In Defence of Safer Spaces: Punk, Privilege and Safer Spaces Policies

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Abstract

Increasing attention to the prevalence of sexual harassment at live music events has led to the adoption of safer spaces policies by venues and promoters. Punk's politics of inclusion and equality suggest that such policies would be welcome as a means to promote access for marginalized groups. However, safer spaces policies are sometimes controversial and their content and implementation patchy. Such policies therefore bear closer examination in order to understand their value and meaning for punk politics. Here we examine the use of safer spaces policies in punk and DIY music spaces asking, how is safety conceptualized, for what purpose, and who benefits from them? We draw on discourse analysis of safer spaces policies and interviews with punks about sexual violence at gigs. We argue that safer spaces policies *can* be a valuable tool for promoting access to pleasurable experiences whilst lessening fear of discrimination, harassment and violence. However, safer spaces can also continue to privilege already privileged punks. We conclude that when safer spaces policies are implemented they must go hand in hand with practical measures to enable inclusion. In doing so the needs of marginalized groups must be prioritized.

Keywords

DIY, feminism, politics, punk, queer, safer spaces, sexual violence

Introduction

Increasing attention to the prevalence of sexual harassment at gigs and festivals in the last few years (e.g. O'Connor, 2017; Madden, 2019) has led to the spotlighting of safer[i] spaces policies at music venues, and a trend towards adopting written guidance on behaviour for audience members and others at live music events. Punk's politics of inclusion and equality suggest that such policies would be welcomed as a means to promote access for groups marginalized outside punk, thus aiding the invigoration of punk music and culture. However, safer spaces policies are heterogeneous in their content and implementation, as well as the centre of controversy around freedom of speech. We begin from the position that the

controversy reflects resistance to feminism and social justice work alongside increasingly vocal right wing populism. Arguments in defence of freedom of speech which seek to silence marginalized voices are made in bad faith (Hill and Savigny, 2019). . Thus safer spaces policies bear closer examination in order to understand both their value and meaning for punk politics. We examine the use of safer spaces policies in punk and DIY music spaces asking, how is safety conceptualized and for what purpose? Who benefits from safer spaces policies? What does this mean for punk politics? We draw on discourse analysis of safer spaces policies and interviews with punks about sexual violence at gigs. We argue that safer spaces policies *can* be a valuable tool for enabling the empowerment and protection of those marginalized in non-punk spaces. Safer spaces policies can promote access to pleasurable experiences and lessen fear of discrimination, harassment and violence. However safer spaces can continue to privilege white, straight, male, middle-class and able-bodied punks. To move beyond this, to engender better inclusion and equality we argue that safer spaces policies need to be backed up with practical measures which evidence punks' commitment to inclusion. In doing so this must prioritize the needs of marginalized groups and embrace the resulting shift in power and cultural formations. We first review the literature relating to safer spaces and marginalization in punk. We outline our methodology before turning to the question of how are safer spaces conceptualized, and what is their purpose? We then examine the epistemological position behind safer spaces policies, arguing that they draw on radical feminist heritage to privilege emotional knowledge. Finally we ask who are safer spaces safer for, answering that if safer spaces are to do the work they are intended to that they need to address the practical and emotional needs of marginalized groups.

Safer spaces

The use of safer spaces in music scenes has been little studied so far, with most of the (non-education-related) literature relating to feminist or LGBTQ uses. These studies are helpful for understanding the political, emotional and environmental underpinnings of safer spaces policies. They indicate that such policies can be a vital tool in enabling punk and DIY music scenes to disrupt the male-dominated status quo of punk through prioritizing other forms of being and doing in punk spaces. Studies on the creation of safer spaces in riot grrrl (Zobl, 2004; Keenan and Darms, 2013) and queer punk (Sharp and Nilan, 2017) provide a basis for understanding the benefits of safer spaces for music-making. However there has been no deep analysis of particular policies in order to understand the groundings and implications of safer spaces policies beyond feminist and queer scenes. We draw together literature across the field of work on safer spaces, noting, therefore, that safer spaces are unequivocally political, and political in such ways as might be expected to tally with punk ideology, which we discuss further below.

The concept of safer spaces as it relates to current usage at punk and DIY venues and events has its origins in the Women's Liberation Movement, where it was a key tool in enabling consciousness-raising (Enke, 2003). Underpinning the concept of safer spaces is a belief in social justice (The Roestone Collective, 2014) which can be traced to Marxist, feminist, anti-racist and decolonial arguments about the structural nature of oppression. Women-only spaces are used to exclude men in order to be free from sexism and the threat of violence prevalent for women living in patriarchy (Enke, 2003; Browne, 2009). Moreover they provide an opportunity for women to be without self-doubt, self-censorship and inhibition usually presented by men's presence (Lewis et al., 2015), and to step outside 'societal pressures and symbolic control' (Zobl, 2004: 451). They are spaces for restorative withdrawal (Keenan and Darms, 2013) and 'escape, rest and healing' (Browne, 2009: 546).

