

2012

(R)Evolution Grrrl Style Now: Disidentification and Evolution within Riot Grrrl Feminism

Lilly Estenson
Scripps College

Recommended Citation

Estenson, Lilly, "(R)Evolution Grrrl Style Now: Disidentification and Evolution within Riot Grrrl Feminism" (2012). *Scripps Senior Theses*. Paper 94.
http://scholarship.claremont.edu/scripps_theses/94

This Open Access Senior Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Scripps Student Scholarship at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scripps Senior Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu.

**(R)EVOLUTION GRRRL STYLE NOW: DISIDENTIFICATION
AND EVOLUTION WITHIN RIOT GRRRL FEMINISM**

by

LILLY ESTENSON

**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

**PROFESSOR CHRIS GUZAITIS
PROFESSOR KIMBERLY DRAKE**

April 20, 2012

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Chapter 1: Contextualizing Riot Grrrl Feminism	20
Chapter 2: Feminist Praxis in the Original Riot Grrrl Movement (1990-96)	48
Chapter 3: Subcultural Disidentification and Contemporary Riot Grrrl Praxis ---	72
Conclusion	97
Works Cited	100
Appendix I: Interview Questions	104
Appendix II: The “Riot Grrrl Manifesto”	105
Appendix III: The “New Riot Grrrl Manifesto”	107

Introduction

In April 2011, I attended a panel on women in the music industry at which panelist Allison Wolfe, a founding member of the riot grrrl movement and lead singer of the seminal riot grrrl band Bratmobile, proclaimed that riot grrrl had been effectively over since the mid-1990s (“Women Who Rock”). “Did she just say that riot grrrl is dead?” my friend immediately scribbled to me. “Then what are we?” Wolfe’s assertion that riot grrrl had met its demise provided the catalyst for my decision to embark on this academic project.¹ Her statement confused my friends and me and left us in a slight identity crisis, as we had been inspired by the riot grrrl movement and identifying as riot grrrls for at least a few years now. And we were not the only ones we knew that were still actively engaged in riot grrrl culture, even if we had been too young to participate in the original movement two decades ago. What was the current legacy of the riot grrrl movement? Was it really dead and gone, or could the current activities of young radical feminist grrrls still be considered a part of riot grrrl? What I have discovered through my research, and what I argue in this project, is that contemporary riot grrrl activism is indeed alive and well and actually thriving in communities all over the world, but in diverse and intentionally modified forms. Contemporary riot grrrls have sustained the original movement’s ethos while transforming its feminist praxis in ways that have made the movement more accessible and relevant to their respective communities.

¹ For the record, contrary to how my friend and I interpreted her words at this panel, Wolfe completely recognized and supported the existence of contemporary riot grrrl activism when I personally interviewed her in November 2011. I now believe she was explicitly referring to the original movement in her comment, and that she validates riot grrrl’s evolution and continuation.

In this project I will critically examine the evolution of riot grrrl praxis, focusing on two specific riot grrrl demographics - founding riot grrrl chapters in the early to mid-1990s and riot grrrl chapters currently active in southern California today. I have chosen to analyze this process of strategic adaptation through the template of José Muñoz's "disidentification." My project theorizes that these contemporary riot grrrls are forming their personal and collective riot grrrl identities through a process of disidentification, neither completely aligning themselves with nor completely rejecting the exclusionary aspects of the original riot grrrl movement but instead transforming riot grrrl culture into something that works within their own cultural practices (Muñoz 4). Additionally, as the cultural community analyzed in this project – the fiercely subcultural original riot grrrl community - significantly differs from the mainstream cultural context in which Muñoz bases his critique, I am differentiating my use of this word by specifically terming the contemporary riot grrrls' process as one of subcultural disidentification. While the original riot grrrl movement privileged the experiences and perspectives of its primarily white, middle-class, and heterosexual demographic, I argue that contemporary riot grrrls have appropriated and adapted the tenets of the original movement through a process of subcultural disidentification to allow for greater racial, class, and sexual diversity. My intervention will be to examine this distinct process of cultural transformation, observe how disidentification from a subculture manifests itself differently from disidentification from mainstream culture, and to analyze how this process affected the feminist praxis of contemporary riot grrrls.

Methodology

I realized that in order to analyze riot grrrl's process of evolution, I needed to first establish a firm reference point of what constituted riot grrrl feminism, context including but not limited to the prevalent political ideologies, practices, and keywords of riot grrrl. With the goal of providing a thorough history of the original movement as well as an analysis of its feminist praxis, I read as many works on the history of and principles behind riot grrrl activism as I could find. For the original movement, I privileged primary sources such as riot grrrl zines, music, and interviews with self-identified riot grrrls, as well as secondary academic secondary analyses that critically theorized about riot grrrl's feminist intervention in mainstream American girl culture. I also personally interviewed Wolfe and two other self-identified original riot grrrls – Erica Flores and Renae² – about their experiences within the movement and their perspective on contemporary riot grrrl activism. I used the information I collected through this ethnographic and academic research to construct both a history of the original movement and an analysis of its feminist practices.

The task of researching contemporary riot grrrl activism was quite different than my process for the original movement. While the original movement has an abundance of secondary information written on its activities, there is little media and academic analyses on the activism occurring now. Consequently, I had to rely on a much more informal and ethnographic approach to learn about contemporary riot grrrl, and I based my analysis on a significantly smaller demographic of local riot grrrls that is not necessarily

² Please see Appendix 1 for full text of my interview questions. My decision whether to identify those I interviewed by their full name or solely by their first name is in accordance with their privacy wishes regarding.

representative of national and international contemporary riot grrrl trends. The different methodological approach, however, was made easier by the more intimate relationship I have with the contemporary local riot grrrl community. My positionality compared to contemporary riot grrrls is different than with original riot grrrls because I am the same age and actively participating in contemporary riot grrrl political initiatives. Due to my inclusion in this current network of feminist activists, I had better access to learn about their activism from the women themselves and not from an intermediary source. I officially interviewed four local women currently involved in riot grrrl activism, Flores from Los Angeles, Adi and Brianna from Orange County, and Gloria, a leader of the Riverside, California – based “IE Riot Grrrl” collective, about their views on riot grrrls’ evolution and the movement’s current state. I also informally discussed the movement with several other contemporary riot grrrls, analyzed zines and music that have been created by contemporary riot grrrls, and engaged in the method of participant observation by attending several IE Riot Grrrl events since summer 2011. I used their personal narratives and the information they provided me to construct an overview and analysis of contemporary riot grrrl praxis that I could then compare to the praxis of the original movement.

In addition to this process of collecting research, my other main methodological step was to select specific critical theories through which to ground my analysis of riot grrrl praxis. I chose theories from the realms of cultural studies, feminist studies, and queer studies that I felt could act as beneficial templates through which to analyze riot grrrl’s continual evolution. Below are the four theories through which I frame the majority of my analysis pertaining to riot grrrl praxis both past and present – DIY (do-it-

yourself), subcultural theory, intersectionality, and disidentification. I chose these theories because I believe that they and their associated ideologies influenced riot grrrls' strategic decisions of how to engage in political and feminist activism. As riot grrrl was and is a diverse political movement with communities active all over the country, I realize that there are numerous theories that may have inspired or still inspire diverse acts of riot grrrl activism, and that there is unfortunately no way for me to comprehensively and fairly represent all of them. Similarly, I do not intend to claim that all riot grrrl activism occurred under the influence or inspiration of these theories. However, I believe the theories below are prevalent and significant enough within riot grrrl culture that they are useful frameworks through which to ground my analysis of riot grrrl feminist praxis and evolution.

Theoretical Framework

Riot grrrl's founders were highly influenced by the anti-corporate, often anarchist-associated DIY (do-it-yourself) principles practiced by both the lo-fi musical scene in Olympia, WA (exemplified by the work of independent local record labels K Records and Kill Rock Stars at this time) and the local punk subculture (Spencer 257). These ideologies were explicitly anti-capitalist and stressed the importance of creating music, art, literary works, and other necessary items independently and without the aim of financial gain. As Craig O'Hara explains in his book, *The Philosophy of Punk: More Than Noise!*, "the ethos of Punk business has been 'do-it-yourself.' This is an extension of the anarchistic principles requiring personal responsibility and cooperation in order to build a more productive, creative, and enjoyable future" (O'Hara 166). Original riot grrrls

made their allegiance to this philosophy clear in a clause of the now famous “Riot Grrrl Manifesto” in which they asserted, “BECAUSE we hate capitalism in all its forms and see our main goal as sharing information and staying alive, instead of making profits off being cool according to traditional standards” (“Riot Grrrl Manifesto”).³

Punk ideology set the groundwork and punk history demonstrated the potential for young people like the riot grrrls to successfully participate in music production and performance, as well as to create and distribute political literature, while simultaneously subverting the mainstream music and publishing industries. As Joel, a self-identified punk, claims, “We Punks can organize gigs, publish books and fanzines, set-up mail order stores, distribute literature, encourage boycotts, and participate in political activities [without the help of corporations]” (O’Hara 153). Through their participation in the local punk and DIY scenes, the riot grrrls knew the importance of getting active and involved, recognized the strong ties between music and politics, and also gained knowledge of how to get the logistical resources they needed to get their bands off the ground. As author Amy Spencer explains in *DIY: The Rise of Lo-Fi Culture*, Hanna and her peers were “following the existing DIY trail but incorporating a feminist agenda” (Spencer 257). In forming Bikini Kill and Bratmobile however, the women were not only organizing independently from the mainstream music industry, but also subverting the subcultural institution of the male-led and misogynistic punk scene.

While the riot grrrl movement did not explicitly align itself with anarchism, their hatred of capitalism and distrust of the government mirror anarchist values. Riot grrrls

³ Please see Appendix II for the full text of the “Riot Grrrl Manifesto.”

turned to anarchistic DIY methods of creation and production as an alternative to existing systems of societal organization and the “continual cycle of oppression” that they deemed each system brought (O’Hara 72). The women at the heart of riot grrrl felt oppressed by a misogynistic mainstream American society, and by the complicated and problematic set of expectations and restrictions placed on them as young women in this society. They also observed how the United States’ capitalist economy heavily influenced American society, and saw capitalism as a main supporter of patriarchy and oppression. They consequently adhered to DIY ideology in order to minimize their participation within this destructive system. Defying traditional modes of production, creation, and performance functioned as political statements in themselves, ones that worked in cohesion with the riot grrrls’ feminist activism. As stated in the “Riot Grrrl Manifesto,” the grrrls were “patently aware that the punk rock ‘you can do anything’ idea is crucial to the coming angry grrrl rock revolution which seeks to save the psychic and cultural lives of girls and women everywhere, according to their own terms, not ours” (“Riot Grrrl Manifesto”). A DIY mentality, and the resulting support of other DIY subcultural communities, made creating art and music more accessible and less intimidating, and supplied the riot grrrls with the confidence to engage in radical feminist activism.

This DIY, anti-capitalist mentality has persisted within riot grrrl communities and is still influencing the actions of contemporary riot grrrls today. Although current riot grrrl communities may not be as strongly aligned with punk subculture and the punk musical genre, contemporary riot grrrl activists also pursue accessible mediums of creating art and music that are purposefully and publicly not for profit (Gloria). Additionally, contemporary riot grrrls have demonstrated their commitment to subverting

capitalist systems by participating in explicitly anti-capitalist political initiatives such as the Occupy movement (which fights against the wide discrepancy in wealth allocation in the United States and the unethical greed of big businesses) and “Really Really Free Markets,” that encourage buying, trading, and personally constructing goods as opposed to buying them.

The chosen modes of feminist activism within both the original and current riot grrrl movements should also be examined through the lens of the original riot grrrl movement as a subcultural community. Many original riot grrrls, including Wolfe and Flores, saw themselves and other riot grrrls as individuals who actively opposed the ideologies of mainstream society through actions like engaging in DIY modes of cultural production. They felt oppressed by their position in mainstream society and had already begun to participate in other subcultural communities like the punk and lo-fi scenes to express their dissent for more traditional values and expectations. As Flores recounts, she saw riot grrrl activities and mainstream pop culture as “inherently juxtaposed” and unavoidably dichotomous, with little room for riot grrrls to participate in “mainstream” activities and maintain the riot grrrl identity (Flores).

Additionally, some riot grrrls not only felt shortchanged by mainstream pop culture but also isolated from mainstream society. The music, art, and other cultural texts found in mainstream popular culture just did not reflect the experiences or cultural reference points that the riot grrrls possessed. To combat this isolation, riot grrrls looked to create their own texts, subcultural texts that opposed mainstream hegemonic ideologies, texts that, as the “Riot Grrrl Manifesto” proclaimed, “speak to US, that WE feel included in, and can understand in our own ways” (“Riot Grrrl Manifesto”). In order

to increase understanding and the feelings of inclusion amongst a diverse and growing number of riot grrrls, the grrrls created their own set of distinctive (sub)cultural practices, practices that explicitly set them in opposition to mainstream society but were still recognized by those grrrls in the know. Original riot grrrls saw the movement as a distinct subculture, and subscribed to particular codes in action and dress, codes that were often utilized in the name of feminist and political activism.

These codes, which I will elaborate on in my discussion of feminist praxis within the original movement, are a main reason for my assertion that the original riot grrrl movement functioned and identified as a subculture. In this paper I am employing a version of Dick Hebdige's definition of subculture in *The Meaning of Style* (1979). This text defines subculture as the expression of discontentment with and resistance to hegemonic culture and also identifies aesthetic "style" as the vehicle through which subcultures voice this resistance. According to Hebdige, subcultures challenge dominant hegemonic culture by expressing their resistance "obliquely, in style" (Hebdige 17). He argues that the main struggle between dominant and subcultural cultures revolves around who gets to define the discourse; subcultural activity to Hebdige is "the struggle between different discourses, different definitions and meanings within ideology [and] at the same time, a struggle within signification: a struggle for possession of the sign which extends to even the most mundane areas of everyday life" (Hebdige 17). Riot grrrls fought for the ability to define what it means to be a young woman in American society and worked to change the cultural discourse through specific musical, literary, and artistic aesthetics. Their DIY and often punk styles of dress, musical performance, and publishing communicated their dissent and their defiance of stereotypical gender expectations. In

this way, the grrrls utilized art and music as modes of feminist activism, practices that resisted expectations and voiced opposition to gender and sexuality norms.

The definition of subculture I employ builds on and challenges Hebdige's precedent-setting work in that it does not categorize the riot grrrls' expression of political resistance as "oblique" because the grrrls expressed their resistance through aesthetic style. The riot grrrls utilized aesthetic choices in an explicitly political manner to directly challenge hegemonic cultural norms. Musical performance, zine-ing, and other aesthetic choices were employed by riot grrrls as strategies of resistance to specific systems of oppression (Piano 259). As Doreen Piano argues in her essay "Resisting Subjects: DIY Feminism and the Politics of Style in Subcultural Production," politics and style are not "irreconcilable" as Hebdige presents them to be; instead, riot grrrls used expressions of subcultural style to define specific identities and positions from which they spoke, and to directly resist oppressive cultural codes that would have restricted, censored, or criticized the riot grrrls' expressions of style (Piano 259).

Unlike the original movement, I have observed that contemporary riot grrrls, at least the communities I am connected with, are much less likely to possess this strong sense of subcultural identity. In fact, some contemporary riot grrrl initiatives regularly interact and engage with mainstream culture in sincere and good-intentioned ways. I examine this switch away from a subcultural identity in chapter three and theorize about why contemporary riot grrrl communities no longer function as strongly on a subcultural level. In this discussion, I recognize how Hebdige's concept of subcultural "style," expressed through certain sonic and aesthetic elements during the original riot grrrl

movement, is not the most ideal framework for contemporary riot grrrls' to utilize in their quest to make riot grrrl activism more accessible to a larger number of grrrls.

While riot grrrl's subcultural identity has ebbed over time, its engagement with intersectional feminist theory has only grown. The theory of intersectionality is the recognition that individuals experience oppression on multiple, often simultaneous levels due to their membership within various subjugated identity categories including but not limited to gender, race, class, sexual orientation, age and ability. This theoretical framework views oppression and discrimination as stemming from a systematic structure of social inequality that is ingrained in our system of government and in dominant ideologies. An intersectional framework became popular in feminist discourse in the 1980s, as feminists realized that they could not view issues of sexism or gender oppression in isolation from issues of racism, classism, age-ism, homophobia, and other modes of discrimination. The framework was heavily utilized by Patricia Hill Collins in her 1990 book "Black Feminist Thought," and became even more popular after Kimberlé Crenshaw first coined the term "intersectionality" in "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," an essay she first published about domestic violence against women of color in 1991. An intersectional approach in feminist activism and study stresses the importance of examining the connections between varying structures of inequality and recognizes that not all women possess homogenous views or life experiences due to the privilege they possess on the basis of social and cultural factors besides gender.

According to Wolfe, the original riot grrrls were aware of the intersectionality of different hegemonic societal structures (Wolfe). As stated earlier, they saw capitalism as

a driving force in misogyny and sexism, and believed that the corporate structure encouraged patriarchy and other discriminatory hierarchies (“Riot Grrrl Manifesto”). Thus, they were adamantly self-identified as DIY and took over their means of cultural production. Additionally, many riot grrrls were taking women and gender studies classes in college and were exposed to the writings of intersectional feminist theories such as Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Crenshaw, and Collins that focused intensely on the intersections between race, gender, and class (Wolfe). However, whether the original movement actually appropriately considered issues of racism, classism, homophobia, and other forms of discriminations when engaging in feminist action and discourse is up for argument. Instances of riot grrrls successfully applying an intersectional approach to feminist actions and instances of an intersectional approach not being applied can be found in riot grrrl ethnographies, zines, and other primary documents. Contemporary riot grrrls, on the other hand, I argue are even more acutely aware and influenced by an intersectional feminist framework. I present evidence of intersectionality’s increasing significance and prevalence within riot grrrl in chapter three.

My last theory is intrinsically related to the theory of intersectionality and enabled by riot grrrl’s use of an intersectional framework. In his 1999 book *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, queer theorist Muñoz creates and defines the concept of “disidentification.” According to Muñoz, disidentification is “how those outside the racial and sexual mainstream negotiate majority culture, not by aligning themselves with or against exclusionary works but by transforming these works for their own cultural practice” (“Defining Disidentification”: Par 1). He frames this concept within the realm of performance studies, and he defines it within the context of how

queer people of color receive, react, and position themselves in relation to mainstream pop cultural practices. Muñoz argues that, by positioning oneself in relation to celebrities by “disidentifying” with them, disidentification acts as a “survival strategy” (5) that allows a minoritized youth to use mainstream media narratives in an empowering and self-affirming way, even though they may not represent her lived reality and are created by a hegemonic class that actively oppresses minority identities such as hers.

Additionally, he asserts that disidentification is not equal to a minoritized youth assuming an “apolitical middle ground between positions” of either aligning themselves with or against mainstream culture; instead, he describes the political agenda of those disidentifying as oppositional and “clearly indebted to anti-assimilationist thought” (18).

Muñoz’s pivotal work challenges the binary between these two positions of identity assumed in Hebdige’s subcultural theories, and expands his discourse to include modes of political subversion in which the activist does not wholly separate herself from the cultural practices she is resisting.

