

From Mosh Pits to Protests

**Investigating how the Punk Community Motivates Punks to Participate in
Social Movements.**

PUNK

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Section 1: Introduction

Purpose

There is a significant gap within the literature pertaining to Punks (as individuals) and the Punk-Rock music subculture. Despite the thematic overlaps of the Punk-Rock subculture with social movements literature regarding what drives political participation (Passy 2020; Polletta 2025; Tilly and Tarrow 2015; Woods 2003) and the literature about the emotionality of protests and social movements (Gould 2009; Kingston and Ferry 2008; Jasper 1998; Blackington 2024) academia has largely either purposefully or implicitly ignored Punk-Rock as a topic of analysis. Additionally, there is significant literature on the power of music and more broadly art as a political force (Goldman 1910;1914; Orwell 2016; Ziv 2019; Vance and Potash 2022; Ward 2020), yet, despite being a music-based subculture, Punk Rock is excluded from that literature. The literature gap is even more interesting when considering Hip-Hop music, which has existed temporally for approximately as long as Punk¹ and yet Hip-Hop as it relates to social movements has received significantly more analysis in the literature (Chang 2005; Kitwana 2003; Rose 1994).

There lies the primary goal of this thesis project; to begin filling that gap in the analysis and bring Punks into the discussion. The secondary goal of this thesis project is to attempt to break the stereotypes associated with the Punk community as chaotic, violent, and emotional. As a political scientist and a Punk, I argue it is important to bring this politically relevant subculture into the discussion because not including Punks only limits analysis of social movements where Punks are present.

Punks are people whose *political feeling* (Gould 2009) manifests as anger, frustration, and dissatisfaction with society because the status quo is constantly challenging their values. The Punk community's *emotional habitus* reflects their political feeling (Gould 2009). I argue that Punks (as individuals) are motivated to participate in social movements by a constant state of moral panic², which is maintained by the Punk community and engagement with Punk Rock music.

The following content of this thesis includes in this section a brief historical analysis of the Punk-Rock subculture to illustrate the semi-cohesive set of values that Punks ascribe to, followed by a positionality statement laying out how I fit into this discussion as a Punk myself. Section 2 will be a literature review. Section 3 will lay out the theoretical framework for this thesis. Section 4 of this thesis will include the methods section, focusing on the narrative of Punk Rock music and on visual evidence of Punks participating in social movements. Section 5 will present the findings of this thesis, synthesizing the theoretical framework in Section 3 and the analysis in Section 4 to demonstrate the thesis statement. Section 6 will conclude this thesis.

¹ Hip-Hop started in 1973 in the Bronx New-York (Maultsby 2026). This thesis argues the first Punk Band was MC5 in 1969; but the most recognizable Punk bands gained success in 1975/76.

² This thesis uses a unique definition of "Moral Panic" which will be elaborated on in the analytical framework (pg.31)

A Brief History of Punk-Rock Subculture

This history section examines how Punk developed a semi-cohesive set of values over time, broadly built around resistance. By answering what Punk values are, how Punks act in accordance with those values, and how they developed, this section aims to clarify that, for Punks, resistance is a way of life and what that resistance means. The analysis in this section will focus on the development of Punk values in North America, with mention of developments elsewhere in the world (mostly the UK) only, when necessary, because Punk is a global community and the scope of this thesis is too limited for a detailed analysis of every country. Despite this, the goal of the values presented in this section is that they could apply to all Punks, regardless of country of origin, even if their development differs greatly.

Going forward, I use “Punk” or “Punk culture” in a general sense to refer to the totality of elements/features relevant to the Punk-Rock subculture, including the people, fashion, community, values, and music. Further, when I refer to the “Punk community,” unless specified otherwise, I am using the term to refer to the Punk community as imagined³. Meaning the collective identity that Punks find with each other, the values and aesthetics of Punk globally.

When I say ‘Punk-Rock,’ I refer to a vast category of music that encompasses all subgenres and offshoots of Punk-Rock. I decided to use a commercial definition of the genre (as antithetical to Punk’s values as that might be) for simplicity’s sake, because otherwise the discussion would become needlessly confusing. At times, I refer to specific subgenres of Punk-Rock, such as *‘Oi’ Punk*, *Anarcho Punk*, and *Hardcore Punk*. Each of these sub-genres, along with many others, has its own political messaging and particular sound but they will only be referred to tangentially within this paper.

As I noted, Punk Rock splinters into so many subgenres, and in complete honesty, I am not sure why. The most educated guess I can make is that as Punk artists entered the genre and brought in their own cultural touchstones which influenced their music and because Punk values are so against strict definitions, they carved out a niche for themselves, which expanded into a deeper subgenre of Punk Rock. The best examples of these splinters are the genres I will not be touching in this thesis because they are too distinct and would deserve a thesis all themselves (e.g. Ska-Punk and Riot Grrrl). Still, they all fall under the Punk-Rock umbrella. I will also refer to some bands as “Proto-Punk,” meaning bands that influenced the sound and culture of Punk-Rock but are not necessarily Punk because they do not directly engage with politics in the way Punk-Rock does.

By “Punk(s)” I mean individuals who self-identify as Punk. Punk itself is a vague category, of which there are only two essential conditions to being a Punk. First, Punk is a music-based subculture, so you must listen to the music to be a Punk. Many Punks will classify themselves by a specific sub-genre of Punk Rock, but it does not really matter if you listen to the music. Secondly, to be a Punk, you must ascribe to most if not all of the values this section has alluded to thus far; it would be against those values inherently to not allow for flexibility in how Punks identify with that set of values, and that is one of the reasons why this thesis refers to the values as “semi-cohesive.”

³ Imagined communities are further defined in the Literature Review, (pg. 20)

The values I argue that Punks ascribe to are as follows⁴: First, a resistance to arbitrary and/or controlling social norms. Social norms such as what is polite or expected in public, what is socially acceptable as fashion, and what is considered “real” music. Punks also challenge societal assumptions about sexuality, race, and gender through their music and fashion. Second, Punks heavily engage in “Do It Yourself” (DIY) through fashion, music, and community organizing, as part of their resistance to societal expectations about how one “should” engage with society. Third, Punks have a healthy resistance toward the government and state coercion, which often spills over into resistance to all authorities. Fourth, Punks believe that there are communities and people deserve protection. Being a guardian takes many forms, from stepping between protestors and police to standing up for people on the street or even keeping fellow community members safe in the mosh pit. Finally, Punks believe in a resistance to all forms of inequality and slightly more broadly they believe in accepting differences; this should go without saying in the context of the other values I argue Punks ascribe to: as a community of people from every walk of life, to be a Punk, you must accept those who are different by no fault of their own

You will notice I have made no mention of a specific political stance or ideology within Punk values. That is because Punk is not an ideology; it is, as I have described and will elaborate upon, a set of values which informs the character of the Punk community and the individual members, otherwise known as an *Ethos*. To define an ethos beyond the Greek translation, I look to Peter Kropotkin’s *Mutual Aid* (1902), which in his discussion of mutual aid as a foundational factor of human existence provides an articulation of ethos.

“It is the conscience – be it only at the stage of instinct – of human solidarity. It is the unconscious recognition of the force that is borrowed by each man from the practice of mutual aid; of the close dependency of every ones happiness upon the happiness of all; and of the sense of justice, or equity, which brings the individual to consider the rights of every other individual as equal to his own. Upon this broad and necessary foundation are the still higher moral feelings developed” (Kropotkin 1902, pg.8).

Kropotkin’s definition is valuable to how I articulated the Punk values because this definition clarifies the collective and community basis for how an ethos develops. By centering ethos in how it relates to others, not just the personal, I can draw on how the Punk ethos is informed by and engages with society and how Punks political feeling is influenced by society. Further, Kropotkin’s use of the term “instinctual” speaks to the same unconscious emotional *affective* forces that Deborah Gould (2009) analyzes and that are key to this papers analysis. As such going forward, I will refer to the Punk values more commonly as the Punk ethos.

The Punk ethos did not just spring up out of nowhere; it took two decades for the Punk community to clarify the values I argue Punks ascribe to now. In North American the development of the Punk ethos occurred in distinct stages: pre-1981 (specifically the mid-60s to 1981) and post-1981. In August 1981, Henry Rollins joined the band Black Flag as the lead singer, and in November 1981, the band The Dead Kennedys released the song “Nazi Punks Fuck Off.” I am making a distinction between the pre-1981 era and post- 1981 era in the US, for the sake of argument and ease of discussion, to draw a line between Punk Rock music getting increasingly political in

⁴ To make a feature of this thesis clear: Many of the insights I provide in this thesis are a result of a preliminary analysis and as informed by my personal experience Punk. I collected as much information from as many sources as possible however without a detailed ethnographic study of Punks from all over the world the analysis is limited.

response to changes in the political and social climate of the world, and a distinct effort within the Punk community to define and defend the borders of its own community from the infection of neo-Nazis that was present at the time⁵.

It is also important to note that January 1981 is the beginning of President Reagan's first term, and Margaret Thatcher was entering her third year as prime minister of the UK. The impact of Reagan and Thatcher is well- documented in the literature (Hutchinson 2008; Fitzgerald 2025; Monbiot and Hutchison 2024) so this thesis sees no need to cover their influence in detail. However, their legacy in Punk endures through the music of the time and the issues their policy created still influence the anger and lyrics of Punk bands today. Further, during and close after Reagan's presidency, any alignment with Reagan of his policies was a dog whistle understood by Punks as somebody they were against (this is a US-specific thing).

From 1966 to 1975 (with one exception, the band MC5), the artists I am interested in are all classified as proto-Punk. Artists such as The Stooges, The Velvet Underground, Patti Smith, The Dictators and Lou Reed. These artists all played a role in carving out the social space that Punk bands would eventually occupy by performing in DIY venues such as black-box theatres, churches, and art collectives (McNeil and McCain 2006). Proto-Punk bands made the literal spaces where Punk shows still take place common. The development of these spaces was so important because proto-Punk and Punk Rock bands needed new venues outside societal norms where they could challenge those norms in their own ways. These spaces were also important for Punk bands to achieve financial success; not that financial success has ever been a defining goal of Punks, but they had to find a way to feed and house themselves. These bands also began challenging gender norms, a feature of music that became more common in the 60s and 70s; specifically, The New York Dolls and Iggy Pop gained significant notoriety for their challenges to gender norms (McNeil and McCain 2006).

The proto-Punk bands also challenged established ideas about what counts as music and what is acceptable during a musical performance. They made space for new ideas and wild behaviour, not just from the artist but from the crowd itself. Iggy Pop and the Stooges were particularly famous for ridiculous and violent performances in which Iggy Pop would throw up on the crowd, throw bottles and chairs into the crowd and prance around the stage nearly nude in a dog collar (McNeil and McCain 2006). There is a direct line from Iggy Pop's performances in the '60s and '70s to the types of performances and crowd behaviour that Punk artists and the Punk crowd would eventually engage in.

The one exception I noted in this proto-Punk era is the band MC5, who released their first album, *Kick Out the Jams*, in 1969 (McNeil and McCain 2006; Tolinski et al. 2024). MC5 were the first underground rock band to combine the sound we now know as Punk with left-wing politics, heavily influenced by their manager at the time, John Sinclair (McNeil and McCain 2006; Tolinski et al. 2024). Sinclair himself founded the White Panther Party, a group modelled on the Black Panther Party, and the members of MC5 served as its information ministers (McNeil and McCain 2006; Tolinski et al. 2024).

The MC5 were the first band in the genre to really articulate a critique of government and authority that would develop into the Punk value of resistance to authority. MC5 was so openly anti-authority and anti-wealth that when their manager made the mistake of showing up to a venue in a limo to collect them after a concert, the crowd rioted, calling them "sellouts" and

⁵ This history will be elaborated on further in this section.

“fakes” (McNeil and McCain 2006). The MC5 riot is the first riot caused by a Punk show getting out of hand (spoiler: there will be more), and it demonstrates how powerful a critique of power through music can be in moving people to action.

