

## VOICES OF DISSENT: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF AMERICAN PUNK LYRICS (1990s-2000s)

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the messages and common themes conveyed through American punk music lyrics from the 1990s to 2000s using Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis framework. A qualitative case study approach examined seven songs from prominent American punk bands spanning grunge, pop punk, hardcore, metalcore, and emo subgenres, which include Nirvana, Green Day, Hatebreed, Converge, Orchid, Silverstein, and My Chemical Romance. The textual dimension revealed lexical strategies that foreground alienation and entrapment through constraining vocabulary and fragmented grammatical structures. Discursive practice analysis showed how punk lyrics appropriate and subvert dominant cultural narratives whilst constructing authenticity through confessional modes. Social practice analysis connected these linguistic features to broader sociocultural contexts, revealing resistance to capitalist structures and a critique of institutionalised authority. Three dominant themes emerged from the analysis. Alienation and social entrapment, systematic critique of institutionalised authority, and collective trauma in response to catastrophic historical events. The findings demonstrate that American punk lyrics function as ideological interventions that expose power relations embedded within late capitalist society, transforming individual suffering into collective political consciousness whilst challenging naturalised social inequalities.

**Keywords:** *American punk music, punk lyrics, critical discourse analysis, ideology and power, cultural resistance.*

### INTRODUCTION

Punk music is a genre of aggressive music that pushes the boundaries of musicality and encourages a sense of non-conformity towards musical standards, per societal perceptions. Punk music initially began in the mid-1960s in the United States as a response to the popularity of contemporary rock music and surged in popularity during the 1970s through the emergence of British punk bands (Chronopoulos, 1997). American punk music represents one of the most notable branches of punk music that remains active today. Tracing its roots to the 1980s, following the perceived 'death' of punk in the United Kingdom according to the music industry, American punk music became a focal point of

the genre at a more community-based level, in contrast to the mainstream popularity of 1970s punk music. Hardcore punk in particular experienced significant growth as like-minded punk fans collectivised and formed their own punk scenes under the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) ethos (Parkes, 2014). American punk music holds considerable influence within the punk community, as many continue to uphold the principles of hardcore as a standard for the punk community to the present day (Easley, 2011).

Due to the popularity of American punk music, researchers have conducted studies examining the general messages contained within the lyrics in response to the mainstream recognition it has received. McDonald (1987) states in his study regarding the messages contained within American hardcore punk music of the 1980s that many researchers and critics do not focus sufficiently on the messages within American punk lyricism. He found that the general themes in hardcore punk music of the 1980s featured rage, anger, and social concerns towards contemporary issues. In another study that specifically analyses American punk music from a gender perspective, De Boise's (2014) research entitled 'Cheer up emo kid: Rethinking the "crisis of masculinity" in emo' aims to analyse the lyrics of emotional hardcore punk in terms of its connection to the "crisis of masculinity". De Boise (2014) found that male lyricists in emo music view women as the cause of their suffering and maintain patriarchal sentiments. The researcher concludes that emo music merely displays traditional hegemonic male power and patriarchal structures, doing nothing to challenge or soften prevailing masculine stereotypes.

Considering the findings of the above research, it can be observed that the messages in American punk music lyrics often encompass themes of anger, social concerns, and internal struggles such as love (De Boise, 2014; McDonald, 1987). However, studies examining the messages within American punk music lyrics are not extensive, as most researchers focus solely on American punk music from the 1980s or analyse American punk music from specific perspectives. This limitation can be observed in Butz's (2008) study, whose scope draws only upon famous American hardcore bands of the 1980s. Thus, to address this gap, this paper analyses the messages in American punk music from the 1990s and 2000s whilst identifying the common themes found within the lyrical content.

