2013

Punk and punk-related subcultures: Striving for change and always changing

Elliot Chi Wang Fong

PUNK AND PUNK-RELATED SUBCULTURES: STRIVING FOR CHANGE AND ALWAYS CHANGING

A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

in

English Composition

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11/21/13

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ABSTRACT

In this study I explore academic constructions of punk subculture which overlook the complexities of punk discourses. "Academic punkism" perpetuates an idea of a monolithic and totalizing construction of punk subculture that derives from particular eras of mainstream punk culture. Academic punkism produces limiting analyses by ignoring the nuances and multiple punk discourses. However, evolutions of punk subculture serve to challenge academic punkism. DIY (do-it-yourself) punk discourses in particular exemplify an antitheses to mainstream notions of punk culture. Punk, however, is prone to its own forms of essentialism, which perpetuate dominant cultural frameworks. This includes subcultural normativity and subcultural assimilation. Punk essentialism limits socio-political consciousness and issues surrounding multicultural punk identity, in particular, people of color in punk. Thus, gaining a wider context of cultural awarenesses diminishes punk essentialism. I conclude by arguing that expansion of punk ethics beyond subcultural boundaries demonstrates the incorporation of punk ethics into everyday lifestyle practices.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest appreciation for my committee chair David Marshall for his guidance and patience through this thesis process. My sincere thanks to Jacqueline Rhodes for her insight and encouragement in this project. I'd also like to thank Angela Asbell for having galvanizing conversations. Shouts out to Mary Boland, Brenda Glascott, Karen Rowan, Dorothea "Dottie" Cartwright, and Andrew Castillo for their efforts in creating a welcoming educational environment.

Thanks to Brenton Aragon for helping cultivate ideas from the initial stages of this project. Shouts out to 5th and B, and Peanut Butter and Jamage (Anna Quiñonez, Estevan Fierro, Josh Penunuri, and Roger Tamayo) for keeping my life lively. Thanks to all the bands who stayed at our house. Thanks to Louis Vandenberg, Eddie Valencia, and KUCR for their support during this process. I'd like to thank my close friends and colleagues Dexter Thomas and Victor Castellanos for the stimulating conversations. Much thanks and gratitude to Alicia Cox for her motivation and inspiration. Thank you to my mom, dad, uncle, and sister for their warmth and generosity. #TYBG

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CHAPTER ONE

ACADEMIC PUNKISM

Academic Punk Discourse

Punk subcultures and discourses have influenced countless individuals across the globe for over thirty years, functioning independently from mainstream culture, as well as being featured in the spotlight of mass media. Academic discourses have taken interest in punk subculture's significant cultural influence. As Dylan Clark of University of Toronto explained, "Such groups were remarkable vehicles for social change, and were involved in dramatically reshaping social norms in many parts of the world" (Death and Life 1). Counter-cultures have effectively changed mainstream social discourses, thus transforming political and cultural landscapes. University published books, award-winning essays, scholarly journals, and academic conferences centered on punk have emerged and increased in numbers in the past two decades.

While the scholarly fascination of punk subculture has spread internationally, this chapter discusses academic constructions of a monolithic and totalizing punk subculture. These research analyses overlook the

subcultural nuances of varying punk discourses. Therefore, these theories embody a type of "academic punkism." This includes an essentialist approach that reduces punk to a particular set of characteristics, concurrently reinforcing a dominant narrative. Conventional analytical approaches to punk, in conjunction with mainstream representations, apply an essentialist perspective on punk subcultural practices.

Media representations largely influence a public view of punk and related subcultures. Consideration of the Sex Pistols as an archetypal punk band shape a particular representation of punk, especially in regard to image and ethos. For example, the nihilistic attitude expressed through bassist Sid Vicious' hard drug use, and his sporting a swastika necklace pendant for the sole purpose of shock value. Spotlighting his bad-boy image keep a mythological legacy as a symbol of punk rock. The public eye maintains consistent attention on the romantic notion of a rock n' roll lifestyle, and the embodiment of "cool." On the other hand, commercial interests largely construct Vicious' character to sell the Sex Pistols image and music. A commercialized punk rock develops a subculture associated with a marketable fashion and product, devoid of ideology and practice. If business-centered interests propel the Sex

Pistols image, and popular culture references Sex Pistols as representative of punk, then the representation only symbolizes a mainstream and superficial aspect of punk subculture.

Some academic discourses maintain a focus on the Sex Pistols as a reference point for punk subculture. This accentuates facets of mainstream punk subculture, and in turn overshadows other concurrent punk discourses. This approach also promotes a starting point for punk subculture, rather than part of an evolution of music and art. Chapter two of Dick Hebdige's *Hiding in the Light*, titled "Mistaken Identities: Why John Paul Ritchie Didn't Do It His Way," reflects on Sex Pistols' bass player Sid Vicious (birth name John Paul Ritchie) and the death (and alleged murder) of his girlfriend Nancy Spungen. This essay discusses media's shaping and public expectations of Ritchie's identity, with Hebdige making an argument that Ritchie became the character that had been created. Hebdige reasons that John Paul Ritchie lost himself in the drug-induced character Sid Vicious. Both Vicious and Spungen became the fantastical persona that the public expected of them. Vicious' fatal overdose in 1979 and his wild character leads Hebdige to dedicate a chapter to him,

published in 1988. However, this is an instance of a continued concentration on a mainstream (British) punk subculture, which focuses on a particular image, era, and discourse, thus promoting a dominant narrative. This focus on a type of "celebrity news" overlook the numerous pluralities of punk characteristics and ideologies.

Hebdige, producing some of the pioneering scholarly works on subculture, combined with media's focus on mainstream punk, has set a foundation in shaping academic punk discourses. Consequently, some scholars have adopted a similar vision of mainstream punk, applied it to an academic punk theory, and developed discourses of academic punkism. Therefore, the emergence of an academic discourse of punk have reified an essentialist punk discourse that have similar academic frameworks found in Orientalism.

To be clear, the issues discussed in this chapter surrounding Orientalism does not directly represent punk subculture. The references to Orientalism and the "East" in this chapter does not seek to characterize punk as an "other." Punk does not embody the "Orient" because it represents a chosen cultural identity. Some scholars examining punk subculture share many of the research approaches found in Orientalist theoretical frameworks.

Furthermore, some scholars exhibit Orientalist-like attitudes while unnecessarily deeming punk subculture as a mysterious "other." These research techniques demonstrate outsider perspectives in their analyses of punk subculture. Aspects of Orientalism, in this chapter, function as a reference point that frame a concept of academic punkism.

Contextualizing Academic Punkism

By establishing punk as a field of study that solely revolves within an academic sphere, some scholars have assumed the role of authority figures in the subject matter. In this respect, these approaches connect to ideas associated with Orientalist theory. Orientalism deals with the "West" and its depiction, analysis, and study of the "East," or the "Orient." According to Edward Said:

> . . . Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (Said 3)

Orientalism depicts an other by a culture with authoritative clout, analyzing the other with inherent pre-existing and pre-established ideas. Similarly, a research approach reflecting academic punkism analyzes punk subcultures influenced by predetermined concepts. Individuals with a distinguished reputation who publish through established media outlets (university presses, etc.) become a representative authoritative voice of their research. These views often reflect an individual and culture that function outside the studied discourse(s), from an outsider unfamiliar with the "subject."

Because academic essays act as authoritative sources, one has a responsibility to examine these written discourses. Said explains:

> There is nothing mysterious or natural about authority. It is formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental, it is persuasive; it has status, it establishes canons of taste and value; it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas it dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions and judgments it forms, transmits, reproduces. Above all, authority can, indeed must, be analyzed. (19-20)

Academic documents represent and define its subjects by presenting a framed discourse. Therefore, texts in "punk studies" becomes representative of subculture. By deconstructing the position of these documents, one may better analyze representations of punk, and examine the author's relationship with punk subculture. Essays that apply generalizing and overarching ideas to research subjects create a limited analytical interpretation of discourse.

Analytical lenses reflected in academic punkism represent conventional fascinations. Zack Furness, professor at Penn State University and editor of *Punkademics,* explains that some academics who have interest in punk-related culture hold a narrow perspective of the subculture. He continues, "Nevertheless, this doesn't stop people from feeling entitled to make assumptions, lodge critiques, and draw conclusions based on what, more or less, amounts to an analysis of punk 'texts'" (12). Scholars with limited knowledge on punk advance ideas that exhibit a limited frame of reference. Though some individuals have an invested curiosity on punk, their professional statuses do not necessarily give credit in having legitimacy on the culture. Furness asserts,

"Academics should not be seen as the authoritative voices capable of explaining punk to the masses . . ." (11). While academic punk discourses could be considered a source of information on punk, the research does not necessarily reflect punk perspectives, and only reflects academically-centered lenses.

In a context of academic constructions of punk, considering the correspondence (or lack thereof) between "researcher" and "subject" provides an insightful analysis of an academically developed "punkism." Analyzing these conversations provide an important lens in grasping academic theories of punk and "punkism." Examining communication allows one to consider attitudes and practices exhibited by scholars. The analysis of academic constructions of punk includes looking at previously-established conceptions. Some of the ideas produced within academic circles become projected onto subcultures.

Some scholars adopt the role of an authoritative figure with the assumption that their "subjects" have less depth of knowledge. Said described a factor of Orientalism as ". . . reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness, usually overriding the possibility that a more independent, or more skeptical, thinker might have had

different views on the matter" (Said 7). This mindset reflects a belief that the researcher holds an insight on the "subjects," a matter which no one else possesses. Therefore, the researcher does not consider a necessity to consult findings with primary sources. In relation to academic discourse of punkism, some scholars who do not re-examine their findings subsequently speak for people in punk. In relation to Said, this included ". . . deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally, representing it or speaking in its behalf" (Said 20). In a situation pertaining to texts associated with academic "punkism," authoritative researchers who assume exclusive understanding circumscribes a punk discourse and places their perspective over the primary sources.

An academic essentialization of punk perpetuates a stigmatizing discourse. Not only are some researchers looking for specific characteristics, but their language reflecte particular attitudes toward their research "subject." In *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, Vijay Prashad explains that scholars involved with Orientalism sought ". . . to impute value to these zones, with the West being productive, dynamic, adult... while the East is slothful, static, childlike . . ." Individuals establishing

a discourse apply particular qualities, thus guiding the perspectives audiences. Prashad's description of that specific research phenomenon relates to academic punkism, in which researchers attribute particular elements in punk subculture. This not only promotes an essentialist perspective, but creates a specific perception of punk. By developing an academic field of study, these scholars become authoritative voices of this area of research. Their conclusions and findings allude to much more than an overly generalized application.

