

## Authenticity after Cock Rock: Emo and the Problem of Femininity

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The genre label 'emo' has a difficult relationship with the concept of authenticity. The full term, 'emotional hardcore' first emerged in the 1980s in America, applied to a small and selective circle of post-punk bands including Rites of Spring and Embrace. Seeking to reject the forms of masculinity associated with cock-rock, these bands combined punk stylistics with emotional, confessional lyrics, shifting the politics of hardcore to the interpersonal, small-p political sphere. Then in the 1990s, the term became associated with softer and more pop-punk sounding bands, such as Sunny Day Real Estate, Dashboard Confessional and the Promise Ring, before breaking into the relative mainstream as in the early 2000s. The three bands that came to define emo post 2001 were My Chemical Romance, Fall Out Boy and Panic! At the Disco, who collectively came to be known as 'the emo trinity'. And yet music journalists and the bands themselves sought either to disassociate themselves from the term 'emo', and/or deny that the label had any meaning. Music journalist Andy Greenwald claims that the term has always been "slightly derisive" (2012). This derision, which often focuses on a posited lack of authenticity, is intensely gendered. Authenticity is a fetishized value in music subcultures, especially in rock. Both the broader derision of emo and the strenuous negotiation of the term amongst bands and fans is part of a dense, well-established discourse that aligns 'real', 'authentic' music and subcultures with hegemonic masculinity, and polices and wards off the threat of feminine hysteria and excess. This chapter utilizes some of the research that informed my book, *Emo: How Fans Defined a Subculture* (Fathallah, 2020) to examine how the tropes of authenticity are negotiated in emo culture, in ways that consolidate and eventually critique Nicholas and Agius' 'persistence of masculinism' in rock music cultures.

Frith and McRobbie's landmark essay "Rock and Sexuality" was first published in 1978, wherein they used the term "cock rock" to describe the aggressive, physical, macho style of classic rock music (Frith & McRobbie, 2006). Cock-rock constructs a devalued other in "teeny-bop" pop music, which is equated with the feminine. Norma Coates went on to argue that according to this binary, "rock is metonymic with 'authenticity' and pop with 'artifice'" (1997, p. 52). Sarah Thornton demonstrated the equation of inauthenticity and commercialism with the feminine in her work on clubbing cultures (1995). Taking these writers' insights together, we can illustrate the discursive binary around authenticity common to music subcultures as in table 1:

Authenticity	Artifice
(Cock-)Rock	Pop
Masculine	Feminine
Valued	Devalued
'Not about the money'	Commercial
Instrumentation (mind)	Singing and dancing (body)
Alternative	Mainstream

Given that emo explicitly rejects cock-rock masculinity, and has been praised by academics for gender progressivism (Mack, 2014; Peters, 2010), we might expect to find a deconstruction of this binary in emo culture. After all, emo itself has been dismissed as inauthentic rock for insufficient or deficient masculinity: there was a time in the early 2000s when the standard insult for emo and its fans was 'gay'. Paul Brannigan, then the editor of *Kerrang*, commented in 2006 that

emo fans are the whipping boys of the moment [...] there's a misogynistic air to it. A lot of the credible metal bands have got an older, very metal following and they see teenage girls getting into bands like MCR and think they've not earned the right to be called a rock fan (in Boden 2006, p. 51).

Yet perhaps in a defense against this, authenticity as a value and gatekeeping the genre are fundamental to emo subculture, in ways that often replicate the binary in table 1 quite closely, even as they reject masculinity in its traditional form. The patterns I identified in my research included the elevation of boys as more valued (and authentic) fans; denigration of feminised fan behaviours as inauthentic and fake; a strong fear of contagion by feminised pop and eagerness to delineate pop from emo; positing male-coded instrumentation and technicality as the highest value in music; and suspicion of mainstreaming and commercialism. As Sam de Boise has so well argued, cock-rock is not the only hegemonic masculinity, and masculinism can easily accommodate the man of feeling, the authentically sensitive and refined male subject of emo culture (2014; 2015). Mack argued that emo constructs a kind of a "synergistic masculinity that dissolves the culturally ascribed border between hegemonic and subordinate masculinities" (2014, p. 136), combining hardcore signifiers associated with aggression and hardness with softer, more feminised properties. We might point to the juxtaposition of hard and soft instrumentation or the contrast of a sung verse and screamed breakdown/chorus common in emo songs as illustrative signifiers. Certainly, emo constructs a of masculine subject positions more varied and