In contemporary LGBTQ locations, safer spaces are a response to homophobia and associated violence. They also generate feelings of belonging (Hartal, 2018) and intimacy (Keenan and Darms, 2013), and they are spaces of predictability (Hartal, 2018) in which those in the space have more control over what occurs there. Riot grrrl's offers safer spaces that place women's voices and control to the front (Keenan and Darms, 2013). For radical feminism and riot grrrl, safer spaces therefore represent a zone to give voice to critiques of patriarchy and male dominance (Keenan and Darms, 2013), and can be seen as a form of disruption and resistance to heteropatriarchal norms, as Sharp and Nilan (2017) argue in relation to LGBTQ Do It Together scenes. In doing so they present a legitimization of and collective response to the fear of cismale violence felt by LGBTQ people living in heteropatriarchy. This emphasis on the emotional foundation of safer spaces – the relationship between fear, safety, and exclusion – is important and highlights the way in which, in most spaces in the West, safety is a straight, white, able-bodied man's privilege (Fox and Ore, 2010). Freedom from fear for those who do not fit this model means opening new opportunities and emotional spaces. Lewis et al (2015) argue that safety itself is a necessary starting point, not an end in itself; safety not only provides freedom from harm, but freedom *to* express oneself and ultimately to be 'fully human' (Lewis et al., 2015: 10). For riot grrrl this means a celebration of girls' marginalized culture and the creation of new, girl-centred cultural forms (Zobl, 2004) (Keenan and Darms, 2013); the importance of feelings of freedom in order to have *fun* should not be underestimated (Sharp and Nilan, 2017), a point to which we return below.

However, it has been long recognized that spaces which are designated as safe for some marginalized groups are not necessarily safe for all when it comes to considering the intersections of marginalization and exclusion. The women-only Coffee House which is Enke's (2003) case study was situated inside church buildings with a predominantly white middle class congregation. The women needed to remain on good terms with potentially lesbian-unfriendly church staff and the raced and classed connotations of the church 'infused' (2003: 639) the Coffee House. This led to a lack of challenge around church discourses (e.g. not saying the word 'lesbian'), meaning that white middle class ways of doing lesbian predominated, thereby marginalizing working class and black women. In this context, therefore, 'woman' was code for 'white middle class lesbian', hiding the implicit identities of those who are 'in' the accepted group. Audre Lorde (1994), Hazel Carby (1996) and others argue, even in spaces that are supposedly safe for all women, oppression of some women by other women occurs. In Held's (2015) and Enke's (2003) examples, the dominant identity position of lesbian includes within it the unacknowledged racial position of whiteness and subtle racisms are committed in those spaces. As Fox and Ore (2010) argue, centralizing some positions around which to create safety leads to the exclusion of others; whilst this may be beneficial in some ways (e.g. excluding 'men' to create safety for 'women'), it can result in dangerous exclusions (e.g. Michfest's 'womyn born womyn' exclusionary policy and transphobic discourses (Browne, 2009: 541)). Thus safer spaces risk implementing implicit biases and othering some of those who they seek to empower. Held (2015) argues that othering works through emotions such as feelings of discomfort (e.g. being looked at by white people) in a space. Thus there is a racialized aspect to safety which is dependent on feelings of comfort in the space. Existing intersections of privilege and power often continue to play out in spaces which are supposedly safe: safer spaces are not necessarily safe for all. This leads Fox and Ore to argue that safety needs to be rethought as 'a process through which we establish dialogues' (2010: 643) and Hartal (2018) to view safer spaces as dynamic, situated and context dependent. Safer spaces are 'socially produced' (The Roestone Collective, 2014: 1350) and depend upon the interplay of the people involved, the physical

spaces in which they are produced and the broader societal context (e.g. Hartal's discussion of the Jerusalem Open House shows the interplay of the needs for safety for LGBTQ people in the context of Israeli state homophobia). They are 'co-constituted by bodies, objects, and environments' (The Roestone Collective, 2014: 1359) and therefore need to be considered as an embodied politics (Sharp and Nilan, 2017). The unstable nature of safer spaces therefore suggests that they can be shaped and used by different groups for different purposes, including in non-exclusionary ways.