The next stage of Punk is what I am calling the “Pop—culturization of Punk.” That pop—culturization stems from two places. First, three fans of the underground New York music scene, Legs McNeil, John Holmstrom and Ged Dunn, start a *Fanzine* (fan-made magazine) covering bands such as The Dictators, The Stooges, The New York Dolls, Lou Reed, and The Ramones. They called this fanzine “Punk”⁶⁷. The production of zines, which began with the fanzine “Punk,” has been an ongoing feature of Punk culture and further embedded DIY values. Zines, in general, represent a resistance to authority through the unregulated production and reproduction of knowledge within the Punk community, and further challenge social norms, not just through DIY but also by challenging what is considered valuable knowledge.

Secondly, on December 1, 1976, The Sex Pistols appeared on the Today program with Bill Grundy. After Grundy grossly asks a 19-year-old female friend⁸ of the Sex Pistols present in the interview, “If they will meet after (the interview)?” In response, Steve Jones, lead guitarist for The Sex Pistols, addresses Grundy as “*You dirty sod*,” “*You Dirty old man*,” “*You dirty bastard*,” “*You dirty fucker*,” “*What a Fucking rotter*” (ThamesTV 2012). In the days following, the British media plastered The Sex Pistols on the front page⁹ pulling both The Sex Pistols and the term “Punk” into the public eye (Cross 2018). This interview is so important to the public perception of Punks in the UK because it entrenches the language the media was and would continue to use to talk about Punks, which is further evident in all British coverage of Punks from then on (BBC Archive 1977). Further, the attitude and style of the Sex Pistols pulled the focus of Punk away from the politics present in the music and onto the “fuck you” attitude of the Sex Pistols. The impact is that, despite The Clash’s heavily political messaging at the time, which offered numerous critiques of British politics and global issues, the media focuses instead on the Sex Pistols’ aesthetic.

The Sex Pistols interview did not just popularize the use of the word “Punk” in that context, but the “Fuck you” and “Fuck your authority” attitude of the Sex Pistols, demonstrated in the interview, really entrenched that attitude into Punk Culture. Further, Steve Jones’s outburst at Grundy is certainly the first recorded example of a Punk standing up for those who need or deserve protection. It is easy to miss the cause of Jones’ outburst, and the British media ignored Grundy’s comment, focusing instead on Jones’ language; however, that did not stop Punks from learning by example and further incorporating those values into the culture. The last touchstone before 1981 is the sixteen months between April 1976 and October 1977, during which The Ramones, The Clash, and The Sex Pistols all released their first studio albums (in that order). Notable for being the first bands to be truly considered Punk-Rock. These bands also finally clarified what much of Punk Rock’s sound is and what it would evolve into.

Much as the Sex Pistols, The Clash, and The Ramones helped clarify the sound of Punk, each of these bands, along with Vivienne Westwood, helped to develop the Punk fashion aesthetic

⁶ See Appendix 1: Figure 1

⁷ Also worth noting some earlier fanzines: Billy Altmens 1973 “Punk Fanzine” and Alan Betrocks 1971 “Jamz” (Worley 2024).

⁸ That girl is Siouxsie Sioux (of *Siouxsie and the Banshees*). Siouxsie and the Banshees are famous for pioneering Goth as a music genre and subculture. The Banshees are often credited as one of the original goth bands along with Joy Division, Bauhaus and the Cure.

⁹ See Appendix 1: Figure 2

(Sorenson 2020; Laing 2001), with many Vivienne Westwood originals worn by the Sex Pistols¹⁰ (Victoria and Albert Museum 2024). Punk aesthetic and fashion as a feature of community is a complicated matter; if you were to ask Punks back in the 1970s, they would say that you had to dress Punk to be Punk, as the style was very much a uniform (BBC Archive 1977). However, nowadays, as the Punk ethos has hardened, the lines between what is and is not considered Punk have broken down. As much as Punk fashion is an identifiable niche, Punks do not have to look Punk to be Punk. In fact, some of the most Punk people I know wear Hawaiian shirts, cargo shorts, and supportive, practical sneakers, but they would be the first people to curb stomp a Nazi if the opportunity arises.

When I say Punk Fashion, I am most commonly referring to dyed and spikey hair, patch-covered leather/denim jackets, ladder-laced black combat boots, and lots (and I mean lots) of spikes, studs, chains, and, frankly, random metal¹¹. For those who dress Punk as I have just described, the most critical feature is not how you look, but that you made it yourself. Punk fashion is about resisting societal norms. That resistance includes not participating in the consumerist structure and, as much as possible, making things yourself.

The historical development of Punk fashion is as complicated as every other aspect of this subculture; however, it began in the 1960s, during the Mods and Rockers era in the UK. The Rockers were the group the British media panicked about before the Punks (Cohen 1990); the Rockers introduced the black leather and motorcycle jackets that became commonplace in Punk (Cohen 1990; BBC Archive 1977). The cultural touchstone in the US and in part in the UK is 1953, with the movie *The Wild One* and Marlon Brando's character, Johnny¹². Johnny is a rebel without a cause who rode a motorcycle and wore all leather, and when asked, "Hey Johnny, what are you rebelling against?" Johnny responds, "Whadda you got?" (Cross 2018). This style and rebellious attitude developed over the next two decades, culminating in Punk. Continuing the Rockers and Brando throughline, the New York band The Dictators released their 1975 album *Go Girl Crazy*; the inner photo of the album featured the band dressed similarly to Brando in *The Wild One*¹³ (Cross 2018). The Dictators fall in the middle ground between the earliest Punk bands and the proto-Punk bands because their aesthetic and sound are very Punk, but their music is not political; regardless, their influence on Punk's aesthetic is clear.

Likely influenced by all these features, the mother of Punk fashion is Vivienne Westwood, who designed clothes for the Sex Pistols. I would not call Westwood herself a Punk because she did not call herself a Punk; she felt Punk had become too mainstream, and she became "disillusioned" (Victoria and Albert Museum 2024; Westwood and Kelly 2014). Regardless of her personal feelings, her influence on Punk style and alternative fashion is immeasurable and well-documented (Shapiro and Kelly, 2022; Tucker and Westwood, 2018; Victoria and Albert Museum, 2024; Sorenson, 2020; Lowthrope, 2004). Westwood's influence on Punk fashion is evident in everything from ripped T-shirts and jeans to an abundance of spikes and studs. Nevertheless, academia and fashion literature treat her time as a "Punk designer" as little more than a footnote or an introductory paragraph, certainly because of Westwood's control of her own image.

Despite Punk's politics and ethos really gaining ground with The Ramones, The Clash, and The Sex Pistols, the overall ethos of Punk remained nebulous. The UK Punks were more radical in their

¹⁰ See Appendix 1: Figures 3 & 4

¹¹ See Appendix 1: Figures 5–8 for some examples

¹² See Appendix 1, Figure 9

¹³ See Appendix 1, Figure 10

music because they had already lived under Thatcher's policy for three years before releasing their first albums. The US Punks were learning what life under the Reagan administration would be like, and, as such, much of the early Punk music focused on releasing the pent-up anger of youth without a clear goal or value system. For example, the band Fear was, for a time, famous for starting riots at their shows by getting the crowd so angry with them and each other that, when the music did start, the crowd turned into an all-out brawl (Spheeris 1981).

That is just one example, and not to say that there was no politics in the music or that none of the values Punks now ascribe to were not present, they absolutely were, as I have described. However, the nebulous nature of those values created a space for a rot that, even to this day, Punks still have not been able to get rid of completely. That rot is neo-Nazi Punks. The origin of neo-Nazi Punks is hard to nail down, but I argue the rot came from two places. First, since the early days of Punk, Swastikas have been a fashion statement. Why exactly? Nobody is quite sure; there are links to soldiers bringing back Nazi paraphernalia post-WW2 and wearing them as trophies, so it could be a matter of children mimicking their parents (Paul 2024). Vivian Westwood can be credited with the most direct link to Punk in the use of swastikas as fashion statements¹⁴ (Laing 2001), and one of the Sex Pistols' entourage is wearing a swastika armband in the Gundy interview (ThamesTV 2012).

I cannot find any evidence that non-Nazi Punks ever wore swastikas seriously, as in, they were Nazis. There was a lot of misplaced youth anger and a hatred of the adults and authority figures, and all the Punks knew was that wearing symbols, including the swastika, pissed them off (BBC 2018; Miller 2007; Paul 2024; Laing 2001). Those Punks grew up and learned how serious the swastika is and what it represents; the ones that did not are the actual neo-Nazis. Despite the "unserious" use of hate symbols from Punks, the normalcy of those hate symbols created a niche space for actual neo-Nazis to develop a movement within Punk.

The second origin point of Nazi Punks is the same as that of non-Nazi punks. It is a sense of frustration and anger toward society, stemming from the feeling that society's formation challenges the core values and beliefs of one's identity. Nevertheless, where Punks channel that anger into overall positive endeavours, the neo-Nazis are frustrated that they are not on top, that they are not supreme, and because Punk shows are violent, the neo-Nazis are drawn to it to beat up those whom they see as lesser. The cycle of neo-Nazis showing up to Punk shows, and Punks fighting back against the neo-Nazis progressed into gang wars between the Punks and the neo-Nazis (Roth 2021; Spheeris 1998).¹⁵

The history of neo-Nazis in Punk culture does get more complicated; however, that history is what brings us to November 1981, and the Dead Kennedys release the song "Nazi Punks Fuck Off." The lyrics of which are entirely as follows:

"Nazi Punks, Nazi Punks \ Nazi Punks, fuck off!!!"

Dead Kennedys, already one of, if not the most, explicitly political bands of the early eighties, summed up the collective feeling of Punks in four words. Making "Nazi Punks Fuck Off" one of the most iconic Punk songs of all time and became a rallying cry against the neo-Nazis infecting Punk. The song was further important because neo-Nazis were an issue not just in one city or

¹⁴ See Appendix 1: Figures 3 & 4

¹⁵ These gang wars are where the term S.H.A.R.P (Skin Heads Against Racial Prejudice) comes from and why the lace code was created.

community, but an issue in every part of the Punk community. For the most part, because of constant effort from Punks everywhere, neo-Nazis are no longer or at least rarely ever, a problem anymore. Not to say they do not still exist; they do. I have personally seen a few, but they are no longer a constant threat to the Punk community. Much in part to efforts spearheaded by bands like the Dead Kennedys, making the Punk ethos abundantly clear¹⁶.

Just a few months earlier, in August 1981, there was another substantial change in Punk. Henry Rollins joins the band Black Flag, becoming the third lead singer since they formed in 1976. Unlike the singers before Rollins and unlike many earlier Punk bands, Rollins had a vision of what Black Flag could do with their music and how music could be a force for change (Rollins 1995). Black Flag released their first studio album, "Damaged," with Rollins as the lead singer in November 1981, right alongside "Nazi Punks Fuck Off," and changed the political landscape of Punk forever. There is a distinct turn in the genre from 1981 onwards, with bands becoming angrier and more political. Can that change be entirely attributed to Black Flag and the Dead Kennedys? Probably not. Regardless, these releases mark a shift in Punk.

1981 is a turning point for the future of Punk because, firstly, the growing threat of neo-Nazis occupying the same space as Punks was a moral threat and a physical threat. The neo-Nazis forced Punks to come together around a collective set of values, which I argue is still the ethos Punks organize themselves around. Because of the anti-Nazi organization, I also argue that anti-authoritarianism is the foundation of the punk ethos, meaning that all the values I have described are a resistance to authoritarianism.

Secondly, Black Flag showed other Punk bands of the time what the genre could do, like proto-Punk bands carving out the space necessary for Punk to grow. Rollins demonstrated the kind of impact music can have when that music has a clear ethos and politics. Nowadays, Punk Rock is more political than ever. Some annoying old Punks say that Punk is not the same as it used to be. Those people are wrong. The only feature of Punk that has changed since 1981 is that the music has evolved, drawing on a wider range of genres and taking advantage of modern music production technology. The politics of modern Punk bands, in some cases, is even clearer than those of earlier Punk bands. Although it is harder to get clearer than "Nazi Punks Fuck Off."

