“‘The Glowing Man’: A Critical Analysis of a Social Media Disclosure of Sexual Violence in the Field of Cultural Production”

by

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the discourse surrounding an online disclosure of sexual violence in the music field. Research questions addressed three things: 1. The discursive role of symbolic capital and the field of cultural production; 2. The extent to which features of the online feminist counter-public were represented; and 3. How the logic of the music field and strategies of the online feminist counter-public contributed to accused and complainant outcomes. A critical thematic analysis of the online discourse demonstrated that symbolic capital and position were deployed to defend the accused and discredit the complainant. The response of the online feminist counter-public countered some discrediting discourse common in sexual assault cases, but did not fully engage with the logic of the field of cultural production that was used to discredit the complainant in this case. Recommendations are offered to music journalists, arts funding organizations, and online activists to mitigate against gendered power imbalances stemming from the devaluing of women as cultural producers.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Media attention about sexual violence in the music industry has increased in recent years, with allegations against prominent individuals generating articles and editorials on various music media sites (Noisey Staff 2016; Roy 2016; Rhoades 2016; Geffen 2016; Sargent 2017). Some of these allegations have resulted in significant career damage to the individuals identified, but in the case of Michael Gira, frontman of the band Swans, minimal or no career damage appears to have occurred (Geffen 2016). My thesis examines the extent to which symbolic capital and position in the field of cultural production, as well as the presence of an online feminist counter-public, influenced the discourse and outcomes surrounding this allegation of sexual violence leveled against Gira by fellow musician Larkin Grimm on social media in February of 2016. This chapter will provide context for my research, as well as outline the justification for my research, and the research questions. Finally, the structure of my thesis itself will be outlined.

Research Context

On February 25, 2016, musician Larkin Grimm made a Facebook post alleging sexual assault against prominent experimental rock musician Michael Gira (Helman 2016). In addition to being a musician in his own right, Gira is also Grimm’s former collaborator and the operator of the record label to which she was signed at the time of the alleged sexual assault (Rhoades 2016). Gira responded to Grimm’s allegations via Facebook, initially describing Grimm’s account as “a slanderous lie” (Hogan and Strauss 2016, par. 1). Subsequently, he issued an official statement to the media, claiming that while the sexual encounter took place, it was a wholly consensual “awkward mistake” (Hogan and Strauss 2016, par. 1). The only apparent sign of negative career fallout from Grimm’s allegation was a canceled three-date Gira solo tour of
Australia, for which no official reason was given, while his European tour dates for that same month were unchanged (Camp 2016; Themusic.au.com 2016).

Increasingly journalists write about sexual assault as a general problem in the music industry, as well as specific allegations of sexual assault leveled against prominent individuals in the industry (Roy 2016; Noisey Staff 2016; Rhoades 2016; Geffen 2016; Sargent 2017). Despite this level of media attention, no academic literature was located that dealt specifically with the phenomenon of sexual assault in the music industry. My thesis seeks to address this gap.

I was curious about what precisely made the outcomes in the Gira-Grimm case different from those in other cases, where the fallout had been immediate, producing significant negative impacts on the careers of accused in the span of days. Gira, on the other hand, appeared to have weathered a short initial storm, barely missing a beat as his tour dates continued and his band’s new album generated positive reviews (the review aggregation website Metacritic gives the album a score of 81% compiled from various critical reviews, and a score of 8.6 from its users, which Metacritic categorizes as “universal acclaim”) (Metacritic 2016). One of the online music news sites that covered the story of Grimm’s allegations, Pitchfork, later issued a review of a new album by Swans, entitled “The Glowing Man” (Reyes-Kulkarni 2016). The language used in the review speaks to the reviewer’s admiration of Gira’s entire body of work, as well as the new album; the last Gira intended to make with that lineup of the band – “a fitting end to a remarkable chapter of their career” (Reyes-Kulkarni 2016, par. 6). The reviewer notes a song on the album sung by Gira’s wife Jennifer about her surviving a violent attack. This prompts the only mention of the allegation leveled by Grimm, which the reviewer says “amplifies the song’s unsettling effect and provokes a slew of difficult questions” (Reyes-Kulkarni 2016, par. 4).
Having studied French sociologist, anthropologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu, and his concept of the “field of cultural production”, I became interested in seeing if Gira’s ability to weather this allegation could be partly explained by the logic of the “field”. Bourdieu’s theories about the field of cultural production resonate with me as someone who has occupied several positions in that field – as a musician, music festival operator, record label owner, activist, and (briefly) music critic. The reverential language that follows Gira’s career, even in the wake of the sexual violence allegation from Grimm, speaks to the degree of his prestige – which Bourdieu (1993, 75) would classify as symbolic capital. This symbolic capital is associated with and facilitates the extent of an artist’s consecration within the field of cultural production – the extent to which the artist is glorified, as “great individuals” in the field tend to be (Bourdieu 1993, 29). The field of cultural production represents the network of relative positions between agents who mobilize and seek symbolic capital in the market of cultural goods, an economy that hinges on a “bad-faith” disavowal of economic interest (Bourdieu 1993, 75-76). Those who occupy the dominant positions in the field are inclined to defend their positions, justifying the status quo and only engage in discourse about their roles in the field as much as is necessary to “rectify the heresies of the newcomers” who “call into question the unproblematic, taken-for-granted world of the dominant groups” (Bourdieu 1993, 83). Larkin Grimm had arguably critiqued this world as problematic by alleging sexual violence by Gira, and specifically tying it to an abuse of his power and relative position in the field (Strauss and Phillips 2016).

The means by which other prominent individuals in the field have recently been publicly shamed for their actions, and the resulting impacts on their careers, also appears to align with manifestations of the online feminist counter-public (Roy 2016; Sargent 2017). The online feminist counter-public is an expansion of American feminist and critical theorist Nancy Fraser’s
(1990) concept of the feminist counter-public as a subaltern public, to which feminist activists could withdraw, formulate ideas, and bring them back to the public sphere (Travers 2003; Salter 2013; Fileborn 2016; Powell 2015). In responding to sexual violence, the online feminist counter-public pursues alternative justice, particularly through online “naming and shaming” of offenders (Salter 2013; Powell 2015). It can additionally provide support to survivors by acknowledgement and solidarity in the face of harm (Powell 2015; Fileborn 2016). Both of these features were on display in the case of disgraced music publicist Heathcliff Berru, to use one example, and the “naming and shaming” approach was apparent in the disclosures of sexual violence against a member of the band PWR BTTM (Roy 2016; Sargent 2017). An additional feature of the online feminist counter-public’s response to sexual violence is awareness-raising behaviour, which draws attention to facts about sexual violence and survivor experiences (Fileborn 2016).

**Research Objective**

Bourdieu’s (1993) field of cultural production and Fraser’s (1990) online feminist counter-public informed the focus of my research. I wanted to assess the extent to which Gira’s symbolic capital influenced the discussion of his allegations on social media, and if this helped explain why he faced so few consequences. I also wanted to examine the extent to which the online discourse via Facebook and Twitter reflected the presence of the online feminist counter-public, and to see if a lack of engagement by the online feminist counter-public might explain the lack of negative career impact on Gira, relative to other cases in which the online feminist counter-public had been represented. The research questions were selected with these inquiries in mind.
Research Questions

The three main research questions that I seek to answer include:

1. How does the discourse surrounding the sexual assault allegations made via social media by Larkin Grimm reflect and impact Michael Gira’s symbolic capital and position as a consecrated artist?

2. Did the online feminist counter-public manifest in response to the online allegations against Gira, and if so, in what ways?

3. To what extent can the dynamics of the field of cultural production, together with the online feminist counter-public, explain the outcomes of the Gira case?

In an attempt to answer these questions, a critical discourse analysis (CDA) was undertaken, in which tweets, public Facebook posts (taken from the walls of Gira and Grimm), and comments on those posts were analyzed. As the disclosure by Grimm was made on her Facebook wall, and Gira’s initial response on his, these sites appeared to be reasonable sources to examine the discourse that played out from the allegation onwards. Tweets were also examined to see how bystanders publicly discussed the allegations in an environment that was neither explicitly Gira’s or Grimm’s.

The parameters of this study are narrow, and thus are only concerned with social media discourse surrounding a single case of the disclosure of sexual violence between two cisgender white artists. A broader, intersectional approach to sexual violence in the music field is outside of the scope of my thesis, but would be an important future research project.

In addition to the introduction, my thesis contains five chapters. Chapter two is a literature review examining sociological issues in the field of music, particularly surrounding gendered patterns of consecration and overrepresentation. Chapter three provides an articulation
of the means by which the research was carried out, the rationale for the methods employed, and limitations of the research and researcher. Chapter four contains my findings, and will identify the data found in the course of the discourse analysis. In chapter five, I discuss my findings in relation to relevant literature. Chapter six is the concluding chapter, and outlines the contribution of this study, as well as recommendations and future research directions.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

My literature review will discuss the state of extant literature on two topics of central interest to my thesis. The first concerns aspects of the music field that may contribute to sexual violence against women. These include masculine domination of the music field, the lack of representation of women in the music field, gendered consecration of musicians, and the employment precarity of agents in the music field. The second body of literature assesses the nature of the online feminist-counter public as a venue for activism against sexual violence. The effectiveness of the online feminist-counter public in awareness-raising activism, survivor support, and enacting alternative forms of justice is reviewed. Following the literature review I offer a justification for my current research based on the assessment of the available literature.

The Music Field and Risk Factors for Sexual Violence

This section of the literature review will examine the aspects of music scenes that contribute to sexual violence against women. Masculine domination of music scenes, negative representations of women, the economic precarity associated with working in music, and factors relating to the environment in which music scenes are enacted are all themes and prevalent risk factors identified in previous research. These risk factors will be explained and contextualized within Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production, as well as his theory of forms of capital (Bourdieu 1993; 1986).

Masculine Domination and the Representation of Women in the Music Field

Despite oft-stated progressive goals that are common to many music scenes, previous feminist research of the music field found a tendency towards masculine domination, enacted in symbolic violence that gives precedence to men (Mullaney 2007; Griffin 2012; Strong 2011; McCarthy 2015). Bourdieu identifies this as universal, and often replicated within the field
As noted by Miller (2016), men dominate fields of cultural production, with music included among these. Academic researchers and journalists have found that women tend to be underrepresented both as music producers and consumers, particularly in masculinized genres such as metal and hardcore (Miller 2014; Mullaney 2007; Griffin 2012; Bannister 2010). Researchers carrying out historical assessments of musical genres have found instances of some genres opening up in which women may share power with prominent men in the field, but also note that these genres tend to masculinize over time (Strong 2011; Mullaney 2007; Griffin 2012).

The system by which this status quo has been achieved and maintained is complex. Bourdieu (1993, 29) states the field of cultural production has always tended, more than any other, to produce revered figures identified as “great individuals”. The reverence for traditionally-masculine traits of competitiveness and assertiveness in fields tends to relegate women to subservient positions within them (Bourdieu 2001, 59, 90). The forgetting or undermining of the cultural contributions of women is noted by feminist scholars, who identify some mechanisms for this phenomenon which are common to Bourdieu’s concepts of hierarchical evaluations of cultural output in fields of cultural production (Smith 1987; Mullaney 2007; Griffin 2012; Strong 2011; Miller 2016; Bourdieu 1993, 40).

The limiting of women’s participatory parity in the music industry often centres around a perceived lack of dedication or ability to produce cultural work that is deemed “authentic” (Brown 2012; Miller 2016; Mullaney 2007). The idea of "authenticity" in the context of economic disinterest is of extreme importance in building artistic legitimacy within fields of cultural production (Bourdieu 1993, 40). The policing of “authenticity” tends to take place in the struggle between consecrated artists and their supporters, and newcomers (Bourdieu 1993, 29, 94). Those artists and promotors who have accrued cultural, social, and economic capital within
the field have the ability to consecrate or deny others who seek to access it. (Bourdieu 1993, 42).

The accumulated forms of capital they wield amount to their symbolic capital – their prestige (Bourdieu 1993, 75; 1989, 19).

In the music field, where an artist’s communication to the audience is often seen as personal, they must “embody” authenticity, and the potential for this embodiment may depend on the gender of the performer, particularly in masculinized genres where “authentic” expression is associated with the “articulation of masculinity” (Leonard 2007, 32-33). Claims of authenticity are invoked frequently in heavily masculinized genres, such as metal, where women are seen as intruders and opportunists rather than dedicated artists (Miller 2016; Bannister 2010). Authenticity is more or less the domain of revered male actors within these genres (Mullaney 2007; Miller 2014). Additionally, the perception of women as suitable as supporters rather than leaders results in their being pushed into acceptable support roles (Clawson 1999; Bannister 2010). Even within those performing groups that are not exclusively male in membership, women can find themselves relegated to subservient “support” roles, as Clawson (1999) found in her study on the “ghettoization” of women in the less-glamorous role of bass guitarist in many bands.

In general, standards of “excellence” in fields tend to be associated with masculine traits, with gatekeeper positions being more or less tailored to those who display traits of masculine excellence, limiting the presence of women in such posts (Miller 2016; Bourdieu 2001, 62). The notion of “creative genius” is similarly masculinized, as are other “high art” terms, which are rarely ascribed to women (Miller 2016; Schmutz and Faupel 2010). In their analysis of consecration in pop music, Schmutz and Faupel (2010) found that albums by men were significantly more likely to be consecrated as works of historical and cultural importance by
critics and their ranking systems than albums by women, and that artists who are women have a lesser chance of being consecrated than artists who are men. Their research also suggests that women are often justified as musicians by their connections to venerated men in the field. They did, however, find that women musicians could be seen as “authentic” in some contexts, though they posited that this may be due to the expectation that women are authentic when their creative output aligns with the narrow role of emotive and emotional support providers (Schmutz and Faupel 2010).

Male critics are also able to trivialize and undermine even the most prominent women in music through the use of language that is rarely applied to men (Garland 2015). The framing of women as the other leads to them being grouped together as a monolithic whole, with music made by women being seen as a genre unto itself (Garland 2015). Musician behaviours that are not deferential or supportive, but are instead erratic or antisocial, are also more accepted when coming from men, even being seen as markers of authenticity (Miller 2016; Leonard 2007, 70-74). By contrast, women musicians behaving in an erratic manner are frequently pathologized, rather than being seen as geniuses or authentic representatives of musical genius (Leonard 2007: 70-74; Berkers and Eeckelaer 2014). This pathologization may be noteworthy in the context of sexual violence, as women’s mental health issues are frequently invoked to discredit their disclosures of sexual violence (Belknap 2010; Waterhouse-Watson 2016; Wilkinson-Ryan 2005). Women who are musicians may be at higher risk of this form of discrediting discourse, since research suggests relatively high rates of mental health issues in musicians (Ludwig 1992; Willis 2003).

