

Consuming Authenticity  
Deconstructing “Do-It-Yourself” Punk Rock  
Ethics in Philadelphia

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## Table of Contents

Introduction: Welcome to “the Best Punk Scene in the Country Right Now”	1
“The House Shows Don’t Really Happen Everywhere”: Why Philadelphia?	7
“Semi Anti-Establishment, I Guess”: Punk as a Vessel	12
“You Know, Just Do It”: An Overview of DIY Punk Ethics	16
“This Music is Just Organic”: Authenticity, Opposition, and the Myth of the Mainstream	21
“We never want to be a band that's just in it to make a buck”: The Narrative of “Selling Out”	27
“It’s Never Been Easier to Make Music Like a Pro”: Capitalism and DIY Punk Rock	32
“To Enhance the Blank Landscape of Whiteness”: Punks in the Sub-urban	38
“They Don’t Wanna Die”: The Unintended Consequences of DIY Punk in Philadelphia	42
“We are Infinite and Never-Ending”: Seeds of Resistance	46
Conclusion: “Everyone’s for Themselves When it Should be Together”	51
Bibliography	55



## **Introduction: Welcome to “the Best Punk Scene in the Country Right Now”<sup>1</sup>**

In a West Philadelphia row house, a group of sixty young people crowd closely together in a small kitchen to watch the bands, We Were Skeletons, MNSA, Kids, and 1994! perform live.<sup>2</sup> This 2012 concert marks one of the last shows held at the punk house, IHOP Estate. Drenched in sweat with beers in hand, the primarily white audience waits for the self-described punk band, Kids, to begin their performance. Consisting of three guitarists, a vocalist, and a drummer, Kids and their musical equipment barely fit in the small room. Immediately as Kids launches into their first song, the audience moves aggressively around the small space, slamming into each other, stomping, jumping, and drunkenly dancing to the driving drumbeats of the music. Kids’ vocalist pushes back at the audience, falling multiple times onto the floor. Confetti, beer cans, and pizza boxes fly through the air as audience members jump from the stairs onto the heads of the crowd. People fall into the amplifiers only to get back up and mosh again. Two men in only boxer briefs climb their way through the audience, pound their fists in the air, and scream the lyrics along with the vocalist. At one point, the drummer stops in the middle of a song and proceeds to repeatedly slam his head against the wall at full force. “It was so fun. Like reckless abandon...,” an audience participant remembers. “What I remember the most is walking away from that house thinking, like, ‘Damn, I can’t believe no one got

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<sup>1</sup> Dan Ozzi, “Philadelphia Has the Best Punk Scene in the Country Right Now,” *Noisey: Music by Vice*, February 4, 2014, <http://noisey.vice.com/blog/philadelphia-has-the-best-punk-scene-in-the-country-right-now>.

<sup>2</sup> “Kids,” YouTube video, 12:44, from a performance at IHOP Estate on June 20, 2012, posted by Vitaly Abrams, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WAwJIxGuOlc>.

arrested at that show.’ There was no police intervention at all and Kids were loud. They didn’t try to play quietly or anything like that. It was good.”<sup>3</sup>

Although I did not attend Kids’ IHOP Estate concert, I have partaken in house shows of a similar nature. Since the age of twelve, I have participated as an invested member of various punk rock subcultures. Punk music seemed to provide me, a rebellious young person in rural Pennsylvania, with everything I felt I needed; it fostered creativity, vocalized teenage angst, and, above all, provided a perceived community of “outcasts” that I could relate to outside the context of my conservative hometown. My interest in punk began when my elementary school teacher introduced me to Green Day’s *Dookie* and Weezer’s *The Blue Album*. I would sit on my bedroom floor for hours listening to the albums over and over. When I sang along to “Basket Case” and “Say It Ain’t So,” I felt a sense of personal connection to music for the first time—a connection I wanted to consistently feel. I proceeded to spend the majority of my adolescence unconditionally devoting my free time in punk rock subcultures by listening to music, searching for new bands, and convincing my older friends to drive me to shows in Baltimore and Washington, D.C. In 2012, I finally joined a band of my own and began writing, recording, and playing music within a variety of scenes across the United States. As I experienced different music scenes, including the house shows of Philadelphia, I began to ask questions that complicated what I witnessed: What does it mean for someone or something to be “punk”? Is punk just a genre of music in opposition to “mainstream” popular culture or is it a lifestyle? How does punk’s historical narrative

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<sup>3</sup> Pierce Jordan (vocalist of the band, Soul Glo; former resident of the Philadelphia punk house, Myspace; scene participant; and concert organizer), interview by Patricia Kotrady, respondent’s home in Philadelphia, February 13, 2016.

influence the understanding of “punk” ethics today? What does it mean to “sell out”?  
Why are punk houses most often situated in low-income neighborhoods of color?

As I explored these questions in personal and academic contexts, I examined scholarship on popular music and youth subcultures, including Holly Kruse’s research on independent music “scenes,” or music-oriented communities; Dick Hebdige’s seminal analysis of British youth subcultures’ symbolic representations of style in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*; Simon Frith’s contributions to the sociology of rock; and Barry Shank’s case study in *Dissonant Identities: The Rock’n’Roll Scene in Austin, Texas*. Using these works as a foundation for my own research, I expand rock music scholars’ findings to capture the current moment of punk in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Although there exists a variety of studies on historically notable punk scenes such as New York City,<sup>4</sup> Washington D.C.,<sup>5</sup> and 1970s England,<sup>6</sup> often with a focus on spectacular elements such as fashion, music, or style, there has been little to no research on punk rock contemporary Philadelphia. I therefore seek to contribute to the field of popular music studies by deconstructing and reimagining contemporary Philadelphia’s “Do-It-Yourself” (DIY) punk rock subculture.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania has gained popularity in the past five to seven years for its development of a vibrant music subculture. According to music journalist Dan Ozzi in a *Noisy* article titled “Philadelphia Has the Best Punk Scene in the Country Right Now,” “Philadelphia is an unrepentant shithole of a city where humanity goes to die, or at

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<sup>4</sup> Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* (New York: Grove Press, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Mark Andersen and Mark Jenkins, *Dance of Days: Two Decades of Punk in the Nation’s Capital* (New York: Akashic Books, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Mark Sinker, “Concrete, So as to Self-Destruct: The Etiquette of Punk, Its Habits, Rules, Values, and Dilemmas,” in *Punk Rock: So What? The Cultural Legacy of Punk*, ed. Roger Sabin (London: Routledge, 1999).

the very least, have its mother insulted...yet, it is home to the most prolific, most honest punk scene in the country.”<sup>7</sup> As Ozzi emphasizes, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania has become a sort of “punk rock haven” that has fostered a booming underground music scene. In the past few years, bands and punk fans from around the United States have relocated to Philadelphia in an attempt to become a part of the subculture.<sup>8</sup> Throughout this study, I investigate why so many punks are gravitating towards Philadelphia if it is considered such a “shithole of a city” to people such as Dan Ozzi. According to music blogger, Michael Tedder, “From Cayetana to Strand of Oaks, Modern Baseball to Restorations, Swearin’ to Pissed Jeans, Nothing to Hop Along, Purling Hiss to Sheer Mag, Philadelphia has more exciting young bands in one place than any town in America. If one still has a soft spot for cheap rock thrills, this town can feel like the promised land.”<sup>9</sup> In listing the most popular emerging artists from Philadelphia, Tedder captures the vast sonic variety of Philadelphia’s music scene. From pop punk to hardcore to indie, Philadelphia’s musical diversity seems to have the potential to draw any rock music enthusiast to its scene.

In this essay, I present three arguments highlighting the subculture’s central inconsistencies. First, I argue that DIY punk is a mythic construct. In prioritizing “authenticity” and romanticizing punk’s historical narrative, DIY punks mythologize a

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<sup>7</sup> Ozzi, “Philadelphia Has the Best Punk Scene in the Country Right Now,” <http://noisy.vice.com/blog/philadelphia-has-the-best-punk-scene-in-the-country-right-now>.

<sup>8</sup> Examples of bands relocating to Philadelphia include the movement of Girlpool from Los Angeles; Modern Baseball from Frederick, Maryland; Strand of Oaks from Indiana; Waxahatchee and Swearin’ from Birmingham, Alabama; The Districts from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania; Radiator Hospital from Grand Rapids, Michigan; Alex G from Havertown, Pennsylvania; among others.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Tedder, “Streets of Philadelphia, How the Former ‘Sixth Borough’ Became Rock’s First City,” *Stereogum*, June 8, 2015, <http://www.stereogum.com/1804162/streets-of-philadelphia-how-the-former-sixth-borough-became-rocks-first-city/franchises/cover-story>.

presumed anti-commercial DIY ethic, relying on constructs that exist only in their imaginations. Second, I assert that capitalist ideologies infiltrate the DIY punk realm, as the two fields cannot exist separately. Although DIY punks define themselves in opposition to a profit-oriented “mainstream” music industry, they rely on capitalist ideologies in order to function, as well as their own system of cultural capital exchange, which perpetuates hierarchies of power through forms of symbolic capital. Finally, I argue that, in an attempt to create an independent sense of self, DIY punks engage in processes of self-marginalization that appropriate a racialized “Other” in low-income neighborhoods of Philadelphia. Although I expose and explain the contradictions of Philadelphia’s DIY punk ethic, I do not seek to completely discredit the resistive potential of punk music. I therefore conclude my analysis with a close reading of lyrics from Philadelphia bands, HIRS and Soul Glo, in order to highlight punk’s potential as a vehicle for social change.

Throughout my study, I employ cultural studies ethnography, using personal and published interviews of major players in the Philadelphia music scene, including punk house inhabitants, musicians, and concert organizers. I combine respondents’ testimonies with readings of media texts from Philadelphia punks’ own cultural production, such as lyrics and punk house concerts. I additionally present economic analyses of popular media’s processes of production and consumption, connecting them to the lived experiences of participants in the Philadelphia DIY punk scene. As I employ these methods, I delve into subcultural terminology, analyze concepts of “authenticity” and “selling out,” investigate the function of economic and symbolic capital in Philadelphia’s punk subculture, and highlight the role of race, class, and gender in the scene. I ground

my assertions in theoretical frameworks, including the work of French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu's theories of cultural production, fields, and cultural capital, as well as Raymond Williams' categorizations of emergent practices. Throughout my study of Philadelphia's DIY punk scene, I constantly keep my personal experiences in mind, as they provide a basis for my understanding of the subculture.

