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Article

Dropkick Murphys vs. Scott Walker: Unpacking Populist Ideological Discourse in Digital Space

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Abstract
On January 24, 2015, the folk punk band Dropkick Murphys penned a tweet to former Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker that read "please stop using our music in any way…We literally hate you!!!" Within hours, thousands of users interacted with the post and a contentious mediated discussion materialized. By exporting the full conversation using the program BrandWatch and applying Sonja Foss's ideological criticism approach, I found several recurrent ideological constructions reappear throughout the data. Through comments considering the band's political activism as alienating, re-envisioning punk rock as right-wing, and framing Dropkick Murphys as inherently un-American and undesirable through Twitter comments, Walker supporters rhetorically dismiss the band and their message. These constructions show how new media audiences discursively construct ideologies to delegitimize opposition along the lines of political affiliation and illustrate the communicative mechanism of populism on a micro-level.

Issue
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1. Introduction

On January 24, 2015, former Governor of Wisconsin Scott Walker walked onto the Iowa Freedom Summit stage to the song "I'm Shipping Up to Boston" by the band Dropkick Murphys (Anderson, 2015) before launching into a speech about conservative ideas winning elections. Shortly afterwards, Dropkick Murphys addressed the following tweet to Walker's account: "Please stop using our music in any way…We literally hate you!!! Love, Dropkick Murphys" (Anderson, 2015). Within hours, thousands of Twitter users converged on the post with rapidly rising numbers of likes, comments, and retweets. The contentious mediated discussion around the tweet quickly caught the attention of national news outlets. Though neither a Scott Walker supporter nor a regular Dropkick Murphys listener, I became intimately familiar with this story through its extensive coverage in major publications like *The Washington Post* (Izadi, 2015) and *USA Today* (Camia, 2015). Though Walker's political power faded in the following years (Strauss, 2018), he is

notable for his role as a precursor to former US President Donald Trump. In his time as governor of Wisconsin, Walker cultivated a sense of resentment among rural voters by framing them as unfairly relegated to a powerless position at the hands of urban elites, public institutions, and unions (Cramer, 2016a, 2016b). While Trump upstaged Walker to win the Republican presidential nomination in 2016, it was Walker's original strategy of stoking antagonisms that provided Trump with the blueprint to effectively appeal to voters' feelings of helplessness and anger (Savage, 2021). As such, Dropkick Murphys' anti-Scott Walker tweet provides an important case study at a crucial moment in US political history.

The conversation surrounding Walker and Dropkick Murphys illustrates the discursive work of digital audience members in a confrontation between two parties with a populist appeal: a rising right-wing politician versus an established left-wing musical group. By using the term right-wing, I mean a synthesis of fiscal and social conservatism that favors the deregulation of markets, reduced government intervention, and elevation

of religion in society (Garratt, 2018). The term left-wing, by contrast, refers to modern liberalism which argues for government regulation of the marketplace as well as expanding civil and political rights (Garratt, 2018). Additionally, populism is a concept central to understanding this contentious digital conversation. Populism as defined by De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017) is a:

> Dichotomic discourse in which 'the people' are juxtaposed to 'the elite' along the lines of a down/up antagonism in which 'the people' is discursively constructed as a large powerless group through opposition to 'the elite' conceived as a small and illegitimately powerful group. Populist politics thus claim to represent 'the people' against an 'elite' that frustrates their legitimate demands and presents its demands as expressions of the will of 'the people.' (p. 12)

In this way, populism functions as a mechanism which is not inherently ideological (Ostiguy et al., 2021). Key to De Cleen and Stavrakakis' (2017) definition is *discourse*. Though discourse is a term with great fluidity of meaning, I adopt Mills' (1997, p. 11) hybrid conceptualization in which discourse is "not a disembodied collection of statements, but groups of utterances of sentences, statements which are enacted within a social context, which are determined by that social context and which contribute to the way that social context continues its existence." These communicative utterances of discourse are sites of constant contestation of meaning, which means that populism is continually constructed and contested through communication. Discourse produces things, like a concept or effect, and cannot exist in isolation. As such, looking at such discourse on a small scale, such as the comment section of a notable social media post, is fundamental to building a contextualized, ground-up understanding of how populism functions (Laclau, 2005).

