

Meeting Virginia:  
Feminist Analysis and Implications of Late- and Post-1990s Pop/Rock Music

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## *Introduction*

Music and feminism grew together throughout the 1990s as two forces of popular culture that helped to define and clarify the roles and representations of bold, bad, and individualistic women of the third wave. Feminism was undergoing a generational wave change, and the new third wave's close interaction with popular culture led to accusations of disorder from second wave feminists and those outside the movement, as well. Third wavers began to use popular culture products, including music, as means to self-understanding, and they overturned dated notions of power in order to assert their own interpretations and use pop music in constructive ways. The '90s was also a locus of change for music and, in particular, third wavers' roles in the industry. The Riot Grrrls of the early 1990s expressed their anger through the punk alternative, and the female singer/songwriters of the later Lilith Fair made feminist music more mainstream and individualized. Although feminist music had made many strides, mass media outlets and feminists alike pinpointed the era after Lilith Fair ended in 1999 as a new low point for feminist music: over-commercialized, over-exposed teen pop stars of the era had become popular, and their lyrics did not initiate constructive feminist discussions. The conversation that early feminist music of the 1990s introduced about personality quirks, identity, and gender issues, however, did not end because of the death of Lilith Fair's cries and the subsequent onset of Britney Spears' lusty sigh. During the final few years of the decade, some male bands of the pop/rock music genre, like Train, whose lyrics lofted through radio airwaves in the late-1990s and early 2000s, caught on to the conversation. Outside the scopes of feminist critics, Train carried on the themes of femininity and female individualism previously introduced by Riot Grrrl and Lilith Fair in the lyrics of the popular song, "Meet Virginia." Through a close analysis of the lyrics of this and other songs in the late-1990s pop/rock genre, like Dave Matthews Band's "Grey Street" and

“3am” by Matchbox Twenty, I will show that male bands from the late-1990s and early 2000s showed some influence from third wave feminist discussion in their lyrics. Together, their lyrics are not perfect manifestations of feminism, but Train generates a new kind of self-realizing feminist identity through the character of Virginia. Thus, Virginia enters the feminist discussion as a strong woman who has concerns about her aspirations, individuality, and need for personal expression.

***Resolving the Generational Interlude:***

***Theorizing the Changing Face of Third Wave Feminism and 1990s Popular Culture***

Popular music was a contentious issue between the second and third waves of feminism, as the two waves used music, and other products of popular culture, differently. With a highly activist critical approach, second wavers most commonly protested negative pop culture representations of women. Feminists of the third wave, however, adopted a new, more personal approach: one that heeded the lessons from the second wave and responded to their age of popular culture. By the 1990s, popular culture, especially music, had become a tremendously pervasive force, and third wave feminists began to see it as a means to understand and construct their personal identities and the identity of their movement. Their new critical approach asserts that using popular culture constructively (and participating in it) is key to gaining both cultural and personal knowledge. Third wave feminists’ personal interactions with popular music are essential elements of the new individualistic and culturally savvy wave of feminism.

Prior to the 1990s, second wave feminists had begun to recognize the negative impacts of popular culture on the feminist movement. Second wavers’ interactions with pop culture were often protests, as they were concerned about the power struggle between real feminists and the

negative representations of women in popular culture. Their Marxist influences led them to adhere to an Adornian approach to pop culture (that introduced by the pop culture critic Theodor Adorno): in essence, they pitted themselves against the potentially destructive powers of popular culture, with its restrictive representations of women (Dibben). In the article “Representations of Femininity in Popular Music,” Nicola Dibben relates the Adornian approach to popular culture specifically to popular music (Dibben). Dibben notes that Adorno’s approach places the power of constructing meaning in the hands of the artists, and asserts that meaning is derived solely from the source of the music or other media form: “popular music affirms the dominant economic order in such a way that it represses and controls listeners while creating the illusion of freedom and choice” (Dibben 332-3). Thus, second wavers sought to wrestle the control from the producers of popular culture, completely break down negative representations of women (whether in movies, music, or magazines), and rebuild. In the book *Feminism and Pop Culture*, Andi Zeisler chronicles a few examples of second wave involvement with pop culture, including protests of the Miss America Pageant in 1968, *Playboy* in 1969, and *Ladies’ Home Journal* in 1970: “Each of these demonstrations made the case that pop culture matters, and that dismantling such pop products—or remaking them to reflect real women’s lives—was an imperative part of women’s liberation” (12). On highly political and public stages, second wave feminists actively protested pop culture representations in order to keep feminism alive.

Third wave feminists grew up in a media-saturated and critical world that demanded a new approach to understanding women and popular culture alike. According to Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier in their introduction to *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, the term “third wave” made its debut in Rebecca Walker’s essay, “Becoming the Third Wave,” published in 1992 in *Ms.* magazine (Dicker 10, Walker). The media had begun to claim a

postfeminist age, asserting that the new emerging brand of feminism strayed too far from the methods and beliefs of the second wave (Dicker). The women of the second wave, including Gloria Steinem and Betty Friedan, were activists: they published texts, participated in protests, and aggressively pursued “full human rights for women” (Dicker 9). Who was this new kind of feminist, the media asked, who had the rights to vote, work outside the home, and express herself through political activism because of her activist second wave mother: what more could she want? As Walker retorted to the media critics in her essay, the feminist struggle had not ended yet: “I am not a postfeminism feminist. I am the Third Wave” (Walker 41). Engaged with political and social activism as well as popular music and fashion, the third wave of feminism creates space for women to both raise consciousness about important issues and work toward understanding their own femininity and individuality.

In the early 1990s, third wave feminists argued that the feminist movement had not become obsolete: the movement still had many more battles to fight, and the women of the third wave would make the space for themselves to fight those battles. In the remainder of her essay, Walker defined the new third wave, balancing carefully between public activism and personal anecdote (Walker). She encapsulated the second wave need for social justice, but applied it to an emotionally empowering personal experience when she dealt with sexist language on a train: “After battling with ideas of separatism and militancy, I connect with my own feelings of powerlessness” (Walker 41). Walker’s desire for the third wave was for it to open discussion about the balance between angry, activist power and the trying, empowering process of personal identity construction:

To be a feminist is to integrate an ideology of equality and female empowerment into the very fiber of my life. It is to search for personal clarity in the midst of systemic

destruction, to join in sisterhood with women when often we are divided, to understand power structures with the intention of challenging them. (Walker 41)

Although her connection to feminism was described as deeply personal, she expressed that the process to attaining personal understanding could draw women of the third wave together.

Walker's defense of feminism demonstrates the third wave's emphasis on bringing personal understanding into the purview of feminist social beliefs and activism.

The third wave did not have a clean conceptual break from the highly active second wave. As Dicker and Piepmeier discuss, the two waves overlap in both theory and practice: "At its best, the third wave engages with a diverse spectrum of issues in ways that are passionate as well as playful, inclusive as well as rigorous, making use of the best of second wave theory and strategy as well as critiques of second wave feminism" (Dicker 10). All women of the third wave unmistakably benefited from the major political and social strides won by the second wave, but they recognized early that second wave feminists often "reduce[d] the category of 'woman' to its essence" when fighting for equality (Dicker 9). Additionally, third wave feminists did not simply inherit the same issues that second wave feminists fought, but responded to the new ones: Dicker and Piepmeier claim, "third wave feminism's political activism...is shaped by—and responds to—a world of global capitalism and information technology, postmodernism and postcolonialism, and environmental degradation" (10). In many ways, the third wavers saw the both the strides and shortcomings of their predecessors, and constructed a feminism focused on their cultural moment. Consequently, the feminist purview opened (and continues to open) to a new variety of women's issues, including the complications and messiness of identity construction and global awareness; as Dicker and Piepmeier say, "Just as it is interested in a multiplicity of issues, the third wave operates from the assumption that identity is multifaceted

and layered” (10). By using “personal experience as a bridge to larger political and theoretical explorations of the third wave,” the new age of feminists appears less reliant on creating a collective political community to combat large gender issues than the second wave; instead, it is more open to studying individual creations of identity (Dicker 13). Third wavers have not lost the sharp, critical eyes of second wave feminists; they simply, and inevitably, have widened the focus.

Popular culture became an increasingly ubiquitous force in women’s lives in the 1990s and, thus, sparked the interests of third wave feminists. Zeisler claims that the undeniable infiltration of pop culture forms into a woman’s everyday existence, as well as feminists’ growing interest in pop culture studies, has fostered an inseparable relationship between feminism and pop culture since the ‘90s: “In the past decade or two, feminism and popular culture have become more closely entwined than ever before” (6). To third wave feminists, many pop culture forms—“entertainment or not”—represent stages for political and social activism, as well as a means by which individual women can inform their own notions of identity (3). For some women, their identity might consist of wearing makeup, dresses, or reading mainstream magazines: all in all, third wave feminists embrace the inability to avoid pop culture, whether it is TV shows, music, or advertising. As Zeisler claims, “people who don’t engage with it risk having no voice in how it represents them”: she proposes that the ability to interact with pop culture places female viewers, listeners, and consumers in positions of power (Zeisler 148). For third wave feminists, the 1990s signaled the time for women to begin to become intelligent about using popular culture, and for feminists to begin to exert power from within the inescapable popular culture hole into which they were born.

Equipped with a new critical approach to popular culture, third wavers recognize and study it as a useful, essential part of women's personal experiences. Third wave feminists engage much more intimately with pop culture than any of the previous waves, fighting for what Zeisler calls "media literacy:" "Media literacy, simply put, is the ability to read, analyze, and contextualize information in a way that looks at its accuracy, its 'framing,' and where it comes from" (141). As Zeisler recognizes, the 1990s was saturated with popular culture, and pop culture was saturated with various representations of women (Zeisler). The third wave asserted (and continues to assert) that women could confront these various representations and undermine the negative ones by assuming power over them. Nicola Dibben notes that the third wave feminist critical approach to popular culture inverts the power model maintained by the second wave Adornian approach (Dibben). The traditional, second wave Adornian critical approach placed power in the hands of the author or creator, but the alternative, feminist approach places more power in the consumer or listeners' hands, as it stresses that they use the media and participate in "the co-production of meaning" (Dibben 332, 342). The alternative approach understands that readers, listeners, and consumers of popular culture can define their own experiences with texts, songs, or other art forms by restructuring or personally connecting with them: "people use these products to create their own meanings which may evade or resist the dominant social order" (Dibben 342). The feminist alternative critical approach makes room for listeners to discuss multiple and ambiguous viewpoints instead of simply accepting one: it creates space for conversation among varying interpretations, between authors and listeners as well as among listeners.

