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Straightedge Youth:
Subculture Genesis, Permutation, and Identity Formation

by

Robert Thomas Wood 

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Sociology

Edmonton, Alberta
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ABSTRACT

Observers typically construe straightedge as an anti-drinking, anti-drug, anti-casual-sex, and pro-animal-rights youth subculture. Despite increased levels of media coverage about the group, scant academic research exists on the straightedge phenomenon. This dissertation is a case study of straightedge, using data gathered from interviews, content analysis, and semiotic analysis. My general research objectives are two-fold.

The first objective is intrinsic in nature. In order to address a persisting substantive gap among existing subcultures literature, this dissertation elaborates a highly descriptive overview of straightedge, including both its contemporary and historical dynamics. I trace the origins of straightedge to the Washington DC punk rock scene in the very early 1980s, where punk singer Ian MacKaye articulated straightedge as a lifestyle choice involving abstinence from alcohol, illicit drugs, and casual sex. I trace also the development of several noteworthy transitions in straightedge cultural boundaries, and I discuss these transitions in terms of influential socio-historical contexts. My analysis suggests that straightedge culture is internally highly variable, with straightedgers often differing in their understandings and experiences of straightedge.

Many other subcultures studies provide evidence of both internal and structural variability among subcultural groups. Nonetheless, diachronic cultural processes remain inadequately addressed by existing subcultures theories. My second general research goal, which is instrumental in nature, is to utilize the straightedge case for the purpose of elaborating a conceptual framework of transition within subcultural groups. Amalgamating and modifying central tenets of interactionist, constructionist, and chaos theories, this dissertation illustrates how macro-level processes of subcultural emergence,

transition, and schism are inextricably linked to micro-level processes of identity formation.

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Chapter One

Introduction

My Relationship to Straightedge

My goal in this dissertation is to illuminate some of the central dynamics of an understudied youth (sub)culture, known as straightedge. No researcher can be completely neutral and detached from the social phenomena that he or she studies. Since straightedge is a phenomenon that has impacted my personal and professional life in a number of ways over the past ten years, it is appropriate that readers begin with some understanding of my own relationship to straightedge.

Every existing media and academic account of straightedge describes it as a philosophy and lifestyle characterized by abstinence from alcohol, drugs, casual sex, and even meat and animal products in some cases. Ironically, the very first time I heard the term straightedge was in 1990 when I was 18 years old and drunk at a house party. I was sitting on a couch next to a guy I hardly knew, and I asked him why he wasn't drinking. He explained that he was straightedge, and that he didn't drink. His decision to abstain did not seem unusual or odd to me. Indeed, until I was 17 years old, I never drank. When I was a very young child, my parents affiliated themselves for several years with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and Mormons are called to abstain from alcohol (among other things). Thus, as a young child, alcohol seemed like a "bad thing" from my point of view. As I grew into my early to mid teens, I was consistently frustrated and saddened by my peers' apparent glorification of alcohol use. To me, drinking seemed weak, immoral, and dangerous.

In the summer before beginning grade 12, on a camping trip, I took my first drink. Two drinks later I was, without a doubt, drunk for the very first time in my life. Grade 12 proceeded to be a turbulent year in my life (as it is for many teens, no doubt). It was a

year of questioning my identity, my life goals, my relationships, and above all my values and beliefs. It was a year of confusion. It was also a year of regular drinking with my friends, the beginning of a strong six year addiction to cigarettes, and it marked my introduction to the hardcore/punk-rock music scene in my home city. Furthermore, it was at the end of this year that I found myself drunk, at a party, and chatting on a couch with a straightedge abstainer.

The straightedge phenomenon became difficult to ignore as I further immersed myself in the local hardcore music scene of the early 1990s. Hardcore music was unlike any other music I had ever encountered. It was fast and intense. Similar to punk rock music, hardcore has a raw edge, characterized by driving, staccato, machine-gun drum beats, fast heavy guitar riffs, and simple repetitive bass lines. The vocalists typically shout or scream, and group chants and anthems frequently punctuate the lyrics. Borrowing from the heavy metal music genre, the speed and intensity of hardcore often gets broken up by interludes characterized by slower tempos, double bass drum beats, and intricate guitar riffs.

The sound of hardcore, for me, was not the only attraction. At the time, the sonic qualities of the music, the lyrics, and the venues where I listened to the music all combined together into one thematic package that seemed to articulate my life experiences. The music sounded angry and militant, and the lyrics always were moralistic, socio-critical, and preachy. I remember that the songs were about a number of different themes and topics, including social justice, hypocrisy, breaking with custom, and fighting back against the alleged corruption of society. Often the songs were also about straightedge. When I first heard Ian MacKaye (lead singer for the straightedge

band, Minor Threat) singing songs about the stupidity of drugs and alcohol, I could not help but be impressed. To me, at the time, this music had something profoundly important to say. To me, the music was about personal power and social change. It seemed strong.

I began to pay closer attention to other straightedge themes in the music to which I listened: songs about "thinking straight;" songs about the weakness and moral degeneracy of teen culture: and songs about straightedgers not being alone because straightedge is a family. I began to think about my earlier teen perceptions of alcohol, and as I progressed into my early 20s I became acutely self conscious of my drinking and smoking. I gave up cigarettes and became a very casual and infrequent drinker. Even then, my drinking experiences were characterized by a low-key sense of guilt.

I remember in 1992 going to a gig featuring a local straightedge band, called Blindside. At the beginning of the show, after the band had assembled its gear upon the stage, the lead singer addressed the audience: "Who here does drugs (a few calls and whistles from the audience)? Yeah, well fuck you! Drugs are for losers!" Directly following this condemnation, the band proceeded into its musical set. For almost an hour, the band played a series of short and speedy songs that addressed topics such as the alleged evils of drug use, unity among "straightedge" youth, social injustice, self-respect, and the necessity of fighting perceived enemies. As the musical set progressed, I noticed the slogans emblazoned on audience members' clothes. Compared to slogans I had observed at other punk rock or hardcore shows, many of these slogans were unusual. Some noteworthy examples included: "Straightedge Youth: A New Direction,"

"Straightedge: Drinking Sucks," and "Straightedge: Watching You Fall Only Makes Me Stronger."

After this show, I began to explore straightedge further. I already listened to straightedge music on a daily basis. I became acutely aware and conscious of drinking and smoking, and I even attempted vegetarianism. Nonetheless, I never (in my mind) officially "became straightedge." It seemed to me a leap or a conversion that required a firm commitment. Straightedgers often described the transition to straightedge as akin to taking a vow or oath, and I never felt that it was one that I fully could live up to or necessarily even wanted to live up to. In any case, as I entered my middle 20s, and as other facets of my life occupied a more central position in defining my self-identity, the idea of straightedge progressively lost resonance with me (at least on a personal level). I continued to listen to hardcore music, but the idea of straightedge became mostly nostalgic.

As I finished my MA degree, I became increasingly interested in the idea of straightedge from an academic, sociological point of view. I began to wonder why some people become straightedge, and what was going on in their lives when they made that transition. I wondered too if the meaning of straightedge changed for them as time passed. Thus, in 1996 I began to search the academic data-bases for articles about straightedge, only to find that none existed. Apparently, at that time, researchers had overlooked the straightedge phenomenon. A scant few media accounts existed but they were cursory and stereotypical in their treatment of straightedge and straightedgers. Since then, at least two academic articles (one that I wrote) have appeared on the topic of straightedge (see Irwin, 1999; Wood, 1999a), but both of these are preliminary

exploratory studies providing a relatively brief overview of the straightedge phenomenon. For me, therefore, conducting a reasonably comprehensive case-study of straightedge and its adherents constitutes the task at hand.

In sum, readers should be aware at the outset of this study that I do not perceive myself as a straightedger and I do not consciously describe my lifestyle as a straightedge lifestyle. Having made these points, readers should also be aware that I hold no particular antagonism towards straightedge and my treatment of it certainly is not motivated by any kind of manifest political agenda. Indeed, straightedge is a phenomenon for which I have held some level of respect and I have even problematized my own identity in relation to it. My general goal is to better understand straightedge and its adherents. I merely want readers to know that this goal did not emerge in a vacuum. It is at least partially inspired by my own subjective experiences.

Research Context and Rationale for this Study

According to American newspaper reports, the straightedge youth subculture primarily is a North American phenomenon that emerged during the early 1980s amidst the American punk rock scene (Krist, 1996; Levinson, 1997; Varner, 1995). Both the print and television news media purport that straightedgers adhere strictly to a philosophy and lifestyle characterized by opposition to alcohol, drugs, casual sex, and animal exploitation (Buckley, 1996; Krist, 1996; Lagatutta, 1996; Levinson, 1997; Varner, 1995). In recent years, some media accounts have deviantized the straightedge subculture as a whole by focussing on a very small minority of contemporary straightedgers, who allegedly engage in brutal violence as a means of enforcing

straightedge ideology (Levinson, 1997). Still other media accounts, however, suggest that the straightedge philosophy and lifestyle primarily is a personal choice that tends to galvanize around the ideals of self-respect and personal growth (Johnston, 1999).

Apart from these brief media accounts, other researchers largely have overlooked the straightedge phenomenon. Prior to 1999, the few existing academic references to straightedge were both vague and fleeting (see Young and Craig, 1997: 179; Zellner, 1995: 12). During 1998 and 1999, in response to this substantive gap, I conducted a brief, yet highly descriptive, pilot study (a version of which will appear as a chapter in this dissertation) of the straightedge phenomenon, using a vast collection of straightedge music lyrics as my primary data source (see Wood, 1999a).

My pilot research suggests that straightedge has its origins in the American punk rock scene during the very early 1980s. More specifically, straightedge apparently finds its genesis in a 1981 hardcore punk rock song by Minor Threat entitled, "Straight Edge." The song condemns drugs and drug use with lyrics such as: "Laugh at the thought of eating ludes -- Laugh at the thought of sniffing glue -- Always gonna keep in touch -- Never want to use a crutch -- I've got the straight edge" (Minor Threat, 1981a). The song resonated with a number of American punk rockers and other youth subculture galvanized around a militant opposition to alcohol, drug use, and casual sex. Today, twenty years after Ian MacKaye wrote the "Straight Edge" song, self-professed straightedgers can be found in most North American cities and their numbers worldwide are likely in the thousands.

In addition to confirming common perceptions of the straightedge subculture's central lifestyle tenets, my pilot study indicates that that straightedge phenomenon has

experienced several substantial thematic transitions and permutations over the past twenty years. In particular, following a period of increased militancy, as well as the incorporation of animal rights issues into general straightedge subcultural ideology, the straightedge subculture spawned at least two crucial (albeit minority) schismatic factions (Wood, 1999), each of which contends to define the "true" meaning of straightedge.

This pilot study of the straightedge phenomenon yielded two crucial implications for future research. First, given the relative spontaneity with which straightedge emerged, and given its persistence into contemporary times, the straightedge phenomenon likely can yield significant insight into questions of how and why subcultures emerge, as well as how and why they persist over time and space. Second, identifying several relatively competitive straightedge factions, my pilot research suggests also that the straightedge phenomenon may yield insight into processes of tension and schism among contemporary youth cultures. Indeed, processes of tension and schism have been observed in other subcultures (Cohen, 1972; Hebdige, 1979; Moore, 1993; Young and Craig, 1997; Wood, 1999b). These processes, however, remain largely unexplored and unexplained at a theoretical level.

While my pilot study outlined several broad straightedge cultural trends, and while it suggested at least two points of conceptual departure for future researchers, it did not explore the life experiences of individual straightedgers (at least apart from the music lyrics that some of them write). On its own, this early research is somewhat problematic insofar as it discusses straightedge transitions in the absence of the people who experience these transitions first-hand. The unintended result is that the straightedge phenomenon, to some extent, gets reified by my earlier analysis.

Conducting interviews and engaging in participant observation, Irwin (1999) also completed a preliminary exploration of straightedge culture. He confirms several of my own observations and his ethnographic approach transcends the limitations of music lyrics as a primary data source. Irwin (1999) confirms the overarching lifestyle tenets of the straightedge phenomenon, as well as the presence of potential schisms within the group. He also confirms the importance of music within the straightedge youth culture. Extending beyond my own findings, Irwin's conversations with New York straightedgers indicate that many of them perceive straightedge as a rebellion against the excesses of mainstream teen culture and as a vehicle for personal growth and empowerment.

General Research Goals

My pilot study provides only an introduction to the dynamics of the straightedge subculture. Even Irwin (1999: 377) acknowledges at the conclusion of his own study that "[f]urther analysis is necessary before a more mature picture of Straight Edge can be developed." This persisting substantive gap within the literature on youth (sub)culture serves as my initial point of departure. Thus, at one level, my goal in this dissertation is to address a substantive gap within the subcultures literature by presenting an in-depth, intrinsic analysis of straightedge culture. In other words, by elaborating a history of the straightedge phenomenon coupled with a distinct focus upon the experiences and perceptions of contemporary straightedge individuals, I hope to establish a comprehensive substantive foundation that can empirically ground future investigations of straightedge.

Apart from addressing a substantive gap, my analysis of the straightedge phenomenon will also serve an instrumental purpose, insofar as I intend to remedy a crucial theoretical deficiency within the existing subcultures literature. Many studies implicitly suggest that subcultures are static, closed and objectively given phenomena Furthermore, many studies and theories treat subculture as a synchronic event as opposed to a diachronic, historical process. This dissertation, at the most fundamental theoretical level, is a response to these problems. Thus, drawing upon interactionist reconceptualizations of the subculture concept, and critically building upon already established subculture perspectives, my goal is to explain the straightedge phenomenon as an historical, diachronic, changing, and socially (re)constructed process. Having offered this explanation, I will conclude this dissertation with a novel theoretical synthesis that can properly accommodate and explain the fluid and diachronic processes of subcultural identity formation, subcultural emergence, and subcultural change.

Dissertation Outline

In order to foreshadow what the reader can expect to encounter in this dissertation, a brief overview of the subsequent chapters is in order. The goal of chapter two is to provide a comparative and critical overview of influential theories in subcultures research, as well as to define and expand a number of crucial concepts related to culture and subculture. Drawing upon this conceptual and theoretical overview, chapter two concludes with a series of research questions that structure my analysis of the straightedge phenomenon. Chapter three justifies the case study research methodology guiding this dissertation, and it argues for the importance of data triangulation when

conducting case study research. Chapter three also provides an overview of the research techniques that I utilize to collect and process data, and it offers some reflection on the rationale behind my choice and exclusion of particular research methods.

Chapters four through eight are substantive and analytical in nature, and each chapter addresses one or more of the research questions identified in chapter two. Relying upon a content analysis of straightedge music lyrics, chapter four provides initial insight into the broad cultural themes and transitions experienced by the straightedge subculture since its emergence in the early 1980s. This chapter illustrates the crucial idea that straightedge culture has endured both continuity and change throughout its life span.

Having acknowledged the limitations of music lyrics as a data source, chapters five, six, and seven rely heavily on interview data as a means of delving deeper into individuals' lived experience of straightedge. Chapter five primarily explores the shared and divergent meanings that individual straightedgers attribute to the straightedge concept. In particular, this chapter explores the ways in which typical straightedge values and lifestyle tenets get subjectively (re)articulated by individual straightedgers. Acknowledging that culture does not emerge and get reconstructed in a social and historical vacuum, the primary goal of chapter six is to examine the socio-historical contexts in which the straightedge subculture emerged and developed. In particular, chapter six explores the ways in which straightedgers and straightedge culture have been influenced by punk culture, mainstream teen culture, and America's 1980s "war on drugs" cultural ethos.

Similarly relying on interview data, chapter seven focuses on the issue of identity development. The chapter examines individuals' transitions into a straightedge identity,

and it explores the ways in which identity gets maintained and reconstructed through social interaction. Chapter eight comprises a semiotic analysis of straightedge symbols. The goal of this chapter is to explore the ways in which straightedge symbols demarcate straightedge cultural boundaries by encoding or embodying straightedge values and beliefs. In turn, this chapter argues that symbols and cultural boundaries coerce the individual's sense of straightedge identity.

Chapter nine is a theoretical synthesis that draws upon all previous theoretical and analytical chapters. In particular, adopting concepts from the currently emerging chaos/complexity paradigm, this chapter offers a novel theoretical explanation of processes of subcultural emergence (genesis) and subcultural transformation (permutation), and links these broad processes to the micro-cosmic identity transitions of individual straightedge youth. Chapter ten concludes the dissertation with theoretical and analytical summaries. It also explores the potential generalizability of the straightedge case, and it outlines several key implications for future research.

Chapter Two

Overview of Guiding Theories and Concepts

Chapter Introduction

Prior to exploring my methodological choices, it is important that I first contextualize this research project theoretically and conceptually. The subculture and culture concepts perpetually get redefined in different ways. Given the lack of consensus among sociologists about the boundaries of these concepts, I begin this chapter by defining culture and subculture. The chapter then proceeds into a critical evaluation of several fundamental subcultures paradigms, including strain perspectives, Matza's subterranean theory, the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies perspective, and relatively recent interactionist perspectives. This evaluative theoretical and conceptual overview serves as inspiration for the research questions guiding my analysis (I will identify and discuss my research questions in chapter three).

Defining Culture and Subculture

This dissertation treats culture as a fluid and socially constructed phenomenon. Culture is the product of the way in which a group's social relations are shaped by the structures, forms, and levels of the social system. It is also, however, the way in which those social relations are experienced, understood, and interpreted (Clarke et al, 1976: 10). Roughly, culture comprises the perpetually shifting, socially constructed sum of any given social group's accepted and shared norms, values, and beliefs as well as the people, material, and social organizations that create and communicate them (Abercrombie et al, 1988: 59; Berger, 1995: 19; Cohen, 1955: 12). Furthermore, socially constructed norms, values, and beliefs inform and constrain group members' knowledge, routines, and experiences (see Abercrombie et al, 1988; Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952;

Swingewood, 1977). In other words, culture constrains the ways in which group members may think and act. Thus, people create culture, and yet culture has the paradoxical effect of acting recursively back upon its creators.

In order to better understand the recursive process of culture, it is useful to refer to Berger and Luckmann's (1966) treatise on the sociology of knowledge, *The Social Construction of Reality*. In this treatise, Berger and Luckman concern themselves with outlining the processes by which subjective bodies of knowledge come to be established as objective reality. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966: 220), people apprehend daily life as a reality that is ordered in terms of pre-existing patterns and categories. Thus, we might apprehend the social world in terms of apparently prearranged categories such as race, ethnicity, gender, youth, or deviance. What we apprehend in a taken for granted manner as objective and prearranged, however, is an objectified embodiment or encapsulation of past subjectively expressive human activity (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 21, 34). Nonetheless, the probable fact that people apprehend reality in terms of objectivated categories necessarily means that the apprehended social categories are recursive in their effect upon social life.

Thus, viewing culture in terms of Berger and Luckmann's (1966) framework, culture is a social construct that in turn structures the social lives of constituent members or affiliates. Culture's component norms, values, and beliefs are socially constructed in a continual and incremental manner through processes of communication between and within both microcosmic and macrocosmic structural and social organizational configurations. Communicated cultural norms, values, and beliefs become the foundation for objectivated and taken for granted categories that maintain and perpetuate

culturally specific social relations. Thus, culture concurrently is both socially constructed and socially constraining insofar as actors collectively demarcate and maintain a crude yet shared set of structuring cultural boundaries through the creation, transmission, and internalizion of culturally specific norms, values, and beliefs.

Contemporary societies typically comprise numerous cultural groups. Relative to others, some cultural groups control a disproportionate number of culture transmitters (i.e., media, educational systems, religious institutions). Consequently, some groups wield disproportionate amounts of power to communicate and thereby facilitate among the members of society a common acceptance of culturally specific norms, values, and beliefs. Disproportionately powerful cultural groups capable of widespread cultural transmission are dominant or mainstream cultures (Wood, 2000).

Like dominant cultures, subcultures comprise sets of socially constructed norms, values, and beliefs, along with networks of individuals, objects, and relationships that communicate and maintain subculture boundaries. Subcultures, however, differ insofar as they generally must struggle for access to powerful culture transmitters (Wood, 2000). More importantly, subcultures are "cultures within cultures" (Cohen, 1955: 12), distinguished by their embeddedness within a dominant cultural milieu. This being the case, all subcultural groups endure at least some form of power relationship with a dominant cultural phenomenon (Clarke et al, 1976: 14; Matza, 1969:71; Matza, 1964:63). Indeed, all subcultures theories define subcultural groups in terms of a relationship to a broader cultural group or milieu.

According to Clarke et al (1976: 13-14), subcultures "must exhibit a distinctive enough space and structure to make them identifiably different from the dominant

cultural milieu within which they are embedded. They must be focussed around certain activities, values, certain uses of material artifacts, [and] territorial spaces. . . which significantly differentiate them from the wider culture." Subcultural attempts to achieve differentiation necessarily render subcultural groups deviant and potentially threatening from the perspective of a dominating or "mainstream" culture. In turn, subcultural attempts to achieve differentiation are subject to counter-reaction from the dominant cultural order.

Mainstream counter-reactions to subcultures occur in a variety of forms, all of which have the effect of challenging subcultural boundaries. Mainstream media, for example, might employ tactics of exaggeration, obfuscation, and misrepresentation to portray the subcultural group in a disproportionately deviantized or demonized light (see Cohen, 1987). Deviantized portrayals of subcultural phenomena inform public sentiments and perceptions of the particular subcultural group in question (Cohen, 1987: 16-19). Moreover, deviantized portrayals to some extent compete to redefine what a subculture is all about as well as what it means to be a subculture member. Consequently, subculture members must struggle to defend the subculture's identity from external mainstream cultural agents, as well as from future prospective members who disproportionately may be acculturated into mainstream appropriations of the subcultural frame of reference.

