MASCULINITY, MISOGYNY, AND THE RHETORIC OF ONLINE MUSICAL DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT

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Online discussion sites, such as social media platforms and discussion forums, have long served as spaces in which fans of specific musical genres can negotiate their identities and construct the borders to their musical community. Due to less involvement from corporate popular music labels, the most tight-knit online communities form around non-mainstream musical topics when compared to their mainstream counterparts. Despite the common assumption that the anonymity of the internet allows for equitable dialogue, the marginalization and silencing of women and minorities is prevalent throughout non-mainstream music communities. In this thesis, I integrate methodologies from media studies, musicology, ethnomusicology, and sociology to examine the ways in which user-generated content serves to police the boundaries of online music communities. Each chapter delves into the unique ways fans in different communities use language to preserve the white, male hegemony. Chapter 1 delves into an examination of the 1970s punk fanzine, *Slash* to introduce the ways in which music fans leverage performances of masculinity to demonstrate authenticity and power in punk communities. Chapter 2 continues this line of inquiry, but I shift my focus to performances intellectualism in the contemporary online independent (indie) music community. In Chapter 3, I move away from genre-based dialogues and examine self-fashioning, essentialism, and taste in high-end audio blogs and forums. Together, these three chapters demonstrate that online dialogues do significant cultural work in the silencing of women and minorities both within and outside of the digital realm.

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INTRODUCTION

Lauren Davidson, a journalist for *The Telegraph,* quipped in 2015 that "everyone knows you should never read the comments."[1] Davidson was referring to the popular belief that the comments sections of online content, such as news articles and blogs, contain some of the most offensive and incendiary language in the public sphere. As such, reading posts by anonymous users can be frustrating, given the apparent lack of civility of those sharing their thoughts. The misbehavior of those on the internet is largely due to the inherent anonymity available in online public spaces that allows internet users to construct and perform identities independent of their public identity. Some use this virtual veil as an excuse to say and do things that would otherwise be unacceptable in person-to-person interactions.[2] Contrary to the common claim that online communities provide an open space for equitable and democratic dialogues, the digital realm reflects, and perhaps even exacerbates, the societal marginalization of women and minorities.[3]

However, for those who participate in online music communities, this user-generated content—text and pictures shared in public online spaces such as comments sections and forums—has served as a major medium for establishing the identity of those using digital

[1] Lauren Davidson, "Never Read the Comments. Here's Why," January 15, 2015, Accessed March 27, 2018. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/11342558/Online-articles-Never-read-the-comments.-Heres-why.html.
[2] Corinne A. Moss-Racusin, Aneta K. Molenda, and Charlotte R. Cramer, "Can Evidence Impact Attitudes? Public Reactions to Evidence of Gender Bias in STEM Fields," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (2015): 194; Lisa Nakamura, *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* (NewYork: Routledge, 2002), 196; Kimberly M. Christopherson, "The Positive and Negative Implications of Anonymity in Internet Social Interactions: 'On the Internet, Nobody Knows You're a Dog,'" *Computers in Human Behavior* 23, no. 6 (2007): 303; Noam Lapidot-Lefler and Azy Barak, "Effects of Anonymity, Invisibility, and Lack of Eye-Contact on Toxic Online Disinhibition," *Computers in Human Behavior* 28, no. 2 (2012): 434.
[3] Leticia Bode, "Closing the Gap: Gender Parity in Political Engagement on Social Media," *Information, Communication & Society* 20, no. 4 (2017): 587; Lincoln Dahlberg, "The Internet and Democratic Discourse: Exploring The Prospects of Online Deliberative Forums Extending the Public Sphere," *Information, Communication & Society* 4, no. 4 (2001): 615; Steffen Albrecht, "Whose Voice Is Heard in Online Deliberation?: A Study of Participation and Representation in Political Debates on the Internet," *Information, Communication & Society* 9, no. 1 (2006): 62.

platforms for more than two decades.[4] The concept of digitally networked communities emerged in the early 1980s, with the first publicly accessible forums, such as Delphi and the WIT Project, appearing in the early 1990s.[5] The familiar hobby-based forums, in which users can post to message boards in specific categories, became popular starting in the mid-nineties, only to wane with the advent of social media-style websites.[6] It was in the late 1990s and early 2000s that the majority of amateur musical discourse moved online, largely abandoning printed media in favor of genre-centered websites, web logs (blogs), and electronic magazines. User-generated content in musically centered spaces is usually unmoderated, that is, posts in forums or comments sections are rarely filtered or deleted. Online spaces with user-generated content, then, are rich with a variety of unmediated voices from members of the community. These unfiltered comments are a long-ignored yet invaluable resource for interpreting the values of online music communities. In an effort to better understand the workings of specific musical subcultures, I defy Davidson's warning and do what "everyone knows" not to do: "read the comments."[7]

As new media scholars Lisa Nakamura and Adrienne Massanari and musicologists Ken Prouty and David Jennings have demonstrated, user-generated content does significant work in establishing the boundaries of online music communities.[8] This cultural work is particularly noticeable in online spaces centered around non-mainstream musical topics. Here community

[4] Andy Bennet and Richard Peterson, *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 221.
[5] Christopher Lueg and Daniel Fisher, *From Usenet to CoWebs: Interacting with Social Information Spaces* (New York: Springer Science & Business Media, 2012), 17.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Davidson, "Never Read the Comments."
[8] Nakamura, *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet*,196; Adrienne Massanari, "#Gamergate and The Fappening: How Reddit's Algorithm, Governance, and Culture Support Toxic Technocultures," *New Media & Society* 19, no. 3 (2017); Ken Prouty, *Knowing Jazz: Community, Pedagogy, and Canon in the Information Age* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012); David Jennings, *Net, Blogs, and Rock "n" Roll: How Digital Discovery Works and What It Means for Consumers, Creators, and Culture* (London: Nicholas Brealy, 2007). See also Arturo Arriagada, "Unpacking the 'Digital Habitus' of Music Fans," in *The Production and Consumption of Music in the Digital Age,* ed. Bran Hracs, Michael Seman, Tarek Virani, (New York: Routledge, 2016), 223–36.

identity formation depends less on corporate advertising and influence from major music labels.[9] Without the large systems of dissemination and criticism found in mainstream music, the communities formed by enthusiasts of niche interests rely on amateur and user-generated blog posts, forum threads, and comments sections to develop the values of music-based subcultures. In this thesis, I analyze fan-created content to explore the ways in which users police the boundaries of internet music communities. As I show, this discourse preserves an overwhelmingly white and male hegemony among users. In each of the following three chapters, I delve into a community centered around different non-mainstream topics: punk music of the late 1970s, contemporary independent music, and both midcentury and contemporary high-end audio. Primarily focusing on language and rhetoric, I parallel the behaviors found in these communities with common discriminatory tactics, and in doing so, demonstrate the significant influence user-generated content has in the marginalization of women and minorities both inside and outside the digital realm.

I contribute to the work already done by Nakamura, Massanari, Prouty, and Jennings by synthesizing methodologies drawn from media studies, sociology, musicology, and ethnomusicology to better understand issues of identity, masculinity, and discrimination as they play out on in musically centered online communities. Nakamura and Massanari have done significant work regarding the ways in which cultural norms are preserved or warped on the internet. Nakamura highlights the notion that online users tend to assume every commenter in a particular space is straight, white, and male until explicitly told otherwise.[10] Revealing a gender, race, or sexual orientation other than straight, white, or male typically results in an immediate

[9] Jennings, *Net, Blogs, and Rock "n" Roll,* 117; Brian Hracs, "A Creative Industry in Transition: The Rise of Digitally Driven Independent Music Production," *Growth and Change* 43, no. 3 (2012): 445.
[10] Nakamura, *Cybertypes,* 197-198.

shift in the treatment of a commenter by the community.[11] In her case study of "Gamergate," the 2014 controversy in which female video game developers and critics were targets of organized online harassment by male gamers, Massanari sheds light on the ways in which interactions shift in online spaces when a commenter's gender is centered in an online dialogue.[12] She takes "geek masculinity" and its part in the development of what she calls a "toxic technoculture" to task, holding those cultural phenomena responsible for the misogynistic behaviors prevalent in the gaming community.[13] Although musicologist Matthew Bannister does not touch on issues of digital media, he does contend with a broadening understanding of masculinity similar to that described by Massanari.[14] He introduces a concept he calls "soft masculinity"—an expression of masculinity wherein "power and control are not mainly physical and bodily, but abstract, indirect, and intellectual"—to explain the ways in which men deploy pseudo-intellectualism and scene-specific constructions of authenticity to exclude women and minorities from independent music communities.[15]

My study differs from those of Massanari, Nakamura, and Bannister in that I investigate a variety of styles of internet communities as well as printed media, including fanzines, magazines, forums, blogs, and social media. Approaching this broad range of sources, I establish a framework for discriminatory rhetoric as it typically appears in music communities through an analysis of the text and photos in historical printed media such as fanzines and enthusiast magazines. I parallel the misogynist tactics of print media with those of current enthusiast forums, thus affirming the historical foundations for the ways in which the exclusion of others

[11] Ibid.
[12] Massanari, "#Gamergate and The Fappening," 329.
[13] Ibid., 331.
[14] Matthew Bannister, *White Boys, White Noise: Masculinities and 1980s Guitar Rock* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 3.
[15] Ibid.

plays out in musically centered communities. By looking at the formulation of language in media of the 1950s-70s and reflections of that language in contemporary online spaces, my work offers a historical grounding absent from existing literature.

In my first chapter, "'Equally subjectable to abuse': Fanzines and the Feigned Gender Equity of the Early Los Angeles Punk Scene," I connect the outrageous and contrarian language of *Slash* (1977-1981), an early punk fanzine out of Los Angeles, to that of current online music communities. Created by amateurs seeking a local and interactive publication for and by local artists, fans, and musicians, fanzines were an early form of user-generated content.[16] Through analyses of musician interviews, concert reviews, and letters written to *Slash*, I demonstrate that, like the online spaces I will examine in chapters two and three, the writers of *Slash* superficially mask discriminatory and sexist rhetoric with sardonic and occasionally elitist humor.

The style of othering I observe in the 1970s fanzines in the seventies is similar to that practiced in contemporary online independent music communities. In my second chapter, "White Masculinity and the Online Indie Music Community," I examine two articles published on independent music review sites and the backlash they generated on social media. The first case study centers around a 2015 *Pitchfork* article that uncovered racist tendencies of the indie music industry and revealed that anonymous commenters perform intellectualism and "soft masculinity" to preserve the hegemony of online indie music criticism. My second case study concerns the contentious 2011 debate sparked by the lyrics of The Decemberists, an indie band known for their evocations of the rape and murder of women. In both case studies, commenters

[16] Dawson Barrett, "DIY Democracy: The Direct Action Politics of U.S. Punk Collectives," *American Studies* 52, no. 2 (2013): 23.

subvert the authority of those advocating for equity and diversification by claiming superior intelligence and understanding of musical issues.

In my third chapter, I turn to high-end audio enthusiasts, those who seek to build high-fidelity (hi-fi) home audio systems with specialized and customizable equipment. Hosted by forums and hobbyist websites, the discourse of this community features almost entirely male voices.[17] My analysis of forums, blogs posts, and Reddit posts, demonstrates that male voices deploy essentialist narratives to justify sexism. While the rhetoric and patterns in language differ from those in both fanzines and independent music social media debates, the discriminatory results are similar: women's interests and intelligence are consistently belittled and dismissed. I conclude by briefly considering online discourse and the current socio-political issues around the internet and equity in the United States. User-generated content and the cultural work done in online spaces—which shapes public opinion, purchasing habits, and the creation of art—remains a critically understudied phenomenon, a lacuna that motivates this study.

[17] "Who Are You?," Stereophile.com, July 6, 2009, Accessed February 13, 2018, https://www.stereophile.com/asweseeit/who_are_you/index.html.

CHAPTER 1

"EQUALLY SUBJECTABLE TO ABUSE": FANZINES AND THE FEIGNED GENDER EQUITY OF THE EARLY LOS ANGELES PUNK SCENE

Introduction: A Familiar Rhetoric

As the early Los Angeles punk scene took shape in the mid-1970s, so too did the crass and irreverent Do-It-Yourself (DIY) fan magazines (fanzines) that centered on the local punk music scene. Fanzines differ from professional magazines in that they were typically written and published by amateur fans who were directly involved with the scenes on which they reported. As such, fanzines were a site of participatory interaction with punk communities and acted in the development of local identities.[1] *Slash* magazine (1977-1981) was among the earliest and most popular fanzines in the nascent Los Angeles punk scene and its unrefined and hard-hitting reporting style followed the model of British and New York fanzines that preceded it.[2] Many punk fans and musicians in the Los Angeles region perceived *Slash* as an "authority" in the scene and depended on it for reviews, interviews, and announcements.[3]

However, *Slash,* like many other fanzines, perpetuated a culture of misogyny within punk, defying the contributors' own egalitarian claims.[4] This contradiction is surprising considering almost half of the contributing writers for *Slash* were women, including one of the fanzine's founding members, Melanie Nissen. In this chapter, I explore ways in which *Slash*

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[1] Dewar Macleod, "'Social Distortion:' The Rise of Suburban Punk Rock in Los Angeles," in *America Under Construction: Boundaries and Identities in Popular Culture*, ed. Kristi S. Long and Matthew Nadelhaft (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997), 131.
[2] Jon Lewis, "Punk in LA: It's Kiss or Kill," *Journal of Popular Culture* 2, no. 22 (1988): 88.
[3] Carolina A. Miranda, "Partying with the Germs and Drinking with X: A New Book about Slash Magazine Captures L.A.'s Early Punk Scene," July,19 2016, accessed March 26, 2018. http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/miranda/la-et-cam-slash-magazine-book-exhibition-20160719-snap-story.html.
[4] "Letters to the Editor," *Slash*, July 1978, 8.

misrepresented women and, as I argue, ultimately failed at fostering equity as one of the leading fan publications in the community. To better understand the behaviors of the punk community, I briefly describe the general characteristics of early punk. I then delve into *Slash* musician interviews to illustrate the ways in which punk musicians and fans negotiate identity both in the Los Angeles punk scene and internationally. Finally, I analyze both interviews and *Slash* concert reviews to uncover the misogynist language and behavior of musicians, fans, and *Slash* contributors. Although one would struggle to find causal links between the sexist language of fanzines and that of the online communities I address in later chapters, it will become clear that there are shared rhetorical devices at work. As I argue here, for instance, sarcasm and derisive banter ostensibly soften the rhetorical edge of sexist language but do little to dilute its ultimately exclusionary power.

Punk as Reaction

Punk rock—a genre of rock that is characterized by energetic tempos, uncomplicated harmonies and rhythms, and irreverent or politically charged lyrics—emerged first in the United Kingdom and soon after in the United States as a musical and cultural reaction to the changing social and political climate of the 1970s. As the economic growth of the 1950s and 60s waned, so too did the optimism of the blue-collar working class. Unemployment soared in the United Kingdom, particularly among the lower classes, and many blamed the growing influence of the conservative party and Margaret Thatcher.[5] Across the ocean, the United States dealt with

[5] Pete Dale, Professor Stan Hawkins, and Professor Lori Burns, *Anyone Can Do It: Empowerment, Tradition and the Punk Underground* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2012), 15.

similar economic stagnation, exacerbated by a deeply unpopular war and the social upheavals brought by the civil rights movement.[6]

In the United Kingdom especially, punk ideologies emerged as a nihilist, defeatist, iconoclastic, and violent reaction to the increasingly libertarian and right-wing economic shifts, a cause-and-effect development on which there is broad scholarly consensus.[7] As William Force argues, the aesthetic of punk of one of opposition, so it is sometimes easier to define punk as what it is not than to define what it is.[8] Those who identify as punks usually decry commercialism, capitalism, and any music associated with the mainstream. Most punk fans and musicians identify politically as anarchists, but as Pete Dale and Dawson Barret demonstrate, punk rhetoric typically betrays traditional leftist leanings.[9] Dale points out the irony of these leftist tendencies in that many punks decry the liberal agenda of their countercultural predecessors, the "hippies."[10] Although the singer-songwriter protest songs of the 1960s are a far cry from the thrashing of mid-1970s punk, the two genres share a similar lineage in their perpetuation of such values as amateurism, anti-capitalism, and egalitarianism.[11] These "anti-rock" values stand in stark contrast to the other popular genres at the time—disco, glam rock, and arena rock—which celebrated excess, commodity, and the use of music in the pursuit of fame and wealth.[12]

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[6] Katherine E. Wadkins, ""Freakin' Out": Remaking Masculinity through Punk Rock in Detroit," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 22, nos. 2–3 (2012): 242.
[7] Dale, Hawkins, and Burns, *Can Do It*; Dawson Barrett, "DIY Democracy: The Direct Action Politics of U.S. Punk Collectives," *American Studies* 52, no. 2 (2013): 23; Ryan Moore, "Postmodernism and Punk Subculture: Cultures of Authenticity and Deconstruction," *The Communication Review* 7, no. 3 (2004): 305; Julia Downes, "The Expansion of Punk Rock: Riot Grrrl Challenges to Gender Power Relations in British Indie Music Subcultures," *Women's Studies* 41, no. 2 (2012): 205.
[8] William Ryan Force, "Consumption Styles and the Fluid Complexity of Punk Authenticity," *Symbolic Interaction* 32, no. 4 (2009): 290.
[9] Dale, *Anyone Can Do It,* 16; Barrett, "DIY Democracy," 23.
[10] Dale, *Anyone Can Do It*, 16.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Moore, "Postmodernism and Punk Subculture," 307-308.

