Sandy Stone make a startling reappearance in the reception of Tegan and Sara's clothing line proclaiming "the future is fluid." This clothing line was explicitly framed as a response to the trans-exclusionary potential of "the future is female"; promotional materials prominently featured videos of and interviews with both binary and non-binary trans people, and in one promotional video the twins' voice-over proclaims, "the future is not assigning gender to genitals" (Getty 2017).

The original "the future is female" shirt was modeled by Alix Dobkin in a now widely circulated archival image. Dobkin was a signatory of the "Open Letter to Olivia Records," and one of the women's music movement's most prominent opponents of trans women's inclusion in women's spaces. The archival image's photographer, Liza Cowan, espoused similarly trans-exclusionary politics as the creator of the lesbian feminist magazine *Dyke: A Quarterly.* In this context, the original shirt's reference to femaleness recalls trans-exclusionary feminists' assertion that by virtue of the fact that they were assigned male at birth, trans women like Stone would never be *real* women. It is within this context that Tegan and Sara's clothing line was launched. However imperfect the politics of any self-proclaimed feminist clothing line might be,

"the future is fluid" constituted an attempt to acknowledge and pivot away from the fraught history of "the future is female."

Much of the backlash that followed was predictably steeped in familiar trans-exclusionary rhetoric. An op-ed on Afterellen.com, a website dedicated to discussing queer women's portrayals in the media, called the clothing line "a slap in the face to second wave feminism" (Macdonald 2017). Author Jocelyn Macdonald goes on to refer to the Quins as "the artists formerly known as lesbian icons," framing the trans-inclusive clothing line's release as evidence that the sisters have betrayed their lesbian fans. Here Macdonald mirrors the transphobic logic of both "Open Letter to Olivia" and "Sappho by Surgery": in both texts, cis lesbians' inclusion of trans people, and particularly trans women, is framed as the ultimate betrayal of their lesbian sisters. In "Sappho by Surgery," Raymond (1994) accuses trans lesbians of being "in the same tradition as the man made, made up 'lesbians' of the Playboy centerfolds" (118), and suggests that cisgender lesbians who accept trans women in "women's spaces" are falling prey to a patriarchal political agenda.

Macdonald's op-ed directly references the history of women's music, linking "the future is fluid" merchandise to Tegan and Sara's supposed rejection of the lesbian feminist musicians who came before them. Calling the clothing line an "implied drag of second-wave lesbian feminists," Macdonald (2017) writes, "It was the second-wave lesbian movement, the lesbian folk singer, who made Tegan and Sara possible." Dobkin is the only women's music veteran explicitly mentioned in the piece, which refers to her 1973 album *Lavender Jane Loves Women* as "the first full-length lesbian album." Although Dobkin is often recognized as an important figure in women's music, to label *Lavender Jane* the first lesbian album is to ignore the countless lesbian musicians preceding Dobkin who made music in genres other than folk, or whose

"outness" is contested. The storied history of out lesbian blues singers in 1920s Harlem alone is enough to warrant the tracing of a different lineage for contemporary lesbian musical artists in the U.S., one that doesn't attribute their success solely to white folk musicians like Dobkin. Here, Dobkin is used to represent the legacy of (white) women's music; implied is the assumption that women's music must be folk music with ties to trans-exclusionary politics. Such a logical jump is the conclusion of decades of work done by trans-exclusionary feminists to stake their sole claim to women's music, and to lesbian feminism more broadly. Even in the movement's heyday, this subsection of lesbian feminists was never as numerous or powerful as they claimed to be. Tracing a different lineage for contemporary lesbian musical artists like Tegan and Sara works to wrest back some of this history, giving credit to the trans women and women of color who not only existed in lesbian feminist communities, but profoundly shaped them.

Rather than focusing on the ways in which Tegan and Sara's music and politics don't align with those of Dobkin, we might link "the future is fluid" to Stone's thinking about gender in "The Empire Strikes Back." The relationship between Stone's field-defining essay and a queer clothing line is surely a complex one; although Stone (1991) famously calls for a proliferation of counter-discourses that exist beyond the boundaries of binary gender, she also closes her essay by cautioning readers that "although *individual* change is the foundation of all things, it is not the end of all things" (232). "The future is fluid" is not an unambiguously good or politically pure alternative to "the future is female"; the very staging of this political conflict to revolve around the release of two different clothing lines points to consumer capitalism's domination of the contemporary political landscape. However, the debate generated by the shirts' circulation points toward the complexity of lesbian feminism's political legacy. The widespread interest in these shirts also underlines the continued relevance of lesbian feminist political concerns, providing an

opportunity to tell new stories about the meaning and history of lesbian feminist politics. If this struggle over "the future is fluid" prompts us to rethink the racial and gendered histories of lesbian feminism, then it can also be a launching point for new conceptions of contemporary lesbian identities, politics, and communities.

IX. References

Avery, Gwen. 2011. "Exclusive Interview with Gwen Avery: A Pioneer Blues Artist of the Women's Music Movement." Interview by J.D. Doyle. *Queer Music Heritage*, November 2011. Transcript. https://www.queermusicheritage.com/nov2011s.html.

Baumgardner, Jennifer. 2011. "Womyn's Music 101." In *F 'em!: Goo Goo, Gaga, and Some Thoughts on Balls,* 41. Berkeley: Seal Press.

Barry, JoAnne, et. al. 1977. "Open Letter to Olivia." *Sister: A West Coast Feminist Newspaper*, June/July 1977: 6.

Berson, Ginny. 1977. Olivia Records letter to distributors. Box 15. Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History. Smith College Special Collections, Northampton, Massachusetts.

Berson, Ginny. 1978. Olivia Records letter to distributors. Box 15. Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History. Smith College Special Collections, Northampton, Massachusetts.

Combahee River Collective. 1983. "The Combahee River Collective Statement." In *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, edited by Barbara Smith, 272-282. New York: Kitchen Table—Women of Color Press.

Drucker, Zackary. 2018. "Sandy Stone on Living Among Lesbian Separatists as a Trans Woman in the 70s." Broadly. Last modified December 19, 2018. http://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/zmd5k5/sandy-stone-biography-transgender-history.

Getty, Stuart. 2017. "The Future Is Fluid: Tegan and Sara X Wildfang." Narrated by Tegan and Sara Quin. Video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IokNNQm4sKg.

Graetz, Susan. 1982. "Her Own Special Song: Women's Music Grows." *Ithaca Times*, November 1982.

Hayes, Eileen. 2010. *Songs in Black and Lavender: Race, Sexual Politics, and Women's Music.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Hogan, Marc. 2005. "Tegan and Sara: So Jealous." Pitchfork. Last modified January 24, 2005. https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/8285-so-jealous/.

Holmes, Lori. 1977. Personal letter to Olivia Records. Box 15. Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History. Smith College Special Collections, Northampton, Massachusetts.

Kearney, Mary Celeste. 1997. "The Missing Links: Riot Grrrl—Feminism—Lesbian Culture." In *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender,* edited by Sheila Whiteley, 207-229. London: Routledge.

LaFleur, Greta. 2015. "Why Women's Colleges Need to Embrace Trans Activists-and So Does Feminism." The New Republic. Last modified February 24, 2015. https://newrepublic .com/article/121135/trans-activism-womens-colleges-essential-gender-struggle.

Macdonald, Jocelyn Macdonald. 2017. "Tegan and Sara X Wildfang's 'The Future is Fluid' Is a Slap in the Face to Feminism (Op-Ed)." AfterEllen. Last modified October 19, 2017. https://www.afterellen.com/people/546113-tegan-sara-x-wildfangs-future-fluid-slap-face-feminism.

Margulies, Candace. 1977. "An Open Letter to Olivia Records." *Lesbian Connection* 3, no. 5: 3-4.

Morris, Bonnie. 2018. "How Should We Archive the Soundtrack to 1970s Feminism?" Smithsonian.com. Last modified March 30 2018. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/how-should-we-archive-soundtrack-1970s-feminism-180968637/.

Neal, Mark Anthony. 2017. "The Post-Civil Rights Period: The Politics of Musical Creativity." In *Issues in African American Music: Power, Gender, Race, Representation*, edited by Portia K. Maultsby and Mellonee V. Burnim, 368-380. New York: Routledge.

O'Leary, Dale, and Peter Sprigg. 2015. "Understanding and Responding to the Transgender Movement." *Family Research Council*. June 2015.

Olivia Records Distributor Newsletter #7. September 1976. Box 15. Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History. Smith College Special Collections, Northampton, Massachusetts.

Olivia Records Distributor Newsletter #12. March 1977. Box 15. Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History. Smith College Special Collections, Northampton, Massachusetts.

Olivia Records Distributor Newsletter #18. September 1977. Box 15. Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History. Smith College Special Collections, Northampton, Massachusetts.

Olivia Records Distributor Newsletter #19. October 1977. Box 15. Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History. Smith College Special Collections, Northampton, Massachusetts.

Olivia Records Distributor Newsletter #20. November 1977. Box 15. Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History. Smith College Special Collections, Northampton, Massachusetts.

Olivia Records Distributor Newsletter #21. December 1977. Box 15. Sophia Smith Collection of

Women's History. Smith College Special Collections, Northampton, Massachusetts.

Olivia Records Distributor Newsletter #22. January 1978. Box 15. Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History. Smith College Special Collections, Northampton, Massachusetts.

Page, Morgan. 2017. "Trans Women Shouldn't Have to Constantly Defend Their Own Womanhood." Buzzfeed. Last modified March 16, 2017. https://buzzfeed.com/morganmpage/there-is-no-universal-experience-of-womanhood.

Pollock, Mary. 1988. "The Politics of Women's Music: A Conversation with Linda Tillery and Mary Watkins." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 10, no. 1: 14-19.

Post, Laura. 1997. "Linda Tillery: Big Voice, Solid Roots, New Spirituals." In *Backstage Pass: Interviews with Women in Music*, 114-119. Norwich: New Victoria Publishers.

Quin, Sara, and Tegan Quin. n.d. "Letter from Tegan and Sara." Tegan and Sara Foundation. https://www.teganandsarafoundation.org/letter-continued.

Radicalesbians. 1997. "The Woman-Identified Woman." In *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, edited by Linda Nicholson, 153-157. New York: Routledge.

Raymond, Janice. 1994. "Sappho by Surgery: The Transsexually Constructed Lesbian Feminist." In *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Riddell, Carol. 2006. "Divided Sisterhood: A Critical Review of Janice Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire."* In *The Transgender Studies Reader,* edited by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, 150. New York: Routledge.

Riedel, Samantha. 2019. "Gen(d)erations: How Sandy Stone 'Struck Back' Against Transmisogyny." Them. Last modified October 17, 2019. https://www.them.us/story/genderations-sandy-stone.

Rupp, Leila J., and Verta Taylor. 1993. "Women's Culture and. Lesbian Feminist Activism: A Reconsideration of Cultural Feminism." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 19, no. 1 (Autumn, 1993): 32-61.

Stone, Sandy. 1991. "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto." In *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Sexual Ambiguity,* edited by Kristina Straub and Julia Epstein, 221-235. New York: Routledge.

Stryker, Susan. 2016. "Another Dream of Common Language: An Interview with Sandy Stone." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 1-2: 294-305.

Williams, Cristan. 2016. "Sex Essentialist Violence and Radical Inclusion: An Interview with

Sandy Stone." The Conversations Project. Last modified February 15, 2016. http://radfem.transadvocate.com/sex-essentialist-violence-and-radical-inclusion-an-interview-with-sandy-stone/.

Women of Olivia Records. 1977. "Olivia Replies." *Sister: A West Coast Feminist Newspaper*, June/July 1977: 6.

Chapter 2

Making Herstory: Lesbian Anti-Capitalism Meets the Digital Age

I. Introduction

This story begins with a striking, widely circulated photograph: a white woman stands in front of a white clapboard building with green shutters, squinting into the sun, donning a white t-shirt that reads "the future is female" in black, capital letters. Her face looks straight into the camera, unsmiling. In many ways, she is the picture of lesbian feminism that has been memorialized in history books; her hair is short and minimally styled, her serious face free of makeup. She leans with one arm on a metal railing, under the other she holds Monique Wittig's 1969 novel *Les Guérillères,* an Iliad-style epic about a group of Amazonian warrior women who wage violent war on men.

The woman featured in the image is Alix Dobkin, a lesbian feminist singer-songwriter and activist who plays at least a supporting role in many of lesbian feminism's most contentious political debates. Her album *Lavender Jane Loves Women* was one of the first to come out of the burgeoning women's music movement in 1974. The photograph in question was taken in 1975 by her then-girlfriend Liza Cowan. An artist and activist in her own right, Cowan took the picture with the intention of featuring it in her magazine *DYKE: A Quarterly.*

Although the image ultimately was not published in *DYKE*, it would go on to achieve viral fame 40 years later when it surfaced on @h_e_r_s_t_o_r_y, an Instagram account run by New York based photo editor Kelly Rakowski. The account, created in 2014, features archival images of lesbian art, history, and media, most of which were initially culled from Brooklyn's Lesbian Herstory Archives. The image of Dobkin, posted in November 2014, is the account's 10th post and garnered a modest 98 likes. The post's caption reads, "'Alix Dobkin wearing

‘Future is Female’ tee. The slogan for NYC’s first woman’s bookstore Labyris Books.’ Photos & text by Liza Cowan/Dyke A Quarterly” (@h_e_r_s_t_o_r_y, Nov. 27, 2014).

The “future is female” shirt’s afterlife as part of Instagram’s queer archival fever (in recent years numerous accounts posting historical images of queer people and political movements have surfaced on the platform) may very well have ended there, had Rakowski not reposted the image in May 2015. That second post caught the eye of Rachel Berks, a white graphic designer and owner of the LA-based store and graphic design studio Otherwild. When Berks reposted the image of Dobkin to her own Instagram account, she was flooded with comments urging her to make reproductions of the “future is female” shirt (Goldstein 2015). She quickly printed a small run of 24 t-shirts, which sold out in two days (Meltzer 2015). After the shirt’s original run sold out, Berks began making more, eventually expanding the store’s offerings to include sweatshirts and pins bearing the phrase. Soon after the phrase went viral, Berks resolved to donate a portion of the t-shirt’s proceeds to Planned Parenthood.

Sales took off when high-profile celebrities were photographed in the merchandise, sparking both an influx of traffic to Otherwild’s small store and a wide variety of knock off t-shirts bearing the phrase. The phrase suddenly appeared to be everywhere, and Berks would later refer to the shirt as her company’s “bread and butter” (Thayer 2017). In the weeks leading up to the U.S.’s November 2016 presidential election, the phrase “the future is female” became particularly ubiquitous among hopeful Clinton voters. Emblazoned on pins and t-shirts, it was a frequent presence on many an Instagram feed; the phrase quickly became something of a rallying cry, especially for media-savvy young women. Clinton herself even uttered the phrase in a short video addressing the post-election Women’s March on Washington, reassuring viewers, “I remain convinced that yes, the future is female” (Gray 2017). The phrase continued to grow in

popularity following the election. In July 2017 (Thayer) it was reported that over 200,000 Instagram posts utilized the hashtag #thefutureisfemale; as of January 2020 there are over 987,000 posts with the hashtag. This widespread popularity is perhaps surprising given the phrase's radical lesbian feminist origins, which Otherwild's promotional images highlighted through the use of Cowan's archival photograph.

Otherwild's marketing connected the viral t-shirt to lesbian feminist history while still depicting it as a unique product of the store's in-house graphic design studio. The store's contemporary iteration of the shirt features a slightly altered design, using a different typeface and placement than the 1975 version. Berks sought (and was granted) permission from Cowan to utilize her original photograph to promote the new shirt, although Cowan herself was not the original creator of either the t-shirt or the phrase that it features. As Rakowski indicated in her original Instagram post of Cowan's photograph, "the future is female" was originally the slogan of Labyris Books, New York City's first women's bookstore. While Otherwild's promotion of the shirt via archival photograph primarily featured Cowan and Dobkin, the shirt was originally created as part of a fundraising effort for Labyris Books. "The future is female" was Labyris's slogan before it was featured on t-shirts like the one worn by Dobkin; the shirt featured in Cowan's photograph was part of a larger effort by New York's lesbian feminist community to prevent the bookstore from closing due to lack of funds.

Labyris Books was run by two lesbian feminist activists: Marizel Rios, a Puerto Rican writer, and Jane Lurie, a white lesbian filmmaker. Before opening Labyris, Rios and Lurie were both involved in the 1971 5th Street Women's Building takeover. During the takeover, which allied itself with New York's growing squatters' movement, women's liberation activists took over an abandoned building in the city's Lower East Side and used it to offer social services to

women in the community. As lesbian feminist business owners, Rios and Lurie were invested in facilitating conversations about race, class, and sexuality; in addition to being a place where women could buy books, Labyris's owners conceptualized it as a movement space where women could talk freely about racism and lesbianism in particular. Much of this history was lost in the phrase's viral circulation, which rarely attended to Labyris's role in both innovating this phrase and disseminating it via fundraisers and merchandise.

Another detail of the shirt's origin story that received little press coverage was the political background of Liza Cowan, the archival image's photographer, and Alix Dobkin, the model featured in that image. As one of the editors of the mid-1970s magazine *Dyke, A Quarterly of Lesbian Culture and Analysis*, Cowan conducted and published a series of interviews entitled "Can Men Be Women? Some Lesbians Think So! Transsexuals in the Women's Movement." Dobkin, a lesbian feminist folk singer, was a signatory of the 1977 "Open Letter to Olivia Records" regarding Sandy Stone. In a 1998 column for *Chicago Outlines*, Dobkin asserted, "For over twenty years now, men have declared themselves 'women,' manipulated their bodies via experimental surgery, and then demanded the feminist seal of approval from survivors of girlhood." Otherwild's website features a disclaimer that the store "believes in an inclusive, expanded and fluid notion of gender expression, identities and feminisms." The statement goes on to emphasize that the store's owners "embrace our trans sisters and brothers" (Otherwild). Be that as it may, Berks's decision to collaborate with Cowan on the shirt's reproduction, along with the use of Cowan's image as the primary promotional image for the shirt, raises questions about the phrase's relationship to histories of lesbian feminist transphobia.

In this chapter, I will make sense of the phrase "the future is female" by tracing its historical origins in lesbian feminist organizing. Through archival analysis and close readings of media coverage surrounding the phrase's contemporary circulation, I argue that the phrase's journey highlights the fraught relationship that contemporary feminist and queer subjects and politics have to lesbian feminism. The phrase's mobilization in the service of consumer capitalism is indicative of the extent to which lesbian feminism's most prescient political visions have not been taken up by mainstream feminist and LGBT political movements.

II. Theoretical Overview

The project of tracing "the future is female" back to its origins is an unwieldy one: four decades lie between the phrase's first life as the slogan of a lesbian feminist bookstore and its reinvention as a viral feminist catchphrase. Over this 40 year span, digital media changed the nature of social movement organizing; as such, any analysis of "the future is female" must reckon in particular with digital media's impact on feminist and queer activism. While the particular story of "the future is female" has yet to be told in its entirety, scholars working in feminist and queer theory, digital media studies, and sociology have produced work that analyzes these social and historical phenomena. Ultimately, these works help to contextualize the relationship between separatist, anti-capitalist lesbian history and contemporary, social-media based attempts at revisiting that past.

As I traverse the decades between the opening of Labyris Books and the viral circulation of "the future is female," one of my central concerns is the form and function of the lesbian archive. The archival image that made "the future is female" a viral trend was originally posted on @h_e_r_s_t_o_r_y, an Instagram page featuring images from Brooklyn's Lesbian Herstory Archives. Feminist and queer theorists have written extensively about the importance of the

archive for lesbian communities in particular. Cvetkovich (2003, 241) analyzes "the vital role of archives within lesbian cultures as well as…their innovative and unusual forms of appearance," highlighting the importance of grassroots archives like the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA) in chronicling and creating lesbian history. For Cvetkovich, the distinction between institutionally funded archives like those housed at the New York Public Library and grassroots archives like the LHA is an important one; grassroots archives often have more freedom to include materials that are controversial, sexually explicit, or derived from the possessions of everyday people rather than celebrities and famous historical figures. Importantly, grassroots archives like the LHA do the work of contextualizing and attaching significance to these collections of diverse objects, texts, and ephemera.

Bessette (2017) analyzes grassroots lesbian collectives including the LHA and the Daughters of Bilitis, arguing that these groups revisit and modify stigmatizing historical narratives about lesbianism for queer activist purposes. Through their historiographic work, these collectives mobilize the past in service of a queer future and expand the range of accessible lesbian history. Like Cvetkovich, Bessette acknowledges the role of queer archives in not just collecting and recording queer history, but in forging "a sense of shared identity across time and difference that can divide any group of individuals." The collectivity that is cultivated through this sense of shared identity is not without its own conflicts; Bessette (7) notes that it "has been hard-earned, fractional, and discontinuous."

Bessette's account of the archive's significance and promise for lesbians speaks to the contemporary success of queer and lesbian archival Instagram accounts like @lgbt_history and @h_e_r_s_t_o_r_y. Although the surge in popularity of archival Instagram accounts is a relatively recent phenomenon, digital media studies scholars have analyzed Instagram's potential

to foster queer and feminist political organizing and self-representation. Eckert and Steiner (2016) argue that despite the consolidation in corporate ownership of major social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, these platforms are nonetheless important sites of feminist self-articulation and activism. While social media platforms' infrastructures undoubtedly privilege the already powerful and wealthy, feminist collectives continue to successfully use social media to circulate political messages and respond to popular misogyny. Similarly, in her analysis of queer women's microcelebrity labor on Instagram and Vine, Duguay (2019) holds in tension the platforms' constraints and demands with individual users' desire for self-representation as sexual minorities. Based on her interviews with queer women microcelebrities on Instagram and Vine, Duguay (2) argues that these women's social media use "may hold a dual capacity to challenge heteronormativity while facilitating greater access to social and economic capital."

In contrast, Carah and Shaul (2015) have posited that Instagram's infrastructure and governance optimize brands' visibility and exposure by harnessing the unpaid labor of the platform's users. Users' engagement with posts through likes, comments, and reposts, along with their creation of branded images, provides an endless stream of usable data and marketing images for brands both on and off the platform. In turn, users become further acculturated to "the experimental, participatory, and data-driven logics of contemporary branding" (Carah and Shaul 2015, 83) that govern social media platforms like Instagram. While this does not negate the capacity for Instagram to facilitate forms of queer and feminist self-representation, community building, and organizing, it does point to what Banet-Weiser (2012) has termed the "ambivalence" of brand culture. In the case of "the future is female," Instagram's investment in

data aggregation, native advertising, and social networking were all key to the phrase's eventual viral fame.

Through its engagement with Labyris Books, this chapter also draws upon historical studies of feminist businesses during and after the 1970s. In her work on the feminist bookstore movement, Hogan (2016) chronicles feminist bookstores' roles as movement spaces. Instead of simply approximating the values and business practices of non-feminist bookstores under a woman-owned guise, feminist bookstores were places where women developed the practice and theory of lesbian anti-racism and feminist accountability. Hogan's history of feminist bookstores thus understands these spaces "not simply as places to find books but as organizations in which bookwomen worked together to develop ethical feminist reading practices that, in turn, informed relational practices" (xvii). My analysis of Labyris Books is informed by Hogan's interpretation of feminist bookstores as movement spaces; I contrast the movement-centric ethos of feminist bookstores like Labyris Books with the viral circulation of the "future is female" shirt and slogan, which often divorced the phrase from its lesbian feminist origins.

In *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (2007), Enke chronicles the role of public space in the women's movement during the 1970s. Through a spatial analysis of feminist activism in urban areas, Enke tracks the political ideologies that these feminist spaces both nurtured and excluded. During this period, feminist spaces were created through both the transformation of established public space and the creation of new, alternative public spaces (Enke 2007, 5). Through its engagement with Labyris Books and the 5th Street women's building takeover, this chapter analyzes feminist interventions in established spaces alongside feminists' creation of new kinds of public space. Through my analysis of these lesbian

feminist public spaces, I analyze the relationship between lesbian feminist political strategies and ideologies and those of contemporary popular feminism.

Collectively, these works inform my analysis of "the future is female" by contextualizing both its emergence in lesbian feminist activism and its resurgence via queer and feminist social media archives. By following this phrase from its origins in the 5th Street women's building takeover, to its use at Labyris Books, to its unlikely second life as feminist phrase du jour, I question what historical and political circumstances come together to shape the successes and failures of each of these feminist ventures. To do so will require an analysis of neoliberal urban restructuring, lesbian anti-capitalist politics, and the uneasy alliance between contemporary popular feminism and transphobia. As I trace the phrase's journey from lesbian feminist bookstore slogan to social media catchphrase, I focus on the iterations of lesbian feminist politics encapsulated by the phrase's circulation in each of these historical moments.

III. The 5th Street Women's Building Takeover

While the image of Alix Dobkin donning the original "the future is female" shirt circulated widely in the late 2010s, its counterpart is much less well known. However, there is another image of Dobkin wearing the shirt, presumably taken as part of the same series of photographs. In this second image Dobkin faces away from the camera, showcasing the back of the t-shirt. In the center of the shirt is a large black labyris, with the words Labyris Books printed on its left and the phrase "the future is female" on its right. The "l" in female is made of another, smaller labyris. Dobkin is standing straight up, balancing a copy of *Les Guerilleres* on the top of her head. Perhaps predictably, Otherwild's 2016 version of the shirt did not replicate the labyris-centric image featured on the original t-shirt.

The phrase "the future is female" was originated by the women of Labyris Books as part of an effort to raise money for the struggling lesbian feminist bookstore. Rios and Lurie, Labyris's co-founders, were inspired to open the store after meeting during the January 1971 5th Street women's building takeover. As Lurie remembers it, she met Rios at initial planning meetings for the building takeover in late 1970, and the two moved in together shortly thereafter (Jane Lurie, personal communication). Although the building takeover lasted only two weeks, the 5th Street women's commitment to anti-capitalist ideology and solidarity with contiguous liberation movements would inform Rios and Lurie's approach to running a feminist bookstore.

When viewed as part of this longer historical arc, the distance between the historical origins and contemporary use of the phrase "the future is female" comes into clearer focus. The 5th Street takeover was a concrete manifestation of a utopian political vision that lesbian feminists would go on to debate and refine throughout the 1970s, and represented a rare moment of collaboration and solidarity between lesbian feminists and other liberation movements like the Young Lords. By revisiting the capacious political vision that the 5th Street women's building takeover represented, I highlight the alternative strands of lesbian feminist history that are contained within the phrase "the future is female."

The 5th Street women's building takeover was carried out during an extended period of government disinvestment in New York City's Lower East Side. This disinvestment happened against a background of the city's general economic decline in the early 1970s. During this time, massive losses in manufacturing jobs and the flight of the city's white middle class to the suburbs resulted in shrinking tax revenue for a city with high Medicaid and welfare costs. When New York narrowly avoided bankruptcy in the mid-70s through a combination of federal loans and sweeping budget cuts, the city's poor and working classes were hit the hardest. Sites (2003)

documents how the Lower East Side (LES) in particular was impacted by the city's use of triage and planned shrinkage policies, which drastically reduced public expenditures in the city's poor neighborhoods. During this time, the city government took over and subsequently abandoned a number of buildings throughout the LES, leaving those buildings empty and in disrepair.

These economic shifts took place following a notable demographic change in the LES. White countercultural activists began moving into the immigrant neighborhood during the 1960s, and in the 1970s they continued to have an ongoing presence in the LES. Still, the racially diverse neighborhood remained home to significant populations of working class African Americans and Asian and Latin American immigrants. The neighborhood's diversity meant that it was also home to a number of social movements, many of which fought back against the city's perpetual disinvestment in the LES. The neighborhood's critical mass of city-owned abandoned buildings made it an important location for New York City's squatters' movement, which challenged the concept of private property by taking over these buildings and attempting to make them livable for many of the city's unhoused people. The LES was also one of the major neighborhood hubs for New York City's chapter of the Young Lords, a Puerto Rican political movement inspired in part by the Black Panthers. While New York City's political elite pushed for a radical neoliberal restructuring of the city during the 1970s, many residents of the LES were organizing grassroots networks of resistance to these changes.

