

# Final Proposal and Annotated Bibliography

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## **Proposal**

“Punk” is more than music and mohawks. Within it exists an attitude beyond the surfaces of image and style, a place that the misfits call home. I came to love punk music in my early 20s just a handful of years ago. There is that attitude I relate to, but a glaringly obvious contradiction. For a movement based on accepting differences and fighting socio-political power structures, there is an overwhelmingly white male population. The punk ethos is applicable to people of all sizes, colors, struggles, and identities. I know this because I am a queer, non-binary, female-at-birth, Asian-American adoptee who has found a place there.

Unfortunately, diversity is often underrepresented in punk history. I am conducting research on gender, punk, sexism, and feminism and looking at some successes and failures of the riot grrrl movement. My research questions include the following: Who and what is punk? How do folks gain access to the scene? How does gender affect visibility in the punk music scene? How does gender empower and inhibit women on this platform? Why does punk need marginalized folks and why do marginalized folks need punk? Lastly, how does punk succeed or fail at practicing what it’s preaching?

Understanding marginalized peoples’ exclusion from the scene exposes where the movement went wrong and how it can change. Inclusion is vital to a platform that preaches non-conformity, difference and resistance. Punk needs diversity and diversity needs punk. When I see myself represented on the stage I feel valid. When I see myself represented on the stage challenging oppressive power structures, I feel empowered.

My preliminary research started with Google searching for gender and punk. The primary research includes interviewing D.C. and Baltimore punk women musicians via Skype and attending several local concerts. I asked the musicians about navigating the music scene and how their gender affects their experiences. My secondary research is a historical approach to create context. What is punk? Is it relevant? What was riot grrrl? Why are men so prevalent?

Using *EBSCO*, *Proquest*, and the American University library SearchBox, I searched the keywords: sexism, feminism, and riot grrrl. I aim to expose how punk fell short, its positive contributions, and how it can do better.

Due to time limitations and accessible interviewees, I have narrowed my research to women and their experiences as musicians in the scene. This also limits the conversation to punk music rather than punk in its entirety (i.e. lifestyle, living situations, occupations, activism, etc.). All of the musicians interviewed are actively creating and performing music. It is understood that groups other than white women have struggled to find a place in this scene, but they are not highlighted in this research. Although it is frustrating to exclude these folks, I have decided for time and space limitations to focus on a narrow subset.

### **Annotated Bibliography**

Bag, Alice. "Work That Hoe: Tilling the Soil of Punk Feminism." *Women & Performance*, vol. 22, no. 2/3, July 2012, pp. 233-238. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1080/0740770X.2012.721079.

Alice Bag, a former member of "The Bags," one of the first L.A. punk bands, writes about punk as an attitude and that it is not dead. Since she was on the front lines of the movement she feels like it's important that she writes about her experiences there. Her conclusions are based on self reflections and the context of the socio-political climate she grew up in.

Bag's definition and origin of punk are important pieces of my research. It's a first hand, insider account of what punk is and how it came to be. She believes that it's alive and well "in the planned actions and protests of anti war organizations, in local organic farming co-ops who demand the right to take back control of their food supply, in the anarchic ideals of hacktivists who target corrupt governments and corporations under the flag of Anonymous" (234). She believes that punk also exists as it did in its peak and continues to live on because of social and political distress (why we still need punk). To Alice Bag, punk is a mentality and way of interacting against power structures to regain agency over our bodies and resources.

Bag describes the birth of punk in L.A. through her own story. As a first generation child of Mexican immigrants who attended an English-immersion school that wanted to erase her identity, who witnessed the

toxicity of the gendered power imbalance between her mother and father, and as a bisexual woman, Bag was always “othered” (235). Social turmoil and the lack of space for marginalized and rejected folks created the foundation of the punk rock music scene where Bag claims that in its early days there were no gender roles, race or class: “the earliest participants and movers behind the scene were united only in the sense of having been identified as ‘outcasts,’ either by society or by themselves” (236). Punk was born from the amalgamation of the outcasts from socio-political frustration and is still present in society whenever people fight against corrupt systems.

