

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Jules Weiss for the degree of Master of Arts in Applied Anthropology presented on May 10, 2019.

Title: “Punk is Caring”: Art, Music, and Embodiment in the Pacific Northwest Transgender Punk Scene

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Joan Gross

In this paper I discuss an ethnographic research project on identity embodiment among transgender and gender nonconforming punks in the Pacific Northwest region of the U.S., with focus on the relationship between transgender/gender nonconforming identity and affiliation to DIY punk communities. Trans punks create a unique, hybridized subculture-based identity embodiment that incorporates punk’s emphasis on non-conformity from dominant culture, gender-bending or androgynous aspects of punk fashion and aesthetic, and personal feelings of gender “weird”-ness. In exploring the relationships between art and embodiment, this study creates claims for the importance of involvement in the punk subculture for freedom of self-expression among transgender and gender nonconforming Pacific Northwest punks, and more broadly makes claims for the importance of creative expression in navigating and expressing marginalized identity.

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“Punk is Caring”: Art, Music, and Embodiment in the Pacific Northwest Transgender
Punk Scene

by
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APPROVED:

Major Professor, representing Applied Anthropology

Director of the School of Language, Culture, and Society

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Jules Weiss, Author

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General Introduction

This project is an ethnographic study of transgender and gender nonconforming people participating in punk music communities in the Pacific Northwest region of the U.S. I aim to explore the relationship between gender identity and creative expression, as well as how transgender and gender nonconforming punks embody a hybridized transgender/gender nonconforming and punk identity. My aim, in conducting this study, was to expand upon the research being done in anthropology and other disciplines on transgender communities. As I developed and conducted the study, several more aims became apparent, including opportunities to theorize 'punk' and 'punking' adjacent to existing work on 'queering'. Documentation became a second aim: documenting the importance of subcultural involvement in the wellbeing of transgender and gender nonconforming punks, and documenting the performances of transgender and gender nonconforming punks for both data collection and as part of participant observation in DIY punk communities. Before presenting the following manuscript, it is helpful to introduce the project in detail, explain the documentary photography element of this project that is not included in the manuscript, and discuss the broad gap in literature that this project seeks to fill.

This study involved a 7-month period (May-November 2018) of participant observation conducted among local DIY (do-it-yourself) punk communities. Primarily, this was done in cities in Oregon, starting in Corvallis (my location of residence) and expanding to Eugene and Portland. I also briefly visited the cities of Seattle and Olympia, Washington to attend shows and conduct interviews with study participants.

Before starting this research, I had only attended a handful of music shows and had never attended a DIY punk show. I was alerted to the presence of transgender and gender nonconforming people in punk communities by a local transgender community organizer. As I began my research, I focused on attending all-ages DIY punk shows and community events to gain access to local punk communities, network with possible participants, and learn how to be a punk. Most of these shows were at house venues in Corvallis and Eugene due to geographic proximity and my ability to learn about these events through community contacts. Through participant observation, I met and conducted audio-recorded semi-structured interviews with 21 transgender and gender nonconforming punk community members and 3 cisgender community members. Of the transgender and gender nonconforming interviewees, 19 were current Pacific Northwest residents, 11 of whom are PNW natives. At the time of interviewing, the youngest interviewee was 19 years old and the oldest was 42 years old, with an average age of about 26. Of the transgender and gender nonconforming PNW residents, 11 are people who were assigned male at birth, 5 of whom are binary-identified transgender women and 6 are nonbinary, genderqueer, or gender nonconforming people. 8 are people who were assigned female at birth, all of whom identify outside of the gender binary or as gender nonconforming. While I met several binary-identified transgender men over the course of my research, none were interviewed, due to both scheduling issues and lack of interest in participation.

In addition to participant observation and interviews, I built a body of documentary photography, largely featuring study participants while performing or playing music. I also arranged some portrait photoshoots with willing study participants

to round out the show photography. This body of photography, while not included in this thesis, has been assembled into an annotated photobook titled *More than Music: Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Punks in the Pacific Northwest*. With the approval of participants, this photobook will be made available to the punk communities in which I conducted my research and will be submitted for publication.

The documentary photography itself became a large portion of this project, especially as I became a member of DIY punk communities. While photographic technology is accessible and many punks are photographers or photograph and record at shows using their smartphones, many in the community (especially in Corvallis) appreciated my presence as a more “skilled” photographer with a high-powered DSLR camera. I could not participate in the DIY punk community as a musician, but I could participate as a photographer by taking photos at shows, posting them online, and giving photography to bands to use for their online presences and promotional materials. I was frequently recruited to take portraits of bands before or after shows, regardless of whether anyone in the band was a participant in my project. Additionally, the photography served as a means of data collection through the documentation of transgender and gender nonconforming punks’ style and aesthetic, a topic that plays heavily into research into punk communities through subcultural studies literature.

There is a relationship found in the literature between the topic of identity (especially embodiment and artistic production), and political/ethical stances in punk communities. Media production and style are both used to signify political or ethical identification, and political affiliation is often part of embodiment of a subcultural identity. DIY, interpreted by punks as an anti-capitalist ethic, is integral to some punk groups and

their media production. DIY also infiltrates punk style and punks often demonstrate their allegiance to DIY through self-modified clothing and grooming choices (Leblanc 1999, 40–42; Hannerz 2015, 144–45; Suterwalla 2013, 163). Riot grrrl, as a musical and political movement by and for female punks, is inseparable from its feminist politics. Riot grrrls embodied the identity through both aesthetic and politics, and bands like Pussy Riot continue to use feminist politics as the basis for their music and band identity (Rourke and Wiget 2016). Queercore was also a movement that began through the fusion of politics with punk, in this case radical queer politics. The music and art that identified itself with the queercore movement also identified itself with this set of political beliefs. Punk began as a political reaction, and political distinctions continue to be important in the embodiment of punk identities (Hebdige 1979).

Anthropological literature focusing on punk subculture, queer subculture, gender, artistic production, style and aesthetic, and related topics often discusses aspects of expression and embodiment of identity. However, there are several gaps in this literature at the intersections of these topics. Gender, as a keyword, often means ‘female’; it refers specifically to women and women’s experiences as opposed to a more expansive category discussing gender broadly (including the gendered experiences of men, transgender, and gender nonconforming people). Studies done on punk embodiment and gender, such as LeBlanc’s *Pretty in Punk*, deal with gender-as-female instead of gender-as-category. Pearce and Lohman’s report on DIY trans punk identity in the UK is one of the few studies that considers gender-as-category within subcultural studies on punk, and it is very limited in scope due to its focus on a small transgender-specific punk community and small number of interviews (2018). Nault’s text *Queercore*

was published in early 2018. The book uses a media studies approach rather than a cultural studies or anthropological approach, but is largely historical in scope and does not thoroughly discuss contemporary queer punk movements. While embodiment is a theoretical approach that can be applied to this text and others about the Queercore movement, this approach is not found within the texts I have discussed. Many texts on contemporary queer punk are focused on queer-as-sexuality and sexuality-as-category for analysis as opposed to focusing on transgender populations or gender-as-category (Rosenberg and Sharp 2018; Sharp and Nilan 2017 are some examples). In addition, these texts have different field, methodological, and theoretical focuses; they are rarely based in anthropology or ethnography, take a subcultural studies and media studies approach instead of utilizing interviewing or methods of direct observation, and primarily apply elements of feminist or queer theory (Wiedlack 2015).

