

Vans Warped Tour's boys club:  
An analysis of representations of women in alternative music

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by

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## Table of Contents

	<b>Page</b>
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Justification for Proposed Study.....	3
Limitations of Work.....	4
Context of the Problem.....	5
II. BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF STUDY.....	7
Definition of Terms.....	7
Alternative Music.....	7
Empowerment.....	7
Feminism.....	8
Objectification.....	8
Sexism.....	8
Cultural Studies.....	8
Third Wave Feminist Theories.....	10
III. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	13

IV. METHDOLOGY .....	21
V. FINDINGS .....	25
Warped Tour restricts women’s bodily autonomy .....	26
Warped Tour gives women a diminished status.....	29
Warped Tour opens space for women’s empowerment .....	31
Warped Tour allows sexist incidents .....	32
VI. DISCUSSION.....	36
VII. CONCLUSION .....	43
REFERENCES .....	45

## List of Tables

1. Listing of texts .....	22
2. Initial stage of analysis.....	24

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## Vans Warped Tour's boys club:

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#### **Statement of the Problem**

“I couldn’t wait for the summer and the Warped Tour,” sings Blink-182 (2001) in the pop-punk outfit’s song “The Rock Show.” “I remember it's the first time that I saw her there,” the lyrics continue, telling the story of a guy who falls in love with a girl while attending the concert. Blink-182 played the Vans Warped Tour in 1996, 1997, 1999, and 2001. On their third stint, Powers (1999) noted that, albeit their songs are “pleasant, poppy odes to adolescent male frustration,” (para. 12) the band members’ attitudes should not be condoned because

the players' crude comments between songs, while apparently sarcastic, tipped the mood toward misogyny. It all peaked when a young woman who jumped onstage was greeted by a massive chant from the crowd, demanding that she expose herself. (para. 12)

Seventeen years later, Powers (2017) took her teenage daughter, a fan of pop-punk and metalcore, to attend the same Vans Warped Tour, which she calls another of the “rock’s boys club” (para. 1). The tour began celebrating punk’s history, but “five years or so in, it became a wild boys' paradise” (para. 3). The sexism Powers (2017) noted the first time had not faded in her view, even if the music genres embraced by the travelling festival—such as emo and pop-punk—seemed more welcoming to females. No only there was a lack of women on stage, but “these scenes mostly assigned women one role, the fan role. The listener” (para. 11).

Vans Warped Tour is a traveling music and lifestyle festival that ran in the United States and Canada during the summer months from 1995 to 2018. Kevin Lyman created the tour in 1995 after years of working in the music business, including as a stage manager at Lollapalooza. In 2005, *Rolling Stone* called the tour the most successful festival in the U.S. In 2012 and 2013,

Vans Warped Tour was voted the “Best Tour/Festival” by *Alternative Press* readers. Although the Warped Tour has been long associated with punk music and skate culture, the festival has tried to showcase different genres of music, from pop to hip-hop and EDM (Payne, 2017).

In 2017, Lyman announced the summer of 2018 would be the last cross-country run of the Vans Warped Tour. According to a statement shared on the festival’s website, 11 million people around the world attended the tour—including runs in the United Kingdom, Australia, and Japan—during its 23 years on the road.

The Vans Warped Tour did not survive all those years without criticism. From lack of female performers (Knopper, 2018; Seling, 2014; Sherman, 2014) to cases of sexual misconduct and abuse (Murphy, 2017; Seling, 2015; Sherman, 2015a; Payne, 2015), as well as allowing a pro-life organization to participate on the tour (Cush, 2017; Gelfand, 2016), the ways the festival portrays women have been extensively discussed in the media. While there have been several female participants calling out sexist and misogynistic behavior in alternative music scenes, many people in the industry praise the Warped Tour and Lyman for their work towards a more inclusive scene (Knopper, 2018; Seling, 2014; Potter, 2017a).

As the transition from punk to hardcore happened in the mid-1980s and 1990s, the alternative music scene turned more towards male angst and the rock image turned into a male domain, relegating women to sideline roles. They became fans or girlfriends instead of performers (Klein, 1997). The bands playing Vans Warped Tour also transitioned from punk to hardcore and, later, to pop-punk and metalcore, mirroring the changes in that scene. That way, the festival can be considered a microcosm of the scene, not only in the genre of music it celebrates but in how it represents women.

Taking that into consideration, this thesis aims to analyze representations of women in the Vans Warped Tour. The goal is to look at how the tour portrays women through a critical-cultural lens using Third-Wave feminism to understand how the alternative music scene, in general, represents women.

### **Justification for Proposed Study**

Representations of women in alternative music is the phenomenon that guides this study. Alternative music originated as a genre of music functioning as a subculture, a field that was open to individuals who were historically left out. Besides, alternative music is associated with small scale productions and more creative art, so the audience ends up having a stronger sense of personal connection. They see themselves as part of a community (Kruse, 1993).

This sense of community is part of what I will focus on to understand how the alternative music scene represents women. Looking specifically at the Vans Warped Tour as an example of the female representation is of interest for two important reasons. First, Warped Tour attendees are, in general, young, and female: 53 percent of the crowd is made up of women (Seling, 2014). Second, during its 24 years of existence, the travelling festival received its fair share of criticism about the way it portrays women.

Writing about assault in pop-punk and hardcore scenes, Sherman (2015a) notes audience members, specifically women, are using social media to voice their complaints because “that’s one way for women to have a voice when emo and pop-punk—and specifically Warped Tour—make it clear that giving them one on stage isn’t a priority” (para. 10). Accordingly, De Galler (2015) highlights that, when singer-songwriter Jake McElfresh was accused of sending sexually explicit messages and pictures to underage female fans, 13,000 people signed an online petition

asking for him to be removed from the Warped Tour lineup in 2015, something the festival organization complied with. (This example will later be discussed in the findings section).

There is a personal connection, as well. Although I did not grow up attending Warped Tour, I spent much of my teenage years wondering what it would be like. As I watched other female fans and participants of this music scene celebrate the end of the tour due to its treatment of women, I felt compelled to investigate the representations of females in the alternative music community and the Warped Tour. As a journalist who has worked for an alternative music publication, this knowledge helps me understand the history, navigate the scene, and look for signs of change.

Klein's (1997) words about the importance of women working and finding better representation on alternative music scenes also resonate with me:

For me, looking at the past, present, and future of women in the alternative music community, I see a continuum of struggle, spiraling upward. This struggle does not depend on the name it takes. Punk has assimilated the demands of girl revolutionaries—there are women tour managers, engineers, and label owners, as well as a plethora of women musicians. But perhaps more important to me is not only that women make up a much more equal balance of those playing music, but also as women occupy a more respected space, support grows for their work outside the traditional punk music arena. (pp. 223-224)

### **Limitations of Work**

The most important limitation of this thesis is the Vans Warped Tour had its last full cross-country run in 2018. Even though there are still plans to maintain the brand to promote music events, the travelling festival as it existed since 1995 is no more. Considering the current

context of women's voices being heard more, it is possible that, if I had more years in the future to keep analyzing the tour's representation of women, I would find different results.

Another limitation is access to some of the material and information, especially from the earlier years of the tour. Because the dataset is limited by what technology allows, most of the texts analyzed are social media texts from more recent editions of the tour, as well as media articles from earlier years that were published online, or new articles with references to earlier editions of the Vans Warped Tour.

### **Context of the Problem**

Starting in November 2017, alternative music scenes saw a string of news reports about sexual misconduct accusations against musicians, many of whom have been part of the Vans Warped Tour lineup over the years. The accusations started coming up following a story that surfaced online about Jesse Lacey, frontman of emo band Brand New, soliciting pictures from a minor beginning in 2002 (Barsanti, 2017; Mack, 2017; Strauss & Wicks, 2017; Trendell, 2017a; Trendell, 2017b). Accordingly, music fans were disconcerted when Ben Hopkins of alternative duo PWR BTTM—who were praised in the LGBTQ+ community for their positive message—was accused of sexual assault by several women (Cills, 2017).

