

Don't Forget the Streets: New York City Hardcore Punk and the Struggle for Inclusive Space

Alan Parkes

History Instructor, Long Beach Community College & California State University, Long Beach
alanparkes@sacstudies.org

KEYWORDS: New York City; punk; hardcore; youth crew; subculture; masculinity; straight edge; neoliberalism

Mike Ferrero, a self-described “fucked up kid” from a small working class town in Connecticut, recalls his life changing after the first time he encountered hardcore punk in New York City in the early 1980s; “I walked away from my first CBGB’s matinee blown away. I was never going to miss another one of these. I could be half dead, but I’m going to make it to every matinee forever.”¹ Hardcore, as the louder, faster, and more politically infused successor to punk, from then on played no small role in Ferrero’s life. It offered him a reprieve from difficulties at home and high school, which he described as a torture chamber. At matinees, he let out the week’s aggression on hardcore’s dancefloor and began to express himself through the creation of his own music. The formation of his band symbolized the actualization of a dream he conjured up to escape the realities of his life. In New York hardcore, bands, only distinct from fans by the instruments in their hands, shouted cries of “unity” amongst kids who wanted something more than the urban decay that surrounded their revered, egalitarian hardcore space. As Ferrero recalls, “All of a sudden I found this group of other fucked up kids, and then I didn’t feel so alone. It became my family, that whole scene. That whole city became my reason for living.”²

The intersection of hardcore punk and New York City during the 1980s impels a long overlooked investigation. Unlike the subculture’s scene in any other city, New York hardcore regularly transformed itself to combat the changing social structures that surrounded it. At the start of the 1980s, New York City’s economic failure, subsequent decline in infrastructure, and increase in crime and drug abuse directly influenced a burgeoning hardcore scene. Hardcore sought to create an inclusive alternative to New York’s deteriorating streets and the dangers it presented. However, by the mid-decade, as the scene effectively established itself in New York’s Lower East Side, hardcore’s goals transformed from inclusive creation to reformation. By 1985, a new generation of members hoped to combat the scene’s increasing violence, apathy, and move toward a metal sound. However, one facet of the scene remained constant; the scene’s hypermasculine idolization flowed throughout hardcore in the 1980s as an often-unrecognized challenge to the subculture’s idealized inclusivity. The scene’s glaring male homogeneity symbolizes New York hardcore’s most engrained paradox that consistently went overlooked. Thus, recognition of hardcore’s incongruities urges examination of both the subculture as a mental space, in which objectives for inclusivity led members’ ideals, and its physical space, in which hypermasculinity condoned exclusion. Exploring how an evolving mental space, from creation to reformation, materialized into a constant masculine physical space reveals that, when it came to identity construction and gender, hardcore throughout the decade succumbed to the cultural influences it intended to defy. From 1980 to 1985, during hardcore’s first wave, the scene emulated masculine roles typified by inner-city strife. Conversely, during the subculture’s second wave, from 1985

1 Mike Ferrero, “There Will Be Quiet – The Story of Judge (Part 1),” <http://noisey.vice.com/there-will-be-quiet/there-will-be-quiet-the-story-of-judge-part-1> (accessed April 8, 2015). CBGB refers to New York’s Country, Blue Grass, and Blues club.

2 Ibid.

to 1990, the subculture retained the masculine form that characterized the apathetic scene it hoped to reform.³ Accordingly, the infiltration and perpetuation of hypermasculinity in the scene resulted in hardcore as a site of male hegemony in which distinctly hardcore roles, such as playing in bands and slam dancing, became homogeneously gendered.

While scholars illuminate punk through works that highlight scenes in New York and Los Angeles in the 1970s, most leave hardcore unexamined. Dewar MacLeod remains the only historian whose writing considers the distinction between hardcore and punk in *Kids of the Black Hole: Punk Rock in Postsuburban California*. MacLeod captures the creativity of an overlooked music scene as it rose from Southern California's sprawling suburbs. Alternatively, a few sociologists offer noteworthy contributions to the study of the topic. Ryan Moore's *Sells Like Teen Spirit: Music, Youth Culture, and Social Crisis*, for instance, explores punk, hardcore, and alternative music particularly during the 1990s, employing poignant ethnographic research to assert the music's correlation with larger economic and political structures. Likewise, Ross Haenfler's *Straight Edge: Hardcore Punk, Clean Living Youth, and Social Change* draws from ethnographic research completed in Boulder, Colorado, during the 1990s and early 2000s and contends that straight edge – a movement within hardcore that abstains from alcohol, drugs, and promiscuous sex – offers hardcore members a form of resistance to cultural mores outside the scene. Moreover, research on gender and the egalitarian aims of hardcore and punk contribute further to a holistic understanding of the subculture. Brian Tucker's "Punk Places: The Role of Space in Subcultural Life" plays the necessary role of examining the purported ideals of an inclusive scene. He contends that "punk places provide shelter from the more homogenizing aspects of capital," offering inherently resistant alternatives to societal norms and traditional American economic structures.⁴ Conversely, Jamie Mullaney's "'Unity Admirable but Not Necessarily Headed': Going Rates and Gender Boundaries in the Straight Edge Hardcore Music Scene," asserts that straight edge members in hardcore dissociate from large society's gender norms in an attempt to create an inclusive environment. However, dissociation ultimately lends itself to the creation of new gendered norms that are no less restrictive. Alternatively, employing ethnographic research conducted in San Francisco, New Orleans, and Montreal, Lauraine Leblanc's *Pretty In Punk: Girls' Gender Resistance in a Boys' Subculture* asserts that hardcore and punk alike fail in creating an egalitarian scene but offer women an alternative to societal gender standards and encourage freedom in gender construction.

