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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Lauraine Leblanc. *Pretty in Punk: Girls' Gender Resistance in a Boys' Subculture*. New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 1999. xii + 288 pp. \$50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8135-2651-5.

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Published on H-PCAACA (August, 2000)



Don't You Know that It's Different for Girls?

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Girls got it bad. Indeed, the historical girth of Western culture, as punk girl-cum-sociologist Lauraine Leblanc reminds us, lays heaped upon the foundations of a male-constructed and male-centered ideological framework. Women have always had to learn to negotiate the discourse of masculinity, and more often than not, accept their subordinated status with silent smiles. In her new book entitled *Pretty in Punk*, Leblanc replaces smiles with sneers and silence with screams, as she examines the ways in which female members of the punk subculture—adolescent girls in particular—attempt to resist the male-dominant cultural codes which permeate a punk way of being.

Combining sociological, subcultural and feminist theory with ethnographic analysis, Leblanc argues that acts of resistance, which she defines as conscious political responses to perceived oppression, serve punk girls as tools of empowerment, bolstering self-esteem at a crucial point in girls' social development. Through strategies of stylistic innovation, parody and bricolage, the punk subculture offers a terrain for the publicizing and questioning of dominant ideologies, including those of class, gender and sexuality. But punk is a double-edged discourse for girls; as Leblanc argues, punk girls' resistance is often limited to and inflected by the masculine codes which characterize the subculture. Thus, while punk resistance serves girls as a strategy of empowerment, it is all too often re-

duced to a means of accommodation. Leblanc's intention in *Pretty in Punk* is to trace both the particularity and the tension of this double-movement.

There is much to commend in *Pretty in Punk*. Leblanc's presentation of the narratives of forty North American female punks is effective in allowing the girls and women to speak for themselves. She rightly points to the lack of scholarship addressing females in subcultural studies (the work of Angela McRobbie being a notable exception), pointing to researchers' continued reliance on traditional male-centered British subcultural theory. Leblanc provides a nice synoptic genealogy of punk in Chapter Two, laying the ground for her ethnographic analysis in the subsequent chapters. Most significantly, in her analysis she offers a nuanced and compelling explanation of punk girls' dialectic of resistance and accommodation. Toward the end of the book, Leblanc addresses the issue of harassment; here, she demonstrates how punk girls strategically respond to public sexual harassment, concluding that the problem is foremost one of unequally distributed power and that "The solution therefore lies in re-visioning cultural notions of gender and power" (216).

As much as there is to commend about *Pretty in Punk*, there are also places where the book falls short of its mark. While Leblanc pays considerable attention to the articulation of class in punk girls' identities, sexuality is underplayed and treated as fairly unproblematic (with

only a few lines about the heteronormative constraints of the punk subculture), and the articulation of race is virtually absent in her analysis (were there really no punk girls of color to be found?). At times, Leblanc's combining of sociological and subcultural theory seems strained, and at times her unabashed celebratory tone threatens to overwhelm. She argues that her "observational account" relies on a conception of resistance as conscious and deliberate action; however, taking a cue from Roland Barthes, one may wonder how less-than-conscious cultural "myths" also inform resistance in less tangible but equally powerful ways. Finally, Leblanc's ultimate reliance on the same masculinist theoretical discourse (Cohen, Hebdige, Brake) which she criticizes in her opening chapter seems to belie her intentions. Considering her interest in the relationship between gender, culture and power, Leblanc's analysis might have benefited from more discourse-oriented theory and analysis—the work of Michel Foucault immediately comes to mind—as well

as the vast body of work in cultural studies addressing the articulation of gender identity.

Despite its few shortcomings, *Pretty in Punk* is an enjoyable and informative read. Leblanc's authorial voice is personal and heartfelt; her choice to include personal narrative accounts of her own experiences as a punk girl serves as an effective (and affective) rhetorical strategy. Moreover, the subject matter, combined with the author's ethnography-driven approach, would make the book a useful supplementary text in upper-division undergraduate courses examining the rhetoric and sociology of popular culture. In all, *Pretty in Punk* is a welcomed addition to the literature on girls and subcultures.

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Citation: D. Robert DeChaine. Review of Leblanc, Lauraine, *Pretty in Punk: Girls' Gender Resistance in a Boys' Subculture*. H-PCAACA, H-Net Reviews. August, 2000.

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