Assigning certain values to a subculture stigmatizes its cultural worth. Prashad explains:

> The point they made was simple: the world had to be sundered between East and West. The former once had a great history, but it had since descended into timelessness and stasis; the latter remained dynamic and cultivated wisdom. (Prashad 174)

An Orientalist perspective represents the "subject" as a stagnant entity stuck in a reminiscent state of past achievements, while the discourse of "research" continues to push the production of knowledge. Comparably, academic discourses of punk emphasize particular time periods as

pinnacle points of punk subcultural worth by overlooking an evolution of cultural practices. Engaging a limited focus in research hinders analysis in research, including punk subcultural practices.

However, academic punk discourses do not completely reflect theories related to Orientalism. One aspect of Said's Orientalism deals with the reproduction of works within a limited community of scholars. These individuals reference each other, thus replicating ideas that continue to push a particular argument (Said 20). In contrast, many scholars who have written on punk subculture have not followed this tradition while explaining their research approaches. Jeremy Wallach states, "...we must turn to approaches to cultural meaning other than those employed by Hebdige" (110). While Hebdige introduces some of the preliminary academic publications on subculture, Wallach proposes additional means of examination. Clark writes off the Sex Pistols by describing them as "sell-out" and a "foremost corporate spokesband" (7). He dismisses the Sex Pistols as having minimal credibility to punk subculture, and not being representative of punk ideology. These acknowledgments promote a more contemporary lens to approaching punk subculture. While some scholars do not aim

to maintain the reproduction of knowledge, these approaches continue to perpetuate a monolithic definition of punk subculture.

Signs and Signifiers

Chapter one of Hebdige's *Hiding in the Light (1988)*, focusing on "working class youth," demonstrates an example of academic punk essentialism. These youths included skinheads, punks, and other people involved with various subcultures. However, Hebdige's chapter one does not contextualize these subcultural identities with their respective discourses. Instead, he labels them all as "working class youth" in "urban ghettos," thus lumping them together in an indistinguishable mass. For instance, all of the individuals in the photographs had no names, with only the author's subtext. This external gaze on a subject projects a type of exoticism, detached from a contextual reality. The person becomes a representation of a grander image rather than a depiction of an individual. In addition, various photographs depict skinheads of different ethnic backgrounds (e.g. black and white skins) without contextualizing the photos. This further generalizes subcultural discourses because the pictured individuals

could all associate with "working class youth." However, differences arise in their approaches to subcultural identities. Academic discourses of punk engage in a critical analysis of superficial subcultural imagery.

One main factor in a scholarly-created punkism involves a focal point on aesthetics. Many scholars acknowledge the importance of signs and signifiers (a la Saussure and Barthes) in punk subculture. Hebdige states, "The politics of youth culture is a politics of metaphor: it deals in the currency of signs and is, thus, always ambiguous" (35). Cultural signifiers embody mysteriousness because subcultures function outside of "authorised discourses," such as institutionalized settings (e.g. schools, workplaces, religious buildings, etc.). By having intent focus on visuals, the physical aspects of punk become an important facet of an academic punkism.

Since punk-related signifiers and their meanings often remain obscure, academic punk discourses reference the traditional 1977-era representations of punk. As demonstrated in *Living the Punk Lifestyle in Jakarta*, Jeremy Wallach emphasizes "mohawks, spikes, and leather jackets . . ." (105) while attending an event. These elements are exemplified in a photograph featured in the

essay, depicting two individuals with mohawks, leather jackets, tight jeans, and boots (106). Although some people in punk continue to embrace traditional signifiers, some scholars apply it to subculture as a whole. Wallach takes it as evidence to assert punk having frozen in time. He describes punk as, ". . . instead of constantly evolving, have remained unchanged to a remarkable degree . . ." (99). Wallach's intrigue focused on the remarkable stagnant characteristics of punk. On the other hand, another photo depicts a nameless performing band, with half of the members wearing caps (104). Even though an argument could be made that the backwards hat represents skateboarding culture's connection with punk subculture, this photo did not receive any analytical attention. These instances reflect a narrowly focused, limiting punk discourse. Looking for, and applying ideas of mainstream punk representations to punk subculture as a whole, perpetuates appearance-based analytical practices.

By focusing on signifiers as a focal characteristic of punk, representations of subcultural bodies become a subject of theory in academic punk discourses. *Hiding in the Light* discusses perceptions of punk subculture in mass media, with Hebdige defending youth culture against media

prejudices by analyzing "the construction of youth within sociology" (27). Hebdige focuses on aspects of subculture as a community for troubled youth, and analyzes popular media portrayed individuals within punk and other subcultures. However, Hebdige's concentration on the "delinquent juvenile crowd" (19) limits punk subculture to a particular population. *Hiding* portrays this particular discourse as young folks who embrace cultural taboos such as ornate hair and facial tattoos. Hebdige emphasizes, ". . . 'youth culture' as a sign system centres on the body - on appearance, posture, dress" (31). This represents a form of "articulating identity and difference" (30). According to Hebdige, the physical body symbolizes an association with particular social groups. This not only acts as a form of expression and communication between people of similar discourses, but also as a separation from those who did not understand the cultural signs. Hebdige characterizes punk subculture as a place where troubled young people expressed themselves by constructing an image through their bodies. Hebdige advances academic punk discourses by stressing on a fashion-centric foundation as a structure of subculture.

An appearance-based theoretical groundwork of "punkism" prompts scholars to focus on physical appearances. The article "The Death and Life of Punk" (2003) by Dylan Clark (University of Toronto) states, "Like their subcultural predecessors, early punks were too dependent on music and fashion as modes for expression; these proved to be easy targets for corporate cooption" (Clark). This statement asserts that early punk rely heavily upon music and clothing style as markers of identification, which become easily appropriated by people with business ventures. The statement also makes the assumption that everyone involved with punk indulged in fashion. By overlooking other characteristics such as ideological and political stances, Clark's article interprets early punk as a subculture having specific inseparable superficial qualities.

Focusing on physical attributes allows the notion of physical space to became a focal topic. Some academic writings characterizes punk subculture as a centrally located physical space. In *Hiding*, Hebdige describes his travels by writing, ". . . a journey from subculture through postmodernism and out the 'other side' . . ." (7). He explains that this journey starts "in the slums of Henry

Mayhew's London" and ends in the "American mid-West." This description confines punk in a poor area of London within certain borders. Furthermore, labeling "subculture" as a different category from "postmodern" could be seen as theoretically problematic because punk had extensive postmodern approaches to art forms, and other folks interpreted punk through postmodern lenses. These separating categorizations engage a limiting interpretation of punk ideological practices. Furthermore, going "out the 'other side'" points out Hebdige's placing of boundaries on subculture, presenting a bordered perspective.

To encourage a recontextualizing perspective of punk, some authors encourage varying approaches to analyzing subculture. Dylan Clark states, "Observers may fall into a classic pitfall, wherein they typecast subcultures. Any number of scholars are guilty of detailing the patterned quality of the discourse of subculture, trapping subcultures in a kind of synchronic Othering" ("The Death and Life of Punk" 6). Clark warns of trends in stereotyping that presents a predictable and formulaic structure of subculture. Therefore, analyzing a subculture through already established theories on punk serve little purpose if punk has become something else. For example, applying a

Sex Pistols-based nihilism on Green Day would prove challenging because they embody completely different discourses and ideologies. Both rock bands have connections to punk roots, and continue to influenced pop culture, but the context of time and cultural evolutions present a problematic comparison. While Clark warn others of typecasting subcultures, he too falls into similar lenses that maintain foundational ideas of punkism.

Academic Perceptions of a Homogenous Subcultural Identity

Even though Clark exhibits a departure from a monolothic definition of punk into a contemporary approach, his ideas perpetuate a homogenous subcultural identity. Clark's essay, "The Death and Life of Punk, The Last Subculture" (2003), discusses how the commodification of punk subculture essentially neutralized its rebellious nature, thus causing the "death of punk." Clark states that an early punk subculture has died, and its restructure causes the birth of a contemporary punk subculture. "The death of subculture has in some ways helped produce one of the most formidable subcultures yet: the death of subculture is the (re)birth of punk" (Clark). Clark argues

that phasing out an older version of subculture allows a more contemporary restructuring of punk. However, the idea of a death signifies a discourse that no longer exists, and a rebirth points to a newly formed singular identity. "When punk was pronounced dead it bequeathed to its successors - to itself - a new subcultural discourse" (Clark 9). Clark emphasizes that punk functions as a single entity, and the article does not take into consideration of the multiple discourses in punk. While Clark recognizes the notion of evolving culture, he too makes generalizations of a present-day punk subculture.

Although Clark presents a monolithic mainstream punk discourse that died, he also introduces another monolithic idea in punk's "(re)birth." In "The Raw and the Rotten: Punk Cuisine" (2004), Clark explores the approaches to punk-related dietary choices at the Black Cat Cafe in Seattle, WA. He deconstructs the cultural issues surrounding a punk diet from the particular eatery and discourse community, and notes this as a "case of Seattle punks." However, the essay applies characteristics of a specific regional discourse to a general punk subculture. By overlooking situational contexts in relation to food politics, Clark continues to apply a perspective of punk

homogeny. The article states, "These foodways define punk cuisine and punks themselves" (30). By having the word "these," Clark's sentence firmly points to particular dietary practices that define punk. If one's diet does not follow the culinary practices as described in the article, then it would cease to be defined as "punk." Academic punk homogeny not only constructs a singular view on punk practice, but imputes value to subculture.

Constructing a homogenous punk subculture allows for an academic punk discourse to implicate overarching stigmas. Jeremy Wallach's "Living the Punk Lifestyle In Jakarta" states, "But how can we best interpret this stubborn refusal to evolve, and again, what could punk possibly mean in an Indonesian context? (Wallach 110)." In overlooking the complexity of punk discourses, Wallach ponders on punk subculture's inability to move forward, and expresses curiosity of an Indonesian approach to punk. Wallach's totalizing assertion of a subculture's "stubborn refusal to evolve" illustrates what Said calls a "positional superiority" in relation to the people in his research.

In the context of scholars researching punk subculture, an authoritative status allows scholars to

apply a stigma of "backwardness" to punk subculture. Wallach's comment also indicates that people involved with Indonesian punk are unaware of their own subcultural context within a larger punk subculture. By aiming his question toward an academic audience, Wallach does not take into consideration an Indonesian punk analysis and spoke on behalf of an Indonesian punk voice. People within Indonesian punk discourses act as exemplary primary sources in examining the meaning of punk in an Indonesian context. Wallach had direct contact with individuals who introduced him to these events. By not communicating directly with Indonesian punks with his inquiries on Indonesian punk, he places primary sources in a secondary tier. Since some of the conclusions made from this article does not engage a punk voice, the article maintained a perspective of an outsider.