Rather than demonizing or deviantizing subcultural phenomena, mainstream cultural counter reactions may assume the distinctly more subversive form of appropriating and institutionalizing a subculture's primary means of differentiation. In particular, the mainstream culture may seek to appropriate and institutionalize certain of

the subculture's fundamental culture transmitters (see Baron, 1989; Cohen, 1987; Dotter, 1994). Mainstream appropriations of subcultural style are illustrative examples of this process. Researchers aligned with the Birmingham school of cultural studies [which I explore in greater detail further into this chapter] claim that subcultures typically construct distinct styles as symbolic modes of resisting mainstream cultural encroachment (see Cohen, 1987: ix - x; Hebdige, 1979). The dominant culture, however, might counter-react to these symbolic modes of alleged resistance via the tactic of incorporating the subculture's style into mainstream popular culture industries (Baron, 1989: 208-209). Mainstream appropriations of subcultural music provide an additional case in point. During the 1960s, for example, "rock music was the primary expressive mode for deviant youth subculture" (Dotter, 1994: 108). Near the end of the decade and into the 1970s, however, rock music, rock artists, "and their symbolic deviance were institutionalized into a larger mass cultural framework" (Dotter, 1994: 108). In other words, according to Daniel Dotter (1994: 108), the rock music of deviant subculture became the popular music of the mainstream culture. Such mainstream reactions relegate subcultures to a paradoxical position of being, concurrently, both mainstream oppositional and mainstream institutionalized phenomena (see Dotter, 1994; Matza, 1964).

In addition to resisting encroachment by mainstream cultural phenomena, there is evidence that at least some subcultural groups must also resist the encroachment of schismatic subcultural factions that compete to reconstruct the subculture's attitudinal and normative boundaries. Schism refers to the division of the social structure of an organization into two or more relatively independent parts (Stark and Bainbridge, 1987:

128). I define subcultural schism as the process and condition where a generally singular subcultural phenomenon spawns two or more relatively distinct, competing, yet related factions (Wood, 2000).

A number of studies identify instances of apparent subcultural schism. Writers adhering to the Birmingham school of cultural studies, for example, identify fragmentation and schism among the British mod subculture (Cohen, 1972; Hebdige 1979). Similarly, my own work identifies and investigates schism among the American skinhead subculture (Wood, 1999b).

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, several skinhead factions were active in North America, with a general schism existing between racist and anti-racist skinheads (see Hamm, 1993; Moore, 1993; Wood, 1999b; Zellner, 1995). Both factions perceived themselves as "true" skinheads. Moreover, stylistically the factions maintained strong similarities, and both were militant and often violent in their enforcement of subcultural ideology (Wood, 1999b). Racist skinheads, however, generally perceived themselves as engaged against a threat to the spiritual, cultural, and ecological survival of the Caucasian "race" (Hamm, 1993). Non-racist skinheads, on the other hand, largely galvanized around a shared concern that the image of the "true skinhead" was being severely jeopardized by the activities and opinions of racists (Wood, 1999b).

Thus, in the case of the American skinhead subculture, racist and non-racist factions adhere respectively to a different conception of the skinhead subculture and what it means to be a skinhead subcultural member. Schismatic subcultural factions, therefore, contend with one another to apprehend and reconstruct the subculture's attitudinal and normative parameters. Over time, sustained and systematic differences in apprehension

and reconstruction result in the bifurcation of the original subculture. Consequently, two or more subcultural groups emerge where only one generally existed before. Indeed, this process is common among subcultures in general. Unfortunately, existing subculture theories fail to properly explain diachronic processes such as schism.

Strain Theory

The first systematic explanations of youth culture and subculture emerge from the strain perspectives of the early to mid 20th century. Building upon the ideas of Robert Merton (which I will discuss shortly), early subcultures theorists such as Cohen, Miller, Cloward, and Ohlin positioned their theories as explanations of juvenile delinquency. Thus, focussing mainly upon the criminal activities of youth gangs, none of the early subcultures theories can properly be viewed as general theories of youth culture or subculture. Nonetheless, despite their narrow scope, and despite the oft-leveled criticism that subcultural strain theories overlook the agency of the individual, these early theories outline the crucial and general notion that youth culture and subculture are constrained and coerced into existence by the conditions of the dominant or "mainstream" socio-cultural order. It is important for this dissertation, therefore, that I outline the bases and guiding ideals of early strain perspectives.

Robert Merton: Deviance as Adaptation

The overarching concept behind a substantial proportion of existing subcultures theory is the idea that the subculture is a reactive deviant response to some facet of the mainstream socio-cultural order. This core idea stems ultimately from Robert Merton's

(1938) essay, "Social Structure and Anomie." Indeed, Merton's essay establishes a general framework upon which the majority of subsequent subcultures theories are based.

According to Merton (1938), deviance is culturally and structurally determined behavior. More specifically, Merton (1938) posits that a disjunction between culturally prescribed goals and the socially defined legitimate means for attaining those goals constrains the individual into a condition of strain or anomie. The individual, in turn, attempts to alleviate his/her experience of strain by either rejecting culturally prescribed goals, or by seeking illegitimate (criminal/deviant) means of attaining those goals. Thus, at a general level, Merton's theory postulates that a lack of fit between ideology and reality, or expectations and lived experiences spawns a deviant adaptation. This idea is crucially important to practically all subsequent subcultures theories.

Albert Cohen: Collective Deviance and Frame of Reference Construction

Building upon Merton's conception of deviance, Albert Cohen (1955) was the first sociologist to use systematically the concepts of culture and subculture to explain apparently collective deviance (Heidensohn, 1989: 44). Similar to Merton, Cohen assumes that a moral consensus exists among the members of society concerning culturally prescribed goals and values. Culture for Cohen, therefore, refers to commonly shared knowledge, beliefs, values, codes, and tastes that are patterned and perpetuated over time (Cohen, 1955: 12). Cohen, moreover, recognizes that certain cultural segments of society may formulate their own unique norms and values. According to Cohen, these "peculiar cultures" embedded within the broader cultural framework are subcultures (Cohen, 1955: 12).

Cohen asserts that deviant subcultures overwhelmingly are concentrated in the male working class sector of the juvenile population (Cohen, 1955: 37). Like Merton, Cohen assumes the existence of a universal set of achievement oriented standards. According to Cohen, however, working class male youth have little chance of achieving these standards, which largely are defined by the middle class (Heidensohn, 1989: 44). Youth, in turn, may form deviant subcultures as a means of resolving the conflict and status frustration caused by situations of blocked achievement and impeded mobility. Thus, Cohen argues that through a psychological mechanism known as "reaction formation," deviants transform their attachment to middle class values into a powerful inversion or rejection of them (Cohen, 1955; Heidensohn, 1989: 45). Deviant subcultures, therefore, take their norms from the larger mainstream culture but turn them literally upside down (Cohen, 1955: 28).

Cohen makes a substantial progression from Merton's focus upon individual responses to strain and conflict. He claims that individuals perceiving similar conflicts and experiencing similar feelings of anomie and strain may engage in a collective adaptation or solution. More importantly, however, and especially for the purposes of this study, Cohen provides a rudimentary explanation of how subcultures emerge.

Cohen posits that a crucial subculture generating force is the interaction among individuals who share and embody, in their beliefs and actions, similar cultural patterns. In other words, subculture requires an aggregate of individuals who perceive, through interaction with one another, similar conflicts, strains, and problems of adjustment (Cohen, 1955: 59). Continued interaction leads to the formation of a new or modified frame of reference (Cohen, 1955: 65).

A frame of reference is a set of socially constructed definitions and "group standards" that emerge primarily from the interactions between subculturally inclined individuals and like minded others (Cohen, 1955: 65). The frame of reference is a shared meaning that delineates generally what the subculture is all about as well as what it means to be a subculture member. Stated simply, the subcultural frame of reference is like a conceptual manual or guide that outlines a set of subculturally appropriate norms, values, and proscribed beliefs that exist in reaction to those predominant in the middle-class mainstream society.

At least some of the difficulties surrounding existing analyses of subculture stem from a tendency among researchers to equate a subcultural frame of reference with what I refer to as a "subculture franchise" (Wood, 2000). A subcultural frame of reference is a conceptual phenomenon. In contrast, a "subculture franchise" is a concrete social network comprised of subculturally affiliated individuals who conduct their activities and interactions within distinct geographic or spatial boundaries (Wood, 2000).

A subculture typically comprises a number of subculture franchises, each of which exists differentially in relation to an overarching subcultural frame of reference. Relatively intimate and localized networks of self-professed punk rockers, for example, exist in cities throughout North America and most of Europe. Although a punk subculture franchise in New York City may have no intimate knowledge of another punk subculture franchise in Paris, both groups may perceive themselves as a part of a broader punk subculture. Each franchise, however, likely apprehends the punk subcultural frame of reference (or at least one element of it) in a slightly different manner. A politically oriented punk subculture franchise might galvanize largely around the punk theme of

anarchy. Conversely, to the detriment of allegedly political punk ideals, another franchise disproportionately might emphasize punk fashions and styles.

Inter-franchise differences in frame of reference interpretation, via the corresponding nuances in subcultural practice that these differences engender, act back upon and modify the general subcultural frame of reference (Wood, 2000). As franchise members derive from or impute new meanings into the frame of reference, they differently perceive and socially construct what the subculture is all about as well as what it means to be a subculture member. Furthermore, members likely transmit or communicate these differential frame of reference apprehensions to other subcultural members. As a result, the subcultural frame of reference necessarily endures at least a minute change (Wood, 2000).

Although a subcultural frame of reference is a socially constructed phenomenon, it may attain somewhat of an independent or "objectivated" existence (see Berger and Luckmann, 1966). In the words of Albert Cohen (1955: 65) a subcultural frame of reference "may achieve a life which outlasts that of the individuals who participated in its creation." The punk subculture again serves as an excellent case in point. Although self professed punks first appeared in the United Kingdom during the mid 1970s (see Hebdige, 1979), the punk frame of reference persists to the present day in numerous countries long since the withdrawal of most of the subculture's earliest members. Moreover, the frame of reference (re)constructed by previous punk subculture members has a recursive effect insofar as it informs the normative and attitudinal parameters for all subsequent punk affiliates.

A frame of reference persists and attains at least partial autonomy through

concretization (Wood, 2000). The norms, values, and beliefs that comprise the subcultural frame of reference become encoded or concretized in objects, symbols, and organizations. In particular, subcultural norms, values, and beliefs are concretized and transmitted at least partially through styles (see Hebdige, 1979), subcultural literature, music genres (see Weinstein, 1991; Wood, 1999), and rituals (see Fonarow, 1997). Consequently, elements of the subcultural frame of reference get transmitted to future subcultural adherents who apprehend existing subcultural style, music, literature, and rituals.

Although Cohen's (1955) frame of reference concept establishes a crucial foundation for subcultures theory, his framework should be criticized for its inherent determinism. Cohen's theory is deterministic in the sense that subcultural adaptations get construed as mere reactions to or mirror images of mainstream cultural phenomena. His theory, moreover, implies that a subculture may never fully challenge or disincorporate itself from the dominant socio-cultural order, since by definition the "reaction formation" concept entails a sustained belief in the legitimacy of dominant socio-cultural norms, values and expectations. Indeed, since Cohen (1955: 28) claims that the subculture member's conduct is right, by the standards of his subculture, precisely because it is wrong by the norms of the larger culture, Cohen also implies that subculture is not actively created. Instead, he suggests that subcultures ultimately are determined by "mainstream" norms and values. Cohen thereby overlooks the possibility that subcultures may form as a result of an active, creative, and aware confrontation with the dominant socio-cultural order.

Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin: The Cultural Autonomy of Subculture

Emulating Cohen's framework, Cloward and Ohlin (1960) posit that discrepancies between aspirations and opportunities are experienced more intensely at some social positions than at others. Moreover, interaction among individuals relegated to relatively deprived social positions may induce among those individuals a collective withdrawal of sentiments supporting the dominant socio-cultural order. Thus, according to Cloward and Ohlin, when a social system generates problems of adjustment for occupants of a particular social position, it is possible that a collective subcultural challenge to the legitimacy of the dominant socio-cultural order will emerge (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960: 108).

The emergence of a subculture, according to Cloward and Ohlin, requires two important social conditions. First, the individual must be freed from both the commitment to and belief in the legitimacy of the existing dominant socio-cultural order. Second, the individual must join with similarly predisposed others in seeking solutions to problems of adjustment (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960: 110).

Failure attribution is the most significant step in withdrawal of sentiments supporting legitimation of the dominant socio-cultural order. According to Cloward and Ohlin, adolescents may see blocked opportunities to succeed in the legitimate system not as their own fault, but rather as "the fault of the system" (Einstadter and Henry, 1995: 164). Moreover, highly visible barriers to opportunity induce, within the individual, perceptions of discrimination, which then increase the likelihood of attributing personal failure to the social order (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960: 121). Ultimately, adolescents may perceive themselves as objects of injustice, and may then attempt to withhold their

support of the social system. Thus, in a process of alienation from established social norms, the individual criticizes his or her location in the social system, reforms it, or disassociates him/herself from it (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960: 111). Once the individual has undergone this process of alienation from the established socio-cultural norms, he/she is then free to join with others in deviant solutions to problems of adjustment (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960: 118).

Although individual adaptation to strain, according to Cloward and Ohlin, is a necessary condition for subcultural emergence, it is not a sufficient condition. Subcultures form only in areas or contexts where similarly situated and predisposed individuals are concentrated enough to band together and support one another's alienation from conventional norms, values, beliefs, and expectations (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960: 63). Borrowing closely from Cohen's (1955) idea of "mutual conversion," Cloward and Ohlin (1960) view subcultural emergence as a collective problem-solving process in which each prospective subculture member stimulates others to reveal their point of view in a "conversation of gestures." This conversation of gestures serves four important functions. It permits the participants to explore the extent and intensity of one another's alienation from the prevailing cultural norms. It allows them to explore their mutual interest in developing a collective solution. It provides the opportunity to elaborate and test various justifying beliefs and values implicit to a commitment to a deviant course of action. Finally, it allows them to evaluate the merits and chances of success of a variety of deviant solutions to common problems of adjustment (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960: 141-142). Through this conversation of gestures, a compromise formation (as opposed to a reaction formation) results to which each participant has

contributed (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960: 140).

Cloward and Ohlin make a fundamental contribution to subcultures theory. They accomodate those instances where subcultures actively attempt to create distinct cultural spaces. Cohen, on the other hand, explains subculture formation as a mere process of normative, cultural inversion. Thus, whereas Cohen implies that the subculture member never fully relinquishes his/her commitment to the legitimacy of the dominant socio-cultural order, Cloward and Ohlin posit that subcultures and subculture members may alienate themselves from the dominant social-cultural order, thus freeing themselves to collectively challenge its legitimacy.

David Matza: Permeation, Encirclement, and Subterranean Tradition

While Cloward and Ohlin write in reaction to Cohen's conceptualization of the relationship between subcultural and conventional cultural phenomena, David Matza in turn writes in reaction to the conceptualizations of all prior subculture theorists, including Cloward and Ohlin. While certain subcultures may in fact be oppositional or reactionary, Matza (1969; 1964: 1961) suggests that prior subcultures theory overlooks or dismisses those subcultures that maintain substantial links to mainstream norms, values, and belief systems. Indeed, Matza suggests that it is counter-intuitive to assume that rebellious (sub)cultural forms, embedded within the mainstream cultural milieu and deriving their members from that milieu, stand in complete alienation or opposition to mainstream norms, values, and belief systems.

Thus, Matza criticizes subcultural strain perspectives for exaggerating the degree of separation between "deviant" and "conventional" cultural worlds (Matza, 1969: 70):

> Whatever the underlying reason, reaction formation, autonomous traditions, or alienation and availability, the relation between delinquent subculture and conventional culture is the same in the theories of Cohen..., and Ohlin and Cloward. It stands in opposition to the conventions of middle class morality... (Matza, 1964:36).

According to Matza, this tendency for subcultures theorists to emphasize themes of moral isolation or cultural autonomy induces a distorted and inaccurate understanding of the subculture's nature. In particular, it causes theorists to overlook the ways in which deviant and conventional cultural forms are related and connected to one another (Matza, 1969: 70-71).

According to Matza, a subculture can not be entirely oppositional precisely because it exists within a wider mainstream cultural milieu which necessarily affects it (Matza, 1964: 37). Assuming that youth is a characteristic of most subculture members, Matza suggests that the category of youth itself represents a transitional position or phase embedded within the larger mainstream socio-cultural order, and consequently is exposed to and permeated by that socio-cultural order. Matza claims, for example, that youth invariably are encircled by the members of mainstream adult society in such contexts as school, neighborhood, work, church, and through the mass media (Matza, 1964: 46). Thus, although the subculture may provide at least partial insulation from the influences of the mainstream culture, the same subculture, as a result of its condition of encirclement, "necessarily reflects the permeation of conventional agents" (Matza, 1964: 47).

According to Matza, the subculture can never exist fully in opposition to mainstream cultural forms. Indeed, deviant subcultures may exhibit various degrees of

hostility or rebellion towards particular elements of the mainstream culture (Matza, 1961). Nonetheless, according to Matza, the subcultures themselves are buttressed by beliefs that flourish in influential sectors of the normative order (Matza, 1964: 63). Thus, while the deviant subculture may rebel against, or neutralize, certain formal social controls (Sykes and Matza, 1957), the deviant subculture can not emerge and perpetuate itself without the support of a latent cultural reinforcement from conventional sources and traditions. At most, therefore, the subculture represents a synthesis of deviance and convention. Moreover, as a result of conditions of permeation and exposure, subcultures to varying extents represent "subterranean" versions of mainstream cultural phenomena.

In sum, Matza claims that the relationship between the deviant subculture and the wider mainstream culture is never simply one of opposition (Matza, 1964: 37). While subcultures can, according to Matza, react or rebel against the mainstream society, they also reflect it in significant ways (Matza, 1961). Thus, Matza elaborates a theory of subcultures as cultural phenomena that maintain close links to the mainstream socio-cultural order, reflecting its norms, values, and belief systems.

The Birmingham School of Cultural Studies: Subculture as Negotiation and Resistance

The term "cultural studies" or "Birmingham perspective" generally refers to the works of scholars from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham. While researchers may casually refer to cultural studies in terms of a monolithic and unified single theory, there really is no distinct set of criteria that firmly defines the boundaries of this perspective. According to Schulman's (1993) discussion of

the history of the Birmingham paradigm, "it is self consciously conceived of as being highly contextual[;] a variable, flexible, critical mode of analysis." Furthermore, the Birmingham perspective tends to galvanize around several key objectives, including the investigation of culture in its historical context, examining new ethnomethodological methods of inquiry (based on Weber's notion of verstehen), and employing an interpretive approach to questions of meaning (Schulman, 1993). The conceptual scope of the Birmingham perspective is notably broad, and at the most general level it tends to revolve around the task of unraveling the complex dynamics and conflicts between subculture, the mass media, commercial culture, and the state (McRobbie, 1994).

On the topic of (British) youth culture, the scholars of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies assume a distinctly Gramscian tone. Indeed, much of the youth culture scholarship conducted under the stewardship of the centre focusses on the issue of hegemony, including the ebb and flow of consensus building and coercion on the part of the dominant British socio-cultural order, as well as the corresponding acts of resistance on the part of subordinate cultures and social groups.

The gamut of youth cultures research, conducted within the loose parameters of the Birmingham perspective, is highly discursive and interpretive, and it views youth (sub)culture as a collective project of resisting the hegemony of the dominant socio-cultural order. Subcultural styles, for example, get construed as symbolic violations of mainstream values and norms (see Hebdige, 1979). In the same vein of resistance, distinctly subcultural behavior is deeply politicized. British skinhead racism, for example, is conceived by cultural studies scholars as a product of false consciousness in which skinheads target racial minorities as the antagonists of traditional British working-

class culture (Cohen, 1972; Hebdige, 1979). Recent works continue to emphasize the theme of subculture as resistance, viewing subcultural texts and spaces as actual sites or locales of resistance.

Paralleling Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) earlier conception of subcultural challenges to the legitimacy of dominant/mainstream society, yet diverging from the determinism inherent in earlier subcultural strain perspectives, Birmingham school theorists impute a significant level of creativity and autonomy to subculture and its members. Cultural studies scholars view the subcultural response as a process of "cultural innovation" (McRobbie, 1994: 179) that emerges within the structuring constraints of a relatively particular socio-historical context. Thus, the Birmingham perspective accounts for the likely possibility that youth actively create (sub)cultures through their subjective lived experiences of historically material social contexts, and especially lived experiences of contradictions inherent to the mainstream socio-cultural order.

Indeed, the Birmingham perspective imparted and continues to develop a number of crucial stances and ideas regarding contemporary youth (sub)culture. Nonetheless, like all perspectives, cultural studies is not without its difficulties. The most notable problem with Birmingham analyses of youth culture is the marked absence of spoken voices (McRobbie, 1994). Birmingham scholars largely concern themselves with decoding and intepreting youth (sub)culture texts, such as styles, symbols, spaces, and music genres. The Birmingham school also concerns itself with exploring the institutional, socio-historical contexts within which prospective subculture members likely resist dominant ideology and challenge the legitimacy of the dominant socio-

cultural order (see Corrigan and Frith, 1976: 231-232). A significant proportion of cultural studies scholarship, however, completely ignores the individual voices of the people who participate in the construction and reconstruction of youth (sub)culture. Hebdige's (1989) prolific examination of subculture, for example, takes style as evidence of youthful resistance to the hegemony of the mainstream society, yet generally does not appeal to the voices of the individuals who actually engage in the creation of those styles.

Some observers assert that one of the basic motivations driving the very genesis of the cultural studies perspective was a reaction to the objectivism and empiricism that permeated traditional British sociology (Schulman, 1993). Thus, McRobbie (1994: 180) at least partially attributes the cultural studies tendency to overlook the individual voices of youth culture as a reaction to traditional sociologists' treatment of individual voices as "transparently meaningful and as evidence in themselves, rather than as complex social constructs[.]" Despite this apparent friction between 'traditional sociology' and cultural studies, at least some contemporary researchers attempt to bridge the two disciplines. Baron's (1989) study of the west-coast Canadian punk subculture, for example, employs relatively traditional ethnographic field methods to examine the complexities and nuances in punk lifestyle as different levels of resistance to the values and norms embedded in the dominant Canadian society.

Of all perspectives on youth (sub)culture, the Birmingham perspective is the only one that clearly elaborates the role of hegemony. Like other theories, the Birmingham school views subculture as a response to contradictions inherent to the dominant socio-cultural order. While traditional theories, however, view the response as one of incorporation (Matza), reaction (Cohen), or alienation (Cloward and Ohlin), cultural

studies views it as one of negotiation, resistance, and struggle. The reason for this more 'active' perspective is the cultural studies' assumption that dominant and subordinate cultures are in a constant struggle over hegemony.