Punk, DIY, equality

The DIY ethos allows punk to be independent of the system which it opposes by creating and maintaining its own independent record labels, press and music venues (Moran, 2010). Thus, DIY punk is self-sufficient and free from the constraints and control of outsider influence. This is evident, for example, in the squat venues which define European punk (Jones and Wood, 2008) such as Bradford's 1 in 12 Club, the side of which is emblazoned with a black and red flag and the words LIBERTY, EQUALITY, SOLIDARITY. Punk therefore, by definition as anti-establishment (Hebdige, 1979), should also be independent of the oppressions of the mainstream; a community formed of members who have previously suffered such discriminations and those in solidarity against their oppression (Carella and Wymer, 2019). For people who experience oppression or who feel their identity to be at odds with mainstream identities, punk can be very attractive, enabling them to (re)define their identity (Shankar et al., 2009). Thus, one identity is rejected to be replaced by another (Ahuvia, 2005). This is an identity formed in part along the lines of what one is *not* (sexist, racist, homophobic etc.), but also what one is for: equality across multiple intersections of structural oppression, and freedom of expression. As a result, many people who identify as anarcho or DIY punks are often initially attracted to the scene for its social justice politics.

Yet punk remains dominated by straight white men (Ambrosch, 2016) and has long been criticized for sexism, not least by riot grrrls in the 1990s (Downes, 2012; Leonard, 1997). More recent attention has been paid to the way older women, disabled, LGBTQIA and BAME people are also marginalized (Way, 2019; Stewart, 2019). Lohman and Raghunath (2019) argue that this is deeply problematic given that punk's credentials rest upon the work and contributions of exactly those groups of people, as well as the political position that insists upon their inclusion. Whilst Haenfler (2006) indicates that there is some hatred of feminism amongst male punks, the unknown authors of a forthcoming *Sociological Review* article (unknown, forthcoming) argue that many punk men can reiterate feminist critiques, speak of other men as sexist and recognize the problems of gender inequality within the scene, but then take no practical action to actually change the situation. Thus they are complicit in the perpetuation of women's marginalization. Moreover, Stewart argues that all punk's talk about marginalized communities is 'virtue signalling' (2019: 223). It is the fetishization of '"strangeness"' (2019: 222, drawing on Sarah Ahmed) whilst ignoring the subcultural capital of the dominant group. Such talk co-opts the language of being a 'freak' (2019: 215) without people having to deal with the real impacts of actually being marginalized, such as homophobic violence. The notional inclusion of marginalized groups in punk therefore indicates that,

> "They are not included on their own terms, or through their experiences but rather as a means of demonstrating the benevolence (or social awareness) of the already dominant" (Stewart, 2019: 222)

Within this context it is salutary to consider what 'political' means for punk. Phillipov (2006) argues that in punk studies, punk is framed as fundamentally left-wing political through its DIY nature. But some subcultures like Oi and Nazi punk are also DIY and rooted in the same musical sounds and theoretical ideas of opposition to mainstream, yet are definitely not left-wing. Similarly, the ongoing sexism within punk leads Phillipov to ask, how does sexism fit in with something which is seemingly left-wing? In this context, and in answer to Phillipov's call for more research into the 'darker side' of punk (2006: 387), it is critical to examine how practical measures that attempt to make punk more equal fit in to the political landscape described by Downes, Stewart and others. Safer spaces policies present a unique opportunity to understand how feminist ideas are being employed in punk and DIY music spaces, allowing us to analyze how punk politics can be enacted and with what fallout.

Methodology

The primary sources used here are eleven safer spaces policies from venues, promoters and a festival in Brighton, Copenhagen, Leeds, London and Manchester. We use 'policies' as a catch-all, but some venues referred to 'safer spaces agreements', 'accountability agreements' or other formulations. However they all work within the discourse of safer spaces and so we use 'safer space policies' as a shorthand. To locate these policies we conducted an online environmental scan of venues to assess information made readily available to the public about each venue and their safer space policies. Eight of the policies are from DIY venues or promoters which are either solely devoted to punk or include punk listings. We were surprised to find that some DIY punk venues that we expected to have a safer spaces policy (e.g. because we had been told they had one when at the venue) did not actually have a policy which we could access. Given that a huge part of the value of safer spaces policies is that people can read them in advance and then act accordingly, this was surprising. The final three policies are included as examples of safer spaces policies in non-DIY spaces (two policies) and in an LGBTQ focused space.