As an expression of opposition to the capitalist tendencies of other musical genres, punk fans and musicians value the DIY aesthetic of their wardrobe, venue choices, and music making.[13] For example, men and women alike might wear shirts that they have altered by either cutting off the sleeves or cropping the neck. Similarly, they often flaunt haircuts, piercings, and tattoos done at home or by other amateurs. Performance venues are often multipurpose and act as communal living spaces, art galleries, workshops, and non-profit concert halls.[14] Similarly, many of the musicians are self-taught instrumentalists with little to no formal training in music. Songs thus tend to have uncomplicated approaches to meter, harmony, or form.[15] As a now-famous fanzine cartoon proselytized, "This is a chord. This is another. This is a third. Now Form a Band" (Figure 1.1). The value placed on simplicity and amateur musicianship allowed all punks to participate in performance. As cultural studies scholar Dewar Macleod explains, participation was a vital aspect of DIY, whether in music making, writing fanzines, or creating art.[16] In the punk community, DIY permeated every aspect of fandom, and served as an integral part of identity formation among those committed to punk fanhood.

[13] Naomi Griffin, "Gendered Performance and Performing Gender in the DIY Punk and Hardcore Music Scene," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 13, no. 2 (2012): 66.
[14] Ross Haenfler, "Collective Identity in the Straight Edge Movement: How Diffuse Movements Foster Commitment, Encourage Individualized Participation, and Promote Cultural Change," *The Sociological Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (2004): 788.
[15] Moore, "Postmodernism and Punk Subculture," 314.
[16] Dewar Macleod, "'Social Distortion:' The Rise of Suburban Punk Rock in Los Angeles," in *America Under Construction: Boundaries and Identities in Popular Culture*, ed. Kristi S. Long and Matthew Nadelhaft (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997), 132.

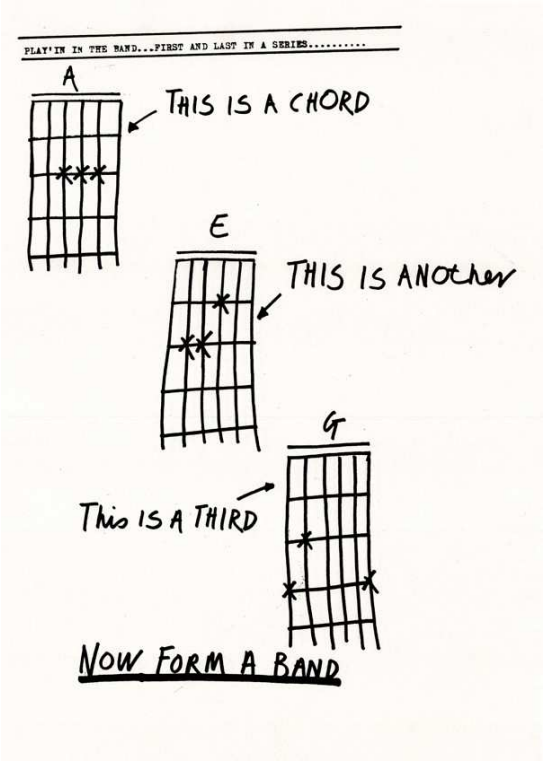

Figure 1.1: "This is a Chord"[17]

Fanzines and Negotiating Identity

Since fanzines were typically self-published by a team of local punk community members, they serve as an informative look into the values of specific scenes.[18] Some of the behaviors that are prevalent throughout the interviews in *Slash* include self-marginalization, disdain for phony punks, claims of freedom from influence, and disparagement of musicians from outside the scene. Fanzines not only reflected the cultural happenings of the punk community, but as media theorists Matt Grimes and Tim Wall show in their study of fanzines throughout punk history, these fan-created publications also held significant influence in shaping

[17] "This Is a Chord," *Sideburns*, January 1977, 17.
[18] "Reading Material," *Slash*, October 1977, 32.

localized punk cultures.[19] Art historian Teal Triggs agrees with Grimes and Wall when she asserts that fanzines "provided a focal point and unifying vehicle for establishing and reinforcing shared values, philosophy, and opinions," emphasizing the importance of the fanzines in constructing the identity of punk scenes.[20] Triggs, however, examines only the visual art aesthetics of fanzines, while Grimes and Wall focus their analysis on distribution networks in the United Kingdom and socio-political influences on fanzine writers. In contrast, I demonstrate in the examples below that the language and behaviors in the fanzine interviews crystallize community understandings among *Slash*'s American readership of what it means to be "authentically" punk.[21]

As noted, fanzines sometimes included interviews with bands that are from the local scene or touring in the area. Such interviews constitute an intriguing site of study because the language used by the band members is mostly candid and unfiltered.[22] For example, identity formation is obvious in this *Slash* interview with Los Angeles-based band, The Germs (note that those conducting *Slash* interviews are rarely identified by name):

> Slash: Are you real punks?
>
> Pat: Yeah, I guess-you shoulda seen what happened at the Orpheus! After we played they closed it down. We trashed the place, they called the police and no punk bands can play there now... we're really sorry, guys.
>
> Slash: Is your music political?

[19] Matt Grimes and Tim Wall, "Punk Zines: 'Symbols of Defiance' from the Print to the Digital Age," in *Fight Back: Punk, Politics, and Resistance*, ed. Matthew Worley et al. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 289.
[20] Teal Triggs, "Scissors and glue: punk fanzines and the creation of a DIY aesthetic," *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 1, (2006): 70.
[21] Force, "Consumption Styles," 290-291.
[22] There is obviously some amount of mediation by the fanzine's publishing team. It is safe to assume, however, that little to no changes are made to the interviews out of a pursuit of fidelity and authenticity to the musicians' words and thoughts. Since these publications were not a commercial pursuit, there is no real motivation to edit or alter conversations with musicians. In fact, doing so may damage the reputation of those distributing the fanzine.

> Bobby: Kind of, we talk about overthrowing everything. We've been ruined by society… I like to refer to us as social heaps.[23]

This brief excerpt exemplifies tendencies found in the *Slash* band interviews. The *Slash* team almost always asks the band to consider their authenticity as punks. In this instance, Pat claims that The Germs are genuinely punk and supports his assertion with the fact that the band and their audiences "trash" the venues at which they perform, aligning punk identity with destruction of for-profit performance spaces. In the next response, Bobby vaguely agrees that their music is political and espouses two common mantras of punk political beliefs. The first is that their lyrics discuss "overthrowing everything" as an expression of anarchy, and second, that due to their radical anarchist beliefs and social ruination, they are "social heaps," or more precisely, outcasts from mainstream society.

In this complex process of self-marginalization, Bobby deflects responsibility in his becoming a punk. He places blame on "society" for "ruining" him to the point that punk culture is the only place he, as a "social heap," can exist. On the other hand, they pride themselves throughout the interview on their social depravity: Bobby refers to huffing spot-remover to get high before shows and Pat repeatedly attempts to turn the conversation to genitalia. In the interview, the band attempts to express their interpretation of punk identity through contrarian and self-deprecating behavior. They even appear to mock the idea of an interview, because it suggests mainstream distribution and readership. By self-marginalizing, the band separates themselves from the musical, social, and political mainstream.[24]

In an interview with The Dils, a band based in Carlsband, California, the *Slash* contributor explores a slightly different topic when he asks the band where they see their genre

[23] "Interview with The Germs," *Slash,* August 1977, 14. Ellipses in original.
[24] Force, "Consumption Styles," 300.

going in the future. The band take this as an opportunity to question issues of geography and identity.

> Slash: If there is a new wave in this country, how do you see it developing?
>
> Chip: To quote David Bowie on the Dinah Shore show when asked "what is punk?," he replied, "Something happening in England." There is somethin' going on here, but it's not that serious. It's more musical, and like an excuse, outrage for the sake of outrage, not so social,
>
> Tony: The vast majority of youth has not much to be pissed about. They have a lot to be bored with, but most American kids don't translate the boredom into political thoughts. They translate it into drugs. Either that or they're college students, they'll write for four years and then get a job with IBM.
>
> Slash: You don't see the two blending and becoming one?
>
> Tony: English new wave will influence a lot of American bands on the surface, but don't think they'll blend that much. People here are not pissed, just bored.[25]

Here Chip starts by differentiating the musical climate in England from that of the United States. He seems envious of what he perceives to be a troubled social climate in England, as if it legitimizes the rage and energy of the country's punk scene. Tony concurs, lamenting American youth's ennui. The Dils are negotiating borders, to be sure, but they must admit that the punk scene of the west coast is subject to the influence of the United Kingdom, which, in the mid-1970s, was viewed by American punks as the epicenter of international punk culture. Later in the interview, Chip redirects attention to aspects of the band that he perceives as authentically punk, arguing that "The Dils are no copycats. The Dils have never been a heavy-metal band, never a top-40 band. They play what they play, it happens to be at the right time in the right place."[26]

[25]The term "new wave" refers to the new punk music that was gaining popularity in the 1970s in the United Kingdom and the United States. While the meaning of the term does shift in the early 1980s to refer to a more synthesizer-based offshoot of the more guitar-and-drums-based punk, any reference before 1980 is typically synonymous with punk-style music. "Interview with The Dils," *Slash,* August 1977, 7.
[26] Ibid.

Chip's recitation of The Dils' punk credentials reestablishes their identity as an American punk band by positioning the group's creativity beyond the influence of trends or audience demands. Here the band affirms its authenticity through freedom from influence, even influence from the leaders of the international scene in the United Kingdom.[27]

The contradictions and impossibilities of fulfilling an authentic punk identity are most apparent in the *Slash* interview with The Zeros, a band based in Chula Vista, California. Band members discuss issues in punk identity at three separate points in the interview, all with different perspectives on being a punk musician.

> Slash: How long have the Zeros existed?
>
> Zeros: Two or three months. Not really ... we've known each other for a year. We had another band, The Mainstream Brats. We were punk way before ...
> ---
> Slash: You broke up once. What happened?
>
> Zeros: It was my fault. (Hector)
>
> -He was obsessed with the punk image (Javier)
>
> -I was hard to get along with. (Hector) -Very! (Javier and Robert) -But he's cooled down a lot now. (Javier) -It set everything back for us for a longtime. (Hector)
>
> Slash: You became a little Sid Vicious?
>
> Zeros: Yeah, and Javier was Tom Verlaine! -He was like those L.A. punks who became punk when they heard of The Pistols. (Javier) But I knew he was not such a hard guy...
> ---
> Slash: What makes you mad?
>
> Zeros: I hate people using that punk thing, billing themselves as new wave when they're not. It makes me sick. We have a song called "Wimp" about these people, the phony punks. If you haven't lived it, well...[28]

[27] Complete freedom from influence is an obvious impossibility, considering the limited skills of and the sparse resources available to burgeoning bands like The Dils. For more, see Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).
[28] "Interview with The Zeros," *Slash,* August 1977, 13.

The Zeros negotiate identity on two levels in this interview. In the first excerpt, band members clarify that they have been punk for a long time. As Force contends, earliness to punk demonstrates insider knowledge that can only be obtained through experience.[29] Earliness increases the chance that someone has a wide-reaching knowledge of the community and its practices. Force argues that "authenticity is performed" through the "seemingly effortless" presentation of "cultural knowledge."[30] In other words, the longer a punk has been in the community, the more likely it is they are able to gain another punk's respect by performing knowledge about the genre. The Zeros capitalize on this tendency, claiming that they have been punks for an indefinite, but certainly long time. The Zeros also condemn those who are not authentically punk, what one of them calls "phony punks."[31] Phony punks or, to use a more current term, "poseurs," are those bands or spectators that imitate "true" punks in dress and demeanor as a way to achieve commercial success.[32] Ryan Moore observes that most musical subcultures distinguish between genuine followers and poseurs, but that punk scenes maintain "an imagined state of commercial purity" to "defend" the authenticity of their cultural practices.[33] Phony punks make The Zeros "sick" and "mad," but the individuals in the band must also walk the carefully constructed line between poseur and punk. In the second section, Hector admits that he was fixated on the punk image, which made him an unpleasant friend and bandmate. Robert says Hector was "like those L.A. punks who became punk when they heard of The [Sex] Pistols," implying that Hector lost sight of his inherent "punkness" and instead starting trying too hard to be punk.[34] To try to be punk violates the construction of authentic and

[29] Force, "Consumption Styles," 291.
[30] Ibid.
[31] "Interview with The Zeros," 13.
[32] Moore, "Postmodernism and Punk Subculture," 321.
[33] Ibid.
[34] "Interview with the Zeros," 13.

effortless expression of self as punk and skirts the use of punk as a conduit to commercial success.[35]

These three examples of fanzine interviews from *Slash* demonstrate the various ways in which fanzines served to negotiate the boundaries of punk. Punk fans could observe the process of bands determining their constructions of identity and authenticity in the genre and thus emulate those constructions. Although the interpretations of punkness vary from band to band, techniques like self-marginalization, aversion to poseurs, differentiating geographic tendencies, and claiming freedom from outside influence are all consistent elements of each band's performance of authentic punk.

Fanzines and Negotiating Gender

There is no consensus on the experience of women in punk. Some scholars applaud the anti-hierarchical roots of the genre as well as higher rates participation of women in bands and concerts than other genres, like metal and arena rock. Others have criticized punk communities for lacking equitable practices in both performance and fandom. In his research on New York City punk communities, Barret praises the presence of non-violent, harassment-free, and democratically administered DIY performance spaces. He only briefly acknowledges, however, that these performance spaces emerged as a reaction to the increasingly violent, dangerous, and "machismo" hardcore punk spaces.[36] In contrast, Katherine Wadkins, William Force, and Noami Griffin assert that punk music developed as a reaction to the disenfranchisement of white, blue

[35] Force, "Consumption Style," 291.
[36] Dawson Barrett, "DIY Democracy: The Direct Action Politics of U.S. Punk Collectives," *American Studies* 52, no. 2 (2013): 27.

collar men, and thus, has always been a space for homo-social male-bonding rituals.[37] Taking yet a different perspective, Jamie Mullaney posits that punk scenes started out as a DIY spaces for both young men and women, but as punk identity crystallized in the mid-1970s, "punk corporeal practices and sounds became vital sites for the construction, exploration, and consolidation of heterosexual masculinities."[38] The potential of feminist direct action politics through punk music performance was not thoroughly explored until the Riot Grrrl movement—a feminist punk movement associated with third wave feminism—arose in early 1990s.[39] Mullaney also asserts that punk men do not hesitate to "pay lip service" to the openness of punk to women, but in practice constantly scrutinize the authenticity and pureness of women's motivation to be a part of the scene.[40] For example, both men and women punks are more likely to assume that another woman is only a part of the scene because she is the girlfriend of a punk, was introduced to the scene by a boyfriend, or is a poseur.[41]

Slash interviews rarely touch on questions of gender, but the language surrounding mentions of women and sex is consistently derogatory and violent, even in interviews with female band members. Returning to The Germs interview, the band wanders into hypersexual banter unprovoked by the interviewer.

> Pat: Let's talk about dicks.
>
> Donna: OK, let's make up a porno story.
>
> Bobby: ...and Mack walked down the street and he thrust he throbbing tool into her ... SNATCH! Yeah, OK-he leveled her lovehole with his atomic dick.

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[37] Wadkins, 'Freakin' Out', 239; Force, "Consumption Styles," 292; Griffin, "Gendered Performance and Performing Gender" 71.
[38] Julia Downes, "The Expansion of Punk Rock: Riot Grrrl Challenges to Gender Power Relations in British Indie Music Subcultures," *Women's Studies* 41, no. 2 (2012): 207.
[39] Ibid, 210.
[40] Jamie L. Mullaney, "'Unity Admirable But Not Necessarily Heeded': Going Rates and Gender Boundaries in the Straight Edge Hardcore Music Scene," *Gender & Society* 21, no. 3 (2007): 402.
[41] Griffin, "Gendered Performance," 66.