Just as different groups and classes are ranked unequally in terms of their wealth, power, and productive relations, the Birmingham school claims that cultures also are differentially ranked along a continuum of cultural power. Cultures, therefore, stand in opposition to one another in relations of domination and subordination. Moreover, the subordinate cultural configurations may enter into struggle with the dominant socio-cultural order, and they will seek to modify, negotiate, or resist its hegemony (Clarke et al. 1976: 11-12).

Hegemony is sustained primarily by the insertion of subordinate cultures into the key institutions and structures that support the power and authority of the dominant socio-cultural order. A hegemonic socio-cultural order attempts to frame, within its super-structural range, all competing definitions of the world. It provides the horizons of thought and action within which conflicts are fought, and, more importantly, it prescribes the limits within which ideas and conflicts move and are resolved. Hegemony, therefore, ebbs and flows on the terrain of super-structures (Clarke et al, 1976: 38-39).

Hegemony sometimes gets referred to as a process of moving equilibrium. It shifts within a continuum of consensus and coercion, of leadership and rule. When it is forcefully imposed, rather than legitimately won, its imposition may signify a crisis in the hegemony of the dominant socio-cultural order (Clarke et al, 1976: 40). Subculture spaces, in turn, ebb, flow, emerge, and disappear with shifts in dominant socio-cultural legitimacy. A socio-cultural order whose hegemony is in a state of coercion and crisis

will generate numerous perceived and experienced conflicts throughout various levels of the social formation. Subcultures, in turn, may emerge as attempts to negotiate these conflicts and challenge the hegemony and legitimacy of the dominant socio-cultural order. Subcultures, therefore, are subordinated cultures.

Subcultures may appear or disappear during particular historical moments through the convergence (or divergence) in time and space of particular configurations of structure, culture, and biography which refers to the lived experience of structure and culture (Heidensohn, 1989: 50). From an early Birmingham school perspective, the convergence in time and space of these factors facilitates the emergence of subcultural rituals, relationships, styles, occasions, and behaviors (Clarke et al, 1976: 45, 47) each of which embodies and communicates shared concerns, activities, relationships, and materials organized to pose at least a symbolic challenge to the legitimacy of the dominant socio-cultural order.

The Birmingham perspective introduces a crucial contribution to subcultures theory in the way that it elaborates the active creation of subcultural spaces in response to subculture members' lived experiences. This innovative focus allows for the likely possibility that subcultures are subjectively constructed as opposed to being objectively determined (as the traditional strain perspectives imply). Furthermore, by detailing the precise historical circumstances and specific intersections of structure, culture, and biography within which subcultures emerge, the Birmingham school provides a repertoire of useful conceptual tools for identifying why particular subcultures emerge at particular moments in history

Interactionist Reconceptualization of the Subculture Concept

The interactionist perspective on subculture is relatively obscure and largely overlooked among existing subcultures literature. Nonetheless, the interactionist reconceptualization of the subculture concept, as outlined by Fine and Kleinman (1979), poses several critical challenges to other subcultures theory, while offering a compelling redress to other theories' apparent deficiencies.

Writing generally in reaction to traditional subcultural strain theories, Fine and Kleinman (1979: 2) claim that "sociologists have tended to portray subculture as a reified system which refers to a discrete, easily definable population segment, ignoring the difficulties involved in defining the concept." In particular, Fine and Kleinman (1979: 2) argue that all previous subcultures theory tends to treat subculture as a homogeneous, static, and overly structural phenomenon that one simply may enter into. Furthermore, Fine and Kleinman (1979: 2) claim that existing subcultures theory treats as self evident the boundaries of subculture, while also assuming that cultural content is transmitted solely by the "subcultural tradition" (pre-existing subcultural norms and values) as opposed to being actively created or generated internally by subcultural affiliates. As further critique, Fine and Kleinman (1979:6) suggest that existing subcultures theory trivializes the fluid nature of (sub)cultural phenomena insofar as existing theories and frameworks are amenable only to a synchronic as opposed to diachronic examination of subculture.

Confirming this latter assertion, a substantial number of contemporary analyses of subcultural groups galvanize around relatively synchronic snapshots of subcultural resistance (see Baron, 1989; Hamm, 1993; Young and Craig, 1997). Consequently, such

studies imply that the content of the subculture at the time of the research is the content of the subculture over time (Fine and Kleinman, 1979: 6). Furthermore, such studies time and again offer the rather redundant observation that subcultures exist in reaction to mainstream cultural phenomena, without addressing the more novel question of how subcultural reactions shift over time and space. Much of this synchronic focus stems from the classical strain assumption that subcultures are in fact subcultural traditions, comprised of a corpus of norms, values, and beliefs external to the individuals who are supposedly constrained by them.

The subcultural strain perspective tends to overlook the likely fact that the norms, values, and beliefs that comprise subcultural traditions shift over time. Furthermore, this view overlooks the possibility that cultural shifts are internally generated. Thus, as Fine and Kleinman (1979: 6) propose, "[e]ach member's perspective on the shared knowledge of the subculture will necessarily be different from that of any other member. Therefore, even within a homogeneous group, action will require a negotiation of meaning, resulting in the continual production of socially constructed realities." A comprehensive account of subculture, therefore, must be an account of the ways in which cultural content is created, modified, and diffused (Fine and Kleinman, 1979: 6). In other words, analyses must locate synchronic snapshots of subcultural phenomena within a broader context of diachronic change.

I generally adhere to Fine and Kleinman's criticisms. Readers should be aware, however, that although Fine and Kleinman claim to be reacting to subcultures theory in general, existing theories at the time of Fine and Kleinman's article typically had a strong basis in the subcultural strain perspective. Thus, Fine and Kleinman's critiques of stasis

and rigidity among subcultures theory in general are best leveled in particular at early subcultural strain theorists that treat subculture as a relatively determined and objectively given phenomenon. Indeed, Fine and Kleinman seem to overlook the fact that during the period that they composed and published their interactionist work on subcultures, the distinctly Gramscian writers of the Birmingham school of cultural studies (see Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979) already were engaging and publishing research that partially transcends critiques of stasis and synchronicity among subcultures theory. The Birmingham school theorists, for example, explored the idea that subordinate cultural groups actively create and utilize culture as a tool to engage the dominant cultural milieu and negotiate collective experiences of structural oppression and ideological contradiction (see Leong, 1992).

Despite their oversight of the Birmingham school theorists, Fine and Kleinman elaborate beyond the contributions of the Birmingham perspective the simple yet crucial idea that the existence of a subculture can not be inferred merely from the presence of a group of demographically similar individuals, nor can it be inferred merely from the presence of common configurations of subordinate norms, values, and beliefs (Fine and Kleinman, 1979). Indeed, while demographic, normative, and attitudinal factors may be crucial to creating and maintaining subcultural boundaries, these factors will not in and of themselves facilitate subcultural genesis without the interactive process of communication. In other words, for subculture to occur, members of a population must communicate certain normative and value expectations among themselves, and through such processes of communication identify and define themselves as a group (Fine and Kleinman, 1979: 5).

This latter assertion builds squarely upon the assumptions of the classical symbolic interactionist school of thought. According to Stebbins' (2000: 3340) interpretation of Herbert Blumer's work, the symbolic interactionist perspective rests on three fundamental premises. First, people act towards the human and non-human objects in their lives according to the meanings that those objects have for them. Second, the meaning of those objects for each individual emerges from interactions between him or her and other people. Third, the meaning of objects learned in this manner are applied and occasionally modified as individuals interpret how the objects and their meanings fit particular social situations (with reference to the individual as well as the individual's reasons for being in the given situation).

Thus, from a symbolic interactionist perspective one's identity and self concept (including subcultural identity, deviant identity, gender identity, sexual identity, etc) exist only in the context of society; acting, reacting, and changing in social interaction with external others and social objects (Akers, 1997: 100). Viewed from an interactionist framework, therefore, the boundaries of the subculture are marked by boundaries of communication and interaction. Where a group of individuals communicate, galvanize, and identify themselves around a distinct configuration of norms, values, and beliefs (that exist in relation to a dominant cultural phenomenon), subculture exists. Where a group of people do not communicate, galvanize, and identify themselves around a distinct configuration of norms, values, and beliefs, then subculture **does not** exist. The presence of subculture fades somewhere in between; in those regions of communication and interaction where, for the participants, the centrality and salience of subcultural identity wanes.

While individuals and groups certainly can communicate subcultural norms, values, and beliefs, researchers must not overlook several other crucial communicating phenomena (which the Birmingham perspective already tends to emphasize). Other subcultural communicators include cultural artifacts (styles, symbols, tools), cultural texts (written documents, music, art), and cultural spaces (meeting places, communication interfaces, events). Communicators are infinitely variable. Communicating individuals in particular differ from one another in complex ways that social science likely never will fully understand. Meanings likely are rarely received in the way that the intitial communicator fully intended. Moreover, initial communicators perhaps are not fully aware of what they mean to say. Also, individuals may differently apprehend communicating artifacts and texts, and they might then communicate their differential interpretations to somebody else. Indeed, the scenarios are unending. What I mean to accomplish by this discussion, is to convince the reader that (sub)culture is a fluid and variable phenomenon. Subculture is a phenomenon that changes. The norms, values, and beliefs, that comprise (sub)cultural traditions spread across individuals and groups at various rates (Fine and Kleinman, 1979: 6), and may undergo a series of iterations or re-articulations (see Wood, 2000).

Summary

While culture and subculture are common topics of investigation in the social sciences, theories construe these concepts in different and sometimes opposing ways. Nonetheless, despite their respective limitations and idiosyncracies, each of the theories reviewed in this chapter offers important insights into subculture and its dynamics. My

goal in this dissertation is to better understand the straightedge subculture as well as to utilize the straightedge case to better understand subcultural dynamics in general. Thus, as opposed to approaching the straightedge case from a single theoretical stance, I intend to utilize a range of theoretical perspective to generally guide my analysis and interpretation.

Retaining the interactionist emphasis on communication and social interaction, I approach subculture as a fluid and diachronic process. In addition, despite criticism of traditional subcultural strain perspectives, I adopt the view that subcultures exist at least partially in reaction to a dominant (mainstream) cultural milieu. I intend to temper this view of subculture as reaction, however, by retaining from Cloward and Ohlin, as well as the Birmingham school, the stance that subculture can actively be created as opposed to passively received by subculture participants. Furthermore, from the Birmingham perspective, I intend to emphasize the importance of the historically material social contexts within which subcultures emerge, change, and even decline. Having evaluated the general theoretical perspectives that guide this study I now proceed to the next chapter, where I outline my theoretically informed research questions as well as the research techniques that I employ to answer these questions.

Chapter Three

Research Questions and Methodology

Chapter Introduction

The following chapter provides an overview of the research questions guiding my analysis as well as an evaluation of the methodologies and techniques that I employ in addressing my research questions. Additionally, the chapter describes my strategies for sampling and data processing. The chapter concludes with a discussion of ethical implications involved in conducting my research.

Deriving Research Questions

As I indicated in the introduction of this dissertation, my investigation of the straightedge phenomenon is guided by two overarching goals. In the first place, reacting to a substantive gap among existing subcultures literature, I seek to consolidate a comprehensive overview of the straightedge subculture, its history, and its dynamics. Secondly, my investigation carries with it an instrumental agenda. Like many subcultural groups, straightedge appears to have endured notable change since it first emerged. Thus, I seek to utilize the straightedge case instrumentally, for the purpose of revealing and explaining diachronic processes of subcultural transition, and thereby addressing a theoretical gap among the existing subcultures literature. Bearing these general research goals in mind, and having evaluated a number of influential subcultures theories, I now derive a series of theoretically informed research questions as a guide for my investigation of the straightedge subculture.

The subculture concept is intricate and layered. At any given moment, a subculture comprises a number of affiliated individuals; possibly numerous subculture

franchises; a changing subcultural frame of reference (composed of socially constructed norms, values, and beliefs); and various cultural artifacts. Bearing in mind the complexity of the subculture concept, and in light of my professed goal of addressing a substantive gap within the existing subcultures literature, it is appropriate to ask the following: **1) How is the straightedge phenomenon culturally and socially bounded?**

In light of interactionist claims that subcultural boundaries are diachronic and bearing in mind the Birmingham perspective's claim that subcultural boundaries are socio-historically informed, it is appropriate to also ask: **2) To what extent and in what contexts have straightedge boundaries shifted over time and space?**

Evidence suggests that all subcultural groups endure a period of emergence. In fact, as I discussed earlier, some subcultural groups emerge as schismatic factions of broader subcultural phenomena. In order to better understand the emergence of the straightedge phenomenon, I propose the following question: **3) How and in what context did the straightedge subculture first emerge?**

Interactionist theories explicitly claim that one's identity as a subculture member emerges through social and self interaction. Certain strain theories, which employ concepts such as Cohen's (1955) mutual conversion and Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) compromise formation implicitly make a similar claim about the role of interaction in subcultural identity formation. Informed by these perspectives, I propose to explore the following additional research question: **4) How do individuals construct and maintain a straightedge identity, and to what extent might that identity shift over time?**

Questions one through four are geared primarily towards fulfilling the substantive task of this dissertation. In other words, questions one through four are each directly

related to the general question of, what is the straightedge subculture? Through exploration of these four substantively geared research questions, however, it is my goal to arrive at answers for two additional questions that are more theoretically and instrumentally oriented. In particular, I intend my analysis of straightedge to make a novel contribution to answering the following questions: **5) What does the straightedge case reveal about processes of subcultural genesis, transformation, and identity formation? 6) Does the straightedge case hold implications for a reconceptualization of the subculture concept?**

Justifying a Case Study Approach

This dissertation is best conceived of as a case study analysis, and the principles of case study methodology are the fundamental driving force behind this project. The power of the case study (and its importance for this project) lies in its ability to cope with complex, diachronic social phenomena. While many other research approaches facilitate the collection of cross-sectional, point-in-time data, the case study facilitates the collection of data that are distinctly historical in nature. Thus, a number of researchers and theorists concur that the case study approach is the one best suited for exploring and revealing social process (Mitchell, 1983; Stoecker, 1991; Yin, 1992, 1984). Indeed, a number of researchers of sub- or counter-cultural phenomena employ a case study approach to examine social process. Bainbridge (1978), for example, reveals and elaborates processes of cultural implosion through his case study analysis of the Process Church of Final Judgment. Similarly, Baron (1989) conducts a case study of the

Canadian west-coast punk subculture to explore processes of resistance to the dominant cultural ethos.

While some researchers claim that the case study simply refers to an object of social inquiry (Stake, 1994), the case study is more fully conceived as an approach to doing social scientific research (Yin, 1992). Thus, the case is not simply the object under investigation. It also is a research frame (Stoeker, 1991) that denotes a substantive set of social, structural, or organizational boundaries within which data collection and analysis may occur. Working within the substantive framework of the case, the researcher may employ any appropriate quantitative, qualitative, interpretive, or historical research techniques.

According to Hamel (1992), case study identification and explanation of social process occurs by way of a "regressive-progressive" approach. This approach comprises three research moments: description, understanding, and explanation. Having first strategically identified a social phenomenon or case which possibly embodies a process or condition of interest (Stoecker, 1991), description involves dissecting and elaborating the case into its constituent parts (Hamel, 1992). Next, utilizing appropriate research techniques, understanding requires the identification of the relationships that link the parts of the case (Hamel, 1992). Finally, using all relevant information, explanation involves integrating the case into a larger underlying conceptual realm that governs the case's genesis, stability, and decline (Hamel, 1992). The case study researcher, therefore, infers and extrapolates from the case by describing its constituent parts, identifying relationships between the case's constituent parts, and then generalizing them to the realm

of concept and theory. Researchers refer to this process of abstraction as analytical generalization (Mitchell, 1983; Yin, 1994).

The case study approach comprises a continuum anchored by case studies geared towards description at one end and those geared towards explanation at the other. Building upon this idea, Robert Stake (1994) construes case studies as being either intrinsic or instrumental. According to Stake (1994), the intrinsic case study essentially is descriptive in nature. It typically does not seek to elaborate any abstract theoretical principle, nor is the purpose of the intrinsic case study the testing or building of theory. Instead, the case itself is of primary interest. The social researcher conducts an intrinsic case study in order to gain a better understanding of the behavior patterns and social relations that roughly comprise the boundaries of the case.

In contrast, Stake (1994) suggests that the instrumental case study is explanatory and seeks either to provide insight into an abstract theoretical concept or to test or construct social theory. When conducting an instrumental case study, the case under investigation is only of secondary interest. It plays a supportive role in the researcher's primary goal of understanding or revealing how particular concepts and processes are manifest within real-life social situations.

Mitchell (1983) and Stoecker (1991) construct a more nuanced case study typology, including (among others) the configurative-idiographic, disciplined-configurative, and heuristic case study types. Similar to Stake's (1994) notion of the intrinsic case study, the configurative-idiographic type essentially is descriptive in nature. It explores patterns and relations within the boundaries of the case, but does not interpret them in terms of broader theoretical tenets. Like the configurative-idiographic type, the

disciplined-configurative case study places a primary focus upon the case itself, elaborating a description of case patterns and relations. Unlike the configurative-idiographic type, however, the disciplined-configurative case study seeks to explain case patterns and relations in terms of general concepts and theoretical postulates. The heuristic case study also is geared towards theoretical explanation. Unlike the previous two case study types, however, the heuristic study retains an abstract concept or theoretical tenet as the primary focus. Thus, the case is deliberately chosen for its potential explanatory power, and throughout the research process the case plays a secondary role in the researcher's primary goal of testing or developing a specific theory.

Delineating the Straightedge Case

I propose for my dissertation a disciplined-configurative case study analysis of the straightedge youth subculture. This approach will allow me to retain the straightedge case as the primary focus of my analysis while allowing me also to interpret my findings in terms of abstract theoretical tenets and concepts. Furthermore, this approach will allow me to utilize the straightedge case for the heuristic project of constructing a novel theoretical framework of subcultural emergence, change, and identity formation. Thus, insofar as I begin this dissertation with the two-fold goal of alleviating both substantive and theoretical gaps within the existing subcultures literature, I seek to conduct a case study analysis that is both intrinsic and instrumental.

As I mentioned in this dissertation's introduction, my pilot study suggests that the straightedge phenomenon has its earliest discernable influences in the American punk rock scene of the early 1980s (Wood, 1999a). Thus, I will bound the straightedge case

temporally from the early 1980s to the present time. Structural boundaries will comprise all straightedge events, locations, and cultural artifacts. Finally, social boundaries will comprise all individuals who, in some way or another, affiliate themselves with the straightedge phenomenon.

Data Triangulation

Case study methodology allows the researcher to pursue a wholistic picture of the phenomenon under investigation. Thus, given my goal of exploring a myriad of subcultural dynamics and processes, a case study approach is the one most appropriate for my examination of straightedge. In order to construct a wholistic and comprehensive picture of the straightedge subculture, however, it is important that I base my analysis upon at least several different data sources, collected using at least several different techniques.

As I mention often in this dissertation, subculture is a complex process. Subcultural processes can not be fully ascertained using only a single data source. A recently affiliated straightedger, for example, in an interview may be able to explain to me why he/she decided to adopt a straightedge lifestyle. He or she will not be able to explain to me, however, why some other person or group of people (who are unavailable for an interview) decided to become straightedge in the early 1980s. By definition, the contemporary straightedger can not speak to the past affiliate's experience. Moreover, straightedge in general may have profoundly changed in the time span between the current and early straightedgers' respective affiliations. Thus, bearing in mind the diachronic and historical nature of this research project, I propose a course of data

triangulation (see Berg, 2001). Recognizing the limitations of a sole data source in a case study research project, I utilize several distinct data collection techniques, including interviewing, content analysis, and semiotic analysis. Each of these is suited to examining a distinct aspect of straightedge culture, and taken together can yield data capable of rendering a relatively comprehensive view of straightedge in both its contemporary and historical forms.

Content Analysis of Straightedge Texts

In those instances where a subculture survives well beyond the disaffiliation of its founding and early members, researchers of subculture history must surmount a methodological difficulty. While current members may harbour at least some historical awareness of the subculture with which they are affiliated, by definition, current subcultural members can not experience a historically prior subcultural moment or event. Consequently, the history of a subculture can not adequately be gleaned only from interviews with current subcultural members. Thus, in those instances where it is not possible to locate early members, and yet one seeks to explore what a particular subculture "looked like" at some point or series of points in the past, one must examine the traces and clues that former subcultural members leave behind as a result of their acting the part of a subculture member. In particular, researchers must turn to the historical artifacts and texts that concretize and communicate past subcultural themes. Arranged chronologically, historical subcultural texts may provide a series of frame of reference "snapshots." From such a series of snapshots, the researcher may piece together at least a rudimentary history of the most general transitions endured by the

subcultural phenomenon in question.

Music lyrics comprise one of the most crucial types of historical subcultural text available to researchers. Irwin (1999: 369), in his own analysis of the straightedge phenomenon, suggests that "music may be seen as a barometer of changes in youth culture." Indeed, numerous academics concur that subcultural music genres play an important role in affirming both conceptual and structural subcultural boundaries (see Baron, 1989; Brake, 1993; Dotter, 1994; Hamm, 1993; Hebdige, 1979; Kinsella, 1994; Laing, 1997; Moore, 1993; Ridgeway, 1990; Walser, 1997; Weinstein, 1991). In a study of the Canadian punk subculture, for example, Baron (1989) indicates that punk rock music communicates general punk subcultural themes. Weinstein (1991) similarly claims that subcultural music genres embody sets of subcultural codes or rules. Likewise, other researchers imply that subcultural music genres are important transmitters of subcultural attitudes and beliefs (see Brake, 1993; Hamm, 1993; Hebdige, 1979; Kinsella, 1994).

Content analysis data, drawn from straightedge music lyrics, will assist in addressing research questions one and two (both of which are geared towards understanding straightedge attitudinal and normative boundaries, as well as how those boundaries may have shifted or fluctuated over time). Thus, in light of other researchers' claims about the importance of subcultural music genres, chapter four draws upon an extensive collection of straightedge music lyrics as a means of delineating historical transitions in the straightedge subculture's cultural ethos. Taken in isolation from other data sources, music lyrics likely present a partially biased or skewed picture of the straightedge phenomenon as a whole. I will address this methodological difficulty in

detail in chapter four.