The women of the 5th Street building takeover saw themselves as part of this broader network of social movements when they began their takeover of the abandoned building at 330 E. 5th Street on New Year's Eve, 1971. The five story building, a former welfare office and women's shelter, had been empty for four years; this was one of the many city-owned buildings in the LES that had been abandoned and subsequently fallen into disrepair. Across the street was

the city's ninth police precinct. A flyer distributed prior to the New Year's Eve takeover reads, "Women will take over a building on the lower east side on New Years Eve. It will be used for the needs of WOMEN" (Subject Files: Building Takeovers). Following this statement is an impressively broad list of the services that the women plan to offer out of the building, including a feminist school, daycare, art workshops, a women's health clinic, a lesbian rights center, a halfway house, and a food co-op. The women anticipated resistance on the part of the city. This same flyer warns potential participants, "Some women are willing to be arrested if necessary; others who are not willing or able to make such a commitment are equally welcome and NEEDED! for support." As part of their preparations for the takeover, the women compiled a list of groups that supported their plans for the building; the list was a snapshot of the city's vibrant activist scene in the early 70s, and included the Young Lords, the 9th Street Welfare Action Group, and the Daughters of Bilitis (Subject Files: Building Takeovers).

The night of the takeover, 100 women representing almost all of the women's liberation groups in New York City joined in, walking through the city's snowy streets and entering the 5th Street building through a ground floor window. They christened it the Fifth Street Women's Building, and the group quickly set to work on the various labor-intensive projects required to make the building habitable. In addition to having no working electricity or heat, there were lead paint chips on the floor, an open elevator shaft, a leaky sewage system, rats, and broken glass throughout the building. As they set about the massive project of cleaning and repairing the building, the women were assisted by various community groups. The Young Lords and the Tompkins Square Community Center[7] helped to clean and repair several rooms of the building that were to be used as a women's health clinic, and men with "necessary skills" were

[7] This group was most likely related to Tompkins Square Park's status as an political and social hub for the Lower East Side's squatters' rights movement.

occasionally allowed into the building to perform repairs. When men did perform repair work it was considered an ad-hoc session of the building's feminist school, and women in the building were taught how to perform the task themselves (Subject Files: Building Takeovers).

Women from across the city were invited to come experience the building for themselves. In the LES, women from the takeover distributed flyers in English and Spanish advertising the building's planned services and asking for women's support. The group would need all of the help they could get; from the beginning of their time at the 5th Street building, the women had been unsuccessfully negotiating with the city for permanent ownership of the building. Over the 12 days during which the group occupied the building, the group's official negotiation committee sent formal letters to mayor John Lindsay's office, discussed the status of the building with city officials, and reached out to activist groups both within and beyond the LES for advice and support. Initially, city officials assured the women that once they vacated the building, the mayor's office would begin negotiations with them. The women flatly refused, believing this to be a ploy to shut down the takeover altogether. Next, city officials informally offered the women a different building in the LES; when the women visited the building, they ran into men from another city department who said they had also been offered the building. In an interview with the writer Adrian Shirk (2017), 5th Street organizer Reeni Goldin recounts being told by city officials that the women could have the building as long as they took in and supervised women on welfare. Because the act of monitoring other women in such an invasive way ran counter to their values, the 5th Street women did not take the offer. Goldin remembers, "I had a friend who worked for the welfare department and she had to go into these women's houses and count their socks and see how many shirts and underwear they had, and if they had too many, they were docked. It was really intrusive, invasive. And we were like, 'We're not counting anybody's

socks, are you kidding me? We're not gonna be their jailer'" (Shirk). Seemingly unable to gain traction in their negotiations with the mayor's office, the women reached out to other political figures in the city. Bella Abzug, a leader of the women's movement who had just taken office as a representative of the city's 19th congressional district, met with the women and supported their efforts to take over the building. So did Borough President of Manhattan Percy Sutton, a lawyer and civil rights activist who had also been Malcolm X's attorney. However, even the support of some of the city's most well-known political figures was not enough to secure the women's right to the 5th Street building.

Throughout this time, the women attempted to maintain contact with New York City mayor John Lindsay's office; a newsletter containing updates on the 5th Street women's negotiations with the city claims that during these negotiations, Lindsay's aid assured the women that they would not be arrested. Notwithstanding any promises from the mayor's office, on January 12th police and several representatives from the city's Department of Real Estate entered the 5th Street building and evicted the women inside, accusing them of making the building a hazard to the community. 3 women refused to leave and were arrested. At a planned demonstration the following morning, approximately 70 women stood outside the building as city workers began boarding up its doors and windows under the supervision of the tactical police force. When police began fighting with demonstrators, 25 women rushed inside the building in protest. Police soon followed, clubbing many of the women and eventually arresting 24 of them. In the aftermath, 4 women were charged with assaulting a police officer, and the rest were charged with criminal trespassing. A subsequent newsletter reported stories of police officers' sexist and homophobic antagonism toward the 5th Street women on the day of the

arrests, including claims that the officers wrote "fuck a pussy tonight" over the "sisters unite" signs posted on the 5th Street building's walls (Subject Files: Building Takeovers).

Following their arrests, the women of the 5th Street Building Takeover continued to highlight the city government's neglect of women and the working class residents of the LES. Following their arrests, the 5th Street women participated in a demonstration outside city hall led by the squatters' movement, continued discussions with city officials like Abzug and Sutton, and urged supporters to attend their trials. Facing criminal charges themselves, the 5th Street women charged the city with criminal neglect of women; while the city prepared its case, so did they. A flyer distributed on the day of the trial reads, "We are called criminals for taking our lives into our own hands & setting up services for the women of the community, for showing women how we can help ourselves. For refusing to follow the rules set up to protect property instead of life. For putting sexism on trial" (Subject Files: Building Takeovers).

The women's capacious vision for the 5th Street building had not been diminished by their arrests. The flyer distributed on the day of their trial reports the city's plan to demolish the women's building and turn it into a parking lot, but it also lists 9 demands that the women were making of the city. Among them were the women's immediate possession of the East 5th Street Building, dismissal of all charges against the 5th Street women, and a recognition by public officials "that the needs of women in this city are great; and that the existence of the Fifth Street Women's Building is only the first step in meeting those needs." In need of a new home base, the 5th Street women soon took up residence in a LES storefront. Calling themselves the Fifth Street Women's Building in Exile, the women continued to make plans for the various services that would be offered from the women's building, including a health center with information on abortion and a women's shelter "for women who want to or have to leave home" (Subject Files:

Building Takeovers). In the weeks following the arrests, the women circulated petitions in English and Spanish condemning the city and the police for their eviction of the 5th Street women and demanding the return of the building; these petitions gained over 500 signatures from people in the LES (Subject Files: Building Takeovers).

The women were ultimately unable to convince the city to return the building to them. The building at 330 E. 5th Street was demolished shortly after the 5th Street women's arrests and turned into a parking lot for the police precinct across the street; the space still serves that function today. Most of the women arrested as part of the takeover were released and given $25 tickets (Subject Files: Building Takeovers). Even after the 5th Street building was demolished, many of the women from the takeover persisted in their efforts to transform urban public space; after leaving the storefront that they occupied following the arrests, the takeover became a phone chain of women looking to begin a similar project at a different building. Although this specific group of women did not go on to take over another building, building takeovers continued to happen throughout the city during the 1970s and 80s. In the end, over the 12 days that it was in operation the 5th Street Women's Building served an estimated 500 women (Subject Files: Building Takeovers), a figure that speaks to the immense unmet needs of women in the city in general and in the LES specifically during the early 1970s.

Although it is impossible to track the takeover's impact on the lives of each of the women who passed through the building, the action clearly served as inspiration for the future artistic and activist endeavors of many of the women who were involved in planning it. Liza Cowan, initially assigned to cover the takeover as a reporter, would go on to join another group of women hoping to start a women's center in their neighborhood. As part of that group she also published her first magazine, *COWRIE Lesbian Feminist*, beginning in 1972. June Arnold, one

of the women involved in planning the takeover, founded the feminist publishing house Daughters Incorporated with her partner Parke Bowman in 1971. In 1973, Daughters Inc. published Arnold's experimental novel based on the 5th Street takeover, *The Cook and the Carpenter*. In 1976, Arnold and Bowman organized the first Women in Print conference, which Hogan (2016, 30) credits with changing the feminist bookstore movement "from being a collection of individual feminist bookstores…to an intentional network of bookwomen who drafted a shared manifesta of feminist bookwomen ethics and visions." Susan Sherman, who acted as a lookout during the women's initial New Year's Eve break-in, went on to have a long career as a radical lesbian feminist poet, playwright, and essayist whose work merged art and politics. Jane Lurie, with the assistance of Marizel Rios and other women from the takeover, made a 15 minute movie about the 5th Street women's building that would go on to be screened at the Whitney Museum of American Art. The closing scenes of Lurie's film feature images of the Labyris Books storefront, which Rios and Lurie would open in Greenwich Village in 1972; the store was located just over a mile west of the 5th Street women's building.

Perhaps more significant than any of its participants' individual accomplishments are the broader political ideals that were invoked and circulated as part of the women's building takeover. The 5th Street women practiced a kind of permeable lesbian separatism; while many of the attempts at lesbian separatism that took place in the late 70s implemented much stricter rules about potential collaborators and participants, the women's building takeover was open to collaboration with a wide array of political figures and movements. Although the majority of the women involved in the takeover were lesbians—organizer Reeni Goldin joked that out of the 500 women involved, "four hundred and seventy were lesbians" (Shirk 2017)—the plans for the women's building also addressed concerns that primarily (though not exclusively) pertained to

heterosexual women. The women's health center was to offer information on birth control and abortion, and plans were laid for 24 hour a day childcare to be offered out of the women's building.

The women also worked with men in several different contexts throughout the building takeover: both mixed-gender and primarily male activist groups helped the women with cleaning and repairs, men were brought in to perform and teach repair work that the women did not have the knowledge or skills to complete themselves (such as repairing the boiler), and a variety of activist groups and community associations were asked to make public statements of support for the action by signing petitions. In turn, there is evidence that the women involved acted in support of political actions that were not primarily lesbian or feminist identified. Shortly after the 5th Street takeover, 106 welfare families began a sit-in at a welfare office in Tribeca to protest the conditions at the city's welfare hotels. Ten women from 5th Street quickly joined them with supplies, writing of the collaboration in a subsequent newsletter, "SEIZE THE CITY!!" (Subject Files: Building Takeovers). This willingness to work with others based on shared political ideals, rather than relying solely on a shared gender or sexual orientation, allied the 5th Street women with the multiracial resistance movements that were active in the LES and other working class New York City neighborhoods at the time. Rather than detracting from the action's focus on women's needs, this coalition-based approach enabled more progress to be made on the building's renovations and generated more community support for the project. In particular, the women's outreach to a number of different community organizations likely helped many more women find the building and access its services than would have otherwise been possible.

Crucially, the 5th Street women were connected to political organizations like the Black Panthers through their shared anti-capitalist ideological commitment. This commitment to anti-

capitalism expanded the core political claim of the 5th Street takeover itself: rather than simply asserting that all women deserved to have access to safe housing, adequate food, and childcare, the women also challenged the city government's violent defense of private property. Not only were the 5th Street women not criminals for providing these services to people in the community, the city government and the police *were* criminally neglectful and abusive in their defense of capitalism over the needs of the people. These political commitments speak to the 5th Street women's relationship to other revolutionary social movements of the time. The action's anti-capitalist orientation and list of 9 demands were clearly influenced by the ideology and tactics of the socialist-leaning Young Lords and Black Panther parties. Like both the Young Lords and the Black Panthers, the 5th Street women offered the surrounding community social services like education, free food, and daycare in ways that drew attention to the city government's neglect of poor communities and communities of color. The activist method of direct action occupation was one that had been used with some success by the Young Lords in 1969; in both New York City and the organization's hometown of Chicago, the Young Lords took over church buildings, renamed them the People's Church, and used them to offer social services like health clinics and childcare. The group's June 1969 building takeover in Chicago was successful, and the Young Lords occupied the building for a year rent-free (Cardoza 2018). The group's New York chapter took over East Harlem's First Spanish Methodist Church in December 1969, almost exactly a year before the 5th Street takeover (Martinez 2019). Like the 5th Street Women's Building, the New York People's Church offered a mix of cultural events and social services. The occupation lasted 11 days, and the group was eventually evicted by police despite community support.

This history of the 5th Street Women's Building takeover is crucial to a deeper understanding of the subsequent creation and political mission of Labyris Books. The 5th Street

takeover also provides a picture of the early stages of the lesbian feminist movement in New York, suggesting that these early attempts at political organizing were often more fluid and coalition based than much of the lesbian feminist organizing that took place later in the decade. The takeover's political mission, which included both broad socialist change and the propagation of women's creative works, challenged the theoretical divide between radical and cultural feminism that scholars like Rupp and Taylor (1993) have critiqued. The image conjured by this direct action is perhaps more complicated than the one that is evoked by the contemporary circulation of the phrase "the future is female," particularly because of its explicit foundation in anti-capitalist politics. With this in mind, I now turn to Labyris Books to analyze the relationship between these political ideals and the lesbian feminist bookstore.

IV. Labyris Books: Fashioning the Future

In her recounting of the 5th Street takeover, Liza Cowan (2012) lists Labyris Books as one of the many feminist projects that were taken up by the 5th Street women. While the building takeover's conclusion was a precipitating factor in Rios and Lurie's opening of Labyris Books, Lurie cites the closure of another important women's center in the city as the crucial factor that pushed her and Rios to open a bookstore.[8] She remembers wondering where movement women would go to get feminist (and lesbian feminist) newsletters like The Furies and Off Our Backs after the women's center closed. In our interview, Lurie said, "[Labyris Books] came out of the women's movement there [in NYC] and it came out of just the need to have a place" (Jane Lurie, personal communication). Their plan was to offer everything from published books to informal pamphlets and newsletters, with the caveat that everything would be written by women. Looking for an optimal place to open the city's first feminist bookstore, Lurie and Rios spent afternoons

[8] Despite extensive archival research, I have not been able to locate records of this specific women's center.

wandering around Greenwich Village, just a few miles north-west of the former 5th Street Women's Building. Although neither of the women had much money, Lurie had some, and she planned to use it to open the store. Eventually, they found an unused storage room on the corner of 7th Avenue and Barrow Street. The room was attached to a Pakistani goods store, whose owner agreed to lease the space to Rios and Lurie. The bookstore's new location was a three minute walk from The Stonewall Inn, the bar where the Stonewall Riots had taken place three years earlier. After securing a location and stocking it with books through an independent wholesaler, the women were ready to open Labyris's doors to the community.

Once set up the store was small but cozy, with a window facing the street and a table in front for women who wanted to read. A community corkboard on one wall featured flyers for consciousness raising groups, advertisements for women-made goods, and other movement updates. The bookstore's location in the heart of Greenwich Village was crucial to the role that it played as a movement space. While the Village had long been home to artists and countercultural types, the neighborhood's reputation as a haven for creatives and the LGBT community was solidified in the 1950s when it became home to many of the Beat Generation and folk revival movement's most iconic figures. The racially diverse neighborhood was home to a number of artistic and political revolutionaries during the early 1970s, and the Village's host of coffee shops and clubs were spaces for both artistic expression and political organizing. Valerie Solanas, perhaps one of the most infamous examples of both artistic and political rebellion to come from the Village around this time, sold copies of her *SCUM Manifesto* on the street in Greenwich Village in the late 60s.

By the time of Labyris's opening in 1972, the Village was already host to the city's first gay bookstore, the Oscar Wilde Bookshop. Oscar Wilde was founded by Mattachine Society

member Craig Rodwell, who utilized the slogan "Gay is Good" in advertising for the bookstore. Like Labyris, Oscar Wilde was run as both a bookstore and community center. However, the bookstores served different communities; while Oscar Wilde was informed by the Mattachine Society's goal of a unified gay community, Labyris's affiliation with lesbian feminist politics meant that the bookstore was an explicitly lesbian space that prioritized feminist politics. Hogan (2016, 13) writes, "The name Labyris identified the bookstore as a specifically lesbian space marked by a lesbian claiming of the double-sided axe carried by the Amazon women warriors."

Labyris's success was intimately connected to the personal and romantic relationships of the women who ran it. While she is unsure of the exact timeline of events, Lurie remembers leaving the city sometime around 1974, a few years after opening the bookstore (Jane Lurie, personal communication). She had met a new girlfriend, and the two went up to the Catskills to homestead. While Labyris had never been profitable, the store struggled to stay open over the next few years. Lurie had been the bookstore's primary financial backer, and her departure coincided with the city's worsening financial crisis. By 1975, the store was in serious financial trouble and struggling to raise money from the community to stay afloat. An April 1975 article by Bonnie Bluh in *Majority Report* writes that "the Labyris Women" (identified as Patricia, Marizel, and Deborah) "will not hassle women to buy books, magazines, newspapers. So women come to the store. They eat lunch. They rap. They discuss their problems. They use the phone. But when it comes to buying books, to putting money in a jar that sits on the desk, sisters forget."

The bookstore did host a series of fundraisers over the next few years, some of which featured famous feminist poets and thinkers including Audre Lorde, Ti-Grace Atkinson, and Andrea Dworkin. The original "the future is female" shirts were part of this fundraising effort. In her article on Labyris's precarious financial situation, Bluh (1975) suggested that it was women's

political duty to support the bookstore, writing, “Labyris needs money. They need larger headquarters. Sisters, our time is now. Let’s not blow it. When we let any sister down, we are always inadvertently hurting ourselves.” Clearly, Labyris’s political function was understood by many to be more important than its business operations. However, it is hard to pin down the specific feminist alliances and ideologies espoused by the women at Labyris. The store’s most famous proclamation—“the future is female”—is frustratingly open-ended. The most accessible means of assessing Labyris’s politics are through its stock lists and event descriptions, which include many of the day’s most prominent feminist thinkers and writers.

Like many lesbian feminist cultural institutions, Labyris Books was a web of sometimes contradictory political ideologies and affiliations. Messaging from the store and its owners often evidenced both a radical feminist interpretation of gender as the primary axis upon which power operates and a commitment to an intersectional feminist sensibility that reckoned with intersecting modes of oppression. One advertisement (Subject Files: Bookstores) for the bookstore features an extended quote from Elizabeth Gould Davis’s *The First Sex*, a book published in 1971 that chronicles the existence of early matriarchal societies and suggests that matriarchal societies are more democratic and high-functioning than patriarchal ones. However, the women of Labyris also foregrounded discussions of race and racism in their description of the kinds of political conversations that the store fostered. Bluh (1975) quotes “the Labyris women” as saying, “Other bookstores don’t discuss racism or lesbianism with you.” This was reflected in the bookstore’s selection of readings, which included works focusing on gender, race, and sexuality. When asked about Labyris’s deliberate effort at fostering conversations about race and gender, Lurie said, “It came out of 5th Street. 5th Street was completely attuned to all of the issues, not like feminism as in Betty Friedan feminism, which was white and

privileged. It wasn't that at all" (Jane Lurie, personal communication). Lurie noted that Rios, a working class Puerto Rican lesbian feminist, was particularly influential in shaping the store's lesbian feminist of color political orientation.

What was consistent was Rios and Lurie's framing of the bookstore as a movement space first, and a business second. Following in the footsteps of 5th Street and similar activist efforts, the Labyris women allied themselves with multiple social movements working toward revolutionary change. Though the most obvious of these were the women's liberation movement and the burgeoning lesbian feminist movement, Lurie remembers the store's clientele being comprised of politically active women who participated in a range of social movements, including the Black Panthers and the Young Lords. The bookstore's status as a movement space was consistent throughout its existence; even after Lurie's departure from Labyris, the Labyris women are quoted as saying, "This bookstore came directly out of the revolutionary movement. The main thing that happens here is communication…Books are jump-off points" (Bluh 1975). This focus on facilitating radical change was reflected in Labyris's set-up; the table and chairs in the front of the store, along with the community corkboard hung on the wall above it, turned the small space into one that could accommodate small gatherings, spark casual conversations, and advertise for community events.

Many of the women who participated in readings and workshops at Labyris had vastly different political visions and commitments. A flyer advertising a poetry reading fundraiser for Labyris (most likely printed in 1975) features the names of lesbian and feminist thinkers, writers, and activists including Audre Lorde, Judy Greenspan, and Robin Morgan, three women with strikingly divergent political views and commitments (Subject Files: Bookstores). Greenspan and Morgan in particular have political legacies that seem to be at odds with one another. Morgan,

the editor of a seminal 1970 anthology of second-wave feminist writings entitled *Sisterhood is Powerful*, was a founding member of numerous radical feminist organizations, including New York Radical Women; today, she is often remembered as the woman who gave a keynote speech excoriating trans woman Beth Elliott at the 1973 West Coast Lesbian Conference. Greenspan, a poet and lesbian feminist activist, would go on to become a prominent prisoner rights activist who was a member of San Francisco's ACT UP and founder of the HIV/AIDS in Prison Project. Greenspan was also a founding member of the Transgender in Prison Committee, an advocacy group that focused on combating transphobic violence and discrimination in prisons. These women's later work, which is almost diametrically opposed on the issue of trans rights and inclusion, is just one marker of how difficult it is to identify one particular political vision as being representative of lesbian feminism in general, or Labyris Books in particular.

A different flyer promotes a series of events referred to as "Sharpen Your Labyris Night," featuring Ti-Grace Atkinson, Andrea Dworkin, Vivian Gornick, and Louise Bernikow (Subject Files: Bookstores). Again, this line-up of speakers suggests a range of political priorities and commitments: Atkinson was a prominent advocate of political lesbianism, Gornick's journalistic coverage of the New York Radical Feminists drew many women to the burgeoning women's liberation movement, and Dworkin eventually became one of the most prominent faces of so-called "anti-sex" feminism. However, it is also clear that Labyris's owners did not agree with the politics of all of the women who gave readings or ran workshops in support of the bookstore. A September 1974 article in the New York Radical Feminists' newsletter discusses a book signing by Ti-Grace Atkinson that took place at Labyris. This book signing was separate from the advertised "Sharpen Your Labyris Night," and was not a fundraiser for the bookstore. In her article, the NYRF's Myra Carter (1974) depicts a book signing fraught with tension, in which

Labyris co-owner Rios argues with Atkinson about her book's conceptualization of lesbianism and reveals that she was against Atkinson's appearance at the bookstore. Articles like Carter's suggest that the Labyris women's political ideals were not always aligned with all of the writers, theorists, and political figures who participated in readings and fundraisers there. Still, the through-line of these women's politics was a shared belief in the urgent need for a radical change in society to combat the crushing oppression experienced by women, people of color, and the working class. This commitment was shared by the Labyris women, who saw the bookstore primarily as a movement space.

Unfortunately, Labyris's commitment to being a movement space above all else ultimately contributed to its closure. This was common for many women's bookstores; Hogan (2016, 4) refers to the "defining tension" in the feminist bookstore movement as being "between a capitalist business format and movement accountability…between a feminist business model and a grassroots organizing model." Labyris Books favored a grassroots organizing model that depended upon community support to keep the bookstore open. Hogan points to the flyer for a 1976 Labyris fundraiser, which reads, "Labyris Books, New York's first feminist bookstore, is in urgent need of funds. We cannot develop and maintain a feminist community without serious feminist support" (Subject Files: Bookstores) as evidence that early feminist bookstores "were seen not as businesses but rather as spaces that relied on community to sustain them in exchange for the movement activism of the bookwomen" (Hogan 2016, 13). This approach appears to have been more sustainable when Lurie was able to supplement the bookstore's profits. Despite the community's attempts at fundraising, Labyris Books closed in 1977.

Archival documents suggest that Labyris's eventual closure was connected to the racial discrimination that Rios faced as a woman of color business owner; this dynamic also has a basis

in broader trends within the feminist bookstore movement. The feminist bookstore movement has often been theorized as a primarily white phenomenon; Hogan's work rightly challenges this understanding of the women's liberation movement more broadly, looking instead at causes of women of color's mobility between social movements and instances of transracial alliances within the feminist bookstore movement. Through this work, she argues that feminist bookstores were "sites that, at their beginnings, drew together lesbians and their allies from across racialized difference to attempt to enact feminist futures" (Hogan 2016, 4). While Labyris is certainly an example of one such attempt, the bookstore's struggle to stay open following Lurie's departure also points to the economic barriers to bookstore ownership faced by many women of color. Without an economic safety net, Labyris was dependent upon community support, which was often contingent upon individual women's relationships with and perceptions of Labyris's remaining owner and co-founder, Marizel Rios.

Archival records of the goings-on at Labyris Books are minimal, but the records that do exist suggest that Rios fell under immense scrutiny as the sole owner/founder of Labyris Books following Lurie's departure. In the aforementioned article written by Myra Carter and published in New York Radical Feminists' September 1974 newsletter, Rios is chastised for voicing her political disagreement with the author Ti-Grace Atkinson. The article, entitled "Greek Politics at Labyris: Junta style that is?" refers to the series of far-right military dictatorships that ruled Greece from 1967 to 1974, implicitly comparing Rios to a military dictator. In "Greek Politics," Carter reports on a book signing at Labyris that Atkinson agreed to do as a fundraiser for an upcoming NYRF event. The book signing was a public fundraiser that eventually turned into a closed-door one, potentially to facilitate a taped interview between Atkinson and a reporter for the German magazine *Der Spiegel.*

In Carter's recollection of the event, Rios voices her disagreements with Atkinson's book during this closed-door session. The author's characterizations of the two women involved in this exchange are starkly different: while Rios is described as "uptight," Atkinson is "listening politely if somewhat harrowed" (Carter 1974). Carter then describes Rios's exchange with Atkinson as a hostile takeover of the fundraiser, despite the fact that the event was hosted by her own bookstore; Carter complains, "We had made seven dollars before the event was co-opted." This tone is carried through to the end of the article, which closes by asking, "Is this Lesbian Separatism? Reduced to bad manners [sic] political opportunism, and Movement sabotage? We lost the gig and I never did get my book signed…" This scrutiny of Rios's disagreement with a prominent white feminist is representative of a larger trend in community perceptions of Labyris Books, in which Rios, a woman of color, is depicted as difficult, unwelcoming, or too separatist. This perception underscores the extent to which reliance on feminist community support is particularly difficult for women of color business owners. Within this context, characterizations of Labyris as unwelcoming (Hogan 2016, 13) appear to be part of the increased judgment and scrutiny that Rios faced as a woman of color who owned and operated a feminist bookstore.

Even the holdings at the Lesbian Herstory Archives affirm this general hostility toward Labyris Books and its owner. In the LHA's files on Labyris Books, there is an annotated copy of Bluh's article (Subject Files: Bookstores) calling for donations to be made to the bookstore. The hand written notes surrounding the article do not have a name attached. The note writer, who appears to have annotated the article and sent it to a friend, calls for "indignant letters" to be sent to Rios, and also notes that Rios suggested in a different editorial that women should support Labyris by donating their tax returns to the bookstore. The note writer's response to this idea—"Ha Ha Ha!"—conveys contempt, whether for Rios, the bookstore, or the collective of women

who were running the bookstore at the time. As I move into an analysis of "the future is female" in its current iteration, I want to underscore the significance of Rios's role in the phrase's inception. In reconstructing the history of "the future is female," it is crucial to highlight which historical figures have been obscured and which have been foregrounded in the phrase's viral circulation.

