

2.4. I've got straight edge: discussions on aging and gender in an underground musical scene

Jhessica Reia¹

Abstract

The straight edge movement first appeared in the United States around the 1980s, having a remarkable influence from the punk scene. They opposed the “live fast, die young” approach of the punks, but incorporated its sonority and the strong DIY culture. More than three decades after the band Minor Threat sang “I've got straight edge”, we still have an important and dynamic underground hardcore-punk scene in Sao Paulo (Brazil) tied to the straight edge values: veganism, sobriety, political activism and the DIY as a way of life that goes beyond the musical production. This article is part of a research carried out over the last three years that aims to discuss the importance of the straight edge identity to this urban youth culture that spins around the Verdurada festivals. Here, the approach is focused on the debate of two problematic questions that cannot be seen separately: the doubts surrounding aging in this scene – since most people that started it on 1996 are still actively producing music and festivals – and how gender issues still permeate this context, even after many years of dialogues with feminism and queer activism. Even with the emergence of new technologies, such as the Internet, the scene keeps its dynamics and maintains much of the energy and processes of the previous days.

Keywords: Straight edge; DIY; Verdurada; Gender; Aging.

Straight edge (sXe) is usually characterized as a movement that started on the 1980's at the USA, specifically at Washington, D.C. It has Minor Threat, former Ian MacKaye's band, as its prominent trigger when they sang, back there in 1981: *'I'm a person just like you / But I've got better things to do / Than sit around and fuck my head / Hang out with the living dead / Snort white shit up my nose / Pass out at the shows / I don't even think about speed / That's something I just don't need / I'VE GOT STRAIGHT EDGE*. The straight edge arise in some way as a contraposition to the punk scene of the period, searching for a life free of drugs, alcohol and tobacco; another aspects on the delimitation of the straight edge identity can change from scene to scene, depending on the country, such as veganism/vegetarianism, DIY culture, political activism and a sort of anti-promiscuity attitude, for example. This movement has been known for decades by its militancy for a sober, drug free life, adopting the X as a symbol of representation and mutual recognition on hardcore punk scenes. The X was initially used to mark the back of youngsters hands, in order to allow then to enter the hardcore punk shows in places that commercialized alcoholic beverages in D.C, but it ended up being incorporated by the straight edgers to represent the choice for sobriety (Haenfler, 2009; Wood, 2006).

Very quickly, the straight edge was spreading its principles of sobriety on other corners of the world, arriving in Brazil at the same decade – the first reference to straight edge in the

¹ Getúlio Vargas Foundation, Brazil.

country is from 1982, on the cover of the *Grito Suburbano* album. Sao Paulo, the largest city in Brazil and home of a diverse range of scenes and subcultures (staging punk versus headbangers fights, eventually) housed a very active straight edge subculture that is still organizing gigs, festivals and other events until these days. They are organized around a collective named Verdurada, created in 1996, that promotes an homonymous festival featuring sobriety, hardcore punk bands, veganism and political activism, all done on the DIY principles – which is claimed to be the largest DIY event in the country. The DIY ethics mark out several aspects of the collective, the festivals, as much as the other agents involved in the broader hardcore punk scene, such as labels, bands, and vegan food providers. On a regular Verdurada day of shows, you can find a wide range of DIY culture, from a small stand selling feminist material with DIY herbal abortion methods to merchandise, recordings and people that sell vegan food made by themselves between one show and another (you can find burgers, cupcakes and the traditional soy drink, *Mupy*). Often, before the last show, there is an informal talk on topics seem as important to the collective: women rights, direct action, real estate speculation and squatting groups, current environment issues, etc.

Although all this political involvement, gender issues still appear like a constant tension among straight edgers: few girls are part of the bands that play in the scene while the mosh pit is still dominated by boys dancing furiously. There are few women at the collective, especially among those who have been part of it for a long time. Several debates around exclusion and prejudice arise, both on the straight edge subculture and on the broader hardcore punk scene. This article is part of a research carried out over the last three years² that aims to discuss the importance of the straight edge identity to this urban youth culture that spins around the Verdurada festivals. Here, the approach is focused on the debate of two problematic questions that cannot be seen separately: how gender issues still permeate this context, even after many years of dialogues with feminism and queer activism; and the doubts surrounding aging in this scene – since most people that started it on 1996 are still actively producing music and festivals, and few of them are women.