The mediated discussion around Dropkick Murphys' 2015 tweet provides such a micro-level snapshot into how populism is ideologically constructed in an instance when the realms of politics and popular music overlap. While protest music regularly appears in scholarly literature as the prototypical form of political musician resistance (e.g., Way, 2016), less scholarly attention is paid to musicians' discursive, non-musical political opposition despite it becoming more frequent in the connected age of social media (e.g., Liakat, 2020). While music taste and participation within music genres are important for identity formation and socialization (Frith, 1996), other factors mediate and inform our relationship to popular music. Additionally, only somewhat recently has a nuanced approach which considers the intersection of popular culture and political engagement neither "an unalloyed political good [n]or evil" (Street et al., 2013, p. 3) emerged. By looking directly at the audience, this study contributes to a growing body of scholarship which

articulates a more contextual view of politics and popular culture (e.g., Couldry, 2010; Street et al., 2013).

I sought to answer one central question: What does the mediated discourse in response to Dropkick Murphys' anti-Scott Walker tweet reveal about how populism is ideologically constructed and communicated? My analysis reveals proponents of Walker utilize a recurrent set of ideologies to disregard Dropkick Murphys. By considering the band's political activism as alienating, re-envisioning punk rock as right-wing, and framing Dropkick Murphys as inherently un-American and undesirable through Twitter comments, Walker supporters rhetorically dismiss the band and their message. These constructions show how new media audiences discursively construct ideologies to delegitimize opposition along the lines of political affiliation and illustrate the communicative mechanism of populism functioning on a micro-level.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

I situate the conversation surrounding Dropkick Murphys' public rebuke of Republican populist and former Governor of Wisconsin Scott Walker in the context of contemporary populism and musician resistance. I highlight an overview of populism as my theoretical framework before illustrating contemporary populism within the US. From there, I present an examination of Scott Walker's unique and seemingly contradictory form of political mass appeal. Moving on, I explore forms of musician resistance and provide background on the left-wing populist appeal of the Dropkick Murphys. Together, these subject areas lay the foundation for this study by explicating populism as a concept which can be applied to both Scott Walker's US-based politics as well as Dropkick Murphys' activism within a larger trend of discursive musician activism.

2.1. Populism as Theoretical Framework

Populism offers a lens to examine and unpack ideologies hidden within communication. Thus, to provide the fundamental framework for this study, I trace a patchwork of populist theorizing by scholars like Laclau and Urbinati. Building on these core understandings of populism, I include important contemporary updates and insights from scholars like Moffitt and Stavrakakis.

Populism is a term which has dominated the news cycle in recent years, often invoking discussions of authoritarian world leaders with seeming grassroots appeal (Anselmi, 2018). But despite the term's explosion in popularity to describe contemporary sociopolitical trends, populism is a concept with paradoxical ends (Tabellini, 2019) which are often oversimplified or mischaracterized (Ostiguy et al., 2021; Stavrakakis, 2017). As mentioned in the previous section, populism arises from "the formation of an internal antagonistic frontier separating the 'people' from 'power'" (Laclau, 2002,

p. 74). This means that citizens grow disenfranchised from a perceived lack of agency. A primary, well-studied attribute of populism is its power to frame, dictating "politics in binary terms: the fight between the people and the elite, two neatly defined and antagonistic camps. Nothing in politics is viewed outside the essential conflict between these two actors" (Waisbord, 2020, p. 5). This dichotomous "friend vs. foe" frame makes populism ideologically flexible, allowing both left- and right-wing populism to use the same mechanism for disparate aims.

As such, the discourse of populism constructs the people and the elite in particular ways. Primarily, "the elite" is communicated as a "small and illegitimately powerful group" (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017, p. 12) while conceptions of "the people" are more fluid and difficult to articulate. There is no pre-existing social group, such as race, class, or gender, which constitutes "the people." Instead, "the people" "only come to be 'rendered-present' through mediated representation, which in populism is usually linked with the image of the leader" (Moffitt, 2016, p. 101). The relationship between populist leaders and "the people" is mediated through idealized images, in which certain identities are highlighted and others are notably absent. Thus, on a base level, populism attracts a wide swath of people who feel stifled by the status quo and identify with carefully constructed communication (Moffitt, 2016).

However, scholars like Hofstadter (1955, p. 71) warned that the emotions of such an audience can easily be manipulated by "agitators with paranoid tendencies" through heated speeches. Indeed, a populist position can bend the truth to become a property of the leader and "the people," which allows for populist notions of truth to become malleable (Waisbord, 2020). Because of this potential for exploitation and the distrust of populism fostered by Hofstadter, populism tends to be naturalized unreflexively as inherently bad (Stavrakakis, 2017). Similarly, an increased focus on xenophobic, radical right-wing movements which weave populism and nationalism together led many to conflate populism with exclusionary nationalism (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017). Though populism can be utilized by unscrupulous nationalist leaders, the same mechanism also allows for the mobilization of common people to fight for social and economic fairness, such as US farmers and wage workers challenging unchecked corporate power near the turn of the 20th century (Stavrakakis, 2017). Further contrasting with contemporary perspectives, Laclau (2002) saw populism as a positive emancipatory force which could usher in egalitarian radical democracy (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Thus, a more nuanced approach to populism is warranted to see beyond false binaries and naturalized distrust.

