

# GIRLS TO THE FRONT

It's often hard to articulate the thoughts and emotions that consumed me the first time I listened to Bikini Kill. Awestruck. Captivated. Confused. Moved. Inferior. To me, the band was the beginning of an awakening or, rather, a tangible example of something I already knew to be true. They just personified it.

I wasn't aware of sexism until later in childhood, roughly when girls started to develop and I didn't. Even then, I didn't really understand it. I understood that men were physically stronger than women, but I kind of thought that's where the conversation ended. I figured my natural weaknesses were women's natural strengths and vice versa, the whole thing ultimately balancing out. I honestly lived my childhood believing that because nature made me stronger, that meant that women were naturally smarter. My mom is smarter than my dad; girls in my classes always seemed to get better grades than the boys. I was the one with the inferiority complex because I had little use for physical strength—I never wanted to beat anyone up. As a little boy, I didn't consume myself with sociology or world history. All I knew was what I saw. Girls were beautiful and tender while boys were rough and mischievous.

Little girls were just little people, kids, and we all played with one another. Gender didn't matter. My first best friend was a girl, Mandy, and we met on the bus in kindergarten. She lived about a mile down the road from me, and she would save me a seat. We talked about bugs and cats—we both had a cat—and the stories our teachers were reading to us in class. We eventually started to go over to each other's house after school. I remember coloring pictures with her but mostly I remember my older boy cousins teasing me about her, saying she was my girlfriend. I didn't understand it. Of course she was. She was a girl and a friend. My best friend. Then I moved away.

I made other friends with both boys and girls wherever I ended up. I played baseball, so I had those friends, but the girls always allowed me to share the swings with them at recess. I didn't have any brothers or sisters pushing gender roles on me or preparing me for society. Being an only child, I helped with the dishes just as much as I did with mowing the grass. Besides Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, I didn't care for action figures; I felt Barbies and G.I. Joes were equally lame. I played cops and robbers with the boys and house with the girls—it didn't matter as long as I had a friend and we were having fun. It didn't help that my family moved just about every year of elementary school, making falling into a group and building lasting friendships impossible. That ultimately led to me relying on myself, and I turned to music to pass the time.

Between binges of Aerosmith, Red Hot Chili Peppers, and Pearl Jam, I loved female-driven rock at a young age. 4 Non Blondes were one of my favorite bands. The Bangles, Fleetwood Mac, and Joan Jett were played as much as any other music. However, there was a turning point. I remember being extremely torn one afternoon at a Sam Goody in the mall. I was agonizing over how to spend some money I had earned from doing chores. In one hand, I held a cassette tape of Paula Abdul and in the other, Ugly Kid Joe. Paula was bit poppy for me, even at that age, but I loved that damn cat... Ultimately, I went with Ugly Kid Joe and preserved my heterosexuality, but who knows what could have happened if the



Photo by Bikini Kill / Riot Grrrl Zine

purchase went the other way (insert heavy sarcasm). It was a defining moment because I distinctly remember not choosing the Paula Abdul album out of fear of embarrassment. I had been bragging about being able to buy a new tape for days and kids at school, my dad, would ask what I bought. I had absolutely no idea why I felt the way I did, but at a 9 years old, I *knew* boys were not supposed to be buying Paula Abdul records.

My family finally decided to settle upon the desert wasteland of Utah to see me through junior high and high school. My dad thought

it was important to stay in one place during those formative years, no matter how much I begged him to leave. Awful. I made some of my best friends there, even to this day, but fuck... Utah? It paled in comparison to Colorado, Southern California, and even Maine, all of the other places I had already lived. By my early to mid-teens, the Beastie Boys, Sublime, PUSA, and Beck were distracting me from the mundane while No Doubt, The Cardigans, Veruca Salt, The Cranberries, and Garbage were singing me to sleep at night.

I eventually developed my core group of friends, the preppy soccer jocks (even though I was a baseball guy), probably because six of us lived within a quarter of mile of each other. However, unlike my soccer buddies, I was allowed, or dared, to freely travel between tribes. I didn't start preschool with these kids and wasn't limited to a social structure based on pissing one's pants in the third grade. Being forced to make new friends over and over when I was little made talking to different kids easier. I wove between the skaters, FFA, band geeks, kids in the slow classes, drama freaks, Mexican gangsters, and the yearbook kids. Music was the bridge, the conduit that allowed this to happen. I could always relate and build common ground with someone over tunes, and being able to harness that power throughout my life has made things infinitely easier.