An Application of Academic Punkism

Applying an academic discourse of punk into research analyses limits the context of punk voices. This causes one to interpret the "subject's" spoken words to fit into characteristics of academic punkism. Joanna R Davis' essay, "Growing Up Punk: Negotiating Aging Identity in a Local

Music Scene" (2006) aims to "examine aging in a particular punk scene by drawing from a larger dissertation project" (Davis 64). In exploring a maturing demographic of subculture, however, Davis does not address what particular scene she intends to discuss. The perception of a homogenous punk subculture did not require for Davis to elaborate on the context surrounding the "particular punk scene." In communication with the interviewees, spoken language becomes analytically misinterpreted through assumed subcultural traits.

Growing Up Punk reflects academic punkism by speaking on behalf of the research subject, consequently resulting in a form of misrepresentation. In one section of the essay, Davis looks into the impact of having children as a person in subculture. An interviewee, Susan, gives her impression of bringing a child to a punk show, stating that a man brought his 10 month old to a show without ear protection. The music engages the father, while the child has a "'look of pure agony on his face'" (66). Davis responds with, "The noise, the violence, and the crowded conditions are, to Susan, important reasons to keep her parenting and her scene involvement separate" (66). However, no where in Susan's testimony where she mentions

violence. Susan only presents a situation of a father who failed to take into consideration of his child's well being. Davis interprets Susan's statement to suit the attributes of academic punkism. Davis states, "[Susan] uses this punk father to identify a problematic compromise between aging (parenthood) and scene involvement" (66). Davis explains that Susan's testimonial illustrates the divergence of a punk-related lifestyle and parenthood. While Susan expresses concern for the young child present at shows, it is not a statement to choose between children and "scene involvement." Davis' essay also exhibits ideas pertaining to academic punk lenses in the representations through language.

Conforming research analyses to expectations of punkism leads to misinterpreted understandings in regard to varying punk-related subcultures. Twenty-nine year old musician, Mitch, states, "Like I've seen people in college that were... militant vegans, straight-edge, hardcore kids, and when they graduated and left college, they gave it all up" (Davis 65). Mitch states that he has seen a number of people give up their personal ethics and beliefs after college. Davis responds with, "However, his awareness that these individuals were some of the most 'militant' or

'hardcore' kids hints at how the extreme situation might operate in a person's life. To be so engrossed may make it a challenge to sustain involvement with age" (65). Davis states that some individuals could not permanently uphold an uncompromising lifestyle. Placing quotations around the word "hardcore" and "militant" in comparison with each other, points to Davis using the traditional definition of "hardcore," meaning committed and steadfast. In contrast, Mitch's comments actually reference a subcultural identity known as "hardcore," something that Davis does not consider. Following the path an academic punk discourse steers Davis' analysis away from further elaborating and examining hardcore subcultural discourses. Consequently, a lens through academic punkism truncates Davis' argument by overlooking the complexities of punk subculture.

Some people may view the misunderstanding of subcultural vocabularies as insignificant mistakes. In discussing minor-looking inaccuracies Zack Furness elaborates, "Trivial? Absolutely. But it is the kind of mistake that a punk is not likely to make and thus suggests the likelihood of other mistakes, or a general lack of knowledge about the subject matter" (13). Some misconceptions may appear frivolous, but it indicates the

shortcomings of an academic punk discourse. While Mitch references a "hardcore" as a punk subgenre, Davis interprets the word through its literal use. The misunderstanding of a word becomes more troublesome when Davis uses the misinterpretation as evidence to support her argument. By having the faulty evidence annulled, her argument becomes less substantial. If researchers apply an analytical lens that proves to limit knowledge production, then academic punkism creates a negative stigma surrounding an academic study of punk.

Evolutions of Punk Subculture

Punk subculture manifests in a variety of contexts, and the application (or lack thereof) of punk-related ethics toward varying lifestyle practices develop discourses. As Furness explains in *Punkademics*, "Punk is neither a homogenous 'thing' nor is it reducible to a specific time, location, sound or . . . live performances" (10). This subculture embodies various distinctions, and can not be condensed into limited features. While punk occurs in particular times and spaces, those specific marks in history do not define punk. Furness elaborates that ". . . the combinations of people, places, cultural

practices, social relationships, art and ideas that co-constitute punk are rife with possibilities . . ." (10). Various factors that include an array of social and artisic practices collectively make up a punk discourse. The combination of these discourses make up a type of punk subculture. The application of punk ideologies and ethics vary between communities and social circles, and in particular environments.

Shattering the idea of academic essentialism in punk is the clustered evolution and development of punk discourses. Hardcore, an American-rooted punk subgenre, developed in the late 1970's and early 1980's, gaining more notoriety through the 1990's. Ian MacKaye (Fugazi, Dischord Records, etc.) explains:

> We were hardcore punks. Right around this time D.O.A. came out with a record called *Hardcore '81* and around the country people began to refer to themselves as hardcore punks. So, at some point the word punk got clipped off and it just became hardcore. (Peterson 8)

D.O.A, based in Vancouver, BC, helped to coin and develop a branch of punk that has become an international phenomenon. In general, people who engaged with punk, but did not

embrace nihilistic and fashionable tendencies of some punk discourses, developed hardcore punk. Now that the hardcore subgenre has evolved over a few decades, hardcore has branched off into a variety of discourses. In many cases, hardcore is still punk.

Punk-related subcultures and discourses challenge dominant culture in various forms, and in different settings. These power structures include institutional frameworks (e.g. church and state), government-related power (e.g. military and foreign policy), and socially constructed norms (e.g. gender and sexuality). Punk subcultures contain an assortment of localized knowledge and unwritten rules, exemplifying what Michel Foucault calls "illegitimate knowledge." As demonstrated in this chapter, some academic analyses overlook the complex and distinct branches of punk subcultures. However, dissecting the layers and evolutions of punk-related subcultures reveal the interrelated social discourses that reach beyond popular conceptions of "punk."

In my next chapter, I will discuss particular discourses that constitute punk subculture. Highlighting these discourses contextualizes punk subculture as a loose association of evolving communities relative to one other.

The ever-changing punk landscape functions with multiple timelines and chronologies. Complexities within punk subculture signify a diverse array of theoretical approaches, demonstrating the intricacies outside of the dominant narrative.

CHAPTER TWO

MULTIPLE DISCOURSES AND INTER-SUBCULTURAL CONVERSATIONS

Multiple Discourses in Punk Subculture

Academic discourses of punk often seek out reproductions of mainstream punk narratives, revolving around particular notions of punk. While the concept of "punkism" aims to gather information on a type of punk traditionalism, punk discourses have continued moving beyond those ideas. In the documentary film, *Another State of Mind*, Shawn Stern (Youth Brigade, BYO Records) explains, "That's what punk's all about - change." Generally speaking, people in punk seek to alter the current state of affairs. Like many forms of social frameworks, punk subcultures continually reinvent themselves through different approaches of traditional foundations and formations. Nonetheless, these progressions often go overlooked.

In discussing mainstream media, Stern explains, "They've always exploited the scene. They've always sensationalized the negative aspects, the violence, they've never talked about positive things." Mass media has

presented an incomplete picture of punk, disregarding a consistent variety of patterns, interpretations and approaches. However, this chapter's discussion of subculture does not aim "to tell the grand story of punk (an impossibly arrogant and pointless task) . . ." (Furness 11). It would take decades to gather timelines of evolving social networks across multiple continents, with numerous regional differences. However, highlighting pivotal turns of events demonstrate the developments of practice and ideology. This chapter argues that the essentializing monolithic punk discourse constructed by academic studies (with help from mainstream media) is belied by the plurality of punk discourses, each of which emerges as a distinct response and/or reaction to a particular historically-specific context.

Crass and Non-Mainstream Punk Subculture

Some of the forerunners of punk who expressed dissatisfaction with mainstream culture, but engaged in contractual dealings with corporate record labels, caused some people in punk subculture to question their credibility. In the 1970's, The Clash and Sex Pistols serve as two of the most recognizable and influential punk rock

bands in the UK scene. These two bands, who supported leftist politics and critiqued governing systems through different expressive means, signed to major labels within the first year of playing gigs. While a major record label had the ability for wide distribution to promote their ideas, some people involved with punk perceived these bands as selling rebellion as a profitable image. In turn, these corporate rock bands with roots in punk ceased to practice their own political beliefs. Some people inspired by their messages considered these groups as deserting their supposed iconoclastic philosophies. Even though Sex Pistols shouted "anarchy" as an expression of nihilistic hedonism, the group Crass embraced and practiced forms of anarchism. Their work not only popularized anarchism in punk but also existed as a political threat.

Crass have become an iconic punk band, whose aesthetics and practices have influenced generations of people . Based in the community-oriented Dial House in Essex, England, the band and project sought to challenge dominant culture and punk practices, and have left a mythical and ethically-pure legacy. They demonstrated the connection between aesthetics and ideology by wearing "black clothing as a protest against the narcissistic

peacockery of fashion punks" (Southern). Members of Crass' clothing reflected their sentiments toward popular culture, setting themselves apart from mainstream punk discourses, echoing anti-capitalist lifestyles. All of their studio albums peaked at No. 1 on the UK Indies Chart, but none of the band members kept the profits. In the documentary *There is No Authority but Yourself*, Penny Rimbaud explains that any money that the band made went into another creative project or to local groups, most notably the Anarchist Center in London. Crass expressed lyrical content and artistic imagery pertaining to socio-economic, military, gender, and religious issues. Due to their staunch political stances, the band quickly gained notoriety for addressing normative and institutional structures, and deeply rooted a socio-political consciousness in punk subculture.

While Crass has engrained artistic and critical elements in punk subculture, their legacy and historical impact created much lore. Steve Ignorant explains, "I'm really proud of what Crass did. But the downside was that - without intending to - we put a host of expectations upon ourselves, and ended up having to live up to this image we'd created" (Ignorant 191). Crass formed in the tail end

of the first wave of of British punk, witnessing pioneering bands such as The Clash, Sex Pistols, and The Vibrators signing to major labels within a year of playing gigs. In keeping with anti-establishment sentiments of punk, Crass kept a visible conscious awareness of staying ethically principled. Ignorant continues, "We were just a bunch of people living together and making music, not a collection of plaster saints" (Ignorant 191). The Crass story often entailed a perfect collective of artists, but the stories often hid their personas as working people. However, their significant influence in music has helped drive numerous discourses including anarcho peace punk, avante garde art, and numerous other subcultures. Their independent label, Crass Records released many of their peers, including Flux of Pink Indians, Dirt, KUKL (Bjork), Zounds, Rudimentary Peni, Conflict, Chumbawamba, and Poison Girls. Even though these artists can all be considered punk bands, they all represent different genres of music. Crass helped recontextualize punk through different media.

