Defiance Labour and Reflexive Complicity: illusio and gendered marginalisation in DIY punk scenes

Dr Megan Sharp, University of Melbourne; Dr Steven Threadgold, University of Newcastle

Abstract

Since punk emerged in the 1970s as a music genre and subculture it has gained significant academic attention. Punk as a concept now alludes to specific places or scenes, and has been established as a general anti-establishment attitude, as well as an anti-consumerist disposition, with a need to do-it-yourself (DIY). Drawing upon ethnographic and interview data from the east coast of Australia, this article analyses struggles that occur within punk spaces where women and queer identifying punks negotiate historically established male dominance. Punk scenes have the general illusio of being resistant to dominant norms and practices, which is attractive to individuals who feel like outsiders. Yet through symbolic violence, systematic oppression can be perpetrated against those who do not invoke idealised forms of masculinity or femininity. Using the affective transference of gendered norms in punk spaces, we find struggles that are often homogenised in punk research which attends critically to subcultural themes of collectivism and resistance. By unpacking these themes, this article puts forth the concepts of reflexive complicity - where men and women reproduce inequality in punk spaces, and defiance labour - moments of overt challenge to symbolic violence within punk spaces and scenes.

Introduction

More than a music genre or a subculture, punk movements originally came to prominence in the public sphere and in academic research in the 1970s. Since then, punk has been theorised as an attitude (Letts 2015) which escapes specific subcultures or scenes. It has been mapped as a general anti-establishment, anti-consumerist disposition and considered as an integral part do-it-yourself (DIY) cultures. Punk scholars and makers have known it to be an aesthetic, one which has been co-opted and can change between contexts (Halberstam 2003). For the informants of this research, punk is many things that can inspire not just musicians, but a wide body of creativity in art, writing, design, filmmaking and photography (Bestley 2016). Punk has travelled from being practiced by specific people to being thought of as an attitude that transcends spaces, individuals or groups. Punk can also be considered as a Bourdieusian illusio, defined as the stakes and rewards of a particular field; pursued not just in creative or artistic spaces, but used to make decisions about careers and life goals (Threadgold 2018b).

The research we present here challenges the general ‘resistance’ and ‘collective identity’ definitions of punk to show how it is ultimately a social space of struggle (Maskell 2009; Ensminger 2010; Griffin 2012). We do this by outlining the conceptual lens used in the paper, a Bourdieusian analysis through feminist reworking of symbolic violence and illusio. These concepts are used to analyse the relationship of punk with forms of violence and to
interrogate the ways gender preconfigures traditional masculinist behaviour. When non-men enter this scene, they are impelled to struggle for recognition, for voice (LeBlanc 1999). Women and gender diverse people must perform their own gendered punk struggle to not only practice in a scene whose doxa is against them, but to organise, resist and perform emotional labour (Sharp and Nilan 2017). Hochschild (1983; Wharton 2009) defines emotional labour as paid work where the worker must feel the right feelings to do the job, where you are employed and then evaluated in the job by the capacity to produce and manage feelings. Recently there has been discussion of whether emotional labour has undergone a ‘concept creep’ (Beck 2018) where it is used to analyse phenomena that other notions of labour, such as domestic or mental would be better placed, but we use and develop emotional labour here to denote specific instances when scene members need to regulate their own emotions to please others, or to minimise situational conflict: ‘If in the course of asserting yourself you find that you are having to brace yourself against imagined criticisms, or people are looking disapproving and you realise your job may be in jeopardy, all of that bracing and anticipation and experience of anxiety I would count as yes, emotional labor’ (Hochschild in Beck 2018).

The struggle to affect the doxa of punk spaces allows the possibility of being more open and accepting of female, queer and gender diverse orientations (Sharp and Nilan 2017). We describe how symbolically violent gender relations are experienced in punk across the east coast of Australia. Straight, white, cis-men can see themselves as allies of emancipatory gender and sexuality struggles, but their actual practices tend to maintain the status quo. Women struggle against sexism but also acquiesce and compromise in ways that maintain the gendered hierarchy. We call these moments, which can be invoked by men and women, reflexive complicity. At other times though, women will oppose gendered symbolic violence and enact what we are calling defiance labour. Defiance labour plays out in specific affective situations, moments and relations which are examined in the final analysis section of the paper. We define defiance labour as situational confrontational moments where the complicity of symbolic violence is reflexively defied through reactions, responses and actions, whether in situations of paid work or in general social situations. This distinction is important as ‘work’ in a DIY scene is often unpaid. Defiance labour differs from emotional labour as it is not about placating, educating, or managing discomfort, but creating discomfort to deliberately provoke offence and resist forms of gendered marginality from men. In this sense it is a resistive punk attitude invoked to defy dominant norms within punk. It is in these affective moments that women utilise counter-arguments against sexism and take specific actions which contribute new narratives of diverse bodies to an archive which is framed by collectivism and heterosexual, male resistance.