These accusations followed movements started with hashtags on Twitter, such as #MeToo and #TimesUp which tried to shift the power of women in conversations about sexism. The results could also be seen in a mainstream context when the red carpets of the 2018 Grammy Awards and BRIT Awards were filled with musicians—mostly female, but also male—wearing white roses to support the victims who have come out with the stories of being sexually abused or harassed by prominent men in the music and entertainment industries (Coscarelli, 2018; Street, 2018).

The necessity women felt of having their voices heard is directly related to how the music industry has historically represented them. In September 2018, Paramore, an alternative/pop punk group that played Warped Tour in its early days, announced they would not perform their breakout song “Misery Business” due to its sexist lyrics, specifically the line “Once a whore, you are nothing more” (Aswad, 2018). Frontwoman Hayley Williams addressed the song for the first time in a blog post, explaining she wrote the song at 17 and had not related to it in a long time (Williams, 2015). The post was a response to criticism Williams faced by calling herself a feminist (De Freitas, 2017).

Additionally, there is a lack of female voices in the alternative music community. In the past five years, media outlets have been analyzing the lineups of major North American and European festivals to find out that, regardless of the genre of music, there is a gender imbalance of performers (Spiegel, Sherman & Ritter, 2013; Stevens & Sedghi, 2015). In the United States, the percentage of all-male performers at festivals range from 66 to 93 percent, even though 51 percent of attendees are women (Vagianos & Scheller, 2016). Alternative music festivals are just as much part of the problem as pop or dance music events. On the first announcement of British festivals Reading & Leeds’s 2017 lineup, only one woman was listed in a group of 11 acts and 57 performers (O’Connor, 2017).

Lack of representation is a familiar problem on the Vans Warped Tour, which has been called a “boys club” (Powers, 2017; Seling, 2014). Alongside the lack of female performers on the tour, other complaints come from the way the tour, participating musicians and crowd members treat and ignore women, both fans and performers. Plus, many female musicians and reporters have used their platforms to criticize the way the tour represents women and handles

sexist incidents. This need to come forward and tell stories seems to stem from a problem in the way the Vans Warped Tour and the community around it portray women.

Taking that into consideration this thesis will look at representations of women on traveling festival, considering topics such as power, gender inequality, and sexism when looking into advertisements, social media posts, media articles, the festival's website, promotions, sponsors, lineups, and the history of Warped Tour.

### **Basic Assumptions of Study**

#### **Definition of Terms**

**Alternative Music.** Alternative music is often defined in opposition to popular or mainstream music, not relating to a specific genre. Instead, it “implies nonconformity, creativity, and freedom of expression, without concern for (the musicians’) music reaching out or even catering to a particular group of listeners” (Loh, 2014, p. 346) and includes several genres and subgenres, from indie rock to death metal. Alternative rock specifically “traces its descent from punk therefore defined as much by a cultural stance of opposition to the corporate institutions of mainstream rock as by stylistic particularities” (Clawson, 1999, p. 193).

However, the most distinctive characteristic of alternative music is the unique way in which musicians and fans engage in music scenes. It “offers those who engage in a certain set of social practices—practices of consumption, of production, of interaction—a sense of community” and its producers and consumers are “conscious of belonging to a subculture” (Kruse, 1993, p. 37). These music scenes function as a cultural resource that enables fans to create collective expressions of identity (Skelchy, 2017, p. 9).

**Empowerment.** According to Farrugia (2004), “third wave feminism focuses on the empowerment of the individual, the success of which depends in part upon the individual’s

capacity to succeed” (p. 17). In this thesis, empowerment considers moments in which women appropriate “the objects, spaces, and aesthetics of a culture generally dominated and determined by men and male issues” (Garrison, 2000, p. 158).

**Feminism.** In a third-wave perspective, it is “the struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all of our lives” (hooks, 1984, p. 26).

**Objectification.** Conceptually, objectification, and more specifically sexual objectification, is a means of oppressing women. These interactions are unethical and are not necessarily “the mistaking of persons for things, but the failure to recognize the embodied other as radically distinct from the self” (Cahill, 2011, p. xi). The idea is not vilifying sexuality itself but questioning interactions that are degrading.

**Sexism.** This study will follow Matzner’s (2007) definition of sexism as cultural, societal, institutional, and individual “beliefs and behaviors that privilege men over women” (p. 1). In a sexist context, “there is an unequal distribution of wealth, income, power, respect, and other social resources throughout society between men and women” (p. 1).

## **Cultural Studies**

This thesis will take a cultural studies approach (e.g. Carey, 2009; Hall, 1992), considering communication as a symbolic process which produces, maintains, repairs, and transforms reality. In this study, I will try to understand how the alternative music community—including musicians, fans, and media professionals—represent women. According to Hall (2013), meanings arise from the way we

represent something, “the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotion we associate with them, the values we place on them” (p. xxii).

Media representations of women in alternative music is not an isolated phenomenon unrelated to how culture constructs women. Rather, this thesis will consider larger issues of power and gender in contemporary society to then understand representations of women in alternative music.

My goal is to understand the context in which women are represented, including the medium and context in which it is happening (the alternative music scene). Plus, representational practices operate in concrete historical situations (Hall, 2013), so it is important not only to make sense of how women have been represented in alternative music historically, but also the current social and cultural context in which the messages are shared, in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of this representation. This work cannot comprise all representations of women in the alternative music scene, so I am focusing on the Vans Warped Tour as a part of this community.

My thesis is connected to the goal of cultural studies: To examine culture to understand “the changing ways of life of societies and groups and the networks of meanings that individuals and groups use to make sense of and to communicate with one another” (Hall, 1992, p. 10). Cultural studies reflects on the shifting nature of society and culture, addressing the most “central, urgent, and disturbing questions” (Hall, 1992, p. 11).

To analyze representations of women in alternative music, the theoretical framework that will guide the study is Third-wave feminism.

### **Third Wave Feminist Theories**

In a patriarchal society, “women are denied equal access to the world of public concerns as well as of cultural representation” (Gamble, 1999, p. vii). In general terms, feminism can be described as a movement to change the fact that women are treated inequitably in society because of their gender. Its early stages can be traced to England between 1550 and 1700. Then, feminism and its attempts against patriarchy were focused on fighting power relations in which the interests of women were subordinated to those of men (Hogdson-Wright, 1999).

Modern feminism and first wave feminism can be traced to the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792. During this time, feminism was a response to “specific difficulties individual women encountered in their lives” (Sanders, 1999, p. 16). Mostly a middle-class movement, first wave feminism was concerned with the way society constructed femininity and the education of young girls. Marriage was another important issue, which led to some victories, including the possibility of separated mothers gaining custody of their children, and the 1870 Act, which allowed married women to keep their earnings and inherit property. The most important reform of this wave was women’s suffrage. Although it would spread through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, suffragist movements demanding women be able to vote began during the 1830s (Sanders, 1999).

Second wave feminism, which can be traced to the 1960s and 1970s, started focusing less on equal rights and more on women’s liberation (Hollows and Moseley, 2006; Thornham, 1999). It was an inherently revolutionary and political movement in the sense that it considered the personal as political because the male power exists in personal spheres such as marriage and sexual practices. “Feminism, then, sought to voice (in Friedan’s terms, to *name*) women’s

immediate and subjective experience and to formulate a political agenda and vision” (Thornham, 1999, p. 31). Second wave feminism is responsible for taking feminism to the academy, with the growing popularity of feminist theoretical writing inspired by Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* published in 1949. Other political concerns of this wave include a change of women’s position in the work place with demands of equal pay; plus, equal education and opportunity, 24-hour nurseries, as well as access to contraception and abortion were among the demands (Thornham, 1999).

