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Gendered Performance and Performing Gender in the DIY Punk and Hardcore Music Scene

By Naomi Griffin[1]

Abstract

This article considers the relevance of geographical theories about gender roles and how gender is performed, to the situated context of a local DIY ('Do It Yourself) punk scene. It draws on an auto-ethnographic study carried out by the author between September 2008 and May 2009, which explored the themes of the body, gendered performativity and gendered spatialities. The study was based on the author's observations, reflections and conversations with other participants at live music events ('shows') in a particular region of the UK, but also revealed how DIY punk offers an example of an imagined community, crossing temporal, spatial and cultural boundaries with a sense of belonging and collective identity expressed by participants. The study illustrates the complexity of the relationship between punk ideologies and practices and the ways that spaces can simultaneously offer contradictory and negotiable opportunities for empowerment and resistance, acceptance and exclusion.

Keywords: Gender, Space, Performativity, Resistance, Auto-ethnography, Punk

Introduction

> '…even a subculture deliberately carved out to oppose mainstream norms and values ends up reinforcing masculinist ideals and male-defined gender expectations' (Mullaney, 2007, p.387)

This article considers the relevance of theories about gender roles and how gender is performed to the situated context of a local DIY ('Do It Yourself') punk scene. I reference literature on subcultures and gender and relate it to reflections from my auto-ethnographic research within the local scene studied. The thread running throughout this discussion is the tension between the nebulous political underpinnings of DIY punk, as a sub-culture, and my experiences of DIY punk and hardcore in a particular localised context (I will use 'DIY punk' to include hardcore in discussing my particular case study). Using the themes of the body, gendered performativity and gendered spatialities, this article explores this tension, as well as the often disconnected relationship between espousing progressive ideas (such as anti-racism and anti-homophobia) and acceptance of, or at times support for, reactionary values (particularly sexism). The demographic composition of the scene I was involved in was mainly white, heterosexual, male participants and men held dominant roles as live music event organisers and musicians

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(the live music events will hereon be referred to as 'shows'). I therefore focus on relationships between the roles played out by men and women, particularly on expressions of masculinity.

I begin by introducing the setting for the study followed by an explanation of the methods used in the research. I then explore the potential for DIY punk to be seen as an imagined community, acknowledging the fluidity of the temporal, spatial and cultural boundaries around punk, yet recognising the very real sense of belonging and collective identity expressed by many of the people I talked to. I use examples from my research to illustrate the complexity of the relationship between punk ideologies and practices, relating these examples to theories of gender and space. Finally, I provide examples from the literature of reclamation of punk spaces by women and feminist politics, as well as the potential for punk spaces to be read as queer spaces. This discussion draws from research that took place in a specific geographic and social location and so will not necessarily reflect experiences in all DIY punk spaces or scenes. Still, I hope that the examples provided will illustrate the complexity of the DIY punk music scene, particularly in relation to gender, and how the punk scene offers an opportunity to study the performance of resistance and gender. Consideration of the spatiality of punk shows illustrates the ways in which spaces can simultaneously offer contradictory and negotiable opportunities for empowerment and resistance, acceptance and exclusion.