Symbolic Violence and Illusio in Punk Scenes

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1 We use the binary terms 'man/men' and 'woman/women' to describe gender identities in this article as no participants self-identified as gender diverse. When referring broadly to power dynamics in social groups, we use 'cis' purposefully. The sexuality of the men interviewed was not recorded as it did not form part of the broader research project. The women interviewed offered their sexualities as either heterosexual, gay or queer. We recognise the complexity of violence in punk for those who do not identify as cisgender, as well as the commonalities that gender diverse people may find in the themes presented.
Symbolic violence was first introduced by Bourdieu to describe not just injurious talk or gesture but ‘violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:167, our emphasis). Symbolic violence is embedded in language (Bourdieu 1994). Authoritative frameworks of communication privilege the normative values of advanced, capitalist, patriarchal societies and so, systems of classification and categorisation themselves become systems of oppression. Bourdieu’s examples of the exercise of symbolic violence include gender relations in which men impose demeaning connotations on women who are already a dominated social group and may have already internalised ideas about their subordination (Bourdieu 2002). In the punk scene, an example might be routine micro-aggressions by men against women and queer people that have become normalised to the extent that they rarely speak up against them, an internalised relation of gender ‘business as usual’. We use the concept of symbolic violence here to situate gender within the broader landscape of subcultural membership (Bourdieu 1994:134).

Bourdieu’s focus on symbolic violence originally centred specifically on political and class struggle, the theory has been reconceptualised to consider gender relations (Bourdieu 2002) and can be applied effectively to punk spaces, which do have a direct relation to the politics of histories and hierarchies of gender. Notable work which broadens Bourdieu’s original theorising is by scholars such as Butler (1997), Adkins and Skeggs (2004), and McRobbie (2004). These scholars tease out the complexity of Bourdieu’s accounts of gender and patriarchy in his development and analysis of symbolic violence as a theory. Butler argues that Bourdieu fails to acknowledge the subversive potential of performativity2 and misconceptualises patriarchy as faultlessly being the dominance of structural power. For Butler, bodily speech can be knowing and unknowing which foregrounds the discursive acts of agentic performativity and speaks to affective transference as a catalyst for resistance to patriarchal regulation. This lays the groundwork for our concept of defiance labour. Such critiques form the basis of our argument for an affective analysis of punk illusio. Illusio denotes how one emotionally invests in day-to-day struggles to pursue the field’s rewards as the means for making one’s life worthwhile (Bourdieu 2000). Illusio can help us to think about how meaning is created, maintained and transformed (see Bourdieu 1990:195; Threadgold 2019). The illusio of a punk scene is associated with reflexively pursuing values and ethics that do not comply with normative discourses and consumerist demands: a broad commitment to attitudes, ethics and aesthetics that align with the notion of ‘self-design’ (Mankowski 2013) while at the same time creating an alternative space where like-minded people can work outside of the ‘mainstream’ to foster a relatively autonomous space for artistic creativity, community building and identity work (McKay 1998; O’Connor 2016; Woods 2017). It is these features that attract individuals that feel like outsiders or want to pursue alternate lifestyles in the first place.

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2 A non-essentialist understanding of gender as performative rather than innate; and naturalised rather than natural (Butler 1997). Butler’s theory of performativity highlights the importance of gender not as cause, but effect, both on understandings of the self as gendered, and in reading the other as gendered.
Utilising these Bourdieusian theories and their critiques for addressing punk communication, space and place, symbolic violence and punk illusio can be productively used to scaffold a theoretical analysis of gender and sexuality divisions within the scene. As seen in recent research concerning subcultural scenes (Maskell 2009, Ensminger 2010; Griffin 2012; Miller 2016), the hierarchy of wider capitalist society is replicated even in anti-capitalist scenes. White, straight, able-bodied cis-men dominate the landscape of music arenas, even in underground communities (Halberstam 2003) where narratives of inequality coalesce to supposedly form community. Men have continued to claim ownership of space through symbolic violence which privileges their advantaged position within the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990) and reduces women’s access not only to participate, but to counter arguments of punk being welcoming for all (Halberstam 2003). Our data provides evidence of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995) as being central to an ‘authentic’ punk embodiment as it is recounted.