For Punks, resistance is a way of life. It is an everyday form of resistance which they build their entire identities around. That identity involves pissing off the powers that be, the authority figures, the local conservative. Really, it is pissing off anybody who disagrees with their ethos, because to Punks, their values are non-negotiable. Not because they think they are better than everyone else, or that their music is the best, or because they think they are supreme in their existence, like the neo-Nazis. It is because their ethos is built on a collective sense of frustration with society's systems and institutions that make their lives harder, not with each other or with individuals.

Of course, Punks are not a monolith, and there are absolutely Punks who will disagree with my take on the Punk ethos and their origins, and probably a lot of other features of this thesis. However, Punks disagree all the time. Despite that, I would stand shoulder to shoulder with even a Punk who disagrees with everything in this thesis if it meant standing up for someone in need of protection. The Punk form of resistance goes beyond just pissing off authority and a general attitude of anti-authoritarianism; it is about forgetting what makes people different, accepting

¹⁶ Later in this thesis there will be a further discussion of how specific songs played a role in development of Punk values and motivating Punks to political action.

those who are different from you, and directing the anger that there are institutions and systems even telling us that we are different from each other to fighting those systems.

Positionality Statement

If I have not made it clear enough in the history section, I am a Punk, and I am writing this thesis because being a Punk is a part of my identity. I ascribe to the Punk ethos, I listen to Punk Rock music, and dress in Punk fashion. Punk is part of who I am (and it is not a phase); it informs my personal politics, my engagement with society, and motivates me to participate in protests and social movements. My positionality as a Punk is the driving force behind my research, as there are few academic contributions on Punk as a community and on Punks' participation in the political landscape. My goal is to change that. As an insider in the Punk community, I know where to look in a non-academic capacity for primary sources that a researcher without a personal connection to Punk culture may not. Further, because of the Punk attitude, the form our everyday resistance takes, and an unwanted association with neo-Nazis, there are many stereotypes about Punks that I endeavour to break.

The most common stereotypes are that Punks are violent and mean, and in my experiences, that could not be further from the truth. The origins of these stereotypes are easy to see in the history section, and, in many ways, they are half true. Punks are loud, aggressive, and sing about punching Nazis and to those unacquainted with Punks, they can be scary. Well, these things may be true, but in my experience, Punks are among the kindest and most well-meaning people around. My positionality in this regard is important because an outside researcher might get blinded by the stereotypes and associations with neo-Nazis in their research. So, despite my bias in this matter as an insider to the Punk community, my internal view of the community allows my research not to get muddled in the stereotypes.

On a similar note, the Punk community is global, and as such, I am an outsider to most Punk communities. Culture and music change dramatically, not just from country to country, but also from city to city. For example, West Coast and East Coast Punk in the US are vastly different; the sounds and politics that emerged from San Francisco and LA differ significantly from those of New York or Detroit. The Punk ethos might transcend geographic boundaries, but the actual face-to-face community across these places differs significantly.

As a Punk living in Canada, I am an outsider to much of the Punk community, but that does not make me any less qualified. I have met and moshed with Punks. I know these people; I know how they think; I understand why they are at the local shows. In listening to Punks from all over the world, I feel connected to their struggles and goals through the politics of their music and their anger. Through my connection to Punk culture, I am both an insider and an outsider, offering the perspective this thesis requires.

Finally, as a Punk with the social and economic means to pursue a university education and participate in academia, in a way many Punks cannot, my goal is to represent the community to the best of my ability. The Punk community needs proper representation from someone who genuinely cares about them. The Punks need that representation because of the form their resistance takes, the stereotypes about them, and the difficulty of defining exactly what Punks and the Punk community are, which makes it exceedingly difficult for academia as an institution to include Punk. The aversion to authority also does not help with Punk participation in academia.

Section 2: Literature Review

Despite the gap in the literature surrounding Punks and the Punk community, there is some literature on Punks and a broad literature on social movements, resistance, and community. The gap this thesis has identified lies at the intersection of those ideas, as they relate to the Punk community. To begin addressing this gap in the literature, this thesis gathers literature on the three key themes: community, resistance, and social movements.

Communities

In the literature on communities, there are two vectors for the conversation. First, the in-person/face-to-face interaction type of community (Anderson 2016), which, in the context of the Punk community, is limited to a singular city. Within the discussion of face-to-face community is an understanding of how communities of resistance will develop in response to systems of domination (Scott 1990). To escape the “humiliation of domination,” subordinate/oppressed peoples will carve out physical spaces in which they are free from the panoptic observation of their oppressors (Scott 1990). These spaces, otherwise known as “dissident spaces or social sites,” themselves draw an audience and communities form as these spaces offer the subordinate group a venue where they can share their opinions safely without fear of retaliation from the oppressors (Scott 1990).

To briefly touch on the concept of subaltern communities in the literature. This thesis does not find any value in engaging with subaltern literature regarding the definitions provided by Gramsci as “those groups subjugated to the hegemonic influence of the dominant class, lacking autonomy and in a state of social subordination” (Gramsci 1972, 52–55). Alternatively, Spivak’s later definition is: “marginalized, lower class and disenfranchised groups who are denied social mobility and agency within dominant power structures in colonial or post-colonial context” (Spivak 2003). Gramsci’s and Spivak’s definitions are specific and not applicable to Punk communities, whether imagined or real. However, Foucault’s understanding of subaltern communities as “groups whose knowledge and experiences are marginalized, disqualified or silenced by dominant society/institutional power structures” is much more applicable to the Punk community and the way society marginalizes Punks (Foucault 2003, 1–23; Foucault 2007, pg.191–227; Foucault 1980, pg.109–134). The only reason this thesis does not engage further with Foucault’s argument is that the literature on subaltern groups has moved away from Foucault’s understanding of subalternity. Thus, there is minimal literature to draw on beyond Foucault’s own definition, which he never fully develops and must be stitched together from various writings.

Within the Punk community, social sites are the venues where Punks hold their shows. Often, these spaces align with spaces documented in the literature: bars, theatres, and churches (Scott 1990). However, punks also find themselves in abandoned warehouses, skateparks, somebody’s basement and so on, anywhere that will break the fire bylaws about occupancy. These social sites generate their own habitus, cultural practices, and discourse (Scott 1990), which, within the

context of this thesis, are understood as the aesthetics and practices of Punks. Further, social sites are generated, maintained, and disseminated by human actors (Scott 1990); in the context of this thesis, those actors are often the Punk bands themselves (or their friends).

The second vector of community within the literature is the distinction of the “imagined community” (Anderson 2016). An imagined community is any community larger than that of the “primordial village,” or, as mentioned, anything beyond feasible face-to-face interaction (Anderson 2016). When this thesis refers to the “Punk community,” it means community in the imagined sense. Because, as discussed in the positionality statement, the Punk community exists worldwide, meaning there is no way you could know every single member of it. Do not take this definition to lessen the impact of the “face-to-face” or “local” Punk community on its members’ lives, as social sites develop, or to push aside the Punk community’s power as a motivator of political participation.

Further, as Anderson (2016) defines an imagined community within the context of the state, as brought together by a sense of collective national identity, the Punk community is brought together by a sense of collective struggle. The narrative of Punk Rock strengthens the collective sense of struggle and the emotional habitus that local punk communities develop, just as a national mythology and identity strengthens feelings of nationalism within the state context (Anderson 2016).

Despite the overall gap in the literature, there is still some investigation into the Punk community and the Punk Rock genre in relation to politics and social movements. The broadest body of literature on Punk concerns “Riot Grrrl” (Wilson 2004; Rosenberg and Garofalo 1998; Radway 2016; Dewitt 2020). Riot Grrrl is a distinctly feminist offshoot of Punk, emerging in response to the heavily male-dominated space that characterized early Punk Rock (McDonnell and Vincenzelli 2019). Riot Grrrl will continue to be a notable exclusion from this thesis because of its history and influence not just Punk, but the music industry could be a paper all its own.

In the broader literature on Punk Rock, four themes lie at the edges of the gap this thesis occupies. First, literature connects Punk Rock to broader social forces such as sexuality, gender, race, and class (Anderson 2021; Campbell 2022; Haas 2013; Tanner 2007). Secondly, a selection of literature looking at the history of Punk and/or Punk in a particular time and place (Davies 1996; Dunn 2008; Force 2019; Hayton 2017; Huq 2002; Jakubovic 2020; James et al. 2012; Martin 2015; Martinez 2019; Patton 2023; Trujillo 2014). Third is literature, which examines some of the work this thesis will investigate: the musicality and lyrics of Punk Rock and their impact (Attfield 2011; Brown 2004; Donahue 2001; Grinnell 2019; Henry 2019; Matula 2007; Uehlein 2001). Finally, the literature most closely aligned with this thesis’s focus examines the roles of social sites, community, and emotion in the development of Punk culture (Bishop 2013; Brown 2004; Gomez 2012; Griffin 2015; Guerra 2025; Nehring 2007). Although this literature is less explicit than the area this thesis focuses on.

Resistance

Regarding resistance, the existing literature has much to say. In the context of Punks and the Punk community, this thesis examines two key features of resistance. First is the literature on art as a political tool; second is the literature on everyday forms of resistance. These areas of the literature are important to the discussion of Punk and resistance because, as a music-

based subculture, Punk Rock and the Punk community raise questions about the impact of art on politics. Further, understanding everyday forms of resistance within the context of the Punk community's actions and motivations characterizes the subculture.

"All art of propaganda" (Orwell 2009). In the context of this quote, it is easy to see the power of art as a political tool, as propaganda or the dissemination of a particular worldview. Orwell uses the term to refer to a novel by Charles Dickens and defines "propaganda" as the idea that all art is a product of society and bears the marks of its power structure (Orwell 2009). Art, which, in the context of this thesis, is Punk Rock music, is propaganda in the sense that it reflects the society in which it is produced (Orwell 2009; Goldman 1910; 1914).

Art in any form holds significant power as a political tool, far surpassing the reach of a single political actor speaking from atop their proverbial soapbox (Goldman 1914). The power of art lies in its ability to confront societal issues through the "dramatization" of events, allowing the audience to connect emotionally with abstract concepts of social or economic injustice/inequality (Goldman 1910; 1914). By opening the audience to the emotional dimensions of societal issues through dramatized reflections on life and society, art, as a political tool, prepares them for the reconstruction of society by allowing them to imagine a better future (Goldman 1910; 1914).

Through this understanding of art as a form of resistance, the production of art that opposes the status quo can be understood further as a form of "everyday resistance" as defined by James Scott (1985). Everyday forms of resistance are any forms of resistance that stop short of outright confrontation with the oppressors; these can include foot-dragging, feigned ignorance, or false compliance. (Scott 1985, pg. 14–15). The goal of everyday forms of resistance is to subvert the expectations and desires of the oppressors through methods that make it difficult for them to prevent, because, by acknowledging these methods, the oppressors risk encouraging the behaviour and acknowledging their own weakness (Scott 1985).

Another important aspect of everyday resistance is the power of words and argumentation as sites for resistance (Scott 1985). Both explicit and implicit forms of argumentation with oppressors and the status quo of society play a crucial role in maintaining the spirit of resistance within subordinate groups (Scott 1985). Even beyond being a motivational factor for the oppressed, argumentation within the oppressor's own boundaries of oppression makes it difficult to challenge their arguments without risking the undermining of their power, thereby making the "war of words" a highly effective method of resistance (Scott 1985). In the Punk context, the war of words is the narrative of resistance presented by Punk Rock music; through the music, Punks argue with the oppressors: the state, the police, their abusive parents, authority figures generally, etc.