Third wave feminists, in essence, argue against Adorno, saying that they can use pop culture products in constructive ways instead of being intimidated by them, or discounting and



protesting them. Robert Miklitsch, a pop culture critic more recent than Adorno, openly and assertively criticizes Adorno's negative impressions of the significance of pop culture, and particularly rock music, in the book *Roll Over Adorno: Critical Theory, Popular Culture, Audiovisual Media*. Miklitsch describes Adorno's views as limited and dated, saying that "his global critique of mass culture involves a regional defense of the values of classical music, epitomized by the heroic figure of Beethoven, and a corresponding depreciation of popular music" (43). For Adorno, rock was not a highbrow musical experience, and represented superficial entertainment consumerism at its best: its ability to be reproduced and replayed further spurred his "withering views about the commodity production of music" (Miklitsch 56). Miklitsch describes Adorno's approach to listening to music as "cognition-heavy:" it demanded willingness to artistically experience, heavily interpret, and, all in all, succumb to the music, which, for Adorno, was primarily classical (54-5). Miklitsch's retort does not refute the power of interpretation, but argues that rock's ability to generate excitement about normal life activities makes it a highly powerful genre in its own right, without intense concentration: "everyday life, revived by daily infusions of rock'n'roll, itself became an art form" (54). Instead of elevating the mind, rock music elevates the everyday (Miklitsch). Miklitsch also claims that rock music, like classical music, is valuable in cultural and social ways: "Simply put, the social context of jazz or rock'n'roll is arguably as complex as that for classical or modern music" (50). Like Dibben's alternative feminist approach, Miklitsch's argument overturns Adorno's notions of value and argues for a new system that understands the simple yet meaningful ways that the lyrics of rock music, as a form of art and often social commentary, can communicate with individual listeners to create their own listening experience. Third wave feminists' views on

popular culture, as discussed by Dibben, echo Miklitsch's argument about rock'n'roll, as they recognize the informative and personally meaningful powers of pop culture.

Surrounded by popular culture products, including the seemingly menial or lowbrow, third wave feminists, like Miklitsch, find value in the ordinary and use it to achieve understanding of themselves and the world around them. According to Zeisler, feminists must use pop culture:

...like the disintegrating line between high and low culture, the distinctions between political and pop have also all but disappeared. Pop culture informs our understandings of political issues that on first glance seem to have nothing to do with pop culture; it also makes us see how something meant as pure entertainment can have everything to do with politics. (7)

Popular culture is literally "any cultural product that has a mass audience" and includes everything from websites and blogs to politicians and celebrities in today's media-centric world (Zeisler 1). Feminists inevitably interact with both the good and the bad in pop culture, whether through protest or consumption, and did so throughout the twentieth century, as evidenced by second wave feminists' multiple protests. On many levels, third wavers' understandings of pop culture reflect those of the second wave, as the new generation understands that the media continues to need occasional castigation so that it "actually reflects a picture of who's consuming it" (Zeisler 144). While both second and third wave feminists have understood that restructuring popular culture and media portrayals of women is not an easy task, third wavers more closely engage with pop culture: Zeisler says of the late-1990s, "an effective feminism needed to critique commercialism and consumerism; it needed to pull no punches in calling out the beauty industry, women's magazines, Wall Street, Hollywood, and Madison Avenue as perpetual realms of

oppression” (Zeisler 122). Since the ‘90s, third wave feminists have engaged with popular culture and asked for representations with “more diversity, more independence, more smarts, more nuance” (Zeisler 127). Third wave feminists seek balance: criticism with consumption, and setbacks with hope.

Feminism and music began to intimately intertwine when the shifting state of feminism became reflected in new artists and a new category of music. Through new female artists with lyrics for and about women, music became a primary scene for much of the third wave feminist change. A basic argument of the third wave is that music does not simply exist for “the pleasure of hearing and seeing it;” it often grows out of “specific cultural communities” (Zeisler 5). The ‘90s was a cultural opening to different female musicians’ voices that sought to debunk stereotypes in their own, individualistic ways: “...the music industry was a locus of questioning, a state of affairs that made for a short but unquestionably fertile time when music was a chief site of feminism and mainstream resistance” (Zeisler 105). An array of popular female artists across musical genres like Queen Latifah, Salt-N-Pepa, and Ani DiFranco created diverse feminist answers to the male-dominated music culture (Zeisler). Although their lyrics, sounds, and fans were different, these female artists wrestled with the 1990s’ definition of femininity, and their messages promoted strength, interiority, and honesty (Zeisler). The feminists of the 1990s were a diverse community of women who used music as a way to claim voices for themselves and for all women.

The variety of voices and array of issues present in the 1990s both complicated and enhanced the ongoing conversation about the definition of the third wave. For instance, global feminisms, popular culture, and identity creation as the primary concerns of third wave feminism do not appear to be a totally cohesive group. However, the third wave’s emphasis on what Leslie

Heywood and Jennifer Drake simply call “contradiction—or what looks like contradiction, if one doesn’t shift one’s point of view” in their Introduction to *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism* has a reassuring tone (2). It reminds women that constructing self and understanding feminism are difficult, yet essential, feminist processes. The many scenes of popular culture available in the 1990s all entered into discordant dialogue with each other about the roles and representations of women, but third wave feminists sought productive conversation with them, whether through art, music, or academia. The cultural moment of the 1990s was when the many different women of third wave feminism, especially those in music, blended politics and pop culture in distinct, novel ways in order to describe, understand, and own their feminist struggles.

***Reviving and Revising: Practicing Feminism through Riot Grrrl and Lilith Fair***

The Riot Grrrl movement and Lilith Fair are both held up as feminist music innovations, and continue to reverberate in music and feminist discussions. They were two very different representations of the changing face of 1990s feminism, from the political activist, potentially abrasive second wave to the diverse and individualistic, yet uniting, third wave. Though part of the third wave, the Riot Grrrl movement of the early 1990s strongly maintained the second wave feminist ideal of activism, as it addressed women’s issues in loud, angry, female punk music voices. Bikini Kill, one essential Riot Grrrl band, showcased the movement’s raw emotion and powerful, unyielding identity in their song, “Rebel Girl.” In the wake of Riot Grrrl, popular female musician Sarah McLachlan co-founded Lilith Fair, the all-female tour: “a celebration of women in music” (“Lilith Fair”). Its daring move to break the industry’s rules about women in music at the time (which asserted that radio stations and concert line-ups could not feature

women musicians together) met with considerable success: the festival raised \$10 million for North American women's charities and attracted over 1.5 million fans in its three years ("Lilith Fair", "About"). With an agenda to enjoy women's voices, Lilith Fair was a very different reflection of third wave feminism than the Riot Grrrls. The artists and songs of Lilith Fair, like the Indigo Girls with their hit "Closer to Fine," had a more subdued and personalized approach to femininity and women's issues than those of Riot Grrrl, like Bikini Kill, that made it mainstream and essentially third wave; the powerful tour created a unique space that brought a whole spectrum of women's voices together and engaged audiences to awareness and strength. The Riot Grrrls and Lilith Fair have left powerful legacies on both feminism and popular music, as they are two distinct emblems of third wave feminist thought in action.

The women of Riot Grrrl punk in the early 1990s used pure anger and underground support to loudly and actively discuss feminist issues. In the early 1990s, Riot Grrrl represented a new form of feminist activism, according to Dicker and Piepmeier: "...young feminists, like the Riot Grrrls based in Olympia, Washington, used their punk sensibilities to create music that proclaimed their defiance of sexist norms and confining gender roles" (11). According to Kalene Westmoreland in the article "'Bitch' and Lilith Fair: Resisting Anger, Celebrating Contradictions," bands from Riot Grrrl "relied on visceral anger to reject rigid gender roles" (205). Melissa Klein's article, "Duality and Redefinition: Young Feminism and the Alternative Music Community," states that punk feminist bands like Bikini Kill and Bratmobile "grew not out of girls wanting sensitive boys so much as girls wanting to be tough girls" (212). Klein notes that Riot Grrrl was a third wave movement because it translated the essential second wave ideas of activism to fit 1990s punk music culture: "And whereas some second wave feminists fought for equal access to the workplace, some third wave feminists fought for equal access to the punk

stage” (215). Screaming was one fighting tactic, as Neil Nehring notes in *Popular Music, Gender, and Postmodernism*: “Pure screaming is what grunge, hip-hop, metal, punk, and Riot Grrrls have in common—not scream therapy, either, for the point isn’t letting it out and feeling better...but enlisting other screamers—and they’re doing it in the public eye, which the authorities hate” (154). Women onstage in the bands of the Riot Grrrl movement heatedly drew attention to women’s issues while women offstage produced issues of “fanzines” to complement the arguments in the lyrics (Klein 213). Riot Grrrl bands made space for themselves in punk subculture because they felt, as the band L7 describes in their song “Pretend We’re Dead,” that “cramping styles is the plan” in mainstream culture (L7 line 3). The Riot Grrrl music culture fought, through its volume and lyrics, typical gender stereotypes and communicated a strong voice to other female music artists and listeners.

The Riot Grrrl anthem “Rebel Girl” emerged in 1993 from the band Bikini Kill, and it discussed the Riot Grrrl ideals of aggression, rebelliousness, and female power. Although Bikini Kill resisted the label of a “Riot Grrrl” band, many of their songs, including “Rebel Girl” and “Carnival,” which Nehring analyzes in his book, express the essential Riot Grrrl tenets of anger and resistance (Nehring). Nehring quotes liner notes from Bikini Kill’s *The C.D. Version of the First Two Records* as admitting, “its members ‘subscribe to a variety of different aesthetics, strategies, and beliefs, both political and punk-wise, some of which are probably considered ‘riot grrrl’” (Nehring 160). In “Rebel Girl,” a female speaker sings praises to another girl; thus, the speaker is not the “Rebel Girl” herself (Bikini). The speaker values her rebellious subject, who looks confident, defiant, and self-aware; lines like, “That girl she holds her head up so high / I think I wanna be her best friend” and “Rebel Girl, Rebel Girl / I think I wanna take you home / I wanna try on your clothes” illustrate that the speaker admires and desires the “Rebel Girl” (lines

3-4, 7-9). Both girls are aggressive, as shown through the language of power evident throughout the song: the “Rebel Girl” is “the queen of the neighborhood” and can conjure “the revolution” with her body, and the speaker pushes for an intimate, if not sexual, relationship with her in lines like, “In her kiss, I taste the revolution” and “I really wanna be your best friend / Love you like a sister always” (lines 1, 10, 13, 25-6). “Rebel Girl” focuses on one aggressive formation of a relationship as well as a powerful female identity.