V. Otherwild Goods and Services: Lesbian Feminism Goes Digital

While the history of Labyris Books was incorporated into the promotional story of "the future is female" shirt's origins, the historical narrative that cohered around the shirt was a surface-level depiction of a much more complicated backstory. On Otherwild's website, the description of the shirt reads, "The original 'The Future is Female' T-shirt design was made for Labyris Books, the first women's bookstore in New York City, which was opened in 1972 by Jane Lurie and Marizel Rios. The photographer Liza Cowan took a picture of musician Alix Dobkin, her girlfriend at the time, wearing it in 1975. The photograph was done for a slide show she was working on called: 'What the Well Dressed Dyke Will Wear'" (Otherwild).

What this description (along with other public statements about the shirt made by Otherwild's founder Rachel Berks) sidesteps is the question of the shirt's original purpose and the phrase's origins. Cowan may have taken the photograph that introduced Berks to the shirt, but she did not innovate the phrase. Neither did Lurie, who had already left Labyris by the time the shirts were made. In our interview, Lurie stated her belief that Rios was most likely the creator of the phrase, potentially in collaboration with 5th Street organizer and Daughters Inc. co-founder June Arnold (Jane Lurie, personal communication). In my interview with Lurie, she referred to the shirt's creation as a kind of co-optation (Jane Lurie, personal communication). When asked what she thought of the phrase's second life, Lurie related a story from her time

working with the Black Panthers, in which a phrase that the Panthers originated was eventually used in a television commercial for Right Guard deodorant. She said, "Everything gets co-opted. It just does. That's what this is about. So this is co-opted by, at least it was co-opted by a woman's business. You know, and I'm sure they didn't think they were co-opting even, they thought they were spreading a wonderful message." Lurie's belief that the Otherwild shirt was a co-optation of Labyris's original message was tempered by her sense that this process is ultimately inevitable for many revolutionary movements. She went on to say, "People make money off of things. I hate the capitalist society. I'm not a big fan. But I understand what I live in" (Jane Lurie, personal communication).

Part of what Lurie's reflections highlight is the stark difference in ethos that exists between early feminist bookstores like Labyris and millennial feminist businesses like Otherwild. Otherwild and Labyris represent divergent ideas about the purpose of feminist businesses: while Labyris was founded with the intent of fostering social movement activism, Otherwild is primarily a queer-identified, woman owned purveyor of ethically made goods. Berks underscored this point in an interview with *Forbes*'s Katheryn Thayer (2017); when asked what resources have helped Otherwild to grow as a small business, Berks responds that one of the most crucial factors in growing her business has been "finding this *thing* that everybody wants." For Otherwild, she says, that *thing* was "the future is female" merchandise. While Berks notes in that same interview that she hopes to find more bestselling items over the course of her career, "the future is female" shirt appears to have grown the business exponentially. Following the shirt's initial release in mid-2015, Otherwild partnered with @h_e_r_s_t_o_r_y's Kelly Rakowski to launch a line of clothing inspired by lesbian archival images, with ten percent of the proceeds going to the Lesbian Herstory Archives. Today, the store also sells a number of items

inspired by the original "the future is female" shirt, including pins, prints, sweatshirts, pencils, tank tops, and children's clothing bearing the phrase. In 2016, Berks opened a second Otherwild location in New York's long-since gentrified Lower East Side. Otherwild New York is less than a mile away from the former location of the 5th Street Women's Building, about a six minute walk. The shirt also generated plenty of press for the previously-obscure small business, which was featured in *Forbes, The New York Times, Think Progress, LA Weekly,* and more as a result of the shirt's viral fame. The majority of this coverage was positive in tone, with many of the articles mentioning Berks's stated commitment to donate 25 percent of the proceeds from the shirt's sales to Planned Parenthood.[9] This tie-in was prescient given House Republicans' failed 2015 effort to defund the nonprofit organization, and seemed to provide a feminist through-line for the shirt's significance from 1975 to the current day.

However, it remained unclear which iteration of feminist politics the shirt represented. For some, the phrase's invocation of the word "female" raised comparisons to trans-exclusionary feminists' insistence that gender and biology are inextricably linked, and thus only those assigned female at birth can ever truly be women. Berks appeared to be aware of these criticisms, and addressed them in a 2015 interview by saying, "I think that this message has sort of evolved in a very important way, where mothers buy this for their sons to wear, trans women wear this, people that don't fit in the gender binary or don't believe in the gender binary wear this shirt. It's meaningful to people who aren't women born women, and it's meaningful to people who are" (Goldstein 2015). While Berks is right—people of various gender identities did purchase and wear the shirt—her use of the phrase "women born women" immediately evokes trans-exclusionary feminists' use of the phrase to identify cisgender women as "real" women. This

[9] As of February 2020, there is no mention on Otherwild's website of any Planned Parenthood donations being made in conjunction with the shirts.

phrase played a particularly key role in debates over trans inclusion at Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, where trans-exclusionary feminists utilized the phrase "womyn born womyn" to exclude trans women from the festival. While Berks uses the phrase to indicate that people of various gender identities have purchased and worn the shirt, in this context the use of a phrase so closely associated with histories of trans exclusion emphasizes the shirt's ambiguous relationship to histories of lesbian feminist transphobia.

On Otherwild's website, the shirt is accompanied by a caption that attempts to address this association. In part, it reads, "Otherwild believes in an inclusive, expanded and fluid notion of gender expression, identities and feminisms. We support liberation, embrace our trans sisters and brothers, and call for the end of patriarchal ideology, domination, oppression, and violence" (Otherwild). While Berks may have adopted the phrase in this spirit, any stated commitment to "embrace our trans sisters and brothers" exists in tension with the history of lesbian feminist transphobia evoked by Cowan's archival photograph. Furthermore, the phrase began to proliferate on large quantities of non-Otherwild merchandise shortly after its viral success. Although the store's message about trans inclusivity in relation to "the future is female" may have reached many of Otherwild's customers, the phrase's wider circulation was largely divorced from this sentiment. Customers can now purchase pins, shirts, mugs, sweatshirts, jewelry, and prints featuring the phrase from a number of merchants, most of which do not utilize Otherwild's trans-inclusive disclaimer. Throughout much of its viral circulation, it is likely that the phrase was interpreted in such a way that gender and assigned sex were assumed to be synonymous. There is also evidence that politically active trans-exclusionary feminists embraced the phrase specifically for its perceived attachment to "biological" womanhood; some feminists' negative response to a line of shirts made by the retailer Wildfang that read "the future

is fluid" (Macdonald 2017) and a thread on the infamous "gender critical" reddit page[10] (TheBioWoman 2019) both suggest that there was a contingent of trans-exclusionary feminists who embraced the phrase specifically because they felt it aligned with their beliefs about gender.

Critiques of "the future is female" led to modified versions of the phrase, including Wildfang's "the future is fluid," appearing on additional merchandise. Other alternatives to the phrase included "el futuro es femeninx," "the future is female ejaculation," and "the future is non-binary." The phrase was also appropriated in apolitical ways, and is now used to sell sorority t-shirts reading "the future is kappa." What even critical appropriations of the phrase fail to critique is the broader embrace of feminist messaging as a tactic of consumer capitalism. This is the salient difference between the shirt's contemporary fame and its historical context at Labyris Books, where the phrase was part of a larger campaign to support an anti-capitalist feminist bookstore and movement hub.

VI. Conclusion

Ultimately, we can only make sense of the gap between the origins of "the future is female" and its contemporary circulation by retracing the history of the 5th Street Women's Building and the massive neoliberal restructuring of New York that followed it. This was just the beginning of a wave of neoliberal government reforms that would take hold in the U.S. during the 1980s, reshaping the country's political and economic landscape in the process. As the government increasingly turned to free-market solutions for a wide range of social problems, so too did many social movements begin to think in these terms. Within the mainstream LGBT movement in particular, the past three decades have seen an increased embrace of a neoliberal, assimilationist political agenda that partners with consumer capitalism in an attempt to create

[10] r/GenderCritical is a popular trans-exclusionary radical feminist subreddit.

social change. The viral proliferation of "the future is female," devoid of any historical background, is part of this contemporary neoliberalization of feminist and queer politics in the U.S.

With only an image of Alix Dobkin and the mention of a feminist bookstore to tell the story of its background, "the future is female" became a blank screen onto which a number of different political and corporate entities could project their own ideologies and ambitions. The "female" future came to symbolize the election of the U.S.'s first woman president, a general end to the patriarchy, and (for some) a future in which only those assigned female at birth would be able to lay claim to womanhood as an identity category. One can only guess how the phrase's innovator would react to each of these political visions, some of which could be interpreted as contiguous with the radical political mission of the women behind Labyris Books, and many of which are directly opposed to it. Likewise, it is unclear whether, or how, a deeper historical contextualization of the phrase might have affected its digital circulation and viral fame.

Although the future is female's latest incarnation as feminist catchphrase du jour fails to capture the multifaceted political vision that surrounded the phrase's origins, there are many contemporary political movements and actions that engage with these histories in meaningful ways. In December 2019, nearly 50 years after the 5th Street Women's Building takeover, a group of four mothers occupied a vacant, investor owned 3 bedroom house in Oakland, California. The mothers, all of whom lacked access to stable housing, organized under the moniker Moms 4 Housing. Their case attracted national attention, and despite attempts by the city to evict them, the women were eventually successful in negotiating for the chance to buy the property through the nonprofit Oakland Community Land Trust (Kendall 2020). Following their victory, the group continues to organize for housing as a human right in and beyond California's

Bay Area. While Moms 4 Housing is not explicitly affiliated with any lesbian, queer, or LGBT social movements, radical actions like this capture the ambitious and transformative spirit of actions like the 5th Street takeover at its best. That they do so without the explicit label of lesbian or queer means only that we must widen our understanding of how these lesser known lesbian feminist political legacies manifest in the present day.

VII. References

Banet-Weiser, Sarah. 2012. *Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture*. New York: New York University Press.

Bessette, Jean. 2017. *Retroactivism in the Lesbian Archives: Composing Pasts and Futures*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Bluh, Bonnie. 1975. "Empty Shelves at Labyris." *Majority Report*, April 5, 1975.

Carah, Nicholas, and Michelle Shaul. 2015. "Brands and Instagram: Point, tap, swipe, glance." *Mobile Media & Communication* 4 (1): 69-84. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177 /2050157915598180.

Cardoza, Kerry. 2018. "Once a street gang, then a political collective, the Young Lords celebrate 50 years with a symposium at DePaul." *Chicago Reader*, Sept. 21, 2018. https://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/young-lords-50th-anniversary-symposium-young-lords-depaul-university/Content?oid=58254685.

Carter, Myra. 1974. "Greek Politics at Labyris?!" *New York Radical Feminists Newsletter* 4 (9): 3. https://voices.revealdigital.org/?a=d&d=BBIJGFBF19740901.1.3&e=-------en-20--1--txt-txIN----------1.

Cowan, Liza. 2012. "Side Trip: The Fifth Street Women's Building Takeover: A Feminist Urban Action, January 1971." *DYKE A Quarterly*. https://www.dykeaquarterly.com/2012/07/the-fifth-street-womens-building-a-feminist-urban-action-jan-1-13th-1971-our-hands-our-feet-our-minds-our-bodies.html#_ednref.

Cvetkovich, Ann. 2003. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Dobkin, Alix. 1998. "Passover Revisited." *Chicago Outlines*, April 15, 1998.

Duguay, Stefanie. 2019. "'Running the Numbers': Modes of Microcelebrity Labor in Queer Women's Self-Representation on Instagram and Vine." *Social Media + Society* 5 (4): n.p. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2056305119894002.

Eckert, Stine, and Linda Steiner. 2016. “Feminist Uses of Social Media: Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest, and Instagram.” In *Defining Identity and the Changing Scope of Culture in the Digital Age,* edited by Alison Novak and Imaani Jamillah El-Burki, 210-229. Hershey: IGI Global.

Enke, A. Finn. 2007. *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Goldstein, Jessica M. 2015. “The Fight Over ‘The Future Is Female.’” *ThinkProgress*, Dec. 8, 2015. https://thinkprogress.org/the-fight-over-the-future-is-female-c1ce89ececd9/.

Gray, Emma. 2017. “Hillary Clinton: ‘I Remain Convinced That The Future Is Female.’” *HuffPost*, Feb. 7, 2017. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/hillary-clinton-the-future-is-f female_n_5899660ce4b040613138de8d.

Hogan, Kristen. 2016. *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Kendall, Marisa. 2020. “Moms 4 Housing victory: Property owner gives squatters chance to reclaim house.” *The Mercury News*, Jan. 20, 2020. https://www.mercurynews.com/2020/01/20 /moms-4-housing-victory-group-gets-chance-to-buy-house-through-nonprofit/.

Macdonald, Jocelyn. 2017. “Tegan and Sara X Wildfang’s ‘The Future is Fluid’ Is a Slap in the Face to Feminism (Op-Ed).” *AfterEllen*, Oct. 19, 2017. https://www.afterellen.com/people/ 546113-tegan-sara-x-wildfangs-future-fluid-slap-face-feminism.

Martinez, Janel. 2019. “50 Years Later, the Young Lords’ Legacy Remains in East Harlem.” *Remezcla*, Aug. 6, 2019. https://remezcla.com/features/culture/young-lords-east-harlem-legacy/.

Meltzer, Marisa. 2015. “A Feminist T-Shirt Resurfaces From the ’70s.” *The New York Times,* Nov. 18, 2015. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/19/fashion/a-feminist-t-shirt-resurfaces-from-the-70s.html.

Otherwild. n.d. “About Otherwild.” https://otherwild.com/pages/about-otherwild-ny-la.

Otherwild. n.d. “The Future is Female T-shirt.” https://otherwild.com/collections/tees-sweats/products/the-future-is-female-t-shirt.

Shirk, Adrian. 2017. *And Your Daughters Shall Prophesy: Stories From the Byways of American Women and Religion.* Berkeley: Counterpoint.

Sites, William. 2003. *Remaking New York: Primitive Globalization and the Politics of Urban*

Community. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Subject Files: Building Takeovers, Lesbian Herstory Archives.

Subject Files: Bookstores: Labyris, Lesbian Herstory Archives.

Taylor, Verta, and Leila J. Rupp. 1993. "Women's Culture and Lesbian Feminist Activism: A Reconsideration of Cultural Feminism." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 19 (1): 32-61. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/240553319_Women's_Culture_and_Lesbian_Feminist_Activism_A_Reconsideration_of_Cultural_Feminism.

Thayer, Katheryn. 2017. "Otherwild's 'The Future Is Female' Shirts: A Cautious Experiment Wins Internet Fame." *Forbes*, July 17, 2017. https://www.forbes.com/sites/katherynthayer/ 2017/07/17/otherwilds-the-future-is-female-shirts-a-cautious-experiment-wins-internet-fame/#192905205d97.

TheBioWoman. 2019. "I bought a 'The Future is Female' shirt to piss off libfems and it worked." *Reddit*, 2019. https://www.reddit.com/r/GenderCritical/comments/8b98wx/i_bought_a_the_future_is_female_shirt_to_piss_off/.

Chapter 3

"A Gathering of Mothers and Daughters": Race, Gender, and the Politics of Inclusion at Michigan Womyn's Music Festival

I. Introduction

"Sisters! Amazons! Welcome Home!" So begins the welcome statement for the 40th and final iteration of Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, held in August 2015. Written by the festival's co-founder and producer Lisa Vogel, each year the welcome statement was printed on the front page of the official program. This one urges attendees, "Breathe in every moment sisters, and feel pride in what we have manifested. Know our seeds are on the wind. Let us go out together—in a blaze of Amazon glory" (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). If Vogel's rhetoric exceeds the intensity of emotion that we might associate with the closure of a music festival, it is because Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (henceforth Michfest or MWMF) was always more than just a series of concerts. Instead, the annual, week-long gathering was a utopian experiment in collective living, a hub for grassroots political organizing, and a site for lesbian feminist community building.

Michfest was held annually in Oceana County, Michigan from 1976 to 2015. Lisa Vogel, along with her sister Kristie and friend Mary Kindig, initially created the festival out of a desire to bring women's music to Michigan (Kendall 2013). Many, though not all, Michfest participants were lesbians, and in its early years the festival was buoyed by the surge in lesbian feminist political and cultural organizing that took place in the U.S. in the late 1970s. As part of the women's music movement, Michfest combined music with lesbian feminist politics, and the multi-day festival included overnight camping, musical performances, political and cultural workshops, and space for women to sell their wares. The woman only festival was run communally: all attendees were asked to complete "work shifts," and registration fees were

sliding scale. Michfest's producers saw the festival's "woman only" policy as critical to their mission of fostering a lesbian feminist community, and controversies over the particulars of the policy's implementation persisted over the years. Should mothers be invited to bring their boy children, and if so, where should they be housed? Should music featuring male voices be allowed to play on the festival's grounds? If essential male service workers must enter the grounds, should they be escorted by a woman festival worker? However, no question generated by the festival's women only policy proved to be more fundamental, or more impactful to the festival's legacy, than whether Michfest should include trans women.

Michfest's founders intended for the festival to be an explicitly political space, where women could escape the restrictions of a heteropatriarchal society while also exposing each other to new ideas, politics, and ways of living. Over the course of its 40 year tenure the festival played host to many of the lesbian feminist community's most acrimonious political debates over everything from public S/M to accessibility for disabled women. Perhaps most famously, the festival community's struggles over trans inclusion during the 90s and early 00s became a defining moment for an emerging generation of trans and queer activists. Festival attendees sometimes succeeded in making substantial changes to Michfest's structure; one of the best examples of these changes is the Womyn of Color tent, which first appeared at Michfest in 1986 after several years of organizing by women of color. The tent was a gathering space for women of color, who were often subject to both microaggressions and overt hostility at the predominantly white festival. Developments like the WOC tent were often touted by Michfest producers and attendees as evidence of the festival's commitment to diversity and community dialogue, despite its ongoing exclusion of trans women.

From 1991 onward, Michfest was plagued by its founders' reluctance to respond substantively to political critiques made by trans women and their allies. One event in particular became a rallying point for trans people who fundamentally disagreed with some lesbian feminists' restrictive definition of womanhood: in 1991, electrical engineer Nancy Jean Burkholder attended Michfest for the second time—she attended the previous year in 1990, without incident. During her first day at the 1991 festival, Burkholder was thrown out because she was trans, despite her own protestations that no festival literature explicitly stated an admissions policy banning trans women. Burkholder's experience at Michfest set off a wave of trans activism surrounding the festival. A 1991 response that was co-authored by Lisa Vogel and her (at the time) festival co-producer Barbara Price claimed that Michfest had been for "womyn born womyn" since its founding in 1976 (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). Camp Trans, an official protest of the festival's admissions policy by trans women and their allies, was held just outside of the festival's gates in 1994; following a five year hiatus, the protest resumed in 1999 and was held every year thereafter. The conflict between Michfest's producers and trans activists highlighted the festival's hierarchical decision making structure, and revealed sharply divergent ideas about festigoers' support for trans women: while producers seemed confident that most festival attendees would not support trans women's inclusion, evidence suggests that a majority of them did.

Pressure on Michfest producers to change the policy mounted in the following years, with numerous performers withdrawing from the festival in protest. In response, Michfest producers published a series of press releases that attempted to clarify the meaning and purpose of the "womyn born womyn" (also referred to as WBW) policy. A 1999 statement refers to this policy as an "intention" set by Michfest's producers, who hoped that the trans community would

respect their wishes (Vogel). In a handout given to festival workers in preparation for Michfest 2000, workers are instructed on how to respond to people who oppose the policy; part of that response reads, "The Festival does not question anyone's gender or sex. We do ask that everyone respect that the intention of the Festival is for womyn who were born as and lived their entire life experience as womyn" (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). Another internal memo sent out to festival workers before Michfest 2000 directs them to deny admission to self-identified "male-to-female transsexuals or female-to-male transsexuals," and refers repeatedly to the womyn born womyn "intention" as a policy (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records).[11]

Festival producers' language shifted again in 2013 when more high profile musical artists like the Indigo Girls withdrew from Michfest in protest; in a September 2013 email to Michfest attendees, Vogel again refers to this not as a policy but an "intention," and emphasizes that Festival workers will never question any woman's gender. This was a particular point of concern for Vogel, who noted in a 2018 interview that in the festival's early years, white attendees frequently misgendered butch Black women in particular, reporting them as men to festival producers (Macdonald). Rather than recognizing this racialized policing of gender as another effect of the festival's WBW intention, the policy's advocates often said this behavior was the result of trans activists' attempts to enter Michfest. One such complaint, addressed to Emily Dievendorf (who was then the executive director of the LGBTQ advocacy organization Equality Michigan) reads, "many female butches' sex and gender are questioned in the ONE place they used to be able to count on that NOT happening" (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records).

[11] That year, eight activists from Camp Trans were admitted to the festival; after entering, the group outed themselves as trans to festival workers as part of a planned protest of the WBW policy, at which point they were expelled from the festival. In an official press release from Camp Trans (2000), activists identified this as the first time that the festival policy was used against not just trans women, but also trans men and nonbinary trans people.

Led by Dievendorf, Equality Michigan called for a boycott of the festival in 2014; at this point, a handful of musicians who regularly performed at Michfest had already withdrawn as part of an unofficial boycott of the policy. In April 2015, Vogel announced that that year's Michfest would be the last. The festival's closure was not attributed to any specific cause, but many media outlets speculated that festival producers' inability (or unwillingness) to resolve the conflicts surrounding the attendance policy was to blame. The flurry of media attention surrounding Michfest's admissions policy and its eventual closure was the most attention that the notoriously media-shy festival had ever garnered; by the time of Vogel's 2015 announcement, the festival had come to represent the outmoded gender politics of an earlier generation for many young lesbians and queer women.

This attitude is reflected in one of the most well-known depictions of Michfest in popular media: in the Amazon original series *Transparent*, Michfest (and the controversy over its position on trans women) is depicted via the fictional "Idyllwild Womyn's Festival." Through its exploration of a trans woman's experience at "Idyllwild," *Transparent* offers a meditation on the impact of Michfest's WBW policy. The show's portrayal of a white trans woman's struggle to navigate a Michfest-like event is indicative of the broader way in which the festival's relationship to trans politics is remembered; that is, trans women are imagined as external, fundamentally unwelcome outsiders. In this chapter, I juxtapose *Transparent*'s satirical take on a women's music festival with archival documents from Michfest's history to question who is served by the Michfest-inspired narrative featured in the show and complicate the ways in which we remember the festival's legacy.

Writing against the notion that white, trans-exclusionary women define the myriad communities that gathered at and around Michfest, I analyze the political contributions of trans

women and women of color to the festival and the lesbian feminist communities that it fostered. Trans protestors were not enemies of the festival; instead, my research shows that trans women and their allies had deep connections to Michfest's community that they fought to preserve. Similarly, while the festival was often depicted as a haven of diversity and acceptance for women of color, I find that women of color continually struggled against a racist power structure that was reflected in the festival's social environment. Through analysis of archival texts including festival programs, internal letters, and press coverage, I connect the festival's racial politics and trans-exclusionary admissions policy. Ultimately, these interconnected struggles reveal deeper fault lines within lesbian feminist communities and politics.

II. "Man on the Land": Televising Lesbian Feminist Transphobia

Given Michfest's contemporary legacy as a flashpoint for trans organizing and activism, it is fitting that the festival is covered in *Transparent*, the Joey Soloway-helmed Amazon original television series that follows the lives of trans woman Maura Pfefferman and her three adult children as they navigate her late-in-life coming out. *Transparent* is a semi-autobiographical account of Soloway's life that was initially inspired by their own parent's coming out as trans. The Pfeffermans are a wealthy, white Jewish family living and working in affluent, predominantly white social circles in Los Angeles. The show has been praised for its nuanced depiction of contemporary Jewish religious and cultural identity (Moss 2017), as well as its exploration of queer family dynamics through Maura's relationship to her two queer daughters, Sarah and Ali (Horvat 2019).

In an episode from *Transparent*'s second season, entitled "Man on the Land," Maura, along with her daughters Ali and Sarah, attends the fictional Idyllwild Womyn's Festival (Soloway 2015). The festival is a clear parody of Michfest, whose final gathering took place just

months before *Transparent*'s second season premiered in December 2015. Like Michfest, *Transparent*'s Idyllwild Women's Festival employs a "women born women" admissions policy. The Pfeffermans are unaware of this as they enter the festival grounds, walking under a banner reading "42nd idyllwild wimmin's music festival" to the sounds of singer-songwriter Carole Pope's Michfest inspired song "Lesbians in the Forest." As Pope sings, "Let's go into the forest, menstruate on a stick," the Pfeffermans venture further into the live show's crowd, with Sarah and Ali smiling and beginning to dance. Accompanying Pope on an acoustic guitar is the legendary bisexual electronic musician and performance artist Peaches, whose spoken word interlude features the contextually ominous line, "Nymphs, fairies, witches, not a cock in sight, 'cause sisters are doing themselves all night." Maura looks on as the song continues, taking in her surroundings in a markedly more reserved way than either of her daughters. Although the family has yet to find out about the festival's transphobic admissions policy, Maura's tentative entry into the festival space marks her status as an onlooker, rather than a reveler. She is outside of the festivities, watching as Ali and Sarah enjoy themselves.

After Ali, Sarah, and Maura receive festival wristbands and an enthusiastic "Welcome Home Ladies!" from a bearded woman working the festival's entrance table, the show cuts to the three women at their campsite. While Ali sets up the group's tent, Maura and Sarah sit in chairs and peruse the festival program. "Do they still have that tampon making workshop?" Sarah wonders. They do, and they suggest arriving early. Maura also notes an intention circle led by Shaman Crying Bear. The women share a laugh, signaling that the show's intimate portrayal of a Michfest-like event is not *too* intimate to level its own critique of the emotional sincerity and cultural appropriation associated with the festival. The Pfeffermans are not, however, above it all: the following scene features the family dancing in the middle of the crowd at another live

show, this time by the Indigo Girls. As Amy Ray and Emily Saliers perform their 1990 song "Hammer and a Nail," Maura, Ali, and Sarah dance together and sing along amid a multiracial crowd of women in various states of undress.

In what will be the episode's final scene featuring the three women together, Maura, Ali, and Sarah sit at a picnic table eating dinner. Seated in a row, Sarah and Ali eat silently as Maura stares at her plate. Finally, she confesses, "I don't really know what I'm eating." Sarah, who is seemingly the most knowledgeable about the festival's inner workings, responds, "It's nut loaf." Maura, still not satisfied, asks, "Is it meat? Is it nuts?" Ali responds, "It's cardboard covered with gravy." With that, the family splits up; Sarah leaves to find Shaman Crying Bear, Ali sets off in search of a poetry reading, and Maura is left on her own. Here, a joke about nut loaf (an actual menu item served at Michfest) becomes a metaphor for the three women's respective relationships to the festival itself. Sarah, who recently left her new wife Tammy and is going through a period of sexual self-discovery, is elated to be in a predominantly lesbian space. Ali, who has recently come out as queer and is nurturing a crush on the famous poet Leslie Mackinaw (a clear stand-in for Eileen Myles), is similarly charmed by the festival's lesbian energy, even if she retains a critical perspective on some of its proceedings. Maura, however, is depicted throughout the episode as a somewhat reluctant bystander who has no lesbian feminist cultural knowledge; she does not know the lyrics to the Indigo Girls song that is playing in the car during the Pfeffermans' drive into the festival, she does not know what nut loaf is, and she spends the rest of the episode anxious about the festival's womyn born womyn policy.