These means of devaluing of women as cultural producers align with observations by Dorothy Smith (1987) that similar arguments have historically been used to limit the presence of
women in cultural production. This feedback loop of masculine domination helps to ensure that men in the music world are in the position to accumulate symbolic capital. Through this capital, they are able to define hierarchies within genres, and the boundaries of the field (Miller 2014). It is no surprise, then, that women working in the music industry often find that they need to go through powerful men to advance their careers, be they musicians or other types of music industry workers – an aspect of the music field that has been noted by journalists and researchers (McCarthy 2015; Garland 2015; Almeida 2015, Rhoades 2016; Miller 2016). The power these men hold by virtue of their position has been posited as contributing to sexual violence in the music field by some music journalists (Rhoades 2016; Almeida 2015).

There are genres which are oriented towards upheaval, and which, for a time, refute the established music scene hierarchy and politics of the music industry in the initial stages of their existence. Over time, though, these genres shift back to a gendered hierarchy which favours and venerates men over women (Strong 2011; Mullaney 2007; Griffin 2012). An example of this phenomenon can be seen in punk music. Perhaps the first time in contemporary music production where significant numbers of women were able to take leadership roles was in the opening stages of the punk rock movement, with its attendant message and representation of social upheaval, and there was a period of time in the early portion of the punk period where woman-directed bands and projects were able to generate success within the mainstream of the punk movement (Leblanc 1999, 33). However, as early punk gave way to hardcore in the early 80s, roles for women became fewer and further between, with opportunities as producers and consumers of the music becoming greatly reduced (Mullaney 2007). One prominent man in the field – Ian Mackaye of the hardcore band Minor Threat – observed this himself: “I started to notice this drift – women at the front of the stage drifting towards the back… and eventually out
of the fucking room” (quoted in Mullaney 2007, 385). Hardcore became the dominant wave of punk, crystallizing around traditionally male characteristics, such as physically violent representations of anger (Mullaney 2007).

The return to masculine domination that occurred in the punk genre could be considered backlash against the role and presence of women, and would appear to align with Bourdieu’s view that power structures (including gendered power structures) reproduce themselves (Bourdieu 1993, 64 ; 2001, 43). In the sense of the field of cultural production, the possible positions open to individuals operating within the field is determined by the perceived appropriateness of the position to the individual, and the individual’s “daring” to aspire to that position – and as noted, this assertiveness is more acceptable in men than in women (Bourdieu 1993, 64; Miller 2016). The determining factors in the individual’s willingness to aspire to the position and ability to be accepted in the position are contingent on their characteristics and dispositions (Bourdieu 1993, 65). While groups of newcomers who are inclined to buck the dominant values in the field (as were punk musicians) may occasionally be grouped together despite very different demographic origins, their interests “will sooner or later diverge” (Bourdieu 1993, 66). Upon this new grouping of artists gaining recognition, they will fragment, with the “symbolic profits” generally going to relatively few, and as per the gendered standards of consecration described above, these are most likely to be men (Bourdieu 1993, 66; Miller 2016). Thus, as journalists and academics have noted, dominance of men within the field of music as the gatekeepers and arbiters of taste is enduring (McCarthy 2015; Garland 2015; Miller 2016).

Male gatekeepers define women musicians in accordance with their gaze, which generally results in the sexualized objectification of women within the industry (Miller 2016).
Those who do occupy lead singer roles are often expected to represent an idealized sexuality that is fit for mass consumption, which may also be held against them as a marketing device, and thus a further demonstration of inauthenticity in a field that prizes economic “disinterestedness” (Miller 2016; Bourdieu 1993, 79, 94). Commentary on the physical appearance and sexual desirability of women in music is common (Donze 2011). This form of objectification may contribute to sexual violence (Ulen 2010, quoted in Houlihan and Raynor 2014). Images of violence against women and sexualized women are also used for advertising purposes, even for nominally progressive punk music shows (Griffin 2012). As represented in the content of popular music, women are frequently sexually objectified, with even young girls having historically been objectified and sexualized (Huffman and Huffman 1987; Houlihan and Raynor 2014; Horeck 2014; Bridges and Pascoe 2015). A recurring theme in pop music has been the blaming of women for the sexual aggression of men, examples of which exist throughout the history of pop music (Huffman and Huffman 1987). Explicit depictions of sexual violence against women in popular music have a history that extends back at least as far as the Renaissance era, and songs of sexual assault continue to generate popular interest and acclaim for the male artists who perform them (Gordon 2015). Exceptions to the tendency to sexualize and objectify women may occur in those genres which defy popular culture’s norms, such as punk and some of its descendant genres – the closely linked riot grrl and grunge genres, for example – have done (Strong 2011). However, riot grrl has had less of a long-term cultural impact than other subsidiary genres of punk, which have tended to replicate the overarching masculine focus seen in fields of cultural production (Strong 2011).

Some of the strongest examples of the overrepresentation of men in music scenes can be found in music festival lineups. There is little academic writing on this topic, but it has received
attention from music journalists. Promoters can make their dominant tastes and values felt in the bills they program for festivals and other shows – largely populated, as journalists in recent years have noted, by male-only bands (McCarthy 2015; Garland 2015). Exceptions to the trend of male-dominated festival programming are so rare, in fact, that they are easily exploited as marketing gimmicks (Garland 2015). In a scholarly paper on gender advocacy groups drawing attention to gender inequality in music festival lineups, Jutbring (2016) states that music festivals make for relatively easy study as they are localized and of short duration. Additionally, music festivals represent power, and “mirror society, its values and its norms” (Jutbring 2016, 528).

Festivals receive considerable media attention, audience revenue, and have regional and international relevance due to their tourism draw (Jutbring 2016). In recent years, gender breakdowns of major music festival bills have been carried out not only by gender advocacy groups, but journalists and scene observers. Writing for the *The Telegraph*, journalist Alice Vincent discussed the gender composition of bills at the largest music festivals in the United Kingdom (Vincent 2014). She found that male-only bands made up roughly 43% of acts, solo male artists 24.3%, and that mixed gender bands made up an additional 15.9% (Vincent 2014, par.4). Acts that were all-women bands represented only 3.5%, and solo women artists fewer than 16% (Vincent 2014, par.4, par. 3). It was also noted that many of the women who appeared on these festival bills were shared between the festivals, and that even fewer women were represented at these festivals than the percentage breakdown might suggest (Vincent 2014).

These breakdowns became a discussion topic in online feminist circles and music journalism, with posters from all of the largest Canadian and UK music festivals edited to highlight poor representation of women by removing all-men acts, leaving mostly dead space (Teo 2015; *The Guardian* 2015). News articles and academic literature reveal that the problem of gendered
inequality in festival lineups is not limited to any particular locality, with journalists writing on the topic in Canada and the United Kingdom, and at least one academic paper concerning the phenomenon in Sweden (Teo 2015; Nicholson 2015; Jutbring 2016). While journalists and advocates point to these discrepancies in gender representation as a problem that reflects laziness, systemic discrimination against women, and the willingness of the music industry to default to social norms of masculine domination, the men who generally run these festivals seem disinclined to agree (Jutbring 2016; Nicholson 2015). The director of a pair of the largest festivals in the UK, Melvin Benn, stated in a media interview that there was “no problem” with these male-dominated festival rosters (Nicholson 2015). Benn’s statement perhaps indicates the extent to which music festivals replicate the status-quo views of the dominant public as noted by Jutbring (2016). The relationship of women to music festivals in particular seems to be very politically driven, and some festivals are themselves manifestations of the feminist counter-public response to male-dominated rosters. These feminist music festivals include 1990s examples such as Lilith Fair, and smaller, more DIY contemporary examples such as Ladyfest, or Slut Island in Montreal, which have an overt political orientation that stands in opposition to festivals dominated by men (Marwick 2013, 40-41; Leonard 2007, 163-179; Gerges 2016).

Overrepresentation of men in the music field also stems from gender imbalances in the cultural capital associated with music education, as women are underrepresented in both music schools and production schools (Bannister 2010). Bourdieu (1986), writing on those who excel in their fields through wielding cultural capital, speaks to the tremendous advantage that comes from the cultural capital acquired through education. The underrepresentation of women or denial of women in music education may thus be a likely contributing factor to underrepresentation of women in music scenes.
**Artist Precarity & Gender**

In a field so dependent on symbolic capital, gatekeepers generally also have the ability to limit opportunities to occupiers of less-powerful positions not only directly, but indirectly, through informal groups and associations (Bourdieu 1993, 140; Miller 2016; Rhoades 2016). Positions within the music field are quite tenuous, and years of work can be obliterated in a short timeframe (Miller 2016; Portman-Smith and Harwood 2015; Rhoades 2016).

The general effect of “women’s absolute status,” the combination of “income, educational attainment, occupational status, and labor [sic] market participation” has been identified as a predictor of rape rates, with higher absolute status having a significant relationship to lower rates of rape (Martin, Vieraitis, and Britto 2006, 335). This may have significant implications for rates of sexual violence victimization among women working in music scenes. Musicians tend to earn very little in general, but women suffer from the low income associated with being musicians to a greater extent than do men (Hill 2015; Nordicity 2015). A 2015 report concerning Canadians who reported being artists in the 2011 National Household Survey and Labour Force Survey found that, while 50% of those who identified themselves as women than men identified themselves as “musicians and singers,” women musicians and singers earned only 72% of what their male counterparts made per year (Hill 2015). Despite this disparity, of those Canadians who reported being musicians and singers on the 2001 census, 56% were women (Hill 2015). It should be noted that indigenous artists and members of other visible minority groups also experience increased precarity (Hill 2015). An intersectional analysis and its impact on specific rates of sexual violence victimization for non-white women musicians is beyond the scope of this paper.

The nature of the music industry is also geared towards exploitation of musicians in a
general sense. As noted earlier, gatekeepers – which would include music festival promoters – wield their symbolic capital in order to consecrate artists and defend the status quo of consecrated artists, as exemplified by the male festival promoter who sees “no problem” the with the overrepresentation of men in festival lineups (Bourdieu 1993, 42, 83; Nicholson 2015 par. 4). Their ability to grant status to musicians, and particularly to newcomers to the field, also grants them the power to exploit the labour of musicians, by asking them to play for exposure rather than financial compensation. In recent years, those who wield this capital and insist on paying musicians via “exposure” have generated cries of exploitation from artists, as well as negative attention from sympathetic members of the mainstream media (Wakin 2012; Gioia 2015; CBC News 2016). The transferability of forms of capital – from economic to cultural to social – means that it may be possible for even those economically-disadvantaged gatekeepers who are musicians themselves to use their social capital to manipulate other artists (Bourdieu 1986). Their position as venerated personages within the field lends them the social capital to consecrate newcomers, which may be abused for the gatekeeper’s personal gain, without compensation to the newcomer (Bourdieu 1993, 42; Wakin 2012).

Workplaces in which men are overrepresented constitute high-risk environments for women working within them (Rhoades 2016; Ontario Human Rights Commission n.d.; McLaughlin, Uggen, and Blackstone 2012; Bourdieu 2001, 93; Fraser 1992). Researchers have found support for the “backlash” theory of sexual violence, which suggests that gains in economic equality or prestige for women can result in sexual assault as a backlash against these gains (Martin Vieraitis, and Britto 2006). Backlash sexual violence has also been noted as a response to women’s incursion into male-dominated career fields (McLaughlin, Uggen, and Blackstone 2012). Women in male-dominated workplaces are at risk of losing their jobs or other
opportunities associated with employment if they report workplace sexual violence (Garrett 2011). Some journalists have noted this same career damage as a potential outcome of disclosing sexual violence in the music industry, with women fearing career harm and social damage as a result of their speaking out about sexual violence perpetrated by well-regarded men in the music field (Almeida 2015; McCarthy 2015; Rhoades 2016). Researchers have called for regulations of workplaces in which men are overrepresented, and some legislation has been created with the aim of codifying effective policies against workplace sexual violence (Garrett 2011; Government of Ontario 2017). The potential for sexual violence in music scenes may be further compounded by the fact that there are generally no regulatory bodies in charge of overseeing interactions between actors in the music field, who tend to represent themselves as free agents in careers comprised of a series of temporary contracts and interactions (Portman-Smith and Harwood 2015). This general lack of regulatory oversight of the music field may render irrelevant workplace sexual violence legislation.

There are few measures in place to prevent or offset exploitation in music, though formal arts funding mandates have been identified as one possible mitigating factor. Miller (2014) posits that one of the reasons that folk music as a genre is somewhat more open to women’s representation is that there are formalized grant organizations and folk music associations supporting it. In comparing it to the metal genre, which depends on masculine individualism and a “do it yourself” (DIY) ethos rather than grant agencies, she found the folk genre to be substantially more supportive of women (Miller 2014). It thus appears that a progressive arts funding mandate may help to undercut gender inequality.

Having considered the sexual violence risk factors in music scenes as described in academic and media literature, I will now examine the online feminist counter-public literature
and its role in sexual violence activism.

**The Online Feminist Counter-Public**

This section of the literature review will introduce and contextualize the online feminist counter-public, as well as discuss its characteristics as relevant to sexual violence and survivors.

The music field, in its prizing of traditional masculinity and associated markers of distinction, reflects the values of the dominant public (Miller 2016; Fraser 1990). Historically, one approach to resisting and reacting against the exclusionary and masculinized dominant public has been through the creation of subaltern counter-publics (Fraser 1990). The concept of the subaltern counter-public originates with Nancy Fraser (1990). Building on Jürgen Habermas’ (1962) concept of the public sphere, she argues that there have been “competing publics from the start”, with counter-publics existing in opposition to the dominant, bourgeois public (Fraser 1990, 61). The bourgeois public, in response, criticizes and silences the counter-public, in order to delimit access to the public sphere (Fraser 1990). The counter-public discourse and counter-discourse happens in parallel with that of the dominant public, but ideally, the counter-public can moderate the distance and level of engagement between itself and the dominant public (Fraser 1990). Members of these groups, in discussing common issues and harm done to them, begin to form or solidify an identity based on mutual recognition, acknowledgement of harm inflicted upon them, and sympathy (Fraser 1990; Ahmed 2004, 172).

Like other counter-publics, the feminist counter-public is beneficial to solidarity- and identity-forming processes (Fraser 1990). In addition to providing a base of operations from which to interact with the dominant public, the feminist counter-public provides a space to which members can withdraw to continue their work without interference from those who represent the exclusionary dominant public (Fraser 1990). The feminist counter-public has been able to create
language and discourse in a semi-segregated space, with the results then being brought to the dominant public sphere through a process of contestation as much as deliberation (Fraser 1990). When relegated to deliberation in the dominant public sphere, the concerns of subaltern counter-publics tend to be glossed over or denied, and it is for this reason that a process of contestation that overwhelms or bypasses the deliberative process favoured by the dominant public is useful (Fraser 1990). Those perceived to be engaging with the public sphere in a manner motivated by emotionality, particularly “negative passion”, may see their speech delegitimized for its lack of conformity to the decorum and values of the dominant public (Fraser 1990; Ahmed 2004, 169-170). This reaction to “negative passion” can itself quickly manifest as a personal attack on the speaker by the public at large (Ahmed 2004, 169-170). The identity of the dissenting speaker is then brought to the fore, picked apart, and constructed as one that does not belong in the civil society (Ahmed 2004: 170). Additionally, in the context of the music field, complaints from one artist against another along ethical or scandalous lines may be seen as a “cynical calculation” to advance or retain one’s own position, in accordance with what Bourdieu calls the “fundamental law of the field” (Bourdieu 1993, 94).