Setting the Context

Punk as a subculture, scene or music style is a slippery term without a clear, fixed or agreed definition (Dunn, 2008). In this article, I consider gendered performance in a local DIY punk music scene that is part of the wider sub-culture of DIY punk. Peterson & Bennett (2004, p.1) conceptualise a 'music scene' as '*the context in which clusters of producers, musicians and fans collectively share their common musical tastes and collectively distinguish themselves from others'*. The term 'scene' can be used to describe collective identity, ideology and activity at different scales, including both the locally specific context as well as the broader international subculture of DIY punk. Although there is wide variation within the style of punk music, punk is generally characterised by fast, aggressive tones and is often politically charged. Hardcore punk is a more abrasive off-shoot of punk music where words are often screamed rather than sung. The DIY ethic 'avoid[s] the capitalist, profit-driven music world by promoting their bands, shows, and records themselves or through small companies' (Haenfler, 2006, p24). Punk in general, and particularly punk which emphasises its commitment to DIY, has been theorised as a subculture that aims to reject oppressive and exclusive aspects of mainstream society, often including oppressive assumptions with relation to gender (O'Hara, 1999, Rosenberg & Garofalo, 1998, Dunn, 2008). Ambrosch (2011) recognises an 'ethical code' of punk (generally associated with anarchist and left-wing ideology), that is, in most cases, more important than the musical style; but he also comments that this code can vary between different punk communities. From my own involvement in a local DIY punk scene I perceived a connection to what may be deemed collectively as progressive politics; attention to and concern about social injustice and individual rights characterised much of the music, merchandise and conversations at shows. However, tensions were apparent in the scene with relation to this connection, which the following discussion examines. The

examples I refer to reflect the complexity of femininity and masculinity, and the ways in which bodies can be both sites of oppression and resistance.

Auto-ethnography, reflexivity and positionality

This article draws on an auto-ethnographic study carried out between September 2008 and May 2009. It involved attendance at around two shows a week, focussing predominantly, but not exclusively, on two cities. During the study I kept a personal diary of observations, conversations and reflections, for later analysis. This approach differs from more traditional ethnography in its attention to self-reflection by the researcher, and in placing the researcher within the research (Chang, 2008). I felt that auto-ethnography was an appropriate method as it allowed me to acknowledge the importance of my own interest and personal history. Denzin (2006) suggests that, unlike other methods, auto-ethnography does not devalue personal reflections and perceptions; instead it appreciates the potential of self narrative, through drawing on the direct observations and experiences of the researcher, to translate the personal into the social and cultural. For Sultana (2007), researcher reflexivity is essential for ethical research. Reflexive research acknowledges that we all, as researchers, are also part of the processes and relationships that we study. This will inevitably impact on our research and analysis. So if we reflect on and try to critically engage with this process then we can better assess this impact (ibid.). Auto-ethnography challenged me to both recognise and reflect on my own moral and personal stance. Keeping a reflexive diary, recording my observations and extracts from conversations with other participants, enabled me to explore my own positionality. To illustrate, I thought about how my current experiences have been developed and shaped by my past. I considered the reasons for my interest in punk, how I felt about punk before starting the study and reflected on the study's impact on those feelings. For example, I am interested in the positive potential of punk as a powerful global, political movement, routed in music, which raises questions about hierarchy, privilege and oppression. In terms of gender, for me these questions offer opportunities to re-negotiate gender relations and even to re-imagine gender in non-binary terms. However, through the process of the research I considered the very real and embodied gendered experiences of those involved in the scene, including my own. So I decided to reflect on my experiences as a woman, and from this the focus on tensions in punk resistance and gender emerged. I feel that reflecting on my position better enabled me to situate myself within the research, as both a feminist researcher and a participant. So, by producing an auto-ethnographical piece, my aim was to engage with gender issues in both a personal and political context, through a reflexive exploration of some of the ways in which gender is performed and experienced in the DIY punk scene.

Punk as an 'imagined community'

As mentioned above, my experiences mainly refer to DIY punk and hardcore shows, in one region of the UK. Although this is a small-scale study with a specific geographical focus, the music and ideologies transcend spatial boundaries, as do connections between individuals. Personal connections are made and sustained in various ways, such as through meeting touring bands, travelling to shows in other towns, travelling as or with a band, as well as through communication online etc. As the broader DIY punk scene has no single location or fixed boundaries, it could be conceptualised as