In an effort to critique dominant discourses, Crass received backlash from the public in an effort to silence, or obscure their subversive expressions. In their efforts to release first record, *Feeding of the 5000* (1978), the

pressing plant refused to press their first track "Asylum," because they considered it blasphemous. The lyrics include, "He shares nothing, this Christ / Sterile. Impotent. Fucklove prophet of death / He's the ultimate pornography." These expressions intended to discredit the holiness of Jesus, and undermine the sovereignty of the Christian institution. The last line of the song states, "Jesus died for his own sins, not mine," which points to Jesus as a man, and denies the Christian belief of Jesus as the son of God. This line also negates Jesus as Messiah, one of the foundational tenets of Christianity.

Mainstream audiences consider the questioning of dominant religious ideologies as offensive and sacrilegious. Crass subsequently released the song as "Reality Asylum/Shaved Women" (1978) as a seven inch single. This caught the attention of UK authorities, who questioned the members of Crass under the Obscene Publications Acts. Major label "punk" bands such as the Sex Pistols sought to shock mainstream audiences (e.g. "God Save the Queen") but had the financial backing from major labels with the intent to sell a high volume of records. Crass named their record *Feeding of the 5000* because 5000 pieces was the minimum number, and did not expect a

successful album. The band's efforts to push the envelope of artistic freedom disrupted conventional approaches to art and music, and threatened existing social frameworks (unlike corporate punk bands that functioned within mainstream frameworks). Crass continued to push social boundaries through different angles with each record release.

Crass released *Penis Envy* (1981) to assert a feminist engagement within punk subculture. Their third album only featured vocals of Eve Libertine and Joy de Vivre because their audiences in general overlooked the feminist element in the band. The songs and album art discussed issues such as gender roles and the institution of marriage. While the band received much support upon releasing *Penis Envy,* backlash came from the corporate music industry, as well as from people in punk. The mainstream press did not favor feminism, and the male-centered punk culture anticipated a more macho-sounding recording. Crass departed from the straightforward boot-wearing image to develop a more complex musical sound, and sophisticated image of the band.

The engagement of women in punk and discussion of feminist issues challenged the normality of the male listener in punk. Lyrics from "Bata Motel" examined the

social expectations of women to beautify in order to please men, stating, "I've studied my flaws in your reflection / And put them to rights with savage correction / I've turned my statuesque perfection / And shone it over in your direction." Feminist-centered lyrics challenged audiences to reconsider punk politics, and the image of subculture. Rimbaud reflected, "We did play it that way - whenever it seemed that our public image was becoming too easily definable, we would do our best to throw people off the scent" (Glasper). The band and project exhibited unpredictability, always in movement. Crass promoted a critical consciousness, and their radical approaches to systemic issues, posing a threat to political discourses.

Hardcore Punk

The commercialization of punk subculture inspired individuals to create other spheres of punk that more accurately represented their contextual situations. Ian Mackaye (Minor Threat, Fugazi) explains:

> . . . in 1979 and 1980 when I first got into punk rock, there were two basic definitions: there were 'new wave' people and punk rock people . . . But the problem with the word punk rock, even though

> it was something we connected with, at the time the way the media had treated the Sex Pistols the word came off as this nihilistic and very fashion oriented, self-destructive, Sid Vicious kind of image. We didn't see ourselves like that at all. (Peterson 8)

The new wave musical genre in the United States developed as a more palatable branch of punk, aimed to interact with pop culture.

On the other hand, mainstream representations of punk subculture reflected images of Sex Pistols, promoting a drug-induced lifestyle. These discourses expressed characteristics that did not appeal to motivated young people who identified with punk expressions. MacKaye continues:

> We were into punk but didn't want to be called "punk rock." We opted for the term hardcore punk. Our idea was that we were kids and we were serious about our music and our scene and we were really into powerful, fast music, so we definitely saw ourselves as being super hardcore. We were hardcore punks. (Peterson 8)

Actively investing within a subcultural community acted as a rejection of the Sex Pistols-esque self-destructive mentality. In an East Coast American context, hardcore developed as a reaction to the perceived mainstream representations of punk. MacKaye and countless other artists recontextualized punk through simple aesthetics and lifestyle politics.

By continuing to drive an aggressive form of music, adopting simpler aesthetics, and incorporating non-commercial values, hardcore evolved into a separate subculture as a branch of a more general punk subculture. The aesthetic of jeans and a T-shirt appearance reflected a less trendy, and non-fashion-centered ideology. Furthermore, hardcore as "a form of exceptionally harsh punk rock" (as defined by the American Heritage Dictionary) made it less marketable from a large industry standpoint. Thus, a circuit of independent record labels largely distributed hardcore music among record stores. Hardcore subcultural ethics, in a similar vein with punk, questioned the status quo in mainstream and youth culture. Many traditional punk discourses tolerated and accepted the consumption of illegal drugs during that time period. This led the band Minor Threat (Washington, DC) to openly

recognize the self-destructive behavior by addressing it in their music. These anthems inadvertently spurred a movement, functioning as a milestone in subculture.

Straight Edge

So far in this narrative, British mainstream punk culture promoted a consumer-based rebellion (e.g. Sex Pistols), while concurrently, non-mainstream and "underground" punk discourses advocated a critical consciousness and activism attendant to particular causes (e.g. Crass). Yet another distinct punk subcultural discourse emerged against self-destructive behaviors of rock n' roll culture (hardcore punk). In response to nihilistic punk attitude and drugs in popular culture, the straight edge movement grew out of the hardcore scene, and developed as a distinctive ideological subgenre. Originally referenced in the song "Straight Edge," written by Minor Threat singer Ian MacKaye, the song expresses an abstention from using drugs. The song begins with, "I'm a person just like you / But I've got better things to do / Than sit around and fuck my head / Hang out with the living dead / Snort white shit up my nose / Pass out at the shows." He expresses disapproval of intoxication and advocates for a

lifestyle of sobriety, commenting on self-degenerating activities. Though MacKaye explained that his songs expresses a lifestyle choice and did not seek create a movement, an increasing number of audiences and hardcore kids adopted a straight edge lifestyle.

Many individuals who embrace a straight edge lifestyle seek not only to reject mainstream punk rebelliousness, but also striving against dominant cultural norms of partaking in intoxicating substances (e.g. alcohol). While reason for adopting straight edge vary, this lifestyle choice advocates a positive self-empowerment. This includes a freedom from engaging in a capitalist culture of corporate alcohol and tobacco companies. Starting in Washington DC, these ideas spread particularly quickly along the American east coast (and globally), prompting young people to start bands revolving around the straight edge ideology. Representations of straight edge varied between regions. DC hardcore directly influenced New York hardcore (NYHC), and developed strong associations with it. Hardcore punk scenes in Los Angeles and Orange County are not traditionally affiliated with straight edge practices. What started as a personal choice developed into a belief system, with multiple interpretations.

While many straight edge kids embraced a positive stance of sober living, the manifestations of extreme ideological practices exhibited authoritarian elements. While straight edge grew out of hardcore, and hardcore is under an umbrella of punk, a militant approach to straight edge acts as an antithesis of punk. Many people in hardcore (hardcore kids) considered straight edge a personal affair, but others engaged in an extremely ideological stance known as "hardline." Hardline discourse exhibited an absolute strictness branched out of straight edge ideology. Hardline ideology embraced a drastic philosophical position that included intimidation and physical violence against individuals who did not embrace their dogma.

Hardline

This offshoot of straight edge hardcore not only challenged mainstream dominant culture, but also the "insufficient" political practices of punk and hardcore scenes. Laguna Beach-based band Vegan Reich sparked the vegan straight edge hardcore movement. Their ideological stances included militant animal rights politics, and a conservative stance against non-hetero sex and abortion. This deep ecology movement also included anti-racist and

anti-sexist views. In the song "No One Is Innocent," Sean Muttaqi, founding member and songwriter for Vegan Reich asserted, "If you don't make a choice it could mean your life / for if you're not on my side you're a target in my eyes." Those who did not embrace the same ideological stance as hardline were subject to harsh confrontation such as physical harm. Muttaqi expresses an extreme binary situation with no opportunity for discussion. This particular dogma promotes an authoritarian belief system restricting particular life choices, resulting in a single-sided conversation. Hardline advocated violence to accomplish idealistic goals, and have criticized the tolerant straight edge cultures for having a limited philosophy. However, people involved with other punk-related discourses greeted hardline with contention.

While hardline inspired a new subculture of hardcore, they also created tides of controversy in punk subcultural communities. Ray Cappo, singer of Youth of Today and Shelter, states that he comes from a more positive perspective of straight edge, but felt it became very "gang-ish" in the 1990s and brought on a lot of "hate." He states, "When movements get motivated by hate then it sort of defeats the purpose especially if they are in the name

of enlightening other people" (Peterson 71). Straight edge discourses originated as a type of critical consciousness, and branched into a stringently ideological doctrine. Many punk and hardcore discourses criticized hardline for fascist tendencies and embracing doctrines of Abrahamic religions, which contrasts many of the principles that myriad punk discourses share as a common foundation.

Women in Hardcore

Hardline ideologies marginalized many identities, including women in hardcore. Daisy Rooks, sociology professor at The University of Montana responds:

> Hardline was closely related to lots of anti-abortion sentiments articulated by some bands and not really being questioned a lot, so I think a lot of women in the scene felt, "Why is a 15-year-old boy who has never been in a serious long-term relationship, preaching to me about what my rights should be with my body?" (Peterson 44)

As Rooks suggests, authoritarian elements of hardline developed doctrinaire attitudes, especially in young men. Young teens who promote and reiterate hardline ideologies have not reflected on the macrocosm of complex socio-

political issues such as abortion. The male-centered approach to, and involvement in, punk and hardcore created a push back from (but not exclusive to) women. Individuals sought to generate change to the predominantly male-driven themes, reflecting conventional social constructs.

Up to this time, the social climate of east coast hardcore punk moved into a direction of rebelling against social norms through straight edge principles. The hardline movement adopted straight edge ideas and produced a type of extreme rebellion by applying literal definitions to straight edge lifestyles. Hardline discourses exhibited intolerance against others who did not embrace the same philosophies. The binary (right/wrong) standards of hardline manifested strict ideology that included a strict vegan diet. These practices reflect the belief in protecting all life forms, which also overlapped into positions of anti-abortion. Anti-abortion sentiments entered a political arena of right wing ideology, which restricted progressive social changes. Practicing ideological consistency also led hardliners to not taking consideration of the complex issue of women's rights. Hardline functioned as a closed dialogue by enforcing

ideological rules, instead of recognizing punk as an open discourse of discussion.

Because punk subculture embody active participation, punk discourses become created in reaction to socio-political subcultural climates. These acts also serve to shift the direction of consciousness in punk. The development of "new" discourses and their characteristics (e.g. musical associations, political stances, etc.) partially serve as a form of communication to others in punk subculture. Because of expansive hyper-masculine tendencies in subcultural discourses, punk texts embodied a representative male voice.