As a current participant playing music and attending shows in local DIY punk scenes, I have a certain degree of credibility that allows me to engage with participants without being labeled an "outsider." According to Tricia Henry Young in her book, *Break All Rules: Punk Rock and the Making of a Style*, "The difficulties of researching punk are complicated by the fact that punk rock developed specific aesthetic codes in order to rebel against, and make itself inaccessible to, the cultural mainstream. The process of documenting the particulars of this aesthetic and subjecting them to scholarly analysis renders the punk code accessible to outsiders—thereby subverting its rebellious nature."<sup>10</sup> Due to my experiences in punk rock subcultures, I occupy the roles of both participant and observer. Although I have attended a few shows in Philadelphia punk houses, I do not live in Philadelphia, and therefore maintain a degree of distance from the DIY punk lifestyle I study. This balance between participant and observer enables me to possess enough background knowledge and subcultural legitimacy to find interview contacts, ask challenging questions, and attend house shows, yet helps me monitor my biases and personal investment in the Philadelphia DIY punk scene. Ultimately, my participation in DIY punk qualifies me to complicate its philosophies and practices while simultaneously upholding its potential to radicalize young people.

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<sup>10</sup> Tricia Henry Young, *Break All Rules: Punk Rock and the Making of a Style* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), viii.

### **“The House Shows Don’t Really Happen Everywhere”<sup>11</sup>: Why Philadelphia?**

Although Philadelphia’s DIY punk scene reflects themes of contemporary punk rock subcultures throughout the United States, it acts as a particularly ideal space for analysis. Key to what makes Philadelphia “the best punk scene in the country right now”<sup>12</sup> is its network of punk houses. Punk houses act as the central space for DIY musical production. Within their walls, scene participants attend concerts, host parties, listen to records, and coordinate band practice. Punk house shows similar to Kids’ performance at IHOP Estate take place in other music scenes, but they occur more frequently in Philadelphia. According to a scene participant and former resident of the Philadelphia punk houses, IHOP Estate and Double Deuce: “The house shows don’t really happen everywhere. A lot of places in the South and the West [of the United States] don’t have basements, so they can’t really do that, and the living room shows get too loud and they get shut down, so kids have to go out to different means of booking and throwing shows.”<sup>13</sup> As this respondent suggests, the current moment in Philadelphia presents an opportune space for the proliferation of house shows. Unlike other cities, DIY punks in Philadelphia can host house shows without getting “shut down.” Philadelphia punks continue to host concerts in houses without disturbance—but how? In order to understand the unique proliferation of house shows in Philadelphia, I briefly outline the historical foundations of Philadelphia’s racial and socioeconomic relations.

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<sup>11</sup> Mark Walsh, interview by Evan Lescalette, *My Basement is a Shithole*, Documentary Film, Directed by Evan Lescalette, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwYVVCimZgA>.

<sup>12</sup> Ozzi, “Philadelphia Has the Best Punk Scene in the Country Right Now,” <http://noisy.vice.com/blog/philadelphia-has-the-best-punk-scene-in-the-country-right-now>.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Walsh, interview by Evan Lescalette, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwYVVCimZgA>.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, also known as “the city of brotherly love,” has a rich history of idealism. Acquired by William Penn in 1681, Pennsylvania became a symbolic space of religious tolerance and community-governance in contrast to the absolute monarchies of England. Growing exponentially throughout the eighteenth century and assuming early leadership in the arts and sciences, Philadelphia became the home of the First and Second Continental Congresses, which proclaimed the Declaration of Independence and governed throughout the American Revolution; held the ratification of the federal Constitution; and served as the capital of the United States from 1790 to 1800. In remembrance of these foundational events, Philadelphia is often considered an early beacon of democracy and tolerance.<sup>14</sup> For many contemporary DIY punks, Philadelphia still represents a space of opportunity and freedom, but this narrative becomes complicated by an understanding of the racial and economic tensions in the postwar city.

With the onset of World War II, thousands of African Americans began to migrate to Philadelphia to work factory jobs while white male workers were off at war, increasing the city’s black population fifty percent from 1940 to 1950.<sup>15</sup> Once in Philadelphia, African Americans tended to live in the oldest, most dilapidated buildings, often occupying North and West Philadelphia row houses built during the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> As tens of thousands of veterans returned home, a housing crisis and racial tension ensued, marking an era of economic inequality and segregation that continues to plague the city in the twenty-first century. As the

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<sup>14</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Philadelphia,” by Sylvester Stevens, April 23, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/place/Philadelphia>.

<sup>15</sup> James Wolfinger, *Philadelphia Divided: Race and Politics in the City of Brotherly Love* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 178.

<sup>16</sup> According to James Wolfinger in *Philadelphia Divided*, 35 percent of black Philadelphians lived in housing that was either dilapidated or lacked a private bath, as compared to only 8 percent of white residents in the 1950s.

Philadelphia's African American population expanded, whites simultaneously moved their families and businesses to the city's suburbs, illustrating "white flight" and suburbanization.<sup>17</sup> African Americans in the city of Philadelphia "were being choked by a ring of suburbs that Philadelphia's future mayor Richardson Dilworth called a 'white noose'."<sup>18</sup> This marks a central theme of Philadelphia's postwar history: the centralization and segregation of people of color in the city's most dilapidated areas and the fleeing of whites to more expensive and racially exclusive suburbs on the outskirts of the city.

As African Americans attempted to integrate the city throughout the 1950s and 1960s, they were met with white resistance. Some whites organized mob opposition, driving out families of color from their all-white neighborhoods. The largest riot took place in October 1966, when a black family rented a house on a block by a predominantly white girls' high school in Kensington. White demonstrators protested in front of the house for long periods of time, throwing rocks, eggs, and bottles until the black family moved.<sup>19</sup> In addition, people of color were barred from suburban neighborhoods through processes of redlining as well as housing discrimination from banks, real estate agents, and housing associations that placed strict limits on who could live in certain neighborhoods.<sup>20</sup> Despite discrimination, middle-class African Americans resiliently continued to integrate the city, and white residents put their homes on the market. As

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<sup>17</sup> According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Philadelphia's population is now about 36% white, 44% black, 14% Latino, and 7% Asian.

<sup>18</sup> James Wolfinger, *Philadelphia Divided*, 179.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 185-186.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 189-190.

whites moved their families and jobs to the suburbs, areas of West and North Philadelphia became all-black ghettos ridden with poverty and police brutality.<sup>21</sup>

From the 1980s onward, gentrification has taken hold of the city, having significant consequences for Philadelphia's poor communities of color. According to Adams et al. in their history of gentrification of Philadelphia, "Gentrification...is the movement of middle and upper-class households into areas that were previously inhabited by low-income people."<sup>22</sup> African Americans, who were once so intensely prohibited from the suburbs, have become displaced from Center City neighborhoods to the oldest suburbs in the northern and western sections of the city, while middle and upper class individuals move into renovated city apartments.<sup>23</sup> Within these neighborhoods of West and North Philadelphia, residents often live in poverty, struggling to pay for food, transportation, and health insurance.

As of 2014, Philadelphia has been ranked the third poorest city in the country, falling narrowly behind Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Detroit, Michigan. About 25.8% of the city's population lives below the poverty line.<sup>24</sup> Philadelphia additionally has the highest rate of deep poverty—annual incomes below half of the poverty line—of the country's ten most populous cities. In Philadelphia, 12.3 percent of the population, or

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<sup>21</sup> In May 1981, the Philadelphia Police Department attacked a home located on Osage Avenue in the Cobbs Creek area of West Philadelphia in response to the "disorderly" conduct of the African-American "back to nature" minimalist group, MOVE. When MOVE resisted arrest, police fired over 10,000 rounds of ammunition into the home, used tear gas, and eventually dropped an explosive on the roof of the home. According to Kimberly Sanders and Judson Jeffries in "Framing Move: A Press' Complicity In The Murder Of Women And Children In The City Of (Un) Brotherly Love," The bomb killed eleven MOVE members, including five children, destroyed sixty-one homes in the neighborhood, and damaged 110 additional houses.

<sup>22</sup> Adams et al., *Philadelphia: Neighborhoods, Divisions, and Conflict in a Postindustrial City* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 88.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-90.

<sup>24</sup> United States Census Bureau, "Quickfacts: Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, 2014." <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST040214/42101>.

around 186,000 people, live in deep poverty.<sup>25</sup> For a family of four, this would mean living off an annual income of \$12,000 or less. Reflecting broader United States trends,<sup>26</sup> Philadelphia's areas of deep poverty are mostly segregated by race. It is within these spaces of economic tension and racial segregation that DIY punks find their place of opportunity, as Philadelphia's punk houses are often situated in some of the most economically deprived family neighborhoods in West, Southwest, and North Philadelphia. I later investigate the effect of punk houses in low-income neighborhoods of color. First, I elaborate on the ideologies that flourish inside the punk house walls.

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<sup>25</sup> Alfred Lubrano, "Among the 10 Largest Cities, Philly has Highest Deep-Poverty Rate," *The Inquirer*, October 1, 2015, <http://www.irp.wisc.edu/dispatch/tag/deep-poverty/>.

<sup>26</sup> John Logan and Brian Stults, "The Persistence of Segregation in the Metropolis: New Findings from the 2010 Census," 2011, *Brown University Project US2010*, Census Brief, <http://www.s4.brown.edu/us2010>.

### **“Semi Anti-Establishment, I Guess”<sup>27</sup>: Punk as a Vessel**

Central to understanding the inner workings of Philadelphia’s DIY punk scene is a consideration of its subcultural terminology and popular historical narrative.

Documentation of punk rock’s past presents a convoluted and ambiguous historical narrative. As Theodore Gracyk mentions in the book, *I Wanna Be Me: Rock Music and the Politics of Identity*, “In rock, there is no virgin birth, no year zero.”<sup>28</sup> Despite an indefinable beginning, rock’s musical roots are commonly traced back to the United States in the 1940s and 1950s with early African American musicians such as Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Chuck Berry, who developed and refined rhythm and blues into what is now considered rock’n’roll. As a subgenre of rock music, punk music is believed to have originated in 1960s and early 1970s with Midwestern and West Coast garage rock bands as well as “proto-punk” musicians such as The Kinks and The Who from England; Peru’s Los Saicos; and United-Statesian bands, MC5, The Stooges, The Sonics, Death, and the New York Dolls, who, among others, presented musical elements that came to sonically characterize punk rock, including driving drum beats, fast-paced rhythm, hard-edged vocals, and stripped down instrumentation.