Bag discusses the time before punk was dominated by white men and stresses the importance of artists writing about their own spaces instead of the academics who did not live through it. She argues that punk had previously been inclusive and limits herself by talking about the early scene that lacked relevant controversy. For my research, I will use her claim that early punk was a band of outcasts that were “different, proudly different, and wanted to express our creativity through our art, our music, our fashion, our way of life,” who were rejected by the status quo, to assert my belief that the punk music scene can return to that state of diversity and inclusion (Bag 236).

Berkers, Pauwke, “Rock Against Gender Roles: Performing Femininities and Doing Feminism Among Women Punk Performers in the Netherlands, 1976–1982.” *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, vol. 24, 2012, pp 155–175. doi:10.1111/j.1533-1598.2012.01323.x

Pauwke Berkers provides insight on a group of women who are underrepresented in punk academic research: the punk women musicians of the late 70s and early 80s who did not ascribe to second wave feminism but were not yet a part of 90s riot grrrl. The author interviewed women who participated in all-women or mixed-gender punk bands in the Netherlands from that time period. The article was written in 2012 and the time period in question was several decades ago, so the data is limited by memory distortion and, thus, Berkers cross-references the interviewee’s claims with fan-zines from the same era. The author leans on the foundation that feminism and punk have similarly challenged and inspired women to participate in traditionally male spaces (156). This article breaks down the ideologies and methodology of each movement and

concludes that despite their similar foundations, that they are rather different movements and had difficulty coexisting at the time. I plan to interview women in active punk and post-punk bands in the DC and Baltimore areas and ask them questions about their experiences as women musicians, what punk means to them, and how sexism and feminism do or do not fit into their lifestyles.

Berkers sheds light on conflicts between young punk performers and second-wave feminism “over how to perform femininity (both in terms of style and music) and how to reach gender equity (with or without men)” and claims that “this generational mismatch is due to the perceived rigidity of radical second-wave gender politics versus punk’s playful engagement with difference, contradiction, and irony” (156). The punk women were multifaceted in expression and had an egalitarian ideology, while the second-wave feminists had a narrow, dualistic idea of gender and a separatist mentality (Berkers 164). However, women punk musicians were similar to feminists and often agreed with several feminist principles (but not the feminist *movement*) in that they strived to enter a male dominated scene (like rock) and gain equal access (Berkers 167).

Contrary to what the author was expecting, many of the informants mentioned that they were taken seriously as musicians regardless of their gender. Punk was not concerned with musical expertise and promoted the DIY (“Do It Yourself”) ideology that provided a gateway for many women (Berkers 156). Sexism was still existent, especially in the audience and oftentimes through the practices of objectification (Berkers 155). Berkers noted that the scene opened the door and invited women in, but they often came across barriers that hindered the full inclusion, privilege, and accessibility that men had.

This article is (purposefully) limited to a previous time period since her focus is punk women who were stuck in between a form of feminism that they couldn’t relate to and the next movement that had not arrived yet. The primary informants discuss that second wave feminism did not co-exist with their ideologies and that punk was a better route to become involved in. The scene was a better space for the younger generation to challenge norms and express themselves and their femininities.

I will build upon this assertion by referring to the generations of punk musicians that came after riot grrrl rather than before it. I will use many of the same methods and approaches as Berker but relate it to

women, sexism, gender, and feminism in the contemporary punk scene. The primary and secondary data I gather will create an image of the current state of women in the punk scene and expand on how ideologies (of punk and feminism) claim to break down barriers of oppression but often fall short.

Dunn, Kevin and May Summer Farnsworth. "'We ARE the Revolution': Riot Grrrl Press, Girl Empowerment, and DIY Self-Publishing." *Women's Studies*, vol. 41, no. 2, Mar. 2012, pp. 136-157. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1080/00497878.2012.636334.