For analytic purposes, it is important to note that Laclau (2005) emphasized examining populism through discourse. Tracing discourse is important throughout the political process because the ascent to power frames the populist candidate as an outsider where, once in office, that candidate must communicatively maintain a connection with "the people" in a different way (Holliday, 2016). Similarly, discourse is never complete (Mills, 1997). In this way, populist leaders continually construct and appeal to "the people" through discourse. Thus, to study populism effectively, one must take a close look at discourse.

Despite populism's shared, basic tenets, populist discourse does not simply bubble up within a vacuum. Instead, populism is a cyclical, context-based phenomenon which reflects the sensibilities and governmental forms of different places (Urbinati, 2019). Importantly, this means populism "resists generalizations and makes scholars of politics comparativist by necessity, as its language and content are imbued with the political culture of the society in which it arises" (Urbinati, 2019, p. 114). Together, this body of scholarship suggests that, while populism is not a precise measurable concept, understanding its nuanced contours, recent developments, and discursive form allows scholars to thoughtfully examine instances of populism. In turn, this enables us to investigate instances of populist discourse to understand the articulations of populism in a particular context.

Though the populist approach is resurging in contemporary political discourse, "populism as a political movement has existed globally since the end of the 19th century and has won political power since the late 1940s" (Finchelstein, 2019, p. 419). The resurgence of populism transcends national boundaries and reflects a larger societal shift toward politics rooted in emotion and grievance (Sullivan & Costa, 2020). Pent-up frustration with the status quo and effective "friend vs. foe" frames propel both left- and right-wing populist candidates with disparate aims. On these shared core components, populist leaders have ascended to power in countries such as India, Brazil, Austria, Italy, Indonesia, Poland, and the US (Serhan, 2020a). Though populism is a concept with broad global appeal, each region adds important contextual dimensions.

2.1.1. Contemporary Populism in the United States

To contextualize this study, it is important to situate the row between Scott Walker and Dropkick Murphys within contemporary US populism. The election of former President Donald Trump in 2016 ushered in a renewed focus on populism within a national US context. Though the exclusionary rhetoric of Trump was clearly linked to populism in a negative Hofstadter-oriented sense, US Senator Bernie Sanders also provides a contrasting illustration of populism at work within the country. For example, Trump's brand of economy-focused, anti-immigration nationalism and Sanders' progressive democratic socialism are strikingly different discourses but showcase populism to varying degrees (Molyneux, 2017).

Both Trump and Sanders were driven by a disdain for elites and support for the people, but those two camps were discursively constructed along national and ideological lines. Trump's targets of populist ire

were bureaucrats, immigrants from what he referred to as "shithole" countries and the press (Denvir, 2020). Trump's discourse follows a populist style "marked not by 'properness' and formality, but rather by informality and transgression" (Ostiguy et al., 2021, p. 6). Specifically, Trump's transgressive communication vilified media outlets like CNN as "fake news" (Kalb, 2018), Congress as a "swamp" full of corruption (Kalb, 2018), and immigrants from Mexico as "bad *hombres*" bent on committing crime (Rhodan, 2016). In this way, Trump used visceral and racist language to discursively construct his vision of nationalized, homogenous people who fit in and identified with his mediated image. Sanders, on the other hand, illustrates a tonally different, left-wing variation of populism (Moffitt, 2016). Sanders set his sights on well-connected government officials and the extremely wealthy as obfuscating the will of the people (Molyneux, 2017). Sanders shows populist tendencies in his impassioned and informal way of communicating about the inequality perpetuated by the billionaires of the financial elite and the need for US government role expansion (Sullivan & Costa, 2020). However, Sanders, unlike Trump, did not discursively construct "the people" ideologically nor did he frame his opponents as illegitimate (Serhan, 2020b). Though the two were bitter rivals with antithetical plans for the direction of the country, they shared those important "common roots in the motives of popular economic and cultural distress" (Grzymala-Busse, 2019, p. 718). Though the discourse itself varies substantially, populism here provides a general mechanism for mobilizing and appealing to would-be voters.