I argue that both generations of riot grrrl I examine in this project engaged in processes of disidentification. Although the original movement consisted primarily of white and heterosexual riot grrrls who do not fit the demographic Muñoz addresses in his book, I qualify their engagement with punk subculture as a form of disidentification due to their position as minoritized youth, an identity from which their activism stemmed. Many of the first riot grrrls were extremely active and well connected within punk communities in Washington D.C. and the Pacific Northwest. By engaging in popular punk practices such as DIY zine-ing, music, and art, under the “riot grrrl” label, the riot grrrls were engaging in a feminist critique of misogynistic and patriarchal practices

within the punk subculture but they were not totally disassociating themselves from punk, nor denying the many sonic, aesthetic, and ideological connections. Instead, the riot grrrls performed dominant punk media texts, inserting an intentionally female subjectivity to activities often deemed to be masculine, and transforming these practices in order to make them safe, inclusive, and empowering to other young women. By disidentifying with punk subculture, and maintaining their associations to their local punk communities, the original riot grrrls were able to transform both the connotations and the cultural coding of original “mainstream” punk performance. Although the misogynistic practices within punk subculture that the riot grrrls challenged cannot be equated to the hegemonic media narratives Muñoz examines in his book, I argue the concept of disidentification still provides a useful frame of analysis because these (sub)cultural norms created oppressive stereotypes and sets of expectations that restricted women’s options of participation in punk communities. However, I want to recognize my focus on disidentification within subcultures, and differentiate my employment of this word from Muñoz’s mainstream context; in order to do this I describe this model of disidentification to specifically be a mode of subcultural disidentification.

This process of disidentification from a subculture, and the consequent renegotiation and transformation of subcultural texts, is also currently being employed by contemporary riot grrrls. However, contemporary riot grrrls, not only disidentify from “mainstream” punk subculture, but also from the original riot grrrl movement. As the majority of the contemporary riot grrrls I connected with for this project do identify as queer women of color, their process of disidentification more closely aligns with Muñoz’s definition. While the original riot grrrls primarily negotiated the gender norms

and narratives within punk subculture, the contemporary riot grrrls disidentify based on their racial and sexual identities too. While punk was founded upon patriarchal and misogynistic practices that excluded women and reserved many main participatory roles for men only, the original riot grrrl movement has been criticized for practices that isolated and excluded women of color and queer individuals. Contemporary riot grrrls are transforming the connotations and cultural coding of the original riot grrrl movement, engaging in similar modes of activism but altering the narrative to include the voices and needs of grrrls of colors and queer grrrl. Contemporary riot grrrl certainly aligns in some ways with the original riot grrrl movement, a positionality that is evident in their decision to operate under the riot grrrl name. At the same time, the contemporary riot grrrl movement resists the characterization that they are a carbon copy of the original movement; instead, there put a particular focus on the process of “re-defining” and transforming the riot grrrl movement through their activism (“I.E. Riot Grrrl Zine Benefit Show”). They are explicitly critical of original riot grrrl practices that they felt made the movement inaccessible to those who were not white, middle-class, cisgender, and heterosexual and work to change strategies of riot grrrl activism so that they are more inclusive (Gloria). By operating under the riot grrrl label but openly positioning themselves in critical response to the norms of the 1990s, contemporary riot grrrls are able to transform riot grrrl works for their own cultural practices.

Organization

My thesis is composed of three chapters. In the first chapter I work to thoroughly define and describe the original riot grrrl movement, with the goal to re-center the discourse so that it emphasizes the riot grrrls' explicit political ideologies and objectives. I will draw from both primary and secondary sources in order to provide historical context of riot grrrl activity between 1991 and 1996, and to dispel misconceptions of the movement that stemmed from misrepresentative accounts by the mainstream press. The first chapter is intended as an in-depth resource that provides the necessary context with which to interpret my more thorough analysis of riot grrrl praxis in chapters two and three.

Chapter two will discuss the feminist objectives and strategies of the original riot grrrl movement, demonstrating how DIY, subcultural identity, and an intersectional feminist framework shaped original riot grrrl praxis, as well as recognizing and analyzing the limitations of their chosen strategies. The riot grrrl initiatives I will focus on are organizing "consciousness-raising" meetings, zine-ing, and engaging in musical performance. Most of my analysis in this chapter is aided by other scholarly analyses of the original riot grrrl movement, with additional information coming from personal interviews I conducted with self-identified original riot grrrls Wolfe, Flores, and Renae, as well as primary sources such as Bratmobile and Bikini Kill songs.

Chapter three, meanwhile, will analyze contemporary riot grrrl ideologies and strategies of activism, focusing on the ways in which contemporary riot grrrls have disidentified with the original movement and adapted those three main tactics in order to make riot grrrl more accessible and relevant within their respective communities. My analysis of contemporary riot grrrl activity will primarily be based in case studies of three

currently active riot grrrl-associated feminist initiatives – the “IE Riot Grrrl” collective based in Riverside, California, the Girls Rock! camp network, and Bikini Thrills, a Bikini Kills cover band based in Los Angeles. Additionally, I will also demonstrate the ways in which DIY ideologies, subcultural identity, and intersectionality interact and influence contemporary riot grrrl activism. Most of my analysis in chapter three is informed by my interviews and personal interactions with those engaged in contemporary riot grrrl initiatives, particularly Gloria, Flores, and the members of the IE Riot Grrrl collective.

Finally, in conclusion, I suggest topics for future study within the riot grrrl realm. These suggestions highlight the aspects of contemporary riot grrrl culture that I believe will act as catalysts for further adaptation of praxis in the future. Additionally, I think they will be highly beneficial frames through which to illuminate the continual processes of subcultural disidentification and evolution in which both contemporary and future riot grrrls must engage in order to keep riot grrrl activism alive and inclusive.

Chapter 1: Un/Defining Riot Grrrl Feminism

[The media] takes something that no actual definition, and they attempt to define it. Riot Grrrl is about destroying boundaries, not creating them. These mags make us look like we are one 'thing' ... [Riot Grrrl] is about a lot of things (D.C. Riot Grrrl Zine quoted in Marcus 198).

The objective of this chapter is to establish a clear and specific reference point for what I mean when I say “riot grrrl” and “riot grrrl” feminism. This is a difficult task, particularly because, like the above quote by D.C. Riot Grrrl makes clear, “riot grrrl,” as per the wishes of those who coined the term, has no official definitive meaning. As one poster made by the Olympia riot grrrl chapter in 1992 proudly proclaimed, “There are no rules – every girl is a riot grrrl” (Marcus 218). As another early 90s riot grrrl zine, entitled *What is Riot Grrrl, Anyway?*, asserted, “Riot Grrrl is whatever I want it to be. It’s whatever you want it to be” (Marcus 223). These postings are largely representative of other “definitions” I have found of riot grrrl in riot grrrl-produced media throughout my research. Riot grrrls have embraced this potential for fluidity and multiplicity of identity, at least in theory if not always in practice, and it shows in the numerous ways the answer to “what does riot grrrl mean to you?” is represented in different riot grrrl documents and media. However, while I recognize that the movement resisted concretely defining riot grrrl feminism, I will introduce my own working, if not all-encompassing definition for the sake of aiding clarity and recognizing my positionality within this project. I describe original riot grrrl feminism as a form of subcultural and youth-driven political feminist engagement whose feminist initiatives were often manifested through, and are now most

publicly known from, the mediums of zine-ing and musical performance. Additionally, I argue that for most original riot grrrls, an unofficial set of criteria existed in order to help them decide who faithfully represented riot grrrl and who did not. The two main and most significant criteria were a grrrl's identification as a riot grrrl or as participating within a riot grrrl network, and her engagement with the most prevalent ideologies and activities within riot grrrl activism.

As I will describe more thoroughly later in this chapter, riot grrrl feminism was deeply and negatively affected by an influx of national media interest in the early 1990s, an interpolation by the mainstream press that many riot grrrls found both intrusive and disrespectful, and to some, ultimately irreversibly destructive. I argue that riot grrrl's explicitly feminist goals have been lost amidst mainstream press coverage defining it as only a musical genre or as a fashion aesthetic. The intention of this chapter is to challenge these assertions by the press that have constructed an inaccurate, simplified, and politically diluted cultural connotation of what it means to be a riot grrrl. My aim is to re-center the discourse surrounding riot grrrl within the realm of feminist political activism and to contextualize media and academic representations of riot grrrl from its advent in 1991 into the present. I will accomplish this goal by providing a brief (albeit unavoidably incomplete) history of the original riot grrrl movement, as well as recognizing common media misrepresentations and explaining why they do not fit the definition of riot grrrl I employed above. My narrative will focus on the feminist political aspects of riot grrrl and will be directly informed by those who participated in the original movement. In addition, this history will function as a review of riot grrrl literature, as I will contextualize my

narrative within other works already written about riot grrrl and recognize the works with which I am in dialogue.

Before I begin, I must preface with two disclaimers. Although I do identify as a riot grrrl and as someone who participates in riot grrrl feminism, I also recognize that I was not old enough to even remember the original riot grrrl movement, much less participate in it. Consequently, before I present my personally compiled historical narrative of riot grrrl, I must recognize my precarious positionality, as an outsider working to define and explain the movement, who runs the own sizeable risk of misrepresenting (if not depoliticizing) riot grrrl. To decrease this risk as much as I can, and to portray the original riot grrrl movement as respectfully and accurately as possible, I will root my narrative in the words of those who were deeply involved in the original riot grrrl movement, with supplementary information coming from thorough historical accounts that have been completed in cooperation with and have been endorsed by riot grrrls.⁴ Additionally, I will privilege academic analyses and independent riot grrrl-produced sources, such as zines and oral histories of those involved with the original movement, over more disconnected for-profit and mainstream narratives (particularly popular music writing), as there has been such demonstrated disconnect between how riot grrrls have presented themselves and how they have been presented in mainstream sources. Most of the literature available on the topic focuses on the original movement, and the proportionality of the sources I chronicle below represents this inequity.

⁴ The resource I will draw on most heavily for historical background is Sara Marcus' 2010 *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*, a comprehensive 300+ page history which Marcus spent more than six years researching and interviewed over 75 women connected to the original riot grrrl movement to complete.

My second disclaimer is an explicit reiteration of a former point. I cannot stress firmly enough that, although I am employing some specific criteria in order to describe riot grrrl, there is not one definitive and all-encompassing definition of riot grrrl feminism. The creators of the term “riot grrrl” began using it to describe their own personal feminist activism, but have explicitly made it clear that they never meant it to describe a specific and concrete form of feminism/s. As Marion Leonard explains in her ethnography of riot grrrl, “Those involved in riot grrrl stressed that no singular viewpoint or cultural product [be it zine or record] could be taken as representative or even indicative of the whole riot grrrl network... In this sense, riot grrrl can be understood as multiplicitous” (Leonard 144). Due to its multiplicity, riot grrrl meant and means a lot of different things to a lot of different people that have participated in feminist activism under this title. Similarly, as there is not one definition of riot grrrl, there is also not one definitive history. I am attempting to present the most inclusive and accurate overview of the original movement, one that is in accordance with the narratives presented in the riot grrrl ethnographies I have found, and with the opinions of the riot grrrls who I have personally interviewed for this project. The purpose for my providing this historical context is to provide a clear point of reference for my upcoming analysis of related feminist praxis. An additional goal of this overview, as my thesis statement asserts, is to re-center riot grrrl discourse away from the depoliticized narratives presented above, to one that appropriately recognizes the feminist activism within the movement. However, I recognize that not every voice or perspective among those that did participate in the original movement will be represented, and this is a limitation of my project.

What is Riot Grrrl? A Brief History of the Original Movement

Beginnings and Inspiration –

The feminist activism which has now become known as the original riot grrrl movement began with the actions of a small group of young women living in the Pacific Northwest and in Washington D.C in 1989 and 1990. The first iteration of riot grrrl activity was not conceptualized as a cohesive movement by participants, and it pre-dated the creation of the term “riot grrrl” and the subsequent riot grrrl identity; instead, it was a loose, unorganized, and unofficial network of feminist-identified and mostly college or high school-aged women who began collaborating on feminist and political projects. This network was formed through many modes of communication and existed on both localized and national levels. The localized aspect of the “riot grrrl” network was that most activity was grounded within two connected subcultural social scenes, one in Olympia, WA and one in Washington D.C. These unofficial feminist collectives (which would later become known as official riot grrrl chapters) were mostly based on previously established friendships between members and were relatively small (only about 6-15 regular members) (Marcus 112, 124, 176). The group of women gathering in and around Olympia included some of who are now the most famous riot grrrl members, and those who are popularly considered to be the founders of the movement.⁵ These co-founders include Molly Neuman, Allison Wolfe, Tobi Vail, and Kathleen Hanna. The women, most of who were in college at the time (Neuman and Wolfe at the University of

⁵ I refer to certain women as founders of the movement because they created the term “riot grrrl” and were the first women to engage in feminist activism under this title. However, almost all of the founders, particularly Kathleen Hanna and Allison Wolfe, have repeatedly refused to take exclusive credit for the start of movement.

Oregon and Hanna at Evergreen University), already considered themselves to be political and feminist activists before they began working together, but were further energized and inspired into action through the sense of power and community that sprung from the creation of this feminist network. According to Wolfe in a panel discussion at Pomona College in April 2011, Hanna, Vail, Wolfe, Neuman, and other founders started what would become the riot grrrl movement primarily to create an outlet in which they could voice their feminist, queer, and in other ways radical political ideas. They aimed to promote a “pro-girl” attitude that would aid in the creation of safe spaces in which “grrrls” could creatively express themselves without being threatened or discriminated against by men (“Women Who Rock”).

Wolfe and the other riot grrrl founders worked to achieve this goal with insight provided by the feminist texts they were reading in and out of their college classes. According to Marcus, Neuman and Wolfe became critically conscious and driven towards feminist activism by the words of the black feminist theorists Audre Lorde and bell hooks. Similarly, Hanna and Vail were inspired by the intersectional black feminist writings of Angela Davis and bell hooks as well as Judith Butler’s poststructuralist writings about the way that “gender actively enacted and performed in relation to social power” in unnatural socially constructed ways (Marcus 47). Although the Washington D.C. grrrls were mostly high-school age and therefore not taking similar classes pertaining to gender and women’s studies in school, they were also were influenced by these authors and incorporated discussion about their critical works into zines and meeting agendas (Marcus 251). In addition to collectively engaging in more traditional forms of feminist political activism, such as attending pro-choice protests, both the

Washington D.C. and Olympia chapters also actively volunteered at local women's health and abortion clinics and at shelters for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Feminist Praxis within the Movement-

Energized by their work together and the knowledge that other like-minded feminist grrrls lived near by, riot grrrl's founders began conceptualizing their feminist project as a grander and more cohesive vision of "revolution grrrl style now" in late 1990.⁶ Hanna was determined to create a network of feminist grrrls in the Pacific Northwest and all over the nation, and she worked to connect to other women and raise feminist consciousness through her art. Hanna was a multi-media artist, a writer, and a musician, and she used all of these creative outlets to express her political values. However, following the advice of one of her role models, author Kathy Acker⁷, she started exploring music as a main medium for feminist expression and activism, and formed a feminist punk band Bikini Kill along with Vail, Kathi Wilcox, and Billy Karren in October of 1990. After seeing Bikini Kill play one night in Olympia, Neuman and

⁶ The phrase "revolution grrrl style now" is one of the most famous catchphrases of the original riot grrrl movement. It was coined by Vail and first appeared in an edition of her fanzine "Jigsaw" (Marcus 48).

⁷ According to Marcus, Hanna was inspired to start a band after attending a writing workshop with Acker in Seattle. Hanna recalls this conversation:

Acker: Why are you writing? Why are you doing spoken word?

Hanna: I feel like my whole life no one's ever listened to me. I want people to listen.

Acker: If you want people to hear what you're doing, don't do spoken word, because nobody likes spoken word, nobody goes to spoken word. There's more of a community for musicians than for writers. You should be in a band (Marcus 34).

Wolfe started their own similarly uncompromisingly political and feminist band, Bratmobile, in early 1991.

The decision to use punk music as a platform for feminist activism was a wise decision for these young women who were ferociously trying to make feminism seem more accessible, relevant, and enticing to teenage girls at a time when the riot grrrls felt American women had become disenchanted with the feminist movement (Wolfe).⁸ Creating and performing punk music as feminist praxis also worked well within the social circles to which the grrrls belonged since punk subculture ascribed to the same DIY ideologies that the grrrls embraced. Within a few months of forming, both bands were playing shows throughout the Pacific Northwest and gaining attention in the predominantly punk and DIY musical scenes to which the grrrls belonged (Wolfe). Through their bands, the women gained an accessible outlet through which they could share their political views and connect with other grrrls, not only in the already thriving and supportive music culture that existed in Olympia, but in the towns across the nation where the bands toured in. The geographical mobility that playing in these bands afforded the women (namely, the ability to travel around the country and meet others in an inexpensive and structured way) allowed the feminist network to expand and include grrrls all over the nation, not just in the founding members' particular social scenes in and around Olympia. As Bikini Kill and Bratmobile continued to connect and play shows with the female feminist musicians from the towns they toured in, an explicitly female-

⁸ This disenchantment may have been caused by the deep schism over the issue of sex positivity within the feminist movement that was playing out in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It also followed what Susan Faludi argued was an intense "backlash" against feminism in the mid-1980s in her bestselling 1991 book *Backlash: The Secret War Against American Women* (Wolfe).

centered and feminist music culture was being cultivated on a more national level, and the connections being made through what is now known as riot grrrl music were continuing to build the infrastructure for a full-fledged feminist movement (Wolfe).

While the inspiration and networking that came from the activity of Bikini Kill, Bratmobile, and other riot grrrl bands are significant factors for why so many girls began participating in riot grrrl, music was not the only medium, or even the most prevalent medium, through which riot grrrls engaged in feminist activism. Perhaps the most integral and widespread platform for feminist engagement in the riot grrrl movement was the creation and sharing of self-published fanzines and magazines called zines (Wolfe). Zine-ing created the backbone of the movement's infrastructure, a fact that is often overshadowed by the mainstream press' extreme focus on the music of Bikini Kill, Bratmobile, and other commercially successful riot grrrl bands. Before the members of Bikini Kill and Bratmobile played one note as their respective bands, almost all members were involved in creating zines. Hanna and Vail's personal contributions to the underground zine world even pre-dated their feminist collaborations. The pair actually started collaborating due to their shared zine-ing, as Hanna, who was a fan of Vail's punk fanzine *Jigsaw*, approached her future band mate about starting a zine with her. Vail agreed and they circulated several issues of a zine they also called *Bikini Kill*,⁹ often in tandem with their music once they had formed the band.

⁹ The name is inspired by their friend Lois Matteo's musical tribute to the 1967 B-Movie *The Million Eyes of Sumuru* in which she summarized the plot as "Two bikini girls kill one bikini girl. Glug glug glug she's dead" (Marcus 47).

For riot grrrls, zine-ing was another medium connected to a lineage of DIY creative expression and alternative knowledge production, and the construction and distribution of these handmade zines served several feminist purposes. Zines were not for profit and served as spaces for feminist dialogue, rebellion, and self-expression (“Grrrl Zines” 146). They included discussions about critical issues such as feminism, sexuality, and sexual assault, and included several features about what life is like growing up female in each zinester’s respective community. Content in zines such as Neuman and Wolfe’s *Girl Germs* and Hanna’s *Bikini Kill* was inspired by each zine-maker’s personal experience as a young woman in America and were often direct reactions to social injustices that the women noticed around them, such as the mainstream media’s mocking of Anita Hill when she filed an sexual assault charge against Supreme Justice Clarence Thomas in 1991, and the increased number of anti-feminist crimes making the news in both Olympia¹⁰ and internationally.¹¹ In addition to reacting to misogynistic and oppressive cultural catalysts purely with personal experiences, zines creators used the space to further dialogue on feminist theories. Riot grrrl zines were intrinsically connected to the feminist theories prevalent in the late 1980s and early 1990s such as the works of hooks and Lorde, and the grrrls navigated the irreversible transition from 2nd Wave feminist thought to more intersectional 3rd Wave feminist thought that was occurring in the academic realm at this time through their zines (Piepmeier 45). Zines

¹⁰ Hanna had to move out of her apartment after the domestic violence between the couple next door became too chaotic and dangerous, an incident that deeply affected her and which she wrote about in her zines (Marcus 40).