progressive than those traditionally constructed in hardcore and punk. Could we not equally argue, though, that the subject position being created simply erases women and girls, recuperating all kinds of gendered properties to men and boys as the authentic, speaking subjects? After all, this is the perspective one often finds in emo lyrics: “I’m just a notch in your bedpost/but you’re just a line in a song” sings Fall Out Boy’s frontman Patrick Stump in the 2005 single “Sugar we’re going down” (Wentz et. al, 2005). Girls may hurt boys with their promiscuous behaviour (and emo can be notably prudish about sex, particularly outside of relationships), but boys are poets, who can create art out of their suffering can “write it better than [she] ever felt it” (Wentz et. al, 2007). This recuperation of authentic subjectivity to the male position is a key illustration of what Nicholas and Agius have called “the persistence of masculinism” (2018). Not to be confused with ‘masculinity’, which changes over time and place, “masculinism” is the discursive strategy by which patriarchy is upheld, valuing whatever is defined as masculine in situated contexts over whatever is defined as feminine. What I don’t want to do here, however, is present this construction of authenticity as some kind of closed, fait accompli in emo subculture - discourse is always in flux, as Laclau and Mouffe showed us, and I did indeed find criticism and deconstruction of the authentic masculine, sometimes in unexpected places.

The websites studied in this project were fan MySpace and LiveJournals, and the bands own websites and MySpaces (courtesy of the Internet Archive WayBack Machine). I then moved on to look at Tumblr and YouTube, and Reddit and 4chan. The latter two were helpfully suggested by a reviewer of an early draft of the book, in order to provide some contrasting perspective on the subculture via sites conventionally coded masculine and with a male-majority userbase. There is no space in this chapter for a full discussion of site context and it's inflection of the discourse over time, but see Fathallah (2020) for these findings. Here, we will address in turn the patterns I identified above, which we should note are frequently upheld by fans who self-describe as women and girls. Masculinism is a pervasive cultural discourse, not an object, and women can uphold it just as well as men can. Finally, we’ll go on to look at the backlash against this as emo culture self-critiques and debates its own tendency towards masculinism, and what this might mean in the context of increasingly blurred genre and gender boundaries in cultural constructions.

Across the online communities, I found that fans presenting as male were more readily accepted as authentic fans, and fans of authentic emo music. This accords with the earlier work of Rosemary Overell, who studied the patterns of acceptance and rejection to emo fan communities on Livejournal. She noted that male-presenting fans were “universally accepted” based on “their music likes and opinions”, whilst “communities’ moderators often positioned female applicants’ appearances as the basis for acceptance or rejection”, then conflated this with poor taste in music. Overell states that all “‘rejectees’ whom [she] canvassed were women, confirming the feminization of the ‘true’ emo’s ‘fake’ Other” (2010, p. 158). Which is to say, male applicants

were taken at their word and accepted as authentically belonging to the group , whilst girls were held to particular standards of appearance, and femininity conflated with disparaged constructs like the mainstream' and inauthenticity. Building on Thornton, Rosemary Hill argues:

To some degree the mainstream stands in for the masses [...] derivative, superficial and *femme*' (Thornton 1995, p. 5). It is associated with pop music, fashion, herd mentality, passive consumption, and lack of discernment or real taste (Thornton 1995, pp. 99-100) (Hill, 2016).