2.1.2. Scott Walker's Populism

While populist US politicians like Trump and Sanders compete on the national stage, there are also populist figures embedded within localized state governments, such as former Republican Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker. After an unsuccessful gubernatorial campaign in 2006 as a Milwaukee County executive, Walker won the following election cycle by defeating Democrat Tom Barrett to become governor of Wisconsin (Isenstadt, 2015). After surviving a special recall election for his anti-union policies in 2012, Walker won re-election in 2014 (Gold, 2014). Early in his 2010 campaign, Walker drew the attention of Americans for Prosperity, a right-wing political advocacy group funded by conservative billionaire brothers David and Charles Koch (Hertel-Fernandez et al., 2018). Bolstered by the continued support and approval of the Koch brothers, Walker entered the 2016 presidential race. Despite coming in as a frontrunner, Walker's campaign ended after 70 days, owing to downward sliding polling numbers and dwindling funds (Hertel-Fernandez et al., 2018). Two years later, Democrat Tony Evers denied Walker a third term for governor of Wisconsin by defeating him in the 2018 gubernatorial election (Strauss, 2018).

Walker's initial campaign platform emphasized promises to create 250,000 jobs and cut taxes for small businesses and individual citizens alike (Isenstadt, 2015; Nelson, 2017). Walker brought about his proposed tax legislation which cut rates for low-income Wisconsinites (Olsen, 2015) while also reducing the tax rates for the wealthy at the expense of state employees (Pommer, 2009). To fund these tax breaks, Walker pursued cuts to state employee wages and benefits. Walker also fought fiercely to dismantle collective bargaining rights in Wisconsin under the auspices that workers deserved to be freed from having to join and pay into unions (Kaufman, 2015). As part of a broader Koch-funded initiative to weaken organizations that support liberal aims, Walker was successful in his state-wide anti-labor efforts with public union membership in Wisconsin "falling from around 50% in 2011 to around 19% by 2017" (Hertel-Fernandez et al., 2018, para. 8).

Despite his staunch anti-labor policies and the state's rising levels of inequality, Walker branded himself as a populist by successfully tapping into rural Wisconsin voters' political consciousness. The discourse of Walker framed him as a champion of a largely homogenous group of white working-class Wisconsinites by promising them freedom and flexibility (Cramer, 2016b). Walker hid his connection to billionaire-funded agenda items by projecting a mediated image of himself as an ordinary citizen, bringing brown bag lunches to work and riding his Harley-Davidson motorcycle around Wisconsin on weekends (Savage, 2021). On the other hand, he discursively constructed a necessary liberal elite foe that undermined the will of *his* people. According to Walker, this liberal elite lived in the state and took the form of everyone from unionized ironworkers to professors in the University of Wisconsin system (Kaufman, 2015). Much like Trump, Walker's populist articulations are contextual, performative, and discursive.

2.2. Mediated Musician Resistance

Though populists today surge into governments around the world thanks to large bases of popular support, their messages do not appeal to everyone. Many left-leaning musicians continue to add their voices to growing choruses of opposition to new right-wing populist leadership. Musicians discursively confront these politicians both musically and through conversation on social media (Holub, 2018). Musicians often utilize their songwriting and performance as protest music, which is a potent platform for criticism of political leadership and policy with a deep history. From the time of the Union protest song "John Brown's Body" stirring abolitionists during the US American Civil War of the 1860s (Henwood, 2017) to the present day, protest music continues as an important and common form of resistance (Garratt, 2018). Though popular culture, such as protest songs, play "a part in informing people's dispositions to the world and to each other" (Street et al., 2013, p. 22), the political effects of popular culture are not solely limited to media artifacts themselves.

Non-musical forms of musician political activism and resistance are also coming to prominence in the hyper-connected digital age. Social media opens a channel for musicians to generally oppose politicians (e.g., Liakat, 2020), but it also allows greater visibility for musicians to publicly dispute politicians' unauthorized use of their songs. While politicians using the songs of musicians averse to their campaign goals is not new (Knopper, 2015), musicians can only now begin a direct confrontation with politicians about music usage. Prior to the advent of social media, such confrontations were settled through backchannels and cease-and-desist letters, where now such a dispute can quickly become public. For example, Canadian folk singer Neil Young is notable for actively calling out Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign on social media for using his song "Rockin' in the Free World" without Young's consent (Greene, 2018). Though politicians can legally license and acquire the rights to musical works without that musician's expressed consent (Schwender, 2017), social media serves as an effective opportunity for musicians to fight back against the cooptation and appropriation of their songs.