After the women split up, Maura's festival experience promptly takes a turn for the worst. While browsing items for sale at a crafts bazaar, Maura meets a friendly stranger named Vickie (played by Anjelica Huston), who tells her about the festival's trans-exclusionary admissions

policy. Panicked, Maura begins wandering the festival grounds in search of her daughters. While she waits in line for the restrooms, women begin chanting "man on the land" to signal that a male maintenance worker has entered the festival grounds to empty the portable toilets. Shaken by her newfound knowledge that the festival is trans-exclusionary, Maura panics and leaves the area. Meanwhile, Ali finds Leslie's poetry reading. Leslie, a festival veteran, informs Ali of the womyn born womyn policy, and the two set off in search of Maura. When we next see them, Ali and Leslie are seated at a campfire, surrounded by Leslie's friends. Maura arrives, fatigued after spending all afternoon looking for her daughters. After being convinced to sit down, Maura argues with Leslie's friends over the festival's trans-exclusionary policy; the women are longtime festival attendees, and believe that only women who were assigned female at birth should attend the music festival. When Ali expresses sympathy with the idea that Maura retains some of the privilege that she experienced as a white man, Maura leaves the campsite alone and exits the festival grounds.

In "Man on the Land," Maura's distance from the 70s-era iteration of lesbian feminism often associated with Michfest is marked throughout her time at Idyllwild Womyn's Festival: she is reluctant to dance, doesn't enjoy the vegan nut loaf, and spends the majority of the episode alone and confused, wandering around the festival looking for her daughters. The longest conversation that Maura has in this episode is with a group of transphobic lesbians who tell her that trans women shouldn't be allowed at the festival, as women born women are "people who were born with a vagina and a uterus." Maura's almost total isolation in this episode marks her— and the show's— distance from what's framed as a regressive, exclusionary lesbian feminism. While it is certainly true that a number of Michfest performers, attendees, and organizers felt similarly to the trans-exclusionary women depicted in this episode, it is also true that many

women, both cis and trans, fought for trans women's right to attend Michfest. The decision to depict Maura as being almost completely alone, rather than as part of a community of trans women and allies fighting to undo the festival's policy, helps to simplify the distinction between *Transparent*'s politics and those of an outdated lesbian feminism.

III. Outside Voices: Trans Politics and Michfest's Archive

Although the storyline of "Man on the Land" attempts to draw attention to the unfairness of such an admissions policy, its positioning of Maura as a complete outsider reaffirms many of the transphobic narratives that attempt to justify trans women's exclusion from women's music festivals. These narratives frequently rely on depictions of trans women as fundamental outsiders to lesbian culture. In her book *The Disappearing L: Erasure of Lesbian Spaces and Culture*, Bonnie J. Morris echoes this rhetoric when she worries about what Michfest's legacy will be after its well-publicized political struggles over the womyn born womyn intention. In a chapter entitled "The Trans Issue," Morris (2016, 110) asks, "Who inherits the custodial role of this narrative: the longtime audience, or external critics?" Such a question assumes that critics of the admissions policy are outsiders, while the festival's "longtime audience" is presumed to be supportive of the intention.

However, a return to archival documents challenges narratives that position trans women as exterior to Michfest's culture, history, and significance for lesbian communities. In a letter to Lisa Vogel dated July 22nd, 1992, Nancy Jean Burkholder speaks directly to this assumption, writing, "I know you think that Festigoers support your policy and the way you handled things. I'm not yet convinced they do" (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). Although she remains deeply hurt by her experience at the festival the previous year, Burkholder writes, "I also learned that there were far greater numbers of women who support transsexual inclusion than I

ever imagined." Burkholder's reference to the womyn born womyn intention as "your policy" hints at the hierarchical manner in which many festival policies and procedures were decided; the festival's producers, rather than a critical mass of festival workers and attendees, appear to have made most of the festival's major policy decisions, regardless of whether a majority of festival attendees supported those policies. A "gender survey" asking festigoers whether they would support the admission of trans women at Michfest was conducted by a small group of trans women and allies at the festival in 1992, and the results confirmed Burkholder's sense that there was less widespread support for the womyn born womyn policy than Vogel indicated. Out of the 633 women surveyed, 73.1% responded "yes" to the question "Do you think male-to-female transsexuals should be welcome at Michigan?" (Burkholder 1993).

While retellings of the eventual conflict between Camp Trans and Michfest producers often position trans people as disruptors with no significant attachment to the festival, Burkholder's letter repeatedly emphasizes her love for Michfest and her sadness at being excluded from it. She writes, "In spite of my experience last year I still have a high regard for the festival. I have many fond memories of the 1990 festival. Knowing that I am not welcome hurts, sort of like being excluded from a gathering of close friends." This letter speaks to the reality that the Michfest debates over trans inclusion could not be easily separated into groups of "longtime audiences" and "external critics," because many of the people involved were both. Rather than positioning herself solely as a critic of the festival, Burkholder compares Michfest attendees to "close friends."

In a 1998 open letter to Michfest producers, the Washington D.C. branch of the trans inclusive direct action group the Lesbian Avengers echoes Burkholder's sentiments of affection for the festival. In their letter, the D.C. Avengers praise Michfest, writing, "The Michigan

Womyn's Music Festival has been an annual source of pride, sisterhood, self-discovery, music, gossip, sexual energy, and fierce networking" (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). However, they also urge Michfest producers to abolish the festival's WBW policy, writing that the Lesbian Avengers' own organizing and activism has been strengthened by their inclusion of trans people. When Camp Trans resumed its annual activities in 1999, the Lesbian Avengers became a key part of the group's protests against the WBW intention.

Although Burkholder's 1992 letter to Vogel was written long before the Lesbian Avengers' show of solidarity, it nonetheless resists Vogel's assertion that the primarily cisgender lesbians attending Michfest did not want trans women to be admitted. Printed on the reverse side of Burkholder's letter is a flyer describing her experience of being thrown out of the festival. Following this narrative, the flyer reads:

> If you have an opinion about this incident then please let the festival producers know by filling out your feedback form. The producers maintain that they have acted fairly and with sensitivity in enforcing their unpublished policy, and that a majority of Festigoers support their "womyn-born womyn only" policy.

This closing statement captures two of the primary points of contention between festival producers (at the time Lisa Vogel and Barbara Price) and trans activists during the initial stages of this conflict in the early 90s. First, while festival producers maintained that the womyn born womyn policy had been in effect during the entirety of the festival's duration, trans activists contended that the policy had never been enforced or published until after Burkholder's expulsion in 1991. Second, festival producers argued that the "intention" was one that attendees not only supported, but that it was essential to festigoers' experience of the event. Trans activists and allies asserted that this was a misrepresentation of festigoers' opinions on trans women's inclusion.

Vogel's connection to lesbian feminist struggles over trans women's inclusion dates back to 1977, when she was one of 22 women who signed an open letter protesting trans woman Sandy Stone's employment at the women's music label Olivia Records (Barry). Her name appeared alongside those of Alix Dobkin and Maxine Feldman, musicians who would go on to perform regularly at Michfest. The letter was part of a series of conflicts over trans women's inclusion in lesbian communities that took place during the 1970s; most notably, the campaign to oust Stone from the Olivia Records collective built on the attacks waged on trans lesbian folk singer Beth Elliott, who was a former vice-president of the San Francisco chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis and an organizer of the 1973 West Coast Lesbian Conference.

Attempts to exclude both Elliott and Stone from lesbian feminist events and organizations framed trans women as opportunistic infiltrators who were the recipients of male privilege. In the open letter regarding Sandy Stone, which was published in a June-July 1977 issue of the feminist newspaper *Sister*, Stone was consistently referred to as a man. The letter excoriated the women working at Olivia Records for not sharing Stone's trans identity with the women's movement at large; it read, "Many women give you their financial support precisely because they trust you to work with women exclusively, and you are not being accountable to these women" (Barry 1977). Buried in this statement was the assumption that these "many women" also considered trans women to be men. The assumption that a majority of lesbian feminists were united in their trans-exclusionary politics can be found throughout the letters protesting Stone's employment at Olivia Records, many of which appeared in the "letters to the editor" sections of lesbian feminist newspapers including *Lesbian Connection*.

The notion that trans women were inherently men did not go uncontested during lesbian feminist struggles over trans inclusion during the 1970s, and many of those same "letters to the

editor" sections prominently featured spirited defenses of trans women's right to participate in lesbian feminist and woman-only communities. However, trans women who did engage with lesbian feminist politics were often pushed out of the movement by small, vocal groups of trans-exclusionary lesbian feminists: the attempt to oust Stone from Olivia Records was ultimately successful, despite the support she received from her Olivia Records coworkers. While trans liberation organizations—like Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries and Queens Liberation Front in New York City, and the Transsexual Action Organization in Miami Beach, Florida—were politically active during the early 1970s, these groups often saw themselves as separate from lesbian feminist communities and organizations. An undated newsletter from Transsexual Action Organization (also known as TAO)[12] warns trans women who are involved with women's liberation, "many feminists will exploit and use transsexuals for the feminist cause, but will not help transexuals in return…we will help support any transexual who runs into difficulty, such as the courageous Beth Elliott. We urge transsexuals to organize with each other rather than get involved in women's liberation, however" (Lesbian Herstory Archives Subject Files). While TAO's warning to trans women urges them to organize with other trans people rather than risk marginalization within the women's movement, the LGBT political landscape that this newsletter depicts had shifted substantially by the time Burkholder was ejected from Michfest.

By 1991, there were rumblings of a reinvigorated trans political movement in the United States. Within the academy, trans studies had begun to take shape as a distinct field with political and epistemological priorities that frequently diverged from those of gay and lesbian studies. Although the origins of trans studies as a field are often traced back to Sandy Stone's 1987 publication of her essay "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," Stone was

[12] This newsletter was likely written by Angela Lynn Davis, TAO founder and trans activist, sometime between 1970-1973.

also in dialogue with other trans theorists, activists, and authors. Influential in the development of this new wave of trans theory and political activism was Leslie Feinberg, who would publish the pamphlet *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come* in 1992. Hir 1993 novel *Stone Butch Blues* explores the overlaps between butch lesbian, gender nonconforming, and trans identities. Conferences and organizations representing a range of views on what issues should be prioritized within the trans political movement also emerged in the early-mid 90s. In 1992, Trans Nation established itself as an independent organization following group members' split from the San Francisco chapter of the activist organization Queer Nation. The direct action group Transexual Menace was founded by trans activist Riki Anne Wilchins in 1994, the same year that theorist Susan Stryker's essay "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix" helped to establish trans studies as an emerging field of inquiry.

IV. Allies in Understanding: Workshops and the Creation of Festival Culture

These shifts in trans politics and community organizing impacted the ways in which trans women resisted and reacted to lesbian feminist transphobia. Whereas the attacks on Sandy Stone and Beth Elliott left both women relatively isolated from lesbian communities despite the support they received from some lesbian feminists, Burkholder's 1991 ejection from Michfest was met with a vociferous response by both trans activists and LGBT media outlets. While Burkholder, along with other trans women and their allies, protested, handed out literature, and conducted a survey outside of Michfest in 1992, trans women's resistance to the womyn born womyn intention also manifested within the festival itself. Although Michfest is most commonly known as a music festival, workshops were also a crucial part of the festival experience. Workshops could be led by performers, festival organizers, or attendees, who were given the option to register their workshop with Michfest organizers before the festival in order to have it

featured in the official program. These workshops often covered political topics that were of interest to the festival's primarily lesbian and queer demographic, including racial politics, bisexuality, and tactics for fighting patriarchal power structures.

The first workshop covering trans issues to be featured in the Michfest program was held in 1991, the same year that Burkholder was thrown out of the festival. The workshop, entitled "Appreciating Gender Diversity," was led by Janis Walworth, an author and activist who would go on to publish her book *Working with a Transsexual: A Guide for Coworkers* in 1999. In part, the workshop's short description reads, "We'll explore our feelings about being women…and our reactions to people who cross gender boundaries in a variety of ways, including androgyny, cross-dressing, and sex change" (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). This description acknowledges the overlap between and among these categories, gesturing to the shifting LGBTQ political climate of the early 90s. Furthermore, the fact that the workshop was offered before Burkholder's ejection and the wave of activism that followed it supports trans activists' contention that trans women and their allies were in attendance at Michfest, and were active participants in the festival community, long before these events occurred.

Trans activists and allies also offered official workshops at the 1993 festival in response to Burkholder's ejection and the womyn born womyn intention. The first of these workshops, entitled "Confronting Transphobia," was led by Walworth. Its description promises to discuss the politics of trans exclusion at lesbian and women only events "in light of the results of last summer's survey of over 600 women at MWMF" (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). The second was led by Walworth and Camp Trans co-founder Riki Anne Wilchins. This second workshop shared its title with a humorous essay written by Wilchins, "21 Things You Don't Say to a Transsexual," and featured a reading of the essay followed by discussion (Michigan

Womyn's Music Festival Records). These 1993 workshops were listed in the official festival program, and mirrored the kinds of programming that were featured at Camp Trans, which also featured multi-day musical and workshop schedules: in 1994, Wilchins would read her "21 Things" essay at a Camp Trans workshop entitled "Read My Lips" (Lesbian Herstory Archives Subject Files).

As Michfest's womyn born womyn policy became more heavily publicized throughout the 90s and 00s, the festival's official workshop program began to reflect the highly polarized nature of the debates around this "intention." Overtly trans-exclusionary workshops were not prominently featured in the festival's program prior to Burkholder's ejection and the wave of trans activism that followed it. However, workshops promoting the womyn born womyn policy began to appear in the festival's workshop schedule more often beginning in 2001, two years after Camp Trans resumed its protest of Michfest in 1999. In 2001, a workshop entitled "Sex, Lies & Feminism" was described in the festival program as a radical feminist analysis of Camp Trans (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). The following year, the same workshop was described as a radical feminist analysis of trans politics, "asking whether Trans ideas and actions regarding gender and sex are truly transformative or deeply conservative (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). As Camp Trans began to gain in popularity and notoriety following its 1999 return, a string of workshops supporting the WBW intention took an oppositional approach to trans people and politics in general, suggesting that trans identity was politically regressive. In 2004, a workshop entitled "Festival as Resistance" is described as follows: "Women-only space as political and feminist resistance to gender hierarchy and patriarchy, considering trans opposition to women-only space" (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). In this framing of trans opposition to the WBW intention, trans women's

advocacy makes them complicit in reinforcing gender hierarchies and the patriarchy. In 2005, a workshop on "Resisting Gender" advocated for a move "beyond gender identity…envisioning the end of gender through radical feminist politics" (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). While the workshop's description does not explicitly reference trans politics or Camp Trans, its discussion of moving beyond gender is a common tactic used to frame binary trans identities as uniquely regressive.

Workshops supporting the womyn born womyn intention often coexisted at Michfest with pro-trans inclusion workshops during this time period. During 2001, 2002, and 2003, at least one pro-trans workshop was featured in the festival program each year. Pro-trans workshops also popped up spontaneously; while the program serves as an official record of the workshops held at a given year's festival, procedures were also in place for attendees to plan and hold workshops after arriving at the festival. Workshops were organized by Michfest's "One World" tent, which served as a hub for information about the workshop schedule and was responsible for coordinating last minute workshops. A report generated by workers at the One World tent after the 2010 festival contains a section addressing an "illegal" trans workshop. According to the report, the workshop's organizer failed to register it with the One World tent, and thus was not permitted to post a flyer advertising her workshop. However, the report alludes to further points of contention; it reads, "I also objected to the title and description of the workshop, the point of which was to welcome trans people on the land, rather than to discuss the festival policy. The flyer presumed trans people were here already and that we just need to acknowledge and make space for them to be heard and seen" (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). While Michfest workshops were advertised as an open forum for performers, organizers, and attendees to conduct whatever activity or conversation they desired, this report

suggests that festival coordinators and producers sometimes screened workshops for their political content. This political censorship created an environment that appeared to confirm the claim made by many supporters of the WBW intention: that trans women and their supporters were not part of the Michfest community.

In a separate section, the 2010 One World report suggests the need for more workshops promoting the festival's womyn born womyn policy. These potential workshops are framed as an opportunity for festival organizers to exert more control over the public narrative around the policy. Referencing the so-called "illegal" trans workshop, it reads, "We are leaving the dialogue up to others who make it their priority to bring this discussion up at their own ('illegal') workshops as well as at any other workshop which is vaguely on a related subject. Or pro trans-inclusion women conduct a regular workshop session on a gender issue and then bring it up there" (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). While there were explicitly pro-trans workshops listed in the Michfest program as early as 1991, this report describes any workshop opposing the WBW intention as illicit.

Following the 2010 One World report, an intensive workshop entitled "Allies in Understanding: Womyn-Only Space, the Shifting Concepts of Gender and Trans-Inclusion" was held at Michfest 2011 (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). This was the first in a series of intensive workshops that were offered again in 2013, 2014, and 2015. While all festival attendees were able to host general workshops, intensive workshops were longer or multi-day sessions that were approved by festival organizers through an application process. Although it was framed neutrally in festival literature, subsequent reports on the "Allies in Understanding" workshop suggest that its most significant outcome was to shore up the legitimacy of the WBW intention. The inaugural "Allies in Understanding" workshop came at a critical time in the

Michfest WBW debates; this was also the first year of an organized campaign called "Trans Women Belong Here," which urged women who were attending Michfest to advocate for trans women (Kalafarski). The campaign also provided scholarships to trans women attending the festival, spearheaded a letter writing campaign to Lisa Vogel, and distributed t-shirts and buttons reading "Trans Women Belong Here" to participants. In response, women who were supportive of the WBW intention wore shirts emblazoned with the letters "WBW" or the phrase "No they don't." Alice Kalafarski (2011), a trans woman who wrote about her experience attending that year's festival on the blog *prettyqueer*, estimated that the festival attendees sporting "Trans Women Belong Here" gear outnumbered those wearing WBW shirts and accessories, despite the latter group having the support of festival producers.

The "Allies in Understanding" workshop seemed to offer festival organizers and producers the chance to reshape a political conversation that was quickly slipping beyond the bounds of their control. Over the 10 years following Burkholder's ejection from the festival, Michfest's producers authored 5 separate press releases attempting to clarify and defend the festival's womyn born womyn attendance policy. However, with each passing year more of the press coverage surrounding the festival focused on the controversy over the intention. Following a 2006 Michfest press release that stated, "…there is nothing transphobic with choosing to spend one week with womyn who were born as, and have lived their lives as, womyn", the nonprofit organizations Families United Against Hate and the National Center for Transgender Equality made public statements denouncing Michfest's WBW policy. These political shifts may explain the 2011 "Allies in Understanding" workshop's conciliatory tone. In the festival program, the workshop is described as a gathering "intended to foster open-hearted, respectful communication, rooted in feminist principals…moving to a place where we hear one another,

heal, and live together as our most authentic selves" (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). In this workshop, women who were for and against the WBW intention were paired up to discuss their positions and personal experiences. Kalafarski (2011), who attended the workshop, notes that while it was "run by cis women on both sides of the issue," none of the women running the workshop were affiliated with the highly visible "Trans Women Belong Here" campaign. This exclusion of activists involved in campaigning for trans women's inclusion at Michfest speaks to the workshop's disconnection from the range of activist efforts toward trans inclusion that were taking place at the festival during this time. It is unclear whether the decision to offer "Allies in Understanding" as an intensive workshop in 2011 was influenced by the 2010 One World report's suggestion that festival organizers offer more workshops in support of the womyn born womyn policy. What is clear is that the 2011 workshop's call for women to engage in "open-hearted, respectful communication" coexisted at the festival with an admissions policy that excluded trans women and, in doing so, questioned their authenticity *as* women.

In 2011 alone, there were four explicitly pro-trans inclusion workshops listed in the festival program: "Transwomyn Ally Toolkit," "Visioning Inclusive Fest," "Trans Basics," and "For Trans Allies" (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). Where these workshops offered active strategies to help attendees advocate for trans women, the festival's "Allies in Understanding" workshop advocated only for a dialogue between women on both sides of the debate. While a version of this workshop was offered again from 2013-2015, there is no evidence to suggest that it ever resulted in any concrete changes to the festival's policy or practices regarding trans women. In fact, the only outcome mentioned in an internal report generated by the One World tent's coordinator in 2014 relates the story of a woman who

attended that year's "Allies in Understanding" workshop planning to boycott the festival the following year because of the WBW intention, only to be "completely turned around by her experiences in the workshop" (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). This report speaks to the primary effect of the intensive workshop, which articulated an argument in support of the womyn-born-womyn intention during a moment when pro-trans inclusion sentiment was circulating widely both within and outside of Michfest.

In her account of the 2011 "Allies in Understanding" workshop, author and academic Laurie Kendall describes being paired up with "young trans-activists." During the workshop, Kendall (2013, 48) likens the situation "to a European-American who 'feels' like, and presents themselves as a Native American, and then goes to a First Nation Reservation and expects that the Native people will allow him or her to move onto the Reservation." Kendall's comparison of trans women seeking admission to Michfest to a white person falsely claiming Native American identity touches on a common thread in many defenses of the festival's WBW policy. These defenses often compare cisgender women as a group to people of color, and associate trans women with white (male) privilege. Gossip that circulated following Michfest 2011 reported a white trans woman wearing a shirt reading "Trans Women Belong Here" at an event for women of color; a blog post relating the story interpreted the shirt as a "proclamation that she [a white trans woman] belongs in WOC space" (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). This focus on white trans women in particular obscures the fact that white trans women were not uniquely guilty of disrespecting the festival's WOC space; the festival's producers initially resisted the idea of a WOC tent, and the tent's organizers would later report that the tent was often overrun with white women attending performances and workshops (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival

Records). This focus on white trans women also helped to associate trans women with power and privilege, a cornerstone of many WBW intention supporters' anti-trans arguments.

In contrast to trans-exclusionary feminists' perpetual focus on white trans women as harmful arbiters of privilege, multiple workshops held at Michfest 2012 spoke to a broader, more diverse trans community not addressed in many conversations about the womyn born womyn intention. In 2012, three separate workshops appeared to address the topics of race and trans identity. The first of these, entitled "Transmasculine Womyn of Color," discussed "how to better nurture and support transmasculine womyn of color both on and off the land" (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). While trans men and nonbinary trans people did not figure as prominently in discussions and debates about the festival's WBW intention as trans women, these populations were also affected by the intention. Because the intention encouraged many of its supporters to monitor and screen the genders of those around them, trans men, nonbinary trans people, and butch women also sometimes found their right to attend Michfest being questioned. The existence of the "Transmasculine Womyn of Color" workshop also gestures to the ways in which race and gender presentation simultaneously affected butch women of color's experience at Michfest, as evidenced by Vogel's interview statement about Black butch women repeatedly being misgendered by white women during the festival's early years (Macdonald 2018).

Two more workshops addressing race and trans inclusion were held that year—"Peaceful Trans Inclusion Conversation" and "Race-ing the Trans Question." While "Peaceful Trans Inclusion Conversation" did not explicitly address race in its description, the workshop was held in the festival's womyn of color tent, refuting the notion that only white festival-goers were active or interested in trans inclusion debates. The second, "Race-ing the Trans Question," is

described as a "Discussion of intersecting race, class, etc. with the trans/gender question both on and off the land" (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). This workshop was facilitated by Sel Hwang, a transgender health expert. While opponents of trans inclusion often depicted trans women as uniformly white and powerful as a means of demonizing them, workshops like this expose that hyper-focus on white trans women as a misrepresentation of a large and diverse trans community. This depiction of trans women as privileged and powerful also spoke to radical feminism's limitations in addressing diverse women's nuanced relationships to power and privilege; when patriarchy is construed as the primary axis of oppression operating in all women's lives, the impact of white supremacy, classism, and transphobia on women's experiences of the world falls out of focus. Thus radical feminism often privileges white, cisgender women's experiences of patriarchal oppression over those of women grappling with multiple, intersecting axes of oppression, including trans women and women of color. Trans women and women of color's unique and diverse relationships to privilege and oppression are consequently flattened out and misrepresented, and white, cisgender women's experiences of patriarchy and misogyny are identified as authentic.

V. Trans-Exclusionary Feminism and Racism at Michfest

Supporters of the festival's womyn born womyn admissions policy often invoke comparisons to a hypothetical white woman attempting to access Michfest's Womyn of Color tent, the only space within the festival that was solely for women of color. This tent was established in 1986, after years of advocacy and organizing by a group of several women of color who regularly attended Michfest and other women's music festivals (Kendall 2013). The persistence of this comparison suggests that it constituted more than just an attempt at shielding the speaker from accusations of transphobia. Instead, defenses of the womyn born womyn policy

that simultaneously invoked the festival's womyn of color tent sought to depict the tent as having originated from within the festival community, while trans activists continued to be framed as fundamental outsiders. This comparison was invoked at least three separate times in official press releases from the festival, in 1999, 2000, and 2006, and was also used in festigoers' informal defenses of the "womyn born womyn" policy.

Festival producers' press release from the year 2000 responds to the presence of the activist group Camp Trans Y2K at that year's Michfest; it reads, "Just as white allies are asked to respect womyn of color only space, we ask the transsexual community to respect womyn-born-womyn space. Supporting womyn-born-womyn space is no more inherently transphobic than supporting womyn of color space is 'racist'" (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival). While this statement describes womyn of color space as internal to the festival, "the transsexual community" is a different entity entirely, one that is external to "womyn born womyn" space. The comparison itself invites questions as to whether a similar space for womyn born womyn could be created within the festival, but no such possibility is discussed. Furthermore, the analogy's categories of "white allies," "womyn of color," "the transsexual community," and "womyn born womyn" likens the predicament of cisgender women to that of women of color, suggesting that cisgender women are oppressed by trans women in much the same way that women of color are oppressed by white women. Such a claim simultaneously downplays white women's ability to wield their power and privilege against women of color while also depicting trans women as threatening and powerful oppressors of "womyn born womyn."

The positioning of Michfest's womyn of color tent as an innovation that arose from within the festival also obscures the multi-year struggle that surrounded women of color's attempts to establish such a space. Laurie Kendall dates the beginning of these efforts back to

1981, when festival organizers set aside "political space" in the community center tent; although it's unclear whether this space was explicitly intended to serve as a gathering place for women of color, that is functionally what it became. In 1982, this "political space" was again set aside within the community center tent; so many women of color came to the space that its walls had to be opened up. Kendall (2013) marks 1983 as the year when women of color first successfully negotiated for their own space at the festival. As a result, a political tent was established behind the community center; half of this tent was given to women of color.

One of the women of color who negotiated for this space was Amoja Threerivers, a teacher, activist, and theorist. Threerivers traveled the women's festival circuit with her partner, Blanche Jackson; together with other women of color who attended these festivals, Threerivers and Jackson devised a plan to establish a women of color resource tent at both Michfest and the North East Women's Music Retreat. In an interview with Rose Norman, Jackson describes the festivals' responses to this idea, saying that while the North East Women's Music Retreat immediately agreed to establish a tent for women of color, "Michigan thought it would be divisive—we should all be sisters together, melded and everything" (Mushroom 2015, 2). It was only after Threerivers and other women "negotiated really hard at Michigan" that festival organizers gave women of color half of the festival's newly established political tent in 1983. For the next several years, the "women of color" half of the political tent was consistently overflowing, and in 1986 a separate women of color tent was officially established.

A 1988 archival letter from Threerivers to the festival's producers underscores the myriad ways in which women of color engaged with Michfest's producers in attempts to proactively address racism at the festival. One of the letter's primary concerns involves the presence of white women at the festival's Womyn of Color tent in 1987. The tent's policies regarding the presence

of white festigoers shifted over the years, and while the space would eventually be designated as WOC only, in 1987 the WOC tent welcomed "all Womyn of Colors and their Friends." Although individual workshops held in the tent could be for WOC only, as a rule the tent was a space for WOC that was open to all festival attendees. In her letter, Threerivers notes that while in previous years white women "would creep timidly past the Tent…", at that year's Michfest the WOC tent was regularly overrun with white women. During two particularly popular workshops hosted in the WOC tent, the white women present outnumbered women of color; Threerivers reports that a workshop featuring drums which was designated for WOC only inspired many of the white women present to begin "…flinging themselves about with unconscious abandon, oblivious to what we were trying to do, crashing into our altar and effectively pushing W.O.C….out of the Tent" (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). While defenses of Michfest's WBW policy like the one featured in festival producers' 2000 press release often invoked white festigoers' respect for WOC space, accounts like this make it clear that the project of racial coexistence at Michfest was in reality a much thornier process.