Historically, the beginnings of third wave feminism can be traced to the 1980s, with the publication of *The Third Wave: Feminist Perspectives on Racism*, written by Jacqui Alexander, Lisa Albrecht, and Mab Segrest. The anthology, published alongside “Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press,” is the first mention of the term third wave and “promised a conceptualisation of the third wave centered around the challenges by women-of-colour feminists to the racial biases of second-wave feminism” (Gillis, Howie & Munford, 2007, p. xxii). Although the wave approach is not generational, Baumgardner and Richards (2000) consider third wavers as women raised in the aftermath of the women’s liberation movement in the seventies, while Heywood and Drake (1997) mention their birth dates as falling between 1963 and 1974.

Third-wave feminism also started as a reaction to postfeminism and second-wave feminism thinking. The first is considered a conservative movement because it “implicitly suggested that feminism’s goals had been achieved and activism was no longer necessary” (Lotz, 2007 p. 76), something third-wavers disagree with. Nevertheless, they “find the notion of victimhood problematic, although in different ways and with different solutions” (Citron, 2004, p. 51).

On the other hand, criticism towards the second wave focused on how its approach flattened out differences and ignored the diversity of women's experiences to look at culture as political with "images, meanings, representation working to define and control women" (Thornham, 1999, p. 38). While second-wave theories looked at feminism as being outside of and in opposition to popular culture because of its status as a site for reproducing gender inequalities (Hollows and Moseley, 2006, p. 3), third-wave embraces it.

Third wave feminism "contains elements of second wave critique of beauty, culture, sexual abuse, and power structures while it also acknowledges and makes use of the pleasure, danger and defining power of these structures" (Heywood and Drake, 1997, p. 3). Therefore, the goal of third wave feminism can be described as "the development of modes of thinking that can come to terms with the multiple, constantly shifting bases of oppression in relation to the multiple, interpenetrating axes of identity" (p. 3). Third-wave feminism theories draw from elements of second-wave feminism to address the experience of women as individual and fragmented selves (Reitsamer, 2012). Third wave feminists, on the other hand, follow movements started by women of color and U.S. third world feminists to embrace multiculturalism, realizing "no account of oppression is true for all women in all the situations all of the time" (Gamble, 1999, p. 52).

Theories of third-wave feminism look at culture, and popular culture, as a means towards the fight for gender justice and "positive media representations of women and feminism," relying on media outlets "to promote politics and issues of representation" (D'Enbeau, 2011, p. 56).

In third-wave feminism, popular culture is a natural site of identity formation and empowerment, providing an abundant storehouse of images and narratives valuable less

as a means of representing reality than as motifs available for contesting, rewriting, recoding. (Karlyn, 2006, p. 62)

Influenced by post-structuralist notions of identity and subjectivity, this movement takes a post-modernist orientation towards art and culture and engages with the pleasures of consumer culture (Karlyn, 2006).

### **Literature Review**

This literature review begins addressing representations of women in music and in the music industry, including lyrics, music videos and behavior of fans, musicians, and the media. Changes happened over the years, with more women fighting misogynistic portrayals or calling out harassment; however, there are still numerous instances of sexist representations. Although the focus is on alternative music, other genres are discussed in order to give a more comprehensive perspective of how females are portrayed in the music industry. One of the specific issues is lack of representation, which is discussed in more detail in the second part of the literature review. The music industry in general is still male-dominated and does not open a lot of space for women to share their perspective. Nevertheless, women-centric movements, which are strongly related to feminist movements, seek to create more space, and give a voice to women performers. Thus, the third part of the literature review focuses on these movements, with special attention to riot grrrl and its effects within the punk community. Lastly, I focus on subcultures and festivals, both of which are considered liberal spaces but continue to borrow from patriarchal structures.

When women come forward to expose acts of sexist or misogynistic behavior in the music industry, they are not only telling the story of a specific incident, but also drawing public attention to the way the music industry represents women. Writing about female performers from

the indie rock community who have called out misogyny, sexism and harassment in music, Coleman (2017) notes that their statements “can be implicitly condoned when the music industry overlooks, ignores, or normalizes sexual harassment in the workplace” (p. 121). The fact that audience members send sexually explicit messages to female musicians and music industry workers sexually harass them or make gender-based evaluations of their performance is connected to how they are represented by the music industry. Sexist portrayals of women in music and in the media contribute to misogynistic behavior.

Much is said about how rap and hip-hop treat women as sex objects in lyrics and music videos; however, rock, and alternative music are not as easily related to acts of sexism. In a comparison between alternative, rap, hip-hop, rock, and dance music, the former was one of the genres that showed fewer sexist themes (Neff, 2014). The songs were analyzed according to if they portrayed women in traditional gender roles, if they portrayed women as inferior to men, if they portrayed women as objects, if they portrayed women as stereotypes, and if they portrayed violence against women. Objectification was found in an analysis of the top ten alternative songs for 2013. However, other issues could have been present in the tracks, such as racism, homophobia, and more.

Likewise, studies about music videos found there is a traditional depiction of gender roles and women are oftentimes portrayed in ways that reflect early media stereotypes. This is true for rock, pop, and alternative music. Although research revealed an evolution in how women were portrayed over the years, later music videos still have conflicting representations of women, using them as props for male pleasure at the same time as showing them as independent, empowered women (Alexander, 1999). Nevertheless, in many genres, female artists have been delivering a growing amount of postfeminist portrayals in music videos (Araña, 2012).

The problem with sexism in music is not only in lyrical and video content, but it is also a question of lack of representation. The participation of women in music has been historically erased, which can be explained in part by the position women hold in popular music, being associated with “low-brow” culture and genres such as pop (Bannister, 2006; Strong, 2011). Pop music is usually associated with femininity (Davies, 2001; Neff, 2014; Schaap & Berkers, 2013) and thought of as female-oriented with many singers promoting messages of empowerment.

Furthermore, the music industry is still a male-dominated field—from record label heads to music journalists— and, outside of female-centric movements, the feminine perspective is still lacking. Even when a segment considered inclusive is in the center of discussion, such as alternative music, subcultures do not generally welcome women, neither as artists nor as fans (Davies, 2001).

In fields dominated by men, such as electronic and dance music and extreme metal, female musicians have searched for ways to get their work noticed and escape gender-biased evaluations and tokenism. Much like their pop and rock counterparts, these artists tried to change how they were represented by taking control of their narrative and creating their own portrayals instead of having men do it (Farrugia, 2004a; Madden, 2016; Schaap & Berkers, 2013). They used their own status as part of popular culture to work towards gender justice in their scenes.

For example, in the late 1990s, a listserv named Sisterdjs was created to help and encourage female DJs, which “positively impacts the identity construction of women DJs by drawing attention to the ways that women are discursively positioned at the intersections of music, technology, and culture” (Farrugia, 2004b, p. 236). In extreme metal scenes, on the other hand, women use online platforms to create a space for them to be evaluated as musicians, not as women. In comparing comments on performance videos on YouTube, the authors found extreme

metal fans were as likely to criticize or compliment men and women on their abilities. Women, however, were still subjected to more technical advice, as well as gender-biased evaluations and romantic overtures (Schaap & Berkers, 2013).

Feminist movements have been important for women in music over the years for different reasons. First, it has inspired and encouraged women's participation in music, including in traditional male genres such as rock (Berkers, 2012). Plus, feminist music is an important step in deconstructing paradigms and building a different space. "The new system (by way of feminist music) of challenging patriarchal discourse is innovative and empowers women, apart from women being defined by men" (Murray, 2005, p. 26). Women have also used music as part of feminist activism over the years, from movements such as Riot Grrrl to women's music festival events such as Lilith Fair and the National Women's Music Festival (Huber, 2010).

During the 1990s, Lilith Fair festival and the riot grrrl movement sought to connect the artistic and political through feminism and music (Huber, 2010). Likewise, the National Women's Music Festival (NWMF) was one of many annual events that bring women together to socialize and discuss issues, using music as the background in the same decade (Staggenborg, Eder, & Sudderth, 1993).