2.2.1. Dropkick Murphys

Like Neil Young, the Celtic punk band Dropkick Murphys are unafraid of voicing their political affiliations and opinions on the usage of their music. However, to understand Dropkick Murphys' perspective, one must trace the band's trajectory after forming in the South Boston neighborhood of Quincy in 1996. From the beginning, the band took a do-it-yourself (DIY) approach to playing, recording, and pressing their own music (Juul, 2016). The band gained popularity after opening for Boston ska band The Mighty Mighty Bosstones in 1997 (Ankeny, n.d.; Juul, 2016), which led to signing with independent record label Hellcat Records to release their first full-length album in 1998 (Purcell, 2007). In the years following, the band went through several member changes, with bassist Ken Casey remaining the only constant member (Purcell, 2007). The band's biggest break came when their Woody Guthrie-inspired song "I'm Shipping Up to Boston" was used in Martin Scorsese's 2006 crime thriller *The Departed* (Ankeny, n.d.). In the years since their formation, Dropkick Murphys collectively played over 5,000 live shows, released 10 studio albums, and sold over 3.6 million album units (Ankeny, n.d.; Dodero, 2018).

Though not all musicians with political valence should be conflated with populism, Dropkick Murphys' unique combination of strong convictions, frequent political critiques, engagement with causes, and economic autonomy fosters left-wing populist appeal. Though the band's music has now found a mass audience, their independence from major record label jurisdiction ensures their ability to remain politically outspoken. Dropkick Murphys began releasing their music on their own Born & Bred Records imprint in 2007, allowing them to retain independence and creative control (Ankeny, n.d.). Founding band member Ken Casey explains the choice to turn down major labels as a political decision harkening back to his identification "as a dyed-in-the-wool Democrat with a deeply blue-collar ethos" (Dodero, 2018, para. 16). In addition to their DIY operation, the band makes their political positions clear, from contributing music to oppose former President George W. Bush (Wright, 2004) to supporting the pro-union organizations like Workers' Rights Emergency Response Fund ("Dropkick Murphys rock out in support of Wisconsin union workers," 2011). In this way, Dropkick Murphys' left-wing political activism is more encompassing and goes beyond the level of many popular bands.

The mediated image of Dropkick Murphys created by this extensive political engagement—in particular, their backing of pro-worker groups and critiques of conservativism as detrimental to workers—frames them as a group with liberal populist tendencies by ideologically situating the band as both members and defenders of "the people," who are constructed as working-class, union-oriented US Americans. Dropkick Murphys' ability to freely exert their support for this articulation of "the people" put them at odds with the right-wing, union-busting Scott Walker from the outset. Together, this background provides the context necessary to understand the moments prior to Dropkick Murphys publicly opposing Walker's use of their most popular song in his 2015 Iowa campaign stop.

3. Methods

It is crucial to consider these social media messages with both visibility and political impact as nexuses of discourse in the age of new media. Around these posts, an audience of supporters and critics coalesce to create conversations where meanings are constructed and contested (Mills, 1997). With this key consideration in mind, I developed the following critical discourse analysis method to answer my central research question.

3.1. Data Collection and Sample Description

I sought out a particular instance of discursive musician resistance to a politician on social media. I engaged in qualitative purposive sampling (Tracy, 2019) by locating strong exemplars of political discourse within the context of popular music. Specifically, I sought posts covered by popular press sources like *Rolling Stone* with at least 500 responses and were less than five years old at the time of original writing. The media artifacts selected for analysis originate from Dropkick Murphys January 24, 2015, message on Twitter rebuking then-Wisconsin-Governor Scott Walker for using their music without permission. Using the digital data aggregation service BrandWatch, I captured the entire conversation surrounding the tweet by amassing a sample of each unique tweet response while eliminating retweets devoid of original discourse

and those posts by automated bot accounts. After cleaning the data, my sample consisted of 1,115 responses to the original tweet.

I remained mindful of the implications of the qualitative, hands-on work required by ideological criticism. Qualitative discursive analyses necessitate a close rhetorical reading of data while giving equitable attention to all the "differing discourses and ideologies contending and struggling for dominance" (Wodak, 2001, p. 11). My qualitative analysis weaves together aspects of holistic reflexive qualitative methodology (e.g., Tracy, 2019) with traditional rhetorical analysis aimed exclusively at interrogating a specific set of texts. In doing so, I utilized a critical discourse analysis method. Specifically, critical discourse analyses examine the "dialectical relationships between discourse and other elements of social practice. The role of discourse cannot be taken for granted and needs to be established through analysis" (Smith, 2013, p. 64). This hybrid approach to bridging critical qualitative and rhetorical work adds to a growing body of literature that carefully incorporates context and social practice into the field of rhetoric (Senda-Cook et al., 2016). In keeping with this approach, ample descriptions and quotations were pulled directly from the corpus of data because they are core to both critical discourse and rhetorical analysis (Foss, 2018). In this way, the tweet responses from fans and critics serve as compact yet robust chunks of text that speak to the nature of the sample without sacrificing context.