The Yearbook Room was by far the best hidden gem within the walls of that piece of shit school. It was a little mecca away from the seminary building complete with couches and a CD player. It was one of those rare places that barely passed as academia and somehow stayed off the radar of the administration. No classes were ever held in this room; it was simply used as independent work space and storage. The teacher who oversaw the school yearbook was old, eccentric, and just didn't care. He purposely left the room unsupervised for those of us looking to get away, and the most remarkable thing is that we, as stupid teenagers, understood and respected that enough to not ruin it by causing too much trouble. My first understanding of Don't Ask, Don't Tell.

I was never officially a part of the yearbook staff, though

I will take responsibility for some of the content. Simply wasting time in that room, listening to music, I would blurt out caption ideas for photos and help create fake organizations that could be featured throughout the club pages. How many times I heard, "I didn't know we had a croquet team?" We don't, you dipshit, but pretending we did got me out of 5th period.

It was in that room that I made my first punk friend, Katie, and she just happened to be a girl. She was so much cooler than I was. She knew all the music I liked, even most of the obscure surfer music I was into, and always one-upped me with an, "Oh man, if you like them, then you will love these guys..." and she was right. I always loved everything she recommended. There was no competing with her on any level; she was so much more daring and dangerous than me. She'd come to school with stories of going to Salt Lake City (which in itself was a big deal) and sneaking into live shows because she was underage. I shit you not, her and her friends were literally the kids, the out-of-control background extras in the movie *SLC Punk!* This girl was beyond rad in every way possible.