Consequently, many punk discourses resisted macho attitudes and sought to alter the socio-political discourse in punk. In echoing Susan S. Lanser's concepts of narratology, punk "narratology have been either men's texts or texts treated as men's texts" (Lanser 676). A subculture that claims to resist cultural norms still perpetuated social conventions of gender roles. Kim Nolan (Kimberly A. Nolan Garcia) of Bark and Grass Fanzine/Cookbook, and professor of political science at Centro De Investigacion y Docencia Economicas (CIDE) in Mexico City, notes that

hardcore manifests as an aggressive culture that attracted few women. Nolan states:

> The way I saw it was that because the aggressiveness in the music was masculine there ended up being roles that everyone was supposed to play, which mirrored more traditional masculine/feminine family roles, which I got into hardcore to get away from. (Peterson 41)

Even though hardcore functions as a counterculture of sorts, many of the people (or males) involved did not challenge themselves in regard to their actions and social consciousnesses, resulting in continual perpetuation of mainstream social patterns. Nolan continues:

> The roles that I felt I was being assigned made me like half a participant in it, and that was the problem. I felt like this was my scene too, but since there were so few women that we weren't being allowed the same access, or participation. (Peterson 41)

As Nolan indicates, women recognized and felt the machismo exhibited by men in the hardcore scene, and reacted by making their presence known. Many women in hardcore began confronting gender issues at events such as music shows.

Individuals began organizing to alter the socio-political climate within hardcore subculture (including straight edge and hardline), seeking to develop a more inclusive environment. One group that directly challenged dominant masculinity in the Midwest and East Coast was Chicks Up Front. Daisy Rooks explains that her sister Margaret Rooks and she started Chicks Up Front to create an image of a "huge movement of straight edge women." What began as a "mythical group" developed into a real movement. Rooks states, "At one point there was about 30-40 women that were affiliated with it and would run around and scream at people. It was a way to confront some men in the scene and voice our opinions on some issues we felt were neglected" (41). Confronting people in an environment with aggressive music and strong social attitudes meant using direct communication with a formidable base of support. This powerful push back opened discussion that promoted acceptance in a counter-cultural atmosphere. Interactions such as these encouraged an ideological shift to a more "liberal" or progressive environment, seeking change in subculture.

Even though the women involved often used direct means of communication to confront people who did not respect

others, it did not completely stop the gender-related inequalities. Kurt Schroeder, of Birthright and Catalyst Records, supported Chicks Up Front because gender-related issues have and still exist in hardcore, even though women have had crucial involvement in it. He explains, "There is such a privilege for white males in the hardcore scene and it was awesome to to see both females and males questioning the macho attitude that has been around since day one" (41). Chicks Up Front reacted to the patriarchal attitudes of people involved with hardcore in particular. Even though women had vital roles in the evolutions of hardcore and punk-related subcultures, dudes often dominated these spaces that supposedly promoted non-mainstream lifestyles and values.

Nonetheless, the social atmosphere in punk subcultures and subgenres have continued to evolve, continuing to build on the subcultural philosophies. Kim Nolan states that the nineties progressed from the late-eighties, having more people with a variety of cultural influences becoming more active in making art and music. She asserts:

> Let's face it, learned to play better, politically, as we pushed each other on racism, sexism and class, and culturally . . . These to me

> are indicative of growth and evolution of the earlier expressions, not necessarily marks of a new form entirely. (16)

The nineties saw a general transition to diversity in ideas and approach to culture. Punk ethics of empowerment continued to inspire young people, encouraging them to create further cultural transitions.

Riot Grrrl

Instead of trying to work within the hardcore scene, someone people in punk began developing their own discourses. As part of an evolution of punk subculture, discourses form as a reaction to punk status quo. This reflects a cultural ethic of creating change by pushing boundaries through active participation. Community building involved creating bonds and relationships not only through event organizing, but also through cultural currency such as literature and music. Connecting with like-minded people fosters a stronger social network on a local and national level. By developing separate discourses, individuals are able to dissect and discuss issues that other punk discourses ignore and overlook. Furthermore, it also

functions as a support network in encouraging creative and intellectual endeavors.

Questioning and pushing social boundaries to reconsider the directions of punk created newer subcultural spaces. Outside of the hardcore scenes, young women particularly in the Pacific Northwest and Washington D.C. began organizing, thus expanding the foundations of punk. With the ethos of punk self-empowerment, young women and girls developed what became the riot grrrl movement around 1991. Riot grrrl functions as part of a lineage of female musicians in punk discourses who also promoted social awareness that influenced riot grrrl philosophies.

Iconic artists such as Joan Jett (The Runaways), Exene Cervenka (X), and Poly Styrene (X-ray Spex) served as precursors. Musicians and artists such as these reflected symbols of leadership and strength, especially in earlier time periods with fewer active women in punk as a whole. Riot grrrl also echoes the socio-political sentiments of Crass' *Penis Envy* in challenging a larger context of punk subculture, embracing a direct feminist message confronting social inequalities within and outside of punk. Similar to *Penis Envy,* confronting normalized punk expressions (e.g. masculinity, gender roles, etc.) serve as one of the main

purposes of the development of riot grrrl. A straightforward feminist message exhibiting strength and intelligence creates intimidation.

Riot grrrl challenged the dominant narrative of punk, including the assumed male voice that represents the subculture. According to the Riot Grrrl Manifesto, the punk scene needed a supportive community of young women:

> BECAUSE we want and need to encourage and be encouraged in the face of all our own insecurities, in the face of beergutboyrock that tells us we can't play our own instruments, in the face of 'authorities' who say our bands/zines/etc/ are the worst in the U.S. . . . (Rosenberg and Garofalo 812)

Existing punk scenes tended to disregard the cultural merit of women as artists. This created fewer opportunities for creative exposure, further discouraging young women to explore imaginative spaces.

Instead of staying within the confines of male-driven discourses, young women created additional spheres of expression "BECAUSE we don't wanna assimilate to someone else's (boy) standards of what is or isnt." By not becoming absorbed into a homogenized scene, riot grrrl discourses

developed in rejection of existing punk conventions that played a role in internalized sexism and gendered expectations. This also included the discouragement of female participation, having a marginalizing effect. The riot grrrl community promoted self empowerment and confidence, with the consciousness of not adopting or tolerating sexist attitudes.

Incorporating a feminist approach to punk altered the political landscape of subculture. Many trailblazers involved with riot grrrl, such as Allison Wolfe and Kathleen Hanna, were university students who applied academic feminist ideas in punk rock. Wolfe explains:

> I think we often felt that sometimes, the language of academic feminism
> didn't really speak to our lives in a simple, young girl, punk rock sort of way. The thing I think we
> were trying to do with Riot Grrrl was to find (or create) an intersection/cross-section between punk and feminism. (Eisenman, par. 29)

Riot grrrl discourses assisted in bridging a gap between academic conversations and young people.

Organizers associated with riot grrrl recontextualized feminist theory within punk discourses, thus making feminism applicable to every day life. Sara Marcus, author of *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution,* states that feminism in the early 90s ". . . was largely the domain of academia." She continues:

> The women's movement didn't have a language for reaching young women. The language and ideas of riot grrrl have permeated the culture and made this more participatory, messy, vernacular feminism available to everybody. (Barton, par. 19)

Riot grrrl as a feminist experience through punk rock created accessibility for a wider audience to grasp academic knowledge. Punk as a participatory culture allowed and encouraged young women to become socially and politically active. These ideas sparked new conversations, and and continued existing punk dialogues pertaining to gender equality and social norms.

While riot grrrl communities pushed subcultural boundaries, the discourses absolutely recaptured and recontextualized the rebellious nature of punk philosophies. Allison Wolfe (Bratmobile, Partyline), one of the pioneers of riot grrrl states:

> And I think a lot of us come from a punk rock history. And I think that that sort of history of punk is really bringing down the barriers, tearing down the walls, and confronting authority, and looking for a world that is more based on equality. (Eisenman, par 9)

Punk subculture as a macrocosm aims to challenge established institutions of dominant culture. Riot grrrl also seeks to deconstruct punk culture, which reflects attitudes exhibited in mainstream society.

Confronting issues such as gender equality and empowering women, some young men and boys expressed reluctance, or resisted the change in social dynamic. Shows with riot grrrl bands often called for the women to move up front, and for the men in the audience to move to the back. This disrupted ritualistic practices for many male show-goers accustomed to moshing and slam dancing. Kathi Wilcox (Bikini Kill, The Julie Ruin) explains, "I don't know why so-called punk rockers are so threatened by a little shakeup of the truly boring dynamic of the standard show atmosphere." Wilcox continues, "How fresh is the idea of 50 sweaty hardcore boys slamming into each other or jumping on each other's heads?" (Barton). Interrupting typical

motions of a music-related event intimidated many of the boys. As Wilcox explains, the changing of customary procedures of a punk show creates more excitement and a less predictable experience. Ritualism at music shows become normalized, and normalization becomes interpreted as a definition. As a result, riot grrrl discourses challenged the expectations that have become standard in punk.

Mainstream media representations of riot grrrl, similar to previous representations of earlier punk, illustrated a one-dimensional depiction of the subculture. The term "riot grrrl" became a catch-all phrase for women in rock (encompassing celebrities such as Courtney Love and Alanis Morissette), even though riot grrrl embodied philosophies beyond a gendered representation of music. "When [riot grrrls] felt their message was being oversimplified by reporters, they imposed a media blackout in an attempt to take back control over the movement's identity" (Zoladz). Instead of allowing large media outlets to speak on behalf of riot grrrl, the subculture recognized the necessity to maintain a portrayal representative of their ethics and practices. Riot grrrl functioned as a greater network of support that advocated young women's creative expressions. Prior to the fascination of

mainstream press, riot grrrl subcultures have already established communication through independent print media.

Zines and Self Publishing

Distributing zines, or independent handmade publications, propelled a larger exchange of ideas between individuals in riot grrrl, on a national and international level. The circulation of self-published work created a network of communication, acting as an integral element of riot grrrl and punk subculture. Sharon Cheslow of Chalk Circle, Washington D.C.'s first all female punk band, stated, "The zines were just as important as the music." She continues, "When I hung out with Tobi, Kathleen, Molly and Allison that summer of 91, a big part of our discussions was about zines" (Barton). Riot grrrl promoted the message behind the music and encouraged conversation. Zines as an element of art and text-based discussion bolstered communication, thus strengthening a community of young women in punk.

Zines provided a space for creative self expression, and acted as a personal outlet for many individuals.

> Lisa, of Olympia, explains, "Zines are so important because so many girls feel isolated and don't have other girls to support them in their beliefs. Zines connect them to other girls who will listen and believe and care if they say they've been raped or molested and harassed. Zines provide an outlet for girls to get their feelings and lives out there and share them with others." (Rosenberg and Garofalo 811)

Sharing experiences with others better connected a subcultural community. Communication through zines provided reassurance for individuals who did not have a support group of like-minded group of people. Zines reflected punk ethics of empowerment and a dedication to changing the status quo.