This is why Overell's moderator tells a female community applicant she is unattractive, then in a silent discursive slide down the binary, dismisses her from the community with "you sound like you got your list of emo bands from MTV2" (2010, p. 158). Girls must keep up particular standards of physical attractiveness; and also, girls listen to fake emo. The underlying logic is quite clear. Surprisingly, I found the validation of male fans on LiveJournal, a female-dominated space, more prominent than on Reddit and 4chan. For example, in an early LiveJournal community devoted to Panic! At the Disco, one commenter bemoans: "most of the members here are female, arent [sic] they?! WHHHHY??" (xpistolax, 2004) to which the responses include, "hahahaha i know. LAMEEEE" (i\_melt\_with\_u, 2004) and "thats true huh?? We need more penis in this community!!!! ::shakes fist::" (adiscobloodbath, 2004). Why more penis would be beneficial doesn't need to be explained: the authentic-masculine discourse is strong enough that everybody knows that boys are the more valued fans. It was on Reddit, however, that feminised fan behaviours were most readily denigrated. This may be linked to Reddit's site norms of rational logocentrism, and the conflation of the masculine with rationality and the mind and femininity with the irrational body. Consider the following comment from the subreddit r/emo:

I had a spastic 14 year old girl next to me at the Pittsburgh show with a pride flag and she was whipping it everywhere . . . during every song . . . and nailing me in the head and eyes with the metal grommets on it (damnitschecky, 2018).

Notice how the physicality of the young teenage girl's expression is particularly denigrated ("spastic"), and contrasted to the rational appreciation of the poster, who is there to *hear* the music, not dance to it. 4chan might call this sort of appreciation 'patrician': to have patrician taste, on 4chan, is to have taste that is correct and discerning, with plebeian taste as its opposite. Yet it was notably on 4chan, which tends to absurdism and self-mockery, that I found the most criticism of the rational male subject as an authentic fan - we'll return to this in the section on critique, below. Likewise on LiveJournal, physical expression and excessive sexuality was very much constructed as the wrong kind of fandom, and inevitably linked to teenage girls. To a poster seeking advice on what she should wear to a My Chemical Romance show, user brndnw22 says,

I personally don't care what people are wearing at the show, as long as they act the right way and are into the music. one 'fuck me gee' and you're down, but if it's just the clothing that's different, who cares? then again, the

rest of the people at the show could have a different opinion of you. just play it safe and wear a black tshirt anyway. Heh' (2005).

Look at the linkage of “act the right way” with being “into the music”. Presumably if one acts the wrong way - i.e., expressing sexual attraction to MCR’s frontman, Gerard Way, one is not really “into the music”, and not an authentic fan. The “safe” attire is a black t-shirt: reserved, respectable, plain. I have mentioned above that emo tends to the prudish, and unsurprisingly, slut-shaming was out of control in early 2000s fandom. Jessica Hopper encapsulated emo’s construction of girls in her 2003 rant with the pithy expression: “Muses at best, cum-rags or invisible at worst” (Hopper, 2003).

I also noted earlier that emo used to be denigrated in the mainstream rock press, and often by older rock fans, as itself tending to the feminine and inauthentic. Emo fandom conflates the feminine with pop, just as Frith and Robbie argued cock-rock does, and goes to defensive lengths to define it's boundaries as a hardcore genre and ward off the threat of the contagion. Or at least - it used to. As we’ll see later on, the increasingly blurred lines of music genres and interconnected internet make this process of gatekeeping more and more tenuous, and fans begin to deconstruct the authenticity binary. Reddit argues endlessly on the nature and definition of “real emo”: so much so that, in a moment of self-mockery, the subreddit r/emo used to label itself as a forum for discussion of “real real emo”, a point we’ll develop below. A fascinating trend on the MCR LiveJournal communities made the threat of contagion by inauthentic pop particularly clear through discussions of space and placement. “i die a little inside whenever i hear they’re [MCR] in yet another teeny bop magazine” (untilyoubelieve, 2005). The press’s placement of his or her preferred band amongst those deemed inauthentic is experienced as an emotional wound. Even more pointedly, user marionettes writes:

So I went to Barnes and Noble today to look for Rocksound, and while we were there my friend Joanna decides she wants to find out who her pop star!boyfriend should be (who places teenie magazines next to Spin and Kerrang and such? I mean, come on!) So she turns to the first page and screams and I look up at her and she's shoving the magazine in my face and saying 'Gerard's in here! What the fuck?' (2005).