Finally, there is a discussion of how subordinate groups find a place for their "voice" under domination and devise simple and complex ways to disguise their insubordination from the oppressors (Scott 1990). The simple forms of disguise include anonymity, euphemism, and grumbling, and, despite their presence in the Punk community, the complex forms of disguise are more applicable to its method of resistance (Scott 1990). The complex forms of oral culture, folktales, and symbolic inversion are all methods of storytelling (Scott 1990). They aim to build a narrative of resistance for subordinate groups so they may hark back to an ideal or an example to shape their own futures (Scott 1990).

Further, Carnivals and Fêtes exist as complex forms of disguise as social sites (Scott 1990). They allow for control and channeling of anger in a space where the normal rules of society do not apply (Scott 1990). Carnivals are spaces of wild abandon, precisely where the power of resistance lies; the carnival can openly ridicule the oppressors through its presentation, and the

oppressors can do little to stop this ridicule because it exists under the guise of entertainment (Scott 1990). Punk shows and Carnival are not dissimilar; they both suspend typical social norms to indulge in wild abandon, and, through the lyrics of Punk Rock, Punk shows can ridicule the oppressors under the guise of entertainment.

Social Movements

This thesis is interested in the literature on social movements, not because it claims that the Punk community, or, more broadly, the Punk Rock subculture, is a social movement. Because it is not, Punk as a subculture meets none of the requirements laid out in the literature for what defines a social movement (Tilly and Tarrow 2015). This thesis is interested in social movements because it seeks to understand how and why Punks participate in them; thus, it is critical to examine the literature on more complex factors of participation.

In simple terms, a social movement requires “Worthiness, Unity, Numbers and Commitment” (Tilly and Tarrow 2015). However, that definition is static and does not account for the complex mechanisms underlying the formation and maintenance of social movements as forms of contentious politics (McAdam et al. 2001). The literature has moved away from static definitions and, instead, broadened the understanding of social movements and contentious politics to focus on patterns in how and why contention occurs (McAdam et al. 2001)—focusing on the dynamics of interaction, with an emphasis on the actions and interactions of individuals and groups over that of a fixed structure (McAdam et al. 2001). Comparative analysis of contention has enabled the literature better to understand the mechanisms at play in contention politics. However, McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly’s (2001) writing still fails to include the role of emotion and narrative in its analysis, two themes of particular interest to this thesis.

Emotional Habitus

Earlier social movements literature offered a corrective to critiques of protest and contentious politics by positing that protesters are rational actors; however, in doing so, it treated emotion as irrational and excluded it from the discussion (Gould 2009). According to more recent literature, a group’s emotional habitus which Deborah Gould (2009, pg.10) defines as “the socially constituted, prevailing ways of feelings and emotion, as well as the embodied, axiomatic understanding and norms about feelings and their expression,” plays a significant role in shaping the group’s political horizons; both of which shape the outcomes of the other, constantly feeding back into each other (Gould 2009, 3). Further, by repeatedly invoking emotions within a social group, they can elevate and give meaning to some emotional states, while others remain repressed or unintelligible (Gould 2009).

By understanding how emotional habitus shapes a social group’s political horizons and how individuals and/or groups channel their emotions into political strategies, the literature maintains the assumption that protestors are rational while also accounting for the totality of the human experience (Gould 2009). The key to this understanding is grasping the relationship between affect, understood as the unconscious bodily response to external stimuli, and emotion, understood as the conscious expression of feelings (Gould 2009). Affect and emotion are almost

always at play simultaneously and work together, making them difficult to distinguish; still, they form a group's emotional habitus and political feeling (Gould 2009).

The key insight this thesis draws from the literature on emotion in social movements is that emotions are a valid means of entry and motivation for getting involved. Because emotional habitus is a combination of affect and emotion, an individual does not need to understand why they feel the way they do to be motivated to participate in a social movement. Further, an individual's participation in a social movement can shape their political views by channeling their emotions toward a particular goal/issue.

Narrative

To build on the goal of a deeper understanding of the motivating factors of social movements, this thesis is also interested in the literature on how and why narratives are present within social movements. Adding narrative to the social movement framework offers significant advantages over other approaches to understanding motivation, such as "frame" or ideologies (Polletta 2006). Further, because of the breadth of literature from several fields of study, the literature is familiar with how narrative operates as a structure, making it easy to identify within a group's messaging (Polletta 2006). In the simplest terms, narratives have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and stories that present them carry significant cultural weight because everyone is aware of what a "story" is, and, as such, stories are easy for the average person to latch onto (Polletta 2006, 7). The final boon for studying narratives is that, unlike ideologies, frames, and discourse, narratives are constructed by the speakers, meaning they are typically aware of their own engagement in storytelling (Polletta 2006).

Narratives play a role in the development of social movements by providing participants with the emotional context for the movement's goals through relatable cultural elements (Polletta 2006). Further, activists can strategically employ narratives to build and/or strengthen a sense of collective identity within a social movement (Polletta 2006). Because storytelling operates on the emotional rather than the logical level, people often gain a deeper understanding of the issues presented in the narrative than they would from a purely logical explanation (Polletta 2006). Thus, it is through narrative's ability to clarify the underlying cultural and structural schemes present in society that narrative holds power within social movements (Polletta 2006).

Further, the literature finds that narrative is not only effective at building and strengthening a sense of collective identity but also at motivating participation in social movements (Polletta 2006). The effectiveness of narrative as a motivator lies in how easily stories are shared among people and in the fact that narrative need not be truthful or accurate to be an effective political strategy (Polletta 2006). By using narratives to push their agenda, social movements can provide emotional context to those unfamiliar with their goals, often motivating new actors to get involved and further spread the narrative and, by extension, the goals of the particular social movement (Polletta 2006).

Organizers of social movements will also use narrative to conceal the true scope of their strategies from authorities seeking to prevent the movement's actions (Polletta 2006). The most common strategy of social movements in this regard is to consistently claim that events like protests or sit-ins are purely spontaneous (Polletta 2006). That lie provides the social movement

with cover from authorities and builds a narrative that anyone could be the next vector of change in society, giving their movement greater credibility (Polletta 2006).

The most important insight from the literature on narrative for this thesis is the role narrative plays in connecting individuals emotionally to society's cultural schema. This thesis is interested in Narrative's ability to synthesize complex ideas and to build a collective identity around contentions and critiques of society.

Section 3: Theoretical Framework

Definitions

This thesis's definition of Punk Rock music is an intersection of several concepts present in the literature review. Further, this thesis defines Punk Rock shows as occurring in the venues where Punk Rock performances take place, in line with James Scott's arguments about resistance. Finally, this thesis will clarify Deborah Gould's definition of moral shock and present its own definition of moral panic.

Punk Rock

Punk Rock music, this thesis argues, is narratively structured, with a beginning, middle, and end, and the performer is aware that they are creating a story of sorts to engage the audience with a particular goal in mind. Punk Rock, as a genre, is less structured than other genres of music and narrative, generally because of its goal of subverting social expectations of what music is and can be. However, that does not disqualify Punk Rock from the definitions of narrative laid out by Polletta (2006).

As both art and narrative, Punk Rock music is a powerful political tool (Goldman 1910; 1914, Polletta 2006). The political nature of art emerges as it reflects the societies in which it is produced (Orwell 2009). The political power of art lies in its ability to present critiques of society in a form that the average person can connect with emotionally (Goldman 1910; 1914). The emotionality of art allows it to reach a much broader audience than even the best political speech could ever hope to reach (Goldman 1910; 1914). Narrative plays a similar role, allowing political messages to pass between individuals through storytelling and a collective understanding of the story's implicit or explicit meaning (Polletta 2006).

Punk Shows

Another key feature of art as a political tool is its ability to criticize society. Understanding this feature of art leads to James Scott's (1985; 1990) definition of everyday forms of resistance, the "war of words," dissident social sites, and carnival, as well as Punk Rock shows. Punk Rock's ability to critique society and, more broadly, its oppressors demonstrate everyday forms of resistance and the "war of words" through its explicit argumentation against the status quo (Scott 1985; 1990). Further, Punk shows function as a dissident social site aligned with everyday forms of resistance, as a space where Punks, as the oppressed group, can express their frustrations without fear of retaliation from the oppressors. Further Punk shows take on the wild abandon of the carnival as a complex form of disguise for resistance through ridicule of the oppressors, the narrative of Punk Rock music.

It is important to note that Punk shows should be placed into one of two categories. Firstly, large-scale shows and officially sanctioned/legal shows, which primarily fulfill the role of the

carnival as described by James Scott (1990. Pg 181–182). Secondly, DIY shows, which are put on in the community in illegal (mostly) venues. DIY shows within the community serve as a form of community building in a dissident social space-centered on everyday forms of resistance.

Moral Shock

These definitions have already touched on emotion as a throughline for this thesis. However, Deborah Gould's definition of moral shock is most important for understanding how emotion functions as a political tool in Punk Rock music. Gould (2009, pg.134) defines moral shock as a "cognitive affective state" that occurs when "an unexpected event or piece of information raises such a sense of outrage in a person that they become inclined toward political actions," and further that "a moral shock jars you into a state of disbelief that forces you to reconsider your habitual going along." In short, Punks experience a moral shock which drives them to engage with the Punk community. They may already have been involved in the Punk community, whether by liking some of the music or knowing people in the subculture. Through a newfound engagement with the community and the music, the new Punks develop or refine the values they previously held, values that the moral shock had challenged.

Moral Panic

This thesis argues that *moral panic* is the emotional habitus of the Punk community. Using Gould's (2009) definition of emotional habitus, along with Gould's understanding of moral shock, in combination with the typical understanding of moral panic as a complex social phenomenon rooted in significant disturbances to social values, whose targets are not random or arbitrary but represent trigger points in society (Cohen 1990; Young 2009). This thesis presents a new understanding of moral panic in which Punks are constantly reconsidering their habitual going along because of disturbances to their ethos, which is maintained by narratives in Punk Rock music, to the point where moral shock is the prevailing feeling within the Punk community. In other words, moral shock is an acute (short-term) experience, and moral panic is a chronic (long-term) experience.

Some further clarification around the use of moral panic is useful here. In Cohen (1990) and Rohloff and Wright's (2010) writing they are describing moral panics concerning the Mods and Rockers in the 1960s, the Satanic Panic of the 1980s, drugs, sex, and violence in media, "welfare queens," refugees, gay people, or transgender athletes. All of which were created and fueled by the media and society, to which Punks were also subject. Moral panics are common, frequent, inevitably delusional, and intentionally deceptive, and although they may represent real trigger points in society, they are produced intentionally by media and political actors (Cohen 1990; Young 2009). This definition is relevant to the general understanding of moral panics and the origin of the term; however, it is not how this thesis is understood or uses the term.

The key difference between the original use of the term and how this thesis is using the term is that moral panics, as discussed by Cohen and others, are centered on the irrationality and created nature of the panics. However, in line with this thesis' overall argument about the rationality of protest and the validity of emotion as a motivator of political engagement, this thesis presents moral panic in the Punk context as a rational response to how society challenges the Punk ethos.

Analytical Lens

The analytical lens of this thesis is as follows: Punk Rock music is political because it is art and presents a narrative to its audience (Goldman 1910, 1914; Polletta 2006). Art and narrative importantly evoke emotion by critiquing society, the oppressors, and the status quo by reflecting society's material and social conditions on the audience (Goldman 1910, 1914; Orwell 2009). As music, Punk Rock necessitates performances that require Punks to create dissident social sites that take on the characteristics of a "carnival," further strengthening the emotional connection by creating a space free from the punishment of the oppressors (Scott 1990). These social sites play a role in generating a sense of community (Scott 1990), both face-to-face on the local level and an imagined community through collective struggle (Anderson 2016).

Through its critique of society, Punk Rock creates and maintains an emotionally charged habitus, drawing on the existing emotional affect of those entering the community and constantly retriggering Punks of the moral shocks they experienced as society challenges their values (Gould 2006), a state this thesis refers to as moral panic. Punk Rock music is, therefore, a significant political tool and driver of political participation through moral panic.

