“Not Just Boys’ Fun?”

The Gendered Experience of American Hardcore

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Abstract

The goal of this thesis is to shed light on a part of the story of American hardcore, a part that in my view has not been given the space it deserves. Women in punk and hardcore do not own a place in the history of their subcultural communities. Their contributions to their scenes are deemphasized, if not ignored. Drawing from subcultural theory and Joan W. Scott's view on using experience as evidence, I use song lyrics, images and interviews to contextualize women's experiences of American hardcore. In this, I attempt to understand how and why some women are drawn to such a closed masculine community, and how they navigate this environment. Women in the scene have been mentioned in works on hardcore, but their experiences and the role of gender in the scene has not been fully studied. Before women can be incorporated into subcultural history, they must be taken seriously as active participants in their environment. This thesis is an attempt at beginning such a discussion.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is ultimately a cultural production of hardcore. Without the influence and inspiration hardcore has given me throughout the years, my path might have been very different.

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1.1 Introduction

There is perhaps no better example of male hegemonic control over popular cultural history than the rewrite of punk to exclude the very large and productive presence of young women in the subculture from the very beginning. - Helen Reddington[1]

The goal of this thesis is to shed light on a part of the story of American hardcore, a part that in my view has not been given the space it deserves. As Reddington points out, women in punk and hardcore do not own a place in the history of their subcultural communities. Their contributions to their scenes are deemphasized, if not ignored. Women in the scene have been mentioned in works on hardcore, but their experiences and the role of gender in the scene has not been fully studied. Before women can be incorporated into subcultural history, they must be taken seriously as active participants in their environment. By looking at their experiences in context with the overarching themes in hardcore, exemplified through cultural products, the full impact of women's presence in the scene can be understood. This thesis does not attempt to be a definitive look at women in hardcore, but it is a beginning. Only when women's experiences are also taken into account in the overall history of hardcore, can we understand why they are present at all and what their contribution means to the scene. This thesis focuses on a specific music scene with specific cultural connotations and rules that are not widely known in mainstream popular culture, thus it is necessary to present a brief history of American hardcore.

1.2 American Hardcore

There are many books, specifically many oral histories about the American hardcore scene, all of which tell different parts of the story. The hardcore scene is not "one," it is not the

[1] Helen Reddington, "'Lady' Punks in Bands: A Subculturette?" in *The Post-Subcultures Reader*, ed. David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl, 239 (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003).

same everywhere. Hardcore kids[2] comprise of youths and adults of all backgrounds, political, social and personal. It would be meaningless to make a comprehensive guide to hardcore music and the scene that surrounds it. Others have tried, and failed. As these attempts describe, the scenes in the United States differ greatly, but remain connected, through basic ideas and personal contact. The framework is the same, but is understood differently, creating vast difference in dress, preferred music, political standpoint and views on activizing gender roles. Touring bands get to see the complexities of American hardcore, some scenes are open to unknown bands, others are "strictly local." It is this diversity that is one of hardcore's greatest strengths, and at the same time, one of its greatest weaknesses. There is a never ending cry for "unity" in the scene, yet few are able to express what this means in practice. In many ways, it is a cry for a mythological golden past where punks, skins and hardcore kids hung out together. I base my historical account mainly on Steven Blush's *American Hardcore,*[3] Stacy Thompson's *Punk Productions* and Robert T. Wood's *Straightedge Youth*.

American hardcore is a community defined by a music genre. While the origin of the term "hardcore" to describe the type of punk music discussed in this thesis is unknown, some refer to Canadian band D.O.A.'s album *Hardcore 81* as one of the first times the term was used. The first pure hardcore record is also open to debate. But there are two records that are mentioned most often. The "Out of Vogue" 7-inch single by the California band The Middle Class came out in 1978. Steven Blush describes the band as playing "in an ultra-fast, monotonal style – two minutes per song max."[4] Short, catchy, extremely fast and aggressive songs are the staple of hardcore music. The other hardcore record often mentioned as the very first is the Bad Brains 7-inch "Pay To Cum." In *American Hardcore,* Jack Rabid, editor

[2] Language in youth culture marks understanding and involvement. I consequently refer to youth involved in the hardcore scene as "kids," although vague as to age-definition, the term is standard vocabulary within many youth cultures.

[3] Steven Blush considers hardcore to be a music scene that ended in 1986. Therefore, the quotes from *American Hardcore* are in past tense. His statement with the book has been widely debated, and this thesis holds that the hardcore scene still lives and breathes in the American underground today. Another punk scholar, Stacy Thompson, holds that "Hardcore did not disappear in the 90's." Blush's book, although informative, is tongue-in-cheek, and his subjective experience as a part of the scene himself undermines the work's legitimacy at times. When this is the case, his analysis can be used as an example of the discourse within the scene, and will be used as such. For reference, see footnote 18.

[4] Steven Blush, *American Hardcore: A Tribal History*, ed. George Petros (Los Angeles and New York: Feral House, 2001), 17.

of *The Big Takeover*, emphasizes the importance of this release: "The DC [Washington DC] scene owes its entire raison d'être to 'Pay To Cum'."[5]

Bands like Bad Brains and Black Flag are deemed as the most important and influential bands in hardcore, and while there were other contemporary acts, these bands remain as leaders of the hardcore canon. According to hardcore historian Blush, Black Flag defined American hardcore like The Ramones and Sex Pistols defined punk.[6] Whichever band one decides on, American hardcore dates back to around 1980, when punk for many had begun to lose its credibility.

In *American Hardcore,* Blush introduces hardcore as "the suburban American response to the late-70s Punk-revolution."[7] When British punk exploded onto the American music scene in the late 70s, it swiftly became a symbol of rebellion. As Blush notes: "The only rule was to break the rules."[8] For kids who cringed at disco and wholesome counter cultural folk rock, punk was a welcome break. Punk spawned changes in popular music. The major labels reworked this new reactionary trend into "new wave," a somewhat watered-down version of punk, often recognized by extensive use of keyboards and angular haircuts. While punk gave a middle finger to established music culture, new wave embraced mainstream audiences. As new wave took over the airwaves and punk went glam, anger towards major labels' appropriation of youth expression simmered in the underground. Blush explains that "hardcore extended, mimicked and reacted to Punk; it appropriated some aspects yet discarded others. It reaffirmed the attitude, and rejected New Wave. That's why it was *hard-core* Punk – for people who were fed up."[9] In his book about straight edge, sociologist Robert T. Wood describes hardcore music:

> Similar to punk rock, hardcore has a raw edge, characterized by driving, staccato, machine-gun drumbeats, fast, heavy guitar riffs, and simple repetitive bass lines. The vocalists typically shout or scream, and group chants and anthems frequently punctuate the lyrics. Borrowing from the heavy metal music genre, hardcore often breaks the speed and intensity with interludes characterized by slower tempos, double bass drumbeats, and intricate riffs.[10]

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[5] Jack Rabid quoted in Blush, 16-17.
[6] Blush, 50.
[7] Ibid., 12.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid, 13. Author's emphasis.
[10] Robert T. Wood, *Straightedge Youth: Complexities and Contradictions of a Subculture* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 3.

In other words, hardcore is more punk than punk. While hardcore music remains fast, hard and relentless, it has also remained much the same. Bands active today are often remarkably similar to early 1980s bands. According to Blush: "Hardcore fans didn't want their beloved bands to grow beyond established parameters. They wanted their heroes to sound exactly the same, over and over again, forever."[11] This statement does not take into account the different sub-genres of hardcore, like emocore,[12] which spawned the emo scene popular among youth today. Blush does, however, make the point that hardcore, in its essence, remains the same. For the uninitiated, separating 80s band Chain of Strength from current band The First Step may only be possible by the sound quality of the recordings.

While an originally American subculture, hardcore scenes are spread across the globe today, each region with their own take on hardcore politics, style and music. I will not claim to be acquainted with them all, but in my decade as a hardcore kid certain concerns have arisen, mostly due to the comparative lack of women partaking in the scene. Much like other American exports, hardcore has been appropriated by and molded to fit each environment. The European hardcore scenes are generally more politically inclined than their American counterparts, often with a strong left-leaning consciousness.[13]

1.2.1 Do it yourself

> We wanted to create our own culture because we didn't feel connected to anything. Here was the perfect opportunity for that. You were instantly devoted to others around you. This was the first time Rock Music was being written by, performed by, shows were being put on by, fanzines being put out, networks were being created – all by kids, completely outside of the mainstream music business, for reasons that had very little or nothing to do with economic incentive. It was a really important time in music history because music actually rose above business; as you know, music has always been a really insidious marriage of art and business.[14] – Ian MacKaye

In the early 80s, the counter cultural trend of the 60s and 70s ran into a brick wall. When Ronald Reagan won the presidency in 1980, he became what Blush refers to as "the galvanizing force of Hardcore – an enemy of the arts, minorities, women, gays, liberals, the homeless, the working man, the inner city, et cetera. All 'outsiders' could agree they hated

[11] Blush, 43.
[12] Emocore is short for emotional hardcore.
[13] While hardcore scenes in Washington DC, and Seattle are known for their strong political sentiments my focus in this thesis is the Northeast and California, where the scenes often are more value-oriented, speaking more of interpersonal relationships than international politics. For reference, see footnote 16.
[14] Ian MacKaye quoted in Blush, 21.

him."[15] The reactionary politics led by Reaganomics fueled the do-it-yourself (DIY) attitude in the hardcore scene. Here was an opportunity to create your own culture by doing everything yourself, a revolutionary concept for many. By making their own culture outside of the mainstream, hardcore kids could, as MacKaye put it, "rise above business."[16] They were creating a youth culture that seemingly was not controlled by the powers that be, but controlled by the kids themselves. This DIY attitude is a staple of the hardcore mentality. Kids put up their own shows, make their own merchandise, learn to play instruments by playing in bands and communicate through independently produced media, like fanzines and websites.

1.2.2 Punk vs. Hardcore

Punk and hardcore, while related, have distinctive differences. The punk scene was deeply anarchistic and often apolitical. The hardcore scene, especially in the beginning, was outspoken towards injustice, however vaguely they defined their political interest. According to sociologist William Tsitsos, the ideological distinctions between the two genres are exemplified through straight edge, a movement within the hardcore scene that rejected punk's self-destructive use of drugs and alcohol. Not only are the politics of the punk and hardcore scenes different; even more, hardcore kids do not look like punks. Hardcore scene members, in contrast to punks, had short hair or shaved heads, they wore basic clothing, in contrast to the embellished leather jackets and pants punks are identified with.[17] Blush notes that hardcore kids were set apart from similar-looking youth by "a vague political consciousness and a vigilante-like do-gooder streak."[18] One can imply that hardcore kids kept a punk political ideology, but added a humanitarian naïveté. Stacy Thompson sees the change in attire as a result of "the scene's desire to arrive at or create a non superficial identity that could emerge after the earlier punk scenes' investments in surfaces had been negated and transcended."[19] Hardcore kids rejected the superficial values of punk, the punk that had become adopted into mainstream fashion. Some saw hardcore as a

[15] Blush, 20.
[16] Ian MacKaye quoted in Blush, 21.
[17] William Tsitsos, "Rules of Rebellion: Slamdancing, Moshing, and the American Alternative Scene," *Popular Music*, vol. 18, no. 3 (Oct. 1999), 403.
[18] Blush, 13.

necessary progression from punk. In Blush's *American Hardcore*, Jimmy Gestapo of New York Hardcore (NYHC) band Murphy's Law underlines the practical qualities of hardcore:

> Everybody got beat down so much for being Punk Rock that they became Hardcore. We got beat into Hardcore. It was fun running around with spiked hair and bondage belt, but I got beat into shaving my head, putting boots on, and arming myself with a chain belt. I evolved my fashion statement into a function.[20]

1.2.3 Women in hardcore

During the 80s, the hardcore style evolved into a "jock"-look, usually referred to as "youth crew." Wearing baseball jackets, army pants or jeans, and sneakers, with a clean cut haircut, hardcore kids stood out from the leather jacket-wearing, mohawk-sporting punks. Women in the scene were no less rough, as Holly Ramos remarks in *American Hardcore*: "Hardcore defined the fashion of the time. We were Hardcore, we were severe. Cuteness had no part."[21] This thinking extends from what Thompson refers to as the first wave through the second wave of straight edge, where the dirty punk-style with plaid skirts, ripped-off shirts and boots were traded in for a more androgynous look. After the youth crew takeover, women in the scene often mirrored the men's look: army pants, band t-shirts and hooded sweatshirts. By downplaying their feminine sides, women in the hardcore scene not only protested mainstream society's demands to be feminine, they also appeared to blend in better in their social environment. While dressing androgynously felt like a relief for many girls, some also experienced the tomboy-persona as difficult. This is an issue many tomboys deal with growing up, as Judith Halberstam discusses in her book *Female Masculinity*. Being a girl in hardcore is rewarding, but difficult. Many complain that they are not seen as female by their male peers, yet they experience sexist attitudes from male friends. They are not girls, but can never be boys. The hardcore scene does incorporate women's liberation from sexism in its political ideology, but in many cases, this does not apply to real life. While the scene as a whole encourages active involvement via the DIY-thinking, women usually end up playing supporting roles rather than occupying center stage. At first glance, many hardcore scenes

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[19] Stacy Thompson, *Punk Productions: Unfinished Business* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 50.
[20] Blush, 25.
[21] Holly Ramos quoted in Blush, 46.

can appear out-right sexist. Theory and practice do not comply. I discuss this in greater detail in Chapter 3.

In the source material I have found, women are usually not taken seriously as participants in the scene. Books published on the hardcore scene have chapters devoted to women, but exclude them from the main discussion. In *American Hardcore*, Blush briefly comments on women in the early days of hardcore:

> Most Hardcore chicks rejected femininity. Their idea was the tomboy – in contrast to the big-haired bitches you'd find sucking dick backstage at Metal concerts. The truth is, few gorgeous women participated in Hardcore – many of them were nasty, ugly trolls. […] Why did Hardcore, allegedly open-minded and egalitarian, involve so few women? And is it politically correct to write women into the history, to pretend they had an active voice, when in truth they didn't?[22]

His analysis of women in the early American hardcore scene speaks straight to the necessity of exploring the gender politics of the hardcore scene, and echoes what Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber found in their look at women in subculture. Women's sexual attractiveness is their most interesting quality, both for participants in subcultures, and the writers who do work on them.[23] Blush also remarks that women in hardcore "appeared severe and unfriendly".[24] This comment on the female element in the hardcore scene is not unique, and women in hardcore, although few and far between, may respond that if they are unfriendly, their reasons for it are sound. Laura Albert of the NYHC scene comments that the role of women in the hardcore scene mirrors what many of the women interviewed for this thesis expressed:

> The role of women in the scene was as the sexual outlet or as something that hung on the arm and stood to the side. Women weren't welcome in the mosh pit; girls who did mosh – that was some weird tomboy thing. You weren't welcome in the bands. Girls didn't welcome each other, either; there was no camaraderie. The only thing you could really offer was sex. It pissed me off that I had to do it, but I was also grateful for it 'cause I got there in a good way. I wanted that power, too, so I learned to play the game. I did what I had to do. […] I was always aware of this very male sexual energy going on, and since I wasn't a boy, I couldn't be a part of it. I wanted something from these people but I knew I didn't want to actually have sex with them. I had this feeling that I would've gotten more if I was a boy.[25]

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[22] Blush, 35.
[23] Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, "Girls and Subculture" in *Feminism and Youth Culture*, Second Edition, 12 (Houndsmills and London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000).
[24] Blush, 13.
[25] Ibid., 34-35.

It is important to note that this quote appears in Blush's book, where he rules women in hardcore to be unattractive and useless, without problematizing Albert's experiences at all. This is, as mentioned, typical of much (but not all) literature on hardcore.

In her book, *Pretty In Punk*, sociologist Lauraine Leblanc comments extensively on how women involved in the punk scene felt exactly like Albert; they felt their sex hindered them from being fully accepted as punks in the same way guys in the scene were. This tomboy dilemma of not being accepted as either a girl or a boy is a catch-22 situation. To be accepted, you have to reject your femininity, as Blush claims hardcore girls do, but because you are a woman, you can never fully be a man in the eyes of your peers, and because you have rejected the idea of traditional femininity, you are not seen as a woman either. This problem is not exclusive to hardcore girls. Women involved in most traditionally male fields, be they personal or professional, are forced to make this choice in some form. By choosing to be a woman, or perform femininity, women have to accept that they will not be taken seriously as an equal. By choosing to reject femininity, they are dismissed to a no-man's-land, where they are neither male nor female.

1.2.4 Race and class

Cultural studies involving groups of people will inevitably include the race-class-gender categories. While this thesis is focused on women and gender roles, it is important to keep in mind that race and class also are important in the analysis of the American hardcore scene. The American hardcore scene is predominantly composed by men, and is, with few exceptions, a white middle-class phenomenon.[26] Hardcore began in Southern California, where the affluent middle-class were living their American Dream, and class marks another difference between punk and hardcore. While punk music took on the markings of a working class, or anti-working class culture, hardcore kids were, and are to a great extent, made up of middle-class kids. Blush remarks that: "The first HC bands came out of suburban LA beach towns, probably 'cause there they lived as close to The American Dream as you could get. Born of a doomed idea of middle-class utopia, Punk juiced their nihilism."[27] To some extent, this description seems to reference how many middle-class housewives felt in the 1950s.

[26] Wood, 7.
[27] Blush, 13.

When you have all you are told you want, what is missing? For many suburban kids, the middle-class was more of a strangle hold than a comfortable way of life.

These middle-class kids are predominantly white. Apart from the Bad Brains, and a handful of individuals, the hardcore scene is, in fact, exclusively white. Some have even went so far as remarking that to study the hardcore scene, one could use the concept of intersectionality inverted, meaning that the categories of race, class and gender are often used to study minorities that are in some way oppressed by established powers in society, namely those who are black, poor and female. When analyzing hardcore lyrics from California, Konstantin Butz found that hardcore youths employ "intersectional privilege."[28] They are white, rich and male.