The study aims to investigate the messages conveyed through the lyrics of 1990s to 2000s American punk music and the common themes reflected by the lyrical content. To accomplish this aim, the objectives are:

1. To identify the messages within the lyrics of prominent 1990s to 2000s American punk music
2. To investigate the common themes within the lyrics of prominent 1990s to 2000s American punk music

The theoretical significance of this study lies in identifying the messages and common themes in the lyrics of American punk music from the 1990s and 2000s to gain a deeper understanding of the lyrical content from a general perspective. Furthermore, as there is insufficient research on American punk music post-1980s, this study aims to inspire other researchers to examine the messages within the lyrics of American punk music beyond the golden age. From a practical standpoint, readers from non-academic backgrounds may find themselves engaged by the findings of this research, as the messages and common themes identified may help to challenge the stigma associated with American punk music from the 1990s to 2000s. Additionally, this study may encourage other researchers to study American punk music from the 1990s and 2000s through critical discourse analysis to understand the subcultural texts contained within the lyrics.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The punk movement initially emerged as part of the cultural revolution of the post-Second World War era. In a study conducted by Chronopoulos (1997), the movement began as a response to the emergence of youth being treated as a vital consumer market and workforce in improving the economy. The common perspectives of the punk movement revolve around the ideas of anti-

establishment sentiment, opposition to materialism, and a rebellious attitude towards mainstream viewpoints. Punk initially developed in the mid-1960s amongst garage musicians comprising suburban teenagers as a response to the rising prominence of the Beatles in mainstream music (Chronopoulos, 1997).

Punk music in the 1960s essentially challenged mainstream music industry practices and continued to evolve in the mid-1970s. The very first punk scene developed in New York, where like-minded punk individuals networked and formed their own underground collective, spawning clubs such as CBGB, where punk bands performed and spread their influence to fans and potential fans. Bands such as Ramones, the Stooges, and the New York Dolls emerged from this scene and established the foundations of punk rock, inspiring other bands to follow. Punk received its greatest mainstream attention in 1975 and 1976 when the genre flourished in the United Kingdom. Bands such as the Sex Pistols and the Ramones achieved mainstream appeal and became widespread (Thompson, 2010). Following 1976, many punk bands were signed to major labels due to this emergence. Ultimately, the music industry became disinterested due to punk's abrasive nature, which was not mainstream-friendly. By 1979, punk was declared dead by the British mainstream, being replaced by the emerging post-punk and new wave subgenre (Chronopoulos, 1997).

Post-1979, punk continued to live on in the 1980s and 1990s despite not being in the mainstream spotlight. At this point, the main focus shifted from the United Kingdom to the United States as every city developed its own local punk scene (Chronopoulos, 1997). During the 1980s, the punk ideology adopted a more radical leftist standpoint due to the conservative nature of US politics and became more independent from the music industry through *Do-It-Yourself* (DIY) ethics (Chronopoulos, 1997; Parkes, 2014). This ensured the survivability of the scene, as more members were able to unite under a single ideology and become self-sustainable without mainstream support. In the 1990s, punk regained the attention of the music industry as punk releases began to increase in record sales, with notable bands such as Nirvana and Green Day causing punk to return to mainstream attention. Following the 'death' of punk in the United Kingdom during the late 1970s, punk continued in the United States. American punk began to undergo more radical changes in ideologies and intensity as every state developed its own punk community (Chronopoulos, 1997). To understand American punk music's evolution, one must first acknowledge the emergence of hardcore punk. During the radicalisation process of punk in the United States, hardcore emerged (Easley, 2011).

Hardcore represented a more extreme version of punk that emerged in the 1980s and could be viewed as a reactionary response to the late-1970s punk rock evolution (Easley, 2011). Hardcore took punk's aggressive nature and amplified it through the utilisation of heavily screamed vocals and distorted guitars. Another notable characteristic was the DIY ethic, whereby many bands in the American punk scene adopted the practices of self-releasing their albums and forming their own independent labels (Parkes, 2014). In Parkes' (2014) study of the legacy and impact of New York's hardcore punk and straight edge movement in the 1980s, he notes that New York's sociocultural problems, such as racial tensions, lack of infrastructure, and poverty, were what elevated New York hardcore. The youth were desperate to escape the bleak sociocultural conditions of New York and find a place where they belonged. The hardcore scene provided an outlet for them to collectivise, which spurred the growth of hardcore further. Due to the DIY ethics and clear ideology of hardcore, the American punk movement was able to stabilise itself and garner more support during the 1980s.