While scholarship presented by these historians and sociologists makes strides in illuminating hardcore subculture through its complexities and contradictions, it is largely contemporary and pays little attention to the influence of New York City's hardcore scene throughout the subculture's history. Furthermore, beyond acknowledging the exclusion of women in hardcore punk scenes, research on the construction of homogenous membership remains unexplored. Scholars dismiss analysis on the construction of masculine identities. Nevertheless, increasing academic interest in the subculture impels a long overdue history of the most dynamic and influential urban setting for the emergence and evolution of hardcore punk and its defining rituals of identity construction. New York hardcore exposes a scene in which idealized masculinity defined a level of exclusion through physicality, not hegemonic ideology.⁵ While the subculture's mental space attempted to defy hegemonic societal structures, including gender proscriptions, its physical space dictated the body politic, signifying a hegemonic physique. Consequently, in terms of gender, in attempting to challenge internalized structures of power, hardcore unconsciously recast them in a physical form.

3 Craig O'Hara, *The Philosophy of Punk: More Than Noise!* (San Francisco: AK Press, 1990), 9.

4 Brian Tucker, "Punk Places: The Role of Space in Subcultural Life," in *Punkademics: The Basement Show in the Ivory Tower*, ed. Zack Furness (New York: Minor Compositions, 2012), 213.

5 Here, I make a distinction between hegemonic masculine ideology determined by a traditional gender dichotomy, attributed to society and internalized, and physical masculine hegemony determined by appearance and physical strength, attributed to hardcore and revealed through ritual. John Tosh, "Hegemonic Masculinity and the History of Gender," in *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, ed. Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann, and John Tosh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 41.

The following breaks down the hardcore scene in New York in three parts, firstly arguing that carving out space in the city during hardcore's first wave necessitated both an expressed ideal of inclusivity and a masculine aesthetic that played out in hardcore space. Secondly, I explore realized exclusivity through the examination of images and lyrics that juxtaposed the subculture's physical and mental space. Lastly, I contend that during hardcore's second wave, members attempted to revive the hardcore ethos of inclusivity that began fading by the mid-decade. However, the attempt to reestablish hardcore's venerable, mental space failed in transcending into its physical space and upheld the hypermasculinity, and subsequent exclusivity, that plagued its creation and existence in a perilous city.

United and Strong: The Creation of Hardcore Space in the City, DIY, and Masculinity

On October 30, 1975, in response to president Gerald Ford's refusal to bail out New York City, the *New York Daily News* covered its front page with the now infamous headline, "FORD TO CITY: DROP DEAD."⁶ New York's fiscal crisis of 1975, however, rooted itself in decades of city officials succumbing to the interests of overly influential real estate developers, pushing out midtown manufacturing jobs to create space for business professionals in finance, insurance, and real estate.⁷ As a result of the city's displaced jobs, New York became, through the eyes of conservative politicians and wealthy elites, a haven for welfare cheats, lazy union workers, and criminals. Perhaps unsurprisingly, nonetheless, conservative economic principles and business ventures led the charge in streamlining the city, forcing austerity measures to the detriment of city infrastructure, policing, and education while condemning petty welfare fraud and overpaid municipal workers. Reprivatizing the economy thus became the official answer to New York City's mess.⁸ However, the official answer did not stimulate contentment among New Yorkers who watched as their neighborhoods deteriorated and crime rates surged. Some of these New Yorkers sought reprieve in hardcore punk, a powerful new sound and style that began spreading across the U.S. in the late 1970s. Thus, while the city dropped dead, hardcore punk began rising from New York's squats and constructing a space detached from the influence of ineffectual city officials and inner-city violence.

Relinquishing itself from the frivolous trappings of its punk predecessors, hardcore offered inner-city youth an alternative to cultural norms the scene deemed incompatible with its socially conscious ideals. Hardcore punks in New York felt that, similar to the apathy stimulated by drugs on the streets of the Lower East Side, their punk predecessors overlooked the interests of their fans and depended on often trivial lyrical content and a lifestyle centered on drug use. As Roger Miret of New York hardcore band Agnostic Front declared, "we started using the term 'hardcore' because we wanted to separate ourselves from the druggy... [punk] scene that was happening at the time."⁹ Hardcore members asserted that while punk intended to dissociate from the norms of youth culture and the music industry, it ultimately failed. Though punks might have dressed differently and condemned social mores, the new generation saw through the façade. Mohawks and leather jackets became meaningless when punks acted in accordance with their non-punk peers as the music industry commodified a punk style. There was nothing rebellious about sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll anymore; it was being sold to the public on a mass scale. In fact, punk's seeming apathy alienated hardcore members. At the start of the 1980s, in the midst of New York's urban decline, hardcore necessitated rebellion from a new front, one that constructed subcultural

6 *New York Daily News* (New York, NY), Oct. 30, 1975.

7 References to New York are to New York City.

8 Joshua Freeman, *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor since World War II* (New York City: The New Press, 2001), 256-291; William Tabb, *The Long Default: New York City and the Urban Fiscal Crisis* (New York City: Monthly Review Press, 1982), 1-10.

9 Jason Buhrmester, "Agnostic Front's *Victim in Pain* at 25," VillageVoice.com, entry posted December 1, 2009, <http://www.villagevoice.com/2009-12-01/music/agnostic-front-s-victim-in-pain-at-25/> (accessed November 1, 2013).

identity through subverting music industry and societal norms and through the reclamation of urban space in defiance of municipal deterioration perpetuated by a corporate stranglehold.