1.3 Previous research

Youth culture studies, subcultural studies, youth studies, even the "umbrella" of social studies have heavily inspired this project. As American studies is an interdisciplinary field, I am blessed to have so much literature from which to draw on. The academic range I am working in is broad, thus it is important to briefly state what research this thesis springs from.[29]

1.3.1 The Chicago School and CCCS

Early subculture theory sprang from explaining what caused "deviant" behavior among youth. Theorists of the Chicago School saw subcultures as a way to normalize such behavior. Subcultures, in Becker's view, resulted in a circle of stigma, where societal reactions to subcultural behavior caused subcultural youths to act even more "deviantly."[30] However, Merton claimed that the deviance acted out by subcultures only served "to acquire

[28] Konstantin Butz, "Rereading American Hardcore: Intersectional Privilege and the Lyrics of Early Californian Hardcore Punk" *aspeers* no. 1 (2008): 133. http://aspeers.com/2008/butz.
[29] Subcultural theory encompasses much more than I have room for in this thesis. I attempt to draw a rough picture of the debates within the field that are relevant to this thesis.
[30] Andy Bennett and Keith Kahn-Harris, "Introduction" in *After Subculture: Critical Studies in Contemporary Youth Culture*, ed. Andy Bennett and Keith Kahn-Harris, 3-4 (Houndsmills and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004).

commonly-targeted social goals."[31] The idea that subcultures are deviant was further reassessed with Matza and Sykes' claim that not all subcultures are deviant. Many are social groupings with their own values, which may appear deviant to mainstream society, but do not disrupt society, and in fact offer alternative lifestyle choices. The Chicago School's inherent use of deviance as a marker of subcultures was further explored by The University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). The CCCS's theories are mostly structured around the relationship between class and ideology, and the form, or style of esthetics in these groupings. Basing their research on subcultural youth cultures like mods and skinheads in the working class, scholars such as Dick Hebdige and Phil Cohen described youth in opposition against mainstream society. Youth subcultures were seen to resist subordination by the mainstream by "semiotic guerilla warfare."[32] But the CCCS scholars claim that subcultures provide an imaginary solution to real class issues. Subcultures were mostly male, and celebrated masculinity as a 'solution' to a lack of upward mobility.[33] The resistance performed by youth studied by the CCCS only postponed their inevitable fate in the British working class. Hebdige even went as far as to say that their stylistic resistance was in the end meaningless because their fashion ideas were swallowed up into the fashion industry.[34]

1.3.2 CCCS critique

The CCCS has come under fire from many angles, mostly due to the importance they place on class, and their failure to incorporate women in their studies of youth. The CCCS saw subculture as working class youth's resistance to society, something Muggleton has pointed out rested on the essentialist premise that all subcultural youth are working-class, a "theoretical conjecture rather than proven fact."[35] The premise that subculture was a male phenomena also harvested criticism. According to Leblanc, feminist cultural researchers are opposed to the CCCS. First, because the main issue for the CCCS was class, while for feminists, the main issue is patriarchy. Second, because feminist researchers demonstrate

[31] Ibid., 4.
[32] Rupert Weinzierl and David Muggleton, "What is 'Post-subcultural Studies' Anyway?" in *The Post-subcultures Reader*, ed. David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl, 4 (New York: Berg, 2003).
[33] Cohen quoted in Ross Haenfler, *Straight Edge: clean-living youth, hardcore punk, and social change* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 133.
[34] Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 4.

resistance discursively, through women's own descriptions of their thoughts and actions, and are thus opposed to the CCCS who see resistance in style.[36] While to some extent pointing out how race and racism adds to British youth's class issues, the CCCS totally neglect women's experiences, painting them as sidekicks to men's subcultural resistance.[37]

Subcultures that did not fit the mold set by the CCCS were deemed inauthentic, and American hardcore would perhaps not be classified as a subculture by the CCCS because, according to Weinzierl and Muggleton, "musically oriented subcultures are unable to be contained within restrictive class-based homologies."[38] It has also been noted that the CCCS completely overlooked the possibility that subculture was, as Matza and Sykes originally claimed, an alternative choice for fun, rather than merely a class-based resistance. The CCCS, while a cornerstone for subcultural research, was also inherently British. Because they base their work on the class-based British society, transferring their theories to other locations can be difficult. American youth culture research has, unlike the CCCS, taken race and gender into consideration. The work of scholars such as Tricia Rose and Sarah Thornton moved subculture's seen goals from confirming social status to creating communities.[39]

1.3.3 Post-subculture

The multifaceted critique of the CCCS's work is not a result of its failing to produce good scholarship. Since the 1980s, youth culture has become increasingly fragmented.[40] This has produced a new approach to subcultural theory, referred to as post-subcultural theory, arguing that the concept of "subculture" has become redundant. The argument is that "subcultural divisions have broken down as the relationship between style, musical taste and identity has become progressively weaker and articulated more fluidly."[41] In other words, youth today pick style, music and ideas from a broad range of identity markers, as "global mainstreams and local substreams rearticulate and restructure in complex and uneven ways

[35] Ibid., 7.
[36] Lauraine Leblanc, *Pretty in Punk: Girls' Gender Resistance in a Boys' Subculture* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1999) , 16-17.
[37] Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture,* Second Edition (Houndsmills and London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000), 32.
[38] Weinzierl and Muggleton, 7.
[39] Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 10.
[40] Ibid., 11.
[41] Ibid.

to produce new, hybrid cultural constellations."[42] Youth no longer buy a packaged lifestyle, such as mod and skinhead. However, while they have a broader choice today, this choice often results in going through several packages more than picking the packages apart. In the further theorizing about this new fluidity of youth culture, several new terms have been created. The words tribes, or neo-tribes, lifestyles, and scenes have all been used to explain how youth express themselves. Of these, "scene" is my preferred term, and will be used extensively in this thesis, along with subculture and youth culture. By scene, I mean "local sites of cultural, particularly musical cultural, production and consumption."[43] However, as Straw argues, scenes are not only local; they are also trans-local, dealing with stylistic or musical association rather than face-to-face contact.[44] Thus, "scene" has two meanings, both used in this thesis, depending on whether it refers to a specific locality or a non-geographical association. While "scene" is used extensively in this thesis, like Hodkinson, my use of the word is not as a theoretical tool, but a non-academic way of describing the physical and associative space of American hardcore.[45]

1.3.4 Filling a void

The scholarly work about youth cultures is great, the work done on musical subcultures is grand, and that done on punk and its later derivations is large. Hardcore, as a relatively young and small subculture, has received quite a lot of attention, although mainly outside of academia. Much of the published work deals with straight edge, the group based within hardcore who abstain from drugs and alcohol. In the last few years, several works have been published on straight edge specifically; Robert T. Wood's and Ross Haenfler's books are notable examples of this.

As the published material on American hardcore grows larger, it is interesting that a scene which seemed so small has suddenly begun to take up a lot of room within the subculture field. Books have been published about specific bands, about the social experiment of touring, the music, the clothes, the religious movements, the big collections, the visual style

[42] Weinzierl and Muggleton, 3.
[43] Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 13.
[44] Ibid., 14.

hardcore represents and more. Hardcore is thus more than music, and "more than fashion," as the band DYS (Department of Youth Services) put it.

The books published on American punk and hardcore deal with cultural productions (Thompson's *Punk Productions*), individual geographical scenes (Mark Andersen and Mark Jenkin's *Dance of Days* on DC, George Hurchalla's *Going Underground* on LA), or specific scenes within the scene (Haenfler and Wood). Non-scholarly books about American hardcore are usually oral histories, comprised of interviews with known or lesser known figures in the scene. While much of the literature makes reference to the lack of women in the hardcore scene, few focus specifically on the worship of masculinity that exists, although Reddington points out that "elements of female punk subculture have been explored in the US."[46] While Haenfler devotes a whole chapter to straight edge women in particular, he is quite alone in placing such importance in textual analysis of the female experience of hardcore. McRobbie and Garber have pointed out that women are "absent from the classic subcultural ethnographic studies, the pop histories, the personal accounts and the journalistic surveys of the field."[47] So also in research on hardcore. Subculture scholars have to a great extent fallen in love with their subject,[48] while not recognizing the double standard apparent in many such environments, a double standard that is easily recognizable in hardcore punk, as Maria Raha points out. It is crucial to recognize that while maintaining a socially progressive stance outwardly, women are oppressed within the scene.[49] While this thesis does not attempt to clarify all women's experiences in hardcore, it is a different approach to an old issue many "outsiders" do not consider particularly relevant to the study of the subculture itself. Presentation, and in some cases idolizing the masculinity of certain subcultures is prevalent in many sociological classics, like those published by the CCCS.[50]

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[45] Paul Hodkinson, "The Goth Scene and (Sub)Cultural Substance" in *After Subculture – Critical Studies in Contemporary Youth Culture* ed. Andy Bennett and Keith Kahn-Harris, footnote 1, 140 (Houndsmill and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004).
[46] Reddington, 240.
[47] McRobbie and Garber, 12.
[48] Weinzierl and Muggleton, 4.
[49] Maria Raha, *Cinderella's Big Score: Women of the Punk and Indie Underground* (Emeryville:Seal Press, 2005), xvi.
[50] It is interesting to note that the books being written on hardcore and punk are by hardcore kids that have used their private lives as the basis for academic work. We write what we know, as I clarify further in section 1.4. In dealing with subcultures like hardcore, having a vested interest in the subculture may prove a great asset. Because youth cultures are difficult to penetrate and fully understand, scholar may find they misunderstand their subject. In my research I found several examples of this, most notably one dealing

What is clear, is that scholars like Haenfler, Thompson and Wood all have an explicit interest in gender and even feminism, while authors like Blush write hardcore histories dismissing women's experiences of it. According to LeBlanc: "Within the context of male focused and male generated subculture theory and research, girls who participate in youth subcultures have been described as passive, ancillary, sexual, and 'less resistant' than their male peers."[51] Blush asks if this is not merely because women did not take an active role in the hardcore scene. It is difficult to confirm or dismiss his insinuation, that women were not active contributors to the scene, because their stories have not been told. McRobbie and Garber claim that "female invisibility or partial visibility in youth subcultures takes on the qualities of the self-fulfilling prophecy," their contributions have not been counted in the same way men's have, which has "[reinforced] and [amplified] this image of the subculture as a male formation."[52] Thus, this thesis expands the history of American hardcore, to paint a broader picture of this seemingly all-male subculture.

1.4 Personal interest and position[53]

One of the slogans of the feminist movement is that "the personal is political." Personal experience informs the choices we make in our professional and personal lives. Thus, thesis topics are not developed in a vacuum. There are often close links between personal interests and the areas one chooses to study. My inspiration to write about women in American hardcore and their experiences stems from personal experience. In my mid-teenage years I landed in the middle of a Norwegian hardcore scene, a scene which at the time yielded strong convictions and great enthusiasm. Encountering hardcore at an age where one searches for meaning in the world is a gratifying experience. It is an environment of acceptance outside of what many refer to as "mainstream society." Within the basement

specifically with American hardcore. Susan Willis' article "Hardcore: Subculture American Style" presents hardcore as a feminized youth culture where participants wear eighty percent black clothing and listen to the band "Bad Brain." Perhaps the most vexing part of her article is where she discusses the existence of black skinheads. While skinheads and punks co-exist with hardcore kids in many scenes, it is usually known that skinhead culture is not essentially neo-nazi, as Willis sees it. In fact, the skinhead movement was initially anti-racist. Such presumptions not only harm the image of the subcultures, they harm cultural research.

[51] Leblanc, 67.

[52] McRobbie and Garber, 15.

[53] Angela McRobbie states that: "[A feminist] will at least announce her interest in, and commitment to, her subject in an introduction or foreword." (McRobbie, 28)

walls of the hardcore scene young people are encouraged to express their frustrations, strengthen their integrity by sticking to their convictions and reaching a greater level of enlightenment. It was my first introduction to alternative ideology, non-Western religion and perhaps most tellingly, it was where I first met youth that were intellectually inclined on a personal level. These were not the kids who merely excelled in school, these were people who sought knowledge for themselves. My years in the hardcore scene have helped mold me into the person I am today, and I credit much of my enthusiasm about and compassion for others to the values I was presented with in the hardcore scene. Needless to say, it is not all rose petals. As I have matured and gained a broader perspective, I see the thorns more clearly. As a woman, I have encountered the very male mindset of hardcore. My involvement in the hardcore scene in Norway, as well as internationally, no doubt influences my analysis of it. In working on this thesis, I have become very aware of my preconceptions about the scene. One of the reasons I have chosen to use interviews as a main source is exactly this. I wanted to explore the experiences of others, not only present my story. But as hardcore is a part of who I am, my story inevitably becomes a part of the thesis. I have been careful to use sources to back up my claims because of this.

1.5 Theoretical framework

1.5.1 American hardcore as a subculture

I maintain that American hardcore is a subculture. As mentioned, a CCCS approach to subculture may deny this. While hardcore may not fulfill all the terms of the CCCS, being a musically based subculture, hardcore kids usually have a strong bond to their subculture. Hardcore is an identity marker for youth that sets them apart from their peers. The post-subcultural view of subcultures having splintered into a "streetstyle themepark,"[54] where youth can pick and choose what elements they want, does not apply. Hardcore kids most often do not adhere to other music genres and styles. Thus, in my view, it is necessary to use several competing theories. American hardcore is traditional and stylistically conservative. Like goths studied by Paul Hodkinson, kids in the hardcore scene display "'traditional'

[54] Polhemus in Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 11.

notions of stylistic unity and cohesion that have consistently been associated with the notion of subculture."[55] While members are middle-class, they use their own cultural productions to resist mainstream values, however not only against classism or racism, but also against sexism. According to Leblanc, women often take part in hardcore and punk scenes to "seek refuge from mainstream gender norms."[56] Opposite to the CCCS's assumption that subcultures employed a "media-free space,"[57] hardcore kids today use new media, specifically the Internet to connect and solidify their scene as different from punks, goths or other seemingly related subcultures.[58] This online communication serves to "'consolidate and strengthen' the boundaries that both internally define this subculture and render it distinct from other formations."[59] A poignant critique of the CCCS is their focus on age. As Bennett and Kahn-Harris point out, subculture speaks to youth of all ages, as subcultures present ideologies that become lifestyles. As youth grow up, and remain attached to the same style, music and ideas they were exposed to early in life, they "[retain] a sense of 'youthfulness' even as they approach middle-age."[60] American hardcore presents exactly such a situation. All of my informants are adults who still feel a strong attachment to the lifestyle they chose in their teens. Because American hardcore does not comply with any formulaic structure of "subculture" or indeed neo-tribe, I use Hodkinson's idea that, like the goth scene, hardcore has "relatively high levels of consistent distinctiveness, identity, commitment and autonomy" which prompt me to use "a reworked notion of subculture."[61] This other concept of subculture is based on focus on what Hodkinson calls "cultural substance," which is primarily identified "through evidence of group distinctiveness, identity, commitment and autonomy."[62] American hardcore has all these elements, shown in section 1.2 and Chapters 2 and 3.

[55] Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 17.
[56] Leblanc, 20.
[57] Weinzierl and Muggleton, 8.
[58] This argument stems from Paul Hodkinson's study on internet use among goths in Paul Hodkinson, "'Net.Goth': Internet Communication and (Sub)Cultural Boundaries" in *The Post-Subcultures Reader,* ed. David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003).
[59] Weinzierl and Muggleton on Hodkinson, 9.
[60] Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 11.
[61] Hodkinson, "The Goth Scene and (Sub)Cultural Substance", 147.
[62] Ibid., 136.

1.5.2 The Evidence of Experience

Blush's *American Hardcore* and Beth Lahickey's *All Ages* both introduce experience through the subjects' own memories. While Lahickey's book reproduces the interviews, Blush uses interviews to tell the story of American hardcore. Scene historians like Lahickey and Blush mostly use oral histories for their accounts. Adhering to the DIY attitude of American hardcore, the participants get to tell their own stories, like they would in self-produced fanzines. Using oral histories presents a series of challenges, because a person's experience never tells their whole story.

Joan W. Scott's work on historical evidence and the use of experience in historical research is the basis of my approach to a gendered story of hardcore. As she details in her article "The Evidence of Experience," we cannot take personal experience at face value. Experience is produced from a context, and thus we must look at the context before we can infer anything from experience-based evidence. Scott's claim is that historians of difference, who seek to document histories that have been overlooked, view "seeing as the origin of knowing."[63] Because one was present, one's experience can be used as evidence. This approach to experience falls in with how cultural historians of punk and hardcore often present their stories. They analyze cultural productions and events by recounting the oral histories of the participants. While this approach to historical practice has resulted in many accounts of events that would not have been heard, none of the countless accounts of any event can ever be completely true.[64] Scott claims that the use of "experience as uncontestable evidence and as an originary point of explanation […] weakens the critical thrust of histories of difference."[65] By overlooking the context experience is formed by, one reduces the value of the account to simply state how it differs from other accounts of the same event. As Scott puts it; "The evidence of experience then becomes evidence for the fact of difference."[66] By giving voice to the experiences of "others," meaning those who are attributed to own characteristics that distinguish them "from some presumed (and usually unstated) norm,"[67] one exposes difference. But simply exposing these differences does not explain why these

[63] Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience" *Critical Inquiry* vol. 17, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 776.
[64] Ibid., 776.
[65] Ibid., 777.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., 773.

differences exist. In order to achieve an understanding of the experience of the other, the goal of this thesis, the subject's experience must be contextualized. Thus, according to Scott, "we need to attend to the historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences."[68] In this thesis I use scholarly observations and analysis of lyrics, images and physical activity in order to set the stage for my subjects' accounts. By discussing the values and ideas these women are, or were, surrounded by, their stories become an extension of the story of American hardcore, rather than a sidelined special interest.

1.6 Research methodology

Finding the right methodology for this thesis has at times been confusing. Beginning with American Studies' scholars, I found much lacking in the direct approach I needed, in explaining youth, and female experience in a larger context. Thus I looked outside of the field, realizing this project is more than American Studies. It is sociology, cultural studies, women's studies, musicology, and literary analysis. Instead of using American Studies scholars, George Lipsitz contends that we rather use classic theorists such as Foucault, Lacan, Derrida and others to understand the complexities of American society.[69] While searching for the right method to use in this thesis, I have come to the same conclusion, reflected in my choice of theorists in section 1.5. Henry Nash Smith's view in 1957 was that we should "conceive of American Studies as a collaboration among men working from within existing academic disciplines but attempting to widen the boundaries imposed by conventional methods of inquiry."[70] We are no longer only men, however. Because cultural landscapes have been drawn for, and by men, I have chosen to focus on American women. Early American Studies scholars were right in calling for a multifaceted methodology, but such a method has yet to be developed, and thus, as a student and researcher in the field, I will draw from several other academic fields, using not only literary analysis and sociological data, but seeking anthropological understanding and using a feminist approach that puts emphasis on individual experience.

[68] Ibid., 779.

This thesis is based on qualitative research. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonne S. Lincoln's definition of qualitative research is "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices […] turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self."[71] The interdisciplinary nature of American studies makes qualitative research fitting. Taking into account many different sources in order to provide an understanding of the hardcore scene is crucial. In the tradition of qualitative research as a means to make parts of the world "visible," my thesis explores a different version of American hardcore than is already known. While scholars such as Haenfler and Ross have focused specifically on straight edge, I view the scene as a larger community, where the use of drugs and alcohol comes second to the importance of the communal societal aspect of hardcore. Like Vidich and Lyman, I see qualitative research as a means to "understand the 'other'," [72] in this case, the other being women in American hardcore.

The choice to do interviews was a turning point in my work. After looking at dozens of fanzines, I realized that using fanzines as my main source would lead to a thesis based in textual analysis. This is not what I wanted, and thus I thought doing interviews directly with women in American hardcore would give me the information I was looking for, that is, their experiences and thoughts about their own place in the scene. Doing interviews would also allow my subjects to reflect on the questions, rather than me extracting answers through textual analysis.

My interview guide (included in the appendix) was heavily influenced by Leblanc, as I saw my intentions reflected her work on punk girls. I did add several other questions, and cut some others. During the interview process, I also added several more questions. Before starting, I practiced the questions on my own friends, women in the Norwegian hardcore scene, in order to see if they worked well.

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[69] George Lipsitz, "Listening to Learn and Learning to Listen: Popular culture, Cultural Theory, and American Studies" *American Quarterly* no. 42 (1990): 620.
[70] Henry Nash Smith, "Can "American Studies" Develop a Method?" *American Quarterly* (1957): 207.
[71] Norman K. Denzin and Yvonne S. Lincoln, "The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research" in *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* Second Edition, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonne S. Lincoln, 9 (Thousand Oaks and London: Sage Publications, 2000).
[72] Vidich and Lyman in Denzin and Lincoln, 2.

The interviews were conducted from May 2007 until March 2009. Originally I intended to do all interviews face-to-face, because I presumed this would add another observatory angle to their stories. I spent two weeks in New York, New Jersey and Philadelphia in May 2007 to do interviews. Before my trip, I had contacted several women, and made a few appointments, other than that I assumed it would be easier to get in touch with more informants through the so-called "snowball"-method: my informants would introduce me, or tell me about other women I could interview. Unfortunately, during my research-stay, I only had the opportunity to do one face-to-face interview. Thus, I was forced to employ another strategy. In many circumstances, doing interviews over email would take a lot away from the responses, because subjects may give more detailed answers in a conversation than in a stricter question and answer-survey. In order to combat this, I sent back follow-up questions when needed. Also, the hardcore scene has a strong tradition of expression through writing. Most of the women I talked to have a college background, and are very comfortable with communicating through writing. The large production of fanzines in the hardcore scene also shows how expressing oneself textually is common in the scene, and it is one of the things hardcore kids learn to do, previously through letters, today through email, chat rooms and message boards on the Internet. Hodkinson's goths experienced that "the onset of the Internet served to consolidate and strengthen [the goth scene's] subcultural boundaries."[73] This is also the case for American hardcore. Through the constant communication that the Internet offers, hardcore kids are more connected across geographical boundaries now than before. While the subculture has a long tradition of mail order and pen pals across the globe, the instant communication through the Internet has naturally made it easier to connect with other participants in the scene. Although my initial plan was to gather most of my information through interviews, the process demanded I find other avenues for data collection. All in all I see experience as more than the words people express. What they have been exposed to, and what they have grown to be a part of, is also crucial.

[73] Hodkinson, "Net.Goth," 286.

1.7 Chapter overview

This thesis is made up of three chapters, each building off of the last. Chapter 1 is a general introduction to the subject matter, giving a brief history of American hardcore and the main themes in the thesis, such as the DIY ethic, how hardcore relates to punk, the status of women in hardcore, and the social categories participants in the hardcore scene belong to. In addition, this chapter presents what research has been done on subculture that is relevant to the thesis, as well as pointing out what is lacking in previous work, making a place for the thesis itself in a scholarly context. Also, the theoretical framework for the thesis is explained, as well as a description of the methodology used.

In his research on straight edge youth, Robert T. Wood used a triangulated approach to data collection. His reasoning resounds with my own thoughts on data collection: "different cultural artifacts, such as music, symbols, and styles, may communicate divergent or partial meanings of straightedge. Thus my examination of straightedge draws upon data collected from a variety of sources, each providing a slightly different window of insight."[74] While an introduction to American hardcore is given in this chapter, Chapter 2 explores the subculture further, creating the basis for examining experience Scott calls for. In Chapter 2, then, various forms of cultural productions are examined, song lyrics, album covers and physical activity, i.e. dancing, are analyzed to present the reader with an insight into the hardcore scene's ideals and values in a gendered context. The lyrical and pictorial source material is grouped together with an analysis of dancing in the hardcore scene, in order to explain some of the possible experiences the women interviewed account for in Chapter 3, thus remaining true to Scott's idea that structures precede experience. The collection of images and lyrics presented in Chapter 2 is a result of my own background knowledge and what scholars like Haenfler and Ross have emphasized. It is important to note that the collection is subjective, and as McRobbie points out: "representations are interpretations."[75] I have attempted to choose examples that show the breadth of themes in American hardcore, but my own interests in the subject have naturally influenced the collection. Thus, it is an interpretation as well as a representation of themes in American hardcore.