Created in 1996 by musicians Sarah McLachlan and Paula Cole after facing resistance to going on tour together, and feeling frustrated by how women musicians' tours were promoted, Lilith Fair was a women-led touring music festival, which took place in North America in the late 1990s. For three summers—1997, 1998, and 1999—the traveling festival featured only "women solo-artists and women-led bands, many of whom are prominent musicians (e.g., Sheryl Crow) who were frustrated with the ways women were being treated by the corporate music community (Huber, 2010).

Riot grrrl is extremely important to this work not only because it stemmed from the punk and grunge scenes, but also due to its ties to third wave feminism. The movement, which “combines feminist consciousness and punk aesthetics, politics, and style” (Garrison, 2000, p. 142) started because women felt left out from these scenes, not being allowed to participate in conversations about music and politics. “When attempting to become involved with the punk movement at the local level, these women felt as though the men leading the punk movement allowed them little voice” (Huber, 2010, p. 68). In reaction to that, they started creating their own music and art, as well as do gatherings where men were not allowed, to discuss issues they saw and make their voices be heard. “Riot grrrl is an alternative subculture built around opposition to presuppositions that young (usually white) U.S. women are too preoccupied with themselves and boys to be interested in being political, creative, and loud” (Garrison, 2000, p. 143).

The participants’ creations, including music and fanzines, focused on female empowerment, discussing their experiences growing up with imposed gender roles, as well as the lack of participation of females in punk rock scenes. Bands such as Bikini Kill also promoted “a renegotiation of the coveted space in front of the stage” (Farrugia, 2004b, p. 13). Instead of letting males occupy that space with moshing or other types of violent behavior, riot grrrl acts encouraged women to step towards the front of the stage, without fear of being hurt or harassed. Farrugia (2004b) notes that, even though this change was important, it did not go as far as to question the phallogentric nature of rock music or break down the binary gender norms. The music is “hard, fast, and loud, perpetuating the idea that women in rock must follow the genres masculine conventions. In other words, it does little to break down and deconstruct the binary of masculinity and femininity” (p. 14).

The riot grrrl movement is also considered an example of third-wave feminism (Farrugia, 2004b; Garrison, 2000; Reitsamer, 2012). One reason for that is how they rejected concepts from the second wave movement to focus on a more individualistic discourse that would encompass different experiences. Furthermore, riot grrrl embraced new media technologies for networking, organizing events, producing content, sharing experiences, and political activism—a use considered as a defining feature of the third wave (Garrison, 2000; Reitsamer, 2002). However, riot grrrl had issues with media representations and inaccurate portrayals of the women involved, which caused leaders to stop doing interviews and contributed to the depoliticization and fracturing of the movement (Huber, 2010). Despite riot grrrl's legacy and the work of other female musicians in the alternative and punk scenes over the years, they are still male-dominated—perhaps even more than in the 1970s and 1980s.

It is interesting to note that, although during the formative years of punk, the percentage of individual female musicians was low, the scenes were considered supportive and the performers were taken as seriously as their male counterparts (Berkers, 2012).

However, as punk moved into the suburbs, it transitioned to hardcore, which is a style of music “fueled by the young male angst of the surfer-skater scene and characterized by pounding drums, frenzied guitar, and testosterone-laden lyrics” (Klein, 1997, p. 210). This male territory, which is tolerant of any men's actions and places them on the highest level of the public sphere, excludes women or invites them to occupy a supplementary place. Not musicians, but fans and girlfriends.

Punk and hardcore are not the only male-dominated scenes. Studies indicate links between maleness, music, and authenticity have existed in different subcultures created over the years (Farrugia, 2004b). Plus, when women and girls are discussed as part of subcultures, they

are usually described in a stereotypical image or marginally present. The lack of female representation in subcultures can be traced to historical reasons. The beginnings of music subcultures can be traced to the 1950s, when women's wages were lower and female-centric magazines, which directed girls "to focus on the home and marriage as opposed to hanging out in the streets and participating in authentic subcultural activities. (Farrugia, 2004b, p. 7). It was not until the 1960s, when mod culture became popular in England, that subcultures started to allow more female participation.

This focus on subcultures as a boys' place is also related to ideas of resistance and delinquency connected to early subculture studies. Farrugia (2004b) notes that youth subcultures, many of which revolve around specific musical genres, are often written about as being heavily rooted in rebellion. Because these subcultures have been historically associated with boys, written and mass mediated accounts continue to associate rebellion and music that lies outside of the mainstream with men and maleness (p. 8).

In addition to it, females are not only present in subcultures in fewer numbers, but their participation is also many times overlooked. In music scenes specifically, they end up needing to look for spaces which are not as contested by men, usually ones that are not on the front, or as visible to the public (Farrugia, 2004b).

The same can be said for festivals. Pielichaty (2015) argues that, although festival environments are seen as an opportunity for liberation, they usually work as a microcosm of how society is shaped and structured. Therefore, not only men and women have distinct roles in this specific environment, festival practices also copy power relations. "It appears that the traditional view of male hegemony features heavily within festival spaces. It is argued that men seek to

usurp the performance of femininity in a way which has the simultaneous effect of marginalising women” (p. 243).

Music festivals are particularly interesting to understand how gender is negotiated inside of specific scenes because they are, at the same time, local, translocal and virtual (Cummings, 2007). The local aspect derives from festivals occupying a specific geographic space. Music scenes become translocal when participants from different local scenes, including musicians, producers, and fans, come together to exchange experiences (Reitsamer, 2012), which happens in festivals. Lastly, the virtual aspect comes from festivals being advertised and reported on a number of media, including the internet (Cummings, 2007).

As with other festivals, the Vans Warped Tour has dealt with questions about female representation throughout the years. One reoccurring theme of criticism was the lack of bands with female members on the festival lineup over the years. Both scene participants and reporters also questioned the values it associates with women, especially considering the way the tour handled some cases of sexual misconduct. Nevertheless, the Warped Tour has also been praised by actions such as the creation of the Shiragirl Stage, which showcased female artists and women-led bands, and the participation of feminist punk band War On Women and their Safer Scenes organization. Those two examples indicate that, as was the case with movements such as riot grrrl, women are allowed spaces within the scene.

This thesis considers popular culture as place of identity formation and empowerment, as proposed by Karlyn (2006), as well as the images and narratives the Vans Warped Tour is presenting to the young women and men who attend the tour and are part of the alternative music community. To understand representations of women in the alternative music community,

focusing on the Vans Warped Tour as a microcosm of the alternative scene, this study aims to answer the following research question:

RQ: How are women represented in the Vans Warped Tour?

### **Methodology**

To answer the questions about how the alternative music community in general and, more specifically, the Vans Warped Tour represent women, grounded theory will inform the analysis thesis. Grounded theory is a qualitative research method that derives from data which is gathered and analyzed comprehensively during the research process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Morrison, et al. (2012) explain that, in qualitative research, data collection and tentative analysis are done simultaneously, and the researcher must work inductively by attempting to identify and classify the objects of study by their distinguishing characteristics, as well as deductively by comparing new information to what already has been defined.

The dataset of this research comprises representations of women in alternative music, looking specifically at the Vans Warped Tour. I reviewed advertisements, social media posts, media articles, the festival's website, promotions, sponsors, lineups, the history of Warped Tour, and a mini documentary series about the Vans Warped Tour to find texts that helped me understand how women are represented in the tour. The selection was made due to the availability of the texts online, so the largest number of texts are social media texts from more recent years and latest editions of the tour. However, some texts are media articles that have been published online years prior and are still available or are new articles that refer to earlier editions of the Vans Warped Tour.

I started collecting the data for this thesis during the Fall 2017 semester. The preliminary topic of the study was sexism in the alternative music community, and some of the incidents I

found during that period happened during the Vans Warped Tour. After the proposal defense and discussions with the committee chair, I narrowed down the scope of the analysis to look at representations of women in alternative music, specifically in the Vans Warped Tour. Starting June 2018, I collected data from the festival’s website and social media channels and looked for media articles about the tour using the keywords “Warped Tour” and “Women.” Due to time and space restraints, I selected ten texts.