Threerivers' letter also addresses festival attendees' requests that the WOC tent be moved to a less central location on the festival's grounds; these requests were allegedly due to the noise generated by nighttime drumming activities that were hosted at the tent. After explaining the significance of drumming for African American women and suggesting several different solutions for the noise complaints, Threerivers writes, "…W.O.C. are not chocolate-coated white wimmin. We have very real cultural differences and customs and if the space is to be shared by all wimmin, then there must be equitable space and time for the customs and perspectives of W.O.C." (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). While white festival producers, organizers, and participants were often quick to praise the festival's diversity and state their

support for the women of color tent, many were reluctant to address the festival's prioritization of white lesbian feminist cultural touchstones and political agendas. In its embrace of a radical lesbian feminist ideology that conceptualized patriarchy as the primary force of oppression operating in women's lives, Michfest often articulated a vision of womanhood that was anchored in the experiences of the white, cisgender women that comprised the majority of the festival's attendees. Here the experiences of women of color and trans women who challenged the festival's policies and power structure intersect; through their efforts to transform Michfest, these women also rejected the idea that white, cisgender women should define lesbian feminist culture.

Although defenses of the WBW policy often refer to the festival's women of color tent in particular, women of color's efforts to create community and address racism at the festival went far beyond the bounds of the WOC tent. Both Threerivers and her partner Blanche Jackson wrote educational texts on racism that were distributed to Michfest attendees. Jackson's handout "Anti-Racism: The Seven Step Program", which encourages readers to "assume that other people know more about their own lives and cultures than you do," was incorporated into Michfest's orientation materials for all crew members at the suggestion of Threerivers (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). In 1989, a massive town hall meeting on racism at Michfest was held at the urging of festival workers. The town hall attracted over 500 festigoers, who collectively suggested that the festival's producers implement better sliding scale payment options, do more outreach to women of color, and use anti-racist language in promotional materials. An October 1989 issue of the feminist magazine *Off Our Backs* quotes the town hall's organizer as saying that festival producers should shift from a proactive, rather than reactive, approach to racism at Michfest (Stato). This critique of producers' approach to addressing racism is indicative of much of the work that women of color did at Michfest; despite the prevalence of accounts depicting the

festival as an actively anti-racist community, the most active efforts to foster WOC community and combat pervasive racism at Michfest came from women of color who were not festival producers.

When women of color did attempt to address racism at Michfest, they were often silenced and ridiculed using language similar to that used to describe Camp Trans activists. In 1990, a year before Burkholder's ejection from Michfest, a multiracial group of women held a "March Against Racism," in which they marched through the festival's marketplace and discussed cultural appropriation with white craftswomen selling clothing, art, and jewelry that featured Native American spiritual symbols. In its coverage of that year's festival the Chicago-based LGBT newspaper *Outlines* interviewed one of these white craftswomen, reporting, "According to the white craftswoman, there was yelling and pointing, negative energy, and lots of hurt feelings" (Loventhal 1990). This accusatory language mirrors rhetoric used to depict trans activists at Michfest as overly aggressive and hostile. In both cases, women attempting to address Michfest's oppressive policies are discredited by their supposedly "aggressive" behavior; this descriptor appears to be used less often to describe white, cisgender women at the festival. That these struggles over racism at Michfest continued well beyond the initial establishment of the womyn of color tent speaks to how far from resolved this issue was when the political battle over the WBW intention began in the early 90s.

Evidence of these ongoing struggles resists the narrative that, while efforts to include trans women came from sources outside of the festival, the woman of color tent was always embraced by Michfest's producers and thus constituted an internal political intervention. Jackson's indication that the woman of color tent was initially dismissed as divisive by organizers, and that Threerivers negotiated "really hard" to obtain even a portion of a tent for this

purpose, suggests that during this period there was some form of hierarchical power structure in place at Michfest, and that this power structure privileged whiteness. An undated handout disseminated at Michfest, entitled "What does racism *look like* on this land?," identifies this directly, stating, "It *looks like* a white power structure here in this festival. Where the womyn most likely associated with power and decision making are all white" (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records). So while it is worth noting that women of color created the WOC tent despite festival organizers' reluctance and white women's continuous resistance to the establishment of such a space, it is also important to note that the problem of racism at Michfest went far beyond the WOC tent itself. Testaments to the festival's diversity that focus on white women's respect for WOC space in general and the WOC tent in particular miss this bigger picture, in which women of color continually came up against the resistance of white women to make fundamental changes to a festival structure that was dominated by whiteness.

Despite this history of women of color's activism at Michfest, statements that frame women of color space as internal to Michfest and trans activism as external to it were widely mobilized in defenses of the womyn born womyn policy. A 2015 article in *Curve* magazine lauded the festival's inclusivity, claiming that Vogel "…wanted to establish space for women of color to have the option of being in a space solely for them" (Brownworth). This retelling of the women of color tent's founding is not only at odds with Jackson's account, but also with that of Vogel herself. In a 2018 interview, Vogel referenced the women who lobbied for the womyn of color tent, saying, "…they changed the culture of Michigan. I can't say I didn't resist some of those changes at first, but the beauty of Michigan was that we all had ownership" (Macdonald). Vogel's clarification that she did *not* found the womyn of color tent, and her allusion to the fact that she was initially resistant to it, lies in stark contrast to the way in which this story is often

told. Foregrounding both women of color and trans women's histories of activism and resistance at Michfest underscores the extent to which these women attempted to make good on the claim that all Michfest attendees "had ownership" over the festival's culture.

VI. Conclusion

In its sole focus on Maura's suffering at the hands of transphobic women's festival attendees, *Transparent* elides this longer history of Michfest-based resistance to restrictive notions of a political sisterhood that is based on white, cisgender womanhood. This problem is not unique to "Man on the Land," but is instead linked to the show's central premise: in its myopic focus on the struggles of a white, wealthy trans woman and her family, *Transparent* was often far less radical a show than it set out to be. Combined with this critique was activists' initial discomfort with the casting of Jeffrey Tambor, a heterosexual, cisgender actor, in the lead role of Maura Pfefferman. Tambor's casting was part of a long history of cis men playing trans women in major Hollywood movies and television shows, a casting decision that many believe reinforces the transphobic notion that trans women are, ultimately, men. Although the cast and crew of *Transparent* expressed remorse about this casting decision, and Soloway vowed to cast only trans actors in the show's other trans roles (Russell 2016), the fact of Tambor's casting remained the uncomfortable bedrock on which much of the show rested. It is fittingly ironic, then, that "Man on the Land" inadvertently echoes the transphobic belief that trans women were fundamental outsiders at Michfest, rooted as that belief is in the assumption that trans women are not really women but men attempting to infiltrate women's spaces. While Tambor's casting played on the transphobic notion that trans women are "actually" men, the storyline of "Man on the Land" also spoke to trans-exclusionary ideas about trans women's inability to exist in women-only spaces.

In April 2015, Vogel announced the end of Michfest with a post on her personal Facebook page; while the post never mentions the festival's political struggles over trans inclusion, they were widely believed to have played a role in the festival's closure. In the months leading up to her announcement, Vogel had privately been in dialogue with several LGBT rights groups involved in the petition to end Michfest's WBW policy, including Equality Michigan, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, the National LGBTQ Task Force, and the investigative news website the TransAdvocate. While Vogel had previously signaled that she might be willing to meet with these groups to discuss alternatives to the WBW policy, she announced Michfest's closure before that meeting ever transpired. In an article for *The Advocate*, TransAdvocate's Editor-in-Chief Cristan Williams is quoted as saying, "She never intended to meet with anyone…she'd rather kill Michfest than meet with trans folk and talk about it (something she's never done)" (Ennis 2015).

While Michfest's producers were announcing the festival's closure, *Transparent*'s production team was preparing to release the critically acclaimed show's second season. Although the show's initial casting of Tambor was the subject of criticism, its first season received generally positive reviews, and many activists praised its depiction of queer and trans lives and communities. In September 2015, Tambor won an Emmy for best lead actor in a comedy series; he dedicated the award to the transgender community, saying, "Thank you for your courage. Thank you for your inspiration, Thank you for your patience. And thank you for letting us be part of the change" (Thomas). At this point, much of the critical conversation surrounding the show seemed to agree that it had transcended the unfortunate political misstep of Tambor's casting. A January 2016 article in *The Nation* entitled "Jewy, Queer, Daring, and Political, 'Transparent' Pushes Past Parody" is emblematic of the media conversations

surrounding the show at the time. In her laudatory review of Transparent's second season, author Alisa Solomon writes, "The show is both sexy and feminist, audacious and concerned with ethics, laugh-out-loud funny and full of pathos."

Although *Transparent* was well-loved by many critics and activists by the time its second season premiered, this adulation was soon tempered by revelations about the working conditions on set. In early November 2017, less than a month after the show's fourth season was released, Tambor's former personal assistant Van Barnes accused the star of sexual misconduct in a private Facebook post. The post quickly spread beyond Facebook, and later that month Amazon Studios began an internal investigation of Tambor's conduct. Barnes, a trans actress and producer, was working as a consultant for *Transparent* when Tambor offered her a job as his personal assistant. During her two years in this position, Barnes alleged that Tambor was verbally abusive, sexually harassed her, and paid her minimum wage. On November 16th, actress Trace Lysette released a statement recounting her own alleged experiences of sexual harassment by Tambor. Lysette, a trans woman who played the role of a yoga instructor who befriends Maura, described multiple instances in which Tambor allegedly sexually harassed and assaulted her on the set of the show. One day later, Tambor released a statement denying any misconduct on his part (Patten 2017). Following its internal investigation, Amazon Studios formally fired Tambor on February 15th, 2018 (Abramovitch 2018a).

In the wake of Barnes and Lysette's allegations, *Transparent* producers' commitment to what Soloway termed "transfirmative action"—a phrase coined to refer to the show's intentional hiring of trans people at all levels of production (Brodesser-Akner 2014)—seemed dubious at best. In one statement, Barnes described her attempts to address Tambor's behavior while working for him, writing that she discussed the problem with both *Transparent* executives and

Tambor's management team, "all to no avail" (Abramovitch 2018a). Lysette also addressed her claims of harassment with the *Transparent* team prior to making a public statement; in their memoir *She Wants It*, Soloway (2018, 221) describes their initial desire for Lysette to refrain from releasing this story to the press, writing, "We could handle this…but let us do it internally, inside the family." Soloway's concern was for the show's image, which they feared would be irreparably harmed by Lysette's decision to go public. While Soloway has since expressed regret for their handling of the allegations against Tambor, what emerged from these stories was the picture of a production team that was invested in the *idea* of hiring trans people, but unable to engage in the material practice of supporting and providing a safe work environment for them.

In her public statement, Lysette urged *Transparent*'s creators and Amazon Studios' executives to continue the show without Maura, recentering it on the many trans characters that had been introduced over the course of its four seasons (Patten 2017). Ultimately, it appears that the show's producers did not consider this to be a sustainable long-term proposition: in May 2018, it was announced that the show's fifth season—its first without Maura—would be its last (Abramovitch). Soon after, Tambor began to speak publicly about his frustration with *Transparent* producers and Amazon Studios executives, who he claimed acted unfairly in firing him. However, what was more troubling (and perhaps more surprising) than Tambor's insistence on his innocence was the implication that this moment of reckoning was actually the result of trans activists' determination to sabotage the show.

In a profile published by *The Hollywood Reporter* on May 9th, Tambor frames his eventual ousting from *Transparent* as the result of a growing trans movement that the show helped to fuel. Although many people had expressed their displeasure at Tambor's casting from the beginning, he says, as the show progressed "…the revolution got bigger. So the very thing

we were doing, the awakening to this movement, made the disparity [of my non-transness] more apparent." In the same profile, Tambor explains his on-set behavior—which he refers to as "difficult"—as a result of his desire to do the character justice, saying, "I was scared, because I was a cisgender male playing Maura Pfefferman. And my whole thing was, 'Am I doing it right?...To the point that I worried myself to death" (Abramovitch 2018b). By Tambor's account, both his firing and the original behavior that sparked it were the result of activists' anger over his casting as a cisgender man; such a story suggests that Tambor's experience of feeling "scared" to be a cisgender man playing a trans woman contributed to his "difficult" on-set behavior.

In the days following Lysette's allegations, both Faith and Joey Soloway appear to have echoed similar sentiments. The day after Tambor released a statement denying Lysette's allegations, he says he received an email from Faith Soloway reading, "We are in a coup. You are fucking fantastic. You have changed the world. We have changed the world. We will get through this. Love, love, love, Faith" (Abramovitch 2018b). Faith confirmed to *The Hollywood Reporter* that she had sent the email. Tambor also claimed that he received a similar email from Joey Soloway on November 19th which read, "They have been after Maura from the beginning" (Abramovitch 2018b). Like their sister Faith, Joey confirmed having sent this email. Together, these emails and public statements evoke the image of a cabal of trans activists who seized upon the Me Too movement as a means of getting Tambor fired.

Such claims bear an uncanny resemblance to the depiction of trans activists as saboteurs bent on destroying Michfest and its legacy. In both cases, trans women attempting to address and remedy exclusionary, hostile, and violent environments are instead identified as the cause of the problem. I retrace these histories not simply to reiterate Michfest producers' and *Transparent* executives' respective errors. Instead, these parallel conflicts are an opportunity to reflect on how

often well-meaning attempts at collectivity ask a disproportionate amount of labor of that collective's most marginalized members. The image of a powerful, white trans woman disrupting Michfest's harmony erases the violent and deadly reality of transmisogyny, the existence of trans women of color, and the many cis women of color who experienced pervasive racism at Michfest. While defenses of the WBW policy often attempted to pit trans women and women of color against each other, these interconnected and overlapping groups are part of a history of Michfest women who attempted to make the festival's vision of womanhood more expansive. These struggles can and must inform the efforts of future activists and organizers looking to challenge, resist, and even build upon the legacies of both Michfest and *Transparent*.

VII. References

Abramovitch, Seth. 2018a. "Jeffrey Tambor's Ex-Assistant and Accuser Breaks Silence: 'He Has Done This to Himself.'" *The Hollywood Reporter*. February 26, 2018. https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/jeffrey-tambors-assistant-accuser-breaks-silence-1088547.

Abramovitch, Seth. 2018b. "'Lines Got Blurred': Jeffrey Tambor and an Up-Close Look at Harassment Claims on 'Transparent.'" *The Hollywood Reporter.* May 7, 2018. https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/features/lines-got-blurred-jeffrey-tambor-an-up-close-look-at-harassment-claims-transparent-1108939?utm_source=twitter&utm_source=t.co&utm_medium =referral.

Barry, JoAnne, et. al. 1977. "Open Letter to Olivia." *Sister: A West Coast Feminist Newspaper*, June/July 1977: 6.

Bishop, Bryan. 2015. "Emmys 2015: Transparent Creator Shouts Out Jeff Bezos, Calls for Transgender Equality." *The Verge*. September 20, 2015. https://www.theverge.com/2015/9/20/9354993/transparent-emmys-2015-jill-soloway-trans-equality-jeff-bezos.

Brodesser-Akner, Taffy. 2014. "Can Jill Soloway Do Justice to the Trans Movement?" *The New York Times Magazine*. August 29, 2014. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/31/magazine/can-jill-soloway-do-justice-to-the-trans-movement.html.

Brownworth, Victoria. 2015. "Michigan Womyn's Music Festival to End after 40 Years." *Curve*. April 23, 2015. http://www.curvemag.com/News/Michigan-Womyns-Music-Festival-to-End-after-40-Years-447/.

Burkholder, Nancy. 1993. "MWMF Anti-TS Awareness: 1992 Gender Survey Results." Email.

Camp Trans. 2000. "'Michigan Eight' Evicted Over Festival's 'Don't Ask Don't Tell' Gender Policy." http://web.archive.org/web/20010302151712/http://www.camptrans.com/press/postct00.html. Press Release.

Elliott, Beth, Davina Anne Gabriel, Anne Lawrence, Gwendolyn Ann Smith, and Jessica Xavier. 2000. "The Michigan Women's Music Festival and Transsexual Women: A Statement by Transsexual Women." http://eminism.org/michigan/20000809-elliott.txt. Press Release.

Ennis, Dawn. 2015. "Michfest Womyn and Trans Women Ask 'Why?'" *The Advocate*. April 23, 2015. https://www.advocate.com/arts-entertainment/music/2015/04/23/michfest-womyn-and-trans-women-ask-why.

Families United Against Hate. 2006. "The Michigan Women's Music Festival Continues to Promote Discrimination." http://www.fuah.org/MWMF_press-statement.html. Press Release.

Hayes, Eileen. 2010. *Songs in Black and Lavender: Race, Sexual Politics, and Women's Music.* Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Horvat, Anamarija. 2019. "Haunting and Queer Histories: Representing Memory in Jill Soloway's *Transparent*. *Feminist Media Studies*: 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2019.1609060.

Kalafarski, Alice. 2011. "Just Another Woman at Michfest." *Prettyqueer*. September 1, 2011. http://web.archive.org/web/20131031214339/http://www.prettyqueer.com/2011/09/01/just-another-woman-at-michfest/.

Kendall, Laurie. 2013. *The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival: An Amazon Matrix of Meaning.* Baltimore: The Spiral Womyn's Press.

Lesbian Herstory Archives Subject Files. Lesbian Herstory Archives. Brooklyn, NY.

Loventhal, Micki. 1990. "Michigan Fest 1990: Record 8,000 Women Attend 15th Michigan Womyn's Music Fest." *Outlines*, September, 1990. 32, 34.

Macdonald, Jocelyn. 2018. "Setting the Record Straight About Michfest." *Afterellen.* October 24, 2018. https://www.afterellen.com/general-news/565301-setting-the-record-straight-about-michfest.

Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. 2000. "Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Celebrates 25 Years of Commitment to Womyn-Born Womyn Space." http://eminism.org/Michigan/20000815-mwmf.txt. Press Release.

Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Records. Michigan State University Libraries Special Collections. East Lansing, MI.

Morris, Bonnie. 2016. *The Disappearing L: Erasure of Lesbian Spaces and Culture*. New York:

SUNY Press.

Moss, Joshua Louis. 2017. "'The Woman Thing and the Jew Thing': Transsexuality, Transcomedy, and the Legacy of Subversive Jewishness in *Transparent*." In *From Shtetl to Stardom: Jews and Hollywood*, edited by Vincent Brook and Michael Renov, 73-98. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press.

Mushroom, Merril. 2015. "'A Great Big Women of Color Tent:' Blanche Jackson and Maat Dompim." *Sinister Wisdom* 98: 150-156. http://sinisterwisdom.org/sites/default/files/Mushroom%20Pushcart.pdf.

National Center for Transgender Equality. 2006. "Womyn's Fest Tells Transgender Women to Ban Themselves." http://eminism.org/michigan/20060824-ncte.txt. Press Release.

Patten, Dominic. 2017. "Jeffrey Tambor Exits 'Transparent' After Sexual Harassment Allegations." *Deadline.* November 19, 2017. https://deadline.com/2017/11/jeffrey-tambor-leaving-transparent-sexual-harassment-allegations-amazon-jill-soloway-1202211711/.

Russell, John. 2016. "Why *Transparent* Creator Jill Soloway Will Never Cast a Cisgender Person in a Transgender Role Again." *TV Insider.* September 23, 2016. https://www.tvinsider.com/98392/transparent-creator-jill-soloway-on-casting-cisgender-actors-in-transgender-roles/.

Solomon, Alisa. 2016. "Jewy, Queer, Daring, and Political, 'Transparent' Pushes Past Parody." *The Nation.* January 11, 2016. https://www.thenation.com/article/jewy-queer-daring-and-political-transparent-pushes-past-parody/.

Soloway, Jill, dir. 2015. *Transparent*, Season 2, episode 9, "Man on the Land." Aired December 11, 2015, on Amazon Studios. https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/0KEKSTBP7P3UGHHJH3BJ8RS70Y/ref=imdbref_tt_wbr_pvs_piv?tag=imdbtag_tt_wbr_pvs_piv-20.

Soloway, Jill. 2018. *She Wants It: Desire, Power, and Toppling the Patriarchy.* New York: Crown Archetype.

Stato, Joanne. 1989. "14th Michigan Womyn's Music Festival." *Off Our Backs*, October, 1989. 20-21.

Thomas, June. 2015. "Jeffrey Tambor Shows How a Cisgender Actor Should Accept an Award for Playing a Trans Character." *Slate.* September 20, 2015. https://slate.com/human-interest/2015/09/jeffrey-tambor-s-2015-emmys-acceptance-speech-honored-the-right-people-trans-folks.html.

Vogel, Lisa. 1999. "Festival Reaffirms Commitment to Womyn-Born Space." http://www.

transadvocate.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/MichiganWomynsMusicFestival_Festival ReaffirmsCommitmentToWomyn-BornSpace_082499.pdf. Press Release.

Vogel, Lisa. 2006. “Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival Sets the Record ‘Straight.’” http://eminism.org/michigan/20060822-mwmf.txt. Press Release.

Vogel, Lisa. 2013. “The Summer of Love—The Season of Sisterhood—The Belief in our Community.” http://eminism.org/michigan/20130904-vogel.txt. Email.

Vogel, Lisa. 2015. “Dear Sisters, Amazon, Festival, Family.” Facebook, April 21, 2015. https://www.facebook.com/michfest/posts/10153186431364831.

Yuan, Jada. 2015. “How Jill Soloway Is Bending Hollywood.” *Elle*. January 13, 2015. https://www.elle.com/culture/movies-tv/a25432/jill-soloway-transparent/.

Chapter 4

Beyond One Direction: Lesbian Feminist Fandom Remakes the Boy Band

I. Introduction

Shortly after creating a Tumblr entitled everydirectiondrag in late 2013, a group of drag kings called Every Direction posted a video of their first performance. When played, the video reveals a dimly lit stage framed by glittering, beaded curtains; the post's caption reveals this to be the Oakland bar known as the White Horse Inn, one of the U.S.'s oldest continuously running gay bars. The video depicts the group of drag kings — performers defined by Jack Halberstam and Del LaGrace Volcano (1999) as those who make masculinity into an act—being welcomed onto the stage for the first time. One by one, the performers known as Ben Downthere, Robin Dick, Cherii Poppins, Jake Mioff, and 7 Minutes in Evan enter the frame, taking their places on the stage as Oakland's premiere drag king boi band: Every Direction.

As the first notes of One Direction's infectious 2012 hit "I Would" begin to play, the bois line up and gently bop from side-to-side in matching cardigans and thick-rimmed glasses. Jake Mioff moves to the front of the stage, assuming the role of One Direction's Liam Payne while mouthing the song's opening lines, "Lately I found myself thinking/Been dreaming about you a lot/And up in my head I'm your boyfriend/But that's one thing you've already got," pantomiming tears as the verse comes to an end and he returns to the group's lineup. Each boi takes his subsequent turn in the spotlight as the song progresses, with Robin Dick delivering Niall Horan's iconic line, in which a daydream about kissing the object of one's affection becomes a crushing return to the real world: "Reality ruined my life."

The song culminates in a series of choruses, punctuated by an insistent set of questions: "Would he please you?/Would he kiss you?/Would he treat you like I would?" At this, the bois collectively lift their shirts to reveal stomachs painted with the letters L-O-V-E and a heart symbol, each moving closer toward the camera and into the audience as hands reach out to touch their exposed skin. After collectively freezing in place for the song's last verse, the bois return to life as the beat drops, leaping off the stage and into the crowd for a rousing final chorus wherein they jump, clap, and spin their way to a final formation that famed 80's boy band New Kids on the Block would have been proud of, with each boi striking a unique signature pose. No longer performance virgins, they exit the stage, and the clip ends with the sound of thundering applause. Subsequent posts reveal handmade signs that were held by fans in the audience that night, along with an endorsement by Autostraddle, a popular website for lesbian, bisexual, and queer women.

That Every Direction's members are not only enthusiastic performers but also avid fans of One Direction is evident from the content of their Tumblr. The group's Tumblr was active from October 2013 to February 2015; during that time, photographs, gifs, and fanart featuring the boy band appeared on Every Direction's blog as frequently as posts promoting the group's performances did. Every Direction also openly acknowledges the extent to which Tumblr fandom of One Direction inspired their formation; many of the group's members began as 1D fans on Tumblr. Every Direction was particularly inspired by queer fandom of One Direction on Tumblr, and the group's performances represent one of the most publicly visible manifestations of the thousands of lesbian fanworks produced on the platform between 2012-2016. The platform's status as the primary digital home for One Direction (henceforth 1D) fandom, coupled with its massive popularity among LGBT youth, made it the central gathering place for many lesbian and queer fans of 1D. Furthermore, Tumblr's public structure familiarized a wide range

of diverse fans—both queer identified and not—with queer reading practices and lesbian cultural spaces. This chapter will analyze the crucial role that Tumblr played in fostering lesbian fandom of 1D, using lesbian re-readings and re-imaginings of 1D circulated by fans on the platform to explore the many and varied manifestations of queer joy, obsession, and self-articulation that the platform enabled. In doing so, I show how lesbian 1D fandom both draws upon and resists the lesbian feminist political legacies outlined in previous chapters.

The structure of this chapter, in which I begin with a contemporary pop cultural phenomenon and use it as my primary object of study, is a significant departure from this dissertation's other chapters. Each of my previous chapters grounds itself in a significant moment or period in lesbian feminist history, whether that is Sandy Stone's departure from Olivia Records, Michfest's ongoing political conflicts, or the opening of Labyris Books, and utilizes that historical analysis to illuminate my critical readings of contemporary lesbian, feminist, and queer media. This dynamic, in which historically grounded analysis shapes and informs my readings of contemporary media phenomena, is one that I replicate on a larger scale through the transition from those first three, historically focused chapters to my final one, which centers on the comparatively very recent past.

Having outlined some of the very best and worst aspects of lesbian feminist politics and culture, and having underscored how often contemporary lesbian businesses and communities repeat the mistakes of their foremothers, I use this chapter to focus on a more hopeful outcome; my analysis of lesbian boy band fandom acknowledges the unexpected places in which we might find the better parts of lesbian feminism's legacy reflected. This analysis of a relatively contemporary media phenomenon provides a more in-depth look at the ways in which lesbian cultures, communities, and individuals continue to work with and on many of the same problems

faced by lesbian feminists in the 1970s. Like the women I discuss in previous chapters, these fans also face the problem of popular culture's overwhelming misogyny and homophobia, work to build connections with other lesbians and queer people, and struggle together over the purpose and meaning of lesbian community. While their modes of connection and cultural touchstones differ significantly from those of 1970s lesbian feminists, I argue that these fans engage with lesbian feminist politics in significant ways.

II. Theorizing Lesbian Boy Band Fandom

It is difficult, though not impossible, to find academic writing on lesbians and boy bands. The boy band phenomenon has received scarce theoretical attention, and existing queer readings of boy bands often underscore the band's performance of homoeroticism and coded queerness. These readings focus much of their attention on the content produced by the boy band itself, often reading the band's lyrics and musical videos for hidden queer meaning. In his article "Marketing Androgyny: The Evolution of the Backstreet Boys," Daryl Jamieson (2007) analyzes the presentation and marketing of the Backstreet boys from 1996-1998. Jamieson's close readings of the band's songs and music videos during this period uncover heretofore hidden signifiers of queerness, which he argues were strategically used to appeal to gay male audiences without alerting heterosexual fans. This focus on the hidden, strategic queerness of the boy band's songs and music videos, rather than the activities of the band's queer fans, fails to account for the ways in which fans can take up and adapt a range of heteronormative texts for their own purposes. Queer music fandom is not always dependent upon a performer's willingness to court, either directly or indirectly, queer audiences; this is especially true in the case of lesbian Directioners.