Using non-probability snowball and purposive sampling techniques, I obtained the lyrics of over six hundred songs, recorded on seventy-three straightedge (or straightedge affiliated) cassette tapes, compact discs, and vinyl records produced between 1981 and 1997. I verified recordings as straightedge (or straightedge affiliated) upon the basis of their association with, or distribution by, self professed straightedge record labels and distribution companies. In most cases, explicit references to straightedge within the lyric sheets, or the presence of typical straightedge symbols on the album covers further verified the authenticity of selected recordings.

I analyze these primary sources according to Stake's (1994) model of issue development in case study research. Initially, I perused straightedge music lyrics for general themes and I based all subsequent data collection upon emergent thematic patterns and issues. I report thematic observations as assertions, and in the text of my study I support assertions with representative examples. Thus, through a process of thematic classification, I utilize straightedge music lyrics as means of delineating historical transitions in the general ideals that comprise a straightedge subcultural frame of reference.

Aside from music lyrics, subcultural adherents typically produce specialized magazines, known as 'fanzines,' for distribution to other members and affiliates. Members of the punk rock and skinhead subcultures, for example, often produce fanzines containing subculturally relevant news (see Hamm, 1993). Straightedgers also produce fanzines containing interviews, commentaries, illustrations, and pictures that may indicate general subculture trends as well as affiliates' personal disposition. Thus, in

order to further identify or elaborate apparent subcultural transitions, I supplement my analyses of music lyrics with examinations of straightedge subcultural magazines, pamphlets, leaflets, and mail order catalogues.

Semi-Structured, In-Depth Interviews with Straightedge Affiliates

A substantial proportion of my data stems from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with twenty-one self professed straightedgers and straightedge affiliates. Similar to other subcultures research that utilizes interview data (see Baron, 1997; Baron, 1989; Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1990; Young & Craig, 1997; Zellner, 1995), this solicitation of emic viewpoints facilitates my understanding of the meanings that individuals attribute to their actions and perceptions. I present interview data in chapters four through nine, with the heaviest emphasis on interview data occurring in chapters five, six, seven, and eight. Interview data buttresses my content analysis of straightedge music lyrics, by yielding added insight into the normative and attitudinal boundaries of straightedge culture. More importantly, interview data best allows me to investigate research question number four, which seeks to understand how individuals create or maintain a straightedge identity, as well as how that identity might shift over time. Interviews with early straightedgers (who were active in the early 1980s) also yield insight for question three, which seeks to understand the contexts in which straightedge culture initially emerged.

Finding respondents proved to be one of the most challenging tasks involved in this dissertation. While several of the interviewees live in the Edmonton area, the city by no means has a large straightedge scene, and so I was required to generate a sample of

respondents from outside of my own immediate locale. Due to the relative obscurity of straightedge, my only practical recourse was to generate the sample using non-probability snowball and purposive sampling techniques. I began my sampling with a few informal straightedge contacts and asked them if they would be willing to pass on my contact information to other straightedgers whom they might know. This technique of sampling via informal networks generated nine respondents. I contacted the remainder of the respondents via the Internet. There are several established and well visited straightedge message boards that I accessed over the Internet. I posted messages on these boards, describing my research and requesting interested parties to contact me if they wished to learn more about the research and possibly participate. This technique generated an additional thirteen interviews. In total, I made contact with about fifty straightedge individuals which, again, yielded a total of twenty-one interviews. Reasons for not participating included the potential respondent being under-age, not having access to a telephone, or simply deciding ultimately that he/she did not wish to be interviewed. In some cases, the potential participant agreed to be interviewed, but then failed repeatedly to make him/herself available to talk at the designated time.

I conducted all interviews over the telephone, and recorded the conversations using a modified tape recorder that I connected to my telephone jack. Interviews averaged approximately one hour in length. Interviews were semi-structured to the extent that I made a conscious effort to explore a list of themes and probes that I had compiled into an interview schedule. Not all themes and probes, however, proved to be relevant for each participant. Indeed, while there was a great deal of commonality among the experiences of my respondents, each person interviewed brought to the research a

unique set of experiences and perceptions. Thus, although I utilized an interview schedule as a general guide (see Appendix A), I made a concerted effort to be attuned to issues that the respondents identified as important and to follow up those issues accordingly. In order to render completed interviews amenable to analysis, all interviews were transcribed either by myself or by a professional transcriber, who signed a confidentiality agreement.

Consistent with my goal of exploring subculture as process, I asked respondents about their transitions into an affiliation with a straightedge identity and with the straightedge phenomenon as a whole. This line of questioning involved delving into the contexts in which these transitions occur as well as the respondent's experiences and perceptions of transitional contexts. I also asked respondents about the ways in which they maintain an ongoing straightedge identity, and I asked about their interactions with non-straightedgers and other straightedgers. Thus, my interview data touches upon the ways in which respondents perform the role of "straightedger" in their everyday lives as well as the ways in which respondents manage a straightedge identity in the midst of other possibly competing identities.

Similar to my content analysis of straightedge music lyrics, I analyzed interview data according to Stake's (1994) model of issue development in case study research. After conducting and transcribing the first ten interviews, I thoroughly read the transcriptions for the purpose of identifying emergent patterns and themes. These initial emergent patterns and themes served as a general guide for subsequent interviews. Throughout these subsequent interviews, however, I made a concerted effort to recognize and explore other novel themes and patterns as they emerged.

Semiotic Analysis of Straightedge Symbols

As I explain further into this dissertation, straightedgers often demarcate themselves as well as their spaces with a distinct set of symbols based on the letter X. Moreover, the X apparently has endured a series of iterations and rearticulations intended to distinguish straightedgers in particular regions or to reflect and communicate a particular subjective straightedge stance. I have observed, for example, the X displayed as two crossed baseball bats, two crossed judge's gavels, two crossed straight razors (dripping with blood) and a wrench crossed with a hammer. Based on my earlier assertion that elements of a subcultural frame of reference get concretized in and transmitted by symbols, and in light of the fact that various groups and individual straightedgers reconstruct their own versions of the straightedge X, I intend to conduct a semiotic analysis of straightedge symbology.

Semiotics refers to the study of signs and the way they work. According to John Fiske (1990: 40), semiotics comprises three main areas of study: 1) The sign itself, (including the different varieties of the sign and the different ways that the sign conveys meaning to the people who use it); 2) The codes or systems into which the signs are organized to meet the needs of the cultural group; and 3) The culture within which these signs operate. In chapter eight, using Fiske's (1990) definition of semiotics as a general guide, I explore the X and its iterations coupled with a distinct focus upon how individual straightedgers apprehend and utilize the X. Also, I discuss the cultural context in which the straightedge X first emerged, as well as the cultural contexts in which it subsequently operates. This semiotic analysis yields substantial evidence of straightedge cultural

transmission and transformation, and thereby partially addresses research questions one, two, and four (which deal respectively with cultural boundaries, boundary transformation, and subcultural identity).

Comments about Other Potential Research Techniques

In an ideal case study, the researcher will utilize any and all forms of relevant data and data collection techniques. While I believe that the three general research techniques that I utilize in this dissertation will yield a reasonably comprehensive picture of straightedge culture, they are not necessarily the only ones that are appropriate. Indeed, in addition to interviews, content analysis, and semiotic analysis, I believe that participant observation of straightedge social events (such as music gigs) as well as ethnographic study of straightedge social network cliques could have yielded an even more highly developed overview of straightedge culture. However, given various fiscal, temporal, and geographic constraints, these methods were not an option for me. I simply want readers to be aware that there are practical reasons for my not relying heavily on observational techniques.

Ethical Issues

Prior to conducting my research, I constructed a research proposal that subsequently passed the scrutiny of the University of Alberta, Department of Sociology, research ethics committee.

The straightedge youth culture poses a special dilemma regarding issues of consent. Typically, minors are not (from a legal perspective) capable of consenting to

their own participation in academic studies. Instead, the issue of consent lies squarely on the parents of the potential respondent. A large proportion of straightedge individuals are under 18 years of age. Thus, in order to include these individuals in my sampling population I would need to get the full name and address of each respondent and also explain to each parent that his or her child is a "straightedger" (an identity that the parents perhaps are not aware of). As I mentioned earlier in this dissertation, a very small minority of straightedge individuals commit brutal and serious crimes in defense of their subcultural ideology. In 1999, for example, a Salt Lake City straightedger was charged with first-degree murder. Furthermore, reports suggest that certain aspects of the straightedge scene may now be under scrutiny by such social control organizations as the FBI.

In light of the possibility that some straightedge individuals would self-report their involvement in criminal activities, I felt that anonymity was a paramount issue in safe-guarding the well being of all respondents. Indeed, while anonymity can never be guaranteed with absolute certainty, the process of obtaining consent for minors would especially jeopardize their chances for remaining anonymous. Thus, ultimately, even though it limited my pool of interviewees, I felt compelled to restrict my sample to people over the age of 18 (who can legally consent to their participation).

In order to satisfy criteria of informed consent, I provided (via email) all interviewees with an information letter outlining the goals of my research, what I intend to do with the data, how I intend to deal with issues of anonymity and confidentiality, as well as the departmental contact information for my co-supervising professors. To indicate that they had read and understood all aspects of the information letter,

respondents forwarded the letter back to my own email account.

In some cases, respondents did not wish to remain anonymous. All of these people are public figures or celebrities within the straightedge scene. One interviewee, Ian MacKaye, is the person who allegedly first coined the term straightedge in a well known song during 1981. MacKaye often gets described as the founder of the straightedge movement (he does not see himself in that way), and his music and opinions are widely known among the straightedge scene. Thus, he and two other celebrity figures chose to not remain anonymous in the final dissertation. All other respondents are anonymous, and I assigned each of them a pseudonym (some people chose their own). I know these individuals by their first names only, and although I did require from them a phone number and an email address, I did not learn their precise geographic locations.

Chapter Four[1]

A Lyrical History of Straightedge Youth:

Insights into the Genesis and Permutation of Straightedge Culture

[1] A version of this chapter has been accepted for publication. Wood, R. T. (1999). 'Nailed to the X': A lyrical history of the straightedge youth subculture. Journal of Youth Studies, 2, 133-151.

Chapter Introduction

This chapter is an overview of my content analysis of music lyrics from approximately 600 straightedge rock songs. I intend this analysis to at least partially address research questions one and two (both of which are geared towards understanding straightedge attitudinal and normative boundaries, as well as how those boundaries may have shifted or fluctuated over time). This analysis also provides insight into the genesis of the straightedge subculture (research question three). Arguing that the straightedge phenomenon gained its initial momentum within the American hardcore music during the early 1980s, the chapter proceeds to outline a number of general lyrical themes. I argue that these lyrical themes are indicative of broad cultural transitions endured by the straightedge phenomenon over the past twenty years. Thus, partially illuminating an answer to research question number four, this chapter provides evidence that elements of straightedge culture do in fact transform over time. The chapter also discusses the limitations of using music lyrics as a data source.

Musical Origins of the Straightedge Concept

A 1982 documentary film of the American punk rock scene attributes the initial use of the straightedge term to Ian MacKaye, lead singer for a punk band called Minor Threat. Claiming that "straightedgers" are a "new breed of punks," MacKaye relates his teenage memories of other kids "getting stoned, throwing bottles, and driving fast." Referring to drinking and drug use, MacKaye adds that he "developed a deep hatred for that lifestyle." When asked "what does it mean to be straightedge," MacKaye replies,

"I've got my head straight, my shit together, and I've got an advantage on you" (Ian MacKaye in Small and Stuart, 1983).

In 1981, two Minor Threat songs (with lyrics written by MacKaye) served as the initial catalyst for the straightedge phenomenon in North America. In a song called "Straightedge," MacKaye sings: "I'm a person just like you -- But I've got better things to do -- Than sit around and smoke dope -- Cause I know I can cope -- Laugh at the thought of eating ludes -- Laugh at the thought of sniffing glue -- Always gonna keep in touch -- Never want to use a crutch -- I've got the straight edge" (1981a). MacKaye further elaborates early straightedge sentiments, in a song entitled "Out of Step:" "I don't smoke -- Don't drink -- Don't fuck -- At least I can fucking think" (1981b). In these early lyrics, straightedge emerges as a lifestyle choice involving a rejection of common forms of alleged vice (i.e., drugs, alcohol, and casual sex). At a more general level, the above lyrical quotes communicate the importance of keeping one's mind and body free and clear of allegedly detrimental substances and practices.

During an interview with MacKaye, he told me that during the early 1980s, a number of other straightedge punk bands began to emerge across the United States:

> I would say that we were the first band to sing about this issue, punk band that is. And then, [in 1982] a band called SS Decontrol from Boston, they kind of came on the horizon and they were much more militant about it. And then a band from Reno, Nevada, called 7Seconds, they were much more kind of positive. . . . SS Decontrol were much more militant in the sense that 'we'll pound your fuckin' ass.' 7Seconds were much more like, we need to unite, let's not fight. But they were drug free, and that was a big part of 7Seconds' message. Those were the first two. And then there was these other bands that started to pop up from Los Angeles, like Uniform Choice or America's Hardcore. . . . By the mid-1980s there certainly was nothing that I thought even approximated a movement.

From MacKaye's point of view these bands simply comprised one element of the broader (and non straightedge) American punk scene. Indeed, according to the quote above, MacKaye suggests that a distinctly straightedge music scene was only loosely affiliated and still developing during the early 1980s. Confirming MacKaye's perceptions, other prominent straightedge musicians related similar observations to me. Porcell, for example, who was a member of numerous famous straightedge bands during the 1980s (including Gorilla Biscuits, Judge, Youth of Today, and Project X), also explained to me that the straightedge music scene of the early 1980s was largely unconsolidated:

> There was a few straightedge bands. They didn't really necessarily champion straightedge. Even like Minor Threat, I think Ian was the only one that didn't drink in the band. It was sort of a more personal thing to him. There was SS Decontrol. One guitar player was straightedge. He wrote all the lyrics, but the singer who was singing the songs, he wasn't even straightedge.

Here, Porcell suggests also that few bands were fully straightedge. Instead, alleged straightedge bands sometimes contained only one or two self-professed straightedge individuals.

Even though observers such as MacKaye and Porcell comment upon the loosely affiliated nature of the early straightedge scene, there is ample evidence that early straightedge bands played a role in articulating a set of themes and ideas to delineate the boundaries of the straightedge concept. As I explained earlier, MacKaye's lyrics outlined abstinence from alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, and casual sex as straightedge lifestyle choices. Indeed, throughout the early 1980s, numerous other punk bands elaborated similar ideas.

7Seconds (1984), for example, poses the following message for the sexually promiscuous males among the hardcore punk scene: "You fucking moron, your brains

have run amuck -- A girl's only lot in life is not to fuck." Analysis of subsequent straightedge music lyrics indicates that opposition to promiscuous sexual activity is a consistent point of concern throughout the straightedge culture's history (see Billingsgate, 1989; Earth Crisis, 1995a; Judge, 1988a; Youth of Today, 1990). Other straightedge songs further elaborate MacKaye's emphasis on thinking or being straight. An early straightedge band called DYS, for example, in a song called "More Than Fashion," sings: "More than X's on my hand -- More than being in a straightedge band -- I see no use in my mind getting fucked -- A needless vacuum, I won't be sucked -- Straight mind, razor edge -- Firm footing on a social ledge" (DYS, n.d.a). A band called Uniform Choice (1985) echoes these sentiments: "Straight [a]nd [a]lert -- Straight [a]nd [a]lert -- Being high doesn't mean that much to me -- There's much more to life than I can see." Similarly, although at a later date, Youth of Today (1986a) sings: "Experiment with your mind -- You see things that I can't see -- Well no thanks friend, because now it ends -- When you push that shit on me -- Life's full of conflicts, we'll face -- We'll overcome them, thinking straight."

In sum, music lyrics suggest that the earliest iterations of straightedge culture comprise a philosophy and corresponding lifestyle opposed to particular forms of alleged vice. Specifically, early straightedge music lyrics build upon the ideas communicated in early Minor Threat lyrics, and communicate the broad theme that drugs and alcohol (and casual sex to a lesser extent) are a problematic aspect of youth culture, insofar as they impose barriers to self-control and clear thinking. Music played a central role in transmitting these early straightedge ideals. According to eyewitnesses, however, straightedge did not constitute a distinct music scene during the early 1980s.

Early Consolidation of the Straightedge Music Scene

Observers often identify a number of mid- to late-1980s bands from the New York area as a crucial force behind the consolidation of a distinctly straightedge music scene. Ian MacKaye, for example, explains:

> It wasn't until the New York scene in about 1984 or 1985 [that] there was an explosion [in the straightedge music scene]. And again, lead pretty much by Youth of Today, what was referred to as New York straightedge hardcore. And that's really where the modern notion of the movement was born. Ray Cappo, who was the singer of Youth of Today, I guess he was really a charismatic person. . . . He was really the one who articulated straightedge in a militant, formalized, movement way.

Here, MacKaye identifies one band in particular (Youth of Today) as a crucial factor in the consolidation of the straightedge music scene.

Members of Youth of Today make similar claims about their influential status. In an interview with Porcell (guitar player and co-founder of Youth of Today), for example, he explained to me that few bands during the mid 1980s fully embraced the straightedge concept, and that the members of Youth of Today intended to position themselves as a fully straightedge unit. In forming Youth of Today, Porcell and the rest of the band consciously sought to become a rallying point for straightedge:

> Being influenced by bands like Minor Threat, and Youth Brigade, and 7Seconds, and these bands that really had a lot to say and lot of criticisms of the way that American life is set up. Just being influenced by that, we wanted to be in a straightedge band. We wanted to be in a band with a positive message that could actually impact kids, like these other bands had impacted us. And we started with this goal in mind of trying to be like a band that had high ideals that didn't necessarily coincide with what the rest of the youth in America were doing. And we came out, we were very vocal, we were very straightedge, we put big black X's on our hands.

Thus, according to Porcell, Youth of Today embodied a conscious and almost premeditated attempt to galvanize a distinct and separate straightedge culture.

Furthermore, as MacKaye relayed to me, Youth of Today attempted to fully articulate and formalize the straightedge concept. In addition to dealing with the early straightedge themes concerning substance use, Youth of Today lyrics established a number of influential themes in the straightedge music genre, including pride, commitment, unity with other straightedgers, and a pervasive theme of optimism about the power of youth in effecting changes in society.: "Physically strong -- Morally straight -- Positive youth -- We're the youth of today" (Youth of Today, 1986b).

Themes of Anti-Drug Militancy

Since the mid 1980s, straightedge lyrical references to drugs and drug users increasingly have become antagonistic in nature. Many straightedge songs construe drugs as a dangerous social and moral threat, and they evaluate drug users as enemies. Moreover, some lyrics prescribe violent confrontation as an appropriate response to the perceived problems engendered by drugs. Indeed, straightedge lyrics similarly abound with denunciations and judgments of drug users, warnings to those who continue to use drugs, and advocations of violence as the most appropriate means of combating perceived drug enemies.

In a song called "In My Way," for example, Judge (1988b) poses the following threat to drug users: "Those drugs are gonna kill you if I don't get to you first -- I'm stepping back and I'm gonna judge you -- I hope that fucked up head can tell you what to do." The band follows up this warning in a later song called "Bringin' it Down": "A

beer, a joint, like a gun at your head -- The price that you pay is the blood that you bleed -- The needle, the track mark, you're scarred for life -- You're weak, you're hurt, and you're gonna lose this fight" (Judge, 1989a).

Other straightedge bands construct similar threats to drug users. Raid takes a particularly militant stance on the issue. In a song called "Words of War," the band issues a warning to users of both legal and illegal substances: "Our war is on, the talk must quit -- and all the guilty are gonna get hit" (Raid, 1990a). The band similarly elaborates a strong condemnation of tobacco smokers in a song called "Your Warning:" "Purification through discipline, my knowledge is superior and my tolerance wears thin -- What you put into your body is what you become -- Drug free fuck, death will be your outcome -- Take This As Your Warning" (Raid, 1991a).

Other bands also promote violence as an appropriate response to perceived drug enemies. In a song called "Bringing it Back," Integrity (1989a) reminisces about past confrontations with drug users: "BRINGING IT BACK, fists of truth -- BRINGING IT BACK, wrapping that chain around their throats. . . . -- BRINGING IT BACK, your misery -- BRINGING IT BACK, One Life Drug Free [emphases retained from original lyric sheet]." Similarly, in a song called "Stra-hate Edge," One Life Crew (1995) urges straightedge youth to rekindle the subculture's allegedly violent spirit: "Now it's time to put the HATE back in straight edge -- If you bring that shit around me, you're gonna fucking pay -- I've told you once, won't warn you again -- ONE LIFE DRUG FREE, until the end [emphases retained from original lyric sheet]."

Music as a Problematic Statement of Real Behavior

Thus, there is compelling evidence that certain elements of the straightedge music genre, especially beginning in the late 1980s, were rife with images of violence against perceived drug enemies. On the basis of lyrical evidence alone, however, it is naïve to merely assume that straightedge individuals actually engage in the drug-war violence described in much of the straightedge music genre. Music is an expression and not necessarily an autobiographical testament. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that at least some song-writers intended their extreme lyrical depictions of violence merely as humorous exaggerations.

In something of a military chant that serves as a prelude to a song called "In Your Face," for example, Slapshot (n.d.) thoroughly epitomizes straightedge themes of violence and moral condemnation: "Kill anyone with a beer in their hand, cause if you drink you're not a man -- Straightedge, straightedge in your face, you don't belong in the human race." As the singer explained to me in an interview, however, he intended the song as a joke. In fact, according to Jack (whose stage name is Choke), the chant emerged partially from inter-scene competition between the New York and Boston hardcore music scenes. Jack explained to me that he wrote the chant in a van, while en-route to a hardcore show in New York. He intended the chant to be humorous, and to parody the toughness of the Boston hardcore scene as well as to parody the straightedge phenomenon in general. Nonetheless, humorous intentions aside, Jack explained to me that the purpose of the chant widely got misunderstood: "Kill anyone with a beer in their hand? If you drink, your not a man? I mean how ridiculous could you be? . . . Every interview was like, 'do you really wanna kill people? I said, 'are you out your mind?'. . .

It's sort of a problem with people in New York. They take themselves too seriously. I can't stand anyone who can't laugh at themselves."