¹¹ The 1989 rape and beating of a female jogger in New York City and the 1989 explicitly anti-feminist shooting rampage of fourteen female engineering students in Montreal were two events that Hanna has discussed in zines (Marcus 40).

often had clear aims of raising awareness of feminist theories and sharing these knowledges with the grrrls who read the zines. As scholar Mary Celeste Kearney asserts in her in-depth work on girl zine subcultures, *Girls Make Media*, “In addition to identifying certain historical women as feminist role models, many grrrl zines provide lists of books and articles considered important for the development of feminist consciousness, identity, politics, and culture” (“Grrrl Zines” 175). By publicizing and engaging with prevalent feminist theories in their zines, grrrls utilized their zines to chronicle their personal processes of gaining feminist consciousness as well as to encourage their readers to educate themselves in feminist theory too.

Lastly, the zines also functioned as tools for alternative identity formation and expression, in a sphere that purposely disconnected itself from and challenged the images and values of mainstream American society. Riot grrrls used zines not to consolidate or form one essentialized “riot grrrl” identity, but to “try out” various forms of identity, including alternative, fantasized, and unruly ones (“Grrrl Zines” 148). Riot grrrls recognized that they were not represented in the mainstream media, and they saw the feminist potential in deconstructing and reconstructing identities through a medium in which they controlled both the production and content. Riot grrrls expressed their identities through a variety of formats, as the zines usually consisted of diverse array of stories, poetry, artwork, non-fiction, and other more freeform types of creative expression. These DIY documents, often printed on the sly by grrrls with access to a relative or employer’s copy machine, were then dispersed for free at shows, and in record stores, student unions, and other local hangouts. The widespread use of mailing and subscription lists, as well as the creation of DIY mail-order establishments like the Riot

Grrrl Press, additionally helped to build the infrastructure of the feminist network, and start a more national network of zine-makers and enthusiasts, with riot grrrls from all over the U.S. sending and contributing to each other's zines ("Grrrl Zines" 141).

Unsurprisingly, zine-ing activity was also at the root of the creation of the term "riot grrrl," which was an imperative step in forming the explicitly feminist identity that the movement would be based on. The term first officially appeared as the title of a feminist mini-zine put out by Wolfe, Neuman, Hanna, and their mutual friend Jen Smith in July 1991. Although details are hazy even to the creators of the *Riot Grrrl* zine, the etymology of the phrase is most widely attributed to Smith in a letter she wrote to Wolfe in reaction to the 1991 Mount Pleasant Race Riots in her hometown of Washington D.C. in which she said, "This summer's going to be a girl riot" (Andersen 314). The creators of the zine then switched the word order and combined its connotation with a phrase that Vail often used in the pages of *Jigsaw*, "Revolution Grrrl Style Now," to form both the zine title and the term that has now come to define each band's musical and activist contributions. The replacement of the traditional "girl" with the growling "grrrl," was Vail's way to re-claim and re-appropriate the derogatory and anti-feminist connotations surrounding the word (Meltzer 13). The term "riot grrrl" was then further publicized (and now canonized) in the second issue (circa summer 1991) of *Bikini Kill* that features the "Riot Grrrl Manifesto." The manifesto laid out both the feminist philosophy and demands behind the budding "riot grrrl" movement, and it was widely re-circulated and re-published by other feminist zinesters across the nation.

The events of the summer of 1991, especially but not limited to the grrrls' implementation of the term "riot grrrl" and the dissemination of the "Riot Grrrl

Manifesto,” acted as catalysts in the transformation of the collective’s political activities into a full-fledged movement based around a common riot grrrl identity. With an official name to operate under and an exciting identity to embrace, a national network of grrrls active in zine-ing subculture, and a few overtly feminist and political bands achieving enough success that they could tour nationally and spread riot grrrl ideology to young women across the nation, all the components existed to get riot grrrl off the ground. This opportunity came when Wolfe, Neuman, and Hanna spent the summer of 1991 staying with friends and family in Washington D.C and began to collaborate with other young feminist activists in the area. Another main element of riot grrrl activism - regular grrrl-only meetings – also began that summer in D.C. when Hanna organized the first riot grrrl meetings at Positive Force house, a progressive house near Washington D.C. that functioned as a home and meeting place for those in the punk community. The meeting was advertised through word of mouth, flyers, and advertising in local zines (Marcus 88). It was open to only young women and, while technically public, was advertised only through DIY mediums that limited the word from getting out beyond the grrrl’s social circles and those already participating in the local punk scene. This first meeting, as well as several regularly scheduled subsequent ones, was intended to serve as a “safe space” for grrrls to share their stories with each other, and to discuss issues related to feminism and other political issues. At these meetings the riot grrrls openly discussed the role of sexism (and, to a lesser extent racism, classism, and homophobia) on their lives and the lives of others, and translated the often autobiographical, emotional, and confessional narratives that they wrote about in zines into real life dialogues. The meetings functioned as feminist consciousness-raising groups much like the ones that took place in the 1970s,

as support groups in which grrrls discussed their personal experiences with sexual abuse and sexism, and as informal social gatherings at which the grrrls (who came from all over the suburban D.C. area) could connect and become friends (Marcus 86).

As the original crew of grrrls who attended these meetings in D.C. graduated from high school and moved away to college, they brought this infrastructure of meetings, zine-ing, and feminist music culture to new cities. The networks provided by the zines and riot grrrl music fan culture, in addition to a national riot grrrl conference that was held in D.C. in 1992, allowed riot grrrl to quickly expand throughout the early 1990s. Autonomous riot grrrl chapters were set up in cities including New York, Minneapolis, Ann Arbor, Los Angeles, and in Canada and Britain too. Although some grrrls in separate chapters were in touch through pen pal relationships and zine mailing lists, there was almost no official communication between chapters. Chapters zined, met regularly, organized feminist music events, attended pro-choice and other feminist protests, escorted women at abortion clinics, volunteered at domestic violence shelters, and engaged in other methods of political activism. Some groups also participated in forms of grassroots and at times controversially vigilante feminist activism, such as publicly calling out and shaming rapists¹², and by creating feminist poster campaigns to display in their schools and communities.

¹² According to the anecdotes relayed to Marcus by riot grrrls from multiple chapters, this task was accomplished in several different ways. Some grrrls started a wall for grrrls to write the names of rapists in public restrooms, some flyer'd the photo and name of accused rapists around town, and some organized boycotts of local bands whose members included accused rapists.

Media Frenzy and Demise of Riot Grrrl

EVERY DAY THERE'S SOME FUCKING MAINSTREAM MAGAZINE, PAPER OR TV SHOW THAT I HEAR IS COVERING RIOT GRRRL... (D.C. Riot Grrrl Zine quoted in Marcus 197).

With a now national network of riot grrrls working hard to empower and support other grrrls through their music, zines, and other feminist initiatives, the riot grrrl movement was thriving. However, the growing popularity of riot grrrl initiatives exposed the movement to what was to be an insurmountable foe – the mainstream media. The increasing success of Bikini Kill, Bratmobile, and other riot grrrl bands, as well as their close friendships with the members of a few widely popular Pacific Northwestern alternative “grunge” and punk bands (like Nirvana), pushed the riot grrrl movement into a national media spotlight in 1992. As the mainstream music media and other mainstream news publications rushed to cover this new “feminist phenomena,” the grrrls found themselves in the position of having to explain themselves to the same hegemonic and sexist institutions they hoped to subvert through their activism. Under the pressure and stress of constant media attention (and overwhelming scrutiny), the safe, nonjudgmental, and supportive feminist community that the grrrls had worked so hard to build was irreversibly lost.

The riot grrrls experienced the negative consequences of mainstream media attention from its beginning, as the first few times riot grrrl chapters agreed to be interviewed by a journalist (mainly the ones in Washington D.C. and Olympia as they were most closely connected Bikini Kill and Bratmobile) they had very negative experiences and felt misquoted, misrepresented, and disrespected. Although some writers contacted riot grrrl chapters and asked for input from members for their articles, their

words were dropped from the final articles, their perspectives on the scene that they created masked by the writers' own views, which were often marred by misinformation, sloppy research, and ill-intentioned generalizations and simplifications (Marcus 193). First, the grrrls felt an article that ran in *USA Today* depicted them in a hostile and condescending manner (Marcus 169). Then the Olympia riot grrrls felt lied to about how their photos were going to be used in *Newsweek's* 1992 "Revolution, Girl Style" (Marcus 216). Additionally, articles such as "Revolution, Girl Style" and *Seventeen's* 1993 "It's a Grrrl Thing" often left out mention of the irrefutably political basis for the riot grrrls' actions (Marcus 220). Media features widely depoliticized riot grrrls' intentions and unfairly extracted their actions from the lineage of music, art, and literary-based feminist activism that had been occurring in the decades preceding riot grrrl's advent ("The Missing Link" 208). For example, features in *Spin* and *Cosmopolitan* highlighted the fashion choices of the grrrls over their politics (Marcus 235). Members of Bikini Kill found most music journalists to be so aggressive, nasty, and dishonest that they stopped giving interviews almost entirely. This refusal to speak to the music media, unsurprisingly, led to even more negative reviews that misrepresented the intentions of the band members participation in both Bikini Kill and in riot grrrl. Bikini Kill remained outspoken and fought media backlash, even going so far as reading the text of especially egregious articles up on stage while simultaneously performing their songs ("Don't Need You"). These public challenges to the press were powerful elements of their live show, particularly as Hanna's movements and execution of the songs often disproved and defied the very gender stereotypes and generalizations the juxtaposed article text was using to label her.

Once journalists gained access to riot grrrl zines and music, and also occasionally to riot grrrl meetings, the grrrls found that their intimate confessional style of creative expression was no longer a safe way to engage with each other, as major news publications were printing zine contributions, often including the author's first name, without an author's consent, and consequently putting the riot grrrls' very personal stories on a platform to be judged by the American public. Experiences that were meant to empower through creative expression and bonding with other grrrls lost their purpose as the grrrls' privacy was lost on this very public pedestal. After several negative, condescending, and sometimes blatantly sexist riot grrrl features were published, several of the chapters chose to participate in a media blackout and stop talking to the press (Marcus 210). Riot grrrls that chose to continue speaking to the press became the representatives of the movement to the general public but were often ostracized and shamed by other riot grrrls who felt betrayed by their actions. While the national media coverage allowed grrrls from outside of the already active cities to learn about the movement and start their own chapters, it caused the members of the Olympia and Washington D.C. chapters to become overwhelmed, stressed out, and divided by the media attention (Wolfe). As the disconnect widened between how those participating in riot grrrl perceived the movement and how the mainstream media constructed it, members of the first two chapters, citing tension amongst members stemming from the inaccurate media representation, effectively ceased activity. By 1994, the riot grrrls who had been misquoted or deceived by a journalist felt that their experiences had been misrepresented and that "riot grrrl" had been irreparably commodified as a music and fashion trend to the point where the term itself was deemed "pointless" by founding riot

grrrls (Marcus 276). Founding members like Vail and Erin Smith of Bratmobile even stopped using the term “riot grrrl” totally because they found “Riot grrrl by name” to be “diluted” and “not cool” (Marcus 276). One of the main aims of the “original” riot grrrl movement¹³ was to empower teenage girls by allowing them to define themselves and construct their personal identities on their own terms, not through the lens of sexist and oppressive mainstream American society. The media’s disregard of riot grrrls’ voices in defining and describing the movement to the general public effectively sabotaged this goal and transformed the decision to participate in riot grrrl from an opportunity for identity exploration, nonjudgmental support, and female empowerment, to a choice that led to widespread criticism and categorization by others, and often condescension from those outside of the riot grrrl realm. The mainstream press attention secured riot grrrl’s legacy, but it also led to the demise of the original movement.

In addition to the many stressful distractions the media attention caused, riot grrrl had other large and divisive problems occurring within its ranks; the exclusivity of the movement and its inability to properly confront issues of race and class created tension at riot grrrl meetings (Marcus 250). Riot grrrl was started by a group of predominantly white, and middle-class women who were very inspired and supportive of intersectional feminist theory but often failed at being fully inclusive in practice. Discord over how to handle dialogue on race and class differences within riot grrrl grew with meetings ending in grrrls storming out in tears and all-around frustration (Marcus 166). Riot grrrls also fought over this issue during the “Unlearning Racism” workshop at the 1992 national riot

¹³ I’m defining the “original” movement to be the first period of widespread young feminist activism under the riot grrrl name that occurred from 1991 through approximately 1996.

grrrl convention in Washington D.C. when the topic of institutionalized race privilege arose. Jessica Miller, a D.C. riot grrrl that helped organize the conference, recounted the tense discourse to Marcus: “Some white girls at the workshop were resistant... and a few of them got defensive. *It’s not my fault if... I didn’t ask to be...* I remember people saying some dumb shit” (Marcus 165). The grrrls’ inability to recognize white privilege at the national conference reflected an overarching weakness in riot grrrl praxis that Mimi Thi Nguyen brilliantly summarizes in her essay “Aesthetics, Access, Intimacy or Race, Riot Grrrl, Bad Feelings:”

In the process of translating the urgencies of political realities into accessible terms of personal relevance, a fundamental misrecognition occur[ed] that ruptured riot grrrl’s fabrication of a singularity of female/feminist community. It was assumed that riot grrrl was, for once, for the first time, a level playing field for all women involved, regardless or in spite of differences of class or race” (Nguyen 31).

This assumption, of course, proved untrue, and the majority of the riot grrrls’ inability “to navigate differences in color, class, and gender that existed within its own cohort,” and the resulting alienation many grrrls of color and working class grrrls felt, is another main factor for the original movement’s decline (Vélez 7). By 1996, almost all riot grrrl chapters had ceased activity and most of the riot grrrl bands had broken up.¹⁴

¹⁴ With the exception of Bikini Kill who remained active until 1998 but intentionally stopped associating as strongly with the “riot grrrl” label.

What Riot Grrrl is Not: Dismissing Misrepresentations

In this section I will directly respond to some of the most egregious misrepresentations and oversimplifications I have discovered on the original riot grrrl movement throughout the course of my research. I believe these works are representative of the prevalent discourse on the movement, one that has committed misinformation into collective memory on the topic. By responding directly to and combating these myths, I aim to once again re-center the discourse on riot grrrl in the feminist political realm, and to provide a specific and clear point of reference through which to contextualize my analysis of feminist praxis in chapters two and three.

A prevalent way that the press misrepresented riot grrrl (and continues to misrepresent it today) is by haphazardly applying the term to musicians, and to arts and action initiatives simply because they are female-centered and/or female-led, regardless if the women involved identify as riot grrrls. This reckless labeling, particularly within the realm of music media, has unfairly equated both past and present riot grrrl activity to a purely musical or aesthetic genre, and has further submerged the cultural connotation of riot grrrl, expanding its boundaries in the minds of many to include a plethora of female musicians and artists that have never associated with the movement. Although riot grrrl was meant to be a multiplicitous and fluid term, a term created for women to adapt and transform to meet their own needs, the cultural context and political aims of the movement has become murky and muddled as the power of definition and description has been usurped by the mainstream media and its definition, as it has been constructed in mainstream collective memory, has been decided by the press as opposed to the women

at its core. For example, journalists have perpetuated this myth by intimately tying the original riot grrrl movement to the 90s “alternative” music scene or the punk subculture¹⁵, and associating any slightly subversive female musician from this time period with riot grrrl. An example of this reckless labeling is in Jim DeRogitis’ *Milk It! Collected Musings on the Alternative Music Explosion of the 90s*. In his overview of “alternative” 90s music, DeRogitis misrepresents riot grrrl by including a diverse array of 90s musicians - from Annie Lennox to Tori Amos to Courtney Love – in the riot grrrl ranks. The logic behind the labeling appears to be that the musicians are riot grrrls because they played loud punk or rock music, because they identified as feminist, or because they did both. While I do not deny that there are parallels and similarities in both musical sound and feminist politics (many of the women DeRogitis mentioned could have inspired the riot grrrls or been inspired by riot grrrl), his over-simplification of riot grrrl to just mean “feminist musician” or “loud female musician” is inaccurate and insulting, and also dispels the idea of original riot grrrl as a subcultural and youth-driven movement. It also situates riot grrrl in the rather depoliticized realm of a “women in rock” discourse, as opposed to privileging their roles as political activists and revealing their many other strategies of feminist engagements. Additionally, DeRogitis’ inclusion of musicians like Love demonstrates the general trend of the press ignoring the voices of those participating in riot grrrl when telling their story. Considering that Love publicly dissed

¹⁵ Riot grrrl has a complicated association with punk music and subculture. While many riot grrrl bands and members may simultaneously identify as participating within punk, riot grrrls often felt the media unfairly equated riot grrrl music and activism to punk music and activism. Riot Grrrl D.C. recognized this tension in a critique of the mainstream media’s representation of riot grrrl when they proclaimed, “You do not have to be ‘punk’ to be involved!” (Marcus 198).

the riot grrrl movement several times¹⁶ and adamantly refused that label, I think it is safe to assume that most women involved in riot grrrl did not view her as an ally.

As distance from the original movement and the “alternative” 90s music explosion has increased, many music critics still use riot grrrl as the go-to word to describe women who play loud, often punk or garage rock- sounding music. The application of the word in this way has also falsely expanded the boundaries of what mainstream media classifies as riot grrrl. This perpetuation of misinformation by generalizing labels is a complicating factor in riot grrrl’s legacy. As blogger Lindsay Zoladz argues in a recent essay called “Every Girl is Not a Riot Grrrl,” this media tendency is at least partially caused by the fact that they have yet to create or learn of new words to describe radical, youth-driven feminist activism within music. Consequently, many female performers and zine-sters are labeled as “riot grrrls” in the press, whether they identify with the movement or not. This is a similar tendency as demonstrated in 90s music critics like DeRogitis’ work, to categorize any all or mostly all girl bands and/or feminist-identified musicians as riot grrrl, particularly if they play punk or loud rock music. This loose connotation frames this politically intense movement that occurred on micro, localized scales, into a vague general term that becomes “diluted” and “pointless” (Marcus 276). The reckless labeling has also provided a source of frustration for women both inside and outside of the riot grrrl movement. As Wolfe told Zoladz in the same article, “There [were] a lot of women who... weren't even [participating] in riot grrrl, yet

¹⁶ Love once told a journalist that riot grrrl activism was “cultural anorexia” (Meltzer 38). Another time she described riot grrrl as, “Kathleen [Hanna] and her little pack of estrogen terrorists... well, estrogen lemmings” (Hirschey 168).

they were all getting called riot grrrls. I can see how some women were like, 'What? Why can't I just be myself?'" (Zoladz: Par 6).