Self-publishing extended beyond riot grrrl, reflecting on the varying socio-political climates of punk. Jen Angel, a writer and activist who published her personal zine Fucktooth, has contributed to publications such as Clamor Magazine, MaxiumumRocknRoll, Bitch, and Punk Planet. She points out that the amount of sexist attitudes and active women in the scene depended on the area. Angel states:

> I was fortunate to have a few really good female friends, and I was really influenced by female-made zines like Slug and Lettuce, Cooties, and a ton more. I did feel like it was a boys' club, but I also felt that I could assert myself if I wanted to, though that was difficult. (Peterson 39)

Angel contributed to a supportive community that provided encouragement to create more outlets for less-heard voices. Their maintained presence in punk influenced others to take action and create their own zines. However, the concepts of self empowerment and the independent network connecting a punk community all linked to the principles of DIY ethic.

D.I.Y.

Do-It-Yourself (DIY) punk ideologies and practices functions as the underlying discourse that ties all punk discourses together. Despite the myriad discourses of punk that rose from and against one another, DIY ethics empowered subcultural networks to function outside of mainstream culture. Tim Singer (Deadguy, Boiling Point Fanzine) explains, "We didn't need MTV or radio or glossy magazines. You put on your own shoes, make your won records, take your own pictures. That's an amazingly

empowering environment" (Peterson 7). The art and music within punk subcultures all derived from people who did it themselves. Circulating one's work within a DIY-based subculture reflected a direct hands-on approach, acting as an alternative to the "proper" channels of industry-related distribution.

These ethics embody the personal involvement in a project, rather than relying on others (e.g. corporate sponsors) to achieve a goal. Guy Picciotto of legendary band Fugazi states:

> A lot of what we learned [is from] the hardcore scene of the early 80's. That was a time when kids were took control of their own affairs, in terms of forming their own bands, setting up touring networks across the country, starting their own record labels, putting out their own fanzines. (Instrument)

Punk as a DIY-based culture established numerous underground networks of communicative exchange, functioning independently from mainstream culture. Picciotto continues, "It was kids creating the whole underground without the interest or the blessing of the record industry, and it was motivated without any hope for profit. It was fueled by

their own energy." This allowed artists and musicians to have full creative control of their own work, without restrictive boundaries in otherwise more commercial contexts. Reflecting an active participatory culture, Do-it-yourself allowed everyone to make almost anything happen, making use of one's own resources. Punk subculture as a means of self-reliance serves as an antithesis to consumer culture.

DIY itself does not necessarily embrace a "political" position, but it turns political when individuals become less dependent, or independent from consumer-based goods and services. This, in turn, reflects anti-consumerist sentiments and promotes a self-sufficient lifestyle. Ian MacKaye states:

> I have a lot of contempt for the record industry, and I don't particularly [want] to be a part [of it] more than I have to. The fact that we started our own label [Dischord] is proof of that. [If] we don't want to be part of something, you do it yourself, so we did. To exist independent of the mainstream is a political feat in my opinion. (Instrument)

The autonomous network provides a space for monetary exchanges that directly supports artists, instead of toward a corporate entity with no investment in the punk scene. The commerce of music changes when major record labels have little or no influence to releasing and distributing music, and the interactions deal within punk and hardcore discourses.

In a similar vein, zines and independent publishing allowed individuals to circulate art and literary works. Instead of writers vying for a contract from a publishing house, punk and hardcore discourses encourage individuals to make a zine and circulates them themselves. This allows the artists creating zines to distribute toward intended audiences. By disregarding "legitimate" paths of printing books and pressing music, punk and hardcore discourses aim to push the boundaries within and outside punk subcultures, propelling its evolutions.

Academic punkism's fixation on corporate "punk" and its preoccupation on image overlooks anti-consumerist DIY punk ethics. This neglects one of the foundational principles of punk that empowers individuals to further creative endeavors through a larger communal support through social networking. People in punk build a scene, or

subcultural community, through DIY practices by independently distributing literature, music, art, and other components of cultural capital. An examination of DIY practices of punk ethics unravels the multitude of interpretations and manifestations that this subculture embodies.

Systemic Issues in Punk Subculture

Punk and hardcore communities engage in continuous conversations involving social attitudes, encouraging individuals to deconstruct the socio-political frameworks in their own subcultures. Examining the social constructs within punk subcultures through different analytical lenses helps one to "recognize the structures of power within systems" (Peterson 31). Many people in punk aim to create alternative spaces, but risk producing a system that imitates structures and values found in dominant culture. Duncan Barlow asserts, "What is the point of subverting a system if you become a power structure with limitations, marketing schemes, and discourse within the larger global economic system?" (31). If punk and other countercultures end up exhibiting the same boundaries that complies with a hierarchical capitalist culture, then it ceases to

represent the very foundation of its origins. Barlow explains, " ...there is no point in challenging the structures of power if you become a new structure of power" (31). Barlow and others encourage people in punk subcultures and discourses to check their personal priorities and perspectives in order to avoid exhibiting the same acts of inequality that punk subculture initially resisted.

In the next chapter, I will explore how punk subculture has essentializing tendencies that influence constructions of punk identity. This type of essentialism in punk limits the interpretations of punk practice. Homogenous punk perspectives perpetuated by punk discourses overlook multicultural approaches to subculture. Challenging the normalization of subcultural practices expands punk ideologies, and resists forms of subcultural assimilation.

CHAPTER THREE

RESISTING SUBCULTURAL ASSIMILATION AND PUNK HOMOGENEITY

Multiple Cultural Identities In Punk Subculture

Academic essentialization of punk subculture ignores the plurality of punk discourses, and neglects to recognize punk practices rooted in DIY ethics. Non-mainstream, DIY punk subcultures serve as a vehicle to promote forms of political consciousness, thus directly challenging dominant social ideologies. But, even as punk discourses aim to reject oppressive mainstream cultural frameworks, social structures that marginalize certain identities continue to transpire in punk subculture. Essentialism of punk practices exhibited by some discourses in punk subculture perpetuate a form of homogeneity that overlooks the complexities of identities within punk. Punk discourses that apply essentialist views to punk subculture promote a limited perspective of the comprising factors constituting punk identity and practices. Therefore, even within punk, essentialism of punk subculture overshadows multi-layered identities through subcultural assimilation, in the same way dominant culture promotes cultural assimilation.

In the United States, individuals embracing multiple identities in punk subculture face similar obstacles as those in mainstream society. In confronting subcultural assimilation, efforts in maintaining different identities within punk brings on a variety of challenges. Some of these experiences reflect Gloria Anzaldua's ideas in *Borderlands/La Frontera* of embodying multiple cultures. "Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war" (Anzaldua 100). The politics of identity deals with the conscious negotiation of balance in regard to one's multicultural embodiment. Some people in punk have taken a resistant stance of homogenous punk identities by incorporating a variety of worldviews. Recognizing and empowering all identities within subcultures and discourses strengthen socio-political movements in (and outside of) punk subculture. Examining the intricacies of counter-cultural identities furthers the complex pluralities in punk subcultures. Creating spaces in punk subculture for dialogue and discussion propels community building and expands discourses, thus diminishing

ideological perspectives in punk subcultures and larger social structures.

Punk Essentialism and Subcultural Normativity

Normativity in punk subculture fails to address social privileges, and in turn ignores ethnic identities within punk contexts. While many folks involved with punk discourses express socio-political messages, they exhibit privilege by claiming a singular punk identity. Practices exhibited by such individuals do not necessarily reflect the subculture's proclaimed punk ethics. Michelle (Todd) Gonzales of Spitboy states, "People weren't always living out their ideals as articulated by songs or in interviews, or whatever, which is always disheartening. What really bugged me was that there wasn't much of a conversation pertaining to people's own privilege" (Peterson 36). Many people view punk hardcore as a subculture that became synonymous to their identity, causing them to gloss over issues regarding personal and cultural backgrounds. Some of these sentiments include, "'Well, I dress weird, so everyone hates me.' But almost no one understands that if they were white and middle class, or even upper class, they

were privileged" (36). She continues to explain that wearing a "punk uniform" does not change a person's social circumstances. Gonzales emphasizes a critical reflection of individuals who adopt a chosen punk identity as their primary recognition. Understanding the privilege of having self-determined identifications highlights underlining essentialist cultural attitudes within punk communities.

Essentialist attitudes in punk subcultures, including riot grrrl discourses, include recognition of punk identity over other cultural identifications, thereby promoting punk homogeny. Spitboy, an all female hardcore band from California, formed in 1990. Their seven inch EP, *Mi Cuerpo Es Mio* (1994), meaning "my body is mine," received a variety of feedback. Drummer and founding member, Michelle Todd Gonzales reflects, "There was a Riot Grrrl in Washington who was going around and saying that Spitboy had culturally appropriated Spanish for our own benefit. The irony of her saying all that pushed me over the edge" (Peterson 36). Certain riot grrrl discourses frustrated Gonzales and Spitboy by echoing essentialist punk attitudes, which reflects the assumption that members of Spitboy are not people of color. While members of Spitboy express their own cultural roots through punk, the band was

accused of borrowing someone else's cultural expressions. Gonzales' letter to the person in Washington expressed, "...how everyone was so absorbed with their identity as a punk rocker or a hardcore kid that nobody is seeing anything else" (36). The self-chosen cultural characteristics of punk became the primary identity of many people, and the multiplicity of others' cultural identities become unnoticed. "People looked at me and saw 'Oh, that's Todd from Spitboy' and nothing else. My ethnicity was invisible to them" (36). The lack of cultural heritage recognition in punk discourses limits the interpretation of punk identities and expressions. In this situation, the sentiments reflecting punk subcultural assimilation absorbed ethnic identity. However, Gonzales challenges punk homogeny. She continues, "Nobody noticed that I was Mexican. I was invisible, and I had done it to myself, because I allowed it to happen. That's when I started to speak out" (36). Gonzales explains that one has to communicate with others for better understandings between parties. By empowering their cultural identities, Spitboy propels increasing dialogue in punk communities.

Riot grrrl discourses exhibits essentialist tendencies by proclaiming representation on behalf of female punk

bands. Spitboy, recognizing particular boundaries within riot grrrl, declined the affiliation. In one situation at a show in Washington, DC, Spitboy engaged in heavy debates with a few women about the riot grrrl movement. Adrienne Droogas, vocalist for Spitboy recalls Michelle Todd Gonzales asserting, '"We are not a fox-core band, we are not a chick band, we are not a Riot Grrrl band. We are simply a group of women who are playing music.' I'm really really paraphrasing that quote, but that started a whole shit storm" (Peterson 374). Some people took offense and could not accept Spitboy's disassociation from riot grrrl. Riot grrrl discourses' attempt to label Spitboy as their own reflected subcultural assimilation, thus discouraging self-representation. In this situation, Droogas' frustration stem from people automatically assuming that Spitboy was connected with riot grrrl just because they are an all-female band who discussed gender issues. Disassociation from a subcultural labels also avoids participating in subcultural expectations.