In sum, since the late 1980s, the straightedge musical genre often describes violent confrontation with the suppliers, dealers, and users of drugs. These lyrical excerpts, moreover, comprise only several examples of numerous references to beatings, stabbings, shootings, and even genocide as acceptable modes or strategies of combating perceived drug enemies. These lyrics, however, do not necessarily reflect actual violent behavior among the straightedge youth culture. As I explain later into this dissertation, a very small minority of straightedge individuals may engage in violent confrontations with non-straightedge individuals. As I also explain, however, a vast majority of straightedge individuals do not endorse violence. Thus, reactionary music lyrics, such as those presented here, may be a form of expressive activity. Lyrics are thoughts, ideas, observations, and even artistic expressions that do not necessarily reflect real behavior. Nonethless, as I explain towards the end of this chapter, lyrics such as these are influential and even instrumental for some individuals in forming and maintaining a straightedge identity.

Themes of Vegetarianism and Animal Rights

Beginning in the late 1980s, and supposedly led by Youth of Today, straightedge bands frequently disseminated criticisms of meat-eating. Porcell, former member of Youth of Today, reflects about the onset of the vegetarian theme among straightedge youth culture, as well as the power of music in effecting that theme:

> Me and Ray were both vegetarians, so we thought it was an important thing. Ray, he wanted to write a song about vegetarianism, and. . . it was

> such a foreign concept to most people like even within the hardcore music scene. We were even like, oh God, do we really want to do this? Are people gonna take to this, or are they gonna take it like completely strange. And then, it was another idea whose time had come, because by the time we put out "We're Not in this Alone" [an album], and went on tour, so many people were vegetarian. And I think that it's a testament to the power of music. Music has such power to change and influence peoples' lives, it amazing.

The song to which Porcell refers is entitled "No More," and it clearly espouses a pro-vegetarian stance with the following lyrics: "Meateating, [f]lesheating, think about it -- So callous to this crime we commit -- Always stuffing our face with no sympathy -- What a selfish, hardened society" (Youth of Today, 1988a). Following the example of Youth of Today, numerous other straightedge bands since the late 1980s also construe meat eating as the moral equivalent of taking an innocent life: "A moral opposition -- To the murder of animals -- It's my philosophy -- To take life is criminal" (Insted, 1989). Similarly, on the topic of eating meat, Insight (1990) exclaims: "IT'S TIME to face the facts -- THIS TIME END THE CRUELTY [emphases retained from original lyric sheet]."

While a substantial proportion of music lyrics simply make a moral statement about animal rights, an element of the straightedge genre advocates a confrontational stance against people who allegedly violate animal rights. Indeed, some lyrics claim that meat-eaters will suffer the consequences of a harsh straightedge judgment. In a song called "Dead Wrong," Integrity (1989b) poses the following warning to meateaters: "You've gone from being the hunter to being the hunted -- You're dead." Other bands also threaten a straightedge backlash against meat eaters. Worlds Collide (n.d.), for example, sings: "Your addicted action brings reaction -- You'll suffer the fate of the

flesh you fry." Moreover, according to Burn (1990), meat-eaters "have killed and shall be judged."

Into the 1990s, music lyrics indicate an increased straightedge opposition to animal exploitation in all of its perceived forms. Raid (1990b) offers the following warning to alleged animal exploiters: "All of their innocent suffering is real -- Now it's time you learn just how the animals feel. . . . -- Hands off the animals." Raid (1991b) further elaborates theses threats in a song called, "Under the Ax:" "I'll remove you from birth and confine your every movement -- Inject you with drugs as you drown in a liquid diet -- Split open your stomach and watch your organs spill into a pool of blood -- And how I smile at your death as I count the profit."

Other straightedge lyrics are nonetheless retributive in content. Earth Crisis (1992a), for example, constructs the following message for meat eaters: "If you refuse to change, then you are guilty and must be destroyed -- Thoughts of superiority, your supremist crimes must end -- You're a demon with blood on your hands, your death will bring their freedom." At a later date, Earth Crisis (1995b) re-emphasizes this message: "A bullet for every demon -- Only your blood can cleanse you of your sin. . . . -- Images of your mutilated victims as I line you in my sight -- The wrath of sanity unleashed; justice on Judgment Night."

In sum, lyrics indicate that, in addition to a perceived drug threat, the issue of animal rights became a fundamental element of the straightedge cultural ethos during the late 1980s. Having said this about animal rights, I do not mean to claim that all or even most straightedge youth, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, opposed drugs and alleged animal exploitation to the extent that selected straightedge music lyrics might

indicate. Indeed, as I explore later into this dissertation, not all self-professed straightedge individuals are vegetarian (or vegan) and most straightedge individuals do not advocate violence. Violent lyrics, furthermore, do not necessarily reflect actual violent behavior committed even by the writers of the lyrics. As evidence of this difference between lyrics and behavior, Dwid (the lead singer of Integrity) comments on the violent tendencies of Karl Buechner (lead singer for Earth Crisis): "I've never seen them follow through with the words they preach. Karl seems like a nice guy, but I often wonder if he or anyone who preaches what they do are prepared to back it up with actions. I don't think so" (Dwid in Nevermore Fanzine, 1995). Despite the difficulties in discerning the extent to which verbal depictions of violence mirror actual violence, I do believe that militant lyrical themes regarding drugs and animal exploitation at least partially comprised a straightedge ideology or conceptual frame of reference. This conceptual frame of reference likely serves as a partial measure according to which some individuals construct for themselves a straightedge identity.

Themes Suggesting Schism and Fragmentation

Straightedge music lyrics throughout the1980s indicate that straightedgers emphasized the importance of maintaining unity within their "scene." DYS (n.d.b), for example, describes straightedge youth as "a brotherhood, true 'til death." In another song (DYS, n.d.c) the band depicts straightedgers as "united together, youth with a voice." Insted (1988), further echoes the unity theme: "Bound together strong and true -- Step by step is how its done -- One plus one is how its done." Similarly, Youth of Today (1988b) refers to the straightedge scene as one founded upon the united efforts and commitments

of individual straightedge youth: "Together we've built this, and all done our part -- Together we've stood here right from the start." A 28 year-old straightedge woman, named Dawn, was an active member of the New York and Connecticut straightedge scenes in the late 1980s (the music scenes that allegedly played a major role in consolidating straightedge into something of a movement). During an interview with her, she confirmed these themes of unity and co-operation. In particular, Dawn claimed that each person felt that they each had helped build the straightedge/hardcore music scene, and that hardcore kids were united in their common ownership of that scene: "we're building something that's completely new and different and, you know, it's going to be a real alternative and a real way for people like us to exist in this world. We had felt like we had ownership in this, you know what I mean? Like, you know, I helped, I am a part of this scene, and I *am* this scene in a way."

Despite straightedge emphases on the importance of unity and the consolidation of a distinct and common scene, music lyrics indicate that the subculture may have experienced a fragmentation during the late 1980s. In particular, straightedge music lyrics communicate a sense of disillusionment and frustration with certain self-professed straightedge youth who are perceived not to be "living up" to the straightedge philosophy and lifestyle. Bold (1988a) for example, sings: "You talk big, when you preach -- But empty promises are what you keep -- You say your dedication is so deep -- I know that your TALK IS CHEAP." Echoing this reference to empty promises, Youth of Today (1986c) says: "I remember all the things that you said: Shit you said! -- I guess it was all just a bunch of lies: Fucking lies! -- Stabbed us all in the back: Right in the back! -- Don't you dare look me in the eye!" Other lyrics also refer to disenchanted straightedge youth

as backstabbers: "We have seen the backstab blood -- Most came and fuckin' went -- They played the part and they wore the right clothes -- But they didn't know what the fuck it meant" (Judge, 1988c).

Confirming this apparent trend, a number of the straightedgers whom I interviewed explained that some people cynically describe straightedge apostates as "true 'till college" (as opposed to "true 'till death"). Indeed, during my interview with Porcell, he discussed his own disillusionment with the straightedge scene in the early 1990s:

> I was playing with Gorilla Biscuits at the time, who were like a big straightedge band at the time. . . . They were straightedge early on, but they were getting older. None of them were straightedge [anymore]. We'd go on tour and sing these straightedge songs, and none of the kids that used to have Xs on their hands - I was friends with them from going on tour so much – none of them were straightedge.

Thus, according to Porcell, much of his disillusionment with the straightedge scene stems from his perceptions of high rates of attrition among his local straightedge networks.

Straightedge music lyrics sometimes construct vehement condemnations of "backstabbing" straightedge youth. Confront (1993), for example, directs the following threat to alleged backstabbers: "You're the one that's gonna pay, getting beat is the only way -- Now it's payday." Moreover, Earth Crisis (1992b) elaborates a similarly strong rejection of disenchanted straightedgers: "Fuck all those who bent the straight edge with their fucking lies." Other bands, however, respond by espousing a commitment to remain "true" to the straightedge way of life. Battery (n.d.), for example, claims that "only the diehard remain!" Similarly, Chain of Strength (1989), purports to be "True ' til death!"

Taking music lyrics at face value, evidence exists that the straightedge culture, at a general level, has experienced internal tension caused by the perceived defection of some straightedge individuals. Whether or not tension and defection equally

characterized all regional scenes and franchises, however, is difficult to ascertain. Indeed, some observers purport that certain scenes were more fragmented than others. Jack, the lead singer for Slapshot (a Boston-based band), commented to me about the New York hardcore scene in particular, claiming: "They always had a disjointed, back-stabbing scene. . . . and it's still that way today." Further into our conversation, Jack suggested that some of the inter-scene tension may have been generated by the efforts of certain bands and individuals (with a pro-vegetarian stance) to consolidate a particular definition of straightedge: "I always thought straightedge should be for everybody. It should be as easy. . . as it possibly can be. A lot of guys decided that they wanted to make it their own little club."

Themes of a Hardline Straightedge Resurgence

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, certain elements of the straightedge music genre referred to an emerging phenomenon called "hardline." More than anything, initial references to hardline referred simply to the level of militancy characteristic of one's claim to straightedge. In other words, hardline straightedge individuals viewed themselves as intensely committed to straightedge and also antagonistic towards those who violated the basic straightedge lifestyle tenets. In line with this idea, Porcell comments on his own perceptions of early permutations of hardline mentality:

> One of the next trends was sort of this hardline, tough-guy, I am gonna kick your ass if you're not straightedge type thing. . . . I can really see where the mentality comes from. Especially growing up in the skinhead scene in New York city; people throwing beer cans at you. In high school, people making fun of you for being straightedge. I can see it as a reactionary thing. I even did this record, Project X, and it was a real hardline straightedge record. Like, we had this one song and the lyrics were: 'I am as straight as the line that you sniff up your nose, I am as hard

> as the booze that swill down your throat, I am as bad as the shit you breathe into your lungs, and I'll fuck you up as fast as a pill on your tongue.' And I mean, whatever, at the time, that's the way I felt. But then, as we went on, and we would like play and stuff, I saw what a negative reaction this had on kids. . . . And it was like, this has to stop. I felt bad because I felt like I was actually promoting it with records.

Here, Porcell describes hardline as a type of mentality, involving a very militant straightedge stance. Indeed, music lyrics suggest that the hardline mentality spread through some sectors of the straightedge music genre during the early 1990s.

Raid (1990c), for example, in a song called "Better Life," implies that some straightedge youth typically do not fulfill their professed goals: "Don't limit your potential through an X -- Develop a superior conscience." Furthermore, stating their opposition to straightedgers who do not adhere to the youth culture's hardline resurgence, Raid (1990d) sings: "Our 'unity' within the scene is a contradiction -- I don't unite with what I despise -- Forget the past its time for the new school, the hardline -- So now you're going to see why you're our enemy." Finally, Raid (1990e) summarizes the band's perception of hardline sentiment in a song called "Unleashed:" "Straight in your face, my law pure and strong -- Live tough on a pledge, in a world full of wrong."

These music lyrics suggest that a number of particularly militant (and likely a small minority of) straightedge individuals assumed the name "hardline" beginning in the late 1980s. They apparently emerged in reaction to harassment from non-straightedgers as well as perceptions of the straightedge subculture's inherent weaknesses. Furthermore, evidence suggests that hardline straightedgers may construe themselves as a unified faction or movement within the broader straightedge cultural ethos. A manifesto, printed by Bloomington Hardline (1994), for example, makes claims about the

distinctiveness of hardline and it outlines a set of parameters for defining oneself as hardline:

> The ultimate goal of hardline, however unrealistic, is to revolt against the present system and tear it apart in the name of supreme justice. . . . a victory for hardline is a victory for nature, for we intend to take the earth back to a system of living with nature and not against it. For too long the greedy hands of evil have forced us to live by their rules, and we will no longer stand for your defiance of the basic laws of the earth. No more eating of our animal brothers and sisters. No more scientific death camps for the unborn victims of selfish sexuality. No more abusing the body with drugs that weaken our minds and make us tools. No more excuses, the earth must be set free. . . . To stand for justice is to stand for all that is hardline, and to stand for hardline is to stand for justice. . . . Hardline cannot compromise itself to those who do not believe in all parts of its ideology, you believe in it all or none.

Here hardline emerges as an orthodox consolidation of fundamental straightedge points of concern. In addition to the historical straightedge focus on drugs, this manifesto places hardline squarely amidst more recent issues such as animal rights, abortion, and environmental awareness.

Rumors abound about the proliferation of hardline violence. A 20/20 news program (aired in early 1998), for example, in its treatment of the straightedge phenomenon, focuses squarely upon the violent acts of a few self-professed straightedgers. The report even likens straightedge to violent street gangs, such as the Bloods and the Crips. Hardline, however, is a difficult phenomenon to confirm (despite the existence of hardline lyrics, manifestos, photographs, and media coverage). Indeed, in my efforts to find straightedge individuals to speak with as part of this study, I was unable to find a single individual who claimed to be "hardline." Ian MacKaye (of Minor Threat) relayed to me several observations that partially confirm the relative rarity of an ultra-militant hardline faction, as well as the media's misrepresentation of the magnitude

of hardline: "what aggravates me so much about all of this is that I think, within straightedge, for every kid that blows up a fur factory, there's like 10 000 kids who are just trying to do the right thing in their own lives. And they're just not news-worthy." While I can not venture far beyond speculation on this point, it seems that hardline straightedgers do not approximate anything like a movement. On the contrary, in all likelihood, hardline is a very individualistic phenomenon, whereby particular straightedge individuals assume the label as a means to symbolize their militant stance and to amplify their resistance to perceived conditions of Western social and moral degeneration.

Themes of Krishna Consciousness

During the early 1990s, a number of straightedge individuals began to align themselves with the teachings of the Krishna Consciousness movement (Westcott, 1994; Wood, 1999a). As evidence of this trend, a number of self-professed Krishna Conscious music bands formed amidst the hardcore/straightedge music scene, and established a sub-genre commonly known as 'Krishna-core.' On the topic of Krishna-core music, and positing a direct connection between straightedge and Krishna Consciousness, one anonymous observer writes:

> Right now you may be asking yourself what is straight edge? [A]nd who is this [K]rishna? [Straight edge] is not only a form of music it is also a way of life. Straight [edge] basically means no drugs, no sex and for most, no meat. As you may see, [s]traight [e]dge and Hindu philosophy are similar in some respects. Krishna-core is hardcore music devoted to Krishna. Krishna is god (Anonymous, 1998).

During the early 1990s, confirming implied connections between straightedge and

Krishna Consciousness, a number of self professed Krishna-core bands appeared within the straightedge music scene (i.e., 108, Another Wall, Copper, Prema, Shelter). Moreover, Krishna-core fanzines (see Equal Vision, n.d.; Krsna Grrrl, n.d.; War on Illusion, n.d.) regularly include interviews with band members who either are current straightedgers or former straightedgers turned Krishna devotees. Comparing names of band members printed on lyric sheets, it appears that many of the players in krishna-core bands previously were members of straightedge music groups. Some members of straightedge music bands Judge and Youth of Today, for example, in 1990 reformed with others as a self-professed Hare Krishna band, called Shelter.

Like straightedge music, Krishna-core encourages opposition to drugs, animal exploitation, and promiscuous sex (see Shelter, 1997; Shelter, 1993). Diverging thematically from straightedge music, however, Krishna-core often emphasizes the allegedly "illusory" nature of material existence. In a song called "Destiny," for example, Prema sings: "We accept illusion, along with false identity -- But only to complicate our path to true destiny -- Krishna Prema." Also communicating a belief that material existence merely is an illusion, a Krishna-core band called 108 (n.d.) says: "I know I'm someone -- And I know that there is something more -- I know your world is nothing -- I turn my back on your corpse hearted 'reality' -- I walk right out that door -- I disaccept [sic] your nothingness -- I am your no one no more." In a similar vein, Shelter (1992a) says the following about material human existence: "This world's like a dream its not what it seems -- You think its solid but it fades instead."

Other subcultural literature echoes the 'material reality as illusion' theme communicated by Krishna-core music lyrics. Shelter's (1992b) Quest for Certainty

compact disc, for example, includes a printed sermon addressing the issue of material existence. According to its author: "The actual form of life for living entities is one of spiritual happiness, which is real happiness. This happiness can be achieved only when one stops all materialistic activities. Material sense enjoyment is simply imagination." Similarly claiming that material existence is illusory in nature, an article in a Krishna-core magazine entitled War on Illusion alleges the futility of the straightedge philosophy and lifestyle:

> Straightedgers realize that sense gratification won't satisfy them. The problem is they don't know what will satisfy them. . . . Since the living entity is by nature spirit, when he engages in spiritual activity, or Krishna Consciousness, he finds the true bliss, peace, and contentment that he's constantly searching for. And if he's found true happiness and satisfaction, what need does he have to dig back into the mire of false pleasures. . . ? (Porcell, n.d.: 17).

This quote depicts the straightedge way of life as inherently unsatisfying because allegedly it is non-spiritual in nature.

In a similar vein, Krishna-core music lyrics sometimes express a sense of dissatisfaction with straightedge subcultural ideals. In a song called"Enough," for example, Shelter (1990) offers the following comment about its members' previous commitment to the straightedge scene: "Fighting for right while not knowing what's wrong -- Trying to change the world with a song -- I was chewing the chewed, I couldn't taste it -- Maybe I knew it was nonsense but I couldn't face it -- Well I've had enough, it's time to wake up."

Although most straightedge individuals likely did not and do not affiliate themselves with Krishna Consciousness, evidence suggests that non-Krishna conscious straightedgers likely expose themselves at least moderately to Krishna-core music.

Analysis of mail order catalogues reveals that Krishna-core music recordings are available through the larger straightedge affiliated record labels and distribution companies (see Revelation Records, 1995; Very Distribution, 1994; Victory Records, 1996). Moreover, a company called Equal Vision Records produces primarily Krishna-core music, while concurrently distributing the recordings of many straightedge music groups (see Equal Vision Records, 1994).

Some straightedgers claim, "Equal Vision Records is a front put forth by ISKCON to recruit hard-core kids into the Hare Krishna movement" (see Equal Vision Records, 1994: 17). According to a co-owner of the record label, however, "Equal Vision [R]ecords is not owned by ISKCON" (in Equal Vision Records, 1994: 20). Moreover, he states, "I'm definitely partial towards 'Krishna bands' just like someone who is straight edge and does a label is partial to 'straight edge' bands. But I'm not an elitist nor am I fanatical, I'm just a kid who prescribes to [a] certain system of ideals and does a record label" (in Equal Vision Records, 1994: 1).

Despite claims that deny direct organizational links between ISKCON and the straightedge subculture, evidence exists that ISKCON does in fact officially acknowledge the presence of current and former straightedge youth within the movement's ranks. A Hare Krishna Internet index produced by ISKCON, for example, includes several World Wide Web page links listed under the heading, "Straightedge/Krishnacore." Pictures in ISKCON books, moreover, indicate that an official ISKCON magazine entitled Back to Godhead sometimes includes articles about straightedge youth (see Prabhupada, 1993: 129).

The Krishna Consciousness movement embraces the Hindu belief that human

existence progresses historically through distinct ages, called Yugas. According to this theory, humankind now lives in the Age of Kali, or the Kali-Yuga, which supposedly is the period directly prior to the termination of humankind's material and allegedly illusory existence (Judah, 1974: 129). Purportedly ruled by the Goddess Kali (a powerful, fierce, and terrible Goddess capable of immense and indiscriminate destruction), sources describe the Kali Yuga as an an evil age characterized by sickness, degeneracy, and indulgence in sense pleasure (Judah, 1974: 129; Prem Nath, 1995: 239).

Straightedge subcultural artifacts indicate that some straightedge youth explicitly identify with the Kali Yuga concept. Conforming to typical descriptions of Kali as a black-skinned Goddess with a tusked and blood smeared face, a third eye, and wearing a necklace of human skulls (Prem Nath, 1995: 239), Integrity (n.d.a) prints a picture of the Goddess upon the front cover of an album entitled, In Contrast of Sin. Furthermore, a song by the same title refers specifically to the Kali Yuga: "Evil lurking, appearing -- Adhering in the corner of my mind's eye. . . . -- In the Age of Kali -- I gotta know, I gotta believe -- You wouldn't leave me -- In contrast of sin" (Integrity, 1989c). Other (non-krishnacore) straightedge music lyrics also refer to the Kali Yuga. Mean Season (1994), for example, in a song entitled "Four Circles: Kali," describes life in contemporary Western society as a degenerate "plague of humanity."

In sum, while most straightedgers likely do not identify themselves as Krishna Conscious, it is plausible that a substantial proportion of straightedgers are exposed to Krishna Consciousness ideals through distinctly Krishna Conscious straightedge music, as well as straightedge music that communicates in a more peripheral and secondary way the Krishna Conscious theme of the Kali Yuga. As I explain in greater detail later in this

dissertation, all Krishna devotees are called to abide by four lifestyle tenets that closely parallel the lifestyle choices of many straightedgers. These central and fundamental Krishna Consciousness lifestyle tenets include: 1) No eating of meat; 2) No illicit sexual activity; 3) No consumption of intoxicants; and 4) No gambling. In order to further gauge straightedgers' potential exposure to Krishna Consciousness compatible ideals, I conducted a quantitative content analysis of the lyrics of 585 straightedge songs, recorded on 65 compact discs, cassette tapes, and vinyl records for which written copies of the music lyrics are available. In order to ensure that I coded distinctly straightedge recordings, I omitted self-professed Krishna-core music recordings from this analysis. I coded the printed lyric sheets of all sampled recordings for instances of five Hare Krishna compatible themes. These include: 1.) opposition to intoxicants and intoxication; 2.) opposition to animal exploitation; 3.) opposition to promiscuous sex; 4.) opposition to gambling; 5.) perceptions of social, cultural, political, or moral degeneration (the Kali-Yuga).