The uncompromising language of “Rebel Girl” is representative of the Riot Grrrl movement at large, as it separates the girls in the song from both other women and men. The strong reference to exclusive sisterhood at the end, specifically in “Soul sister, blood sister / Please be my rebel girl,” both displays the speaker’s strong attraction to the “Rebel Girl” and singles out one version of sisterhood; it connotes that a woman must subscribe to the idea of “blood sister” and be a “rebel girl” for the speaker to desire her (lines 27-8). The “you” addressed in line 20 (“That girl thinks she’s the queen of the neighborhood / I got news for you—she is!”) represents everyone that the speaker fought against with her new proclamation of gender and sexuality in rock (lines 19-20). Namely, it was meant for the men of rock: as Simon Reynolds and Joy Press say of “Rebel Girl” in their book, *The Sex Revolts*, “It’s an anthem of sorority after decades of rock’n’roll’s blood-brother imagery” (Reynolds 330). Exclusivity and language of resistance were primary facets of the Riot Grrrl movement: as quoted in Reynolds and Press’s epigraph to the chapter “There’s a Riot Going On: Grrrls Against Boy-Rock,” Riot Grrrls demanded that they were violently different both from the boys of rock and the accepted version of femininity by saying, “Death to all fucker punk boys who refuse to acknowledge the girl punk revolution” (Reynolds 323). Thus, they created a very potent Riot Grrrl identity through their tough image and lyrics: as feminist musicologist Susan McClary said, “popular

music... isn't *just* a commodity but is also a public medium that helps shape our notions of self, feelings, gender, desire, pleasure, the body, and much more" (404). The Riot Grrrls were radical and loud, and their angry proclamations of female identity and women's issues through songs like "Rebel Girl" were central to the ideology of a burgeoning group of feminists who wanted to be different.

Created in 1997, Lilith Fair stood for essential third wave feminist ideals, as shown through its attention to individual women and activism for women's issues. Fed up with the unbalanced standards of radio stations and concert promoters of the 1990s, Sarah McLachlan, along with Dan Fraser and Terry McBride from Nettwerk Music Group and New York talent agent Marty Diamond, wanted to create a new, all-female, kind of music festival ("Lilith Fair"). According to the tour's website, it was "the only tour of its kind" ("About"). Westmoreland outlines McLachlan's essentially frustrated and feminist decision to form the fair in light of "the blatant sexism of the patriarchal record industry, which included radio programmers who refused to add more than one female act during a week and would not play women artists back to back" (217). Throughout its three years, the festival booked dates all over the U.S. and Canada and boasted such female artists as Jewel, Paula Cole, Dido, Missy Elliot, Chantal Kreviazuk, and Indigo Girls ("Lilith Fair"). Aside from its basic musical aims, the tour also served as an awareness-raising and fundraising event to support women's issues: each venue on the tour held booths for concertgoers to learn about feminist causes and women's charities, and one dollar from every ticket sold was donated to such charities as community shelters and breast-cancer funds (Cave 156). Westmoreland argues that Lilith Fair "made feminism accessible...through its music, the alley of informative, political booths, and the celebratory atmosphere" (216). Lilith



Fair's legacy stems from how it brought different women together, both fans and musicians, and connected them to a larger, universal vision of feminist activism.

The Lilith Fair artists' more personal approach to femininity was quite different from that of the thunderous Riot Grrrls. According to Westmoreland, Lilith Fair's "more tempered feminist solutions and praxis" served as a reaction to the anger of the Riot Grrrl movement (205). While more toned-down than the loud Riot Grrrls, Lilith Fair still maintained the essential feminist focus on activism, thereby proposing that being a woman and a feminist requires attention to the political and social struggles of other women and feminists. Borrowing activist ideals from both the second and third waves of feminism, Lilith Fair created opportunities for its attendees to participate in and donate to several causes, thus, treating "personal empowerment and political activism equally and interdependently" (Westmoreland 206). Lilith Fair also upheld the Riot Grrrl tradition of creating a space for women's voices. However, Lilith Fair's treatment of another essential third wave ideal, Heywood and Drake's idea of "contradiction," diverged from that of the Riot Grrrls (Heywood 2). In an article structured as a written correspondence between a second wave feminist mother (Roxanne Harde) and her third wave feminist daughter (Erin Harde), daughter Erin writes, "Militant action is not needed to promote the third wave; instead, the experiences of young women construct the third wave" (Harde 119). It is precisely the deeply personal attention to women as artists and listeners that defined the experience of Lilith Fair and separated it from the Riot Grrrls.

Amidst all of the acts, the Indigo Girls' "Closer to Fine" stood out as one universally magnetic performance at Lilith Fair because its lyrics brought female fans together and spoke to each of them on individual levels. As Buffy Childerhose tells in her book *From Lilith to Lilith Fair*, even other female artists on the tour loved to watch, as well as socialize and perform with,

the duo: “According to Sarah [McLachlan], it was the arrival of the Indigo Girls, Amy Ray and Emily Saliers, that really kicked in the tour’s growing sense of community and many collaborations” (38). The lyrics of “Closer to Fine” trace the steps of a woman searching for meaning in her life, looking for “insight between black and white” (Indigo line 2). She shows vulnerability in lines like, “I wrap my fear around me like a blanket / I sailed my ship of safety till I sank it,” but displays agency in her active search for meaning (lines 9-10). Seeking a cure from many conventionally prescribed sources, like a “doctor” or “the doctor of philosophy,” the speaker recognizes that their analyses of her life are unsatisfactory; of her encounter with the “doctor of philosophy,” she says, “He graded my performance, he said he could see through me / I spent four years prostrate to the higher mind / Got my paper and I was free” (lines 12, 19, 22-24). Even other sources like “the mountains” and “the bar at 3 a.m.” cannot provide any solace, as the bar only left the speaker feeling “Twice as cloudy as I’d been the night before” (lines 12, 31, 34). The chorus affirms that trusting one’s own answers to life’s questions, and even the fact that there are twists and turns in life, is one healing solution: “There’s more than one answer to these questions / Pointing me in a crooked line / And the less I seek my source for some definitive / The closer I am to fine” (lines 14-17). Thus, “Closer to Fine” encourages women to trust, and even embrace, ambiguity in their personal searches for meaning.

“Closer to Fine” and Lilith Fair together promoted an open, convivial kind of sisterhood and feminism. In the final chorus of the song, the pronouns shift from singular to plural, and the verb tense changes from past to present: “I went to the doctor” becomes “Yeah we go to the doctor” (lines 36, 38). The later line, “We read up on revival and we stand up for the lookout,” further implies a type of collective effort, as “revival” can connote a new revolution and could refer to the lively kind of feminist outlook or voice that McLachlan sought to create with Lilith

Fair (line 41). The pronouns switch back to singular with the line, “Pointing me in a crooked line,” which seems to highlight that the collective “we” is made up of diverse, individual listeners (lines 43, 38). The individualistic yet communally supportive portrait of sisterhood present in the lyrics of “Closer to Fine” was present at the Lilith Fair tours. The live audiences at the festival, as well as the various collaborating performers, could sing through the collective struggle for meaning that pervades the third wave at large which, as Dicker and Piepmeier claim in their Introduction, relies on “paradox, conflict, multiplicity, and messiness” (11). In essence, women had the freedom to feel their femininity and connect with any of the artists they chose; McLachlan seems to have not only recognized but also promoted the divergent process of creating individuality and femininity by including artists from a variety of genres.

The diversity did not detract from the overall celebratory and communal experience of womanhood and feminism that the tour promoted—it was not the community of Bikini Kill’s “blood sister,” but that of Indigo Girls’ “We read up on revival and we stand up for the lookout” that dominated (Bikini line 27, Indigo line 41). As Harde and Harde’s article says about Lilith Fair, “So many voices being heard through different media shows the different possibilities of third wave expression” (126). A primary tenet of the third wave is the plain fact that different women have the ability to “understand their own feminisms,” as opposed to feeling pressured to adopt one overarching idea, like public activism, or one mode of expression, like punk music (Harde 131). Roxanne Harde, who represents the mother-voice of the second wave in Harde and Harde’s article, agreed: “I think that even as it set forth feminist theory in a practical forum, Lilith Fair embodied the ideal of women in community” (133). Furthermore, Roxanne Harde praises the diversity and attention to feminist theory: “The festival literally was a matrix of feminist discourses, and it interwove the ideological with the practical in a way that one doesn’t

often find in the course of daily life” (134). Riot Grrrls paved the way for women to awaken to a voice, but Lilith Fair made that awakening mainstream and individualized. The festival also voiced the feminine struggle of self-acceptance: as Westmoreland says, “a kind of strength through vulnerability” (207). Evident in many Lilith Fair performers’ songs, like Fiona Apple’s “Never is a Promise,” self-awareness is often a product of vulnerability; Apple’s speaker comes to terms with her individuality and her own feminism as she bitterly expresses desire to free herself from someone: “You’ll never feel the heat of this soul / My fever burns me deeper than I’ve ever shown” (Apple lines 14-5). With an air of celebration, Lilith Fair sought to connect with individual women and allow them space for a “catharsis from complacency and apathy towards empowerment and interiority” similar to that in Apple’s song (Westmoreland 219). Women at Lilith Fair were supposed to experience the call to womanhood and feminism together, but realize their calls on individual terms.

The vast differences between Riot Grrrl and Lilith Fair illustrate the changes that feminism, and specifically feminist music, underwent through the 1990s. Riot Grrrl was a movement because bands like Bikini Kill and L7 were not afraid to overturn traditional notions of womanhood and rock, and the women of Riot Grrrl borrowed essential second wave practices for their interpretations of third wave feminism. An icon for mainstream feminist activism and an inviting space for women’s voices, the Lilith Fair of the 1990s exuded a version of third wave practice different from that of its Riot Grrrl predecessors. The Lilith singer-songwriters, like Indigo Girls and Fiona Apple, opened mainstream music to a new feminist legacy that worked by empowering women with individuality. Separately, Riot Grrrl and Lilith Fair were very different feminist music movements, but together they showcase the power of women’s involvement with popular music.