American punk generally experienced a punk explosion in 1994, which many dubbed the American 'punk revival'. According to Ambrosch's (2015) study on American punk, this explosion in popularity bridged the gap between hardcore's aggression and the melodic sound of music in general in the 1990s, which helped elevate punk's status back into the mainstream. Newer bands that achieved mainstream success, such as Nirvana, had adopted the basic punk structure, which helped reach mainstream America's music industry. A new wave of punk bands, such as Green Day and the Offspring, was instrumental in punk's return to the mainstream due to their catchy songs incorporating punk song structures. Thus, punk gradually returned to the mainstream spotlight, despite the protests of some movements, such as hardcore punk, who remained adamant about not relying on the

mainstream music industry (Ambrosch, 2015).

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate the messages conveyed through American punk music lyrics from the 1990s to 2000s. The qualitative approach was selected for its capacity to provide contextual understanding of cultural phenomena, enabling researchers to comprehend the complex social and environmental conditions that shape textual meaning (Yin, 2016). A case study design was specifically chosen because it allows for intensive examination of contemporary cultural phenomena within their real-world contexts, making it particularly suitable for analysing how punk music functions as a vehicle for social commentary.

The corpus comprised seven carefully selected songs from prominent American punk bands spanning the target period. Selection employed purposive sampling based on four explicit criteria: temporal relevance (prominence during the 1990s-2000s), cultural impact (demonstrated influence within punk communities), commercial success (chart performance or media coverage), and genre authenticity (recognition as legitimate punk acts by critics and communities). In this study, “prominent” punk music was operationally defined as music satisfying at least three indicators, which include Billboard chart placements, critical acclaim in established publications, documented influence on subsequent artists, or sustained community recognition.

**Table 1.**  
*Selected American punk songs from the 1990s and 2000s*

<b>Song Title</b>	<b>Band</b>	<b>Era</b>	<b>Subgenre</b>	<b>Justification</b>
Territorial Pissings	Nirvana	1990s	Grunge/Alternative	Iconic track exemplifying punk-grunge crossover and anti-establishment themes
She	Green Day	1990s	Pop-punk	Representative of political commentary and mainstream punk evolution
Perseverance	Hatebreed	1990s	Hardcore	Exemplifies hardcore’s motivational messaging and community themes
Heartache	Converge	2000s	Metalcore	Represents experimental hardcore’s emotional intensity
In G and E	Orchid	2000s	Screamo	Influential track demonstrating genre’s emotional expressiveness
Discovering the Waterfront	Silverstein	2000s	Post-hardcore	Showcases melodic hardcore’s introspective themes
Skylines and Turnstiles	My Chemical Romance	2000s	Emo/Alternative	Addresses 9/11’s impact; demonstrates punk’s social responsiveness

This study implemented Fairclough’s (1995) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, chosen for its systematic approach to uncovering ideological constructions within text. Fairclough’s model was selected over alternative CDA approaches for its three-dimensional structure, which includes textual analysis, discursive practice analysis, and social practice analysis. This structure aligns optimally with punk lyrics’ multi-layered nature as both artistic expression and social commentary.

The analytical process proceeded through the systematic application of each dimension. Textual analysis examined vocabulary choices, grammatical structures, cohesion patterns, and rhetorical features to understand meaning-making functions. Discursive practice analysis investigated how lyrics function within punk discourse conventions and examined intertextual references. Social practice analysis connected textual features to broader social patterns, examining power relations and ideological positioning embedded in lyrical content. Coding employed a hybrid deductive-inductive approach. Initial codes were developed based on existing punk scholarship around anticipated themes, while additional codes emerged inductively through iterative analysis. Codes were subsequently grouped into overarching themes through constant comparative analysis until theoretical saturation was achieved.