[74] Wood, 12.
[75] McRobbie, 125.

Furthermore, Chapter 3 focuses on my informants' accounts of their experiences in the American hardcore scene. Life history narratives investigate the processes of agency and consciousness among women.[76] Complementing the analysis of cultural productions in Chapter 2 with women's own voices adds a dimension of depth to the thesis. By sorting their experiences by themes, quotes from the interviews are linked to the themes presented in previous chapters. The aim of the final chapter is to see how the ideas that surround women in hardcore, presented in Chapter 2, fit with what place women see themselves as having in the scene, how they perceive the environment they are in, how they are greeted, what image is portrayed of them within the scene, and how this fits with their view of themselves.

[76] C. Lynn Carr, "Tomboy Resistance and Conformity: Agency in Social Psychological Gender Theory" *Gender and Society* vol. 12, no. 5 (Oct. 1998): 528.

2. Representations of Gender

To be feminine is to appear weak, futile, docile. – Simone de Beauvoir[77]

Women were an integral part of the early American punk scene. But as hardcore evolved out of punk, women disappeared, and their voices no longer influenced the scene environment. The, to some extent, androgynous and gender-bending style of punk and early hardcore became sexually conservative. The male majority were more comfortable with women who embraced de Beauvoir's notion of femininity. Women were again given a passive supporting role. By using lyrics, images and dancing, mostly from the mid-1980s, this chapter will examine ways in which gender is represented in the hardcore scene and what space women are allowed into, the idea being that the view of gender in the scene heavily influences how women experience it.

2.1 A gendered scene

American hardcore is an inherently gendered subculture. It is frequently described as masculine, falling in line with most subcultures that have been subjected to scholarly assessment. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, men by far outnumber women. Haenfler estimated in his book, *Straight Edge: Clean-Living Youth, Hardcore Punk, And Social Change*, that there are three men for every woman in the straight edge scene.[78] There are numerous explanations for this that I will discuss further in Chapter 3. While maintaining the idea that they are a part of an opposition to mainstream norms and ideas, subcultural youths often reinforce the same conventions as the society they oppose. This is true of punks as well as hardcore kids, as Leblanc and Haenfler have commented. And it is particularly true of gender codes. Theory and practice do not comply. Leblanc comments that "[i]n theory, punks oppose the norms and values of mainstream culture. In practice, punks adopt many of the gender codes and conventions of mainstream adolescent culture." While hardcore kids speak of fighting oppression of all types, they are exposed to, and express, at

[77] Simone de Beauvoir quoted in Leblanc, 11.
[78] Haenfler, 104.

times, opinions that may paint them as prejudiced and even misogynistic.[79] Their views on gender often echo the words of Simone de Beauvoir above. Women are not deemed a productive asset in the scene.

In accordance with Joan W. Scott's ideas on using experience as empirical data, as explained in Chapter 1, I have chosen to use multiple sources for the basis of my thesis. While the interviews give voice to some of the women in American hardcore, it is crucial to put their experiences in context with their surroundings. Thus, this chapter will look at the cultural products produced by the hardcore scene, and attempt to paint a picture of the discourse on relationships and gender, and specifically on women within the scene. Through examples of lyrics, artwork, and physical appearance and activity, it is my goal that a broader image of the many aspects of American hardcore will emerge.

2.2 The multiple faces of hardcore

The American hardcore scene originally had strong political convictions to base their rebellion on. Many participants were marginalized both economically and socially and used the hardcore scene as a safe haven in which they could act out their anger against mainstream culture and society. The commitment to politics in hardcore varies from person to person, and scene to scene, but seems to have become a trend that comes and goes in waves, from Minor Threat's lyrics on everything from gender to substance abuse and race to Shelter's religious fancies and Earth Crisis' focus on veganism and animal cruelty. For hardcore bands with such a topical approach, some issues are widely agreed upon; vegetarianism/veganism[80] and the evils of substance abuse, epitomized in the straight edge subculture that started within the American hardcore scene. These issues are widely acknowledged, and thoroughly researched in the works of a.o. Wood and Haenfler, who

[79] Leblanc, 110.
[80] Many hardcore kids see vegetarianism and veganism as a part of their personal ideology. This has many causes, some tie vegetarianism to a drug-free lifestyle, where one aims to control ones body, others associate the ideals of friendship and unity to all living things. The idea of living cruelty-free was brought to the scene through bands like Minor Threat and Youth of Today. They, and many other bands, have songs dealing specifically with vegetarianism. Vegetarianism is also a staple of the hinduism, which influenced the hardcore scene greatly during the early 1990s, through its association with the Hare Krishna movement.

have both written books focusing exclusively on straight edge.[81] Although there are strands of feminism today, such as eco-feminism, that consider vegetarianism central to their cause, the issues hardcore kids are faced with mostly do not concern gender. In the hardening of the music scene, with hardcore becoming a more masculine version of punk, the social issues punk bands often fronted, like gender equality, got lost along the way. As slamdancing and moshing took over the softer punk pogo and lyrical content focused more on "brotherhood" than opposing discriminatory mainstream ideals, women were squeezed out of the physical environment both on, and in front of the stage.

2.3 Lyrics

Because there are thousands of songs to choose from, any attempt to read hardcore lyrics must begin with a reflection on the selection itself. Many of the songs I have chosen are a part of what I will refer to as the classic canon of American hardcore. Mostly written in the 1980s, they provide inspiration for current bands, and are usually considered to be must-haves in any hardcore record collection. However, some exceptions from the canon have been made, in order to illustrate the range of topics in hardcore lyrics. Hardcore is today many scenes, banded together mostly through the musical category "hardcore," described in section 1.2.1. The many sub- and sister genres like krishnacore, emocore and so on have given the American hardcore scene a broad musical range, but have also made the hardcore subculture more difficult to pin down. Kids will constantly debate what is or is not hardcore, who is or is not real, and who has sold out, as in most other youth cultures. This is another requirement for my selection. The songs chosen for this thesis must undoubtedly be hardcore songs. Notably, many of the bands are straight edge bands, a movement which had its initial beginning in the mid-1980s, and in many ways, has been the core of hardcore, so to speak.

Hardcore lyrics are usually straight forward and repetitive, made to sing along with, with short verses, and "chantable" choruses. As most hardcore songs are short, many just over one minute long, lyrics must be concise. The lyrics are easy to understand and learn, and while they may be easily understood, they deserve close reading. Hardcore lyrics are the

[81] The ideas presented by Haenfler and Wood deal specifically with straight edge youth. As the American hardcore scene is closely knit with the straight edge scene, so much so that separating them is almost

basis of the scene's ideologies. When straight edge emerged, it was through the words of Ian MacKaye and the Washington DC-band Minor Threat. Their song "Straight Edge" named a phenomenon that came to be of great importance for thousands of youth. As Wood mentions in *Straightedge Youth – Complexity and Contradictions of a Subculture*, "lyrics became part of a broader frame of reference that constrains or impacts […] the identities of all people who consider themselves sxe."[82] In other words, hardcore lyrics became identity markers for those involved in the scene. Through lyrics, hardcore kids are introduced to the values and ideals that are important in the scene.

2.3.1 Lyrics about brotherhood

It has been tempting only to choose songs mentioning women outright, songs like Warzone's "She Fucks For Drugs" from the 1984 demo, that strictly consists of the words "she fucks for drugs" repeated throughout the 46 second short song. Songs like this and others could easily make a case that hardcore is misogynistic. However, this is naturally not the full truth. More to the point, most hardcore lyrics do not mention women at all. One may derive from this that women's presence in the scene is embraced to the point where singling them out is not necessary. Hardcore songs express raw emotion. And they are to some extent genderless, if not for the overarching theme of friendship, expressed through "brotherhood." Bonds of friendship are made between men. Thus, fittingly, my first choice is the DYS song "Brotherhood":

Best years of your life
You know it's true
You're like a brother to me
I'm like one to you
We've had some great times
And despite the bad
I know that these years
Are the best that I've ever had
Brotherhood
Brotherhood
Brotherhood
True 'til death
Beyond the bullshit politics
Or the gossip on the scene
We're like brothers deep down

impossible, for this thesis I choose to regard them as relevant for the hardcore scene as a whole.
[82] Wood, 41.

Clowning around or thrashing mean
Best years of our life
We know it's true
The Boston Brotherhood
Is me and you
Brotherhood
Brotherhood
Brotherhood
True 'til death[83]

The repetitive chanting of the word "brotherhood" underscores that, as mentioned, one of the main themes in hardcore music is interpersonal relationships. According to Haenfler, "brotherhood" is a core foundation in the hardcore scene.[84] Using the term "brother" is a sign of affection among hardcore kids, and although women in the scene have to some extent embraced "sisterhood," exemplified through the website xsisterhoodx.com, the difference marked by such a terminology is notable. Because the lyrics only refer to male friendship, women are excluded. Men are assumed to be both the listener and the participant. The lyrics portray a scene that consists of men who relate to each other through familial bonds, becoming seemingly as close as family. The emphasized use of a gendered word like "brother," as opposed to "friend," marks the presumed audience as male. Women are nonexistent; they are the other.

While "Brotherhood" celebrates male friendship, other songs express frustrations with former friends. In his book *Punk Productions*, Thompson makes an analysis that summarizes the focus on male bonding in hardcore lyrics: "[T]he male singer/narrator recounts the story of a close friendship, almost always with another male, and expresses his anger and disappointment with that male for betraying him."[85] This is one of the classic tales of the hardcore scene, specifically relating to straight edge. If a straight edge kid starts using alcohol or drugs, they are referred to as "sellouts," "wimps," "drop-outs" etc. Selling out often means you let your friends down, at times resulting in the end of friendships. An example of this is the Youth of Today (YOT) song "Stabbed In The Back":

We were brothers, you and me
Loyal to our hardcore scene
Our thoughts, our aims,
our goals were true

[83] DYS, "Brotherhood" *Brotherhood*, Boston: Xclaim Records, 1983. LP.
[84] Haenfler, 126.
[85] Thompson, 45.

Then something happened to you
You changed
I remember all the things you said
Shit you said!
I guess it was a just a bunch of fucking lies
Fucking lies!
Stabbed us all in the back
Right in the back!
Don't you dare look me in the eyes!
All we stood for, all our dreams
you've forgotten what they mean
I tell you this
My thoughts are real
and I'll never change
the way I feel![86]

The occurrence of "brotherhood" yet again is, as mentioned, typical for the language used within the scene. But the brothers in the YOT song are no longer family. YOT, as a straight edge band, make an example out of people who no longer fall into line with the accepted norms. The male bonding going on in the hardcore scene bears witness of an almost militant environment, as Haenfler, the important values being strength, honor and discipline.[87] The message expressed in these lyrics is harsh and unapologetic. As California-band Strife put it, "there is only one truth."[88] The rules must be followed, or you are no longer "true" to the scene. However, the loss of friendship is embraced as traumatic, as the scene depends on the personal relationships among the kids. The fear of losing friends to outside influences that do not correspond with the self-imposed rules or ideas of the group, is sometimes used as a call for unity. But maybe not in YOT's case. Thompson uses "Stabbed In The Back" in his book *Punk Productions*, and describes the song's message as not so much uniting among those who are "still true," but expressing anxiety about losing a friend.[89] Ray Cappo, singer of YOT's message in the song, addressed to his former friend is brutal. But his main frustration is directed at his fear of his own ideals losing their power. "All we stood for, all our dreams / you've forgotten what they mean / I tell you this / My thoughts are real /and I'll never change / the way I feel!" emphasizes the importance of these ideals. The absoluteness of his claim that he will never change the way he feels, is common, not only for hardcore kids, but for youth in general.

[86] Youth of Today, "Stabbed in the Back" *Break Down The Walls*, New Haven: Revelation Records, 1986. LP.
[87] Haenfler, 126.
[88] Strife, "Through and Through" *One Truth*, Chicago: Victory Records, 1994. LP.
[89] Thompson, 54.

2.3.2 Lyrics about women

Leblanc named a section in her book *Pretty in Punk* "'Punk's Not Dead – It Just Smells That Way': Punk to Hardcore, with Girls on the Side". This simply explains what happened to women involved in the American punk scene when hardcore emerged. Women were, as mentioned, pushed aside to make room for an increasing proto-masculinity that took over the physical and mental space of the scene. They did not only disappear from the stage and the audience, they were not included as equals in lyrics. Women are mentioned only when specifically spoken of. Brotherhood took precedence over the other of women. Haenfler claims that straight edge youth "[negotiated] a personal way of being that pushed progressive values while maintaining aspects of hegemonic masculinity."[90] I see this as relevant to the hardcore scene as a whole; hardcore kids are both progressive and socially conservative at the same time, much like the youths studied by Cohen and Hebdige.

In the early 1980s American punk and hardcore scenes, women eagerly took part. But as hardcore drew away from punk, women in many cases disappeared, and their issues went with them. What was left of references to women was often harsh and drenched with bitterness. Women's withdrawal from the scene was perhaps aided by songs such as In Your Face's (IYF) "Henpecked":

When you first met her
She was sweet, she was kind
Then she took over,
took control of your mind
Things were much better but now
they've changed, and now you deny
that you've been deranged
She's not even pretty, what were
you thinking, were you all there
man, or had you been drinking?
She's as big as a horse,
She's as fat as a cow
Sometimes I wonder
I just wonder how.
Your race is run you're hen pecked
You'll work all day until you get
old, just to keep her happy with
silver and gold, no ring on her
finger but the marriage is still
true, she's in love with the

[90] Haenfler, 131.

comfort the bond and not you
She acts like a fool when she's talk-
ing to me, she even has
trouble just counting to three
She's got some attitude boy, the way
that she thinks, and I'd rather not
mention the way that she stinks[91]

While humorous, IYF manages to enforce all the stereotypes about women in one song. Not only do women have ulterior motives in their relationships with men, seeking only economic comfort ("You'll work all day until you get old, just to keep her happy with silver and gold, no ring on her finger but the marriage is still true, she's in love with the comfort the bond and not you"), they are dangerous to men's integrity. Perhaps most importantly, the song describes a jealousy towards women, who, when in relationships with men, are considered to steal men away from their friends ("Then she took over, took control of your mind / Things were much better but now they've changed, and now you deny that you've been deranged"). Women are a threat to male friendship and to the individual's integrity.

While IYF is not among the most famous of the classic "old-school" hardcore bands, Alone In A Crowd is. Their only release, a self-titled 7-inch, is well-known. The song "Who You Know" expresses many of the frustrations felt towards people coming into the scene, not respecting the established values. And it does so with the use of derogatory slang for women.

You're a fucking groupie
You're in it for the social scene
You know you don't give a shit
About what the message really means
You don't care about the music
You don't care about the words we say
Who the fuck do you think you are
Anyway?
You walk around like some fucking slut
You're getting me enraged
'Cause you'll crawl up anyone's ass
Just to be on the fucking stage
It's not who you are, it's who you know
Who the fuck are you trying to fool
If you're looking for status
Then go back to your fucking high school![92]

[91] In Your Face, "Henpecked" *The Grub*, Long Island: Common Cause records, 1989. EP.
[92] Alone In A Crowd, "Who You Know" *Alone In A Crowd*, Newport: Flux Records, 1989. EP.

The song uses "groupie" and "slut," common derogatory slang for women. Language, as mentioned in Chapter 1, is often used as a marker of group affiliation. Within this context, the words can refer to both women and men, but the use of them builds up preconceived notions about the connection between women's value and their sexual potential. Undermining a woman's integrity for sexual reasons also reinforces the bonds of brotherhood within the scene. Moreover, "Who You Know" introduces an image of women as gold-diggers who only enter the hardcore scene in order to meet men. These women, often referred to as "coat racks," have no respect or vested interest in hardcore. They treat the hardcore scene as any social hierarchy, where knowing the right people will get you ahead. The hatred of high-school in the lyrics connects with the opposition to such social hierarchies, as high-school is viewed as both immature and without substance.

At Alone In A Crowd's only live appearance, November 25, 1988 at The Anthrax in Norwalk, Connecticut[93] (05:55 – 06:58), "Who You Know" is introduced like this:

> This next song goes out to specific type of person that comes into this scene, it's a type of girl that thinks that they can find some kind of respect and status by knowing people who are influential in the scene. Who will stoop to any level just to be fucking respected. You cannot be respected if you are not a human being. This song is not about the people who are real, it's about the people who are fake. And this song is about the people who think it's not who you are, it's who you know.[94]

In the eyes of the band, women may be deemed non-human, non-authentic, if they come into the scene because of any social reason, like that of having a boyfriend in the scene.[95] The act of identifying social climbing in the scene with gender marks many, if not all women present suspect. Women are thus forced to prove their reason for being involved in hardcore in a totally different way than men. They are accused as inauthentic from the very beginning.

While girlfriends seem to pose a threat to the male brotherhood in the scene, relationships are formed and dissolved there as in mainstream society. The personal aspects of relationships as a theme for a song does make it hard to draw wide connotations for the hardcore scene as a whole, but in the Gorilla Biscuits song "Slut," some broader themes are touched upon:

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[93] Beth Lahickey, *All Ages – Reflections on Straight Edge* (Huntington Beach: Revelation Books, 1997), 83.
[94] Alone In A Crowd, *Live at The Anthrax in Norwalk, Connecticut* November 25, 1988. Bootleg recording.
[95] "Who You Know" is rumoured to be about a specific woman involved in the hardcore scene at the time, who's conduct was so offensive to her peers at the time that she is still referred to in what I would refer to as

1-2-3 It's easy to see you and me were never meant to be
Cheated on you, yeah you made me blue
With what we had, we'll be through
You all wanna make me captain of the football team
Say always do my best
I think you're scared, it never mattered what you said
I wish I would've never met that slut
You're a slut
You're a slut[96]

This Gorilla Biscuits song is often related not to a male-female relationship, but a male friendship. However, lyrics exist on their own, as well as in context with the writer. The song writer's intentions are not always the most important concern when reading song lyrics to decipher attitudes about gender roles and sex. Whether or not CIV wrote the song "Slut" about a woman or a man is in this context irrelevant. The repetitive use of the word "slut" forges it to a representation of women. It may even be said that the song supports adultery, as the protagonist admits he cheated one the grounds that his partner made him "blue." The interesting aspect of this lyric in this context is how women are referred to with derogatory language when they behave in any unpleasing manner.

Despite all this seeming hatred and fear of women, hardcore, as previously mentioned, does not have a misogynistic agenda. Hardcore embodies many different ideas, some sides to it may be negative towards women, but others speak out against this very idea. Hardcore is not just one thing. While songs such as "Who You Know" and "Henpecked" present a view of women as intruders and violators of a sacred brotherhood, there are other songs that tell other stories about women. A song many connect with women in hardcore is 7 Seconds' song "Not Just Boys' Fun." It is a direct attack on the view of women presented in the songs above. 7 Seconds is one of the hardcore bands that have always spread a positive empowering message to kids. "Not Just Boys' Fun" is often covered by contemporary bands, and at times, works as a shield against criticism of sexism in the scene. It is not hard to understand why.

Man you've gotta problem, who made you fuckin' king
A macho pig with nothing in your head.
No girls around you, their place is not at gigs,
Don't want 'em on the dance floor 'cos they're weak.

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hardcore mythology. This specific person is, however, not the subject of my analysis, and because the song is so well known today I read its message to be greater than the harassment of one individual.

[96] Gorilla Biscuits, "GM2 1 (Slut)" *Gorilla Biscuits*, New Haven: Revelation Records, 1988. EP.

A woman's place, the kitchen, on her back,
It's time to change that attitude, and quick.

Showing us your phobias, you're scared to see 'em think,
You'd rather dress 'em up in pretty lace,
All nice and colored pink.
You feel so fucking threatened,
When they stand out in front,
A stupid, passive piece of meat is all you really want
But it's:
Not just boys' fun

There's girls who put out fanzines, others put on shows,
Yet they're not allowed to get out on the floor.
Some make the music, well that you can accept.
Hell, maybe live you'll get some tits and ass
You fucking moron, your brains have run amuck,
A girl's only lot in life is not to fuck![97]

7 Seconds, a self-identified "positive" hardcore band, points out here the ways in which they see how women are stereotyped within the scene, not as people, but as pieces of "meat" that have no place in the scene other than to provide sex. Instead of embracing or ignoring these ideas, the lyrics speak out against such behavior, instead degrading those who feel this way, claiming they "feel threatened" and are "morons." The fact that such a song exists only underscores the importance of a gender-based study of the predominantly masculine worlds of subculture. The lyrics are clearly oppositional, and thus they are created to oppose against something very real in the scene. The song presents a message that in itself legitimizes demeaning behavior towards women, meaning it presents the status quo. While opposing it, 7 Seconds accepts that such behavior is rampant in the scene. The discourse on gender presented in the song is described as a normative one; this is how women are viewed in the scene in general. Songs like "Not Just Boys' Fun" can be described as exceptions that define the rule. Women are present, but they are not presentable.