1 in 12 Club , Bradford	Music venue, social centre	Anarchist	DIY collective
CHUNK , Leeds	Music venue, rehearsal space	Alternative	DIY collective
Cowley Club , Brighton	Music venue, café, social centre, bookshop	Anarchist	DIY collective
DIY Space for London (DSFL)	Music venue, rehearsal space, social centre	Punk	DIY collective
Girl Gang Leeds	Music promoter, events	Feminist	DIY collective
Hyde Park Book Club, Leeds	Music venue, café	Independent, grassroots	Owner run

K Town festival, Copenhagen	Hardcore festival	Punk	DIY
OK Café , Manchester	Music venue, social centre	Anarchist	DIY collective
Pxssy Palace , London	Club night, events	Black queer	unknown
Wharf Chambers , Leeds	Music venue, event space	Alternative	DIY co-operative
Wire , Leeds	Club venue	Dance	Owner run

Alongside examining policies, we re-analyzed interview data which formed part of an ecological research project into experiences of sexual violence in one English city. These semi-structured interviews were with seven concert-goers, three venue managers, three promoters and three organizations campaigning against sexual harassment and violence at live music events. We employed critical discourse analysis (CDA) to investigate the policies and interview material. CDA asserts that language always has political meaning: the speaker or author exists within an environment in which differing ideologies are discursively constructed. The language used, therefore, is both affected by the ideology of the speaker, and at the same time constructs that ideology (Griffin, 2007). CDA involves close analysis of how language constructs reality (Hesmondhalgh, 2006), with consideration for 'the deployment of specific textual features (lexical, grammatical, semantic)' (Griffin, 2007: 9). We analyzed metaphor and tone, implied addressees and authorial positions. We took notice of discourses relating to legal frameworks, 'rape myths' (false ideas such as that if a woman wears a short skirt she 'deserves' to be raped), social justice and structural oppression, neoliberal individualism and feminism.

1: Safe for what purpose?

The purpose of safer spaces policies is to ensure the safety of people at the event or using the venue. Some of the spaces used as punk and/or DIY venues have multiple purposes (e.g. practice rooms, café, live music venue, club space, events space). Furthermore, the policies written by promoters use multiple venues, thus the policy may apply to people going to gigs, club nights or other events. The individual policies therefore address audiences across these different roles and in a variety of settings. The policies vary in who they address within their audience, how they address them and what they ask of people. Indeed, even the policy that states that it is drawing on a policy from elsewhere (1 in 12 Club drawing on OK Café) has key differences, as we discuss below. However, the policies have a commonality in their conceptualization of safety and space, even when they are not claiming to be aiming for a safer space (e.g. DSFL reject the terminology of 'safer space'): the relationship between the individual and the powers structuring broader society. In this context safer spaces are conceptualized as having two main functions: to protect vulnerable groups from hate speech and acts such as they may experience in broader society (i.e. outside the venue), and to provide an environment of freedom and empowerment for all.

'Safety' in the context of safer spaces policies does not refer to the same 'safety' as appears in UK health and safety legislation. That legislation relates to the workplace and covers fire

risk, use of machinery and chemicals, amongst other issues. In distinction, safer spaces policies are addressed to those coming to the venues and events for the purposes of leisure and/or creative endeavour (music-making is specifically referenced in CHUNK's and DSFL's policies). As leisure spaces, punk and DIY venues and events, which happen primarily in the evening, share the broader problems that exist in the night-time economy, such as sexual harassment (Fileborn, authors), racism and other forms of discrimination and violence. Punk's ideology might maintain that a punk identity means eschewing prejudice, yet some venues and promoters acknowledge that structural power relations *do* make their way into punk spaces. It is in this context that 'safety' is redefined as being very specifically about security from forms of discrimination, violence, discomfort and hate speech that may abound in punks' lives outside punk spaces. For example, DIY venue Wharf Chambers' policy explicitly highlights the following behaviours as 'unacceptable' and subject to sanction:

> 'physical violence and attempted physical violence, any kind of nonconsensual sexual behaviour, aggression and intimidating behaviour'

…And…

> 'discrimination of individuals due to their; age, disability, body shape/size, gender history, marital/civil-partnership status, pregnancy/maternity/paternity status, race, religious or philosophical belief, gender, sex, sexual orientation, colour, nationality, ethnic origin, social class/caste, asylum/immigration status, mental health, political affiliations, viral status, health status, care responsibilities or criminal conviction.' (Wharf Chambers).

Wharf's list of the axes of discrimination is reminiscent of, but wider ranging than, the protected characteristics mentioned in the UK Equality Act 2010. Other venues also include lists of the forms of prejudice and discrimination that they will not tolerate, e.g. the Cowley Club seeks to challenge 'oppressive behaviours' along the lines of:

> 'Racism
> Sexism
> Homophobia
> Transphobia' (Cowley Club)

Some of the policies are better than others at fleshing out how such prejudice manifests as dangerous behaviour. However, there is an acknowledgement of power structures and the ways in which they work through individuals who may not recognize their privilege and/or power in a situation. Thus OK Café, DSFL and the 1 in 12 Club all make reference to a need for those who are privileged more broadly in society to be self-aware in understanding how their privileges may impact on others in the space:

> 'Identify your own privileges – the things that sometimes give you an easier ride than others – and actively challenge them.' (OK Café and 1 in 12 Club)

Thus there is an attempt here to mitigate structural power differentials in order to provide a greater level of protection and safety within the space than without. This fits in well with punk's ideology of equality. The idea also correlates with the language of social justice activism and attendant calls to 'check your privilege'. It marks out privilege as a specific damaging mechanism that harms and inhibits others.