Lyrics were collected from Genius.com (2022) with verification against official sources where available. All materials underwent accuracy checking through cross-referencing with multiple sources and were archived with metadata for audit trail purposes. Analysis proceeded through systematic text preparation (segmenting lyrics into analytical units), dimensional analysis (applying Fairclough's three-dimensional model to each song), cross-case comparison (identifying patterns and variations), and theme integration (synthesising individual analyses into overarching themes). Several measures ensured analytical trustworthiness. First, credibility was established through prolonged engagement with lyrical content, multiple data sources, including contextual information, and verification against available band statements. Second, transferability was enhanced through detailed reporting, enabling readers to assess applicability to other contexts and strategic sampling across punk subgenres. Third, dependability was maintained through comprehensive audit trail documentation and methodological transparency. Lastly, confirmability was achieved through data-driven analysis grounded in textual evidence and systematic reflexive documentation.

The researcher's positionality was acknowledged. As academic analysts examining punk culture from outside its primary community, the researchers recognise potential interpretive limitations. Reflexive practices included analytical journaling, assumption checking, and multiple reading cycles to minimise bias influence and challenge initial interpretations. This study adheres to fair use principles, employing brief lyrical excerpts for scholarly commentary with proper attribution. Limitations include the focused sample size providing depth over breadth, temporal and geographic constraints excluding broader punk developments, and an academic analytical perspective potentially differing from subcultural interpretations. These limitations establish the study's specific contribution while suggesting directions for future research into punk music's cultural significance.

## RESULTS

Through systematic application of Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis framework, this study identified significant patterns in how American punk music from the 1990s to 2000s constructs social meaning through lyrical discourse. The analysis revealed three dominant themes: alienation and social entrapment, systematic critique of institutionalised authority, and collective trauma in response to catastrophic historical events.

### **Textual Analysis**

The textual dimension of these seven American punk songs reveals a deliberate lexical strategy that foregrounds alienation and entrapment through the sustained deployment of constraining vocabulary. Nirvana's "Territorial Pissings" employs the modal verb phrase *gotta find a way* as an obsessive refrain, creating a sense of desperate searching intensified by the grammatical incompleteness that leaves destinations unspecified. This linguistic uncertainty extends through Green Day's "She", where interrogative structures beginning with *Are you locked up* position the addressee as a prisoner within predetermined social structures. The metaphorical *social tool without a use* transforms human agency into mechanical function through nominalisation, whilst the violent imperative *Scream at me until my ears bleed* paradoxically demands authentic expression through destructive imagery. Hatebreed's "Perseverance" similarly constructs existence as warfare through the nominal phrase *legacy of shame and deceit* and the declarative *the only real truth in your life that you know is hostility*, establishing

conflict as the fundamental condition of lived experience rather than an aberrant state.

The grammatical architecture across these texts systematically constructs collective suffering through pronominal choices and verb tense manipulation that blur temporal and personal boundaries. Converge's "Heartache" achieves universalisation through the inclusive first-person plural *We are all falling down*, repeated with ritualistic insistence that transforms individual despair into shared descent. The present continuous aspect foregrounds ongoing deterioration rather than completed action, whilst the prepositional phrase *Under the weight* establishes causality linking abstract emotional states to tangible consequences. My Chemical Romance's "Skyline and Turnstiles" employs second-person address alongside first-person plural pronouns to negotiate between individual trauma and collective memory, as evidenced in the question *Can we still reclaim our innocence?* which presupposes lost purity through the modal auxiliary *can* combined with the temporal adverb *still*. The extended metaphor of urban destruction, realised through compound noun phrases such as *broken city sky* and *steel corpses*, materialises psychological fragmentation into physical landscape.