The fear of contagion by feminised pop is literalised by the shop’s placing the “teenie magazines next to Spin and Kerrang”, thus infringing on the masculine critical tradition of the rock periodical (Fathallah, 2020,7 p. 70). Hill considers this to be a defense mechanism against the broader cultural feminization of emo bands, noting that “the trouble is that femininity proves a threat to authenticity so that anything associated with women needs to be restrained from rock to preserve its authenticity” (2016). The contagion metaphor pops up on Reddit too. In a discussion over whether the subreddit tends too far towards elitism in it's definitions of ‘real emo’, user in\_san1ty asks

Are we an elists [sic]?

This question appeared in my mind since I've been called an elite [sic] for saying that bands like these are not emo. For example, if we correct someone that Panic! At The Disco isn't emo and we showed him/her the emo bands like pageninety-nine, Rites of Spring, Embrace, Thursday. Does that count we are being an elists or just fighting for the true emo genre? [sic] (2018).

To this, Hotdogtacos187 responds that “it's not being elitist to defend the genre from bands that gave emo a dirty name and warped people's perception of it” (2018). Contagion is dirt: the increased commercialism over emo in the early 2000s threatens its authenticity, metaphorically besmirching its name.

Now, this suspicion of commercialism, which I identified above as a common pattern, is conflated with femininity in emo fandom in quite fascinating ways. On the official Fall Out Boy MySpace, which I accessed via the Wayback machine, one user complained, “I feel like a woman . . . you guys are such sellouts” (anon., 2008). This odd statement would be very difficult to parse without the benefits of the authenticity binary established by Coates and Frith and McRobbie. As it is, we can understand it thus: the commenter feels that a band he had formerly loved, and considered to be authentic musicians, has sold out by joining a major label (Fall Out Boy moved to Island Records from the tiny independent Fueled by Ramen after the success of their 2003 album, *Take This to Your Grave*). His investment in a band that has proved not to measure up to his standards of authenticity makes the commenter ‘feel like a woman’: because commercialism is inauthentic, and inauthenticity is feminine. Compare this announcement from MCR’s official website in 2004, which was immediately copied and pasted into the LiveJournal fan community:

MCR HITS TRL

Yeah—you read that right. The powers-that-be at MTV have seen the light and have asked MCR to play live on TRL on January 17th. We’re all just as surprised as you are, but it’ll be pretty amazing to see the TRL crowd experience the MCR assault.

To make sure that there aren't the usual TRL Barbie and Ken dolls in the audience, they're looking for 15 of the biggest MCR fanatics to be in the studio live with the band. So, send in a note explaining why you want to be in the audience that day . . .

Jeff at MCRHQ (2004, reposted in the LiveJournal community by user `_tune_you_out`)

TRL stands for Total Request Live, an MTV show associated more with pop, hip-hop and gossip sections than indie or punk. This type of show - being feminine - would ordinarily have an audience composed of "Barbie and Ken dolls", thus in order to recuperate a claim to authenticity, the publicist frames MCR's appearance as something that will happen to the show, violently, via assault. MCR will change TRL, not vice versa. Initial responses from the LJ community are taken aback: "I got that email", says `fanxx00_o`: "it's just...wrong" (2004). Pretty soon, though, fans adopted the same discursive strategy as the band's spokesperson, framing the appearance as an opportunity in which MCR are the agents of change, not their subject:

aww, yeah. i'll admit, at first when they were on trl i was a bit bummed cos everyone else was convincing me, but later, i realized just how great they are for doing that/ they deserve it more than anyone! . . . MCR didn't go mainstream . . . mainstream went MCR. ;) (`gerards_kitten`, 2005)

Notice, however, this user's distinctly feminine-coded username, which may denote a more critical stance towards the authenticity binary than some fans expressed. Moreover, if the "mainstream" is capable of change, the binary is not fixed: the "mainstream" may be capable of recouping authenticity via inclusion of sounds coded as authentic.