Section 4: Methods

This section presents the methodology through which this thesis will select and organize the evidence for its analysis. The methodology will primarily focus on the lyrics of Punk Rock, as narrative plays an important role in the development of moral panic. To support the lyrical analysis of Punk Rock, this thesis will provide examples from biographies and documentaries about Punks' experiences, ethos, and motivations. This thesis will also provide visual evidence illustrating how the Punk ethos influences Punk culture and identity, and how Punks participate in social movements.

Music

The methodology used to select Punk Rock music in this thesis is as objective as possible while acknowledging the inherent bias in selecting music for analysis. The music selected for this thesis best represents the Punk ethos I have so far described, drawn from a variety of bands that are more recognizable to an audience less acquainted with Punk Rock. Regardless of some Punks arguing that the most popular bands are "sellouts"¹, providing recognizable examples from popular bands lends the most validity to the claim that these bands and their message are representative of Punk ethos, since most people identify with them.

In short, this thesis will draw on political Punk Rock songs, written and/or performed by a popular and/or recognizable artist, and that either represent or help develop the Punk ethos. These categories are still broad for a selection method; however, they allow the necessary flexibility, as music genres are hard to define, and this thesis has already significantly limited the scope of analysis to prevent it from getting out of hand. The selections will be organized in a semi-chronological manner, focusing on the year of release and making distinctions when appropriate.

The selection process for the music covered in this came down to which songs best represent the emotional habitus of the Punk community and its ethos. Throughout the process, this thesis considered hundreds of songs from across the history of Punk Rock, narrowing them down to approximately 80 songs. The further filtering of songs down to the forty songs (ten per value, that is, excluding DIY culture) focused on which songs offered the best discussion of that value, while also considering covering the various eras of Punk Rock, so as not to pull only songs from one decade. Of those forty songs, the final selection for the fifteen songs used (and the handful of other songs mentioned) came down to which songs have enough support from secondary sources to facilitate a discussion to support the argument this thesis presents.

¹ There is an ongoing and never-ending argument about which bands are sellouts and which ones are not. Because of the anti-establishment values of Punk there is a common feeling that the bands that sign with major labels and/or gain significant commercial success are somehow betraying their values as Punks. Personally, I think this is ridiculous but that is beside the point.

Written & Oral

The methodology for the written and oral Punk media will focus primarily on books and documentaries featuring first-hand accounts of the Punk experience. That includes books written by Punks about their experiences, such as “Get in the Van: On the Road With Black Flag” by Henry Rollins (1995), lead singer of Black Flag and “Rebel Girl: My Life as a Feminist Punk” by Kathleen Hanna (2024), who is a formative figure in the Riot Grrrl section of Punk. The documentaries covered will focus on the same type of first-hand experiences, such as *The Decline of Western Civilization Parts I and III* by Penelope Spheeris or *Brass Tracks*, a 1977 BBC documentary about Punks at the time. The analysis of these sources will examine what influenced Punks to participate in a social movement through their engagement with the Punk community. Further accounts of why individuals found their way to the Punk community in the first place will help depict how emotional affect and the challenges to the Punk ethos draw people into the community as an emotional home for those feelings. The first-hand accounts further demonstrate that resistance is a way of life for Punks. Like the organization of the music, this thesis will organize the written and oral examples according to the values they helped develop or exemplify and will order them semi-chronologically. Because the biographies span such long periods, the examples will be organized by time only when necessary.

Visual

The visual methodology of this paper exists entirely to provide visual evidence of Punks engaging in social movements. That means collecting images from protests, riots, concerts, or other large-scale events with a discernible goal that aligns with Punk values. The selection of images for the most part came down to which images this thesis was able to find reliable sources for. Because although there are endless images of Punks yelling at cops at protests, it is difficult to find the exact protest those moments occurred at. Those images are key to this paper’s thesis, which asserts that Punks are, in fact, participating in these social movements. These images will be organized into a separate section that specifically addresses Punks’ participation in social movements.

Section 5: Findings

This section is organized around the five Punk values that make up the Punk ethos, plus an additional category for Punk participation in social movements. Each value will receive at least one piece of musical evidence for analysis supported by written/oral examples to provide further context. The main outlier in this section will be the evidence for DIY as a Punk value. There is no music¹ that articulates DIY as a value, so the discussion of DIY will focus on visual evidence, such as fashion, fanzines, and DIY shows.

Resistance to Social Norms

A key part of the Punk ethos is a resistance to all arbitrary and controlling social norms. That includes style, language, gender, sexuality, and politics. The goal is to challenge the societal idea of what is “acceptable,” because what is “acceptable” is informed by the ruling class of society as a method to control the behaviour of the subordinate classes (Scott 1990). As the Punk ethos developed over time, that resistance moved from just trying to piss off authority to challenging the dominant social norms because Punks gained a deeper awareness of the underlying structures of society. For Punks, a resisting social norms is an everyday form of resistance (Scott 1985), because the formation of society is at all times challenging their ethos and thus in response, Punks must always be challenging that method of control.

In his book “Domination and the Arts of Resistance” James Scott (1990) discusses how subordinate groups will hide their resistance in “hidden transcripts.” Scott argues that the feelings of hatred towards the oppressors; insulation and rejection of the dominant forces in society cannot happen within the “public transcripts” and that those feelings must be cleverly hidden to avoid retaliation or otherwise expressed offstage (Scott 1990, pg.40). The Punk method of resistance to domination challenges Scott’s assertion because the Punk method of resistance occurs almost entirely within the public transcript. There is no need to hide the resistance to domination because Punks do not fear the retaliation, in fact in most cases they relish the retaliation no matter what form it takes.

The Punk resistance to social norms occurring within the public transcripts is where the Punk definition of everyday resistance becomes clear. By pursuing resistance in their daily lives, through how they interact and present within society Punks mitigate and deny the claims and expectations of the dominant classes while disavowing the oppressor’s public symbols and goals (Scott 1985, pg. 32–33). The Punk method of resistance is so effective because everyday forms of resistance are informal; making it a powerful political tool because there is little the oppressor can do to stop it without making their methods of control all too clear (Scott 1985; 1990).

¹ At least any music I can find or that I am familiar with. The only example that gets even close to my knowledge is “Punk By the Book” by Anti-Flag

To illustrate how everyday resistance to the social norms developed within the Punk ethos this paper looks to is “Anarchy in the UK” by The Sex Pistols (1976). This paper looks to The Sex Pistols because were formative in carving out the archetype of what Punks look like, how they act and how they challenged authority. “Anarchy in the UK” rocked the boat in the seventies because British polite society hates nothing more than rowdy teens and “hooligans,” and that is the narrative the song presents. The narrative structure and political message of the song are not particularly important in this case because the value of the song lies in how it informed the Punk ethos which is clearest in the outro of the song.

“I wanna be anarchy \ And I wanna be anarchy \ Know what I mean? \ And I wanna be anarchist \ I get pissed, destroy.”

The language of destruction and the use of anarchism as a buzzword, scared British polite society because The Sex Pistols for the first time brought this type of resistance based and inflammatory language into the public transcript.

The Sex Pistols use of inflammatory language along with interaction that Steve Jones (lead Guitarist for the Sex Pistols) had with Grundy in the interview described in the historical section demonstrate the argumentative nature of Punk resistance, and role the Sex Pistols had in building that argumentativeness into the Punk ethos. The argumentativeness of the Punk Rock genre informs the Punk method of resistance because argumentation with the oppressors is itself a form of resistance as the “war of words” described by James Scott (1985, pg. 240). Argumentation is not a sufficient form of resistance to achieve meaningful change however it is deeply important to resistance because it helps to maintain the “spirit of resistance” within the community (Scott 1985). This maintenance of the spirit of resistance speaks to how Polletta (2006) discusses how narrative plays a role in maintain a collective mythology within social movements to create a unified goal and demonstrates why the Sex Pistols are so important to development of the Punk ethos.

Despite the lack of overt political language throughout their discography the importance of the Sex Pistols influence on the Punk ethos is further evidenced by how they spoke to the affective feelings (Gould 2009) of young people at the time. The narrative of their music created an emotional home (Gould 2009) for young people to feel their anger towards the society that they felt was against them, their friends and their families (*BBC Archive* 1977). Speaking to that affective feeling and creating an emotional home for young people within the music and in the community represents the shift from affective emotions to feeling as described by Gould (2009, pg.). Further, the frustration about the economic crash, lack of affordability, lack of housing and lack of work opportunities (*BBC Archive* 1977) that Punks felt at the time is the moral shock, that made them reconsidered their habitual going along (Gould 2009). The Sex Pistols themselves are a product of that moral shock, and they played a significant role in developing that moral shock in a moral panic within the community.

The Sex Pistols were never the most political band, and their critique of society was not as articulate or as ruthless as that of future Punk bands or their contemporaries (such as The Clash). But that does not make them any less important to the development of the Punk ethos, because a brilliant critique of society was never the point of the Sex Pistols; they challenged social norms by sticking a finger (literally and figuratively) to the expectations of British society and, in doing so, made clear that the anger young people felt about their day-to-day lives should be directed at society and laid that groundwork for the future of Punk-Rock.

DIY Culture

This discussion of Punk's commitment to DIY (Do It Yourself) culture, focuses on Punk Fashion, Punk Zines, and DIY Punk shows to illustrate this part of the Punk ethos. DIY culture is best understood as a connective tissue that runs through the Punk ethos. As such, DIY culture is reflective of the Punk communities emotional habitus as a representation of the embodied understanding about feelings and their expression (Gould 2009). This paper refers to Gould's use of the term "embodied" because DIY creations (fashion and zines) and organizations (Punk shows) are a physical representation of the Punk community's emotional habitus that as Gould (2009) describes "plays a role in shaping a groups political horizon;" both of which play a part in shaping the other. To that point DIY creations and organization also exemplify affective unconscious emotion moving into conscious feeling (Gould 2009) because they are physical manifestations of those emotion.

The key feature of DIY culture which binds it to all other parts of the Punk ethos is that DIY culture is the method of Punk resistance to consumerism, overproduction and capitalism by removing as much reliance on capitalist systems from Punks daily lives as possible. In removing reliance on capitalist systems where possible DIY fashion and zines are in some ways even more representative of everyday forms of resistance than the Punk resistance to social norms because James Scott (1985, pg.29) describes everyday resistance primarily along economic lines through acts such as foot dragging, malicious compliance, arson, sabotage and so on. DIY Punk shows further demonstrate that economic element of everyday resistance because they are often illegal and thus resist the bureaucracy required for permits and the consumerism present in the mainstream music industry. However, the analysis of DIY shows in this section is much more focused on the community building elements of DIY shows regarding James Scott's (1990) dissident social spaces and Benedict Anderson's (2016) imagined communities.

In the discussion of Punk fashion, it is impossible to ignore Vivienne Westwood's influence however because the historical section already covered Westwood for the most part, the only feature of her influence necessary for this section is implicit resistance to social norms. Westwood's focus throughout her career was always on pushing the boundaries of fashion (Westwood and Kelly 2014), so although she may not have been a Punk herself much like the Sex Pistols whose legacy is much more important than their work, by challenging the norms of fashion at the time Westwood helped instill that attitude into Punk fashion and by extension DIY culture.

DIY culture is so interconnected with Punk fashion because in the mid-70s the only way to get the clothing Punks wanted to wear was to make it themselves; a feature of Punk fashion is still true today. Punks wanted and still want to challenge social norms by wearing something they know will incur retaliation from authority, and in doing so they brought their resistance into the public transcript (Scott 1990). Punk fashion is further an embodiment of the Punk ethos and the moral shocks that inform that ethos. For example, the *battle jackets*^{2,3} that Punks wear represent the personal taste of the owner and their personal brand of resistance. Battle jackets are an embodiment of the political feeling present in the Punk community and are representative of the commitment to everyday forms of resistance, because by literally wearing politics on their

² See Appendix 1; Figure 11,12,13 for examples.