Manuscript - "Punk is Caring": Art, Music, and Embodiment in the Pacific Northwest Transgender Punk Scene

Abstract

In this paper I discuss an ethnographic research project on identity embodiment among transgender and gender nonconforming punks in the Pacific Northwest region of the U.S., with focus on the relationship between transgender/gender nonconforming identity and affiliation to DIY punk communities. Trans punks create a unique, hybridized subculture-based identity embodiment that incorporates punk's emphasis on non-conformity from dominant culture, gender-bending or androgynous aspects of punk fashion and aesthetic, and personal feelings of gender "weird"-ness. In exploring the relationships between art and embodiment, this study creates claims for the importance of involvement in the punk subculture for freedom of self-expression among transgender and gender nonconforming Pacific Northwest punks, and more broadly makes claims for the importance of creative expression in navigating and expressing marginalized identity.

Introduction

For about a year, there existed in Corvallis, Oregon a DIY punk house venue called Horsey House. The group of trans women who lived in the house booked punk bands, primarily bands with women and queer members, to play in their one-car garage to a small audience of trans and queer young adults. Horsey House was the first venue I went to when I started this research project, and the first house venue I ever attended a show at. But Horsey House and its residents invited me into a subculture filled with unique people who had unique ways of being themselves, namely transgender and

gender nonconforming punks. When I started this project, I was not expecting to find such a diverse, creative, and outspoken community. I was also not expecting to find a community that I, as a transgender person, artist, and academic, could feel at home in.

Transgender and gender nonconforming punks' sense of gender identity, as well as the ways in which this is expressed and embodied, cannot be separated from their sense of punk identity. Within the community I worked with, punk was often a core identity, one that was salient before queer, transgender, or gender nonconforming identity. Membership or alignment with both queer/trans/gender nonconforming and punk spheres are contested, contextual, fluid, and constantly re-negotiated. Identity embodiment revolved around more than music taste and gender expression; political and regional affiliation (and disaffiliation), personality, personal history, and creativity were also expressed through fashion, style/aesthetic, and music creation and performance.

Punk provides a space of exploration for gender nonconformity that does not feel as dangerous as more directly exploring cross-gender or gender nonconforming ways of being. For trans and gender nonconforming people, membership in punk communities provides a space to explore gender "weird"-ness and general discontent with their dominant culture. For those who are closeted or have not yet consciously assumed trans or gender nonconforming identity, punk provides models for non-normative gender embodiment that they see as safe ways to explore this nonconformity. Punk provides androgynous and gender-bending models for fashion, style, and aesthetics. It also provides ways of embodying gender non-normativity and non-conformity that are read by their dominant culture as "punk" before (or instead of) being read as transgender or

gender nonconforming. Punk music creation and performance creates a space for personal expression of gender identity that can be separated from daily gender embodiment or expression and can be used as a testing ground or extreme expression of gender embodiment. Trans punks create a hybridized, subculturally unique identity embodiment that incorporates punk's emphasis on non-conformity from dominant culture, gender-bending or androgynous aspects of punk fashion and aesthetic, and personal feelings of gender "weird"-ness.

Transgender and gender nonconforming people are musicians, artists, cooks, gardeners, car geeks, computer geeks, writers, and many other things. They are more than just their gender identities, expressions, or embodiments, and those aspects of gender were often based in more than just trans or gender nonconforming identity. Punk, as a subculture, provides a space for disenfranchised, passionate, and "weird" people to socialize with similarly nonconforming peers and explore multiple aspects of their identity that do not fit within dominant culture. Membership in punk communities was important both to trans punks' understandings of their identities and embodiments and to their well-being and survival. By providing both a safe, welcoming community and models for embodiment, involvement in subcultures like punk allows transgender and gender nonconforming people to better understand and accept their queer identities and to live more free and authentic lives. In exploring the relationships between art and embodiment, this study creates claims for the importance of subcultural involvement among queer (or otherwise culturally nonconforming) people, the importance of creative expression in understanding and expressing identity in marginalized communities, and

the creation of more diverse scholarship on trans identity and experience focusing on subcultural, creative, and interest-based community involvement.

Transgender Identity

Participants in this study resisted providing concise terminology when asked to define their gender as part of collection of demographic data. This could, perhaps, be related to the culture of the Pacific Northwest and an emphasis on individually and general non-conformity to cultural norms. While some participants had a simple, direct response to my question, most found being asked to define their gender an unsettling activity. In response to my question, I received a myriad of answers ranging from vague hand motions to compound terms of queer identity and cultural references like “futch mom”, “lumberjane”, or “alien boy”. Some participants had a ready answer that they indicated was often given in response to invasive questioning by cisgender people, and a longer and more complicated answer that they felt was more appropriate to their personal sense of identity and more easily understood by other queer, transgender, and gender nonconforming people.

It is important to note that in this paper and other materials related to this study, I broadly refer to members of my study population as “transgender and gender nonconforming”. Only using the term “transgender” would be inaccurate. Not all participants considered themselves members of the transgender community, for a variety of reasons, and there is ongoing dialogue within queer communities around where the boundaries of the term “transgender” lie. In respect to the identities of participants and community members who do not claim the term “transgender” for themselves, the addition of “gender nonconforming” encompasses a wide array of

people and their experiences without forcing upon them an identity term they do not ascribe to.

Embodiment Theory

The use of embodiment as a theoretical approach is centered around the definition of the word embodiment itself, referring to tangible representations of the intangible. A theory of identity embodiment refers to physical, visible, and/or tangible representations of identity. Within cognitive anthropology especially, embodiment has been used as a paradigm to understand the relationship between cognition of culture and the body, how culture is influenced by physical limitations of the body, and how bodies are shaped by culture (Csordas 1990; Borghi and Caruana 2015).

As I use it in this study, identity embodiment refers to the relationship between the physical body and cultural senses of identity: how a person enacts cognitively-held identity onto their body, how both that identity and its embodiment are influenced by culture, and how culture is shaped and altered by shifting methods of embodying identity. A person's embodiment of an identity is influenced both by their sense of identity, innate or adopted, and by what options or models for embodiment of that identity their cultural surroundings provide. Transgender and gender nonconforming punks hybridize two categories of identity and their respective models for embodiment: transgender, queer, and nonconforming senses of gender identity, plus punk identity (mostly via involvement in DIY punk communities). The later discussions will explain the importance of punk community among participants, how transgender and gender nonconforming punks utilize style and aesthetic to embody their hybrid identities, and

the importance of creative expression on participants' understanding and expression of their identities.