The final pattern we'll explore here is a little more subtle in its elevation of the masculine. This is the valorization of instrumentation and technicality as the highest value in music. To understand this, we need to recall the history through which Western culture conflates the masculine with the mind, and with culture, and the feminine with the body and nature. Singing and dancing are not only physical acts that originate in the body, but commonly perceived to be more 'natural' than playing an instrument (even though at the professional level, this is patently false. No-one 'naturally' has a five-octave vocal range). Here is a neat illustration of Nicholas

and Agius' insights: that masculinism, as a flexible discourse, is the subtle process which maintains male hegemony by elevating whatever is considered masculine in a particular context over whatever is considered feminine. No-one explicitly links instrumentation to masculinity in emo fandom, but the cultural heritage of the discourse is fairly evident. Look at this comment from user *forlornangel* in the MCR LiveJournal community:

People always tell me how EMO MyChemRomance is . . . It's really annoying and then they always ask if I'm EMO just because I listen to them . . . Then I get grief from EMO kids who think MCR sucks and aren't "Real Emo" . . . There is no winning for MCR where I live . . .

But my best friend likes them, and I sport MCR shirts at least 3 out of 7 days of the week . . . I've gotten one awesome comment from this Hardcore Metal guy at Guitar Center . . . He told me how different the Lead Guitarist is, and how he does something no one else would have ever thought of (*forlornangel*, 2005).

There are several points of note here. Firstly, the label "emo" is a difficult one for this user to negotiate - 2005 was the peak of stigmatization for emo fans on one hand, and the band she favours is dismissed as inauthentic emo on the other. Secondly, the approval of a "Hardcore Metal guy at Guitar Center" is important to her in validating her fandom. Both via his job and the visual signifiers that presumably mark out his subculture of choice, this "guy" is positioned firmly on the side of cultural authenticity. Finally, validation of MCR is dependent on technical skills and innovation of the pointedly capitalized "Lead Guitarist".

So despite the cultural feminization of emo - indeed, sometimes because of it - the binary upholding the authentic masculine and stigmatizing femininity as inauthentic seems to persist in emo subculture. But discourse constructions are always in flux, fans are not cultural dupes, and the binary is certainly not unchallenged. Partly, this challenge has been enacted via osmosis between websites in an increasingly interconnected internet, as the feminine-coded anarchy of Tumblr blogs and incessant links to the broadly-populated YouTube render the boundaries of communities like subreddits harder and harder to gatekeep (Fathallah, 2020, pp. 106-26). But I found to my surprised that self-criticism comes, if anything, most-strongly from within the masculine coded Reddit and 4chan threads. The subreddit *r/emo* birthed an extremely popular

meme known as the "real real emo cypasta", which satirising gatekeeping practices around authenticity:

"Real Emo" only consists of the dc Emotional Hardcore scene and the late 90"s Screamo scene. What is known by "Midwest Emo" is nothing but Alternative Rock with questionable real emo influence. When people try to argue that bands like My Chemical Romance are not real emo, while saying that Sunny Day Real Estate is, I can't help not to cringe because they are just as fake emo as My Chemical Romance (plus the pretentiousness). Real emo sounds **ENERGETIC, POWERFUL** and somewhat **HATEFUL**. Fake emo is weak, self pity and a failed attempt to direct energy and emotion into music. Some examples of **REAL EMO** are Pg 99, Rites of Spring, Cap n Jazz (the only real emo band from the midwest scene) and Loma Prieta. Some examples of **FAKE EMO** are American Football, My Chemical Romance and Mineral **EMO BELONGS TO HARDCORE NOT TO INDIE, POP PUNK, ALT ROCK OR ANY OTHER MAINSTREAM GENRE**.

Said to be originally authored by Reddit user Kage6613, this parody links "real" emo to energy and power (masculine), "fake emo" to weakness and self-pity (feminine), and draws a firm line around the label "hardcore", excluding the feminised mainstream. The parody is much-repeated across the subreddits, and has also found its way to YouTube. It's accuracy is such that in accordance with Poe's law, it is sometimes read as genuine. 4chan created the "emo guy" meme, a image-based parody of a pretentious young man, drawn with his spectacles brimming with tears, whose hobbies include crying over his uniquely sensitive feelings; having sex whilst crying; crying in general; and lamenting the fact that there will never be a girl with his "patrician taste" in music. 4chan users also mock too-earnest attempts to defend masculinity. In a heated exchange over whether or not listening to MCR makes one a "pussy" (of course, a gendered insult), one commenter impersonates the detractor: "g-guys look at how much testosterone I have! I am a fat virgin on 4chan...but I don't listen to MCR! \*flex\*" (4chan user, 2018). 4chan might be masculine-coded, but being on 4chan in the first place means that one is failing at hegemonic masculinity, so users are in no place to mock anyone.