Pat: DICKS! All rite! (laughter)

The shock value of the language is an intentional effort at self-marginalization: The Dils wish to be seen as "societal heaps," so their social performances are irreverent and crass. Donna's behavior is also consistent with the limited roles women could fill in the punk scene. As gender studies scholar Julia Downes delineates, women were either relegated to the role of sex object (girlfriend or conquest) or "one of the boys."[42] The "one of the boys" role involves the rejection of the feminine in favor of emulating the masculine in posture, language, and dress. Through the denunciation of feminine behavior, women gained some power. In Donna's case, it is unlikely that she or any of her band members truly wish to act on Bobby's violent suggestions, but she is complicit in this sexually violent language in an effort to maintain her position of power as "one of the boys." Even highly respected women in the punk community, like self-proclaimed "anti-rock" artist Lydia Lunch, fall into this anti-feminine narrative. When *Slash* asked what she thought of the growing acceptance of women in punk bands, she answered,

> I think it's just stupid for girls to be in bands because they always look so incompetent. They try to be cute, they're not! Most of them look like total lames running around the stage making fools of themselves. The only other girls in bands that should be allowed to live are Exene of X and Siouxsie of the Banshees, both of whom I've met. All other girls drop dead or kill yourselves right now.[43]

Lunch's language is hyperbolic, but the message that she conveys is that only a certain performance of femininity belongs on the punk stage. Donna and Lunch's own performances exemplify the ways in which women in the punk scene might position themselves as "one of the boys" and establish the boundaries of the punk scene by rejecting certain expressions of femininity.

[42] Downes, "The Expansion of Punk Rock," 208.
[43] "Teenage Jesus," *Slash,* November 1978, 10.

In another demonstration of the ways in which women are discussed, band members of The Sex Pistols jokingly allude to sexual violence and non-consensual sex:

Slash: What do you think of Blondie?

Steve: I'd like to give her a good stuffing.

Sid: I think she's fucking ugly and she's got a big fat face.

Paul: He'd give her a seeing to ...

Steve: Her 'ead's too big for her fucking body.

Sid: I wouldn't. I'm a snivelling little homosexual really. I wouldn't be capable of it. I'm an impotent little wanker.

Steve: I'd fuck any bird any fucking shape or size.

Sid: I try to make out I'm a man, you see, but really I'm just a snivelling coward.

Slash: Why, I heard you took on a group of five-year-olds single-handed the other day.

Sid: That's not true, I ran away. I was frightened they'd beat me up.

Slash: Do you get many groupies then?

Paul: You're joking! They're ugly cants, punk rockers.

Steve: We don't even fucking play anywhere, do we?

Paul: I don't mind the old suspenders though ...

Steve: I tell you what. I fobbed one-we played one night-I fobbed one about a minute before we were on stage. And I fobbed it when we went off as well. I gave her a severe seeing to 'round the back of the stage. She started screaming, "No, no! I have to go home now!" I said, "Shut your cakehole when yer ..."

Slash: What do you think of Eno?

Steve: Eno's an arsehole.[44]

[44] "Interview with The Sex Pistols," *Slash,* September 1977, 13.

Here Sid and Steve to quip about the sexual allure of fellow punk rocker, Blondie. Indeed, throughout the whole exchange, women are assessed exclusively by their attractiveness, referring to punk groupies as "ugly cants." To be sure, there is caustic humor at play throughout the *Slash* interviews. When Sid Vicious indulges in self-deprecating humor and performs the same self-marginalization evident in the interview with The Germs.[45] He and his cohort recognize the irony when he calls himself "little" and "sniveling," because these are impossibilities in the hypermasculine performance of punk. Additionally, Sid takes a jab at the queer community by coupling the words "impotent" and "homosexual." Banter-like, self-marginalizing humor nevertheless perpetuates discriminatory stereotypes of male homosexuality, here using them as a contrast to punk masculinity.

At best, the *Slash* writers do little to prevent derogatory commentary in their interviews and, at their worst, join in with misogynist remarks. In an aside to an interview with Steve Jones of the Sex Pistols, the editor reveals that the *Slash* staff promised a "hookup" in exchange for the interview: "To do the interview, we promised Steve we would set him up with a surfer girl."[46] Though possibly a crude joke, such sex-as-currency talk ultimately exemplifies a narrative of female objectification that runs consistently throughout the publication. In a review of a performance by Mary Monday, a *Slash* editor writes "Ms. Monday… was a talented singer," but that "the age-old 'tits and ass,' rough and tough leather bitch presentation buried her good voice" and that "maybe the future could have held more widespread popularity for her in other forms."[47] Monday is the only female musician in the entire concert review section and at no other point does the author comment on the appearance of other musicians. Similarly, when reporting her

[45] Ibid.
[46] "Holiday in the Sun," *Slash,* November 1978, 19.
[47] "Local Shit," *Slash,* December 1977, 22.

recent arrest for trespassing afterhours in cemetery, *Slash* refers to Lorna Doom as the "bass and charm for the Germs." Doom was the only woman in the Germs, a fact the *Slash* contributor highlights by implying her feminine "charms" are as significant as her role of bassist in the band.[48]

In addition to their pattern of objectification, the *Slash* editors also tend to belittle, diminish, or completely edit out women's voices. In reporting on a signing event, *Slash* contributors depict the young women on the scene as overenthusiastic, naïve, and beholden to commercialist behavior associated with mainstream genres:

> blond [*sic*] teen dream Billy Idol came all the way from England to sign autographs, be seen and drive all the little girls hysterical. In L.A., the "event" took place one afternoon in Licorice Pizza record store across from the Whisky, there were more professional photographers than fans and the atmosphere was an embarrassing mixture of tacky hype and naive groupie antics…the 14-year-old school girls with Rutles badges that handed Billy their brand new [*sic*] copies of the Gen X album (I mean, Gen X is not yet a household word in Bel Air!) and got it returned with a lovely signature and a pleasant little chat…[49]

The author uses buzzwords such as "tacky," "embarrassing," and "professional" to imply that the signing event comes dangerously close to the commercialist hype associated with mainstream music. He also mentions that the overexcited teenage girls are new to punk and from wealthy neighborhoods to undermine their authenticity as punks, thus casting the event and its attendees in a negative light.

In other instances, like an interview with the Deadbeats, women's voices are completely omitted. Despite the inclusion of Deadbeats bandmate manager, Kathy Matthews, in the preface and pictures taken during the interview, anything she may have said during the session is edited out or not included in the write up.[50] Similarly, the 1979 interview with the Go Go's, an all-

[48] "Local Shit," *Slash,* July 1978, 4.
[49] Ibid.
[50] "Deadbeats Interview," *Slash,* May 1978, 16-17.

women band, is roughly half the length of the standard interview in *Slash.*[51] Instead of interview content, the editors include one page of brief snippets of the interview and a two-page photo spread of the band (Figures 1.2 and 1.3). The length of the Go Go's interview stands in sharp contrast to most of the fanzine's interviews, which typically include two, occasionally three, pages of texts and images (Figures 1.4 and 1.5).[52] Unlike the vast majority of the interviews with all male bands, the voices and thoughts of the female musicians of the Go Go's are omitted from the publication in favor of images.

Figure 1.2: "Interview with the Go Go's"[53]

[51] "Interview with the GoGo's," *Slash,* January 1979, 17.
[52] "Interview with the Dead Kennedy's," *Slash,* March 1979, 22-23.
[53] "Interview with the GoGo's," *Slash,* January 1979, 17.

Figure 1.3: "Interview with the Go Go's"[54]

Figure 1.4: "Interview with the Dead Kennedy's"[55]

[54] Ibid. 18-19.
[55] "Interview with the Dead Kennedys," *Slash,* March 1979, 22-23.

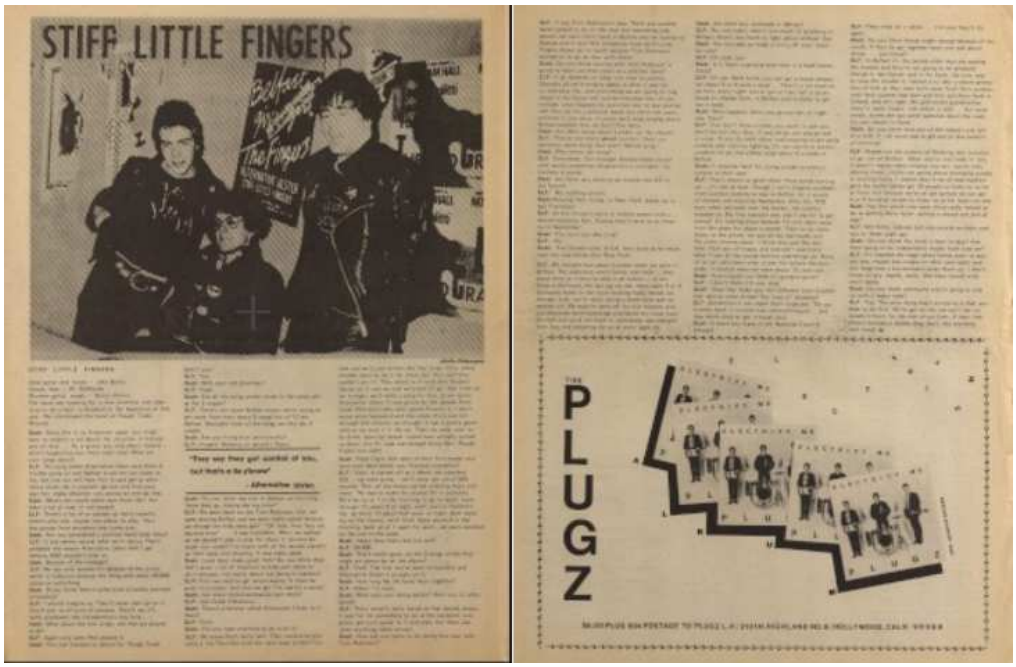

Figure 1.5: "Interview with Stiff Little Fingers"[56]

Ultimately, it is not surprising that an amateur music publication such as *Slash* contains misogynist material. Yet this is a magazine whose editors once defensively asserted, "we regard women (punks) as totally equal to men (punks)…and therefore equally subjectable to abuse, insults and other forms of communication."[57] This language recalls the "lip service" that Mullaney explains is largely performative, but is also similar to the ways in which online music fans deflect and disregard issues of gender in online exchanges.[58] As I explore in the next two chapters, online music fans fall into patterns of self-fashioning and identity formation like that seen in the early punk community of the 1970s, citing credentials like authenticity and knowledge of the scene to determine if others are qualified to be a part of the scene. This exploration will take us to independent music and high-end audio, where—unlike punk—fan

[56] "Interview with Stiff Little Fingers," *Slash,* March 1979, 18-19.
[57] "Letters to the Editor," *Slash*, July 1978, 8.
[58] Mullaney, "Unity Admirable," 388.

discourse has flourished online in recent years.[59] The punk community remains largely one of word-of-mouth communication and has tightly knit, highly exclusive social networks primarily focused on local scenes. The rigorous identity building of punk's early years has proven to provide a relatively cohesive and long-standing tradition of DIY performances and lifestyles without the need for digital media to thrive.

[59] Grimes and Wall, "Symbols of Defiance," 287.

CHAPTER 2

WHITE MASCULINITY AND USER-GENERATED CONTENT IN THE ONLINE INDIE MUSIC COMMUNITY

Introduction: The Digital Sounding Board

Indie music has grown exponentially as a subgenre since the 1980s and now boasts a large fan base of primarily millennials.[1] This generation of listeners relies on online resources to discover new music, interact with other fans, and keep track of favorite musicians. Online activity of this sort shapes the ways in which fans think about the genre and, as a result, establishes expectations for new artists entering the scene.[2] As with most online communities, users also discuss more general questions of indie music culture. A web of forums and social media sites distribute articles and opinion pieces on politics, technology, and industry trends, provoking commentary from a wide audience of indie enthusiasts. Questions of social justice, however, seem to be particularly contentious within the conversations surrounding these articles. Indie fans openly discriminate against women and minorities in written commentary, edging them out of the conversation. Pieces that deal with issues of social justice are consistently treated by members of the online indie community as "nonsensical" and "destructive" "tantrums."[3]

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[1] Musicologist Matthew Bannister succinctly defines indie rock as "a post-punk subgenre of independent or alternative rock, featuring mainly white, male groups playing mainly electric guitars, bass and drums...to primarily white audiences, recording mainly for independent labels, being disseminated at least initially through alternative media networks such as college radio stations and fanzines, and displaying a countercultural ethos of resistance to the market," *White Boys, White Noise: Masculinities and 1980s Indie Guitar Rock*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 57. See also Jeremy Gilbert, "White Light/White Heat: Jouissance Beyond Gender in the Velvet Underground," *Living Through Pop*, ed. Blake Andrew (London: Routledge, 1999), 41; Sarah Cohen, "Men Making a Scene: Rock Music and the Production of Gender," in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender,* ed. Sheila Whitely (Routledge: New York, 1997), 35.

[2] Aaron Robert Ferguson, "Surfing for punks: The Internet and the Punk Subculture in New Jersey" (Ph.D diss., Rutgers, 2008), 4; See also David Jennings, *Net, blogs, and rock 'n' roll: how digital discovery works and what it means for consumers, creators, and culture* (London: Nicholas Brealey, 2007), 1-15.

[3] Mike Roberts, comment on Matt Wendus, 2015. http://ripfork.com/2015/03/response-to-the-unbearable-whiteness-of-indie-by-sarah-sahim/; Jacob, comment on Matt Wendus, 2015. http://ripfork.com/2015/03/response-to-the-unbearable-whiteness-of-indie-by-sarah-sahim/

But, if the critical conversation around indie is primarily online—a presumably democratic space—then how does online discrimination even take place? Scholars such as Lisa Nakamura have grappled with this very question. She uses the term "cybertyping" to describe a system of stereotyping that occurs on the internet despite the lack of physical bodies that betray skin color and physically gendered characteristics. She argues that cybertypes are encouraged by the anxious need to determine users' identities and "stabilize a sense of white self" that is put into question in the "fluidity" of cyberspace. In essence, internet users are assumed to be white males until proven otherwise, allowing all genders and ethnicities to perform as any other identity. Cybertyping occurs once language or behavior gives reason for the illusion of a user's identity to be questioned. The user is then positioned and treated as an extreme example of all negative stereotypes associated with their race or gender identity.[4]

The discriminatory rhetoric and cybertyping deployed in indie communities is particularly disturbing because many fans perceive their discourse as cerebral and analytical. Authenticity, which many indie fans define as the artistic freedom from popular commercial influence, is deeply valued in indie, and the listening base carefully monitors which musicians, events, and ideas appeal to this anti-commercialist aesthetic.[5] A sense of exclusivity can be found in other genres, but indie is unique in that listeners consistently use intellectualism and elitism to weed out those who do not appear to adhere to the indie aesthetic and to preserve the boundaries of the community.[6]

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[4] Lisa Nakamura, "Cybertyping and the Work of Race in the Age of Digital Reproduction," in *New media, old media: A history and theory reader*, ed. Wendy Chun Hui Kyong and Thomas Keenan (New York: Routledge, 2006), 319.
[5] Ryan Hibbet, "What is indie rock?" *Popular Music and Society* 28, no. 1 (2005): 56.
[6] Hugh Barker and Yuval Taylor, *Faking It: The Quest for Authenticity in Popular Music* (New York: W. W. Norton), 264. See also Paul Barretta and Yi-Chia Wu, "Perceptions of Music Authenticity," *Advances in Consumer Research* 40 (2012): 1083.

To illustrate the ways in which this behavior plays out in online communities, I present two case studies in which I analyze the dialogue that emerged around internet articles by Sarah Sahim and L.V. Anderson. My analysis is informed by the work of Sarah Cohen and Matthew Bannister, who, as I noted in the introduction to this study, have broadened the conversation around masculinity to include the "soft masculinity" practiced in many online spaces. Bannister defines the soft masculine as an expression of masculinity that establishes power through the overwrought performance of reason and intelligence.[7] Although Nakamura, Ferguson, and Jennings have enriched the analytical toolbox for unpacking online discussion, none has attempted a systematic study of community discourse. Here I synthesize my analysis with this broadened consideration of masculinity and demonstrate the ways in which intellectualism serves to protect the white, male hegemony of the online indie music community.

User-Generated Content and DIY Fan Spaces

Underground fan-based dissemination of amateur music criticism evolved from the fanzines circulated in rock, punk, and new wave communities starting in the early 1970s. These fanzines were amateur publications that embraced the "DIY" aesthetic of fringe music scenes and were typically available for free. Most featured news, gossip, poetry, and critiques of live performances, and some grew to be so influential that independent labels sent newly released music to them for review. Dedicated followers came to rely on underground media for the most current information on new music, cultivating a culture of hipness and insider knowledge.[8]

[7] Bannister, *White Boys, White Noise,* 55; Cohen, "Men Making a Scene," 5.
[8] Chris Atton, "Popular music fanzines: Genre, Aesthetics, and the 'Democratic Conversation,'" *Popular Music and Society* 33, no. 4 (2010): 518.