Being part of a three decades movement

Aging in straight edge is a sensitive issue, since there is a belief/joke that you can only be 'true till twenty one'. After this age you grow up, become an adult, eventually start a new family and it would be difficult to keep up with the sobriety-activist-hardcore identity. Straight edge has now more than three decades since it appeared and people who were part of it at the beginning usually change their perspective on identity issues related to 'being a straight edger'. In Sao Paulo, there are people involved with the Verdurada since 1996. The motivations to continue defining themselves as straight edgers are multiple, but they converge at some points, such as: they believe in the value and importance of this event both to the underground hardcore scene and the youngsters living this experience, they want to be with their long time friends, and they are living for something that make a difference:

² The research was carried out between 2011 and 2013 and it is a result of my Master's thesis. The methodological approach was both theoretical (based on previous works in the field, as much as discussion of Cultural Studies on subcultures, scenes and identity) and empirical (two years of fieldwork with the object, consisting in participant observation, interviews, survey and nethnography).

This is an event as no other I've known, since it goes beyond the music. I think this is the most important thing about it. It is not a show, it is an event that addresses interesting topics that we think should be discussed anyway. I still believe on the importance of Verdurada, as much as on the importance of the topics that we bring here to be debated – and we are a very united and cool group after all. (D.M., 31 years old, woman).³

I really like Verdurada, because it is not only a rock show for the kids; I think it has something more, it has a clear political goal: move the do it yourself forward. We always try to show that DIY is possible. I like being part of it (F.M., 37 years old, man).

Here we can spread the vegetarian lifestyle and do something that goes beyond the established rules. Hardcore gives you two lifes: the everyday life (with its standard routine) and the other. At Verdurada we can have this other life just as we are, more honestly. Also, there is the music – something that I love. There is this desire to get things done, to spread the DIY, to show that we can do lots of things without tying ourselves to the government neither to the market – we can make our scene grow, musically and artistically. (X., 22 years old, man).

I always imagined how it would be like to age inside a scene. This is a motivation for me. I want to be linked to this when I become 40 or 50, I don't know. I want to be still involved in some way. If I eventually get tired, that is ok, but for now it is important, I'm experiencing a unique sensation: I'm getting old while I'm involved with all this. Seeing people taking their sons to a hardcore show... I feel good about that. (A.M., 34 years old, man).

Few women have been participating at the Verdurada collective for a long time, and their motivations to continue in the group are very similar to those pointed out by men: the feeling of belonging to a scene, to a subculture, to a group of close friends working together to build a better world, etc. Also, this question is closely linked to the identity boundaries of being a straight edge, since after the 30's, usually, you no longer belong to the youngest groups of the scene and you have a family, a job and carry out a 'regular life' to pay the bills. The idea of two lifes comes up eventually, together with the idea that these two sides of their life complement each other and let them move on without 'losing the edge'.

Straightedge and the gender issue

One of the few female authors writing about straight edge in the U.S., Beth Lahickey (2007), compiled interviews and interesting information about the straight edge subculture in New York. In her words:

Like any musical movement, straight edge has its pros and cons. I have never seen any live bands that can match the level of physical energy put forth at straight edge shows. The lyrical suggestions of a positive outlook, unity, and basic clean living are admirable, though not necessarily heeded. [...] I definitely tout the motivation behind the straight edge, but at the same breathe denounce its male-based egocentricity. At any rate, I chose to stand at its sidelines and support its players. And more importantly, I found the subject worthy of documentation" (Lahickey, 2007, p. xvii).