The strong link between genre and gender means that masculinism is challenged both by the increasingly blurred lines between genres and between websites in a porous online culture. Tumblr blogs, which tends to be feminine-coded, intersperse posts on emo fandom with pop bands and other genres, frequently using terms such as "cute" and "adorable" to describe

them. They engage in affectionate mockery over too-serious attempts to gatekeep the genre, and whilst there is no space here for a full discussion of genre development, it is not controversial to say that the rise of digital music, ease of personalized curation and dominance of the single over the album in the 21st century have rendered the discursive boundaries of music genres increasingly permeable. The phrase tongue-in-cheek phrase "emo trinity" is popular on Tumblr, for example to describe deliberately-bad photoshopped collages of the bands' respective frontmen onto Christian iconography. Tumblr frequently recirculates "emo pepes", instances of the Pepe the frog meme which depict him pouting in exaggerated eyeliner with floppy black hair, accompanied by emo song lyrics adapted to describe his life as both a frog and an internet meme. Users call these sorts of absurdities "shitposting" or "crack". "Emo crack" videos are a popular YouTube subgenre. These are somewhat difficult to describe in words, being a distinctly visual form of humour, and the interested reader is advised to search for one. But in brief, they contrast short, often distorted clips of emo band members saying things the user finds humorous or silly, punctuated with clips from memes, funny sound-effects, unfortunate zoom-ins and close-ups on freeze-framed facial expressions as a sort of satirical commentary. Much shitposting and crack utilises what Nick Douglas calls "internet ugly". He describes this as a "a definable aesthetic running through meme culture, a celebration of the sloppy and the amateurish"(2014, p. 314). In a distinct challenge to the authenticity binary, its function is to puncture seriousness, to take down anything too self-important, to "emphasize human messiness" and contrast with the smooth efficiency of technology. It "supposed to look like shit" (p. 327; p. 324). Emo crack and shitposting roundly punctures the seriousness of the authentic male subject, even as fans express their affection for the bands and their members. Contra the authenticity binary, music fandom doesn't have to be rational: it doesn't even have to be serious.

Sometimes both the fans and the bands themselves display critical awareness of the gender/genre binary. The video for Fall Out Boy's single 2009 'I Don't Care' contains a preamble in which an older man bearing all the typical signifiers of a 1970s cock-rocker is shown lounging backstage at what we presume is a music venue. He has long, slightly greying hair, a long moustache and goatee, wears a blue denim jacket, blue jeans and obnoxious sunglasses indoors. A lurid red electric guitar is slung across his lap. A crowd cheers in the background, and the members of Fall Out Boy enter from a stage door. The rocker looks them up and down with disdain, then sneers to his companion:

ROCKER: What the *hell* happened to rock and roll? [...] *Eyeliner*? [...] Energy drinks? And no guitar solos? [laughing] I've taken shits with bigger rock stars in them! (Fall Out Boy, 2009).

The band looks disconcerted, and the rest of the video alternates between depicting them attempting to cause chaos in a stereotypical 'rockstar' manner, but failing ineptly at it, and performing the song. Now, we should note that whilst the band is mocking themselves for failing at conventional masculinity and depicting it as connected to cock-rock, the focus on technicality and their accomplishment at playing does tap into the elevation of instrumentation we noted as adhering to a flexible form of masculinism. Fall Out Boy might be nerds: but they're *really good* at their instruments. ('I Don't Care' does, in fact, have a guitar solo. As do most Fall Out Boy songs). Below the video, however, user TJ Williams comments:

"What the hell happened to rock & roll?"

It's 2018. DEAL WITH IT! (Williams, 2018).