Kevin Dunn and May Farnsworth focus their research on the riot grrrl movement of the 1990s which spawned from zine and punk communities as a reclamation of space in the scene. The authors discuss the creators of zines and the products, like Riot Grrrl Press, rather than the more often, inaccurate representations depicted by mainstream media or the exclusive academic approach that is often entirely focused on the music produced by riot grrrl bands. These secondary and primary resources vary between interviews with early punk musicians, published literature, newspaper articles, and many zines.

My primary research is looking at relations between gender, feminism, sexism, and punk music. Just as Dunn, Farnsworth, and many others have noted, despite punk's anti-authoritative, anti-oppressive, anti-status quo ideology, it is susceptible to the mainstream patriarchal ways. I am conducting interviews with active female punk musicians to gather information on their current experiences with sexism and male dominance and how their gender affects or doesn't affect their experience in the music scene.

In its origin, young punks gathered in Britain as a response to working class culture and class politics (Dunn and Farnsworth 137). The authors describe how this evolved into a more generalized rejection of the status quo, utilization of the do-it-yourself (DIY) attitude and diverse group of participants (137). In early punk, everyone was encouraged to get involved with these ideologies, such as production of music, identity, and politics. Unfortunately, as time went on and the scene progressed, it became increasingly more male-centric. According to Dunn and Farnsworth's research, women like Jennifer Miro from the West Coast punk band The Nuns, in reference concert spaces, claim that women "didn't

even go because it was so violent and so macho that it was repulsive. Women just got squeezed out” (138). The 90s riot grrrl movement was, in part, a reclamation of punk spaces and voices and a response to the exclusive macho-hardcore scene from the 80s (Dunn and Farnsworth 138). Through the use of DIY feminist zines, Allison Wolfe, Molly Neuman, and Kathleen Hanna became several key players in the movement. Riot grrrl, as a movement, supported a DIY community, zines, bands, and a national convention in DC in 1992. All mediums covered topics including but not limited to: sexual identity, self-preservation, racism awareness, surviving sexual abuse, self-defense, and female empowerment (Dunn and Farnsworth 139). The main goal was reclaiming the female body under female terms against mainstream media, patriarchal, and capitalist standards. Other predominant concepts to the movement were girls seizing the means of production, girls creating their own cultural capital, and girls empowering themselves and each other (Dunn and Farnsworth 141). Despite their efforts against it, mainstream media caused great harm to the movement when it latched on and exploited, misrepresented, and commodified the riot grrrls, reducing them to a kind of superficial fashion statement (Dunn and Farnsworth 143).

Many participants and scholars can agree that punk is more than an image or musical style. Dunn and Farnsworth shed light on punk’s origins as diverse and that it later developed into a male-centric scene. The 90s riot grrrl movement was a response to this exclusion. This project is restricted by time, with a focus specifically on the 90s riot grrrl zine culture. My research continues the conversation of women and their place in punk music using secondary research, definitions, historical accounts, and interviews with contemporary female punk musicians. I will also attend several punk music concerts and take notes on how women inhabit the scene’s space.

Griffin, Naomi. "Gendered Performance and Performing Gender in the DIY Punk and Hardcore Music Scene." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2012, pp. 66-81, *ProQuest*, <http://proxyau.wrlc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxyau.wrlc.org/docview/1019284979?accountid=8285>

In “Gendered Performance and Performing Gender in the DIY Punk and Hardcore Music Scene,” Naomi Griffin utilizes published literature on

gender roles, how gender is performed, and an autoethnographic approach for research methods in her local UK, DIY punk scene. She chooses to use autoethnographic text to “put the researcher in the context of the research,” thus strengthening the findings by translating the “personal into social and cultural” (68). Griffin stresses the importance of recognizing and reflecting on her own positionality for observational research because she is the lens and tool of measurement. The demographic consists of white, male, heterosexual, musicians and organizers because they are who dominates the scene in question. Therefore, Griffin primarily focuses on expressions of masculinity in addition to women and feminist politics. Her aim, which focuses on gender performance and relationships, “illustrates the complexity of the relationship between punk ideologies and practices and the ways that spaces can simultaneously offer contradictory and negotiable opportunities for empowerment and resistance, acceptance and exclusion” (65). (disconnect) By going to concerts, running a zine stand, and conducting secondary research, Griffin is able to observe and conclude that there is a disconnect in the punk scene between rhetoric and experiences, particularly surrounding social injustice.