Associating with specific punk discourses, such as riot grrrl, automatically depicts particular sets of practices. Punk discourses have variances of particular practices and ethics (or lack thereof), making them

distinct from one another. Members in Spitboy do not want to affiliate with the riot grrrl movement due to differences in self representation. Gonzales explains:

> We were purposefully not using our sexuality as part of our performance. Now we weren't repressed in any way, but we did not understand the blurring of lines between exploitation of women and using that kind of exploitation as performance. (Peterson 374)

Some riot grrrl discourses embody strong correlations with sexuality and performance, but Spitboy declines to exhibit those practices. Difference in subcultural expressions mark a diversion of ethos, therefore separating Spitboy from riot grrrl. Furthermore, being a part of a subcultural identity involved becoming part of a monolithic discourse. Gonzales states, "I also had a sense that as soon as Riot Grrrl was over, we'd be over if we got too closely associated with it" (374). To become part of a singular discourse also meant to forfeit an independent identity. Spitboy desired to engage through punk expressions without having to assimilate to particular subcultural expectations. Varying approaches to punk subculture, and keeping broader punk affiliations, encourages discourses to

define themselves. We find a similar impulse towards more critical analysis of social roles within punk in the thinking of both Mitchell and Burgess.

Issues of Race

So far in this discussion, Spitboy demonstrates a resistance to subcultural assimilation in punk, particularly in riot grrrl discourses. Normativity in punk discourses perpetuate the idea of particular components that constitute punk identity, therefore creating a limiting definition of punk subculture. Furthermore, problematic issues arise when singular worldviews in punk subculture omits the politics of race and ethnicity.

Subcultural assimilation stem from dominant punk discourse's expectation of particular means of expression. These expectations perpetuates the normalization of mainstream worldviews in punk subculture, and advocates essentialist interpretations of punk identity. Assumptions of homogenous identities within punk subculture maintains an ambivalence to the politics surrounding race and ethnicity. Ken Olden, currently in the popular hardcore band Youth of Today and formerly in groups such as Battery and Damnation A.D. states, "There's no doubt that the style

of music is very white male dominated . . . I don't think hardcore is any different than mainstream America in that way" (Peterson 34). In large, punk hardcore subculture reflects the cultural discourses similar to mainstream America, and demonstrates a type of subcultural microcosm of conventional social order. Olden continues:

> I think most people see racial problems as minor, and why shouldn't they? I mean, if you're white, they don't affect you in any kind of day-to-day way, and depending on where you live, they may never affect you. For others it's a daily struggle. (34)

A person of any ethnic background that has access to privilege may not necessarily realize some of the underlying social structures that govern punk subcultures. Even though punk subcultures function outside of mainstream culture, essentialist perspectives establish normativity in punk discourses, which overlook cultural nuances.

The establishment of normative perspectives and practices perpetuate an essentialist lens. Normativity in mainstream culture perpetuates a singular worldview. Punk subculture reflects mainstream society, in which it marginalizes of people of color, and overlooks issues of

race. "Race in hardcore was glossed over in general," states Moe Mitchell, the singer for hardcore band Cipher, who comes from a black ancestry. Mitchell mentions that many people in the subculture display stickers and buttons with anti-racist and anti-Nazi messages, but those sentiments, also popular in mainstream culture, do little to address racism as a systemic issue. Mitchell confronts the lack of analyses in punk subculture, stating, "What about taking accountability and recognizing your own racism? That was frustrating. I've developed better strategies for dealing with it. I used to feel silenced" (Peterson 24). Many punk discourses overlook issues of racism in a subcultural context, failing to recognize varying embodiments of racial prejudice. In the spirit of punk traditions, individuals like Mitchell challenge these issues to create change in subculture.

Various punk discourses confront mainstream institutional frameworks by continuing to engage discussions pertaining to race, and awarenesses of cultural politics. Looking within subculture to recognize these issues promotes the dissection of punk subculture as a microcosm of popular culture. Mitchell remains outspoken stating:

> Now, I attempt to be consistently vocal about chanting down oppression. It's perfectly valid and needed for white folks to discuss white supremacy and for men to discuss patriarchy. The people who benefit from and keep a certain system alive should certainly be talking about it. (Peterson 24)

Mitchell suggests that analyzing oneself within a social structure encourages one to recognize her/his own privileges, and in turn helps to understand mainstream cultural characteristics in punk subculture. Addressing these issues in conversation shapes the socio-political climate in punk discourses to expand punk perspectives beyond essentialist approaches. In discussing Cipher's album "The Joyous Collapse" during an interview, Mitchell explains that the band aimed to "put together a record that addressed . . . different institutionalized forms of oppression," and "how that impacts the individual . . . dealing with internalized racism, sexism, homophobia, what have you" (vimeo.com). This album acts as a form of subcultural currency that encourages critical analysis of the status quo surrounding punk subculture. People associated with punk identities become empowered to bring

about change in punk subculture to alter its socio-political framework.

Socio-political discussions within punk discourses may also exhibit disconnects between activist practices and activist expressions. Social criticisms and calls to action receive differing reactions based on situational contexts. Aaron Burgess, a longtime writer and contributor to publications in punk and in popular culture, states:

> I mean, listening to young, straight white men in hardcore bands decry racism, homophobia, sexism or any other sort of social problem always struck me as laughable and sort of disingenuous - not disingenuous to the cause, per se, but to the individual championing the cause. (Peterson 43)

Burgess points out that not enough males have examined their positions in punk subculture, and explains that some people in punk have to view themselves with an "outside perspective and comic distance" to understand a bigger picture. Burgess states:

> . . . you have to be able to laugh at yourself. A lot of the reason I feel this way stems from the fact that I, too, am a white man, and I, too, have dealt with the sort of guilt and existential

navel-gazing that comes from pondering one's own position of relative social privilege. (43)

Burgess acknowledges the dilemmas of Anglo American-related, identity politics in punk. While intentions of pushing socio-political discussions may stem from honest convictions, the disassociation between speakers' identities and their relationships with the cause come into question. Burgess' statements encourage self analysis and acceptance of self within social contexts. Contextualizing oneself within social structures, while having consciousness of other people's positions, furthers the understandings of socio-political struggles.

Up until this point, discussions pertaining to race and ethnicity within punk subculture become overlooked, even though punk subcultures embody a form of counterculture that seeks to challenge overarching dominant cultures. Nonetheless, punk subcultural evolutions continually recontextualize punk practices and challenge punk conventions. Dissociation from established discourses enable entities in subculture to define themselves. This practice diminishes all-encompassing labels that generalize punk identities. Disaffiliating with specific punk

discourses also creates space for encouraging other discourses to come into fruition.

Latin@ Hardcore

Multiple discourses allows for increased dialogue that broadens perspectives of what constitutes punk identities. Los Crudos appeals to a lot of young people whose cultural, social, and national identities differ in comparison to the previous generations of people in punk. This project started in 1991 with singer Martin Sorrondeguy. Born in Uruguay and growing up Chicago, Martin Sorrondeguy helped connect a lot of younger people in punk who identified with multiple cultures. His independent record label Lengua Armada was a driving discourse of Latino hardcore in the United States. Sorrendeguy states, "I was coming from a very different place from a lot of the kids I met at shows. Many of the kids were coming from suburban areas while I was coming from the city in more of an urban place" (Peterson 297). Some people in punk, such as Sorrendeguy, were unable to relate to many of the issues expressed by the normative suburban-based punk bands. Although Sorrondeguy and numerous others shared the aesthetics and lifestyle involved with punk subcultures, the discourses

they encountered did not connect with their own cultural roots. Because of this, he and his friends formed Los Crudos to express a different punk sentiment, and to reflect the perspectives of "the Chicago area barrios." Latino hardcore as a punk discourse incorporates cultural components through punk lenses.

Punk ethics critique dominant mainstream culture. Los Crudos uses punk philosophies to critique dominant punk subculture. Crudos' sentiments of expanding punk consciousness empower people coming from similar cultural backgrounds. Although many people relate to Los Crudos' socio-political stances, others express criticism. Sorrondeguy explains, "It was really bizarre because many people, even old friends of mine, rejected it. They were like, 'Why are you singing about this stuff?' It was bizarre . . ." (297). By questioning punk normativity, Los Crudos directly challenge their audiences by discussing punk essentialist attitudes. The non-mainstream affinity in punk subculture do not eliminate cultural intolerance. Some people in punk questioned Crudos' lyrical content, because Crudos do not meet expectations of incorporating particular punk themes.

In this context, lyrics function as part of a socio-political discussion in punk discourses. Explaining the basis of the song "That's Right, We're That Spic Band," Sorrondeguy explains:

> There was some old Chicago people talking about us, and they were like, 'Los Crudos? Oh they're that spic band, right?' It was really weird. [laughs] We just decided that's the title of our song right there. It was our anthem for the later part of the band. (Peterson 299)

Some people in punk use racial slurs in describing Crudos, and others, in punk subculture. Los Crudos directly addresses these racist sentiments through their anthem. "That's right motherfucker, we're that spic band! / You call yourself a punk? / Bullshit! / You're just a closet fucking Nazi / You are bullshit!" Sorrendeguy discredits people in punk by calling them Nazis, an identity antithetical to punk. This song also asserts a claim in punk space by repudiating dismissive statements that marginalizes one's cultural identities. It therefore influences the socio-political climate in punk by opening up perspectives of punk identity.

Song lyrics not only confront critical issues, but also act as a uniting element that strengthens punk discourses. Spitboy handed out lyric sheets at their shows as an additional mode of communication. Gonzales explains, "We'd hand them out because we wanted people to know what we were singing about" (Peterson 373). Distributing lyrics directly creates a relationship with the crowd, closing the distance between audience and performer. These acts foster a stronger community by actively developing discourse. Gonzales continues:

> There were always people coming up afterward who appreciated the lyrics or felt like they could identify with what our songs were about. Many women just said they were happy they saw us because they said we had the courage to say the things they didn't have the courage to say. (373)

Spitboy provides inspirational support that strengthen communities. In reflecting a traditional ethics of punk, Spitboy empowers niche audiences that would otherwise be overlooked in an essentialized punk subculture.

Engaging multiple punk discourses enables more conversations with people in punk subculture. Los Crudos and Spitboy's 12" split LP, "Viviendo Asperamente/Roughly

Living," demonstrates a crossing of audiences and discourses, therefore establishing contemporary intersecting borderlands. Spitboy's song "Emaciation" from the split LP states, "The Slim Fast diet's on heavy TV rotation / Vogue magazine's telling me the new look is emaciation / So I starve myself to death to feed your image" (Ebullition Records). This song discusses mainstream media's unhealthy social expectations of women's bodies. The split album between the two bands embodies the intersections of various discourses including feminism and Latina/Latino (Latin@) cultures, articulated through punk expressions.