Drawing on elements from proto-punk, New York-based bands such as Television, Patti Smith, and the Ramones rejected the perceived excessiveness of popular rock bands of the 1970s and pursued what many now consider “punk” in their musical

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<sup>27</sup> Rachel Dispenza (current resident of Philadelphia punk house, Milhouse; member of band, Coping Skills; scene participant; concert organizer), interview by Patricia Kotrady, respondent’s home/punk house in Philadelphia, February 13, 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Theodore Gracyk, *I Wanna Be Me: Rock Music and the Politics of Identity*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 8.

style and attitude.<sup>29</sup> Legs McNeil, involved with the East Village New York City rock club, CBGB, soon thereafter started a low-budget fan magazine, or “fanzine,” called *Punk* in 1976. According to McNeil, “The word ‘punk’ seemed to sum up the thread that connected everything we liked—drunk, obnoxious, smart but not too pretentious, absurd, funny, ironic, and things that appealed to the darker side.”<sup>30</sup> Drawing on early definitions of punk as hoodlum or amateur, McNeil and other participants in the 1970s New York rock scene found commonalities in popular definitions of “punk” and the musical style and defiant attitude of New York’s emerging rock bands.

When punk rock transmitted throughout the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, sparking the creation of new bands, it splintered and expanded into various subgenres such as ska punk, Oi, pop punk, metal, grunge, and hardcore punk (particularly in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C.), as well as alternative and indie rock, which may not have directly adopted punk sound, but applied the DIY ethic to an often less aggressive, and by extension a less spectacular and co-optable, style of music and fashion.<sup>31</sup> The expansion of punk rock music in the United States, England, and South America prompted a rise in scene participants around the world, all implementing their own sonic, historical, and geographical interpretations of punk.

As evident in punk’s historical narrative, meanings of “punk rock” have changed individually, historically, and geographically, resulting in no concise definition of punk

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<sup>29</sup> In a 1975 *Village Voice* review, Ricard Mortifoglio stated that the band, Television, had “allegiances with punk rock,” reportedly using “punk” in a musical context for the first time.

<sup>30</sup> McNeil and McCain, “Why Don’t We Call It Punk?,” in *The Rock History Reader*, ed. Theo Cateforis (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2007), 169.

<sup>31</sup> Cotten Seiler, “‘Have You Ever Been to the Pleasure Inn?’ The Transformation of Indie Rock in Louisville, Kentucky,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 13 (2001): 189-205.

as it currently exists in living language.<sup>32</sup> “Punk” as in “punk rock” or “punk culture” therefore acts as a notoriously amorphous concept. Some scholars have attempted to define punk by the commonalities found amongst bands and participants in a scene. According to Patricia Henry Young in *Break All Rules: Punk Rock and the Making of a Style*, common characteristics may include “unusual fashions, the blurring of boundaries between art and everyday life; juxtapositions of seemingly disparate objects and behaviors; intentional provocation of the audience; use of untrained performers; and drastic reorganization (or disorganization) of accepted performativity styles and procedures.”<sup>33</sup> Although the identified characteristics vary, scholars often classify punk generally as loud, fast music with a basis in anti-authoritarian beliefs. Other scholars have instead opted to use words such as “alternative” or “indie” to describe the musical subcultures of their study, often using them interchangeably with “punk.” This seems to be due to a generational difference in terminology. In contemporary Philadelphia, most of the respondents used the word “punk” to describe themselves, their music, and music scene, but this is historically and geographically contingent. At another place and time, such as Washington, D.C. in the 1980s, for example, they might have used a different word to describe the values and practices to which they are drawn, but “punk,” and particularly “DIY punk,” appears to be the consensus term for Philadelphia’s subculture.

Considering punk’s definitional variation and ambiguous history, it acts not as a particular musical style or event, but instead as a vessel for self-expression and personal

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<sup>32</sup> The word “punk” first appeared in the English language as a synonym for prostitute, as evidenced through Shakespeare’s use of the word in his 1603 comedy *Measure for Measure*, and later came to describe a gay male, particularly within prison. Definitions also include a hoodlum, amateur, or young gangster.

<sup>33</sup> Tricia Henry Young, *Break All Rules!: Punk Rock and the Making of a Style* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), 1.

meaning that can be interpreted based on individual experience, time period, and geographic location. Although punk is often traced back to the 1960s and 1970s in the United States and England, it has transformed and developed into different scenes that take “punk” as a master signifier for various sounds and attitudes. In this way, punk is transient. It moves and transforms over time as well as through different musical and geographic spaces. As a current resident of the Philadelphia punk house, Milhouse, states, “Punk has many different meanings. There’s punk as a genre then punk as a lifestyle or mindset. Genre wise—fast, loud, a little gritty, maybe a little fuzzy, and kind of driving. Thematically—semi anti-establishment, I guess.”<sup>34</sup> As evident through these broad interpretations, contemporary concepts of punk connote a fast and loud genre of rock music as well as a vague, “semi anti-authoritarian” lifestyle in which any style of music could potentially act as punk, even if a band does not sound directly descended from historically “punk” bands. It is this *semi* anti-authoritarian definition of punk that I seek to highlight and deconstruct throughout this study. In contemporary Philadelphia, punk has taken a form that defines itself not sonically or stylistically, but through “semi anti-establishment” DIY ethics.

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<sup>34</sup> Rachel Dispenza, interview by Patricia Kotrady.

### **“You Know, Just Do It”<sup>35</sup>: An Overview of DIY Punk Ethics**

In order to best articulate the current moment in Philadelphia’s music scene, I emphasize punk’s imagined “Do-It-Yourself,” or DIY, ethics, and use the term “DIY punk” to describe the subculture in this study. All interviewees suggest either explicitly or implicitly that they are a part of DIY punk, with one interviewee even asserting that she was not just a punk, but instead a “DIY person.”<sup>36</sup> Although not exclusively found in rock music or in Philadelphia, but certainly rooted in the popular narrative of punk history (and particularly the presumed anti-commercialism and non-professionalism of punk in the 1970s), DIY generally encompasses an ethic of self-sufficiency through the completion of tasks without the aid of a paid expert. According to a long-time scene participant and former resident at the 1990s Philadelphia DIY punk warehouse venue, Stalag 13, DIY means, “If you have a challenge, try to look at it through a lens of self-empowerment. There’s no reason to manufacture adversity, but realize that you have a lot of options and a lot of ways you can tackle the problem... You want to offer shows? You wanna see a band play? You know, just do it.”<sup>37</sup> DIY punk ethics therefore claim that anyone is capable of doing a variety of tasks within the scene, such as booking shows, learning an instrument, touring, making merchandise, or recording music, without the aid of professional, who is skilled in a specific task and receives monetary compensation for their job. If a DIY punk wants something done, they apparently “just do it,” regardless of inexperience or lack of pay, instead of hiring a professional to act on the desired task.

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<sup>35</sup> Tony Croasdale (a.k.a. “Tony Pointless”; former resident of 1990s Philadelphia punk warehouse, Stalag 13; former concert organizer; former member of the band, R.A.M.B.O.; current scene participant), interview by Patricia Kotrady, respondent’s home in Philadelphia, February 13, 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Rachel Dispenza, interview by Patricia Kotrady.

<sup>37</sup> Tony Croasdale, interview by Patricia Kotrady.

I use “DIY punk” in this study as a fairly fluid term that encompasses the Philadelphia DIY punk scene’s various subgenres, including, but not limited to emo, grunge, melodic rock, hardcore, alternative rock, folk punk, screamo, and pop. Due to the diversity of musical genre and style in the scene, I argue that the Philadelphia’s DIY punk subculture is not necessarily bounded by sound, but instead by DIY ethics. In light of the scene’s sonic and stylistic diversity, I focus on the commonality of belief amongst scene participants instead of fashion or genre. In defining DIY punk, a former resident of Philadelphia punk house, IHOP Estate, stated,

All of those [Philadelphia] bands, what they have in common (or at least they should have in common) is we want a safe space and we want to pay five to ten dollars for a show and we know that the money’s going to the touring bands and that’s how its been riding for years now. It’s more of the community thing or more of the mentality of it rather than what it actually sounds like [sic].<sup>38</sup>

As this participant describes, paying five to ten dollars for a show and ensuring the money goes directly to touring bands constitutes a DIY ethic or “mentality” that presumably ensures money does not go to venues, booking agents, or other more professional players, but instead circulates amongst people in the DIY “community.”

Although not coined by a specific person, DIY punk ethics can be traced back to the mythical origin narrative of rock and roll. The emergence of punk changed the way people viewed the production and consumption of music, which eventually contributed to

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<sup>38</sup> Mark Walsh (former resident of Philadelphia punk houses, IHOP Estate and Double Deuce; former member of the band, Secret Plot to Destroy the Entire Universe; current member of the band, Kississippi; former concert organizer; current scene participant; current worker for Good Sadie Media [record label]), interview by Patricia Kotrady, respondent’s home in Philadelphia, February 13, 2016.

the DIY ethic of the Philadelphia scene today. As Simon Frith describes in his book, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock'n'Roll*,

Punk opposed commercial music in two ways. First, it denounced multinational record companies with a version of the assertion that ‘small is beautiful’—punk music was, authentically, the product of small-scale, independent record and distribution companies. Second, punk demystified the production process itself—its message was that anyone could do it. One effect of this was an astonishing expansion of local music-making, but the most important strand in its development was a people’s version of consumerism, the idea that record buyers had a right to maximum market choice, that record buying should involve customer expression rather than producer manipulation...Such consumerism led to the creation of an “alternative” production system...<sup>39</sup>

As Frith emphasizes, early punk rock encouraged participation in the processes of production and consumption of its products, encouraging people (mostly white, suburban males) to start their own bands, create fan magazines (“fanzines”), and establish record labels to distribute, advertise, and sell the punk ethos. The development of this system of “alternative” musical production marks a beginning of DIY punk history, as it provides a foundation for the DIY punk ethos: self-sufficiency through the completion of tasks without the aid of a paid professional.

Historically, DIY punk can be traced back to certain elements of 1960s and 1970s punk’s anti-commercialism, but also to musicians such as the British anarcho-punk band, Crass. Birthed from four commune housemates in the early 1970s, Crass is thought to be

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<sup>39</sup> Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock'n'Roll* (New York: Pantheon Publishing, 1981), 159.

one of the first DIY punk bands, or “the first major band to demonstrate the authentic anarchist potential of punk.”<sup>40</sup> They incorporated anarchist literature into their manifestos, organized protests, released music on their own label, and ultimately, chose to walk away from fame when on the verge of success by voluntarily disbanding. Although Crass’ anarchist politics do not unanimously transfer to the ethos of contemporary Philadelphia, their commitment to alternative musical production and negation of commercial fame provides a historical basis for the DIY punk ethos in Philadelphia’s scene.