With the rise the personal computer and the Internet in the 1990s, a large portion of critical conversation moved online. While some fanzines are still being printed today, "E-zines" and dedicated forums like *Usenet* alt groups took on the role of curation and discussion. In the mid-90s, independent hosts launched music criticism focused websites such as *Pitchfork, Consequence of Sound,* and *Drowned in Sound*, in an attempt to capture the low budget, scrappy character of fanzines in an online format. These sites, *Pitchfork* in particular*,* have since gained large and fiercely loyal reader bases and wield considerable influence in the indie music community.[9] Fueled by the perceived anonymity of the internet, these online conversations are unfettered and to some extent, unmoderated, thus exposing the problematic cultural stances of large parts of the indie community.[10]

Case Study 1 – "The Unbearable Whiteness of Indie"

An example cybtertyping and online dialogue was prompted by Sarah Sahim's article "The Unbearable Whiteness of Indie," which she published on *Pitchfork* in 2015.[11] As her title indicates, Sahim tackles the lack of diversity in a subgenre that values the authenticity and originality of artistic content over marketability. Her piece is an unrelenting challenge to the systematic discrimination in the indie industry: "while indie rock and the DIY underground, historically, have been proud to disassociate themselves from popular culture, there is no divorcing a predominantly white scene from systemic ideals ingrained in white Western

[9] Justin Sinkovich, Philippe Ravanas, and Jerry Brindisi, "Pitchfork: Birth of an Indie Music Mega-Brand*," International Journal of Arts Management* 15, no. 2 (2013): 73.
[10] Rebecca Ann Lind*, Race and Gender in Electronic Media: Content, Context, Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 5.
[11] Sarah Sahim, "The Unbearable Whiteness of Indie," *Pitchfork*, 2015. http://pitchfork.com/thepitch/710-the-unbearable-whiteness-of-indie/

culture."[12] She details the ways in which this discrimination works, including systematic "microaggressions" such as a fan-led petition to remove Kanye West from the Glastonbury music festival line up in favor of a white rock group, and appropriation of African American musical elements by white indie bands like Vampire Weekend and The Dirty Projectors.[13]

The article quickly went viral. It was shared over 26,000 times from *Pitchfork*'s Facebook page, retweeted several hundred times, and taken up for discussion on a multitude of social commentary websites.[14] Reception was, and continues to be, deeply divided between those who sympathize with Sahim and those who dismiss her rhetoric as racist and poorly argued, the latter being the most vocal and active in the online conversation. As with many widely distributed articles discussing the issue of diversity, unmoderated comments, posts, and tweets quickly devolved into what many would dismiss as the hateful dregs of the internet. I contend, however, that this commentary must be taken seriously and inspected closely to better understand popular music culture, especially in a community like indie, which primarily identifies as educated and progressive. I particular, I am intrigued by the amount of silencing and marginalization that occurred in the guise of thoughtful replies to Sahim's article, and others like hers.[15]

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[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Social commentary sites include platforms on which users and businesses share media with the intention to elicit reactions and discussion from users. Examples of such sites include Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, and Tumblr.
[15] Other articles that have recently provoked controversy in the community include: Jenn Pelly," Unraveling the Sexism of Emo's Third Wave," *Pitchfork*, 2017. https://pitchfork.com/thepitch/unraveling-the-sexism-of-emos-third-wave/; Eli Davies, "Retrospective Sexism: How Women Are Written Out of British Indie Music History," *Noisy UK,* 2015. https://noisey.vice.com/da/article/6x85j3/revisiting-pulps-different-class-and-how-indie-writes-women-from-history; and L.V. Anderson, "The New Decemberists Album: It Contains 100% Less Raping," *The Awl*, 2011. https://www.theawl.com/2011/03/the-new-decemberists-album-it-contains-100-less-raping/

The substantial response of Matt Wendus, owner and editor of the site *Ripfork*, to "The Unbearable Whiteness of Indie" exemplifies the type of silencing prevalent in indie criticism.[16] Wendus's response is a departure from *Ripfork*'s usual lineup of album reviews in which Wendus primarily addresses the technical problems in the writing, such as, what he calls, "Jargon Palsy," "Toxic Tedium," and "Infectious Punctuation."[17] He veered from this course, however, when "the choice came down to writing about a slapdash *Pitchfork* article on race or just another album review with too many adverbs."[18]

Aside from the shock value of his language, there are less obvious rhetorical tools that Wendus uses to undermine Sahim, and ultimately remove her from a position of power. He destabilizes her authority while behaving as if he is addressing exclusively the technical aspects of her writing. Near the beginning of the essay, he writes "I'd like to think you wrote this screed with good intentions, not just for extra SEO clicks from the guilty and the outraged. 'Whiteness' appears 11 times after all."[19] "SEO clicks" refers to a form of online advertising known as Search Engine Optimization, in which bloggers and online businesses post alluringly titled content to generate traffic to a webpage and ensure that the site will appear high on a list of results returned by a search engine. Online advertisers pay more for space on domains with higher traffic, so some companies produce low-quality content with exaggerated titles to entice traffic at a low cost. "Clickbait," as this content is called, is viewed as a purposefully deceitful attempt by websites to increase site clicks and advertising revenue.[20] In truth, the majority of

[16] Matt Wendus. "Response to 'The Unbearable Whiteness of Indie' by Sarah Sahim." *Ripfork* (blog). Last modified March 30, 2015. http://ripfork.com/2015/03/response-to-the-unbearable-whiteness-of-indie-by-sarah-sahim/
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid
[20] Kyle Puetz, "Consumer Culture, Taste Preferences, and Social Network Formation," *Sociology* Compass 9, no. 6 (2015): 440.

casual browsing sites are funded by practices like SEO, but Wendus questions Sahim's motives by associating her with business tactics that are to blame for troves of bad content. In other words, Wendus suggests that Sahim wrote this piece for profit while posing as if she is concerned about diversity. Wendus also casts doubt on her musical knowledge of the subgenre:

> Let's look at some of the examples you chose to illustrate your far-flung complaints about this general scourge of Whiteness: Major Lazer (cultural appropriation), Bono (white savior complex), Miley Cyrus and Taylor Swift (…icons of White aspiration?). Other than Major Lazer, those artists are about as indie as chicken soup is corned beef. The example you used to support the ill perception of an artist of color threatening a white "space" is the fracas over Kanye West headlining the Glastonbury Festival. Wow, that's so indie that it's…not at all indie.[21]

Sahim cites many musicians in the article, but only two make music that falls into Wendus's definition of indie, leading him to question her musical knowledge of the subgenre. Thus, he encourages the indie music fan, who is committed to lineage of anti-commercialism and insider industry knowledge, to doubt Sahim's understanding of the indie aesthetic and commitment to the subgenre.

Having positioned her as an outsider, Wendus then removes her intellectual authority:

> Sarah, regardless of how scattered your argument became, I kept coming back to one thing: motivation. What's the POINT of this article you wrote? Who are you trying to help? What are you trying to accomplish? You name four prominent performers who "look like you," but you never so much as mention a struggling band of "browns" you know and love who've been actively shut out of consideration by racist music labels because they don't fit the marketable concept of "Whiteness." There's nothing like that...But who needs clear, tangible evidence when giving the IMPRESSION of an "omnipresent" problem will attract just as much if not more attention?... Sarah, I'm not suggesting there isn't something worth investigating here, just that you did a crappy, needlessly divisive job trying.[22]

[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.

Wendus places himself squarely into a larger narrative surrounding the criticism of women and rhetoric by dismissing Sahim's writing as aimless ranting.[23] His attack on Sahim is particularly potent because it fits into a larger trope of framing the female voice as hysterical and irrational. Elaine Showalter's work in the history of women's health and hysteria illuminates the ongoing tendency to associate the feminine with rage, instability, and moral depravity. In her examination of the Victorian treatment of female hysteria, she writes that "the goal was to isolate the patient from her family support systems, unmask her deceitful stratagems, coerce her into surrendering her symptoms, and finally overcome her self-centeredness."[24] Similarly, Wendus characterizes Sahim's article as misleading and unsupported, suggests she has overstated her case, and finally asks her to set aside her anger and calmly consider the larger issues in music industry. Twisting her words and ignoring salient components of her argument, he reconstructs Sahim as a stereotypical madwoman.

Central to Wendus's attack are notions of reason and emotion. He questions Sahim's ability to reason through such an emotional topic and claims that her article is unfocused and rambling. She does not fulfill the rational need for solid evidence, like hard numbers or interviews, and does not corroborate her experience with other people of color. He claims that, in lieu of evidence, she relies so heavily on her own impressions that he is "inclined to think the racist musical dystopia you painted is just an exaggeration of your own personal irritations."[25] Not only does Wendus attack her rhetorical ability, he also suggests that Sahim is overreacting to a problem that only she perceives. Later in the article, he admits there might a problem in indie,

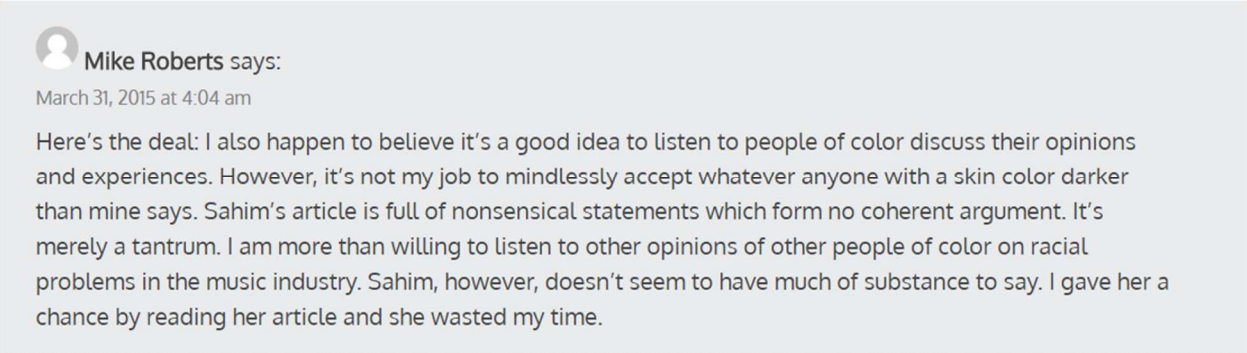
[23] Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 43-44.
[24] Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 39.
[25] Wendus, *Response*.

but then writes "[Sahim] wrote a mean-spirited article in the mold of so many 'pressing issue' pieces today: two pages of doomsaying and shaming, then a feeble conclusion," while she should have "written an inspiring article about how we as human beings can foster musical aptitude and appreciation…in ALL people."[26] He closes by saying that he does not expect Sahim to finish his article before angrily tweeting about it, but if she did, that issues of race were far more complex than she made them out to be. In closing this way, Wendus implies that Sahim is too reactive to read criticism of her article, and that, despite being a woman of color who specializes in dialogues around diversity in popular music, she does not understand issues of race in indie. Significantly, Sahim refrained from responding to Wendus and continues to publish on issues of music and inclusion on several sites, including *Rolling Stone* and *Pitchfork*.[27]

In his response to "The Unbearable Whiteness of Indie," Wendus demonstrates the ways indie fans mask discrimination with performed intellectualism. There are, of course, positive responses to Sahim, even in the comments section to Wendus's article. However, there are more discriminatory responses on his post, Facebook, and Reddit. The comments section to Wendus's article is rich with material that aligns with his marginalization tactics. Two users who identify themselves as Mike and Jacob both mirror Wendus's behavior and attack Sahim's rhetoric (figures 2.1 and 2.2). Mike writes that "Sahim's article is full of nonsensical statements which form no coherent argument. It's merely a tantrum," while Jacob insists that he "was annoyed by her argument. It was so facile, so poorly reasoned, and so misdirected. There was no focus to it either; it came off as a gripe born from some ignorant viewpoint that ignores much deeper

[26] Ibid
[27]Sarah Sahim, "Ezra Furman: Perpetual Motion People Album Review," *Rolling Stone,* 2015, Access date December 2017. http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/ezra-furman-perpetual-motion-people-20150710; Sarah Sahim, "M.I.A OLA Album Review," 2016. Access date, December 2017. https://pitchfork.com/reviews/tracks/18114-mia-mia-ola/

complexities and arguments."[28] Jacob goes on to suggest that there is a problem with diversity in indie, and that such topics are "food for thought." Significantly, Jacob agrees that there is a diversity problem in indie, even suggesting that it is "food for thought," making it clear that his concern is more with the women who is delivering the message and less with the message itself.

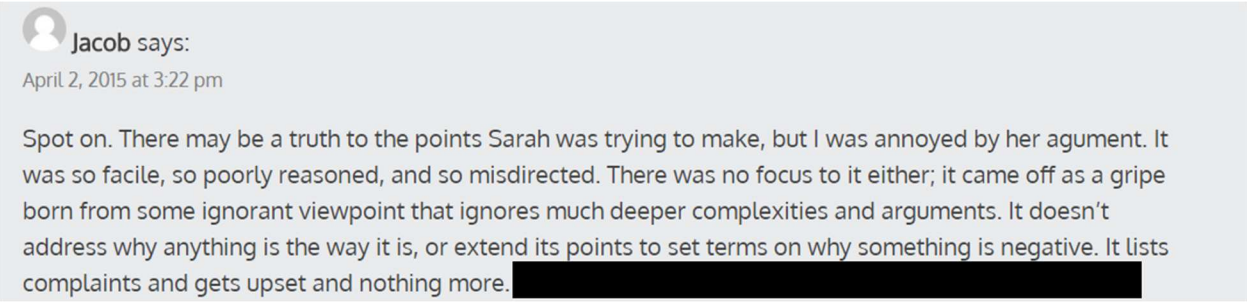


Mike Roberts says:

March 31, 2015 at 4:04 am

Here's the deal: I also happen to believe it's a good idea to listen to people of color discuss their opinions and experiences. However, it's not my job to mindlessly accept whatever anyone with a skin color darker than mine says. Sahim's article is full of nonsensical statements which form no coherent argument. It's merely a tantrum. I am more than willing to listen to other opinions of other people of color on racial problems in the music industry. Sahim, however, doesn't seem to have much of substance to say. I gave her a chance by reading her article and she wasted my time.

Figure 2.1: Comment from Wendus's site[29]



Jacob says:

April 2, 2015 at 3:22 pm

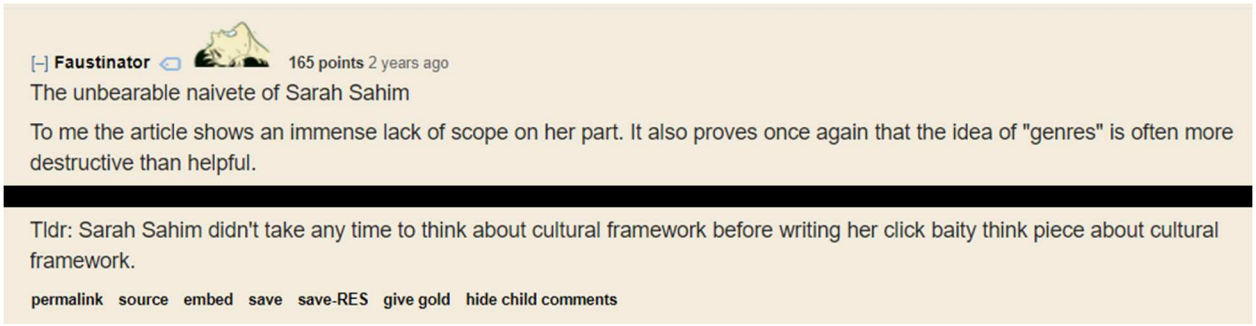
Spot on. There may be a truth to the points Sarah was trying to make, but I was annoyed by her agument. It was so facile, so poorly reasoned, and so misdirected. There was no focus to it either; it came off as a gripe born from some ignorant viewpoint that ignores much deeper complexities and arguments. It doesn't address why anything is the way it is, or extend its points to set terms on why something is negative. It lists complaints and gets upset and nothing more.

Figure 2.2: Comment from Wendus's site[30]

The dialogue outside the microcosm of Wendus's blog is similar to these perspectives. On Reddit's "IndieHeads" forum, username "faustinator" writes "Tldr: Sarah Sahim didn't take any time to think about cultural framework before writing her click baity [*sic*] think piece about cultural framework."[31] Username "nietzscheispeachy," with his NPR flair, writes "Ew. More of

[28] Mike Roberts, March 31, 2015, comment on Matt Wendus.
[29] Ibid. Due to the length of these posts, I cropped a substantial part of both.
[30] Jacob, April 2, 2015, comment on Matt Wendus.
[31] "Tldr;" is short for "Too Long; Didn't Read" (usually abbreviated TL;DR) and is typically placed before a long comment to summarize the user's post. Comment by Faustinator, fda1993, "Pitchfork article: 'The Unbearable Whiteness of Indie,' (Reddit Post), March 2015. https://www.reddit.com/r/indieheads/comments/309szj/pitchfork_article_the_unbearable_whiteness_of/

the same tacky flavor of the month social justice, and destructive too…She just ignores all criticism and makes it clear that she's enjoying not provoking thought or challenging beliefs, but simply "making white guys angry" (figures 2.3 and 2.4).[32]


[–] **Faustinator** 165 points 2 years ago

The unbearable naivete of Sarah Sahim

To me the article shows an immense lack of scope on her part. It also proves once again that the idea of "genres" is often more destructive than helpful.

Tldr: Sarah Sahim didn't take any time to think about cultural framework before writing her click baity think piece about cultural framework.