Cohesive ties throughout these lyrics function to intensify thematic persistence rather than develop narrative progression, creating a circular discourse structure characteristic of entrapped consciousness. Silverstein's "Discovering the Waterfront" demonstrates lexical cohesion through the semantic field of warfare, which manifested in *hung up my guns* and *I won't kill again*, before transitioning through the maritime metaphor *I sail off to sea* which maintains the theme of escape whilst shifting register. The repetitive imperative *count me down* functions as both a cohesive device and a rhetorical weapon, whilst the future tense construction *I will live forever* offers defiant futurity against relational destruction. Orchid's minimalist "In G and E" strips language to its essential subjunctive core through the repeated phrase *I wish I could give you more than this*, where the modal construction of impossibility creates pathos through grammatical incompleteness. The fragmentation across all seven texts operates not as a stylistic choice alone but as an ideological positioning, whereby syntactic disruption mirrors the rupture between punk subjects and dominant social orders.

### **Discursive Practice Analysis**

These seven punk lyrics demonstrate the production and consumption of discourse through interdiscursive borrowing that positions punk music as simultaneously inheriting and rejecting established cultural narratives. Nirvana's "Territorial Pissings" appropriates the countercultural maxim *Just because you're paranoid don't mean they're not after you* to invoke the discourse of societal conspiracy in the opening assertion. *When I was an alien, cultures weren't opinions*, references to science fiction discourse to articulate cultural estrangement. The text functions within punk's anti-establishment discourse practice by transforming philosophical uncertainty into raw repetition that mimics obsessive thought patterns rather than reasoned argument. Converge's "Heartache" similarly draws upon religious discourse through the lexical chain of *pray*, *idol*, *cross*, and *grave* to construct a counter-theology that inverts spiritual salvation into collective damnation. This intertextual strategy reveals how punk discourse produces meaning by appropriating dominant ideological discourses and systematically dismantling their redemptive promises through repetition that emphasises futility rather than transcendence.

The discourse practice evident across these lyrics constructs authenticity through confessional modes that blur the boundary between personal testimony and collective manifesto. Green Day's "She" employs direct address to create an interpersonal dynamic where the lyricist positions themselves as witness to another's awakening, realised through the narrative progression from *she screams in silence* to *she's figured out all her doubts were someone else's point of view*. This movement from internalised suffering to externalised recognition participates in punk's discourse of consciousness raising, where individual experience becomes representative of systemic oppression. Hatebreed's "Perseverance" intensifies this practice through sustained use of second-person imperatives that function as motivational discourse, evident in commands such as *Face your torment and dismantle your doubt* and *Refuse this legacy of shame and deceit*. The text draws upon self-help and empowerment discourse whilst maintaining punk's aggressive aesthetic, demonstrating how punk incorporates mainstream discursive practices whilst recontextualising them through musical intensity

and lyrical confrontation that distinguishes sincere exhortation from commercial platitude.

The consumption and distribution of these texts occurs within a discourse community that values emotional rawness and political consciousness expressed through deliberate aesthetic transgression of conventional song writing practices. My Chemical Romance's "Skyline and Turnstiles" exemplifies this through its narrative fragmentation and apocalyptic imagery that references disaster discourse, particularly evident in phrases such as *memories blanket us with friends we know, like fallout vapours*, which invokes nuclear catastrophe as a metaphor for traumatic memory. Silverstein's "Discovering the Waterfront" employs nautical metaphor alongside warfare discourse to construct romantic relationships as battlegrounds requiring strategic withdrawal, whilst Orchid's minimalist "In G and E" strips discourse to its essential emotional core through grammatical incompleteness that mirrors the inadequacy being expressed. These diverse discursive strategies collectively demonstrate punk's function as a site where multiple discourse types intersect and are recontextualised through the genre's particular modes of production and reception, establishing punk lyrics as discursive events that challenge the boundaries between personal expression and political statement.