While the above texts perpetuate the myth of riot grrrl as solely a musical genre through sloppy classification, other texts depoliticize the riot grrrl movement by simply omitting discussion of political activism from the dialogue. These other non-academic texts, like Gerri Hirschey's *We've Got To Get Out of This Place*, consequently devalue and downplay the political activism of the riot grrrl's work. These texts depoliticize by defining riot grrrl as a musical genre as opposed to a political movement, not mentioning the other forms of feminist activist engagement in which riot grrrl was grounded, and by simplifying and dismissing riot grrrl's modes of feminist praxis, such as the re-appropriation of the word "girl," as uncomplicated, almost kneejerk reactions to sexism within the music industry. Texts like Hirschey's do not accurately recognize the complicated and continual thought processes that went into riot grrrl feminist engagement, and in an ironic but unsurprising twist, continually underestimate the intellectual and activist potential of the young women they are describing. One way this is accomplished is through the use of condescending and belittling terms to describe riot grrrl activity. For example, Hirschey describes riot grrrl bands' impetus to make music as "girls were bickering with their brothers over garage rehearsal time... with their overamped passions" (159). She then continues on to describe the increasing diversity and expansion within the riot grrrl network, or, in her words, the "angry girl scene," by proclaiming, "Not that the music hied to some monolithic PMS perspective; there seemed to be a band for every nuance, area code, and sexual orientation" (159). The immature and nonintellectual connotations associated with the words "bickering," "overamped

passions,” “angry” and “PMS perspective” creates a dismissive, mocking tone in her characterization of riot grrrl. Although many feminist theorists (most noticeably Lorde) have successfully argued that emotions and emotional reactions should not be devalued when compared with more “objective” and logical responses, Hirschey does not engage in this dialogue of rational thought vs. emotional thought in a critical, norm-defying way; Hirschey invokes these words, and stresses the “anger” of the riot grrrls in a dismissive and disrespectful way that severely underestimates the grrrls’ potential to critically and meaningfully engage in political feminist activism.

Lastly, her final move to devalue the activist work within the movement is to portray riot grrrl as a trend and foreground her discussion of riot grrrl with the incorrect assumption that riot grrrls’ main aim were to achieve fame and commercial success within the mainstream music industry. This incorrect presumption goes against the anti-capitalist and DIY ideologies upon which riot grrrl was formed, and views riot grrrl as perpetuating mainstream materialist values as opposed to explicitly challenging and critiquing them. The mainstream media’s tendency to discuss riot grrrl actions without recognizing the critical ideologies behind them painted the grrrls as nonintellectual dolls; this non-recognition of serious theoretical and oppositional ideological thought in mainstream coverage of riot grrrl has diminished the political currency of the movement.

Another widespread misrepresentation of riot grrrl that my project challenges is the myth of riot grrrl as fashion aesthetic. This myth was perpetuated by coverage of the original movement in magazines like *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* that depicted riot grrrl as a fashion trend and instructed readers how to adopt “riot grrrl” style, and has only continued with the marketing of “riot grrrl” Halloween costumes (Marcus 9). The

media's superficial focus on riot grrrl aesthetics has left out the relationship between alternative aesthetic and political expression in its discussion of "grrrrl fashion." This disconnect between aesthetic style and political expression does not hold true when thinking about riot grrrl identification as a subculture. According to Dick Hebdige in his now legendary discussion of subcultures:

The struggle between different discourses, different definitions and meanings within ideology is therefore always, at the same time, a struggle within signification: a struggle for possession of the sign which extends to even the most mundane areas of everyday life... 'humble objects can be magically appropriated; 'stolen' by subordinate groups and made to carry 'secret' meanings: meanings which express, in code, a form of resistance to the order which guarantees their continued subordination. Style in subculture is, then, pregnant with significance" (Hebdige 17).

Some riot grrrls did indeed conform to a certain fashion aesthetic, wearing hyper-feminine dresses and other clothing that reminded them of what they wore as children. This fashion choice represented an intentional move to appropriate the word "girl" and critique the restrictive gender norms that it connoted (Wald 594). This style choice was a method of "stealing" the traditional significance attached to this stereotypically girlish clothing and subverting its meaning. The women dressed as stereotypical little girls wore these clothes as an act of resistance. Their style was "pregnant" with political significance, and the commodification and superficiality of a "get their look!" section (accompanied by information of the stores that carried the clothing) ignored the explicitly political context for their actions as well as their non-profit DIY ideals.

Finally, the last misrepresentation I will directly challenge is the concept of riot grrrl as merely a “punkette” subculture, symbiotically dependent on punk subculture and only recognized in relation to its position to the punk movement. In her essay “The Missing Link,” Kearney very articulately challenges the idea of viewing riot grrrls as “girl punks” and “punkettes,” and to defining their activities in relation to the punk movement:

What needs further exploration, therefore, is why punk has become associated with the empowerment of female musicians (not to mention female youth such as riot grrrls). Certainly, this is largely due to the fact that the amateurist ethos of punk culture gave many women the confidence to perform; but punk is not the only movement which empowered women to assertively express themselves. However, because riot grrrl is primarily contextualized in relation to punk music, the DIY ethos advocated and practiced by the riot grrrl community at large is most often discussed only in relation to the practices of riot grrrl’s punk musicians and their fans (215).

Kearney’s quote supports a point I have already argued, that mainstream press coverage often left out recognition of the other DIY feminist praxis in which riot grrrls were involved if the practices fell outside of the realm of punk music. Vail has been quoted as saying, “[Bikini Kill’s] vision was of creating a feminist youth culture that was participatory and would change society... we didn’t just want to be ‘the feminist punk band’ that people would come and see on tour” (Marcus 272). Yet many discussions of the original movement have failed to recognize these grander intentions, or any riot grrrl

activity that occurs outside the realm of punk subculture. Although many riot grrrls did not identify as “punk” and did not make music, riot grrrl has been incorrectly simplified into a punk musical movement (Marcus 198).

Additionally, this particular discourse also somewhat simplifies riot grrrl ideology to “punks vs. punkettes” or even “grrrls vs. boys.” Even if engaged in gender separatist activities, the ideologies at play in riot grrrl were much more complicated than the elementary thought process of “grrrls vs. boys.” The “punkette” myth narrows the scope of riot grrrl discussion only to what happened in relation to punk subculture, and also reinforces the binary between male punk subculture and/or phallic indie rock culture and riot grrrl. For example, in *The Sex Revolts* by Joy Press and Simon Reynolds, the authors label their chapter on riot grrrl as “grrrls against boys-rock” (Press 323). While some riot grrrls were indeed responding to misogynistic practices within the music industry, and particularly within the punk scene, this angle defines riot grrrls solely based on their relation to men, and frames their methods of resistance as directly aimed towards boys, instead of the more inclusive and abstract opponent of hegemonic ideologies and norms. Additionally, the “grrrls vs. boys” binary does not accurately represent the lived experiences of queer-identifying riot grrrls and other grrrls who did not construct their identity around their positionality in relation to men. Not all modes of riot grrrl praxis were created from this position of “grrrls vs. boys,” and descriptions of riot grrrl ideology should not be simplified to this one narrow intention.

Contextualizing Contemporary Riot Grrrl Activism

Riot grrrl has left a feminist legacy and is a term that women still utilize today to describe and inspire their activism. Through the preservation of riot grrrl zines and music, and further ethnographic research being conducted, teenage girls today have learned about the original movement and have become inspired to operate under the riot grrrl name, using the same mediums of zines and music to work towards their specific aims of feminist activism. As my introduction to this project makes clear, I believe that there are strong, active riot grrrl communities operating in cities all over the world today.

However, contemporary riot grrrl activism is not merely a copy of what occurred in the 90s. Nor is riot grrrl's legacy cohesive or linear enough to invoke a more straightforward lineage of mother to daughter. What contemporary riot grrrls have done is re-appropriate the term riot grrrl and transform its meaning to work within their own temporalities and communities. As Amy Klein, who started Permanent Wave, a feminist activist group based in New York City explained, "What I took away from [*Girls to the Front*] was the idea that every girl is a riot grrrl-- I want to be part of that definition and create something new without just going back to what it was in the 90s" (Zoladz: Par 20). I do not define contemporary riot grrrl activism as specifically as I do the original movement's but I do invoke one criteria in determining who is eligible to be described as a contemporary riot grrrl, which is their¹⁷ participation in some form of feminist activism while identifying as either a riot grrrl or as participating within a riot grrrl network. Consequently, I am defining my demographic of contemporary riot grrrls as individuals who are using riot grrrl ideologies, strategies, and identity as a framework but changing, editing, and revising as they see fit to adapt to today's specific cultural characteristics.

¹⁷ I use "their" in this instance as a singular, gender neutral pronoun.

Chapter 2: Feminist Praxis in the Original Riot Grrrl Movement (1990-96)

“BECAUSE I believe with my wholeheartmindbody that girls constitute a revolutionary soul force that can, and will change the world for real” (“Riot Grrrl Manifesto”).

As a revolutionary grassroots feminist network, the original riot grrrl collectives shared particular stated political objectives and modes of activism with which they sought to “change the world.” One main objective was to challenge negative, limiting, and misogynistic societal constructions of what it means to be a young woman and/or girl in the United States and to create new, positive and unrestrictive ones. Another goal, which riot grrrls deemed imperative to achieve in order to disrupt these negative societal connotations, was to support “girl love,” a buzzword of the movement that can be found in many riot grrrl publications and creations. Although its definition, much like the term

“riot grrrl,” is open to multiple interpretations, I am defining it based on how Wolfe described it during our interview, which was as “positive, sincere, and supportive relationships amongst grrrls” that were devoid of jealousy and disrespect (Wolfe). The riot grrrls believed that the “internalization of sexism” in mainstream society manifested itself in “girl/girl jealousy and self-defeating girltype behaviors” and that the lack of camaraderie amongst grrrls severely weakened their collective feminist potential (“Riot Grrrl Manifesto”). Riot grrrl aimed to combat jealousy, and encourage “girl love” in order to create a non-competitive and supportive network of young radical feminist women. They believed creating a supportive and safe environment would nurture collaboration and creativity amongst grrrls and help them achieve a third main objective – to create a palpable girl culture with “girl artists of all kinds” that both valued and encouraged creative self-expression (“Riot Grrrl Manifesto”).

These three main objectives integrally shaped the values and activities of the original riot grrrl movement, as riot grrrl collectives based their actions on achieving these explicit goals. I argue that, in working towards these objectives, particularly the goal to challenge restrictive societal constructions of girlhood, the original riot grrrl movement strategically essentialized the young American female experience in order to assert their explicit rebellion against it. To rebel against institutional sexism, the riot grrrls ironically assumed and critiqued one specific mainstream construction of American girlhood. This strategic move privileged a white, middle class, heterosexual, and cisgendered experience and caused the majority of the movement’s feminist discourse to revolve around this specific “girl” subjectivity to which grrrls of color, working class grrrls, and queer grrrls could not often relate. Although this tactic was successful in

raising visibility about riot grrrl activism, it isolated grrrls with multiple subjugated identities and limited riot grrrl's ability to reach out to young women outside of riot grrrl circles. In the words of riot grrrl Flores, the original movement focused on visibility to the detriment of accessibility, publicly presenting an image of femininity and feminism that was empowering to those who felt they could relate but isolating to those who did not see their life experiences reflected in riot grrrl's messages (Flores).

In this chapter, I will examine three prevalent and representative examples of original riot grrrl feminist praxis. Although riot grrrl collectives engaged in an exhaustive array of feminist practices, the following chapter will highlight: 1. organizing consciousness-raising groups and events 2. zine-ing, and 3. engaging in DIY musical performance and music culture. I will examine how these practices were utilized in order to serve the grrrls' explicitly feminist agenda, as well as how they reflect and interact with the movement's subcultural identity, its DIY philosophies, and prominent early 3rd Wave intersectional feminist theories. In addition to providing this theoretical analysis, I will also critically analyze these methods' effectiveness and limitations, with a focus on accessibility and diversity within the movement. Finally, I conclude this chapter with an even more focused discussion of riot grrrl's strategic essentialism of "girl" subjectivity and how it limited the movement's accessibility.

Theoretical Framework

It is important to recognize that the riot grrrls' mission to re-appropriate girlhood was based upon their idea that "girl" subjectivity in the United States was culturally, and in some ways arbitrarily, constructed. The riot grrrls did not believe that inherent gender

roles and characteristics existed; instead, they believed in gender socialization theory and recognized that cultural ideologies influenced both the life experiences and ingrained patterns of behavior in individuals of all genders. Their reclamation of “girlhood” was in direct response to what they saw as another arbitrary cultural construction – a gender dichotomy that labeled individuals either male or female, and actions as either “feminine” or “masculine.” Their strategy of activism, to raise awareness about both the oppressiveness and arbitrariness of this dichotomy, was to perform “masculine” activities under a very public guise of being “grrrls.” They dramatically and publicly juxtaposed dichotomous feminine and masculine behaviors, for example performing a stereotypically loud, aggressive, and “masculine” punk song, while dressed in stereotypically “feminine” clothing like delicate lace dresses and heels, in order to critique this dichotomy and gender socialization. The riot grrrls’ manipulated traditional aesthetic points of reference to denote gender in explicitly subversive ways, participating, the words of feminist-Marxist scholar Laura Kipnis in a process “in which raw materials’ [are] appropriated and transformed by oppositional forces in order to express antagonisms and resistance to dominant discourses” (Wald 591). The grrrls incorporated “raw materials” like traditionally feminine clothing into their aesthetic style in ironic and incongruous ways in order to express their resistance towards the institutional forces that they felt mandated that young women wear this clothing.

Additionally, the riot grrrl’s imitation of girlishness can be seen a form of drag, as defined by gender theorist Judith Butler in her seminal 1991 work *Gender Trouble*. Butler’s theory of drag is based upon the idea of gender performativity, which invalidates the notion of understanding gender as “psychologically innate” (*Gender Performativity*:

Par 6). As Nikki Sullivan explains in *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, gender is a “performative effect of reiterative acts, acts that can be and are repeated though a highly regulatory frame – which congeal over time to produce the appearance of a ‘natural’ sort of being” (Sullivan 82). The riot grrrls, as adult women performing notions of girlhood, unveiled the imitative structure of gender, and challenged this presumption of “psychological innateness.” By engaging in drag and performing as little girls, the riot grrrls subversively parodied “girl” subjectivity and revealed the unnaturalness of gender norms.

However, it should be noted that the grrrls’ “strategic reversion to girlhood” was about more than just challenging gender norms; this tactic was both a form of disidentification and an open critique of the patriarchy, misogyny, heteronormativity, and other oppressive societal structures that prevented American girls from feeling the emotional innocence and naivety that constituted their prescribed gender role. The riot grrrls “performed nostalgia”– by adopting “girly” aesthetics such as pigtails and babydoll dresses, or reciting lyrics in sing-song melodies - for an innocent girlhood that many felt that, in reality, they never achieved due to sexual abuse and violence (Wald 593). This ironic re-appropriation of “girlhood” stressed the element of innocence was an condemnation of both the “violence of heteronormative beauty culture” and the infantilization and sexualization of girls by the media, themes that riot grrrls also explored in their zine articles and song lyrics (Wald 596). This performance was a highly intentional act of feminist resistance that attempted to reveal patriarchy, misogyny, and heteronormativity, and other oppressive mechanisms of mainstream culture. Through their performances of “girlhood,” the riot grrrls participated in what Ernesto Laclau labels

“disarticulation-rearticulation,” the process of symbolic struggle through which social groups reformulate dominant codes as a means of negotiating political-cultural agency” (Wald 591). By engaging in “disarticulation-rearticulation,” which is similar to the process of re-appropriation that Kipnis describes, the grrrls claimed agency by disrupting, reframing, and refuting dominant cultural norms that had previously disenfranchised and silenced them. Through irony, juxtaposition, theatrics, and other tactics of performance and aesthetic, the riot grrrls reformulated dominant gender codes in an empowering and inspiring way.

Modes of Feminist Praxis

Consciousness-Raising Groups and Safe Spaces

BECAUSE we are interested in creating non-hierarchical ways of being AND making music, friends, and scenes based on communication + understanding, instead of competition + good/bad categorizations (“Riot Grrrl Manifesto”).

The riot grrrl movement began with grrrls in both Washington D.C. and Olympia organizing riot grrrl meetings. Much like their 2nd Wave feminist counterparts, riot grrrl organizers facilitated these “consciousness-raising” meetings with the intent of making the women who attended conscious of the sexism and misogyny rampant in all facets of American society. To a lesser extent, they also aimed to recognize, critically discuss, and create actions in order to combat other forms of discrimination within American society, including but not limited to racism, classism, and homophobia. Their diverse approach

towards feminist activism reflected the value they placed on intersectionality, a theory that many grrrls were learning about in the gender and women's studies classes they were taking at their respective colleges. As Hanna proclaimed in the Bikini Kill zine in the summer of 1991, the overarching goal of these meetings was to "help us gain the strength and sense of community that we need in order to figure out how bullshit like racism, able-bodieism, ageism, speciesism, classism, thinism, sexism, anti-semitism and heterosexism figures in our own lives" ("Riot Grrrl Manifesto").

In addition to directly discussing prominent works by feminist theorists such as Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Cherríe Moraga, and Gloria Anzaldua, the grrrls utilized these academic theories in order to analyze incidents in their own lives. Prevalent 3rd Wave feminist texts, particularly ones surrounding the issues of sexual violence and gender roles, greatly influenced their discussions and political objectives. For example, the concept of gender socialization certainly influenced their strategy of re-appropriating the meaning of what it means to be a girl in American society, as many riot grrrls felt oppressed by what they felt was an unnatural gender dichotomy in hegemonic American society, in which children were socialized to perceive certain activities, preferences, and mannerisms as gendered either "male" or "female." Many grrrls felt like they were not encouraged to pursue activities that involved "competition, physical strength, and skills," and other traits traditionally associated with masculinity (Messner 114). Additionally, they were frustrated because they found that the gender dichotomy even manifested itself within punk subculture, with violent mosh pits, misogynistic lyrics, and negative reactions to female musicians being the norm. Subsequently, the purpose of re-claiming the word girl, both through spelling it "grrrl" and publicly participating in activities

traditionally gendered as “masculine,” was to challenge this arbitrary and restrictive dichotomy of expectations. Additionally, their use of “grrrl” is an example of disidentification from mainstream gender expectations, as the riot grrrls co-opted the word and imbued it with an explicitly feminist significance so that its use could work within their radical feminist framework.

Additionally, as I have mentioned previously, the theory of intersectionality, specifically as it related to oppression, also guided discussions at meetings. Through examining incidents in their own lives through an intersectional lens, the grrrls gained a clear recognition of how institutional structures worked in concert with each other to perpetuate systematic forms of oppression such as gender violence and sexual assault. The realization that oppression was systematic, and that lived experiences were shaped by identity categories outside of their control, allowed the grrrls to see their personal struggles on a macro level. Intersectional theory permitted them to recognize the role that politics, discrimination, and hegemonic ideologies played in their lives and consequently overcome feelings of shame and guilt. As Bryant recalled, “I think without the Women’s Studies programs of the early 90s, *Ms. Magazine*, and the amazing books that were being published at that time, like *Backlash* by Susan Faludi, I am not sure that Riot Grrrl would have existed. Riot Grrrl owes as much to feminist theory as it does to punk rock” (Bryant). Early 3rd Wave feminist theories were integral parts of riot grrrl discourse, and these feminist texts helped to inspire and guide the riot grrrls’ political actions.