The author points out a common discussion about the straight edge subculture: its male dominance and sexist approach. Robert Wood (2006), who studied this subculture in the United States, affirms that the people who identify themselves with this subculture can be characterized as predominantly male, Caucasian, young (under 30 years old), from urban centers and belonging mostly to the middle class. Ross Haenfler (2009) states that straight

³ The interviews were conducted in Sao Paulo, between 2011 and 2013. The ages shown represent how old people were at the time I interviewed them. Here I opted to use the initials, instead of the names, in order to keep them anonymous.

edgers, today, face dilemmas on the gender subject, since some boys are trying to re-think their role, as much as their position inside the subculture, in order to redefine their meaning for masculinity. According to this author, we can find some contradictory masculinities within the subculture, since the 'progressive, idealistic, anti-sexist, pacifist, animal rights activists coexist with hypermasculine, domineering 'tough guys' who resemble the stereotypical 'jocks' they claim to resist' (Haenfler, 2009, p.103). Sometimes, young cultures opposing the hegemonic gender roles end up reinforcing the values they are trying to deny:

Like punks, sXers seek to create an alternative to sexism and patriarchy and question what it means to be a man, but the pull of dominant society is difficult to overcome. Straight edge presents two general faces of masculinity, one proposing a more progressive vision of manhood, the other reflecting 'hegemonic masculinity'. Multiple expressions of masculinity emerge within *any* single men's movement and faces problems of reconstructing manhood in a masculine context (Haenfler, 2009, p.104)

To this author, the straight edge movement usually offers two perspectives on gender issues: in an extreme, the pro-feminist approach and at the other, a reproduction of the hegemonic masculinity. Men roles among straight edgers vary widely, producing many fragmented masculinities (Haenfler, 2009). The progressive face of straight edge, as a subculture, tries to resist oppressions, challenging sexism and homophobia, for example; also, it intends to 'break patterns of abusive masculinity' and empower women inside its dynamics. Some women are very critical to the men-only bands that raise gender issues on stage, but part of them think that it is valid, indeed, that men take the initiative to transform both the scene and the world in a better place for everyone (Haenfler, 2009, p.107-121).

There are several engaged girls, such as Jenni Ramme, interviewed by Gabriel Kuhn (2010). She funded the Emancypunx Records in 1997-98, a project developed in the anarchy-feminist hardcore punk scene (from a group called Women Against Discrimination and Violence), at Warsaw (Poland), which ended up becoming a very important reference of feminist and queer politics with a straight edge approach. According to her, Emancypunx arose from the need to distribute feminist materials (pamphlets, books, zines and music), since there was no internet back then and Poland did not have a consolidated movement; the name derives from 'emancipation in punk' or from 'suffragettes punk' (which in Polish is *emancypantki*) (Kuhn, 2010).

Issues of discrimination for sexual orientation are quite common in straight edge, as well as activists fighting for respect and equality, combined to the principle of sobriety. Nick Riotfag, an activist and writer that was also interviewed by Kuhn (2010), tells his difficulties to connect his sXe side with his *queer* side, since he faced resistance in both scenes (for his sobriety, in the *queer* world, and for being *queer*, among sXers), claiming to be very difficult to counteract the exaggerated masculinity of the hardcore-punk-straightedge scene (Kuhn, 2010, p.200-212). Nevertheless, some bands challenged homophobia in their music production, such as Outspoken, Good Clean Fun and Earth Crisis.

One of the approaches in the straight edge scene that tries to revert these problematic gender issues is the idea of women empowerment, managing to include women and give them an active voice inside the scene. Haenfler (2009) shows that the women he interviewed in his research told him that they indeed felt empowered by the movement. One of the interesting discoveries made by the author is that straight edgers girls usually put themselves not only in an opposition to girls that drink and use drugs, but also to mainstream culture girls, and independence in relation to men is an element they proudly defend – along with a

rejection to some aspects of femininity such as passivity, a constant necessity to impress men, competition with other girls and an exaggerated focus on appearance (Haenfler, 2009). Anyway, it is clear that there are problems that follow the hegemonic culture tendencies, such as the lack of an effective inclusion of women in the scene and its consequences.

The only possible way to change these patterns would be through a persistent action, thanks to the diffuse nature of sXe, and one cannot exclude women from defined positions; however, one can only discourage them to assume important positions in the scene – like being a band member, for instance. Even in a scene that offers quite opportunities for girls to be involved, to be in a band is certainly one of the most prestigious roles, since the bands are responsible to define the sXe ideology, to create new meanings for the movement and have a big admiration by the fans (Haenfler, 2009).