an 'imagined community', in Anderson's (1991) sense, which describes the nation as a socially constructed community. In Epstein's (1998) analysis, youth cultures can transcend local, regional and national boundaries as 'mobile communities'. The community can at all other times be imagined and occupy no distinct physical space but then coalesce into a distinct physical space at shows. 'Community' interaction also occurs in virtual space such as internet message boards (Mullaney, 2007). Members will never physically meet all the people who consider themselves part of the 'scene' and so it is 'imagined'. I have attended shows frequently since my early teens. I feel part of an 'imagined community' and I, at least partly, constitute my own identity through my involvement in it. But I have been conscious that I am a female-bodied person in a predominantly masculinised scene. Throughout my involvement, the local DIY punk scene has symbolised, for me, an empowering space where issues of hierarchy and traditional gendered roles and relationships can be challenged. Yet, engagement with the examples of dissonance provided in this article and relevant literature highlights the limits and complexity of this challenge. Next, I illustrate this complexity by discussing how the body can be simultaneously a site of resistance and conformity.

Bodies: resistance and conformity

People live most of their lives as 'clothed bodies', yet, for Longhurst (2008), the importance of clothing as part of *embodied* identity has been largely ignored in academia. Fashion is a vital part of an individual's identity (ibid.). The temporary and permanent ways in which we alter our physical appearance can be referred to as body technologies. Wesely (2003) argues that body technologies are only accepted as 'natural' when they conform to social norms and expectations. Longhurst (2008) explains what this means with the example that western culture assumes good mothers to be gentle and warm. So a pregnant woman with ripped clothes and piercings may be judged by her appearance as a 'bad mother' despite there being no direct relationship between clothing and the ability to care for a child. Therefore, we use body technologies to both present ourselves and to understand others. These notions seem particularly important in the DIY punk scene as there is an effort made to reject expectations and restrictions through body technologies, using the body as a 'site of resistance' (Preston and Ustundag, 2005 p 220). Body-piercings and tattoos were common, which may be understood as reflecting a rejection of societal norms and expectations. Bell and Valentine (1995) suggest that body modification, such as tattoos, can be seen as a response to feeling powerless to societal problems; power is exercised through alterations to the body as a site which can be controlled, as the body is something the person does have some power over. Their observations are pertinent in the context of the DIY punk scene, observable in members' efforts to resist negative aspects of society's expectations about appearance, behaviour, personal presentation and ascribed role models. Also, as many women struggle to overcome notions of passivity, compliance and naivety (Brown, 1998), for some, tattoos, piercings and wearing non-traditional clothing may signify resistance to these stereotypical or 'natural' notions of femininity (Eileraas, 1997). Thus the body can be used as a means to (re)claim agency: a 'locus of empowerment', rather than a site of inscription or oppression, opposing the disciplinary practices and gender norms imposed on the body, through the body (Langman, 2008, p257).

Still, it may be too simple an analysis to interpret these bodily practices as only signifying a rejection of societal expectations. Commonalities, in the forms of body technologies practiced by participants exemplified by tattoos and piercings, could indicate that people also feel pressure to present themselves in particular ways to meet alternative social norms and expectations within the scene or community. In discussing gender, Haenfler (2006) found that some women felt pressure from others in punk to not look conventional or 'mainstream' and feeling that they would be judged for wearing makeup or not sporting tattoos. This suggests certain expectations about how punk women should reject mainstream notions of femininity, implying an almost oxymoronic expectation to conform to a non-conformist norm. The benefits of utilising body technologies to nurture a sense of collective identity are understood as particularly important in providing structure for diffuse movements (Haenfler, 2004). Yet it does also seem that within punk there may be altered but still restrictive notions of acceptable behaviour and bodily performance. As Longhurst states; '*fashion and clothing are cultural constructions of embodied identities which are ultimately bound to spatialities*' (2008, p40). Hence, in the context of the punk scene, there is a complex relationship between the aim of rejecting 'the mainstream' and internal struggles for acceptance and collective identity.