Safety from discrimination, hate speech, violence and subtle forms of oppression like microaggressions is a means to make a more level playing field at punk and DIY venues and events. The purpose of this is to enable the greater participation of all who come there, and, by extension we can infer, to encourage the inclusion and participation of those who experience exclusion elsewhere. What does inclusion and participation mean in the context of safer spaces? It means generating atmospheres in which fun can occur, providing an environment for free expression and creativity. With regards the first of these, those policies which are written by feminist and queer promoters (Girl Gang Leeds, Pxssy Palace) and non-DIY venues (Wire, Hyde Park Book Club) emphasize having a good time; indeed fun is prioritized:

> 'We expect everyone to be able to have a good time at our events. We won't tolerate harassment or abuse of any kind, and we work closely with our venues to maintain a safe environment for all.' (Girl Gang Leeds)

Linked to the idea of the importance of fun, is the valuing of creativity, which DSFL mention specifically:

> 'As club members, we want all our fellow members and the guests they bring along to agree to a way of being, doing and interacting in the space so that we can work together to make some amazing stuff happen.' (DSFL)

What this emphasis on fun achieves is to make access to pleasure a central part of the policies. It produces a social and communal responsibility to ensure that everyone is able to exercise that right. This is distinct to some of the more negatively toned policies that spotlight the kinds of behaviours that people should avoid, whilst omitting to mention the broader leisure context. It is surprising to find that one of the main values of safer spaces at DIY/punk venues and events – space to enjoy oneself free from oppression – is not signalled. The majority of the DIY/punk policies are therefore negative in tone and describe sanctions for transgressing the policy (in some cases in close detail, for example Wharf Chambers), without really explaining the further benefits. Whilst social justice and creating a space free from oppression are vital aims in themselves, the broader gains from doing so are no less important, especially for those for whom a safer space policy creates a vital reprieve from the emotional, mental and physical labour of being marginalized or oppressed in broader society.

Lewis et al (2015) argue that there is value in women-only safer spaces because they provide freedom *from* men's sexist behaviours and violences in order to be free *to* speak freely without needing to explain or argue about experiences of oppression and prejudice. They argue that women-only safer spaces enable women to speak in new ways, to be creative and express themselves freely. Whilst we question the article's use of 'women' as a monolithic group and note the political homogeneity of the women in their case study, we feel the value of the argument that safer spaces can enable people to live more freely is a powerful one. The purpose of safer spaces is therefore not only to be safe *from*, but to be safe *to* have fun, be creative and, in Lewis et al.'s words, be 'fully human' (Lewis et al., 2015: 10). Thus 'safety' presents the conditions in which to live in the way that feels good and authentic and, fundamentally, to experience pleasure in a leisure space, something which may not be guaranteed in spaces without an intentional policy.

Thus safer spaces policies are underpinned by an understanding of the world as shaped by systemic power structures which are gendered, raced and classed alongside other forms of

systemic hate. Safer spaces policies aim to offer the individual living in the structured world an alternative in which those structures have less power. Whilst the social justice discourse is evident, the epistemology of what counts as 'safety' strikes us as remarkably feminist, as it depends upon emotional knowledge.

2: Feelings of safety

The value of emotional knowledge underpinning safer spaces policies is evident in the emphasis placed on the *feeling* of safety. In a text search of the eleven policies we examined, 'feel' appears 23 times across eight policies and is the fifth most popular word across that dataset. This indicates that emotional engagements with the space are important in knowledge of what makes a space 'safe'. Yet, even as feelings are the guide for what counts as safety, the policies also reveal a failure of empathy where further feminist thinking or engagement with women's accounts is lacking. As policies aim to change behaviour and language, in general they do little to lessen the impact of fear on audience members.

The kinds of feelings that are equated with safety are:

- Feeling included/welcomed. For example, 'we want to make sure that your night is free of judgement and that you feel welcome and included' (Pxssy Palace)

- Feeling un/comfortable. E.g. 'any other behaviour that makes you feel unsafe or uncomfortable' (Wharf Chambers)

- Feeling boundaries are crossed (both bodily and verbally/politically). For example, 'Do not cross people's boundaries. Don't assume that you know where another person's physical, mental and emotional boundary is.' (K Town).