When critics rely on the boy band itself to provide evidence, however subtle, of its own queerness, girl-fans' queer readings are often obscured in favor of gay men's interpretations of the boy band. Jamieson's readings of the Backstreet Boys' homoerotic music videos, some of which include no girls at all, suggest that the band's producers intentionally "present music and videos that are easily interpreted by those in the know (i.e. gay men,) while those who are not (i.e. young straight women or prepubescent boys) are completely unaware" (2007, 247). Such an analysis assumes that only gay men are capable of conducting queer readings of these music videos, while girls are among those not in the know. In Jamieson's interpretation of the boy band's audience, the lesbian viewer is nowhere to be found, or else she is among those girls who are incapable of unearthing the boy band's queer subtext. Although this approach may go some way toward accounting for gay men's interest in individual boy bands, the construction of girls' boy band fandom as exclusively heterosexual recalls popular portrayals of boy bands' fans as being consumed by girlish desire for the figures on stage.

Other queer interpretations of the boy band offer up a more expansive reading of boy bands' queer audiences. However, these texts often continue to rely on the boy band itself to enable fans' queer readings. Jennifer J. Moos's "Boy Bands, Drag Kings, and the Performance of (Queer) Masculinities" also seeks to queer the boy band phenomenon (2013). Through a close reading of a Backstreet Boys music video, Moos argues that boy bands use gay cultural markers and homoerotic subtext to perform a kind of queer masculinity. Through their performances of boy band personas, drag kings recognize and reinterpret the boy band's queer masculinity. Moos's analysis of drag kings' relationship to the boy band makes room for alternative interpretations of boy band fandom that are not rooted in romantic desire for the boys themselves. However, such a reading continues to assume that a queer affinity for boy bands

must anchor itself in some part of the text, whether that be the potential of a romantic relationship between the boys, or the hint of androgyny in their gender performance.

Shifting from close readings of boy bands' songs and music videos to an analysis of boy ban fandom allows for a more nuanced theorization of boy bands' queer appeal. Feminist analyses of boy bands highlight the misogyny inherent in popular attitudes toward girls' fandom, which are often rooted in the assumption that girls are incapable of making nuanced artistic judgments. Sarah Dougher and Diane Pecknold take up this issue in their introduction to a special issue of *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, writing, "the snide dismissal of girl audiences…has long been a mainstay of journalistic criticism" (2016, 407). Dougher and Pecknold chronicle both the sexist ire directed at these fans and fans' own critical responses to it, noting the ways in which social media enables many fans to defend themselves and connect with one another. Their description of the diversity of girls' pop music fandom is a counterpoint to Jamieson's depiction of girl-fans of the Backstreet Boys as "completely unaware." Instead, Dougher and Pecknold frame the inability to imagine lesbian boy band fandom as an extension of the broader misogynist failure to recognize the complexity of girls' pop music fandom. If the lesbian fan of boy bands seems like an impossibility, it is partially because girl fans are depicted as "hysterical, driven by uncontrolled sexual urges, and completely bereft of critical discernment" (Dougher and Pecknold 2016, 407).

Many of these interpretations of boy bands and fandom draw from Gayle Wald's 2002 essay, "'I Want It That Way': Teenybopper Music and the Girling of Boy Bands," which was for too long the only in-depth feminist analysis of the boy band phenomenon. That Wald's essay continues to be cited in more recent interpretations of girls' pop music fandom speaks to the expansive conversation it opens up about boy band fandom's critical possibilities. Through a

comparative analysis of the music videos for the Backstreet Boys songs "I Want It That Way" and "Larger Than Life," Wald draws out the "girlish masculinity" that boy bands both establish and negotiate through their performances. Crucially, Wald is one of the few feminist theorists to connect the boy band phenomenon of the 90s and 00s to the success of Black male R&B groups of the 1980s and 90s, writing, "the Backstreet Boys perform a 'girlish' masculinity mediated through their appropriation and adaptation of black performance styles" (2002). Although the success of boy bands like Backstreet Boys and 'N Sync was dependent upon this appropriation, the girlish masculinity that Wald describes was also used as a strategy "of self-conscious distancing from African American male vocal groups." This particular gender presentation is identified as a source of the boy band's popularity with girl-fans, who use the boys' girlish masculinity to "negotiate their own fluid gender and sexual desires" (Wald 2002). Wald's interpretation of the boy band's appeal gestures toward the broad range of embodiments and practices encompassed within boy band fandom. Wald pairs this reading with the third-wave feminist insight that feminist resistance is rarely straightforward, and often takes unexpected forms or adheres to so-called "wrong" objects.

Although Wald's essay suggests the transgressive possibilities of queer girls' fandom, it does not deal directly with the attitudes and practices of lesbian fans. Unlike that of gay men, lesbians' fandom of pop music has not been extensively theorized. This oversight cannot be wholly explained as a heteronormative or misogynist erasure of the lesbian fan; rather, I argue that the lesbian pop music fan's absence from academic literature can be attributed to the particular history of lesbian politics in the U.S. Musicologists have noted that lesbianism in particular is often conceived as being oppositional to pop music. In her work on lesbian pop music, Jodie Taylor argues that the very phrase "mainstream lesbian music" is potentially

contradictory, as lesbianism itself is often understood as anti-mainstream (2008). Taylor points to the women's music movement, which famously positioned itself against the mainstream pop and rock music of the 1970s, as a formative historical moment for lesbians' ongoing relationship to the musical mainstream. She traces this influence through lesbian music making of the 90s, when North American dyke punk bands appropriated select elements of women's music and combined them with musical effects (such as electric guitars) that were often rejected by lesbian feminists. Taylor's analysis of this overlap between women's music, Riot Grrrl, and mainstream popular music points to "both the plurality of the mainstream and the plurality of lesbian identities…" (2008, 47). While some lesbian feminists attempted to shape women's music into a musical genre that was totally distinct from the mainstream, the "more complex realities of identity, politics, music-making and consumption in the twenty-first century" (2008, 47) make such a neat separation impossible. Although Taylor's work focuses primarily on music production and lesbian musical artists, rather than lesbian fan reception, she is one of the few theorists who identifies the lesbian feminist historical lineage that continues to impact how lesbian music and fandom is theorized. Taylor also chronicles the way in which this history is taken up and reworked by lesbians today; I argue that, like the Riot Grrls before them, lesbian One Direction fans engage in the cultural work of reinterpreting lesbian feminist political, cultural, and artistic legacies.

In her essay, "Tickle Me Emo: Lesbian Balladeering, Straight-Boy Emo, and the Politics of Affect" (2006), Karen Tongson provides one example of what Taylor describes as the plurality of the musical mainstream and lesbian identity. Presenting what she calls a "mutant genealogy" of the relationship between second-wave feminism and the musical genre known as emo, Tongson argues that primarily male and heterosexual emo bands draw upon and benefit

from the emotional earnestness associated with women's music. Tongson's analysis of the lyrical and rhythmic similarities between the work of bands as disparate as Dashboard Confessional and Indigo Girls eschews the notion that such an influence must be overtly claimed by emo bands as a means of legitimation; instead, she argues that this lack of recognition is emblematic of a form of white suburban navel-gazing that is endemic to emo music. Tongson's analysis of the tropes of sentimentality that are pervasive in both emo and women's music pays homage to the value that lesbian feminists placed on such modes of affective expression, despite contemporary dismissals of the women's music movement as a "more sentimental and, for some, a retrospectively embarrassing era…" (Tongson 2006, 55). This reevaluation of lesbian feminist sentimentality also resonates with feminist defenses of boy bands, whose musical oeuvre is often associated with heightened emotionality. Just as women's music encouraged and valued emotional sincerity, girl-fans' experiences with the boy band enable and encourage intense, shared emotional experiences. Tongson's tracing of a "mutant genealogy" for popular musical genres speaks to the necessity for queer critics to trace alternative lines of affiliation for pop music that include lesbian and queer musical histories. Such a methodology makes possible a queer and lesbian history of a boy band like One Direction, regardless of individual band members' recognition of their lesbian appeal.

III. One Direction's Digital Breakthrough

Popular discourse often frames 1D as one of the pop music machine's most artificial products, in part because the group did not form organically. Rather, all of its teenaged members auditioned as individual acts for the British singing competition show *The X-Factor*, and were subsequently grouped together by judge Simon Cowell. Though the boys placed third in the singing competition, One Direction was a hit with young women, who comprise a large portion

of the show's audience demographic (Barnes 2010). Shortly after being voted off the show, the band was signed to Syco Records. Their first studio album, *Up All Night*, was released in early 2012 and became a massive global success, the first debut album by a British band to enter the US charts at number one (Fitzmaurice 2012). Buoyed by the huge amount of enthusiasm expressed by fans on social media, the boys embarked on their first headlining concert tour in the UK in late 2011. The group went on to release four more chart-topping studio albums, headline many more sold-out tours, and became the subject of a successful Morgan Spurlock documentary (*One Direction: This is Us*) before finally disbanding in 2016.

Less visible to the public at large than the band's music, touring, and official merchandise was the vast, active fan base that took shape around them on various social media platforms, especially on Tumblr. Tumblr served as a primary hub for 1D's fans from early on in the band's career, and the boy band's popularity on the platform remained high even as their broader public appeal began to wane in 2015-16. There are many reasons why the platform was ideal for 1D fandom. As critics have pointed out, the boy band had a uniquely "chaotic" appeal (Tiffany 2016), with the boys wearing artfully mismatched outfits and engaging in light roughhousing. As a platform, Tumblr was uniquely suited to accommodate this chaos; its multimedia interface could allow fans to use a single platform to circulate videos, gifs, photos, and text-based posts about the band, and its infinite scrolling dash acted as a constant content generator for a worldwide fandom that was active 24/7 (Stein 2016).

Although 1D's youthful antics certainly made them easily gif-able, I argue that the group's success on Tumblr had much more to do with the platform's ability to accommodate fans' particular needs and desires, particularly those of queer fans, than it did with the boys themselves. 1D fans' avid use of Tumblr to not only consume, but also create media for other

fans helped 1D retain its popularity on the platform for more than a year into the group's hiatus. According to Tumblr's own metrics, 1D was the platform's second most reblogged band for the year 2015 and Larry Stylinson—the name given to the imaginary romantic relationship between Harry Styles and Louis Tomlinson—was Tumblr's most reblogged ship (Falcone 2015). In 2016, a year into their hiatus, 1D was still Tumblr's third most popular fan fiction topic, as well as the third most popular band on the platform (Tiffany 2016).

Directioners also valued Tumblr because they regarded it as a more private space than other social media. Fans' perception of Tumblr's status as the home for true One Direction fans is tied to the anonymity that the platform offers its users. Unfettered by the judgment of their families and peers, who might mock their love for the band, fans took to Tumblr to express their unfiltered thoughts, opinions, and desires. In her analysis of the Larry Stylinson phenomenon, Daisy Asquith notes that many Directioners considered "Tumblr to be an almost sacred space, in which the *Larry* fandom can be private" (2016, 87). This notion of privacy comes up often in fans' explanations of their preference for Tumblr; the inscrutable logic by which the platform operates is thought to keep out older siblings, parents, and anyone else who would mock Directioners' love for the band. Alexander Cho's (2018) work has shown that this privacy is particularly important to queer youth of color, many of whom prefer Tumblr over other, more public social media platforms like Facebook. Ksenia Korobkova's study of identity formation in 1D fandom also emphasized Tumblr's relative privacy, with one of her informants praising the platform "for having a logic that is harder for adults to crack and thus less likely to be invaded by adults, unlike Facebook" (2014, 31). *Storyboard*, Tumblr's short-lived news blog, asserts that Directioners use the platform like "a kind of naively secret journal, a place to document it all, in company with other people who understand" (Bennett 2012).

This language of privacy and no-adults-allowed policies recalls Jenny Garber and Angela McRobbie's seminal 1977 identification of girls' bedrooms as important subcultural spaces that often revolve around the consumption of popular culture. Tumblr's relative privacy from parents places it within this tradition, and made it appealing to Directioners looking for a virtual home. For lesbian fans of 1D, such private spaces were especially important; like so many other LGBTQ youth from this period, they congregated on Tumblr. Several studies of young people's media preferences in the mid-2010s have found that LGBTQ youth were more likely to use Tumblr regularly (Byron et al. 2019). As a result, Tumblr became an outlet for the expression of lesbian Directioners' queer identifications and desire, challenging the heteronormative depictions of girl-fans that have long characterized writing about boy bands.

While there is little scholarly work on One Direction fandom in particular, scholars working in the fields of fan studies and musicology have explored the relationship between queerness and girls' boy band fandom. Fan studies scholars have written extensively about "popslash," a subgenre of RPF (real person fiction, or fanfiction written about real people) fanfiction focusing primarily on boy band members, that sprung up on writing-focused social media platforms like LiveJournal during the early aughts. In her work on RPF and the performance of queerness on LiveJournal, Kristina Busse (2006, 216) analyzes the ways in which fans "write their RPS characters as addressing issues of identity construction and performativity, and in so doing, they deal with their own identities, relationships, and desires." Although the majority of One Direction's fans opted for video and audio-centric platforms like Tumblr over writing-oriented ones like LiveJournal, Directioners continued this tradition of utilizing fanworks to construct their own identities and communities. Musicologists have also addressed the queer potential of girls' boy band fandom. In her 2016 study of lesbian fans of

male pop idols, scholar Barbara Brickman updates Garber and McRobbie's work by complicating heteronormative readings of "what girls do in their bedrooms" (2014, 447). She demonstrates how male pop idols in particular enable homoerotic interactions between female fans, drawing attention to "the fan's consumption of a sign of female masculinity and lesbian erotic potential in the figure of male pop star" (Brickman 2014, 444). 1D's blurring of gender lines-- the "girlish masculinity" (Wald 2002) so common to male pop idols-- was marked by their youthful, androgynous appearance and boyish sartorial preferences, which gave them enormous lesbian aesthetic and erotic appeal. Tumblr's 1D fandom provided a multitude of digital evidence of how this lesbian aesthetic sensibility and "erotic potential" was incorporated into fans' processes of individual and collective identity formation, highlighting the boy band's relevance to both lesbian identified fans and a broader lesbian community. Every Direction is one such example, as the group drew from both Tumblr-based 1D fandom and lesbian performance traditions to articulate a queer and lesbian interpretation of the boy band's appeal.

IV. Feminist Values, Queer Desires: Boy Band Fandom and Lesbian Politics

As a performance group, Every Direction follows in the well-established footsteps of the many drag kings that came before them. While they have never achieved the kind of fame or notoriety accorded to drag queens, drag kings have proliferated in urban hubs as both group and solo acts for decades, reaching their heyday in the 1990's. Groups of drag kings have also previously performed as boy bands; the Backdoor Boys, referenced by Jack Halberstam (2005) in his book *A Queer Time and Place,* are one notable example. What Every Direction's unique performance aesthetic highlights is the fannish sincerity that characterizes lesbians' relationship to boy bands. The love and intimacy with which the routine is crafted, the evident earnestness with which it is acted out, reveal something beyond a desire for the boy band to be "taken back

from the realm of popular culture and revealed as proper to the subcultural space" (Halberstam 2005, 178). Rather, Every Direction's performances and Tumblr presence highlight the limitations of the subculture vs. popular culture binary. Instead of crafting a camp performance that attempts to extract boy bands from the realm of popular culture to insert them into a lesbian subcultural canon, Every Direction's performance of fandom brings the boy band into conversation with lesbian culture and identity, recalling the historical affinity that has existed for decades between lesbians and young, male heartthrobs from James Dean to Justin Bieber (Brickman 2014). Indeed, rather than existing as a kind of counterpoint to Directioners' love for the band, Every Direction's performance and Tumblr persona reveals that lesbian fandom is inseparable from the popular cultural realm. The group's Tumblr juxtaposes photographs of drag performances and posts from other queer 1D fans with photographs and gifs of the One Direction boys singing, dancing, and horsing around, challenging the neat separation of subculture and popular culture that pervades academic discussions of lesbian fandom.

A post on the group's Tumblr page features the boi band's recreation of a popular promotional image of One Direction (everydirectiondrag 2014). The original 1D image is from a staged photoshoot typical of the band's early years in 2011 and 2012; the boys are lined up in a row, all wearing blazers and pants of different colors. To the far left, Liam Payne and Niall Horan lean together while taking a selfie. To their right, Zayn Malik stands slightly forward from the rest of the group, looking into the distance while appearing to text on his cell phone. Next to him, Louis Tomlinson reaches into his blazer pocket and Harry Styles looks into the distance, one hand resting casually in his pocket while the other holds a cell phone to his ear. In their Tumblr post, Every Direction places this official image directly below their own recreation. The bois line up in the same order, each one occupying the space of his assigned One Direction

counterpart. Their poses are carefully crafted to mimic those of the One Direction photograph: Jake Mioff and Robin Dick pose for a chummy selfie, Cherii Poppins holds a cell phone at the front of the group, 7 minutes in Evan reaches into his pocket, and Ben Downthere smilingly holds a cell phone to his ear. Each boi wears a black blazer, button down shirt, and pants or shorts in bright, contrasting colors. While the colors of Every Direction's outfits are not an exact recreation of the 1D image, their bright colors and simple silhouettes evoke those of the original.

One of the group's most notable sartorial differences is the pair of bright yellow shorts and knee-high black crew socks worn by Cherii Poppins. Cherii's placement in the center of the photograph emphasizes his outfit's deviation from the One Direction image; this marked change is consistent with the drag king group's ability to infuse boy band performances and imagery with moments of queer aesthetic appeal. Another change, this time by way of 7 minutes in Evan, transforms Louis Tomlinson's hand reaching into his pocket into a full-on limp wrist, his hand dangling in front of the blazer. Here the boy band's often discussed gay subtext becomes text through the group's winking reference to a common (and often derogatory) stereotype about the effeminacy of gay male body comportment. In this context, however, the insinuation is transformed into a loving one; the boy band's (real or assumed) gayness becomes something to be reenacted and celebrated. Through the intersection of boy band fandom and queer performance, the group is able to explore, celebrate, and recontextualize the boys' feminine appeal.

The setting of Every Direction's group photograph is also markedly different from that of the One Direction image. While 1D stands in front of a clean white background, nothing surrounding or behind them, the bois of Every Direction are clearly positioned in a domestic space: they stand on low-pile carpet, with vertical blinds behind them. To the left of Jake Mioff,

there is a bicycle, a discarded jacket, and a pile of papers. These details speak to Every Direction's desire to do things "on the cheap," as Ben Downthere/Rachel W. indicated to me in our interviews. The group's outfits also signal this concern: while some of their deviations from One Direction's aesthetic are surely intentional, the group's slightly different outfits are also a product of the fact that they shared clothes to cut costs. Group members said that this was an intentional break with drag culture as it has been marketed to a mainstream audience; Rachel noted that while the group was passionate about performing, "at the same time we tried to do it on the cheap, and do it in ways that would kind of fit us, so we definitely modified it. It wasn't like you're going to get a RuPaul's Drag Race style performance" (Rachel W., pers. comm., Oct. 11, 2016).

These details make Every Direction's recreation one that draws attention to the labor and human connections behind it. Rather than presenting themselves as a carbon copy of One Direction, the group highlights the unique set of circumstances that helped to produce this iteration of the boy band image. Critics often charge that boy bands utilize the veneer of spontaneity and friendship to mask the reality that their performances and interactions are highly produced. George Lipsitz makes a similar claim in his writing on boy bands, arguing, "Every aspect of their identities…is scripted and carefully coordinated on the basis of market research. They are never original, innovative, or unpredictable" (2007, 4). However, the girl-fan's gaze can often turn such slickly produced images and personas into something more. While a photograph of One Direction pretending to interact with one another might appear to be highly staged, upon a seasoned fan's inspection it often reveals a hidden intimacy between the boys. Every Direction's interpretation of one such promotional image celebrates these kinds of fan readings by creating one of its own.

This merging of lesbian subculture and mainstream popular culture does more than just challenge conventional wisdom about the boy band's heterosexual appeal. Lesbian 1D fandom also resists the exclusive association of lesbians with the subcultural. Brickman describes this phenomenon in her work on lesbian fandom of Morrissey, writing that although much academic writing recognizes lesbians as engaged fans of other forms of popular culture, lesbians are almost never identified as fans of popular music (2014). Furthermore, when queer critics do discuss lesbian music fandom, "…adoration of pop music becomes an unwelcome or less pressing concern than fandom directly tied to subcultural practices, feminist values, and identity politics" (Brickman 2014, 446). The notion that lesbians have a general preference for music with lesbian and queer subcultural affiliations can be traced back to the legacy of the women's music movement of the 1970s. During this era, lesbian feminists attempted to create a musical genre and industry powered solely by women, hoping to give women an alternative to the male-driven popular music industry. While early definitions of women's music often described it as music created by, for, and about women, such definitions failed to address the reality that women's music was specifically lesbian music. Although the movement's popularity dwindled during the 1980s and 90s, its impact on lesbian music is still felt today. The fusion of lesbian identity, politics, and musical genre that characterized the women's music movement continues to shape assumptions about lesbian musicians and fans within the music industry, underscoring the belief that lesbian fandom primarily coheres around music that is both political and subcultural. Rather than generatively tracing a feminist lineage for contemporary lesbian and queer women's music listening practices, this exclusive association between lesbians and subcultural music often replicates lesbian feminist political proscriptivism, suggesting that lesbian fans of mainstream popular music have failed to achieve political purity.

For the women involved in making and promoting women's music, it was important that listeners' reception of that music was shaped by the same lesbian feminist ideology that the movement espoused. Musicologist Jodie Taylor notes that early women's music was influenced by the stylings of folk music, which "was already imbued with leftist and egalitarian political themes, and less bound to the rigid gender roles ascribed to rock and pop" (2008). Women's musicians also shared many folk musicians' desire to collapse the distinction between audience and performer, fan and celebrity (Frith 1996): the movement discouraged women from thinking of its most well-known performers as stars, and many lesbian feminist publications (Graetz 1982) suggested that the star-fan dynamic itself replicated the oppressive power dynamics inherent in heterosexual relationships. When viewed using this analysis of fandom's power dynamics, boy bands appear to be a particularly insidious method of channeling girls' energies toward boys, reinforcing their ultimate subservience in a gendered power dyad. However, this opposition to fandom and star-worship misses the ways in which the fan exercises a power of her own.

One Direction fans utilized this power in a number of ways both during and after the band's five-year career. Instead of uncritically worshipping the boys of One Direction, fans often encouraged members of the band to speak out on behalf of various political causes and social issues. The band's LGBTQ fanbase was particularly organized in their quest for acknowledgement from 1D's members; in 2014, a group of fans came together under the moniker "Rainbow Direction" and encouraged fans to bring pride flags to 1D's then-upcoming tour for their album *Midnight Memories*. As word spread through Tumblr and other social media platforms, more pride flags and handmade signs began to show up at One Direction shows. Fan actions like this were designed to counteract what many lesbian and queer fans described as a

sense of alienation within One Direction fandom; Rainbow Direction's Tumblr page reads, "The One Direction fandom can often be unwelcoming to LGBTIA+ fans…We want to speak out to show support, and stand up proudly to make ourselves known" (takemehomefromnarnia 2014).

Sometimes the One Direction boys themselves contributed to what Rainbow Direction describes as an "unwelcoming" environment for queer fans: at a 2015 concert, Liam Payne introduced the band's single "Girl Almighty" by saying, "It is about trying to find that number one woman of your life, which none of you can relate to, because most of you are girls. Except for the boys in here, you know what I'm talking about" (Ross 2015). The heteronormative implications of Payne's statement are in keeping with mainstream conceptualizations of boy band fandom: girls don't date or pursue other girls, or at least girls who are One Direction fans don't. However, the volume of lesbian fans' negative social media response to Payne's statement posed a powerful challenge to his assumption about fans' sexuality. Posts like Tumblr user rubyfruitjumble's wondering, "Who is going to tell one direction that they are lesbian icons. Who is going to spoil their hetero fanbase fantasy" (2015) quickly began circulating online, with some lesbian fans using the opportunity to reimagine the chorus of "Girl Almighty" as "let's have another toast to the dyke almighty" (@foucaulttheh8rs 2015). Fan collectives like Rainbow Direction are an extension of these informal conversations about homophobia that queer fans had long participated in on social media.

While multiple band members eventually expressed some form of appreciation for their LGBTQ fans, Harry Styles was particularly responsive to queer fans' desire for recognition. When an increasing number of pride flags began showing up at the band's concerts in 2014, Styles began bringing these flags up onto the stage with him, sometimes wrapping them around himself like a cape. This behavior continued throughout his first solo tour in 2017, during which

Styles made a habit of bringing bi, trans, and pride flags on stage every night. Styles emphasized to fans that these concerts were safe space where everyone was welcome; official merchandise featured the phrase "treat people with kindness," and the queer band MUNA was chosen as one of the tour's opening acts. In her dissertation, Allyson Gross (2018) argues that fans' political engagement challenged Styles' tendency to embrace noncommittal statements like "treat people with kindness." Rather than inspiring his fans to take part in political activism, Gross found that Harry Styles fandom often works the other way around. She writes, "…most fans interviewed articulated a desire for Styles to reflect and represent their own political views beyond advocating the vague impunity of 'kindness'" (2018, 36). Fans' political views also encompassed topics other than LGBT visibility and gay marriage, two of the only political issues that Styles had addressed publicly at the beginning of his 2017 tour.

During that same tour, Black fans began urging Styles to acknowledge and show solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. Black Lives Matter was co-founded in 2013 by radical Black organizers Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi in response to George Zimmerman's acquittal for the murder of Trayvon Martin. From the beginning, the movement's priorities have been shaped by the queer and feminist sensibilities of its co-founders; a "Herstory" of BLM posted on its website reads, "Black liberation movements in this country have created room, space, and leadership mostly for Black heterosexual, cisgender men—leaving women, queer and transgender people, and others either out of the movement or in the background to move the work forward with little or no recognition" (Black Lives Matter). BLM explicitly challenges that pattern by calling attention to both the leadership and the vulnerability of Black trans women in particular while simultaneously advocating for justice for everyone affected by state-sanctioned anti-Black violence. When Michael Brown was shot and

killed by police officer Darren Wilson in August 2014, people around the country gathered in protest; this is often marked by scholars as the moment when #BlackLivesMatter coalesced into a social movement (Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark 2016). Two years later, the police killings of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile sparked renewed interest in the movement's philosophy and tactics, as well as increasingly heated backlash from political conservatives and law enforcement. For many, Donald Trump's election in the fall of 2016 underscored the starkness of this ideological divide. It is within this political context that fans began pushing for Styles to endorse BLM.

At a Harry Styles show in Hammersmith, London in October 2017, a teenage fan named Yasmin distributed 500 Black Lives Matter signs throughout the crowd. She also ordered and brought a Black Lives Matter banner to hold near the front of the stage, hoping that it would prompt Styles to address and endorse the movement. Given Styles' enthusiasm for the rainbow flags and homemade signs that fans brought to his shows each night, her plan seemed likely to work. When Styles did not address the Black Lives Matter signs, fans were disappointed; speaking to Anna Leskiewicz (2017) for *New Statesman,* Yasmin said, "It felt horrible that he wouldn't show support to his black fans, which there are actually quite a large number of…he didn't show support to our movement even though he shows support to the LGBT community." Fans continued to bring Black Lives Matter signs to Styles' solo shows after Yasmin's initial action. Three days after that initial night, Styles posted a photograph of one such sign to his Instagram account, accompanied by the caption "Love." Eight months later, Styles waved a BLM flag on stage and said, "thank you for your Black Lives Matter Signs." As Gross's work documents, many fans were not satisfied with this gesture; one fan named Elham argued that Styles should follow the action up with further education. Gross notes that both Black and non-

Black interviewees described a desire for Styles to engage with political causes in more substantial ways (2018, 38).