The DIY punk ethic of Philadelphia can also be attributed to the Washington, D.C. hardcore scene of the 1980s. Inspired by the African-American D.C. hardcore band, Bad Brains, Ian MacKaye and Jeff Nelson founded the band, Teen Idles, in 1979.<sup>41</sup> Taking the means of musical production into their own hands, MacKaye and Nelson started the record label, Dischord Records, in 1980 in order to release Teen Idles’ music. Dischord Records and their bands (Minor Threat, Fugazi, Iron Cross, Scream, Rites of Spring, and Void, among others) became most notable for employing a DIY ethic.<sup>42</sup> The record label produced all albums on its own and sold them at discount prices to scene participants. The record label functioned completely through a punk house in Alexandria, Virginia, called Dischord House. MacKaye remembers, “Those of us who lived in Dischord House were all involved with bands. Our basement became a non-stop practice room, and since it was one of the first group houses in our punk clique, it became a major

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<sup>40</sup> Brian Cogan, “‘Do They Owe Us A Living? Of Course They Do!’ Crass, Throbbing Gristle, Anarchy, and Radicalism in Early English Punk Rock,” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 1 (2007): 79.

<sup>41</sup> Mark Andersen and Mark Jenkins, *Dance of Days: Two Decades of Punk in the Nation's Capital* (New York: Akashic Books, 2009), 53-57.

<sup>42</sup> Brian Cogan, *The Encyclopedia of Punk* (New York : Sterling, 2008), 82-83.

hangout. People were around day and night, and quite often found themselves putting together record sleeves and folding lyric sheets.”<sup>43</sup> Dischord House functioned as a place of socialization and musical production. Although Dischord did not solely invent DIY punk houses, they certainly pioneered the proliferation of punk houses in the eastern United States. As one of the first group houses in the Washington, D.C.’s “punk clique,” Dischord House acts as a foundational model for the DIY punk houses in Philadelphia today.

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<sup>43</sup> Ian MacKaye, “Dischord Records,” *Dischord.com*, December 2006, <http://www.dischord.com/history/>.

**“This Music is Just Organic”<sup>44</sup>:**

**Authenticity, Opposition, and the Myth of the Mainstream**

Central to the mythology of DIY punk is the concept of authenticity, often characterized by a commitment to punk ethics. As Max Paddison states in his work on authenticity in Theodore Adorno’s aesthetics of music, “In its most straightforward and everyday sense, the term ‘authenticity’ refers to the ‘real thing,’ the original, the unique, as opposed to the illusory, the imitation, the reproduction, the fake, the counterfeit, or the mass produced.”<sup>45</sup> In terms of DIY punk, “authenticity” has similar meanings. According to an interview participant on the potential differences between DIY punk and dominant music industry, “this [music] is just organic. You just start a band. Most of these bands don’t want to get popular...they write the songs, they write the music, and they ultimately choose what happens.”<sup>46</sup> This DIY punk participant believes that DIY punk presumably represents an “organic” process of music making that includes starting a band without the desire to “get popular.” According to Paddison’s definition of authenticity, this assumes that, in pursuing an “organic,” or authentic, approach to music, bands must oppose “the mass produced,” or “fake,” in order to maintain authenticity.

Vital to notions of a band’s authenticity is an understanding of sincerity as a character trait of the musicians involved. In response to a *New Noise Magazine* interview question on how a prospective fan could get involved in the Philadelphia DIY punk scene, a member of the Philadelphia band, Cayetana, states, “You have to just believe in yourself...If the spirit’s inside of you, that’s all that matters. It doesn’t matter if you’re

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<sup>44</sup> Mark Walsh, interview by Patricia Kotrady.

<sup>45</sup> Max Paddison, “Authenticity and Failure in Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed. Tom Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 201.

<sup>46</sup> Mark Walsh, interview by Patricia Kotrady.

the best shredding guitar player. It's about your sincerity."<sup>47</sup> As this musician suggests, a DIY punk band's success does not rely on musical talent or capital, but instead on a "spirit" inside of oneself—a spirit of sincerity. This vague description not only implies the vitality of imagined sincerity in the scene, but also that a musician cannot be motivated by economic profit or fame. Instead, prospective DIY musicians must simply "believe in themselves" and play music, regardless of talent. Yet, even the most "authentic" images are constructed. One's sincerity, or by extension, authenticity, is an imagined concept of credibility. How would a fan actually *measure* a musician's sincerity? Because authenticity and sincerity cannot actually be measured or definitively tracked, DIY punks rely on the physical act of playing and attending live concerts in order to express imaged concepts of sincerity and prove credibility.

In DIY punk scenes, the physicality of a compelling live performance is vital to the expression of sincerity. A significant example of the importance of physicality is evident in a respondent's description of his favorite show. Referencing Snowing's last show at the First Unitarian Church in Philadelphia, this participant remembers: "Kids were all bleeding with boot prints on kids' faces...they beat each other up, fucking punched and kicked each other. Everyone went home and had to ice something, but everybody was smiling."<sup>48</sup> These intense, and sometimes painful, physical interactions produced by musical experiences demonstrate the intimacy and power of a live performance. Although punks left the show injured, "everybody was smiling," suggesting that the violence was not necessarily damaging, but instead a cultural signifier of musical

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<sup>47</sup> Cayetana, interview by Damian Burford, "Video Interview: Riot Fest Denver 2015-Cayetana Talk Importance of Participating in Music Scene." *New Noise Magazine*, September 25, 2015, <http://newnoisemagazine.com/video-interview-riot-fest-denver-2015-cayetana-talk-importance-of-participating-in-music-scene>.

<sup>48</sup> Mark Walsh, interview by Patricia Kotrady.

community. In Barry Shank's investigation of the Austin punk scene, he emphasizes the importance of physicality during a live performance, which goes beyond dancing or "moshing." According to Shank in *Dissonant Identities*, "The meaning of a musical experience turns first upon the series of unconscious movements produced by the specific articulations of rhythm and timbre found in the music. This physical interaction among musical signs and individual bodies establishes the conditions that allow for the allusive combinatorial associations of cultural signifiers of identity and community."<sup>49</sup> Physical movements at a show, whether they manifest as the unconscious movement of foot tapping or "beating each other up," act as cultural signifier for sincerity.

Punk house shows encourage a heightened intimacy of interaction, particularly between the audience and the performer. According to a member of the band, Girl Scouts, and former resident of Philadelphia punk house, Myspace: "Personally, I don't like playing on a stage 'cause I feel like playing on the floor where the audience is right in front of you is really, really, um...it's more personal. I don't know. A lot more fun."<sup>50</sup> As opposed to a stage, where the band is often elevated and separated from the audience, live performances at punk houses allow bands and fans to interact on the same level, both physically and figuratively. In small house concerts, the stage disappears, resulting in a seemingly more personal connection between musician and fan during the performance. A member of the Philadelphia bands, Algernon Cadwallader and Hop Along, elaborates: "I mean, I like being in a sweaty pool covered in beer and, you know, throwing myself

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<sup>49</sup> Barry Shank, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock'n'Roll Scene in Austin, Texas*. (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 125.

<sup>50</sup> Girl Scouts, interview by Dayna Evans, "The Philly Report," *Impose Magazine*, February 10, 2014, <http://www.imposemagazine.com/features/the-philly-report>.

into people, and it's almost like a contest to see how much you can get away with."<sup>51</sup> Musicians, such as this respondent, have far less opportunity to spill beer and throw themselves into the audience when they play a concert at a club. Unlike a venue concert with an elevated stage, security guards, and expensive musical equipment, house shows nurture an environment of unregulated, sometimes violent interactions between audience and musician.

Not everyone in the scene can freely experience these physical expressions of musical impact. The enjoyment of intense physical movements and violence during a show often depends on gender identity. Having also attended the last Snowing show in November 2011 at the First Unitarian Church in Philadelphia, I disagree with the respondent's assessment of the concert experience.<sup>52</sup> He remembers, "Everyone went home and had to ice something, but everybody was smiling."<sup>53</sup> I, on the other hand, recall standing in the back of the room witnessing the commotion from a distance. While a large group of (mostly white) men "beat each other up," I, along with some other women, experienced the show without physically interacting with the often-violent mob in front of the stage. Intimidated by male violence and afraid of nonconsensual touching (sexual or otherwise), some women avoid the physically aggressive aspects of the concert experience.<sup>54</sup> The front of the concert is a privileged space. Women, people with

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<sup>51</sup> Joe Reinhart, interview by Evan Lescalette, *My Basement is a Shithole*, Documentary Film, Directed by Evan Lescalette, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwYVVCimZgA>.

<sup>52</sup> Mark Walsh, interview by Patricia Kotrady.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> For more information on experiences with concert violence, see Sarah Cowell's zine, "Don't Touch Me: A Zine on Concert Violence," March 2015, <http://scowll.tumblr.com/post/112435619848/dont-touch-me-a-zine-on-concert-violence>.

disabilities, people of color, transgender people, and queer people, who are generally marginalized in society, often feel similarly marginalized at DIY punk shows.

As evident through the gendered dynamics of concert violence, DIY punk is linked to wider systems of social power. It is therefore more difficult for women, people with disabilities, LGBTQIA-identified individuals,<sup>55</sup> and people of color to obtain credibility for authenticity or sincerity. According to Kruse, “Like any other social group, music fans are cross-cut by differences of gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, generational identity, ethnicity, politics and so on.”<sup>56</sup> Although DIY punks attempt to oppose themselves from mainstream media structures, they often mirror dominant social practices by excluding or delegitimizing the experiences of marginalized identities.<sup>57</sup> Within DIY punk subcultures, factors such as a individual’s gender, race, ability, and sexuality, for example, are crucial in determining the way people experience the scene.

Because authenticity and sincerity cannot be measured or definitively tracked, DIY punks rely on imagined concepts of the “mainstream,” or dominant culture, in which to oppose as a means of proving credibility. In order to make sense of the perceived opposition between “authentic” DIY punk and the mainstream music industry, I utilize Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of cultural production, as explained in his book, *The Field of Cultural Production*. According to Bourdieu, high and low culture engage in permanent conflict. This conflict generates a unifying system among members of a low culture

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<sup>55</sup> LGBTQIA stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual.

<sup>56</sup> Kruse, *Site and Sound*, 12-13.

<sup>57</sup> See Figures 1 and 2 at the end of this essay for a visual representation of typical Philadelphia punk house shows. As you can see from the photographs, the crowd seems to consist mostly of white men.

(autonomous principle) in which they define themselves in opposition to high culture (heteronomous principle).<sup>58</sup> Although Bourdieu specifically references French literature and art of the nineteenth century, the concepts of cultural opposition can be seen in DIY punks' attempts to distinguish themselves from the profit-oriented activity of the dominant music industry. This oppositional rhetoric contributes to an "us" versus "them" mentality, which results in a belief that DIY punk is somehow a more authentic musical environment than the profit-oriented musical realm. Advocates of autonomous principle, as exemplified through the DIY punk scene in Philadelphia, "tend to identify with a degree of independence from the economy, seeing temporal failure as a sign of election and success as a sign of compromise."<sup>59</sup> Independence from the economy, and particularly major capitalist record labels such as Sony-BMG, Universal Music Group, EMI, and Warner Music Group, ultimately defines the basis of the subculture.