The process can be arduous, but the feminist counter-public can meet with success, as it did when it shifted the issue of domestic assault from the private sphere to the public in the 1970s and 1980s (Fraser 1990). The history of the feminist counter-public extends back to mirror-image social organizations modeled by bourgeois women on those of bourgeois men, and to participation in male-led and dominated street protests for less-privileged women (Fraser 1990). To some extent, semi-formal advocacy organizations such as Women in Music Canada, with its commissioned surveys, administrative apparatus, and membership forms, may echo the former (Women in Music Canada 2014). The online feminist counter-public, with its vocal and
confrontational presence in an easily-accessible social arena, may echo the latter (Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose 2016; Rentschler 2014).

The online feminist counter-public is a novel development of Fraser’s (1990) concept, advanced by feminist scholars to describe online networks of feminist support and activism (Salter 2013; Powell 2015; Ng 2015; Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose 2016; Fileborn 2014, 2016). Despite the relatively recent popularization of the term, a recognizable online feminist counter-public predates contemporary Web 2.0 social media (Ng 2015; Marwick 2013, 25-26, 38-41).

Initially, the internet was viewed as a discursive space with the potential to transcend markers of difference such as race and gender (Marwick 2013, 25-26). The low barrier to entry and the radical “DIY” ethic associated with punk music scenes were initially seen as having the potential to dominate the emerging online public (Marwick 2013, 36-37). The feminist print magazines *Bitch* and *Bust* were early adopters of online technology, with a substantial web presence starting in the mid-1990s (Marwick 2013, 38-39). Feminist music festivals as well, such as Lilith Fair, utilized the internet to build their base of attendees (Marwick 2013, 40-41). Still, the reality of the internet’s potential was somewhat more complex, with new online technologies largely replicating the power structures and divisions seen in offline society (Travers 2003, boyd 2013, 156). There is, however, potential for the formation of subaltern counter-publics within these online power-structures, as there is in the “real” world (boyd 2013, 200-201; Travers 2003; Powell 2015; Salter 2013). Travers (2003, 228) was noting in the early 2000s that, despite the elitist standards of accessibility to online manifestations of the public sphere, “feminists and progressives are acting with a sense of entitlement to the public potential of cyberspace and fashioning alternative social spaces at an impressive pace”. Increasing accessibility of the associated technologies also increases the potential for their use among subaltern counter-
publics. As the technology becomes more accessible over time, the potential for online counter-publics to contest the values of the dominant online public increases (Travers 2003). The advantage that is presented by the accessibility of the online feminist counter-public, in contrast to offline manifestations of the feminist counter-public, is the broad range of possible connections and the breadth of the available social network (Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose 2016). These features were not available prior to the advent of online platforms (Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose 2016). The following subsections will discuss in depth the benefits of the online feminist counter-public that have arisen as recurring themes in the literature. These themes are awareness-raising, support, and alternative forms of justice.

**Online Feminist Counter-Public Themes: Awareness-Raising**

One of the benefits of the feminist online-counter public most frequently cited in feminist academic literature is its potential for creating awareness around feminist issues (Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose 2016; Rentschler 2014; Rentschler 2015; Ng 2015; Sills et al. 2016; Rodino-Colocino 2014; Jackson and Banaszczyk 2016; Armstrong and Mahone 2016; Clark 2016; Linder et al. 2016; Fileborn 2016). Similarly to blogs and websites such as Hollaback! and stfurapeculture, feminist social media activism on Twitter can effectively problematize sexual violence and bring it to a place of discursive visibility (Rentschler 2014; Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose 2016; Sills et al. 2016). Twitter makes possible the simple organization of expansive conversations with large numbers of participants through its hashtag system (Small 2011). Accordingly, Twitter is a popular focus in literature on feminist social media activism at this juncture (Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose 2016; Rentschler 2014; Rentschler 2015; Linder et al. 2016; Jackson and Banaszczyk 2016; Armstrong and Mahone 2016; Clark 2016). In direct reaction to the sexual assault allegations made against Jian Ghomeshi in 2014, the hashtag
#BeenRapedNeverReported was created by a Toronto journalist, Antonia Zerbisias (Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose 2016). The hashtag quickly became a jumping off point for discussion among people (mostly women) who had been sexually assaulted, but wanted to share the reasons they had never reported these experiences. The hashtag gained significant traction, with over 8 million uses in the days it spent as a trending tag on Twitter (Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose 2016). The effect of this hashtag was to produce a sense of “community, solidarity and support” (Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose 2016, 7). Of particular interest is the observation by Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose (2016, 8) that the feminist consciousness of participants in the online discussion was developed by engaging with the hashtag, and that it had induced a “high number of participants… [to] begin identifying as feminist through their online engagement.” This declarative self-identification is significant. In their survey of 220 college women in the midwestern United States, Yoder, Tobias, and Snell (2011, 16) determined that an individual’s self-labeling as feminist was key to operationalizing feminist politics and action. Only those survey participants who embraced the label of “feminist” “participated in significantly more feminist activities than women who rejected the label” (Yoder, Tobias, and Snell 2011, 16).

The online feminist counter-public thus appears to provide an effective space for further developing its own politics, and number of political participants. The hashtags that organize much of this discourse also have the potential to serve as spaces for broadening the inclusivity of feminism, and the variety of feminisms that are given visibility. Discussions around the #YesAllWomen hashtag, which was introduced in 2014 as a reaction against the “feminist-derailing argument” espoused by anti-feminists on social media that “not all men” engage in sexual violence, also bounded impassioned discussions about the parameters of feminism (Rodino-Colocino 2014, 1113; Jackson and Banaszczyk 2016). The hashtag's original purpose of
combating rape myths was expanded by feminists who did not see themselves effectively represented in the original discussion spurred by the hashtag, thus widening the hashtag’s purpose to include discourse for broadening feminist understanding (Rodino-Colocino 2014; Jackson and Banaszczyk 2016). Discussion around black feminism, trans feminism, and intersectional feminism in general increased the potential for reflexivity among feminist activists (Rodino-Colocino 2014; Jackson and Banaszczyk 2016). Nascent feminist activists brought into the online feminist counter-public through engagement with such hashtags may encounter new-to-them feminisms, and seek to learn about them on their own initiative, thus taking steps towards their own broader conceptualization of feminism (Sills et al. 2016). Clark (2016), in her discussion of the #WhyIStayed hashtag (launched in order to push back against the propagation of myths about domestic violence), argues that online feminist activism centring on hashtags generates attention through providing a compelling “social drama” to a wide, networked audience. She further argues that the power of the connectivity provided by social media stands to not only resist and refocus the dominant discourse, but also to serve as a point of cultural reference for offline feminist activism (Clark 2016). This view also aligns with that of Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose (2016), who argue that feminist activism on social media stands to contribute to higher visibility of feminist discourse in the broader public. The mainstreaming potential of social media activism around sexual violence has also been noted by Linder et al. (2016), who see potential for offline responses from educators and administrators to social media activism against campus sexual assault in the results of their study on “social media counter-space”. Visibility within social networks in general may also contribute to performative activism against sexual violence, due to social pressure (Armstrong and Mahone 2016).

Hashtags like #BeenRapedNeverReported and #YesAllWomen serve to refute the
dominant public conception of sexual violence rates and rates of false allegations, as well as the idea of what a survivor of sexual violence may look like. Hashtags can also be used to refute misguided “helpfulness” in the form of victim blaming statements, as noted by Rentschler (2015). The hashtag #safetytipsforladies effectively mobilized sarcastic humour to undermine victim-blaming “safety tips” that can be prevalent in the traditional public discourse surrounding sexual violence (Rentschler 2015). The safety tips generated by the hashtag inverted the blame and responsibility that was being directed towards women for sexual violence, instead placing responsibility on sexual assaulters by offering them comic advice on how to avoid raping women, such as suggesting they “carry whistles to warn potential victims” (Rentschler 2015, 354). This humorous approach to anti-sexual violence activism demonstrated its value as a means of “hijacking spaces of discussion and commentary online, articulating feminist critique in ways that also, importantly, make us laugh” (Rentschler 2015, 355).

In some recent cases, the online feminist counter-public has succeeded in injecting feminist concerns into mainstream discourse. Public attention paid to allegations of sexual violence against United States President Donald Trump, as well as boasts of sexual violence that he himself had made on an audio recording, involved highly-visible online feminist activism (Malkin 2016). Further examples exist that are pertinent to social spaces of music. Research has found that the online feminist counter-public succeeded in influencing booking practices at some major music festivals in Sweden, in order to reduce gender inequality in festival bills (Jutbring 2016). Additionally, mainstream news media coverage was given to a Twitter thread which ran to over 700 replies, in which music writer Jessica Hopper asked women and other marginalized people to share stories of the first time the music scene or industry made them feel as though they did not “count” (Holpuch 2015; Hopper 2015). The thread was declared a “must read” by
Newsweek magazine (Mejia 2015, headline). The singer Kesha Rose Sebert, alleging that her producer Lukasz Gottwald sexually assaulted her, became embroiled in a recording contract dispute with Sony Music Group after refusing to continue working with Gottwald (McCarthy 2016). Her request was initially denied, and a subsequent civil trial upheld the contract. This led her supporters to create the #FreeKesha hashtag on Twitter, which was shared by several hundred thousand fans and fellow musicians online (McCarthy 2016). It also contributed to greater news media visibility for Kesha’s case (McCarthy 2016).

**Online Feminist Counter-Public Themes: Support**

The capacity of the online feminist counter-public to provide benefits to its members through affirmative support is well-documented (Salter 2013; Powell 2015; Rentschler 2014; Rentschler 2015; Fileborn 2016; Wånggren 2016). While some of that support also happens in the course of the awareness-raising behaviours described above, some additional support features of the online feminist counter-public will be discussed here. Importantly, the online feminist counter-public, while not impermeable to anti-feminist activists, represents a space of relative discursive safety, healing, humour, and validation (Rentschler 2014; Sills et al. 2016). Alongside other features such as trigger warnings, the use of humour in discussing sexual violence in the online feminist counter-public contributes to a “politics of care” (Rentschler 2014). Suran (2014) speaks to the empowerment provided through the ability of those who have been exposed to sexual violence to redefine themselves as survivors and activists rather than victims, through the public curation of their identities that social media facilitates. Fileborn’s (2016) survey of women who shared stories of street harassment found that respondents felt validated by the online feminist counter-public they encountered on Hollaback!, Facebook, or the Everyday Sexism Project website. These sites provide an online, social support network of women able to share
each other’s stories and validate each other’s experiences, letting each other know they are not alone (Wånggren 2016; Suran 2014). Ahmed (2004, 172-175) states that women’s shared testimonies of their experiences of violence are important both as in a therapeutic sense, but also for motivating the anger that gives impetus to politics.

The overwhelming majority of those who are called on by survivors of sexual assault to informally support them in their sexual violence disclosures are women (Orchowski and Gidycz 2012). This tendency for survivors to make use of informal support networks made up predominantly of women may explain in part the use of the online feminist counter-public as a support mechanism for disclosing sexual violence, such as can be seen through the disclosure-oriented Hollaback! websites, and Twitter hashtags such as #BeenRapedNeverReported (Wånggren 2016; Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose 2016; Powell 2015).

The support network provided by the online feminist counter-public also lends itself to certain forms of alternative justice, and the following subsection will discuss this link.

**Online Feminist Counter-Public Themes: Alternative Justice**

In contrast to the dissatisfying outcomes associated with formal disclosures of sexual violence, literature on the online feminist counter-public suggests its potential as a space for producing satisfactory alternative justice outcomes for women who opt to disclose their experiences online (Fileborn 2016; Wånggren 2016; Powell 2015; Salter 2013).

One of these forms of alternative justice is storytelling justice, an extension of the development of the validation and acknowledgement that are essential to the support-providing capacity of the online feminist counter-public (Wånggren 2016). This upholds a long-standing tradition of interpersonal validation of lived experiences within communities of women, and assists in providing opportunities for alternative justice practices, particularly justice through
acknowledgement and recognition of harm done (Wånggren 2016; Fileborn 2016; Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose 2016). For example, Wånggren (2016) writes on the importance of the Hollaback! campaign in creating a form of storytelling justice. Hollaback! originated in New York, spreading around much of the Western world, and provided an anonymous online space for women to share stories of the street-level sexual violence and harassment they faced daily (Wånggren 2016). Exemplifying the degree to which the online feminist counter-public can give rise to transnational initiatives and cross-pollination of ideas, a project similar to Hollaback! arose in Egypt to combat the high prevalence of sexual harassment experienced by Egyptian women. Called Harassmap, it allows women (and men) the opportunity to tell their stories of sexual violence, with each instance being overlaid on Google Maps (Peuchaud 2014; Skalli 2014). Peuchaud (2014) also notes the importance of this “citizen journalist” approach to sexual violence disclosure, and documentation in the form of this mapable data. The reports themselves may also be picked up and then more broadly disseminated by the mass media (Peuchaud 2014).

At present, there exists a music field-specific variation of the Hollaback! concept, in the form of a Tumblr blog called “The Industry Ain’t Safe” (The Industry Ain’t Safe 2016). This blog archives stories of sexual violence in the music industry, providing an outlet for disclosures of music field sexual violence, though disclosures on this blog sometimes explicitly name alleged offenders (The Industry Ain’t Safe 2016).

The potential for reputational damage to the accused provides an insight into the retributive justice capacities of social media disclosures. In cases of disclosures of celebrity sexual violence, this effect may be accelerated by the celebrity of a deviant, which lends greater newsworthiness to an allegation of sexual violence (Jewkes 2015, 57). Shame-based justice has an established history in the formal justice system (Goldman 2015). Writing on the potential for
judges to impose social media shaming punishments on criminal offenders, Goldman (2015) points to formal and informal shaming techniques, but notes that a consistent and codified approach to social media shaming would require careful consideration and guideline creation in order to avoid the appearance of arbitrary standards of punishment. The use of social media for shame-based justice as a supplement to the traditional justice system is also noted by Salter (2013) and Powell (2015). Braithwaite and Drahos (2002) state that naming and shaming is ineffective in cases where the individual being shamed lacks an interest in the opinion of those doing the shaming, and is additionally unnecessary in addressing those who are already vulnerable to disapproval. However, they make a case for the shaming of the “powerful,” those who are relatively invulnerable to disapproval (Braithwaite and Drahos 2002). Using the example of a corrupt corporate executive, whose activities are unlikely to be detected by those whose opinions they value, or who may even be “shielded from disapproval” by those at the “unethical company” where they work, they suggest that public shaming that draws attention to “organizational responsibility” as well as “individual responsibility” may be a useful tactic (Braithwaite and Drahos 2002, 275). The extent to which this tactic is mirrored by social media posts and news articles that call out elements of music industry as a whole in response to the crimes of prominent men within it is perhaps debatable.