Table 1

*Listing of Texts*

<b>Text number</b>	<b>Text description</b>
1	Keep A Breast Foundation, a non-profit organization that works raising awareness about breast cancer and has been on the tour since 2000.
2	Rock For Life, an anti-abortion organization that was allowed on the tour as a vendor in 2016 and 2017.
3	Participation of War On Women and their project Safer Scenes on the 2017 Warped tour.
4	Complaints about the lack of female musicians on the tour.
5	Shiragirl Stage, an all-female stage, which was part of the traveling festival in 2004, 2005, 2006, 2014, and the first three dates of 2018.
6	Feeling of belonging by women who are part of the tour.
7	The language The Dickies’ frontman Leonard Graves Phillips used to yell at a female crowd member who held a sign saying, “Punk should not be predatory!” in the audience.

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- 8 Rock band Slaves' removal from the Vans Warped Tour lineup after playing two shows because singer Jonny Craig sexually harassed a female merchandise salesperson who was working with the band.
  - 9 Jake McElfresh, who performed as Front Porch Step, removal from the 2015 Warped Tour lineup after several underage girls came shared stories about being in inappropriate relationships with him and/or claimed they exchanged explicit photos and messages with him but was then allowed to play one date as part of his recovery process.
  - 10 The large number of women working behind the scenes at the Vans Warped Tour.
  - 11 Female musicians reporting harassment by other musicians, industry workers, and crowd members.
- 

My analysis follows a two-part data analysis of open and axial coding (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). As the first step, open coding allows the researcher to open the text to understand the ideas in it, which means breaking down the data in small parts to exhaustively examine it in search for similarities and differences (Strauss & Corbin 1998). During this examination, information can be separated into categories that will group similar texts.

To begin, I arranged the texts into themes categories based on third wave feminism theories. Following an open coding process, I began with multiple readings of the texts, looking for words and images the Vans Warped Tour produce about women, the stories the Vans Warped Tour tells about women and the emotions the Vans Warped Tour associates with women. Based on my initial readings and third wave feminist theories, I created seven categories: Women's health, gender inequality, women of color, LGBTQ, power, bodily autonomy, and sexism. Then, I set

the texts under the corresponding categories. None of the texts corresponded to LGBTQ and women of color; therefore, I discarded these categories.

Table 2

*Initial stage of analysis*

<b>Women's health</b>	<b>Gender inequality</b>	<b>Power</b>	<b>Bodily autonomy</b>	<b>Sexism</b>
Keep a Breast Foundation	Lack of female bands	Shiragirl Stage	Rock For Life (pro-life non-profit)	Verbal abuse (The Dickies)
		War on Women and Safer scenes		Sexual harassment (Jonny Craig)
		Feeling protected/the good side of being one of the few women		Sexual misconduct (Front Porch Step)
		Number of women behind the scenes		Harassment

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The second step, axial coding, can be described as “the act of relating categories to subcategories along the lines of their properties and dimensions” (Strauss & Corbin, p. 124). In

other words, this second step helps delineate how the categories from the first step are linked to each other, as well as what differentiates them.

During this step, I looked for similarities and differences between how discourses about women are constructed and presented, setting the grounds for the analysis. The first action was describing the texts in detail for a comprehensive idea of what they mean, the stories they told, if any sexist incidents happened, and how the portrayals were created. Subsequently, I coded the categories by color to determine themes, as well as if the portrayals were positive, negative, or neutral representations. I chose the colors, as well as the type of representations, based on the words and emotions women were associated with, asking the question “What does this text say about how women are represented in the Vans Warped Tour?” The concepts of objectification, empowerment, and sexism helped with answering the question, as well.

Based on the answers, I dismembered and rebuilt the initial categories according to information from the analysis to better explain how the Vans Warped Tour represents women in order to answer the research question. The ten texts fit into four themes: women’s bodies, gender inequality, empowerment, and sexism.

The texts I analyzed answer the research question by giving insight into how the Vans Warped Tour talks about women, how the Vans Warped Tour responds to women, how the Vans Warped Tour objectifies women, and how the Vans Warped Tour empowers women. Along with the research question, another query that I tried to answer as I analyzed the data was:

### **Findings**

Considering the four themes—women’s bodies, gender inequality, empowerment, and sexism—the findings indicate that there are at least four ways in which the Warped Tour represents. First, the tour restricts women’s bodily autonomy. Second, the tour presents gender

inequality. Third, the tour opens space for empowerment. Fourth, the tour allows for sexist incidents.

The representations, however, are not all positive or negative. There are tensions and contradictory portrayals within each of the themes and even the texts themselves. The findings indicate that the festival upholds societal norms by giving women a diminished status, maintaining gender role stereotypes, restricting women's bodily autonomy, and allowing objectification. Although the tour allows efforts to change the participation of women in the tour, they do not come from within and start as a response to complaints made by women who are part of the tour or the community surrounding it.

### **Warped Tour restricts women's bodily autonomy**

I joined the preliminary categories women's health and bodily autonomy together into one theme: Women's bodies. This is represented by two texts: Keep A Breast Foundation, a non-profit organization that works raising awareness about breast cancer and focuses on educating young people about prevention and early detection, and Rock For Life, a Virginia-based anti-abortion organization subsidiary of Students for Life. Even though both organizations reach out to women and men, they work with issues that are mostly related to women, indicating the Vans Warped Tour opens space for conversations about women's bodies. However, these discussions are not always complete, excluding the people affected or not opening space for varying points of view.

Keep A Breast started in 2000, which is also the first year it participated on the Vans Warped Tour as a vendor. Warped Tour creator Kevin Lyman, whose mother died of breast cancer, personally invited Keep A Breast founder Shaney Jo Darden to be on the tour. The organization, which became a foundation in 2005, has been on every tour from 2000 to 2018, and is one of the

few non-profits advertised on the festival's website. On the Warped Tour, Keep A Breast works by reaching out to attendees about awareness, prevention and asks concert-goers, as well as musicians to tell their own stories related to the disease. Keep A Breast advertises on the Vans Warped Tour website and social media platforms, informing followers of its existence, but also promoting its work, search for volunteers during the tour, and more.

Keep A Breast's videos on YouTube demonstrate that some bands on the tour choose to support a female-centric organization. However, that also leads to another issue: On Warped Tour, Keep A Breast discusses breast cancer in the third person. Most of the attendees are younger and most of the musicians are male, so they share stories about family members. Their tour videos and advertisements feature male band members sharing (others') experiences and doing breast casts to raise awareness. For example, the first video available on Keep A Breast's YouTube channel, posted in 2005, shows Fall Out Boy, Valient Thorr, and MxPx—three bands with all male members—teaching breast self-examination. The concern with women's health exists, but it lacks voices of people who are directly affected.

The second text focused on women's bodies is Rock For Life. The non-profit's mission is "promoting human rights for all people, born and preborn, by engaging the culture through music, education and action." Rock For Life's logo is a fetus playing guitar and, among its merchandising is an "All Lives Matter" t-shirt. Here, the organization uses the response to #BlackLivesMatter to promote its pro-life agenda. However, while Black Lives Matter started as an online movement against police brutality and social justice activism, #AllLivesMatter engaged in racism by trying to universalize and simplify the issue (Carney, 2016). By associating its name with All Lives Matter to promote their views, Rock For Life stepped into a racial issue that is not related to their message.

On social media, specifically Twitter, Rock For Life is vocal about defunding Planned Parenthood. On its website, there are lists of "bands who support life" and "bands who advocate for abortion," as well as stories of young people who changed their minds about abortion after discussing the issue with a Rock For Life volunteer. Most of the stories, as well as the pictures on the website, are of women. In 2016, Rock For Life participated on the Vans Warped Tour for the first time as a vendor, which caused controversy among attendees, reporters and bands who were participating or had been involved with the travelling festival (Gelfand, 2016; Hugar, 2016). One of the complaints was that the non-profit was not listed on the tour's website, which Lyman explained that the Vans Warped Tour does not list or promote organizations which are not sponsors on their website (Williams, 2017). Despite the controversy, Rock For Life was back on the 2017 edition of the festival. Facing backlash once again, Lyman defended its presence using two main arguments: He wants the tour to allow varying opinions, and he likes the fact that Rock For Life promotes adoption, a cause dear to his heart, since he was adopted (Cush, 2017). Nevertheless, in both instances, Lyman stressed his personal pro-choice views and advocacy work and praised the organization for not trying to attract kids to their booth, waiting for the ones who walk up to them instead.