In addition to discussing personal struggles, the grrrls also used these “consciousness-raising” meetings as a space in which grrrls could respond to prominent sexist incidents within pop culture. All of the “original” riot grrrls I interviewed - Flores,

Rena, and Wolfe - mentioned the sexual harassment trial between then Supreme Court Justice nominee Clarence Thomas and his employee Anita Hill as a catalyst for getting active in riot grrrl communities. As Flores described, "I remember watching [the trial] on the news and being so infuriated and not understanding why it was even an issue, why it was [that] people were questioning her. This was this really intelligent woman and watching her be berated by this panel of old white men. It was so infuriating" (Flores). The Hill trial just reiterated to the grrrls that they lived in a society that was patriarchal and sexist, a society that, in Hanna's words, "tells us Girl = Dumb, Girl = Bad, Girl = Weak" ("Riot Grrrl Manifesto"). Through critically analyzing these incidents, and often times just having the opportunity to openly criticize the rampant and seemingly condoned sexism they saw all around them was therapeutic and empowering. The all-female environment, as well as the confessional and often anecdotal topics of discussion, gave the meetings a safe, almost support group-like feel, that encouraged honesty and allowed for anger and uninhibited self-expression. These regular meetings provided emotional support, camaraderie, and a sense of validation in knowing that many of the member's had similar experiences and political views (Wolfe). These meetings facilitated dialogue that helped riot grrrl members to recognize oppressive mechanisms of mainstream culture and create plans of action in order to combat them. They also facilitated a group mentality that gave the grrrls the confidence to "resist dominant discourses... and negotiate [their] political-cultural agency (Wald 591).

In accordance with their fierce advocacy for "girl love," the riot grrrls worked to form this all-female group without the negative and "anger-diffusing" effects of "girl/girl jealousy and self-defeating girltype behaviors." Riot grrrl was a community building

movement, and these regular meetings were meant to build local communities (and later, with widely publicized conventions – national communities) of grrrls “sharing strategies,” “criticizing-applauding” each other’s work, and supporting each other in a non-competitive, non-hierarchical, and non-jealousy-driven setting (“Riot Grrrl Manifesto”). To achieve these goals, guidelines about confidentiality and respect were established in order to create a safe and non-judgmental environment in which grrrls felt support for their opinions and goals, not more adversity. Jealousy between women was viewed as another negative product of gender socialization, a trait that the riot grrrls believed society gendered “feminine” and consequently, a trait they felt they were taught to both feel and act on as young women (Wolfe). The riot grrrls viewed feelings of jealousy and cattiness as a form of internalized sexism, and as an ultimately unproductive and divisive mechanism that disempowered women by destroying feelings of trust and camaraderie. The meetings were therapeutic and cathartic for several reasons, but they also helped to establish the riot grrrls as cohesive social groups in which members could go to for unabashed support. Although the riot grrrls’ use of the term “girl love” can be interpreted as an overt endorsement of lesbianism and other forms of non-normative sexual love, according to Wolfe the founders’ primary implication when invoking this term was to encourage intimate, significant, yet still assumedly platonic relationships between grrrls (Wolfe). The riot grrrls felt the need to create “girl/girl” relationships, and ultimately an overarching grrrl culture devoid of jealousy, because they felt they needed to work collectively and cohesively if they were to succeed in their main objective of challenging the sexist and misogynistic hegemonic systems that influenced their daily lives.

For grrrls that operated within a riot grrrl chapter's inner social circle, these "consciousness-raising" meetings acted as beneficial events through which they could intimately connect with other riot grrrls, gain emotional support, and voice their opinions on feminist and political issues. However, a limitation of this small and intimate meeting format, and the riot grrrls' decidedly underground methods of advertising, is that they could seem exclusive and intimidating, or remain totally unknown, to grrrls not already established within connected friend groups. As Olympia riot grrrl Tracy Sawyer recounts in *Girls to the Front*: "I saw how non-inclusive it could be. We were a pretty tight group of friends, and that's really what a lot of it was about" (Marcus 128). Additionally, the intended "safe" space environment was often compromised when riot grrrl chapters failed to incorporate an intersectional lens when discussing sexist incidents in their personal lives and in popular culture. Despite the influence of intersectional feminist theorists, primarily white, heterosexual, and middle-class riot grrrl chapters struggled to recognize the privilege they possessed due to their non-subjugated identities, and would isolate their discussions of sexism from issues pertaining to race, class, sexuality, and other modes of identity (Marcus 166). The tendency to focus discussion solely on issues of gender stemmed from the fact that the majority of grrrls participating were mostly white and mostly middle-class. As May Summer, a Washington D.C. riot grrrl told Marcus, "We were what we were... We were suburban young girls involved in this predominantly white scene. It wasn't Riot Grrrl's responsibility to attract and recruit other people" (Marcus 166). Despite how unintentional the privileging of a white and middle-class experience of girlhood might be, grrrls of color and working class grrrls became extremely frustrated at the majority of riot grrrls' lack of critical examination of how their

practices interacted with and sometimes even reinforced racial and class-based oppression. The assumption of white, middle-class, and often heterosexual subjectivity during discussions, and the tension that arose if this assumption was recognized or challenged, prevented minoritized grrrls from feeling completely safe to share their opinions and experiences at riot grrrl meetings (Marcus 251).

Zine-ing

BECAUSE us girls crave records and books and fanzines that speak to US that WE feel included in and can understand in our own ways (“Riot Grrrl Manifesto”).

Zine-ing was an important aspect of riot grrrl activism in that the zines provided a space for both creative expression and feminist political discourse, and functioned as a main community-building tool both locally within riot grrrl chapters and nationally between them. The subsection of “riot grrrl” zines that bloomed in the early 1990s created a constantly expanding riot grrrl canon, a collection of work that conveyed riot grrrls’ objectives and helped to cement a strong collective “riot grrrl” identity amongst those who were participating in riot grrrl zine culture. The zines were a perfect medium through which the riot grrrls could communicate because they were already staples within other subcultural scenes in which the grrrls participated, and many grrrls were already active in zine culture before they identified as riot grrrls. Zine-ing was also ideal because the process of zine production and dissemination was historically and intentionally DIY, which made the act of creating, contributing, and acquiring zines accessible to young women, including those who did not have the material and financial resources necessary to formally publish their writing. Additionally, the flexible format of zines, which

allowed for the inclusion of drawings, photography, and other creative media in addition to prose, was attractive in that it helped facilitate the riot grrrl goal of “fostering and supporting girl scenes and girl artists of all kinds” (“Riot Grrrl Manifesto”). Due to all of these reasons, zines became a mainstay of riot grrrl culture, and another important space for discussion about feminism, politics, and oppression. Participating in zine culture also became a tool of agency in which riot were able to uninhibitedly and unrestrictedly embrace, express, and perform their different socio-cultural identities. The riot grrrls recognized that their life experiences and opinions were not represented in the mainstream media, and saw the feminist potential in deconstructing and reconstructing identities through zines, a medium in which they could control both the production and content. Zine-ing was another medium through which the riot grrrls disidentified from mainstream society. Riot grrrl zine-sters imitated mainstream magazines for young women like *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* in format but provided content that recognized their life experiences and challenged the sexist ideologies they felt these magazines perpetuated. Zine-ing was also an outlet through which the riot grrrls could disidentify from the punk fanzines they felt concealed women’s participation in punk subculture and music. I would argue that the DIY mentality so closely associated with zine production made zine-ing an ideal platform to engage in disidentification, as DIY ideology stressed both the capability and necessity for every person to engage in modes of cultural production.

As Kearney establishes in “Grrrl Zines: Exploring Identity, Transforming Girls’ Written Culture,” riot grrrls used zines not to consolidate or form an essentialized identity, but to “try out” various forms of identity, including alternative, fantasized, and

unruly ones (“Grrrl Zines” 148). In the same way they viewed gender was performative and socially constructed, the grrrls applied these framework when examining other aspects of identity, and they were acutely aware of their relation to what they perceived as identity norms for young women their age. As Kearney explains:

According to Teresa de Lauretis, the ‘double vision’ of marginalized individuals comes from their experience of knowing that their social group is not represented accurately in public discourse... De Lauretis suggests that this form of perception increases the potential for a critical understanding of identity’s social construction, and thus an appreciation for, if not enactment of, de- and reconstructed identities and their emancipatory principle... Indeed I would argue that disenfranchised individuals have triple vision’ given that through their consumption of texts produced through the culture industries, they are made acutely aware of the norms of identity that they are encouraged to adopt as ideal but will never achieve (“Grrrl Zines” 146).

Identities presented within zines reflected this “triple vision,” as authors, mostly through anecdotal or autobiographical storytelling, emphasized the tensions between the image society constructed of them and others in subjugated identity categories, the ways that dominant cultural texts represented them, and what they felt were their actual life experiences. Zine writers recounted personal incidents of marginalization, discrimination, and misrepresentation (or total lack of representation), primarily on the basis of gender but sometimes on the basis of sexuality, race, and class too. Zines were often fiercely autobiographical, with writers sharing extremely personal and often

traumatic experiences in order to make a point, to gain support from others in the community, or to empathize or inspire other grrrls too. In many ways, the topics of discussion and confessional nature of zine entries mirrored the format of the riot grrrl meetings and served similar functions – as mediums through which grrrls could safely talk about issues they faced, explore the role that societal practices played in creating these issues, and gain emotional support and empathy from other grrrls in the process. Although sharing personal details in zine entries was much riskier than confiding in the other grrrls at a meeting, the decidedly DIY production and distribution process limited channels of access enough that most grrrls still felt safe to share personal details without the fear of being judged. Although the zine network was solidly national (even before the mainstream media picked up on riot grrrl), the exclusive readership demographic based around a collective “riot grrrl” identity created a sense of subcultural community in the same ways that the meetings did. Additionally, zine-ing went one step further than the meeting discussion in creating a palpable grrrl culture since the zines were physical and recorded testaments of riot grrrl art, music, literature, and politics.

Although riot grrrl zine-ing certainly revolved around the perpetuation of a collective riot grrrl identity, the exploration of identities was thoroughly intersectional in that the authors embraced the possibilities of possessing multiplicity in identity. In *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock Discourse and Girl Power*, Marion Leonard asserts that riot grrrl zine-ing activism was post-structuralist in that it recognized the multiplicitous and intersectional nature of identity. According to Elizabeth Grosz’s definition, on which Leonard bases her thesis, “a multiplicity is an ever-changing, nontotali[z]able collectivity, an assemblage defined, not by its abiding identity or

principle of sameness over time, but through its capacity to undergo permutations and transformations, that is, its dimensionality” (Leonard 144). Riot grrrls embraced a variety of conflicting and fluid identities within zines, and strove to prevent essentializing, stereotyping, or hierarchizing identities. Although the authors assert this goal in several riot grrrl zines, these intentions did not always result in a multiplicitous reality, as many authors’ noticeable emphasis on gender issues isolated from discussion of race, class, sexuality, and other identity factors alienated grrrls of color, queer grrrls, working class grrrls, and others who were not white and middle-class. As Kearney explains, “white middle-class riot grrrls were able to ‘isolate their sex’ from other components of identity and write from a focus on a (non-raced/non-classed) female identity (“Grrrl Zines” 154). This uncritical isolation of sex from other modes of identity limited the effectiveness of riot grrrl zines in creating an inclusive and all-encompassing riot grrrl community and “grrrl culture,” as riot grrrls who were not white and middle-class and who experience their deprivileged identities as inseparable from their gender did not see riot grrrl zines as reflective of their life experiences (154). I will discuss these limitations more in the conclusion of this chapter.

Musical Performance

BECAUSE we want and need to encourage and be encouraged in the face of all our own insecurities, in the face of beergutboyrock that tells us we can't play our instruments, in the face of "authorities" who say our bands/zines/etc are the worst in the US and BECAUSE we don't wanna assimilate to someone else's (boy) standards of what is or isn't” (“Riot Grrrl Manifesto”).

Musical performance was riot grrrl’s other main method of publicly challenging gender and other societal norms, and another essential strategic component in their goal

to build a cohesive and supportive “grrrl” culture. Through creating riot grrrl music, and participating in the riot grrrl musical “scene,” the riot grrrls achieved several feminist objectives. Similar to zines, song writing provided a space for grrrls to voice their opinions, challenge and criticize norms, and share their personal experiences with others. However, engaging in riot grrrl music differed because songs, unlike zines, were not seen as semi-private or safe spaces. While the accessibility of riot grrrl music was hindered by DIY modes of production and distribution, the national scope of tours by riot grrrl bands like Bikini Kill and Bratmobile, as well as their choice to perform in diverse and public venues, allowed those outside of riot grrrl subculture to become connected to the movement. As riot grrrl bands picked up recognition within various musical scenes and performed with non-riot grrrl-identified bands, the riot grrrl movement’s visibility grew and the riot grrrl network expanded rapidly. Much as they used zines, riot grrrls used music as a platform through which to “try out” and assert various identities, to engage in subversive gender performance, and to discuss political issues. To those creating riot grrrl media, zines and songs often accomplished the same feminist goals. What set musical performance apart from zine-ing was not its function but its format; while riot grrrl zines were often created and read by grrrls individually, the act of creating, performing, and consuming riot grrrl music was normally a group experience. The fact that riot grrrl bands performed at well-known, public venues made it more convenient and less intimidating for potential grrrls to check out what riot grrrl was all about, and participating in a show as an audience member allowed for an option of anonymity that zine-ing and riot grrrl meetings did not. For all of these reasons listed above, musical performance gave the riot grrrls the greatest potential of the three main modes of activism

to reach the general public and to expand the riot grrrl network nationally. Riot grrrl musical performance became an extremely effective way in which the riot grrrls used distinctive aesthetic and sonic styles in order to voice their dissent towards discriminatory mainstream societal structures.

As the “Riot Grrrl Manifesto” objective quoted at the beginning of this chapter makes clear, riot grrrl musicians had an extremely established point of reference of what they aimed to rebel against – “beergutboyrock” (“Riot Grrrl Manifesto”). In creating and performing their music, bands like Bikini Kill and Bratmobile were not just critiquing the normative scripts within mainstream society, but what they saw as sexist and normative standards surrounding rock n’ roll music within the independent music industry. They were reacting to a phenomenon that music sociologist Susan McClary asserts in her book *Feminine Endings*, the tendency for most forms of Western popular music, including punk and indie rock, to be connotatively “gendered.” Rock music particularly has been presented as the “articulation of masculinity” with “women in rock’ being an exception, not the norm (McClary quoted in Leonard 32). Most forms of musical expression within these realms both privilege and assume heteronormative male subjectivity. This discriminatory categorization has occurred through rock documentation and canonization that only recognizes male musicians (28) and media accounts that view female musicians either as trivial or as merely a “fad” (35). Riot grrrl musicians recognized what they saw as a societal tendency to gender instrumental roles such as lead guitarist or drummer as “masculine,” and felt the repercussions in that, as women, they were often not expected to be able to assume these roles (44). A main reason for why riot grrrl bands chose to play loud rock music, besides the fact that many grrrls were already active in punk

subculture, was that playing this traditionally “masculine” music directly challenged the “feminine” connotations of gentleness and submissiveness that they felt pressured to live up to.

Riot grrrl also used musical performance in order to accomplish their goal of challenging cultural constructions of girlhood. Riot grrrls ironically performed girlhood nostalgia in their musical performance by matching an aesthetic they felt represented a stereotypical little girl. This “riot grrrl” style that bands like Bikini Kill and Bratmobile assumed on stage included clothing like babydoll dresses and lace accessories, and hairstyles like pigtails and double braids. To further portray a girlish aesthetic riot grrrl bands started songs with dramatically high-pitched “sing-song” voices (like in Bratmobile’s “Fuck Yr Fans”) or incorporated popular playground melodies (like the “Miss Mary Mack” handclap in Bikini Kill’s “Demirep”). These distinctive musical practices and aesthetic styles helped to distinguish riot grrrl as a subculture, and also played an essential role in defining the stereotypical girlish archetype which the riot grrrls were challenging. Riot grrrls used these aesthetic and sonic elements in order to perform “girlhood” and then employed theatrical visual irony and traditionally “masculine” behaviors and aesthetics with which to subvert expectations assumed from their gender performance. On stage, bands combined girlish attire with loud music, screaming vocals, and the extremely mature and often vulgar, sexual and/or controversial lyrics of their songs. For example, in Bikini Kill’s 1993 single “Rebel Girl,” Hanna sings about a female friend who lives in her neighborhood.¹⁸ Although the subject matter first comes

¹⁸ It should be noted that Bikini Kill has never definitively claimed that the lyrics of “Rebel Girl” are autobiographical. However, I am interpreting the song from the point of view of Hanna, as her first-person narration gives the song an autobiographical feel.

across as innocent and trivial, with assertions like “she’s got the hottest trike in town,” by the middle of the second verse the lyrics become increasingly sexual, with Hanna screaming “in her hips there’s revolution...in her kiss, I taste the revolution” (“Rebel Girl”). Hanna’s transitioning language to describe her “neighborhood’s queen” throughout the song jarringly defies societal expectations and assumptions about the relationship between school-age girls. Her sensual description of the “rebel girl’s” hips and lips not only portrays young girls as sexual/sexually active beings, but challenges heteronormative assumptions by implying the existence of intimate “girl love” or even a sexual relationship between her and the other girl. This juxtaposition of stereotypical gender performance and often shocking and explicitly stereotype-defying lyrical content recognized the incongruity between the representation of girls in society and what the riot grrrls’ actual lived experiences as young women were.

In addition to challenging heteronormativity, the riot grrrls also skewered additional sexist societal beliefs through aesthetic juxtaposition. In addition to performing in girl drag by wearing stereotypically girlish clothes, band members like Wolfe and Hanna would also embody a very different female archetype by appearing on stage in only a bra, and often with derogatory words like “slut” scrawled on their stomachs. Often times, these two very different aesthetics would be directly juxtaposed in that the grrrls would come out on stage with a dress, only to take it off mid-set and complete the rest of the performance in their bras. Similar to the unsettling impact that the combination of political lyrics and a girlish aesthetic aimed to make on the crowd, this strategic change of style was a visual criticism of the rampant sexualization and sexual abuse and harassment they felt girls faced. The strategic transition in performativity and

signification, from appearing as an innocent school-age girl to appearing as a mature, scantily-clad young woman emphasized the paradox between the non/anti-sexual and virginally “pure” expectations society places upon girls, and the frequent and nonconsensual objectification, sexualization, and even rape girls were forced to experience due to patriarchal and misogynistic cultural norms. The visual labeling of their bodies as “slut” and other sexist terms was an act of resistance against a society that they felt shamed young women for being sexual, and also an attempt to re-claim these words – much like their overarching goal of re-claiming the word “girl” – so that they had empowering and feminist connotations. According to Joanne Gottlieb and Gayle Wald in their essay, “Smells Like Teen Spirit: Riot Grrrls, Revolution, and Women in Independent Rock,” the riot grrrls’ very visible “deployment of their bodies in performance” in these specific ways “provide[d] an antidote to its previous violations [of objectification, sexualization, and rape]” (Gottlieb 20). Through employing and manipulating girl subjectivity through performance, the riot grrrl “interrupted the flow of images” and, as Hebdige argues, challenged the male gaze by turning “being looked at into an aggressive act,” much like women in punk subculture did before them (Hebdige quoted in Gottlieb 20). These aesthetic considerations and modes of performance, in addition to other riot grrrls “styles” described in this section, were highly strategic efforts with which to critique the problematic cultural construction of girlhood. Loud rock musical performances acted as the riot grrrls’ preferred platform in which to employ these methods as feminist activism.