The era of cock-rock is over. That said, on YouTube as on the fan sites, plenty of commenters, mostly with male usernames, hark back to a posited era of authenticity before bands like Fall Out Boy 'sold out', claiming they *used to be* punk or hardcore, but have lost whatever marker of authenticity the current commenter perceives as important. "member when fob [sic] fans weren't just cringy 13 year old girls?" asks Joseph Lyle: "I member" (Lyle, 2018). The video in question is for 'Grand Theft Autumn', an early single released on Fueled by Ramen. Commenters observe that the audience is indeed almost exclusively white boys. The mere presence of teenage girls as fans has apparently ruined Fall Out Boy's former credibility. But the interesting point here is that Lyle's comment contains its own interdiscursive self-critique. He is referencing an episode of Season 20 of the long-running animated satire *South Park*. This episode, which initially aired during Donald Trump's successful 2016 campaign for presidency of the United States, depicts a plague of so-called 'member berries' which descend upon the town. These talking berries constantly demand to know whether listeners "[re]member" cultural texts or events, such as scenes from *Star Wars*, before sliding comfortably into loaded nostalgic rhetoric like "member when there weren't so many Mexicans?" (Parker, 2016). The warning is against romanticising the past as some kind of whitewashed haven of authenticity: it never was, nor should we wish for it. Even LiveJournal, which was surprisingly conservative with regard to gender and authenticity, sometimes questioned the denigration of feminine-coded fan behaviours. In response to a list of the usual complaints - excess physicality, sexual excitement, hyper enthusiasm, high-pitched voices - user mystil12 writes

I say, be a fan however you want to be a fan. You're entitled to your opinion, but there's just so many of these pointless rants by people who want to distance themselves from stupid little fangirls. I don't give a fuck which you are as long as you appreciate MCR and they bring you happiness. The important thing is that we know who we really are and what the band means to us, right? So who give s a fuck what anyone else thinks? (2005).

These defenses were rare on LiveJournal though, and tended not to be couched as a defense of feminine behaviour, so much as accusations of intolerance and hypocrisy on behalf of other users: “I bet fifty bucks that over 99% of these kids that agree with you[r complaints] are the people that you just ranted about” (mystil12, 2005). Indeed, one of the most interesting findings of the study was how the formats of sites, such as the now-prominent Tumblr, puncture the authenticity contrast via their anarchic structures and preference for “shitposting” and “crack”, often more effectively than reasoned critique of the construct. As Zizi Papcharissi established (2015), humour is never apolitical. Internet theorists Phillip and Milner note:

Just as anger and frustration can facilitate meaningful public debate, so too can engagement that appears to be ‘just’ playful. Theorists across disciplines have long affirmed the political potential of play, immediately complicating the notion that play is, or should be, framed as ‘just’ anything (2017, p. 188).

In our case study, we note that the the authority of the masculine is difficult to uphold in the face of the “emo guy” meme, or “emo pepe” lamenting his existential despair, or YouTube compilations intersecting interview clips with bathetic sound effects and comic freeze-frames. Internet ugly punctures self-importance.

In conclusion, then, we might observe that whilst girls and women are not exactly silenced in emo culture, femininity and feminine-coded behaviours are still, frequently, aligned with the inauthentic. TThe authenticity binary established by earlier critics, as applied to cock-rock, privileges men and boys. Emo denigrates cock-rock, and yet, the authenticity of the masculine in emo culture maps onto the binary in often quite traditional ways. The discourse is never closed: it contains self-criticism, humour and self-awareness, which puncture the seriousness of the authenticity construct and dissect the self-importance of masculinism. Yet in illustration of Nicholas and Agius’ insights, the flexibility of the masculine maintains its hegemonic strength: justifications might change, but the gendered hierarchies that privilege whatever is deemed masculine over whatever is deemed feminine endure. The sensitive man, the man of feeling, even the nerd are easily accommodated, as they have been in other contexts and other historical periods (Fathallah, 2020). Thus, despite the numeric majority of girls in emo subcultures, boys

are largely constructed as more valued, authentic fans, reflecting the dominance of male performance in the genre.

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