*Theory Meets Practice: Locating Sex Appeal and Girl Power in the Late-1990s*

By the turn of the twenty-first century, Riot Grrrls had simmered down and the consecutive summers of Lilith Fair tours had ended. Feminist critics often argue that the primary tenets of these feminist music movements—activism, individuality, and consciousness-raising—soon seemed to be lost in the bubblegum teen pop genre of music. According to Zeisler, Lilith Fair had brought third wave feminism to the forefront of mainstream music, and its termination in 1999 compromised its accomplishments: “...in the realm of the mainstream, the end of Lilith Fair left a noticeable hole” (112). Women continued to make feminist music after Lilith Fair ended, but they did not achieve the united mainstream stance that Lilith Fair had. The new mainstream music, to feminists, had become overly commercialized—even the “Girl Power!” mantra of the Spice Girls became a selling point for advertisers, who were more interested in selling t-shirts than true empowerment. The women of pop were undoubtedly alluring to both men and young girls, who found the sexiness and frivolity of their lyrics, like Britney Spears singing “Oh pretty baby / there’s nothin’ that I wouldn’t do” in her hit “...Baby One More Time,” to be attractive (Spears lines 24-5). Mature feminists, however, could not find the interiority, honesty, and table-turning antics of female artists of Riot Grrrl and Lilith Fair in the new pop culture icons. Even in the wake of the clear feminism of the Riot Grrrls and Lilith Fair, many female pop music artists of the late-1990s muddled the portrait of female music and bought into the mass media trap with their overtly saleable, sexual, and impersonal messages.

Although Lilith Fair and Riot Grrrl left markedly positive impacts on circles of feminist discussion, the movements were the subjects of much mainstream media criticism. Many of the artists who appeared at Lilith Fair, including Sheryl Crow, Natalie Merchant, and Queen Latifah,

remained cultural icons after the tour ended in 1999, but the Lilith Fair of the '90s acquired a slew of what the "Lilith Fair" *Wikipedia.com* page terms "pejorative nicknames, including 'Breastfest' and 'Girllapalooza'" ("Lilith Fair"). Some sources, like a 2003 article from *Billboard* magazine, invoke the Lilith Fair ladies' personal lives as the reasons for the tour's end: McLachlan was then (in 2003) unlikely to bring the fair back because of her priority of "continuing to raise her family" (Ault 14). According to a 2004 article from *Rolling Stone* magazine, however, the onslaught of new teen pop stars in the late-1990s lines up with the death of Lilith Fair: "Suddenly, teen popsters replaced willowy singer-songwriters, and bare bellies replaced Birkenstocks" (Cave 156). This kind of pop-hype commercialism is also blamed for the death of the Riot Grrrl movement. The do-it-yourself antics of the Riot Grrrls, from their homemade t-shirts and zines to their messy sound, were, for a while, protected from the mainstream media, as Riot Grrrls refused to become dupes of advertising and commercialism (Zeisler). Their silence, however, became fuel for media outlets that could cast them in unflattering, instead of empowering, light: "Without the actual voices of riot grrrls to depend on, the press managed in record time to reduce the rhetoric and the goals of the movement to some fearmongering sound bites and peppy fashion statements" (Zeisler 107). Mass media had misinterpreted and re-packaged the counter-cultural tactics of feminist musicians in ways that discounted and denied them a place in respectable mainstream culture.

Feminist music did not completely dissipate after the end of Lilith Fair, but feminist festivals after 1999 did not achieve the same caliber of centralized mainstream success that Lilith boasted. For example, Harde and Harde discuss the empowerment of big names like Madonna, Courtney Love, and Alanis Morissette, who all, through self-expression in music, represented their own forms of feminism: they proved that not all new female pop artists were completely

diluted (Harde). Although their radical appearances and actions sometimes confused even feminist fans, they often had clear feminist themes in their lyrics (Harde). Thus, some feminist musicians existed in the mainstream, but they were not brought together under a feminist banner in a Lilith Fair-like setting. Instead, other feminist musicians came together on the outskirts of the mainstream: Zeisler notes that Ladyfest, another all-women festival started in 2000, “seemed to return to a pre-Girl Power format of smaller, anticorporate, and do-it-yourself events” (Zeisler 112). After 1999, the feminist music that Lilith Fair had encouraged had to negotiate the consequences of either occupying a place in the mainstream or taking a place on the margins (Zeisler). In *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*, Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards use Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival, the annual weeklong all-female festival, to illustrate the conundrum:

Separatism...can be great in the short term—and for many feminists it’s necessary to achieving certain kinds of consciousness, security, and possibilities that can be strong enough to transform the mainstream. The goal of liberation, however, is a radical restructuring of society, one that women can’t achieve from the margins—even though they use this perspective to gain a clear vision of the center. (Baumgardner 81)

The goal of the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival had been, since it was established in 1976, to create a positive, separate space for women’s voices; as Baumgardner and Richards say, however, this goal seemed moot after the mainstream success of Lilith Fair and the popularity of several individual feminist artists (Zeisler 110, Baumgardner 81). After 1999, some individual female artists continued to make feminist themes accessible in the mainstream, but the unified, all-female fairs had shifted out.

Mainstream media went as far as claiming the death and downfall of feminism multiple times throughout the twentieth century. The outlets took feminists' decade of re-definition in the '90s as an excuse to analyze and criticize all women (including feminists) from a clearly hegemonic perspective. In the chapter "Feminists Want to Know: Is the Media Dead?", Baumgardner and Richards describe an article from a 1998 issue of *Time* that stakes out the death of feminism: "Writer Ginia Bellafante, whose first cover story this was, argued that the women's movement was dying under the weight of the lip gloss and self-obsessed solipsism of young women" (92). Baumgardner and Richards argue that Bellafante's article ignores women of color and many other key players in third wave feminism, including "activists, academics, writers, politicians, and the everyday women who form the bulk of the feminist ranks" (92-3). Instead, Bellafante extrapolated a few mainstream pop culture icons with questionable associations to feminism (Calista Flockhart, for example), called them feminists, and wrote feminism's death notice (Baumgardner). Bellafante was at fault for interviewing "mostly random celebrities caught in a feminist act" that provided no knowledge of feminist history or dreams for the feminist future (Baumgardner 121). In addition, Baumgardner and Richards refer to another 1998 article from *The New York Observer* by Erica Jong that states that *Time* has pronounced feminism dead 119 times since 1969 (Baumgardner 93). Third wave feminists were independent and engaging with pop culture in new ways that deserved notice, but mainstream media outlets were focusing on the wrong women and interpreting the wrong message. One year later (in 1999), De Beers saw women's independence as "market potential," advertising to single, career-driven women to buy diamond rings that were eerily similar to engagement rings: "Advertisers would not stop looking for ways to make women buy things they didn't need just because those women weren't looking for men and marriage" (Zeisler 104). Media outlets and companies all



too often misconstrued the honest liberation and freedom purported by Lilith Fair ladies and Riot Grrrls and found ways to mass-produce and sell it to create a new regressive representation of women.

As destructive as mainstream media was, feminists did not always agree with each other that all women's representations in 1990s' media were completely terrible. One particularly splintering issue was "Girl Power!," the mantra of the equally questionable British pop sensation, the Spice Girls, who hit it big in America in 1996. For some feminists, "Girl Power!" was easy to immediately reject. For example, Rachel Fudge, whose article "Girl, Unreconstructed: Why Girl Power is Bad for Feminism" appears in the book *Bitchfest: Ten Years of Cultural Criticism from the Pages of Bitch Magazine*, is unforgiving of the phrase and its power to dilute feminism (the article was originally printed in *Bitch* magazine in 1996) (Fudge). For Fudge, "Girl Power!" became a soft, apolitical phrase after it was stolen from the Riot Grrrls and twisted in the hands of mainstream media and advertisers (Fudge). Corporatization and commercialization robbed it of its potential to change women's lives: it "represents the ultimate commodification of empowerment" (Fudge 155). Fudge also poignantly argues that "Girl Power!" reduces the power of the women's movement for future generations, claiming, "Worst of all, it lulls us into thinking that all of feminism's battles are won, that females in America don't have anything to fight for anymore" (157). Zeisler's contribution to the discussion about "Girl Power!" is less angry than Fudge's. Zeisler cites that—"in theory"—the phrase was not entirely harmful, noting studies from psychologists that show that the phrase had power to raise girls' self-esteem (109). Her conclusion that "Girl Power!" served "as shorthand for a kind of diet feminism that substituted consumer trappings for actual analysis," however, ultimately aligns with Fudge's article (Zeisler

110). Though they could sometimes see its potential, feminists often agreed that the over-commercialization of “Girl Power!” rendered it non-activist and immature.

Fighting the “Girl Power!” phrase was not as easy as simply discrediting its meaning: by the end of the 1990s, plenty of reductive, over-sexualized representations of women, like the Spice Girls, had seeped into mainstream pop culture. The Spice Girls’ empowering visions and attention to individual identity had potential to contribute to the feminist movement, but the group ultimately met the same fate as its “Girl Power!” mantra in the eyes of feminist critics. According to Marion Leonard in *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse, and Girl Power*, the Spice Girls was an inherently problematic group because of its commercialization: perpetually drowning in sellable merchandise, each of the girls in the band, like their overall message, was “packaged and presented for maximum economic return” (Leonard 160). Leonard argues that the Spice Girls’ physical appearances could have been beneficial to young girls learning to form their own individual identities, but instead they affirmed patriarchy and commercialism: “The girl power message was represented here in a form that diluted its radicalism while offering a catchphrase acceptable for mass-market consumption” (159). The group’s song lyrics continue its complicated trend. “Wannabe,” from their 1996 album *Spice*, promotes female community, especially for girls in heterosexual romantic relationships: “If you wanna be my lover, you gotta get with my friends./ Make it last forever, friendship never ends” (Spice Girls. “Wannabe.” lines 15-16). The demand for power and independence in the lyrics, however, is vague, lost in meaningless phrases like, “I wanna really/ really really wanna zigzag ha” (lines 5-6). “2 Become 1,” also from *Spice*, over-sexualizes a woman’s relationship with a man, placing emphasis on physical, instead of intellectual, connection: “Are you as good as I remember baby,/ get it on, get it on,/ ‘Cause tonight is the night when two become one” (Spice

Girls. “2” lines 20-22). Lines like, “Silly games that you were playing,/ Empty words we both were saying,/ Let’s work it out boy, let’s work it out boy,” make disagreement and fake behavior sound playful, and suggest that the solution is sex, instead of communication, to reach mutual understanding (lines 14-16). Though the Spice Girls sought to promote power, the group’s lyrics portray confusing and overly sexual female characters that blur the idea of empowerment.