Through the popularity of Bikini Kill, Bratmobile, and other riot grrrl-identified bands, musical performance brought the greatest level of visibility to the riot grrrl

movement of any strategy of activism. However, the increase in visibility did not necessarily correlate with increased accessibility. The effectiveness of employing girl performativity and girl drag on stage was limited by how narrow of a girl archetype the drag portrayed. The aesthetic and sonic elements that the riot grrrls incorporated in order to ironically represent girlhood only invoked constructions of white, middle-class, and heterosexual childhoods that were similar to their own. While they did not construct this societal stereotype themselves, their continual embodiment of the stereotype (even as a form of protest), backfired in that it threatened the movement's inclusivity. For young women who could not relate to this particular version of girlhood due to their race, class, sexuality, or other mode of identity, the riot grrrls' methods of critiquing societal sexism and misogyny may not have been as relevant or as valuable.

Limitations

The feminist activist work that the original riot grrrls did was extremely important and positively impacted many young women's lives. However, I also find it imperative to recognize the limitations of their particular strategies, as well as the young women to whom riot grrrl activity did not reach. The riot grrrls walked a fine line between visibility and accessibility, especially when engaging in activism through musical performance. The popularity of bands like Bikini Kill and Bratmobile certainly made the movement more visible to a larger number of people which in turn gave more young women the knowledge of riot grrrl's existence and the necessary information of how to access resources such as music and zines. But although higher visibility gave more grrrls access to riot grrrl resources, it did not necessarily make the movement more accessible to grrrls

who were not white and middle-class like the majority of the founding riot grrrls. When engaging in riot grrrl strategies of feminist praxis – from re-claiming “girl” subjectivity through performative activities to writing about sexism in their zines – the grrrls often assumed their audience had access to the same resources, generalized similarities between themselves and other grrrls, isolated topics of gender without appropriately considering an intersectional experience, and generally assumed a clear, white, middle-class subjectivity that did not wholly represent the experiences of riot grrrls belonging to other subjugated identity categories.

Gayle Wald tackles these issues of subjectivity in her essay "Just a Girl? Rock Music, Feminism, and the Cultural Construction of Female Youth" in recognizing that the riot grrrls' re-appropriation of girlhood was based on their particular conception of what constitutes a traditional or stereotypical girlhood in the United States. The riot grrrls placed themselves in open opposition to what they felt were prevalent expectations for young women in American society. However, in order to manifest the activities, images, and ideologies they felt rebelled against this image, they first had to work from a cohesive vision of what hegemonic American “girl” subjectivity is. As Wald asserts,

The strategic reversion to girlhood not only rests on an ability to imagine girlhood outside of patriarchal representation, it also presumes cultural entitlement to ‘womanly’ subjectivity.... Such an observation... has important implications for the transportability, across socially determined lines of difference, of the Riot grrrl strategy of re-appropriating girlhood to construct alternative (i.e., non-patriarchal) modes of visibility (Wald 599).

The “girlhood” on which the riot grrrls’ strategy of performative re-appropriation rested on acquired its meaning “within the context of specific discursive regimes,” regimes that do not reflect the experiences of riot grrrls who did not benefit from other components of their identities such as race and class. The “girlhood” that the riot grrrls invoked nostalgia for was not universal; instead the term, and the activities and aesthetic the riot grrrls associated with it, “implied very specific practices and discourses about female sexuality, women’s cultural-political agency, and women’s social location (Wald 591). What many original riot grrrl activists were guilty of was the failure to interrogat[e], in an ongoing and self-critical fashion, the conditions that govern their access to social and cultural agency” (Wald 608). By not recognizing that their experiences were shaped by the privileges they possessed due to their position as white, middle-class, and/or as heterosexual women, many original riot grrrls unintentionally prevented riot grrrls who did not have these privileges from feeling part of the “grrrl” culture riot grrrl aimed to promote. The lack of representation for non-white and middle-class experiences, and the generalizations around life experiences, did not create an exceptionally safe or welcoming environment for young women of multiple subjugated identity categories.

While the exclusive and uncritical tendencies I listed above might have been unintentionally damaging, it is necessary to recognize how these oversights essentialized the riot grrrl identity to a degree, and limited the effectiveness and overarching impact of the riot grrrl movement. As I move on to my discussion of contemporary riot grrrl culture in chapter three, these issues of visibility, accessibility, and inclusiveness become even more significant to my narrative. Contemporary riot grrrl culture responds to and challenges both patriarchal hegemonic cultural norms and exclusivity within the original

riot grrrl movement. Through changing modes of feminist activism, vocabulary, and other practices, contemporary riot grrrls are continually transforming the riot grrrl movement and its political connotations, working towards making the movement as accessible to the young women who might have felt left out of the original movement's messages. Contemporary riot grrrl activity is two decades removed, and the strongest communities I have found are often supplanted in different places and in different demographics. In the next chapter I will explore how the feminist praxis of riot grrrl has evolved since its advent, and what contemporary riot grrrls have changed in order to expand the message and accessibility of the movement to those who may not have had the opportunity to be riot grrrls in the early 1990s.

Chapter 3: Subcultural Disidentification and Contemporary Riot Grrrl Praxis

If we want Riot Grrrl...to survive, we need to keep Riot Grrrl accessible. We need to make the movement as inclusive as possible... We do this by doing what the previous generation failed to do; that is, by examining our own behavior and making sure that it does not alienate, offend, upset any girl... or make her feel unsafe in any way (Vélez 8).

Despite the original riot grrrl movement's self-professed commitment to exploring feminist issues through an intersectional lens, many grrrls of color and working class grrrls still felt "isolated" and subjugated within riot grrrl subculture ("Don't Need You"). Mimi Thi Nguyen succinctly outlines the movement's main failure in her essay "Aesthetics, Access, Intimacy or Race, Riot Grrrl, Bad Feelings," when she asserts that the original riot grrrl movement wrongly presumed "that riot grrrl was, for once, for the

first time, a level playing field for all women involved, regardless or in spite of differences of class or race” (Nguyen 31). The majority of the riot grrrls’ inability to recognize the privilege afforded them by their race and class, and to critically examine how their own actions played into an intersectional oppressive hegemonic system, left less privileged riot grrrls with the “bad feelings” that Nguyen describes in her essay, as well as made them feel “alienated,” “offended,” “upset,” and “unsafe (Vélez 8). These tensions are part of the reason, in addition to the intense mainstream media scrutiny and misrepresentation, why riot grrrl’s popularity declined in the mid-1990s. As Jamie Varriale Vélez asserts in her 2011 essay “The Copy is Always an Original: Adaptation, Evolution, and Riot Grrrl”:

Riot Grrrl has suffered for alienating and excluding people in the past.

Dominated by dedicated, but ultimately inexperienced, middle-class, white cisgendered teenage stewards, Riot Grrrl was unable to navigate differences in color, class, and gender that existed within its own cohort.

This is Riot Grrrl’s most egregious and most frequently discussed failure, and part of what lead to its initial decline (Vélez 7).

However, although the original movement’s popularity ebbed due to these noticeable limitations in access, both the term “riot grrrl” and the modes of feminist praxis associated with it have survived to a certain degree and have continued to be used by grrrls all over the world throughout the last two decades.

In recent years, I would even argue that feminist activism under the “riot grrrl” title has surged, with highly active riot grrrl collectives forming in countries all over the

world. And what struck me most, as I first embarked on this project, is that, despite the “bad feelings” produced by the original movement’s exclusivity, the majority of active, self-identified contemporary riot grrrls in the communities I focused on are queer, working class, and/or Chicana/Latina. My argument is that contemporary riot grrrls are actively engaging in both critical examination and in subcultural disidentification, a process in which they are reworking elements of the original subcultural movement that excluded them while simultaneously maintaining riot grrrl’s stance of operating in opposition to mainstream society. I argue that contemporary riot grrrls still meet the riot grrrl criteria I listed in chapter one as they engage in feminist activism under the riot grrrl label, associate either themselves or their activism with riot grrrl, subscribe to many prevalent riot grrrl ideologies such as DIY and intersectionality, and participate in popular riot grrrl practices such as zine-ing and musical performance. However, in addition to utilizing many of the original movement’s resources, they are also disidentifying from the original movement’s strategic essentialism of girlhood subjectivity (white, middle-class, able-bodied, and heteronormative), and adapting and evolving the original movement’s main modes of praxis in order to make riot grrrl more effectively accessible to grrrls outside of the original movement’s preferred demographic. I hope to shed light on this process of subcultural disidentification both by recognizing the ways in which contemporary riot grrrls utilize and build on original riot grrrl praxis, and also examining the ways in which their strategies of activism depart from original riot grrrl tradition.

The main community through which I will explore this process of subcultural disidentification is the “IE (Inland Empire) Riot Grrrl” network, a recently created

feminist collective with around twenty active members that is based in and around Riverside, California.¹⁹ IE Riot Grrrls display many markers of disidentification from the original riot grrrl movement. For example, while their name, radical political nature, and employment of DIY arts and music as modes of activism are directly inspired by the original movement, both zines released by group members and event publicity for IE Riot Grrrl events explicitly mention “re-defining” Riot Grrrl (“IE Riot Grrrl Zine Benefit Show”). Although IE Riot Grrrl takes a similarly multiplicitous approach to defining their group as the original riot grrrls did²⁰, there are noticeable differences in how the group presents itself and how the members choose to engage politically. A major change is that instead of describing members as simply “grrrls” or “ladies,” or “women,” IE Riot Grrrl mission statements consistently expand membership to include “queers,” “trans folks” (both female-to-male and male-to-female), “genderqueers,” and “genderfuckers.” (“We are Looking for IE Riot Grrrls!”). In addition to shaking up original riot grrrl norms, IE Riot Grrrls also engage in critiquing the exclusionary aspects of the original movement, holding public workshops that present the history of riot grrrl with a critical examination of how the movement addressed (or failed to address) issues of race and class, as well as discussing these issues through private, inner-group communications (Gloria). In fact, at the majority of the activist events they have organized between October 2011 and April 2012 in which they invoke the riot grrrl name, the group has explicitly and publicly

¹⁹ As IE Riot Grrrl has close ties to Riverside Community College and the University of California, Riverside, most members are in their late teens and early twenties and are currently in college. However, member ages range from in their young teens to in their mid-40s (Gloria).

²⁰ On the Facebook event page for an “IE Riot Grrrl Benefit Show” in December 2011, the hosts mirror the original Olympia riot grrrls’ language by stating, “There is no one specific example of riot grrrl, in fact the best example is contrasting different people who associated themselves with the movement” and encouraging attendees to “Define riot grrrl for yourself” (“IE Riot Grrrl Benefit Show!”).

recognizes this tension between the original movement and their contemporary praxis. The group proudly associates itself with the original riot grrrl movement, but simultaneously positions themselves as markedly localized to meet the needs of their southern California communities, historicized to react to the oppressive cultural catalysts they personally face today, and just generally evolved from the original movement.

This third and final chapter is intended as an exploration of how subcultural political movements, particularly youth-driven ones like riot grrrl, are adapted and transformed by the diverse communities who choose to associate with them. In contrast to the first two chapters, I will spend this chapter focusing on “contemporary” riot grrrl communities in southern California, particularly the IE Riot Grrrls, detailing both how and why riot grrrl politics have evolved over the last twenty years. By chronicling the activities of contemporary Southern California riot grrrls, I want to highlight their process of disidentification and continued evolution that is absolutely imperative to undertake in order for riot grrrl to stay relevant and survive. I will frame my discussion with Muñoz’s theory of disidentification, and additionally adapt and develop this theory, so that it can be employed to explain the process of disidentification and transformation in reaction to a subcultural movement like riot grrrl, not just the mainstream cultural narratives that Muñoz addresses. However, before I introduce the theoretical framework for this final chapter, I would like to re-state how my methodology for it differs from the rest of my thesis, and how it affects the scope of this chapter’s analysis. As the original riot grrrl movement has been examined extensively, I relied on several secondary sources to aid in an analysis that is representative, if not comprehensive, of most riot grrrl activity within the United States that was occurring in the early 1990s. Conversely, as the current

reiteration is occurring and evolving right now, the contemporary movement has yet to be canonized and chronicled in the way that the original movement has been, and I have no secondary sources to guide my research. Consequently, most of my analysis has been informed by the primary ethnographic data I collected by interviewing Gloria, Adi, Brianna, and Flores, four women who are currently engaged in riot grrrl activism in southern California, and should be conceived as more representative of the micro-demographic of contemporary riot grrrl communities in Los Angeles, Orange County, and the Inland Empire than of larger, national and international contemporary riot grrrl culture.

Theoretical Framework

Much of my discussion in this third and final chapter will focus on the ways in which contemporary riot grrrl communities in Southern California position themselves in alliance with as well as in opposition to the original riot grrrl movement. This process of cultural transformation, which I argue contemporary riot grrrls employ in order to make riot grrrl activism more accessible to grrrls of color and queer individuals, resembles what I defined as José Muñoz's concept of disidentification in the introduction. However, as this process of disidentification involves disidentification from riot grrrl – a firmly subcultural movement – I want to reiterate my differentiation in context from how Muñoz employs the term. I am consequently labeling the contemporary riot grrrls' process of cultural negotiation and reclamation as “subcultural disidentification.” In this chapter I will explore how currently active riot grrrl communities, specifically the “IE Riot Grrrl”

collective, have adapted riot grrrl activism in order to make it accessible and relevant for their respective temporality and locality. I will additionally examine how disidentifying from a subcultural movement like riot grrrl compares to the process of disidentifying from mainstream cultural texts that Muñoz describes.

Additionally, I would like to recognize the evolving definitions of “feminism” employed by contemporary riot grrrls, and explain how intersectionality is perhaps even more integral now than it was during the original movement. While the term was just becoming prevalent in the field of gender and women’s studies during the original movement, I have yet to experience an instance of feminist activism by the IE Riot Grrrls since I became involved last spring that is not wholly grounded within an intersectional framework. The importance of an intersectional approach to combating inequality is demonstrated in a clause of the “New Riot Grrrl Manifesto,” a manifesto modeled after Hanna’s original and written by members of the IE Riot Grrrl network in December 2011 that has since been circulated within their zines and internet spaces.²¹ The clause proclaims, “Because I see the connectedness of all forms of oppression and I believe we need to fight them with awareness (“New Riot Grrrl Manifesto”). Further recognition of this intersectional framework can be found in the introduction of the IE Riot Grrrl-produced *B.E.T.C.H. Rag No. 1* zine²², which states,

We’re envisioning a world without rape, where we don’t have to defend
out choice to say ‘no’ or our decision to say ‘yes,’ where we don’t have to

²¹ Please see Appendix III for full text of the “New Riot Grrrl Manifesto.”

²² *B.E.T.C.H. Rag No. 1* was created by several IE Riot Grrrl members in the fall of 2011 and released at an IE Riot Grrrl benefit show at the Blood Orange Infoshop, a DIY music and art space in Riverside, in December 2011.

submit to rigid outdated gender roles, where our bodies are truly ours, where racism and classism don't exist, where our differences are not tolerated, but celebrated, and we are free to love and fuck who and how we please (*B.E.T.C.H. Rag* 1).

Another example of intersectional recognition can be found in the same zine in an article on "Power Dynamics and Consent." In this article, the author Julie thoroughly and systematically details how factors such as age, ableism, and "gendered oppression" affect an individual's sexual experiences and ability to consent (*B.E.T.C.H. Rag* 24). This language closely models that of the original riot grrrls, particularly the clause of the original manifesto in which Hanna asserts the need to figure out how "bullshit like racism, able-bodieism, ageism, speciesism, classism, thinism, sexism, anti-semitism and heterosexism figures in our own lives" ("Riot Grrrl Manifesto"). However, I have found that contemporary riot grrrls more fully integrate an intersectional viewpoint into their methods of activism, recognizing issues of access to riot grrrl culture such as language barriers, physical disability, and a non-female gender orientation, and often explicitly both acknowledging these identities and altering their activism to make riot grrrl more accessible to affected individuals. This increased awareness can be evidenced in the fact that IE Riot Grrrls have made it an objective to make their zines available in both English and Spanish (Gloria), and also that Julie and other *B.E.T.C.H. Rag* contributors made a point to thoroughly discuss consent and sexual activity through a disability or genderqueer/fluid framework in their zine. Additionally, the influence of intersectional feminist theory can be found in the IE Riot Grrrl's continued dedication to causes other than traditional women's issues like reproductive rights and sexual violence. Through

advocating for the DREAM Act and immigration rights, participating in the Occupy movement, engaging in critical dialogues about racism pertaining to the Trayvon Martin shooting²³, contemporary riot grrrls have demonstrated their understanding that all forms of oppression are intrinsically connected and must be viewed and challenged together.

The evolution and increased importance of an intersectional framework with which to view feminism has also increased at least local contemporary riot grrrl communities' awareness about the relationships between agency, privilege and language. This recognition of how terms like "feminism" are tied to connotations of race and class privilege has led to an increased respect for those who engage in feminist and political activism under a different, self-defined, or intentionally non-specific label. One major change from how original riot grrrl members expressed their feminism and how the contemporary riot grrrls I have met do now is that many now choose to surpass the "feminist" label entirely to avoid what they see as exclusive connotations (Gloria). Other contemporary riot grrrls, like Adi and Brianna in Orange County, identify as engaging in feminist and riot grrrl activism and as participating in a riot grrrl community, but do not personally ascribe to either the riot grrrl or feminist label (Adi and Brianna). Instead, both women prefer to ascribe to no labels, as they feel like this transition towards anti-categorization allows for fluidity and maintains the focus on one's actions, not one's identity (Adi and Brianna). This focus on language, and the agency that self-definition

²³ On February 26, 2012, George Zimmerman, a white Hispanic neighborhood watch captain, shot and killed Trayvon Martin, a black, unarmed teenager while he was walking back to his father's fiancée's home in Sanford, Florida after buying a snack at a convenience store. Zimmerman was not immediately arrested in Martin's death and the case has set off a national debate on racism in both American society and America's criminal justice system ("George Zimmerman Charged, Hearing Expected Thursday").

provides, is a major theme within contemporary local riot grrrl discourse, and I argue that it symbolizes an evolution in how riot grrrls conceptualize feminism. This change is demonstrated in how riot grrrls both then and now choose to define “feminism.” While Wolfe described feminism as “about the empowerment of women and striving towards that and struggling against patriarchy” (Wolfe), Gloria provided a significantly expanded description, quoting Liz Stanley and Sue Wise to define feminism as “directly confront[ing] the idea that one person or set of people [has] the right to impose definitions of reality on others” (Gloria). Gloria’s definition of feminism is representative of the contemporary riot grrrl’s increased awareness that identifying as a “feminist” and using other academic feminist language, are actions afforded by race, class, and other forms of societal privilege. A contemporary definition acknowledges that engagement with feminism and feminist activism requires individuals to have the ability to exercise some degree of agency, a fact that these grrrls do not take for granted. Contemporary riot grrrls embrace a more current and expansive definition of feminism that more thoroughly incorporates an intersectional framework, and this evolution in the way they conceive feminism has led to concrete changes in how they engage in feminist riot grrrl activism.

Contemporary Feminist Praxis

Online Discussions and Safe Spaces

Because we need to talk to each other. Communication/ inclusion is key.
We need to break the silence (“New Riot Grrrl Manifesto”).