In pursuing authenticity by defining themselves in binary opposition to "mainstream" popular music, DIY punks actually *rely* on the mainstream for their very existence. If there was no "mainstream," to rebel against, how could one still be punk? Holly Kruse elaborates, "Without dominant, mainstream musics against which to react, independent music cannot be independent. Its existence depends upon dominant music structures and practices against which to define itself."<sup>60</sup> By defining itself in opposition to the "mainstream," DIY punks position themselves as dependent on a mythical universe of dominant musical production in order to exist. Punks have therefore constructed the

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<sup>58</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 40.

<sup>59</sup> Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 40.

<sup>60</sup> Kruse, *Site and Sound*, 149.

myth of the “mainstream” as a monolithic force somehow completely disconnected from subcultural activity.

**“We never want to be a band that's just in it to make a buck”<sup>61</sup>:**

### **The Narrative of “Selling Out”**

When a band participates in the dominant music industry’s processes of capitalist music production by “abandoning” the realm of DIY and signing to a popular record label or hiring management, they are often considered to have “sold out.” In “selling out,” bands tend to lose a degree of authenticity that is associated with opposing the mainstream. According to a DIY punk from Philadelphia, “DIY bands, to me, stop being DIY once you have management because you no longer know the little things around you, which now you’re aloof and that’s not a good place to be. The people fighting for you are fighting for your wellbeing, but also because it puts money in their pocket and that’s where the difference lies.”<sup>62</sup> As this participant emphasizes, adopting an explicitly profit-oriented approach to music production, through hiring management, for example, results in a perceived loss in autonomy and therefore, authenticity and control over the musical process. When one strays from DIY ethics of self-sufficiency and low-cost production, they presumably enter into a world of the mass-produced that foils DIY ethics of authenticity.

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<sup>61</sup> Ian Farmer, Interview by Eric Swedlund, “Why Modern Baseball’s Pop Punk Relates to You,” *Phoenix New Times*, November 19, 2014, <http://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/music/why-modern-baseballs-pop-punk-relates-to-you-6611176>.

<sup>62</sup> Ruben Polo (concert organizer; current member of bands, Soul Glo and Jank; current scene participant), interview by Patricia Kotrady, respondent’s home in Philadelphia, February 13, 2016.

In order to understand the imagined processes of “selling out,” it is crucial to look at how punk is perceived through what Holly Kruse calls the “narrative of rise and fall” in her book, *Site and Sound: Understanding Independent Music Scenes*.<sup>63</sup> According to Kruse, this imagined narrative occurs when “a musical form like punk or indie pop/rock begins to receive some recognition from mainstream institutions and audiences and is ‘co-opted’ by the mainstream, thereby losing much of the aura of authenticity that is held for its original audience. The move from margins to mainstream...marks a central moment of decline in most narratives.”<sup>64</sup> As evident through punk’s popular narrative, the genre experienced a “rise” in the 1970s,<sup>65</sup> splintered into subgenres throughout the late twentieth century as it spread to different geographic locations, and then “declined” in the 1990s to early 2000s with the perceived co-optation of punk into the “mainstream.” Participants and rock scholars often point to the year 1991 as the beginning of this narrative’s “fall” with the Billboard success of Nirvana’s album, *Nevermind*.<sup>66</sup> The historical “fall,” characterized by the commercial success of a former DIY band in the mainstream, can be further understood through the popularity of street punk, pop punk, and grunge genres in the 1990s to early 2000s, as exemplified through the Billboard successes of Green Day, The Offspring, The Smashing Pumpkins, Blink-182, Jimmy Eat

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<sup>63</sup> Holly Kruse, *Site and Sound: Understanding Independent Music Scenes* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2003), 14.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> This perception of punk “rising” or having a “true” time reflects ideas of purity in early punk. I argue that there was never really a time in which punk rock was “pure” or “meant something” more than what it does today. The assertion of DIY as a mythic construct can also be applied to earlier eras of punk rock.

<sup>66</sup> Pete Dale “It Was Easy, It Was Cheap, So What?: Reconsidering the DIY Principle of Punk and Indie Music,” *Popular Music History* 3 (2008): 187.

World, Weezer, and My Chemical Romance, among others.<sup>67</sup> As various genres of punk rock seemed to gain commercial popularity, underground punk scenes reformed and renamed their subcultural terminology in order to avoid categorization alongside profit-driven musicians who “abandoned” their DIY roots in a quest for fame.

In an effort to prove allegiance to DIY ethics, bands often attempt to distance themselves from profit-driven motives. A member of the Philadelphia band, Modern Baseball, states: “We never want to be a band that's just in it to make a buck or in it to further ourselves. We like to have fun, and that's the main goal. We just try to run things based on that. If other things come, that's awesome.”<sup>68</sup> Modern Baseball, who moved to Philadelphia from Frederick County, Maryland in 2011, has done extremely well in the Philadelphia DIY punk circuit. When asked which Philadelphia bands, if any, have “made it,” two respondents immediately referenced Modern Baseball.<sup>69</sup> Modern Baseball started as a “DIY” band playing shows in their Mantua area punk house, Michael Jordan House, but proceeded to tour with pop punk superstars, The Wonder Years, as well as open for Taking Back Sunday at a major venue.<sup>70</sup> Yet, they assert that “making a buck” and “furthering themselves” is not their goal. In an effort to preserve their DIY beginnings and distance themselves from the “selling out” narrative, Modern Baseball distinguish themselves from profit-oriented bands by claiming “having fun” is their main motivation, despite growing fame.

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<sup>67</sup> “Billboard Charts Archive (‘Alternative Songs’ 1991-2008 Archive),” *Billboard.com*, Accessed April 5, 2016, <http://www.billboard.com/archive/charts/1991/alternative-songs>.

<sup>68</sup> Ian Farmer, Interview by Eric Swedlund, <http://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/music/why-modern-baseballs-pop-punk-relates-to-you-6611176>.

<sup>69</sup> Rachel Dispenza and Mark Walsh, interviews by Patricia Kotrady.

<sup>70</sup> “Second Holiday Show December 28 at Starland Ballroom,” *TakingBackSunday.com*, <http://www.takingbacksunday.com/second-holiday-show-dec-28-at-starland-ballroom/>.

The band, Green Day, particularly embodies the “selling out” narrative in popular historical memory. Starting out in the Berkeley, California punk scene’s DIY 924 Gilman Street club during the 1980s and early 1990s, Green Day began with a relatively strong degree of DIY credibility. After leaving the DIY record label, Lookout!, in 1993, Green Day signed to Reprise Records, owned by Warner Music Group. Green Day proceeded to sell over 20 million copies worldwide of their first Reprise Records album, *Dookie*, and 14 million copies of a later album, *American Idiot*, in 2004.<sup>71</sup> In 2010, Green Day starred in a commercial for the music downloading website, Rhapsody, and even proceeded to create a Broadway musical based on their *American Idiot* album. By signing to a major record label, selling millions of records, starring in a commercial, and creating a Broadway musical, Green Day exemplifies a quintessential “sell out” in the imaginations of DIY punks.<sup>72</sup> In highlighting the “selling out” process, I do not mean to contribute on a moral ground as to whether bands have “actually” sold out; I instead aim to shed light on the realities of commodification in music, even for bands most seemingly removed from the “mainstream.”

In selling millions of records and producing a Broadway musical, Green Day embodies a threatening connection between the “underground” DIY punk subculture and the “mainstream.” Although Green Day’s status as “sell outs” deems them presumably less authentic than other DIY punk bands, my personal experiences indicate that authenticity does not directly influence a band’s musical impact. As one of the first punk

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<sup>71</sup> “Green Day,” *Billboard*, 2016, <http://www.billboard.com/artist/303108/green-day>.

<sup>72</sup> For commentary on Green Day’s “selling out” process, see Dan Ozzi, “Major Label Debut: Punk’s ‘Sell Out’ Albums Revisited,” *Noisey: Music by Vice*, April 2, 2015, <http://noisey.vice.com/blog/major-label-debut-punks-sell-out-albums-revisited> and Matt Prieria, “*Uno Dos, Tres*: Top 5 Ways Green Day Sold Out the Punx,” *Broward Palm Beach New Times*, April 17, 2012, <http://www.browardpalmbeach.com/music/uno-dos-tres-top-5-ways-green-day-has-sold-out-the-punx-6430004>.

albums I ever listened to, Green Day's *Dookie* initiated my interest in punk. Although Green Day sold over 20 million copies of *Dookie*, they sonically introduced me to what punk. In this way, the authenticity of "sell out" bands such as Green Day does not really matter. *Dookie* provided me with entertainment, personal connection, and the perception of liberation that would have occurred regardless of the band's DIY credibility.

Contemporary DIY punks in Philadelphia similarly grew up witnessing the successes of Billboard bands such as Green Day throughout the 1990s and 2000s. In many ways, the fear of "selling out" and becoming like "mainstream" bands has sparked a powerful reaction. Kruse elaborates,

"In the face of the perceived 'selling out' and downward trajectory of the music, participants may employ a series of tactics in an effort to continually define the music and its culture in opposition to dominant musical practices. In the case of indie music, these may have included at various moments retrenchment in new 'authentic' localities, the embrace of the seven-inch vinyl single, new ways of expressing a 'do-it-yourself' (DIY) ethic, and the celebration of 'pure pop' in the wake of mainstream success by noisier former indie bands like Nirvana.<sup>73</sup>

As Kruse suggests, DIY subcultures will continuously employ tactics to define themselves in opposition to the "mainstream" so long as they fear selling out. In contemporary Philadelphia, we can see this through the proliferation of punk houses as a reassertion of a DIY ethic and a distancing from profit-oriented means of concert organizing. Although DIY punks attempt to distance themselves from capitalist modes of musical production, the two seemingly separate realms of economics and subculture are more interconnected than they may think.

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<sup>73</sup> Kruse, *Site and Sound*, 6.

## **“It’s Never Been Easier to Make Music Like a Pro”<sup>74</sup>:**

### **Capitalism and DIY Punk Rock**

Given the assumption that DIY punk music inherently exists in opposition to “mainstream” popular music, or music directly influenced by capitalism, money (or lack thereof) seems to significantly contribute to a band’s perceived authenticity. In defining DIY punk, a resident of the Philadelphia punk house, Milhouse, situates the subculture in opposition to a mainstream music industry: “With mainstream, money is a huge, huge factor in terms of what gets pushed and what kind of falls back... The mainstream is like your monopolies, your Wal-Mart, I guess. Your high-end retail stores, your higher end huge chain stores with corporate CEOs...”<sup>75</sup> In comparing the dominant music industry to major profit-oriented companies such as Wal-Mart, this respondent reveals the economic nature of their subcultural opposition. According the respondent’s line of thinking, the capitalist mentality of Wal-Mart and high-end retail stores presumably negates creative processes. In contrast, this same respondent describes the DIY music scene: “When you come to a DIY show, you have three dollars and its like, okay here’s this tape. This is my record... People support each other and spread each other around and it’s not advertisements on billboards or product placement in movies.”<sup>76</sup> Again, by contrasting the DIY punk scene (paying three dollars for a tape) to key components of marketing (billboards and product placement), this DIY participant attempts to set herself in opposition to capitalist music production.