There is some reasonable room for concern over social media disclosures of sexual violence. Powell (2015) acknowledges the concerns that attend a low barrier to claims-making, and a lack of due process. Salter (2013) questions the proportionality of shaming and reputational damage in certain cases. Whether false or accurate, a single post on social media can spiral rapidly into a widely-disseminated, life-changing event, with tremendous impact on the individuals at its core (Kelly 2013; Tsikata 2015). As reported by various music media outlets,
an anonymous comment made on the website xojane.com in 2013 accused the prominent musician Conor Oberst of rape (Michaels 2014). The accusation was later withdrawn by the accuser after her named witnesses disputed her account (Goodman 2016). Harris stated that she had been experiencing personal and emotional turmoil at the time they made the post, and that she had felt the need to generate attention for herself (Michaels 2014). The consequences of the apparently false disclosure were fairly involved, with Oberst having launched a defamation suit prior to the claim being withdrawn, and eventually being hospitalized for stress and exhaustion after sustaining career damage and ongoing suspicion (Michaels 2014; Goodman 2016). To date, stories about the allegation are still prominent in Google search results for Oberst’s name (Goodman 2016). He has also become an unwilling poster boy for mens’ rights advocates and those who would otherwise seek to discredit survivor disclosures (Osternof 2014/2015; Michaels 2014; Goodman 2016).

The motivation of an individual who levels a false allegation online may be partly explained by danah boyd’s argument that the ability to spread and broker gossip on social media is an important means of displaying social power and challenging the stature of established figures in communities (boyd 2013, 145). Writing on the use of social media by youths, boyd (2013, 145) states that those who have high social status become important targets for gossip, as possessing and disseminating intimate knowledge about prominent individuals is important for displaying one’s own social power. This bears some resemblance to the struggle between newcomers and consecrated artists described by Bourdieu, wherein those trying to build their own symbolic capital are expected attack the consecrated holders of symbolic capital (1993, 94). Marwick notes the performative and political nature of conflict on social media, as well as the importance placed on celebrity personas and their interactions with fans on social media (2013,
220). These features of social media conflict may partly explain the potential dangers of isolated false accusations when taken with the newsworthiness of celebrity deviance, and particularly celebrity sexual deviance (Jewkes 2015: 57; Madoc-Jones et al. 2014).

While optimistic about its potential for alternative justice, researchers have stated that there is also no guarantee of ideal outcomes for those who engage with the online feminist counter-public (Salter 2013; Powell 2015; Fileborn 2016). While noting the positive results that may be afforded to a survivor in the case, Salter (2013) addresses the apparent issues of perceived survivor respectability and credibility in other cases, which caused those survivors to not generate as much support from the online feminist counter-public. While enthusiastic about the potential for alternative justice, awareness-raising, and political action as a result of pursuing justice in the online feminist counter-public, Fileborn (2016, 17) notes that “online spaces were also clearly a limited avenue of justice in many respects.”

Survivors may also face backlash from anti-feminist activists, and be subjected to hate speech on social media, with the associated technology being used to replicate the gendered power imbalances seen in offline society (Fileborn 2016; Powell 2015; boyd 2013, 156). The permeability of the online feminist counter-public to motivated opponents has been noted by researchers (Ng 2015; Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose 2016). Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose (2016) see open refutation of anti-feminist activism on social media as an important means of countering the aggressive “trolling” behaviours associated with online anti-feminists. Similarly, Demirhan and Çakir-Demirhan (2015) attribute the presence of patriarchal discourse on Twitter to a lack of counter-public presence, and advocate for feminist counter-public countering of this anti-feminist discourse. This may be easier said than done, however. When attacking visible activists within the online feminist counter-public, anti-feminist activists can be extremely
aggressive, engaging in sustained campaigns of written abuse, the revelation of personal and identifying information (“doxxing”), rape threats, and death threats (Gray, Buyukozturk, and Hill 2017; Massanari 2015; Chess and Shaw 2015). In recent years, this anti-feminist backlash has become better organized, being orchestrated in part by prominent members of the pro-fascist, ethno-nationalist “alt-right,” which was itself at least partly birthed in an online anti-feminist activism campaign centred around the hashtag #Gamergate, which represented a social media campaign to limit the presence of progressive feminists in the world of video gaming (Gray, Buyukozturk, and Hill 2017; Massanari 2015; Chess and Shaw 2015). While plagued by ideological incoherence and infighting, the alt-right in a broad sense represents an oppositional counter-public to that of the feminist counter-public, and it has also demonstrated an activist capacity for political mobilization, supporting the successful presidential campaign of Donald Trump, and even advocating or spurring acts of real-world violence (Malmgren 2017).

Aside from the dangers survivors face due to the permeability of the online feminist counter-public, some survivors may simply not be satisfied by the range of possible justice afforded by social media means (Fileborn 2016). However, Fileborn (2016, 17) notes that “a limited or muted sense of justice is better than no justice”, particularly in cases where justice is not easily rendered through the intervention of “formal justice avenues”. As an example of such a case, she utilizes street harassment, which is the focus of her survey study (Fileborn 2016). This is logically extendable to other forms of sexual violence as well. The criminal justice system is not geared towards survivor-satisfactory justice outcomes in most sexual violence cases (Herman 2005; Lonsway and Archambault 2012; Larcombe 2014). Therefore, despite its shortcomings and associated risks, alternative, social media-based justice through the online feminist counter-public remains at times the most appealing or feasible option, however limited or risky (Fileborn
Justification for Research

As made evident in this literature review, there has been research into gendered power imbalances in the music field scenes. The activist potential of the online feminist counter-public has also been a recent topic of academic research, with a particular focus on its engagement with the topic of sexual violence. No academic writing which directly examines the nexus of these topics could be located, however, despite the increasing number of high-profile social media disclosures of sexual violence in the music field. The social media presence and value set that accompanies the music field, and which lend themselves to anti-sexual violence activism by the online feminist counter-public, have also not been examined in an academic context. This research deficit will be remedied, in part, by my thesis.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter identifies the data collection procedures, and data analysis process employed for my study of online disclosures of sexual violence in music scenes. I will provide a basic overview of considerations for researchers using social media for qualitative research as described in the extant literature, before explaining my research questions and methods. The chapter will conclude with a reflexivity statement acknowledging my personal position relative to the research topic, and the steps taken to overcome challenges in conducting the research.

The extant literature, discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, provides ample evidence of negative outcomes resulting from male domination in fields of cultural production. Bourdieu’s (1993) theory of the field of cultural production was used to explain the power dynamics within the music field. There is also evidence of the activist potential of the online feminist counter-public. My research was constructed with the assumption that the male-dominated music field contributes to sexual violence within said field, and survivors may be inclined to disclose in the online feminist counter-public because musicians rely on social media for image management in advancing their careers. My research questions developed in part from Nancy Fraser’s (1990) concept of the feminist counter-public – the space in which feminist activists organize and engage in resistant speech – as expanded on in an online context by Ann Travers (2003), Michael Salter (2013) and Anastasia Powell (2015). The questions were developed with the aim of assessing the extent to which discourse surrounding Larkin Grimm’s online disclosure of sexual violence in the music field aligns with feminist online counter-public themes of awareness-raising, survivor support, and alternative justice identified in the literature.

The research conducted was qualitative in nature. Qualitative methods are those that seek to interpret the world in a given context and perspective (Denzin 2008). The methods selected
were a case study and an analysis of the discourse surrounding the case, elaborated on below. The research was conducted from a critical feminist standpoint, and the data was approached using a theoretical thematic analysis (Lazar 2007; Braun and Clarke 2006). This is a form of thematic analysis useful for the critical assessment of qualitative data as it relates to existing theory and literature, and provides the researcher a good deal of flexibility in coding and analyzing data (Braun and Clarke 2006). Theoretical thematic analysis allows for a directed approach to the critical interrogation of qualitative data in a manner that originates from and is aligned with the values of the researcher, and the existing body of theory and research (Braun and Clarke 2006).

To some extent, the research is conducted from an insider standpoint. Insider research in an online environment involves the sense of being intimately acquainted with the research topic, and proximal in terms of “time and space” (Bengtsson 2014, 867). I am both close to the research topic due to my own position in the field of cultural production, as well as being proximal in time and space, as I watched the Gira and Grimm case unfold in my own Facebook feed in real time. I will return to the discussion of the insider standpoint in my reflexivity statement later in this chapter. The next section of this chapter will detail the methods used and contextualize them in their relationship to social media as a site of research.

**Social Media for Qualitative Research**

While social media is of increasing interest to researchers, no cohesive set of best practices for conducting qualitative research on social media exists (Snelson 2016). One consistent observation among researchers is that the online environment is messy, complicated, and difficult for researchers to sort through, particularly if they are engaged in qualitative research (Petrovčič, Vehovar, and Žiberna 2011; Davidson and di Gregorio 2011; Gatson 2011;
Postill and Pink 2012). Data requires considerable cleaning and filtering to ensure a relevant and manageable data set for coding (McKenna, Myers, and Newman 2017). Despite the challenges of conducting qualitative research on social media, qualitative methods “are very adaptable” to the chaotic social media environment (Branthwaite and Patterson 2011).

The case study method has previously been used as an overarching framework for a discourse analysis of emotional disclosure, with the authors of that study noting its usefulness for providing a holistic overview of data that comprises a rich narrative (Ellis and Cromby 2012). Discourse analysis examines the interaction between communicators, the intent behind their communications, how they create their narratives, the “shared cultural resources that are drawn upon,” and the relative positioning of communicators (Ellis and Cromby 2012). It is a useful research method which pairs well with online ethnography for comprehending the meaning-making processes and interpersonal communications of social groups online (Lomborg 2012; Ziegler 2014; Giles 2016). Accordingly, I pair a theoretical thematic analysis of the discourse surrounding Grimm’s disclosure with the case study approach to examine the way that complainants, accused, and online bystanders spoke about the disclosure. The discourse surrounding the allegation was analyzed particularly through Facebook comments on Gira and Grimm’s posts, as well as their posts themselves, but also through Twitter posts.

The observation of interactions in the online environment also constitutes a form of ethnography, as it involves the observation of a social group (Gatson 2011; Giles 2016; Postill and Pink 2012; Shumar and Madison 2013). It is argued by Gatson (2011) that even an unobtrusive, observational researcher presence in an online environment involves participant observation in the act of “lurking,” or reading posts from others without making a direct contribution to the discourse oneself. There is a tension in the literature on this topic, as Lomborg
(2012) argues that these forms of unobtrusive data collection do not constitute a form of ethnography.

**Research Questions**

My research attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. How does the discourse surrounding the sexual assault allegations made online by Larkin Grimm reflect and impact Michael Gira’s symbolic capital and position as a consecrated artist?

2. Did the online feminist counter-public manifest in response to the allegations against Gira, and if so in what ways?

3. To what extent can the dynamics of the field of cultural production and the online feminist counter-public explain the outcomes of the Gira case?

**Research Method**

A mixture of qualitative research methods was used to examine these questions. These methods included a case study and discourse analysis, executed from an insider standpoint. It can also be argued that this study, or the data harvesting process, makes use of multisited ethnography (Gatson 2011; Giles 2016). The case study method was appropriate and useful for providing the overall context for the disclosure, particularly for the manner in which the disclosure appeared in the public sphere via social and news media. Case study methodology is suited to providing a long-term overview of the case (Aaltio and Heilmann 2010). My research used a case study to follow the outcomes for Michael Gira’s career after fellow musician Larkin Grimm alleged, on social media, that he had sexually her. Data was gathered manually from publicly-available, online sources. These included individual social media posts on Facebook by
the complainant, Larkin Grimm, and the accused, Michael Gira. Data also included bystander comments on Facebook posts by Larkin Grimm and Michael Gira, as well as bystander tweets relevant to the case.

The primary rationale for the use of case study and discourse analysis methodologies in my thesis was to examine discursive outcomes of Larkin Grimm’s allegation against Michael Gira. The secondary rationale for using the case study method was to provide a comprehensive overview of the examined case, to consider broader implications of the discourse surrounding Grimm’s disclosure.

The data was obtained through observational, unobtrusive, multisited ethnography, seeking out Tweets and Facebook posts that addressed the allegation against Michael Gira. The data set represents a snapshot of what I determined to be relevant tweets, Facebook posts, and Facebook comments which contained original contributions from the complainant (Grimm), the accused (Gira), and bystanders. Posts and comments on the walls of Grimm and Gira were assessed to see how the discourse played out in an environment where Grimm and Gira could exercise some control over bystander engagement, as Facebook affords users considerable control over comments posted on their walls. Twitter posts were used as a source of bystander data that Grimm and Gira would have no ability to influence directly, as posts by Twitter users are not subject to possible removal by other users. Retweets and links to news articles that provided no original data from bystanders were cleaned from the sample.

The data taken from Facebook was collected in January 2017, 11 months after Larkin Grimm’s online allegation of sexual violence against Michael Gira. Grimm’s original Facebook post was removed, but remains preserved by its publication in music blogs and news media, though initial bystander comments on the disclosure were deleted. Gira’s public response, made
on his Facebook wall, remains both on his Facebook wall, and quoted in online news articles. Three posts concerning the allegation by Grimm were sourced from Gira’s wall, and 569 comments from bystanders were located on those three posts. Ten posts were sourced from Grimm’s wall, with 231 comments from Grimm and bystanders located on those three posts. An eleventh, Grimm’s initial disclosure post, was deleted shortly after it was made, but was available through news articles. Comments on this post were unavailable. The data taken from the Facebook walls of Gira and Grimm spans a period immediately after Grimm’s disclosure at the end of February, 2016, until mid-March of 2016. This point was selected as a cut-off, as the frequency of posts on both walls had begun to wane, with Gira ceasing to post about the allegation after March 1st.

Data was also taken from Twitter, to observe bystander discourse in an environment that was not associated with either party in the case (in contrast to the bystander comments taken from Facebook walls). Data was collected in January 2017, and some supplementary data was collected in June 2017, after I became aware that there had been comparisons made on Twitter between the outcomes of Grimm’s allegation against Gira, and allegations against a member of the band PWR BTTM. This supplementary data consisted of those tweets that compared the Gira case against the PWR BTTM case.

There was no straightforward, easy way to organize tweets, as no hashtag gained traction in association with the Gira case. This necessitated Twitter searches for relevant terms to compile tweets. In the case of Michael Gira, this was achieved by a search for Larkin Grimm’s name, and terms associated with the allegations against him, such as “allegation,” “rape,” and “assault.” This use of specific search terms was necessary, as Gira’s popularity as a cultural figure meant that his name was attached to many tweets that were not to do with the allegations
of sexual violence, but were rather focused on aspects of his career as a musician. The overwhelming majority of tweets concerning the case consisted of posts by news outlets and bystanders posting links to news articles. After cleaning the data to omit retweets of news articles about the case which lacked original content from the bystanders, 191 tweets were included in the sample. Between tweets, Facebook posts, and Facebook comments, the total number of statements by Grimm, Gira, and bystanders contained in the sample was 1005 (n=1005).