The analysis confirms my assertions that straightedge music lyrics frequently communicate a number of Krishna Consciousness compatible themes. Fifty out of 65 (or 77%) of the straightedge recordings in my sample contained at least one reference to at least one of the five identified themes. In total, I tallied 520 references to Krishna Consciousness compatible themes, including 194 references opposing intoxicants and intoxication, 133 references opposing animal exploitation, 21 references opposing promiscuous sex, and 172 references to perceived conditions of social/cultural/political/moral degeneration. I observed no references that opposed gambling. Of the 585 analyzed songs, 50 of them expressed opposition to intoxicants and

intoxication, 29 expressed opposition to animal exploitation, 15 expressed opposition to promiscuous sex, and 98 contained references to social/cultural/political/moral degeneration.

Satanic Themes

Some elements of the straightedge music genre, beginning in the early 1990s, display a preoccupation with themes either explicitly related to Satanism, or generally related to themes of evil and indiscriminate human destruction. Certain songs frequently invoke religious imagery to depict scenarios of hell, denial of redemption, and the general destruction of humankind. In a song called 'Tempest,' for example, Integrity (1991a) sings: "Fire enters the gallows -- Prisoners trapped like rats -- Somewhere out there watching -- Your saviour starts to laugh." During another song, Integrity (1991b) states: "No name is legion -- The Son a demon -- Brought up from the depths of hell -- The changing lamb, it turns to sand -- Glorious renewal of war -- Dawn of a new apocalypse." Invoking similar imagery, a band called Ringworm (1993a), whose members each formerly belonged to self-professed straightedge bands, claims: "I have touched the face of God, and it is cold, it is dead." In another song, asserting that humankind presently lives in "the witch's season," Ringworm (1993b) implies the need for mass human extermination: "The cleansing of humanity is the chore -- The instrument is the irony of holy war -- Witness the end of our world."

References espousing a need to purge humankind of its social and moral degeneration appear frequently in other straightedge (and straightedge affiliated) music lyrics. In a song called "Wound in Society," for example, Transcend (1993) sings:

"Look up towards boundless daydream kingdom -- Then walk outside, to the reality of infernal regions -- Holy war -- Holy War -- Holy War -- Holy War." Mirroring this theme, Integrity (1996) prints a startling image upon the band's Humanity is the Devil album cover. Under the caption "Holy Terrorism," there is a cherubim likeness of Charles Manson, his forehead marked with an X (not a swastika), riding upon a saddled fish. Also, printed upon the album cover are the following words: "You enter this world in pain, and shall leave in the same vain."

Throughout the 1990s, small elements of the straightedge music genre abound with the teachings of an obscure, and arguably satanic (see Bainbridge, 1991, pp. 301-304) religious group called the Process Church of the Final Judgment. According to the Processeans, humankind has doomed itself through its inherent and unchecked corruption, and now lives amidst the apocalypse prophesied in the Book of Revelations (Bainbridge, 1997, pp. 250-251). Moreover, the group communicates a belief that the events of the apocalypse stem from a pact between the alleged gods Jehovah, Lucifer, Christ, and Satan (Bainbridge, 1997, p. 245; Bainbridge, 1978, p. 170). Reflecting this belief, Processean religious meetings typically involve the following announcement:

> Through Love, Christ and Satan have destroyed their enmity and come together for the End, Christ to Judge, Satan to execute the judgment. . . Christ and Satan joined, the Lamb and the Goat, pure Love descended from the pinnacle of Heaven, united with pure Hatred risen from the depths of Hell. . . . The End is now. The New Beginning is come (in Bainbridge, 1997, p. 245).

Other Processean publications depict a more sinister image of a supernaturally conspired apocalypse. According to a Processean pamphlet entitled "Satan on War:"

> The final march of doom has begun. The earth is prepared for the ultimate devastation. The mighty engines of WAR are all aligned and brought

> together for the End. The scene is set. The Lord LUCIFER has sown the seeds of WAR, and now weeps to see them take root and flourish in the fertile ground of man's destructive nature. The Lord JEHOVAH decrees the End and the violence of the End. He prophesies the harvest of monumental slaughter. And I, the Lord SATAN with My army of the damned, am come to reap that harvest, and to feed My furnace with the souls of the fearful (The Process, n.d.).

Some straightedge affiliated publications and subcultural artifacts also communicate these Processean apocalyptic themes.

During 1996 and 1997, for example, a straightedge record and distribution company disseminated pamphlets which communicate distinctly Processean beliefs about humanity's inherent corruption and the imminence of a divinely-conspired apocalypse. Written by the self-proclaimed Holy Terror Church of Final Judgment, these publications (echoing Processean teachings) claim that Jehovah and Satan have conspired together in a plan to destroy humankind. Moreover, claiming that the world soon will come to an end, "Holy Terror" publications state that all humans should participate in the world's demise.

A Holy Terror Church of Final Judgment (1996) pamphlet, entitled "Humanity is the Devil," explains that: "Humanity chose to disregard Jehovah's generous wager. Your humanity chose sense pleasure over eternal salvation. Now you must live with your choices." Further reflecting Processean teachings, the pamphlet describes, in detail, that "the lamb and the goat have finally fused as one." More specifically, the pamphlet explains that Jehovah and Satan, at the request of Jesus Christ, have engaged in a mutual pact to destroy humankind. The unknown author says also that demons in human form already are living among humankind, preparing for its destruction. Thus, the pamphlet urges readers to "identify the demon, and then destroy them before they destroy you."

All of these publications are adorned with Process symbols and imagery. Allegedly symbolizing power (Bainbridge, 1978, p. 186), the typical Processean symbol consists of four interlocking bars, which resemble concurrently both a swastika and the letter P. A band called Integrity displays variations of this symbol on three different album covers (see Integrity, 1996; 1997; n.d.b.), in the form of a lamb and goat fused together at the legs. The symbol also adorns Integrity shirts worn by a number of straightedge individuals.

Building upon the Processean theme of humanity's allegedly immanent destruction, as well as the individual's role in the world's demise, a 1997 Victory Records Megazine article entitled "Release the Fiend," states:

> Know that life is worthless unless it is lived in the very teeth of death, that peace is nothing more than a fleeting moment in the midst of war, that love is empty save as a transitory oasis in a world of violent hatred, that to create is only meaningful in order to destroy. . . . Choose what road of slaughter you will follow. Then stride out upon the land amongst the people. Kill with the devastating precision of your sword arm[,]. . . destroy with the overwhelming fury of your bestial strength, lay waste with [the] all encompassing majesty of your power (Abernathy, 1997).

These straightedge allusions to evil and the mass destruction of humankind may embody an extreme consolidation of traditional straightedge themes of Western social and moral degeneration. These themes in the music genre, however, should not necessarily be taken as conclusive evidence of some sort of straightedge faction. Indeed, upon closer examination of the source of these themes, it appears that they stem predominantly from bands in the Cleveland, Ohio area, and from the band Integrity in particular.

Dwid, the lead singer from Integrity, explains that he simply finds the Process Church an interesting phenomenon: "There are so many speculations regarding the Process. There are several alleged connections between the Process and certain serial

killers. . . . There are many sides to the Process, but the destructive side of it is what interests me" (Dwid cited in Terrorizer Magazine, 1997). Dwid further explains, "I'm definitely attracted to Satanism. I am interested in the destructive and animalistic side of who I am. I think mankind is an abomination. . . . For lack of a better word, Satanism is the most appropriate term I can think of to describe how I feel. I am more of a predator than pacifist" (Dwid cited in Terrorizer Magazine, 1997). In a 1997 interview with Metal Maniacs Magazine, Dwid explained that his lyrics are highly personal in nature and that he is "not calling for people to commit crime sprees" (Dwid quoted in Metal Maniacs Magazine, 1997).

While songwriters may claim that their use of Satanic imagery is highly personal in nature, evidence suggests that at least a few isolated straightedge individuals are "dabblers in Satanism" (see Zellner, 1995). A 1994 issue of the Inside Front straightedge fanzine, for example, includes an interview with a former straightedger who claims now to be a satanist. The interviewee explains that he distanced himself from the straightedge subculture because he perceives that straightedge philosophies and lifestyles are "obsessive" in nature. Moreover, the interviewee professes his adherence to the alleged satanic tenets of "do unto others as they do unto you, be aware of your surroundings, and value yourself" (quoted in Inside Front, 1994). During a separate interview in the same magazine, an anonymous member of a straightedge band (called Lash Out) refers to satanism as "a positive ideology" (quoted in Inside Front, 1994).

At least one straightedge individual with whom I spoke also expressed an interest in Satanic themes. During an interview, this particular individual explained to me that he does not abide by any particular religious codes, but that he emphasizes themes such as

"self empowerment, think for yourself, do your own thing." He further explained that he glanced through Anton Lavey's, The Satanic Bible, and he concluded that the book is really about "doing your own thing." This individual, however, in no way labels himself as a Satanist. Instead, he explains that his stance on life involves "[not] hurting people in a direct sense, and don't worry about what other people are gonna say."

In sum, while there likely is nothing that resembles a full-blown Satanic straightedge faction, Satanism is an ideology that appears to resonate with at least some straightedge affiliates and former affiliates on at least a superficial level. Insofar as satanism and Processean teachings emphasize the straightedge themes of personal power, self-preservation, and/or hatred of one's enemies (see Bainbridge, 1997; Bainbridge, 1978; LaVey, 1969), straightedge youths' attraction to Satanic and Processean teachings at least partially become clear. Processean and Satanic ideals provide straightedge youth a means to amplify their commitment to self-edification.

Summary of Lyrical Themes

Utilizing an extensive collection of straightedge music lyrics, and supported in a secondary way by interview data, this chapter constructs a preliminary picture of the straightedge subculture's general historical thematic development. In summary, my analysis of straightedge music lyrics suggests that: 1) The concept of straightedge first emerged amidst the Washington DC punk rock scene, and stems specifically from a song written by Ian MacKaye of Minor Threat; 2) The early straightedge cultural ethos emphasized such themes as the importance of unity, opposition to substance use, and the value of being mentally and physically independent of alleged vice; 3) During the later

1980s, straightedge opposition to substance use became more extreme at least at a general level, and animal rights emerged as an issue of straightedge concern; 4) During the late 1980s, the straightedge subculture possibly began to fragment, with small minority straightedge factions constructing their own boundaries; and 5) Indicating at least the potential for further bifurcation of the straightedge phenomenon, evidence suggests that newly emerging themes within the straightedge cultural ethos (such as Satanism) are beginning to resonate with at least a very small minority of straightedge individuals.

Having made these assertions, I do not mean to reify the straightedge subculture. Straightedge is not a "thing" that exists in its own right. It is a concept that exists only insofar as individuals subsume themselves collectively within its label and thereby impute it with meaning. Straightedge is a socially constructed frame of reference, which individuals both refer to and reconstruct as a means of formulating for themselves a straightedge identity (or some variant thereof). As I present it in this chapter, therefore, the history of the straightedge subculture is a history of conceptual/thematic shifts in one element of the straightedge cultural frame of reference. Further into this dissertation, however, I explore the perceptions and experiences of individual straightedgers who apprehend and modify the straightedge frame of reference in constructing for themselves a straightedge identity.

Does Music Really Matter?

It is plausible that music has no role whatsoever in affirming cultural boundaries. Perhaps straightedge music lyrics merely are nothing more that personal expressions of the individual song-writers, as opposed to being signifiers of broad straightedge cultural

themes. Furthermore, it is plausible that a significant number of straightedge individuals simply do not care for the music at all. In light of these possibilities, and in anticipation of criticisms regarding validity, I think it is appropriate to address these issues.

I argue that music can be central to defining and maintaining straightedge cultural boundaries. Indeed, while a song embodies the subjectivity of the song-writer, that song is coercive insofar as it evokes at least a small reaction from the listener and in some cases even evokes a profound reaction. In fact, of the straightedge individuals with whom I spoke, many reported that their introduction to straightedge was facilitated directly by music lyrics. Neil for example, explains: "I started listening to punk rock. . . and then I came across that Minor Threat album and that. . . whole straightedge song. and I was like, oh, that sounds kinda like me." Neil further explains that in many ways he lived a straightedge lifestyle before encountering the idea of straightedge, but that many of his friends did not make the same lifestyle choices as he did and that he felt a sense of loneliness as a result. During our interview, Neil explained to me that music helped him deal with that sense of loneliness: "After I heard those songs, I was like, hey, someone else is the same as me."

Others reported similar experiences to me. Dan, a 34 year-old who discovered straightedge in the early 1980s explains: "The first time I heard the term straightedge was, of course, the Minor Threat song. A friend had loaned me a tape. . . so I am listening to this noise that I've never heard before. And what I could pick out was that 'I don't smoke, I don't drink, I am straightedge.' And I was like, wow, I don' t do that either. There's a term for this!" Also commenting on the personal resonance and significance of straightedge music, Derek explains:

> I grew up on metal. . . and I'd like never heard of Earth Crisis and all those victory bands. . . I mean they were really really good! . . . And I was blown away. I mean it was just this heavy brash music [with] songs about not doing drugs, and songs about veganism. . . . I really got into hardcore over night. I was like, wow, this is so cool! It's because like you listen to the lyrics, and you go and buy a Minor Threat CD, you can relate to everything being said.

Porcell relates a similar experience: "I heard about straightedge bands like 7Seconds and Minor Threat, and I was like, wow, this is something smart. This is something positive, this is something progressive. So I latched onto those early straightedge bands and it really hit home with me." Thomas explained to me also that, at the time he first defined himself in terms of the straightedge concept, straightedge hardcore music strongly resonated with his own life experiences: "I just felt like, very discontented and disenchanted, and just didn't know where to turn or just what the heck was going on. And that's what I always felt that the music was all about. And I thought that the music actually captured that feeling surprisingly well."

A straightedge woman named Vessel explained to me that an affinity for the music genre in some sense is actually a crucial defining characteristic of a straightedge identity: "I think music, it's not only very important to me, but a big part of straightedge because it did start in the music scene. . . . part of straightedge is the music, and there's a difference between being drug free and being straightedge." Vessel further elaborates that "within any culture there's different things that the people within the culture have in common. And, with the straightedge culture, one of the common grounds is music."

Thus, for at least some straightedge individuals, straightedge music is crucial in facilitating the initial formation of a straightedge identity as well as being important in the ongoing maintenance of a straightedge identity. Indeed, during our interview, Dan

commented on the early East coast American straightedge scene, claiming: "I think everybody, when they heard Minor Threat, just had an epiphany."

Despite claims about the centrality of straightedge music in forming a straightedge identity, however, not all self-professed straightedge individuals are fans of the music genre. Sarah, for example, explained to me: "the only straightedge band I have is Minor Threat. . . . I'm not really into hardcore, it's little bit too hard for me. . . . I've never been to a straightedge show, though I've been invited. It just didn't seem like something that I wanted to do." Another straightedge woman, named Janine, explains that she hears straightedge music only in passing. She further explains, "I didn't care for the music that much. It wasn't really my kind of music I guess." 29 year old Benjamin expresses a similar ambivalence towards straightedge music:

> I think a big difference between me and other straightedge kids is that I'm really not a huge fan of straightedge music. . . . Most of the stuff I'm just not really into because I really don't like that metal stuff. . . . The chances are, if there's a straightedge show here I probably won't go. I might go, I might not go, whereas I think for a lot of other straightedge kids the music is like the central focus of the movement.

Thus, while music may be a crucial source of straightedge identity for many, there are at least some individuals who claim to maintain an ongoing straightedge identity without affiliating themselves strongly with the straightedge music genre or scene. For at least some individuals, therefore, themes predominant in the straightedge music genre may have relatively little impact on their straightedge self-identity.

Chapter Five

Constructing and Reconstructing the Straightedge Frame of Reference: Exploring the Normative and Attitudinal Boundaries of Straightedge Youth

Chapter Introduction

Drawing upon interview data, this chapter explores individual straightedgers' perceptions of the meaning of straightedge. Thus, the chapter generally is constructed to illuminate answers to research questions one and two (both of which seek to understand the nature of straightedge cultural boundaries). In chapter four, content analysis of straightedge music lyrics provided evidence of shifting straightedge cultural boundaries. The current chapter suggests that these broad cultural transformations (including schism) may be linked to individuals' reconstructions of a straightedge frame of reference. Thus, chapter five also offers a partial answer to research question number five, which asks (among other things) what the straightedge case reveals about processes of subcultural transition.

Straightedge Rules

As I outlined in the previous chapter, the straightedge culture generally galvanizes around an opposition to drugs, alcohol, and promiscuous sexual activity. Furthermore, in the latter half of the subculture's history, straightedgers increasingly advocate a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle. Without exception, every straightedge individual that I interviewed referred to one or more of these lifestyle choices in describing themselves. Indeed, a substantial majority of the people with whom I spoke claimed to abide by every one of these lifestyle parameters.

These informal 'straightedge rules' allegedly stem from the words of Ian MacKaye, lyric writer and lead singer for a hardcore punk band called Minor Threat. In 1981 Ian MacKaye wrote a song entitled "Straight Edge," in which he describes

abstinence from psychoactive substances as the foundation for having a straight edge (presumably an edge over others who do use substances). In another song entitled, "Out of Step," MacKaye sings, "I don't smoke, don't drink, don't fuck -- At least I can fucking think." Taken together, these songs became something of a foundation set of codes or rules for people who subsequently defined themselves as straightedge.

MacKaye explained to me that he is thoroughly surprised that the straightedge concept developed beyond his song: "I think that it's really important to note that I was singing to fifty people, or maybe one hundred, or maybe even two hundred. But, I wasn't thinking that it [straight edge] would be something that people all around the country or the world would pick up, or that it would be an idea that would be discussed for more than [twenty years]. It's crazy." Nonetheless, despite his own amazement at the proliferation of the straightedge concept, as well as his role in that proliferation, many straightedgers view MacKaye as the founder of straightedge.

Vessel, for example, said to me: "I think the original basis of straightedge is the whole, from the Minor Threat song, don't drink, don't smoke, don't fuck." Similarly, Thomas explained to me: "straightedge is just abstaining from drugs, drinking, and cigarettes, and any addictive or mind-altering substances." Another straightedger, Neil, claims also that straightedge is "a lifestyle choice of not drinking and doing drugs, and not having promiscuous sex."

A number of straightedge individuals suggested to me that the authenticity of one's identity as straightedge hinges upon maintaining a commitment to the traditional straightedge lifestyle tenets. Vessel for example, makes the following statement about straightedge authenticity: "the people who call themselves straightedge and then go do

drugs or other things, they never really were straightedge because it's a lifetime commitment....They're a minority; not all straightedgers go out and break their oath." Here, Vessel suggests that straightedge is not a lifestyle that people simply can drift into and out of in a transitory manner. Instead, she implies that a true straightedger is one who makes a lifetime commitment to the straightedge lifestyle tenets, and then adheres to that commitment.

18 year old Alan makes a similar claim about straightedge authenticity. When I asked him about his network ties in high school with other straightedge individuals, he claimed: "at the high school I went to, I was one of about six straightedge kids, but only about four of us were true. That sets me off worse than people smoking; is people who say they're straightedge and don't know what it's about." Alan further explained: "being true is following the basic, quote unquote rules, of not drinking, not smoking, not doing drugs, and no promiscuous sexual activity.... Don't drink, don't smoke, don't fuck. Those are the rules. If you don't want to follow the rules, unclaim." Alan explained to me also that he disdains self-professed straightedge individuals who do not abide by all of the traditional lifestyle tenets: "They do what I call weakening the movement. They're the weak link in the chain. They're the ones who are gonna cause us all to fall." Furthermore, mirroring Vessel's perception that claiming straightedge comprises an oath, Alan says: "realize that straightedge is a lifetime commitment. And if you say you are straightedge, and if you sell out, you can never be straightedge again because you've already broken the oath." Indeed, this idea of a lifetime commitment to straightedge lifestyle tenets is not unusual among straightedge individuals.

This is Not a Set of Rules

While many straightedge individuals with whom I spoke described straightedge in terms of a strict set of rules, this was not the case for all of the interviewees. Indeed, many straightedge individuals seemed averse to explaining straightedge in terms of a universal set of rules. During our interview, Ian MacKaye expressed not only some level of surprise, but also some level of frustration that his music lyrics have been re-articulated by some self self-professed straightedgers into a full-blown set of straightedge rules.

MacKaye explained to me that he intended his lyrics to reflect only his own subjective perceptions and experiences within the Washington DC punk scene:

> In the summer of '81 I wrote a song called, 'In My Eyes.' 'In My Eyes' was sort of a point by point thing about my take on a lot of what was going on in MY community, like MY punk friends.... And then, sort of as a companion piece to that song was a song, 'Out of Step, which was just like this fuckin' rage about, 'yeah here's the things that I don't do, but I can think. And I guess the fact that I can think puts me out of step with the rest of the world.

MacKaye went on to explain that, although his lyrics reflect his own perceptions about drugs, alcohol, and casual sex, listeners sometimes objectified these lyrics into rules, which was not MacKaye's intent:

> Now in the song, 'Out of Step,' the lyrics are, 'don't smoke, don't drink, don't fuck, at least I can fucking think.' And I didn't realize at the time, but the thing that really blew everybody's mind, and I think what really became so controversial was the 'don't fuck' line.... It was an interesting phenomenon, and to this day, when people say, 'oh, you're like a monk,' or, 'you don't believe in sex,' it's insane.... Never ever in my mind was I making a call for abstinence, ever....What I only had a problem with is what I consider to be abusive kinds of predatory exploits.... You have to be interpretive of these things. You just can't look at the words and go, 'oh, we're not supposed to do this, this, or this'....

Further relating his frustration with people taking a dogmatic stance on his lyrics,

MacKaye explained to me that he left an important message for listeners in a second version of the song, "Out of Step": "When we put the Out of Step record out, there was a second version of the song, 'Out of Step,' on there, where I say in the song, 'this is not a set of rules.'"

Others apparently agree with MacKaye's apprehension about articulating straightedge in terms of a set of rules. Jason, for example, explains:

> I don't like it when... people view it as kind of a set of rules, you know, where you have to do A, B, and C. I don't think that's what it's all about.... It's not like it comes with an instruction manual that tells you, 'okay, here's the steps.' I think its basically...living your life the best way you know how. And, trying to achieve your goals and not let anything get in your way.... It should be...not a set of rules, but just your whole lifestyle I guess; it's just a way of thinking about things and viewing things.