The Gender Bias

Here it is useful to consider the work of authors who have looked specifically at the straight edge (also represented as sXe) movement, a subculture of hardcore punk associated with a particular lifestyle. A straight edge lifestyle avoids the use of recreational drugs and alcohol. For some adherents, a straight edge lifestyle extends to refraining from the use of violence, promiscuous sex and for some, the consumption of animal products. People who live by straight edge philosophy often draw crosses on their hands to symbolise this lifestyle choice but also, in some cases, to symbolise the rejection of negative aspects of mainstream society (which have been connected to DIY punk more generally). As a subculture whose participants are predominantly male, some participants reject hegemonic masculinity that values hierarchy, sexual prowess, physical strength and emotional distance. Haenfler (2006) explains the logic that secure men should not need to destroy their own or others' bodies with violence to prove themselves. These alternative notions of masculinity, including ideologies of abstinence, represent a renegotiation of masculinity, which could work to create more inclusive and safer spaces for women, and others who do not identify with the aspects of hegemonic masculinity that are being negotiated. However, male-centred discourse and a focus on male bonding to overcome negative masculinities can result in the exclusion of women from a scene (Mullaney, 2007). According to Wood (2006), references to straight edge as a form of brotherhood, along with more overt examples of sexism, contribute to a discursive gender bias, which can negatively affect straight edge women's experiences and identities within the scene. Wood, (ibid.) also noted that this gender bias is present in DIY punk more broadly and other youth subcultures. The insights provided by these authors are helpful in illustrating the complex and sensitive relationship between nurturing collective identity, inclusion and strategies of resistance and the negotiation of gender relations in spaces where there is a clear gender bias. I found that women tended to be a small minority of the audience at the shows I attended, and were rarely seen performing in bands. As I explained earlier,

in my study, most participants were male and men also held a monopoly over the organisation of shows. In local scenes where this is the case, the men involved are thus in a position to determine the discourse of punk in these local contexts; ultimately controlling the 'voice' of the scene by producing the music and deciding which bands will play. It seems that due to a gender imbalance, there is a risk that women's voices are hidden and their contributions overlooked, even where attempts are made to challenge gender norms.

Public and Private, Front stage and Backstage

Domosh and Seager (2001) discuss the ways in which private and public spaces and roles within those spaces are coded according to gender, with the public sphere (and the roles associated with it) being heavily denoted as 'masculine', leaving the private sphere (the other) to be feminine. It has also been argued that in mainstream society activities such as housework or childcare, which are generally equated with femininity and the private sphere, are less valued than paid employment in the masculine coded public sphere. Thus, distinctions are made between the status of (public) work and (private) 'women's work' and between front stage and backstage roles (ibid. see also Goffman in Friedman, 1994). It is possible to draw comparisons between these theoretical concepts and the roles performed at the DIY punk shows observed. The 'public' sphere could be understood as the bands, and the performance. Hence, if the bands that are promoted are predominantly male, along with the promoters themselves (as they were in my experience), then there is a risk that the 'face' of DIY punk is a male one. The musicians and performers need the support of all other members of the scene, including those who organise and promote shows, distribute music and attend shows. Acknowledgement of the importance of this support was present in rhetoric that encouraged people to support their scene; a theme in discussions during my research. Yet for Mullaney (2007), in the boys club that is the punk music scene girls are the 'supporting cast', which implies a risk of the marginalisation of the roles that women perform in punk.

The important role of the 'audience' at punk shows must be recognised. The punk scene, and the hardcore scene in particular, is generally characterised by the involvement of the crowd and that includes the (physical) interaction of the crowd with each other as well as with the bands playing (see appendix A). The vocal and physical interaction blurs the boundaries between those 'on stage' and those in the 'audience'; an altered power dynamic to that which you may expect at non-DIY shows. However, literature on punk has highlighted concerns about women tending to be less visible in the band and audience interactions. O'Hara (1999) commented on an uneven gendered spatiality, observing a gradual movement of women to the edges of the room at shows and eventually out of the shows altogether. Though not the case for all DIY punk shows, at the shows I attended there were relatively few women performing in bands and a pattern of women standing at the edges of shows, less central to the physical and vocal interaction and therefore physically separated. It has also been noted that at shows women are often assumed to be someone's girlfriend (Haenfler, 2006 and Wood, 2006); my own observations, were consistent with this. If women are assumed to be 'girlfriends' rather than active participants, their 'front stage' participation may be regarded in some sense as problematic. Similarly, the paucity of women's front stage involvement, and the

promoters' tendency not to secure bands with female musicians, may be seen as unproblematic. The theoretical concepts of 'public' and 'private' spheres, allows for the possibility that women play more central roles in activities that are less visible when analysing the spatiality of a show.