Violence and Punk

Violence, physical and symbolic, appears as a classic mode of communication in punk fields (Leblanc 1999). Historical accounts of global punk participation are never without reference to resistant expression which is often correlated to violent acts or engagements with social and political agendas (Sabin 1999; Langman 2008; Cogan 2012). For young people looking for a way out of a ‘conventional’ lifestyle, punk is perceived to embody an unknown but exciting future, a liminal space (Haenfler 2004; Ensminger 2010; Griffin 2012) where the possibilities of constructing selfhood are self-governed rather than externally imposed. This is the key historical illusio of punk. Nevertheless, in a movement born from emancipation, a hierarchy within punk becomes evident in its malestream (O’Brien 1981) historical re-tellings.

With diversified sounds and cityscapes, the symbolic violence in punk spaces is complex, opaque but nuanced. A difficulty in portraying entanglements so intricate is that the researcher can become lost in their own analysis. Where this article can offer some depth of argument is in its ethnographic and ‘insider’ methodology. As sociologists, and cisgender participants in punk music scenes, we are provided with knowledge and access to tease out the violences that so often become homogenised in punk spaces. In doing so, we find that while punk sounds and scenes are diverse, and often stratified, the enactment and display of violence is (re)produced clearly when considered in a framework of gender. Here, symbolic violence persists through micro-aggressions, dismissal and erasure which were frequently recounted by informants as experiences of insidious practices. Yet, they can also be a powerful weapon of self-assertion. Ultimately, we find that gender performances are heavily regulated in terms of legitimated subcultural knowledge systems and that these systems are formulated through pervasive and embedded cultural logics of masculinity.

Men’s opposition or ambivalence to non-cismale participation reinforces entrenched historically located meanings. Men are understood, at least amongst themselves, to be the ‘forefathers’ of punk narratives and are seen to own the most authentic codes of punk discourse. Embedded power structures are (re)produced using these codes, by men in positions of power as venue owners, sound engineers, organisers, label owners and
performers. This article highlights how a gendered discourse of ‘superior’ male knowledge and competence is produced at gigs through the performance of these roles. Yet these moments and situations also initiate starting points for strategies by women to counter disempowerment.

Methods

This article has been assembled from qualitative data collected for two research projects concerned with Australian DIY music scenes. These studies are of queer identities in punk spaces (see Sharp and Nilan 2017) and DIY careers in alternative music scenes (Threadgold 2018a&b). The concerns of this paper appeared from a specific theme arising in both datasets: the affective transference of symbolic violence along gendered lines. Therefore we extracted narratives of lived experience pertaining to violent interactions as well as the strategies of resistance, complicity and/or perpetration that followed. Importantly, participants were specifically asked about gender by the interviewer in both projects.

Data was collected by both authors in Newcastle, Melbourne and Brisbane (Australia) over a two-year period using a combined ethnographic and interview approaches, facilitated by immersion in punk scenes and a snowballing participant recruitment strategy. 15 semi-structured interviews with cis-men and cis-women were included in this article. The larger datasets contain interviews with transgender and gender diverse people however, their narratives do not form part of this article. We could not do their specific experiences justice here due to word limits and as cisgender researchers, the need for an alternate methodologies and literature.

Both authors have proximity to Australian punk scenes over many years and take up positions of audience/acquaintance/friend/fan/collector with participants. As such, we have employed a reflexive method to our interpretation of data by drawing on the work of Hodkinson (2005) and Taylor (2011). Taylor (2011) points to the rich data-generating potential of an ‘intimate insider’, someone who has relationships and social investment within a music field; friends, lovers, family, band members and so on. We find that an insider position, which has been reconceptualised through the term ‘insighter’ (Hodkinson, 2005), affords possibilities unachievable to outsider researchers while simultaneously requiring ongoing reflexive boundary work to negotiate the complex meaning of being inside subculture.

An ‘insighter’ delineates between assumed positions of knowledge; while we may see inside, absolute insidership is not granted simply by virtue of the longevity of our subcultural affinity. Techniques of insider researchers have been documented widely by scholars of music subcultures (see Bennett 2002; Hodkinson 2005; Taylor 2011) to be beneficial for uncovering deeply embedded social formations. The challenge in this case is to acknowledge and manage one’s own investment in the scene so that embedded proximity does not skew perception and result in biased arguments or a drift into advocacy. This reflexivity can have an array of affects for the researcher’s own practice. For the cis-male author this includes coming to critically interrogate his own relation with the scene, seeing doxic unequal relations that were always there but which he never questioned. For the cis-female author,
interviews with participants and proceeding analysis of data required extensive consideration of the author's own biographical relationality to these lived experiences. We each analysed the data of the other, and spoke at length of our theoretical and analytical contributions prior to assembling this article, which strengthened the analysis.