Perhaps the most crucial element of New York hardcore's space revolved around a do-it-yourself (DIY) ethos that ensured the scene relinquished any remnants of the society it defied. When it came to the music, the confines of major labels, through restrictive business practices or attempts to universalize a sound, could not sustain the localized lyrical content and concern that hardcore embraced, particularly in New York.¹⁰ Most importantly, however, hardcore was unmarketable. It was too loud, too fast, and too angry. Hence, early hardcore bands received little interest from major labels. Likewise, hardcore members directed scorn towards attempts at surrendering any aspect of their music, through production, distribution, or sales. The scene recognized that its DIY ethos was a necessary factor in its rebellion against societal norms and popular rock. Consequently, bands put out music themselves, often scraping together just enough cash to spend a day or two in a small recording studio. Don Fury, who ran Demo Studio, a popular and affordable site for hardcore recording, created the studio as "a little place where local bands could come and make records."¹¹ After Agnostic Front recorded its *United Blood* album in 1982, Demo became a mainstay for New York hardcore bands and a symbol of a localized, DIY mentality that dominated the scene. Nevertheless, bands also recorded at 171A and released music on the in-house label and store Rat Cage Records. John Joseph, frontman of New York hardcore band Cro-Mags, states that Jerry Williams, the man who ran 171A, "was an integral part of the scene... He recorded [bands'] records for free. He produced their records. He did everything."¹² Crucially, while Don Fury and Jerry Williams ran the studios, the music never left the control of the bands that created it, and hardcore bands recognized Fury and Williams as part of the scene, not detached businessmen.

Likewise, bands also managed their own promotion and distribution of music. The era's most influential hardcore bands all released music on labels ran by fellow hardcore members or themselves. For instance, in 1978, Los Angeles's Black Flag released their debut album, *Nervous Breakdown*, on singer Greg Ginn's SST Records. Likewise, in 1980, Washington D.C.'s Bad Brains, released its seminal single, "Pay To Cum," on its own BB Records, setting a sonic and DIY standard for hardcore.¹³ Following the hardcore template, New York's Agnostic Front released its debut album *United Blood* on its own AF Records in 1983 after pressing 1000 seven-inch records. Other bands, alternatively, recorded their music and released it without a label attached. In either case, after recording, hardcore bands created their own artwork and cut and pasted their own album sleeves, following the DIY hardcore model for bands across the U.S.¹⁴ In New York, after completing albums, bands often dropped off their records or cassette tapes at the local hardcore record shops, Rat Cage Records, in the basement of 171A, and Something Records.¹⁵ Band members also rehearsed to play at local venues where they tried out before performing in one of the Lower East Side's hardcore clubs. Nevertheless, musical talent ultimately held little weight in determining whether or not promoters, often hardcore members themselves, booked bands for shows. In effect, hardcore's DIY ethos emphasized that any hardcore member could create a band, record, and play shows. With inclusivity essential to the scene, any barriers between bands and fans perished.

At the start of the 1980s, hardcore spanned a two-mile radius, from CBGB at 315 Bowery to Max's Kansas City at 213 Park Avenue. Between these venues existed two other sites of hardcore punk, the aptly named A7, located on the corner of A Avenue and 7th Street, and 171A, at 171 A Avenue. Max's Kansas City, as Bad Brains bassist Darryl Jenifer recalls, "was most likely the place where New York punk started. It felt more like drug rock as opposed to the punk rock that

10 Alan O'Connor, *Punk Labels and the Struggle for Autonomy* (New York: Lexington Books, 2008), 4-5.

11 Beth Lahickey, *All Ages: Reflections on Straight Edge* (Huntington Beach: Revelation Books, 1997), 59.

12 Toney Rettman, eds., *NYHC: New York Hardcore, 1980-1990* (New York: Bazillion Points, 2014), 53.

13 Kevin Dunn, "'If It Ain't Cheap, It Ain't Punk': Walter Benjamin's Progressive Cultural Production and DIY Punk Record Label," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 24, no. 2 (June 2012): 219.

14 O'Connor, *Punk Labels*, 21.

15 Rettman, *NYHC*, 301.

we embraced as youth in D.C... New York City was dope, Johnny Thunders, and the like.”¹⁶ However, with the introduction of hardcore, Max’s Kansas City began its decline. As Peter Crowley, Max’s former talent booker, asserts, “We had a very young audience that didn’t spend any money. Allowing them to play was an act of charity. The bartenders wanted to kill me... There was no justifying the [hardcore] bands at Max’s except as art.”¹⁷ Max’s closed as a hardcore venue in 1981, symbolizing the fact that hardcore offered little to the business-minded and found a more fitting home where the scene’s inability to make profit posed no limits on expression.

A7 and 171A revealed a more appropriate alternative for hardcore space. Both sites exemplified the scene’s DIY ethic.¹⁸ As a record store, recording studio, and space for hardcore punks to socialize in New York’s low-rent and waning East Side, 171A presented itself as a hardcore space without acquiescing to traditional business standards. Likewise, A7, just a block away from 171A, offered hardcore members a venue without restrictions on how loud the bands played or how many people could be packed into the 200-square-foot room. Hardcore member Steve Blush contends that A7 was both a “shithole” and New York hardcore’s “spiritual home when hardcore was introduced to New York in 1981.”¹⁹ Both labels characterize an ideal space for hardcore. It took seventy-five people to fill A7, but more well-known bands, such as Bad Brains or Black Flag, filled the room beyond capacity.²⁰ Parris Mayhew of the band Cro-Mags recalls, “There’d be ten bands a night for three bucks. There’d be a sheet of loose-leaf paper with the bands’ names. You’d knock on the door and enter this little world where there were 70-100 kids.”²¹ Additionally, just across the street from A7 existed another hardcore “hang out,” Thompson Square Park, affectionately renamed Needle Park by locals.²² Though fraught with violence as a result of contested grounds for drug sales between gangs and dealers, Needle Park presented hardcore punks a space to socialize. Together, members did not fear the threat posed by violent gangs in the Lower East Side. By night, hardcore members found themselves at the park catching fresh air between band sets. During the day, members played recently released cassette tapes they found at 171A and Something Records from hardcore bands throughout the U.S.²³