In using these feelings of safety as the grounding for what safety means, no further 'proof' that safety has been compromised is needed. Emotional knowledge is validated. It is useful to contrast this position with that of two of our interviewees, both of whom were unhappy with the concept of safer spaces. They argued that anyone accused of doing something, e.g. groping someone in the crowd, should be seen as innocent until proven guilty. In reference to the specific discussion of sexual violence at hardcore gigs, Promoter 3 said she needs, 'to have a lot of information on somebody and proof before I do call somebody out'. Underpinning her argument is the legal discourse of *proof* which sets high standards for evidence. This legal discourse differs from the feminist discourse of valuing victim/survivors' knowledge, i.e. believing them. Sadly, in the context of sexual violence, Promoter 3's argument works alongside rape myths such as that women lie about rape (CPS statistics show that false rape allegation are no higher than false reports for other crimes (Levitt and Crown Prosecution Service Equality and Diversity Unit, 2013)).

Considering our interviewees' legal discourse-informed attitude towards victim/survivors of sexual assault brings to the fore the feminist underpinnings of safer spaces policies, even when they are not explicitly linked to feminist ideas. Feminist theorists such as Dorothy E. Smith (1974) and Patricia Hill Collins (1990) argue that the dominant forms of knowledge about the world, including about women, are from a male perspective, and this perspective masquerades as objective (Haraway, 1988). As a counter to this, ways of valuing women's experiences and understandings of the world through consciousness raising became a means

through which to develop new lines of knowledge. Crucial to this is the valuing of emotion as an epistemological tool, in distinction to masculine ways of knowing which aim to exclude emotion (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). This works alongside Marxist elaborations of the oppressed holding a privileged view of the world and their treatment (Hartsock, 1983). What this means for cases of harassment, violence and oppression in safer spaces is that those who are on the receiving end of negative treatment are believed, and this is the first step to further handling the situation. Such a position of belief then enables the venues to deal sensitively with any incidents of harassment or violence, rather than risking the retraumatisation of the victim/survivor.

However, emphasizing the emotional basis of the knowledge of what counts as 'safety' reveals a limitation in some safer spaces policies' authors' empathy, their imagination of who is made vulnerable and what kinds of risk they face from others. This is evident in K Town's address to the victim/survivors of sexism or abuse:

> '**What to do if you experience sexism or abuse**
> In case of an incident, it is important that you approach the door crew as soon as possible. The longer you wait to report the episode, the harder it is for the door crew to find the person(s) involved.' (K Town)

This does not offer sympathy to those who have experienced 'sexism or abuse', but rather demands practical action. It puts the emphasis for taking care of the situation on the victim/survivor (likely a woman, given that the policy's first section's discusses consent). Furthermore, a paternalistic protective role is evoked where the only action mentioned that the festival staff would take would be to 'find the person(s) involved' (K Town), rather than offering support and care to the victim/survivor. The underlying message is that if the victim/survivor does not speak to staff in a timely manner, then it is her/their own fault if nothing further can be done. This is immensely disappointing and there are echoes of victim blaming. We would suggest that the emphasis on equality amongst punks plays a misguided part here, leading as it does to a misunderstanding of the differences of living in a gendered world for women and men. That is, punk equality expects everyone to be strong and independent, to be able to call out abuse and stand up for themselves. However, in situations of sexual assault, victims are likely to suffer a variety of emotional and bodily responses which may prevent them from acting in ways thought of as 'strong' and 'independent'. Our concert goer interviewees spoke of the fear and shock they experienced when assaulted, of freezing and wanting to be away from the venue. Moreover, seeking help through reporting assaults to venue staff was a roulette of whether a complaint would be taken seriously or the victim/survivor even believed, leading to poor experiences of a lack of support and secondary traumatization (see AUTHORS). These particularly gendered experiences of violence show that the requirement for the victim/survivor to speak immediately to venue staff is unrealistic, unsympathetic and ignorant of gendered experiences and inequalities (see also Schippers (2002) for a discussion of similar problems in the alternative rock scene). What is happening is a failure of empathy and a failure to recognize the privilege of the authors.

A linked but unwritten aspect of the emotional basis for safer spaces policies is fear. As Held (2015) argues, fear of what may occur in a space plays a large part in whether someone feels comfortable and whether they choose to stay there or return at a later date; and experiences of fear vary for different identity positions. Most of the policies target the behaviours and language that occur in the venue during an event. But inclusion and participation require

people to come to the venue or event in the first place, and fear can be a significant factor in preventing this. In our experience of being in spaces when known domestic abusers are also there, a safer spaces policy which is reactive only protects if the abuser actually causes harm on the night, it does nothing to quell the fear and anxiety of being in the same room, of what might happen, of the subtle impact of domestic abuse. Our interviewees who had experienced sexual violence at live music events spoke of avoiding particular venues and ceasing to attend gigs altogether due to fear of something similar happening again. Fear thus plays an important role in drawing the lines of who is able to participate (Authors). A failure to anticipate how fear works means that safer space policies may well be less successful than anticipated. CHUNK's policy is striking in its more preventative stance. Rather than engaging with those who may act in ways that marginalize or abuse other people (either inadvertently or purposefully) and asking for better behaviour from them, CHUNK's policy excludes people who may cause harm before they arrive:

> 'We will also try to ensure that groups with harmful political positions will not be asked to participate in our events. There is more information on how we define harmful behaviour further down, but essentially this means no bigots. If you feel that something has slipped through the net, please let us know.' (CHUNK)

This stance is marked in its difference to other policies and identifies that people who are likely to cause harm (under the catch all 'bigots' here) do damage by their presence, even if they do not actually behave badly in the end. This is, we argue, a very valuable approach and may do much to mitigate feelings of fear held by marginalized groups. Sharp and Nilan (2017) argue that safer spaces policies can act as a legitimation of gendered fear *and* as a collective response to it which disrupts 'the male-gendered status quo of punk' (2017: 77). Significantly the policies they discuss are those written by and for queer Do It Together punk groupings. A safer spaces policy which does not acknowledge the differently raced, gendered, classed experiences maintains the misinformed views of those who are privileged enough to live without these kinds of fears. That said, acknowledging difference is not enough. In the final section we discuss how privilege works through safer spaces policies and how practical action is needed.

3: Privilege, power and practical measures

Our analysis of the policies allows us to draw one inference regarding their authors: the majority occupy privileged identity positions. This is indicated through the use of the 'we' in the policies' guidance on how to behave. For example, DFSL call upon all included in the 'we' (members of the collective) to acknowledge their privileges:

> 'We built a place where everyone can make their own noise, but to enable that to happen, we first have to be aware of our own volume, why it might be set at that level, how to turn down so others can be heard, and most importantly, be ready, willing and able to share the controls!' (DSFL)

Common to safer spaces policies, then, is a desire to raise awareness of the readers' own relationships to privilege and power, which may then benefit a wide range of users of a space. In doing so, however, DSFL's 'we' indicates that symbolic ownership of the venue resides in those who need to 'turn down', i.e. the already privileged. Similarly the Cowley Club, OK Café, 1 in 12 Club and CHUNK all acknowledge multiple oppressions and privileges. However we argue that this approach is limited, because the first three of these all seem to be

addressing a white dominant group and calling upon them to recognize their privileges. In doing so they inadvertently 'other' groups who are different from that dominant group. This is particularly obvious with DSFL who are at pains to acknowledge their own privilege ('we first have to be aware') whilst also writing 'We accept that others' lives and histories outside the space may be different to our own.' (DSFL) which positions those 'others' outside the norm presented by the writers of the agreement. The 'we' therefore contrasts with 'others', signalling the privilege of the authors, whilst those whose experiences may be different are further 'othered'. The attempt to be inclusive thereby actually highlights the *exclusivity* of the space. Stewart argues that too often in punk the story of inclusion of marginalized communities by the dominant group is little more than 'virtue signalling' (2019: 223) which ignores the subcultural capital of the dominant group. We would go further to argue that such inclusion actually shores up the subcultural capital of the dominant group, for, as Lohman and Raghunath (2019) argue, it is marginalized groups who provide punk with its political credentials.

Furthermore the implication of who counts as 'punk' indicates problematics around the identity position, as demonstrated in the 1 in 12 Club's policy. The 1 in 12 Club's policy begins with a preamble that draws on punk identity to introduce a policy which it would seem the writers have little investment in:

> 'A few Sunday Meetings ago, back in the heat haze of mid-August, we finally adopted a Safer Spaces Policy. It's been a glaring omission from the club's constitution and bye-laws arising from our ancient origins when such things were little heard of, and generally thought of as needlessly re-stating the bleeding obvious. But we know better now, and a documented commitment to maintaining a safer space is long overdue. In a spasm of laziness we just looked for an existing doc we could "take inspiration from" rather than arguing for ever and a day over the small print, and found a really good one over at the OK Café in Manchester. So here then, is our lightly updated version.' (1 in 12 Club)

Punk identity and heritage ('our ancient origins') is used to state the writers' position that safer spaces policies are not really necessary ('needlessly re-stating the bleeding obvious' (1 in 12 Club)), thus all of the things encapsulated in safer spaces policies already exist within 'being punk'. The tone of the preamble is disrespectful to safer spaces policies and the people who find them useful: 'we know better now'; 'we just looked for an existing doc'; quote marks around '"take inspiration from"' and 'arguing for ever and a day'; the openly admitted laziness of using somewhere else's policy; the rejection of a need to take the discursive process of agreeing a policy seriously… all this indicates not only a lack of commitment to the policy, but also of the feminist underpinnings of safer spaces policies. Thus the writers reveal themselves to be fundamentally at odds with the policy they are introducing. We suggest that they do not actually embody the kind of punk ideology and politics which would support the need for understanding how privilege and prejudice works in a space. Ideologically, the identity position of 'punk' would seem to include an anti-sexist, anti-racist etc. stance; but we suggest that adopting a punk identity can function to paper over the cracks of prejudice and entwine with a lack of self-examination when it comes to unconscious bias and subtle forms of oppression. Just 'being punk' does not mean that one has not imbibed the sexist, racist, classist and prejudiced discourses which abound in broader society. Nor does it remove the ways in which an individual's privileged identity position (e.g. through being middle class, white or male etc.) may inhibit their ability to empathize with those in different positions. And it does not automatically engender an understanding of how their own