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<sup>74</sup> “GarageBand for Mac,” *Apple.com*, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://www.apple.com/mac/garageband>.

<sup>75</sup> Rachel Dispenza, interview by Patricia Kotrady.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

Despite attempts to define themselves in opposition to capitalism, DIY punk subcultures cannot be understood outside of their economic practices. As Simon Frith points out in his book, *Sound Effects*, all rock music “is capitalist music.”<sup>77</sup> Socialized under global capitalism, learning that consumption is identity and production should be rewarded through profit, participants in DIY subcultures apply their economic dispositions to the cultural field of “the scene.” According to Pierre Bourdieu, any social formation (which includes DIY punk subcultures) is made up of several “fields,” or sets of social relationships and networks organized around a particular practice.<sup>78</sup> Fields, categorized into the economic field, the political field, the educational field, and the cultural field, provide the contexts in which participants act. Within these fields, participants reproduce and express their dispositions. Although fields, such as the cultural field (DIY punk) and the economic field may be relatively autonomous, they are interrelated and influenced by each other. DIY punks may oppose the capitalist-driven ethics of major record labels such as Sony-BMG, Universal Music Group, EMI, and Warner Music Group, but they still engage in ideologies of capital exchange.

Although punks attempt to differentiate themselves from the monetary focus of mainstream popular music, DIY punks engage in their own form of capital exchange through *cultural* capital exchange. Generally, one can gain cultural capital through involvement in DIY scenes by playing in a band, organizing shows, running an independent record label, or living in a punk house, for example. The accumulation of cultural capital also comes from a general commitment to DIY ethics by refusing to “sell out” or sign to a major record label. According to an *NME* blog post about emerging

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<sup>77</sup> Frith, *Sound Effects*, 272.

<sup>78</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 128.

Philadelphia band, Sheer Mag, “by refusing to sign to - or, in some cases even correspond with - any of the record labels desperate for a deal, they've created an air of mystique that has only magnified the level of hype surrounding them.”<sup>79</sup> Although Sheer Mag may not initially benefit *economically* by declining deals with major record labels, they gain a sort of “hype,” or popularity, from an accumulation of cultural capital, therefore increasing their power within DIY punk subcultures. Bourdieu asserts that, although autonomous subcultures may define themselves in opposition to dominant economic systems, they still participate in processes of capital exchange within their groups through cultural capital exchange.<sup>80</sup> In a restricted field, such as DIY punk, a lack of interest in popularity or profit results in a symbolic cultural profit. When a band expresses disinterest in a major label in defense of DIY ethics, for example, they gain a degree of cultural capital, and therefore a degree of power.

Punk houses particularly embody an important site for cultural capital exchange, as this is where Philadelphia’s DIY punks tend to live, attend shows, and generally socialize. By hosting shows in private venues, punk house inhabitants (whom tend to hold large amounts of cultural capital) dictate who can participate in Philadelphia’s DIY punk subculture. Since concerts are held in private living spaces, punk house residents have the power to exclude those who do not have a certain degree of cultural capital. Unlike event venues or bars, which publically advertise concerts before their occurrence, punk houses are relatively private, as most punk house inhabitants only provide their addresses to fellow punks. Even when punk houses advertise their shows on flyers, they

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<sup>79</sup> “Sheer Mag Interviewed: The No-Nonsense Philadelphia Punks Reigniting Classic Rock,” *NME*, November 13, 2015, <http://www.nme.com/blogs/nme-radar/sheer-mag-interviewed-the-no-nonsense-philadelphian-punks-reigniting-classic-rock>.

<sup>80</sup> Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 74-112.

tend to only provide the name of the house or instruct fans to “ask a punk” for the address. Therefore, in hosting shows in private punk houses, those with the most cultural capital make the Philadelphia DIY punk scene exclusive to those who have a certain degree of cultural capital.

As evident through the importance of cultural capital, DIY punks employ tenants of capitalist ideology. The process of socioeconomic ranking applies to Philadelphia’s DIY subculture as well. A member of various DIY punk bands in Philadelphia suggests that a band’s income directly relates to their status in the scene:

I think it [Philadelphia DIY punk] looks like a caste system from an outsider’s perspective, to be honest. I mean, the people I think who are being paid the most for making music are the people who are selling it at the highest levels who are the ones making the most money... You can’t base it on the quality of music because that’s not a real thing. You’re basing it off of, like, income.<sup>81</sup>

In comparing the Philadelphia DIY punk scene to a caste system, this participant highlights both the hierarchies that exist within the subculture and the continuing role of economic capital in forming these hierarchies. Although cultural capital certainly plays a vital role in determining hierarchies in the scene (especially during the initial stages of a band’s success), a band’s income also contributes to their social position. According to Bourdieu, a relative mix of economic capital and specific forms of cultural knowledge position individual participants hierarchically.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, both cultural capital *and* economic capital contribute to participants’ social positions in Philadelphia’s DIY punk subculture.

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<sup>81</sup> Pierce Jordan, interview by Patricia Kotrady.

<sup>82</sup> Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 128.

Although DIY punks define themselves as separate from the profit-driven realm of capitalist economics, they often rely on commodities produced by major corporations. In defining DIY, a concert organizer in Philadelphia asserts, “DIY is still for the most part...still means Do-It-Yourself, which means playing in a basement or you recorded your record on GarageBand or, you know, things like that.”<sup>83</sup> As this participant emphasizes, playing in basements and/or recording music oneself on GarageBand software constitutes a DIY ethic. This statement illustrates an important contradiction within Philadelphia’s DIY scene: Punks consume and utilize products from the very corporations they stand against. GarageBand, a recording software program created by Apple, allows users to have “a whole music creation studio right inside your Mac.”<sup>84</sup> According to Apple’s website, “It’s never been easier to make music like a pro.”<sup>85</sup> Programs such as GarageBand cater directly to DIY punk consumers, enabling them to record and produce music without the help of a paid professional. This consumer-capitalist machinery encourages a DIY ethos on the part of the consumer as a mandate of individual self-expression. Participants’ reliance on GarageBand as a key tool of DIY punk musical production demonstrates the implicit alliance between DIY punk scenes and major corporations.

Abiding by DIY punk ethics often necessitates the consumption of goods other than GarageBand. Playing in a DIY punk band may require purchasing an instrument; musical equipment such as amplifiers, chords, drumsticks, or pedals; recording gear like computers, recording software, or microphones; and merchandise such as CDs, vinyl,

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<sup>83</sup> Ruben Polo, interview by Patricia Kotrady.

<sup>84</sup> “GarageBand for Mac,” *Apple.com*, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://www.apple.com/mac/garageband>.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

tapes, and t-shirts, among other products. Furthermore, if a band decided to go on tour, each member would have to take multiple days off of work in order to travel. “Doing it yourself” can actually get quite expensive. Therefore, although DIY punks often claim that “anyone” can “do it,” I argue that not *everyone* can. The costs associated with playing and participating in DIY punk subculture—in addition to social barriers related to race, age, gender, and ability—may discourage people from participating in the scene. The native Philadelphians, for example, who live in the deeply impoverished neighborhoods where punk houses are located, would not be able to easily participate in the DIY processes of production and consumption due to financial barriers. Ironically, DIY punk’s reliance on the market forces of capitalism causes those who cannot purchase goods to be excluded.

### **“To Enhance the Blank Landscape of Whiteness”<sup>86</sup>: Punks in the Sub-urban**

The placement of punk houses in inner-city working class neighborhoods enables the inhabitants of punk houses to pay cheap rent and host concerts without concern for the ramifications that often come with hosting house shows. Many participants regard Philadelphia’s economically deprived neighborhoods as beneficial to the DIY punk scene. A member of the Philadelphia band, Amanda X, elaborates, “Philadelphia speaks to the starving artist in the same ways that the South does. It says, ‘I’m relatively cheap to live in and I’m close to a ton of cultural hubs.’ With a low rent I am able to work a part-time job as well as write music, play shows, create artwork, and basically do whatever I want.”<sup>87</sup> Although Philadelphia’s cultural hubs and central location certainly attract DIY punks, its desirability ultimately stems from the city’s high levels of poverty. The cheap rent of Philadelphia’s low-income areas enables musicians and fans to work part time and invest the majority of their energy into music, therefore opening opportunities to do “whatever they want.” Yet, this mindset rests on an enormous amount of privilege. In pursuing “whatever they want,” DIY punks often unintentionally disregard the effect their white, middle-class presence has on the poor neighborhoods they inhabit.

In light of Daniel Traber’s work on the self-marginalization of whites in Los Angeles hardcore punk scene, I assert that white suburban DIY punks similarly recreate an independent sense of self by voluntarily pursuing a lifestyle based on preconceived notions of the inner-city underclass, or what Traber calls the “sub-urban.”<sup>88</sup> Sub-urban

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<sup>86</sup> bell hooks, “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance,” *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 372.

<sup>87</sup> Cat Park, interview by Dayna Evans, “The Philly Report.” *Impose Magazine*. February 10, 2014. <http://www.imposemagazine.com/features/the-philly-report>

<sup>88</sup> Daniel Traber, “L.A.’s ‘White Minority’: Punk and the Contradictions of Self-Marginalization,” *Cultural Critique* 48 (2001): 30-34.

life constitutes a multiracial class position in which one often confronts poverty, hunger, inadequate housing, and the threat of physical danger on a daily basis. On the other hand, DIY punks from all over the country (including the suburbs) move to Philadelphia's suburban areas to pay cheap rent and participate in a vibrant music scene. A DIY punk participant (who is a transplant to Philadelphia) elaborates,

All the bands everyone's talking about, they're not from here. Let's see, Cayetana is from the 'burbs just like the Menzingers are from the 'burbs just like how Modern Baseball is from Maryland and how all your biggest bands from Philly, ain't none of them from Philly. Not one. You might get lucky to find one, but it's 'burb kids.<sup>89</sup>

As evident through this testament, as well as a long-time DIY punk participant's assertion that his native Philadelphian roots extremely rare among people in the scene,<sup>90</sup> fans and bands alike move to Philadelphia, and particularly the sub-urban areas of Philadelphia, to set up house shows, play in bands, and ultimately, live in a cheap and seemingly more "authentic" area.