### **Social Practice Analysis**

These seven punk lyrics show resistance to capitalist social structures that position individuals as commodified labour within systems of economic and ideological control. Green Day's "She" explicitly challenges the reproduction of hegemonic social orders through the interrogative *Are you locked up in a world that's been planned out for you* which frames individual existence as predetermined by dominant institutions rather than autonomous choice. The metaphor of being a *social tool without a use* directly addresses the alienation inherent in late capitalist societies, where human value becomes contingent upon productive utility within market economies. My Chemical Romance's "Skyline and Turnstiles" extends this critique through imagery of mechanised urban labour evident in *We walk in single file, we light our rails and punch our time*, where the routinised movements of workers are depicted as prison-like conformity. This representation challenges the naturalisation of capitalist work relations by exposing the dehumanising processes that transform individuals into interchangeable units of production.

The ideological positioning within these texts reveals profound scepticism towards institutionalised authority and established belief systems that function to legitimate existing power structures. Converge's "Heartache" dismantles religious ideology through the assertion that *Every word that you pray makes another slave and Every idol that you build brings another plague*, thereby constructing organised religion as an apparatus of oppression rather than liberation. This critique extends beyond mere atheism to interrogate how dominant institutions manufacture consent through spiritual discourse that obscures material inequalities. Hatebreed's "Perseverance" addresses the failure of traditional heroic narratives with the declaration *All your heroes have failed you*, acknowledging the collapse of legitimating myths whilst simultaneously advocating for individualist resistance through *Pure strength through solitude*. This paradox reflects the broader tension within punk between collective political consciousness and the individualist ethos prevalent in American cultural ideology during the neoliberal period.

The representation of traumatic historical events and their psychological aftermath positions these texts within specific sociocultural contexts that shape their meaning and political function. My Chemical Romance's "Skyline and Turnstiles" engages directly with post-traumatic discourse through apocalyptic urban imagery and the reflexive question *Can we still reclaim our innocence*, which suggests collective witness to catastrophic events, specifically the 9/11 tragedy, that fundamentally alter social consciousness. Nirvana's "Territorial Pissings" shows profound cultural alienation through the retrospective positioning *When I was an alien, cultures weren't opinions*, which critiques the commodification of cultural identity within postmodern consumer societies, where authentic difference becomes marketed diversity. The pervasive themes of isolation, betrayal, and systemic hostility across all seven texts reflect the broader social conditions of late twentieth-century American capitalism, where traditional community structures have fragmented whilst economic precarity intensifies. These lyrics, therefore, function not merely as personal expression but as ideological interventions that

expose and contest the power relations embedded within contemporary social practices.

### ***Thematic Integration***

The analysis reveals that alienation and social entrapment constitute a central thematic concern across the examined punk lyrics, manifesting through sustained linguistic patterns that position individuals as imprisoned within predetermined social structures. The textual analysis demonstrates how vocabulary choices such as *locked up in a world that's been planned out for you* and *social tool without a use* present the experience of living within systems that deny authentic agency. This theme permeates multiple songs, from Nirvana's obsessive searching for escape routes to Converge's collective descent under oppressive weight. The discourse practice analysis further illuminates how punk appropriates and subverts dominant cultural narratives to express estrangement, whilst the social practice dimension connects these expressions to the material conditions of late capitalist societies where individuals become commodified labour. The consistent presence of confinement metaphors and mechanised imagery across diverse bands suggests that alienation functions not merely as individual experience but as the fundamental condition of existence within contemporary American society.

A second theme emerges through the systematic critique of institutionalised authority and the failure of established belief systems to provide meaningful guidance or liberation. The analysis identifies how Converge's dismantling of religious ideology, Hatebreed's acknowledgement that *all your heroes have failed you*, and the pervasive scepticism towards received wisdom collectively present profound disillusionment with traditional sources of meaning and power. This resistance operates across multiple levels, from the textual rejection of redemptive narratives to the discursive appropriation and inversion of religious and motivational language. The social practice analysis situates this scepticism within broader historical contexts where neoliberal ideology fragments community structures whilst intensifying economic precarity. These lyrics, therefore, are ideological interventions that expose how dominant institutions manufacture consent through discourses that ultimately maintain rather than challenge existing power relations.