Here, Jason implies that a rule-oriented approach to straightedge treats it as an end in and of itself, when, according to Jason, a straightedge lifestyle is a means to better achieving one's goals. 29 year old Benjamin, similarly explains to me a relatively broad, non-rule oriented view of straightedge: "I think that straightedge is essentially a philosophy that advocates examining your individual life and looking at elements in it that might be playing an influence on you, on your decisions, on your thoughts, on the way you behave." Another straightedger, named Allison, explains:

> I just think its important to remember that, yes, straightedge is a subculture, yes, straightedge has music and maybe fashion, and, you know, a whole bunch of conventions that are associated with it. But, I think it's important to remember that straightedge is also, besides the philosophy, a way of looking at the world and a way of understanding the world. It's a political identity and it's a political movement....By not participating in certain activities they're making a political statement.

Here, echoing Benjamin's interpretive view of straightedge, Allison describes it as a state of mind and a politicization of one's identity.

To summarize, while every one of the straightedge individuals that I interviewed claimed to live by the typical rules of straightedge, a notable proportion of these individuals de-emphasized rule-following. Instead, many straightedge individuals construe straightedge as a state of mind and as a tool to be reflexive about one's own lifestyle, as well as a vehicle for critiquing society in general. In line with these relatively open conceptions of straightedge, many people emphasized to me that claiming a straightedge identity is a highly subjective and personal thing. In other words, according to many straightedgers, straightedge is a personal lifestyle choice and each individual can establish his or her own set of personal straightedge boundaries.

Indeed, Ian MacKaye himself explained to me that straightedge, in his view, is purely a personal and individual matter:

> I was trying to write my version of 'A Six for a Nine' [a Jimi Hendrix song]....At the ending of the song, Hendrix says I'm the one who has to die when it's time for me to die, so let me live my life the way I want to. And that's what my song was about. It was like, this is my choice, my life, and if I don't want to get high, then I'm not gonna do it. And it's a personal choice. But, it wasn't so much a call to arms, like I wasn't trying to encourage other people to do it necessarily, and I certainly wasn't trying to encourage some kind of movement at all.

Jason similarly elaborates that straightedge is "definitely something personal because to me it's a way of living your life. A more healthy, anti-obsessive way. . . . I think it's basically like, I guess kind of like a stepping stone. It's a way for me to achieve my goals."

Descriptions of straightedge as a personal and individual matter were common in other interviews. Allison, for example, claims: "I'm not better than anyone because I'm straightedge. I might be a little more clear-headed than someone because I'm sober. . . . Straightedge, that's a personal choice, y'know?" Sarah is another self-professed

straightedger who posits a fairly open-ended definition of straightedge lifestyle parameters: "I feel personally that everything that you decide to do within the straightedge umbrella is completely up to you." Thus, at least some straightedge individuals describe straightedge not in terms of a movement or as a basis for collective action, but rather as a personal lifestyle choice, the parameters of which are open to interpretation.

Making New Rules: Animal Rights

While traditional 'straightedge rules' stem from issues of substance use and promiscuous sexuality, a majority of the straightedge individuals with whom I spoke claimed that vegetarianism and veganism were central components of their respective identities. Ian MacKaye himself became vegetarian several years after coining the straightedge concept: "I wasn't a vegetarian until 1984 or so....I think that vegetarianism was a logical step for straightedge. For me, it was logical. To me, it's a process. The idea of my life, of the process that is, is re-examining things given to me and seeing if they work and constantly working to make myself better - do a better job in the world. So, it just seemed to make sense" (Ian MacKaye quoted in Lahickey, 1997: 103). MacKaye further explains that some early straightedge individuals were averse to his decision to become vegetarian:

> So I met up with Ray [Ray Cappo from Youth of Today], and he goes, 'what's this about the vegetarian thing being straight edge?...And Ray said to me, 'that's insane, what does that have to do with being straight edge?' I told him that I was speaking about my own ideas on straight edge and how it made sense, as did the vegetarian thing. It was like I was making up new rules or something, which I wasn't trying to do. I was just speaking my mind. It's funny now, of course, since Ray is a Krishna (Ian MacKaye quoted in Lahickey, 1997: 103-104).

Here, Ian explains that vegetarianism for him was a personal choice that made sense. Furthermore, he does not articulate vegetarianism as a straightedge rule, yet he does imply that vegetarianism for him is almost a natural lifestyle progression given his own perceptions of the meaning of straightedge. Indeed, as evidenced in my earlier analysis of straightedge music lyrics, vegetarianism and even veganism did in fact appear to assume a strong position in straightedge culture during the later 1980s.

Straightedge individuals explained to me often that their decisions to live a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle stemmed from animal rights issues. Alan, for example, explains:

> The thought of innocent, beautiful creatures dying for me to eat disgusted me. And, I didn't want to die with that blood on my hands....Veganism is when a person chooses to abstain from animal products and by-products....Because we believe that animals have their own rights. We believe that they have their own entitlement to freedom. We believe that we are speaking up for the creatures of the Earth who can't speak for themselves.

Derek similarly explains his vegan lifestyle in terms of animal rights. In particular, having first become vegetarian for health reasons, he later became vegan after reading an educational pamphlet at an Earth Crisis gig and later feeling further enlightened by the works of animal rights scholar, Peter Singer: "After reading some books by Peter Singer, I definitely now have stronger beliefs about the rights of animals."

Some straightedge individuals describe their vegan lifestyle in terms of a social responsibility not only to animals, but also to other people and to the Earth in general. Sarah, for example, explains: "it doesn't seem right for people to eat diets that are not only bad for their own bodies, but that murders and tortures animals, and that also allows

less people of the world to eat. Like it's been studied; the amount of land to accommodate one meat-eating person can feed 22 vegans."

Another straightedge woman, named Daisy, also raises themes of social responsibility as she explains that her decision to become vegan has helped her to realize what she perceives as a proper relationship with the Earth: "I feel like I have more of a personal relationship with the earth. Instead of going out to conquer the earth, I'm one with it and I am working with it." Commenting on her perceptions of people who eat meat, Daisy also claims that her decision to become vegan stems from her aversion to animal suffering: "They have no idea that eating that meal is destroying rain forests, is causing deserts in the United States, and is causing total pain and suffering to all the animals that go into that burger. And, most people just don't want to hear it."

Despite the importance of veganism for some straightedge individuals, many of them explain that veganism is not a requirement to make a claim to straightedge. In fact, many suggest that veganism and straightedge, for them, are very distinct and separate phenomena. 20 year old Leo, for example, says: "I am a vegetarian, but that has nothing to do with being straightedge. It just happened. Some people require you to be vegan or something to be straightedge. I don't believe in that. As long as you follow the three basic rules." Similarly, Alan says, "veganism is a strong part of my life. I am a one-hundred-percent animal rights activist. That has nothing to do with me being straightedge, however. They go hand in hand.... But, if I wasn't straightedge, I'd still be vegan, and if I wasn't vegan, I'd still be straightedge." Similarly claiming the potential separateness of straightedge and veganism, Derek said to me, "A lot of straightedge kids are vegan; it's not a requirement or anything." Another straightedger, named Thomas,

also explained that his identity as a vegan is at least somewhat distinct from his identity as straightedge: "I heard about both of them [veganism and straightedge] through the music, and yet my decision to do them was not related. I mean, my decision to go straightedge was not in any way related to my decision to go vegan.... Straightedge is a definitely a personal choice, while veganism I consider I am contributing to something. I'm contributing to the economic boycott of cruelty basically." Here, Thomas contextualizes straightedge as a highly personal issue while construing veganism as a more political and social issue.

Bending the Rules: Conflict Surrounding the Rearticulation of Straightedge Normative Parameters

Given straightedgers' pervasive and consistent emphases on a common set of lifestyle tenets, it is easy for observers to inadvertently stereotype straightedge individuals. Indeed, it seems that most straightedge individuals are at least broadly aware of a set of general straightedge rules (no drinking, no drugs, no casual sex). There is ample evidence to suggest, however, that straightedge individuals often disagree and pose different viewpoints regarding the role of the typical straightedge lifestyle tenets in defining straightedge cultural boundaries.

Some straightedge individuals suggested to me that these rules serve as only a broad and flexible boundary for a straightedge lifestyle. Moreover, some straightedge individuals suggested that the traditional 'straightedge rules' can be set aside or at least re-interpreted. Benjamin, for example, outlines his views that straightedge is about examining and eliminating the harmful influences from one's life, and that alcohol is not

necessarily a harmful influence in the lives of all drinkers:

> A lot of straightedgers live by the golden rule, the words of Minor Threat: 'Don't drink, don't smoke, don't fuck.' But I think for me the problem I have with that is a lot of kids who are claiming straightedge, those aren't issues for them. You know, maybe they've never had drinks in their life.... What have you changed in your life? Nothing. You haven't changed your behavior at all. You haven't examined your life. You're just claiming the label without kind of doing the work. I have a lot more... respect for straightedgers that have looked at their lives and looked at things in their life, like I said before, impact their behavior, influenced them negatively. And they've actually gotten rid of those things, whatever they may be. So, I actually think a straightedger could drink, you know?... It's a pretty radical view and I think a lot of straightedgers would not agree with me. But, I think it's a lot more sensible than saying, these are the rules of straightedge.

Benjamin is a non-drinker, himself. Here, however, he elaborates a truly novel view of the meaning of alcohol within straightedge cultural boundaries. Indeed, consistent with Benjamin's opinion that other straightedgers would disagree with his views, no other straightedge individual reported to me the same perspective about alcohol.

Within the parameters of straightedge culture, there are other sharp divergences in perspective on straightedge norms. One point of divergence stems from the issue of sexual activity and sexual promiscuity. Alan exemplified one general stance on the issue when he explained to me that he is very serious about his opposition to promiscuous sexual activity. Indeed, Alan describes his stance on the issue in the following way: "I believe in total monogamy. I don't believe in sex before marriage because it's a covenant between husband and wife." Alan then proceeded to tell me that he knows some straightedge individuals who are sexually active, and that in his opinion these individuals are not true to the meaning of straightedge.

Conversely, a straightedge woman, named Allison, outlines a very different view of sexuality within the parameters of straightedge culture:

> For me, as a woman, as a feminist, I think this gets a little bit tricky because I feel a lot of the straightedge rules have been shaped predominantly by men participants in the scene....In our culture, we encourage men to display their masculinity and their cultural dominance or power through sexuality, where my understanding is that women have been acculturated to repress [their sexuality].....You know, men specifically I think are bombarded with like the encouragement to be sexually aggressive and promiscuous....For a man, perhaps not engaging in sexual activity, maybe that's a liberating experience....I think it's a different experience for a woman and part of my experience as a woman...has been coming to terms with sexuality and re-questioning sexuality....and trying to re-evaluate that and come to terms with the sexuality and identity that is good for me. That is constructive for me, and is healthy for me, and is a liberating practice for me.

Here, Allison posits the idea that the alleged straightedge rules may be gender biased, both in terms of their construction as well as in terms of their impact upon the lives of female straightedge individuals. Thus, while Allison's view certainly does not necessitate engaging in promiscuous sexual activity, it does allow for the possibility of sexual activity outside of marriage or even outside of a committed relationship. What the reader should realize, however, is that Allison's view of sexuality has the potential to clash outright with Alan's emphasis on the importance of monogamy. Consequently, we see two self-professed and committed straightedge individuals espousing very different views about the place of sexuality within straightedge cultural boundaries.

Some of the most staunch dissent emerges around the issue of vegetarianism. As I said before, a substantial proportion of contemporary straightedgers either are vegetarian or vegan. Some straightedge individuals, however, strongly claim that vegetarianism and veganism have no place whatsoever within straightedge. 37 year old Jack (singer for Slapshot), for example, explained that the original spirit of straightedge, in his opinion, has become distorted over the years: "I call it the MacKaye edge now, because when I got into it, it was no smoking, no drinking, no doing drugs. I get asked

by German interviewers or what not about the straight edge. They'll be like, 'yeah, but you eat meat.' It's like, 'yeah, AND?' 'You can't be straightedge if you [eat meat].' I'm like, 'well, who says?'" Jack further explains that his band, Slapshot, decided to take an open stance in opposition to vegetarianism and that this created some level of discontent and friction between the band and hardline straightedgers in Memphis, Tennessee (allegedly where hardline gained its initial foothold through the music of bands such as Vegan Reich and Raid):

> So, we played in Memphis....We knew these guys were all hyped up because we were there, and we actually had a T-shirt at one time in Boston, where it said, ' Where the men are men and the meat is red.' So we've kinda come out like and pretty much made our statement just to piss them off....But, you know, these guys have a, you know, little kids with a stick up their ass, and they're just taking themselves a little bit too seriously. So, we're, you know, gonna turn up the heat just a little bit. And, so we played in Memphis. We had heard a rumour that someone was gonna throw like tofu at us while we were on stage....Nothing happened while we played, you know, we did our show. But, they put tofu on the front of our van.

Thus, in some instances Slapshot tried to poke fun at straightedge vegans, with the goal of evoking negative reaction. Indeed, according to Jack, this tension with vegetarian and vegan straightedgers was not an isolated incident.

Despite claiming to be a vegetarian himself, Ian MacKaye explained to me that he also felt some aversion to the attitudes of hardline straightedgers in the Memphis area during the late 1980s and early 1990s:

> There was a band called Vegan Reich, and they were kind of the first band of the hardline kind of movement. They had a particular bent about animal rights. They were completely anti drug, anti drink, anti smoking, anti abortion, and pro animal rights. Completely vegan, you know, no meat, no dairy products. And they had literature out that basically says that their mission is to educate people about that life was above all the most precious thing. However, they said that if people did not accept the education, then they waived their rights...and that they'd have to be

> physically confronted. That's heavy. Its...undefendable in a lot of ways. It's absurd.

A 31 year old straightedger, named Jeff, explained to me that his hardcore band actually used to receive hate-mail from Vegan Reich: "They used to send us hate-mail...because we weren't vegetarians. None of us were vegetarians.... And, I mean, just the name, Vegan Reich, implies oppression.... It's not something that sort of embodies freedom of thought."

Other instance of intra-straightedge dissent emerge over what actually constitutes a drug. Some of the people with whom I spoke claimed that, in addition to abstaining from alcohol and illicit drugs, they abstain also from legal and non-psychoactive drugs such as caffeine and over-the-counter medications. Alan, for example, explains: "I feel that over the counter drugs are easy to overdose on and easily addictive. I also don't drink caffeine." Similarly, Vessel explains: "to me, it's doing no drugs at all, including no cigarettes, or no alcohol, [and] no caffeine." Another straightedger, Benjamin, does not say that caffeine is a substance that all straightedge individuals should avoid. He does explain, however, that caffeine has become a problematic substance for him personally:

> I'm currently battling with Coca-Cola. Here's the thing. I've kind of taken a long time assessing my life, what substances influence me, and a big substance that influences me is Coca-Cola....A lot of caffeine in it, a lot of sugar, and it totally affects my mood. If I'm under a lot stress, and I'm sleepy, and I have to write papers, I don't take it. I'm using it to alter my behavior....If I have like a can of Coke in a day, I crave it the next day, and the day after, and the day after that....I know that the caffeine and the sugar are causing my body to want to buy it. And that makes me feel a little bit weaker, y'know. A little bit not in control of myself.

Not all straightedge individuals agree about the definition of caffeine as a drug. Indeed, evidence of this disagreement is in Ian MacKaye's reflection of his experience drinking

an iced tea and being confronted by a disgruntled straightedge on-looker: "I had this one kid say to me - I was outside the van drinking an iced tea - and he says to me, 'I can't believe you're drinking iced.' I was like, 'what?' And he said, 'in my book caffeine is a drug.' I said, 'fuck you.'"

Another apparently significant source of intra-scene dissent stems from issues of spirituality and religion. Ian MacKaye elaborates strong anti-Christian sentiments in his early songs. In the song, "Filler," for example, MacKaye sings: "you call it religion, you're full of shit" (Minor Threat, 1981c). Jack, the lead singer of Slapshot, takes a similarly strong stance on the issue of religion: "how can you possibly call yourself straightedge when this religion has fucked you up way more than shooting heroine?" A 31 year old straightedger, who I call Jeff, similarly suggests that religion and straightedge are by definition incompatible with one another:

> I don't think religion has anything to do with hardcore, especially not the straightedge. Because, as far as I'm concerned, the straightedge is about keeping yourself free, thinking for yourself, just being in control of what you do.... People become obsessed with religion too, and they no longer think for themselves, and they allow a religion to dictate their behavior instead of doing for themselves.

Other individuals, with whom I spoke, expressed generally negative, although moderately tolerant, perceptions of a small segment of the straightedge hardcore music genre, known as Christian hardcore. Derek, for example, organizes music gigs in his area, and he explains: "I have negative feelings towards Christian hardcore. Honestly, I think its weird, but I'm still open to it. I'll book a Christian band if they want to play."

As I outlined earlier in chapter four, there is a small minority of Krishna Conscious devotees active within straightedge cultural boundaries. As I discuss in greater detail further into this dissertation, these people see straightedge and Krishna

Consciousness as compatible belief systems and in many ways logically connected. Some straightedge individuals, however, are particularly contentious about the presence of Krishna Consciousness within straightedge cultural boundaries. Jack, for example, explains: "I just think the whole Hare Krishna religion thing is stupid. You're just relying on a different crutch." Also explaining her aversion to Krishna Consciousness, 28 year old Dawn says: "that was so weird [the appearance of Krishna Consciousness]. That like ruined hardcore for awhile. I think that really contributed to the downfall of the straightedge in Connecticut."

Despite some straightedgers' negative claims about religion and spirituality, a substantial proportion of the straightedge individuals that I interviewed, claimed that religion and/or spirituality were important factors in their lives. Alan, for example, explains the centrality of Christianity in his own life: "as far as believing in Him [God], and knowing He's there, and keeping faith in Him, yeah, I'm one hundred percent Christian." Alan further explains his perception of the role of Christianity within straightedge: "It can have a part of straightedge. It depends on the individual.... I've seen people who say they're straightedge for Christ, and they take the promise [claim straightedge] because they want to honor God and not poison His temple, because our bodies are His temple."

Other straightedge individuals expressed a more general conception of religion and spirituality. Daisy, for examples, says: "I believe there's a higher being or higher power. And, I don't know if it is a single person or if it is a collective consciousness but I think that there's something out there that has put things together the way they are." Similarly espousing a general and relatively open conception of God, Leo explained to

me his take on spirituality: "I do believe that God exists, but I don't see God the way most Christians do.... I see a river of energy. That river of energy is God. I see that river going to waterfalls. And the bubbles that form is just life. Its me, its you, its somebody else. And then the bubbles just pop and you continue on. So I see everyone as part of God and God as everyone at the same time." Allison is another straightedger who integrates notions of spirituality and religion into her life. She explained to me her perceptions about the centrality of Jewish norms and values in her own life: "I was brought up with certain Jewish, I guess you could say, ethics, traditions, and you know ritual type celebrations that I still participate in strongly. And I plan to participate in that and teach that to my children if I have any. Like, I think it's really a strong part of my identity."

Out-Group Antagonism

Interview evidence suggests that at least some straightedge individuals encounter some level of criticism, opposition, and even antagonism from non-straightedge individuals. Andrew is an individual who regularly confronts straightedge individuals with his Internet website dedicated to mocking straightedge. Rather than making fun of the straightedge lifestyle tenets themselves, the site is highly critical of what Andrew perceives as a straightedge "scenester" mentally. According to Andrew, "a scenester is basically someone who is totally into the scene. Just like a straightedge guy; always talking about it, always into the music, talking about the latest music that's going on, preaching a lot." Andrew explained why he holds negative feelings and perceptions of the straightedge phenomenon, even though he tends to live a straightedge-compatible

lifestyle himself:

> They never do drugs, not drink, not smoke, not have promiscuous sex. Anything like that, that's pretty much me, but I've never called myself straightedge at all.... People involved in it, most of them have a real desire for this whole group mentality thing. I don't know, I just really associate it with people who don't want to think for themselves, you know? If you want mind control, be a straightedger, join one of our cliques. It's just another clique.... I mean there's a lot of elitism in it, you know? If you're not one of us, you know, you're not our friends.... There's a whole lot of preachism, holier than though attitude associated with it.... It should be all about what you think, but sadly it's more than not what everyone else thinks about it.

While Andrew tends to limit his antagonism of straightedge to the level of critique and mocking via the Internet, some straightedge individuals that I spoke with report more direct conflict with non-straightedge individuals.

Ian MacKaye, for example, explained that his early straightedge-oriented songs caused tension and opposition as much as they evoked support within the American punk scene: "The first movement that sprung up after the song straightedge came out was actually something referred to as the 'bent-edge' movement. And it was like people who were anti-straightedge. I mean, in 1983 we did a tour, Minor Threat did a tour, and in almost every city there was some variation of the bent-edge or the round-edge. People who were really threatened by this song."

Other straightedgers reported antagonistic experiences with their non-straightedge peers. 18 year old Alan, for example, explained to me his perception of how others in his community view his straightedge lifestyle: "People around here have a problem with straightedge, because the community I live in there are a lot of people my age who are heavily into drugs and alcohol. And they see straightedge as like a pansy way of life. They consider us little momma's boys and stuff."

Chapter Summary

In sum, straightedge normative and attitudinal parameters get constructed and reconstructed across time and space. The idea of straightedge stems initially from a single song written by Ian MacKaye in 1981, which MacKaye intended as a reflection of his own perceptions of drugs, sex, and alcohol in his local punk scene. Since MacKaye's initial articulation of the straightedge concept, it has developed and progressed in a number of different ways. Most notably, this development occurs via the incorporation of new straightedge issues and the rearticulation of existing straightedge rules and issues. For some individuals, straightedge is an external and coercive body of rules that provides a source of lifestyle structure. For other individuals, the traditional straightedge rules are highly subjective and amenable to interpretation. Different individuals can perceive the same straightedge issue (e.g., sexual activity) in entirely opposite ways, and such intra-subcultural conflicts lead to individual straightedgers elaborating competing claims about straightedge authenticity. These competing claims and different subjective stances on the meaning of straightedge likely serve as the initial impetus for the schisms and broad transitions characteristic of the straightedge phenomenon since the late 1980s. I will explain processes of schism and transition in further detail later in this dissertation.