Gendered performance

In discussing gender and space it is useful to turn to Butler's (1990) theory of performativity; which questions universal and dichotomous assumptions about gender identity and proposes instead that gender is performed and constituted through repetition of these performances. If gender is 'doing', as Butler suggests (ibid), the most prominent example of gendered action from my observations was the dancing at some of the shows. Dancing at heavier shows (particularly at hardcore shows) often involved ('simulated') punching, raised fists, pushing, and collisions (see appendix B). People involved cited the atmosphere created, the passion for the music and the philosophy underpinning it as an explanation for this bodily performance. These behaviours exemplify an attitude of resistance prominent in punk that challenges assumptions that this style of dancing and movement is meaningless violence[2]. Yet, the way that passion is expressed and encoded here can be understood as a performance of masculinity. O'Hara (1999) explains that in a patriarchal society such as ours, men are categorised as the 'reference point' and women as the 'other', and so behaviours coded as masculine are valued over those seen as feminine. In this way, passion is expressed with masculine displays of strength, power and emotional restraint. These masculine bodily performances are not exclusive to male bodies, and not inclusive of all male bodies. However, in the shows I observed, very few of the women attending took part in these performances.

The theory that male and female bodies learn to occupy space in different ways could help in the analysis of the patterns of gendered performance that I observed. Young (2005) discusses how girls tend to learn reserved bodily comportment. This is particularly interesting when we consider one motion, termed 'windmilling', which involves the person spinning their arms around rapidly. Encompassing as much space as possible, this motion clears the area around you, preventing anyone from approaching. For Young (ibid), typical reserved feminine bodily comportment is not biological but is rather produced by societal structures and restrictions on women's bodies. Women tend to *'lack an entire trust in our bodies to carry us to our aims, approaching physical activity with hesitancy, tending to see our bodies as fragile and so fear pain more than men'* (ibid., p34). Although many men will inevitably fear pain at shows, and many women may not, Young's (2005) work explains that from a young age girls are taught that to be feminine is to be weak, submissive and reserved (also see Fredrickson & Harrison, 2005). From speaking to other women at shows and from my own experiences, it seems that the fear of pain is a concern for some women but there was also a concern to avoid being judged or questioned for taking part in a masculine performance; suggesting another aspect to the way some women experience others' perception of them. As noted, masculine bodily performance is not exclusive to male bodies and the proportions of women involved may not be the same for every show or scene. However, where there are very few women, and when this is combined with other factors discussed above, (such as the ascribed status as

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[2] Although it has been reported that some participants do abuse the situation in ways that allow for violence without impunity (Haenfler, 2006)

'girlfriend') women's concerns about being more visibly and centrally involved may be reinforced.

Bodily boundaries: reimagining the 'abject'