³ The term "Battle Jackets" was popularized by the Metal community and has its origins in WW2 flight jackets as well as the 1950s biker scene (O'Hagan 2021), however the Punk community adopted them right alongside the metal community.

sleeve Punks make themselves a target for retaliation from the oppressor. Making themselves a target is broader reflection of Punk ethos and the commitment to protecting others because by being the loudest person in the room Punks draw the attention away from those less equipped to handle the retaliation.

Punk fashion takes two forms as it reflects the Punk ethos; first as discussed above, Punk fashion is a matter of *expression* and more closely tied to the Punk everyday forms of resistance. Broadening the scope of Punk fashion as an embodiment of everyday resistance, Emma Goldman's (1910;1914) argument about the power of art as a political provides a lens through which to understand the political impact of Punk fashion. Fashion is an artform, and as such as Goldman (1910;1914) argues is a political tool which allows the audience to connect to the message present in the art significantly more than traditional political rhetoric. In the case of Punk fashion as a matter of expression, the audience is the Punk community; as Punks signal their collective struggle, their moral shocks and their political feelings to each other through their fashion (Gould 2009). The audience is also the oppressors or those who align with the values of the oppressors, by bringing politics into the public transcript (Scott 1990) through the fashion Punk are inciting a negative emotional reaction. Thus, Punk fashion is a political tool for expressing the Punk ethos to other Punks as a method of resistance.

Secondly, Punk fashion is a matter of *necessity*, because as mentioned Punk clothing is still something that can only be handmade, even as "alternative" fashion has become more accessible and mainstream in the last few years there is no way to mass produce something like a battle jacket or the patchwork clothing common amongst Crust Punks. To the point of Punk clothing being a necessity, Crust Punks are often unhoused or impoverished individuals, so the

act of repairing their clothing with fabric scraps and dental floss until they became a patchwork was/is a matter of survival as well as a form of resistance.

Punk fashion as a matter of necessity demonstrates moral panic as the emotional habitus of the Punk community because patchwork clothing is a direct indication of the material conditions of Punks and the features of society; the wealth inequality, inadequate social welfare systems, job scarcity, inadequate mental health support and so on, that play a role in Punks living in those conditions. Returning to the discussion of Punk fashion as an artform and Orwell's (2016) description of "all art as propaganda" as in all art is a reflection and product of the society in which it was produced. Punk fashion as a matter of necessity and survival is "propaganda" as it reflects the poverty and inequality in society which further builds on how the Punk ethos and emotional habitus of the Punk community feed into each other. This feature of the Punks existence, as sometimes impoverished or unhoused further demonstrates this paper's argument about moral panic being the chronic experience of a moral shock. Gould's (2009) moral shock is a one-time event that makes an individual reconsider their place in society, and a moral shock could be any of the features of society listed above, living under the oppressive heel of all those societal conditions on the daily will inevitably lead to a moral panic.

Zines (short for Fanzines) have long been a feature of Punk culture⁴. Zines are small, hand-made pamphlets/booklets made by Punks as a form of guerilla journalism, iconic examples of which include "Punk Fanzine" (1976)⁵ as mentioned in the history section and "Sniffin Glue"

⁴ It is important to note that zines are not exclusive to the Punk community, and credit where credit is due to the numerous queer, leftist and other alternative groups who also engage in zines for many of the same reasons as Punks (Worley 2024).

⁵ Appendix 1: Figure 1

(1974)⁶. Zines are not just representative of DIY Culture as a Punk value; they also helped establish the Punk ethos as an early form of anti-establishment and anti-capitalist expression (Worley 2024). Zines like DIY culture overall were a key connective tissue bringing Punk together around the collective struggle and the Punk ethos. In that beyond the face-to-face interaction between community members in the “real” community the Punk community is “imagined” as Anderson (2016) describes and united by a collective sense of struggle. Zines were sold (or handed out) at shows, record stores, and newsstands, serving as an entry point for new Punks (Worley 2024). They were a way for the community to share a collective identity and collective struggle through the dissemination of information that was much harder to come by in the 70s and 80s (Worley 2024). Zines connected the broader Punk culture as it developed back to its base, through the circulating alternative media back into the community (Worley 2024).

For essentially the same reasons as Punk fashion, Punk zines as another art form are representative of Goldman’s (1910:1914) argument about art as a political tool and Orwell’s (2016) art as propaganda. Punk zines, however, demonstrate another feature of Punk resistance as a dissident social space (Scott 1990). James Scott (1990, pg.118) argues that for dissident social spaces to occur “the subordinate group must carve out for itself social spaces insulated from control and surveillance from above.” The creation of zines represents a distinct social space carved out by Punks separate from control and surveillance of the dominate class because zines in practice are a method of independent journalism which formed around challenging dominant news media practices and attitudes towards Punks (Worley 2024). Through developing this understanding of zines this paper demonstrates the importance of their creation in developing and codifying resistance (Scott 1990) into the Punk ethos.

As the final point to DIY culture, DIY Punk shows need discussion because they are key to understanding the Punk community as both real and imagined (Anderson 2016) and DIY shows as dissident social spaces (Scott 1990). As mentioned, DIY shows are any Punk show that occurs outside of an officially sanctioned venue⁷. DIY shows are at the heart of Punk community because Punk bands often were not allowed to play in official venues, so they had to create their own spaces. DIY Punk shows bring the argument immediately back to James Scott’s (1990) dissident social spaces as discussed regarding Punk, however Scott (1990) also discusses within dissident social space the act of “carnival” as a complex form of disguise under domination.

As mentioned in the definitions section, there are two types of Punk shows; the DIY shows which are primarily illegal and put on by the community in unsanctioned locations and large-scale/official legal shows that occur in actual venues. Large scale shows need to be understood as a form of imagined community because stadium shows or even comparably smaller but still large venues break the threshold for face-to-face real community. Benedict Anderson (2016) limits the “real” community to the size of a “primordial village,” he is unclear about the actual number, but an educated guess can place that number in the realm of a few hundred people. Most music venues of any significant size have a capacity in the thousands, as such by Anderson’s argument they cannot be considered “real” community. However, the crowd is still unified under the Punk ethos and the collective sense of struggle making the community at large Punk shows imagined.

Despite large Punk shows manifesting only an imagined community, these shows still play an important role within the Punk method of resistance as they take up the role of being a “carnival.”

⁶ Appendix 1: Figure 14

⁷ See Appendix 1: Figure 15,16

James Scott (1990, pg. 181) defines the ritual of “carnival” as a complex form of disguise within the hidden transcripts during which “in its ritual structure and anonymity, gives a privileged place to normally suppressed speech and aggression.” Although large scale Punk shows do stretch the definition of a dissident social space because they are officially sanctioned, especially when compared to DIY shows. Large scale shows still play an important role in the community by bringing people together and letting off pent-up emotion through moshing, and by serving as a visible critique of the status quo through their performances.

DIY shows on the other hand are representative of Scott’s (1990) dissident social spaces to a tee. They occur outside of the law, their location is hidden and kept within the community, for example by listing the location on promotional material as “Ask a Punk⁸.” As such, DIY shows play a significant role in defining and codifying the Punk ethos through face-to-face community interactions. In that vein of thinking DIY shows are vitally important in maintaining the integrity of the Punk ethos, because as mentioned in the history section sometimes neo-Nazi’s enter the community and start harassing people under the guise of being Punks. Without DIY shows to check the community the ability to beat infections like neo-Nazis or otherwise unsavory individuals out of the community would be severely limited.

DIY shows are also an important site for further political organization. At large shows, you could never feasibly organize the audience into a social movement or any form of community engagement. At DIY shows, because of the face-to-face nature, it is much easier to organize the Punks into groups to engage with social movements and share information about upcoming political events. In being this vector for organization DIY, shows demonstrate how Punks become politically engaged and how their political feelings translate into real action and involvement in social movements.

Resistance to State Coercion

Punks hate cops, they hate the state and the power it wields, and they hate how those forces inform their lives. Some of that hatred can be attributed to many Punks aligning with anarchist politics however more of that hatred is attributed to the fact that “forced compliance produces a reaction against such forces” (Scott 1990, pg.109). If the Punk resistance to social norms is about resisting the public transcript that is naturalized and affirmed by elites and how those inform individuals daily lives (Scott 1990, pg.18). Then the resistance to state coercion is about opposing the underlying structure of society which maintains and manipulates the public transcripts for the benefit of those in power (Scott 1990, pg.23) while also opposing the explicit violence of the state at the hands of the police (for example).

This element of the Punk ethos is often the most explicit and purposeful manifestation of using Punk Rock as a political tool. The critiques present in the songs in this category are blatant and use narratives to provide emotional context to the audience and build the goal of resisting state coercion into the Punk ethos (Polletta 2006). The importance of specific narratives for this part of the ethos lies in narratives ability to clarify the complicated forces at play in state coercion (Polletta 2006). Clarifying those forces is needed because it is difficult to understand system of power when you are constantly having that power exercised on you as an individual or commu-

⁸ See Appendix 1: Figure 17

nity; the systems of domination will remain opaque until the powers operating them choose to make them evident (Scott 1990, pg.25).

To illustrate this part of the Punk ethos and Punk rock as a political tool this paper looks to “Clampdown” by The Clash (1979). The title of the song sets the stage for the critique of state coercion; a *Clampdown* is a severe or concerted attempt to suppress something. Joe Strummer sings about fascism and capitalist state and equates the two under the oppressive force of the clampdown as a representation of the coercion of the state, evident in the lines

“Takin’ off his turban, they said, ‘Is this man a Jew?’ \ (Working for the clampdown) \ They put up a poster saying ‘We earn more than you!’ \ We’re (Working for the clampdown).”

By equating capitalism to fascism as equally oppressive forces The Clash develops a narrative which clarifies the forces of state coercion that maintain their material conditions and creates a space for the audience to direct their affective emotions at a clear source (Gould 2009; Goldman 1910;1914; Polletta 2006). The Clash continues the verse with a further articulation of state coercion as a form of ideological domination akin to how James Scott (1990, pg.18;23;118) presents the public transcript as a naturalization of domination;

“We will teach our twisted speech to the young believers \ We will train our blue-eyed men to be young believers.”

Here, The Clash alludes to fascism again with a reference to “blue-eyed men” as the ideal “Aryan” as part Nazi ideology which again lets the audience connect their affective emotions back to a more articulated source. In making these clear references to fascism as an easy point of comparison The Clash demonstrates how the public transcript and the “stereotypes of domination” can be a resource for the oppressed in their ongoing resistance (Scott 1990, pg.34). Through this articulation of the domination present in the public transcript, The Clash is presenting a purposeful political message that intends to inform the audience of the power structures in society and in doing so provide further evidence of how Punk Rock is a political tool.

“Clampdown” also offers a lens to investigate another feature of state domination and how resistance arises out of that domination as described by James Scott as “Resistance, then originates not simply from material appropriation but from the pattern of humiliation that characterize that exploitation” (1990, pg.112). In their critique of capitalism as “*Working for the Clampdown*,” The Clash articulates that pattern of humiliation in the lines “*It’s the best years of your life they want to steal*,” “*So you got someone to boss around, it make ya feel big now*,” and in the outro of the song,

“Begging to be melted down \ (Get along, get along) \ Work \ Work \ And I give away no secrets \ Work / Work \ More work \ More work \ Work \ Work \ Work \ Work \ Who’s barmy now?”

This hammering of “work” as outro of the song builds on the origin point for this part of the Punk ethos as the outcome of resentment from having to constantly take commands from authority and from the coercive apparatus of the state (Scott 1990, pg.112). To that point The Clash is illustrating an important feature of how society informs the Punk ethos and emotional habitus of the Punk community; that it is the experience of indignities and humiliation (or moral shocks) that bridge the gap between condition and consciousness (Scott 1990, pg.113).

Bridging the gap between conditions and consciousness through the narrative of Punk Rock music is what gives it so much power as a political tool. The emotionality and ability to connect

to affective emotions is an important feature here because it gives the artform significantly more reach than traditional political rhetoric ever could (Goldman 1910;1914). In connecting to the daily humiliation present in the public transcripts to obvious targets for anger (i.e. fascism) The Clash created a powerful political tool in “Clampdown.”