Embodiment has also been used extensively in studies of punk. Hancock and Lorr's ethnographic study of punk, technology, and identity explores specifically the embodiment of music and musical practices in hardcore punk communities in Chicago (2013). Dines, in a different take, explores the intersection of straightedge punk and the Hare Krishna Movement in what he calls "Krishnacore", and how participants embody religion through their musical practice (2013). Some of these studies of embodiment of punk identity deal specifically with gender, but "gender" in these cases usually refers to women, not to queer or transgender people. Dunn's exploration of the continuation of the riot grrrl movement into the 2000s and their appeal abroad, most notably into Russia, explores how the embodiment of riot grrrl shifts in cross-cultural contexts (2014). Within studies informed by queer and feminist theories, embodiment is also used to study performance or manifestation of queer identity and transgender or alternative gender embodiment cross-culturally: relating to the embodiment of non-normative gender identities and expressions in child psychology (Farley and Kennedy 2016), migration and border violence (Gillespie 2015) artistic production in transgender youth (Rooke 2010), gender-building through language use (Borba and Ostermann 2007), and even gender and anarchy in the field of criminal justice (Herman 2015). Embodiment is also a lens through which queer theorists have discussed the applications of existing queer and feminist theories of identity to transgender populations (Elliot and Roen 1998; Roen 2001).

Punk, Art, and Embodiment

Punk provides models through which individuals can generate art, namely music and forms of visual art such as zines ('fanzines', from 'fan magazine'), album art, merchandise, and show posters that are meant to supplement and promote music production and performance. A main tenet of the punk communities in this study is the culture and ethic of DIY (do-it-yourself). DIY is autonomous, separate from corporate music production, and the creation and employment of independent labels allow musicians to have more freedom in the creative process (Moore 2007). There is less pressure in DIY music production to conform to a style that is marketable or sellable. In DIY-centric punk communities, the ethic is pervasive and can be considered a kind of lifestyle in addition to a mode of artistic production (Hannerz 2015, 117–18; Leblanc 1999, 234). While embodiment through politics/ethics and the DIY ethic will be discussed more later, it is useful now to outline how two alternative punk movements, riot grrrl and Queercore, have used DIY methods of media production to create radical identities.

DIY was especially important in the maintenance of creative freedom in riot grrrl and feminist punk: "The riot grrrl movement arose within an infrastructure of do-it-yourself media already established in Olympia [WA]. [...] In turn, the riot grrrl subculture took independent media in new directions, especially in its innovative use of fanzines as a forum for community outreach and political communication." (Moore 2007, 463). Riot grrrl utilized the framework of DIY punk and the creative freedom it entails to "scream feminist protest and give voice to female desire" (Spiers 2015, 2). Additionally, riot grrrl relied heavily on the creation and circulation of zines to spread its political messages,

and the influences of riot grrrl DIY and zine creation continue to affect contemporary feminist punk and pop culture through publications like *Bitch Magazine* (Spiers 2015). Both the artistic production itself and the method through which it is produced are important to riot grrrl embodiment of a punk feminist identity. Riot grrrl took existing punk and DIY culture and created a hybridized movement by incorporating feminist politics. Riot grrrl embodied a specific feminist punk identity and created media (music and zines) meant to model this embodiment. The fusion of feminist and punk altered punk culture as a whole and made riot grrrl's brand of feminist punk a model for others to adopt in their own identity embodiment.

DIY and zine publication is also especially important to queer punk movements, namely the Queercore movement of the 1980s, which began with the zine *J.D.'s* and had a lasting effect on queer movements of resistance (Nault 2018a; DeChaine 1997). Queercore, as both a movement and a genre, fused antiestablishment queer politics with punk practice and aesthetic (Nault 2018a, 1). The radical, sexual, and fluid (non-fixed) nature of Queercore music and artistic production would not have been possible outside of DIY spaces, considering its highly personal nature and lack of focus on reaching and selling to a general market. Queercore provided an alternative embodiment of queer identity, one that was informed by DIY punk media creation and held onto the radicalness of queer politics. Grassroots production continues to be the norm in queer spaces even outside of punk, where DIY ensures creative freedom and resistance to capitalist artistic authority (Nault 2018b).

Punk Style and Aesthetic

Subcultural studies of punk have historically focused on style and aesthetic as the main lens through which to understand punk embodiment. Dick Hebdige's landmark text *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) examined the development of punk style in London and how punks used style and aesthetic to embody and align themselves with punk identity and politics. Punk style continues to be documented through subcultural studies texts as well as visual collections of punk ephemera such as band merchandise and show posters (Sklar 2013; Kugelberg et al. 2012; Ensminger 2011). More recent sociological work by Hannerz investigates the varieties of punk subcultures and how they differ in embodiment, often through differences in style (2015).

Special attention has also been paid to how gender affects punk style, though these studies focus almost exclusively on gender-as-women. Leblanc devotes an entire chapter in *Pretty in Punk* to punk girls' constructions of femininity through fashion and dress, body modification, and artistic productions like zines and girl-themed music (1999, 134–65). Suterwalla's oral history project on women's subcultural embodiment through dress discusses the conflict between stereotypes of punk women's fashion and the stylistic realities of the average woman punk (2013). Style is also of particular importance to punk women's acts of resistance, notably Pussy Riot and the clash of punk fashion with conservative Russian Orthodox aesthetic and mainstream Russian women's fashion (Rourke and Wiget 2016, 252–55). Riot grrrl, too, had its own gendered punk fashion, though Dunn argues that the riot grrrl aesthetic's commercialization is part of what led to the movement's downfall and the absorption of its "girl power" message into mainstream American girls' culture (2014, 322–24).

Queer style has long been focused on non-conformity to gendered expectations for dress. Fashion is a way of expressing identity, and this is doubly true for creating identity distinctions in queer communities: between gay men and lesbians, butches and femmes, metrosexuals, drag queens and kings, and gender nonconforming populations cross-culturally (Geczy 2013). Queercore's queer punks in particular have used style as a means of rejecting queer conformity and normativity in both queer and punk spaces (Taylor 2012, 117–20). Incorporation of punk style is the ultimate “queering” of queer style and a rejection of normative style within queer communities and the pressure to embody a typical queer style (Nault 2018a, 145–47).

Methods

This study involved a 7-month period (May–November 2018) of participant observation conducted among local DIY punk communities primarily in cities in Oregon (Corvallis, Eugene, and Portland) and secondarily in cities in Washington state (Seattle and Olympia). I attended mainly all-ages DIY punk shows and community events to gain access to local punk communities, network with possible participants, and learn how to be a punk. Through participant observation, I met and conducted audio recorded semi-structured interviews with 21 transgender and gender nonconforming punks and 3 cisgender community members. Of the transgender and gender nonconforming interviewees, 19 were current Pacific Northwest residents, 11 of whom are PNW natives. The youngest interviewee was 19 years old at the time the interview was conducted, and the oldest interviewee was 42 years old. After interviews were conducted, they were summary-logged, coded, and analyzed.

Introduction to Subjects and their Subject Pronouns

The participants in this study are a diverse group of people – musicians, artists, bookers, show-goers – that I met through a variety of punk-related circumstances. While I cannot discuss every person who I interacted with or interviewed over the course of this project, I can briefly introduce some of the people whose knowledge, ideas, and words have contributed to the writing of this paper. I have included in parentheses the subject pronouns each person uses, in the written convention common to many transgender communities, so they may be referred to respectfully. However, I want to resist the idea of labeling or defining participants based on their gender identities. Pronouns can be, and often are, gendered words, but I invite you to consider the relationship between the limited number of commonly-used personal pronoun sets in the English language and variance of gender identity among people who use certain sets of pronouns.