Table 1: Data Sources by Type and Quantity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook Posts</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Michael Gira</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Larkin Grimm</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bystander Facebook Comments</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On posts by Michael Gira</td>
<td>569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On posts by Larkin Grimm</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bystander Tweets</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total n</td>
<td>1005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Due to an error on my part, I was not able to effectively make use of the NVivo NCapture tool to import tweets into NVivo 10, a qualitative data analysis software.¹ Including data from

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¹ Unfortunately, due to my inexperience with the software, I waited for a mass of tweets to build up before collecting my data. As a result, most of the tweets I was working with were unavailable to N Capture – due to the way that Twitter’s API functions, N Capture is generally not able to capture tweets that are more than a few weeks old. Instead, multiple snapshots over time are required in order to collect data that spans a wide timeframe (QSR Interational, n.d.). This reduced the ease with which the data could be sorted and coded, and with which retweets of news articles could be omitted from the data. To make proper use of the full utility of N Capture, it is thus necessary to snapshot data every few weeks if examining tweets that span a large period of time. My lack of knowledge and
Twitter required me to import blocks of tweets as PDF files, each corresponding to a different Twitter search (i.e. “Michael Gira sexual assault,” “Michael Gira rape,” “Larkin Grimm”).

Numerous posts were discarded to clean and filter the data to a manageable sample. This was mostly an issue for content on Twitter, as Facebook comments on Michael Gira’s posts and the various posts by Larkin Grimm were generally relevant to the topic of the sexual assault allegation, and espoused clear stances from the commenters. This is not surprising, given the direct and less-anonymous nature of Facebook interactions, as well as the ability of Facebook posters to delete comments that are irrelevant or unsupportive of their position. Tweets that did not contribute to the discourse around the allegations of sexual violence against Gira were discarded. These were generally retweets of news media articles about the cases in question, made without the Twitter user indicating their own perspective on the cases. It was not reasonable to attempt to infer the viewpoints of Twitter users who retweeted media articles without adding their own commentary. Therefore, these tweets have not been included in the coded output.

**Data Coding and Analysis**

Data was coded in NVivo 10. Coding was structured according to: 1) which responses to the disclosures were supportive of Grimm or Gira, 2) which comments or posts alluded to the accused’s creative output or value as a cultural producer, 3) if the role of gendered power in the music field or the broader field of cultural production was discussed, and 4) evidence of the online feminist counter-public (i.e. awareness-raising, survivor support, alternative justice measures). The coding process was informed by theoretical thematic analysis, which takes an experience with NCapture resulted in a regrettable missed opportunity that increased my data sorting and coding workload.
adaptive approach to coding (Braun and Clarke 2006). In following this coding process, I did not operate with any form of script, but instead observed the data collected in the context of my theoretical perspective, and then allowed an iterative coding process to both inform my analysis, and influence my theoretical interpretation of the data (Braun and Clarke 2006).

**Organization of Findings**

Findings are presented on a per-topic basis, with each set of posts or comments only pertaining to their position in the thematic presentation of the data, rather than in chronological order. Each exchange between bystanders is treated separately, as are individual bystander posts. This organization is done in order to keep the focus of the findings on the discursive content produced by the collective whole of users discussing the case, rather than a chronological or associative focus that looks at the sequence of interactions, or the network of relationships between users. In addition to not being necessary to an assessment of how the two players in the field of cultural production and the allegation between them were discussed, attempting to map these connections would be both beyond the scope of the thesis and very difficult to execute over two social media platforms and hundreds of posts. I use “FBOC” (Facebook Original Commenter) as an acronym to refer to whichever bystander was the original commenter in a given Facebook comment thread, for the theme under discussion at that time. The designation “FBOC” thus represents many different bystanders, as does the designation “RC” (responding commenter). Where more than one user responds to a comment, I have appended a numerical designation to differentiate voices. However, these numbers do not represent specific bystanders from within the data set. Many different bystanders have been given the designation “RC1, (Responding Commenter)” for example, based on the position they occupied in an interaction in the data.
Similarly, for Twitter, I have used the designation TU (Twitter User) to represent individual bystanders. In those relatively rare instances where bystanders on Twitter interacted with each other, I appended a numerical designation, modeled on the numerical designations appended to “RC” for data taken from Facebook (i.e. “TU,” “TU2”).

I attempted to present a progressive narrative when possible, and to provide some context for the order of statements made by Grimm, Gira, and bystanders. For a chronology of events surrounding the case, please refer to the introductory chapter of my thesis. The next section of this chapter will address my researcher reflexivity practices.

**Researcher Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is a means by which the researcher critically assesses their position and biases relative to the research topic and subjects (Jorgenson 2011; Taylor 2011). This sort of self-examination and self-reflection is valued in feminist research, in order to situate the researcher in relation to the individuals and structures under study, examine the limitations of the researcher’s own understanding, and to prevent or mitigate against the replication of harmful power dynamics (Lazar 2007, Jorgenson 2011). Below, I will engage in this reflexive self-examination.

Since 2002, I have occupied various positions in the independent and experimental sectors of the Transatlantic music field. I used my position within the North American independent music field to conduct this research. As a musician, promoter, festival organizer, former record label operator, former contributor to an online music magazine, and music scene activist, I have a broad, international network of friends and confidantes who provide me with scene gossip and links to disclosures or articles that I may have otherwise missed. These advantages for data collection are afforded to me as an insider researcher, since insider research provides those who are perceived as participants on an equal footing with access to information
that might not be so readily divulged to an outsider (Smetherham 1978). The cases under study were brought to my attention because both cases involved individuals I “knew” through online “friendships” facilitated by social media platforms, and I was made aware of these events more or less instantaneously. I have had Michael Gira as a Facebook friend since November of 2010, for example, owing to our mutual friends and his presence as a relevant figure in the field. This insider access facilitated my witnessing, in real time, the unfolding of this social media disclosure and response process. These advantages of personal knowledge are characteristic of the insider research position (Taylor 2011). Despite my insider status, my data collection will have had a very small researcher footprint, as my contacts themselves are not research subjects. I gathered data at a significant distance from the subjects, and it was not necessary for me to interact directly with the individuals involved in the cases under study, as their disclosures and reactions are publicly available online. This overcomes some of the ethical dilemmas noted by Taylor (2011), such as potential violations of interpersonal trust. In this regard, the social media case study I undertook differs significantly from a typical case study (Aaltio and Heilmann 2010).

Taylor (2011), in talking about damage to communities or community members arising from research, identifies the political nature of omissions in the interest of maintaining public face for the community the insider researcher is studying. I have taken reasonable care in avoiding an uncritical look at the community as a musician and activist in my approach to this research. Firstly, because the discussion of music scene power dynamics, and the sexual violence to which they give rise is inherently a critical one, and secondly, because in examining the responses of the online feminist counter-public, I have acknowledged the potential for miscarriages of alternative justice.
In conducting this research, I found myself in an uncomfortable position on a few occasions, particularly when mutual friends I shared with Michael Gira attended a music festival I operated and asked me what my masters’ thesis research was about. Depending on the person in question, I would either provide a detailed response, or a vague answer to the effect that I was researching “sexual violence disclosures.” On reflection, this behaviour suggests that I was acutely aware of the power dynamics in play within my field, and reacted to them in accordance with a desire to maintain my status and ability to operate in the field, even as I was researching some of the detrimental effects of the symbolic capital that was influencing my behaviour. This would bear further examination in an autoethnographic research paper, and may suggest support for Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*, as I have the impression that these behaviours were near-unconscious reactions to the balance of power and positions in my field. Michael Gira’s band, Swans, is very well-regarded amongst my peers, with considerable symbolic capital in experimental music communities, and his creative output over the past 35 years has created ardent fans in the audience on which my music festival relies to sustain itself.

It should be noted that my personal bias in the discussion of allegations of sexual violence is in favour of the person making the allegations, for a variety of reasons. These include the low rate of reporting, the gendered nature of sexual violence, the tendency for survivors to experience revictimization, the low estimated percentage of false reports, and the general lack of survivor-favourable criminal justice outcomes (Lisak et al. 2010; Belknap 2010; Lonsway and Archambault 2012; Larcombe 2014). These points lead me to assume that most reports are unlikely to be false, since there is little chance of a survivor gaining anything from lodging a true report, let alone a false one. Additionally, I occupy a (very minor) activist role in the music field, in which capacity I helped stage a concert that, while not explicitly an anti-Gira or anti-Swans
show, was a benefit for the Toronto Rape Crisis Centre, and was intentionally held on the same evening as a Swans concert in Toronto in July of 2016. This activist stance is informed by my own position as a critical sociologist.

Still, I acknowledge that false reports of sexual violence in music scenes, while uncommon, may occur. While Facebook has made anonymity increasingly difficult over time, Twitter still affords considerable anonymity and a low degree of accountability, and I suspect that the anonymous nature of the xojane.com message boards may have facilitated, in part, the apparently false allegation against Conor Oberst mentioned in the literature review of my thesis.

In regard to my position as a critical sociologist, I have tried to be mindful of my educational privilege and associated cultural capital in interpreting the data available to me. I have attempted to avoid replicating problematic hierarchies, especially of gender (as it is a focus of my thesis) in assessing my data. I have additionally attempted to avoid judgmental language referring to individuals, as I am aware that my position as a critical sociologist affords me the luxury of thinking critically about social issues and phenomena to a degree that would be unreasonable and unfair to assume of every commenter and observer in this case. My own critical standpoint has been a relatively recent development in my life, and my divestment from attitudes and behaviours that I view as problematic is an ongoing process. I have tried to keep this in mind, and to treat individuals whose views are represented in the data with fairness and respect, even when those views conflict with my views as a critical sociologist.

Finally, the position I occupy in the music field means that I wield power within the field. I hold this position because of my cultural, social, and economic capital. I was afforded the opportunities necessary to learn how the music field operates, and maneuver myself to take up a position within it. I am additionally a cisgender young white man, and while I attempt to use my
position to further the representation of artists from backgrounds unlike my own, I am still representative of the overrepresentation of men in positions of power in the field of cultural production. For this reason, the process of reading and interpreting data surrounding this gendered power imbalance – particularly data that is apparently generated by the online feminist counter-public – has been a learning experience for me that transcends academic interest.

Research Ethics

Debate exists over the extent to which social media users should have a reasonable expectation of privacy in the public environment provided by social media sites. Greaves (2016) advocates for taking care to protect the privacy of individuals despite the public nature of the data gleaned from social media. By contrast, Gatson (2011) questions the extent to which anyone who uses social media sites has a “reasonable or defensible expectation of being unobserved”, and Burkell et al. (2014) note that Facebook users tend to be aware that their content is available to a wide range of potential unknown observers.

All data obtained for my research was obtained through publicly-available online sources, and in the course of doing this research, I had no contact with any individuals whose posts or comments are represented in my data. The data was taken from public Facebook posts by Larkin Grimm and Michael Gira, which were additionally discussed on multiple music news websites. Bystander comments on those posts, as well as posts on Twitter, were also included in the data. I have avoided the use of individuals’ names in transcribing Facebook data. Twitter data requires linking to the individual’s profile in citing data. Still, public social media posts do not afford a reasonable expectation of privacy, and as such this research did not require Research Ethics Board approval, as per Article 2.2 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al. 2014).
The following chapter will describe and discuss the results obtained in the application of the methods outlined in this chapter.
Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter of the thesis will identify relevant findings from Twitter posts, as well as posts and comments on the Facebook walls of complainant Larkin Grimm and accused Michael Gira. A prevalent finding is the way in which Gira’s symbolic capital was used against Grimm and mobilized for his defense. Additionally, manifestations of the online feminist counter-public were widely represented. Below, I will describe the layout of my findings and explain them via Bourdieusian theories of forms of capital and the field of cultural production. I will identify the manifestations of the online feminist counter-public via three themes: alternative justice, awareness-raising, and survivor support.

I present a progressive narrative when possible, and provide some context for the order of statements made by Grimm, Gira, and bystanders. For a chronology of events surrounding the case, please refer to the introductory chapter of my thesis.

The Power of Symbolic Capital and Position in the Field of Cultural Production

Michael Gira’s long career in music extends back nearly forty years, and has seen him successfully maneuver from a fringe musician into an accomplished and extremely well-regarded artist, who commands the respect of fellow artists, journalists, and audiences alike (Lipez 2014; Turner 2014). Unsurprisingly, Gira’s symbolic capital emerges as a prevalent theme in the data. I argue that the existence of such capital in the social media excerpts below was used by Gira, and those bystanders who support him, to defend him and discredit Grimm. Additionally, as per Grimm’s account, his symbolic capital and position were used to facilitate his alleged sexual violence against her, and granted him the ability to punish her when she confronted him over that sexual violence. At other times, the value of his symbolic capital was made evident in comments by those who supported Grimm in her allegation, but admitted that they would still support
Gira’s career and cultural output. As a well-regarded, consecrated artist and record label operator, frequently referred to as a “genius”, Gira possesses considerable symbolic capital – the prestige or honour that results from the value of his accumulated economic, cultural, and social capital (Bourdieu 1993, 75; Bourdieu 1989, 19). Additionally, as operator of the record label that was releasing Grimm’s work, he specifically possessed some measure of economic capital relative to Grimm. In Grimm’s initial disclosure, she discusses Gira’s position of power relative to her, calling him a “trusted mentor” who clearly had the ability to direct her career (quoted in Helman 2016, par. 3). Per her statement, both Grimm and Gira knew he could mobilize adequate symbolic and economic capital to delimit her success in the field. This made Grimm unwilling to end the relationship or confront Gira about his behaviour, even in the midst of continued alleged harassment:

**Grimm:** “Michael took the opportunity to kiss me in the elevator, and I complied because I really, really, really wanted to be a successful musician. He’d often say to me, ‘I’m gonna make you a star, Larkin. You can trust me.’” (quoted in Helman 2016, par. 5)

Grimm says that, when she eventually confronted him about the alleged sexual assault and harassment, Gira “dropped [her] from Young God Records,” “destroying” her life in the process (quoted in Helman 2016, par. 6, 8).

Over the course of her online disclosure, Grimm makes it clear that she was acutely aware of the symbolic and economic power Gira possesses, that these forms of capital worked to make her fearful of confronting him over the alleged sexual assault and ongoing sexual harassment, and that he ultimately deployed them in a punitive manner:

**Grimm:** “Michael Gira, my producer, raped me and dumped me from his label when I confronted him about it, needing to feel safe… Sending my love to #Kesha I know how you feel. At least I got out of my record deal, though I was never offered another one after
that.” (quoted in Helman, par. 7, 9).

In expressing support for Kesha, who was then embroiled in a very public dispute with her label, Sony BMG, over her desire to get out of a recording contract that would have seen her forced to collaborate with her alleged abuser, Dr. Luke, Grimm also contextualized Gira’s power and abuses thereof in the broader context of social spaces of music, particularly in a professional context (McCarthy 2016). This may have been an attempt to draw the attention of the online feminist counter-public, which had already had an influence on the visibility of Kesha’s case through the #FreeKesha hashtag (McCarthy 2016).