Due to its ties to punk and skate culture, Warped Tour is expected to be an event that attracts mostly liberal-minded people, which is one of the reasons why Rock For Life's presence caused controversy. Warped Tour, then, is a liberal space in the way it is accepting of anyone regardless of their opinions or background; however, it is not apolitical. Furthermore, by allowing the presence of a pro-life organization without a pro-choice counterpart, the tour is taking a stand in favor of Rock For Life's views, implying it can discuss female bodily autonomy with its young attendees, promoting certain beliefs.

### **Warped Tour gives women a diminished status**

There are two texts about the theme of gender inequality on Warped Tour: On the one hand, there is a lack of female performers. On the other hand, all behind the scenes aspects of the tour are run by women. These two conflicting realities also affect female musicians' feelings as part of the traveling festival, with many noting Warped Tour creates a safe environment for them. The large number of women working in production is important but does not prevent the tour from criticism about gender inequality because they are behind the scenes. The faces the alternative music community associate with Warped Tour are founder Kevin Lyman and the performers. Since the latter group is composed of mostly males, attendees experience the tour as a space for men.

The first text is the gender imbalance of performers on the Vans Warped Tour. Seven percent of the bands that played the last cross-country edition of the tour in 2018 had women members (Knopper, 2018), a number lower than the 19 percent average of other American festivals in the same year. The low female participation is not a new: In 2014, 24 acts included at least one female member, and women made up six percent of the tour (Seling, 2014). Female musicians who have participated in the tour express mixed feelings about these figures. While some complain about how little female participation there is, others point out the lack of female representation in festivals across the board and adding the importance of considering other circumstances, including the low number of bands with female members that apply to be on the tour, which is around 10 percent (Knopper, 2018). However, it is important to point out Lyman disagrees there is a lack of women and believes it is fine having only six percent of women performers in a given year because most people in bands are male (Seling, 2014). Although Warped Tour is not alone in booking fewer female than male performers, Lyman's response, and

the lack of change throughout the years, suggests that the gender imbalance is not something the tour worked to fix despite complaints from attendees and media professionals.

Nevertheless, the small number of female performers is not always related to feelings of not being welcome or not belonging in the tour. Many felt the opposite, describing the tour as a welcoming environment for females and noting that being outnumbered means some men felt a need to protect them (Knopper, 2018). Moreover, Ash Costello of New Years Day explains that the tour has had meetings about how to treat women who are on it. “Warped has regular meetings and they did one a couple of weeks ago on how to treat women on the tour to make sure everyone is treated equally” (Sherman, 2015b). Thus, women who break out and can be part of the tour are not excluded or seen as inferior, although some felt the need to explain that there are right and wrong ways to treat women.

Conversely, gender imbalance does not seem to be a problem behind the scenes at the Vans Warped Tour. The large number of women working behind the scenes at the tour is the second text. According to Lynn Gunn, vocalist of alternative trio PVRIS who have played Warped Tour, 95 percent of the workers at Warped Tour are women, including production, catering, and paramedics (Sherman, 2015b), a sentiment echoed by Vibe Up Magazine publisher Chayenne Simmons, who argues women do not have to be on stage to be present at a festival such as Vans Warped Tour (Beyond The Music, 2018). Likewise, Julie Grant, who works as an operation manager at 4Fini, the company that runs Warped Tour, sees the festival environment as welcoming to women (Iversen, 2017), noting she had female mentors and worked alongside many other women.

## **Warped Tour opens space for women's empowerment**

Two texts suggest ideas or attitudes that promote empowerment: The Shiragirl Stage and the participation of War on Women and Safer Scenes on the 2017 tour. The first one, an all-women stage that functioned as an extra stage on select dates of the traveling festival, indicates there is a space for female performers on Warped Tour. These texts suggest that there is a space for women to promote empowerment and discuss feminist issues on the tour.

One person used the gender imbalance some people noticed at Warped Tour to make a difference. Singer and performer Shira, artistically known as Shiragirl, approached Lyman in 2004 with the idea of creating an all-girl stage on the tour. The musician was turned down by the founder but showed up on the tour with a pink RV and created the stage anyway (Seling, 2014). The Shiragirl stage became official in 2005 and, although it was not present at every Warped Tour since, it participated in 2006, 2014, and during the first three dates of 2015 (Kaufman, 2018). According to Shira, having a separate stage for women performers is not ideal, but it is all she could do to fight for the women. The musician also explains she hears from young girls who thought they could not be in a band that, but after seeing the bands on the Shiragirl Stage, they want to pursue a career as musicians (Seling, 2014). The Shiragirl Stage example indicates that there is space and power for women on Warped Tour, but the effort to make changes comes from outside.

Nevertheless, the tour creates opportunities for people who discuss women's issues to be part of the tour. One example is when feminist punk band War On Women participated in the festival in 2017. The band brought Safer Scenes on the road with it, a tent to teach attendees about bystander intervention and sexual assault prevention. Frontwoman Shawna Potter also wrote blogs for Noisey during the tour, sharing her experiences and discussing microaggressions

she suffered, harassment cases she witnessed and discussing the overall feeling of participating in the traveling festival. On her last blog, Potter asked different musicians why they played Warped Tour—mostly women—and ended up with an explanation why War On Women did it. This is an example of women being given a voice at Warped Tour. The tour does not only book bands with female members to prove they exist and are playing the festival, but by booking War On Women and letting them go on the road with Safer Scenes, it demonstrated interest in listening to what women have to say.

### **Warped Tour allows sexist incidents**

Although many women praise the Vans Warped Tour's inclusivity, some women performers, crew members, and attendees still suffer with harassment from other musicians and industry workers, but mostly from crowd members. Some describe being hit on during meet and greets (Knopper, 2018; Sherman, 2014), others point out pressure to party harder and accompany the men, as well as point out instances they noticed male performers being sexist towards female audience members. However, the behavior come from Warped Tour participants and not from its organizers. Mariel Loveland, frontwoman of pop punk outfits Candy Hearts and Best Ex, who was assaulted on Warped Tour, describes the people who worked for her as being unsupportive, but Lyman as caring. (Knopper, 2018).

Three texts describe more specific instances that indicate the Vans Warped Tour tries to support women who complain about harassment and sexism. However, the movement usually happens after something is said or done.

The first one is a video Twitter user @thechubbywubby shared on June 26, 2017. Recorded on Sunday, June 25 during the Denver, Colorado date of the Vans Warped Tour, the clip shows a part of punk band The Dickies' set. Recorded vertically from what it seems like the

photographer pit on the left side of the stage, the video captures The Dickies' frontman Leonard Graves Phillips, who is the only person that can be seen, yelling at someone in the audience. The person he is talking to cannot be seen, but it looks like it is a woman from the language he uses, a fact confirmed by Shawna Potter, the lead vocalist of War On Women. At the start of the video, Phillips is on the right side of the stage, close to the front and the speakers, holding his microphone. He turns around and points to his back, saying: " Kiss it! Kiss it! Kiss it, you bitch! I have fucked farm animals that were prettier than you, you fucking hog." Phillips then turns around and points at the person, continuing his speech. "Are you ready everybody? Blow me! Blow me! Blow me! Blow me! Blow me! Blow me! How does it feel? To get shouted away, you cunt? C.U.N.T. Can you spell? You are a fat cunt. Fuck you!" When Phillips ends the speech, the camera turns around to the audience around where the person he was pointing at supposedly is, quickly going back to the stage, where Phillips is walking towards the center. Throughout Phillips speech, the crowd cheers and applauds, even though they do not repeat his chants of "Blow me!" All the audience members that can be seen in the video are turned towards Phillips and the person he is talking to. Potter (2017b) explained the events that led to Phillips' discourse.