Mika (she) and Julia (she/they) lived and booked shows at a house venue in Corvallis, the first venue I visited when starting this research. When the venue disbanded, Julia moved in with her partner Ava (she), also a member of the local DIY punk community, and Mika moved to Portland. Benny (they), is also a longtime Corvallis resident who recently moved to Portland. Through the Corvallis scene I also met Aspen (they), who has since moved out of state, and Indiana (she), who both plays and books shows in Corvallis. I met Nati (they, from Eugene) and Leona (they, from Portland) through their bands - both played at shows I attended in Corvallis.

As the DIY scene in Eugene expanded, bands from Corvallis started to play at new house venues and I started attending shows there as I learned about them. Zoey

(she) is an electronic musician who lives at one of the newer house venues in Eugene. I met Forest (they) at a different house venue in Eugene, where they were also attending a show. The Eugene DIY punk group is close-knit, and I encountered many of the same people at different venues.

After asking around the Corvallis community for information on bands with queer, transgender, and gender nonconforming members, I was directed northward. Sonia (she), Mira (she), Quinn (she/they), and Stevie (she) all live in Portland and play in bands based there. Sonia and Stevie also book some shows at Portland-area venues, for both their bands and others in their communities. Harley (they), is a good friend of Mira's who lives and plays in Seattle. Kari (they/she) is also a Seattle resident, and her bandmate Samuel (they) lives in Olympia.

Most of the people I interacted with considered themselves members of punk or DIY punk communities, though not all took "punk" as an identity label. In Corvallis and Eugene I met folks like Julia and Zoey who, in addition to being part of punk communities, are members of electronic and experimental music communities. Both Julia and Zoey have participated in the Corvallis Friends of Noise group, which arranges shows featuring local noise musicians, who play experimental and often electronic music. Stevie's music is also very experimentally based. Musicians like Mira and Harley also play music outside of the traditional "punk" umbrella – their tracks are heavily influenced by topics like theater, classical composers, and gothic music. As will be discussed, transgender and gender nonconforming musicians resist the boundaries of genres in similar ways to their resistance to the boundaries of gender.

The Importance of Punk Community

Punks aren't solo; solo sets might be common but bands of one are rare, and you can't make a scene all by yourself. Finding or creating a community gives a person a group of peers with whom to explore the thing that brought them together, and this is especially true among trans and gender nonconforming punks. While queer-only scenes are rare and trans-only scenes don't seem to be emerging in this area, queer folks do tend to stick together. In towns where the population can support multiple local music scenes, there's often a small but well-defined queer-centric scene. In Eugene, this community is close-knit, consisting of a handful of house venues and local bands, and in larger cities like Portland and Seattle this ebbs and flows: economic pressures force people in and out of the cities, and queer punk scenes form and disband at alarming rates. The scene in Corvallis has a high queer and trans population compared to other subcultural or hobby-based groups I've interacted with in town. For a while, the trans population congregated around the Horsey House venue, where Mika and Julia lived and booked shows. While the venue began in an effort to provide a house venue for electronic music in Corvallis, it soon expanded to feature queer-centric acts and provided a welcome space for women and queer people interested in local music. While the house has since disbanded, with some of its inhabitants moving back to Portland and others remaining in Corvallis, the queer and trans folks brought into the scene by Horsey House have continued to attend other DIY punk shows in Corvallis.

What folks who started attending shows at Horsey House found in Corvallis was a DIY punk community, built on ideas of freedom of creative expression, mutual support, radical acceptance, and leftist politics. This community, too, has ebbed and

flowed over the years, but community members told me so far it's always managed to reemerge when it has disappeared and that it's not dissimilar from any other city's DIY punk community.

Trans and gender nonconforming punks I interviewed, many of whom had grown up in the Pacific Northwest, spoke at length about the importance of punk and punk communities in their understanding of their queer identities. Mika, as a teen in the Corvallis area, found the punk scene to be a positive gathering place for social outcasts - somewhere she fit in as a closeted trans person. Others who got involved with the community as youth, like Zoey, stressed the importance of punk communities on exposure to peers, politics, and positive queerness. Zoey got her start in the Corvallis Friends of Noise experimental music community in her late teens, through which she was exposed to local music, other trans people and musicians, and a positive space to explore her trans identity. Now, she lives at a house venue in Eugene and appreciates her ability to provide these same sorts of opportunities to young people:

“Presenting a space in which younger people can have a chance to go to cool shows and meet people that are genuinely nice and are interested in maintaining a good environment for them to be in is really important. As someone that grew up in Albany, where jack shit happened ever, if I had known that just literally 10 minutes over there was a place that pretty regularly held shows that were donation-based, I didn't have to have that much money to attend them, wasn't at a bar so that I could actually go to them, and was full of people with good politics and just an overall welcoming environment, that would have been a very big deal to me at a much younger age. And I'm not saying it's a bad thing that I didn't discover it until later, it's just now that I am in the position to provide that for other people, it's cool to be able to do the same for others, you know?”

Julia, too, began her involvement with punk through the Corvallis noise community, and she's particularly concerned with the community aspect of DIY punk culture. She feels appreciated as a member of a community based on mutual assistance, and for her,

“punk is caring.” While Indiana didn’t get her start in Corvallis, she’s now one of the more visible members of the DIY punk community in town and does a lot of all-ages DIY punk show booking in Corvallis. She’s concerned with making the local DIY shows open and comfortable places for everyone interested in DIY and punk music. And personally, she’s only been interested in identifying with queerness through punk because of DIY punk’s radical politics, something she feels she can’t always find in queer-specific communities. Indiana preferences booking bands that are women- and queer-centric, especially punk bands that are fronted by queer people, women, and/or people of color - folks who she identifies with personally and politically.

Efforts to construct purposefully inclusive, welcoming punk music communities are appreciated by queer people looking for spaces for creative expression and like-minded peers. For Nati, punk “made me feel like I fit in somewhere,” a space for weirdos that embraces difference and individuality. Samuel agrees that punk is important because it makes and holds space for marginalized people. Punk, for them, is more than a single aesthetic or genre, it’s about pushing the boundaries of music and identity.

Interviewees stressed the importance of these queer-specific DIY punk communities. Those who were finding these, or successfully building them, felt comfortable with and spoke confidently about being punk. Trans and gender nonconforming folks who couldn’t find queer-specific DIY punk scenes, or segments of punk scenes that welcomed them as queer people, often felt unseen, unappreciated, or unwelcome in punk. Forest, who started their involvement in punk through girl-centric

punk spaces, stressed how finding other queer and trans people through punk connected them more strongly to punk as a community and ideology:

"The mental images I have is a fungus. When you make a connection with another queer trans person, it's so much stronger than other kinds of connections, so being trans and trying to enter the punk scene, I felt rebuffed a lot in certain sectors but in the sectors that were for other specifically trans specifically queer people, those connections became very strong very quickly. I feel like being trans first helped me realize, it helped me connect to punk as a philosophy, why we need punk and why I personally am invested in punk art. But also, when I was becoming more involved in the punk scene, it helped cement me into the parts of the scene that were queer and trans because when you make those connections with other people they take care of you and they bring you in really quickly."