2.3.3 Lyrics about sex

As shown, women were often referred to with derogatory slang in early hardcore lyrics. Hardcore attempts to be socially progressive, speaking out against injustice, racism and sexism. But sexuality is almost a non-topic. While other music genres often deal with sex in lyrics, hardcore lyrics seem to focus on issues beyond the physicality of sex. However, this

does not mean sex is not an issue in the hardcore scene. In fact, the lack of lyrics dealing with sex may even be seen as a sign of its importance.

Perhaps the most debated reference to sex in hardcore music, is in Minor Threat's "Out of Step," which begins: "Don't smoke / Don't drink / Don't fuck / At least I can fucking think."[98] The song is considered to lay down the rules for being straight edge.[99] While the first two rules are self-explanatory, the third rule – don't fuck – demands some explanation. There are two possible messages in this, the first that one should be celibate, and not engage in sexual activity at all. While some may adhere to this, it is the second interpretation most straight edge kids see as relevant, that one should abstain from casual sex. In this lies that sex can be used as a drug, and thus should be confined to committed relationships. This view of sex, as sidelined with other intoxicants, is central to how sex is viewed in the hardcore scene.

In order to find more lyrics that speak specifically about sex, I looked beyond hardcore's classic canon, these songs are perhaps not all known by most hardcore kids, but they do represent reoccurring themes about sex well-known in hardcore.

When lyrics do concern women and male-female relationships it is often from a wider religious or societal standpoint. Krishna core-band Shelter's song "Progressive Man" is an example of how exploitive sexual relationships between men and women are focused on more as a sign of weakness in society than lack of respect for women.

Well I just did what they all do
And everyone else is doing
I've heard stories of romance
And I wanted to take a chance
To taste what they're pursuing
Love stories told to me
In books, TV, and magazines
So excuse me if you can
But try to understand
I'm a victim too ... Progressive man[100]

[97] 7 Seconds, "Not Just Boys' Fun" *The Crew*, Los Angeles: Better Youth Organization, 1984. EP.
[98] Minor Threat, "Out of Step" *Minor Threat*, Washington DC: Dischord Records, 1981. EP.
[99] Haenfler, 9.
[100] Shelter, "Progressive Man" *Attaining the Supreme*, New York: Equal Vision Records, 1995. LP.

Shelter, along with 108 and others, led a religious revolution within the early 1990s hardcore scene.[101] "Progressive Man" blames society, and specifically the media for sexual desire. It is, in my view, a justified claim, but it relinquishes any responsibility for personal actions. The message is: It is not my fault, it is society's. The sexual pressures of society are viewed as an outside evil, making sex wrong. Thus, sexual responsibility becomes a non-issue, except when in connection with addiction.[102] Because Hare Krishna teachings have very specific ideas about women, for example that women are less intelligent than men,[103] and that women's sexual appetite is nine times that of men's,[104] I would argue that the wave of krishna consciousness in the hardcore scene helped reinforce already established gender roles. Although Hare Krishna in itself may not be misogynistic per se, it is fearful of female, and indeed of human sexuality. Their traditional conservatism towards sex and gender underscored the already established views of women.

Another example of hardcore lyrics dealing with sex beyond the physicality of the act itself but without the religious connotations of "Progressive Man" is "Object of Desire" by Worlds Collide:

Sex – so easily caught in its snare
Lies – looking for some skin to share
Pain is knowing that I'm not immune
how many lives has it left in ruin

I can't turn my back
on what I know is wrong
I'm reduced to an object of desire
I want to put myself above
but I keep getting dragged into the fire

Images of sex confused with love
society has turned into a drug
and I've fallen victim time and time again
I just wish it would end

Are we just objects of desire?[105]

[101] The influence of Hare Krishna was also present earlier, with bands like the Cro-Mags.
[102] Being straight edge often means that you obstain from casual sex, as well as drugs and alcohol, because it 'weakens the mind'.
[103] Srimad Bhagavatam Canto 9 Chapter 14 Verse 36, http://vedabase.net/sb/9/14/36/ (accessed May 8, 2009).
[104] Srimad Bhagavatam Canto 3 Chapter 23 Verse 44, http://vedabase.net/sb/3/23/44/ (accessed May 8, 2009).
[105] Worlds Collide, "Object of Desire" *Worlds Collide*, Chicago: Victory Records, 1992. EP.

Sex is introduced as a trap, one that tricks you with lies about relationships between people. The author of the lyrics is frustrated by the sexualization of society. Like in “Progressive Man,” sex and love are deemed as opposites, as the media (in this case images) present sex as love, thus confusing the two. Sex is again described almost like a drug; it pulls the author in unwillingly, it seems almost impossible to have the stamina to abstain from it. The joys of sex are nowhere to be found. Sex is painful, it is a fire. The struggle described in the song – to turn one’s back on what is wrong (sex) cannot be won. The trap sex represents is so alluring one cannot resist even when one is aware of the emptiness it brings. Sexuality must be overcome in order to be free. Being perceived as an “object of desire” undermines the true self, it takes over and replaces integrity with physical pleasure. The fear of losing one’s humanity is ever-present; being fooled by the physical pleasures of the body is a threat to one’s integrity. The emotional pain described by the song is possibly a result of reoccurring heartbreak, experiences where sex and love are confused.

Pitboss 2000 is a part of what many would refer to as macho hardcore, they are an offshoot of One Life Crew, which were similarly macho, but perhaps less explicit. While intentionally provocative, their music does touch a nerve:

On your knees coat rack whore
Started out a nobotz, now get on the floor
Pole in mouth sucking cock
I’m glad he beat you, you’re both fucking nutz
You’re stuck on the bottom rung
That’s where you need to be
That’s where you belong
On your knees coat rack whore
You’ll always be a nobotz
Now get on the floor and suck some cock, bitch

Every scene’s got ‘em, coat rack sluts
Jock all the bands just for scene points
Big pant broad from suburbia
Use your box to become a scene star
One band to another you’ve got something to prove
Everyone you’re with is born to lose
Get into the shows we really don’t care
You’re just an ugly bitch with Spock hair

Not all the girls act this way
It’s the coat racks that give a bad name

To the real girls who try to help out
And use their heads without putting out[106]

Few hardcore kids take songs by Pitboss 2000 seriously, this and other songs by them are extremely explicit, but they do give voice to an anger towards women that is present in the undertones of other lyrics. It does also reflect the machismo seen in style and action that will be described later in this chapter. The lyric stands well alone, describing how "coat racks" destroy the reputation of women in the hardcore scene by having sex with men in bands in order to be respected in the scene. To some extent, the women described fill the girlfriend role, which is further discussed in section 3.4.3. What is interesting in this lyric, besides the clear hatred towards sexually active women, is how performing sexual acts is considered denigrating, thus the command to "get on your knees." The "coat rack" will always be a nobody, because she has nothing to contribute to the scene other than sex. The last verse is directed to the 'real' women in hardcore, those who are not "coat racks." It is poignant that they are described as using "their heads without putting out." Sex is damaging to a woman's reputation, as arguably it is in mainstream society, but all the more in a small, tight-knit subculture like hardcore.

2.3.4 Race and Class

As mentioned previously, the kids in the hardcore scene are often from the middle-class, and are predominantly white. Some subcultural historians refer to the term "white guilt" in connection with this group's politics. Although this is not a focal point for this thesis, and will not be discussed here, it is significant to mention that the hardcore scene's political focus often centers on racism and class politics.[107] A brief and well-known example of this is the Minor Threat song "Guilty of Being White". A song often misunderstood as racist, vocalist Ian MacKaye wrote the song about his own experience growing up as a part of a white minority in Washington DC.[108] While personal politics vary in the scene, it is

[106] Pitboss 2000, "Blow the Ladder/Coatrack Whore" *Everyone's A Winner*, Brussels and New York: I Scream Records, 1999.
[107] Butz' article "Rereading American Hardcore: Intersectional Privilege and the Lyrics of Early Californian Hardcore Punk" sheds light on the privileges hardcore kids often enjoy, and how these privileges work with their seeming opposition to mainstream society.
[108] In American Hardcore, MacKaye tells the story behind the song: "'Guilty of Being White' was a song I wrote growing up in DC, being a part of the minority – the White population. It drove me crazy – people would beat the shit out of me or rob me 'cause I was White. We had a history class talking about slavery and after class a couple of guys just knocked the shit out of me. It was right around the time Roots was on. I got

considered fair to say that today, the scene is a conservative one politically. This is due to not only the kids' class background but also the emergence of the straight edge scene.[109]

2.4 Images of hardcore

For anyone studying American hardcore, pictures can provide enormous insight. Photography is a large part of the scene's activity. There are always photographers present at shows, and pictures are featured prominently in both artwork for records and in fanzines. Many professional photographers started out by taking pictures at hardcore shows, among them Glen E. Friedman and Fred Hammer. Books have been published commemorating the visual art of punk and hardcore, most recently, Nathan Nedorostek and Anthony Pappalardo's book *Radio Silence*, which documents the vast visual history of American hardcore. This, along with collections of photos, like Fred Hammer's book *The Power of Expression*, and the visual contributions to other published works, are an integral part of hardcore history. It is through pictures that the sounds, smell and feel of American hardcore is documented. Because I have chosen to base this chapter mostly on textual sources, the section on images will be brief. But it must be included. There are many iconic images of the American hardcore scene, pictures that became the basis for the scene's stylistic ideals. Because of the abundance of images accessible, I have picked the cover art for four straight edge hardcore records. YOT, Uniform Choice, Society System Decontrol (SSD) and Minor Threat are all major hardcore bands of the 1980s, bands that created hardcore in itself. Like the lyrics, the images chosen are ones recognized by most hardcore kids, past and present.

2.4.1 Images of style

In her critique of the Birmingham school, Angela McRobbie points out that the style Hebdige and his fellow scholars refer to is gendered. Her claim is that subcultures present their style as that of the entire group, but, in reality, "the style of a subculture is primarily that of its men."[110] When scholars describe a subculture's style, they usually only describe

beat up because I was the 'massa People mere judging me on the color of my skin, so I wrote what I thought was a really direct anti-racist song – I wanted to say something radical." Blush, p 30

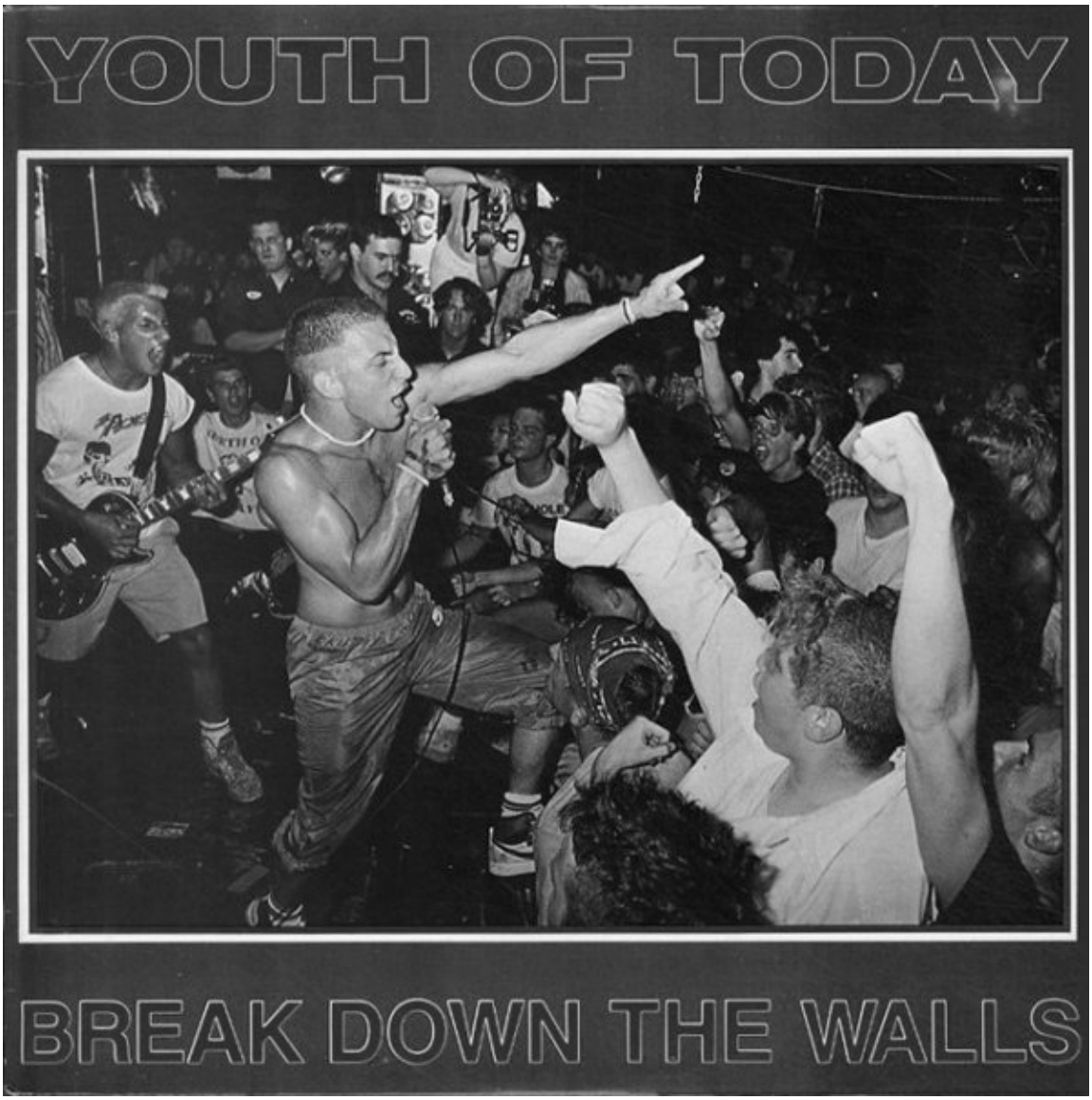
[109] Straight edge is covered extensively in the work of a.o. Haenfler and Wood.

[110] McRobbie, 34.

what the male participants in the culture are wearing. In a broader view, this is almost ironic, for outside the subcultural sphere fashion is usually considered a female interest. While men may design the clothes, it is women who wear them. This obviously does not apply in subculture studies, where women's style is considered an offshoot of men's.

Youth of Today were leaders of a new stylistic approach to punk, known as "youth crew." While earlier bands like Black Flag and Minor Threat wore no-brand army-surplus clothing, presumably because it is cheap and practical, the new style embraced a stricter dress code, keeping army fatigues, but adding to them clothing most often connected with high school athletes. This includes Champion brand hooded sweatshirts, Letterman-jackets (or varsity jackets), and expensive athletic footwear by Nike or Adidas. This style is usually connected with the straight edge movement within the scene, where control over the body and mind resulted in a body ideal simply described as "well-trained."[111] The muscular male body, clad in sportswear, either had a shaved head or a military style haircut, called a "crew cut" or "fade." The image of this man is seen on the cover of one of the pressings of YOT's album *Break Down The Walls*. The image on the cover is a live shot from a show, where the singer of YOT, Ray Cappo, is prominently figured. Wearing only running pants and Nike basketball shoes, the picture, according to Thompson, "accentuates his sweaty and well-defined muscular upper body." This focus and celebration of the physically strong male figure became a trademark for subsequent straight edge album covers.[112] To be in control of your mind and body did not only mean staying away from alcohol and drugs, it also meant keeping your body in pristine shape.

[111] Thompson explains the body ideal as a result of the lyrical importance of male physical strength. "An abundance of NYHC lyrics deal with male physical strength, and the whole scene celebrated the fit male body that it pictured as young, muscular, broad-shouldered, small-waisted, and free of body and facial hair," 56.
[112] Thompson, 56.



It is important to point out that the athletic style YOT represents is a staple of the New York hardcore scene (NYHC). Other scenes, like Washington DC and the early California scenes, often attempted to turn away from constructions of masculinity that praised athleticism and a muscular male body.[113] Bands such as Big Boys and MDC (Millions of Dead Cops) are well known for their play with gender, to the point of cross-dressing on stage. The hyper-masculine style NYHC promoted has however, become a staple of hardcore style much more than the gender bending styles of MDC. Today, many kids wear very tight jeans, often referred to as "girl's jeans," however, I do not consider this as such an important marker of hardcore identity as earlier styles. Tight jeans were popular in the early American punk

[113] Ibid.

scene, as well as the mainstream pop scene today. The athletic style YOT pioneered within the hardcore scene has remained popular since the mid-1980s.

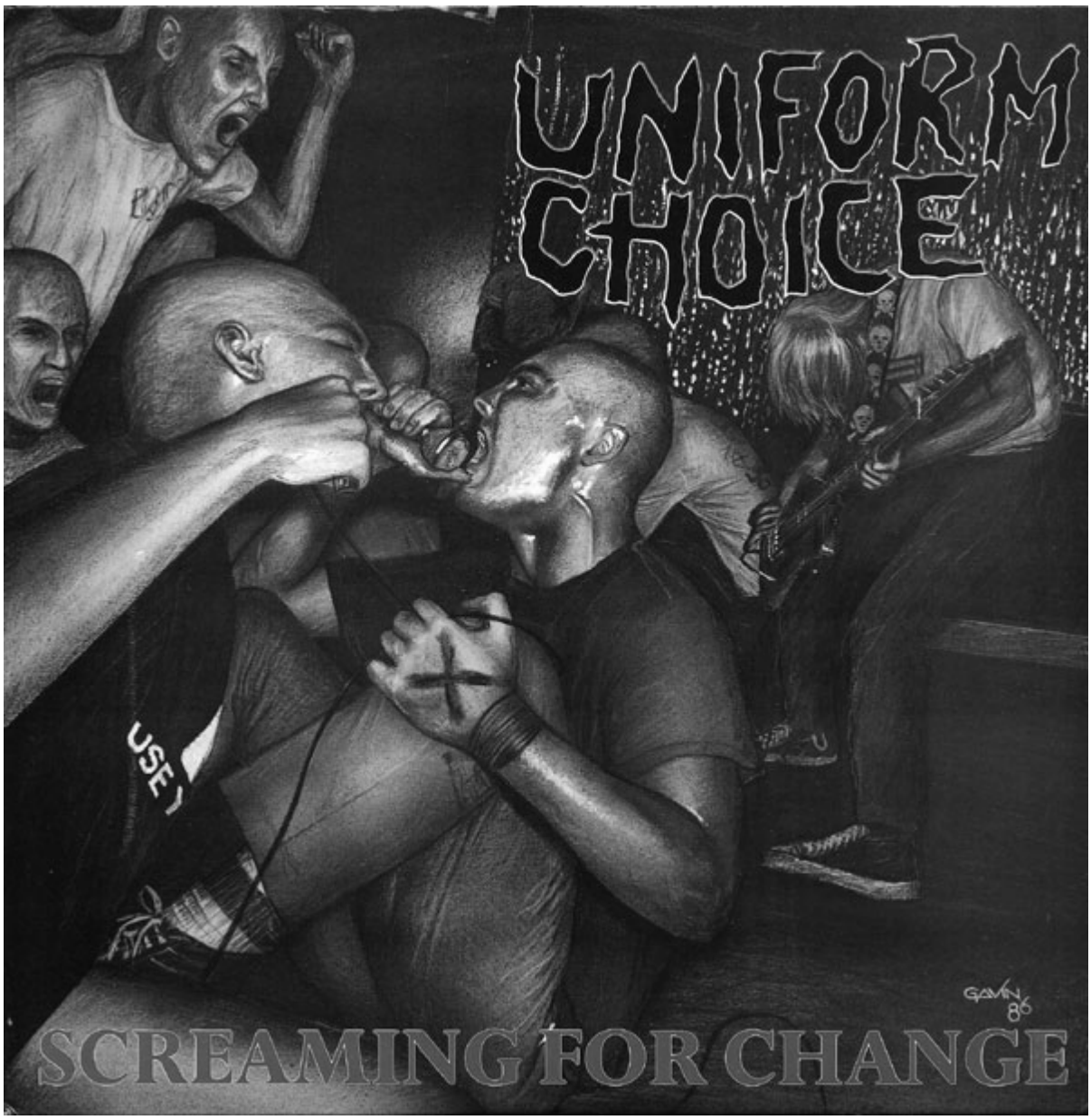
2.4.2 A woman's place

The cover image of *Break Down The Walls* does not only feature several fit male bodies. It also shows a typical scene at a hardcore show. The audience is packed tightly around the stage, in the "pit" at the very front, and around the sides. At a local show, friends of the band often stand on the edges of the stage during a performance, along with photographers, who place themselves at points with good angles. The photographers in this image stand in the back of the picture, on the band's left side. The photographers pictured are women. While many men are also photographers, as those previously mentioned, taking pictures is deemed an activity suitable also for women. Images are as mentioned extremely important for the scene, creating material for zines and record sleeves. Some women thus choose to stand on the sideline and document, presumably because getting in the often rough and violent pit can be daunting for many. Photography is one way these women can contribute to the scene. In fact, several of the women I interviewed have been active photographers in the scene. How they and other women contribute to the scene will be further discussed in Chapter 3. The absence of women in front of the stage is often explained as a result of the increasingly violent atmosphere that in the end separated hardcore from punk. I will discuss this further in my analysis of hardcore dancing, and in Chapter 3.