3.2. Analytical Procedures

I adhered to Foss's (2018) four-step approach to ideological criticism. In the context of this study, these steps begin with identifying the presented elements of the artifacts. In this case, "identifying the basic observable features of the artifact" (Foss, 2018, p. 243) means recording the core elements of the responses to Dropkick Murphys' tweet. The first step of identification includes calling attention to aspects such as major arguments, common terms, and metaphors. Second, I identified the suggested elements linked to the presented elements. Suggested elements go beyond simply translating elements to engaging in interpretations of meaning and synthesizing the core concepts. Third, I formulated ideologies implicit within the artifacts. This involves categorizing and organizing suggested elements into "a coherent framework that constitutes the ideology [argued to be] implicit in the [artifacts]" (Foss, 2018, p. 246). Finally, my analysis concluded by identifying the functions served by the ideologies. This final step ties the ideologies to the function of the artifacts and considers the consequences these artifacts have in the world.

4. Analysis

I discovered that several recurrent ideologies inform the conversation around Dropkick Murphys' anti-Scott Walker tweet. Though the tweet attracted both opponents and proponents of Walker, most of the discourse centered around individuals refuting, attacking, and minimizing Dropkick Murphys for their vocal opposition to Walker. The most prominent ideologies articulated in the conversation include considering the band's political activism as alienating the people and facing economic consequences, re-envisioning punk rock as right-wing, and framing Dropkick Murphys as inherently un-American and undesirable.

4.1. Alienating the People and Facing Economic Consequences

A major ideology that underpins much of the critical response to Dropkick Murphys frames the band as foolish for dividing their audience with a controversial political message. In keeping with populism's dichotomous frame (Waisbord, 2020), critics of the band's tweet construct the band as against the people for refuting Walker. In this view, Dropkick Murphys undermine the will of people they claim to care about because many of those Americans identify with Walker's supposedly people-oriented right-wing image. Walker supporters articulate this ideology by both warning the band against alienating their fans and proactively invalidating the band's political beliefs:

> Example 1: "It sounds like @DropkickMurphys hates conservatives? Ok, I'll tell all my friends u shit on half the country!"

> Example 2: "Hey guys—Enjoy your music, just learned I hate your politics….Shut up and sing!"

> Example 3: "Grow up and get a real life. Please get over yourselves. No one cares about ANY band's political agenda."

In addition to framing the band as against the will of the people Walker represents, this line of thinking suggests that those with public-facing platforms in the entertainment industry should leave politics to the politicians. This ideological construction demands the separation of "politically neutral" and profitable entertainment from activism is also reflected in contemporary conversations about athletes "sticking to sports" (Kang, 2017). Though musicians like Taylor Swift have intentionally entered the political arena by coming out to support specific politicians (Driessen, 2022), here critics of Dropkick Murphys consider value-based political activism as ill-advised for musicians who should only be recording, selling, and playing music. Where Taylor Swift calmed tensions by extolling her fans to find their own political voice after stepping into a new role as a celebrity politician (Driessen, 2022), Dropkick Murphys made no such concessions and faced backlash for their opposition to Walker.

In further communicating economic consequences to the band for their opposition to Walker, Walker supporters frame musicians embedded in the culture industry as hypocritical for indiscriminately taking money from all buyers while simultaneously complaining about certain people using their music:

Example 4: "You are owned by the record company, they have every right to use 'your' music….You already sold…U don't own…idiots."

Example 5: "Too fucking greedy so reduced to complaining while cashing the check! So punk rock!"

Example 6: "Maybe you shouldn't sellout if you don't want your music 'used.' LOL."

Critics of Dropkick Murphys' political tweet argue that their anti-Walker resistance is hollow and performative. This ideological frame introduces the term "sellout" to brand any band which disputes the use of their song. Despite Dropkick Murphys' focus on independence and avoidance of major labels (Ankeny, n.d.; Dodero, 2018), supporters of Walker rhetorically construct the band as beholden to an imagined "record company" and greedy for allowing their music to be sold to the people they criticize. Here there are consequences to Dropkick Murphys for making music within a capitalist system and those dictate the band should either seek to make money or be activists. For Walker supporters, constructing this viewpoint, Dropkick Murphys undermine the will of the people, unnecessarily insert a political agenda into their work, and flaunt the rules of capitalism.