Female American pop stars of the decade were also problematic for feminists and many, including Britney Spears, lustily affirmed commercialism and pleased male eyes. Britney appeared in *Billboard* magazine in 1998, when Chuck Taylor described her single “...Baby One More Time,” saying, “The danceable track, whose hook has a tenacious grip and enough vocal edge to keep it out of the bubble-gum aisle, readily fits the vibe of top 40’s current affinity for the uptempo sounds of youth acts like Backstreet Boys, Robyn, ‘N Sync, and Five” (Taylor, Chuck. “Jive’s” 80). Thus, Spears had a sound similar to the mainstream pop brand that other young, commercialized acts had created before, and she was popular for it. As Melanie Lowe notes in her article “Colliding Feminisms: Britney Spears, ‘Tweens,’ and the Politics of Reception,” Spears had launched into a pop-diva icon by 1999, when she had the top-selling album and many young girls became hooked on her pop beats and sex appeal (Lowe 135). Her breakthroughs as a [female] performer are nothing to scoff at—according to a March 20, 2000, article in *Forbes*, written by Peter Kafka when Britney was 18, she made \$15 million in 1999 alone—but the combination of her insistence on wearing next to nothing, her wacky behavior, and her empty lyrics mark her as irresponsible with her fame (Kafka 162). Her first hit, “...Baby One More Time,” was sultry, sexual, and masochistic, as the female speaker begs the male listener, “When I’m not with you I lose my mind/ Give me a sign/ Hit me baby one more time” (Spears lines 18-20). The young girls that Lowe interviewed for her article agreed that Spears’

identity was confusing: "...despite their disapproval of its message, they smile and laugh when they hear it, dancing and singing along" (Lowe 135). Spears' message was entertaining for them, but not cohesive with their beliefs: "In other words, their social practice of being teen pop's target audience allows them to maintain strong feminist convictions and still enjoy songs, videos, and other texts that don't jibe with their politics" (Lowe 140). Kafka's *Forbes* article portrays Britney as a young, teen pop icon with her audience in mind, but big stars in her eyes, including advertising deals, high royalty rates, and massive record sales: "The idea, Britney says, is to have a career like Madonna, who is still selling millions 17 years after her first hit" (Kafka 162). Spears' new standards for female pop divas suggested that the outlook for pop music in the late-1990s, and beyond, was saturated with immature and contrived sexual innuendo and driven by commercialism.

Many over-commercialized and overly glam female pop stars hit their peaks in the late-1990s, and their lyrics and commercial histories were empty of the feminist legacy for which Riot Grrrl and Lilith Fair had fought. Feminist music still existed, particularly in names like Morissette and Love, but the most newsworthy mainstream female artists—Spears and the Spice Girls—were nothing like them. Both feminists and the mass media attempted to locate feminist role models in some of these new female pop stars of the late-1990s, but failed to find anything positive about them. The "Girl Power!" phrase, the meaningless lyrics, and the excessive gyrating complicated the portrait of women in music. Women's music after 1999 did not provide all of the answers to feminists' interests and goals.

*Driving Honesty: Train's Representation of Third Wave Feminist Ideals*

On the edge of feminists' radars, in the male-dominated pop/rock genre, the male band Train was breaking ground with lyrics that engaged many of the feminist themes introduced by earlier female artists—language of activism, desire to claim a voice, and an understanding of a true feminine identity. The band grew slowly outside of the commercial advertising trap with the help of Aware Records, and was marketed to occupy an honest position in the music market (Bell 1). Thus, the band's history automatically contrasts them with the earlier acts of the 1990s that had based their successes on the glitz and glamour of lights and pop beats in their music videos. Train's lyrics, particularly of the song "Meet Virginia" (which is about a quirky and complicated female character named Virginia), not only contributed to the band's genuine personality, but also to the ongoing complicated discussion of third wave feminism. The band has enjoyed the fact that "Meet Virginia" has highly accessible lyrics and has consequently attracted many diverse interpretations from a variety of listeners (Taylor, Chuck. "Columbia's" 92). Train's identification with feminist themes, existence outside of the commercialization hype, and dedication to promoting individual interpretations of their lyrics earn them a place in the previously female-dominated 1990s' critical third wave feminist music culture.

In 1998, the same year that Spears released her first single, "...Baby One More Time," Train released their first single, "Meet Virginia," introducing the mainstream music world to a woman who provided an intellectually stimulating alternative to the sexual stimulation of Britney's schoolgirl gig. While most pop music slid into the boy-band-and-female-diva stint with its club and dance influences, the ready-for-radio, pop/rock bands like Train issued an alternative, grittier sound. The band immediately received positive press that described them in terms similar to those used to describe the female Lilith Fair artists just a few years earlier.

*Billboard* magazine issued praise for Train's authenticity in March 1999 that was much different from what they had given Britney Spears:

San Francisco's Train was formed with the collective belief that if you write and perform great songs, people will listen. Train has been crisscrossing the country in support of their debut release, an album that showcases the quintet's strong, honest songwriting, great musicianship and straightforward approach to music. Don't let Train pass your station.

("Train." *Billboard*. 35)

*Billboard* continued to use terms that encouraged readers to trust the band, saying that the band grew "organically" and "did it the old-fashioned way" (Taylor, Chuck. "Columbia's" 92). A DJ from Birmingham, Alabama, claimed in a September 1999 issue of the magazine, "This is the kind of group that everybody's been itching for, and here they are" (Taylor, Chuck. "Columbia's" 92). Other *Billboard* articles about the band from 1999 also describe them as a new type of sound, a breath of fresh air (Hay 11). Train elicited a sense of excitement from *Billboard* that derived from its new, honest, alternative sound.

In the world of music production, Train occupied a dynamic that drifted away from the typical commercial scene of the late-1990s that had spawned the Spice Girls and Spears. Though they were not as over-commercialized as many other 1990s pop acts, they did not reject the commercial world like the Riot Grrrls; instead, they struck a balance, appealing to mainstream audiences while maintaining integrity with themselves and their audiences. Train's first album, *Train*, was a part of a deal between Columbia Records and Aware Records, a "grass-roots label," by which Columbia helped Aware to "grow" bands slowly with the attention and distribution help they needed (Bell 1). In a May 1999 issue of *Billboard* magazine, Tim Devine, then senior Vice President of A&R at Columbia, said, "We wanted to create a farm-team situation that

would enable us to develop bands under the radar until they were ready to be marketed by the major-label machine” (Bell 1). Later in the article, Devine admits, “Train is the textbook example of how this plan should work” (Bell 1). According to the language of most *Billboard* articles about them, Train’s success was contingent in part upon the aura of trustworthiness and respect that they cultivated across shows and songs. While the fans of the sweetly esculent Britney Spears simply consumed her pop music hits, fans of Train identified and connected with the band’s deeply personal lyrics. Chuck Taylor’s September 1999 article entitled “Columbia’s Train Scheduled to Speed Thru Stations’ Playlists with ‘Virginia’” praises the band for its interest in the “work ethic” and “genuineness” of other bands in their genre, like Dave Matthews Band (92). A 2002 article from *Rolling Stone* published after Train released their second album, *Drops of Jupiter*, also praised Train for its ability to connect with listeners and concertgoers, as writer Anthony Bozza suggested that Train achieved depth, personality, and honesty in its lyrics and performances through somewhat entrancing powers: “Train capture the timeless elements of classic rock—the singalong melodies, the universal stories and the hands-in-the-air choruses—that have a building full of Britons singing ‘na-na-na-na’ like they’re American kids growing up in the heartland” (35). The article, titled “Train The Little Band That Could,” also showed that amidst the fame, the band members, particularly lead singer Pat Monahan, maintain their humble personalities: “But spend any time with Train,” Bozza said, “and it’s clear the attention won’t change them” (36). The band members’ relationships with one another, their stage presence, and their sound are generally described as authentic and sincere.

Train’s sincerity translated into its lyrics, and the confident, positive attitude about a quirky, complicated, and individualistic woman showcased in “Meet Virginia” is implicitly feminist. “Meet Virginia” belongs in discussions of feminist music, as it blends Lilith Fair’s

attention to women's personal desires with a new discussion of male involvement. Beginning with the title, Train continuously encourages audiences to get to know Virginia. One of many hits for the band, "Meet Virginia" shows small manifestations of 1990s third wave feminist ideals, as it portrays small anecdotes from Virginia's everyday life that show her unhappiness, independence, nonconformity, and peculiar interactions with both popular and political culture. Virginia is not afraid to speak out about "uncomfortable topics" in her life, which, as Baumgardner and Richards explain in *Manifesta*, is an essential aspect of third wave feminism (61). The song brings the life of an individual woman and, thus, the path of feminism, to the pop culture purview, through Train's honest words: Virginia fights to understand herself and can help third wave feminists to work through the confusion of feminism and realize themselves. Heywood and Drake note that they believe the third wave was powerful for contributions like "Meet Virginia," saying, "Further, our struggles to negotiate individualism's powerful seductions and betrayals provide the third wave with an odd form of common ground, linking us across our many differences" (11). Thus, "Meet Virginia" makes a contribution to the feminist music canon, as it transcended the mainstream media in order to convey an honest interpretation of women to the female audiences of the 1990s.

"Meet Virginia" was an expression of Train's thematic interest in female identity formation, and the band's reactions to its success indicate its postmodern, third wave feminist inclination to accept complication and divergent viewpoints. By the October 30, 1999, issue of *Billboard*, the song, described as "an ode to a free-spirited woman," had reached the No.54 spot on The Billboard Hot 100 chart (Hay 11). An article in the issue quotes Greg Linn, then senior director of marketing at Columbia Records, saying that "Meet Virginia" was good for opening up Train's fan-base to young females, as opposed to "primarily what you'd see for a rock band:



young males” (Hay 11). Radio DJs from around the country and female fans fell in love with the song, and became curious about the origins of the intriguing lyrics (Taylor, Chuck. “Columbia’s” 92). Pat Monahan, lead singer of Train, claimed in a September 1999 article that he wrote the song from his own personal experience to be a representation of a lot of different women he had known (Taylor, Chuck. “Columbia’s” 92). Monahan even provided somewhat of an interpretation in the article, saying, “It’s just about being unusual and wanting to be grandiose, like being a rock star or an actress, but in the end, knowing that you’d be more satisfied being who you are and keeping it simple like that” (Taylor, Chuck. “Columbia’s” 92). The lyrics could provide comfort to real female listeners like Virginia who were searching for their own true identities. In a very postmodern move, though, Monahan resists definition entirely, both of the band’s sound and the lyrics of “Meet Virginia” (Taylor, Chuck. “Columbia’s” 92). Monahan undermines the Adornian approach to musical interpretation, which primarily placed interpretive powers in the hands of the artists, and assumes an alternative [and feminist] approach by conversing with co-interpreters about the lyrics and believing, “Man, if you come up with something...just take it that way and go. Everyone is going to interpret things their own way” (Taylor, Chuck. “Columbia’s” 92, Dibben). Monahan’s welcoming language is reminiscent of that of Robert Miklitsch, who argued that popular rock music has the power to uplift and invigorate everyday peoples’ lives as they participate in personal meaning creation (Taylor, Chuck. “Columbia’s” 92, Miklitsch). By using his personal life as inspiration for lyrics and seeing the value in the personal lives of his listeners, Monahan breaks down a formal creation of meaning in order to allow for various, informal, and multiple interpretations of the song, “Meet Virginia.”