2.4.3 Violence vs. Warmth

Although the NYHC- and Boston Hardcore scenes boast of defending their scenes in fights, against outside threats, punks or other scenes, like NYHC band Judge do in "New York Crew",[114] the hardcore scene today is almost pacifist. Yet, at first glance, it appears violent. The outpour of aggression in front of the scene, is, as mentioned, heavily documented. The images portray young angry men pouring out their aggression in a closed setting. The cover of Uniform Choice's album *Screaming for Change* has such an image.

[114] Judge, "New York Crew" *New York Crew*, New York: Schism Records, 1988. EP. "Thompkins Square on a Saturday night / See my brother, he's in a fight / They got him down, it's 3 on 1 / 10 of us show, GUESS WHO



The black and white drawing depicts a live scene in the midst of a powerful lyric, the crowd on the verge of exploding into frenzy. Apart from the guitarist, all the men pictured have shaved heads. They look remarkably alike, almost like faceless soldiers in uniform rushing ahead into battle. But they are not faceless; their faces show a surge of raw emotion coming to the surface. The aggression one may assume these men are displaying is at once violent and peaceful. While they rush ahead, climb on top of each other in order to reach the stage, they do so in order to reach the microphone, to sing along to the words that express their

WON? / We hung out on 7th and A / Friends worked the door / We didn't have to pay / Boston came around

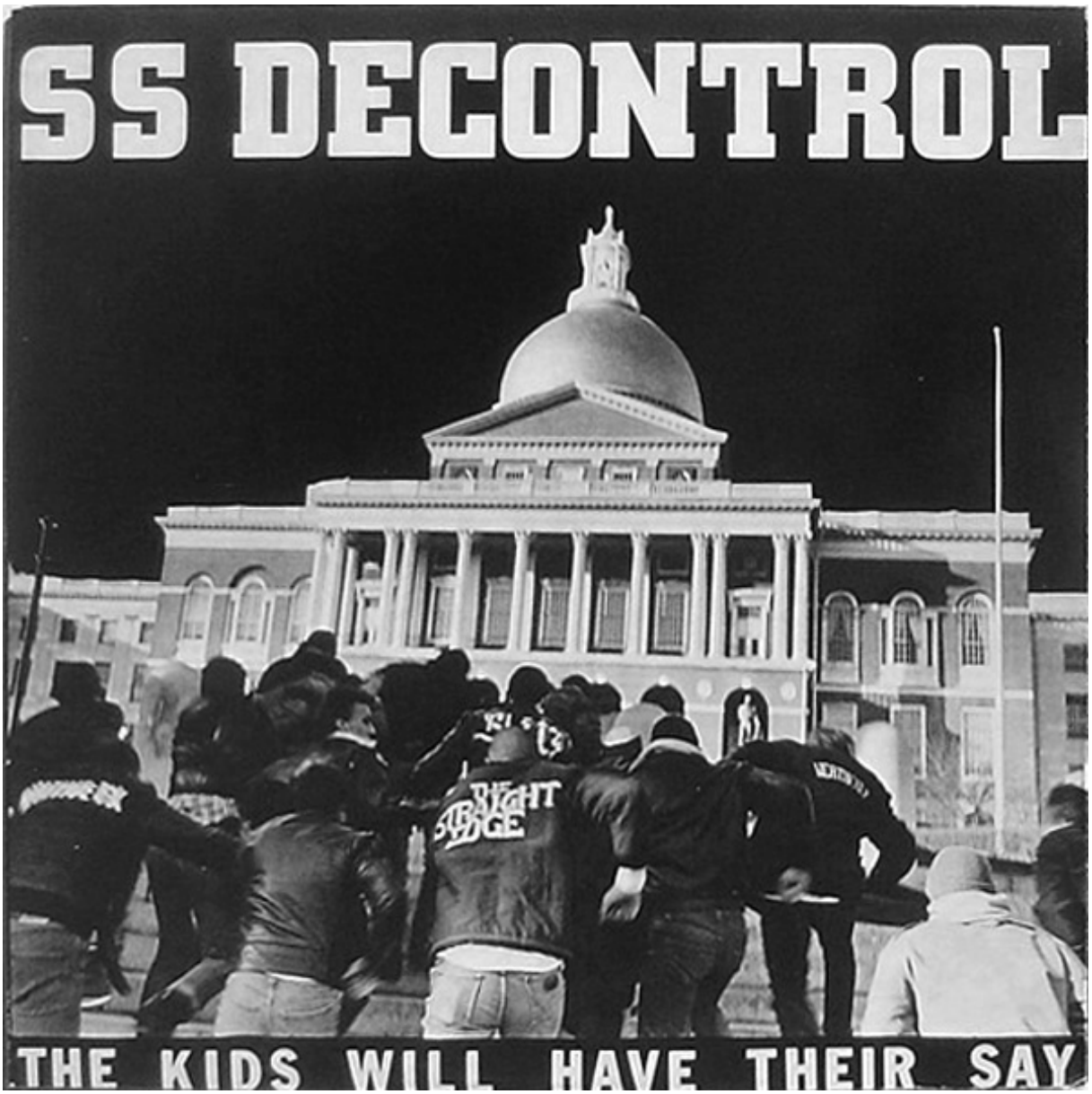
ideals. They are fighting, but perhaps more for each other than against each other. If this is a war, the enemy is not there in the flesh.

Most hardcore kids are, as mentioned, white middle-class men. They are a part of a subculture that originated in tough circumstances, where participants were poor and felt desperately like outsiders. Because kids since the mid-80s mainly have come from to some extent affluent homes, their class revolt is, in some ways, a moot point. The society they express opposition against mostly works in their favor. However, they have continued the stylistic tradition set up by early American hardcore, embracing it as a way of releasing aggression in a relatively safe environment. While they, by American economic standards, have nothing to complain about, they still feel like outsiders. The importance placed on photography in the scene may be a result of these kids' peaceful nature. Because they in reality are to some extent non-violent, pictures of the striking aggression that appears during live performances, along with their almost military athletic style, are the proof they retain of their masculinity. But, fighting does occur, and some scenes are more violent than others. Therefore, I see this more as one of many possible explanations of the importance of iconic photography and visual imagery. Because women traditionally cannot exude the masculinity desired, their role in the imagery can only be to produce it, not be a part of it.

2.4.4 Community vs. Individuality

Community is perhaps the most important thing in American hardcore. As a subculture, hardcore is dependent upon its participants feeling loyal to a scene, and to the larger hardcore community. This is evident from the repeated focus on unity and brotherhood in lyrics, and is also apparent in record artwork. However, the unity so often called for by bands stands in stark contrast to the individuality hardcore participation seeks to display to the outside world. When you choose hardcore, you not only choose the hardcore community, you in many cases also choose to be different from the majority of your peers. Hardcore is a community, but it is also a strong marker of perceived individuality.

one night / Push came to shove and / WE WERE DOWN TO FIGHT"

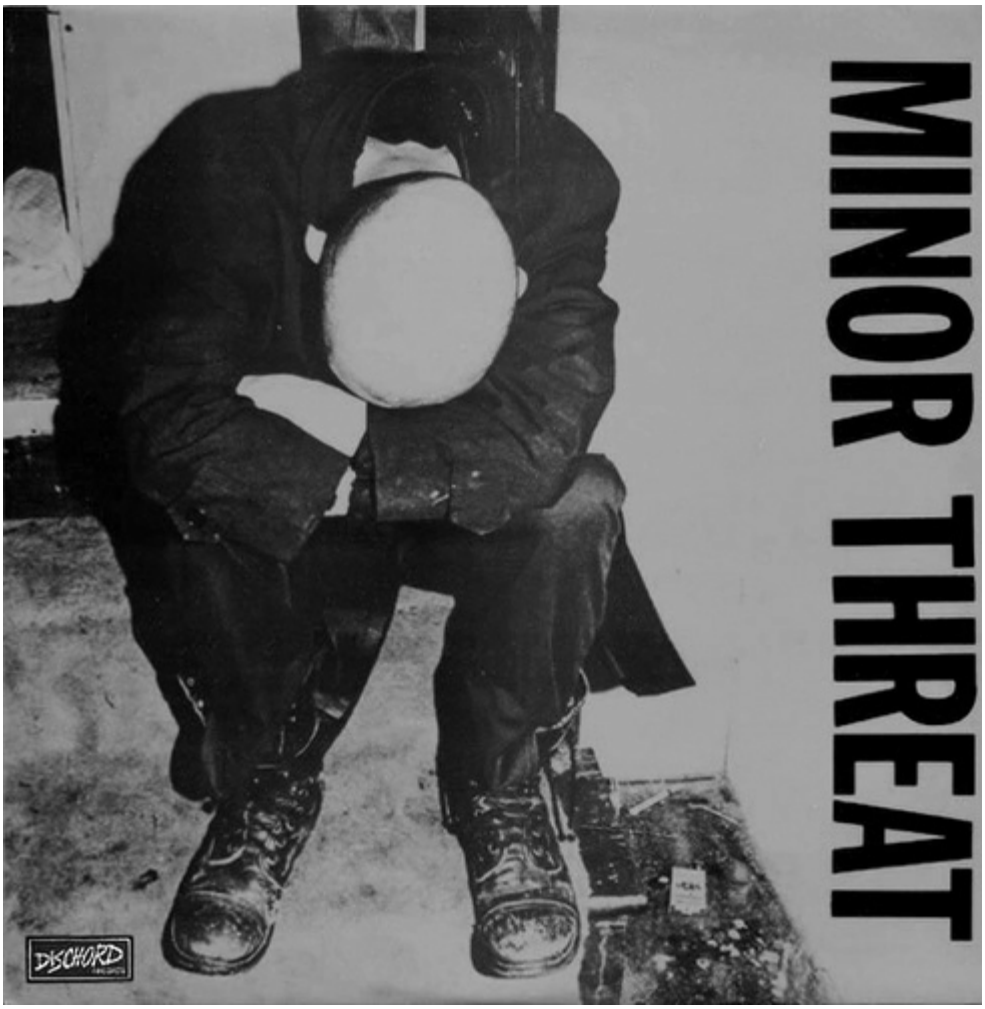


Community is often exemplified through crews, a term co-opted from rap and hip hop, meaning "a group of male [hardcore kids] who have formed a subgroup within [hardcore] in general." In this context, crews are groups of friends, often connected to a city, or a specific band.[115] The cover image of SSD's 1982 debut album *The Kids Will Have Their Say*, is a classic example of the crew and the display of community it provides. It is one of the most recognized images in American hardcore, one that has been copied numerous times by hardcore kids across the globe. The image portrays a united front against the powers that be. The young men running up the stairs of Boston City Hall echoes the fighting masses in the Uniform Choice-cover. The Boston crew, dressed alike in jeans and leather or windbreaker

[115] Thompson, 54.

jackets, almost look like an army storming the government building. They are the kids, alienated youth looking to make their voices heard, to show their dissension against society. They will have their say, if necessary by force.

This sense of community, of fighting a common goal and seeking a shared shelter against mainstream society is the backbone of the hardcore scene. The scene is dependent on internal consensus on style and ideas to emphasize their otherness to the outside world. However, this community spirit is opposed by the individualism valued in hardcore. Coming out of punk, hardcore is essentially oppositional. This opposition is both collective and



individual.

Perhaps the most iconic image of the early American hardcore scene is the cover of Minor Threat's first 7-inch, of lead singer Ian MacKaye crouching on a staircase, resting his bald

head in his arms.[116] The image represents how alone many punk and hardcore kids feel in their communities. Weighed down by loneliness and feeling like an outsider creates the desperation that Minor Threat's music came to articulate. In some ways, the man on the stairs has given up on mainstream society. He is apathetic to the problems those around him deal with because they do not reflect his own world view.

The images on SSD's and Minor Threat's releases stand in contrast and community to each other. While the SSD cover represents the formation of crews and communities that stand in opposition to the establishment, the Minor Threat cover captures the individual's plight outside the hardcore community. In a way, the individual portrayed in the Minor Threat cover is a single person taken out of the context of the crew portrayed by SSD. Each member of the crew is alone by mainstream social standards, but in the hardcore scene, they find others, as different as they portray themselves to be. Hardcore promotes the isolation of the individual from mainstream society but builds a sense of community among those who feel like outcasts.

2.5 Dancing

One of the things that is most noticeable at hardcore shows, besides the music itself, is the dancing. Hardcore kids may display their appreciation for a band through applause, but the applause at the end of a song is totally overshadowed by the crowd's reaction during a performance. According to Angela McRobbie, "[o]ne of the most important activities to analyse if we're going to understand how sexual ideology works is dancing. The dance floor is the most public setting for music as sexual expression."[117] McRobbie refers to dancing in a more traditional sense than what occurs in front of a stage at a hardcore show, but her point is still valid in this context. Hardcore dancing is one of the subculture's most distinct features. The physical style of hardcore dancing is called "slamdancing" or "moshing." The terms are relatively interchangeable, apart from "moshing" being a more general term, while "slamdancing" refers to a distinct style of dancing that appeared in the scene in Southern California around 1980. Steven Blush credits the first performance of slamdance to Mike

[116] The image above is the cover of Minor Threat, *Complete Discography*, Washington DC: Dischord Records, 1990. It used the same picture as their first record in a different color scheme.

Marine, a former US Marine, who appears in Penelope Spheeris' 1981 documentary *The Decline of Western Civilization*. Slamdance was referred to by the kids as "The Huntington Beach Strut." The dancer struts around in a circle, swings his arms around, hitting everyone within his reach. According to Blush, slamdancing was an important marker that "separated the kids from the posers and adults."[118] Dancing thus became a sign of authenticity, if you danced the right way you had earned your place in the scene.[119] Stage-diving is also a part of the physical expression displayed at hardcore shows.

Aggressive dancing is a part of every hardcore show. The level of violence in the early days of hardcore often resulted in injury; some even went as far as considering these injuries desirable.[120] When women in the scene comment on whether or not they dance, they often say no, because of the level of aggression in front of the stage, the pit. Some of the women I interviewed mentioned how stage-diving is awkward for girls, and that going up front at a show meant getting their "ass kicked." The raw physicality of hardcore dancing may not be as tempting for women.

The divide between men and women in the scene is especially noticeable in the physical activities during shows; stage-diving and moshing. This style of dancing helped exclude women from the scene, the violent moshing made hardcore, as Ray Farrell of SST Records has described it, "more like a sporting event than music – with the worst jocks you've ever seen."[121] The main result became the disappearance of women. Cynthia Connelly, author of *Banned In DC*, cites hardcore as the main reason the lost interest in the punk scene: "As it got more and more Hardcore I got more and more disinterested. By '83, I was 100% disinterested. Most women I knew bailed."[122] Even some prominent people in the scene agreed; the violence became too central.[123] The violent aspect of hardcore seems to have scared women away.

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[117] McRobbie, 157.
[118] Blush, 22.
[119] Leblanc, 108.
[120] In *American Hardcore*, Jack Grisham of TSOL (True Sounds of Liberty) comments: "I always thought getting hurt at shows was healthy, because you knew you were having as much fun as possible." Blush, 22.
[121] Blush, 22.
[122] Ibid., 35.
[123] Ian MacKaye states "By 1984, the violence had become too central" in *American Hardcore: The History of American Punk Rock 1980-1986.* DVD. Directed by Paul Rachman (Sony Pictures, 2007).

Because hardcore lyrics preach non-violence and aggression, unity and individualism simultaneously, the rough atmosphere in the pit can have many causes. First, the music itself is aggressive, making aggressive dancing only fitting. Hardcore dancing comes out of punk dancing, where punks notoriously went as far as beating each other up at shows. But while the "[d]ancing is a full contact sport,"[124] as Haenfler describes it, hardcore kids were also encouraged to take care of each other, helping each other up if anyone fell down in the pit. The aggression was not directed at their fellow hardcore kids, it was directed outward. Leblanc remarks that slamdancing was a parody of violence.[125] As such it is not a clear assumption that people getting hurt in the pit was intentional. Hardcore released aggression locked in the kids. Letting loose in a closed environment may have had physical consequences, yes, but as opposed to punks, who at times attacked each other, moshing was and is about letting go in a safe environment, where people would to some extent take care of each other. As Wood puts it, "[v]iolent lyrics do not necessarily reflect actual violent behavior."[126] But the *appearance* of violence was enough to drive away women.

2.6 Conclusion

The lack of women in the hardcore scene can be explained in many ways. This chapter has sought to explore what environment women experience in hardcore, how women are described in the cultural productions of the scene, and what place is left for them there. The assumption made by scholars such as Leblanc and Haenfler, suggests that hardcore, while promoting itself as a socially progressive movement, reinforces mainstream values while at the same time opposing them. While the values promoted in the hardcore scene, such as loyalty and friendship, are genderless, they are presented in a way that mostly only applies to men. Women are deemed as outsiders who do not naturally belong in the scene. The linguistic approach, through lyrical reading, suggests that women are left out of the main discourse within the scene. They are usually not mentioned, and if they are, they often appear as threatening intruders to male friendship bonds. Although there exists some exceptions to this, in the big picture they seem to be the exceptions that confirm the rule.

[124] Haenfler, 126.
[125] Leblanc, 51.
[126] Wood, 38.

Looking at the images chosen for this thesis, the idea that male hegemony is one of the (perhaps subconscious) driving forces in the scene becomes even more apparent. The style of the hardcore scene in the era described[127] is an almost military and exceedingly masculine one. While making room for women is a priority for some, women are assigned more specific places in the subculture than men are. Women appear behind, or beside, the scenes, taking on the role of photographer, and perhaps fanzine-publisher and show booker, as I will discuss further in Chapter 3. The physical space of the hardcore scene is not only filled with men, it is to some extent also filled with violent physicality, shown through moshing and stage-diving. These activities contribute to a rough stage environment that many say exclude women, pushing them to the side of the stage or the back of the audience. I quoted Simone de Beauvoir in the beginning of this chapter, her statement reflects a femininity that is perhaps wanted in the hardcore scene, the women men do not need to fear. But perhaps because women attracted to the hardcore scene are not always weak, futile and docile, their strength and integrity become threats that must be silenced, either through labeling women themselves inauthentic or by physical means, such as violent dancing. If and how women identify with this and other parts of the hardcore scene will be examined in the next chapter.

[127] The 1990s produced some other styles of clothing, mainly very large T-shirts and pants, that perhaps made the proto-masculinity somewhat less apparent, drawing more towards an asexual look.

3. Experiencing Hardcore

The things that bothered me the most about being a younger female in the hardcore scene was that while I was dating a hardcore guy I got cast into the "girlfriend" role. I was seen & treated by some people as so & so's girlfriend and not as someone who was there on my own, for the music. That sucked. I had been going to shows way before I had a boyfriend in hardcore & hadn't gone out of my way to date anyone in hardcore. Then suddenly I'm just "the girlfriend." – Lauryn

The last chapter described how women are represented in the cultural productions and activities in hardcore. Having discussed the important values in hardcore – unity, brotherhood and self-improvement – the voices of women involved in the hardcore scene can be more easily understood. This chapter will explore how women experience the elements discussed in Chapter 2 and how they identify with the hardcore scene. The roles open to women are few, and the threat of being cast into "the girlfriend role," as Lauryn experienced, is ever present. For some, becoming the girlfriend voids all their previous efforts to create a scene identity for themselves. But being the girlfriend is not the only place for women in hardcore, as this chapter will show. Being a part of the hardcore scene is a life-changing experience for the women I have interviewed. The hardcore scene provides an opportunity to escape from the restrictions mainstream society places on female behavior. In hardcore, many women feel they can escape being women altogether. Some of the women interviewed see themselves as more aware of how mainstream society controls them. They possess a greater knowledge, a knowledge they have learned through the values and ideals hardcore represents. Thus they also hold themselves and each other to a higher standard than others. As Lauryn explains:

I expect more from [hardcore people] & I am more disappointed by stupidity in hardcore than I am when I see it in mainstream society. I always felt like there was the potential to make real changes through music and that hardcore music spoke of that change.

In the eyes of those involved, hardcore encourages action towards improving both oneself and the society one lives in. However, a gendered ghost hovers in the background. Being a woman in a subcultural environment is not an asset. Women in the scene must adhere to the oppositional nature of hardcore as well as a traditional view of gender roles, roles they attempt to escape from by participating in the scene. Their intentions are constantly questioned, and their identity is carefully balanced between being "one of the guys" and women. These women's vocalizations of their experiences in the hardcore scene show how

hardcore is at once compelling and alienating. While hardcore gives these women an outlet for their otherness, it also manifests their gender identity into traditional gender roles.