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Figure 2.3: Post from Reddit sub-forum, r/indieheads[33]


[–] **nietzscheispeachy** 26 points 1 year ago* (last edited 1 year ago)

Ew. More of the same tacky flavor of the month social justice, and destructive, too. No one can help what skin color they are born, even big, *scary* white people! It's that simple. I don't know why people have to drag this shit into art.

TPaB having no white dudes on the cover has no influence on me appraising its art. Belle and Sebastian Isn't guilty of anything for not having every race represented in their album covers because that's not how art works. They probably weren't thinking about skin color before they were thinking about the atmosphere and themes of the music and what images would be complementary.

Edit: her social media was the nail in the coffin, for me. She just ignores all criticism and makes it clear she's enjoying not provoking thought or challenging beliefs, but simply "making white guys angry."

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Figure 2.4: Post from Reddit sub-forum, r/indieheads[34]

As is seen in figures 2.5, 2.6, and 2.7, many posts also evoke issues of "colorblindness" and "reverse racism," concepts that have been debunked by scholars yet remain prevalent in the online rhetoric surrounding issues of race.[35] For example, user Lorenz Stransky's Tweet, punctuated with the hashtag "AntiWhite," calls Sahim's article "unbearably" racist and asks *Pitchfork* to remove it and apologize. PROUSTPOSITIVE! exaggerates the contents of the

[32] Ibid. Nietscheispeachy, March 2015.
[33] Ibid. Faustinator, March 2015.
[34] Ibid. Niescheispeachy, March 2015.
[35] Miri Song, "Challenging a culture of racial equivalence," *The British Journal of Sociology* 65, no 1 (2014): 108. See also Hephzibah Strmic-Pawl, "Reverse Racism," in *Race and Racism in the United States: An Encyclopedia of the American Mosaic*, ed. Charles A. Gallagher and Cameron D. Lippard (Denver: Greenwood, 2014), 1065.

article, writing “Sarah Sahim says whites bad, too many in indie bands.” This “AntiWhite” claim is also popular in the comments section to Wendus’s blog. For example, Nate, one of many representing this view, writes “that piece is nothing but racist, misandrist hokum.”

Figure 2.5: Twitter response to Sahim's post[36]

Figure 2.6: Twitter response to Sahim's post[37]

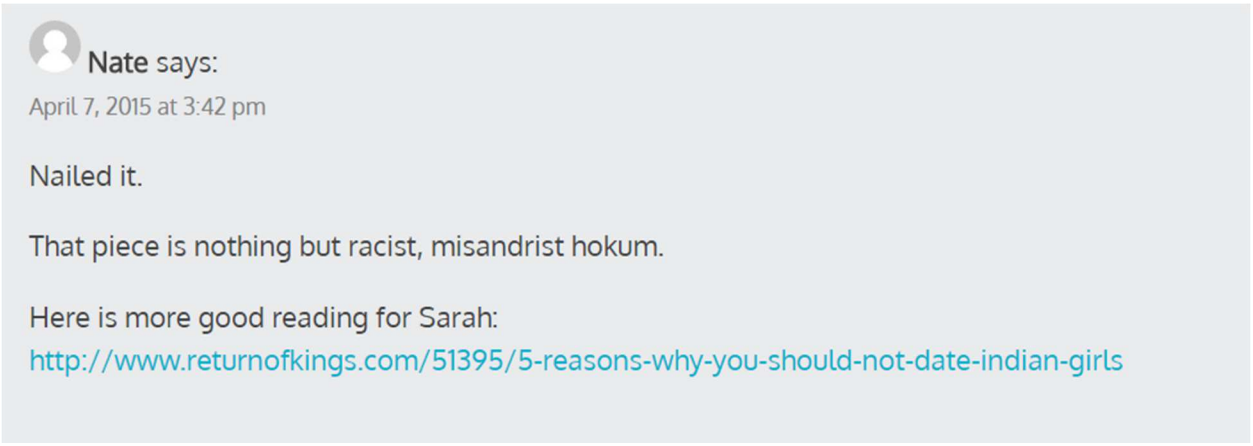

Figure 2.7: Post from Wendus's site that is representative of accusations of reverse racism in Sahim's post.[38]

[36] Lorenz Stransky, April 4, 2015. http://twitter.com/
[37] PROUSTPOSITIVE!, April 6, 2015. http://twitter.com/
[38] Nate, April 7, 2015, comment on Matt Wendus. The anti-feminist website “Return of Kings” is administered by Daryush Valizadeh, who gained infamy in late 2015 for making several pro-rape statements via his YouTube channel and working to organize international “pro-man” meetups. After much backlash, he has since claimed that the content of the website is satire.

Case Study 2 – "The New Decemberists Album: It Contains 100% Less Raping"

Another noteworthy online conversation occurred in 2011, when *TheAwl.com* published L.V. Anderson's think piece "The New Decemberists Album: It Contains 100% Less Raping."[39] Here Anderson sarcastically praises indie rock band The Decemberists for producing an album that steers clear of rape, something often addressed in their earlier songs. Anderson, for instance, criticizes bandleader Colin Meloy's tendency to write songs in which women are frequently raped, beaten, and murdered. Written in the style of British folk songs, Meloy's lyrics often tell dark-humored stories set in sixteenth- or seventeenth-century Europe. Recalling the folk revivalist songwriters such as Maddie Prior, Anne Briggs, and Nick Cave, Meloy said in a 2009 interview with the *AV Club* that

> A lot of scary misogyny was present in a lot of early folk songs. And I think there's an empowering sense, this idea of revisiting these songs in a contemporary context is a way of not only highlighting what it was to be a woman in the 16th, 17th century, but also how those sorts of scary, violent events were omnipresent in these folksongs as well.[40]

Anderson takes issue with Meloy's statement and lyrics when she writes

> The Decemberists' use of misogynistic images isn't any worse than that of Ludacris or Dr. Dre, but it isn't any better, either. So why has Meloy been largely spared the same hand-wringing and moralizing that have dogged hip-hop for literally decades? Oh, right: He's white; he has a bachelor's degree in creative writing; he employs an expansive vocabulary and has a penchant for historicism and literary devices… The Decemberists' music creates a space where people who are normally constrained by political correctness—well-educated, politically liberal, upper-middle-class, mostly white people—can enjoy uncomplicated misogynistic fantasies.[41]

Anderson's article, although not as widely distributed as "The Unbearable Whiteness of Indie," garnered a similarly mixed reaction on indie discussion platforms. However, of the top

[39] Anderson, L.V, "The New Decemberists Album: It Contains 100% Less Raping," *The Awl*, 2011. https://www.theawl.com/2011/03/the-new-decemberists-album-it-contains-100-less-raping/
[40] Colin Meloy, "The Decemberists's Colin Meloy," interview by Tasha Robinson, *The AV Club*, 2009, https://music.avclub.com/the-decemberists-colin-meloy-1798216134/.
[41] Anderson, "New Decemberists Album."

fifteen posts responding to Anderson in the *DrownedinSound.com* community discussion forum, all but three lashed out at Anderson. Commentary ranged from derogatory statements such as "ugh…silly bitch" and "feminists are bloody stupid" to more developed responses. Username "bornin69" wrote, "You feel in reading it that her heart's not really in it – she realizes that her argument is as absurd as if she was arguing that Dostoyevsky was promoting the murder of old ladies when he wrote Crime and Punishment" (figure 2.8).[42] Reacting to Anderson's rhetorical question "can we imagine, for a moment, what this song would be like if Meloy hadn't couched it in elaborate language and a pseudo-historical setting," username "calumlynn" responded "that's like complaining that Sweeny Todd wouldn't be as fun if it was set in a modern hairdressers and the victims were made into Gregg's pasties" (figure 2.9).[43]

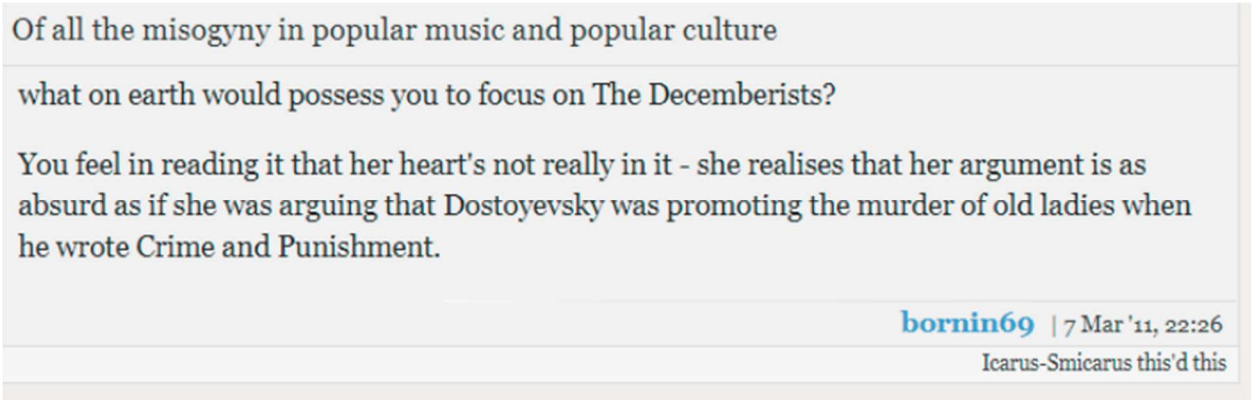

Figure 2.8: Post in a *Consequence of Sound* forum dedicated to Anderson's article[44]

[42] Icarus-Smicarus, MatthewCargill, calumlynn, March 7, 2011, comments on L.V. Anderson.
[43] Calumlynn, March 7 2011, comment on L.V. Anderson.
[44] Bornin69, March 7, 2011, comment on L.V. Anderson.

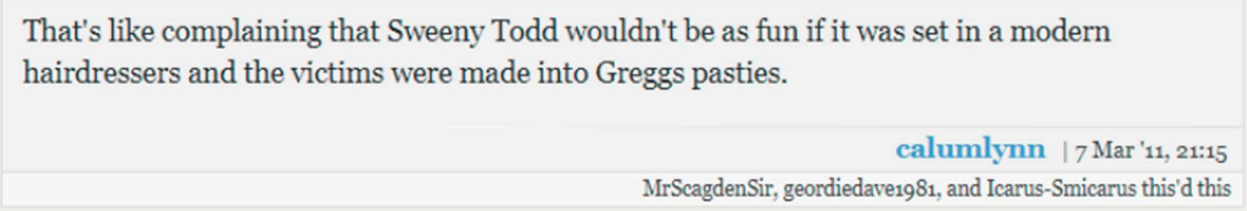

Figure 2.9: Post in a *Consequence of Sound* forum dedicated to Anderson's article[45]

The latter two posts exemplify my previous claims that users deploy performances of intellectualism to assert power over those promoting social justice in indie music. For example, "bornin69" insists that Anderson's writing is so weak she cannot convey a sense of confidence in her argument. He then makes a reference to Dostoyevsky, which he uses to make Anderson's argument sound absurd, but also to demonstrate his knowledge of a literary touchstone. Likewise, "calumlynn" makes a cultural reference to the musical *Sweeny Todd* to demonstrate that historical contexts are a necessary element of intrigue in Meloy's song-writing.

Similarly, users, both in the comments section and on Facebook, attack Anderson's intelligence by claiming that she does not understand the irony built into Meloy's music and lyrics. Comments from the *Drowned in Sound* comments section like are reflected in a Facebook thread on the subject. James Walling posted on Facebook that "whatever you think of Meloy (and I don't think much), he's hardly offensive. The song is an attempt at irony, plain and simple. Take it or leave it, but to boil it down to the 'social merit of rape jokes' is simply absurd."[46]

Anderson, to be sure, acknowledges the "attempt at irony" to which these posters are referring in her article:

[45] Calumlynn, March 7, 2011 comment on L.V. Anderson.
[46] James Walling, 2011. http://facebook.com/james.walling208

> It was supposed to be ironic. In fact, irony was the entire point. The Decemberists' juxtaposition of old-fashioned language with disturbing themes is what has endeared them to so many listeners since their formation in 2000…[47]

Yet she goes on to argue that the irony is not profound, academic, or an excuse for the rampant misogyny of the lyrics:

> I see the irony now—but it's not a particularly profound irony. The song's tone is certainly sardonic enough, and the combination of old-fashioned poetics with a violent subject matter is joltingly incongruous. But beneath Meloy's dense, wry language, 'A Cautionary Song' is little more than a three-minute yo-mama joke, with the extra thump of an unexpected punch line…[48]

Not only does Anderson perceive and understand the irony of The Decemberists' music, she also explains how The Decemberists use musical irony and why it is does not excuse the violence and misogyny of the lyrics. Thus, it is possible that the aggrieved posters on Facebook and the comments section did not read the entire article before they leapt to the defense of the band. Without reading or gaining an understanding of her argument, these posters publicly denounce and undermine Anderson, assuming that any attack on the "literary" Decemberists likely is not intelligent enough to understand the band's intentions. Regardless of whether posters misread or simply failed to read Anderson's article, their dismissive behavior reflects that of Wendus and the decriers of Sahim's article. In that case, users accuse Sahim of not understanding the complexities of racial discrimination, which allowed users to diminish the importance of her contribution to the online conversation. In Anderson's case, users accuse her of not understanding the complexities of irony as it is deployed by Colin Meloy. In both cases, users are not arguing, or even acknowledging, the points that each woman makes. Instead, those in the comments are asserting intellect over these "bloody stupid," "destructive," and "silly" women.

[47] Anderson, "New Decemberists Album."
[48] Ibid.

Broadening the Conversation around Masculinity

The problem with the negative responses to Sahim's and Anderson's articles, and others like them, is not only that they are marginalizing, but that the marginalization is done by those perceived to be upwardly mobile, culturally savvy men: those who are typically thought to be allies in the work against discrimination.[49] Bannister suggests that to understand this phenomenon, the dialogue surrounding masculinity must be diversified to reflect a spectrum of representations ranging from the physical, virile, and aggressive male to the cerebral and passive male.[50] Similarly, in Sarah Cohen's ethnographic studies of indie music, she observed that indie rock audiences are largely comprised of young white men who characterize themselves as vulnerable and powerless yet are still beholden to traditional conceptions of masculinity. Building on Judith Butler's work on the performance of gender, Cohen writes that the indie scene "involves the performance of rather traditional gender roles and ideology, with men dominating the scene and excluding women through their activity, relationships and conversation, yet it also involves the performance of alternative or contradictory masculinities."[51]

Cohen and Bannister illustrate the ways in which segments of the indie community express masculinity, opening up an understanding of how online critical discourse can serve to police the borders of taste in music. Indie furthermore relies on a foundation of intellectualism and purity to establish autonomy from the commercialized mainstream. As Bannister notes, for example, "such intellectualism, insofar as it produces power, through distinctions of class for

[49] Michael S. Kimmel, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (New York: Nation Books, 2013), 5.
[50] Bannister, *White Boys,* 31.
[51] Cohen, "Men Making a Scene," 35.

example, has some relation to hegemonic masculinities."[52] The performance of intellectualism that Bannister mentions here parallels the rhetoric used in online music criticism and demonstrates that the "soft masculinity" of the indie community preserves its margins, and its hegemony, through the performance of intellectualism, elitism, and authenticity.

I do not mean to stereotype the men who are fans of indie music. Indeed, many men are complicit in the behaviors I have described, but the gender of the person behind the computer keyboard is beside the point. A user does not have to subscribe to their own gender in the digital realm, and, as Nakamura demonstrates, those posting in indie rock forums are presumed to be white males. Usernames "nietzcheispeachy" and "faustinator" give no indication as to their gender or race, yet because they are posting in a male-dominated online space they are assumed to be white men. In addition to these assumptions, all genders of indie fans perform soft masculinity to reinforce their sense of belonging in the indie community.[53] This performance of intelligence and hipness is engrained in anti-mainstream music fan groups, and despite the best intentions of indie followers, reinforces the othering of those who do not fit the performative mold. Attacks on intellect, authenticity, and commitment to the indie aesthetic silence those who criticize the marginalization apparent in indie, thus preventing challenging dialogue from thriving. Online dialogue mediates success of particular artists, the taste of the community, and the identity of fan groups, and as such, it remains for scholars to be much more sensitive to online content that might otherwise be dismissed. It is important to remain sensitive to the dynamics of the dialogue in indie musical community, as the cultural work done in these online spaces carries as much, if not more, influence as any user-generated media to precede it.

[52] Bannister, *White Boys*, 55.
[53] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 23.

CHAPTER 3

"MY HUMBLE SETUP": HI-FI, MASCULINITY, AND EXCLUSION IN THE DIGITAL REALM

Introduction: High Fidelity Then and Now

When flipping through mid-century issues of the home audio magazine *High Fidelity*, it does not take long to determine the target market for high-end audio equipment:

> Pilot stereo components are all 'men.' Each is a strong link in any system…;[1]

> …the trend of substituting three controls where one would do the work is unsound… it only means that the audiophile's wife will take an extra six months to learn how to play records on her husband's high fidelity [*sic*] system;[2]

> The true measure of the man may be that in his home… he maintains in the same household a (1) very attractive and spirited wife and (2) an Altec-Lansing Model 800…[3]

Those publishing *High Fidelity* not only marketed to men, but they also assumed their readership was entirely made up of men. Although there were no polls in the 1950s and 1960s to confirm that assumption, a poll by Stereophile.com in 2009 shows only one percent of their subscribers were women.[4] Undoubtedly that number has changed very little in the past five to six decades.