For his part, Gira immediately mobilized his symbolic capital via a response to Grimm’s disclosure. Calling Grimm’s allegation “a slanderous lie,” he made an appeal to the “intelligence” of his fans, positing that his innocence could be taken for granted among those familiar with his creative output and public persona:

**Gira**: “I trust in the intelligence of those who have followed my work and respect me as a person, to know this is NOT the person I am.”

Gira’s successful mobilization of symbolic capital came from supportive bystanders. On his Facebook wall, which was an online environment likely to draw the attention of his supporters, the majority of bystanders supported him against Grimm’s allegations. Many mentioned that they “know” he is innocent, because of his creative output and value as a cultural producer. For example, his history of songs criticizing abuses of power, including sexual assault, was invoked as evidence of his innocence. In the exchange below, one bystander connects Gira’s

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innocence to his creative output, and a second bystander argues that if you are familiar enough with Gira’s creative output you would know the allegation is false:

**RC1:** “And for fucks sake, has anyone listened to his songs speaking out against rape?!!??”

**RC2:** “EXAAAACTLY”

Anyone who believes this probably doesn't listen to swans.”

Another bystander equated Gira’s creative output and public persona with the reality of his personal life. In so doing, the bystander produced what appears to be precisely the defensive effect that Gira hoped his symbolic capital would provide:

**FBOC:** “I personally think that, with Gira's personal history and whatnot, this is something absolutely unlike him.” … “If you know anything about Gira at all you'd know that he is strongly against rape, he is against prison, and he is against capitalism. Swans early work screams that out loud. Before you take sides I suggest you learn about the accused's history too.”

Gira’s supporters also compared his symbolic capital via his artistic output and position to Larkin Grimm’s artistic output, to discredit her allegation. This was done in two ways: 1. By claiming Grimm was making her allegation in order to get “free publicity,” 2. As a wanton attack on a superior artist because of “greed” or “jealousy.” These posts and comments suggested that it was Gira who was the victim, an inversion of power wherein Gira’s standing as a consecrated artist and mentor to Grimm made him her target, rather than someone with the symbolic capital to exploit her. More directly but less frequently, bystanders found Grimm’s account unbelievable

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or discreditable because they perceived her to be a lesser artist. The following quote includes examples of both:

**FBOC (emphasis in bold):** “Sorry, I might be speaking from a place of bias in terms of their respective music (Michael's being light years and aeons better than hers), but logically and intuitively, I know he didn't do that. One might even go as far to say that maybe she made advances on him and was rejected over and over. And also didn't see her creative potential being appropriate for YG any longer and subsequently dropped her.

Now that he's toning down a bit with Swans etc and as others have said, the trend of Facebook confessions and Cosby/Kesha rape accusation culture has been taken advantage of. This seems very opportunistic and spiteful.

This is a bitter artist who was lucky enough to collaborate with a rare talent and oddity like Michael Gira. She wanted more, didn't get it. In 8 years didn't get very far and now, with impeccable and oh so suspicious timing drops the fame bomb. Pitchfork, Brooklyn Vegan, Sterogum! Oh lord, the publicity! PR 101...

Those of you who have been inspired by Swans and other sonic adventures of the man and have seen and felt the love Gira emits through his music (especially for women, which is empowering goddess worship), stand up. Defend your shaman.”

The above bystander quote is evidence of the power of Gira’s symbolic capital, and his consecrated position relative to Grimm. Of key interest is the statement that the bystander “knows” that Gira did not sexually assault Grimm. The bystander acknowledges that this “knowing” may be informed by the bystander's bias against Grimm because of Gira’s body of artistic work being superior to hers. Moreover, the perceived lower value of Grimm’s artistic output makes the bystander suspicious – she talks about the supposed publicity value of her “opportunistic and spiteful” allegation against the superior artist, and goes so far as to urge other fans to “defend” Gira, whom the bystander describes as a “shaman.” In one particularly salient exchange, Gira’s symbolic capital as a cultural producer was used to shut down one of his

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attackers. A bystander commented on Gira’s wall, calling him “an evil, disgusting fuck.”\(^9\) This provoked a response that appeared to claim that those who attack Gira need to adequately demonstrate their own value to justify their presence in the conversation:

**RC1:** “Fuck off ya cunt! What have you done with your life?”\(^{10}\)

This overt question implies that the bystander’s discussant value is to be weighed against that of Gira’s symbolic capital to determine if she should be heard. In this example, a supporter of Gira suggests that Gira’s critics need to demonstrate their productive value or relative merit in order to critique him. The Grimm-supporting bystander RC1 addresses has essentially been told to either demonstrate her value, or “fuck off.” I have construed this response, with its focus on the productive value of the targeted bystander, as further evidence of Gira’s elevated status over his potential critics. Additionally, it contains a misogynist insult that suggests gender plays some part in the assessment of value. This quote offers additional support for the argument that bystanders who do not value Grimm’s achievements and cultural output think this means she has no right to critique Gira.

Gira’s position as a consecrated artist with tremendous symbolic capital was demonstrated by fans via language such as “shaman”, and heroic descriptions of Gira. For example, they commented on the inspirational impact he has had on their lives through his cultural output and public persona:

**FBOC:** “You are one of my biggest heroes, and you inspire me every day to write and play and live.”\(^{11}\)

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While speaking of him reverentially, other supporters also lashed out at Grimm with language representing gendered stereotypes:

**FBOC:** “This woman has the evil eye! Bitch! Mr. Gira. saved my life!”

Gira’s symbolic capital is such that even those bystanders who supported and believed Grimm could not help but acknowledge Gira’s “genius” and value as a cultural producer:

**TU:** “it sucks that Michael Gira is a genius and a rapist”

The high value of Gira’s symbolic capital was further evidenced by the fact that some supporters of Grimm specifically stated that they are continuing to support Gira professionally, despite their discomfort or guilt in doing so. One Twitter user stood out for a series of tweets in which they reference pervasive sexual violence in social spaces of music, and spoke of the creative output of musicians as having a “fucking crazy” influence on fans. These tweets suggest that Gira’s cultural output continued to hold value for them, and although this value is not evidence of his innocence like it is for some fans, they will nevertheless continue to be consumers of his cultural product, even though they do not separate his private actions from his public persona:

**TU:** “And yeah it’s really horrible that my first thought behind the new Swans album is ‘aw it’s gonna be hard to enjoy it, shucks’/ And not ‘Wow Michael Gira is probably a rapist, I think there needs to be a greater dialogue re: sexual abuse in the music industry’. That above statement is true, BTW. Whether it happened or not, whether the evidence for/against the rape is true, that dialogue is

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importantﻯ // Final Side note: I find it interesting that some people defend Gira while decrying Bill Cosby. The influence of music is fucking crazy.”

Above, I argue that the forms of capital wielded by Gira facilitated his abuse of Grimm as per her account, and contributed to his defense by bystanders. In the next section, I examine the existence of the online feminist counter-public in the discourse surrounding Gira’s alleged assault of Grimm. The data I examine provides evidence that the online feminist counter-public is used to do three things: It provides space for survivors and their supporters to seek alternative forms of justice, it raises awareness around issues such as sexual violence by challenging misconceptions held forth in the dominant public and it provides support for survivors (Salter 2013; Fileborn 2016).

“This is your last chance for redemption, Gira:” The Online Feminist Counter-Public and Alternative Justice

As stated above, the online feminist counter-public is inclined towards engaging in alternative justice measures, awareness-raising and survivor support. In the data I examined, I found evidence of all three of these features of the online feminist counter-public. I will begin this section of my findings by first discussing the alternative justice approaches of the online feminist counter-public in relation to this case.

Grimm’s initial disclosure was itself an example of an alternative justice approach to sexual violence. By bypassing the formal channels of the criminal justice system to make her complaint against Michael Gira, Grimm sought a form of justice that appeared to be more

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oriented towards receiving acknowledgement of harm done and an apology for said harm, as
well as a possible shame-based justice approach. Grimm also initially stated that she “didn’t want
to destroy his whole life with a rape charge,” which presumably also made a disclosure on social
media a preferable option to a formal charge in her view (quoted in Helman 2016, par. 9). A
follow-up post of hers made explicit her desire for a public apology, and in a comment on that
post, Grimm left open the possibility of a formal criminal complaint if she was not given one
(though such a complaint has thus far not materialized):

**Grimm:** "If he doesn't publicly apologize soon, I'm taking it to the
police. This is your last chance for redemption, Gira.”

Shaming justice is one form of alternative justice that can occur when the online feminist
counter-public names and shames perpetrators (Salter 2013). In naming Gira as her assailter and
describing his alleged abuses in intimate detail, Grimm engaged in this behavior. An interesting
and unexpected feature that I encountered in the data was the apparent extension of shaming
justice on Twitter to artists and media outlets that continued to support Gira’s career. The
apparent intent behind these statements was to create some form of punitive measure against
Gira for his alleged assault of Grimm. It appears that bystanders hoped to limit press
opportunities and collaborative artistic opportunities for Gira by shaming or imploring their
targets into foregoing professional relationships with him. Due to their apparent focus on trying
to cause professional harm to Gira, these bystander posts could also be construed as an attempt at
a form of retributive economic justice:

**TU:** “@amandapalmer why are you involved in the new swans doc?
michael gira being a rapist and all?”

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19 Comment on Facebook post by Larkin Grimm, “The words of a rapist…”, March 24, 2016, 11:17 p.m.,

TU: “Pitchfork was the first to point fingers at Gira when he was
outed as a rapist now they’re pushing a crowdsource link for a doc abt
his band”

The desire to see justice visited on Gira via career damage was expressed in even clearer
terms by some bystanders supportive of Grimm, particularly on Twitter:

TU: “If there was any justice, Michael Gira’s career would be
finished.”
TU: “So Michael Gira is a fucking rapist. I hope Swans disband and
his career is ruined.”

Shaming justice based on dismissive statements about the value of Gira’s artistic output
were also evident in the discourse on social media. As much as Grimm was attacked as an
unworthy artist by supporters of Gira, some Grimm supporters (as well as Grimm herself) made
posts that were dismissive of Gira as an artist. In these instances, Gira’s work detailing topics
such as sexual assault and abuses of power, taken as a defense of his character by his supporters,
were seen differently by Grimm’s camp. They construed these aspects of his cultural output as a
telling fixation on his part, rather than evidence of his good politics. This was an apparent
inversion of the tactic of Gira and his supporters. These attacks on his artistic output, and the use
of his output to impugn his character, may also be construed as a form of retaliatory justice,
meant to publicly shame him for his work, particularly as it was seen to relate thematically to his
alleged assault of Grimm. This may speak to a mirror understanding among Grimm’s supporters
of the power of his position in the field of cultural production, in accordance with the
fundamental law of the field (Bourdieu 1993, 94):

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22 jasoncherkis, Twitter post, February 27, 2016, 11:07 a.m., http://twitter.com/jasoncherkis. Accessed January 19,
2017.
23 plastic_eggs, Twitter post, February 26, 2016, 5:41 a.m., http://twitter.com/plastic_eggs. Accessed January 19,
2017.
FBOC: “Well, Michael, if he is not a rapist, which I suspect he is, is at horrible poet/writer…”

FBOC: “One of the reasons I never liked Swans music (apart from it being boring) was that whole 'power over the weak' crap Gira used to obsess over. I mean, what the hell was the appeal in that to people anyway?”

It is also worth noting that the fact that these commenters took the time to belittle Gira’s work may also speak to a tacit awareness of the important role played by symbolic capital in the debate surrounding Grimm’s allegations, and a desire to reduce that symbolic capital held by Gira.

“Anyone who denies rape culture exists needs to take a gander at what is being said in these forums”: The Online Feminist Counter-Public and Awareness-Raising

Another characteristic of the online feminist counter-public, as identified in the literature, is awareness-raising or educational behaviour, in which feminist concerns around a given topic are advanced in online discourse (Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose 2016; Jackson and Banaszczyk 2016; Fileborn 2016). Awareness-raising or educational behaviours associated with the online feminist counter-public were evident on Twitter and in comments on Gira and Grimm's Facebook walls. As evidence of this, I highlight posts and comments that seek to dispel rape myths, advance discussion of gendered power in social spaces of music, or explain why a survivor may not choose to engage with the criminal justice system. I view these bystanders (and Grimm herself) as taking on an educational role to disseminate opinions and facts that run counter to those dominant on Gira’s wall, which included, among others, recurring rape myths. Among these were statements suggesting the justice system was the only appropriate avenue for

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discussing an allegation of sexual violence, that false rape allegations are a common threat faced by men, and that someone cannot be raped while asleep or inebriated.

Much of the most explicit awareness-raising was done on Gira’s wall in response to attempts to discredit Grimm, by bystanders who confronted Gira supporters. Some of Gira’s supporters openly lamented the fact that Grimm had opted to discuss the alleged sexual assault on social media, and the majority placed their faith in the criminal justice system – bystanders frequently stated that Gira is “innocent until proven guilty,”27 and that “the truth will come out”28 eventually. The fact that Grimm had not engaged with the criminal justice system, has suffered with mental illness, had delayed making her allegation by eight years (a fact referred to disparagingly by Gira’s wife Jennifer, who referred to Grimm as “mentally unstable”29), and opted to make the allegation on social media, was often used to discredit her. However, several bystanders took exception to attempts at discrediting Grimm, and used this forum to educate. The following example describes false rape allegations as uncommon, decries the practice of discrediting survivors by invoking their mental health issues, and offers a feminist analysis by situating these discrediting tactics as a feature of rape culture:

_FBOC_: “False rape allegations are rare … but to discredit her allegations because of an alleged mental illness of the woman making the claim is not very rare. That is a typical response, in fact, and so is pulling out old statements in an attempt to discredit the accuser. … Anyone who denies rape culture exists needs to take a gander at what is being said in these forums.”30

In a different exchange, the same bystander refuted a vaguely-sourced set of statistics, (provided by a Gira-supporting bystander) with direct references, to challenge the claim that false rape allegations are common:

**RC1:** “Dude official fed statistics put false rape accusations between 17 and 40% of the total how is this not common?”

**FBOC:** “…. in the United States, the FBI Uniform Crime Report in 1996 and the United States Department of Justice in 1997 stated 8% of rape accusations in the United States were regarded as unfounded or false.[3][4][5] Studies in other countries have reported their own rates at anywhere from 1.5% (Denmark) to 10% (Canada)’ In other words, rare.”