3.1 I had always felt like a bit of a freak

Punk and hardcore are subcultures that clearly portray themselves as oppositional to mainstream society. In her book *Pretty in Punk*, Leblanc explores how women in punk experience their male-dominated subculture. She found that women were attracted to the punk scene because it proposes an "opportunity to construct a form of self-presentation that is not dependent upon traditional femininity."[128] In punk, women can rebel against their parents and mainstream culture while gaining support from a community that shares their political ideologies, sense of style and taste in music.[129] This is to a great extent also true for women in American hardcore. The women I interviewed were all attracted to hardcore because it gave them a different way of approaching life.

Abby, 30, has been a part of the hardcore scene since she was 15:

> [What attracted me to hardcore was t]he positive message, when I first heard Youth of Today's "Positive Outlook" I was sold…it was like that song was written for me. […] Hardcore to me is music and people who express a positive message by valuing friendship and integrity, while working to better themselves and their environment.

For Abby, hardcore has a positivity that differs from the mainstream. She sees hardcore as a means for self-improvement and as filling a void. The YOT song "Positive Outlook" spoke directly to ideas that she may not have fully thought out at a young age. As seen in section 2.4.4, hardcore promotes the isolation of the individual from mainstream society and builds a sense of community among those who feel like outcasts.

Lauryn, 38, has been into hardcore since 1984 and runs an independent record label today. For her, hardcore was a community that welcomed her as she was:

> I had always felt like a bit of a freak. […] Punk & hardcore was so different from normal society that I immediately related to it. No one looked or acted like the average kid and you were not only accepted being different you were encouraged to be. The biggest thing though was how hardcore questions all the things that you secretly think are bullshit. Everything from fitting in or team sports

[128] Leblanc, 142.
[129] Ibid., 79.

to religion & politics. Nothing was above being questioned. Of course the music hit the spot too. At that time in my life I had a lot of anger and frustration & the music was the perfect non-self destructive relief for all of that. It sounds so cheesy but think it literally saved my life. I wore my little walkman & listened to my Avengers and Germs and Government Issue tapes and I was in another world. It got me through until I was out of my awful high school and could move out of my parents' house. Mostly though the ideas in the music made me realize that there were other ideas & ways to live and that I was not going to be stuck in that life for ever.

Lauryn points out the reasons why many fall in love with hardcore. The otherness of punk and hardcore meant she had the space to say anything, and question everything. The music as well as the message in it are in stark opposition to what much of mainstream popular music represents. It provides a haven for those who feel like outsiders in their social environments. One may perhaps point out that most youth feel like outcasts from society at some point in their adolescent lives. The difference in hardcore may be that this feeling of otherness towards society never really leaves those deeply involved in the hardcore scene. This is why one sees hardcore labels that do not make money run by people like Lauryn, who are grown and have families, but still have a strong affinity for the music scene that got them through their teens in one piece.

Like Lauryn, Andrea, 34, is still heavily involved in the hardcore scene, after going to shows for over 20 years:

When I went to shows I would stay in the back and … just kinda started buying stuff, going out buying 7 inches and tapes and … I didn't think it was gonna be like forever engrained in my head, my soul kinda.

For Andrea, a music scene she got to know through the skateboarders she hung out with in high school became one of the most important things in her live. She still considers herself to live a hardcore lifestyle, even after starting a family. While she puts her family first, she also makes room for shows and other hardcore activities. She often has friends and acquaintances stay at her family home, something she assumes people not involved in hardcore would do much less of. Providing a place to sleep for people one has never met when there's a show in the area is common for participants in the scene. It is one of the ways in which hardcore kids are bonded together. Hardcore is for Andrea, and many others, an extended family:

[I]t was like a family unit. We were from all over the place and you could just meet up with somebody or just see them at a show and feel like you're friends already. […] You know, we were out to dinner and some kid was wearing a Gorilla Biscuits shirt and you know I was texting [my husband] that there's a kid wearing a Gorilla Biscuits shirt! Like it's just like a cool thing to see, you know, someone else with that same bond, same…

Wearing a hardcore shirt is enough to create a bond between strangers. Because so few people know of these bands, the merchandise becomes a tool for expressing affiliation to hardcore.

The sense of community Andrea speaks of, next to the music itself, is probably what attracts most people to hardcore. For her, and women like Erica, 40, who grew up in suburbia and did not relate to her peers there, hardcore was "an outlet for life's pent up frustrations and often looks for a way people can make change:"

> I was attracted to the sense of community. Growing up [in suburbia] tended to be more of an isolating experience, and the people on the whole were way too materialistic. The hardcore scene was stripped down and raw. It was like family.

This concept of family is, as shown, common in describing hardcore. It embodies everyone involved in the scene. The flat structure of hardcore provides a great deal of interaction between the bands and the audience. They are even intertwined during shows when bands become the audience and vice versa. The ability to be both the artist and the audience is quite different from mainstream popular music, where the fans are strictly that. For hardcore kids, hardcore speaks a truer message, one that relates more to their lives because those who deliver the message in fact are themselves, making the message more authentic.

When asked about the relationship she felt with bands she saw at shows, Andrea expressed that she looked up to hardcore bands when she was younger, but that the values the music instilled in her was affected by how hardcore bands were made up by regular hardcore kids, not by stars.

> [T]hrough the music you got, this is gonna sound corny, but you got some of your ideals, your morals I guess in a way, you know, through reading some of these lyrics how you're going to treat people and while you listen to regular rock'n'roll kinda music, you can't talk like that. They're just singing about love songs and weird ... you know what I mean? There's no like real message where these people are obtainable, so you can go to a show, they can sing about whatever, and then you can walk up to them and talk to them afterwards, you know.

Being able to talk to and befriend those who play in bands is important to the egalitarian setup of the hardcore scene. The DIY sensibility of the scene grounds everyone to the same level; the bands and the audience are inherently the same. In contrast, mainstream rock music, while crafted to be identifiable to youth, is not made by the vast audiences who buy it. For Andrea, the message in the music is stronger in hardcore, not only because hardcore

songs deal with other issues than mainstream rock music. The songs speak louder to her precisely because they are made by her peers in the scene.

The impact of being involved in the hardcore scene from an early age was important to all the women interviewed. When asked what participating in the hardcore scene had meant to her, Lauryn expressed that it had meant everything:

> I literally became another person than I would have been. I really can't imagine what I would be like if I had never found hardcore but I am pretty sure I would not be as happy a person as I am now. Hardcore gave me the confidence to not give a crap what the average jerkbag thought of me. I shaved my head when I was in high school, I wouldn't want to do it again because I don't think I looked very good at all but it was one of the best things I could have ever done for myself. […] As a girl in the 80's having a shaved head was like being a leper. It really opened my eyes to the way some people see & treat each other.

As she expressed previously, hardcore gave her the means to be anything she wanted, not only what was expected of her. Like the women Leblanc studied in the punk scene, Lauryn constructed her female identity on the outside of mainstream society. She sees hardcore as having a larger impact on her life as a female than it would on a male because "most guys don't seem to struggle with the same self esteem issues that many young women do." While the validity of this assumption may be questioned by cultural studies scholars today, it does seem apparent that the raw nature of hardcore is in greater opposition to the traditional ideals of female behavior than to that of male behavior.

3.2 The main thing was the friendships

Many of the songs cited in Chapter 2 deal with friendship, either the loss of one, or the strength of another. While the analysis of these songs pointed out that the friendships described were mostly between men, women also see friendship as one of the cornerstones of the hardcore community. As there are so few women in the hardcore scene, one may assume that the friendships women in the scene have are mostly with men. The women I interviewed had different opinions on this, but mainly, the friends they had within the hardcore scene were mostly male. Andrea especially expressed a lack of female friends. She described her friends as 99% either vegetarian or straight edge, and 97% male. However, her friends were mostly long-standing friends that she had known for a long time:

> I think the main thing was the friendships that I've gotten over the years. Like I'm still friends with people from my high school time, but not from my high school. You know, so 20 years later I can

still be friends with these people and still have this common bond. Even though we all have totally different careers we still went to those same shows, we still hung out with the same people and still interested in looking at records and you know, not as much anymore, but you know, talk about the same old stories from 15 years ago.

The bonds of friendship she describes are ones that many in the hardcore scene recognize. Not all are close, but the friendships built in the scene often last decades. While circumstances for the individual changes throughout life, hardcore kids share a common cultural history, to some extent even a mythology that they continuously revisit.

Andrea's lack of female friends may possibly be a result of her total commitment to the hardcore scene since adolescence. When asked about what she did not like about the hardcore scene, she points to the lack of girls in her group of friends:

I think the main thing is I wish there was more girls that I could've had more of a long-term friendship with. I never really had that, like a long-term person that wasn't just someone else's girlfriend. […] I didn't have that growing up, I didn't have anyone to just sit around and talk about periods and hair and makeup and little things like that, along with talking about bands and everything else. To have that, a good mix, to not just talk about bands and shirts and sneakers. You know, or going to get like camo shorts, like camouflage short and cargo shorts or whatever.

It is clear that Andrea appreciates her male friends, but recognizes that they were different friends than girls would have been. She admits that the close female friendships so many women depend on growing up are hard to come by in the hardcore scene. Describing her social life with men as being about bands, shirts and sneakers, she is missing a confidant in the scene. As I will discuss further, the girlfriend is not only a negative archetype for men and the girlfriend herself, but also for other women in the scene, who approach new female faces in the scene cautiously, because they cannot depend on them being friends when the girlfriend is no longer in a relationship.

According to Leblanc, male punks deal with female presence by masculinizing girls to become virtual boys. Andrea's description of her friendships with men in hardcore echoes this assumption, that she is seen somewhat as genderless by her male friends. Leblanc poses that "integration into the punk scene through friendships with males is contingent upon [females'] attainment of the males' "respect"."[130] In order to build non-sexual relationships with men in the hardcore scene, women must gain respect from their male peers. This is done by abstaining from appearing overtly female, gaining hardcore knowledge and

[130] Leblanc, 120.

participating in the activities that make up the hardcore lifestyle, such as making fanzines and taking pictures at shows.

3.3 You know, I did my part

In Chapter 2 I discussed several ways of taking part in the hardcore scene. In order to become a respected or valued part of the scene, one must contribute in some way. Hardcore kids play in bands, take pictures, make fanzines and put up shows, and this activity is what makes up the base of the hardcore scene itself. In his book about straight edge, Haenfler notes that while there are few women in the scene, those "who do join and manage to thrive in the movement often feel special or unique simply for being women in the scene."[131] While women may get recognition merely for being present in the scene as curiosities, in order to being seen as true to the scene, they must do their part.

Andrea has been active on several levels during her life in the hardcore scene:

> You know when I booked shows and stuff like that I got involved and I wasn't, I have no musical talent whatsoever, totally tone-deaf you know, can't do anything vocally or musically. You know, I did my part, I did a zine, I booked shows, I got involved. I didn't just sit back and expect everyone to you know take a free ride. I did my part. For the years that I could, you know what I mean? When you get older you don't have the means to do that like back then.

By taking an active part in the scene, Andrea gained respect from her male peers and a sense of accomplishment. Not participating in these activities, taking "a free ride," not only makes a woman liable for questions about her sincerity, it also undermines the scene itself. Hardcore is, as mentioned, dependent on its participants continuously maintaining the scene. Andrea emphasizes the importance of getting involved for women:

> I think it's important for girls to do it. If you're not going to be in a band, just once every once in a while do something, not that you have to prove it to anybody but just kinda like contribute. […] Book a show, or I don't know, have people stay at your house, that's always like there's a designated house, you know it really helps a band when they're coming through…

While Andrea does not think women have to prove their sincerity through these activities, it is certainly a way to avoid being cast as suspect. Women are more susceptible to attacks on

[131] Haenfler, 135.

their integrity than men are. While they may not gain as much as men do by taking part in the activities mentioned, they certainly lose more by not participating.

Sylvia, 21, a college student, has also contributed to the scene, and sees this as solidifying her place in the scene:

> When I was younger, I did identify myself a hardcore "kid," but now since I've grown a lot I've noticed I am actually a vital part to the hardcore scene. My boyfriend ran a webzine for a few years and I would always take pictures or videos at shows and it felt good. I really felt like I was contributing to the scene and helping it grow. I wasn't just some "kid" who showed up to watch the bands and buy the merch.

Helping her boyfriend make a webzine by taking pictures and videos, Sylvia is one of many women who help document the scene for posterity. Because hardcore mostly exists outside of the public eye, keeping records of events within the scene falls to the participants. The many fanzines and websites dedicated to hardcore help keep the history alive, something that is very important for the scene's survival. By becoming a valued part of the hardcore scene, Sylvia has earned the right to be there, she is not merely a consumer of hardcore, "just some kid."

Respecting the past and knowing the history of hardcore is an important part of being a part of the scene. Andrea even describes the difference between people who just like hardcore and those who are hardcore by pointing to the things that make up a hardcore lifestyle:

> [T]hey like hardcore, different bands, but they're not living that kinda lifestyle, where they're not about the T-shirts, worried about their records, listening to old stuff, learning about the past and, you know …

Blush implies that hardcore kids live in the past, as discussed in section 1.2.1, but saying that hardcore bands make the same music over and over is not completely true. In some ways, the bands that made the hardcore sound in the early 80's became genres themselves, and today bands describe their sound by referring to older bands, such as YOT, Black Flag, 7 Seconds or Bl'ast. This focus on the past is a reason why collecting hardcore artifacts, such as T-shirts, flyers and fanzines is important to many hardcore kids.

One of the things that prove one's contribution to the hardcore scene is getting mentioned in the thank you-list on a record. Almost all records have them, lists of people that have been important to the band in some way. Being pictured in images on records or in fanzines is also a way in which one's presence in the scene is documented for all to see. Like many

other people in hardcore, Andrea notices who is mentioned and who is documented in this way:

> I like that for a certain time a lot of girls were taking pictures at shows, like when you see on a record at least there's some female names on there now. You know, not just the girlfriends on the thanks list, you know, like some girl actually helped me out and booked a show and made some progress along the way …

Andrea appreciates how more women make their presence known in this way. Being mentioned in the thank you-list as a valid contributor to the scene is worth more than being mentioned as a girlfriend, because by doing your part for the scene you are a part of the progression of hardcore.

Not everyone takes an active part in the scene by doing a fanzine, taking pictures or other activites. There are many hardcore kids who are, by Sylvia's standard, "just some kid." Being active in the scene does help to solidify a place there, but it also makes participants feel more a part of their community. The kids who do not take part in this way may feel a little left out. While she runs a record label now, Lauryn was not very active at a younger age:

> I was always a wallflower. I went to tons of shows but I was kind of there as an observer. It's kind of funny when I think about it, with hardcore it seems almost everyone is involved in one way or another. Either you're in a band, putting on shows, doing a fanzine, running a label, taking photos or recording it all. I may have been the one & only audience. Not really, but it seemed that way. I wish I had been more involved when I was younger, I was just sooo shy.

Lauryn's experience as "the one & only audience" is an alienating one. Her shyness at a young age got in the way of being the "vital part of the scene" like Sylvia is. Hardcore kids make their own scene, and while the scene cannot survive without them, the rewards of doing your part personal as well as communal. Being able to contribute to hardcore makes these women feel more a part of the community. Helping the scene grow is an empowering experience, one they value highly.

3.3.1 You had photographers, but no one in a band

As mentioned above, women often contribute to the scene by taking pictures, making fanzines and booking shows. The one activity they very rarely take part in, is playing in bands, actually making hardcore music. In his research, Haenfler only found four prominent hardcore bands with female members: Walls of Jericho, Indecision, Most Precious Blood

and Martyr AD.[132] This lack of women in hardcore bands is worrying for some of the women I interviewed. Andrea is worried about young women still not having role models in the scene:

> I wonder if the girls have … who do the girls look up to. 'Cause there is no current, there really hasn't been a prominent girly person to have that role model. You know I guess you had photographers, and stuff like that, but not, no one in a band.

While Andrea and other women interviewed had a hard time coming up with any women in bands, the ones who were mentioned were mostly all in the same position, on bass. According to Mary Ann Clawson, women's participation in American punk and related genres "tended to take the form of women's minority membership in predominantly male bands."[133] In other words, women don't form bands, they join male bands. When asked about this, many people, both women and men, tend to use Kira Roessler's membership in the band Black Flag as their first example. Here was a woman playing bass in one of the hardest bands out there. Roessler's role in Black Flag mimicks Clawson's main assumption, that women play the bass. In her book, *Cinderella's Big Score*, Maria Raha comments that the Los Angeles band The Germs, "complete with a female bassist, were a band that broke new ground for hardcore, a scene in which women generally played ancillary roles."[134] The Germs were a part of the LA punk scene that would spawn bands such as Black Flag (with Roessler), Circle Jerks and Social Distortion.[135] In rock music, women have traditionally taken the role as vocalist, opting to sing instead of playing instruments. There are numerous examples of punk bands with female vocalists, like The Avengers and Blondie. While female vocals could easily fit into the punk sensibility, as "the ideology of punk offered women a specific realm in which to create their own opportunities, and a specific incitement to do so,"[136] hardcore was, and is, another story. The raw sound of hardcore had no room for a female voice.

Clawson holds that women's role in alternative rock music is greatly confined to the instrumental specialty of the electric bass. The reasons for this are many. Clawson argues that the bass is often considered an easy starter-instrument, and as such requires less skill

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[132] Haenfler, 125.
[133] Clawson, 195.
[134] Raha, 35.
[135] Ibid., 37.
[136] Clawson, 195.

than other instruments,[137] and that women seem to begin playing instruments and joining bands at a later age than men.[138] The fact is that most women in alternative music do not play instruments, and in the hardcore scene, they hardly participate musically at all. Ian MacKaye explains the lack of women in the Washington DC scene like this: "There's a certain kind of aggressiveness that leads the boys to pick up instruments."[139] In other words, women do not possess the aggression needed to attack an instrument used in hardcore. Clawson emphasizes "the supportive nature of the female character" and that women have better rhythm than men to explain why they prefer the bass guitar.[140] Thus, the bass is the least aggressive instrument. It is supportive and is in many cases heard in the background, where women take their place.

In his book about straight edge, Haenfler talked to several women in the hardcore scene. One of them, Maggie, shared her frustration of not being let in on the most active parts of hardcore, playing in a band and dancing:

> [W]e're really not as involved. No one wants to hear a girl singer, which sucks, 'cause I really want to sing in a band. No one will … it doesn't help that I'm so little … but no one will let me up front. No matter how hard I push, no one lets me up front. Even my friends.[141]

Female singers are not popular in hardcore, and this is perhaps directly related to their lighter voices, which for many do not fit the music genre. Female vocalists are more common in metalcore than in the old-school hardcore this thesis mainly focuses on. Andrea expresses that women do not fit as well as vocalists in the genre, but that the important thing is to contribute in some way:

> I don't think a girl singer is always the best idea, sounds a little screechy, but if she's good, more power to her. If she wants to dive and do all that, I think its awesome. I think its awesome that a lot of … I guess for years didn't get to do a lot, so at least they were photographers, and got active that way, got their pictures out that way and participated and helped out bands that way. That was the way for a long time that girls can do it. At least you did something, you contributed in some way. You know, helped out some bands, some label, some … somebody.

In Andrea's opinion, playing the supporting role in the scene by documenting bands is the way in which women can contribute. According to McRobbie: "The problems facing a

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[137] Although the bass is often considered easier than the guitar, it is not to say that it does not require skill.
[138] Clawson, 199.
[139] MacKaye in *Our Band Could Be Your Life*, quoted in Raha, xiii.
[140] Clawson, 205.
[141] Haenfler, 135.

woman seeking to enter the rock world as a participant are clear. A girl is supposed to be an individual listener, she is not encouraged to develop the skills and knowledge to become a performer."[142] This means that women are offered a place in the scene, but have difficulty being at the center of it. They can help their male friends in bands by taking pictures, but they are almost always in the back of the pictures taken.

3.4 Hardcore girls are not interested in conforming to stereotypical feminine roles

Being a woman and a hardcore kid are to some extent conflicting roles. In order to comply with the ideals of a true hardcore participant, a woman must denounce some of her feminine traits. According to Leblanc, girls in the punk scene "have to reconcile the ways these terms contradict each other, and […] negotiate between the expectations of both."[143] Hardcore, as discussed in Chapter 2, is a thoroughly masculine subculture, especially in form. Creating a space for being a woman in hardcore is therefore a complex task. The attributes that traditionally make a woman are constructed to contrast masculinity.[144] Therefore, embracing traditional femininity opposes the masculine style of the hardcore community. Women in the hardcore scene will differentiate themselves from women in the mainstream before they will to men in the hardcore scene. For them, gender is often second to belonging to the hardcore community. When asked about how hardcore women are different from other women, Erica answered:

> I think in general hardcore girls are more independent and free thinking on the whole, not interested in conforming to a stereotypical feminine role.