Grosz's (1994) discussion of 'abject fluids' is relevant to this discussion. Fluids that cross bodily boundaries such as sweat and tears are natural but are often seen as embarrassing in western cultures and are responded to with abjection. Yet at punk music shows this common social reaction seems less apparent. An accepted expectation of attendance at punk shows, and hardcore shows particularly, is that there will be sweating and spitting, especially from lead singers singing or screaming into the crowd. Collisions between bodies in dancing seem to allow sweat and even blood as abject fluids to become more acceptable. Also, it could be argued that bodily hygiene is not assessed by the same standards as in wider or 'mainstream' society. For Longhurst (2001, p30) '*dirt is essentially disorder...matter out of place*'; so in a scene characterised by the rejection of mainstream social norms, it is possible that dirt, altered expectations of bodily hygiene and acceptance of abject fluids are both a result of and are involved in the construction of this image. Therefore, it seems that punk shows have the potential to create spaces where some previously abject fluids are non-abject; a liminal zone. Eileraas (1997) discusses the potential for self-empowerment through identification with the abject, using examples of female punk bands using 'ugliness' as resistance. Eileraas explains how bands, such as *Hole*, have used the process of abjection to reject traditional notions of femininity, manipulating the dichotomy between femininity as 'nice, gentle and pretty' with female bodies as uncontrollable and messy, reworking 'pretty' femininity into the grotesque and disturbing. Thus, this liminal zone may provide a liberating space where abjection and bodily boundaries can be questioned (what is outside and what is within), where women can use parody to highlight the complexity of femininity. The reason this parody is so powerful may be explained by Grosz (1994) who highlights that, in western thought, female bodily fluids are generally considered as less acceptable than male bodily fluids and so women are generally made to feel more embarrassed by or ashamed of theirs. Engaging with this theory then suggests that the overcoming or re-imagining of the abject may be more problematic in the context of women's bodies. The liberatory potential of negotiating the abject in this context is therefore complex when we consider gender and is worthy of further investigation.

Discourse: questioning and undermining women's involvement

As previously noted, the under-representation of women in DIY punk is in common with many music sub-cultures or scenes, especially in heavier hardcore punk (Wood, 2006). This may be partly attributed, within and outside the scene, to girls and women being socialised into not enjoying heavy music (Haenfler, 2006). However, not all local scenes reflect this and many women are interested in punk music and ethics, so this analysis does not provide a sufficiently inclusive explanation (cf. for example literature on the Riot Grrrl movement such as Monem, 2007; Bock, 2008; Rosenberg & Garofalo, 1998). Still, in the scene that I studied, there were many barriers to the involvement of women. Discourses which undervalue women represent one of those barriers. For example, at one show a band sang an anti-racist song, followed by a song about 'bitches'. The singer explained: '*I wrote this song about several ex-girlfriends,*

mainly so one girl can't go "ooo look, someone wrote a song about me and how much of a bitch I am" because it's about loads of bitches' (07/11/08). This provoked no negative reaction from the crowd, in fact most people laughed. Although racism, homophobia and sexism are often denounced in the punk scene generally, it seemed that sexism, covert or more apparent, often went unchallenged, again illustrating inconsistencies within the scene. For O'Hara (1999), although sexism may exist in punk to a lesser degree than in society as a whole, it is difficult to be totally detached from hegemonic masculinity that dominates mainstream society.

Another example, which highlights the dissonance between DIY punk's nebulous political ideology and the complexity of how this plays out in practice, is a poster/ flyer that was used to advertise a show. The headlining band were an anarchist hardcore punk band, with anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-homophobic lyrics, yet the image on the poster for the event was of a nearly naked woman, half submerged in acid. By 'humorously' trivialising objectification and violence against women's bodies, this poster shows disregard for the problematic message that the image promotes and ignorance of the philosophy of the band it was advertising. Another poster depicted a woman holding her bleeding face (again, one of the bands listed, sing about sexism in the punk scene). Although not representative of all posters for shows, the use of women's bodies to advertise shows is not uncommon, particularly on posters for heavier shows in the area. For Wolf (2002), degrading images of women and those presenting an unattainable beauty ideal, used in advertising, attack women's self esteem. So the use of such images is problematic. O'Hara (1999 p102) explains that while *'many punks take a stand against speciesism, racism... [they] contradict themselves by practicing or accepting sexism'*. This again highlights the tensions between principles that promote equality and respect, on the one hand, and exclusive practices that ignore or deny gender issues, on the other.