Furthering the discussion of how Punks resist state coercion this paper looks to “Killing in the Name” by Rage Against the Machine⁹ (1992) in combination with James Scott’s argument about how resistance to ideological domination forms. James Scott in his discussion of the ideological domination of the public transcript argues that “Resistance to Ideological domination requires a counter Ideology – a negation – that will effectively provide a general normative form to the host of resistance practices in self-defense by any subordinate group” (1990, pg.118). This paper is clear that Punk is an ethos not an ideology, however the Punk ethos can still fit within Scott’s definition because the through dissident social spaces and the narratives of Punk-Rock, the Punk community affords itself a reprieve from the humiliation of domination (Scott 1990, pg.114). That is the Punk community’s negation of domination through which the Punk ethos develops and provides a normative form to the resistance to state coercion.

“Killing in the Name” by Rage is a perfect example of Punk ethos negating domination because the narrative it presents is in complete and utter contradiction to the system of enforced habits and beliefs present in state coercion (Scott 1990, pg.115–16). The intro of the song sets the stage for the narrative by posing a sort of rhetorical question “*Killing in the name of...*” Rage purposefully leaves the “who” implicit to the line blank, making the audience fill in the who with their own assumption. The immediate next verse starts answering the question of who by repeating the lines “*Some of those that work forces \ Are the same that burn crosses.*” In this line Rage is referring to the police in “work forces” and argues that the police and Ku Klux Klan as those who “burn crosses” are one in the same. By drawing this connection Rage is challenging the enforced habits and beliefs of the state which present the police as a force for justice. This connection further allows the audience to connect their anger towards either group to the other and connect the method of resistance to police or the KKK to state coercion.

By depicting the main violent arm of the state in the police to an explicit hate group in the KKK, Rage is calling into question the ideological domination of the state through questioning the validity of the violence the state enacts on its citizens. Violence which Rage calls into question in the chorus; “*Those who died are justified \ For wearin’ the badge, they’re the chosen whites \ You justify those that died.*” Rage is arguing that the state justifies violence entirely arbitrarily, based on who is enacting that violence. In arguing this point, Rage is negating the idea that the state should have any say over who gets to enact violence, which calls into question the state’s authority overall. Rage’s negation of domination provides a home for resistance as it aligns with the Punk ethos by arguing with the material and social conditions of society (Scott 1990) and in doing so Rage is demonstrating how thoughts about resistance and acts of resistance are in constant dialogue with each other (Scott 1985, pg.38).

In the outro of “Killing in the Name,” Rage effectively captures the resentment, humiliation and anger that Punks feel because of the coercive control of the state and how those feelings inform the Punk ethos and further how that translates into how Punks interact with the state. The outro is as follows “*FUCK YOU I WON’T DO WHAT YOU TELL ME (x15) \ MOTHERFUCKER, UGH.*” When it comes to Punks, the oppressors control of the state backfires against it because

⁹ Rage for Short

firstly coercion effectively inoculates Punks against any form of compliance (Scott 1990, pg.45) and secondly the nature of the Punk ethos and its resistance as willing to incur retribution from the oppressors especially in protection of others makes Punks as individuals and as community real or imagined a significant political force against the state.

Guardianship

When discussing this part of the Punk ethos, this paper is referring to “guardianship” as the act of “protecting” in which Punks take on the role of guardians for others when they need it. That takes the form of stepping in front of police and protestors as a line of defense, breaking up fights or kicking the shit out of neo-Nazis who show up at Punk shows. This paper extends this definition to protecting each other in the community, not just from neo-Nazis, but also as part of the social contract of the Mosh Pit present at all Punk shows. In understanding guardianship as a verb as well as a thought process within the Punk ethos, this value demonstrates how the “real” face-to-face Punk community plays an important role in channeling the anger and frustration present in its habitus into real physical action.

Drawing on Gould’s (2009) work on the ACT UP movement and it pertains to how affective emotion translates into real feeling when presented with a moral shock; moshing as a feature of Punk shows offers an interesting case study for understanding this part of the Punk ethos. Beginning with Gould (2009), she spends chapter one laying the groundwork for the affective shift to come in the AIDS movement by demonstrating that the anger was always present, however it was masked by other feelings such as shame and sadness. Gould’s groundwork is a necessary step in understanding how moral shocks can shift a groups emotional habitus because it was not until June 1986 when the supreme court ruled on the *Bowers v. Hardwick* case that the emotional habitus of the queer community shifted to anger. Gould (2009, pg. 123) describes that “*the news of the Hardwick decision was enough to awaken the radical in the most apolitical queers... Protests erupted in cities across the country as the news reaching communities in which frustration and rage had been mounting...*” *Bowers v. Hardwick* was the moral shock the queer community needed to shift their affective frustration and anger into a real feeling which informed their subsequent political participation (Gould 2009, pg.134).

Moshing at Punk shows similarly demonstrate that shift from affective emotion to feeling and is representative of this paper’s argument that the anger which is created and maintained by the Punk community and Punk rock music drives Punks to engage in real political action. Moshing is a type of group “dance” that happens mostly at Punk and metal shows, in which the crowd violently shoves, pushes, and slams into each other repeatedly until the song is over or they get tired, whichever comes first. Moshing is triggered by the emotions that Punk Rock music elicits in its audience because the narrative presented by Punk-Rock reminds the audience of the moral shocks they have previously experienced and brings forth their affective emotions which then manifest as consensually hurting each other. Moshing in other words is the Punk communities emotional habitus made manifest in the most literal sense.

This element of emotions manifesting in a very physical manor within a politically engaged community further speaks to Gould’s description of ACT UP meetings post 1986. Gould (2009, pg.181–192) presents several interviews in which members of ACT UP describe the environment at meetings as “*sexy*,” “*erotic*,” “*electric*,” “*a place where people met to have sex*” and so on. One quote

speaks to why the emotionality and the face-to-face nature of communities such as ACT UP and the Punk community are so important to maintain their political engagement; *“I thrived on the camaraderie and needed it very much during that period of my life. People in ACT UP valeted my feelings that something was very wrong with the ways things were. Our government and society had failed us...-Billy McMillan”* (Gould 2009, pg.187). These quotes demonstrate how key emotions are to maintaining social movements and how that emotionality informs the communities emotional habitus. For Punks, building those feelings of anger and frustration into the habitus and the ethos has primed them to be politically engaged.

All of which leads the analysis back to the Punk community being guardians, the commitment to which is built on emotionality and sense of camaraderie present in the face-to-face community. For example, there is a social contract present at all Punk shows where moshing is involved that is informed by the Punk ethos. The social contract of the Mosh Pit is sometimes presented by the performing artists but more commonly a member of the community who will yell to the crowd “Rule #1 of Moshing! If someone falls, you pick them the fuck up!” The other rules of the pit include not being a creep, not dragging in anyone who does not want to participate, not starting “real” fights, and so on. Not to say that at every show the crowd gets reminded of the rules of the pit; however, at every show, the social contract dictates that if someone falls or otherwise gets hurt beyond the agreed-upon amount, the community takes care of them.

The argument for this value thus far has been in effort to demonstrate how the face-to-face “real” Punk community plays a role in moving Punks from affective emotion to feeling and how that translates to real action; using moshing as an example. This shift from affective emotion to feeling is an important feature of this paper’s argument, so to illustrate this further this paper looks to the personal experience of Henry Rollins, lead singer of Black Flag in his autobiography (1995). Before Rollins ever joined Black Flag, founding member of the band Greg Ginn wrote the song “Police Story” (1981) as an anti-police anthem and depicts the never-ending war marginalized groups fight with the police as an arm of the state. The first verse of the song sets the state well;

“This fucking city \ Is run by pigs \ They take the rights away \ From all the kids \ Understand we’re fighting a war we can’t win \ They hate us, we hate them \ We can’t win, no way.”

Although this song thematically fits better within the discussion around the Punk resistance to state coercion the way Rollins describes his experience with this song and Black Flag before he joined illustrates the affective shift.

Before joining the band Rollins was a fan of Black Flag and his descriptions of seeing Black Flag live for the first time speaks to the unconscious level that affectual emotion operates on (Gould 2009), *“It was one of the most powerful things I’ve ever seen — The urgency of the music and the playing was unsettling”* (Rollins 1995, pg.5). This feeling Rollins describes is clearly the “unconscious bodily response to external stimuli and emotion” that Gould (2009, pg.20) describes when discussing the affective shift. Further to Gould’s argument that moral shocks make individuals “reconsider their habitual going along” (2009,pg.134), Rollins also offers a clear depiction of this moment for him *“After I had hung out with the Flag guys, I saw that there was a lot more out there to be seen and done”* (Rollins 1995, pg.8). Rollins is clearly experiencing a shift in perspective because of his experience with Punk Rock music, this demonstrates Goldman’s (1910;1914) arguments about why art is such an effective political tool in its ability to connect to the emotions of

the audience. Rollins does not even remember fully what song Black Flag played the first time he saw them live, he only remembers how he felt and simply feeling something, drove him want to be involved.

Rollins affective shift from unconscious to conscious is completed when he auditions to be lead singer of Black Flag. The first song Rollins chose to sing for his audition was “Police Story” and in Rollins own words the decision to sing “Police Story” was completely unconscious; “*Greg asked me what song I wanted to play first. I thought I must be dreaming. For a second I didn’t even think I was there at all. I told him Police Story*” (Rollins 1995, pg.11). Without further explanation from Rollins this paper can only guess at what unconscious factors drove Rollins to sing police story, however from contextual clues throughout his biography, Rollins certainly held some amount of resentment towards police. Thus, the educated guess this paper makes is that Rollins unconsciously chose “Police Story” because his affectual anger was most closely tied to the police or injustices related to the police. Rollins then provides the clearest example of the affective shift on an individual level this paper can find, Rollins describes as he started singing that “*It was as if I had flipped the switch on some kind of angry machine*” (Rollins 1995, pg.11).

Looking to Rollins experiences throughout his biography also reveals how his engagement with the Punk community and the moral panic he experienced drove Rollins to stand up for and protect others in line with this part of the Punk ethos. In the approximately six years Rollins toured with Black Flag, Rollins describes endless instances of the police harassing Rollins, his bandmates and friends. In nearly all these instances Rollins put himself in front of the brutality to protect those around him (Rollins 1995). For Rollins standing up for others is a part of his character, it is an implicit feature of how he goes about the world. Which is exactly why this paper uses the term “ethos” rather than “ethic” or “moral code,” to describe how Punks operate. Guardianship is as much a part of the Punk resistance as challenging social norms or DIY is because the ethos informs how Punks move through their daily lives.

Resistance to Inequality

Resistance to inequality as part of the Punk ethos is representative of how the Punk ethos informs itself. Meaning that if Punks are to resist social norms about what is acceptable and challenge those norms themselves, if they are to challenge the coercive power structure of the state which have at times legislated and controlled the bodies and minds of citizens and if they are to be guardians then as a feature of Punk resistance Punks must also accept those differences and resist inequality as it forms in society. Looking again to James Scott (1985;1990) and Deborah Gould (2009) for a lens of analysis focusing on how social site provide a reprieve from the “humiliation of domination” and how Punk communities’ emotional habitus informs how it forms. To further the discussion of resistance to structural inequality (while avoiding Political economic theory) this paper looks to “Do They Owe Us a Living” by Crass (1979) to reveal how anarchism and class dynamics helped form the Punk ethos.