privileged behaviour may be very damaging for others (c.f. unknown, forthcoming). The 1 in 12 Club's policy is disappointing in the extreme.

In this context, those policies whose addressees are not an already privileged majority, such as those of CHUNK and Pxssy Palace, are a breath of fresh air. Pxssy Palace's policy regarding their 'intentional' space provides a glimpse of what a punk safer spaces policy might be, were it to be committed to bringing people beyond already privileged groups into the scene. Pxssy Palace's statement prioritizes 'queer womxn, non-binary & trans folk of colour' (Pxssy Palace no title). In order to create an intentional space, the authors of the statement signal their awareness of the intersections of multiple oppressions, but then state what they *do* to mitigate those oppressions:

> 'We are committed to making Pxssy Palace events as accessible as possible for all womxn, non-binary & trans folk of colour, if you are low on funds and still want to come please let us know. We aim for all of our venues to be wheelchair accessible, close to public transport and have adequate seating. We don't use strobe lights and we have gender neutral toilets for all of our guests. For more detailed accessibility information please check our event page.' (Pxssy Palace no title)

Thus the policy signals the promoters' attentiveness and willingness to assist various groups of people: those with a range of disabilities; trans people who may find binary toilet choices a gauntlet; people who cannot afford taxis; and those whose gender identity means they face increased risk of attack and fear of attack (women, trans and non binary people) on their way home. The positive terminology means that the policy is directly addressing those marginalized groups, signalling that those groups are prioritized and the preferred clientele of the night.

A suggestion for DIY punk venues and promoters, then, is to move beyond asking people to be aware of their behaviour and change it when necessary, laudable though those aims are. But only speaking primarily to the already privileged and telling them to tone it down is unlikely to make those from marginalized groups feel that they will be safe in the space. The next step, then, is to directly address those in marginalized groups and tell them exactly what practical measures are in place to enable their participation. To make a space which embodies punk values – by prioritizing those who are usually marginalized – puts normally privileged people in a space in which they have to consider how this works differently to their quotidian experience. In such spaces their new embodied experiences will be of not being prioritized. This may feel uncomfortable and maybe some of those people will cease to go to the venue, or express their uneasiness. However, the policy can be used to quell that discontent. And anyway, are these the people one would truly want in the space? Perhaps they were already at risk of flouting the policy. The potential gains in pleasure for those in marginalized groups, on the other hand, are likely to be high.

Conclusion

Safer spaces policies at punk and DIY venues and events are not homogenous. They vary in terms of the audiences they address and their apparent commitment to implementing inclusive and equal participation for marginalized groups. Our analysis finds that safer spaces policies *can* be a valuable tool for enabling the empowerment and protection of those marginalized in non-punk spaces, promoting access to pleasurable experiences and lessening fear of discrimination, harassment and violence. However safer spaces can continue to

privilege white, straight, male, middle-class and able-bodied punks, unless safer spaces policies are backed up with practical measures which show their commitment to inclusion. Lohman and Raghunath argue that marginalized groups have historically 'provided the necessary enrichment to allow punk to be more than just another youth style dominated by white, cisgender, heterosexual men' (Lohman and Raghunath, 2019: 190). This intervention in the narrative of punk also enables deeper thinking about the ontology of 'punk' not just politically but as a cultural form. Safer spaces can enable more people to have pleasurable and creative experiences. Policies such as those of Pxssy Palace and CHUNK work to produce the conditions in which people are safe to have fun, express themselves authentically and satisfy their creativity. Punk and DIY collectives and scenes must accept the political, musical and cultural changes such a shift may engender and, indeed, be excited about new alliances, ideas and sounds. As the continuing black, feminist, queer and trans punk scenes which are supported by safer spaces ideas exhibit (Downes, 2012; Ensminger, 2010; Sharp and Nilan, 2017; Pearce and Lohmann, 2018), there are exciting versions of punk to be explored beyond the straight white male hegemony.

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[i] The use of safe*r* spaces rather than 'safer spaces' reflects the argument by many of the policies that safety cannot be assured, but it is something being worked towards.