**Femininity as Other: Establishing the Periphery**

This section reviews participant narratives focusing on gender in the punk scene in Australia. We consider here how men frame marginalisation as a reproduction of wider social issues, while also situating punk as set apart from those dominant discourses. Participants reflected on stereotypically masculine and feminine performativity, as Chris notes:

Chris: Gender is mostly male [in the scene]... I’ve been in a number of bands now and I’ve had a number of female band mates, it’s interesting to see their perspective on it. [Female identifying name redacted] is very vocal about the gender stuff that she comes across, cause she’s been in a lot of bands, and some of her friends are very aware of it, they’ve come across it quite a lot. Cause she’s from a bit more of a genuine punk rock, like a hardcore punk background. She used to play in a band called [name redacted], which was like four girls who were very much…They were kind of like a middle finger to the overly machoness, like they used to put glitter on and all this kind of stuff. But they were a full on punk band, like not... Um, they were like a noisy, rough, raw punk band, they weren’t girly at all.

While Chris asserted that he would like to see more diversity across the scene, he appraised the authenticity of punk participation using performative codes. By differentiating female performers and girls, Chris encoded masculinity through credibility, suggesting that punk music and performers cannot be ‘girly’ and subversive in tandem. This is not a new finding, McRobbie (2004) among others have documented these slippages widely in media, sport and work fields. However, the distinction between normative and subcultural affiliation is particularly salient in punk, where participants consistently report being in active resistance to dominant norms yet are still reproducing them (Bennett 2002, Haenfler 2004).

Chris' example of gender divisions is quite an obvious one, however there are more covert and potentially pervasive ways in which gender is occluded in punk spaces. Callan took a different tact when explaining his positionality:

Callan: I don’t know what my opinion is about women in DIY. I think there are a lot, you know, there are people that are, but I just don’t see that distinction. Like I’ve never seen there being a distinction between males and females, and I don’t really think about it personally... Yeah, I dunno.

Ascribing to post-gender politics, Callan explained that in his circles, men and women seem to have equal opportunities to access punk places. In this way, Callan intended to move beyond gender binaries, instead taking an apparent meritocratic stance toward full punk
participation. However, from the proceeding analysis of women’s experiences in punk, such a perspective reinforces symbolic violence through the erasure of lived experience. The assumption for Callan that there is no difference between men and women’s ability to engage in punk prescribes inequality as it diminishes real-world enactments of symbolic violence and in turn, may create barriers to women speaking out against marginalisation. Callan’s record label that has had dozens of releases is almost exclusively male artists.

Men tended to discuss gendered issues through observations or in theory, where women discussed them through their own everyday experience of the affects of violence. Elle listed some of these experiences in terms of thresholds, where gendered symbolic violence is observed so constantly it becomes a doxic ‘taken-for-granted’. Below Elle described an affective transference where she experienced sexism which she felt unable to address directly.

Elle: It’s about thresholds, you know? When every day, not just at shows or as a band member or even in any music space, you have to deal with men treating you like you’re incompetent, your threshold for bullshit gets higher and higher. And then these micro-aggressions get less and less noticeable because even you are used to them. And it becomes even more pervasive and insidious because you start giving out cookies to dudes just for making room for you at the bar.

We understand Elle’s threshold elevation to be affective in the way she recognised her actions as reproducing encoded marginalisation, however her embodied sense of safety and exhaustion is reflected on afterward with contempt. Affective transference is the recognition of this distinction: Elle is cognisant of the symbolic violence in her scene keeping her complicit and at the same time configured her responses to it around rewarding basic tenets of respect in order to remain in the scene. As Elle explained through her description of micro-aggressions, minimisation and erasure are part of the everyday experiences of being a woman in punk scenes. By delegitimising the distinction between men and women in these spaces, resistance to gendered symbolic violence becomes less and less achievable. Elle’s use of ‘giving out cookies’ suggests that being treated respectfully by men becomes a congratulatory act, ‘giving out cookies’, where men are rewarded for not being overtly sexist. In this way, both men and women become complicit in the production of symbolic violence.

To establish modes of complicity, the narratives of male participants have been analysed through a lens of symbolic violence and performativity. For example, Axel refocused the argument of why punk archives are so male dominated to reflect broader cultural trends, rather than being specific to the punk scene:

Axel: There is always a marginalisation of women in music when the focus or the language being used triumphs masculine values and I can understand that. As someone who does triumph masculine values quite a lot, I can see myself doing this and I can see that it’s a marginalising thing… It’s just that we live within a time and within a scene or culture in which these things are ignored or marginalised. That makes sense to me. I mean, these are facts about culture in general.
Of course, such an assessment is valid; the enactment of marginalisation for women can be connected to broader social trends. However, it fails to account for the nuance of women’s experiences in punk landscapes and rationalises it in a space that is meant to exist alternatively to mainstream discursive norms. Instead, it dualistically absolves those in positions of power while shifting the discussion away from personal accountability, which is what the women interviewed argue needs to happen for punk scenes to be made less symbolically violent and in turn, more inclusive.