In addition to cheap rent, Philadelphia's "rough" reputation also connotes a sense of authenticity that aligns with allegiances to DIY ethics. According to Emma Brault, a recent transplant to Philadelphia for its DIY punk scene, "I like that the minute I walk out of my apartment I'm not bombarded with advertisement and underwriting. I like that 'Do-It-Yourself' and 'punk' can actually exist in this city because venture capitalists and advertising firms don't have a stranglehold on real estate in this city."<sup>91</sup> As Brault

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<sup>89</sup> Ruben Polo, interview by Patricia Kotrady.

<sup>90</sup> Tony Croasdale, interview by Patricia Kotrady.

<sup>91</sup> Emma Brault, interview by Dayna Evans, "The Philly Report." *Impose Magazine*. February 10, 2014. <http://www.imposemagazine.com/features/the-philly-report>.

suggests, a lack of advertising and city development results in an environment where “authentic” DIY processes can flourish outside of capitalism. It also suggests that DIY cannot exist in a more affluent area due to its contradictions with DIY ideology. Another Philadelphia scene participant elaborates,

It’s all happening here because we have this really unique sort of juxtaposition of a large, populous, urban environment, but you still have the rough areas where gentrification hasn’t taken hold in West Philly... There’s not like, craft mustard shops on every corner. There’s still sort of that rough edge that you need to throw these house shows and to be able to do this. We’re not getting noise complaints. It’s just a mess. They get sloppy, and that’s important to keep a scene alive. If it becomes too clean, if it becomes too venue-centric, then sort of the DIY element and the ground-level energy, the overall spirit of the scene goes away [sic].<sup>92</sup>

Within the “sloppy” and “ground-level” energies that come with a relatively “rough,” or non-gentrified, environment, DIY punk flourishes. The sub-urban seemingly nurtures a DIY “spirit” that is not stifled by noise complaints, advertisements, or potential commercial cooptation.

In romanticizing the “down and out” as a more “authentic” lifestyle, punks often unintentionally reinforce dominant culture’s stereotypes about sub-urban people in order to define a space that empowers themselves.<sup>93</sup> In reinforcing the idea that the sub-urban, and by extension working class African American and Latino neighborhoods, has an inherent “roughness,” DIY punks play into the same negative stereotypes perpetuated by

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<sup>92</sup> Faigon, Gaia. “My Basement is Better than Yours: A Field Guide to the Philly Punk Scene.” *5027Mac*. Drexel University, February 10, 2015. <http://www.5027mac.org/2015/02/10/basement-better-field-guide-phillys-punk-scene>.

<sup>93</sup> Traber, “L.A.’s White Minority,” 31.

harmful narratives of the racialized “Other.” In asserting that a gentrified environment is “too clean” for a DIY punk scene to thrive, the respondent consequently insinuates that a sub-urban area is “dirty,” therefore perpetuating stereotypical assumptions about the daily lives of the inner-city working class. I would like to further this argument to assert that, in using negative stereotypes of the sub-urban to empower themselves, DIY punks are appropriating an assumed “Otherness” of the economically and racially oppressed.

In the article, “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance,” bell hooks asserts that, due to an imperialist nostalgia rooted in the belief that the spirit of “primitive” resides in the bodies of dark-skinned “Others,” whites often appropriate bodies deemed Other “to enhance the blank landscape of whiteness” and relieve a white guilt from the past.<sup>94</sup> The desire to make contact with Othered bodies creates a “contemporary narrative where the suffering imposed by structures of domination on those designated Other is deflected by an emphasis on seduction and longing where the desire is not to make the Other over in one’s image but to become the Other.”<sup>95</sup> By living amongst the Other, adopting characteristics of a “poor lifestyle,” and using assumed characteristics of people of color to their advantage, DIY punks in Philadelphia appropriate the Other to *become* what they believe the Other should be. Acting as the Other functions as a form of cultural capital, in which DIY punks gain power within the scene by looking or “acting” poor and living amongst those who struggle to survive. Yet, as transplants to the city, DIY punks have the ability to move back, or re-escape, to their original location outside of the city, while native sub-urbans often cannot escape the realities of their daily lives.

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<sup>94</sup> hooks, “Eating the Other,” 372.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 369.

## **“They Don’t Wanna Die”<sup>96</sup>:**

### **The Unintended Consequences of DIY Punk in Philadelphia**

The appropriation of the sub-urban Other results in a degree of tension between white DIY punks and their neighbors. For example, after a threat of eviction from the Northwest Philadelphia punk house, IHOP Estate, an interview participant moved about a block away, starting a new punk house called Double Deuce. After doing about 20 shows there in the span of a few months, he states, “One of my neighbors knocked on the door and threatened to *shoot* me and then we stopped doing shows there.”<sup>97</sup> As evidenced through this example, the noisiness and messiness of punk houses do not go unnoticed by neighbors. After multiple complaints from neighbors, IHOP Estate’s residents moved only a block away, continuing to disrupt neighbors who obviously did not appreciate loud concerts throughout the night. One neighbor even resorted to the threat of gun violence to stop the disruptions.

Yet, in telling of stories of neighborhood tensions from DIY punks, there seems to be little elaboration on the role of whiteness in the disputes, as an interview participant instead blames negative stereotypes of college students for the conflict:

When I was booking at my second house [Double Deuce], the families were mad and would yell at us and would say “you college students,” but we only had two college students out of the four people living in my second house, so I would tell them I don’t even go to college and they would say, “We don’t care, you go to

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<sup>96</sup> Ruben Polo, interview by Patricia Kotrady.

<sup>97</sup> Mark Walsh, interview by Patricia Kotrady.

college because you're a young white kid and you're twenty and you're making noise and you're driving up our rent."<sup>98</sup>

In negating claims of college student identity, the participant insinuates that it is not *his* whiteness that increases bitterness between DIY punks and native sub-urbans, but instead assumptions about college students generally as white and middle class. In doing this, he subtly acknowledges the role of whiteness in neighborhood conflict, but deflects his *own* whiteness by saying he was “not a college student,” and therefore not contributing to the gentrification and general disruption caused by young whites in sub-urban areas.

Gentrification, or “the movement of middle and upper-class households into areas that were previously inhabited by low-income people,”<sup>99</sup> has spread in cities around the world. According to economist, Stephen Sheppard,

Critics of gentrification have viewed the phenomenon as a major source of disadvantage for low income urban residents who, having established a community with all of its complex social networks must now see it torn apart as they are displaced – either by choice or compulsion – to move to other housing that is less desirable or alternatively remain behind to pay higher rents in a neighborhood they no longer feel is their own.<sup>100</sup>

This process of gentrification has most popularly spread to major U.S. cities such as New York City, Boston, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles, but it has also made its way to Philadelphia. Philadelphia's popularity among middle and upper-class young people, and particularly DIY punks moving to the city to become involved in the music scene, has

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<sup>98</sup> Mark Walsh, interview by Patricia Kotrady.

<sup>99</sup> Adams et al., *Philadelphia*, 88.

<sup>100</sup> Stephen Sheppard, “Why is Gentrification a Problem?,” *Williams College*, June 24, 2014, <http://web.williams.edu/Economics/ArtsEcon/library/pdfs>.

seemingly caused a threat gentrification's intensification. According to a major booker of house shows in the DIY punk scene,

Everyone wants to come here and be here now, but it's not about to be that cheap safe haven anymore. My favorite part is that people are like, we'll just have basements, but what about when all the rich people live next to other rich people. You think they're gonna want to hear that noise? The families just don't wanna call the cops, because why would you want to talk to the police? They don't wanna die. That's why we can have at any given point, twenty house venues up and running in Philly. Anywhere from fifteen to thirty houses doing shows in the city at any given time. If gentrification keeps going, that's definitely not gonna be a thing.<sup>101</sup>

When participants move to Philadelphia, they often disregard the effects of their presence on the sub-urban communities in which they live. When disrupted by the loud shows, native residents of Philadelphia's sub-urban are afraid to contact cops for fear of their lives. Within non-gentrified areas, Philadelphia's DIY punks can host house shows without the inconvenience of police intervention or eviction. Philadelphia's white punks therefore benefit from the fears of working class people of color. Furthermore, it is often after DIY punk infiltration of the sub-urban when other middle-class whites, including relators and entrepreneurs, find it acceptable to move in as well. The respondent's comments also suggest that without non-gentrified areas, the DIY scene would fall apart. What makes Philadelphia's DIY punk scene special (punk house shows) depends on the cheap rent, ideas about "rough" sub-urban life, and ultimately, an absence of gentrification.

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<sup>101</sup> Ruben Polo, interview by Patricia Kotrady.

Despite threats of gentrification, a long-time DIY punk and Philadelphia native believes that the current moment of gentrification will not stop the DIY scene from flourishing:

To be completely, brutally honest, there's so much left of Philly to gentrify still, so I don't foresee that [the DIY scene's disappearance] happening. There are entire areas of the city that have tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of people in parts of the city where no one goes to, where I grew up. No one goes there from the punk scene, you know?<sup>102</sup>

According to this argument, Philadelphia's DIY scene will not dissipate since there is "so much left" of Philadelphia that is non-gentrified. Although this participant believes in the continuation of DIY punk in Philadelphia, he too insinuates that non-gentrified, "rough" areas are vital for the proliferation of punk houses, and by extension, DIY punk. Additionally, he still implies that non-gentrified areas play a vital role in the proliferation of the Philadelphia punk scene, arguing that the DIY punk scene will not dissipate because it still has places to gentrify.

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<sup>102</sup> Tony Croasdale, interview by Patricia Kotrady.

## "We are Infinite and Never-Ending": Seeds of Resistance

Although I deconstruct the contradictions of Philadelphia's DIY punk scene, I do not wish to trivialize the oppositional potential of DIY punk, as I believe it can be effective as a means of resistance. I therefore challenge Holly Kruse's assertion that participation in music's social, cultural, and economic practices is an ineffective and futile means of resisting dominant power.<sup>103</sup> DIY punk is more complicated than the binary opposition of dominant verses oppositional; it has the potential to both uphold and resist structures of power. To highlight the oppositional potential of DIY punk, I analyze the lyrics of Philadelphia punk bands, HIRS and Soul Glo.

Self-described queer punk band, HIRS, bring their marginalized identities to the forefront of their music. The band considers themselves a collective, explaining on their website: "We are infinite and never-ending. A collective of freaks and faggots that will never stop existing."<sup>104</sup> In solidarity people of LGBTQIAA identities, and especially transgender (trans) identities, HIRS takes a collective, and explicitly political, approach to their music. They have written and performed music dealing with police brutality, racism, sexism, queer struggle, and transmisogyny. For example, HIRS wrote a song on their most recent album, *NEW JAMS*, titled "Say Her Name." In the song, HIRS' vocalist screams the names of thirty-two trans women who have died, either by suicide or murder, in the year 2016.<sup>105</sup> Referencing the Say Her Name movement,<sup>106</sup> HIRS honors the lives

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<sup>103</sup> Kruse, *Site and Sound*, 149.