I will also conduct autoethnographic research at concerts and utilize secondary sources to define terms. My research also includes interviews with female punk musicians and placing the punk ideologies and experiences in a historical context. Similarly, I have noticed some contradictions in the punk scene. Punk, which inherently rejects mainstream standards, like the means of production and oppressive standards, perpetuates mainstream sexist and exclusionary practices. Like Griffin, I will use my position in the punk scene, which is more limited than hers, to discuss my draw to its ideologies. I will attend concerts, take notes on how women take up space at the venues, and conduct interviews with several musicians.

Griffin deconstructs terms and defines punk as “generally characterised by fast, aggressive tones and often politically charged” (67). It rejects oppressive and exclusive parts of mainstream society and oftentimes focuses on social injustices and individual rights. Her observations, personal experience, and research conclude that within the umbrella of punk’s anti-racism, anti-homophobia, anti-sexism stance, that practices and expressions of its ideals are not always true to the ideology (66). For example, personal presentation and image (ex. tattoos, piercings

and non-traditional clothing) are forms of resistance to traditional representations of female gender roles. This allows punk women to reclaim some agency over their bodies but become susceptible to the trappings of expectations to fit the non-traditional punk image and conform to nonconformist standards (Griffin 70). Griffin also found that women are seldom present as the voice of musicians or organizers of shows and are often viewed in terms of men when they are in the audience. In their most visible space, as an audience member, women are often reduced to “the girlfriend” of a man, in part due to the aggressive form of dancing at shows that simulate fighting, in which women rarely participate and are oftentimes pushed off to the side (Griffin 71).

As many participants and academic researchers observe, Griffin homes in on the scene’s contradictory nature of anti-sexist rhetoric and its failure to contribute to anti-sexist practices and spaces. She makes a point in her conclusion that her aim is describing the complexity and difficulty of removing a scene from the dominant culture’s narrative of patriarchy and sexism even when the scene is rooted in the rejection of it (78). Her research is limited by geography and time because it is located in a small contemporary UK DIY punk and hardcore scene and does not account for all DIY scenes. I am also spatially limited and will expand on Griffin’s research in my area (DC and Baltimore) by interviewing several members of local punk musicians who are women to include their first-hand experiences from creating and performing music.

Pinterics, Natasha. "Riding the Feminist Waves: In with the Third?" *Canadian Woman Studies*, 2001, pp. 15-21, *ProQuest*, <http://proxyau.wrlc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxyau.wrlc.org/docview/217463158?accountid=8285>.

This article highlights the third wave feminist movement as a response to and criticism of second wave feminism. Pinterics notes that the reactive nature of the third wave is a “building upon” the previous generations. She attributes the assets and the baggage to each movement respectively and briefly discusses the anti-feminist movement that was born during the formation of the third wave. She references several big names in feminist theory, like Rebecca Walker and Audre Lorde, to hit the key points, perspectives, and attitudes of the different feminist models.



My research is based on sexism in the punk rock music scene. Sexism is of great prominence in the human experience and punk is an attitude that challenges societal norms (like sexism). As a response to second wave feminism and punk as their vehicle, the riot grrrl movement was born in the 90s. Pinterics' article nods to riot grrrl and the scene's grassroots and DIY creation of zines that "can include poetry, essays, interviews, rants, manifestos, and articles ranging from how to make your own pads and tampons, to information about date rape resources" (3). This article gives foundation to the facet of my research that deals with punk as a space for everyone in theory and that it falls short in practice, even in riot grrrl. Punk, sexism, feminism, gender, and inclusion cannot be talked about together without context and definitions of the terms. Since I will be discussing riot grrrl, I will talk about third wave and, in turn, talk briefly about second wave. I will also speak to the irony of the three divisions in the punk context.