Our friendship grew, and I eventually became really close

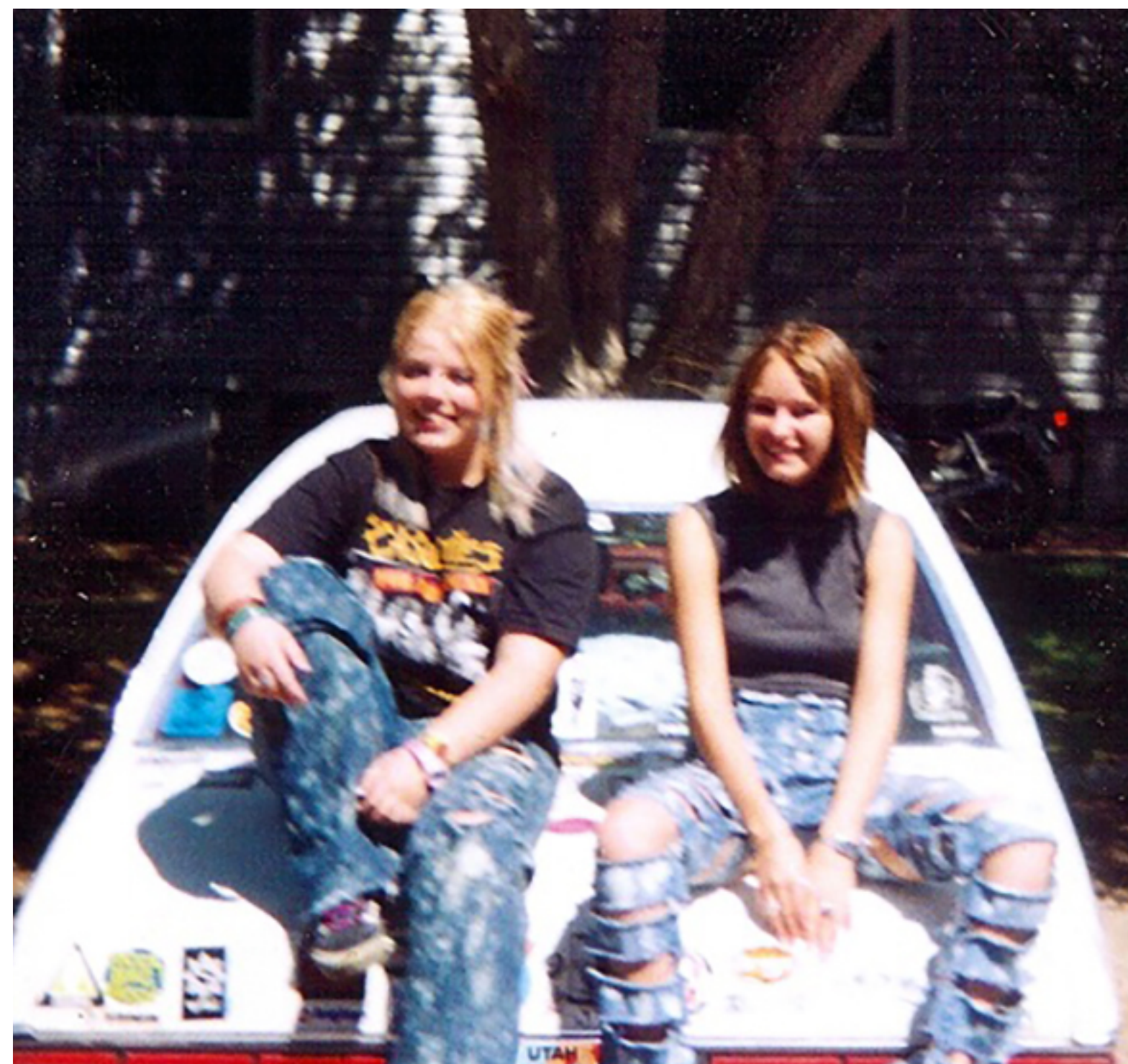


Photo by Katie Sherman / Surf Star Media

to her and all of her like-minded friends. I even started going to my fair share of shows in Salt Lake. She pushed me way out of my comfort zone, something I will be forever grateful for. I remember early in our friendship—it may have been the first time I rode around in her old, white boat of a car complete with punk stickers on the windows—that I heard "Girl Germs" by Bratmobile. Naturally, I dug it right away, and that surprised and intrigued her.

She grinned and of course followed with, "Well, if you like that, then you'll love this..." and fumbled with her CD case, somehow keeping us on the road. She popped a disc into a Walkman that had a cord running from it that magically transformed into a cassette tape at the other end, and she jammed it into the player. She cranked the volume and skipped through several tracks until she landed on that iconic, marching snare drum beat. The distorted-as-fuck guitar kicked in and my eyes widened. "That girl thinks she the queen of the neighborhood, she's got the hottest trike in town. That girl, she holds her head up so high, I think I wanna be her best friend, yeah!" and then the chorus hit and my mind exploded.

Bikini Kill's "Rebel Girl" was so raw and powerful, identifiable, sexy, and the greatest call to arms I had ever heard. "When she walks, I hear the revolution. In her hips, there's revolution. When she walks, the revolution's coming. In her kiss, I taste the revolution!" After that song, I basically wanted to push the reset button of my life and start over. It brought everything I knew about the world into question and flipped it on its end—or better, gave everything perspective.

"Rebel Girl" is iconography for the genre, but as I soon discovered, that wasn't even Bikini Kill's best song. Hearing Kathleen Hanna shriek and growl with obscene aggression, hearing her flirt and tease with Valley Girl bubblegum, hearing her sincerity and vulnerability on top of brutal lyrics about oppression, sexism, exploitation, violation, abuse, rape, and insecurity was a kick to the nuts. My heart bled for her, for Mandy, and for Katie. I felt responsible.

To that point in my life, I had inherently respected women—of course they could be powerful, thoughtful, talented, and angry. What I didn't know is that they sometimes felt bad about being who they were. Or were made to feel bad. Or that they seriously struggled with inferiority. That a girl's voice is silenced, ignored, or patronized. That a woman's idea, thoughts or life was less valuable than mine. I had heard stuff like that on the news occasionally, but Bikini Kill made it real—something that couldn't be ignored or go unnoticed.

I didn't really know how to react to the injustice other than to consume myself with more music. I immediately immersed myself in the band's entire catalog and then started branching out. Bratmobile, L7, Lunachicks, Letters To Cleo, The Butchies, Dance Hall Crashers, Sleater-Kinney, Heavens To Betsy, theSTART and Tsunami Bomb. I admired the strength, courage, message, and talent. These women became heroes of mine, another paradigm shift in the classic gender roles of our society.