Haenfler (2009) says that, in the scene he observed, there was this situation where girls were called 'coat racks', referring to those who held their boyfriends coats when they went to the *mosh pit* to dance during the shows – an attitude very ill-seen by girls who questioned women authenticity inside the sXe. The dance itself is quite violent and turns away much of the girls, who fear getting hurt among the boys punching and kicking each other in front of the stage.

The girls that join the straightedge end up feeling special exactly because they are women in the scene, since this is rare; a lot of members believe that the aggressive and furious musical style can turn women away, at the same time that women aren't socially educated to appreciate such kind of music – a belief that reinforces the dominant gender pattern (Haenfler, 2009).

It is considered that the most accepted girls in the scene are those that, somehow, fit as 'one of the boys' – what turns out to be problematic at the moment that women must conform to a masculine performance, and that some women will never be able to fit this role. Regarding relationship among women, it is believed that, in face of so many adversities, they end up uniting themselves in strong friendship bonds – building up the idea that girls must be united to win their space inside straightedge (Haenfler, 2009).

Haenfler (2009) makes a reference to the Brazilian straightedge scene (which, according to him, is one of the biggest in the world) and to the band Infect, composed only by girls that sang against sexism and homophobia. In their music 'Homophobia', originally sang in Portuguese, they say: '*End up homophobia / We support free choice / of sexuality*'. Social criticism against sexism is clear in their musical production.

Besides participating in bands, in these male-oriented subcultures, girls often use fanzines for their creativity and political views. The Riot Grrrl⁴ movement, for instance, gave more visibility to feminist fanzines inside subcultural spaces. After the Internet diffusion, some women started the creation of feminist websites about sXe: the two most popular in the 2000's were *Girls with Xs on their hands* and *xSisterhoodx*. These sites had a lot of elements from a conventional website, with discussion forums, interviews, musical reviews and links to other sites.

Other important roles are added to these, like scheduling shows, producing the festivals, advertising the shows, helping touring bands to find some place to stay, photographing and

⁴ Riot Grrrl is a movement that ranges from fanzines to festivals and hardcore-punk-feminist bands, whose intention is to make women become aware of and claim their rights, having music as their primary form of expression.

documenting the history of the scene, among other things – showing that some scenes only work thanks to women participation.

There is a feminine adhesion inside the straightedge scene that ends up blending with sXe identity – with many men ending up being at least friendly to principles and attitudes claimed by feminism. However, there are still those that do not see homophobia and sexism as obvious inside the scene, as an issue that should be discussed and changed; there are also lots of girls who believe that opportunities are equal and the main reason for women not assuming more prestigious roles is a lack of interest.

Straightedge in Brazil: limits and opportunities to discuss gender issues

São Paulo has one of the largest hardcore punk scenes in the world and since the emergence of straight edge subculture in the 1980's it has been playing a renowned role on the international scenario – principally after people started Verdurada, a music festival organized by the homonymous collective since 1996. Nowadays, Verdurada is a festival, with shows (mostly from hardcore punk bands) and lectures/conversations about political issues, in addition to workshops, debates, video and art exhibitions with a political and divergent content. At the end of the day, they distribute a free vegan dinner for all the participants.

These festivals happen periodically, without a fixed address (in fact, they're facing problems to find a place, due to the changes in Brazilian real estate speculation over the last years), but always close to the public transportation system. Besides the shows, there is always vegan food, water and *Mupy* for sale, as much as merchandise material from DIY and independent labels – like t-shirts, zines, recordings, etc. The festival brings together several bands, most of them being outsiders even for the 'independent' circuits and are not part of the recent trend of new business models on the music industry. They claim to be DIY, delimitating clearly that they are not part of an alternative network of independent rock scene gaining strength in Brazil – such as Fora do Eixo⁵.