In short, Pinterics describes second wave feminism as groundbreaking. The movement highlighted violence against women, began advocating for greater acceptance toward sexualities, and moved women "from the kitchen to the boardroom" (Pinterics 2). The third wave argues that the former focused too much on the "common, universal" experience of women and ignored the multitude of differences, especially those of oppression, that many women face. The latter advocates for the mobility of all women, a deeper exploration and understanding of gender, sexuality, race and class, reliance on personal experience, and "making room for difference instead of trying to build a cohesiveness" (Pinterics 3).

In closing, Pinterics quotes Lorde and describes criticism as constructive rather than destructive. People need to reflect as individuals, as a group, and as a movement. Critique is powerful because it can help propel us forward; it can act as tool to build upon the previous. It is a lost cause when critique is utilized through "argument for argument's sake." In my paper I will describe sexism in the punk music scene, analyze punk and riot grrrls strengths and weaknesses, and then assert a call for growth, a reminder that critique is healthy if it is used productively. If something falls short, then the next person can take on responsibility of doing better and openness for more critique. Where Pinterics is general about the strength of discomfort, I will, with my interviewees' assistance, discuss means of progression.

Thi Nguyen, Mimi. "Riot Grrrl, Race, and Revival." *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, vol.22, No. 2-3, 2012, pp. 173-196, Taylor and Francis Online, DOI: 10.1080/0740770X.2012.721082

Mimi Thi Nguyen's "Riot Grrrl, Race and Revival" dives into the 90s punk scene subculture, riot grrrl, and its complications. She draws on her personal experiences in punk, interviews with zinesters and musicians, and zines and scholarly articles for her research. I am utilizing the first piece of Nguyen's two-part article that interprets riot grrrl as a means of access and opposition to patriarchy that failed to address race in a constructive manner due to the movement's central concept of "intimacy" relating to access.

Nguyen discusses the riot grrrl movement belief that "doing it yourself made it possible to know yourself as a revolutionary act," that women's control of cultural capital, production, and expression reclaim their autonomy and thus resist patriarchal, sexist ideologies (175). She discusses how the third wave feminist riot grrrls believe that the personal is political and strength in coming to know self and others is through "intimacy." "Radical girl love" and "girl intimacy" is described by Nguyen as a "liberalist fantasy of self-actualization"(176). She suggests that the "intimate aesthetic" of riot grrrl, of transparency and self-actualization don't inherently create change in the nature of relationships and are destructive concepts. (extend to *see how to avoid this and not marginalize WOC, transpeople? Give them a voice, give them THEIR voice?*) *Be self-relective*

In the attempt to dismantle "white boy mentality," many of the women in riot grrrl would not address their own "white upper middle-class girl mentality" (180). According to Nguyen, the actualization of riot grrrl struggled to include POC. The movement wanted to address the patriarchy but failed to address racism which, in turn, created exclusionary spaces. The concept of riot grrrl intimacy and personal experiences as political, in regard to race, demanded the emotional labor of POC to "reveal themselves, to bear the burden of representation ('you are here as an example') and the weight of pedagogy ('teach us about your people')" (180). This reduced POC to the roles of teachers and examples as a token character in a sea of "allies" (180).

Her research relates to mine in that it addresses the pitfalls of the movement's ideologies. I will use Nguyen's critique of riot grrrl and discuss

the current status of punk music in the post-riot grrrl era and gender inclusivity, in part relating it to the necessity of equating feminism and equality to intersectionality. We extend the fight for inclusion, visibility and accessibility beyond white women to include all women, POC, and LGBTQA+ communities. She differs from many scholarly sources in that she focuses on race in punk rather than sex. The punk culture's contradictorily racist issues are highlighted rather than punk's view of the structures of racism as a power structure.