The denunciation of traditional femininity is to Erica a positive trait among women in hardcore. These women see themselves as operating outside of oppressive gender norms in the mainstream, they see the world more clearly through hardcore, stripping away behavioral demands put on them by society. However, many find it difficult to embrace their "genderlessness" in hardcore, as they are still women, and still seen as women by men in the scene. This is an impossible equation. However much they may denounce their traditional

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[142] McRobbie, 143.
[143] Leblanc, 135.
[144] Leblanc, 136.

femininity, they can never be as masculine as the men in the scene are. In attempting to get rid of their femininity, they also lower their chances of finding a boyfriend who shares their lifestyle, because men in the scene are presumed to prefer feminine girls not in the hardcore scene as partners.[145]

3.4.1 I'm not gonna wear a skirt to a show

In section 2.4.1, the masculine athletic style of the hardcore scene was exemplified with the cover art of YOT's *Break Down The Walls*. For many women in the scene, the style of hardcore means one is able to, as Leblanc puts it, "construct a form of self-presentation that is not dependent upon traditional femininity."[146] Women do not have to adhere to styles of clothing women outside their community are wearing. Haenfler notes that: "Straight edgers, both men and women, hold women to higher standards than they do men in the scene, often denigrating women who wear more fashionable, mainstream clothing and makeup."[147] Wearing skirts and earrings at shows does not only oppose the chosen style of the hardcore scene, it is also impractical. For some women, like Andrea, dressing in hardcore is at times difficult:

> [I]t was a little different being a girl because you couldn't, you didn't have that role model or something to look up to like oh that's a cool look … […] It was hard, you always felt like you were dressing like a boy. Back then. 'Cause it wasn't, I'm not gonna wear a skirt to a show 'cause, you know, are you gonna hang out in a skirt while singing along, it was hard, you always looked like, all the girls looked like boys, like the boy style, there wasn't a girl … back then, to me, there weren't no girls on stage for me to look up to.

Stage-diving and dancing upfront is hazardous in a skirt and earrings. While some women, like Andrea, wanted to dress in a more traditionally feminine manner, they ended up "dressing like a boy."[148] Without any real female fashion role models, women in hardcore have often dressed exactly like men. Some, like Lauryn, who shaved her head (see section 3.1), found it liberating not to conform to society's version of femininity, while others, like

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[145] This is certainly individual, and while many women in hardcore are convinced of this, their own relationships with men in the scene contradict its truthfulness. This is discussed further in section 3.4.2.
[146] Leblanc, 142.
[147] Haenfler, 126.
[148] It should be mentioned that the style of dress some of the women interviewed adhere to, belongs specifically to the tradition exemplified by YOT in Chapter 2, as mentioned in section 2.4.1, the early hardcore scene also had men wearing dresses on stage, and Kira Roessler of Black Flag often wore a dress. However, these are presumably exceptions from the rule.

Andrea, perhaps dressed androgynously more out of necessity than desire. According to Leblanc, attributes of femininity are constructed to contrast masculinity, and the hierarchal relationship between the two means that femininity is worth less.[149] For women in the hardcore scene, showing their femininity to some extent meant being less hardcore.

Abby mentioned that stage-diving at shows was more "awkward" for women. This may relate to the potential physical intimacy that stage-diving presents, but this is not the only reason women often choose not to take part in the physical activities on, and in front of the stage at shows. Andrea explains she did not want to get hurt:

> I didn't always go up front, I wanna get my ass kicked! I didn't want to sit up front and like … why put myself through all that? I did it a few times and like ... that one […] show I got freaking kicked in the face, spent a night in the hospital … why? You know what I mean? So I guess on that point, I totally support girls wanting to dive and all that stuff, power to them, but … And you know I love going up front and singing along when people don't dive on my head and kill me.

The violent atmosphere of hardcore shows forces women to the sidelines. As pictured in section 2.4.3, the war-like scenes in front of the stage rarely include women. Getting hurt is not uncommon at shows, although it is usually accidental and not a result of fighting. Andrea's experience, getting kicked in the face and having to spend the night in a hospital led her to avoid going up front, unless it is clear that she will not get hurt. In his research on straight edge, Haenfler found that "the few women who do dance with the men insist that any woman who really wants to dance could do so."[150] In his view, as in mine, the choice not to dance at shows is often assumed to be simply an individual choice, not a result of an environment that is unwelcoming to women.[151]

3.4.2 The girlfriend

As Lauryn expressed in the beginning of this chapter, being categorized as the girlfriend is a negative experience for women in the hardcore scene. This is mainly because, as Haenfler writes: "Women who attend hardcore shows because they have boyfriends in the scene are particularly suspect."[152] The girlfriend is an accessory; she is, as the Pitboss 2000 song in section 2.3.3. crudely states, a "coat rack," standing in the back holding her boyfriend's coat

[149] Leblanc, 136-7.
[150] Haenfler, 127.
[151] Ibid., 131.

while he is up front at the show. The girlfriend is feared because she holds the means to take men in the scene away from their "brothers" (as discussed in section 2.3.2). But she also poses a threat to women in the scene. Because of the lack of women, and thus the lack of female friends women like Andrea have, the girlfriends are the other females at the show, they are the other females women in hardcore can befriend in their scene. In itself, this is not a threat to women in hardcore. But because the girlfriend is connected to the scene only through her boyfriend, she disappears when the relationship is over, leaving those she has befriended through her boyfriend. Andrea has been through this scenario several times:

> [I]t was hard to keep building all these friendships with girls 'cause they just kept disappearing. Most of the time they would get a boyfriend and say see ya later – bye. And then that was it.

Befriending a girlfriend of a male in the scene is in Andrea's experience inherently dangerous. The friendship will never last. In this context, the girlfriend is "double trouble" for the hardcore scene. All of this shows that men in hardcore do not only date women in hardcore. In fact, it is often the opposite. While most of the women I interviewed have dated men in the hardcore scene (apart from Erica, who responded "Oooh, I stayed away from those"), this does not go the other way. When looking at the numbers, one may conclude that the lack of women in the hardcore scene would make it necessary for men to date outside of the subculture. Andrea, though, has another opinion. She claims that men in hardcore do not want to date women in the scene:

> I think it's weird they don't wanna date girls involved in hardcore. […] Probably because they all look like boys. 'Cause that was the fashion, you know. And girls want to be more around their boyfriends so they want to do everything together.

In her opinion, women in hardcore are not attractive partners for men because they downplay their femininity. On the other hand, men in hardcore are attractive to women in the scene because they share a common lifestyle, and women want to spend more time with their boyfriends than the other way around. Most of the women I interviewed were, or had been in a relationship with a man in the hardcore scene. In direct contradiction to Andrea's statement, one of Haenfler's informants, Patrick, was very enthusiastic about dating women in the hardcore scene:

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[152] Ibid., 126.

> [Y]ou find a girl who's into hardcore, she's like a frickin' … that's like a rare gem. You're like, 'Yeah!! [laughs] this girl likes metal! Let's go!'[153]

While the laws of attraction are not the subject of this thesis, it is interesting to note this difference of opinion.

Because of this threatening figure of the girlfriend in hardcore mythology, women who come into the scene are often judged more harshly than new male faces. It is assumed that they enter only to find a boyfriend. The idea that women only come to hardcore shows to pick up men is funny to many women who are familiar with the scene, as it is usually women who are commented on, as Andrea points out:

> Why can't I assume every guy there isn't just there to pick up a girl? Why is that never assumed? Guys always comment on the girls at shows. Whenever you're at a show and a girl walks by, guys are always commenting on her. But yet, the girls are the ones who are always assumed to be there to pick up a boy. It's kinda funny when you think about that.

This double-standard may reflect how Leblanc saw punk women treated by their male peers. According to her, "male punk protectiveness is a tool used simultaneously to care for and disempower punk girls."[154] By not looking at their female hardcore friends as women, men in hardcore protect them from being cast as girlfriends, and thus becoming less valued in the scene. Assuming that any new women are there to meet them, men can protect their female friends' honor by questioning the new women's sincerity, creating a divide between established hardcore women and new female faces.

3.4.3 One of the guys

Women in hardcore are often assumed to be tomboys. They are part of a subculture that has almost no focus on women, and that assumes brotherhood to be equivalent to friendship. In order for women in hardcore to earn a place in the scene, they must, as mentioned, participate in hardcore-related activities that support the hardcore scene. The friendships women make in the hardcore scene are most often with men. Because of the overtly masculine style of hardcore, women often choose to downplay their femininity in order to be taken seriously as hardcore kids. To the outside world, they can be seen as tomboys. They often dress like their male friends, and wear little to no make up. Outside of hardcore,

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[153] Ibid., 135-6.

"tomboyism generally describes an extended childhood period of female masculinity."[155] It is common among young girls to opt out of traditionally feminine behavior. According to Halberstam: "Tomboyism tends to be associated with a 'natural' desire for the greater freedoms and mobilities enjoyed by boys. Very often it is read as a sign of independence and self-motivation, and tomboyism may even be encouraged to the extent that it remains comfortably linked to a stable sense of girl identity."[156] When I asked Lauryn if she considered herself to be feminine, she replied:

> Yes, but then again any girl is feminine right? There are just different styles to it. I have always been pretty "girlie" though. I was never a tom boy, kinda wish I had been a little.

In Lauryn's eyes, being feminine is inherent in being female. Her desire to have experienced tomboyism may be precisely because of the connotations Halberstam ties to it. In young girls, tomboyism is positive. It is only when girls grow into young women that being a tomboy becomes problematic. In adolescence, girls who do not give up tomboyism are subject to pressure to conform to more standard gender roles.[157] While I do not claim that women in hardcore are all tomboys, Lauryn is only one example of women who do not consider themselves as such in the scene. It is possible that an added attraction to the hardcore scene is that women are allowed to be tomboys to a greater extent there than in society at large. The difficulty in this is that while many women in hardcore relish that they can choose not to look like women, they can never become men in the scene.

According to McRobbie, "any indication of [sexual] ambiguity in girls is still a sure sign that they could not make it in a man's world. Failure replaces choice; escape from heterosexual norms is still synonymous with rejection."[158] In this context, it is clear that the tomboyism displayed by many young women who enter the hardcore scene cannot be a sign of sexual ambiguity. It is usually not connected to sexuality, only to the norms of appearance regarding gender. As McRobbie points out, the choice given to these women does not apply to sexual behavior. Like the punk scene Leblanc examines, in hardcore, "compulsory heterosexuality is normative like in the mainstream."[159] While homosexual hardcore kids are

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[154] Leblanc, 123.
[155] Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 5.
[156] Halberstam, 6.
[157] Ibid.
[158] McRobbie, 36.
[159] Leblanc, 125.

not unheard of, the culture in the scene is clearly built on traditional gender roles, as we have seen with women being cast in supporting roles. According to Raha, it is "a community which proudly rejects societal and cultural norms, yet, that same community falls prey to those same traditions and confining notions of behaviour in regards to gender and sexual identity."[160] Because of this women end up with an unsolvable dilemma, being a hardcore kid or being a woman. To be fully accepted as an equal in the scene, you must be "one of the guys," as Andrea was:

> I was one of the guys, but … yeah I was one of the guys. 'Cause I didn't make it an issue of I gotta get dressed up all the time or do all that where I was gonna be all super or do all that where I was gonna be all super girly. Or sometimes you think maybe I should have and they'd think girls were more accepted and let's not make fun of them at a show and … you know … 'Cause they would always make fun of them, not that individual but thinking that of they're not gonna be here next week anyway, what's the difference. You know, like doubting their sincerity.

Andrea attributes her status as "one of the guys" to not dressing feminine, not being "super girly." By not looking like a girl, she assumes her male friends take her more seriously. Having already established friendships, she sees a possibility of changing her friends' attitudes towards women by looking more "girly." If she, as an already respected woman in the scene would look more like the women who enter the scene and are immediately cast as girlfriends, their attitude and actions towards these women may change. Thus, in a way adhering to stylistic gender norms in the hardcore scene would for women be progressive.

Being one of the guys is not only a stylistic choice. For women in the scene it also means having to observe, or take part in, what they deem as typically male relationships. In hardcore, this often means long discussions about hardcore historical details, and commenting on girls.

As mentioned, keeping track of the historical details in American hardcore is of great importance to the scene. In many cases, the detailed knowledge hardcore kids possess daunting, to say the least. After being in the hardcore scene most of her life, Andrea sees this focus on details as gendered:

> Yeah. I think most girls I know, and for me too, I was never into like memorizing all those little shirts and records and every little detail, I just like enjoyed it. I got what I wanted out of it where most guys when they're together, I'm sure you know, they talk about every detail of every show, like what he was wearing, what songs in order and I'm like … are you kidding me? You know, [my

[160] Raha, xi.

husband] would be like, yeah you were at that show, what did they play? And I'm like what the hell, that was 1988, how am I supposed to remember? […] I have no problem talking about music and stuff like that, but not like a guy would.

When hardcore kids discuss the issues presented by Andrea, the importance of documentation becomes clear. Without pictures, fanzines and flyers, only those with exceptional memories would be able to settle an argument. Andrea points out that being a woman, she is not as interested in the little details that make up hardcore history. This is another example of how specific traits of hardcore kids are seen as gendered, and thus out of reach for women. It seems that for some women, this recurring debate on specific historical details leaves them out of the social loop. While some are able to partake in the discussions, according to Andrea, most opt out:

You're sitting around in a circle and there's one or two girls, and most of the time they're probably not even talking, they're probably listening when you have a whole bunch of guys sitting around and talking, you know.

Whether this silence is simply due to personal interest or because of larger issues, is difficult to pinpoint. What is interesting is that women, even outside the environment of the show, where they are sidelined due to the threat of violence or just not welcome in bands, are outsiders. They are seemingly passive participants, watchers. This is naturally not true for all women in the hardcore scene, but the fact that Andrea mentions this in context with social gatherings points to the larger otherness that women are in the hardcore scene. They are there, they take part, but they do not quite fit in.

So why do these women feel they relate better to men, who to some extent consider them as the other in the scene, than to women who are in the same position they are? When I asked Lauryn about her friends, she admitted she had mostly male friends, and that she saw herself as relating better to men than women:

I think that's because I am very interested in music. Not in a groupie or "oh he's so dreamy" kind of way, I actually really dig music. So on that level I feel more comfortable around guys than I do around some girls. It more unusual for me to meet girls that are really into music and not just music-culture.

Herein lays a dichotomy. For Lauryn, as for many women in the scene, most women seem not to be interested in music itself, they are interested in what surrounds it; the "music-culture," as Lauryn describes it. This is the question that new participants are required to answer in order to be admitted into the scene as a true, or sincere hardcore kid. This is perhaps perplexing when one thinks of the value put on knowledge of detail, as described

earlier. While taking part in all the sides to hardcore culture, especially learning details about canonical bands and what I would call myths, the most basic demand of any hardcore kid is a love of the music itself. But for women, love of the music is not enough to be set above suspicion.

3.4.4 Sisterhood

The concept of brotherhood, as discussed in section 2.3.1, is perhaps the most important aspect of friendships in the hardcore scene. Because hardcore is experienced as a family, the relationships within the scene are seen as stronger than those made in the outside world. Bands like H2O[161] play on this theme, presenting themselves and their friends as a family unit that stick together no matter what. Because brotherhood in itself excludes women, it is pertinent to examine if there in fact is a sisterhood to mirror the hardcore brotherhood. The lack of women in the hardcore scene has two possible results for sisterhood among them, either, women grow tighter to each other because they are different from men and in minority, or they denounce each others sex, and thus see themselves as individuals, in some way part of the brotherhood that is so important in the scene. As the women interviewed already have expressed, they are weary of forming friendships with women in the scene, yet they admittedly miss having close female friends.

Lauryn found her experience as a female in hardcore different from that of men's because of her role as a minority, but also because of her lack of a crew:

> I didn't have a "crew" (so to speak). I had one other girlfriend that went to shows with me & we were inseparable. I didn't have that same membership feeling that most hardcore guys probably felt. It was more of a solo thing & more observing than actually participating in some ways.

As the quote by McRobbie in section 3.3.1 pointed out, women are assumed to be individual listeners, not performers or a part of a crew. The fellowship Lauryn found in hardcore was brought into it with the one female friend who also went to shows. Larger groupings of women in the scene are rare, often groups of women are associated with a male band, such as the Warzone Women, who supported the NYHC band Warzone, and are mentioned in

[161] One of H2O's records is called *Thicker Than Water*, the title plays on "blood is thicker than water," referring to how family relationships are stronger than other friendships.

various interviews and thank you-lists.[162] Another kind of female grouping was Chicks Upfront, a Washington DC group of girls who went to shows together and marked their common bond by wearing pink X's on their hands, in contrast to the traditional black marker X's that straight edge kids draw on their fists. In my research I had a hard time uncovering any details about the women active in these crews, but some of the women interviewed had some insight, like Andrea:

> So I was kinda friends with them, I wasn't in their click, and that was like hard, 'cause you're thinking like, I was mostly friends with guys and they where so mocked on, it was unbelievable. They probably never knew that, 'cause you know I was more friends with guys so I got to hear all the stuff on the way home or afterwards all the people knocking on them. And then you're thinking like, they went out of their way to almost isolate themselves and then they got mad like if a guy would dive on them, but you made yourself a target. Because why shouldn't they? So the other side is why couldn't they, with all guys and almost no girls, you know. And I was never really part of their whole little click, I was friends with all of them, but I never fit in because I saw the other guys' side of it so I'd see how much people would make fun of them.

This crew of females apparently caused a stir in the scene at the time. Singling themselves out as a female counterpart to the male brotherhood, as a sisterhood, made them a target for ridicule in the scene. For Andrea, positioning herself between the women and her male friends became an issue, as siding with them would cause her to be exposed to the same mockery the Chicks Upfront crew were. Thus she is stuck between the bonds of friendship she shares with men and the respect she feels for women making a place for themselves in the scene. The negatives to forming an all female crew are clear; by expressing one's gender identity as overtly female, one takes an oppositional stand against the unified male brotherhood of the scene.

The Chicks Upfront and Warzone Women are only two examples of female crews, but they are ones central to hardcore history, and in their time, the only ones still talked about to my knowledge. The difference between the two is one of credibility. While the Chicks Upfront wore pink X's on their hands, and made their mark in the audience, moshing in the pit, the Warzone Women appear to have had a more supportive role. Forcefully taking your place in front of the stage with markings that identify you as 'the other' to the scene at large is clearly more oppositional than being a group of females supporting a male band. By demanding attention on the basis of their gender, the Chicks Upfront were more liable to be

[162] Because of lack of sources, the Warzone Women are all but forgotten, although it is assumed that they were girlfriends and female friends of Warzone who helped out with practical issues concerning the band.

verbally abused than women who supported a band, taking a more credible space in the background. It should be noted that these two groupings were not contemporary, and thus comparing them is only for analytical purposes. In hindsight, the Warzone Women achieved almost mythological status, while the Chicks Upfront were slagged on, an often continue to be so on Internet message boards etc.

Since the female crew is a rarity, women in hardcore exist mostly alone, as Lauryn and her friend did, or as part of a male crew. Surrounded by men, women in hardcore often come to look upon other females in the scene with the same critical gaze as their male friends do. When I asked Andrea if she had ever been harassed or mistreated in the hardcore scene because of her gender, she replied that abuse most often came from other women:

> I had more problems from other girls than boys. […] I think you get more at a show of girls looking at other girls and judging, just like regular society, girls are the ones that judge more than guys I think. […] We're the ones that always just think the worst. I think we think the worst of people, and if they sleep around, you're like oh they're a slut and just wave them off, it's like you don't even know them but you're just thinking … The intentions you just think are the worst.

In Andrea's experience, women in the scene are threatened by each other, and behave according to what she deems as normal behavior between women; viewing each other in a skeptical light and questioning each others' intentions. This skepticism is mostly based on sexual behavior, echoing the judgments from men based on sexual activity, intentions and availability. According to Leblanc, women in masculine subcultures adopt the criteria men judge them by, putting new women through the same tests they were subjected to.[163] Andrea and women like her thus see new women who come into the scene through the same lens as men do, they are considered suspect, or at least possibly suspect until proven sincere. Andrea admits to judging other women in the scene on their sexuality or lack of sincerity to the scene:

> And I think also too I was one of those, I know I was one of those judgmental girls back then. And you know, girls would sleep around and you were like oh, and I didn't know why I couldn't be friends with her and I didn't know why I couldn't be friends with her, but you realize this when you get older and you look back.

Rather than "rejecting femininity outright," the punk girls Leblanc studied negotiated "between the expectations of culture and subculture."[164] Andrea and other women in

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[163] Leblanc, 122.
[164] Ibid., 148.

hardcore do the same, they to some extent accept that they are women, and thus different, but impose the same behavioral rules on themselves and other females that men in the scene demand of them. The constant focus on women's sexuality in connection with their personal integrity and sincerity towards the hardcore scene underscores the point that women are not considered equal.

3.5 Sexism and feminism

In this discussion of how women experience the rules imposed upon them in the hardcore scene, which they to some extent embrace, it is clear that they are in a somewhat sexist environment. Women's intentions in the scene's social life cannot be connected to sex, as this would result in loss of respect and derogatory treatment by those in the scene. Their honor, so to speak, is closely connected with their sexual behavior. However, many do see themselves and other women in the scene as more aware of gender oppression than women in the mainstream, and hardcore is considered somewhat egalitarian, as Erica points out:

> There is a lot of machismo in the scene and I think some girls feel they need to prove they are as tough. But on the whole, I think it's more of an egalitarian experience than a lot of other small communities.