Harley sees DIY punk politics as going hand-in-hand with commitments to create inclusive and empowering spaces, especially for queer people:

"I have an analogy for when people say 'god' I hear 'community,' you know? And I think the same way about punk rock. I don't even hear 'punk' when people say that, figuratively, obviously I fucking hear you. But it's important for creating a subversive system that is inclusive and creates community, creates conversation. I'd say the political aspect of it's really important to conversation."

And Benny sees punk as important because of its nature of inclusion: "'Everyone's kind of a weirdo and that's kind of the idea.'" Benny has found many queer-specific, non-punk communities to be exclusionary, where people have to be 'queer enough' to join. However, there's no pressure for Benny to be "punk enough" in the spaces they participate in - there's no right way for them to be a queer punk person.

Not everyone agrees with this positive portrayal of punk communities. Mira, in particular, has "always been inspired by punk music, but disillusioned by punk scenes." While she supports queer-centric scenes, she's had difficulty finding these communities living in Portland as a youth:

“The narrative conveyed about [punk] is that it’s a place for weird people to get together and find acceptance. I was fucking weird kid, a lot weirder than most of the people in those scenes, but I didn’t want to adopt their antiquated uniform. [...] When I realized that in order to be accepted you had to wear this costume and tailor your interests in a contrived way, I felt like punk wasn’t very... punk?”

Leona feels comfortable and free to be creative in their section of the Portland punk community, but they “don’t feel visible as a trans person in punk.” Nonbinary and gender nonconforming identity, combined with a resistance to claiming a label of “trans”, has made it difficult for them to feel recognized. Aspen, too, feels unrecognized as a trans person, specifically because they found it difficult living in Corvallis to find a close group of similarly-identified people. While they have friends, there isn’t a well-defined group of transmasculine or nonbinary AFAB people they feel a sense of community with. While Forest has found creative community in women-aligned punk spaces, they don’t feel recognized as a nonbinary trans person:

"I feel welcome as a trans person, but I'm not often perceived as a trans person and I feel unwelcome when I'm perceived as a woman. I enter spaces and it isn't until I clarify my gender that I feel more welcome."

Trans identity changes what communities Harley accesses, for their own comfort, and makes them more aware of accountability and representation in their communities.

They don’t feel in danger or targeted, but they also don’t feel completely comfortable sharing their trans identity with cisgender peers:

“Do I feel welcome, like, showing up? Yeah. Do I feel welcome correcting somebody on my pronouns? Not necessarily. Is that related to the community itself, or societal norms, or is it just my own anxiety based on projection of how I’ve been conditioned to think about pronouns...”

Stevie agrees that her trans identity changes her ability to access punk communities. The community she feels most comfortable in is a small one, a group she’s built with

friends and one that is more concerned with DIY music production practices than strict adherence to a punk sound. Coming out as a trans woman was one push to build this small, insular space:

“It might limit the scope of who exactly I interact with, but not in a negative way, because... After you come out you’ll find out that a lot of people might not want to have anything to do with you but you’re also finding out at the same time that you wouldn’t want to have anything to do with them. You wind up with a much stronger, more productive community, one that’s worth working with.”

Involvement in punk communities provides several things for transgender and gender nonconforming punks: a community of supportive peers, a model for political and ethical affiliation, and models for gender nonconforming style and aesthetic. Many participants, when I asked what was important to them about punk, cited the community and their peers as central to their understanding of the importance of punk. Involvement in DIY punk communities specifically was common, and participants who spoke of disillusion or dissatisfaction with punk were often not deeply involved in DIY punk communities. The DIY ethic and radically leftist nature of these punk communities, while not universal, seemed to provide for many a welcome reprieve from dominant culture’s rhetoric about political progress, youth discontent, and queer identity. While among fellow DIY punks, study participants could be open about their queer, gender nonconforming, and/or transgender identities, their inability to see themselves represented in mainstream political discourse, and their desires to build positive communities for people of all marginalized identities. They could also share a visible aesthetic with these peers, a sense of style that aligned with both their sense of gender identity and punk identity.

Trans Punk Aesthetic

Historically, punk fashion, style, and aesthetic has gathered attention worldwide because of its loud nature - colorful and dramatic hairstyles, black leather and denim, spikes and studs, military boots, and patches and pins declaring musical preferences and political alignments. Punk fashion also plays with gender, particularly in expressions of androgyny. There are uniforms of sorts that persist across gender lines. Masculine punk fashion borrows from the feminine: tight jeans, eyeliner, long hair. And feminine fashion can also borrow from the masculine, especially in cut, with the universality of 'unisex' band shirts, oversized denim and leather jackets, combat boots, and short hairstyles.

Within the community of Pacific Northwest punks I worked with, very few adopted that dramatic, historical fashion, though some elements remained. Everyone's summer 'uniform' consisted of self-made jean shorts and band shirts, and as weather got colder, jeans got long again. Denim was the fabric of choice for jackets, prevailing over leather perhaps because of the already-ubiquitous nature of denim jackets in the Pacific Northwest. Doc Martens were frequently worn, both in classic black and more colorful varieties, and ankle-height Converse and Vans were other popular any-gender shoe options. Skinny jeans were worn regardless of the gender of the wearer, and no daily outfit was complete without an element proclaiming something political: patches and pins on jackets, bags, and sometimes even hats. This punk style embodiment wasn't universal or ubiquitous but was common. Especially in the Corvallis community, many resisted any pressure to "dress up" for shows - punk-ish daily-wear was enough to go

out or play music in (and I'm not the only person to have shown up to a house show in sweatpants, socks, and sandals).

The crowds at many house shows I attended were fairly homogenous in both style and demographics. Most attendees were in their 20s or early 30s, were overwhelmingly white (or white-presenting), and dressed in either casual or punk-influenced-casual attire. At shows not featuring explicitly queer bands, attendees were often majority male or masculine, though women, feminine people, and gender nonconforming people were almost always in attendance regardless of the band or specific genre of music. Interviewees represented a more diverse group than generally representative for the Pacific Northwest. None of my interviewees described themselves as men, male, or strictly masculine. About half of interviewees identified themselves, when I asked them to describe their racial and ethnic background, as people of color, white-passing but non-white, mixed race, and/or as members of Indigenous nations. However, when discussing style and aesthetic choices during interviews, only occasionally did participants bring up racial or ethnic identity and background as an influential factor. I primarily asked participants to consider gender identity and punk involvement and did not stress race in my questioning. Because of this, it is unclear as to the involvement race has on the style and aesthetic choices participants made. As a group, participants dressed in similarly punk-influenced styles regardless of racial or ethnic identity and background.