The third theme centres on collective trauma and psychological fragmentation in response to catastrophic historical events and oppressive social conditions. My Chemical Romance's apocalyptic urban imagery and questions about reclaiming innocence, combined with the universalised suffering expressed through Converge's ritualistic repetition of collective descent, suggest shared witness to experiences that fundamentally alter consciousness. The analysis demonstrates how grammatical choices blur boundaries between individual and collective experience, whilst discursive practices employ disaster metaphors to articulate psychological states. This theme reflects the specific sociocultural context of turn-of-the-millennium America, where events such as the 9/11 tragedy alongside ongoing economic instability produced widespread cultural anxiety. The consistent representation of fragmented urban landscapes and lost innocence across multiple songs showcases punk as a space for processing collective trauma whilst simultaneously critiquing the social structures that produce such suffering.

## **DISCUSSION**

The application of Fairclough's three-dimensional framework to the 1990s to 2000s American punk lyrics reveals messages that systematically challenge dominant social structures through linguistic resistance and ideological critique. The textual analysis identifies how these lyrics employ constraining vocabulary and fragmented grammatical structures to articulate experiences of entrapment within predetermined social systems, whilst the discursive practice analysis demonstrates how punk appropriates and subverts established cultural narratives to construct alternative meaning systems. Green Day's interrogative *Are you locked up in a world that's been planned out for you* signifies how these messages function as consciousness-raising discourse that encourages listeners to recognise their positioning within hegemonic orders. Furthermore, the social practice dimension reveals that these messages extend beyond mere complaint to constitute ideological interventions that expose the dehumanising processes of late capitalism. The consistent deployment of warfare metaphors and

collective pronouns across diverse bands suggests these messages serve to both articulate shared experiences of oppression and mobilise resistance against the naturalisation of exploitative social relations.

Three dominant themes emerge from the analysis which reflects the sociocultural conditions of turn-of-the-millennium America and punk's function as a critical cultural practice. Alienation and social entrapment constitute the primary theme, manifesting through sustained linguistic patterns that position individuals as commodified labour imprisoned within systems denying authentic agency. The second theme centres on systematic critique of institutionalised authority, particularly evident in Converge's dismantling of religious ideology and Hatebreed's acknowledgement of failed heroic narratives. This scepticism towards established belief systems reflects broader historical contexts where neoliberal ideology fragments community structures whilst intensifying economic precarity. The third theme addresses collective trauma and psychological fragmentation, particularly evident in My Chemical Romance's apocalyptic imagery responding to catastrophic events such as the 9/11 tragedy. These themes collectively demonstrate that punk lyrics function not merely as personal expression but as sites where individual experience becomes representative of systemic oppression, thereby challenging the boundaries between private suffering and political consciousness.

## CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that American punk music from the 1990s to 2000s functions as a significant cultural practice that challenges dominant social structures through sophisticated linguistic and ideological strategies. Through the application of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework, the research identified three overarching themes that characterise this period of punk expression. These themes of alienation and social entrapment, critique of institutionalised authority, and collective trauma reveal how punk lyrics operate as more than mere artistic expression but as ideological interventions that expose and contest the power relations embedded within late capitalist American society. The findings indicate that punk musicians employed deliberate lexical choices, fragmented grammatical structures, and interdiscursive borrowing to articulate experiences of oppression whilst simultaneously mobilising resistance against hegemonic orders. These lyrical messages represent crucial sites where individual suffering becomes politicised as systemic critique, thereby transforming personal expression into collective consciousness raising. Future research should expand the corpus to include diverse punk subgenres and examine how contemporary punk continues to negotiate shifting sociocultural landscapes. This study ultimately affirms punk music's enduring significance as a discursive space where marginalised voices challenge naturalised inequalities and assert alternative visions of social possibility.

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