It is a difficult landscape to navigate. Many women experience the hardcore scene as Erica sees it, as egalitarian. At the same time so many issues points towards the opposite. It is plausible that the experience she describes is separate from these women's sexual identity. Because they choose to be a part of a community where their sexuality is suspect, or even a threat to the community itself, it must be disarmed, either through reverting to chastity or altered to fit men's behavior. According to Leblanc, sexual banter is an acceptable way of communication between men and women in the punk scene.[165] This style of communication has paradoxical results. While men engage girls in sexual activity, they sanction those who take part.[166] Sexual chastity or monogamy is a positive trait for Leblanc's punk girls, as it is for most women in the hardcore scene, and all those who are straight edge.[167]

[165] Ibid., 128.
[166] Ibid., 127.
[167] Ibid., 129.

In the interviews, one story emerged as a cornerstone to how women are perceived in the scene. Several women brought this same story up, about one notorious straight edge girl, who gained her reputation for sleeping with several famous hardcore personalities in the 1980s. What is interesting about this story is not that one woman actually was sexually active within the scene, it is how her behavior lost her all respect to the point that she is still mentioned, two decades later. These are the women who come to mind for many in the hardcore scene, those who in a way defined how one is not behave. Andrea sees the story as reflecting how women are judged by their behavior in the scene in general:

> I never knew her personally, she was just like the myth, you know. And, I thought, Oh! There's this popular straight edge girl! And then years later you find out that she slept with everybody and you're just bummed out like when you hear these little […] She's known for sleeping around. With a lot of people I guess. Bands would come to her house … I heard all different stories. […] It just sucks when you hear that, she's a prominent person, and that's why she's prominent. […] It's weird, she can sleep with the world, it doesn't bother me it's just weird that that's what she'll be known for it, too. Like when I talk about John Porcell [guitarist in ao. YOT and Judge], do I talk about all the girls he's probably slept with in the world? Like, Judge went on tour, am I keeping tallies of all … you know, […] but do we do that with guys? So we talk about all the people they slept with? No, it's not an issue.

Andrea makes a good point. The woman in question's action have created a myth that ties women's behavior directly to sex instead of credible activities in the scene, like playing in bands. At the same time men's sexual activity is rarely questioned.[168] This double standard reflects mainstream rock culture, where, as Raha points out: "Male rock stars […] seemed to measure their musical worth not only in how many seats they could sell, but in the lengths to which they could coerce decadent sexual favors from their female fans."[169] While sex with fans is to some extent considered prestigious in mainstream rock, it is not talked about openly in hardcore. Men may not boast about their sexual prowess in the hardcore scene, but they see female sexual activity as problematic, while theirs' is not.

In such a morally hardened yet outwardly progressive environment, one would look for women to show the political awareness they consider themselves to have in some way. And while women in American hardcore at times have spoken out against sexist oppression or other political issues, their voices have been heard mostly as a result of political interest in the scene at large. These issues surface periodically. In the 1990s there was a surge of

[168] Exceptions to this exist, especially in connection with the more moral-oriented subgenres of hardcore like krishnacore, as discussed in section 2.3.3.

radical politics, led by the band Earth Crisis, who spoke out against abortion. This pro-life wave was loudly opposed by both male and female voices in the hardcore community.[170] But as these politics disappeared from the scene, women's political voices were almost silenced. In Haenfler's book, this is touched on by Carrie:

> I feel like somehow it comes across as more masculine to [take a stand against sexism and rape] if a guy is telling you it's OK and he's in a band. Not that it should be that way, but that's to an extent how it is.[171]

That women's political interest is dependent upon the political atmosphere in the scene is not surprising. Women in hardcore do, after all, often consider themselves as hardcore kids first. In fact, the overall egalitarian setup of the hardcore scene does outwardly paint it as a place where women can escape from pressures to conform to traditional gender roles. According to bell hooks: "The absence of extreme restrictions leads many women to ignore the areas in which they are exploited or discriminated against; it may even lead them to imagine that no women are oppressed."[172] As such, it is no wonder that women experience the hardcore scene as a place they can be themselves to a greater extent than in society in general. The restrictions put on female behavior are not so much outspoken, they are implied.

Because this thesis is heavily influenced by feminist theory, I found it central to ask my informants if they identified with feminism. I found that women talk about feminism very differently, either in a monetary context, or plainly that feminism was a fight for equality on a general level. This echoes bell hooks' view, that many Americans equal feminism to the women's movement that fought for social equality, for them, most notably for equal pay. However, this view of feminism ignores the fact that men themselves, as a group, are not equal. And thus, I ask myself the same question hooks poses: "Since men are not equals in white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal class structure, which men do women want to be equal to?"[173] One may assume that the women I questioned want to be equal to their male

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[169] Raha, 7.
[170] When asked about feminist politics in the hardcore scene, Andrea responded: "It's not an issue anymore. At times there were phases of it, with different issues, like when Earth Crisis was around and they did the whole pro-life thing, I think you had a lot more women stick up for themselves, and voice their opinion about it, and defend themselves about it, have their say with them."
[171] Haenfler, 111.
[172] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, Second Edition (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 5.
[173] Ibid., 19.

peers, in effect white middle-class men. When probing further, many women shied away from the term 'feminist,' Abby even denied she connected with the term at all. This attitude echoes McRobbie's point, that feminism has been perverted by the political right, "where values of brutal individualism and the pursuit of wealth and success turn all personal and social relationships into an extension of the market economy."[174] In McRobbie's and other feminist scholars' view, the feminist politics of the 1970s was a failure for the women's movement. According to Karin Widerberg, the movement for equal pay contributed to reproducing the gender differences they wanted to abolish. [175] Thus, few women identify with feminism today. Lauryn noted that:

> If believing in men & women being equal is feminism than yeah I am [a feminist]. I just don't totally relate to a lot of women who use the tag feminist. I honestly don't believe that it is men holding women back at this point.

Lauryn considers the feminist movement to lay individual responsibility for sexist oppression on men. The oppression hooks refers to when she defines feminism as "a struggle to end sexist oppression"[176] is however not based in the fight for equality, it is structural. In Widerberg's analysis equality is a failed goal because women are inherently unequal, they are women and not individuals, because their initial inequality voids their claim to be individuals. In accepting "the terms set by the existing social structure," it is according to hooks "apparent that women cannot gain much power [...] without undermining the struggle to end sexist oppression."[177] I would argue that women in hardcore to a great extent embrace the myths created about them, as described earlier in this section, and accept the behavioral rules developed in the scene, seemingly as a result of these myths.

While I argue that the American hardcore scene to some extent embraces sexist behavior, it is important to note that what attracts people to the scene often is progressive values that run parallel with this sexism. This duality causes a constant enforcement of the status quo. One of Haenfler's informants, Sid, explains it:

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[174] McRobbie, 211.
[175] Karin Widerberg, "Könskontraktets kropp" *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift* vol. 4, no. 15 (1998): 315.
[176] hooks, 26.
[177] Ibid., 86.

[T]here definitely is still that really large elements of … I don't think it's misogyny or anything, it's just not creating a space for women. […] It's like society, not saying women are bad. It's just not facilitating anything to make it better.[178]

Subculture theorist David Matza argues that "a subculture cannot be entirely isolated or autonomous precisely because it exists within a wider mainstream cultural context that necessarily affects the subculture"[179] The restrictions placed on women's behavior in society at large, as pointed to in section 3.4.3, are reflected in the hardcore scene. As Andrea described it, "I think all the little microcosms of hardcore and girls is the same in the regular world. But on a smaller, more personal level."

3.6 Women remembered

In my research for this project, I visited a number of websites in addition to the social networking sites I found some of my informants through. As the hardcore scene has evolved, it has, like most youth cultures, spread onto the Internet. In the early stages of my research, I posted an open inquiry to the people active on Livewire Records' message board[180], a website known for its ties to the older hardcore kids, especially on the American East Coast. I asked for information on fanzines written by American women, as I was preliminary interested in using textual productions as my main resource. Perhaps as a sometime active participant on the site, I received a lot of feedback. Later, I observed as several threads appeared on the board about females involved in the scene. What struck me was how few women had actually made their mark in hardcore history. Along with the Warzone Women and Chicks Upfront, as I have already mentioned, and the woman referred to in section 3.5, only two or three photographers, some fanzine publishers and a drummer were mentioned. When I asked Andrea if she knew any other females I could contact, she said:

I'm thinking, like you asked me for names, I'm like, I don't know. Which is sad, why don't I know all these people? After fifteen years, I can't give you a list of ten girls to call? Don't you think that's pretty sad?

To me, this is not only sad, it is a sign of what constitutes a hardcore kid. Because as Haenfler describes the ideology within straight edge, hardcore "does not explicitly exclude

[178] Haenfler, 120.
[179] David Matza quoted in Wood, 17.
[180] Livewire Records message board, http://forums.livewire-records.com/ (accessed 2006 – May 2009)

women […] but neither does [it] intentionally *include* them."[181] In hardcore, as in many youth subcultures, "[t]he result is 'female exscription,' a process that makes women absent or invisible."[182] Women are not remembered because they, in the end, are not counted as important assets to the hardcore scene.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter the voices of women in hardcore have been added to the discussion. Their experiences vividly portray an environment where women are accepted, yet not fully embraced. Through the roles set by behavioral myths in the scene, women are put up against each other, making it difficult to create a sisterhood that fully compliments the brotherhood so crucial to the setup of the hardcore subculture.

Hardcore is experienced as a safe haven, a place where the difference many feel sets them apart from their mainstream peers is accepted. In hardcore, the women I interviewed found a place to flourish, some even credit the scene for saving their lives. The hardcore scene offers friendships, personal growth and an opportunity to partake in a community that is dependent on one's participation. The emphasis put on this participation, through playing in bands, making fanzines, photography and the like increases the self-worth of hardcore kids. Women like Andrea and Sylvia feel that their activity in the scene has empowered them and gained them the respect of their peers. However, the activities offered to women in the scene are limited, as playing in bands is mostly considered off-limits to women. While the lack of female vocalists in hardcore is often explained with their voices being higher pitched, and thus not fitting for the music genre, Clawson argues that women in alternative music most often play the bass due to the instrument's musically supportive nature, which echoes the role women appear to hold in the scene at large. They are in the background, supporting men's efforts. This can also be seen in how female crews are viewed in posterity. While the Warzone Women have a credible air to them, the Chicks Upfront, who sought a place upfront and center, demanding attention as women, are ridiculed.

[181] Haenfler, 124.
[182] Walser quoted in Haenfler, 124.

While the hardcore scene gives women the opportunity to escape rigid gender roles they may experience in mainstream society, it imposes other norms of behavior on them that reflect those they may be trying to escape. As Matza claims, the hardcore subculture reflects traditional mainstream values, even in its struggle to oppose mainstream society. Hardcore, being a subculture displaying at times extreme machismo, offers no clear space for women. Women who enter the scene must thus either create a space for themselves as women, or become a man, so to speak. Through tomboyism, women in the scene oppose traditional femininity. However, because they ultimately are women, they can never be accepted as men. And because they opt out of traditional femininity, they are often not considered as women either. The focus on brotherhood in the community, where friendships are considered more as familial relationships (as discussed in section 2.3.1), also means women see other females in the scene through male eyes. Women in many instances look on each other the way men view them, and thus women demand new females in the scene to go through the same rights of passage as they themselves went through in order to be considered sincere. This makes the forming of female relationships that reflect the male friendships in the scene difficult. Many of the women I interviewed claimed to have few close female friends, in Andrea's experience, women she befriended in the scene disappeared quickly. Because many of the women who enter the hardcore scene are girlfriends of male hardcore kids, women are deemed as inauthentic in the scene, because they are thought to leave it as soon as the relationship ends.

In theory, women in hardcore should have a strong awareness of sexual politics, they are a part of a community that opposes mainstream conformity, one that emphasizes the importance of individualism and the threat of societal oppression. According to McRobbie: "Becoming aware of what it is to be a young woman today almost inevitably means being touched by elements of feminist discourse."[183] And to some extent, the women I interviewed have been. However, many equate feminism with economic equality, overlooking the structural oppression women, and ethnic and sexual minorities are subject to. Thus, they also overlook the systemic way in which women are excluded from the core of the hardcore community. If they are not participating to the same extent men are, it may in fact be because they are not allowed to.

[183] McRobbie, 211.

4. Final Thoughts

This thesis has sought to explore how women experience the American hardcore scene. As mentioned, I do not claim to describe the American hardcore scene as a whole, in the end, my claims are based on the source selection made and on the women interviewed. It is intended as a beginning, and as a way to start a broader discussion about hardcore, as well as other masculine subcultures.

American hardcore is a subculture with opposing values. Hardcore is inherently oppositional towards mainstream society, promoting to some extent feminist ideals and questioning oppression, and thereby providing a context in which young women feel empowered. However, hardcore can also be described as a men's movement, where the sense of brotherhood creates what Haenfler refers to as "a relatively safe place for men (at least heterosexual, and usual white) to congregate, share their concerns, and reinforce their values."[184] This safe haven is in many ways out of reach to women. This is the dichotomy this thesis has explored. Originally deeply involved in punk, women disappeared from the scene as hardcore emerged. In scholarly research, women are most often overlooked in the study of youth subculture, starting with the masculine bias of the CCCS, where women are deemed as passive accessories to active men. Although revisionist, post-subcultural works have attempted to present women as central to subcultural practice, the work on women in American hardcore, which as a small subculture has received quite a lot of attention in subcultural studies at large, has remained confined to single chapters here and there. Women in hardcore are often assumed not to exist at all, and the work done on them supports the idea that they, in fact, were not important. As Blush puts it, "Why did Hardcore, allegedly open-minded and egalitarian, involve so few women? And is it politically correct to write women into the history, to pretend they had an active voice, when in truth they didn't?"[185] In this thesis I have tried to answer these two questions.

Ideas presented as central to hardcore ideology in Chapter 2, such as brotherhood, physical strength and self-control to some extent exclude women from the communal discourse. The ideals presented in the scene are inherently masculine. Women are presented as the other,

[184] Haenfler, 109.

even as a threat to the strength of the hardcore community, and their presence is suspect until proven sincere. It is not strange that this does not attract many women. The women who do enter the scene, especially those who are introduced to hardcore through a boyfriend, do not linger after the relationship ends. Hardcore imposes many rules, however progressive it paints itself to be. It is my hypothesis that perhaps women are not attracted to the strict control aspect of the hardcore scene, because they experience control in so many ways from society in general. While hardcore provides a space for opposing many mainstream values, the rules of conduct for women are as strict, as this thesis has uncovered.

So why even try? To some extent, questioning why a woman is into hardcore is as absurd as asking men. While many women in the scene would take offense to this question, the analysis in this thesis calls for an answer. Much of it lies in what the subculture offers to participants: music, friends and a community outside the mainstream. They are there because they love the music and are committed to the ideals hardcore promotes, while perhaps not considering the gender norms I have focused on in this thesis. Hardcore also offers a means to at least stylistically oppose traditional gender roles that feel confining to many young women, and is in the end a community that embraces otherness and preaches for a self-employed, united community outside what is deemed as normal in society at large.

As to Blush's question about writing women into the history of hardcore when they did not have an active voice in the community, it is crucial to point out the problems with this assumption. To imply that women had no part of hardcore is simply not true. The fact that women were sidelined due to an increase in violence and machismo does not mean they were not there. In the American hardcore scene specifically, women provided (and still do) much of the non-musical aspects of the culture, making fanzines, putting up shows and taking pictures. Their voices were there; they were simply not heard. In order to discuss and document the breadth of the history of American hardcore, one cannot avoid the contributions of women in the scene. Their presence in the background is not necessarily a choice. I would argue that women in hardcore realistically do not have the choice to take their place upfront and center. In hooks' definition, oppression is the "absence of choices."[186] The answer to Blush's question is that his assumption is false, the women he

[185] Blush, 35.
[186] hooks, 5.

cannot hear are to some extent silenced by an oppressive structure. Writing them into the history of hardcore is not only *politically* correct, it is correct.

The process of writing this thesis has crystallized things I have not been completely aware of in my own relationship with hardcore, something that has at times been difficult to accept. By looking closely at how gendered issues are represented in and presented to the hardcore scene, a common thread has emerged. I would argue that women are structurally excluded from the hardcore scene, that they are clearly sidelined and expected to hold strictly supportive roles. The environment that so many see as progressive and welcoming to those who feel like outsiders in mainstream society, has another side to it, one that reinforces traditional and oppressive gender roles and punishes the transgression of rules with suspicion or even exclusion. While women can (and must) prove their sincerity through partaking in activities that support the hardcore scene, they are excluded from some of these activities because of the inherent masculinity of these activities. Women cannot be as masculine as men, not only because they are women, but also because if they attempt to deny their femininity, they become non-men, neither men nor women. In this light, I have become increasingly impressed by women in hardcore. The women I talked to experience the hardcore scene as positive, their experiences boast of friendships, empowerment and strengthened self-esteem. Creating a comfortable place for themselves in the circumstances this thesis has uncovered, is no small feat.

5. Appendix

My interview guide is heavily influenced by Leblanc's strategy in interviewing female punks.[187] This is due to her project's similar goals to mine. When doing e-mail interviews, I divided the questions into two or three e-mails, and sent new questions out after getting the first answered, thus making it possible to add follow-up questions, while keeping the communication flowing. I added an introductory letter that explained my purpose, and changed or removed some questions, while adding others during the process.

5.1 Interview guide

Notes to self:

- Not necessary to ask all the questions, see which ones are relevant
- Stress anonymity
- Ask how/why, don't lead interviewee to answer in the way you want.

Introductory information:

Is it OK with you if I tape this?
As I mentioned, this is for my thesis on women in the American hardcore scene.
I may quote you in print, but I won't use your real name if you want to be anonymous.
I won't ask you questions I'm not prepared to answer myself.
I'm trying to find out what your personal experiences and opinions are.
If you don't want to answer a question, you don't have to.
If you are unsure of what I am asking, ask me to explain.
If you want to suggest any other questions, that would be great.
If you don't agree with what I am saying, interrupt me.

Questions:

Name:

Age:

Where do you live?
With whom?

[187] Leblanc, 253-257.

Do you work?
    What do you do?

Do you go to school?
    What are you studying?

Where were you raised?
    How would you describe the environment where you were raised?

What do your parents do?

How would you describe yourself?
    Do you identify as a hardcore kid, or a part of the hardcore scene?
        How?

How would you define hardcore?

What does hardcore mean to you?

When/How did you get involved with the hardcore scene?

When/how did you first hear about hardcore music?

When did you first hear hardcore music?

When/how did you first meet other hardcore kids?

Are you straight-edge?
    Y: How and why did you become straight-edge?
    N: How do you feel about straight-edge?

What attracted you to the hardcore scene?

What do you like about it?
    Is there anything you don't like about the hardcore scene?

Do you go to a lot of shows?

Do you or have you played in a band/done a fanzine/put up shows? (How are you active in the scene, how is hardcore a part of your life?)
    Y: What was that like?
    (N: Why not? – negatively charged question, implies you should do something)

Did being involved with the hardcore scene change anything in your life?
    Yes: What changed?

How did people react when you got involved with hardcore?

Do you feel that the hardcore scene has changed since you got involved with it?
    Yes: In what way?

Are many of your friends into hardcore?

Are they mostly girls or guys?
Why do you think that is?

Are you in a relationship with someone?
Yes: Are they also into hardcore?
No: Have you dated anyone in the scene?

How are you treated by guys in the scene?
Like a girl, like a "pal".

Do you think that your experiences as a female in the hardcore scene are different from those of males?
Yes: In what way?

Have you ever been harassed (because you are a girl)?
By whom? How did this happen?

What do you think you would have been like if you never had been involved with the hardcore scene?

Do you think hardcore girls are different from other girls?
Yes: In what way?

Do you consider yourself to be "feminine"?
Yes: In what way?
No: Why not?

Are you politically active?
Yes: How?

Would you call yourself a feminist?
What do you mean by feminist?

Is there anything I haven't asked you about that you think I should know/that you want to talk about?

5.2 Statement of purpose

Thank you for allowing me to interview you. Your opinions and experiences are very valuable in allowing me to write about the American hardcore scene, and the female experience of it. I am doing this research and writing my thesis on this because I think women are not mentioned as much as men in discussions and literature about the hardcore scene, or other subcultures. By interviewing you and others I want to find out how women see themselves as participants in the hardcore scene, and how they view their gender within it.

I think it is important that women in the hardcore scene talk to each other and share their experiences, and I want to make my work available to you if you want to read it when it is

done. I might write an article, and possibly a fanzine in addition to the thesis in order for others to read about how women view the hardcore scene.

If you wish, you can be anonymous, although I will quote you, I will change your name and details in order for your identity to be unknown. Everything you say will be kept in confidence. If you have any questions about this, please ask me!

You can email or call me (I will be in NY until May 24th).

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