Those who live in suburban America have associated high fidelity (hi-fi) home audio with masculinity since it burst into the public consciousness immediately after World War II. American economic growth in the 1950s and 1960s resulted in a massive surge of wealth in the white, suburban, middle-class. One result of this financial influx was that families could afford to purchase newly available electronic appliances such as electric stoves, refrigerators, and

[1] "Pilot Speaker Advertisement," *High Fidelity Magazine*, January 1960.
[2] "Craftsmen C350 Control: Manufacturer's Comments," *High Fidelity Magazine*, January 1955.
[3] "AUTHORitatively Speaking," *High Fidelity Magazine*, March 1955.
[4] "Who Are You?," Stereophile.com, July 6, 2009, https://www.stereophile.com/asweseeit/who_are_you/index.html.

dishwashers. In the ensuing consumer rush, such home technology quickly became a symbol of social status.[5] Most of the home technology that emerged during this time, however, was designed for and marketed to women.[6] Manufacturers of time-saving devices like kitchen appliances, in-home intercom systems, and televisions all consistently advertised to middle-aged, middle-class women with families. On the other hand, technologies invented for high fidelity listening—such as multi-component home audio systems and large collections of long-playing (LP) vinyl—quickly became a symbol of masculinity in suburban America.[7]

Audiophiles, as they became known in the 1950s, define themselves as those who seek to replicate the sound of live musical performance with their in-home audio systems, as historian Kieran Downes has explained in a study of the listening habits of audio enthusiasts.[8] To achieve the highest fidelity to the original sound, an audiophile typically purchases modular audio components such as receivers, amplifiers, speakers, pre-amplifiers, and sometimes even specialized cables and room treatments, and assembles them to create a customized system.[9] According to musicologists Steve Waksman and Keir Keightly, and ethnomusicologist Marc Perlman, the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) aspect of hi-fi listening is compulsory, as an important aspect of the culture of audiophilia is the constant updating, tweaking, and adjusting of equipment in incremental steps to create the best sound possible.[10]

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[5] Inari Aaltojärvi, "Ascribing Gender from Domestic Technologies," *Computer* 52, no. 6 (2009): 4.
[6] Keir Keightley, "Low Television, High Fidelity: Taste and the Gendering of Home Entertainment Technologies," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 47, no. 2 (June 2003): 241; Andrew Gorman-Murray, "Masculinity and the Home: A Critical Review and Conceptual Framework," *Australian Geographer* 39, no. 3 (2008): 368.
[7] Aaltojärvi, "Ascribing Gender from Domestic Technologies," 4; Keir Keightley, "'Turn It down!' She Shrieked: Gender, Domestic Space, and High Fidelity, 1948–59," *Popular Music* 15, no. 2 (1996): 152.
[8] Kieran Downes, "'Perfect Sound Forever': Innovation, Aesthetics, and the Re-Making of Compact Disc Playback," *Technology and Culture* 51, no. 2 (2010): 306.
[9] Ibid, 308.
[10] Marc Perlman, "Golden Ears and Meter Readers: The Contest for Epistemic Authority in Audiophilia," *Social Studies of Science* 34, no. 5 (2004): 790; Downes, "Perfect Sound Forever," 307.

Since its advent in the 1950s, high-end audio has remained a masculine pursuit. As such, the language, imagery, and popular culture surrounding home audio also remains heavily gendered and acts to exclude women from contemporary hi-fi enthusiast communities. Media scholar Sofia Johansson, gender studies scholar Ann Werner, sociologist Michael Kimmel, and musicologist Keir Keightly have all explored the gendered language of mid-century home audio advertising, but none have addressed the exclusionary tactics deployed in the current audiophile community.[11] As with almost all hobbyist communities, current hi-fi reviews, editorials, advertisements, and conversations that once resided in enthusiast magazines have all moved to online spaces. The benefit of these online spaces is that, in addition to manufacturer advertisements and paid magazine reviews, there are also un-moderated posts, comments, and queries from those in the community. These unfiltered voices from actual audiophiles—not mediated publishers—provide valuable insight into the community's stances on gender, equity, and women in high-end audio.

In what follows, I examine these online spaces to demonstrate that, while the advertising may not be as flagrantly gendered as in the mid-century publications, derogatory and essentialist rhetoric is still used in blogs and forums to discourage women from participating in high-end audio. To understand better these discriminatory tactics, I delve into the history of the gender and technology divide in domestic spaces, as well as middle-class male hobbyism. I linger on this midcentury history because the conceptions of gender established in this time continue to frame our current understandings of hi-fi. I then analyze online audiophile forums and comments

[11] Keightley, "Low Television, High Fidelity," 241-247; Keightley, "Turn It Down!," 156; Ann Werner and Sofia Johansson, "Experts, Dads and Technology: Gendered Talk about Online Music," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 19, no. 2 (2016): 187; Perlman, "Golden Ears and Meter Readers," 783; Steve Waksman, "California Noise: Tinkering with Hardcore and Heavy Metal in Southern California," *Social Studies of Science* 34, no. 5 (2004): 675; Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996): 238-242.

sections that deal with women in hi-fi to demonstrate the parallels and differences from the mid-century magazines. Finally, I introduce several blog posts made in 2014 that indicate an industry-wide effort to include women in high-end audio and the various community responses to these initiatives. Despite these efforts, online discussion remains sexist, exclusionary, and inaccessible by women.

Post-war America and Hi-Fi Listening

As noted, the emergence of hi-fi listening is inextricable from the mid-century boom of the American middle class.[12] After World War II, the United States experienced a long-awaited swell in the economy and many men took on newly available, white-collar jobs. As Leerom Medevoi and Michael Kimmel detail, manufacturing and agricultural jobs remained steady, but managerial, sales, and financial jobs increased significantly, altering the image of the working man. What was once an image of dirty hands building, making, and toiling, became one of "gray flannel suits," office buildings, cubicles, and nine-to-five work days.[13] Families moved from rural family farms to suburban expanses of trimmed lawns and small, tidy houses.

In addition to these significant geographical and employment changes, the popular floor plan of the American home moved from a collection of small, private spaces to the open concept, which encouraged a sense of familial togetherness. Home and life magazines promoted the "togetherness" agenda in a series of articles that list ways in which women of the household could cajole their husbands into family weekend picnics, road-trips, and board game nights in with the children.[14]

[12] Keightley, "Low Television, High Fidelity," 233.
[13] Kimmel, *Manhood in America*; Leerom Medovoi, "Mapping the Rebel Image: Postmodernism and the Masculinist Politics of Rock in the U. S. A.," *Cultural Critique*, no. 20 (1991): 153.
[14] Keightley, "Turn It Down," 153.

Men of post-war America took on the tasks of breadwinning and career building almost exclusively outside of the home, which relegated homemaking to the women of the family.[15] This division of family duties was not entirely different from that of pre-war America, but the sheer amount of time men spent away from not only the home, but the suburb itself was a new development for many families. As such, all things associated with the home fell into the hands of the women. To the list of historically feminine duties such meal-preparation and child-rearing was added home decoration, finance management, and hiring contractors to repair or maintenance home gadgets such as refrigerators, televisions, ovens, and dishwashers. Thus, the male self-conception of the middle-class American man became one of displacement: he was away from home for work, and when he was home, he was in a space designed by and for women and children.[16] The new open concept floor plans replaced traditionally male spaces such as the den, office, or library with eat-in kitchens and sprawling, multi-purpose great rooms. There was no escaping the din of home life.[17]

Enter the rise of hi-fi listening. High-end home systems emerged from the development of two technologies: the long-playing record in 1948 and the modular playback system in the early fifties.[18] Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, most American families had large console radios, built to fit into the décor or aesthetic of the home.[19] Designed to be self-contained and easy to use, these radios were difficult to repair because the failure of one component typically made the entire unit unusable. Popular media also came to associate radios and broadcasts with

[15] Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 232.
[16] Medovoi, "Mapping the Rebel Image," 158; Keightley, "Low Television, High Fidelity," 241
[17] Keightley, "Turn It Down!," 154-155; Keightley, "Low Television, High Fidelity," 241.
[18] Tom Perchard, "Technology, Listening and Historical Method: Placing Audio in the Post-War British Home," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 142, no. 2 (2017): 367.
[19] Downes, "Perfect Sound Forever," 310.

women and children, since most programming was designed to entertain children or provide background music for women as they went about their daily homemaking duties.[20]

Although large and a little cumbersome, the LP allowed for more than twenty minutes of music on each side of the disc. This starkly contrasted the five minutes available per side on the "78," the LP's predecessor, and allowed for extended listening without constantly needing to change or turn over discs.[21] These advantages, combined with the superior sound quality compared to radio broadcasts, made the LP the perfect media for hi-fi listening. Radios and all-in-one record players were easy to use, but difficult to repair and of average sound quality. Modular audio systems developed as a reaction to these "console" radios, as they were known, and were easier to repair, customizable, and able to produce higher quality sound. These systems generally split into four parts: the source components (turn-table or radio receiver), the pre-amplifier (controls volume, source selection, and tone options), the power-amplifier (controls the electrical power delivered to components), and the speakers. A primary benefit of a modular listening system is that each component could be purchased, upgraded, and repaired independent of the others, allowing each owner to customize their own set up.[22]

To research and design a home system took a significant amount of time, so much so that DIY hi-fi became a popular hobby for men. Keightly and Downes argue that white-collar work culture allowed for more leisure time in the evenings and on weekends, which resulted in the popularization of men's hobbies. Keightly suggests a complicated relationship between the rise of DIY hobbies and the changing role of the middle-class American man.[23] Popular male-

[20] Keightley, "Low Television, High Fidelity," 242.
[21] Downes, "Perfect Sound Forever," 311; Perlman, "Golden Ears and Meter Readers," 789.
[22] Perlman, "Golden Ears and Meter Readers," 789; Downes, "Perfect Sound Forever," 312; David Z. Morris, "Cars with the Boom: Identity and Territory in American Postwar Automobile Sound," *Technology and Culture* 55, no. 2 (2014): 326.
[23] Keightley, "Turn It Down!," 156.

targeted magazines such as *Playboy* and *True* blamed the movement away from jobs that required hard labor for the "feminization" of American men.[24] These same sources recommend that men use hobbies to return to their roots as workers and makers. Activities that required some amount of craftsmanship, such as woodworking and tinkering with automobiles, became popular pastimes for those men with extra time on weeknights and weekends. For example, building a bookshelf was promoted as a more authentically masculine activity than purchasing pre-fabricated factory furniture. Due to the amount of television and catalogue advertising directed at women, popular media such as television shows and lifestyle magazines came to associate commercialism with the feminine and the crafted and home-built with the masculine.[25]

Rising availability of modular listening equipment and long-playing records fed easily into this culture of middle-class male hobbyism. Audio sales magazines fostered a culture of constant tweaking and improvement in pursuit of the greatest fidelity to a live performance.[26] To tweak equipment, hobbyists had to research specifications, high-quality brands, and compatibility requirements. This demand might mean that they subscribed to hi-fi magazines, which had equipment reviews, advertisements, and technological advice columns; or that they met with other men in the neighborhood to learn about each other's systems. The acquisition of technological knowledge was primary to the hi-fi hobbyist, as it is the only way to properly upgrade and repair equipment. The ability to tinker with the complex electronics distinguished men from their wives and children. Indeed, manufacturers marketed products to women such as televisions, radios, refrigerators, toasters, and electric can openers leaned heavily upon the notion

[24] Medovoi, "Mapping the Rebel Image," 157; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 254.
[25] Keightley, "Low Television, High Fidelity," 243; Kimmel, "Manhood in America," 267-247.
[26] Perlman, "Golden Ears and Meter Readers," 784; Downes, "Perfect Sound Forever," 307; Perchard, "Technology, Listening and Historical Method," 372.

that a product was "so simple a woman could use it."[27] This is an obvious contrast to the rise of hi-fi audio equipment, which could not function without integration of other independent components. The feminine home gadget was easy-to-use and aesthetically pleasing and the masculine gadget was mechanical, complex, and designed without concern for aesthetics.

In addition to the intricacy of the devices, hi-fi systems were also bulky, cluttered, and visually unattractive. As open floorplans became popular and private men's spaces disappeared, husbands were required to build their listening systems in the shared living space. Home and life magazines directed toward homemakers portrayed audio setups as ostentatious invaders of the carefully decorated family living space that placed wires and vacuum tubes dangerously within reach of the children.[28] Hi-Fi magazines, in turn, framed wives as the domineering naysayers, belittling their hapless husbands and decrying his singular attempt to pursue peacefully his own interests.[29] These portrayals of husbands and wives are exaggerated, but the language of this battle for domestic space came to be deeply imbedded in the contemporary lexicon of high-end audio. For example, the "Wife Approval Factor," or WAF, was first used in the 1950s to describe any limitations put on a system by a wife that might question its volume, size, complexity, or location in the home.[30] An unsightly system that is too loud, for instance, might be relegated to the basement because it did not meet the WAF.

Reddit, Photosharing, and the Domestic Space

As with many enthusiast communities, the conversation around high-end audio and audiophilia has moved primarily to the digital realm. Although several magazines such *The*

[27] Dempsey, "The Increasing Technology Divide," 40.
[28] Dana Andrews, "Living with Music," *High Fidelity,* May 1955, 41.
[29] Keightley, "Turn It Down!," 151-152.
[30] Ibid.

Absolute Sound, High Fidelity, and *Stereophile* remain in circulation, online forums have provided a space for hi-fi devotees of any degree to discuss, share, and provide help for those troubleshooting their home systems. Some of these forums, such as AudioShark.org and Head-Fi.org have existed since the beginning of digital public discussion forums in the late 1990s, while others, like Reddit's r/audiophilia, are only five to six years old.

These online spaces are significantly more interactive than the magazines that preceded them. The user-posts in forums thus provide a nuanced look into the language, behavior, and group-think of the contemporary hi-fi community. By contrast, magazines analyzed by Keightly contained reader editorials, reviews, and letters, and Keightly only briefly considers that the content and attitudes of the opinions expressed in these publications were filtered and presented by the publishers.[31] Readers did not generate content; rather they only consumed the opinions of those who put forth the magazines. Online forums, on the other hand, present a myriad of voices. Reading online forums with midcentury conventions in mind allows us to see that there is a great deal of carryover from enthusiast magazines to current high-end audio communities.

In the following section, I examine three major types of online platforms: discussion threads on Reddit.com/r/audiophile, forums on dedicated enthusiast websites, and blog posts. Reddit.com/r/audiophile is a "subreddit"—a smaller, themed branch of Reddit.com—dedicated to the discussion of high-end audio equipment. Users often post pictures, questions, or announcements in individual links that the community can vote to the top or "front page" of the subreddit. Redditors can then comment in a thread format on each link. Dedicated enthusiast forums, in contrast, do not have a voting structure and posts are organized by date. These forums are also usually a part of a smaller website that is completely dedicated to high-end audio. Unlike

[31] Keightley, "Low Television, High Fidelity," 173.

Reddit, which has many different subreddit topics, enthusiast forums only discuss high-end audio and form tightly knit communities in which many of the users buy or sell equipment, ask detailed questions, and know each other personally (or as personally as is possible in the digital sphere). Blog posts are yet a different format in that they are typically longer, more carefully edited, and more developed than forum posts. Bloggers also are usually not anonymous and thus responsible for the ideas expressed on their sites. The blogs that I examined all have comments sections included on their pages, which permit the readers to express support or dissent for the blogger's perspectives. All three of these platform formats have overlapping userbases and share common jargon, behaviors, and ideals that are descended from the hi-fi magazines of the mid-century.

Among the many conventions that have rolled over from magazines, the "WAF" has remained consistent in its use and meaning. The term emerges, however, not in cartoons or editorials, but almost exclusively in threads in which users post pictures of their home set ups. "Eye Candy" or "Share your Setup" threads are a popular type of post in which users share pictures of their own high-end systems, typically accompanied by descriptions of the pictured equipment. Placement and prioritization of the "share your system" posts vary depending on the forum. Older forums, such as Audioaficonado.org, Audioshark.org, and Head-Fi.org have partitioned threads in which users post only their pictures and comment on other's pictures. In Reddit's r/audiophile and r/vinyl, users post pictures that are voted on by other visitors to the forum. Pictures with more votes are pushed to the top of the forum feed and typically have more active comments sections. On Reddit in particular, users often title these photos "My Humble Setup," although the price of the equipment in the photos may be far from "humble."