It has been noted that the scrutiny received by women is far greater than that faced by men in punk, which is common to many youth subcultures (Haenfler, 2006). It is tempting to assume that this is because there are fewer women in bands and so women are more likely to stand out; but this explanation fails to address the question of *why* there are fewer women. It is possible that this extra pressure to meet or exceed expectations deters women's involvement, again, resulting in women assuming back stage roles. At one show I attended, where six bands played, totalling fifteen people, only one band member was female. The woman concerned explained that it was not uncommon for her to be the only woman playing and that, although she has played many shows and has had years of experience, she still felt she was more nervous than the other (male) members of her band. Although she does not physically take 'centre stage', she explained the pressure she felt to perform to a higher standard than other members of bands; *'people assume that any tiny mistakes are 'cause I'm a girl', when boys can be bad just 'cause they're bad'* (21/03/09). This quote implies a feeling of being 'othered' and ascribed a lower status because of being a woman. Her perception of how others regarded her suggests a risk that women's roles become defined by their gender, for example as 'girl' drummers or 'girl' guitarists, devaluing the contributions of the women involved.

The pressure on women to fit in; feeling limited to either 'boy-wanna-be' or the 'submissive girlfriend' role, are described by Haenfler (2006) in relation to punk subcultures. This suggests that women may feel pressure to assume more masculine characteristics, (such as posture, clothing etc.) to prove their commitment to the scene

and to avoid being labelled as the latter. A personal example illustrates this pressure; at one show I was standing at the 'distro' (a stall/store that distributes DIY music and 'zines'[3]) that I co-run and a man approached and asked for a recommendation. As we had over twenty different bands' music I asked what sort of music he liked. A women accompanying him said *'you'd be better off asking a lad'*, pointing at a boy standing near her, who had no link to the stall (12/01/09). As a reaction to the hyper-masculinity of the scene and assumptions of female inferiority, women may feel a need to assimilate in behaviour and appearance, for acceptance and respect. For Leblanc (1999, p.104) *'punk is constructed and enacted as a discourse of masculinity...punk girls are constrained within male-defined gender expectations'*. However, this perspective risks undermining the subjectivity of those who could be described as 'assimilating' and the potential for women to demonstrate a rejection of dominant femininities. These punk spaces may offer the potential for a negotiation of expectations of women and femininity, allowing people to play with and manipulate the distinctions between masculinity and femininity through performance. Yet the limitations described by Haenfler (2006) remain a concern.

Punk's potential: Feminist and Queer Possibilities

Here I turn to examples of bands utilising the political potential of punk to challenge assumptions about gender within punk and within society in general. O'Meara (2003, p300), using *The Raincoats* as an example, discusses how punk ideology can and has been used by women to challenge the masculine assumptions of the punk genre, using punk ideology of *'passionate amateurism to express feminine possibilities'*. O'Meara (ibid.) explains that punks' passion for musical amateurism provided a space for women to fully participate in a rock discourse in the late 1970s. So the DIY punk scene may offer opportunities for resistance to musical masculinity, while operating within DIY punk conventions. An example from my diary of women utilising punk ideology and practices to produce progressive discourse is *No Fit State*; a punk band whose band page describes their members as '*screaming fertile energetic anarcha feminist banshees*' (No Fit State, 2010). *No Fit State's* musical style, lyrics and on stage performance exemplify how DIY punk ethics can fit with feminist aims (along with promoting other issues such as No Borders campaigns). The feminist emphasis on producing a collective, non-competitive and democratic alternative genre encouraging involvement from other women (ibid.) is shown by the ever strong turnout of women at their shows. At one show, all the members of the band performed dressed as stereotypes of housewives, playing behind a makeshift washing line. This created a space for negotiations of how women identify with femininity, parodying the notion of womanhood being equated with house work, utilising the punk context to promote this message.