It got me thinking, as a young man with jock male friends, who were our female role models? Who did we look up to? Honor? There were plenty of girls we wanted to fuck, especially at that age, but I mean truly respected on the merits of their talents and voice. The Disney Princesses were cartoon sex objects to us, not something we ever aspired to be or held with high regard. Yet Superman was okay and Batman was a viable career choice. I happened to think Layne Beachley and Lisa Anderson were amazing surfers, but none of my friends could even name a woman athlete except for maybe an Olympic figure skater. We didn't care much about politics at that age, but I can't remember any of us recanting the policies of a female politician. I mean, Mary Poppins? It was just so absurdly unbalanced and unequal considering that women make up half of the population and I never once even noticed it before. I never thought about it.

Discovering the Riot Grrrl movement that contained the repressed voices of young girls from coast to coast, from other countries, was truly overwhelming and inspiring. Reading snippets on a dial-up internet connection of Kathleen Hanna's manifesto and the Riot Grrrl zines that circulated by means of traveling bands seemed like the only true, unfiltered voice that spoke directly on the subject and from the heart. Sadly, these zines were already fading by the time I came of age and emerged into any music scene. A decade had passed since all girls were called to the front of the stage and clearly, this was still a major issue.

I would never label myself as a third-wave feminist activist, but I was now aware. I supported the sentiment and encouraged the conversation, even seeking out content creators and zine publishers occasionally with my own album or show reviews and my thoughts on the topic. Ironically, and the

**WHAT IS RIOT GRRRL?**

BECAUSE we will never meet the hierarchical BOY standards of talented, or cool, or smart. They are created to keep us out, and if we ever meet them they will change, or we will become tokens.

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

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

BECAUSE in every form of media I see us/myself slapped, decapitated, laughed at, objectified, raped, trivialized, pushed, ignored, stereotyped, kicked, scorned, molested, silenced, invalidated, knifed, shot, choked, and killed

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

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

BECAUSE we need to acknowledge that our blood is being spilt; that right now a girl is being raped or battered and it might be me or you or your mom or the girl you sat next to on the bus last Tuesday, and she might be dead by the time you finish reading this. I am not making this up.

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

BECAUSE I am still fucked up, I am still dealing with internalized racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, etc., and I don't want to do it alone. BECAUSE we need to talk to each other. Communication/inclusion is key. We will never know if we don't break the code of silence.

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

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

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

No we are not paranoid.  
No we are not manhaters.  
No we are not worrying too much.  
No we are not taking it too seriously.

RIOT GRRRL IS GIRL LOVE + 2 US STAMPS (please no checks)

RIOT GRRRL P.O. BOX 11002 WASHINGTON, D.C. 20008

FOR MORE info send 1\$ to

start a Fuckin HEELP ME

riot

riot grrrl is...

Photo by Kathleen Hanna / Riot Grrrl Zine

Riot grrrl is.....

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

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

**BECAUSE** we don't want to assimilate to someone else's (Boy) standards of what is or isn't "good" music or punk rock or "good" writing AND THUS need to create forums where we can recreate, destroy and define our own visions

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

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

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

**BECAUSE** i believe with my holeheartmindbody that girls constitute a revolutionary soul force that can, and will, change the world for real

Riot Grrrl Manifesto, 1991

Photo by Kathleen Hanna / Riot Grrrl Zine

humor did not escape me, my voice was not welcome. Because I was a straight male—and yes, for some reason, orientation seemed to matter—I had no place talking about the plights of women. A feminist reading a feminist zine had absolutely no interest in anything I had to say about about the issues or my experiences simply based on what dangled between my legs. I would only be diluting the movement and stealing page space from yet another woman...

Growing up, I didn't struggle with identity as much as I struggled with being accepted. I was always the new kid; I was never cool enough; I was never smart enough; I was never good-looking enough; and in Mormonland, I was never a good enough person. My first taste of caring about a cause, besides saving the beaches from the middle of the desert, was feminism, and they didn't want me, either.

Riot Grrrls ultimately made me hypersensitive and neurotic when it came to anything related to women, and I usually ended up feeling like an asshole. I got along with a lot of feminists, especially one on one, but no matter what I did, I simply represented oppression. This became particularly difficult when dating. While there were a lot of great thoughts and convictions in our late teens and early twenties, we weren't all that mature. It seemed like torture for a feminist to admit that she liked me, as if she was betraying her cause and losing her identity. She feared, rationally or not, a backlash among her community and friends—as if she had forsaken them and was literally sleeping with the enemy.