During the fieldwork at Verdurada one of the most sensitive subject to be addressed was the gender issue – specially regarding sexism – inside the hardcore punk scene and, mainly, inside the straight edge subculture. There are several discussions on the male predominance at straight edge gigs, a fact that can be confirmed just by taking a look at who is attending the event and who is dancing in the mosh pit. Also, I heard people from outside the subculture affirming that sexism and homophobia are remarkable among these straight edgers.

Most part of the above discussed issues was reproduced at Sao Paulo's straight edge subculture. During interviews and participant observation I noted that the perception hold by the collective's members over the treatment given to gender issues differ significantly from the rest of the scene, since several members believe that the scene is neither sexist nor

⁵ Fora do Eixo (FDE) is a Brazilian network of cultural collectives created in 2005, which has been dramatically growing since then. Having Pablo Capilé as a "founder", along with other artists and cultural producers, it has the goal of promoting cultural exchange in regions located outside the axis of Rio de Janeiro/Sao Paulo. It focused initially on independent musical production, but is now also engaged with other artistic expression, such as cinema, visual arts and theater – at the same time that it is now also expanding its actions through Latin America. Criticism has been directed at their so-called independent network of cultural production, for the fact it receives money both from the government and from private initiatives, to the organization, and that it is said to be horizontal, decentralized and collaborative, but raised many recent debates around authorship and appropriation of works inside the collective.

homophobic. They suggest that what create this animosity against straight edgers would be the results of uncontrollable individual actions towards a sexist/homophobic attitude. It is also remarkable, in some discourses, affirmations that girls should 'make themselves respectable' and stand for themselves, which means, they should earn the boy's respect, as if respect were a reward or recognition of pre-determined efforts, attitudes and so on. It is also common to hear from girls that they have a tougher way to conquer their own space in the subculture, passing through a process of 'masculinization', eventually becoming (or being seen as) 'one of the boys'.

For C.M. – who has recently been integrated to the Verdurada collective – one of the biggest problems inside the straight edge subculture is the sexist jokes made by the guys. According to her, these jokes are not made to offend or sound sexist, but this culture is so deeply rooted on people's imaginary that ends up appearing even among those who claim to resist it, such as the Verdurada. The opinion from other members who are also part of the collective shows a diverse perception:

We always promote debates, but sometimes we see these jokes; maybe the person does not think that way, but these are kinda annoying jokes. (...) I agree with the talks between the shows; I think it's always worth to discuss these gender things. It is one of the topics we talk most because lots of people say that the Verdurada is sexist; and this is something that we always try to demystify, because we have the 'Verdurada show' and the 'collective Verdurada'. It's a hardcore show and the boys that hang out with us are not like that, but it has some young boys who go to the mosh pit and dance violently, clueless and end up hurting the girls. But they belong to the same hardcore scene, and not the collective. We always try to discuss this, because it [*Verdurada*] is not sexist. (C. M., 18 years old, women)

The Verdurada always tried to confront homophobia and sexism, both in everyday life and in specific policies, debates, supporting some groups and initiatives, and everything else. We always made an effort to keep these things on the agenda. What also happens is that society is sexist and homophobic, and we can not pretend that this is not reflected in any way among us. These problems are reflected even in those who are consciously resisting it. We live in a world like this, which is slowly changing. I think it is an illusion to believe that hardcore is a bubble that protects people from the outside culture, like a field of cultural strength that we live daily; we exist in social relations that propagate and perpetuate this kind of prejudices. We fight, keep it on the agenda, stand up against homophobia and sexism. The best way we can (P. C., 34 years, man).

I think there are more sexism, homophobia and prejudice outside of this scene, than within it. I think it is a mistake to try to understand the straightedge hardcore punk scene as a perfect scene, this is what ends up confusing the kids - they want to create a perfect utopia to live in, and this will never happen. You'll have to deal with some difference inside it, you will have to deal with opinions very different from yours. (F. M., 37 years, man)

According to C.M., one of the biggest challenges of being a woman in this context is the fact that you have to prove that you are really interested on music, on activism and on whatever the subculture can offer to you – in other words, that you are not interest only in meeting and hanging out with the boys:

I was talking to the girls about it - and we agree - that some girls really come here because they think the boys are handsome and want to hook up with them. But I don't. When I started to come here I had already read about straight edge, I had listened to some bands and I wanted to enter the scene for the music. When you arrive, the first thing that some boys do is to flirt with you; but then I continued to come here and tried to show that I knew stuff – and was not here just because of men. When they realized it, everyone welcomed me, even the boys that flirted on me ended up supporting me, sending me new songs and bands. But I really think that at the beginning everything is much more difficult for the girls, because it seems to me that men have to prove themselves just once to be accepted in the scene, while women have to prove themselves twice: prove that they like being there and that they are not

only looking for boys to hook up with. I think women always have to make a greater effort. (C. M., 18 years old, woman)

When questioned about the necessity of becoming 'one of the boys', i.e., the process of adopting certain masculinities in order to be accepted among the guys, she affirms that this happens more often than she would like – even because hardcore is an aggressive way of expression, and girls are educated to follow some stereotypes that tell them to keep a safe distance from this kind of sonority and ambient:

I think we don't have to show it [*being one of the boys*], but as we hang out with them it ends up becoming something like this. I faced many situations where the boys were talking about stuff as if I was one of them, even some embarrassing things. This 'women issue' is very strong, for us to stand there is a much greater effort than if we were men. Because hardcore is a kinda sound that men are created to listen to, we usually grow up to listen to fluffy music. Then, the girl enters the scene and the guys think they are looking for them. (...) There is plenty of cases of girls who come here with these intentions. But I do not care. There are also girls who come here while they are dating some of the guys, and when they break up, the girls just stop showing off at shows. (C. M., 18 years, woman)

C.M. is one of the girls who participates at the mosh pit, dancing and performing stage dives. For her, being recognized by these actions, by her engagement with the scene, is the best part of the straight edge subculture:

The best part - I feel that it is silly to talk about this – is that the scene does not have many girls, but those few are your friends, and it is very cool when the guys say: you 'represented'! Giving a stage dive, for example, and hear that you 'represented' is the best part, because the guys are recognizing your efforts. (C. M., 18 years, woman)

In her opinion, the relationship between the girls goes beyond gigs, becoming part of everyday relationships – going out to talk, visiting each other and skating, for example. Also, at the time of my fieldwork, there was a Facebook page that the hardcore girls used to talk and exchange information. The use of new technologies and its platforms facilitate the interaction and information available. Some of the girls that I talked to affirmed that they feel different from the 'regular' girls outside the subculture, since these straight edgers allege to not care that much about their physical appearance or 'superfluous' and 'empty' things. Furthermore, straight edge can evoke, according to these girls, empowerment and security feelings, since sobriety allows the control over their own body in situations where you will need to stand by yourself, such as parties: "I like to have control over my actions, knowing exactly what I am doing, with my mind fully working; I feel safe as a straight edger", affirms C.M.

Both for her and for P.C., the fact that men dominate the scene is natural, since it reflects the reproduction of outside notions that the music played there, as much as the aggressiveness involved in the dances and performances, belongs to the male imaginary. However, P.C. believes that the violent dancing at the mosh pit is an expression of anger, which is not directed specifically to somebody; according to him, people rarely get hurt. He thinks that we should discuss if the dance excludes people, but we cannot prohibit people from dancing.

But according to the general public that attend the festival, several perspectives on gender issues can be addressed, without a homogeneous point of view:

Sexism is well addressed, mainly because of the feminist bands, hitting hard against this, but I still think there is resistance on homophobia. They are not homophobic, but this topic is not as addressed as sexism is (B.J., 31 years old, man).

It's a very male-dominated and sexist scene; only men stay at the mosh pit. In theory nobody is sexist or homophobic, but when a homosexual appears you can see the strange looks he/she gets, people pointing at the person. The same thing that happens in the streets (C.B., 20 years old, man).

I think this issue [*gender issues*] is not properly addressed, nor by the organizers neither by the public. You can still see a lot of sexism and this is not only in sXe, other scenes also have it. I think this is a problem that is rooted in Western culture, and if we take it - just as we already do - into the counterculture, it gets worse. I think it is extremely important to address these issues and to promote productive conversations, and mainly, to support who was sexually harassed - it's hard to see such support or any emotional structure within the scene (L.A., 21 years old, man).