This week, as the long-running punk band The Dickies were doing their usual shock rock performance, in which frontman Leonard Graves Phillips made jokes about things like how much he loves teen girls and how he would love to snort Viagra off your asses and fuck your daughters, a female acquaintance of ours held up a sign in the front of the crowd that read: "Teen girls deserve respect, not gross jokes from disgusting old men! Punk shouldn't be predatory!" What followed was a long, misogynist tirade directed at her from the singer. (Potter, 2017b, para. 1)

According to Lyman, the person who held the sign was a member of the touring party and that The Dickies would not be a part of the Warped Tour anymore from that day on. However, he did not mention that it was the band's last scheduled day on the tour; so, even if the incident had not happened, The Dickies would not be on the road with the Vans Warped Tour that summer anymore.

The second text is rock band Slaves removal from the Vans Warped Tour lineup on July 17, 2015, after playing only two shows because singer Jonny Craig sexually harassed a female merchandise salesperson who was working with the band (Payne, 2015). She reached out to a Warped Tour crew member and told her story, after which the band was asked to leave the tour. After the dismissal, Lyman took two immediate actions. Being aware of Craig's history with drug and alcohol abuse, the Warped Tour founder talked to the musician's mother about the situation and flew her in to talk to her son. Lyman's attitude is interesting to reflect on the role women have on the traveling festival: Caretakers of men. According to this view, Craig's mother—and not a doctor or a counselor—should be responsible for taking care of him, independent of their ages. The next step was he held a town hall meeting, in which other musicians and crew members voted to let or not the band back on the tour if they followed a five-point plan created by Lyman himself, which included Craig issuing a public apology, attending meetings about sexual harassment and bullying, daily meetings with a MusiCares representative, the band participating in a lecture about being enablers and an additional management person joining Slaves' crew. According to Lyman, about 75 percent of attendees voted not to let the band back on tour if Craig was not sober. The Warped Tour prides itself in being a welcoming place and treating all crew members as part of a family. However, this example hints at the treatment being exclusive for performers—especially male performers—,

who are given the possibility of a second chance, despite the consequences of their actions. There is no coverage about what happened to the female crew member who was assaulted by Craig, and if she was given the chance to stay on the tour and work with another band, for example.

The ideas that Warped Tour both listens to women and is open to give people a second chance are at the center of another example. In 2014, a petition was started to remove Jake McElfresh, who performed as Front Porch Step, from the 2015 Warped Tour lineup after several underage girls shared stories about being in inappropriate relationships with him and/or claimed they exchanged explicit photos and messages with him (Coscarelli, 2015; Westcott, 2017). The petition reached was signed by over 12,500, and McElfresh, who was 23 years old at the time, was removed from the tour. Fast forward to the following year's Nashville date of Vans Warped Tour. Without any previous announcements, McElfresh was scheduled to play an acoustic set. The decision to allow the musician a 20-minute set was explained by Lyman as "part of the 8-month therapy program, with his counselors and all his supervisors here" (Seling, 2015, para. 4) and many musicians took to social media to express their concerns with the move. Dan Campbell, frontman of pop punk outfit the Wonder Years, canceled his performance which was supposed to take place on the same stage as McElfresh. Lyman defended his actions saying the musician did not get paid for the appearance and that it was time to move on from the matter because no charges were filed (Seling, 2015). Although Vans Warped Tour is open to listening to women about issues important to them, it ends up focusing on the needs of artists to the detriment of the audience and victims.

## Discussion

In response to the research question about how women are represented in the Vans Warped Tour, the findings cannot be considered overwhelmingly negative or positive because the texts within them convey images that are conflicting or outright contrasting. From the way the Vans Warped Tour opens space with conversations about women's bodies to how it deals with sexist incidents, there are claims to be made about what the tour does that negatively affects representations of women and how it positively portrays them. Nonetheless, I cannot suggest that the representations are neutral either because they have consequences on how the alternative music community portrays and treats women, as well as how women who are part of this community relate to the tour.

This thesis indicates that, although there are initiatives to give them a voice and more space, the traveling festival still upholds societal norms and perpetuates sexist portrayals of women. This happens in four specific ways.

First, the Vans Warped Tour upholds societal norms and perpetuates sexist portrayals in the way it talks *about* women. In many aspects, women are the "other" at the Vans Warped Tour: The performers that are not there or have not applied to be on the tour, the breast cancer survivors, the women who were harassed by musicians or crew members but do not get a say on what will happen to them or if they can continue as part of the tour. The lack of performers is especially notable when considering the alternative music scene, even though there is an argument to be made about how women are at Warped Tour, as part of the crew or as fans. Playing instruments and being onstage is a form of resistance and activism (Klein, 1997; Nehring, 1997). "Whereas some second wave feminists fought for equal access to the workplace, some third wave feminists fought for equal access to the punk stage" (Klein, 1997, p. 215),

which is the case of the artists that played Lilith Fair and participated in riot grrrl in the 1990s. There is a power that comes with being onstage, having a microphone to share your art and your thoughts, and being seen.

Second, Vans Warped Tour upholds societal norms and perpetuates sexist portrayals because it excludes some women. As noted, Vans Warped Tour does not exclude all women, they exist as attendees and behind the scenes, but they are not as welcome as performers. This is not exclusive of this tour, but happens in festivals of different genres, from country to dance, in the United States and Europe (Spiegel, Sherman & Ritter, 2013; Stevens & Sedghi, 2015). Music subcultures have long related masculinity to authenticity and higher culture, whereas femininity is connected to pop and mainstream culture, consequently having a lower credibility status (Bannister, 2006). Nonetheless, there is another issue to note: No texts analyzed discussed the position of women of color and LGBTQ+ women on the Warped Tour, except for the racist “All Lives Matter” t-shirt from Rock For Life. In the second episode of a mini documentary series that explores the different cultures that Warped Tour brings from around the world, there is one mention to the tour not representing just one race. Although there is a likelihood that these are not issues when female representation at the Vans Warped Tour is considered, it is possible that the movement against sexism in the alternative music scene has not yet acknowledged the multiple ways oppression can take form and how different groups experience it in differing ways.

Third, the Vans Warped Tour upholds societal norms and perpetuates sexist portrayals in the way it talks *to* women. It is different and, in some aspects, opposite to the former two. Warped Tour talks to women who are part of its community in a supportive way. It proposes a welcoming environment to females and, if the environment is not welcoming or they suffer in

any way, it is supportive of their needs. Furthermore, there is an effort to listen to women's complaints and try to fix what is wrong. However, that only happens in some cases and, most of the time, an incident needs to happen before the tour recognizes the problem and acts. This resonates with the concepts of both rock music (Murray, 2005) and festivals (Pielichaty, 2015) as spaces that consolidate power relations and gender norms. While festival spaces establish different roles for men and women and perpetuate male hegemony rock "mimics that which society is willing to commodify – with little to no desire to influence political movements since the main goal is one of capitalism" (Murray, 2005, p. 3).

Fourth, Vans Warped Tour upholds societal norms and perpetuates sexist portrayals in the way it allows for women's empowerment. Although the findings did not indicate any actions the traveling festival takes to create positive representations of women from within, it does provide a space for them to engage in the scene and be heard, as allowing the Shiragirl Stage suggests. Additionally, the discourses of War on Women onstage and in the media, as well as their project Safer Scenes teaching attendees about bystander intervention and sexual assault prevention draw from a radical gesture performed by riot grrrl. Using the stage as a place of protest and activism, some riot grrrl bands wrote words such as "slut" on their bodies and created a space in the front of the stage only for women, where they could watch the show without being hit or harassed (Farrugia, 2004b). These performers are also connected to Heywood and Drake's (1997) assessment of music and activism:

Because contemporary rap, rock, and alternative music is produced and consumed primarily by persons in the third wave, music has emerged as a site for activism coalition and community building like no other and has led to activist projects that link gender activism with other interventions. (p. 17)

The findings fit with previous research, which has emphasized the existence of sexist portrayals of women in music. This is true not only in lyrics and in music videos, noting themes such as objectification and traditional depiction of gender roles (Alexander, 1999; Neff, 2014), but also in music scenes or communities (Coleman, 2017). Specifically, many incidents on Vans Warped Tour contribute to the ongoing issue of sexual harassment in the workplace, indicating that the alternative music community mirrors Coleman's (2017) assertions about the indie-rock scene. Sexism extends beyond music as an art form, existing in the community and perpetuated by professionals and fans.