The mainstream band Train deserves recognition for their alternative and implicitly feminist music; although it was sung by authentic pop/rock males, it was, like other feminist music by females, sung for individual women creating their identities in the 1990s. Train occupied an honest position in the music market and rejected commercialism in ways similar to previous feminist artists. In addition, the lyrics of Train's first hit, "Meet Virginia," highlight its affinity for the third wave feminist themes of personal identity formation and individuality. Telling the story of a complicated and ambitious woman, "Meet Virginia" propels the band, the most feminist male band of the 1990s, forward into a place in the established postmodern and third wave feminist genre of pop/rock music.

### ***Who, Exactly, Is Virginia? I'd Like to Meet Her: Lyrical Analysis***

Virginia, the intriguing female character in "Meet Virginia," was a female character with which individual third wave feminists could identify, and she re-introduced the pop/rock world to an independent and individualistic, yet struggling, woman. Other acts, like Tal Bachman, Nine Days, Matchbox Twenty, and Dave Matthews Band, also incorporated conflicted women into the lyrics of their songs, but each of them failed to attain the honesty and interiority of the Virginia character that Train created because of their overly pitying and self-absorbed male speakers. "Meet Virginia" stands above the rest as a new anthem for third wave feminism, as Virginia confidently and mysteriously breaks conventions, cultivates a meaningful relationship with the genuine male speaker, and attains the voice to express her desire for a fulfilling life. Ultimately, "Meet Virginia" shows that feminist themes had successfully trickled down into the lyrics of one mainstream male pop/rock band, and fans' (female, in particular) reactions to the lyrics show that feminist themes were still pervasive and important to real women in the late-1990s. As

Baumgardner and Richards said, the third wave opened up a space for women to explore and express their feminism in their own personal ways: “Third Wave women have been seen as nonfeminist when they are actually living feminist lives” (48). Male-led pop/rock bands of the late-1990s attempted to carve out a new genre around exactly this quirky, individualistic, expressive, and everyday feminist type of woman, and Train, with “Meet Virginia,” succeeded.

Tal Bachman, Nine Days, Matchbox Twenty, and Dave Matthews Band have songs that feature themes of individual female subjects searching for answers, but each of them is too caught up in the selfish and pitying attitude of its male speaker to achieve the truly feminist depth, meaning, and comfort of “Meet Virginia.” Tal Bachman’s 1999 hit “She’s So High” idealizes the featured woman, as the male speaker fails to see past his own fantasies to recognize the beauty of the woman standing right in front of him. Similarly, the speaker of Nine Days’ successful pop hit “Absolutely (Story of a Girl)” focuses too heavily on himself to even begin to understand the woman’s struggle, which he addresses with a mocking tone. “3am” by Matchbox Twenty is more honestly invested in the psychology and motivations of the woman it discusses than either “She’s So High” or “Absolutely,” but the desperation and sadness in its tone do not provide hope to female listeners. Dave Matthews Band’s “Grey Street” achieves the most depth of all the songs, but its tone is ultimately too pitying, and its female character sadly remains lost, empty, and lonely in the end. Many male music acts at the end of the 1990s attempted to appeal to conflicted and individualistic women through their lyrics, but their self-righteous perspectives, mocking tones, and pity kept them from truly understanding and valuing women.

The speaker of Tal Bachman’s song “She’s So High” subscribes to the myth that the mysterious, confident woman that he desires is utterly unattainable and, thus, misses the chance to truly get to know her in the end. Throughout the song, the male speaker dotingly praises his

beloved for her beauty, power, and “first class and fancy free” spirit (Bachman line 12). To him, her beauty is real and appealing: “She’s blood, flesh and bone/ No tucks or silicone/ She’s touch, smell, sight, taste and sound” (lines 1-3). In each chorus, he alludes to her strength by comparing her to “Cleopatra, Joan of Arc or Aphrodite” (line 10). Although his admiration for her should lead him to want to foster a relationship with her, the speaker insists, like the title of the song suggests, that the woman is too good for him: “What could a guy like me ever really offer?/ She’s perfect as she can be, why should I even bother?” (lines 15-16). In this way, the speaker sets up a hierarchy, asserting that the woman is “high,” and continuously reminding himself, “I know where I belong/ And nothing’s gonna happen” (lines 8, 6-7). Even when she initiates a conversation between the two of them in the final verse of the song, he reiterates his own self-esteem problems and disbelief that she would ever want to be with him: “‘Cause somehow I can’t believe/ That anything should happen” (lines 24-25). He even goes so far to call their interaction “unreal” (line 23). Ultimately, the song is all about him, as his decision to not believe in the possibilities of a relationship between them proves that he would rather live in his own fantasies than challenge the division between them. His own creation of hierarchy and his recurrent self-deprecating tone blind him, as he chooses his perfect vision of this attractive, mysterious, and self-sufficient woman over reality.

In Nine Days’ “Absolutely (Story of a Girl),” the woman’s struggle is lost in the speaker’s disrespect, insincerity, and ultimately self-centered desires. Many lines throughout the song showcase that the female character feels lost and confused. The chorus, for example, suggests that she sobs an unfathomable volume of tears in her depressed state: “This is the story of a girl/ Who cried a river and drowned the whole world” (lines 1-2). Line 7, “She woke up with hope but she only found tears,” describes a day in her life as a kind of mission to combat sadness

(line 7). Instead of searching for ways to understand her, the male speaker buries her conflict in practically nonsensical rhymed lyrics that cast the woman as disheveled and defeated: “As long as she stands there waiting/ Wearin’ the holes in the soles of her shoes/ How many days disappear?/ You look in the mirror, so how do you choose?” (lines 10-13). Even after admitting in line 8, “And I can be so insincere,” he proceeds to call her antics “shit,” criticize her for speaking (“You never seem to run out of things to say”), and attempt to draw pity for himself for dealing with her: “How many lovers would stay?/ Just to put up with this shit day after day” (lines 8, 16, 22-23). He flippantly disregards her generally sad and conflicted nature when he asserts, “And while she looks so sad in photographs/ I absolutely love her/ When she smiles” (lines 3-5). These lines, which appear in the chorus, epitomize his attitude, as they show how he arrogantly chooses to ignore the conflicted, unconventional side of her in order to maintain a beautiful, smiling portrait of her in his mind. Like the speaker from “She’s So High,” the speaker from “Absolutely” selfishly discounts the woman’s struggle for individuality.

In the Matchbox Twenty song “3am,” released in 1996 on the album *Yourself or Someone Like You*, the male speaker pities the unconventional female character, casting the song with a discouraging, exhausted tone. Throughout the song, the woman makes herself vulnerable by living according to her desires instead of according to convention: in essence, she lives in her own “color portrait world,” where her routine is governed by such rules as “she only sleeps when it’s raining,” and “It’s 3am I must be lonely” (lines 12, 4, 7). These rules are her attempt to make sense of life, which she finds confusing: she says, “Well I can’t help but be scared of it all sometimes” (line 9). Living by her own rules is not empowering for her, however, as her perpetual sadness makes her reach out to the male speaker of the lyrics for some comfort. She tries to make him hear and understand her, as shown in the line, “And she screams and her voice

is straining,” but he disregards her as simply “worried” and pities her situation: “She’s got a little bit of something, God it’s better than nothing” (lines 5, 2, 11). The woman, rumored on *Wikipedia.com* to be the speaker’s mother struggling to come to terms with life after a bout with cancer, intimately calls the speaker “baby” in order to appeal to his sympathies, but he simply takes advantage of her vulnerability by emotionlessly highlighting how backwards she is: “She thinks that happiness is a mat that sits on her doorway” (line 6, 23, “3 a.m.”). Unresponsive to this quirky, complicated, and desperate woman’s situation, the speaker gets lost in his own pity for her and does not provide her with the valuable comfort and support that she needs.

While the lyrics of “Grey Street” by Dave Matthews Band are most seriously invested in exploring the psychology of a plagued woman, the tone remains pitying and empty, as the woman fails to translate her colorful desires into action. The primary imagery of the song is color, with “grey” representing both boredom and confusion, and “all the colors” representing excitement and fulfillment (line 11). The woman shows that she is aware of the discrepancy between her bland life and the active life she desires as she continually asks herself questions like, ““hey/ how did I come to this?”” and ““Am I supposed to take it on myself/ To get out of this place?”” (lines 5-6, 19-20). In addition to her “emptiness” and “loneliness,” she also feels panicked and trapped, shown when she states, ““I live on the corner of Grey Street/ and the end of the world”” (lines 9, 21, 34-35). All of the emotions confuse her, as shown by the popular line, ““but all the colors mix together—to grey,”” and she is rendered speechless and still: ““Oh look at how she listens/ She says nothing of what she thinks/ She just goes stumbling through her memories/ Staring out onto Grey Street”” (lines 11, 1-4). In her mind, however, she expresses the desire to force some action and excitement into her life. Despite the action of self-inflicted pain suggested by the line “red blood bleeding from her now,” she remains paralyzed: “it feels like

cold blue ice in her heart” (lines 23-24). The final chorus features activist language to describe how violently the woman wishes to change her life, but the language fades again into disappointment: “She feels like kicking out all the windows/ And setting fire to this life/ She could change everything about her/ Using colors bold and bright/ But all the colors mix together/ To grey” (lines 40-45). Thus, the emphasis remains on the sadness, and how “it breaks her heart,” and the speaker never attempts to investigate the root of, or possible solutions for, the woman’s disheartening issues (line 12). “Grey Street” emphasizes the depth of a woman’s honest feelings, but its pitying tone only highlights the woman’s inability to change her life, and the song ends with no comforting resolution.