I cannot remember at least one homosexual couple at Verdurada – maybe girls, but never boys. Sexism reigns, since the girls have to fight a lot to conquer some space in which they are not “the girlfriend of...”. The guys are pro-equality in theory but in everyday life this is way more complicated. The jokes about gays appear as in any other place (B.K., 25 years old, woman).

I know I am not as active as I would like to, I don't have a band, zine or organize events, but sometimes I saw the guys saying hello to other people that were with me, but just ignored me for being a woman. This upsets me a lot. I also saw people spread an idea in their music and bands, but outside the stage they adopt totally controversial attitudes. (S., 26 years old, woman)

Obviously, it is not possible to generalize the whole scene situation through these testimonies, but it is symptomatic that some people can perceive, or suffer, different types of sexist discrimination. There is a spectrum in these testimonies that initiates with the belief on the underground scene in promoting equality, debating the controversial topic and changing some bad attitudes; at the same time, it is possible to see, for example, girls affirming that usually the discourse does not match with the scene's reality, as they had problems related to their gender. Some of these young women say that they had to change themselves in order to be accepted by the group of straight edgers:

Today I realized how much I became “masculine” in order to be accepted. Dominatrix [*Brazilian Riot Grrrl band*] used to say that we should not worry about our appearance, but accepting this as the truth continues to tie me to the dialectic. Now I understand: to free me I need to know different points of views and make choices. Choosing to wear lipstick – or not wearing it at all – is something that makes me a victim of a discourse at the same extent. It is clear that Verdurada has more men than women participating and I feel the urge to assume a masculine attitude in order to protect me, which really sucks and I am trying to change this. (...) I don't dance in the shows anymore, nor do I go to the stage; besides my desire, I feel uncomfortable and this is something that decreased significantly my frequency to the shows over the last years (B.K. 25 years old)

We can see that, despite the anti-sexist discourse, some girls still feel uncomfortable for having to assume masculine roles to be accepted, and also the caution that they think is necessary when dating one of the sXers boys, because it is easy to become “ill-spoken”. The feeling is that there is some anxiety on the part of these girls, in this transition of being accepted or not, to have a relationship with any other individual in this scene – of any gender – and still to manage to make it clear that there is no other reason for being there than to enjoy the shows, their friends or even the vegan food.

Conclusion

We saw, briefly, that much of the issues being reproduced about gender at Sao Paulo's straight edge subculture were already observed and discussed in other similar underground scenes. There is clearly a gap between people directly involved with Verdurada and its organization - who aged inside the sXe subculture - and the people that belong to the hardcore punk scene of the city. Perceptions on sexism and homophobia vary significantly, but it is not possible to negate that, besides all the efforts to resist them, they are still sharing the space with sobriety and other questions. Probably because hegemonic discourses, and the actions and positioning that derives from them, are rooted in our culture - and of course, have its roots on the scene and in Verdurada. Even though increasing the spaces for debate that were made possible by the organizers - facilitated by new technologies - as well as the attempt to politicize discussions and to foster social/cultural change, by now, these actions are not so effective to reach everyone and to decrease contradictions and oppressions.

Funding: This work was supported by the Fundação Carlos Chagas Filho de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (FAPERJ)

References

- Bittencourt, J. B. M. (2011). *Nas encruzilhadas da rebeldia: etnocartografia dos straightedges em Sao Paulo* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). IFCH-Unicamp, Campinas.
- Haenfler, R. (2004). Rethinking subcultural resistance: Core values of the straight edge movement. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 33, 406-436, 2004.
- Haenfler, R. (2009). *Straight Edge: Clean living youth, hardcore punk, and social change*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Kuhn, G. (2010). *Sober living for the revolution: Hardcore punk, Straight Edge and radical politics*. Oakland: PM Press.
- Lahickey, B. (2007). *All ages: Reflections on Straight Edge*. Huntington Beach, California: Revelation Books.
- Wood, R. (2006). *Straighedge Youth: Complexity and contradictions of a subculture*. New York: Syracuse University Press.