Transgender and gender nonconforming PNW punks use the style elements available to them through punk to play with gender. For Ava, finding punk and punk fashion as a young teen gave her space for freedom of expression, both of her feelings

of anger and alienation and of her gender, without having to take on a label of “trans” or “queer”. As a person growing up in a conservative place, punk allowed her a more feminine model for style that was read by others as influenced by her involvement in punk and allowed her to avoid the confrontation that would have occurred by being an out queer person in her hometown. The style she often wears now - band shirts (frequently modified), skinny jeans, denim jackets, and patch-covered bags - is based on the punk style she adopted as a closeted teenager. The gender-bendy aspects of punk fashion have kept older queer punks like Kari attached to the style. Kari has been a punk for so long she “can’t not dress punk,” and punk provided a model of feminine dress that was, for her, a way to avoid the awkwardness she felt being a transfeminine person. She wanted to be seen as “tough” and punk style allowed her to be both tough and somewhat feminine, although she also mentioned that her attachment to punk androgyny’s familiarity keeps her from presenting as femininely as she feels.

Stevie, another transfeminine person, was drawn to punk as a child not only because of the music but because of the models of gender non-conformity she could find among punks:

“Dressing differently has been part of my interaction with music since I was a child. I knew from when I was prepubescent that I preferred to wear women’s clothes and that was something that was visible in punk music before it was visible to me, way before it was visible to me in other trans people.”

Like many punks, Stevie is interested in the history of the subculture, and has read a lot about how first-wave punks were harassed for their style choices. She was harassed as a youth living in the suburbs for dressing in a punk, androgynous style, and feels a kinship between this harassment and the harassment she (and many of her peers) has

faced over coming out as a trans woman and presenting femininely in public. For her, there's a connection between these two parts of her identity that revolves around fashion and style and the social repercussions for choosing to embody nonconforming identities.

For gender nonconforming women and nonbinary AFAB punks, punk style has provided a model for comfortable androgyny. The 'uniform' of band shirts is a model provided by many subsections of punk, including the hardcore scene that Indiana was involved in as a youth. She frequently dressed like the hardcore "bros" she encountered because their fashion was accessible and proclaimed her punk affiliation to her peers. It wasn't odd for women and men to dress similarly in punk circles, so she didn't have to claim a queer identity in order to dress in androgynous ways. Hair was an especially important part of Indiana's punk expression. She wore a mohawk on and off through her late teens and early 20s because it was one of the few parts of her appearance that she could change at will and genuinely liked. This decision in hairstyle was based in punk identity (mohawks as a common punk hairstyle), gender expression (mohawks as gender-neutral), and race (as an Asian American person, a way to shift expectations of hairstyle based on hair texture). People still may have stared at her, but it was because of conscious choices she was making about her appearance as a "freaky punk kid" as opposed to being a confused, awkward queer teen. Sonia also spoke about how her embodiment of both punk and queer identities involves how she cuts and styles her hair. Punk has provided a comfortable fashion sense that allows her to experiment with androgyny and femininity while rejecting normative ways to embody gender as a trans person. Her mostly-black outfits, band shirts, leather jackets, dangly earrings, and short

haircut loudly proclaim her affiliation with punk and alter perceptions of her queer identity without silencing it.

Involvement in punk provided for participants models for embodiment of various aspects of identity, outward expression of these inwardly held pieces of themselves in ways they possibly would not have found otherwise. Punk provides, as participants made clear, models for gender nonconformity through dress that allowed them to feel comfortable in their embodiment of gender without having to identify or integrate themselves into queer communities. Political affiliation could be embodied through style choices as well, or simply through obvious alignment with politically radical punk communities where leftism is commonplace – where these discussions are actively happening and where people are committed to creating cultural shift. Creative expression was evident in style and aesthetic, too; DIY punks often modify their own clothes, buy secondhand, or use band merchandise to embody their musical preferences. Being around punks, especially queer, transgender, and gender nonconforming punks, taught participants about how to embody their identities in ways that were positive for them and recognizable to other potentially similar people.

Genre/Gender

Most of my interlocutors are artists, in one way or another, and the vast majority of the people interviewed are musicians. They described their music in a myriad of ways, often refusing to settle their music into a genre label in the same way they refused to settle themselves into a gender identity label. Asking for descriptions of the genre of music people played often resulted in similar answers to asking about gender identification: confusion, multiple answers for multiple audiences, and compound terms

referencing DIY music culture and niche music genres. Many musicians also play in multiple bands or have multiple concurrent music projects, which added more complexity to answers. Just *punk* was a genre that came up rarely; words like melodic, indie, noise, electronic, pop, hardcore, post punk, rock, experimental, glam, and doom, often in combination, described the genre of their music better than punk alone. One musician, Quinn, described her band's music as "genre fluid," referencing genderfluid identity among trans and nonbinary communities and her band's tendency to mix and shift genres in their writing and recording. A commonality between many interviewees was an emphasis on music creation and performance as something central to their identity, or as something important to their understandings of themselves.

For many trans and gender nonconforming punks, music composition and performance create a space for expression and exploration of gender identity. Punk or punk-adjacent music is especially important in this. Quinn, for example, likes writing punk music because of the directness of the message. Punk music is a way she can share her political messages, which may be unfamiliar to some listeners, using familiar sounds. This interest in sharing messages through music is common. Mika has found that punk, in particular, is a way to put political ideology into music and represents a powerful tool for conveying radical political messages. Harley finds that punk and DIY spaces provide good platforms to talk about queer and trans issues with cis people. Mira, in her band Sweeping Exits, used a story about vampires to tell her story of gender exploration. And these messages do reach audiences, particularly other queer people and trans people exploring their identities, like Benny:

"Specifically, punk music from trans people was really important for me in kind of giving me the strength and inspiration and support that I really

needed to consider who I am as a person and what it means to be me, and sort of set aside who people have always told me that I am."

Music presents a very direct way to send a message. In a community like DIY punk, there's also a directly available audience for that message and a platform to send it from. Punks create music with the intent to share it, so there is space for identity embodiment in both the act of creating music and the act of sharing it. Trans and gender nonconforming punks create music to share their experiences, ethics, and politics with peers.

Outside of message, the process of music creation itself, especially music perceived as weird or outside of the norm, was crucial to trans and gender nonconforming punks' understanding of the importance of punk. Aspen, as a person often disillusioned with punk communities, is also disillusioned with the idea of a standard for "good" music:

"Music is fun. Or it's not. I also like that there can be really shitty music and that people can just play. It can be good, and that's cool, or you can sound like shit and you still got your shot."

Stevie has found that purposefully creating insular circles of musicians with similar ethical concerns has improved her music:

"Something interesting that this does style-wise is that it will remove you from any incentive to sound like more popular styles of music, because once your audience is just around this small circle of people that you trust and respect you're going to make strange music. It's not going to be in-step with these larger and slower and calcified ways of playing, especially guitar music. And it'll put you more in touch with music that's like, regional, because there isn't media attention for any of the kind of punk ancestors that people who play here would want to claim."

Being queer in punk leads musicians like Leona to seek out similar people and musicians to play with. To Leona, people are their music, and they have found a kinship

with other queer musicians and an interest in finding spaces where music can be a tool of exploration:

"Spaces where you can be yourself, regardless of all the pressures of, I don't know, all these things telling you what you're supposed to be. And then I think the music just reflects that cause it's so much about like, what can you do and how do you do it together. It's not about being some amazing musician or showing off, and I think that that is reflected in the ethos to, like 'what can we do together?'"