‘It Is What It Is’: Negotiating Boundaries of Complicity

The following analysis highlights how men position themselves within the discourse of violence and marginalisation in their local punk communities. Most of the men interviewed took up a dual position of acknowledging their privileged position within Australian punk scenes and being reflexive about their own complicit involvement in (re)establishing gender hierarchies. Importantly, the men interviewed mostly considered themselves to sit apart from a dominant narrative of cis-male punk participation. They reflected on being powerful within their scenes to some extent, but distanced themselves from an encoded or stylised punk performer or audience. The semiotic relationship which punk has to fashion, sonics, and attitude is used in the male participant’s narratives as one which distinguishes more ‘progressive’ members from those who they perceive as less socially informed. So even within masculine interactions, there exists a kind of paternalistic passivity where some men can identify acts of symbolic violence which they then attribute to a performance of masculinity set apart from their own. Elliott described some bands that play a macho style of punk music that organised some gigs at a venue he once ran:

Elliott: There’s like your fashion version of that which is all the dudes with slicked over hair and black shirts and a lot of them do weights and they’re often from the coast. They all come into town and bash each other up and it’s really overly macho and aggressive and misogynistic a lot of time. Like I would have those shows sometimes at [venue name redacted] and I hated them. They were just so, so anti-women and meat headed. They have all these aspects, but they were so like, welcoming to each other, like lifting each other up [when fallen down in the mosh] and it was kind of weird. There were definitely aspects to it that were kind of admirable but the central messages in a lot of it was despicable and I couldn’t get down with it.

Using aesthetics, geography and behaviour to distinguish his position, a form of Bourdieusian distinction within the punk scene, Elliott set himself apart from the specifically cis-male punk participation described above. This becomes an affective transference as, when discussing male behaviour, Elliott used traditionally gendered terms to describe the affective resonance of their engagement, ‘macho’, ‘aggressive’ and ‘misogynistic’, implicitly rejecting the behaviour of those he saw as oppositional to himself. However, he found some admiration in the way these groups of men come together in the music space. As a venue
operator, he referred to times where these acts of homosocial display were furthered by bands who booked his venue. Witnessing anti-woman sentiments, he reflected on feeling ‘hate’ towards the scene he was engaging with and the central messages that were being perpetuated within the space and potentially beyond.

Elliott is no longer a venue operator and spent some time during the interview reflecting on the choices that he made when booking bands and how he negotiated making a living against having some power to mitigate gendered stratification in the Australian punk scene. While he did not think of himself as holding the ability, or desire, to regulate the attitudes and behaviour of others, he noted that his choices in booking bands without any prior knowledge of their lyrical content or sentiment may have had ramifications beyond that particular show or venue. This leads to an ambivalent outcome, where he was reflexive about the gender related problems in the scene, but did little to address or resolve them, essentially maintaining the unequal doxic relations. Jim reinforced this orientation toward reflexive complicity by describing how he signed bands and performers to his record label:

Jim: I dunno, maybe I haven’t thought about it enough. Like, is it my responsibility as a label guy to present more female artists? And maybe the answer is yes, maybe I need to be really aware of what we are releasing and to make sure that people are represented fairly. But I predominantly release things that I get excited about and think are important in the current Australian music context and recently that just happens to have been [female identifying name redacted], that’s just what’s been there. I didn’t go out looking for those records because I was looking for a female record, they were just there, they were making those records. Perhaps I need to consider more my responsibility in making sure that gender is represented fairly. While staying true to the criteria that I... Yeah, sure.

The reflection that Jim undertakes in considering his position of power as the owner of a record label demonstrates the individual imagining of a more inclusive punk scene. In this way, the taking up of personal responsibility was a key driver in his process of reflexivity and suggests that the work of challenging hierarchies can be integrated into his business practice. In the years following this interview, Jim’s label has signed a diversifying array of bands, including more women, queer, gender diverse and Indigenous musicians.