While fans' interest in having Styles acknowledge BLM makes sense given the pop star's massive platform and attendant ability to frame the movement in a positive light for millions of people, fans' interactions with one another around this issue are what truly evince the kind of political activation that is found throughout lesbian boy band fandom. The initial action carried out by Yasmin at a 2017 concert—which both Gross and Leskiewicz identify as the beginning of fans' push for Styles to engage with BLM—was one that necessitated interaction with other fans; for her plan to work, Yasmin had to show up to the October concert early and hand out 500 Black Lives Matter signs to fans entering the stadium (Leskiewicz 2017). Styles' eventual acknowledgement of BLM was the result of Black fans' decision to network, strategize, and organize around this subject. These fans' engagement with both Styles and one another mobilized a significant portion of the fandom around a specific activist movement with concrete goals and strategies, rather than simply advocating for everyone to "treat people with kindness."

Fans' engagement with BLM is another way in which lesbian feminist legacies surface in and through boy band fandom; BLM's mission and ideology draws upon centuries of Black feminist activism and organizing, including that of Black feminist groups like the Combahee River Collective. The movement's insistence on speaking to the state sanctioned violence faced by Black men while also drawing attention to the ways in which Black women are particularly and uniquely vulnerable to violence echoes the CRC Statement's rejection of lesbian separatism and biological essentialism. The statement reads, "Although we are feminists and Lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand…We struggle together with Black men against racism, while

we also struggle with Black men about sexism" (Combahee River Collective 1983). Fans' attempts to get Styles to engage with BLM bring this political legacy into the space of boy band fandom. While Styles did eventually acknowledge the movement by both thanking fans for bringing Black Lives Matter signs and putting a BLM sticker on his guitar, fans' engagement with one another on this issue represents an even more significant political intervention. Although Styles may limit his engagement with these issues to a supportive statement or sticker of endorsement, the fans who rallied together around BLM take their collectively generated political energy out into the world long after the concert ends.

Fans' engagement with BLM is just one example of the many ways in which 1D fans (and the 1D boys' solo fanbases) brought a range of lesbian feminist political legacies into conversation with boy band fandom. However, while lesbian 1D fandom retains some key elements of lesbian feminist politics and culture, this re-interpretation of the boy band phenomenon also has much in common with the poststructuralist analysis of gender, sexuality, and power that began to dominate lesbian and queer communities in the 1980s and 90s. Sociologist Arlene Stein describes how, spurred on by both the rise of poststructuralism in the American academy and the challenges to (white, cisgender) lesbian feminist political dogma posed by lesbians of color and trans women, many lesbians during this time period "shifted lesbian politics away from its focus upon the 'male threat' and toward a more diffuse notion of power and resistance…" (1997, 215). While a separate "women's culture" was often framed as the solution to patriarchal mass culture by lesbian feminists seeking to empower women and build community, women of color had long pointed out that this same women's culture remained rooted in racism and misogyny. As the 80s progressed, many lesbians embraced the notion that there was no such unproblematic space separate from popular culture, opening the door to more

ironic and playful forms of cultural consumption. Lesbian 1D fandom shares the more diffuse conception of power that undergirded this shift, but retains some critical elements of lesbian feminist culture and politics: a trenchant critique of heteropatriarchy in popular culture, the creation and circulation of lesbian media, and the establishment of an affirming lesbian and queer women's culture.

V. "I Would": Making Lesbian Culture on Tumblr

Though queer women existed both within and alongside a larger 1D fan community that had a vast, powerful presence on Tumblr, little to nothing has been said about them in media coverage of the band's fan-base. In the absence of mainstream recognition of their existence, queer women use Tumblr to cultivate fan communities through multiple practices, sharing queer-specific fan texts, artwork, and personal confessions that cannot circulate as easily on other social media platforms. Tumblr user jack-nought's post proclaiming, "one direction really is lesbian culture wow" (2017) is representative of an entire genre of lesbian One Direction content production on Tumblr, in which users repeatedly assert the group's cultural significance for lesbians. Lesbian Directioners also frequently post images and videos that combine 1D's lyrics and/or music with visuals pulled from movies or music videos featuring queer women. One set of images, created by Tumblr user poweredbynew (2015), features photographs of two women kissing, limbs entwined, overlaid by lyrics from two popular 1D songs. The pastel pink images, taken from the music video for pop singer Hayley Kiyoko's 2015 single "Cliff's Edge," are combined with the love-struck lyrics of 1D songs "Diana" and "Olivia," evoking the visual aesthetic of Jamie Babbit's lesbian camp classic, *But I'm a Cheerleader.* Posts like these demonstrate the extent to which 1D fandom facilitated the formation of community and sexual

identity for lesbian fans; through the consumption and remixing of these images and texts, lesbian fans were able to connect with each other and conceptualize their own identities.

In a similar post garnering over 8,000 notes, Tumblr user jameswesleys (2015) remixes another music video of Kiyoko's—this time using the video for her song "Girls Like Girls"—and scores it with One Direction's 2012 hit "I Would." The lesbionic potential of One Direction's "I Would," a song that pledges the singer's everlasting love to an unavailable girl, is maximized through its pairing with Kiyoko's video, which tells the story of a teenage girl whose same-gender love interest has a boyfriend. This video remix gives concrete form to the mental gender-swapping that many lesbian fans engage in when singing along to One Direction's supposedly heterosexual songs. The use of Kiyoko's visuals alongside 1D's songs and lyrics not only literalizes the lesbian potential of the boy band's work, but also explicitly carves out space within lesbian 1D fandom for queer women of color. Kiyoko, a multiracial Japanese-American lesbian, has spoken frankly about her sexuality since publicly coming out in 2015; dubbed "lesbian Jesus" by her fans, Kiyoko dedicated her 2018 VMA award for Push Artist of the Year to queer women of color (Nicolaou 2018). Kiyoko has directed all of her own music videos since 2015's "Girls Like Girls," and stars in a majority of them as well. Many of these videos feature Kiyoko successfully romancing a woman, often another woman of color (see the music videos for "Sleepover," "Feelings," and "What I Need"). The music videos utilized in the aforementioned Tumblr posts, "Girls Like Girls" and "Cliff's Edge," subvert representational tropes common to depictions of lesbianism in music videos; the romantic exchanges they portray are neither hypersexualized nor stylized for the male gaze, and the women in them are depicted as desired and desiring sexual subjects. Posts like these redirect fans' attention from the boys themselves to the lesbian fantasies that the boy band enables.

For many Directioners, this element of fantasy was an essential part of boy band fandom. Self-insert or Y/N (short for "your name") fanfiction (also sometimes referred to as an "imagine"), which allows the reader to imagine themselves as the protagonist of a fanfiction story, was particularly popular within 1D fandom. This genre of 1D fanfiction is often heterosexual in nature, and typically invites girl-fans to imagine themselves as the romantic interest of their favorite boy from the band. 1D imagines that circulated on Tumblr were typically short stories accompanied by a series of images. In the 2014 music video for their single "Night Changes," the band alluded to this genre of fanfiction by filming the video from the perspective of a series of girls positioned just behind the camera, each one on a date with a different boy from the band. The video seemed to invite viewers to imagine their ideal date with Harry, Louis, Niall, Liam, or Zayn. However, the video's release received mixed reviews from fans: the girls, visible only through occasional arm or hand gestures, were all white. Fans' objections to the "Night Changes" video highlight the normative investments of much Y/N fanfiction, which often replicates the racial and sexual hierarchies found in mainstream popular culture regardless of the genre's fantastical nature.

A Tumblr entitled "1Dgaymagines" attempts to address the scarcity of lesbian self-insert 1D fanfiction by posting a variety of short Y/N fanfiction stories accompanied by images. One of the blog's most popular posts features a series of early-career solo photographs of each of the 1D boys holding a lesbian flag, transposed over an image of the lesbian flag. The top of each image reads, "LESBIAN RIGHTS!!!!" (1Dgaymagines 2019). However, most of the blog's posts take the form of traditional self-insert fanfiction, in which "Y/N" stands in for the name of the reader. While these posts vary thematically, many storylines describe one or more of the 1D boys as the reader's friends and confidantes. One such story revolves around the reader's excursion to a

Bruce Springsteen concert with Niall Horan. It reads, "…you see a cute girl but you're too shy to talk to her so he [Niall] throws a pint of beer on each of you so you have to go to the bathroom together to clean up and you fall in love" (1Dgaymagines 2019). The story is accompanied by photographs of Niall and Bruce Springsteen (a figure whose working class image has its own kind of lesbian appeal), along with stock images of beer, two hands touching, and a women's restroom sign. This imagine is one of many that focuses more on the reader's romantic interest in another woman than it does on the 1D boys themselves.

Other posts incorporate queer cultural references into Y/N fanfiction. One story features Y/N as Harry's assistant on the night of the 2019 Met Gala (1Dgaymagines 2019). To understand the story's premise, readers must be familiar with the real-life story of Styles' involvement in that year's Met Gala, which is an annual fundraiser for the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute. The exclusive social event's guests are expected to dress according to the gala's chosen theme, which changes annually. The event's 2019 theme, "Camp: Notes on Fashion" referred to camp sensibility. Styles was chosen as a celebrity co-chair of the event, an honor that nodded to his partnership with the luxury brand Gucci and penchant for frilly, androgynous suits on stage. The imagine reads, "Harry sees you on the street and recognizes your immense and powerful gay energy so he appoints you as the official door person for the Met Gala, with specific instructions to turn away any guests whose outfits don't meet your incredibly high gay standards." The women of the heist movie Ocean's 8, much of which takes place at the Met Gala, also make an appearance in the story, and Y/N is "successfully seduced by every member of their team as part of the heist." The story is preceded by a series of 9 images in a 3 by 3 square: Styles on stage in a pink suit, a still from the John Waters movie *Pink Flamingos* featuring the drag queen Divine, a still from *Ocean's 8* featuring the actresses Rihanna and Cate

Blanchett, a stock image of a man clinging to a woman's leg and crying, Styles dressed as Elton John in a bejeweled Dodgers uniform, the Met Gala red carpet, a fluffy pink Viktor + Rolf evening gown featured in the "Camp: Notes on Fashion" exhibit, a stock image of a woman holding a clipboard, and Harry Styles wearing a purple suit and pussy bow blouse while brushing his teeth. The story's reference to *Ocean's 8*, similar to other users' incorporation of Hayley Kiyoko into their 1D fanart, integrates media that centers women and explicitly courts a lesbian audience into lesbian 1D fandom. This imagine depicts lesbian fans' attachment to Styles as a specifically queer one, in which an understanding of the pop star is enhanced by knowledge of queer cultural references (like John Waters films) and aesthetic preferences (which outfits qualify as "camp" enough to gain entrance to the Met Gala).

1dgaymagines also occasionally incorporates queer historical references into Y/N fanfiction. These posts depict Y/N (and one or more of the 1D boys) as queer people living in an earlier historical era. An imagine set in 1973 features Y/N as a working-class, closeted lesbian "wishing she knew where to meet ladies" (1Dgaymagines 2019). Her sympathetic coworker Louis Tomlinson introduces her to roller disco, "and in months Y/N is a regular and every girl wants to roller-skate with her." While this post follows a similar formula to that of the other blog's imagines, which often depict the 1D boys as gay friends of Y/N who help her meet women and connect with a queer community, the story's mention of roller disco specifically also evokes the Black queer social scenes that coalesced around roller discos in the U.S. during the late 1970s and early 80s. While roller disco enjoyed a brief window of mainstream attention around 1980 thanks in part to movies like *Roller Boogie* (1979), *Skatetown, U.S.A.* (1979), and *Xanadu* (1980), the phenomenon was born in roller rinks located in working class Black and queer communities, like Brooklyn's Empire Roller Skating Center. Roller disco remained

popular in many of these spaces long after popular interest in the activity waned, and the Empire's 2007 closure was met with protest by community members who considered it a historical landmark (Bleyer 2007). 1Dgaymagine's incorporation of this history into a 1D Y/N fanfiction accomplishes what much of 1D's lesbian fandom attempts to do: it creates a window into boy band fan culture for fans beyond the white, heterosexual girls evoked by 1D's "Night Changes" video. The blog also complicates popular ideas about what girls want from boy band fandom. Rather than seeking male validation or a non-threatening heartthrob to lust after, girls might see boy band fan communities as spaces where they can gain a greater understanding of queer histories and cultures, and connect with other queer and lesbian identified girls.

Another wildly popular genre of One Direction content on Tumblr is Larry Stylinson fanfiction and art. Just as lesbian fans have taken up and reworked the genre of Y/N fanfiction, lesbian Directioners have also found creative ways to engage with Larry Stylinson content. One such intervention takes the form of Larry Stylinson "femslash": art and fanfiction that reimagines Styles and Tomlinson as two girls in love. Tumblr user twotalkaholics' "fem!larry" illustration (2014) features Styles and Tomlinson engaged in a passionate liplock, with Styles' iconic mane of hair cascading down her back and Tomlinson wearing a short black skirt. Posts like this are common on Tumblr both within and beyond One Direction fandom; here the illustration highlights the band members' lesbian aesthetic appeal (marked by their androgynous appearance and boyish sartorial preferences) and disrupts the notion that it is exclusively straight girls who are invested in "shipping" Larry Stylinson. Instead of simply asserting that the Larry Stylinson phenomenon reveals the truth of Styles and Tomlinson's secret romantic relationship, fanworks like twotalkaholics' "fem!larry" illustration frame "Larry" as a multipurpose fantasy, one that is flexible enough to accommodate a diverse fanbase's wildly differing emotional needs and sexual

desires. While much of the content produced by lesbian Directioners on Tumblr highlights the band's appeal for lesbians, femslash like this goes one step further by imagining the boys *as* lesbians, literalizing the lesbian erotic potential found in so much of 1D's work.

The lesbian 1D fandom that coalesced on Tumblr helped to create, connect, and support an entire ecosystem of queer women writers and artists, from visual artists creating fanart, to fanfic writers, to alt-pop stars like Kiyoko. This network of lesbians and other queer women once again calls up the legacy of the women's music movement. The women who were involved in this movement—as artists, listeners, and workers—were brought together under vastly different circumstances from those of lesbian Directioners; women's music was by, for, and about women, and the record labels created as part of this movement attempted to train and employ as many women as possible. However at odds with this legacy boy band fandom may seem, lesbian Directioners' use of Tumblr to form a creative subculture similarly fostered community support, the circulation of lesbians' creative work, and a critique of heteronormativity in the popular music industry.

This remixing of lesbian feminist political goals denaturalizes the supposed heterosexuality of boy band fandom. Lesbian fans' ability to rework texts that are marketed as heterosexual and build community through these reappropriations casts doubt on the popular conception of boy bands as an exclusively heterosexual cultural phenomenon. Indeed, boy band fandom also gives heterosexually identified girls the opportunity to explore their sexuality and gender presentation. The widespread and prolific nature of lesbian 1D fandom on Tumblr influenced fans throughout the platform; because of Tumblr's open structure, *all* 1D fans were exposed to lesbian readings of the band. The platform's ability to circulate lesbian subcultural interpretations of the boy band so widely allowed lesbian fans to reshape 1D fandom on Tumblr

writ large. This contact between lesbian and non-lesbian identified 1D fans again highlights the strategic similarities between women's music and lesbian 1D fandom on Tumblr; within the context of the women's music movement, many lesbian feminists saw women's music and the community surrounding it as a potential site for the political, sexual, and social transformation of non-lesbian identified women. Ultimately, these lesbian re-readings of boy bands' performances expose all 1D fans to queer readings of the boy band, while also pushing back against the notion that only queer or lesbian identified performers are appropriate subjects of lesbian fandom, desire, and creative energy.

VI. Remaking the Boy Band: Fandom and Performance in Every Direction

By embodying the queer joy of lesbian 1D fandom, Every Direction's performances extended the radical sense of possibility generated by the link between boy bands and Tumblr's queer feminist subcultures. My interviews with the group's members revealed these performances to be the product of a significant amount of fan labor, much of which was performed within digital fan communities. Though Shannon, who performed as the group's Niall Horan, says that while her love for the boy band at first felt like a joke, interacting with other fans sparked a deeper interest in the band's queer potential. In our interview, she noted that having access to a community of fans who were dedicated to making the boy band's queer subtext visible inspired her to think more deeply about One Direction's relevance to her own gender and sexual identity. When asked why Every Direction chose Tumblr as their primary social media platform, Shannon cited Tumblr's status as a major hub for One Direction fandom, saying that she considered the platform to be 1D fandom's primary home. The group's recognition of Tumblr's dominance among fellow Directioners also meant that the bois turned to the platform to learn about the band, their characters, and fellow fans, highlighting Tumblr's

status as the home of both 1D fandom and queer and lesbian fandoms more broadly. Tumblr posts like jack-nought's simple declaration that One Direction is lesbian culture and twotalkaholics' "fem!larry" illustration comprise one crucial way in which the boy band's queer potential becomes visible. When asked about the beginning of her interest in One Direction, Shannon said, "as we got into it, you know, it's like we were listening to everything differently, suddenly like all of their songs had all of this amazing queer subtext, and then you get into the whole fandom aspect of it, and all of the Larry shipping, and then you realize that there's actually so much queer content to work with. And I think that definitely through Every Direction I became a much bigger fan of One Direction" (Shannon M., pers. comm., October 11, 2016). Not only does Tumblr help to actively cultivate such lesbian re-reading practices, it also facilitates conversations among queer fans who are both consuming One Direction's music and producing a variety of queer fan texts.

For Cheryna, who performed as Every Direction's Zayn Malik, Tumblr served as an authoritative source of current, in-depth information about One Direction. It is difficult to make sense of a performance group like Every Direction outside of the context of queer women's prolific engagement in One Direction fan communities. Though the group's members were quick to emphasize their roots in the Bay Area's queer community, Every Direction was equally indebted to a lineage of fans, both queer and not, who used social media platforms like Tumblr to create and share their own interpretations of One Direction's songs, videos, and group dynamics. Cheryna specifically named Tumblr as a crucial component of the character research that she undertook in preparation to perform as Malik, saying, "I would search the web or like Tumblr, just Tumble. I would just go on Tumblr and I would check out all of the things going on" (Cheryna G., pers. comm., Oct. 11, 2016). This use of the platform is evident in the group's

Tumblr page, which features gifs of the One Direction boys affectionately roughhousing alongside meticulous drag recreations of official band photoshoots and promotional flyers for Every Direction's lone music video. Every Direction's queer re-imaginings of the boy band's manufactured pop persona were enabled by Tumblr's exhaustive record of each One Direction interview, music video, and photo shoot, the existence of which is a testament to fans' dedication to their role as the band's unofficial documentarians.

Every Direction's performances also highlight the contemporary boy band's roots in Black male R&B groups of the 1980s and 90s. Every Direction's preference for matching clothes and choreographed dance routines deviated from the mismatched clothing and refusal to dance that were hallmarks of One Direction's unique spin on the boy band phenomenon. The drag king group's adoption of these practices was a throwback to boy bands of the late 90s, which were largely based upon Black male vocal groups like New Edition, Blackstreet, and Boyz II Men. These earlier boy bands, which were influenced by the emerging musical genre known as new jack swing (Harrison 2011), all consisted of 4 to 5 members, utilized vocal harmonies, and frequently traded in romantic ballads. Additionally, each of these groups—and many of their contemporaries—wore matching or coordinated outfits, and performed tightly choreographed dance routines in their music videos and/or live shows. The white boy bands of the late 90s, namely Backstreet Boys and NSync, relied on the formula for success that was developed by these Black male vocal groups. The dance routines and matching outfits favored by Every Direction thus call back to these previous boy bands, which are all too often erased in discussions of the boy band phenomenon. While One Direction attempted a rockist appeal to "authenticity" via their slightly scruffier appearance and lack of choreography, Every Direction's performances simultaneously drew attention to the racial history and queer appeal of the

contemporary boy band. The performance group's multiracial tribute to 1D also gestured to the racial diversity within 1D fandom, which was seldom acknowledged in media coverage of the boy band's fanbase.

Every Direction's creative reworking of One Direction both draws from and contributes to lesbian 1D fandom's expansive reimagining of what the boy band can be. Just as fem!larry unearths new, subtextual facets of the boy band's appeal in its literalization of 1D's lesbian potential, Every Direction's group members and performances give form to a queer, multiracial vision of the boy band. In my interview with Rachel, the group's Harry Styles, she described preparing to perform as one of the world's most famous white boys as a Black woman, saying, "I definitely watched music videos, I read a lot of articles, you know, followed on Twitter, watched the One Direction movie a lot of times, and just tried to study things about his personality because obviously like, I'm black, I don't look like Harry. I can't get Harry's hair or anything like that, and so it was like, how can I exude his personality while performing so that people know who my character is?" (Rachel W., pers. comm., Oct. 11, 2016). Rachel's description of the labor that she did in preparing to perform as Harry Styles points to the wide range of lesbian aesthetics embodied by One Direction. While Rachel notes that Styles's look in particular is reliant on a "specific kind of rocker style" that she did not try to emulate, she remained determined to "become him as a person" through physical mannerisms, intonation, and personality. In our discussion, Rachel emphasized the amount of work that her transformation into Styles represented, saying, "that took a lot of research in to how he talks, what he does, all of the jokes that he plays." Though Rachel does not identify with the white alt-rock masculinity that Styles embodied during the group's third and fourth album cycles, the research that she describes doing allowed her to recognize their commonalities in speech, mannerisms, and

demeanor, as well as helping her to pinpoint the band's different aesthetic eras. Through her performance of fan labor—the act of rifling through the unwieldy number of articles, videos, and photographs that attempt to capture the essence of a performer—Rachel took on Styles's role within the group.

For Every Direction's members, digital 1D fandom was closely related to the joy that the group took in reinterpreting the boy band's work. Rather than existing as a counterpoint to mainstream 1D fandom, Every Direction's performances drew energy from the boy band's massive global following. Rachel describes being a member of Every Direction and engaging with digital 1D fandom as two key components of her own experience as a fan, saying, "to me the joy of One Direction was just hanging out with my friends, trying to conjure up the essence of this boy band, and then also exploring some of the fandom." In addition to watching fan-made 1D music videos and keeping up on band-related gossip, Rachel describes using online fan communities to find another One Direction themed "boi band" in Minnesota. The group's connection to 1D fan communities was coupled with a rootedness in the Bay Area's lesbian and queer communities; Every Direction's Tumblr page advertises performances at The White Horse Inn, Oakland's oldest gay bar, and El Rio, a San Francisco gay bar and community space that was established in 1978. Every Direction also hosted and performed at a benefit show for Lyon-Martin Health Services, a community-based health clinic offering trans-inclusive healthcare to women. Initially founded in 1979 as a clinic for lesbians who had difficulty accessing adequate healthcare, Lyon-Martin now serves women of all sexualities, and trans people of all genders. Every Direction's benefit night, which included One Direction trivia, live performances, and a DJ, links Lyon-Martin's queer and lesbian feminist mission with the 1D fan communities from which the group pulled inspiration. The group's connection to a queer politics that is both trans-

inclusive and tied to lesbian feminist history speaks to ways in which many lesbian Directioners negotiate and make sense of lesbian political histories.

VII. Conclusion

Though Every Direction (and their slightly more well-known boy band counterpart) ultimately broke up, the group lives on in its digital archive. Through their collective performances and individual statements, Every Direction's members continually reaffirmed the radical sense of possibility generated by this link between boy bands and Tumblr's lesbian feminist subcultures, whether it was through the lesbian boi band aesthetic that the group made visible or the queer joy that their performances engendered. In this sense, the group's work embodies one vision of the queer futurity that José Muñoz describes as "a backward glance that enacts a future vision" (2009, 4). Their insistence upon exposing the boy band as a site of affective investment and queer political energy challenges the pervasive relegation of lesbian art and performance to the realm of subcultural production, a phenomenon that imposes a static vision of lesbian feminist political priorities on contemporary expressions of lesbian identity.

Lesbians' digital fandom of One Direction does interact meaningfully with lesbian feminist culture and politics, through fans' connections to organizations and political movements with roots in lesbian feminisms (like Lyon-Martin Health Services or Black Lives Matter) and lesbian fandom's claiming of a specifically lesbian culture. However, lesbian feminism's relationship to boy band fandom also underscores the danger inherent in the assumption that there is one fixed meaning, legacy, or effect of lesbian feminism. Instead, these fans encourage us to remain open to the many and varied ways in which lesbian feminist cultural and political histories continue to shape contemporary lesbian life. Rather than framing lesbian feminism as a singular, restrictive vision of lesbian life, identity, and politics that was overcome on the way to a

more nuanced queer understanding of sexuality, this approach acknowledges an ideologically and culturally diverse range of lesbian feminisms. For queer and feminist theorists, it serves as a reminder that such dismissals do nothing to recognize the women who fought for these alternative forms of lesbian feminism. Remaining alert to lesbian feminism's most unlikely contemporary manifestations also transforms our understanding of radical queer politics' historical origins, which have so often been attributed primarily to white gay men. To connect the utopian imagination of an Every Direction performance to the mission of projects like the 5th Street Women's Building or Camp Trans, we must first understand each of these events to represent a historically significant form of queer survival, resistance, and transformation.

The fantasy life that Every Direction's performances conjured—one in which the Bay Area's most famous boi band reigns supreme, and everyone in the club finds their dream girl by the end of the song—invoked a queer utopia that is too seldom seen, even if it only lives on in the hearts of the group's digital fangirls. Although Tumblr fandom of One Direction may be in decline following the boy band's hiatus, the platform remains vital to queer and lesbian fan communities. The digital fan base that coalesced around Every Direction may not be seeing a new Tumblr post by the group any time soon, but there are countless new pop cultural phenomena that will continue to capture their attention and inspire them to create something of their own. Likewise, One Direction's queer and lesbian fans still use Tumblr to critique and celebrate everything the boy band was, is, and could have been. Lesbian fans' use of the platform to reinvent the object of their fandom has also reinvented lesbian culture, which will doubtless continue to transform itself and reimagine the future long after Tumblr itself is gone.

VIII. References

1Dgaymagines. 2019. "One Direction said lesbian rights!!" *Lavender (Marriage) Country* (blog),

Tumblr. January 29, 2019. https://1dgaymagines.tumblr.com/post/182404558224/one-direction-said-lesbian-rights.

1Dgaymagines. 2019. "Imagine…Niall takes you to a Bruce Springsteen concert…" *Lavender (Marriage) Country* (blog), *Tumblr*. January 11, 2019. https://1dgaymagines.tumblr.com/post/ 181930881981.

1Dgaymagines. 2019. "Imagine: Harry sees you on the street and recognizes your immense and powerful gay energy so he appoints you as the official door person for the Met Gala…" *Lavender (Marriage) Country* (blog), *Tumblr*. May 3, 2019. https://1dgaymagines.tumblr.com/ post/184627255910/imagine-harry-sees-you-on-the-street-and.

1Dgaymagines. 2019. "It's 1973 and Y/N is a closeted lesbian working a blue-collar job and wishing she knew where to meet ladies." *Lavender (Marriage) Country* (blog), *Tumblr*. January 19, 2019. https://1dgaymagines.tumblr.com/post/182143134061/its-1973-and-yn-is-a-closeted-lesbian-working-a.

Asquith, Daisy. 2016. "*Crazy About One Direction*: Whose Shame Is It Anyway?" In *Seeing Fans: Representations of Fandom in Media and Popular Culture*, edited by Lucy Bennett and Paul Booth, 79-88. New York: Bloomsbury Academic USA.

Barnes, Rachel. 2010. "A Question of X Appeal." *Campaign*. Nov. 24, 2010. https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/question-x-appeal/1042343

Basiliere, Jae. 2019. "Staging Dissents: Drag Kings, Resistance, and Feminist Masculinities." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 44 (4): 979-1001. https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/702034?journalCode=signs.