Contemporary riot grrrls are still extremely committed to fostering positive and supportive communication between “womyn” and fostering safe spaces in which members can have critical discussions about issues pertaining to feminism, political

activism, and social justice. The clause from the “New Riot Grrrl Manifesto” in this section’s epigraph that stresses “communication/inclusion is key” to achieving riot grrrl objectives stresses this priority, as well as this additional one in which the IE Riot Grrrls proclaim that “a safe space needs to be created for Grrrls where we can open our eyes and reach out to each other without being threatened by this sexist society and our day to day bullshit” (“New Riot Grrrl Manifesto”). However, a main change from the original movement is that the main and most constant “safe spaces” within the IE Riot Grrrl community are constructed online through private groups on social networking sites instead of in physical spaces through in person meetings. The “IE Riot GRRRLS” group on Facebook, which Gloria and other IE Riot Grrrl leaders created in August 2011, is perhaps the most active safe space with 62 overall members, more than twenty regularly active members, and new posts and discussions occurring almost daily. The group discussions function in a similar way to how in-person meetings did during the original movement with members utilizing the page to achieve objectives such as publicizing upcoming events, asking for help, advice, and support from other members, and discussing issues related to feminism (“IE Riot GRRRLS”). From my personal participation in this group since its inception, I have found that the group also encourages “grrrl love” in that I after months of regularly following the discussions, I never noticed a negative or judgmental post. The group is also intended as a private space, as the group administrators, in accordance with the wishes of several members, have set a rule that no details of discussions should leave the group space. As one member reiterated in a post in December 2011, “IE Riot Grrrls’ is suppose to be a safe space where you can be

comfortable in expressing yourself and your feelings... There should be trust and respect on what is posted here” (“IE Riot GRRRLS”).²⁴

The fact that these discussions, ranging from discourse surrounding political issues like reproductive rights and the Occupy movement to support group –esque threads with grrrls sharing their personal experiences with sexual violence and harassment, take place online introduces a new level of access to riot grrrl participation as well as a dynamic that differs from the in-person interactions of the early 1990s. Although access to an Internet connection can still be a barrier, the contemporary movement’s transition to online communication also makes at least casual participation in the “IE Riot Grrrl” forum easier for more grrrls to achieve. Once they pass the initial barrier of being accepted into the group, grrrls that may not already know more than a few or even any current members outside of the Facebook group have the option to browse posts and follow interactions almost anonymously without feeling pressure to write or respond to posts. Some grrrls write often, while others rarely do, a dynamic that works within the context of this online group and does not compromise its status as a safe space but, I argue, would be significantly harder to achieve within the context of a small, in-person meeting. Additionally, the “IE Riot Grrrl” group also gives members more time to write and respond to posts, which changes the temporality of interactions, with discussions taking place at all times of day and night but not always at the immediate pace of in-person conversations. The flexibility in when members can post allows grrrls who might have work, school, or other obligations during a set meeting time, as well as grrrls who

²⁴ As “IE Riot GRRRLS” is a private, closed group, I recognize my precarious positionality in publicly describing the discussions happening within it. In order to protect the privacy of its members, I am refraining from revealing members’ identities and including any quotes that reveal personal information about a member.

do not live close to Riverside or do not have transportation to get to an assigned meeting place, to participate in the group. However, this increased accessibility occurs in combination with decreased intimacy; although the closed format, active moderators, and clear rules regarding privacy give the group's wall the feeling of a safe, confidential space, the advice and support provided does not always seem as helpful since not everyone in the group is connected outside of the Facebook page and are often providing advice without much knowledge about the particular grrrl asking for the support. Also unlike an in-person meeting, the online forum does not always bring reliability in communication, as posts, even highly personal ones from grrrls asking for advice on personal issues, can often go unanswered by others in the group.

The differences in how the IE Riot Grrrls choose to communicate and support each other and how original riot grrrl chapters did twenty years ago reflect technological changes over the last two decades, as well as more general shifts in how young people communicate with each other due to the increase in mobile and social networking technology. Contemporary riot grrrls like the IE Riot Grrrl network have adapted original riot grrrl tactics and strategies of communication and used Facebook in order to increase accessibility for their activism and let more grrrls in on their discussions. The main objectives of increasing "grrrl love" and communication between grrrls have not changed since the original movement, and contemporary riot grrrls are certainly using the original movement's objectives and strategies as a template for their activity. However, their choice to imitate original riot grrrl tactics is coupled with a strong desire to use the most accessible mediums of communication available to grrrls today in order to get the word out about riot grrrl. Their choice to move consciousness-raising and supportive discussion

primarily online has built the IE Riot Grrrl network and allowed a larger and more diverse group of grrrls to participate in discussions and reap the benefits of this safe space than would have been possible with just physical, in-person meetings. At the same time, the IE Riot Grrrls have had to sacrifice some degree of intimacy and security in their evolution to making “IE Riot Grrrl” discussion online. However, while this switch in format is probably less due to disidentification and more caused by technological developments and the increasing pervasiveness of online communication, it has still expanded the riot grrrl network, and set a new template for communication amongst riot grrrls that is, in some ways, more accessible and inclusive.

Girls Rock! Camps

Because we are being divided by our labels and philosophies and we need to accept and support each other; acknowledging our different approaches to life and accepting all of them as valid (“The New Riot Grrrl Manifesto”).

One initiative that has its roots in the riot grrrl movement is the Girls Rock! camp network. Girls Rock! summer camps are non-profit organizations that teach girls (usually from elementary school through high-school age) how to play rock and various other styles of popular music. The first Girls Rock! camp was started in Portland, and the movement has since grown to several associated Girls Rock! organizations in cities all over the United States, with international chapters starting almost yearly. In southern California, both Los Angeles and Orange County have Girls Rock! camps, and all six of the past and contemporary riot grrrls I interviewed have worked or volunteered for one of the two local chapters, or has concretely demonstrated her support by participating in benefit concerts and events for the organization. In many ways, the Girls Rock! camp

network can be viewed as a contemporary reiteration of the original movement's grrrl music culture, and certainly a concrete initiative meant to achieve their goal of creating a tangible grrrl music and art culture.

However, the fact that there are perhaps as many or even more local contemporary riot grrrls participating in Girls Rock! activities as there are grrrls playing in riot grrrl punk bands is evidence of the disidentificatory process I outlined in this chapter introduction. While Girls Rock! is in many ways associated with the original riot grrrl movement, and incorporates and encourages campers to assume similar feminist DIY ideologies in their approach to creating art and music, Girls Rock! activism is definitely different from original riot grrrl musical performance in praxis. A notable difference is how Grrrls Rock! camps approach "girl" subjectivity and the cultural construction of girlhood. Unlike the original riot grrrls, and the performative on-stage tactics of many of the bands, camps do not engage in essentializing girlhood. According to Flores, who is the Communications and Outreach Director at Girls Rock Los Angeles, counselors do not fill the camp agenda with critiques of societal misogyny and patriarchy, nor do they engage in any type of ironic drag performance meant to ironically portray an archetypal American girl. Instead, the camps focus solely on allowing the campers to personally define what it means to be a "girl" in the way that is most empowering to each of them without reinforcing a particular culturally constructed girl subjectivity (Flores). The camps' focus on personal empowerment and confidence-building differs from original riot grrrl strategy, in that it is less explicitly political, adopts a less critical lens with which to view societal norms regarding gender, and also allows for more diversity in the campers' representations of girl identity. In short, through allowing campers more

agency to learn, explore, and create popular music on their own terms, these camps propose new ways for campers to think about being a girl as opposed to just exposing and explicitly critiquing the normative way society thinks about it. This evolution of tactic is of course brought on by the change in age group and context of activism; the primarily teenage and college-age crowd at riot grrrl punk shows in the 1990s is an entirely different age demographic than the significantly younger camper base. However, I argue this shift in feminist practice also reflects the larger racial and class diversity of Girls Rock! campers, and is an intentional change by camp staff in order to make the movement more accessible to a larger number of potential Girls Rock! campers. In part because the lack of girl drag, “grrrl” reclamation, and other embodiments of young feminine stereotypes by camp staff is less traditionally performative than original riot grrrl tactics, camps avoid privileging only one specific “girl” aesthetic and consequently, one specific perspective on girlhood. According to Flores, camp staff explicitly recognize that if their campers never related to white, middle-class experiences of girlhood in the first place, then re-working and critically analyzing these experiences through camp curriculum will not be a productive or empowering feminist project (Flores). The decision to stay away from this essentializing “girl” imagery makes the camp spaces more inclusive and welcoming to campers of color, working class campers, and queer-identifying campers, as their experiences will not be compared to or hidden by an overarching white, middle-class girl subjectivity.

Another disidentificatory evolution that is apparent within the Girls Rock! movement is the increasing disassociation from punk and loud rock genres of music. Although Girls Rock!’s name certainly emphasizes a strong relationship to rock n’ roll,

and many camps like Rock n' Roll Camp for Girls Los Angeles' curriculums still revolve around traditionally "rock n' roll" instruments like the drum set, electric guitar and bass, and keyboards ("Summer Camp:" Rock n' Roll Camp for Girls LA"), new Girls Rock!-associated programs devoted to other musical genres have popped up around the nation. According to Flores, camps often customize their programming to reflect their city's local musical culture, as well as the musical traditions of certain ethnic communities if many of their campers come from this demographic. As Flores told me,

Some camp creators identify as riot grrrl and some not. The thing I like about the camps is that the identities are really tied into the geographies, so like the [Girls Rock! Philadelphia] does a lot of hip-hop programming because hip-hop is big in Philly... and there is a Chicas Rock! camp in Corpus Christi [in Texas] that targets Latina girls and works with the large Latino community there too. So maybe people don't necessarily identify as riot grrrl but they take the politics of it and try to make it as applicable and useful to the individual city as it can be. So I think we have a major duty to represent as many different kinds of girls as possible at the camp and have as many mentors with varying kinds of backgrounds (Flores).

Flores, and other Girls Rock! employees, have a clear awareness of how musical genre and practices intersect with the racial and ethnic demographic of their base city, an awareness that was not as visible within original riot grrrl praxis. The camps recognize the needs of their specific communities, and work to meet the campers and their families at their level, providing the atmosphere, experience, and financial resources that they believe will best fit the campers' and their families' needs (Flores). This willingness to

adapt, as well as the willingness to make concessions to expand the accessibility and effectiveness of their programming, is a notable difference from the strict, often unwavering position the original riot grrrl movement often took in regards to altering an established aesthetic, ideology, or praxis. Girls Rock! camps like Rock n' Roll Camp for Girls Los Angeles are extremely focused on making the camp as accessible as they can to the largest number of girls as possible. If that calls for incorporating genres besides rock and punk that campers, particular girls of color, may be more familiar with, they are willing to make this adjustment.

Additionally, as the camp in Corpus Christi, Texas's switch from Girls Rock! to Chicas Rock! demonstrates, camps are choosing the words they use to publicize and describe the camp with the objective of reaching the largest number of potential campers and their families as possible. Not only does that involve incorporating Spanish and other popular non-English languages into programming and publicity, but intentionally decreasing the political explicitness of their words in order to appeal to families with a wide range of political views. While original riot grrrl praxis often revolved around the riot grrrls' expression of aggressive and unapologetically explicit political terms, many Girls Rock! camps avoid even using the word "feminism" so that they do not turn off parents of potential campers. As Flores described,

Girls Rock! staff members] shy away from using the word "feminism."
 Instead we talk a lot about "female mentorship." There was even a
 workshop at the [national Girls Rock!] conference this spring about how
 and when to use the "f-word." It is always a balance and it is hard"
 (Flores).

According to Flores, this hesitance to use “feminist” or “feminism” within the context of Girls Rock! publication is not necessarily because of the personal and political views of Girls Rock! staffers, but instead stems from a desire to appeal to conservative families that may not approve of feminism, or still in many ways subscribe to traditional gender roles (Flores). While original riot grrrl strategies of activism explicitly criticize those who hold these traditional views, and likely would come across as polarizing and offensive to the “conservative families” that Flores describes, Girls Rock! is willing to make this concession and work with these families in order to benefit their campers. As she made clear, “It is often girls from the most conservative and traditional families that might benefit from our camp the most” (Flores). Girls Rock! publications, unlike original riot grrrl publications, aim to gain both parent and camper approval, and they express their political messages accordingly as not to isolate either demographic.

Another concession that Girls Rock! camps have been willing to make in order to increase the camps’ accessibility is to break away from the original movement’s firmly subcultural identity. Although many camps encourage campers to adopt DIY ideologies and, due to poor financial resources, often rely on DIY practices in order to operate, they do not position themselves as subcultural organizations or value only subcultural media texts as previous punk and riot grrrl communities have done. Even when attempting to spread the word about riot grrrl to other potential grrrls, the original movement did not use mainstream modes of communication or non-ironically incorporate mainstream media into their publications as tactics. Rock n’ Roll Camp for Girls Los Angeles,

conversely, regularly use mainstream outlets of communication²⁵ in order to advertise the summer camps, and are significantly more open to incorporating major label music and musicians into camp curriculum. They do view their organizations and its values in direct opposition to mainstream societal values, yet they do not see aligning with some mainstream societal practices and organizations as hindering them from accomplishing their objectives. Instead, their association with more mainstream forms of media has provided them with the resources to get the word out effectively about their camps to a large and diverse number of people in Los Angeles, which they view as serving their objective of empowering as many girls as they can (Flores). While I would not characterize the Girls Rock! network as corporate in any way (they are firmly non-profit organizations with many staff members working part or even full time with only small stipends or even no financial compensation in return), the organization has diverged from the original movement's subcultural identity by working to find a balance between mainstream and subcultural media. Although they do make a point of keeping their campers out of the media spotlight (Rock n' Roll Camp for Girls Los Angeles will not consider any offers by television or film producers to use their campers for projects), the organization has learned to negotiate their politics and tactics without an exclusively subcultural grounding, and have found ways to utilize mainstream media attention without feeling as though they are sacrificing the well-being or mission of Girls Rock! (Flores). This transition mirrors a similar shift in positionality that I have observed among IE Riot Grrrls, in that activists do not see their engagement in riot grrrl communities and

²⁵ Outlets through which Rock n' Roll Camp for Girls Los Angeles have publicized the camp have included tabling at school and community events, publicity in newspapers and local magazines, reaching out to local radio stations, sponsoring a film at the Outfest film festival, and sponsoring concerts and other live musical events (Erica interview).

activism as putting them and their group in intrinsic opposition to mainstream societal practices and values. While Gloria did not view her feminist activism as connected to a sense of subcultural identity at all, Flores actually noticed a change in her perception over the years as she has become more involved in the Girls Rock! movement. As Flores described, “I don’t see [riot grrrl and mainstream society] as inherently juxtaposed anymore, which I did for a really long time, I saw this dichotomy. But that is not the case, we are all formed by our environments and our media... and everything has their place” (Flores). A main effect of this subcultural disidentification process from riot grrrl is that contemporary riot grrrls have evolved from operating from only an exclusively subcultural positionality; in order to make their feminist activism more accessible and take advantage of all resources presented to them, they have sincerely embraced some mainstream cultural practices and media texts.

Once again, I feel I should reiterate that, similar to the camps’ evolved use of “girl” subjectivity in camp programming, Girls Rock!’s different tactics and lack of a subcultural base are at least partially due to the different context and age group of those involved. However, I argue that the camps’ strong drive to make the camps accessible and relevant to their home communities, their constant evaluation of their programs’ effectiveness in this regard, and their continued commitment to adapting their programming to accommodate the needs of as many girls as possible, mark an undeniable evolution in praxis. Girls Rock!, at least Rock n’ Roll Camp for Girls Los Angeles, has been willing to break from riot grrrl tradition, and even disassociate from a strict collective riot grrrl identity, in order to accomplish their goal of empowering girls and cultivating a feminist music culture. Although they may not label their objectives as

“feminist” or even as political, I think their focus on female empowerment and their riot grrrl roots certainly qualifies their project as both of these terms. And despite the major adaptations, I count the Girls Rock! initiative as a contemporary riot grrrl project because it meets my established riot grrrl criteria and because all of the past and present riot grrrls I interviewed for this project brought it up as an example of what they considered to be contemporary riot grrrl activism. By allowing these concessions in language, ideology, and tactic, Girls Rock! is a contemporary riot grrrl initiative that has successfully transformed riot grrrl activism into a model that meets the needs of working class, grrrls, queer grrrls, and/or grrrls of color too.

Art, Zine-ing, and Musical Performance

Because every time we pick up a pen or an instrument or get anything done. We are creating the revolution. We are the revolution (“New Riot Grrrl Manifesto”).

Contemporary riot grrrls are undeniably using, if not identically imitating, many of the same tactics as original riot grrrls in order to express their views and create a palpable art and music culture. As the clause of the “New Riot Grrrl Manifesto” with which I began this section clearly states, contemporary riot grrrls in Orange County, the Inland Empire, and Los Angeles are still creating and distributing zines, creating art, and making DIY lo-fi, punk, and loud rock music under the riot grrrl label with the belief that their creative contributions can start a revolution. Additionally, contemporary riot grrrls collectives similarly subscribe to DIY modes of operations and ideologies. In fact, I believe the confidence, innovations, and “you can do anything” mentality that their DIY

mentality provides them allows for a dynamism that encourages disidentification and evolution within riot grrrl activism.

Before concluding my discussion of evolution within these contemporary riot grrrl communities, I want to highlight one more example of contemporary riot grrrl activism that I believe perfectly reflects the current movement's disidentificatory process— the contemporary riot grrrl band Bikini Thrills. Bikini Thrills is a currently active Bikini Kill cover band composed of four self-proclaimed riot grrrls currently based in Los Angeles. While their official description on their facebook proclaims that they “hope to carry the torch, keep girls stoked on rock and aware of important issues through the songs of the amazing band, Bikini Kill! (“Bikini Thrills”), during their performances they accomplish much more than just being Bikini Kill imitators. I view Bikini Kill's performances as a perfect example of subcultural disidentification because in covering riot grrrl songs they pay tribute to the original movement but also adapt the original songs so that they recognize and celebrate their experiences as Chicana and Latina women. For example, when I saw them perform at the Blood Orange Info Shop Riverside in August 2011, the lead singer Charlene Renee continually switched out English lyrics for Spanish ones, translating at times even whole verses into Spanish. The most notable revision was when, much like the Girls! Rock chapter in Corpus Christi, Bikini Thrills continually switched out “girl” for “chica” in “Rebel Girl.”

Considering the context of their performance – at an IE Riot Grrrl-organized concert in Riverside in which the audience was primarily both Chicana/Latina and riot grrrl-identified, Bikini Thrills' Spanish translation takes on particular disidentificatory significance. My first cursory observation was that by translating the lyrics the band

enabled this English-language song to be accessible to Spanish-speakers. However, I argue this is not Bikini Thrills main contribution since, considering the audience demographic and location, it is likely most of the audience spoke English and were even familiar with the original version of “Rebel Girl.” I argue that the main effect of Bikini Thrill’s bilingual performance and replacement of “girl” with “chica” was to add a dimension of Chicana/Latina identification to this song that is wholly entrenched in the distinctly American and primarily white original riot grrrl subculture. Bikini Thrills’ “Rebel Chica,” although its melody and most of the lyrics were true to the original Bikini Kill song, is infused with a Chicana/Latina subjectivity that could never be assumed when Bikini Kill and Kathleen Hanna sang it. This intentional change in subjectivity, and this juxtaposition of paying tribute to songs like “Rebel Girl” while adapting their cultural contexts, allows Bikini Thrills to occupy a position of disidentification, building on the work of the original movement yet firmly positioning themselves in another community, and from a different perspective as Bikini Kill. This disidentificatory positionality was only reinforced when, between songs, Renee explicitly identified herself as a Chicana/Latina and asserted her Chicana/Latina pride. And it was further cemented when Bikini Thrills led the audience in collectively repeating Spanish-language lyrics translations of song lyrics, with the expectation that most if not all of the audience spoke Spanish. These verbal recognitions of Chicana/Latina subjectivity and language, as well as the visual of a mostly Chicana/Latina riot grrrl band up on stage, created a space for Chicana/Latina -identifying riot grrrls at this concert that did not often exist at a Bikini Kill show. By performing the lyrics in a mix of Spanish and English, Bikini Thrills forces songs like “Rebel Girl,” to be interpreted not only within an exclusively feminist

context, but also with the added dimension of awareness about how their gender identities are intrinsically linked to their racial and ethnic identities. Additionally, they successfully took a song that has long been considered a feminist and queer anthem, and re-worked it so that it could also be utilized as an expression of Chicana/Latina pride. Chicana/Latina visibility, and explicit Chicana/Latina pride is an important and constant aspect of riot grrrl feminism within the IE Riot Grrrl collective. IE Riot Grrrls are constantly negotiating the process of balancing, celebrating, and recognizing the intersections between their racial and gender identities. Through initiatives such as Bikini Thrills that assert Chicana/Latina identity and recognize Chicana/Latina culture, contemporary riot grrrls are able to transform staples of riot grrrl culture into media texts that are just as relevant to their cultural backgrounds.