Mika has found that being a trans musician has instilled within her a desire to break molds and to do something nonconforming with her music. Sonia's queer identity pushes her to make music where self-reflection is preferenced over stressing other people's identities or actions. Stevie's music is very influenced by process: who she makes it with, and in what context. Being a queer person and holding to certain ethics (DIY punk, anti-rape culture) has led her to small circles of close, similarly-minded people:

"All these things create a constellation of influences that are just as important as the music that you listen to. It'll put you in contact with people who think that these things are important and it'll influence the kind of art that you make."

Music can be used to tell personal stories or express engagement with social movements. The act of making and performing music allows the creator to figure out exactly what they want to share and how; it provides a process to think through identity and embodiment and what that means to the musician. In this discussion, the term performance doesn't refer to performativity in the theoretical sense. I am utilizing a more literal definition of performance: the act of performing for an audience. Music is a form of verbal and sonic art, which linguistic anthropologists and folklorists have discussed as part of the concept of performance (Bauman 1975). The meaning of performance,

especially punk music performance, is emergent – each instance is unique and is built by the interplay between the performer(s), the audience, and their relationships to each other. Transgender and gender nonconforming musicians bring their identities and embodiments to their performances. Additionally, this sense of performance and embodiment are not opposing concepts. A musician who is performing is embodying their identities in front of an audience. Their identities are not put on or taken off because of the act of performing; identity persists through the process of playing music for an audience. While musicians may dress or act in certain ways while on stage, in the cases presented here this does not negate the daily embodiment of identity.

Performance is a space where trans musicians can explore how they want to embody their identities on a daily basis, or make more visible aspects of themselves they don't (or can't) strongly outwardly represent everyday - a place to play with both musical identity and gender identity in front of peers.

Julia entered DIY punk through the noise music community in Corvallis. This experimental music group gave her space to explore art and performance as well as identity, and she was respected and encouraged by peers. Her noise act, which she calls Coach Waters, has become a way for her to use the act of performance to explore aspects of herself. Coach Waters is improv-based and built on the idea of a life coach, so she uses the performances to help herself explore self-improvement in her life and art. It's also been an opportunity for her to explore gender-related dress on stage - if Coach Waters can wear a skirt, Julia can wear one in everyday life. This freedom in creative creation in punk and noise has allowed her to find herself and shape her

identity and how she embodies it. Looking back, she values this space to play with embodiment and how it's improved her personally and artistically:

"A lot of that had to do with finding my sense of self, and I was able to make better art because of it because I knew myself better. I was really at this point before, like I realized I was trans or where I was just having this whole battle with masculinity and like, I don't know, I just fucking hated it? I felt like it wasn't me and I didn't know how to express that. [...] I think that gave me a good sense of being able to shape myself into what I wanted to be."

Quinn, as a performer, has found confidence through punk music and being involved in punk communities to be more out in her music as well as on stage. She's more comfortable involving herself in projects or shows as a trans musician or a member of a queer band. Nati likes dressing up for shows, specifically as a way to make themselves visible as a queer person to their queer audiences. As a person committed to making music relatable to local queer people, they find that dressing in weird, goofy ways connects them to peers, makes them visible as to younger queer people, and provides inspiration for other queer folks to freely express themselves. While they don't dress as glittery in daily life, performing as the lead singer of G.L.I.T. gives them a space to go all-out with their expression of identity.

Being an audience member, a listener of the message, is an additional opportunity for embodiment. Some participants were especially concerned with who and what they were listening to, and preferentially listened to music from bands they agreed with politically or identified with personally. Being a listener of a specific genre or band was a way to embody identity in a way that would be identifiable to other listeners. Hearing a particular message was also important to some trans punks. Having other queer people embody their identities through music was a way to potentially discover or

better understand something about themselves through an accessible and identifiable format. Music becomes a way for the listener to connect with the musician, the musician's identity, and how they express it.

These connections – to people, politics, and ways of dress – are important to the wellbeing and survival of trans and gender nonconforming punks. For some, finding a subcultural community as youth wasn't just for fun, it was a matter of freedom of identity or even life or death. Participants who expressed disillusionment with punk also expressed a lack of connection to the support a subcultural community provides. Stevie, who is particularly concerned with the importance of close-knit and accepting subcultural community in her own life, expressed this argument eloquently:

"Music isn't a matter of life and death for everyone, but it is for me and a lot of people like me, because these communities will necessarily double as your support group, your music community, if it's going well. In the best case scenario, these people will be people that you'll depend on and give you space to do the work that you need to do. I've been frustrated by some people who are like, really nice cis dudes that I work with for whom the sense of urgency isn't really that high and they don't understand why it's so high for me, that if I didn't have this I don't think I would have survived. That this connection with other people like me is a completely necessary life raft to navigating the experience of being trans in the United States. And that it's not just like that for trans people, too, punk saves peoples' lives sometimes."

Conclusion

In exploring the relationship between art and embodiment, this study creates claims for the importance of subcultural involvement among queer (or otherwise culturally nonconforming) people and the importance of creative expression in understanding and expressing identity in marginalized communities. While I use punk communities as my frame, these claims are by no means exclusive to punk

communities – in fact, few participants would describe their music-based subculture involvement as strictly punk. Additionally, this study creates a claim for the creation of scholarship discussing transgender people as more than just their gender identities and expressions. The bulk of social sciences literature existing on transgender and gender nonconforming people focuses on medicalization and/or discrimination, and it is often not clear who participants are as people beyond their gender identities. Not discussing medical needs or discrimination as part of interview schedules gave participants the space to discuss ways in which they combat medicalization and discrimination in their daily lives, including the ways in which involvement in punk communities allows them to find supportive peers and venues where they can be seen as human being deserving of respect. Punk, sometimes, teaches transgender and gender nonconforming people that there is no single right way to be transgender and that they are free to be creative with their embodiment of gender identity. It also gives people the space to be out and to be respected as transgender or gender nonconforming, something trans people often can't find in their day-to-day lives. What is clear is that punk is important to the people who participate in it, and that creative expression is often integral to peoples' understandings of themselves and their identities. By studying the impact of factors like supportive peer groups and venues for creative expression, social scientists can better understand the ways in which transgender and gender nonconforming people navigate medicalization and discrimination.

DIY punk and queer punk community building also create opportunities to theorize. This study was not intended to be generalized, but it certainly can be used as an example of the influence subculture, alternative ethics, and creative expression have

on members of these communities. The DIY ethic and its inclusion of nonconformity can be applied outside of music or broadened to communities that are not traditionally thought of as creative. There can be meaning behind 'punking' something, in the same way gender studies theorists are 'queering' things. Overall, there are lessons found here in diversity, identity embodiment, inclusive community building, and outreach that can be taken beyond transgender and gender nonconforming punks.