CBGB, however, became the unrivaled symbol of New York hardcore. While A7 and 171A represented inclusive hardcore ideals and a “spiritual home,” CBGB offered a more apt space for the scene’s performed rituals and disparity between mental space and physical space. Although CBGB did not host hardcore shows exclusively, during hardcore matinee nights, the venue became overrun with hardcore fans. Often a site for introduction to the scene for new hardcore members, CBGB became the physical home of the subculture. While socializing, recording, and sharing music took place at A7 and 171A, CBGB was larger, more recognizable, and perhaps externally less intimidating to new members who may have felt apprehensive about walking into more intimate hardcore spaces, regardless of the scene’s openness. Moreover, CBGB’s existence as a venue continued on long after A7 and 171A closed by the mid-1980s. Many members professedly shared Mike Ferrero’s profound experience after first walking into a CBGB matinee. Ray Cappo, who later became the frontman for one of New York’s most influential hardcore bands, Youth of Today, for example, recalls after going to his first hardcore show at CBGB, “I was impressed. No, impressed isn’t the word. I was in love. I fell in love with hardcore.”²⁴ Like Ferrero, Cappo vowed to never miss another CBGB matinee.²⁵

¹⁶Ibid., 29.

¹⁷Ibid., 31.

¹⁸Ibid., 54.

¹⁹Steve Blush, *American Hardcore: A Tribal History* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2001), 177.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²John Joseph, *The Evolution of a Cro-Magnon* (New York: Loudspeaker Entertainment, 2007), 241.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ray Cappo, forward to *All Ages: Reflections on Straight Edge*, by Beth Lahickey (Huntington Beach: Revelation Books, 1997), x.

²⁵Ibid.

As Cappo and Ferrero's stories and the scene's DIY ethic suggest, hardcore in the city emphasized inclusiveness and comradery as necessitated for carving out subcultural space. As put by Jack Rabid, a member of the early New York hardcore scene, "[hardcore] was this club where no one ever took membership and there was no barrier to entry. The fact of you being there meant you were accepted."²⁶ Inclusion allowed involvement to expand while purportedly offering a space for identity construction to members who felt unwelcome anywhere else. Hence, seminal New York hardcore bands, such as Agnostic Front and WarZone, made comradery within the hardcore scene a central theme in many of their songs. As put by Agnostic Front bassist Diego Casalinas, "We always preach unity. We gotta [sic] stick together or else we're all defeating our purpose."²⁷ Their song, "United and Strong" emphasized this point: "We gotta stick together / And fight for what we believe / There won't be a second chance / We've got to have it soon / Got to stick together / And fight 'em all now / Our friends are more important / We gotta stick together / Support one another / United and strong."²⁸ Similarly, as WarZone passionately proclaims in their song, "As One," "We must be united as one / Think for yourself now / United we stand / Divided we fall."²⁹

However, while hardcore proposed an inclusive space for outliers to form a community free from the violence and drug abuse witnessed on the streets, the construction of New York hardcore's subcultural space necessitated recognition of the larger society in which it formed. As put by WarZone frontman and Agnostic Front drummer Raymond Barbieri, "[the Lower East Side] was violent. You gotta figure there's a lot of Spanish and black kids and you have all these white kids coming down, looking fuckin' wild and bugged out. They didn't go for that."³⁰ To secure its recognition in an environment attuned to violence, hardcore stressed physical strength. Consequently, New York hardcore necessarily played into structural elements of the larger culture it hoped to undermine by emphasizing masculinity and providing space for young men to display their mannishness while professedly participating in a rebellion against the cultural mores beyond the walls of the scene's venues. Furthermore, bands' cries for unity did little to inspire bridging the gap between idealized inclusivity and physical space, where hypermasculinity defined hardcore. Inadvertently, these cries were directed at a scene that restricted participation through the creation of hegemonic masculine roles, such as playing in bands and slam dancing. Thus, hardcore's inclusive ethos did not materialize into the physical space the subculture occupied.

Not Just Boys' Fun: Images, Words, Slamming, and Exclusion

Like Cappo and Ferrero, scene photographer Bri Hurley became deeply inspired by what she witnessed at CBGB. Though unfamiliar with the subculture, after capturing images of hardcore punks outside Sunday matinees, Hurley became attracted to the scene's sense of community and openness. Her photographs and experiences, nevertheless, perhaps best exemplify the contradiction between the idealized inclusivity New York hardcore purported and actual space the subculture established as its own. Hurley's photographs display warm smiles on a self-described dirty group of kids against a backdrop of urban decay (Fig. 1-2). Echoing Rabid's assertion that "the fact of you being there meant you were accepted," Hurley found that the inclusiveness of the scene "imparts a strong sense of belonging and intensifies [members'] everyday lives."³¹ Intending to capture this through her images, Hurley recognized that the formation of a community, more than the music's sound or style that existed independent and counter to larger cultural norms in the midst of New York's fiscal crisis, signified the most important element of hardcore in the

²⁶Blush, *American Hardcore*, 174.

²⁷Bri Hurley, *Making A Scene: New York Hardcore in Photos, Lyrics, & Commentary*, Rev. ed. (Harrisburg: Butter Goose Press, 2011), 64.

²⁸Agnostic Front, "United and Strong," *Victim In Pain*, Rat Cage Records, 1984, 33 1/3 rpm.

²⁹WarZone, "As One," *Don't Forget the Struggle, Don't Forget the Streets*, Caroline Records, 1988, 33 1/3 rpm.

³⁰Raymond Barbieri, interview by John Porcelly, *Schism New York Fanzine*, issue 7, Winter 1987-1988, 15.

³¹Bri Hurley, *Making A Scene: New York Hardcore in Photos, Lyrics, & Commentary* (Harrisburg: Butter Goose Press, 2011), 9.

city. However, this distinction between hardcore as an inclusive community and hardcore as musical sound and style signifies the discrepancies between the subculture's mental space and its manifestly hardcore physical space.