Above all of the other male pop/rock songs of the late-1990s and early 2000s, “Meet Virginia” deserves recognition as a truly genuine and individualistic version of third wave feminism that spoke to its female fans. Certain elements of Virginia’s attractiveness acquire a quirky and mysterious air throughout “Meet Virginia,” as she enacts her individuality through strange, yet fun, idiosyncrasies. Asking listeners to “Meet Virginia,” the title opens the door to the captivating world of her unconventional behavior and beauty: thus, from the title, she immediately gains power (Train, “Meet”). Some specific interactions that the male speaker has with Virginia, however, pinpoint her most enchanting features. The lyrics, “She only drinks coffee at midnight/ When the moment is not right/ Her timing is quite unusual/ You see her confidence is tragic, but her intuition magic/ and the shape of her body, unusual,” for example, discuss not only her tendency to break conventions of time, but also evoke a mysteriously uncanny aspect of her personality (lines 34-38). Using “tragic” to describe Virginia’s “confidence” may allude to the classic literary device of a tragic flaw, which would portray Virginia as a heroine in some sort of tragedy (line 37). Using the word “magic” to describe her

“intuition,” however, seems positive, as the speaker appears to be intrigued by her sharp perceptive powers (line 37). The positive tone of the word “magic” is further enhanced by the conjunction “but” between the two clauses; in essence, “but” conveys that Virginia’s “intuition” saves her from her “confidence” (line 37). The speaker never elaborates on why he feels that “her confidence is tragic,” but, in context, it seems to be an example of his awareness of her inner struggle for true individuality: he realizes and accepts her weaknesses along with her fascinatingly beautiful characteristics (line 37). Thus, the speaker does not monopolize upon the negative connotations of the later lyric “not right,” but instead sees Virginia as a wholly charismatic character with flaws and strange late-night tendencies (line 35). Every part of Virginia’s personality—from the overtly incomparable to the mystifying—appears exciting, and showcases the power that stems from her individuality.

Virginia’s quirks not only demonstrate her eccentric personality, however; they also represent how she showcases her rejection of many socially accepted standards. As shown in the lines, “She only drinks coffee at midnight/ When the moment is not right/ Her timing is quite, unusual,” Virginia literally breaks conventions of time and operates on her own schedule (lines 34-6). She rejects conventional beauty standards in a way that the speaker enjoys, as shown in the opening verse: “She doesn’t own a dress/ Her hair is always a mess/ You catch her stealin’ she won’t confess/ She’s beautiful” (lines 1-4). The first two lines of this opening verse cast Virginia as relatively unfeminine, and the following two lines showcase her resolute assertiveness: thus, she appears impervious to socially accepted beauty standards and authority figures. In addition to the “stealin’” and lack of confession from line 3, Virginia appears strong-willed in other ways that make her stand out: “She never compromises/ Loves babies and surprises/ Wears high heels when/ she exercises” (lines 3, 11-14). The language of “Meet



Virginia” even harkens back to the power imagery of the Bikini Kill song “Rebel Girl,” in which the female subject is described as “the queen of the neighborhood;” unlike the “Rebel Girl,” though, Virginia wrestles with the idea of power, and looks deep inside herself to determine, “I don’t really wanna be the Queen” (Bikini line 1, Train “Meet” line 20). Although her eccentric acts stem from her deep-rooted dissatisfaction with life, they are not protests: they are simply unabashed, unconventional actions that communicate Virginia’s singular version of noncompliance. Virginia achieves the interiority of Lilith Fair and the emotion of Riot Grrrl, as she confronts her unhappiness, but she does not let it rule her. Instead, she is able to own it and make it a part of her original sense of individuality, as she channels it into hilarious, everyday quirks that help her to begin to live the life she imagines.

Part of the charm of “Meet Virginia” is Virginia’s meaningful relationship with the male speaker of the lyrics, and how both characters show investment in exploring and understanding each other’s motivations and personalities. Throughout the lyrics, the male speaker refers to her odd, even stereotypically unfeminine, habits and behaviors with an endearing sense of admiration; the first verse, which casts her as unfeminine and somewhat stubborn, ends with “She’s beautiful” (lines 1-3, 4). Although the speaker could be referring to her physical beauty in this line, other lyrics show that he knows Virginia very well, and his attraction to her is more than simply skin-deep. In this way, the speaker relates her beauty to her sense of individuality and assertiveness. In general, his insistence to “meet” her and not just see her also suggests that he wishes for the audience, as well as himself, to further foster a relationship with her (line 10). His relationship with her is playful, and the two of them engage in banter shared by close friends: “Smokes a pack a day, oh wait/ That’s me, but anyway/ She doesn’t care a thing/ About that, hey,/ She thinks I’m beautiful” (lines 5-9). While the tone of these lyrics is lighthearted and laid-

back, they suggest that Virginia looks to deeper things than simple habits, like smoking, to find true beauty. The speaker does the same: the choruses show that he is aware of Virginia's insecurities and desires for a fulfilling life, and he, figuratively and literally, hears her when she "screams/ 'I don't really wanna live this life'" (lines 32-33). He acknowledges her anger and confusion; additionally, however, he recognizes the actions she exhibits on her way to a complicated, tenacious, and brazen construction of her own personality and reality.

Virginia's realistic personality, insecurities, and family are also all facets of her charm for the speaker, who admires her attitude and embraces her conflicts. A few lines toward the end of the song suggest that perhaps Virginia is literally the speaker's ideal woman, and that he has not met her yet: "Meet Virginia, I can't wait to/ Meet Virginia, yeah e yeah hey hey hey" (lines 39-40). Although these lines seem to cast Virginia as a fantasy woman, they do not compromise the integrity of the story told in the rest of the lyrics: they simply beg the question, why would Virginia, real or unreal, be his ideal woman? The answers can be found in the lyrics. Virginia and the speaker's connection is founded upon their common actions and beliefs, as shown in lines 25-28: "And here she is again on the phone/ Just like me hates to be alone/ We just like to sit at home/ And rip on the President." By talking on the phone and casually keeping each other company, the two of them feel comforted and validated, in spite of their insecurities about loneliness. They are able to share feelings that make them vulnerable to each other, but they are both accepting and comfortable, as shown in the lines, "She doesn't care a thing/ About that, hey/ She thinks I'm beautiful" and "just like me hates to be alone" (lines 7-9, 26). Through all of her quirkiness and anguish, Virginia doesn't intimidate him or scare the male speaker away. Unlike the Riot Grrrls who abrasively "didn't need the punk boys' playhouse anymore; they had their own," Virginia does not totally reject male involvement in her life (Baumgardner 91, Train.

“Meet”). Instead, she finds an honest romantic partner who, on his own path to truth and understanding, values her amidst her quest to self-discovery. As relaxed as they sound, Virginia and her lover’s common actions, “We just like to sit at home/ And rip on the President” are also a metaphor for Virginia’s disavowal of political institutions and of her own brother, who works for those institutions (lines 27-28). The speaker appears to have met her family, each member of which has its own sense of whimsicality and eccentricity: “Daddy wrestles alligators/ Mama works on carburetors/ Her brother is a fine mediator/ For the President” (lines 21-24). By referring to her family, consisting of parents with relatively outlandish careers and a brother living life as an upstanding citizen, the speaker gestures that he knows and accepts Virginia’s unconventional background. Thus, Virginia’s common interests with the speaker shed light on her relationship with him and with her family.

Most importantly, Virginia’s personal version of femininity and feminism lies in her expression. Even though she speaks a mere six of the approximately 50 lines in “Meet Virginia,” Virginia does not bury or disown her personal conflict: she is expressive and decisive, and demands a good life for herself. The chorus of the song is where she attains her voice and sheds light on her own perception of the life she lives: “Well she wants to be the Queen/ Then she thinks about her scene/ Pulls her hair back as she screams/ ‘I don’t really wanna be the Queen’” (lines 17-20). The second version of the chorus, later in the song, reiterates the message of the first, but conveys even more about Virginia’s perspective: “Well she wants to live her life/ Then she thinks about her life/ Pulls her hair back as she screams/ ‘I don’t really wanna live this life’” (lines 30-33). As these lyrics show, Virginia sounds ambitious and positive, as her quest to be a queen and “live her life” are optimistic pursuits (lines 17, 30). However, her attitude changes between the beginning and end of each chorus, specifically at the part “Then she thinks:”

Virginia rejects the overly-positive sentiment of the first line, in which she expresses the generic desire to “live her life,” after processing the reality of her own personal situation (lines 31, 30). Specifically, the distinction in the second chorus between “her life” and “this life” is striking, as it illustrates that in order for Virginia to “live her life,” she must first be able to accept and then take full advantage of life, but she cannot: thus, she yells rebelliously, “I don’t really wanna live this life” (lines 30-33). In reality, “this life” is the same thing as “her life”—the phrase “this life” is simply an expression of how Virginia views life (lines 30-33). Virginia uses the word “this” to illustrate that she believes life is impersonal and like an imposition (line 33). As another lyric states, however, “she never compromises:” thus, Virginia does not settle for her unhappiness (11). Her quirks are her reaction to her unhappiness. Through her strange actions, Virginia constructs a life on her own terms—one in which she can explore her own identity, and with which she can be happy. By creating a version of “her life” that responds to her desires, Virginia undermines the power of the external world, and instead seeks inner contentment that is self-defined—a kind that is truly hers (line 30). In addition, she does not simply state the last line of the chorus (“I don’t really wanna live this life”): she “screams” it, blasting her insecurity, anger, and anguish out for others to hear (lines 33, 32). Her scream is not meant to ask for pity, though; it is simply her way of showing self-awareness, as she does not ask for anything from the audience, or even from the speaker of the song. Virginia is self-aware, as she honestly speaks out about her insecurities and seeks fulfillment.

Virginia’s expression of self-discovery is intriguing to hosts of particularly female listeners, who voice their own personal quests and opinions through the popular lyrics and interpretations website, [Songmeanings.net](http://Songmeanings.net). The site is largely an open forum: some users vehemently disagree with one another, while others take new interpretations into consideration

and provide feedback. “Meet Virginia” has attracted over 70 listener comments that range in length and depth; most, however, show that the song is a locus of attention and thought for fans. A response by a user named “lilk9too” from June 7, 2002, shows that the user discusses the song with a friend: “my best friend thinks she kills herself and the song is a kind of eulogy. after having heard this theory i can’t decide if she’s right or not” (Songmeanings.net “Meet”). Another response by “angelle” from July 1, 2002, simply reads, “this song is simple and beautiful” (Songmeanings.net “Meet”). Many other listener responses on Songmeanings.net show that fans expressively investigate Virginia, as if she is a character in a novel or a poem. User “evened” posted on November 6, 2005, about Virginia’s entrapment: “every reference to this woman seems to imply that she is just too big and too much for the box life has her trapped in. she is capable of so much more than life has offered her...” (Songmeanings.net “Meet”). The interpretation by user “hulidoshi” posted on March 18, 2003, is similar, but connects Virginia’s conflicted internal situation to her external social life: “Seems to me this is about Virginia being an outcast...Basically, she’s kinda eccentric and she hates it, and just wants to fit in” (Songmeanings.net “Meet”). Songmeanings.net shows that fans delve deeply into Virginia’s intriguing story, and use online forums to discuss their own interpretations.