General Conclusion

In summary, the data I collected creates a claim for the importance of punk subcultural involvement among queer (or otherwise culturally nonconforming) people and the importance of creative expression in understanding and expressing identity in marginalized communities, as well as for the creation of more diverse scholarship on transgender and gender nonconforming identity and experience. This is especially true for future research focusing on subcultural, creative, and interest-based community involvement – scholarship discussing transgender people as more than just their gender identities and expressions, their involvement in transgender or queer-specific communities, or their experiences of discrimination. The photographic project, while not included in this manuscript, presents a claim for the creativity of queer punks and the importance of creative expression – through music, style, aesthetic, and visual art – in how transgender and gender nonconforming punks understand and embody their identities.

It is important to note that, from the start, this project was intended to be exploratory. I did not set out to document the entirety of trans punk life in the PNW, nor did I expect to discover anything entirely new to anthropology, or social sciences more broadly. The value of this project for academia was always meant to expand upon the view of transgender and gender nonconforming people. I wanted to render trans people in a more-than-one-dimensional way, where lives are understood beyond medicalization or discrimination. The most gratifying and telling part of this project was the weight interviewees placed in the interview process itself; frequently, participants would comment that they appreciated the space of the interview to talk through thoughts they

had been hanging on to for a while, or to better process their own inklings about relationships between gender identity, embodiment, and involvement in DIY music scenes. Further research would benefit from greater attention on how to encourage dialogue in ethnographic research settings. I set up my interview schedules with discussion in mind. Questions were designed to open participants to the possibility of this relationship between gender and punk (if they were not cognizant of this already) and to tease out how that relationship affected them as punk community members, musicians, performers, and people. Participants, however, were looking for dialogue – opportunities to communicate their thoughts on gender and music with a peer who understood where they were coming from, validation of their feelings of dissonance, and gentle prompting to look further at thoughts they had thought were theirs alone. Many interviews did create this atmosphere, while some were less successful. The value this project has is hard to explain in an academic context but was very salient to the participants themselves, especially those who found that place for dialogue.

There are some takeaways relating to politics and ethics that are worth reiterating. DIY punk communities and a sense of DIY ethic were especially important to people I interacted with. For those who had found or created positive, often queer-focused DIY music communities, their music communities were spaces for companionship, creativity, and growth. They felt seen and welcome in those communities as queer, transgender, and/or gender nonconforming people and as musicians and artists. Those who had struggled or were struggling to find a community of ethically, political, and creatively like-minded folks did not feel as welcome in whatever music community they were a part of. This sense of being able to be involved

because of different aspects of identity – as a queer person and as a musician of whatever persuasion – in a way that supported your personal sense of ethics and politics was essential to involvement in DIY. Many participants mentioned that DIY punk communities were safe places for them to come out as queer and explore complex gender identity because they felt accepted as both artists and as weird, unique humans. And this is reflected in how people embody identity, in their style and in their performance, and how those aspects of embodiment are regarded by the people around them. Performance can be a place of comfort and passion, but it can also be a place of stress, especially if you lack a supportive peer group.

Many punks I interacted with had affiliations with leftist politics and working-class organizing, notably people involved in the Democratic Socialists of America, unionizing efforts, and participation in local politics. For some, affiliation with left-leaning politics was learned after beginning to interact with punk and finding political, leftist punk music and the working-class history of punk as a genre. For others, their interest in radical politics led them to music that would speak to this interest and allow them to find a community of people who were similar in both political and musical affiliation. There was a relationship between affiliation with leftist politics and movements and the anti-capitalist, ethically radical nature of DIY punk community. Not all music was political in nature, but music that was political was aligned with American leftist movements.

The photographic portion of this project also presents its own methodological argument. Utilizing documentary photography showed me how being seen as an artist, creator, or performer in an art- and performance-centric community gave me as an ethnographer a new and deeper way of engaging with participant observation. Being a

photographer-ethnographer among DIY punk musicians gave me a new way to interact with community members that fostered positive, mutually beneficial, and productive relationships. I could engage more fully with the anti-capitalist ethic of DIY by giving edited digital photos to musicians to use for their own self-promotion. I was respected as a fellow creator, a title more easily understood than researcher or ethnographer. And the act of physically carrying a camera into a show space and using it added an additional dimension to my interactions: people would approach me to ask about my photography, I could approach bands and introduce myself as a community member and hobby photographer before attempting an introduction as a researcher, and I had something to physically be doing during a music performance besides standing and listening. While this method will not work for all communities or ethnographic scenarios, it may work well in research scenarios involving creative expression.

During the research process, I was surprised by the degree to which people *cared*. As with many graduate student-researchers, a single summer of fieldwork (or other limited research period) can be a time of stress and upheaval. I had things happening in my personal life that made research more difficult, which is an experience I feel many anthropologists, ethnographers, and social scientists encounter but seldom write down. My interactions with interviewees, in contrast to my expectations, were largely filled with genuine empathy. Many of my interviews were bookended by personal, friendly conversations with the near-strangers I was meeting with. We would discuss our lives, families, jobs, and whatever was weighing heavily on our minds, and often traded stories of experiences and advice. I went into the ethnographic process expecting my interactions to be more business-like but ended up forming empathetic

connections and genuine friendships with many of the people I call “participants” or “interviewees”. This kind of data – chats over the remnants of coffee cake after finishing an interview recording, casual check-ins between sets at shows – wasn’t apparent in my interview transcripts and often didn’t make a prominent place in my fieldnotes, but it’s one of the things I remember most about my research experience. Punks often dress in intentionally confrontational or distancing ways, but behind the spikes, leather, radically political identifiers, and body modifications, most punks are intentionally kind and compassionate people. I set out to find data worthy of an MA thesis, and I found a community of caring people and an environment I felt at home in.

This project represents a snapshot of the community discussed, and punk changes rapidly. Already, since the primary data collection period, bands and house venues have been created and disbanded, and people have moved to different cities or different parts of the country. The punk community in Corvallis will look much different this coming summer than it did last summer. The geographic area surveyed was limited by available resources, but produced a deeper, more grounded insight into the communities I did manage to spend time in. The DIY punk community in Corvallis received the most attention because my residence is located in Corvallis and the shows held here are most accessible to me. I was only able to travel to Seattle and Olympia once, and was not able to network with many possible participants from afar. DIY punk communities do not utilize technology heavily, and while events are often shared on social media, many still rely on posting fliers and word-of-mouth to notify their local communities about shows. Geographic distance made it very difficult to integrate myself into communities, especially those where membership is gauged by attendance to

events. However, where I was able to integrate myself, I was able to do so very deeply. I made many acquaintances in scenes after attending only a few shows, and was able to form friendships that will last far beyond the scale of this study.

Lastly, there are several clear opportunities for future research directions. I am most interested in future research discussing the relationship between queer and transgender identity and subcultural/interest-based community involvement outside of DIY punk. The population I encountered in this research was largely white or white-passing, partially due to the demographics of the Pacific Northwest generally, and it is important for further research to be conducted on queer communities of color and the relationship between queer people of color and subcultural communities like punk. While a few interviewees in this study touched on the relationships between their racial and ethnic identities and their involvement in music communities, this was not a focus of my interview schedule and the relationships between race, gender, and subcultural involvement are not clear in my data. There are avenues that should be explored to link membership to subcultural/interest-based communities and creative communities to wellbeing and resilience among queer, transgender, and gender nonconforming people.

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