Indeed, images of hardcore members taken while outside the scene's venues do little to reflect the subculture as it passed through venue doors and engaged in distinctly hardcore rituals that solidified a cult of masculinity.³² Hardcore rituals, such as playing in bands and slam dancing, played the precarious role of exemplifying community while also constructing a space with restrictions on inclusivity. As the violence witnessed in the streets of New York impelled hardcore members to create a masculine identity that could compete for contested, urban space and as show flyers, album covers, and photographs from inside hardcore venues reveal, New York hardcore glorified the meanest and most masculine slam dancer who entered the dancefloor. Agnostic Front's cover art for their album *Cause For Alarm*, for instance, exposes the idealized menacing look hardcore promoted.³³ It displays the devil as a skinhead, not in opposition to skinheads but as a representation of justice being served. In hell, the businessman, drug addict, and street criminal answer to a hypermasculine and vengeful skinhead (Fig. 3).³⁴

Likewise, show flyers displayed the hypermasculine arena of "the pit," hardcore's dancefloor (Fig. 4-5).³⁵ The pit offered a space for hardcore members to perform distinctly hardcore acts, solidify a sense of community, and assert their masculinity through slam dancing. Though hardcore members contended that slamming involved a protocol that rejected intentional violence inflicted on other hardcore members, ritualistic shows of strength challenged etiquette.³⁶ As scene member Kevin Crowley recalls, "The pits could get crazy, but no one was sitting there waiting to do something to someone. If some jerk-off was standing on the sidelines punching people, that was the guy who ended up getting beat up."³⁷ Hence, any slam dancer who failed to follow the tacit rules of the dancefloor faced the risk of suffering at the hands of more masculine members who regulated the pit. As artistic representations of the subculture reveal, exemplified by both album and flyer art, the scene idealized a homogenous masculine skinhead form that limited members who did not adhere to the subculture's norms.

Consequently, hypermasculine gender construction as a model for hardcore membership left little room for gender alternatives in a purportedly inclusive and welcoming scene. In fact, hardcore closely resembled society's traditional gender binary through male hegemony. While most hardcore members shared the ideal that women's involvement should include them moving from groupies to band members, hardcore imagery excluded them, and they almost never entered the dancefloor.³⁸ Likewise, very few women joined bands. Expressing the sentiment that hardcore necessitated representation for its female members and going one step further by acknowledging hardcore's actual exclusivity, in 1984, all male, Nevada hardcore band 7 Seconds called for the scene's members to recognize male hegemony as a challenge to the professed ideals of the subculture in their song "Not Just Boys' Funs." As singer Kevin Seconds declares, "There's girls who put out fanzines, and others put on shows / Yet they're not allowed to get out on the

32Cult of masculinity is attributed here to Mike Brake who asserts that subcultures cultivate masculinity by offering space for boys to express their mannishness when they cannot do so in other cultural settings. Mike Brake, *The Sociology of Youth Culture and Youth Subcultures: Sex Drugs and Rock 'n' Roll* (New York: Routledge, 1980).

33Agnostic Front, *Cause For Alarm*, Relativity Records, 1986, 33 1/3 rpm.

34In accordance with skinhead subculture's earliest, multi-racial, and working class form, skinheads involved in New York hardcore were generally not racist and were critical of racist skinheads who were thus much less likely to be involved in the hardcore scene. The promotion of racial equality was a common lyrical theme for prominent New York skinhead hardcore bands, such as WarZone and Agnostic Front.

35Tony Rettman, "Check Out This Incredibly Deep Wellspring Of New York City Hardcore Treasures," New York Village Voice Blog, entry posted June 6, 2013, http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2013/06/nyhc_chronicles.php (accessed March 1, 2015).

36Anthony Civarelli, interview by Denise Richardson, *Good Day New York*, Fox, May 6, 1992.

37Rettman, *NYHC*, 209.

38Jamie Mullaney, "'Unity Admirable But Not Necessarily Headed': Going Rates and Gender Boundaries in the Straight Edge Hardcore Music Scene," *Gender & Society* 21 (2007): 385.

floor / Some make music, well that you can accept / Hell, maybe live you'll see some tits and ass / You fucking moron, your brains have run amuck."³⁹ However, 7 Seconds exemplifies an exceptional case and the often more inclusive vibe of hardcore in the West. While New York hardcore members certainly did not refute Kevin Seconds calls to recognize the participation of women as essential to an inclusive subculture, the scene's structural cult of masculinity prevented effective change and celebrated the hard-style appearance of male skinheads as a reaction to the violence witnessed in the streets of the Lower East Side. As sociologist Jamie Mullaney asserts, "Music subcultures that aim not only to embrace women as participants and musicians but also to consciously subvert dominant conceptualizations of femininity often end up reproducing the structures of inequality they purport to defy."⁴⁰ New York's scene perhaps best exemplifies Mullaney's assertion of hardcore's internalized contradictions, as exemplified by the scene's mental and physical spaces. According to scene member Laura Albert, "I was always aware of this very male sexual energy going on, and since I wasn't a boy, I couldn't be part of it. I wanted something from these people, but I knew I didn't want to actually have sex with them. I had this feeling that I would've gotten more if I was a boy."⁴¹ Women involved in the scene were thus relegated to roles outside the subculture's distinctly hardcore rituals, as exemplified by Albert and Bri Hurley, who recognized the scene's openness to outsiders, but also remained a hardcore outlier as a photographer and not a band member or slam dancer.