Perhaps not surprisingly, the divisive and gendered language of audiophilia shows up most prominently in discussions that, like the "My Humble Setup" posts on Reddit and other

dedicated forums, involve the individual tastes of users. While much of the online audiophile conversation is technical—discussing products or ways to make those products sound better—pictures of the user's homes open up the possibility for commentary on the lives, homes, and families of those in the forum. Among these posts, commenters echo the divisive and gendered language that Keightly and others have analyzed at length. The heavily gendered language is likely because commenters can ascertain where in the house a picture is taken, the size of the setup, and if the poster shares his home with a woman.

There are three assumptions made in these comments sections. The first and most important is that all the users in the forum are male.[32] Recalling the 2009 survey by *Stereophile* stating that ninety-nine percent of hi-fi users and enthusiast are male, the likelihood that most of the users in the forums are male is very high. The homogenous nature of the hobby is obvious in forum threads like one started by username taters on SteveHoffman.com that asks, "Have you ever met a woman that was into high-end audio[?]"[33] Taters clearly assumes that every poster in the forum is male because he does not ask something directed at women such as, "Women of high-end audio: why are there so few of you?" Username TVC15 reinforces this assumption when he writes "no. If I had I would have married her instantly had I lived through the various duels for her affection betweenst [*sic*] the various forum members here."[34] Additionally—as noted in the previous chapter and argued by new media scholar Lisa Nakamura—the actual gender of the user does not matter, particularly in such male-dominated online spaces. The gender of the user may be indicated her username if it is something obvious like "MissUSA2018" or "JustGirlyThings," but otherwise the gender of every contributor is assumed

[32] Lisa Nakamura, *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2002): 196.
[33] taters, "Have You Ever Met a Woman Was That into High-End Audio," *SteveHoffmanMusicForums*, February 2, 2011, http://forums.stevehoffman.tv/threads/have-you-ever-met-a-woman-that-was-into-high-end-audio.240826/.
[34] Comment by TVC15, thread by taters, "Have You Ever Met a Woman…"

to be male, unless proven otherwise.[35] Considering Nakamura's work on anonymity in online spaces, it appears that the combination of anonymity and presumed absence of women from these spaces gives license to the users to write misogynist posts that they would not typically say in mixed company.

The second assumption is that the woman in each poster's life does not approve of his sound system and that he must navigate the WAF.[36] This means that an intrusively large system is likely relegated to an out-of-the-way recess of the home. It is usually easy to determine in which room of the house the user's setup resides, whether it be the living room, bedroom, basement, or an office or den. If the setup appears to be in a living room, the commenters in the thread may mention that the Original Poster (OP) is lucky to have a woman who "allows" the high-end audio equipment to be out in the main living space of the apartment or assume that OP does not share his home with a woman.[37] Contrastingly, if the equipment is in a den, office, or the basement, there is rarely a mention of any woman in OP's life, as it is assumed that OP does not have to share the room with others in the home. An important (sometimes not-so-subtle) undertone to this assumption is the belief that women simply do not appreciate the importance of close listening, are not interested in learning how to use high-end audio equipment, or do not understand the technology behind the improved sound.

[35] Later in this SteveHoffman.com thread, username pencilchewer mentions that she is a woman interested in high-end audio. Only after several comments and responses to other comments, do the men in the thread even acknowledge her. There is certainly no competition for her affections.

[36] A significant part of these first two assumptions is that the conversation is also overwhelmingly heteronormative. Users assume other users are men, but also that those men are attracted to or involved with exclusively women. There is almost never any mention of same-gender couples or any other LGBTQ considerations throughout the posts I examined. LGBTQ issues in hi-fi certainly calls for further study but are outside the scope of my current arguments.

[37] Original Poster, or OP, refers to the user that started the thread by posting the picture of their home. The term is most popular on websites like Imgur and Reddit in which users post material that is upvoted or downvoted to front pages. The term likely originated on 4Chan.com, which is responsible for the popularization of the forum-style voting structure.

The third assumption is that there is a feminine presence in the home if the space is decorated in a certain way or cluttered with knick-knacks. While some audiophiles recommend that there be rugs or posters hung behind speakers to prevent excessive reverberation off the surrounding walls, these suggestions are typically the limit to the décor that commenters expect of a typical listening space. Some of the starkest listening spaces appear to receive the most admiration from other community members, while users disparage spaces with family photos, small decorative items, or shelves containing anything besides listening media. To be sure, items should not be placed on turn table covers or speakers, as they may scratch surfaces or cause extraneous vibrations (I keep my own listening setup clear of clutter), but the preference is for spaces that are dedicated to listening.

For example, a post by username kingmeowingtons, the first comment in the thread says, "now HERE'S a guy who's single… Congrats on the nice setup."[38] Kingmeowington corrects the commenter, saying "I actually live with my girlfriend. We both love music," to which several other posts respond by congratulating him, telling him that she's a "keeper," to "put a ring on that," or asking if OP "are you sure you're not dating a tranny?" OP confirms that she is most certainly not a "tranny."[39] Further down in the thread, username WretchedLocket explains that he does not deal with WAF "because she knows it's a passion of mine, but she could care less about how it sounds. She loves background music, but couldn't begin to tell you if I swapped a pair of Bose with a pair of KEF Blades."[40] Any products from the audio company Bose are largely disdained in the audiophile community. This is mostly due to Bose's mass market appeal, high prices, and gimmicky technologies. Bose also launched a high-end kitchen radio in the 1990s

[38] The IndySSD, January 3, 2018, comment on kingmeowingtons, "Buy a Rug They Said," (Reddit Post), January 3, 2018, http://reddit.com/r/audiophile/7o4fxa/buy_a_rug_they_said/.
[39] Ibid, Atcoyou and Bud_Johnson, January 3, 2018.
[40] Ibid, WretchedLocket, January 3, 2018.

that was popular with women. Despite the discontinuation of the kitchen radio advertising campaign, Bose products continue to be associated with women, commercialism, and dilettante audio enthusiasts. Any mention of Bose in the forums is understood to be derogatory.

Another post by username Chillschematics indicates that he shares his home with a family with the title of his post, "My setup somewhat cleaned from kids [*sic*] toys."[41] The first post in the comment thread is the OP detailing the technical specifications of his setup, but the first comment to follow states "that's a lot of clutter," to which OP responds "personally id [*sic*] like to throw everything out, put the TV on the wall and only have the speakers and amp but my SO is very attached to the clutter."[42] Here it is apparent that the differing tastes of OP and his partner have caused tension in the home, a struggle with which those in the thread proceed to commiserate. Some post short exclamations like "ugh feel your pain," that it "looks damn clean with kids," while others share more frank words such as username Redbone838, who writes "it's almost a new year you can 2 for 1 start 2018 with a clean slate get rid of both SO and clutter."[43] Username thenandz is a little less hostile, but still divisive when he posts "it's difficult to post and open your set up to criticism. If you're like me, posting inspired several ideas that have all turned into fights with SO. Good luck."[44]

An exchange in a thread started by username djungal playing into the assumption that a feminine presence means clutter. He makes it clear from the title of his setup post, "Recently moved in with my girlfriend – thankfully (W/)GAF isn't too bad," that he has a new shared domestic space.[45] In the comment that follows djungal's post, username seanheis writes "gosh

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[41] Chillschematics, "My Setup Somewhat Cleaned from Kids Toys," (Reddit Post), December 30, 2017, http://www.reddit.com/r/audiophile/7n8j8r/my_setup_somehwat_cleaned_from_kids_toys/.
[42] Ibid, YumYumCookieChips, January, 1 2018.
[43] Ibid, Thenandz, Ferggzilla, Redbone838, January 2, 2018.
[44] Ibid, Thenandz, January 1, 2018.
[45] djungal, "Recently Moved in with My Girlfriend, - Thankfully (W/)GAF Isn't Too Bad," (Reddit Post), January 21, 2018, http://www.reddit.com/audiophile/7rx1ez/recently_moved_in_with_my_girlfriend_thankfully/.

that bulletin wire thingy is full of junk. A proper print and the room would be on hit," to which username Stonewallsorgi response "I saw that an[d] [*sic*] immediately pictured shit dropping onto the turntable/amp [*sic*] trying to hang it on that contraption."[46] Username baconlayer adds to the clutter commentary when he says "just wait… she will be sitting [*sic*] knickknacks on top of those wonderful LS50's the first time you turn your back!"[47]

These Reddit posts are all examples of the ways in which the assumptions outlined above play out in online spaces: hi-fi communities are made up of primarily men, women of the household do not understand or approve of high-end equipment in the home, and cluttered décor is inherently feminine and at odds with the audiophile aesthetic. Other setup sharing threads exist outside of Reddit, but "My Humble Setup Posts" are far more common on Reddit since photo sharing is a major part of the site's platform. Hobbyist forums outside of Reddit, while not great for analysis of domestic spaces, are excellent sources for topical conversations.

As mentioned previously, the vast majority of audio forums are dedicated to equipment reviews and providing help with technical problems. Occasionally, however, users or moderators of these forums ask general questions of the community. In most major forums, members attempt to broach the topic of women in high-end audio to better understand the perceived tensions between the genders. Varied questions launch these threads, for instance "why do almost all women today hate home audio," "why don't more Women [*sic*] develop audiophile interest," "why aren't there more women in high-end audio," "have you ever met a woman that was into high-end audio?"[48] Yet all of these questions share the goal of determining why men dominate

[46] Ibid, Seanheis and Stonewallsorgi, January 21, 2018.
[47] Ibid, Baconlayer, January 21, 2018.
[48] don_c55, "Why Do Almost All Women Today Hate Home Audio?," Fan Website, Audiogon.com, n.d., https://forum.audiogon.com/discussions/why-do-almost-all-women-today-hate-home-audio; Lisa T. Marv, "Why Aren't There More Women in High-End Audio?," *Stereophile*, July 11, 2010, https://www.stereophile.com/content/why-arent-there-more-women-high-end-audio; Scott Powell, "Why Don't More Women Develop Audiohpile Interest?," Quora.com, December 28, 2017, http://quora.com/Why-dont-more-

high-end audio. Motivations for these conversations are as varied as the questions that start them. Some may wish there are more women with whom to share their hobby or simply want to make home audio more accessible to their spouses. Others may hope to consolidate the perception of high-end audio as a homosocial hobby, finding solidarity in these anonymous online spaces. It is most likely, however, given the traffic buzz words attract, including my own, that posters are stoking the flames of the hot topic of gender equity to promote lively debate in the forum, appear on indexed searches on the topic, and increase site traffic.

Whatever the motivation, these forum threads often go on for dozens of pages, with hundreds of posts by almost as many users. The responses vary widely, but the commenters tend to cite two general reasons women are not interested in high-end audio, both of which proceed from the mid-century attitudes and assumptions we surveyed at the outset of this chapter. First, audio equipment does not appeal to traditional feminine tastes and second, women are unable or unwilling to learn about the technology required to build a home audio system.

Perceptions of Taste

The first, and largest, category of user comments is made up of those who believe that women are naturally repelled by the aesthetics of high-end audio due to differences between male and female hobbies, taste, or lifestyle choices. In these posts, commenters use essentialist feminine interests like shopping, shoes, makeup, or jewelry as examples of things that men deem frivolous and uninteresting. In doing so, commenters parallel men's ambivalence to these examples to women's ambivalence to home audio. For example, username mep on

Women-develop-audiophile-interest; taters, "Have You Ever Met a Woman"; Mike, "Women in High-end Audio," Fan, Audioshark.com, December 6, 2014, http://www.audioshark.org/general-audio-discussion-15/women-high-end-audio-6248.html.

AudioShark.org claims that "the only way I could get my wife into my listening room is if I left a trail of diamonds leading into my room. Once she had collected all of the diamonds, she would head back out."[49] In the same thread, username puroagave adds "it would take more than diamonds for my wife." Puroagave goes on to question why audiophiles should even take the time to consider a naturally occurring difference in taste:

> why [*sic*] is our society so bent on making woman [*sic*] into men and feminizing males?? my [*sic*] spouse is no more interested in joining me in the garage fixing stuff as I am helping her choose outfits or stand with her at the cosmetics counter [emoji with an exasperated expression].[50]

In a similar thread on Stereophile.com, an anonymous user argues that high-end audio is not popular among women because it cannot be used as a fashion accessory when he writes "I think women would take more interest in audio gear if they could take it and show it off when they go out. Maybe if Calvin Klein, Jordache, or Gucci made gear."[51] Another anonymous user elaborates on this point:

> Women are very driven by appearance, the ability to impress. There may be exceptions, but the boxes, speakers, wires, and complexity of use are all negatives. Stainless steel appliances and a big diamond are more important. Sound is, by American culture, not fashionable, waste of money, and an eyesore. After all, with Bose, what more could you ask for?[52]

Finally, username Larry corroborates:

> Simple, they can't wear it. They can't wear an amplifier, turntable [*sic*], or speakers and impress their girlfriends at lunch after golf or tennis. Same reason they don't care about cars, home theater, watches, or any of the other techno-mechanical things that fascinate us guys. If you can't spread it on your face with a brush or wear it on your body – in other words, if it doesn't make you look younger and more attractive to the opposite sex, they couldn't care less… Sexist? Yes. True? Yes.[53]

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[49] Mep, December 6, 2014, comment on Mike, "Women in High-end Audio."
[50] Ibid, puroagave, December 6, 2014.
[51] Al Earz, November 21, 2010, comment on Lisa T. Marv, "More Women in High-End Audio?"
[52] Ibid. Allan, November 21, 2010.
[53] Ibid. Larry, November 10, 2010.

A shared theme of these threads is that women still value things that are as extravagantly expensive as high-end audio, but the motivations for buying those things is predominantly social and a chance to show off wealth to friends and neighbors.

The above commenters parallel the masculine interest in high-end audio with the feminine interest in fashion and social status, but these posts carry a more malign undertone in which male posters demean essentialized feminine tastes while uplifting an equally essentialized masculine taste. A post by username Karem Icelli captures this undertone and is worth citing at length:

> I think it is a natural phenomenon about general interests/characteristics of men and women... Besides, I would rank men as the better sensualists! There must be a reason and an etymological sense for ending up with a phrase like 'man of pleasure.' Hi-fi is not only about music or reproduction of sound. It has many other aspects to it, that are more likely to be perceived by men. Hi-fi represents technological progress in the service of different philosophies, aiming to achieve the highest possible quality in sound-reproduction. Hi-fi causes huge amounts of aural joy. It costs a lot of money. And, not only because of the last, but because of all these reasons, it represents prestige. Moreover, I also have the feeling that there are more men than women, capable of delving into music, feeling, and enjoying it, becoming one with it. Hope I am wrong, but so far I have not heard of many women shedding tears or getting goosebumps while listening to music and only because of the music playing. Hi-fi eliminates barriers and brings one closer to music. Hi-Fi makes it much easier to delve into music. For those who desire to delve into it. And if it is a fact that there is more men interested in hi-fi than woman, it either means that I am somehow right with my above mentioned feeling, or that women have not yet discovered what hi-fi can affect in increasing the levels of joy and emotion when listening to music.[54]

As Karem Icelli indicates here, the primary difference between sex-based tastes is that women's tastes are considered superficial compared to the tastes aligned with the skilled hobbies of men. For example, on AudioShark, username Odyssey cites his wife's short attention span when he writes "I get my wife involved by playing Blue Ray concert videos of her favorite artists. She lasts about 20 minutes during two channel only listening. Then out comes the iPhone and she

[54] Ibid. Karem Icelli, November 10, 2010.

starts texting and becomes disengaged."[55] On Audiogon, username mofimadness ignores the historical lack of female interest in hi-fi and blames social media: "I can only speak to the women I'm around, but social media killed their interest. They are way too busy checking Facebook, Pinterest, Snapchat and all the other ilk out there. They couldn't/wouldn't sit still for a whole album if you paid them."[56] Username taters rebuts the social media angle:

> Even before social media existed I don't remember women seriously Interested [*sic*] in listening to albums. As far back as I can remember it was only men that say and listened to a whole album. I remember driving around with my teenage sisters and they would be constantly changing the radio stations to find a hit of the day.[57]

These men imply that women are inherently incapable of enjoying music as profoundly as men and are attracted to superficial, socially driven buying habits and hobbies. Their divisive language positions men's tastes as more ambitious and refined than those of the women in their lives. In this sense, men indulge in a form of self-fashioning that literary historian Stephen Greenblatt has described as an individual "self-consciously" shaping his identity to fit a "distinctive personality, a characteristic address to the world, a consistent mode of perceiving and behaving."[58] Greenblatt adds that self-fashioning is done in "relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile."[59] This issue of incompatibility rings true for the audiophile and his wife. To reassert power in the domestic space, the male hi-fi enthusiast must "attack and destroy" the opposing "authority," to borrow Greenblatt's evocative language.[60]

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[55] Odyssey, December 6, 2018, comment on Mike, "Women in High-end Audio."
[56] mofimadness, July 5, 2016, comment on don_c55, "Women Hate Audio?"
[57] Ibid, taters, December 1, 2015.
[58] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984). For more on self-fashioning and the self-conscious molding of the self, see Michele de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 97-99.
[59] Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning,* 12.
[60] Ibid.