4.2. Punk Rock Conservatives and Paradoxical Liberals

Instead of brushing off the band as inconsequential liberals, Walker supporters rally around a revisionist view of punk rock. These critics argue that the right-wing conservativism of Walker is more ideologically compatible with punk rock than the pro-union liberalism of Dropkick Murphys by conflating notions of punk disobedience with "small government" conservativism:

Example 7: "A pro status quo government punk band…Walker is more punk than you are.''

Example 8: "Not sure if you realize this @Dropkick Murphys, but punk rock is anti-government. What's closest to no govt? Small govt. Support @ScottWalker.''

Example 9: "Irony: DM, a punk band, telling others what to do….What was the punk genre built on? Defiance."

Punk rock is often characterized as a "symbolic negation of the existing social order, expressed through confronta-

tional style and transgressive performance" (Martin-Iverson, 2018, p. 129). Despite this common conception, punk rock is a multifaceted genre that contains a variety of possible dispositions (Laing, 2015), which means punk rock is not necessarily inherently liberal or conservative in nature. However, punk rock initially emerged as both a challenge and alternative to rock music when the latter "become more integrated with mainstream commercial culture and lost its political bite during the late 1970s" (Moore, 2007, p. 442). Additionally, the presence of notable and vociferous anti-conservative punk rock bands like Reagan Youth and NOFX (Cogan, 2006) suggests that contemporary US punk rock is situated as oppositional to the status quo of both financial and social conservatism. Regardless, Walker supporters ideologically resituate punk rock as inherently conservative to match Walker's populist appeal and political orientation.

Through this ideological lens, not only are Dropkick Murphys framed as fake punks fighting to maintain a perceived over-regulatory, pro-union status quo but the band is also constructed as hypocritical betrayers of supposed liberal tolerance by turning their backs on the people for whom Walker supposedly speaks. This new twist on punk ideology and history brands liberals as intolerant, hypocritical, and antithetical to the true tenets and meanings of punk rock. This ideological perspective builds Walker's people-focused right-wing populism as faithful to true punk rock, while Dropkick Murphys are cast as paradoxical liberal punks trying to enforce oxymoronic "big government" punk ideology against the will of the people.

4.3. Dropkick Murphys as the Undesirable, Un-American Other

In the final overwhelmingly recurrent ideological construction of Dropkick Murphys for their message, Walker supporters resort to personal, ad hominem attacks on the band that positioned them as the undesirable and "un-American other." Because logic dictates that "to be something is always not to be something else" (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 128), othering is a way of ideologically constructing individuals as antagonistic outsiders (hooks, 2006). Though populism is not always indicative of nationalism (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017), the two often intermingle in forms of right-wing populism, especially more radical xenophobic variants. Thus, if the Walker supporters called to by his form of populism are true Americans, Dropkick Murphys must be everything but true Americans. First, critics of the band utilize insults to frame Dropkick Murphys as unpatriotic:

Example 11: "Bunch of douche bag collectivist[s]. You guys have sucked for the last 10 years. Eat a dick commies!''

Example 12: "Nice, teach your fans it's ok to hate people because you disagree with them. Nazis."

To ideologically position Dropkick Murphys as antithetical to US American democracy, Walker supporters reference the band as both fascist Nazis and collectivist communists. Though communism and fascism are diametrically opposed government orientations, critics seek out the most viscerally un-American ideologies to attach to the band. In addition to accusations of Dropkick Murphys as un-American, critics additionally frame the band as childish, feminine, gay, unattractive, alcoholic, and drug-addled:

> Example 13: "So, you've just demonstrated to everyone that you're just a bunch of sniveling, bitchy little girls."

> Example 14: "Yeah, please stop using the music of these talentless homos."

> Example 15: "Such weak sauce. Be men, not babies. Who cares who uses your music? #Selfimportant."

Critics ideologically position Dropkick Murphys as outside of supposedly attractive dominant US American heterosexual masculinity by attaching othering characteristics to the band. Instead of powerful upstanding patriots, Walker supporters paint the band with antagonistic, nondominant labels meant to delegitimize. Considering populist leaders may appeal to societal norms and stereotypes when constructing their images (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017), discursive othering presents an effective way for populist followers to signal that someone does not fit with "the people." These labels, meant to marginalize and draw ire, ideologically position the band as all things nondominant and un-American to Walker's heteronormative American right-wing populist appeal.