Latin@ hardcore and related discourses illustrate a type of generational progression, marking punk subcultural shifts. As Sorrondeguy explains, ". . . there was this huge divide that happened between the old scene of people I knew and the new people I was doing the band with, and I was okay with that" (Peterson 297). Representations of punk identities expand because individuals of varying cultural backgrounds become more active in punk subcultural participation. This subsequently alters socio-ethnic politics in punk subculture. Being a part of an internationally known music project discussing identity

politics gains a significant amount of responsibility and scrutiny. Gonzales states, "After that I started speaking more about it, and I didn't want to do it to separate myself from my band or my friends, but I also felt like it was a conversation that needed to happen" (36). As Gonzales explains, addressing intertwining self and culture causes some friction in relationships. However, discussing such issues proved important to continually push discourse. Spitboy and Los Crudos as driving forces in Latin@ hardcore discourses propelled a more layered and complex punk community.

Thus far, culturally-validating punk discourses challenge punk homogeneity by establishing voice and socio-political attributes. Punk discourses reflecting people of color convey punk expressions relative to experiences stemming from multiple cultural backgrounds. These discourses shatter forms of punk traditionalism that perpetuate specific punk paradigms exhibiting specific ideologies.

Expanding Punk Ideologies

Challenging normalized subcultural perspectives keeps punk subculture from becoming a microcosmic replication of

mainstream culture. Incorporating culturally-validating attitudes into punk discourses further pluralizes and complicates punk subcultures. Resisting forms of subcultural assimilation simultaneously defies particular ideologies. For example, Droogas aims to dissociate Spitboy from the narrow ideological perspectives often reflected in punk discourses. In discussing riot grrrl, she states, "Once you start pointing fingers and start saying someone else is the problem then you are scapegoating and not addressing those issues within yourself, and that's never okay" (374). She specifically refers to times when "white suburban" males were expected to pay more and stand in the back of certain riot grrrl shows. Droogas clarifies, "I have friends who happen to be male and are pretty right-on people and they shouldn't be punished because of a systematic problem, because I'm part of the same problem and so are you" (374). Certain overarching riot grrrl ideologies that dictate punk discourses concerns Droogas. As Droogas explains, everyone functions as a part of a social whole, and that these systemic matters involve interconnected issues.

Oversimplifying social issues in punk discourses fail to recognize the absolutisms within punk politics. The late

Sarah Kirsch, most recently active in Mothercountry Motherfuckers and Baader Brains explains, "When the focus becomes so much about the political line and that 'this' is the key issue and you're with 'this' then you're basically good and if you're against it then you're basically our enemy" (Peterson 101). She warns of the us-versus-them mentality that can divide communities. By projecting stereotypes, strict ideological prejudices can have negative consequences, and issues become insignificant when it revolves around "one or two points." Kirsch continues, "...people need to have a little humility about their situations and make connections and not just settle for one issue" (101). Having the ability to take into consideration the big picture helps individuals to consider the variety of discourses that come into play. Gaining understandings of interrelationships between global issues decreases essentialism within punk discourses.

Cultural Identity and Punk Politics

Another example of a myopically focused subculture within punk is found in some vegetarian and vegan lifestyles. Punk-related vegetarian principles stem from issues such as the environment, animal rights, health, and

capitalism (e.g. factory farming). However, some punk-related activist practices solely concentrate on not consuming animal products as their focus. This symbolizes a limited, essentialist approach to punk lifestyle. Swedish musician Dennis Lyxzen of Refused and The (International) Noise Conspiracy remarks, "I've been vegan since about 1992, but if you think the main problem in the world is that people are eating meat then there is something wrong, because there are social and political structures you need to consider" (Peterson 99). In this example of some vegetarian discourses as punk essentialist practices, the larger issue does not solely concern humans consuming animals. Lyzxen encourages an understanding of broader socio-political frameworks that govern discourses, a perspective that dismantles an essentialist punk perspective.

Punk essentialist approaches in ideological vegan practices (not consuming any type of animal product) perpetuate a type of subcultural assimilation. Some people may not "go vegan" due to cultural reasons. Although Michelle Todd Gonzales has embraced a vegetarian diet since the age of 15 and made a conscious decision not to become vegan because of her Chicana roots. Gonzales explains, "One

of the ways I was able to observe my heritage was through food. You use a lot of cheese in Mexican food, so that was a sticking point for me" (Peterson 91). Since vegan diets refrain from consuming any type of animal product, for Gonzales, not using cheese means forfeiting a portion of her culture. Gonzales further states, "I didn't become vegan because I felt I was going to have to give up more of my heritage and I felt like I was holding on to every shred I could in the scene already" (91). The decision to not become vegan represents a resistance to subcultural assimilation that embodies essentialist ideologies. Keeping a strong non-vegan cultural identity while staying active in punk proved challenging, because a vegan diet represents radical lifestyle. An individual not aligning to a vegan dietary choice symbolizes a lack of "punkness." Gonzales, aware of a potentially homogenizing punk identity, rejects essentialism by intentionally seeking a balance that reflects her own cultural background and punk subculture.

Vegetarian lifestyles become perceived as a radical practice within particular punk contexts. Author and journalist Jessica Hopper (Hit It or Quit It fanzine) adopted a vegetarian diet in tenth grade, and notes it as a "radical thing" for a young person growing up in the

Midwest. Hopper states, "white middle class kids are prone to embrace a struggle that they may or may not have," and "there is a lot of romance in being the other and positing yourself in a struggle" (100). She contends that some people desire to be a part of a greater movement, and overemphasize particular practices associated with it. Having romantic notions of a struggle results in an erroneous sense of revolutionary actions. However, Hopper explains that diet "is one of the most basic lifestyle choices that you can make" (Peterson 100). While a dietary choice represents a significant aspect of livelihood, a focus on the diet as an exclusive radical issue promotes a false sense of revolution.

Punk subculture often romanticizes revolution as a force for change. Incorporating punk ethics into lifestyle practices recontextualizes change as a gradual process, rather than an established goal. Jose Palafox, a colleague and bandmate of Sarah Kirsch in Bread and Circuits and Baader Brains, recalls Kirsch declaring, "'Hey, the revolution is not some event over there where we get rid of these motherfuckers that we hate, the revolution is an everyday practice'" (Lefebvre). Seeking to eliminate an enemy as a root of a problem signifies an essentialist

perspective. Integrating punk practices with standard lifestyle approaches forms a more holistic perspective. Getting rid of something or someone does not solve issues. Thus, the simplicity of essentialist perspective in punk discourses become futile in the face of interconnecting global issues. Discourses reflecting punk essentialism exhibit ideological approaches to lifestyle. These practices become perceived as radical when they are considered to be the exclusive path in achieving a goal. However, ideological punk practices cease to become radical when examined within a larger context.

Beyond Punk Subculture

Incorporating multiple approaches to punk practice coincides with punk subculture's drive for change. Continuously understanding root causes of socio-political issues promotes comprehensive perspectives. Jose Palafox, a popular musician (Swing Kids, Struggle), activist, professor (Cal, Stanford, Mills), and publisher (AK Press), states, ". . . it's also important to look at the broader issues such as why people eat meat so much and how that's connected to our whole capitalistic society" (Peterson 99). The culture of eating meat does not simply exist in a

vacuum, but as a part of a complicated equation within larger socio-political structures. Palafox stresses the importance of deconstructing the interconnecting political discourses that dictate one's existence. He continues:

> This society we live under is so terrible for all species that until we look at the gross global inequalities and how we're connected to that and the consumer divide between first and third nations then it will be difficult to really make broad changes. (99)

Looking into the global relationships between countries, such as economies and foreign policies, among other connections, gives a clearer picture of dominant discourses that continue to perpetrate injustices on all living beings. If punk culture as a normative discourse represents a microcosm of mainstream society, then it lacks a comprehensive analytical perspectives on a broader status quo.

Within this more enlightened perspective, punk subcultural practices serve as a foundational approach to lifestyle. Punk lenses act as a springboard to promote development a more conscious member of society. Jen Angel, a prolific writer and publisher, and contributing editor to

Yes! Magazine explains, "Punk/hardcore was not only instrumental in helping me become who I am today, but also for turning me on politically and giving me a community in which I could play a more engaged role" (Peterson 54). The DIY punk community allows for direct participation, which empowers individuals to shape their surroundings. Instead of acting as a bystander or a consumer, punk subculture encourages active engagement with one's environment. Angel expresses, "Even just the basic suggestion that there is another way to live than what is fed to us by dominant culture, despite our replication of some of those very things, was enough to plant a seed in me" (54). Even though punk subculture reproduces aspects of mainstream culture, the concept of living independently from mainstream discourses disrupts notions of normativity. As Angel explains, punk subcultures still function with flaws, but its basic principles opens the possibilities of alternative lifestyles. Angel further explains, "I truly believe that I would not be the political activist about what kind of world and society I wanted to live in, and what I thought was possible" (54). Punk empowers individuals to see themselves alter the potential future. This practice

directly promotes communal efforts in creating transformative change.

Appling punk theories into larger discourses expand punk-related praxis beyond subcultural boundaries. Joining discussions that further movements larger than punk propels the change of macrocosmic socio-political situations. Daisy Rooks, assistant professor at the University of Montana in the Department of Sociology, states, ". . . if I wanted to engage with different kinds of people then I had to really think about the difference between lifestyle politics and broader politics" (Peterson 53). Lifestyle politics in Rook's case meant vegan and straight edge practices. She continues, ". . . but I'm not going to be an animal rights activist for the rest of my life, I want to work on women's issues and labor issues and other larger issues" (53). Broader political issues offer a more wide-ranging scope that extends beyond personal lifestyle choices. Using experiences in punk subculture such as grassroots events organizing and DIY ethics demonstrates an implementation of theory and action.

Punk subculture functions as a critical lens to expression and practice, but not a means to an end. Although DIY punk subcultures and discourses do not exist

as utopian communities, they still continue to inspire generations on an international level. People of all backgrounds become empowered to create spaces for dialogue, and help folks take punk-related ethos into other discourses. While punk subcultures function independently from mainstream culture, they continue to evolve interconnectively with other discourses. Expanding punk interpretations also means to apply punk approaches (such as anti-capitalist perspectives) into everyday lifestyle practices. Utilizing critical lenses in everyday analyses encourages taking into consideration alternative ways to approach different situations. Offering diverse standpoints reduces essentialist perspectives in mainstream society. Experiences with community organizing and event planning helps to reinforce social movements. DIY ethics, in connection with grassroots efforts, cultivates independence from corporate entities. Therefore, incorporating punk ethics into non-subcultural practices aims to alter the socio-political climate of larger social discourses.

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