Crucial Times: Hardcore's Second Wave

Hurley's photographs and hardcore imagery, however, do more than depict a static image of the discrepancies between mental and physical space. They furthermore display a transitory hardcore scene in which, by the mid-1980s, the fight for inclusion and of reclamation of space ended. Accordingly, New York hardcore regressed into a subculture reminiscent of the apathetic punk scene that precipitated it. As new fans became intrigued by hardcore, an increasing level of visibility and opportunities for bands to commodify their sound threatened hardcore's DIY ethos and damaged a sense of community.⁴² This fact symbolized the notion that, as hardcore member Steven Blush contends, the scene was built to self-destruct. Inherent in the subculture's construction, hardcore revered a simplistic sound that resulted in the music parodying itself, and while musicians claimed they were not in it for profit, bands often dissolved due to a lack of funds.⁴³

Thus, with a more technical and monetarily viable sound, metal – with slower song structures, guitar solos, and professional production – became a guiding light for bands as they began bridging the gap between hardcore simplicity and marketability. Consequently, as Blush asserts, "By 1986 Hardcore was over... The scene itself committed suicide."⁴⁴ Hardcore bands' moved away from their hardcore roots, crossing over to metal both lyrically and sonically. Leading crossover bands, such as Agnostic Front and Cro-Mags, though sincere about their passion for New York's hardcore scene, began playing bigger venues to larger audiences. "Outsiders," who became attracted to the new scene and did not recognize hardcore's communal ideals, interacted with the subculture with the perception that hardcore welcomed violence, diminishing dancefloor etiquette and ensuring unmitigated violence. As scene member Sal Canzonieri recalls, "These Newcomers weren't interested in the music. They were there to fight... Shows looked more like a gang convention than a celebration of great music and a close-knit community."⁴⁵ For many older members, the rush of new participants and subsequent unjustified violence signified hardcore's

397 Seconds, "Not Just Boys' Fun," *The Crew*, Better Youth Organization Records 005, 1984, 33 1/3 rpm.

40Mullaney, "Unity Admirable," 387.

41Blush, *American Hardcore*, 35.

42Ibid., 194.

43Blush, *American Hardcore*, 296.

44Ibid.

45Ibid., 194.

demise; however, less willing to see hardcore's expiration, a new generation of kids who recognized and valued the subculture's ideals quickly began reclaiming hardcore space.

Disheartened by what he witnessed in the regressing hardcore scene, Ray Cappo hoped to revive his love through an injection of what he perceived as authentic hardcore. As the city's original hardcore bands intended to create a scene disconnected from their predecessors, Cappo hoped to detach from hardcore's misguided form in the middle of the decade. His band, Youth of Today, revisited the faster sound being lost to metal and infused it with positive new lyrical content. As Cappo's bandmate, John Porcelly, asserts, in the hardcore scene during the mid-1980s "the clothes were dirtier and people had weirder haircuts, but basically they were doing the same things that every burnout in my high school was doing – listening to music, getting drunk, and getting in fights."⁴⁶ Thus, with a surge of violence and membership, the distinction between hardcore and broader culture narrowed. While members of the hardcore scene overlooked the intrusion of hypermasculinity as a threat to the subculture's ideals, the intrusion of a metal inspired business ethic, violence, and drugs found a less affable welcome from Cappo, Porcelly, and a second wave of hardcore members who ensured hardcore's survival.

Youth of Today and the second wave of hardcore most emphatically rallied behind a new galvanizing theme. Although not new to hardcore, having originated with DC's Minor Threat in 1981, straight edge played the role of reviving New York's declining hardcore scene in 1986. Its tenets, as blatantly put by Minor Threat frontman Ian Mackaye, "don't drink, don't smoke, don't fuck," represented a new rebellion.⁴⁷ As New York hardcore member Beth Lahickey writes, straight edge was "an untraditional form of rebellion... rebelling against the traditional forms of rebellion."⁴⁸ It presented itself as defiance against New York's drug culture exemplified by punks, hippy counterculture, and the increasingly apathetic existing hardcore scene of the mid-decade. Likewise, straight edge views on sex signified a reaction to what members perceived as a vice constraining society. As sociologist Ross Haenfler contends, "whereas hippies viewed liberated sex as revolutionary, punks saw it as just another pleasure, and skinheads valued sex as a supreme expression of masculinity, [straight edgers] see abstinence from promiscuous sex as a powerful form of rebellion."⁴⁹ The straight edge philosophy sought cultural defiance through subverting inhibitors of rebellion. As New York show promoter, Dave Stein recalls, "the rebellion, the angst, the being fed up with the status quo lost all of its validity when people were doing all these things that destroyed themselves."⁵⁰ Sex, drugs abuse, and alcoholism represented the culture straight edge members intended to defy, not hardcore as they perceived it.

However, straight edge defiance also played a role in perpetuating hardcore's gender construction.⁵¹ Straight edge members made a clear association between mental strength in refraining from mind altering and addictive endeavors and physical strength already inherent in hardcore by the end of the decade. New York straight edge band Judge, for example, made the association between mental and physical strength clear. As declared in the opening song from their first release, "Smoking that butt / It makes you mature / A slave to sex / And you tell me you're pure / You slam that beer / It makes you a man / I'll try to keep my cool / But you better understand / UNDERSTAND!"⁵² The following song, "In My Way," pushed the point even further, declaring, "Those drugs are going to kill you / If I don't get to you first."⁵³ Both songs seemed to threaten a physical altercation if listeners did not heed the tenets of straight edge.

46 Lahickey, *All Ages*, 130.

47 Minor Threat, "Out Of Step," *Out of Step*, Dischord Records 010, 1983, 45 rpm.

48 Lahickey, *All Ages*, xviii.

49 Ross Haenfler, *Straight Edge: Clean-Living Youth, Hardcore Punk, and Social Change* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 43.