The community in the real and imagined sense is a social site that can provide a reprieve from the humiliation of domination by providing a sometimes literal, other times figurative space away from the observation of the oppressors (Scott 1990). The humiliation of domination is not just present in the oppressors control of economic power or in the indignity of authority making constant demands of the individual as Scott (1990) discusses. The humiliation of domination is also

present in the hierarchical and supremacist norms of society; whether it be regarding race, gender, class, physical ability or so on, the humiliation can take many forms (Scott 1990). Thus, by creating and maintaining a community which accepts differences, the Punk community operates as a safe spaces for those individuals to find a reprieve. In doing so the Punk community demonstrates how the Punk ethos informs its habitus (Gould 2009) by incorporating a resistance to social norms and guardianship into how the community forms. Here the Punk community is also demonstrating part of its everyday resistance in its refusal to condone its own social and ritual marginalization at the hands of society (Scott 1985, pg.240).

It is also worth understanding social sites for the Punk community not just where their DIY shows take place as in those which are abandoned or otherwise forgotten by the state. Those site are protected from the humiliation of domination because of their anonymity and are still very important to the community (Scott 1990). However, we can further understand the Punk community broadly as a social site which is built up from many small victories over time and defended from the oppression of the state and from other oppressive forces such as neo-Nazis (Scott 1990, pg.123). The constant struggle to defend community is part of the communities habitus and informs Punks political feeling and their methods of resistance.

For Punks the resistance to inequality is informed by the enforced norms of the public transcript (Scott 1990) as they present in daily life; Racism, homophobic, transphobia and so on and their resistance is informed by an understanding of the structural forces at work in creating inequality. All inequality is in some way structural, a feature of society which all Punks at least implicitly understand as part of the Punk ethos. However, in the case of class inequality because it was so significant in how the Punk Rock genre formed, investigating how Punks respond to class inequality specifically gives this paper a lens to investigate how Punks feel about structural inequality and how their resistance responds to it.

To provide that class perspective this paper looks to “Do They Owe Us a Living” by Crass (1979). Crass is anarcho-Punk band that had a significant influence on the anarcho-Punk philosophy and on the more explicitly political bands in the early Punk days (Berger 2008; Bushnell and Turcotte 2013). Crass’s politics focused on critiques of capitalism and because of their anarchist alignment on the power structures in society making them the perfect vector for analysis in this regard. The opening lines of “Do They Owe Us a Living,” does something interesting; “*Fuck the politically minded, here’s something I want to say \ About the state of the nation, the way they treat us today.*” Firstly, it is very Punk to cuss out your own audience secondly “*Fuck the politically minded*” tells the audience that the critique they are about to present is not complicated or something which operates in the higher realm of politics, it is grounded in individual experience evidenced by “*here’s somethingI want to say.*” This again speaks to how simplifying a complicated issue within a narrative allows the song to speak to the emotions of the audience more clearly and be a more effective political tool (Gould 2009; Goldman 1910;1914; Polletta 2006).

Crass then continues their structural critique in the chorus using the strategy of rhetorical argumentation with the stage to present a narrative which will more easily connect to the affective emotion of the audience, and by answering their own question in the chorus Crass gives the audience an emotional home to direct their anger (Gould 2009; Polletta 2006). The chorus argues “*Do they owe us a living? \ Course they do, course they do \ Owe us a living? \ Course they do, course they do \ Owe us a living? \ Course they fucking do!*” Crass wrote “Do They Owe Us a Living” sometime in 1978/79, the peak of the economic crisis that followed the post WWII economic boom; the question they ask if furiously fighting with the state that is actively failing its

citizens, more and more of whom were living off government assistance (Berger 2008; Bushnell and Turcotte 2013). Crass is presenting a simple and effective critique of the wealth inequality in society and of the capitalist systems that rests upon the resentment to state coercion present in the Punk community. In doing so they use their music as an effective political tool, by speaking to the Punk ethos and the political feelings which informed it.

Participation in Social Movements

With the Punk ethos clarified this paper can look at examples of how and why Punks have participated in political social movements to demonstrate how the Punk ethos informs participation. This paper presents four examples of Punks participating in social movements; Sum 41 working with War Child Canada in 2004 to make a documentary about the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Billy Talent is starting a fundraising and scholarship program in support of those living with Multiple Sclerosis. The counter protests by ANTIFA during the 2017 “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. The final example is one of my own participation in a counter protest, to bring the paper back to my own positionality as a Punk.

The first two examples in this section focus on the actions of Punk bands because bands are the most blatant indicators of how the Punk communities emotional habitus informs their resistance. The artists are the ones that craft the narratives that continuously feed into the habitus and play a key role in maintaining that habitus. To that point, Scott (1990, pg.123) describes how individual actors are responsible for the maintenance and dissemination of dissident social spaces. It is evident in how the Punk community forms around the music and the fact that Punk shows are key for maintaining the community that Punk bands play a key role as facilitators of resistance.

Which leads to this papers interest in Sum 41’s documentary, in their own words “*The original reason we went to the Congo was to document what was happening -Deryck Whibley*,” “*We initially went to the Congo to get a better understanding of what’s going on around the world -Dave Baksh*” (Callender 2005). Sum 41 does not make its intentions clear beyond these quote however, with the added context of how much more politically engaged the band became post 9/11 (9/11 being a significant moral shock) this paper makes an educated guess that aspect of the Punk ethos mainly Resistance to state coercion, a resistance to inequality and some amount of guardianship motivated Sum 41 at an affective level to make this documentary (Bobkin and Feibel 2025). As to how making this documentary facilitates resistance; Sum 41 is taking on the role of educators and in doing so further disseminate the real information about the ongoing (at the time) conflict in the Congo and pass the emotions they felt while in the Congo about the injustice to the wider community through the narratives present in their music.

Moving now to Billy Talent for a clearer example of how the Punk ethos motivate community building and mutual support. In 2002, Billy Talent used the music video and radio campaign for their song “Nothing to Lose,” which was inspired by the real story of a teen who committed suicide in Ontario, to double the funding for the Kids Help Phone (Bobkin and Feibel 2025). Later in 2006, in support of their drummer, Aaron Solowoniuk, who lived with Multiple Sclerosis (M.S), Billy hosted the first F.U.M.S benefit show in Toronto (Bobkin and Feibel 2025). All the money raised went to the M.S Society of Canada, and the following year, Solowoniuk started a scholarship program for Canadian youth living with M.S. (Bobkin and Feibel 2025). Billy Talent’s action in both examples demonstrates their commitment to guardianship and a resistance to inequal-

ity as in both examples they use their platform and accumulated wealth to support their real and imagined community. These examples also demonstrate how art as a political tool (Goldman 1910;1914) operates not just on an emotional level to motivate people to participate but also as a method for social movements to make more concrete change in society (Polletta 2006).

When it comes to the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville the key insight to draw is the Punk connection to ANTIFA. The rally in short was a collection of various right-wing groups (neo-Confederates, neo-fascists, white nationalists, white supremacists, neo-Nazis, Klansmen, and far-right militias) coming together to whine about the removal of a statue of confederate general Robert E. Lee (Fausset and Feuer 2017; Steinmetz 2017; Stolberg and Rosenthal 2017; Yan et al. 2017). In response ANTIFA and several other organization showed up to counter protest the rally; this paper points connects ANTIFA to Punks because the values that inform ANTIFA as anti-fascists (Steinmetz 2017) and the values that inform Punk are essentially the same. That is to say that not every member of ANTIFA is a Punk but every Punk as a feature of how their ethos informs their resistance should be a member of ANTIFA. By participating in ANTIFA action, like the Charlottesville counter protests¹⁰, the Punk community is making their ethos clear and demonstrating how moral panic translates into real action (Gould 2009).

Finally, a personal example. On February 1st, 2026, across the country, a white nationalist group called “Stand United Canada” staged a protest broadly against Canada’s immigration policies, as they blame most of the issues facing Canadians on immigrants coming into the country (“Standunitedcanada.Com,” n.d.). Across the country, in response to these white nationalists, the local communities staged counterprotests (Hall 2026; Perez 2026; Ran 2026). Amongst the counter protestors in Kingston, one visible Punk was present (it was me)¹¹. With my positionality and the Punk ethos in mind, it should go without saying why I would have an issue with white nationalists, regardless of how few showed up, demonstrating in my hometown. My commitment to guardianship and resisting inequality is why I showed up to this counterprotest, it is why I stood in the front and made myself a target to the slurs and insults. These action are my everyday resistance (Scott 1985), and they are informed by the Punk ethos, and it is the moral shocks I have experienced in my life that motivated me to engage in this counterprotest (Gould 2009).

¹⁰ See Appendix 1: Figure 18,19

¹¹ See Appendix 1: Figure 20

Section 6: Conclusion

Throughout this paper I have endeavored to tackle several problems — filling the literature gap pertaining to Punk-Rock and the Punk community, to challenge academic and societal assumptions about Punks and the Punk community as a bunch of rowdy teens who like fighting cops (this is still mostly true) and to demonstrate that Punks are rational political actors worthy of and in need of further study. The scope of this project is undoubtedly limited by the inherent constraint of being an undergrad thesis and by the limited literature on the subject requiring significantly more foundational work.

Despite the limited scope this paper built on the existing social movements literature (Gould 2009; Polletta 2006), literature about resistance (Scott 1985;1990) and literature about the relationship between art and politics (Goldman 1910;1914) to show that the Punk community is Not a social movement or an ideology but is an *Ethos*. An ethos, as in a set of values which inform how Punks move throughout society, values which are informed and maintained by a constant state of *Moral Panic*, as in the chronic experience of Gould's (2009) moral shocks. This moral panic is maintained by engagement with the Punk community, the narrative presented by Punk-Rock music which serves to constantly remind Punks of the moral shocks they experience and keep them angry. The result is Punks constantly being angry at the formation of society; anger which manifests in their everyday forms of resistance, and which further drives them to participate in social movements like counterprotests or to do community support work in charities and fundraisers. Punks do this because the ethos is not a moral or ethical commitment which requires more thought process, the ethos is a feature of their character that primarily operates at the affective level and thus makes their resistance to the status quo a matter of identity.

Appendix 1

Figure 1: First Issue cover of Punk fanzine (1976)

Figure 2: The front page of the Mirror, 2nd December 1976 (Image credit Mirror Group Newspapers)

Figure 3: Shirt, Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren, 1977, England. Museum no. T.773–1995

Figure 4: Top, Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren, 1976, England. Museum no. T.93–2002.

Figure 5: @punx_worldwide. “Saška from Slovakia.” Instagram. March 2, 2025.

Figure 6: @takashi_pogo. “LA PUNK INVASION 2025.” Instagram, March 23, 2025.

Figure 7: Errol G — Self Portrait, Sept 3, 2025

Figure 8: THE-DECLINE-OF-WESTERN-CIVILIZATION-III_1 (Spheeris 1998)

Figure 9: Marlon Bradon as Johnny in The Wild One (1953)

Figure 10: Inner photo from the physical release of Go Girl Crazy by The Dictators (1975)

Figure 11: Errol G, Personal Battle Jacket 2026

Figure 12: u/katian64, r/BattleJackets, “90% Finished 80s punk leather.” Reddit, 2022

Figure 13: u/Alarming-Place-7293, r/BattleJackets, “Punk leather jacket.” Reddit, 2025

Figure 14: First Issue Cover — “Sniffin Glue,” Mark Perry (1976)

Figure 15: u/Folk_Punk_Slut, r/FolkPunk “Apes of the State at Lansing’s DIY punk show, Stoopfest playing to a packed back yard.” Reddit, 2022

Figure 16: Times Union “Robust DIY scene proves rock isn’t dead in upstate New York,” Mark Ferris, 2023.

Figure 17: @puptheband “MegaCity Madness: A Quest Through Toronto.” Instagram 2025

Figure 18: Anti-fascist counterprotesters wait outside Emancipation Park to hurl insults as white nationalists, neo-Nazis and members of the “alt-right” are forced out after the “Unite the Right” rally was declared an unlawful gathering August 12, 2017

Figure 19: ANTIFA counterprotesters at “unite the right” rally Charlottesville 2017 — Author Unknown

Figure 20: Left faced off against right as protesters and counter-protesters clash on the front steps of Kingston City Hall on Saturday, Feb. 1, 2026. Photo by Bill Hall / The Kingston Whig-Standard

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