Conclusion

This chapter's objective was to describe the numerous ways that contemporary riot grrrls have evolved their feminist praxis from those of the original movement, and to analyze how these changes have affected the movement's accessibility. Overall, I argue that the contemporary riot grrrls proudly associate with the original riot grrrl movement and utilize many of the same strategies of activism, but also openly work to adapt and expand riot grrrl tactics in order to make them more relevant and effective in this current time period. Between technological advances and intentional strategic shifts in praxis, contemporary riot grrrl communities like the IE Riot Grrrls are working to keep riot grrrl capable of meeting the needs of the specific temporalities and geographies in which they

operate. Subcultural disidentification provides a lens at which to view this evolution and to recognize the ways in which riot grrrl activism is still thriving. Additionally, the process of subcultural disidentification ensures the possibility of future reiterations of riot grrrl, with future riot grrrls that will continue to transform riot grrrl activism so that it stays relevant and useful to meet the needs of their community. My conclusion will expand upon this potential future, the continuation of subcultural disidentification within the movement, and also about aspects of this evolution that still need to be examined more thoroughly.

Conclusion

In the preface to Hanna's now infamous "Riot Grrrl Manifesto." the authors of *Bikini Kill* claimed, "there is no concrete vision or expectation. We Riot Grrrls aren't aligning ourselves with any one position or consensus, because in all likelihood we don't agree on everything" ("Riot Grrrl"). This attitude that both original and contemporary riot grrrls possess towards approaching and defining riot grrrl has provided one of the largest challenges for me in the process of completing this project – the challenge to accurately

and ethically represent a movement as heterogeneous, diverse, and intentionally not cohesive as riot grrrl. Due to the limited scope of my project, I was only able to account for the perspectives of a few select founding chapters of the original riot grrrl movement and a few select contemporary riot grrrls active in southern California right now. I believe my observations are well-grounded, despite the micro-scale of my demographic and representative of a more general trend in riot grrrl activism occurring now in places all over the world; however, I recognize that there are still many riot grrrl perspectives that have yet to be told and I hope that one day they too get chronicled. From the extremely active and increasingly powerful riot grrrl-associated Permanent Wave collective based in New York City, to the feverishly productive Riot Grrrl Berlin network in Germany, there are many political and feminist initiatives taking place under the riot grrrl label that deserve more recognition and further examination. In addition to members of current collectives like these, there is also the issue of riot grrrl activity in the years between 1996 and 2010, which is a demographic I unfortunately was not able to represent in this project. Although I could not include their activities in this particular project, I certainly hope that more riot grrrl researchers in the future dedicate their time to constructing a more thorough and continuous timeline of riot grrrl evolution and growth that highlights the achievements of riot grrrls active between 1996 and 2010.

Additionally, there are many aspects of contemporary riot grrrl activism that I believe should be explored more thoroughly in the future because they will deeply affect the future evolution of riot grrrl activism. These aspects are the increasing employment of the Internet and social networking technology in order to facilitate communication both between riot grrrls and between non-local chapters, and the evolving perspectives on

gender identity and its impact on who can claim membership to the riot grrrl community. My interest in examining the Internet's role in riot grrrl evolution stemmed from my exploration of the intensely online-focused discussions among contemporary riot grrrls in the Inland Empire, and the many ways I observed that the online format changed how they communicated and worked to support each other from the in-person meetings of the original movement. I believe that a thorough study of "grrrl love" and intimate communication within contemporary riot grrrl communities, one that additionally incorporated Internet communication theory and other critical media theories, could draw some fascinating observations about what future riot grrrl activism and evolution could look like, and how these changes might affect the movement's accessibility and visibility. My additionally interest in gender identity within riot grrrl communities comes from my observation that, although IE Riot Grrrl intentionally expanded the definition of a "riot grrrl" to include trans-identified, genderqueer, and gender fluid individuals, most of the collective's members were still cisgender women. I believe that as this expanded and more inclusive definition of riot grrrl becomes more prevalent, and that even mainstream societal starts recognizing gender identities and gender activities outside of the traditional male/female dichotomy, more non-female-identifying and non-normatively gendered individuals will join the movement. How this increased presence of non-female identifying riot grrrls will affect both praxis and the language used to describe future riot grrrl activism is a fascinating question about which a study focused on issues of gender identity could reveal answers. Assuming contemporary riot grrrls maintain a similar trajectory of working to make the movement more accessible, more inclusive, and more representative of the life experiences of more individuals, I am confident that future riot

grrrls will alter their practices in order to incorporate those who do not identify as a cisgender grrrl but want to participate in the riot grrrl community.

Lastly, I argue that for all of these potential future studies of riot grrrl activism and culture, disidentification, and more specifically subcultural disidentification, provide a beneficial lens through which to analyze riot grrrls' process of evolution. I learned from my analysis that it is important to recognize both the ways that the most contemporary riot grrrls imitate and pay tribute to past movements, and the ways in which they choose to break away from tradition and adapt the praxis to better suit their needs. Grounding riot grrrl research in the theory of (subcultural) disidentification rightly recognizes the constant potential for adaptation and transformation within riot grrrl activism, and aids in explaining processes of evolution in feminist praxis such as the ones I have discovered between the original movement and contemporary riot grrrl activism now. Subcultural disidentification provides a template of analysis that rightly acknowledges the possibility for future reiterations of riot grrrl activism, and recognizes the intersections between accessibility and evolution.

Works Cited

- "About Bikini Kills." *Bikini Thrills*. Facebook. Web. 6 Apr. 2012.
<<http://www.facebook.com/BikiniThrills>>.
- Adi and Brianna. Personal interview. 12 Nov. 2011.
- Andersen, Mark, and Mark Jenkins. *Dance of Days: Two Decades of Punk in the Nation's Capital*. New York, NY: Akashic, 2003. Print.
- B.E.T.C.H. Rag*. [zine] Issue #1. Riverside, CA. 2011.
- Bikini Kill. "Rebel Girl." *Pussy Whipped*. Kill Rock Stars. 1993. CD.

- Bikini Kill. "Riot Grrrl." *The Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader: Histories and Debates*. Ed. David Brackett. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009. 508-509. Print.
- Bikini Kill*. [Zine] Issue #1. Olympia, WA. 1991.
- Bikini Thrills Live Performance*. Blood Orange Info Shop, Riverside, CA. Aug. 2011. Performance.
- Bratmobile. *Pottymouth*. Kill Rock Stars, 1992. CD. Cited?
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. London, England: Routledge, 1990. Print.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1991. Print.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43.6 (1991): 1241-299. Print.
- DeRogitis, Jim. "It Was a Riot, Girls." *Milk It! Collected Musings on the Alternative Music Explosion of the 90s*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2003. 109-138. Print.
- "Don't Need You: The Herstory of Riot Grrrl." Dir. Kerri Koch. Urban Cowgirl Productions, 2006. Film
- Faludi, Susan. *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women*. New York, NY: Crown, 1991. Print.
- Flores, Erica. Personal interview. 5 Nov. 2011.
- "George Zimmerman Charged, Hearing Expected Thursday." *CNN*. 11 Apr. 2012. Web. 12 Apr. 2012. <http://www.cnn.com/2012/04/11/justice/florida-teenshooting/index.html?hp=hp_c1>.
- Gloria. Personal interview. 13 Nov. 2011.
- Gottlieb, Joanne and Gayle Wald. "Smells Like Teen Spirit: Riot Grrrls, Revolution, and Women in Independent Rock." *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music & Youth Culture*. Ed. By Tricia Rose and Andrew Ross. New York, NY: Routledge, 1994. 250-274. Print.
- Guzaitis, Chris. "'Defining Disidentification.'" *Jose Muñoz – Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Handout. Introduction to Queer Studies. (Professor Chris Guzaitis.) Scripps College. Fall 2011. Print.

- Guzaitis, Chris. *Gender Performativity: A Primer*. Handout. Introduction to Queer Studies. (Professor Chris Guzaitis.) Scripps College. Fall 2011. Print.
- Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1979. Print.
- Hirschey, Gerri. "The Nineties: Riot Grrls and Mack Mamas, Troubadours and pissed-Off Hippie Spawn." *We've Got To Get Out of This Place*. New York, NY: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2011. 155-198. Print.
- "IE Riot Grrrl Benefit Show." Facebook, Web. Dec. 2011.
<http://www.facebook.com/groups/245008972200137/>
- "IE Riot Grrrl Zine Benefit Show and Clothesline Project Event." Facebook, Web. 10 March. 2012. <http://www.facebook.com/events/101163926677962/>
- IE Riot GRRRLS*. Facebook, Web.
<<http://www.facebook.com/groups/245008972200137/>>.
- Kearney, Mary. "Grrrl Zines: Exploring Identity, Transforming Girls' Written Culture." *Girls Make Media*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Routledge, 2006. Print.
Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1999: 125-189. Print.
- Kearney, Mary Celeste. "The Missing Links: Riot Grrrl, Feminism, and Lesbian Culture." *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*. By Sheila Whiteley. London, England: Routledge, 1997. 207-25. Print.
- Leonard, Marion. *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock Discourse and Girl Power*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2007. Print.
- Marcus, Sara. *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2010. Print
- McClary, Susan. *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1991. Print.
- Meltzer, Marisa. "Riot Grrrls." *Girl Power: The Nineties Revolution in Music*. New York, NY: Faber and Faber, 2010. 3-40. Print.
- Messner, Michael A. "Boyhood, Organized Sports, and the Construction of Masculinities." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. 4th ed. Vol. 18. Sage Publications, 1990. 416-44.
- Muñoz, José. "Introduction: Performing Disidentifications." *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 1999. 1-36. Print.
- Neuman, Molly and Allison Wolfe. *Girl Germs: The Glory on Highway 69*. [Zine] Issue #5. Olympia, WA. 1992.

- "New Riot Grrrl Manifesto." *IE Riot GRRRLS*. Facebook, Dec. 2011. Web.
<<http://www.facebook.com/groups/245008972200137/>>.
- Nguyen, Mimi Thi. "Aesthetics, Access, Intimacy or Race, Riot Grrrl, Bad Feelings." *International Girl Gang Underground*. [Zine] Ed. Stacy Konkiel and Kate Wadkins. New York, NY. 2011
- O' Hara, Craig. "DIY." *The Philosophy of Punk: More Than Noise!* San Francisco, CA: AK Press, 1999. 153-167. Print.
- Piano, Doreen. "Resisting Subjects: DIY Feminism and the Politics of Style in Subcultural Production." *The Post-Subcultures Reader*. Ed. By David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzerl. New York, NY: Berg, 2004. 253-268. Print.
- Piepmeyer, Alison. *Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009. Print.
- Press, Joy and Simon Reynolds. *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock n' Roll*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995. 323-331. Print.
- Renaë. Email interview. Nov. 2011.
- "Riot Grrrl Manifesto." *Bikini Kill*. [Zine] Ed. By Kathleen Hanna. Issue #2. Washington D.C. 1991.
- Smith, Rachel. "Revolution Girl Style, 20 Years Later." *NPR Music*. 22 Sept. 2011.
- Spencer, Amy. *DIY: The Rise of Lo-Fi Culture*. New York, NY: Marion Boyars, 2008. Print.
- Sullivan, Nikki. "Performance, Performativity, Parody, and Politics." *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2003. 81-98. Print.
- "Summer Camp." *Rock N' Roll Camp for Girls Los Angeles*. Girls Rock! Web. Apr. 2012.
<<http://www.rockcampforgirlsla.org/summer-camp/>>.
- Vélez, Jamie Varriale. "The Copy is Always An Original: Adaptation, Evolution, and Riot Grrrl." *International Girl Gang Underground*. [Zine] Ed. Stacy Konkiel and Kate Wadkins. New York, NY. 2011
- Wald, Gayle. "Just a Girl? Rock Music, Feminism, and the Cultural Construction of Female Youth." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 23.3 (1998): 585-610. Print.
- "We Are Looking for IE Riot Grrrls!" Facebook, Web. 14 Aug. 2011.
<<http://www.facebook.com/groups/245008972200137/>>.
- Wolfe, Allison. Personal interview. 6 Nov. 2011.

“Women Who Rock: A Panel on Women in Music.” Rosehills Theater, Pomona College, Claremont, CA. 6 Apr. 2011. Panel Discussion.

Zoladz, Lindsey. “Every Girl is Not a Riot Grrrl.”
<http://pitchfork.com/features/articles/8710-not-every-girl-is-a-riot-grrrl/>. Nov 16, 2011.

Appendix I: Interview Questions

Background

Tell me about yourself (name, age, place of birth, and current place of residence)

Describe your involvement in feminist activist communities (in LA).

Describe your involvement in musical communities in (LA).

How did you start making music and/or participating in these communities/scenes?

Why do you participate in these communities/scenes?

Please give a brief history of when, where, and how these feminist collectives/networks/scenes formed and other historical details

Defining Terms

What does the term/identity “riot grrrl” mean to you?

Do you identify as a “riot grrrl?” Please explain why yes or no.

What do the terms “feminist” and “queer” mean to you?

Do you identify as either “feminist” and/or “queer?” Please explain why yes or no.

Experiences with and Thoughts on Riot Grrrl

When and how did you first become introduced to riot grrrl?

Do you listen to “riot grrrl” music such as Bratmobile, Bikini Kill, etc? Do you read riot grrrl zines? Please describe your experiences with these medias.

If you actively sought out more information about riot grrrl, where did you look? What sources did you find?

Do you think a “riot grrrl” community is still active today? If no, why? If yes, how is it different from the one that existed in the Pacific Northwest in the early 1990s?

How do the feminist ideologies and goals of groups you participate in relate to those of the original movement?

How does your community’s strategies of action relate to those of the original movement?

What are critiques you have heard about the original riot grrrl? How would you respond to them?

Feminist Theory

What is your experience with academic feminist theory and theorists?

How would you describe the relationship between your feminist activism and feminist theory?

How would you describe the relationship between original riot grrrl activism and feminist theory?

Subcultures

How would you position the original riot grrrl movement compared to mainstream society? Compared to the punk subculture?

How would you position your community compared to mainstream society? To the original riot grrrl movement? To other contemporary feminist collectives in LA? To other subcultures?

Appendix II: “The Riot Grrrl Manifesto”

This text was written by Kathleen Hanna and first appeared in issue #2 of her zine *Bikini Kill* in the summer of 1991. Since then it has been widely re-published in zines, on websites and blogs, and in feminist readers.

BECAUSE us girls crave records and books and fanzines that speak to US that WE feel included in and can understand in our own ways.

BECAUSE we wanna make it easier for girls to see/hear each other's work so that we can share strategies and criticize-applaud each other.

BECAUSE we must take over the means of production in order to create our own moanings.

BECAUSE viewing our work as being connected to our girlfriends-politics-real lives is essential if we are gonna figure out how we are doing impacts, reflects, perpetuates, or DISRUPTS the status quo.

BECAUSE we recognize fantasies of Instant Macho Gun Revolution as impractical lies meant to keep us simply dreaming instead of becoming our dreams AND THUS seek to create revolution in our own lives every single day by envisioning and creating alternatives to the bullshit Christian capitalist way of doing things.

BECAUSE we want and need to encourage and be encouraged in the face of all our own insecurities, in the face of beergutboyrock that tells us we can't play our instruments, in the face of "authorities" who say our bands/zines/etc are the worst in the US and

BECAUSE we don't wanna assimilate to someone else's (boy) standards of what is or isn't.

BECAUSE we are unwilling to falter under claims that we are reactionary "reverse sexists" AND NOT THE TRUEPUNKROCKSOULCRUSADERS THAT WE KNOW we really are.

BECAUSE we know that life is much more than physical survival and are patently aware that the punk rock "you can do anything" idea is crucial to the coming angry grrrl rock revolution which seeks to save the psychic and cultural lives of girls and women everywhere, according to their own terms, not ours.

BECAUSE we are interested in creating non-hierarchical ways of being AND making music, friends, and scenes based on communication + understanding, instead of competition + good/bad categorizations.

BECAUSE doing/reading/seeing/hearing cool things that validate and challenge us can help us gain the strength and sense of community that we need in order to figure out how bullshit like racism, able-bodieism, ageism, speciesism, classism, thinism, sexism, anti-semitism and heterosexism figures in our own lives.

BECAUSE we see fostering and supporting girl scenes and girl artists of all kinds as integral to this process.

BECAUSE we hate capitalism in all its forms and see our main goal as sharing information and staying alive, instead of making profits of being cool according to traditional standards.

BECAUSE we are angry at a society that tells us Girl = Dumb, Girl = Bad, Girl = Weak.

BECAUSE we are unwilling to let our real and valid anger be diffused and/or turned against us via the internalization of sexism as witnessed in girl/girl jealousy and self defeating girltype behaviors.

BECAUSE I believe with my wholeheartmindbody that girls constitute a revolutionary soul force that can, and will change the world for real.

Appendix III: The “New” Riot Grrrl Manifesto

This text was posted and discussed within the “IE Riot Grrrls” facebook group in December 2011. It was written by a current member of the group, a self-identified “riot grrrl” who is based in the Inland Empire.

BECAUSE I need laughter and I need love. We need to build lines of communication so we can be more open and accessible to each other.

BECAUSE we are being divided by our labels and philosophies and we need to accept and support each other; acknowledging our different approaches to life and accepting all of them as valid.

BECAUSE in every form of media, I see us/myself slapped, decapitated, laughed at , objectified, raped, trivialized, pushed, ignored, stereotyped, kicked, molested, silenced,

invalidated, knifed, shot, choked and killed.

BECAUSE I see the connectedness of all forms of oppression and I believe we need to fight them with awareness.

BECAUSE a safe space needs to be created for Grrrls where we can open our eyes and reach out to each other without being threatened by this sexist society and our day to day bullshit.

BECAUSE we need to acknowledge that our blood is being spilt; that right now a grrrl is being raped or battered and it might be me or you or the grrrl next to you and she might be dead by the time you finish reading this.

BECAUSE I can't smile when my friends are dying inside. We are dying inside and we never touch each other; we are supposed to hate each other.

BECAUSE we need to talk to each other. Communication/ inclusion is key. We need to break the silence.

BECAUSE we want to create mediums that speak to us. We are tired of boy band after boy band, boy zine after boy zine.

BECAUSE I am tired of these things happening to me. I am not a fuck toy. I am not a punching bag. I am not a joke.

BECAUSE every time we pick up a pen or an instrument or get anything done. We are creating the revolution. We are the revolution.

START A FUCKING RIOT.