50 Lahickey, *All Ages*, 27.

51 Haenfler, *Straight Edge*, 95.

52 Judge, "Fed Up," *New York Crew*, 1988, Schism Records, 33 1/3 rpm.

53 Judge, "In my way," *New York Crew*, 1988, Schism Records, 33 1/3 rpm.

Perhaps only surprising to Mike Ferrero, singer of Judge, these lyrics attracted hypermasculine, violent fans. After older hardcore members began criticizing straight edge bands, such as Youth of Today, for their sanctimoniousness, Ferrero intended to give critics “a little bit of what they thought we were about,” not to promote violence.⁵⁴ Ferrero declared, prior to forming the band, “I was mad at these people who were saying [all straight edgers] were these elitist, Nazi-type guys.”⁵⁵ Additionally, Ferrero’s lyrical content developed from personal experiences concerned with his family and “fucked up childhood,” impelling his dismay after hardcore members used his words to justify physical violence on behalf of straight edge.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, while Ferrero condemned actual violence, the militancy of Judge introduced a principled component to straight edge that members adopted and defended. With Judge, the music once again represented a turn from hardcore roots with both the band’s increasingly slower sound and straight edge exclusion promulgated by violent fans. Similar to the boost in popularity and outsider participation that threatened the scene a few years prior, Judge typified an increasingly influential hardcore scene. Nonetheless, after witnessing the violence in which Judge fans engaged, as perceivably justified by his lyrics, Ferrero quit the band at the height of success. As straight edge hypermasculinity swept through the scene, Judge’s influence exemplified hardcore’s crumbling community idealism.

While, many straight edge bands, such as Youth of Today, did not share Judge’s militancy and espoused a significantly more positive and optimistic outlook, most straight edge members promoted an association between physical strength, mental vigor, and rebellion that perpetuated the customary gender norms of the scene. While straight edge members rarely adhered to a skinhead style, in its admiration for virility, straight edge identity offered little distinction between the first and second waves of hardcore (Fig.6). Ultimately, as Beth Lahickey writes, “as the straight edge scene progressed, it became hauntingly reminiscent of all the narrow-mindedness that hardcore had given me refuge from.... It all began to make me feel uncomfortable. I fell in love with hardcore for the freedom I felt from others’ expectations. Straight edge became just a different set of rules.”⁵⁷ While reverential, positive hardcore bands attempted to rescind hardcore’s digressions and the loss of communal mental space it tightly grasped, militancy prevailed, ensuring homogenous masculinity remained a dark cloud that loomed over the subculture, unseen from the physical space the music occupied.

Conclusion

As hardcore continued into the 1990s, New York’s scene and its history became the leading influence for the subculture throughout the U.S. and the world. The scene developed into a force unforeseen at the start of the decade. However, while New York hardcore stood in opposition to the world around it, the subculture consistently failed in defeating veneration for hypermasculinity that ultimately crushed the scene’s inclusive aims. As the subculture’s masculine physical space contested its inclusive mental space, hypermasculinity won through force and ritual. This proved the case during the creation of New York hardcore in its first wave and its reformation through straight edge in its second wave. In fact, hardcore constructed a cult of masculinity blinded by the homogeneity it did not realize it perpetuated. Thus, while the music and dancefloor offered an escape and family for members like Mike Ferrero, for others, it reproduced the same “fucked up” realities lived outside of CBGB’s walls.

⁵⁴Lahickey, *All Ages*, 79.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Lahickey, *All Ages*, xviii.

Appendix

Fig.1: Todd Youth, Jimmy Gestapo, and Raybeez, 1985. Photograph by Bri Hurley

Fig.2: Outside of CBGB, 1986. Photograph by Bri Hurley



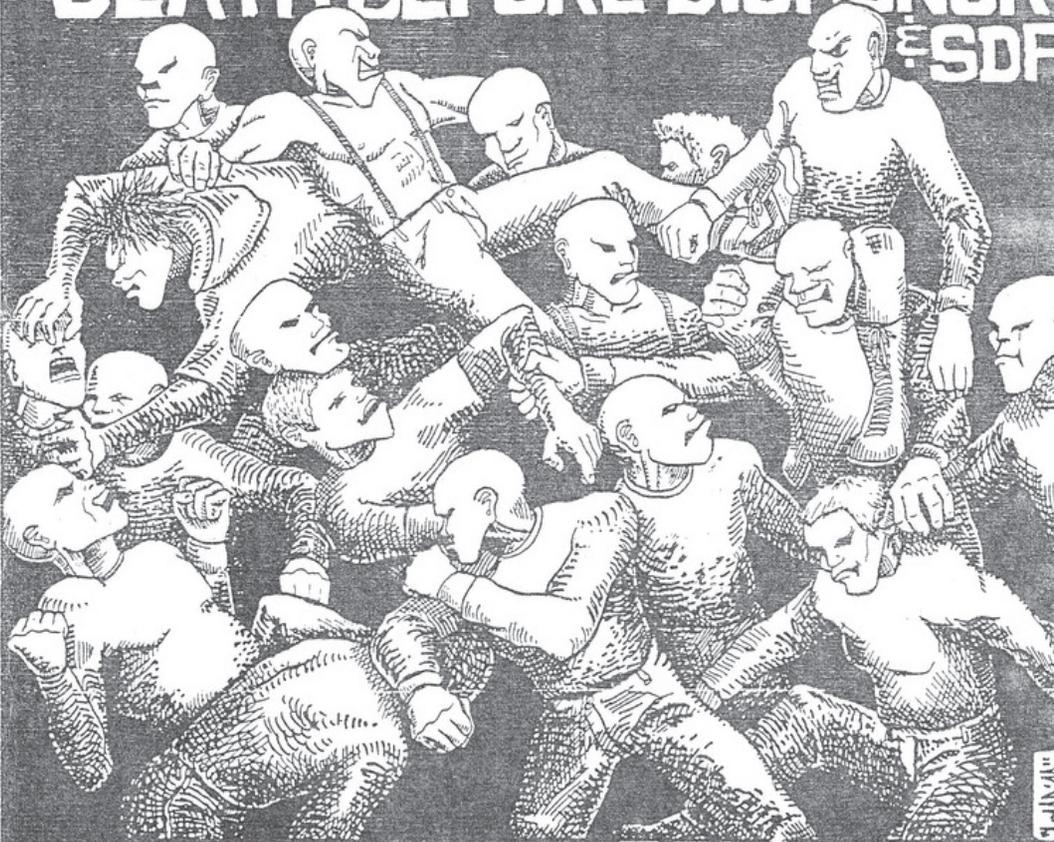


Fig.3: Agnostic Front - Cause For Alarm. Relativity Records, 1986 (above)

Fig.4: Show Flyer, 1984 (opposite)

7 SECONDS AGNOSTIC FRONT DEATH BEFORE DISHONOR

• SDF



SUNDAY-MATINEE OCT 14

AT CBGB
and OMFUG
(212)982

ABUSED with THE MOB/CRUCIAL TRUTH

AND
Urban
Waste



FRI.
JULY
2ND

at
A-7

Now
in 3-D



CAPTAIN
HARD CORE

TO
THE
RESCUE!