Chris made similar comments when discussing his experience of recording a band in his studio where he had no prior knowledge of their style or content:

Chris: It was like this pop punk, like a Blink 182 thing, and the chorus was like: “I think that dress is a little short, I guess that’s the kind of slut you are”. These kids are 20 and I was just like [exaggerated sigh]. They’re young but someone needs to say something. Then it was four hours later or something, and now it’s gonna be “oh, you know that lyric we’ve been working with all day, I think actually it’s bad and you should change it’. So, I think at this point it’s just a lost cause, let’s just finish the day and if they ever come back, I’ll mention it then. When they try to book some time again, I’ll say: “look I’m not sure I’m down with your lyrics”. So, I’ll cross that bridge when I come to it... But you know, it is what it is I suppose.
For Chris, on top of making the distinction between pop punk and punk authenticity, age played a vital role in his rhetorical distancing between himself and the band he was recording. Being young men, he allowed some leniency when negotiating whether to ‘say something’. Taking a paternal position, Chris used the young men’s age as an indicator of their apparent inability to engage with the social implications of marginalising women. In doing so, Chris, who was in his early 30s when interviewed, became complicit in the enactment of symbolic violence through his passive acceptance of the performativity of young masculinity: ‘it is what it is’. There was an assumption by Chris that the young men would pass through this stage of ‘boys being boys’ without his intervention, and further, that intervening was not his responsibility. This generational distinction advances an argument of complicity in that the men interviewed employed modes of difference such as age, subcultural affiliation, genre and style, and job description, in order to distance themselves from taking accountability for gendered violence in the punk scene.

Elliott followed a line of distinction and dual positioning in his rethinking of sexism within the punk scene:

Elliott: I’m trying to think of a couple of cases of sexism I’ve seen lately. One of which is a really popular club night [name redacted] and there’s a young sound guy there… and when [band name redacted] went in, two girls with electronic instruments, he asked their boyfriends how he should set up their sound. But in most of the music I’m involved in, no, women are, I think, really respected to the point where the issue of misogyny is quite negligible in like a live situation setting... But I’m not naive, I think that a lot of the women in the scene will feel overlooked, maybe even threatened at different stages in the scene by different individuals in different situations.

The experiences of Elliott and Chris highlight strategies developed within a situation to not only distance themselves from those they see as problematic, but to actively generate modes of distinction. They were clearly aware of their involvement in making space for marginalising sentiments, however they struggled to circumvent these narratives of dominance. While enacting tacit compliance with symbolically violent behaviours, Elliott and Chris expressed a kind of dismissive exhaustion as a best practice approach for dissipating male dominance. This suggests that DIY ethics present a barrier to what some punk participants may consider their creative output. This distancing between what they see as bad behaviour and their own inaction, the refusal to expend energy on performing this emotional labour, seemed to threaten their own sense of creative freedoms. Instead they do nothing, rationalise their ambivalence, and just get on with it.

For these male DIY participants, the illusio of participating in the scene was dominated by artistic and musical concerns that align with punk subculture history and while cognisant of the gender and sexuality related symbolic violence within the scene, an illusio of addressing this issue did not possess enough social gravity for them to markedly change their practices or invoke a framework of accountability for thinking through them.
Gendered Expectations as Symbolic Violence

There is divide between the perception of work that men put into their scene, and the emotional labour that women - among other marginalised groups - do to make the Australian punk scene safer (Sharp and Nilan 2017). In many of the narratives recounted during interviews, men pointed to ‘work’ as the tangible outcomes of their paid labour - recordings, venues, labels, bands and tours. Women also noted these material things but were much more likely to raise topics of safety at gigs, and representation in scenes as key outcomes of their labour. As Debbie expressed:

Debbie: There’s bands in Melbourne that I refuse to play with because it’s so male orientated and it’s a bummer... I’ve played with [band name redacted] twice and by the third time I was like, ‘I will not’. Not just for the sake of myself and the women I play with, I’m not going to be in that environment cause it’s literally like footy players or skateboarders. It’s heightened testosterone, rape culture, under this idea. And it’s a strange thing that has come up in the last 5 or 10 years where this Australiana is a punk way to be ironic and it being license to be like, a piece of shit.

Debbie provided an example of how women reconfigure punk scenes through practices of removing themselves from hostile environments which ultimately speaks to violence being used as capital in some punk spaces. Using Australiana-styled punk as a culturally specific locality and genre, Debbie expressed concern and anger at the violence that is perpetuated by the melding of scenes which attract and, even revere, aggressive and misogynistic bands and audiences. Debbie commented that non-participation was often the only choice for marginalised people when they felt that a gig or scene was too problematic to engage with. As Elle discussed in the example of thresholds, Debbie distinguishes between symbolic violence and its relationship to broader issues of women’s safety in punk places. Debbie connected in-the-flesh violence such as sexual assault with the affective atmosphere that is generated by the formation of male dominated punk spaces. Like Elle, Debbie recognised safety as paramount to continued scene participation, but the exhaustion of participation means sometimes removing herself entirely.