Bennett, Jessica. 2012. "Meet the Directioners: The Superfans of One Direction." *Storyboard*. July 10, 2012. http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:lLYy9-_Me7MJ:storyboard.tumblr.com/post/26829131695/meet-the-directioners-the-superfans-of-one+&cd=10&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&client=safari.

Black Lives Matter. n.d. "Herstory." https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/herstory/.

Bleyer, Jennifer. "The Last Lace-Up." *The New York Times,* April 22, 2007, CY6.

Brickman, Barbara Jane. 2014. "This Charming Butch: The Male Pop Idol, Girl Fans, and Lesbian (In)Visibility." *Journal of Popular Music Studies,* no. 28, 443-459. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jpms.12193.

Busse, Kristina. 2006. "My Life Is a WIP on My LJ: Slashing the Slasher and the Reality of Celebrity and Internet Performances." In *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, 207-224. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc.

Byron, Paul, Brady Robards, Benjamin Hanckel, Son Vivienne, and Brendan Churchill. 2019. "'Hey, I'm Having These Experiences': Tumblr Use and Young People's Queer (Dis)connections." *International Journal of Communication*, no. 13, 2239-2259. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/9677.

Cho, Alexander. 2018. "Default Publicness: Queer Youth of Color, Social Media, and Being Outed by The Machine." *New Media & Society*, 20 (9): 3183-3200. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817744784.

Combahee River Collective. 1983. "The Combahee River Collective Statement." In *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, edited by Barbara Smith, 264-274. New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press.

Dougher, Sarah, and Diane Pecknold. 2016. "Girls, Girlhood, and Popular Music." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 28 (4): 407-411. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jpms.12190.

Everydirectiondrag. 2014. "OH yes…" *EveryDirection* (blog), *Tumblr*. n.d. https://everydirectiondrag.tumblr.com/post/63725498683/oh-yes-this-is-gonna-start-happening-prepare.

Falcone, Dana Rose. 2015. "Tumblr's Most Reblogged 'Ship 2015: One Direction's Harry Styles and Louis Tomlinson." *EW.com*. Dec. 8, 2015. https://ew.com/article/2015/12/08/tumblr-most-reblogged-ship-2015-harry-styles-louis-tomlinson/.

Fitzmaurice, Sarah. 2012. "One Direction Make History as First UK Group to Hit No.1 Spot in the US Album Charts with Debut." *Daily Mail Online*, March 21, 2012. https://www.dailymail. co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-2118004/One-Direction-UK-group-hit-No-1-US-album-charts-debut.html.

Freelon, Deen, Charlton D. McIlwain, and Meredith D. Clark. 2016. "Beyond the Hashtags: #Ferguson, #Blacklivesmatter, and the Online Struggle for Offline Justice." Washington, D.C.: The Center for Media and Social Impact.

Frith, Simon. 1996. *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Garber, Jenny, and Angela McRobbie. 2006. "Girls and Subcultures." In *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain,* edited by Stuart Hall, 177-188. New York: Routledge.

Graetz, Susan. 1982. "Her Own Special Song: Women's Music Grows." *Ithaca Times*, November 18, 1982, 1-5.

Gresehover, Ehren, and Tammy Oler. 2012. "Ugh, You're Probably a Directionator." *Slate*

Magazine, June 19, 2012. https://slate.com/culture/2012/06/one-direction-fans-on-tumblr-and-youtube-directioners-and-directionators.html.

Gross, Allyson. 2018. "Sign(ifier) of the Times: On Pop Stars, Populism, and the Harry Styles Fandom." MA diss., University of London.

Halberstam, Jack. 1997. "Mackdaddy, Superfly, Rapper: Gender, Race, and Masculinity in the Drag King Scene." *Social Text* 15 (3): 104-131. https://www.jstor.org/stable/i220082.

Halberstam, Jack. 2005. "What's that Smell? Queer Temporalities and Subcultural Lives." In *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives.* New York: New York University Press. 152-188.

Harrison, Thomas. 2011. *Music of the 1980s*. Santa Barbara: Greenwood. 17-19.

Jack-nought. 2017. "one direction really is lesbian culture wow." *dont like it? become god* (blog), *Tumblr*. July 18, 2017. https://jack-nought.tumblr.com/post/163100189629.

Jameswesleys. 2015. "The Girls Like Girls video edited..." *woman.mp3* (blog), *Tumblr.* July 9, 2015. http://jameswesleys.tumblr.com/post/123629348061.

Jamieson, Daryl. 2007. "Marketing Androgyny: The Evolution of the Backstreet Boys." *Popular Music* 26 (2): 245-258. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4500316?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_content s.

Korobkova, Ksenia A. 2014. *Schooling the Directioners: Connected Learning and*

Identity-Making in the One Direction Fandom. Irvine: Digital Media and Learning Research Hub.

Leskiewicz, Anna. 2017. "Why Harry Styles Fans Are Taking #BlackLivesMatter Signs to His Gigs." *New Statesman America*, November 9, 2017. https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/ music-theatre/2017/11/harry-styles-fans-black-lives-matter-signs.

Lipsitz, George. 2007. *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Meme Daddario's Mess (@foucaulttheh8rs). 2015. "LETS HAVE ANOTHER TOAST TO THE DYKE ALMIGHTY." Twitter, August 19, 2015.

Moos, Jennifer J. 2013. "Boy Bands, Drag Kings, and the Performance of (Queer) Masculinities." *Transposition: Musique et Sciences Sociales* 3: n.p. https://journals.openedition. org/transposition/325#quotation.

Muñoz, José Esteban. 2009. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York:

NYU Press.

Nicolaou, Elena. 2018. “Hayley Kiyoko Dedicates Her VMA To Queer Women of Color.” *Refinery29*. August 20, 2018. https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2018/08/207835/hayley-kiyoko-vmas-speech-lesbian-queer-women.

Pellegrini, Ann. 2015. “After Sontag: Future Notes on Camp.” In *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*, edited by Molly McGarry. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.

Poweredbynew. 2015. “Diana...” *I hope you can see* (blog), *Tumblr.* Nov. 11, 2015. http://poweredbynew.tumblr.com /post/132986964955.

Ross, Martha. 2015. “One Direction’s Liam Payne Denies He’s Homophobic.” *Times-Herald*. August 19, 2015. https://www.timesheraldonline.com/2015/08/19/one-directions-liam-payne-denies-hes-homophobic/.

Rubyfruitjumble. 2015. “Untitled.” *Untitled* (blog), *Tumblr*. August 18, 2015.

Stein, Arlene. 1997. *Sex and Sensibility: Stories of a Lesbian Generation.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Stein, Louisa. 2016. “The Limits of Infinite Scroll: Gifsets and Fanmixes as Evolving Fan Traditions.” *Flow: A Critical Forum on TV and Media Culture*, 22.03 (January). https://www.flowjournal.org/2016/01/the-limits-of-infinite-scroll-gifsets-and-fanmixes-as-evolving-fan-traditions/.

Takemehomefromnarnia. 2014. “The ultimate…” *Take Me Home from Narnia* (blog), *Tumblr*. September 20, 2014. https://takemehomefromnarnia.tumblr.com/post/97918944291/the-ultimate-rainbow-direction-masterpost.

Taylor, Jodie. 2008. “Lesbian Dissonance, Music Cultures and Mainstreams.” In *Stuck in the Middle: The Mainstream and Its Discontents: Selected Proceedings from the 2008 IASPM-ANZ Conference, Griffith University, Brisbane*, edited by Catherine Strong and Michelle Phillipov. Auckland: IASPM-ANZ. 49-57.

Tiffany, Kaitlyn. 2016. “How One Direction Stayed the World's Biggest Band Even After It Stopped Existing.” *The Verge*. Dec. 13, 2016. https://www.theverge.com/2016/12/13/13937688/ one-direction-one-year-hiatus-anniversary-social-media-blogging.

Tongson, Karen. 2006. “Tickle Me Emo: Lesbian Balladeering, Straight-Boy Emo, and the Politics of Affect.” In *Queering the Popular Pitch*, edited by Sheila Whiteley and Jennifer Rycenga, 55-66. Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis.

Twotalkaholics. 2014. “fem!larry.” # (blog), *Tumblr.* May 16, 2014.

http://twotalkaholics.tumblr.com/post/85902602713.

Volcano, Del Lagrace, and Jack Halberstam. 1999. *The Drag King Book*. London: Serpents Tail.

Wald, Gayle. 2002. "'I Want It That Way': Teenybopper Music and the Girling of Boy Bands." *Genders OnLine Journal* 35: n. pag. https://www.colorado.edu/gendersarchive1998-2013/2002/03/01/i-want-it-way-teenybopper-music-and-girling-boy-bands.

Wise, Sue. 1990. "Sexing Elvis." In *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, edited by

Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin, 333-340. New York: Pantheon Books.

Conclusion: Lesbian Feminist Futures

As I write this conclusion, COVID-19 related panic is just beginning to sweep the nation. Businesses are shutting down, UC Irvine has shifted to fully online courses for the upcoming spring quarter, and I, like many graduate students, have been quarantined in my home for the last week. Theoretically, this has created more time for me to focus on finishing my dissertation. In reality, it is very hard to focus on anything in the midst of a public health crisis. I open my laptop, meaning to draft an outline for this conclusion, and end up checking for news about coronavirus. Still, even during my anxiety-ridden internet wanderings I see traces of this project everywhere.

One of my key concerns throughout this research has been to trace the ways in which brands and media texts make use of lesbian feminist aesthetics while refusing to seriously engage with lesbian feminist politics in all of their complexity. In chapter two, "Making Herstory," I analyzed the store Otherwild and Instagram account @h_e_r_s_t_o_r_y's collaborative clothing line, arguing that the line co-opts a phrase from lesbian feminist history. On March 15th, one week into the U.S.'s first serious wave of COVID-19 related shutdowns, the @h_e_r_s_t_o_r_y account posted its first coronavirus-related update: a "starter pack" meme in which a collection of items are pictured together, as though forming an emergency kit for a particular situation. Many of the items depicted in @h_e_r_s_t_o_r_y's post, entitled "Social Distancing Starter Pack," are innocuous enough: a bowl of soup, a packet of Emergen-C brand vitamin supplement, and Purell hand sanitizer appear alongside queer author Carmen Maria Machado's 2019 memoir *In the Dream House*, a sweatshirt emblazoned with the word "Gay" written in the style of the Gap logo, and a vibrator from the feminist friendly millennial sex toy store Unbound.

Rounding out the starter pack are three images advertising @h_e_r_s_t_o_r_y's latest endeavor, a text-based queer dating app called Lex. The app draws from the tradition of lesbian personal ads that were featured in magazines like *Off Our Backs*, with Lex posts eschewing photographs for users' short written descriptions of themselves and what they're looking for in a partner, accompanied by a descriptive title. The "social distancing starter pack" features three images promoting the dating app: one is an iPhone screen featuring the app's bright blue login page, and another consists of two sent iPhone messages that wonder, given the low price of flights, "should I risk it and fly across the country for someone I met on Lex an hour ago lol." The final Lex-related image is a sample personal ad from the app, entitled "Queerantine." It reads, "any fellow queers want to keep me company while I'm stuck at home? let's make art, play board games, watch love is blind for hours on end, and make out when this is all over."

The meme, which debuted in the midst of the 21st century's first truly global pandemic, fell flat for a number of reasons. Although it drew on some of the cultural markers of lesbian feminism—support of women owned and lesbian businesses, references to queer literature, and the use of the personal ad—the post was also an attempt to capitalize off of a public health crisis by driving more users to the Lex app. The meme's playful references to meeting people from the app in real life during the coronavirus outbreak struck a particularly strange tone, and spoke to the meme's imagined audience. Media coverage of the outbreak has emphasized that the elderly and immunocompromised are most at risk for contracting and having serious complications from the virus, as are service workers, the uninsured, and the unhoused. Subsequently, people outside of these populations have been encouraged to self-isolate in their places of residence to avoid further spread of the virus to vulnerable people. This can be seen as a form of community solidarity, in which those who are less vulnerable take measures to decrease the risk of death or

serious illness (and the often crushing medical debt that often comes with illness in the U.S.) for those who are most at risk. In contrast, @h_e_r_s_t_o_r_y's "social distancing starter pack" meme imagines an audience for whom social distancing is a personal prerogative, an extension of commodified "self-care" routines that can be taken up or dropped at will. This audience can use their time at home to purchase new clothing and sex toys, cruise queer dating apps on their iPhones, or even book a flight across the country. While this meme might play on some of the aesthetics and cultural traditions of lesbian feminism, its prioritization of the individual over the collective, and of capital above all else, is a stark refusal of many lesbian feminist political ideals. Throughout my dissertation, I have attempted to capture this tension as it arises in contemporary pop cultural texts. Furthermore, in my analysis of major conflicts from lesbian feminist history I have highlighted the nuanced and still-relevant lessons about social movements, intersectionality, and community building that these conflicts hold.

There is a story about lesbian feminism, one that has at times been circulated among both self-identified lesbian feminists and their critics, that lesbian feminist politics have always been the provenance of cisgender, primarily white, women. By retelling stories from lesbian feminist history in different ways, it is possible to undo that narrative, bit by bit. Centering the experiences of women like Linda Tillery and Sandy Stone at Olivia Records, or Marizel Rios at Labyris Books, or Nancy Jean Burkholder and Blanche Jackson at Michigan Womyn's Music Festival brings into focus the many and varied shapes that lesbian feminist politics often take. Juxtaposing these alternative historical narratives with contemporary media texts highlights both how often lesbian feminist tropes are utilized in popular depictions of lesbianism, and the extent to which lesbian feminism is imagined to represent a single, restrictive social and political vision. The television show *Transparent*'s depiction of a transphobic woman's music festival does not

highlight the communities of women of color and trans women who fought so hard to change the culture of women's music festivals, Michfest among them; instead, the space of the women's music festival is depicted as a straightforwardly transphobic one, with no trans women in attendance besides the show's main character. In 2015, the Los Angeles-based store Otherwild went viral after reproducing a lesbian feminist t-shirt reading "The Future Is Female"; the shirt's sales skyrocketed partially on the strength of the nostalgia inspired by the store's promotional use of a 1970s-era image of Alix Dobkin wearing the shirt. The phrase's political history, its original attachment to a woman of color owned lesbian feminist business, and Dobkin's own history of opposition to trans women's inclusion in women's spaces, were all left unexplored. These contemporary texts, in turn, have informed my interpretation of lesbian feminist historical narratives; to fight against the depressing continuity between transphobic and trans-inclusive interpretations of lesbian feminism, alternative stories must be told about lesbian feminism's origins. By bringing these texts together, I have shown both how contemporary media narratives about lesbianism replicate lesbian feminist racism and transphobia, and how we might envision alternative lineages for more expansive iterations of lesbian feminist politics.

I. Summary of Key Findings

My research has generated four key findings, which impact work done in gender studies, queer theory, and trans studies. The first of these is that contemporary popular media's depictions of lesbianism are shaped by the (sometimes partial or inaccurate) memory of lesbian feminism. In chapter one, we see this in the media's reception of the band Tegan and Sara: although the band's self-proclaimed influences included Neil Young and Bruce Springsteen, reviews of the sisters' work consistently mentioned Lilith Fair, Ani DiFranco, and women's music. While my dissertation's fourth chapter begins with a contemporary phenomenon rather

than a historical event, the relative invisibility of lesbian One Direction fans speaks to the ways in which traditions of lesbian feminist music making continue to shape assumptions about lesbians as music listeners. Whether media coverage of One Direction marveled at the existence of the band's lesbian fans or ignored them completely, it often relied on commonly held assumptions about both boy band fan demographics and lesbians' musical preferences: young, heterosexual girls are fans of One Direction, while lesbians are fans of lesbian and queer-identified musical artists, typically those working in the folk or singer-songwriter genre. The latter set of assumptions stems from the legacy of the women's music movement, despite the fact that the movement's sound was diverse and its sole association with folk was contested, particularly by Black lesbians who made music in a variety of other genres. The folk sound associated with some of the movement's most well-known (primarily white) artists continued to be associated with lesbian musical preferences long after the movement's heyday, as did the movement's anti-pop ideological stance. This account of the women's music movement's ongoing impact on lesbian musicians and listeners is just one example of the ways in which contemporary texts that appear to have no relationship to lesbian feminist politics often bear significant traces of this history.

Another key finding of my research is that these narratives about lesbian feminist history have the capacity to do real harm in the present. One of the clearest examples of this comes in the form of an Afterellen op-ed defending Otherwild's "the future is female" t-shirts and disparaging Tegan and Sara's "the future is fluid" clothing line. In its attack on the trans-inclusive clothing line, this op-ed mobilizes the notion of a unified radical lesbian feminist past, led by transphobic white women; an archival image of Alix Dobkin wearing the original "the future is female" shirt becomes symbolic of this history. In asserting white, cisgender lesbians'

ownership of lesbian feminist politics, this op-ed (and other, similar accounts of lesbian feminist history) both erase women of color and trans women's contributions to lesbian feminist thought and attempt to shut these groups of women out of contemporary lesbian communities. However, it is not just intentionally transphobic or racist accounts of lesbian feminist history that do this kind of damage; even well-intentioned critiques of lesbian feminism often reproduce these divisions. While *Transparent's* satirical depiction of Michigan Womyn's Music Festival undoubtedly sought to depict the pain that many trans women felt as a result of Michfest's "womyn born womyn" policy, the show's narrative surrounding the music festival inadvertently affirms that trans women were not a significant part of this community. This erases Michfest's rich history of conflict over this issue, as well as the clear evidence that many trans people felt a strong connection to the event and made significant contributions to the festival's culture. More careful attention to the nuances of lesbian feminist history can prevent these kinds of depictions from doing further harm to marginalized lesbian communities.

My research supports a model for thinking about lesbian feminist histories and communities as much more varied than many historians, feminists, and queer theorists have previously imagined them to be. Critiques of white, cisgender lesbian feminism are necessary and even vital to moving our political thinking and social movements forward, but this should not be imagined to be the only iteration of lesbian feminism that exists. In each of my dissertation's chapters, I explore a different way of looking at lesbian feminist history and its legacy. In chapter one, I revisit the story of Sandy Stone's time at Olivia Records, highlighting the work that Stone did to shape the sound (and scene) of women's music. Instead of focusing my attention on the transphobic hate that Stone was subjected to, I use archival documents to debunk the myth that there was widespread, near-total community opposition to Stone's work

with Olivia. In chapter two, I look at a story that seems to begin with white, cisgender lesbian feminism as usual: Otherwild's "the future is female" shirts, which were promoted using an archival image of Alix Dobkin. However, a retracing of the shirt's history reveals the much more complex political affiliations that preceded its creation, including an alliance with the Young Lords and roots in the anti-capitalist squatters' movement. The futures we might imagine based on this amended history are potentially quite different than the ones evoked by Otherwild's contextualization of "the future is female." In chapter three, I ground my analysis of Michfest in the festival experiences of trans women and women of color. Instead of focusing on the logic behind the festival's transphobic policies, I direct attention away from Michfest's organizers and toward the women of color, trans women, and allies who challenged those organizers' restrictive vision of feminist womanhood in a variety of ways. After thinking through these alternative modes of lesbian feminist historiography and storytelling, I move to a contemporary phenomenon that captures some of the legacies of these diverse iterations of lesbian feminism.

Lesbian feminist history continues to show up in the unlikeliest of places, popular culture among them. While this resurfacing of lesbian feminism can often take the form of media texts' one-note depictions of lesbian feminists, my fourth and final chapter asks, where can we find the echo of alternative lesbian feminisms in the contemporary media landscape? In the unlikely subject of lesbian boy band fandom, I find a community of lesbians and queer identified people who are working through many of the same problems that I explore in previous chapters; that is, they are attempting to form feminist relationships to popular culture, generate community support for lesbian artists and organizations, and create expansive political communities that still retain meaningful ideological commitments. While this fandom is certainly not politically faultless or devoid of conflict, it manages to center lesbian identity without exclusively

prioritizing the experiences of white, cisgender lesbians. I also see traces of lesbian feminist anti-capitalism in lesbians' fan practices, which often abandon hyper-commodified fan practices in favor of creative, community building ones. Every Direction's drag show benefit for Lyon-Martin Health Services, a crucial provider of trans healthcare in the Bay Area with roots in lesbian feminist activism, is just one example among many of the forms that these fan practices can take. I argue that an example like this, which forms an unlikely bridge between subculture and pop culture in its combination of boy band fandom with lesbian feminist activist work, hews much more closely to the political legacy of the alternative lesbian feminisms that my dissertation highlights than some contemporary, trans-exclusionary iterations of lesbian feminist politics. Every Direction's work with Lyon-Martin Health Services can be contrasted with Afterellen.com, a lesbian website that in recent years has been dominated by trans-exclusionary lesbian feminist viewpoints. While Afterellen's writers and editors might seem to possess a clearer connection to lesbian feminist history than lesbian Directioners do, the iteration of lesbian feminism that the website represents possesses a much narrower political vision than that evoked by groups like Every Direction.

II. Limitations and Future Research

Future work on this project should supplement its current lack of interviews with relevant parties, especially the women who were involved in the historical narratives that are outlined in chapters one, two, and three. This lack of interviews is primarily the product of time and budgetary constraints. Two interviews were completed as part of these first three chapters, one with Labyris Books cofounder Jane Lurie, and one with Emily Dievendorf, the former director of Equality Michigan. Each of these interviews underscored the difficulty associated with finding, contacting, and interviewing subjects for this project. Lurie was only located and contacted after

months of searching for her online, and she is much more readily available than many of the women who were involved in the historical events that I analyze. Others are no longer with us; Gwen Avery, whose work is discussed in chapter one, died in 2014 at the age of 71. This underscores how urgent it is that these interviews be completed while many of the women involved in lesbian feminist organizing are still able to tell their stories. Another set of concerns regards protecting interview subjects who are being asked to discuss traumatic events including personal experiences of transphobia, racism, and other forms of discrimination.

My attempts at locating and contacting Labyris's co-founder, Marizel Rios, were all unsuccessful; women who were previously acquainted with her told me that it was unlikely she would want to talk with me even if I did succeed in contacting her. Given the hostility toward Labyris (and Rios) that clearly existed among some feminists, it makes sense that Rios might be reluctant to talk with me about this story. These are difficult (and for some, outright dangerous) stories to tell, and many women are thus understandably reluctant to talk about this history at all, much less with a white, cisgender academic working on her dissertation. Nevertheless, this project would be strengthened by the inclusion of interviews with a number of the women involved in both the historical events and contemporary media texts that I discuss. It would also enrich this project's analysis of intra-community conflict to further discuss the impact that these absences have on the historical narratives that I am able to tell. How have these stories been shaped by the presence of white, cisgender women willing to talk about their experiences, and what does this (re)telling leave out?

In my analyses of contemporary media texts, further exploration of the supply chains that produce the television shows, clothing lines, and music that I analyze would deepen the political economic analysis component of this research. This is particularly relevant for my analysis of the

store Otherwild and its lesbian feminist clothing line; while I discuss the line's political implications and historical background, investigation of the material working conditions for those producing this clothing would help to contextualize this argument. Questions about the supply chains of businesses like Otherwild are particularly relevant to the broader question of how to run a (lesbian) feminist business in a capitalist society, which is one of the through lines that I found to be relevant in both historical and contemporary contexts. The political economic element of my research is more clearly realized in chapters one and two, particularly in my analysis of Olivia Records and the Amazon original series *Transparent*, but elements of this analysis could be brought out even further in each of these chapters as well.

III. Recommendations

As I was forming my dissertation proposal, one of the gaps in existing literature that most motivated me to take up this project was the lack of writing about lesbians' unique relationship to popular culture and mass media. While writing and theorizing about gay male relationships to pop culture is abundant in queer theory, similar writing about lesbians is difficult to find. Explanations as to why this is vary: it might be, as Alexandra Chasin posits in her work, that lesbian feminism wed lesbians with anti-consumerist politics in the popular imagination, making advertisers hesitant to market to them. Another possible explanation is that lesbian culture has not historically celebrated the consumption of popular cultural products. Regardless of its origin, I was troubled by the seemingly widespread assumption that lesbians were not active consumers of and participants in popular culture. The lack of academic writing on this topic is reflective of that assumption. Through my research, I hope that future writing can operate instead from the assumption that lesbian history, politics, and culture is always operating in relation to the realm

of the popular. The tone of that relationship—be it critical, playful, or even oppositional—may shift, but there is always a relationship there to explore.

This project thinks about lesbian relationships to popular culture in two primary ways. The first is that, especially in the U.S., the relationship between lesbians and popular culture *is* shaped by lesbian feminist political history; media depictions of lesbians continue to rely on stereotypes pulled from the lesbian feminist 1970s, and to a certain extent lesbians continue to be seen by marketers and advertisers as a non-entity. The second sense in which lesbians (and lesbian feminists) have a relationship to popular culture has to do with lesbian feminist efforts at cultural production. Throughout my research, I have tried to emphasize the ways in which lesbian feminists of the 1970s and onward were interested in playing with and subverting cultural forms derived from mass media. The music, films, and books produced by lesbian feminists were a key component of the movement's political strategy. Lesbian feminists' oppositional relationship to popular culture evinces a desire to engage with and transform it for the better. Queer theorists writing about popular culture should attend to the ways in which relationships to pop culture are particularly gendered, making it difficult to theorize a "queer" relationship to popular culture that applies to all queer women, men, and nonbinary people. Contemporary lesbians are the inheritors of a fraught political history surrounding popular media that impacts their patterns of media production and consumption.

Future researchers would also do well to think about lesbian feminist politics in the 1970s and onward as being much less cohesive than has previously been imagined. While lesbian feminism has often been understood as presenting a single, dogmatic political line for its adherents to follow, actual lesbian feminist history evinces much more conflict over what people, political ideologies, and strategies the term "lesbian feminist politics" includes. Framing lesbian

feminist history in these terms must not bury histories of racist, transphobic lesbian feminism; instead, these forms of lesbian feminism should be critiqued and decentered, making way for alternative strains of lesbian feminism to move to the forefront of our analysis. One of the primary arguments made throughout my research is that a primary focus on identifying racism and transphobia in lesbian feminist history has had the paradoxical effect of presenting transphobic white women as the exclusive arbiters of lesbian feminism, erasing the presence of trans women and women of color in these histories. A broader historical view, which can account for lesbian feminist racism and transphobia without making them its primary focus, can address lesbians of color and trans lesbians as historical actors and agents of change, rather than solely as victims of discrimination or perpetual outsiders.

Through these alternative ways of theorizing lesbian feminist history, we can also make visible an expanded set of connections between lesbian feminist politics and contemporary theory, media, and activism. Attending to these lesser known histories allows us to find their resonances in unexpected places. Many are already doing this work; *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective,* edited by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor and featuring interviews with Combahee River Collective members and Black Lives Matter activists, is one example of work that bridges the gap between lesbian feminist histories and the contemporary social movements that they continue to inspire. Tracing these connections can also help scholars, practitioners, and community activists to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. For instance, any account of Michfest that addresses its history of top-down transphobia without paying equal attention to trans women's organizing around the festival runs the risk of reproducing the erasure and repression that trans women experienced through the womyn born womyn policy's implementation and enforcement.

Because this project poses such a particular set of questions, I often had to invent an appropriate structure as I went along. In order to identify, and subsequently complicate, popular ways of talking about lesbian feminist politics, I toggled between the past and the present, between the moment of our remembering and the actual historical event being discussed. This meant tracking established ways of thinking about lesbian feminist history, using archival documents to complicate those histories, and then applying the resulting insights in a range of contemporary contexts. Now that this project is complete, I hope that future research can utilize this framework when necessary. More broadly, it is my hope that researchers can use this project as the starting point for new and exciting work that delights in unlikely connections between the lesbian past and present. Lesbian activism and community building has long been expansive, groundbreaking, and ahead of its time in innumerable ways; it deserves to be remembered in all of its complexity.