Other rape myths were also challenged by bystanders who supported Grimm. A bystander who identified herself as a “(feminist) researcher” hoping to confront the “hysteria” around sexual assault invoked rape myths, claimed that someone cannot be assaulted while they sleep, and admitted to harassing Grimm on her wall. This led to Grimm supporters challenging her academic authority and chastising her for spreading dangerous rape myths. The following comment arose from this exchange, including a discussion of what constitutes “feminist” in sexual assault victimization discourse. In this way, it echoed other awareness-raising comments that appeared to shut down attempts by Gira-supporting bystanders to identify as feminist while seeking to discredit Grimm:

**RC1:** “There is seriously something wrong with you if you go around studying sexual assault in order to prove that it doesn't happen. And on top of that to say it's not feminist to be a victim of sexual assault? You can absolutely be raped in your sleep and for you to say any of these horrible things, or harrass someone for speaking up about an

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experience. I hope one day you start to research why you so vehemently argue these things, because THEY are truly twisted, not feminist and very dangerous”.

Some bystanders sought to educate Gira’s supporters about reasons Grimm opted not to go to the police, in an effort to refute the assumption that she would have done so had there been any merit to her allegation. The following comment sees a Grimm-supporting bystander referencing her own experience as a survivor to explain the difference between the online disclosure process and the negative experience of engaging with the criminal justice system:

**RC1:** “If you know anything about our court system, you would understand why 90% of rape victims never go to the police or to court. It fucks you up emotionally, you're stunned, and when it's someone you know and/or love there's also denial and wanting to pretend and make it go away. She has literally nothing to gain from this. She's not going to the cops. She's sharing her story. I as a rape survivor understand her post, and I identify with the feelings she shared about her experience. It feels very genuine. Just so you know.”

Another bystander used sarcasm to illustrate reasons that a survivor may not feel safe speaking to police:

**RC2:** “hard to wonder why a woman wouldn't trust a legal system where police commit spousal abuse at double the rates of others, have been known to rape on the job etc. backed by a corrupt court system full of dead ends and humiliation… hmmmmpmp it's almost like when women are brave enough to share their experiences men flock to call them harpies witches and liars, to defame them with impunity. you all make me sick.”

Some bystanders offered education on the difficulty associated with securing convictions in cases of assault of the nature alleged by Grimm. This appeared to be an awareness-raising

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measure to challenge the phrase “innocent until proven guilty,” which was repeated frequently by Gira’s supporters as a way to justify their claims that Grimm’s allegation was wholly without merit:

**FBOC:** “The legal route in a case like this that happened over a few years ago is void. The burden of proof women need to convict a rapist is beyond what can be given by the victim at this time.”

**FBOC:** “Unfortunately, in the case of an accusation of rape, to proclaim "innocent until proven guilty" is almost always going to be difficult to justify, since there is not usually any means to a proof by the alleged victim. It might not be fair to put that burden on the accuser.”

Grimm herself made posts and comments offering readers a feminist analysis of sexual assault. Her disclosure statement, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, included an explanation of the power dynamics she experienced and rationale for her continuing to work with Gira after he assaulted her. In subsequent posts, Grimm continued to explain her experience as a survivor of sexual assault. For example, Grimm provided some reasons that she spoke kindly about her alleged assaulter after the fact, and took eight years to go public with her allegation:

**Grimm:** "Like of course I tried to ‘tend and befriend’ the assaulter. We had a deep 2 year friendship that I desperately wanted to heal, and he was manipulating me into thinking I was loved and cherished. A mutual friend said ‘I can't believe a person as strong as you would let that happen. Why didn't you come to me?’ I didn't tell my own mother and sisters. I wanted to erase the event and erase the trauma before it took hold of me.”

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Grimm: “Why have I been so kind to that man through all this? Society has conditioned me to be nice at all costs.”

Grimm’s feminist awareness-raising practices were not restricted to talking about her own individual experiences. She also made posts and comments to educate bystanders on her views of patriarchy and gendered expectations of sexuality in broad terms:

Grimm: “As long as the patriarchy rules and men hold the keys to the kingdom, women will continue to fight over access to these men and the power they hold. Recognizing misogyny where it exists is only the first step.”

Grimm: “Men need to be held accountable for their actions and made aware of their privilege and the responsibility that comes with the power they have been handed by the patriarchy.”

Grimm: “Self restraint is something women are REALLY REALLY good at. Men aren't taught to have much of it, but they certainly are capable of restraint.”

Taken together, these awareness-raising examples speak to the presence of an online feminist counter-public that is willing to bring its ideas to other audiences, even hostile ones – a key feature of counter-publics, as identified by Fraser (1990).

“I believe you 100%. Crazy Survivor Solidarity” The Online Feminist Counter-Public and Survivor Support

A third theme that emerged in my review of the literature concerning the online feminist counter-public was that of its potential to provide support to survivors (Salter 2013; Powell 2015;...

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Such support for Grimm was abundantly represented in the data taken from Twitter, and from Grimm’s Facebook wall. This support took the form of words of encouragement, sharing of experiences, legal advice, and general praise for what bystanders identified as Grimm’s bravery in coming forward with her allegation against Gira.

Support via Twitter and on Grimm’s Facebook wall came in the form of praise for Grimm’s decision to speak out, and the acknowledgement of the pervasive nature of gendered abuses of power in social spaces of music. Such messages of support were numerous:

**TU1: [addressing TU2]** “i’m glad that people like larkin are starting to become more open about this now, because it's an issue we need to fix”**47**

**TU2: [addressing TU1]** “the music business, music culture, has become so toxic i am glad to see victims having the bravery to speak out.”**48**

**TU:** “Only just learned about Larkin Grimm and Michael Gira. My heart is broken for her. Women in music are speaking out and it is so heroic.”**49**

**FBOC:** “We love you Larkin. You are so brave and strong to not only endure this, but to come forward and help others.”**50**

In addition to provoking the sort of awareness-raising backlash detailed in the previous subsection of this chapter, the rhetorical use of Grimm’s mental health issues to discredit her also generated messages of support and solidarity on Grimm’s wall, from bystanders who identified themselves as having mental health issues:

**FBOC:** “I believe you 100%. Crazy survivor solidarity. <3

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An additional form of support for Grimm came in the form of rationalizing, in a legal context, her choice to avoid engaging with the criminal justice system. There were only a few such messages of support, but they are included here as a mirror image of the faith in the formal justice system held by many of Gira’s supporters, as well as an attempt to provide support and justification for Grimm’s specific course of action in the interest of justice:

**FBOC:** “It seemed Gira by using the term ‘slander’, making the public aware of his lawyers was going down the legal path until him and his followers kept the dialogue going on Facebook but I understand by you needing pro bono representation, Facebook may have been the only public place you could talk about this, so Larkin I can see why now you took the course of action you did with this.”

**FBOC:** “unfortunately the law is an exceedingly flawed & blunt instrument in these matters, so much so that it normally does more damage than good no matter what legal principles are brought to bear your means of seeking redress seems much more productive …”

In this section of my thesis, I have detailed the ways in which the data reflects key themes in the literature, including the power of forms of capital and positionality in the field of cultural production. The discourse captured in the data points to how a revered artist’s position and capital can facilitate exploitation of those who occupy a position of relative disadvantage in the field. The data has also exemplified how the symbolic capital of a revered artist can be wielded to defend them from criticisms that are not even necessarily artistic in nature, but which may

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extend to ethical or criminal criticisms. The data also contains evidence of the existence of an online feminist counter-public. Grimm, and bystanders who supported her, reflected themes of alternative justice, awareness-raising, and support, all of which align with literature on the online feminist counter-public. In the next section of my thesis, I will assess how these findings align with or differ from the extant literature.
Chapter 5: Discussion

I return to my research questions. First, to determine why the Grimm-Gira case has played out as it has, I wanted to examine the role position and capital in the field of cultural production played in directing the discussion of the case on social media. The results provide significant evidence of the marshalling of symbolic capital for the defense of a prominent man in the field of cultural production, and the relative power of his position and symbolic capital over that of a woman in the field who occupied a more tenuous, relatively unconsecrated position. Second, I wanted to assess whether the online feminist counter-public was represented significantly in the discussion of the case on social media. My findings also provide significant evidence of the presence of the online feminist counter-public in the online discourse surrounding this case. Three themes associated with the online feminist counter-public are for provision of alternative justice, as well as providing awareness-raising, and survivor support. Third, I wanted to assess the extent to which the dynamics of the field of cultural production and the online feminist counter-public explain the outcomes of the Gira case. The data appears to support the conclusion that the nature of the field as a site of struggle between consecrated artists and newcomers cast additional suspicion on Grimm as a complainant, particularly as one whose cultural output was being denigrated by Gira’s supporters. While it addressed Gira’s power and the discrediting tactics associated with sexual assault cases in general (such as rape myths), the online feminist counter-public appears to have responded incompletely to the framing of Grimm as a cynical operator within the field by Gira’s supporters.

The following section will contextualize and discuss these findings in relation to relevant literature.
Symbolic Capital, the Field of Cultural Production, and the Defense of Valuable Agents

The findings support Bourdieu’s theory of the field of cultural production, and the value of symbolic capital in attaining and maintaining an advantageous position in that field. Writing on the field of cultural production, Bourdieu (1993, 75) states that the consecration of an artist depends largely on that artist’s ability to convey disinterest with commercial success, to disavow the economic association of cultural production, and to accumulate symbolic capital. In so doing, the artist cements their value in the long game, so to speak – they invest in a drawn-out career, building their reputation through their “disinterested” production and career trajectory, with the hope of long-term returns (Bourdieu 1993, 75).

Michael Gira, leader of the band Swans, is a good example of an artist who has developed substantial symbolic capital, and converted it to economic capital. He operates his own record label, through which Larkin Grimm was an employee. He convincingly portrays the economic disinterest and disavowal Bourdieu describes by maintaining a plausible distance from what is perceived as the more apparent economic interest of mainstream popular music (Bourdieu 1993, 75, 79). The language used by critics following Gira’s work has made it clear that he is not aligned with “commercial” music. The unconventional tonal palette and instrumentation he uses are spoken of reverentially, and their unconventionality is seen as representing a dedication uncorrupted by economic interest – “What appears at first to be field recordings of church bells (but is actually percussion) and squealing, workshop band saws slicing through timber set the tone for what is a serious but beautiful album. A statement of labour and love” (The Quietus, 2010, par. 1). Writing for The Guardian, in the intervening time between his alleged assault of Grimm and her speaking out about it, a critic states that “More than 30 years after they started, Swans are still flying boldly against the prevailing winds of our age” (Turner
This despite the fact that Swans have appeared as a headline act at some very large, “commercial” music festivals, such as North by Northeast in Toronto (Côté 2014). In an apparent example of the overlooking of Gira’s own economic interest as a cultural producer, that Swans performance was described in a “10/10” review as “an exhaustive rock’n'roll exorcism on Toronto's commercial core [emphasis mine]… one of the best concerts of 2014, and perhaps the finest hour of Yonge-Dundas Square as a venue for live music.” (Côté 2014, par. 2). In the eyes of these writers, he appears to exist outside economic calculations.

His established nature as a genius of the old guard, a man of legendary status whose position is secure, is noted in the preamble to an interview with Gira, published four months after Grimm went public with her allegation: “The band is Swans, and the musical genius behind this now legendary project is a man by the name of Michael Gira, a no nonsense musician with enough life experience to be my (badass) dad.” (Kuhn 2016, par. 1). His consecration is demonstrated clearly in the reverential terms with which critics and fans have always spoken of him, and continue, to, even in the wake of the allegation by Grimm. Even Pitchfork, one of the music news websites that initially reported on Grimm’s allegation, has gradually reduced references to the case in its coverage of Gira’s career (Reyes-Kulkarni 2016; Yoo 2017).

This perception of Gira as an artist with purely artistic intentions (and, as the bystanders noted in the data, as someone who interrogates power relations with a critical eye in and by the music he makes) served him well in convincing many of his fans not to believe Grimm’s allegation. Additionally, I posit another factor that has contributed to the apparent forgetting of Grimm’s allegation over time, which is that it took place between players in the field, who both stand to lose or gain in the course of playing the game. Bourdieu would suggest that this is tacitly understood on some level by those witnessing the contests between those who hold unequal
positions as producers in the field of cultural production (Bourdieu 1993: 94). In this case, Grimm being an identifiable, individual female musician occupying a lesser position in the field created an additional level of suspicion that hangs over the typical discrediting tactics deployed against survivors like a magnifier. It amplifies the mythologizing of false allegations as commonplace, despite research suggesting that they are rare (Lisak et al. 2010). It additionally contextualizes Grimm’s allegation as an obvious tactic to increase her visibility in the field. Despite the rarity of false allegations as described by Lisak et al. (2010), the data identifies bystanders alluding to false allegations against prominent musicians as “today’s witch hunt,”55 and “PR 101,”56 accusing Grimm of “trying to get easy fame.”57 Suggestions that she is jealous of his position, and motivated primarily by having been let go from his label (though her account suggests she was let go as a consequence of the alleged assault) occur with prevalence in the data.

It appears that, in the bystanders’ view, Grimm is acting in a way that aligns with what Bourdieu (1993, 94) calls “the fundamental law of the field.” This is the contest between consecrated position-holders and newcomers, as well as their associated “camps,” who are aware of this constant contest. They are thus inclined to perceive “aesthetic or ethical choices” in the context of “cynical calculation” by the opponent, who seeks “success at all costs, even through provocation and scandal.” (Bourdieu 1993, 94). The frequency of accusations of cynical self-interest made against Grimm by bystanders supportive of Gira suggests that her allegation was seen in the context of this contest, and that this contributed additional doubt to the public

perception of her claims. The response to the allegation by Grimm was to attack her both as a cynical manipulator and as a lesser artist, with the latter accusation also offering a partial explanation for the former. As demonstrated in feminist literature concerning women in music (as part of the field of cultural production), the consecration of producers skews overwhelmingly towards men, with male cultural producers generally seen as more “authentic” (Miller 2016; Schmutz and Faupel 2010). Women in music are, by contrast, seen as opportunistic intruders (Miller 2016; Bannister 2010). This plays into suspicions arising from the “fundamental law of the field,” providing a logical justification for Gira’s camp to claim that Grimm is simply seeking to advance her position in the field by diminishing his (Bourdieu 1993, 94). This works against Grimm, while also allowing Gira to deploy his creative persona and output as a defense, buoying up his claim (supported by those bystanders who favour his side in the contest) that they are accurate reflections of his authentic self, and suggesting that he has been made a target of a sexual assault allegation by virtue of his artistic position. Additionally, behaviours seen as non-deferential or anti-social (which may well include a public social media callout) are not tolerated from women musicians to the same extent as they are in men (Miller 2016; Leonard 2007: 70-74). These factors may have further impacted on the willingness of bystanders to see in Grimm the “respectability” relative to Gira that Salter (2013) found to be important for a survivor-favourable outcome in online disclosures of sexual violence. Zaleski et al. (2016) have noted that the respectability of a celebrity accused has an impact on the extent to which they, and their alleged victims, receive bystander support for their respective positions. In this context, respectability, similar to prestige or honour, appears to function as another term for symbolic capital.
Bourdieu also notes that attacks on artists who have established their position in the field also “hit the distinguished consumers of their distinctive products” (Bourdieu 1993, 108). The personal interest of the bystander who supports Gira is thus bound up in Gira’s success and veneration, because they reflect the implicit success and veneration of their tastes and sensibilities. There is some self interest, then, in bystanders defending Gira or reframing the allegation against him in a less-damaging way. Their investment in him is personal, and is reflected in the data by the many bystanders who appear to see him as a “shaman,” or equivalent. That such fans can have an impact on support for a celebrity perpetrator of sexual assault has been discussed in existing literature, with what Marwick (2013, 95) would call “fan labour” on social media – defending or building the reputation of a celebrity – being a possible contributor to support for comedian Bill Cosby (Zaleski et al. 2016).