K. CROWLEY (82) 8/12/82



Fig.5: Show Flyer, 1982 (opposite)

Fig.6: Straight edge band Project X. Photograph by BJ Papas (above)

REFERENCE LIST

PRIMARY SOURCES

- Barbieri, Raymond. Interview by John Porcelly. *Schism New York Fanzine*, issue 7, Winter 1987-1988, 14-17.
- Civarelli, Anthony. Interview by Denise Richardson, *Good Day New York*, Fox, May 6, 1992.
- Ferrero, Mike. Interview in *Double Cross Zine*, August 27, 2013.
- Ferrero, Mike. "There Will Be Quiet – The Story of Judge (Part 1)," <http://noisy.vice.com/there-will-be-quiet/there-will-be-quiet-the-story-of-judge-part-1> (accessed April 8, 2015).
- Joseph, John. *The Evolution of a Cro-Magnon*. New York: Loudspeaker Entertainment, 2007.
- Lahickey, Beth. *All Ages: Reflections on Straight Edge*. Huntington Beach: Revelation Books, 1997.
- Miret, Roger. Interviewed in *Flipside* #45, 1985.
- Miret, Roger and Vinny Stigma. Interview by Kent, "Agnostic Front interview." *No Answers*, 1988, 4-8.
- New York Daily News* (New York, NY), Oct. 30, 1975.
- Rettman, Tony, ed. *NYHC: New York Hardcore, 1980-1990*. New York: Bazillion Points, 2014.
- Rose, Joel. "Lower East Side: Directors Love It To A Fault." *New York Times*, May 7, 1989.
- WarZone. Interview by Marlene Goodman, *Crucial Chaos Radio Show*, WNYU 89.1 New York, 1987.

DISCOGRAPHY

- 7 Seconds. "Not Just Boys' Fun." *The Crew*. Better Youth Organization Records 005, 1984, 33 1/3 rpm.
- Agnostic Front. *Cause For Alarm*. Relativity Records, 1986, 33 1/3 rpm.
- Agnostic Front. "United and Strong." *Victim In Pain*. Rat Cage Records, 1984, 33 1/3 rpm.
- Judge. "Fed Up." *New York Crew*. Schism Records, 1988, 33 1/3 rpm.
- Judge. "In My Way." *New York Crew*. Schism Records, 1988, 33 1/3 RPM vinyl.
- Minor Threat. "Out Of Step." *Out of Step*. Dischord Records 010, 1983, 45 rpm.
- Youth of Today. "Youth Crew." *Can't Close My Eyes*. Positive Force Records 004, 1988, 45 rpm.
- WarZone. "As One." *Don't Forget the Struggle, Don't Forget the Streets*. Caroline Records, 1988, 33 1/3 rpm.

SECONDARY SOURCES:

- Blush, Steven. *American Hardcore: A Tribal History*. Los Angeles: Feral House, 2001.
- Brake, Mike. *The Sociology of Youth Culture and Youth Subcultures: Sex Drugs and Rock 'n' Roll*. New York: Routledge, 1980.
- Burhmester, Jason. "Agnostic Front's Victim in Pain at 25." *VillageVoice.com*, December 1, 2009. <http://www.villagevoice.com/2009-12-01/music/agnostic-front-s-victim-in-pain-at-25/> (accessed November 1, 2013).
- Dunn, Kevin. "'If It Ain't Cheap, It Ain't Punk': Walter Benjamin's Progressive Cultural Production and DIY Punk Record Label." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 24, no. 2 (June 2012): 217-237.
- Freeman, Joshua. *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor since World War II*. New York City: The New Press, 2001.
- Haenfler, Ross. *Straight Edge: Clean-Living Youth, Hardcore Punk, and Social Change*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006.
- Hurley, Bri. *Making A Scene: New York Hardcore in Photos, Lyrics, & Commentary*. Harrisburg: Butter Goose Press, 2011.
- Macleod, Dewar. *Kids of the Black Hole: Punk Rock in Postsuburban California*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010.
- Mullaney, Jamie. "'Unity Admirable But Not Necessarily Heeded': Going Rates and Gender Boundaries in the Straight Edge Hardcore Music Scene." *Gender & Society* 21 (2007): 384-408.
- O'Connor, Alan. *Punk Labels and the Struggle for Autonomy*. New York: Lexington Books, 2008.
- O'Hara, Craig. *The Philosophy of Punk: More than Noise*. San Francisco: AK Press, 1999.
- Rettman, Tony. "Check Out This Incredibly Deep Wellspring Of New York City Hardcore Treasures." New York Village Voice Blog, entry posted June 6, 2013, http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2013/06/nyhc_chronicles.php (accessed March 1, 2015).
- Tabb, William. *The Long Default: New York City and the Urban Fiscal Crisis*. New York City: Monthly Review Press, 1982.
- Dudink, Stefan, Karen Hagemann, and John Tosh, eds. *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004.
- Tucker, Brian. "Punk Places: The Role of Space in Subcultural Life." In *Punkademics: The Basement Show in the Ivory Tower*, ed. Zack Furness. New York: Minor Compositions, 2012, 213.