In terms of normative expectations of gender performance, Jemima reflected on her experience of being policed by music journalists who she noted have a sexist understanding of what her bodily hexis should be while she plays guitar in her band.

Jemima: It’s clear that it is a dude who is expecting a specific performance from a female on stage or a specific kind of engagement. And I’ve definitely never done that, mainly cause of shyness and mainly cause of not caring. I’m always careful on stage, stay focused. I always try to do things that are outside of my technical abilities as well, so I’m always trying to do the thing that I’ve made on guitar. I’ve probably had between five and seven other reviews over the last year where people have been like “she never smiles on stage”.


This type of expectation to perform femininity, to smile, be accommodating and look more like she is having fun is what Jemima understood to be a form of emotional and aesthetic labour that is specifically woman-centric in the punk scene and in the music industry more generally (Taylor 2012; Strong and Rogers 2016). In order to be upheld as a role model and successful musician, Jemima is required to do more visibility work\(^3\) than that of her cis-male band members, to affect the audience in ways they can read easily as feminine. This frames the way women in punk, who implicitly resist emphasised femininity (Connell 2005) through their participation in the scene, are trivialised. Reducing women’s punk participation to their bodily expression reinforces dominant tropes of performing for the male gaze. By refusing to smile following this review, Jemima is performing defiance labour, which we expand upon below.

A drummer in several Melbourne punk bands, Ren recounted her experience of the reaction she elicits when she appears ungrateful for men's ‘compliments’:

Ren: Oh, dudes are always like “you’re my favourite female drummer” or “damn, you hit really hard for a girl”, just to let me know that I’m not as good as men but that I’ve done enough to warrant their approval. And they don’t even realise or care about what they’ve just said or what it means. Apparently, I should just be thankful? They get really confused when I tell them I’m not.

Ren witnessed and was often the subject of the male gaze. Like Jemima, her narrative of becoming a gendered object in the form of critique was common among women interviewed. Such a line of commonality speaks to the pervasiveness of gender hierarchies within Australian punk scenes by way of their infiltration into attempts by men to give positive feedback. We find here that women experience a paradox. To accept a comment in which one’s gender is featured is to be complicit in the subjugation being enacted. However, to rebuff opens a dialogue which has the potential to insight more violence. Furthermore, Ren’s interpretation of men being ‘confused’ by her dismissal of their feedback suggests that men perceive women as open for compliment, even critique, under the guise of uniqueness or skill. Ren’s comments resonate with Butler’s (1997) assertion that speech acts are formulated within and outside ‘official discourse’. While the commenter takes up a position of authority - being a man in punk - her dismissal of his feedback works against the confines of expected female behaviour, moving beyond top down symbolic violence to be a form of everyday resistance, an enactment of defiance labour.

**Discussion**

The above analysis of participant narratives is by no means new information in terms of men’s complicity towards diversity in male-dominated music spaces. Research in this field is

\(^3\) Visibility work is operationalised here as the labour women do to adequately represent all women in marginalised spaces according to gendered logics of role-modelling (see Sharp and Nilan 2017).
expansive (see Halberstam 2003; Cogan 2012; Griffin 2012; Taylor 2012; Strong and Rogers 2016). And yet, we find something particular about both the punk scene, and those who participate in it when we use performativity, illusio and symbolic violence for interpretation. On one hand, the men interviewed profess a desire to see change in their scene but are reflexive about their own passivity. On the other, they freely admit their absolution toward practices of accountability, going so far as to separate themselves from ‘the masses’ of punk participation, a form of in-scene distinction. Both of these trajectories present a kind of reflexive complicity, where men attribute labour to their ability to think broadly about cultural issues, but make few sacrifices or actions. Their knowledge only has small effects on their practice.

We theorise this in relation to punk illusio. If the illusio of punk scenes is broadly about assembling alternate spaces to practice creatively and even subversively outside so-called mainstream norms (Sabin 1999; Haenfler 2004; Griffin 2012), bringing in progress about gender and sexuality politics is rhetorically accepted, and for most participants, they express a desire to see emancipatory social change. By making disparate the formations of punk, participants can make choices about their engagement in diversity work, while also triumphing the DIY ethics embedded in scene authenticity. Situating themselves as reflexive actors, their decision-making practices relating to calling out sexism are intrinsic to their judgement of what is ethical and authentic practice. Our analysis suggests that symbolic violence is enacted even when men are aware of what constitutes symbolically violent sexist dispositions.