The Gender/Tech Divide

The second, smaller category of posts are authored by those who believe women do not the possess specialist knowledge of high-end audio, whether due to a biological inability to understand the technological complexities of equipment, fear of technology, or a lack of patience for such a time-consuming hobby. This claim is particularly prominent in the Stereophile.com thread, on which ten of the thirty-five comments mention women's opposition to technology. David L. Wyatt is flummoxed as to why women are not interested in tech:

> More guys are into technology as an interest, and well, that's an important step towards audiophiledom. Now why women aren't so interested in tech, I'll never get. Barbies versus amplifiers, no contest![61]

Glenn Bennet assumes interest in equipment is inherently masculine when he writes:

> I think hardware, equipment, cables, etc, is a 'guy thing.' Flipping switches, levers, making adjustments; girls are just happy to listen to a pleasing sound from almost anything of decent quality with a lot of hassle. Sounds like the success story behind Bose radio, eh?[62]

Other posts take a more self-effacing approach, blaming a perceived social stigma associated with technology. For example, users write "because high-end audio is a form of geekdom," "the techno-geek babble that populates the mag/board/audio world is why," and "obvious stereotypical reasons: hi-fi is seen as technical and sometimes geeky."[63] In the Stevehoffman.com forum, username pencilchewer writes that "a lot of women are intimidated by science and math, so they tend not to place as high value on sound and technology."[64] It is important to note that pencilchewer mentions earlier in the thread that she is a woman, and continues in her post,

[61] David L. Wyatt, November 21, 2010, comment on Marv, "More Women in High-End Audio?"
[62] Ibid. Glenn Bennet, November 21, 2010.
[63] Ibid. Chris, KRB, Anonymous, November 21, 2010.
[64] pencilchewer, February 2, 2011, comment on taters, "Have You Ever Met a Woman."

> i [*sic*] have in mind a conversation i had with my oldest girl friend [*sic*]… she said 'i don't think about those things, i just want to slap it on and listen, as long as it goes loud, what do i care about how it sounds?' … *LOL* i couldn't help but to laugh at her… i used to feel the *same exact way* until i actually got to hear the difference between quality and low-quality sound!... now my ears tell me not to dare crank something up unless it's not gonna hurt! [laughing emoji][65]

Pencilchewer's post is significant because hers in the only one in any of the forums I encountered that suggests that a woman can overcome discomfort with technology and learn to build her own home audio system. Other users in the forum agree with pencilchewer, but do not acknowledge her implication that women can easily learn to use audio equipment, instead referring to her as a "rare breed" and holding to the "truth" that "women don't take to technical things like men do."[66]

These users assume that men and women are inclined not by social conditioning but rather by nature to have different aptitudes for technology or different tastes. Blaming genetics allows complacence on the part of the men in the hi-fi community: if men and women's taste are biologically determined, then there is nothing that hi-fi enthusiasts can or *should* do to involve the women in their lives with this naturally masculine hobby. Furthermore, it is historically common for those in power to use pseudo-science to support the othering, dehumanization, and ultimately, oppression of marginalized groups.[67] So continues the social construction excluding

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[65] Ibid. Emphasis and ellipses in original post.
[66] Ibid. btf1980, Scott in DC, February 2, 2011.
[67]At its most extreme, this brand of pseudoscience was deployed in the "scientific racism" of phrenology and the eugenics movement. More recently, James Damore released an incendiary memo during his employment at Google, decrying the company's attempts at gender equity in hiring for technical jobs. Citing "inherent" differences between the genders, Damore argued that women were scientifically proven to be less suitable for technical jobs and leadership roles. Damore cited several scientific articles, but many of the researchers cited publicly denounced Damore's memo as an example of scholarly cherry-picking. For more on the incident see Kate Conger, "Exclusive: Here's The Full 10-Page Anti-Diversity Screed Circulating Internally at Google [Updated]," Gizmodo, August 5, 2017, https://gizmodo.com/exclusive-heres-the-full-10-page-anti-diversity-screed-1797564320; Megan Molteni and Adam Rogers, "The Actual Science of James Damore's Google Memo," WIRED, August 15, 2017, https://www.wired.com/story/the-pernicious-science-of-james-damores-google-memo/. Adam Cohen, *Imbeciles: The Supreme Court, American Eugenics, and the Sterilization of Carrie Buck* (New York: Penguin Books, 2017), 14; P.D. Curtain, "'Scientific' Racism and the British Theory of Empire," *Journal of the Historical Study of Nigeria* 2, no. 1 (December 1960): 41.

females from high-end audio with the reasoning that such a masculine pursuit would be a violation of the natural laws dictating the interests of men and women.

There are a handful of commenters who challenge this dangerously essentialist cycle of thought but are certainly the rarest voices in the online conversation. These posters, who typically have a female audiophile partner or friend, try to uncover the boy's club inclinations of the community. For instance, username Seth G. writes "women love music just as much as men, if not more so. Maybe they are put-off by how male-centric the hobby is. I know I certainly see as many women as men at concerts. And now that I think about it, the orchestra I last went to hear was a very even mix of men and women..." and username tzed claims that "even though it's the 21st century, there are lots of men who haven't gotten the memo. Women are people too, but I see otherwise intelligent men treat them condescendingly every day."[68] Unfortunately, these posts by Seth G. and tzed were ignored by their fellow commenters, without even a simple affirmation or condemnation by any other users. This silence indicates the reluctance of those in the audiophile community to engage critically with those who point out the systematic misogyny of high-end audio forums.

#WAFGate in the Blogosphere

Despite the disparaging tenor found in hi-fi online community spaces, there are several indications that those leading the industry wish to promote inclusion in the hobby. The motivations behind this change of heart, however, are at least in part monetary. High-end audio, like other luxury industries, was hard hit during the American recession and forced to downsize significantly. As American families failed to thrive, so did the commodity market around home

[68] Ibid. Seth G, tzed, February 2, 2011.

audio systems. When the recession eased, however, high-end audio did not experience the same recovery as other technologies, such as handheld devices and televisions. Manufacturers and advertisers speculated that part of the reason for the slow recovery was their failure to reach more than fifty percent of the American market: women.[69] Unsurprisingly as the American economy climbed out of its malaise in 2014 and vinyl underwent an unexpected resurgence, blog posts promoting a more female friendly audiophile community burst into the blogosphere.[70] In what blogger John H. Darko deemed "#WAFgate," a series of posts appeared across several different blogs delving into the issue of language, discrimination, and gender equity.[71] Calling women the "future of high-end audio," Toneaudio.com contributor Jeff Dorgay note his nineteen-year-old daughter can deftly manage his home wireless router, concluding that "the fact that we are living in a world of technologically savvy women can only mean good things for the consumer electronics industry."[72] On PartTimeAudiophile.com, hi-fi blogger Scott Hull describes the issue with some humor:

> The real reason women don't line up and buy high-end audio gear? No one told them they ought to… Given that the audio's high-end has been variously described as 'being on its dead bed' or in a 'death spiral' or 'deathy death deathing death-death of death,' you'd be forgiven is someone, somewhere, didn't stand up and say, 'Hey we might have overlooked a demographic here.' Someone like Apple. Or Bose. Or B&O. Oh, right. Not *everyone* has overlooked women.[73]

Hull suggests that some audio brands that were, perhaps not so incidentally, doing well despite the recession primarily because those companies had successfully marketed to both men and

[69] Jeff Dorgay, "The Future of Audio Is... Women!," *Tone* (blog), December 18, 2012, http://www.tonepublications.com/blog/the-future-of-audio-is-women/.
[70] Ibid.
[71] John H. Darko, "Girls Aloud: Gender Issues in the Hi-Fi World #WAFgate," *Darko.Audio* (blog), December 2014, https://darko.audio/2014/12/girl-aloud-gender-issues-in-the-hi-fi-world/.
[72] Dorgay, "The Future of Audio."
[73] Scott Hull, "Marketing, Audiophiles, and the Opposite Sex," *Part-Time Audiophile* (blog), December 10, 2014, https://parttimeaudiophile.com/2014/12/10/mrketing-audiophiles-and-the-opposite-sex/. Emphasis in original.

women, while those companies that marketed exclusively to white-collar, middle-aged men struggled to stay afloat during the recession.

Significantly, this group of 2014 blog posts demonstrates an improved self-awareness on the part of those in the hi-fi community. Naturally, some of the authors exhibit the same fallacies as those in the forums. Roger Skoff on AudiophileReview.com and Marc Phillips on PartTimeAudiophile.com both imply that men and women have inherently different tastes and aptitudes, for instance. Yet there is a genuine effort to turn the conversation away from the tired essentialist WAF tropes.[74] John H. Darko's post on darko.audio.com challenged the language of the forums:

> …why not put terms like 'WAF and 'man cave' out to pasture? Perhaps we should stop referring to our significant others as 'SWMBO' ('She who must be obeyed') … Of course, I can't tell you what to do. You can continue with outmoded language as much as you please, but don't complain that your local audiophile society meet is always such a dude-fest if you're still referring to your partner as 'The minister for war and finance.'[75]

While Darko focuses on the language of those in the audiophile community, Phillips's posts stand out because he includes his interview with the Public Affairs Executive Manager at the Australian Government's Workplace Gender Equality Agency, Yolanda Beattie. Beattie has significantly more experience discussing matters of equity and she is the only feminist activist contribute to the community conversation. The Beattie interview is lengthy, but she concludes that

> language and imagery are the primary means by which we send and receive signals about who belongs, what's important and what's valued. Terms like 'Wife Acceptance Factor' and 'no girls allowed' sends a clear signal that women have little credibility in hi-fi and

[74] Roger Skoff, "Lady Hi-Fi Crazies?," *Audiophile Review* (blog), December 4, 2014, http://audiophilereview.com/audiophile/lady-hi-fi-crazies.html; Marc Phillips, "How Not to Get Women Interested in Audio," *Part-Time Audiophile* (blog), December 5, 2014, https://parttimeaudiophile.com/2014/12/05/how-not-to-get-women-interested-in-audio/.
[75] Darko, "Girls Aloud."

> that their voice and contribution is not valid or welcome. It's exclusionary and derogatory.[76]

Darko acknowledges that Beattie's words will likely agitate his readership of "middle-aged, middle-class" males, a prediction that has come true.[77]

The comments sections of the #WAFgate posts do not reflect the progressive nature of their parent posts, though at least some readers concede that language in media, retail, and online spaces should change. These readers hardly seem inspired to action, however. "I hope to see more articles like this on you blog," writes one, while another simply praises the "excellent writing."[78] Those who disagree, unsurprisingly, tend to fall in line with the attitudes of those in the forums. Username Jim writes that women "might indeed appreciate great music reproduced brilliantly; they just don't make it a cornerstone of their existences," and Mike Middleton argues that "it is what it is, the book says woman are from Venus, and are from Mars…long may it continue."[79] Username Gan Solo insists that if LV or Hermes made speakers, women would "come in droves."[80] These comments indicate that a large part of the hi-fi community needs more than a few blog posts to shift the exclusionary culture around high-end audio.

#WAFGate posts fell silent in 2015 and forums and blogs appear to have completely dropped the issue of women and high-end audio. Perhaps the current cultural push for gender equity has made those in the forums bashful about broaching the topic in public spaces, for fear of a tactical misstep rebounding poorly. Or maybe the audiophile community has come to view online spaces centered around high-end audio as a getaway, free from the chaotic din of social

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[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[7878] RobD, December 9, 2014, comment on Darko, "Girls Aloud."; Cookie Marenco, December 10, 2014, comment on Hull, "Marketing."
[79] Jim, December 11, 2014, comment on Hull, "Marketing"; Mike Middleton, December 2014, comment on Darko, "Girls Aloud." Ellipses in original.
[80] Gan Solo, December 2014, comments on Darko, "Girls Aloud."

media, focused on a singular and neutral topic. Whatever the reason for the long silence, the most current posts in Reddit's r/audiophile indicate that the discriminatory rhetoric has not changed, and that women's tastes continued to be demeaned and undermined in online spaces. Despite the progress made from the enthusiast magazines of the midcentury, the audiophile community continues to exclude women from the hobby through essentialist and dated rhetoric in online spaces.

EPILOGUE

In her interview with a popular audio blog, feminist author and activist Yolanda Beattie touched on some of the same points that I examine throughout this thesis:

> I would suggest any demographic that can dominate an idea, industry, organisation etc. enjoys some power or privilege simply because they belong to that demographic, not because they necessarily have innate talent and ability over the minority demographic… Language and imagery are the primary means by which we send and receive signals about who belongs, what's important and what's valued. Terms like 'Wife Acceptance Factor' and 'no girls allowed' sends a clear signal that women have little credibility in hifi [*sic*] and that their voice and contribution is not valid or welcome. It's exclusionary and derogatory.[1]

As Beattie indicates in her examination of the online hi-fi community, the discriminatory rhetorical devices deployed throughout online communities have the power to other, exclude, and discourage participation from women and minorities. In each chapter of my thesis I have studied a different community to demonstrate the unique ways in which those in power develop identities, construct borders, and police the boundaries of musically centered online spaces.

My analysis of punk fanzines of the late 1970s introduced the divisive and caustic language prevalent in amateur music criticism. Through a close reading of the interviews and editorials in *Slash,* I demonstrated that early punk fanzines contain a significant amount of derogatory and sexist language. Building from the scholarly work of Jamie Mullaney, Ryan Force, and Naomi Griffin, I explored the ways in which the rhetoric of fanzines carried great influence in local punk communities.[2] Thus, the misogynist language found in fanzines not only

[1] John H. Darko, "Girls Aloud: Gender Issues in the Hi-Fi World #WAFgate," *Darko.Audio* (blog), December 2014, https://darko.audio/2014/12/girl-aloud-gender-issues-in-the-hi-fi-world/.
[2] Jamie L. Mullaney, "'Unity Admirable But Not Necessarily Heeded': Going Rates and Gender Boundaries in the Straight Edge Hardcore Music Scene," *Gender & Society* 21, no. 3 (June 2007); William Ryan Force, "Consumption Styles and the Fluid Complexity of Punk Authenticity," *Symbolic Interaction* 32, no. 4 (2009); Naomi Griffin, "Gendered Performance and Performing Gender in the DIY Punk and Hardcore Music Scene," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 13, no. 2 (2012).

reflected the exclusionary nature of the scene, but also shaped the values and perceptions of punk fans that consumed the fanzine.

After establishing the framework for the exclusionary tactics apparent in amateur musical discourse, I jumped to the present day to illustrate how these tactics play out in contemporary virtual spaces. In my analyses of Sarah Sahim's and L.V. Anderson's internet articles and their critics, I highlight the tendency of commenters to use gendered attacks against women who threated to disrupt the power of the white, male hegemony. Due to the novelty of this sort of methodology, I had to synthesize the work done by musicologists Matthew Bannister, Susan McClary, and Sarah Cohen with that of sociologist Michael Kimmel, and new media theorist Lisa Nakamura to interpret the blog posts and comments sections in both case studies.[3] In this interpretation I sought to illustrate the ways performance of masculinity play out in social media and internet forums and dictate who does and does not have a valid voice in online discourse.

Finally, I connected historical rhetoric in fan publications to that of the contemporary digital realm, but compressed my analysis to a single fan base. By focusing exclusively on the audiophile community, I showed the similarities in prejudiced methods between midcentury high-fidelity magazines and contemporary enthusiast forums and blogs. Much has been written on masculinity and high-end audio in the midcentury, such as Keir Keightly's study of audio and domestic spaces and Leerom Medovoi's work on the masculinist politics of close listening, so I mapped some of their existing ideas on my interpretations of user-generated content from the

[3] Matthew Bannister, *White Boys, White Noise: Masculinities and 1980s Guitar Rock* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006); Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Sarah Cohen, "Men Making a Scene: Rock Music and the Production of Gender," in *Sexing the Grove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whitely (New York: Routledge, 1997); Michael S. Kimmel, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (New York: Nation Books, 2013); Lisa Nakamura, *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* (Psychology Press, 2002).

online high-end audio community.[4] In my work I found that while the content of the forums is not nearly as offensive as that of the midcentury magazines, the essentialist and exclusionary rhetoric is still discouragingly common.

While the analysis in these three chapters indicates that online discourse does indeed shape the values of the musical community, the scope of my study here does not include the sonic or sociological impacts of user-generated content. Further inquiry is required into the buying habits, interactions, and music making of those in touch with online communities to determine how profoundly online dialogue permeates American culture. With the growing array of digital social platforms, it is clear that scholars must continue to scour the depths of the internet for the daily conversations between musicians, critics, and fans to better understand the always shifting landscape of digital rhetoric.

[4] Keir Keightley, "'Turn It down!' She Shrieked: Gender, Domestic Space, and High Fidelity, 1948–591," *Popular Music* 15, no. 2 (1996); Keir Keightley, "Low Television, High Fidelity: Taste and the Gendering of Home Entertainment Technologies," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 47, no. 2 (2003); Leerom Medovoi, "Mapping the Rebel Image: Postmodernism and the Masculinist Politics of Rock in the U. S. A.," *Cultural Critique*, no. 20 (1991).

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