Dating women outside of the world of Riot Grrrl and feminism was equally as challenging because I couldn't understand them. Why didn't these issues matter to her? Doesn't she have any thoughts or ideas other than supporting mine? Why is she constantly judging and tearing down other women at school or work? Conversely, she was wondering why I was such a pussy. Why doesn't he just tell me what to do? Why would he consult with me when making a decision? Why is he so cautious when making the first move?

Photo by Daniel Locke / PR Photos

By my mid-twenties, I simply became exhausted with women. I didn't know what to do, how to act, or what to say. I didn't know what was proper or expected. I had literally been yelled at for being too considerate and not considerate enough.

I've learned that I will always respect women, encourage their identity, and hold those as personal heroes who have earned it, regardless of gender. As a male, I am not afraid of equality because I know women are strong and capable. I just want each person to be the best they can be and doing the best job they can do. However, I've also learned that I can't be something I'm not. I'm a dude. I like tits. I like that women intellectually stimulate me and animalistically make my dick hard. I like women who have identities, convictions, and thoughts. It makes me happy as a human and attracted to them as a mate.

If you're mature enough to call for revolution, then you need to be mature enough to understand that men are humans, too. Kathleen, the epitome and heart and soul of a significant female cultural movement, understood that. She had the balls to fall in love, be happy with, and marry a Beastie Boy. Let's allow that to sink in.



Photo by Janet Mayer / PR Photos



STOP the J word jealousy  
from killing girl LOVE

encourage IN  
THE face OF  
INSECURITY



Photo by Riot Grrrl Zine

Being very well-versed and fans of both bands and careers, the combination is so absurdly perfect. You can go back and listen to them both mature—busting onto the scene, figuring out what they felt was important in life, finding each other, and balancing the equation. Stranger than fiction, Bikini Kill and Beastie Boys sitting in tree, k-i-s-s-i-n-g. To me, it makes complete sense and I couldn't be happier for Adam and Kathleen. However, the backlash she received was deplorable. The same women she inspired to think twice before using the word *slut* were being equally as judgmental by labeling her a "sellout" and "traitor." For shame, Riot Grrrl. Their union shouldn't tarnish feminism but reaffirm that the cause is working and fostering positive change.

As a feminist, as a human, you have four choices concerning romantic relationships. Love men, love women, love everyone, or love no one. Unless you're bisexual or gay, chances are you'll eventually get lonely at night. You'll want to experience intimacy and love, not just sex. You're going to want to share your life with someone, and that someone is going to be of the opposite sex. Realizing that's where the road leads will make that inevitable day much easier to accept. To begrudge someone's happiness and freedom of choice is in direct contradiction of the crucial elements that I

believe feminism to be.

I realize now that I shouldn't have a place in the Riot Grrrl movement. While initially the hypocrisy astounded me, it wasn't until later in life that I understood that Riot Grrrl wasn't about equality. It wasn't about revenge. It's about a safe space unique to the feminine experience. Until the MLB or NFL starts allowing women onto their fields, I guess chicks should be able to exclude me from theirs. That doesn't mean I'll stop listening to the music. It's my turn to be a cheerleader. To simply look on, smile, encourage, support, and rock out while women continue to create some of the most meaningful and moving music ever written. The best thing I can do is get out of the way and let the girls to the front.

Photo by Janet Mayer / PR Photos



## WHY AREN'T BOYS CALLED SLUTS?

I am writing this because I was one of "those girls" (a slut) in high school. I remember living in fear of someone saying "that word" around me, always fearing it, afraid it could be just around the corner.

I got my bad reputation because I told this guy I didn't like him and he wanted to look cool in front of his friends so he told everyone he fucked me and that I was this total sleaze who liked all this weird shit and would "do it" with anyone, etc... REGARDLESS, who gave him the power to MAKE or BREAK my reputation?

BEFORE YOU USE THE WORD SLUT Think

about a time when someone spread a rumor about you, insulted your body or hurt your feelings. If you're really mad at a girl you could write her a note or tell her *in person*. That is a lot more courageous than stabbing her in the back anyways. Destroying her reputation just feeds into the same system that gives other people the RIGHT to JUDGE you UNFAIRLY.

Photo by Riot Grrrl Zine