The next section of this chapter identifies the presence and role of the online feminist counter-public between my data and previous literature.

**The Existence and Role of the Online Feminist Counter-Public in the Gira-Grimm Case**

One response to the “fan labour” described above in the wake of a sexual assault allegation is the sort of work done by the online feminist counter-public, and the findings provided considerable evidence of its existence in the discourse surrounding the Grimm-Gira case. While the social media environment in which the online feminist counter-public operates is permeable, unlike the discursive spaces to which feminist activists would retreat in Fraser’s (1990) conceptualization of the feminist subaltern counter-public, Grimm’s Facebook wall still provided an example of a relatively safe site for feminist discourse and support work. Grimm’s discussions of rape culture and gendered power dynamics in the music field, shared with her supporters on her Facebook wall, represented this discourse. Interestingly, this same environment
is where Grimm posted her initial disclosure statement against Michael Gira, and in that case, managed to gain the attention of the broader public sphere through the reporting of the music news media. This represented an example of Grimm bringing her concerns to the public sphere, another feature of the feminist counter-public conceived of by Fraser (1990). Additionally, the awareness-raising engaged in by Grimm’s supporters also constitute the transmission of feminist issues to members of the broader public engaged in discourse surrounding the case. Due to the permeable nature of social media, these spaces of support and contestation can be one and the same. This permeable and dualistic nature of the online feminist counter-public has been acknowledged by researchers such as Fileborn (2016).

Those bystanders who offered support to Grimm, waded into online discussions (or conflicts) with Gira’s supporters, or who advocated or attempted to enact alternative justice represented three major themes of the online feminist counter-public as described in the literature (Salter 2013; Fileborn 2014; Fileborn 2016). What is less apparent is the extent to which these feminist counter-public discourses were successful, and the data is not able to reflect this. The data provides evidence for significant support for Grimm as well as awareness-raising and calls for alternative justice. Yet, neither the data nor the scope of my thesis provides a means of assessing the ultimate impact or outcomes of these discourses. Those bystanders who were or are clearly fans of Gira, yet were swayed by Grimm’s allegation on Facebook and the resulting coverage in the music media or by other bystanders on social media, may themselves demonstrate the clearest evidence of a measure of success in awareness-raising and alternative justice measures undertaken by the online feminist counter-public in relation to this case. However, it is worth noting that several of these bystanders still ascribe value to Gira’s artistic career, despite believing Grimm’s allegation, and labeling Gira a rapist.
As mentioned in the findings in chapter four, some bystanders who represented the online feminist counter-public demonstrated awareness of the influence of Gira’s symbolic capital on perceptions of the credibility of Grimm’s allegation. Despite these instances, Gira’s symbolic capital was not consistently linked to the relative appreciation of Grimm’s value as a woman and cultural producer. However, as noted in the findings, this was of key importance to how Gira and his supporters defended him. Additionally, gendered insults and the implication that Grimm (and, though the comment was unique in the data set, at least one bystander) demonstrate value as a cultural producer before criticizing Gira spoke to the combination of misogyny, gendered stereotypes, and position that placed Grimm at a disadvantage in terms of being heard and respected. It appears that the online feminist counter-public as represented in my data may not have succeeded in addressing Grimm’s lower position within the field in a direct way, despite their ability to challenge misogyny and rape myths. The discussion supporting Grimm on her Facebook wall discussed overrepresentation of men as gatekeepers in the field, but did not address the gendered accumulation of symbolic capital among artists in the field. One possible response to devaluing Grimm as an artist and elevation of Gira would have been to point out that Gira himself had clearly seen her work as being worthy of release through his record label. An additional possible tactic would have been to talk about gendered patterns of consecration, and the language used to discuss men artists versus those who do not identify as men. The specifics of position and symbolic capital in this case appear to have not been a primary concern of the online feminist counter-public, but perhaps engaging with these aspects of the field of cultural production would have furthered the pursuit of alternative justice and awareness-raising outcomes in this case.
In the final chapter of my thesis, I will conclude with my thoughts on the relative outcome of the Gira and Grimm case as compared to other cases of sexual assault allegations in the music field, as well as ideas that may assist with limiting such instances in the future.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

My analysis has led to two major findings. One is that position within the field of cultural production, and the forms of capital that are connected to success in that field like symbolic capital, can also facilitate forms of exploitation that are not part of the essential function of the field. To my knowledge, this finding represents an original research contribution. In this case, symbolic capital was invoked to safeguard a consecrated artist’s reputation against an allegation of sexual assault by an artist occupying a lesser position. The second finding pertains to the online feminist counter-public. The extant literature demonstrates the presence of an online feminist counter-public in discussions of disclosures of sexual violence on social media (Salter 2013; Powell 2015; Fileborn 2016). This online feminist counter-public appears in the data collected for my thesis, and appears to have manifested in response to other cases of sexual violence in the music field (Roy 2016; Sargent 2017). The online feminist counter-public appears in response to such high-visibility cases, a finding that would align with Jewkes’ (2014, 57) assertion that a celebrity offender increases the visibility of a case of deviant behaviour. This finding is also in keeping with the apparent manifestation of the online feminist counter-public in the cases of Heathcliff Berru and PWR BTTM, as described by news media (Roy 2016; Sargent 2017).

In responding to cases of sexual violence in the field of cultural production, it appears the success of the online feminist counter-public may partly depend on how it addresses the relative positions of the accused and the accuser in terms of their consecration and symbolic capital. An awareness of these particular features of the field may assist with formulating counters to those arguments that discredit complainants based on their productive value in the field. To my knowledge, this finding constitutes an original contribution to the research on interactions
between the field of cultural production, and the online feminist counter-public. In order to know more about outcome or impact, further research is needed about the specifics of symbolic capital and position in the field of cultural production.

The topic of sexual violence committed by consecrated artists in the music field has received considerable media attention in recent years, but there is no academic research on this topic. To my knowledge, my thesis represents the only critical discourse analysis of a social media disclosure of sexual violence in the field of cultural production, and the fallout in terms of response from bystanders and the alleged offender. Bourdieusian theories of forms of capital and field offer a novel explanation for the harmful exercising of gendered power and exploitation in music, specifically, but which would by extension apply to other sectors of the field of cultural production. It also supports previous research that finds an online feminist counter-public that provides survivor support, awareness-raising around issues of sexual violence, and attempts to provide a kind of alternative justice, in forms that resemble Fraser’s original concept of the feminist counter-public (Fraser 1990; Salter 2013; Fileborn 2016). Given forty years of research that demonstrates the negative experiences sexual assault survivors have experienced embroiled in the formal criminal justice system, the online feminist counter-public provides an important alternative means of achieving some measure of justice, however limited (Fileborn 2016).

Towards a Greater Understanding of the Role of Gendered Symbolic Capital in the Field of Cultural Production: Recommendations for Arts Funding Organizations and Music Journalists

The case of Heathcliff Berru, the music publicist accused by multiple women of sexual assault, whose career imploded more or less immediately afterwards, saw a similar manifestation of the online feminist counter-public (Roy 2016). The allegations arose on social media, and
contributed to a discussion about sexual violence in music in the music press, which focused on
issues of male gatekeepers, underrepresentation of women, and general sexism (Roy 2016;
Noisey Staff 2016). That there were multiple allegations against Berru from many prominent
women in the field likely contributed to the swiftness with which he was punished via alternative
justice, but this is not necessarily a complete explanation for that success. PWR BTTM, a queer-
identifying band whose politics saw them only playing venues with gender-neutral washrooms
and enforcing safer space policies, also had their career effectively dismantled in the wake of
anonymous allegations against one member of the group (Flanagan 2017; Sargent 2017). The
apparent hypocrisy of their political stance when contrasted with the alleged sexual violence one
member was accused of has been offered as a speculative reason for the rapid dismantling of
their career, particularly when coupled with the political sensibility of their audience (Sargent
2017). This is also not necessarily a complete explanation for the collapse of their career. After
all, Michael Gira had to contend with an allegation that, taken as true, would also expose him as
a hypocrite. In my analysis of this case, I found that his politics and persona, as represented by
his productive output, were used for his defense by his supporters. Supporters who identified
themselves as having feminist politics rallied to him and condemned Grimm, and his supporters
argued about their status as feminists (or misogynists) with those bystanders who represented the
online feminist counter-public.

I believe that a partial explanation for the success of the online feminist counter-public in
contending with the Berru and PWR BTTM cases is that the positions of Berru and PWR BTTM,
as unconsecrated agents in the field of cultural production, made them more vulnerable to
allegations than Gira. Berru’s purpose in the field was overtly economic, as he was concerned
with advertising the work of artists without being an artist himself (Roy 2016). He was thus not
likely to be afforded consecration or many advantages of position when considered against a multitude of prominent women who are producers in the field – he is not able to play the game of economic disinterest, for one, and as an art “marketer,” his “very existence” amounts to “cruel unmaskings of the truth of artistic practice” (Bourdieu 1993, 79). As relative newcomers, PWR BTTM’s career collapsed and they were dropped by their record label days before the release of what was “supposed to be one of indie rock’s breakthrough records of the year” (Sargent 2017, par.1). Similarly, they did not hold the position in their field to weather allegations of sexual violence, even though the alleged survivors remain anonymous and their allegations were initially voiced through only one Facebook user (Sargent 2017; Flanagan 2017).

Gira’s greater accumulated symbolic capital and position relative to Grimm facilitated the exploitation she claims in her disclosure on social media, and appear to have influenced the bystander responses to her disclosure. Redistributive justice that recognizes the positional disadvantage of women in the field of cultural production may be of some help in mitigating against similar exploitation in the future. Fraser (1997) advocates for redistributive justice that addresses needs of disadvantaged groups on the basis of recognizing the specific characteristics of their disadvantage (i.e. cultural devaluation based on gender), in order to foster participatory parity in the public sphere. In so doing, she links socio-economic injustice and cultural domination (Fraser 1997).

There are some possible measures that could hypothetically be taken to aid with these forms of injustice as they appear in the field of cultural production. In addressing economic injustice in the field of cultural production, redistributive justice through greater arts funding for non-male-identifying artists is one possible solution. Currently, some arts’ funding organizations encourage and prioritize artists from less privileged backgrounds, such as the Ontario Arts
Council (which has a list of priority groups for arts funding, though gender is not one of the
group delimitations listed), or the Canada Council for the Arts, which references gender in its
equity statement (Ontario Arts Council 2017; Canada Council for the Arts n.d.). The importance
and potential of funding organizations for assisting with gender parity is reflected in emerging
fears that cuts to the United States’ National Endowment for the Arts under the Trump
presidency will contribute to greater gender inequality in the arts (Deng 2017). Miller (2014)
also partly attributes greater gender parity in folk music, as compared against the metal genre, to
the association of folk music festivals and labels with funding organizations.

These grants are, however, still open to men, who, as demonstrated in the literature
reviewed above, are overrepresented in positions of power in the field (Miller 2016). Even with
equity statements and priority groups in place, grants which still require underrepresented
demographics to compete for funding with the men who are overrepresented in the field are
essentially failing to account for the impact of accumulated cultural capital on successful grant
writing, which requires specialized knowledge, and is influenced by assessments of artistic merit,
which tend to favour men (Khan 2014; Schmutz and Faupel 2010). Partitioning off a substantial
portion of government mandated arts funding for grants that are not accessible to men, may be
one way to encourage and support music festivals organized by women and may help address
gendered underrepresentation at the hands of powerful male gatekeepers (Jutbring 2016; Vincent
2014).

In addressing cultural domination, examining the language deployed in discussing
musicians may also help alleviate gendered consecration and associated power imbalances in the
field. Critics are vital tastemakers, and contribute to the process of artistic consecration
(Bourdieu 1993: 78, 100; Schmutz and Faupel 2010). Critics engage in gendered patterns of
describing artists: i.e., the gendered use of the word “genius,” or “authentic” (both of which are granted more frequently to men), and the trivializing language that undermines the status of women artists (Schmutz and Faupel 2010; Garland 2015). Greater care should be taken with the choice of language used in assessing the public persona and cultural output of those cultural producers who do not identify as men, in order to foster a greater relative valuation of the cultural output of women and others who do not identify as men.

Recognition-based redistributive justice is necessary to foster cultural value for marginalized groups (Fraser 1997). What Fraser refers to as participatory parity in the public sphere would perhaps have made it possible for Grimm to locate herself on a more level playing field with Gira (Fraser 1997). In addition to the discrediting potential that faced Grimm as a lone accuser coming forward years after the fact, her position in the field of cultural production rendered her motivations suspicious to those who assessed her actions within the context of “the fundamental law of the field” (Bourdieu 1993: 94).

Redistributive justice, paired with recognition as Fraser (1997) conceives of it, is one of the few forms of justice that offers real change in the field of cultural production. While these suggestions will not eliminate sexual violence in the field, they can perhaps further discourse and greater awareness of gendered assessments of the relative value of agents in the field of cultural production. In the meantime, the online feminist counter-public may benefit from increasing awareness-raising activities that critically examine the positions of complainant and accused in the field of cultural production.

Future Research

The scope of my thesis was limited to one case, between a man and woman who are cisgender, straight, and white. Further research examining how the field of cultural production
contends with different identities and social locations (i.e. race, sexualities, as well as trans and non-binary people) is needed. An intersectional analysis is likely to expose relative devaluation of agents in the field of cultural production along these lines, and may contribute additional perspectives on the problem of the disproportionate representation of white men among consecrated artists. Research on sexual violence perpetrated by artists in other sectors of the field of cultural production – literature, film, etc. – may also reinforce these findings, or offer new perspectives on the role of the forms of capital and position in allegations of sexual violence and other forms of exploitation within the field of cultural production.

The gendered pattern of consecration in the music field contributes to the devaluing and exploitation of those who operate within the field and who do not identify as men. The online feminist counter-public has demonstrated its value and capacity for raising awareness, providing support, and pursuing alternative justice around instances of sexual violence in the field. In cases where an allegation arises between two actors in the field of cultural production, however, the success of these measures depends on addressing discrediting arguments that are based on the logic of the field itself. Discrediting arguments that seek to draw parallels between the credibility of an allegation of sexual violence and the relative value of the cultural producers it concerns need to be addressed by calling attention to the long history of male overrepresentation and gendered consecration in the music field, in much the same way as awareness-raising behaviours around rape myths seek to contend with their use in discrediting sexual assault survivors. In so doing, the online feminist counter-public may increase its potential to help those in the music field who find themselves in positions similar to Larkin Grimm.
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