Similar arguments about the tension between misogyny and the struggle to create egalitarian spaces have been put forward by Ensminger (2010), in discussing queerness and punk (particularly 'queer' hardcore or 'queercore'). Ensminger explores the historical presence of queer cultural practices within the punk music scene, and the continual conflict between those who identify the scene as a 'queer space' and the hetero-normative assumptions and homophobic behaviours and perceptions which still survive in the scene. Ensminger (2010) explains that for many people who identify themselves as queer or

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[3] Zines are short run DIY publications, often discussing DIY music, politics among many other issues.

identify with queer culture, the punk music scene offers a space where homophobia is suspended (again, a liminal zone); suggesting that it is possible that punk politics and gay culture have merged to change mainstream attitudes. However, for Leblanc (1999), the pressures of heterosexuality and hetero-normativity are dominant in punk. Although written over ten years ago, Leblanc's analysis seems to have continuing relevance. While homophobia and homophobic behaviour are generally condemned, as noted by Haenfler (2006), there remains a more passive acceptance of homophobia. An example from my own experience is the occasional use of the term 'gay' as an insult, as in wider society. Still, Ensminger's work (2010) highlights the possibilities within punk to reclaim a space which for many is 'latently queer':

> 'Being outsiders due to a subjugated sexuality provides gays and lesbians a critical distance to deconstruct punk rock and allow[s] them the possibility of creating a culture outside the mainstream, which [is] innovative, yet critical of existing social and cultural standards' (Ensminger, 2010, p65).

When discussing queer punks, this author refers specifically to gay men and acknowledges that there is a need for an examination of whether lesbian women are 'equal partners' in the reclamation of punk space. Discussions of sexuality were not prominent throughout my research, nor was the presence of overtly queer music or politics within the scene that I studied (although there were notable exceptions, such as No Fit State). Yet, the potential for punk spaces to be seen as latently queer is an interesting one, and worthy of further investigation, particularly in relation to gender as well as sexuality. Ensminger's (ibid.) research does further highlight the tension between different ways of understanding and interpreting space, and the complexity of punk's relationship with progressive politics and the spaces that are created as a result.

Conclusions

While temporally, culturally and geographically situated, my experiences illustrate the punk scene's potential as a space for the resistance of oppressive ideologies, providing examples of ways in which identities are embodied and how the body can be viewed as a site of resistance. For Lefebvre (cited in Stewart, 1995) space is a product of the human body, suggesting that to look at resistance we need to first start at the body. I feel that the punk music scene exemplifies this well; in attempts to resist oppressive ideologies and practices through body technologies and the potential that punk spaces provide for the renegotiation of neatly defined notions of masculinity and femininity. Yet, other embodied gendered performances (verbal and physical) are in tension with this analysis. Although ethics of equality are often verbally promoted and sexism condemned, discourses of sexism, along with masculine bodily performances, raise questions about the potential for producing inclusive spaces. However, the way gender is performed at shows can also be seen as context specific; as, say, the form of dancing described earlier would induce a very different meaning if performed in an office workplace, demonstrating how behaviours are imbued with different meanings based on context. So it seems that the spatiality of the scene produces gendered performance while gendered performances simultaneously produce the spatiality of the scene. The tensions,

complexities and dissonances discussed in this article demonstrate that DIY punk is a useful case study for the application of theories of resistance, gender and performativity.

I acknowledge that by focussing on the examples of dissonance that I have provided, examples of strategies which aim to negotiate these tensions have been overlooked. My aim is not to delegitimise the political potential of punk, or to deny the possibilities that DIY punk spaces offer for the promotion of progressive politics but it does aim to highlight how complex this relationship is in practice. Despite what may seem a negative account, I do see the punk scene as providing spaces where dominant and negative gender relations can be challenged, and new forms of identity are explored. Rather than an attack on the scene, my reflections are intended to illustrate the pervasiveness of patriarchy; by demonstrating the conflict and contradictions apparent in attempts to reject oppressive aspects of mainstream society.

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Appendices:
A)

The tattooed lead singer of a hardcore punk band crowdsurfs with mic in hand. Tattooed man at the back drinks beer from a glass bottle amidst the chaos. (Taken: 28.04.09)

B)

A predominantly male crowd dancing. Note the arm extension of many of the audience members and the collisions which are taking place. (Taken: 16/03/09)