5. Discussion and Limitations

Within the conversation surrounding Dropkick Murphys' tweet, a vocal majority of pro-Walker supporters took the opportunity to dismiss the band's criticism in line with populism in a variety of ways. First, Walker supporters take issue with Dropkick Murphys alienating a large segment of their conservative audience by disputing Walker's use of their music. Additionally, Walker supporters articulate that value-based politics tarnishes supposedly value-free music. Second, to preemptively cut off the argument of the left-wing band with a populist pro-union appeal, critics ideologically shift the meanings of punk rock into line with Walker's "small government" conservativism. Simultaneously, these same critics present liberalism as an inherently flawed political ideology with an anti-punk rock belief in "big government." Third, Walker supporters contend that Dropkick Murphys' form of liberalism is un-American and undesirable by lobbing insults and attaching supposedly unsavory marginalized identities to the band.

Much like how populist leaders seek to maintain a connection with their supporters (Holliday, 2016), this study shows that supporters also engage in communicating connections with their leader. Instead of isolated arguments with no deeper impact, the mediated discourse of social media users does things (Mills, 1997). These layers of discourse accumulate and stratify into meanings beyond the small scale of a Twitter post. Importantly, the discursive constructions uncovered in this study contribute to a diverse body of scholarship.

This study builds on scholarly literature at the nexus of politics and popular culture. The response of Walker supporters in this study runs counter to the increasing trend of popular culture figures becoming "celebrity politicians" who disclose their political affiliations (Driessen, 2022). Informed by populism's "friend vs. foe" framing, most Walker-supporting fans of Dropkick Murphys in the data seemingly could not remain fans of both. The antagonism of populism surfaced most viscerally when former Dropkick Murphys fans discussed destroying band merchandise to symbolically communicate that the band is now an enemy of "the people." This discourse of audience alienation, economic consequences, and policing of political affiliations builds an ideology which positions music and politics as clearly divided, even though popular music (Garratt, 2018) and populism (Moffitt, 2016) ostensibly speak to what common people want.

This study also contributes to a growing body of populism scholarship by providing a snapshot of contemporary populism at work within mediated discourse. For example, Moffitt (2016) states that a key aspect of populism is the image of a populist leader and "the people" being rendered by strategically highlighting and obscuring certain details. By discursively framing the transgressive anti-status quo nature of punk rock as in line with Walker's right-wing union-busting and attacks on public institutions, Walker supporters showcase populism's ideological flexibility to ignore punk's challenge to corporate interests (Moore, 2007), deep history of outspoken left-wing bands (Cogan, 2006), and Walker's Koch connections (Hertel-Fernandez et al., 2018). But the status quo is similarly flexible within the scope of populism. By framing the band as oppositional to all things perceived as good and natural within a dominant heteronormative ideology (van der Toorn et al., 2020) that Walkers fits comfortably within, the band is "othered" so that their perceived difference can be exploited, derided, and made to uphold the status quo (hooks, 2006). Through this study, we can see that discourses, like right-wing populism and heteronormativity in this example, shape and reinforce one another.

There were several limitations to this critical discourse analysis. Most critically, though this study is symptomatic of larger discursive new media practices and builds on a growing body of literature regarding musicians' political discourse (e.g., Driessen, 2022), more research is required to develop a deeper understanding of the multiple

intersections of politics and popular culture. Further, this area of scholarship provides important context to work on protest music (e.g., Garratt, 2018; Henwood, 2017) to create a more cohesive picture of musician resistance. Second, though populism and instances of musician resistance are truly global phenomena (Serhan, 2020a), this study is constrained to an English-speaking focus. Future studies may continue to explore and unpack these conversations surrounding discursive musician resistance across national boundaries, languages, and cultures to formulate new understandings.

6. Conclusion

This study reveals a multilayered world of discursive ideological constructions all related back to populism. The discussion around the tweet provides insight into the polarizing, politically charged ideological constructions that would later come to characterize antagonistic conversations around Donald Trump's frequent and provoking tweets throughout much of his presidency (Humphrey, 2021). Specifically, this study shows the communicative mechanisms of populism at the intersection of politics and popular culture through the discourse of social media users. Supporters of the right-wing Walker rely upon ideologically constructing boundaries, connections, and attacks in a way that mirrors the broader contours of populism. Populism and discourse are not fundamentally ideological (Mills, 1997; Ostiguy et al., 2021), but each provides a potent vessel for ideology. This study is symptomatic of larger communicative strategies of defense and attack in an era defined by new media and populism.

In penning a short tweet critical of Walker and his use of their song, Dropkick Murphys ignited an impassioned discussion that swirled around their message for weeks. This micro-level snapshot provides a case study where average social media users take to their keyboards to build ideologies which are strategically constructed to elevate, obscure, and marginalize along the lines of populist logic. Looking at growing instances of contentious discourse on new media platforms between populist supporters and critics reveals not only the impact of discourse but the functioning of populism itself.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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