In contrast to male participants’ narratives of accountability practices in punk, women interviewed were much more likely to take on collective decision-making strategies and practices, while also rejecting notions of total collectivism in the scene. Choices about inclusion and exclusion became contingent to the overall effect they would have on the broader punk landscape, which the women saw as fractured down gendered lines. So, where men stated, ‘it is what it is’, displaying reflexivity about the problems but not changing their actions, women rebuked this ambivalence with ‘it is not what it could be’. It is in this ‘could be’ that a stark division is drawn between how men and women perceive their scene. Men have a scene built around the historical choices they have made and so understand their everyday punk practice as a form of resistance, as one of rebellion from the normative codes, especially around discourses of authentic artistic practice and anti-consumerism. For women, punk has had a strong social gravity because they felt the need to pursue the same illusio, but in doing so, they have entered a scene which to some degree replicates normative gender and sexuality codes. This requires an intense dispositional investment in the futurity of what the scene could be, compelled to drive the changes the men interviewed here would appreciate as well, but do not feel the need to expend their energy pursuing to anything like the same degree. In terms of investment, women situate themselves as active actors, rationalising their choices to intervene in exclusionary practices, or exclude themselves all together, based on the greater overall good for marginalised people’s inclusion. In some moments, women perform defiance labour as a means of making clear in that situation that they are not accepting the discrimination directed their way.
Bourdieu's fields of practice are organised around two ‘poles’: the autonomous pole is where practices happen with relative autonomy from other interests, while the heterogeneous pole is where influences from other fields may leak in (Bourdieu 1993:29–72), especially from the field of power. The poles are therefore organised around ‘the protagonists of change and the apostles of law and order, the progressives and the conservatives, the heterodox and the orthodox, or the challengers and the incumbents’ (Kauppi 2003:778). In terms of the punk scene studied here, women tend to orient their activities as protagonists of change, pursuing challenging practices towards better gender relations. The irony here is that the punk scene would usually be organised around autonomous practices concerning notions of ‘authenticity’ and heterogenous activities around ‘selling out’. But in this case, the men are conservers and the women are the progressives, practicing in ways that want to change the scene away from its traditional sexist hierarchy, but both are susceptible to be complicit in forms of symbolic violence.

**Conclusion**

Punk has generally been seen as a space of defiance, but for women, they often need to perform defiant acts within a punk scene to create spaces that are safe or that actively challenge sexism. We found that men were more likely to draw on distinctions of masculinity than women, who generally spoke of men in homogenised terms. This finding is congruent with Butler’s assertion of bodily speech acts where women resist domination by naming the privilege and codes of authenticity which are bound up in malestream punk histories. Furthermore, the men interviewed capitalised on these histories, setting up recording studios, labels and touring bands, and so their decisions were also based on their ability to earn a living, or at least some cash, from their labour.

We follow the critiques of Bourdieu while also drawing on his frameworks of symbolic violence and illusio to be attentive to gendered power dynamics in Australian punk scenes. We found that women drew on the affect of a preconfigured collective throughout their interviews. Thinking along the lines of safety, most women interviewed spoke of the critical need for men’s action in enacting social change. Women also were more likely to recognise their own accountability for generating safety in their scene. Such strategies to challenge violence and perspectives of safety were somewhat at odds with the narratives of male participants who spoke in much more individualised and passive terms regarding how to disrupt homosocial hierarchies.

We have theorised the concepts of reflexive complicity and defiance labour to think about the struggles that are occurring punk places and spaces. *Reflexive complicity* is performed when one knows about unequal social relations or forms of marginalisation, can observe them and claim to want things to change, but there are no significant changes in practice by the individual and little effort to engage in situational interventions that make a difference. *Defiance labour* is performed when marginalised members of a group, scene or community reject the reception of symbolic violence and challenge those transmitting it in ways that cannot be neatly mapped onto existing theories of emotional or affective labour.
Thinking with these concepts, if the affective environment is one of symbolic violence, what does this mean for punk ideology and politics? Punk has often been analysed as a coherent or homogenous space, where its unity and coherence has been overemphasised. Our research shows that even those collectives that mount resistive practices against dominant norms will contain struggles and hierarchies that may actually work to reproduce the very things they are built to challenge. By disrupting homogenised collectives of resistance in punk spaces, this research addresses the affective dimensions of gender relations in punk scenes. We have brought together narratives of men’s and women’s experiences of symbolic violence to demonstrate a conversation which is often homogenised in punk research. Men, women, gender diverse people - heterosexual and queer - have vastly different ways of negotiating their relationality to violence and invoke a multiplicity of labours - affective, emotional and defiance - to simply remain active in their scene. In this way, being ‘aware’ of social divisions in punk amounts to a performance of empathy without doing the actual emotional labour and practices required to make emancipatory social change, something that women pointed out was actually a display of reflexive complicity.

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Author/s:
Sharp, M; Threadgold, S

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