Several comments about “Meet Virginia” show that the listeners relate deeply to the content of the lyrics, finding inspiration in its positive tone and a true connection with Virginia’s revelry. In this way, Songmeanings.net helps listeners to engage in the construction of personal meaning—a phenomenon that Pat Monahan loves (Taylor, Chuck. “Columbia’s” 92). A user called “obsessed angel” finds meaning in the supernatural element of Virginia, as she [or he] posted on January 13, 2005, “i love this song because i can relate to it...” then personalizes the lyrics with, “my confidence is tragic, but my intuition magic” (Songmeanings.net “Meet”). User

“Desaparecida” also owns Virginia’s struggle, as she [or he] said on April 13, 2005, “i feel like that a lot of the time,” in reference to the chorus, “Well she wants to live her life/ Then she thinks about her life/ Pulls her hair back as she screams, / ‘I don’t really wanna live this life’”(Songmeanings.net “Meet”, Train. “Meet” lines 17-20). Listeners also find her personality quirks and her meaningful romantic relationship endearing, as shown by a post on Songmeanings.net by user “sk8ing88” from July 5, 2002, that says, “This is my song...I have loved this song since I first heard it...These lyrics are so wonderful and my dream guy is going to sing this song to me because the person who loves me for my crazy traits is the one I want to spend the rest of my life with!!” (Songmeanings.net “Meet”). The responses on this ordinary website are thorough and thoughtful, giving listeners the space to process Virginia’s feelings and engage in the production of personal meaning. Instead of making her inaccessible to men or to other women, Virginia’s oddities make her a source of inspiration for women who engage with and use popular culture to inform their senses of self.

Third wave feminism becomes real through the small manifestations of individualism in real women’s lives. Garnering strength from popular culture, and particularly music, feminism has grown to include not only unconventional women, but also a sect of men who find meaning and comfort in beautifully honest women. Of the male pop/rock acts of the late-1990s who wrote songs about individual, conflicted women (including Matchbox Twenty, Nine Days, and Dave Matthews), Train stands apart with the song “Meet Virginia” as the most honest and feminist group. The song creates a holistic and fearless portrait of a woman in the 1990s on the road to finding herself. Virginia is an individual woman and third wave feminist, but, more so, she transcends these roles to become a contributor to the ongoing conversation about third wave

feminism, as she inspires men and women to intelligently understand themselves and their relationships. “Meet Virginia” belongs in the pop culture history of third wave feminism.

*Can I Still Hang Out with Virginia? :*

*Manifestations of Feminism in “Meet Virginia” and Beyond*

Train’s song “Meet Virginia” exemplified the male-led version of third wave feminism, and the discussion in which it participated continues on into new, exciting outlets for feminism. Virginia’s struggle for self-definition throughout the lyrics of “Meet Virginia” was an individual representation of the struggle of third wave feminists to define their new movement throughout the 1990s, as both bore the importance of personality and self-definition to overcome doubt and negativity with their female audiences. Now, in 2010, third wave feminism continues the same kind of representation in popular music it began in the late-1990s with the resurgence of the female-led Lilith Fair. Additionally, Train’s new release of the endearing radio hit “Hey, Soul Sister” shows promise that the band’s genuine passion for individualistic and amazing women, like Virginia, is a constant quality that their loyal female fans can anticipate. Third wave feminism continues to intersect with popular music in ways that can help individual women to gain confidence in themselves, their dreams, and a new community of feminists.

The difficult path to attaining true individuality and self-understanding was a theme of third wave feminism that materialized in the lyrics of “Meet Virginia.” As shown in Baumgardner and Richards’ *Manifesta*, third wave feminists believed that true feminism had to stem from individual women’s interests in issues like personal constructions of femininity, representations of women in popular culture, and equality: “feminism is out there, tucked into our daily acts of righteousness and self-respect” (17). As the history of third wave feminism and

the character of Virginia both show, however, achieving this kind of feminism is not easy: the processes of accepting individuality and searching for a singular sense of femininity are confusing. Throughout *Manifesta*, the authors show that definitions filled with negatives were ongoing problems for the feminist movement: “Now, let’s discuss what a feminist isn’t. T-shirt and button slogans such as a feminist is the ‘opposite of a doormat’ and ‘not a masochist’ have outworn their usefulness in bringing clarity to the subject. Feminism is more often described by what it isn’t than by what it is...” (61). They, however, seek a definition of feminism that excludes negatives and accounts for the everyday feminism that comes through individuality and social awareness: “We have to locate the feminism and feminists who already exist, tucked into mainstream places and issues, everyday jobs, and a seemingly apolitical culture” (Baumgardner 125). The variety of quirks that Virginia exhibits throughout “Meet Virginia,” including how she “Wears high heels when / She exercises,” show that she has the ability to act out the kind of unconventional, offbeat, everyday feminist life that she ultimately desires: only the words to describe the life she wants are not available to her (lines 13-4). The rhetoric of her few lines shows that she struggles through the process to define her dreams, as she, like feminists, uses negative statements to tell her story. Instead of outlining exactly what she wants, she “screams” what she does not want: “‘I don’t really wanna be the Queen,’” “‘I don’t really wanna live this life’” (lines 19-20, 32-33). More than just an individual feminist searching for answers for her life, Virginia represents the struggles of all third wave feminists, and is the kind of woman that third wave feminism seeks to reach.

The consecutive summers of Lilith Fair tours ended in 1999, but announcements of its 2010 return should be invigorating for today’s third wavers. On October 27, 2009, the new Lilith 2010 website launched, and a beacon of hope shone for third wavers in a press release: “Nearly 6



months ago, Nettwerk CEO and Lilith Fair co-founder Terry McBride announced that the all-female festival would make its return in Summer 2010” (Lilith\_admin. “Brand”). According to the same release, the new tour will revive the celebratory spirit on an international level (Lilith\_admin. “Brand”). A release from November 3, 2009, announced that the 2010 festival will continue the legacy of pairing artistic experience with social activism by partnering with the i4c Campaign™ “to drive social awareness” and Reverb, a “non-profit Greening partner” (Lilith\_admin. “i4c”). The revived Lilith Fair will, like the Lilith Fairs of the 1990s, participate in its own contemporary political and social culture: one that now focuses on “supporting the triple bottom line business sector—companies that focus on people, planet and profit” through the i4c Campaign™ (which denotes “i4c a better tomorrow”) and the environmental sustainability issue (Lilith\_admin. “i4c”). The press release also announced that one dollar from every ticket will go to the i4c Campaign™ (Lilith\_admin. “i4c”). Furthermore, the variety of female artists who will perform at the fair, including Sugarland, Queen Latifah, and Heart, shows that Lilith Fair will continue to allow individual female concertgoers to find their own version of feminism through their favorite genre of music (“Artists”). The revival, it seems, will be a full one, as the 2010 Lilith Fair will adapt the third wave tenets of individuality, contradiction, and international perspective to a new generation.

Train belongs in the legacy of third wave feminism for its hit “Meet Virginia” and the feminist, Lilith-like admiration for individualistic women that remains a central theme in its song lyrics. Their 2001 album featured a song called “Drops of Jupiter” that tells the story of a man who sees the newfound thirst for life his lover brings home after her intergalactic quest for self-discovery—what the speaker calls a “soul vacation” (line 13). “She’s on Fire,” another song from their 2001 *Drops of Jupiter* album, similarly focuses on a woman’s awesome power to

make her dreams reality: “Well it’s not just a daydream if you decide to make it your life...She’s on fire” (lines 15-17). On the most recent album released in 2009, *Save Me, San Francisco*, the hit “Hey, Soul Sister,” has attracted the attention of critics and fans alike, with its comforting, intimate lyrics and cheery sound. Users of Songmeanings.net have posted over 60 comments about the new song, discussing, like others did for “Meet Virginia,” its sound and story (Songmeanings.net “Hey”). In an article from *Rolling Stone* called “*Train* Roll Into New Decade With Unlikely Comeback Hit,” writer Andy Greene calls “Hey, Soul Sister” Train’s “breezy, ukulele-driven new single,” drawing attention to its sound as part of its appeal (Greene 17). Fans, too, have noticed the peppy sound, as the Songmeanings.net user “Sierrabelle” posted on March 25, 2010, about its appeal, saying, “It just makes you want to dance” (Songmeanings.net “Hey”). “Hey, Soul Sister” has drawn huge live crowds for Train’s *Save Me, San Francisco* tour since its release, ones that Greene calls their “largest crowds in years” (Greene 17). The lyrics feature a man who has fallen in love with a beautiful, quirky woman that he admires: “I don’t want to miss a single thing you do...tonight” (Train. “Hey” line 15). He calls her his “soul sister,” referring to the deep connection that they share: “I knew when we collided/ You’re the one I have decided/ Who’s one of my kind” (lines 11, 8-10). He also draws inspiration for his own individuality from her, saying, “You see, I can be myself now finally/ In fact there’s nothing I can’t be/ I want the world to see you’ll be with me” (lines 35-37). Some fans on Songmeanings.net are inspired by the suggestion that the speaker and the woman are destined for each other, as a post from user “RedWren” on March 11, 2010, says,

I think this is about finding your soulmate. Not in the purely romantic sense, but the person who is your everything. Your best friend, your lover, the person who absolutely everything just feels right with. The rather random, hodgepodge lyrics come together

beautifully with an upbeat feeling and, to me, embody what I'd imagine that sort of relationship would be like. (Songmeanings.net "Hey")

Like "Meet Virginia," "Hey, Soul Sister" has spurred conversation among its fans for its mature optimism in an individualistic woman.

Virginia infused male-led pop/rock music with third wave feminist discussion. She was quirky, conflicted, and undeniably herself, and she ultimately shares the story of third wave feminism. Feminism continues to intersect with popular music in promising ways, as the iconic Lilith Fair will return this summer (2010) to bring more women together to achieve their own voices. Train's newest release, "Hey, Soul Sister," echoes with the confidence in individuality that "Meet Virginia" displayed, and shows promise that the band has not lost sight of the genuine legacy that it left on both feminism and music in the 1990s. Third wave feminists and music lovers alike can only hope that the buzz around the 2010 Lilith Fair tour and Train's "Hey, Soul Sister" will awaken the individuality, femininity, and perhaps Virginia-style feminism in another cycle of mainstream music listeners.

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