<sup>104</sup> HIRS, 2015, [hirs666.com](http://hirs666.com).

<sup>105</sup> HIRS, "Say Her Name," *NEW JAMS*, HIRS, 2016, MP3.

<sup>106</sup> According to the Say Her Name brief, the movement began in response to the murder of 28-year-old black woman, Sandra Bland, at the hands of law enforcement. To honor Bland and other underrepresented black women who have been murdered, Say Her Name "responds to increasing calls for attention to police violence against Black women by offering a resource to help ensure that Black women's stories are integrated into demands for justice, policy responses

of (mostly black) trans women and calls attention to violence against women and LGBTQ individuals (particularly trans women of color). Furthermore, in the song, “We Love All Trans Femmes and Support You Forever and Ever,” HIRS’ vocalist shouts,

It's not about what if; it's about when.

How can we stay alive?

We're being murdered by our own parents.

Beat to death and suicide.

We're being offed everyday by our own hand when it's not yours.<sup>107</sup>

Inspired by their own experiences as queer punks, HIRS documents transgender struggles for survival. In communicating the threat of death for trans femmes, HIRS bring their experiences to the forefront of a mostly white, male-dominated scene, asserting their space, promoting solidarity, and using their platform as a band to reach those who may be suffering.

The hardcore punk band, Soul Glo, similarly brings attention to racial injustices within DIY punk as well as the broader United States. Their song, “Guilty of Being... Wait” reads as follows:

I've skinned myself alive skinning myself a life.

All that can be seen may as well be all of me.

Hanging like strange fruit from a tree is the option to praise, or degrade.

The auction block is the every day, as dissimilar to my reality as my double consciousness, constant vigilance, repeated reminders of my appearance.

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to police violence, and media representations of victims and survivors of police brutality.” <http://www.aapf.org/sayhernamereport/>.

<sup>107</sup> HIRS, “We Love All Trans Femmes and Support You Forever and Ever,” *NEW JAMS*, HIRS, 2016, MP3.

Triple consciousness, constant vigilance, self-hate and paranoia.

My black experience.<sup>108</sup>

In describing his “black experience,” Soul Glo’s vocalist draws on histories of racism within the punk scene. Titling the song “Guilty of Being... Wait” directly references the 1981 song, “Guilty of Being White,” by the prominent Washington, D.C. Dischord Records band, Minor Threat. In “Guilty of Being White,” Minor Threat vocalist, Ian MacKaye, sings: “I’m sorry for something I didn’t do. Lynched somebody but I don’t know who. You blame me for slavery a hundred years before I was born.”<sup>109</sup> Although MacKaye denies any claims of racism, “Guilty of Being White” attempts to distance the band from the benefits of white privilege, ignoring the roots of systematic racism in America’s history of slavery and oppression. Soul Glo, recognizing Minor Threat’s historical prominence in the scene, subtly negates MacKaye’s denial of white privilege by referencing “Guilty of Being White” but shifting the narrative from white guilt to black experience.

Unlike Minor Threat, who dissociated contemporary racism from its historical foundations, Soul Glo connects their experiences of judgment and degradation to slavery’s “auction block.” Describing feelings of “constant vigilance, self-hate, and paranoia,” Soul Glo exposes their primarily white audience to the struggles of their black experiences. They additionally connect their experiences to concepts of double consciousness and triple consciousness. In *Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. DuBois coins the term, “double consciousness,” or the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the

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<sup>108</sup> Soul Glo, “Guilty of Being... Wait,” *Untitled*, Soul Glo, 2014, MP3.

<sup>109</sup> Minor Threat, “Guilty of Being White,” *In My Eyes*, Dischord Records, 1981, MP3.

eyes of others” in a society of white supremacy.<sup>110</sup> This state of internal conflict deals with the experience of existing as “An American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”<sup>111</sup> In utilizing the term, “double consciousness,” Soul Glo articulates the feeling of “two-ness” that comes with living as an African American in a white supremacist state. Elaborating on W.E.B. DuBois’s concept of “double consciousness,” Franz Fanon sees himself “in triple person,” splitting his consciousness into three general categories: how he views himself, how white people perceive him, and how he *sees* white people seeing him.<sup>112</sup> This third consciousness, or awareness of objectification before the white gaze, also connects to Soul Glo’s explanation of their experiences, as they live in a state of “constant vigilance” and “repeated reminders of [my] appearance.” Soul Glo, using theoretical foundations, historical contextualization, and personal testimony, succinctly communicate the realities of their experiences through the medium of punk music, therefore embodying the resistive potential of DIY punk rock.

Furthermore, the DIY ethic has the ability to span beyond the musical realm and apply to community organizing and personal development. According to a respondent, DIY is more about people learning skills outside of, like, learning to put on a dope show. People can basically learn to become more effective versions of themselves, I guess...its providing information and skills for people who may not

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<sup>110</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Co., 1903), 2.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Frantz Fanon, “The Fact of Blackness,” *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 112.

be able to otherwise. For example, like, bike repair or workshops on different social issues so people can be informed...<sup>113</sup>

As this respondent suggests, DIY punk ethics can apply to aspects of life outside of the music. Punks can use the DIY ethic they hold so dear to increase accessibility and availability of important information about social issues, for example. The Black and Brown Punk Collective (BBPC) of Chicago provides an excellent model for the potentials for DIY ethics in activism. BBPC focuses on “promoting solidarity between minority groups in a segregated city and carving out a space for queer, trans, and intersex people of color (QTIPOC) in a punk scene that is overwhelmingly white and male.”<sup>114</sup> In pursuing this mission, BBPC hosts an annual summer festival featuring only QTIPOC musicians; workshops on topics such as DIY sustainability, queer and trans liberation, food justice, and labor rights; and fundraisers to benefit groups such as Feed the People, a grassroots food bank, and The Anhele Project, a college scholarship organization for undocumented students. Although not located in Philadelphia, BBPC demonstrates the activist potential for DIY punk, as it promotes marginalized groups within the scene and gives back to the community in which it belongs.

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<sup>113</sup> Pierce Jordan, interview by Patricia Kotrady.

<sup>114</sup> Bea Malsky, “QTIPOC to the Front: The Black and Brown Punk Show Collective Builds Sound Solidarity for Queer, Trans, and Intersex Punks of Color,” *South Side Weekly*, April 22, 2015, <http://southsideweekly.com/qtipoc-to-the-front/>.

**Conclusion: “Everyone’s for Themselves When it should be Together”<sup>115</sup>**

DIY punk, as it currently exists in Philadelphia, often perpetuates the dominant ideologies it seeks to resist. Based on a mythology of “authenticity” and a maneuverable anti-commercial historical narrative, DIY punk defines itself in opposition to capitalistic “mainstream” music industries. Although DIY punks seek to exist as oppositional to the “mainstream,” they rely on capitalist ideologies, as well as their own system of cultural capital exchange, in order to function. In a perpetuation of dominant structures of power, DIY punks engage in processes of gentrification through the proliferation of punk houses in low-income neighborhoods of color in Philadelphia. This self-marginalization process relies on the appropriation of a racialized “Other,” through which DIY punks perpetuate dominant systems of racial and socioeconomic power.

In attempting to create an independent sense of self, DIY punks often subjugate others, especially women, queers, the poor, and people of color, who are already marginalized in society. Through concert violence, a lack of historical representation, and issues of accessibility, for example, not everyone can just “do it themselves.” Yet, marginalized members of the scene concurrently participate in punk music as a form of resistance. They write songs about their experiences of racial oppression, misogynoir, and transgender survival, as exemplified through the lyrics of Soul Glo and HIRS. In understanding the way that DIY punk subcultures simultaneously reinforce and oppose dominant ideologies, I draw on Raymond William’s theory of emergent practices. Through an understanding of culture as a collection of experiences, Williams categorizes

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<sup>115</sup> Ruben Polo, interview by Patricia Kotrady.

practices by their relation to the status quo as dominant, alternative, or oppositional.<sup>116</sup> In an attempt to distinguish themselves from “mainstream” dominant culture, DIY punks in Philadelphia assume a position as oppositional, especially in terms of musical production and consumption. Although DIY punks attempt to define themselves in opposition to capitalist modes of production, they actually exist in a balance between alternative and oppositional practice, constantly in a liminal state between hegemony and resistance.

Philadelphia DIY punk represents a series of contradictions: resistance and conformity, liberation and oppression, independence and hegemony. It perpetuates dominant structures of power while simultaneously showing resistive potential. A respondent elaborates,

Philadelphia’s not a bad place. There are a lot of kids here and it’s a good place if you’re trying to pop off and do some stuff. It’s a great place. There’s always people trying to play music here. There’s merit in it. But everyone wants to do their thing but no one wants to put back in to keep the city continuous. It’s a self-serving thing in this city, not a community. DIY should be DIT [Do-It-Together]... That’s my only real issue with DIY, at least here. Everyone’s for themselves when it should be together.<sup>117</sup>

The city of Philadelphia, the third poorest city in the country, is often regarded as a place of opportunity for DIY punks. With about 26% of its population living below the poverty line,<sup>118</sup> Philadelphia provides a space for the proliferation of DIY. Punks set up punk houses in some of the poorest neighborhoods of the city, using the cheap rent and

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<sup>116</sup> Lee Artz and Bren Ortega Murphy, *Cultural Hegemony in the United States* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000), 60-62.

<sup>117</sup> Ruben Polo, interview by Patricia Kotrady.

<sup>118</sup> United States Census Bureau, “Quickfacts: Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, 2014,” <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST040214/42101>.

proximity to oppression to their advantage as they accumulate cultural capital and gain “authentic” credibility. As the respondent suggests, DIY punks should reassess their role as residents of Philadelphia. There are benefits to participating in Philadelphia’s DIY punk scene, but we must challenge our practices of consumption in order to make it sustainable. What are we, as DIY punks, doing to give back to the communities who give us so much? How are we helping to ensure our neighbors’ wellbeing? Are we conscious of how our actions affect those around us? Who might we be excluding and why? Are our processes of production and consumption *really* that oppositional? Unfortunately, I do not have the answers to all of these questions. They are deeply complex and require a long-term, communal discussion with those in our scenes; but, through shifting to a “Do-It-Together” (DIT) approach, we may become more aware of our subcultures’ contradictions. If we detach from a DIY approach of self-sufficiency and commit to a more DIT philosophy of communal wellbeing, we may hold onto the creative resistance of punk music, but come closer to creating the community we hope to build.



Figure 1. Grown Ups performing at Philadelphia punk house, IHOP Estate, in 2012. Photograph by Mark Walsh.



Figure 2. The Menzingers performing at Philadelphia punk house, Golden Tea House, in 2013. Photograph by Jessica Flynn.

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