In addition to that, there is an erasure of women from popular music and subcultures (Bannister, 2006; Davies, 2001; Strong, 2011). This has historical roots tied to the beginnings of subcultural movements, which were geared towards men (Bannister, 2006), as well as a pre-conceived notion of what is masculine and feminine music. While women like mainstream music, men have a stronger relation, and contribute more, to what is perceived as serious music (Strong, 2011). So, pop music is related to femininity, while "rock music has historically been constructed as a form of male rebellion against female domesticators and the ideology of romance" (Schaap & Berkers, 2013, p. 104). That is true for rock and other derived genres, such as extreme metal, but also for other subcultural music genres, such as dance, in which women need to find ways to include themselves in the communities, in order not to be seen as tokens or evaluated for their gender (Farrugia, 2004a; Madden, 2016). Even in liberal-leaning scenes, such as punk, who have allowed a space for women, their roles are limited. This means the Vans Warped Tour and the alternative music scene it is part of are not outliers in how they represent women, suggesting even communities that are associated with rebellion and position them as against the establishment mirror certain aspects of the mainstream and the patriarchal society.

Further indication of this are findings about festivals as places to understand how gender is negotiated inside music scenes (Bennett & Peterson, 2004; Cummings, 2007) and as environments that function as a microcosm of society (Pielichaty, 2015). While festivals offer attendees and performers the chance to express themselves freely and renegotiate gender rules, “it is debatable to what extent this self-expression is completely agency-led or rather socially constructed through the festival hierarchies” (p. 240), meaning there is still a heavy male hegemony and a marginalization of women, even if it is performed differently than in society in general.

Nonetheless, many studies suggest that women in fields dominated by men have historically searched for ways to take control of the narrative and change the way they are represented. This is also true for alternative music, as noted by movements such as riot grrrl, which claimed a space for females in alternative scenes, joining music and activism. Feminist music (Murray, 2005), which challenges patriarchal discourse, and postfeminist portrayals of women in music videos (Araña, 2012) indicate an “emergence of new ways of ‘being a woman’.” (p. 242).

Feminist movements were important catalysts of the growth of women participation in music because it “encouraged women to enter traditional male enclaves as such as rock music” (Berkers, 2012, p. 2), which led to events such as Lilith Fair, Ladyfest (Huber, 2010) and the National Women’s Festival (Staggenborg et. al 1993). It is interesting to note that these movements create a space in which female musicians find a way to exist inside community spaces where they were marginalized. Even in alternative music scenes, women have been historically excluded or portrayed by men as inferior or as props. By inserting themselves, they can change the narrative and build their own representations.

However, for contemporary alternative artists and fans, riot grrrl might be the most important movement because it connected music to feminist activism inside the alternative and punk scenes in the 1990s (Garrison, 2000; Farrugia, 2004b; Reitsamer, 2012). Moreover, they “began using the Internet for networking, organizing local music events and producing websites, e-zines and blogs” (Reitsamer, p. 400). They are considered an example of a third-wave feminist movement, not only because of the media riot grrrls used, but also for how they expressed their activism.

Gender, like class, is a vast, multifaceted, layered, complex, and overlapping set of subcultures and objects. This Riot Grrrl movement actively confronts these structures and objects by claiming them: their bodies, music and its objects, information technologies, language, anger and violence, even punk culture. In these acts of resistance and subversion many young women produce critiques that address their own and others’ experiences as women as well as their experiences of race, sexuality, class, and other forms of embodiedness. (Garrison, 2000, pp. 156-157).

Looking at how riot grrrl informed the music scene at the time it started, by giving a voice and a microphone for women to express their complaints, fight harassment and establish a place in the scene is especially interesting when examining the findings from this thesis. Even though the most popular music genres in the Vans Warped Tour are directly derived from the punk and grunge scenes in which the riot grrrl movement started, its legacy does not seem to prevail on the tour. The Vans Warped Tour and the alternative music community have become a target of criticism throughout the years because of their portrayals of women. Issues such as lack of representation and harassment are still prevalent, as indicated in my findings. Although there are some examples of people or groups working to change the current context, they do not seem to be enough to create a movement. A question about why this is arises from the findings. If riot

grrrl started when women decided to take the stage and then moved to other forms of feminist activism, are women musicians what is missing from today's alternative music scene?

Two other important issues that should be noticed are related to how the Vans Warped Tour is portrayed in the media. First, the face of the Vans Warped Tour is exclusively founder Kevin Lyman; many times, the notion of what the tour stands for is mixed with what Lyman as a person, and as the spokesperson for the festival, believes in. This helps create a masculinized portrayal of the Vans Warped Tour, even with efforts to show the women behind the scenes who participate in the decision-making processes. Furthermore, the differences in how the media and musicians and crew members portray the tour are significant. Discussing sexism at Warped Tour, Taylor Jardine, singer of We Are The In Crowd, reflects about the dissemination of stories pointing out the problems with female representation on the festival:

I know that's been a popular topic nowadays, to address the female world in the music industry. It's always so confusing to me because sometimes it almost seems like there are problems that are created by putting such a spotlight on it versus just saying how it really is. (Sherman, 2014, para. 5).

Jardine's point of view is tied to her power as a performer on Warped Tour, a position few women occupy. Although her views cannot be dismissed, it is important to consider that there are different forms of oppression and exclusion and that, as a performer, she is part of an environment that oppresses other women who are not or cannot take part in it.

The media participation in spreading criticism about female representation in the Vans Warped Tour also offers a reflection on the role of journalism, artists, and fans to start movements in subcultures. Garrison (2000) notes that mainstream media appropriates

subcultures for profit, instead of constructing meaning and starting movements. Therefore, participants should take the lead in the resistance.

At a time when the mainstream mass media scripts politics as bumper stickers, soundbites, and tabloid sensationalism, it seems especially important to look for and foster (sub)cultural spaces that insist on political content and intent in members' activities and in the objects they create. These include the tactical subjectivities employed to counter and subvert the depoliticized politics of conspicuous consumption. (p. 163)

Nonetheless, in the case of many incidents this thesis analyzed, the media was the starting point of the criticism. It noted issues about female representation and took a stand against sexist incidents, starting conversations inside the community. These debates started on social media and spread out to different media outlets, affecting the discourse of the tour.

### **Conclusion**

This research began looking at these conversations and criticism. As there was no literature on how specifically the Vans Warped Tour, as part of the alternative music community, represents women, it expanded what the media started with a goal to give an academic outlook on this issue. It is relevant not only because of what the findings indicates but as a form of going beyond criticism to shed light on what goes into these portrayals, considering the context.

As a professional journalist, it provides a starting point to reflect on what could be done to get rid of sexist portrayals and create better, more inclusive, female representation in the alternative music scene. Even though the Vans Warped Tour ended in 2018, the artists and professionals who participated in it will continue to be members of a community. Moreover, the fans are still going to attend other shows and festivals within the same scene, and it is important

that they can be introduced to a different environment, one in which women are not tokens but active participants.

Because media articles indicate that the Vans Warped Tour is not alone in how it portrays women, suggestions for future research include analyzing how other festivals are creating these representations. Looking into how other participants of alternative music scenes, such as magazines and blogs focused on alternative music, represent women is also a possibility, especially if the findings can be compared to those in this thesis. Finally, future research could focus on the public, specifically the young and female participants of alternative music scenes, to understand what efforts they are making to revise old portrayals and create new ones.

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