At this point in the study, readers should retain the crucial idea that subcultural boundaries are relatively fluid, amorphous, and permeable. Straightedge persists across time and space, but its meaning changes, and it gets apprehended and reconstructed differently by each self-professed straightedge individual. As each person encounters the straightedge concept, they rearticulate its meaning in a way that is congruent with their own perceptions and subjective life experiences. As I explain in greater detail further

into this dissertation, these instances of apprehension and rearticulation are the most crucial and fundamental factors in processes of subcultural emergence and transition.

Chapter Six

Straightedge Culture in Social and Historical Context

Chapter Introduction

This chapter draws upon interview data as well as secondary data sources. In order to partially illuminate research question number three, this chapter delves into the socio-historical contexts that influenced both the emergence and transition of the straightedge youth subculture. The chapter identifies both American punk culture and mainstream American teen culture as factors that facilitated the emergence of straightedge culture, albeit in a negative manner. The chapter also argues that mainstream America's war on drugs provided latent cultural support and reinforcement for the straightedge phenomenon during the late 1980s. Also partially addressing research question number five, this chapter suggests that changes in encircling mainstream cultural phenomena may have the unintended effect of facilitating subcultural emergence and stimulating subcultural change.

The Importance of Social and Historical Context

A common problem among many contemporary studies of youth culture is the tendency for the researcher to extract and isolate the subcultural phenomenon from the social and historical context in which it emerges, changes, and even declines. Recent studies of the American skinhead phenomenon, for example, in their attempts to document what skinheads say, think, and do, overlook or exclude the social and historical contexts that likely inform skinhead norms and values over time (see Baron, 1997; Craig and Young, 1997; Hamm, 1993). Consequently, such studies inadvertently suggest that the content of the subculture at the time of the research reflects the content of the subculture historically.

Not all subculture studies suffer this deficiency. On the contrary, writers adhering to the perspectives of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies construe youth cultures and subcultures as phenomena that ebb, flow, and change with historical shifts in the structure of society. Regarding the rise of punk culture during the mid 1970s in Britain, for example, observers suggest that punk embodied something of a collectively perceived and experienced contradiction between ideology and reality. In particular, observers generally imply that punk embodied the conflict between a cultural ethos that emphasized consumerism and the reality of rising unemployment and economic austerity among British youth. Supporting these speculations, British punk rock band, The Buzzcocks, described this state of affairs in 1976 as "all these livid things that you never get to touch" (The Buzzcocks quoted in Savage, n.d.). Thus, in something of a dramatization of this conflicting state of affairs, British punks in the late 1970s allegedly championed all things that, from the perspective of mainstream culture, were offensive, perverse, chaotic and threatening, and they defined their subcultural space through symbols of nihilism, anarchy, and violence (Brake, 1993; Hamm, 1993: 29; Hebdige, 1979: 106-107).

The reader may recall from an earlier chapter my discussion of the theoretical contributions of David Matza. Matza makes the simple yet crucial observation that the social spaces that youth inhabit invariably are encircled and permeated by conventional cultural agents. Thus, by definition, all subcultures at least partially are informed by the encircling and permeating conventional cultural ethos. Bearing Matza's ideas in mind, and building upon the examples provided by Birmingham School scholars, observers can better explain diachronic fluctuations and permutations of cultural networks, boundaries, and frames of reference by contextualizing youth cultural and subcultural phenomena in

social historical context. It is naïve to assume that any novel cultural phenomenon emerges in a social vacuum, and the straightedge youth culture is no exception. Indeed, from my analysis of interview data, several crucial and recurring themes emerged to suggest that straightedge cultural boundaries get constructed often in relation to encircling and permeating cultural agents and environments.

Early Connections Between the Straightedge and Punk Scenes

By all accounts, the straightedge phenomenon emerged and gained momentum within the American punk scene. Ian MacKaye, for example, explained that punk, for him, was a context in which he could realize an identity for himself amidst the late 1970s and early 1980s American teen culture: "Punk rock was really the first time I ever found a place. I was like, ah, here it is, this is what I'm looking for. This is something that you get to re-write the roles and you get to change things." Confirming assertions about the punk scene as a partial genesis point for the straightedge phenomenon, interview evidence suggests that straightedge and non-straightedge individuals for awhile maintained at least a tenuous and loose alliance within the punk scene. Indeed, as I mentioned in a previous chapter, it seems that the straightedge phenomenon did not develop its own distinct and separate music and social scenes until at least the late 1980s.

According to Dan, hardcore punk music gigs in Boston during the early 1980s, involved a cross-section of the punk culture as a whole. Moreover, as Dan explains, different types or varieties of punks maintained a relatively peaceful coexistence within the punk scene:

> We tended to consider everybody that went to these shows hardcore, whether they were straightedge or not. And the bands generally there

> would be maybe one band on the bill, out of four or five, that were overtly straightedge....The overview was that we were all different, no matter what kind of school we were coming from. Whether it was crusty-punks, or mohawk guys, or straightedge, or just hardcore no hair kids, that we were all part of something that was unique. It's kind of like factions within the church I guess.

Other straightedgers spoke also about the early intra-scene alliance between punks and straightedgers. Jason, in particular, elaborates a sentiment that strongly parallel's Dan's view of punk/straightedge co-existence: "I don't know if it was just my point of view, but back then it seemed like everybody went to every type of show. Whether it was a straightedge show, whether the band was straightedge or not, you would have punks there, you would have straightedge kids there." Jason further elaborates his perception that contemporary straightedge individuals are not particularly tolerant nor likely to affiliate themselves with the broader punk scene: "Now it seems very splintered. It seems like straightedgers will only go to a show if it's a straightedge band, you know what I mean? And I think that's a problem. I think a lot of the kids are very closed minded now."

Twenty-eight year old Dawn also explained to me her perceptions of the mid 1980s Connecticut punk/hardcore scene as a mixed cultural environment: "When I first got into hardcore back in like '86, and the scene that I was around...it was more of a hybrid scene then. There were a lot of like punks, and straightedge kids, and hardcore kids, and skinheads, and it was all kind of one big scene." Dawn further explained to me that she perceived a rift forming within the New York punk scene, beginning in the late 1980s:

> You know, there started to be a divide in the scene between straightedge, and between hardcore and punk....Around like '88 or so, you started seeing like a real big divide in the scene. You started seeing straightedge

> bands playing together and never playing with punk bands....You know, straightedge and a punk band together and everyone would stay outside during the punk band.

Confirming Dawn's perceptions, Jeff also remembers observing the emergence of distinct straightedge music scenes during the late 1980s: "The late '80s is where the whole hardcore and straightedge thing, the punk and straightedge thing sort of separated.... It's really tough to say where it started, whether it was the punk separating from straightedge kids or the straightedge kids not wanting to have anything to do with the punks."

Straightedge as a Reaction to Punk Culture

Despite evidence of a tenuous scene alliance between straightedgers and punks, further interview evidence suggests that the emerging inter-scene rift (that allegedly developed in the late 1980s) stems largely from incompatibilities between straightedge and punk norms and values. The straightedge phenomenon staked its own distinct claim to punk authenticity during the 1980s, and it did so in a way that drastically rearticulated and challenged typical meanings of punk.

Ian MacKaye explained to me that the idea of straightedge did not generally encounter a warm reception within the punk scene, and that the straight punks of the Washington DC area in the early 1980s were not fully accepted by many older, long-term punks:

> You've got to remember that the older punk scene was really fashion, New York, LA, or New York and London based, and kind of druggy. There was like Johnny Thunders, the Dolls, the Sex Pistols.... It was really druggy, and kind of like snobby, and arty. And we were saying look, we were punk rockers but we were like hardcore punk rockers, we're young. We were being called teeny punks, that's what they referred to us as in DC all the time. And it made us mad, because we felt like we saw punk rock as sort of like this safe haven for deviance. We felt as if we

> were deviant. I mean there was all these other people who were challenging all these conventions, sexual conventions, political conventions, sociological conventions, philosophical conventions every kind of convention, musical and artistic, all this stuff. There were people who were challenging these conventions and so were we, we were challenging social conventions too. And we felt like we belonged there and that we should be respected. But what we ran into was a real snobbery with a lot of the older punks who felt like that either we were some weird fundamentalist Christian kids, or that we were just stupid violent kind of kids.

Here, MacKaye explains that punk largely was about challenging social conventions, and he further claims that he and his friends were resisting the social and cultural conventions that encourage drinking and drug use among teen culture. Thus, Ian MacKaye suggests that straight punks deserved a legitimate place in the punk culture.

According to MacKaye, the traditional punk involvement in drugs and alcohol does not constitute a true form of rebellion: "It just seemed like a strange form of rebellion, and one that I still think is. I still think that smoking, and drinking, and even drug taking I consider state sponsored rebellion." MacKaye further explains that his song resonated so strongly among the various American punk scenes in the early 1980s precisely because so many self-professed punks rejected the nihilism characteristic of punk culture. Indeed, MacKaye speculates that the straight edge concept embodied a crucial yet latent sentiment felt by a significant minority of punks in his local scene:

> Ultimately, when it boils down to it, if there was some sense of competition at all, . . . that I am not a junkie gives me somewhat of an edge. Whereas it is safe to argue that someone who is a junkie or an alcoholic is not entirely in control. They're somewhat at the mercy of their habit. So I tried to articulate in the song. . . my ideas about it. The song, really, it resonated with a lot of people; a lot more than I had ever imagined. . . . I felt like the people really keyed on that song. They really looked in on it, because I think there were a lot of punk rockers who were straight, who felt like finally here is someone who's straight.

Given the sudden proliferation of straightedge rock bands throughout the early 1980s and

continuing ever since, it seems that MacKaye's song did in fact tap into, and potentially mobilize, a latent yet collectively shared dissatisfaction with the drinking and drug use characteristic of punk rockers at the time.

Other individuals involved in the early straightedge scene confirmed MacKaye's speculations when they reported to me a sense of discontent with the punk scene and especially the role that alcohol and drugs play in punk culture. Jeff, for example, explains:

> I don't think that being punk includes, you know, hanging out at bars and drinking alcohol, you know, just like every other college kid and young adult does. You know, that's not what I consider to be punk at all....But, I think anything you do to separate yourself from what goes on in mainstream society is punk. And, again, I think mainstream is definitely geared towards drugs and alcohol.

Porcell, reflecting on his memories of the New York punk scene of the early to mid 1980s, also expresses disdain for the proliferation of drugs and alcohol among punk culture:

> It was a very, very drug oriented scene.... And I tell you, my early memories of going to CBGB's and like the hardcore scene, you're walking into the bathroom and there's like six guys in there sniffing glue and everyone is rocked out of their mind. People are just passed out in the corner. It was pretty horrible. Even those early memories, they reinforced in me that this is a destructive thing, and this is horrible, and this has nothing to do with punk rock, or supposedly trying to go out and make a change in the world.... I was like this is ridiculous. And I was even thinking, how is this the alternative? My whole life I grew up and on the weekend you go to a party and people would get drunk and they get in fights. Then you have the punk scene, which is supposed to be this big alternative, and what happens? People like go to shows and they get drunk and they get in fights on the weekend. It's totally ridiculous. It was white-bread suburban life in leather jackets and spike bracelets.

Here, in addition to expressing disdain for the proliferation of alcohol and drug use within the punk subculture, Porcell suggests that substance abuse is not an authentically

punk activity.

In sum, straightedge apparently assumes the position of being informed by the broader American punk cultural ethos, while articulating a claim to punk authenticity that critiques and ultimately rejects that ethos. This process illustrates the central importance of latency in the initial generation of novel youth cultural phenomena as well as permutations of existing youth cultural phenomena. In part, the straightedge phenomenon is a permutation of an existing punk frame of reference. Prior to McKaye's formal articulation of the straightedge concept, straightedge sentiments comprised a latent yet obviously present element of the American punk ethos. MacKaye's song ignited these latent sentiments into a manifest concept. Once the straightedge concept became manifest, discontented or disgruntled straight punk rockers apprehended it as a means of rearticulating the meaning of punk, a means of validating their own authenticity as punk rockers, and a means of challenging the authenticity of other punk rockers.

Straightedge as Reaction to Mainstream Teen Culture

Apart from emerging in reaction to certain typical elements of the punk cultural ethos, straightedge culture apparently emerged and found sustenance in opposition to the drinking and drug use behavior characteristic of mainstream teen culture. Many of the straightedgers that I interviewed stated that they perceive alcohol and drugs as pervasive and consistent elements of teen culture, both locally and more generally. 37 year old Ian MacKaye, for example, who went to high school throughout the late 1970s, explained to me that he could not relate, at the time, to his peers' drinking and drug use, and that he simply did not wish to participate:

> In the late 70s, I mean, everybody got high. I mean, in my high school, everybody got high or drank. . . . For me, it just seemed like a really stupid way to spend time. It just seemed like in the trajectory of life that, those years, it seemed such a waste of time to only think about medicating oneself. . . . In my first band that I was in [The Slinkees]. . . . we wrote a song called "Milk and Coke," which was probably the first sort of straightedge song. It went, 'I drink milk, I drink milk, I drink milk, I drink milk – I don't care what people say, I drink milk for the vitamin A – I drink Coke, I drink Coke, I drink Coke, I drink Coke – I don't care what people say, I drink coke for the tooth decay.' But, the idea was we didn't drink beer. It was silly, it was just kind of fun, it was not a big deal. But, it was speaking directly to these high school kids.

For Ian MacKaye, therefore, the very idea of straightedge emerged at least partially in reaction to his perceptions and experiences of drinking and drug use among his high school peers. Furthermore, his earliest elaborations of the straightedge concept were attempts to validate and legitimize the deviant practices (at least among late 1970s youth culture) of NOT drinking and NOT using drugs.

Also commenting on the centrality of drinking and drug use in his local teen culture, 37 year old Jack explained to me: "kind of where I grew up, a lot of alcoholics, small town, really the only thing to do was you either have sex, or you know get shit-faced, or a combination of everything. There was a lot of drugs; it was mid to late seventies." Vessel also perceived a proliferation of drinking and drug use among her teen peers, yet she links their substance use to broader societal expectations of teens:

> It kind of bothered me because I knew that they were intelligent people, but they were doing things like that just to fit in or because they thought it was cool. And I think they just thought it was cool because it's been pushed down their throats all their lives. It's kind of something that society tells people that it's a normal part of, like almost a rite of passage. Being a teenager is to drink and do drugs.

Many other straightedgers with whom I spoke identified also their aversion to mainstream teen culture as an influential factor in their becoming straightedge. Indeed,

most of the straightedge individuals with whom I spoke explained that they simply could not identify with their peers' alcohol and drug use. Dan, for example, explains:

> When we were kids, we saw all around us the kids in our town.... The older hippie kids would buy beer for the younger kids, and they would all hang out together and get drunk and get into trouble and that sort of thing, and we just thought that that wasn't a very good lifestyle.... We wanted to react differently, we didn't want to be part of this, so we even called ourselves 'the new breed.' You know, these two or three kids that weren't going to go down the hippie path, substance abuse path, you know we shied away from everything that was related to that.

Another straightedger, Thomas, laments the fact that his college of choice ended up being "a big party school." According to Thomas, "it was mainly just a lot of drinking and smoking pot, and I just couldn't relate to any of these people." Similarly expressing disappointment Ian MacKaye explains: "I guess at the time I felt that it was kind of dumb and I didn't have any patience for it. I was a skateboarder, so if I went to parties and if everyone was going to drink, I was like, 'fuck it, let's just go skating,' because it seemed like a much more interesting way to spend time."

Some people explained to me that their aversion to drinking and drugs left them feeling alienated or left out among their teen peers. For some of these individuals, the straightedge concept helped them to impute meaning and dignity to their lifestyle choices. Janine, for example, says: "it gave me a sense of belonging to something, instead of just this girl that doesn't do anything. Instead, I was this girl that doesn't do anything for a reason." Thomas described to me how he eventually began to feel embarrassed about not drinking and using drugs. For him, straightedge allowed him to deal with these negative feelings:

> It was a way that people like me could actually feel proud of their choice instead of feeling like they're outside the normal and, you know, outcast. So, I started going around college, I was in a college full of pot-heads, and

> I started putting X's on my hands. Nobody even knew what the hell I was doing, but I would happily tell them when they asked. It made me feel better about myself.

Similarly, 28 year old Dawn describes her transition into straightedge as something of a liberation from the negative feelings she associated with her mainstream teen peers. Indeed, according to Dawn, the straightedge and the hardcore music scene served as "an escape from the horrors of mainstream Connecticut high-school."

Latent Cultural Support from the American War on Drugs

Thus far, it is apparent that straightedge cultural boundaries, by way of reaction, garner latent cultural support from both mainstream and punk youth culture. These cultural phenomena embody ideals and normative practices that comprise the anti-thesis of straightedge, and thereby serve as boundary signifiers to straightedge youth. While straightedgers may derive a negative latent cultural reinforcement from punk and mainstream youth culture, the straightedge phenomenon likely received positive reinforcement from still other external cultural phenomena. Particularly striking is the coincidence in timing between the emergence and development of straightedge culture and the declaration and waging of a war on drugs by American politicians in the early 1980s.

Numerous polls, self-report surveys, and other studies reveal a significant overall decline in most forms of illegal drug use in America during the 1980s, relative to the 1970s (Goode, 1990: 1091; Jensen et al, 1991: 653-655). Nonetheless, during the 1980s, American politicians increasingly made public declarations of a war on drugs. Ronald Reagan, for example, made several presidential statements, the first of which occurred in

October of 1982: "The mood towards drugs is changing in this country and the momentum is with us. We're making no excuses for drugs hard, soft, or otherwise. Drugs are bad and we're going after them" (Reagan quoted in Wisotsky, 1990: 3). In 1989, George Bush made a similar televised declaration of war on drugs. Bush's language, however, was strikingly more militant. Bush invoked numerous signifiers of war, including such terms as "battles," "weapons," "strategy," "winning back neighborhoods block by block," "just cause," and "victory" (Bush quoted in McGaw, 1991: 53-54). Bush and Reagan furthermore depicted drugs and drug users as a dangerous and serious threat to the social and moral fabric of American society, and Bush even made claims that capital punishment is an appropriate punishment for certain drug criminals (See McGaw, 1991).

Both Reagan and Bush thoroughly deviantized illicit drugs. In fact, as the following quotes illustrate, both politicians construe drugs as the most serious and vile threat to American society:

> Let us not forget who we are. Drug abuse is a repudiation of everything that America is. The destructiveness and human wreckage mock our heritage.... Drugs are menacing our society. They're threatening our values and undercutting our institutions. They're killing our children (Reagan quoted in Elwood, 1994: 28, 29)

> This is the first time since taking the oath of office that I felt an issue was so important, so threatening that it warranted talking with you, the American people. All of us agree that the gravest domestic threat facing our nation today is drugs.... Drugs are a real and terribly dangerous threat to our neighborhoods, our friends, and our families.... In short, drugs are sapping our strength as a nation (Bush quoted in Elwood, 1994: 33-34)

According to McGaw (1991), these discursive rhetorical signifiers of the war on drugs became a social reality in the form of laws, and law enforcement practices. Moreover, the war metaphors surrounding the issue of illicit drugs heightened public awareness of

America's drug problem, thereby making it a more pervasive and universal issue of American concern. Indeed, while public concern was only moderately high during the early 1980s, it soared to unprecedented levels during the mid to late 1980s (Jensen et al, 1991: 655).

These pervasive and highly public sentiments have substantial repercussions. Referring back to Matza's ideas on permeation and exposure, as well as his conception of youth cultures as subterranean versions of mainstream cultural phenomena, the war on drugs is precisely the sort of mainstream cultural ethos that encircles, permeates, and thereby offers latent cultural support to collectives such as straightedge. Elements of the straightedge youth culture reflect the mainstream war on drugs in significant ways. In light of Matza's conception of subterranean youth culture, it is plausible that the American war on drugs provided latent cultural support to the straightedge phenomenon throughout the 1980s.

The potential similarities between the two cultural forms are especially apparent when comparing mainstream drug war discourse with themes in the straightedge music genre. The following two quotes, for example, are respective examples of drug war discourse and straightedge music lyrics that seem to reflect mainstream drug war discourse:

> But the war on drugs will be hard-won, neighborhood by neighborhood, block by block, child by child. If we fight this war as a divided nation, then the war is lost. But if we face this evil as a nation united, this will be nothing but a handful of useless chemicals. Victory. Victory over drugs is our cause, a just cause, and with your help, we are going to win.... Who's responsible? Let me tell you straight out. Everyone who uses drugs. Everyone who sells drugs. It's as innocent looking as candy, but it is turning our cities into battle zones, and it is murdering our children (George Bush quoted in McGaw, 1991: 53, 61).

> Street by street, block by block, taking it all back -- the youth immersed in poison, turn the tide counter attack -- violence against violence, let the roundups begin -- a firestorm to purify the bane that society drowns in -- no mercy, no exceptions, a declaration of total war -- the innocent's defence, the reason it's waged for -- born addicted, beaten and neglected -- families torn apart, destroyed and abandoned -- children sell their bodies, from their high they fall to drown -- demons crazed by greed, cut bystanders down -- A chemically tainted welfare generation -- absolute, complete moral degeneration -- Drug lords and dealers all must fall, the helpless are crying out -- we have risen to their call -- A firestorm to purify (Earth Crisis, 1993a).

Present in both of these quotes, and apparent in general in the war on drugs discourse as well as the straightedge musical genre during the late 1980s, is a general theme that drugs are destructive, dangerous, corrupting, and even inherently evil. Moreover, both cultural discourses portray drugs and drug users as a social and moral threat to the fabric of American society. By extension, straightedge music lyrics as well as the mainstream war on drugs discourse both construe drug dealers and drug users as the propagators of these moral and social threats. Thus, just as the mainstream war on drugs culminated in the re-articulation of domestic police tactics as well as the mobilization of the armed forces in drug interdiction activities (see Kraska, 1993: 165-175), themes in straightedge music lyrics often construe straightedgers as subcultural drug warriors. Indeed, just as mainstream drug warriors espoused a "get tough on crime" approach to drug criminals, the reader may recall from an earlier chapter that some elements of the straightedge music genre espouse extreme and retributive violence towards all perceived drug enemies.

I do not argue that the mainstream war on drugs somehow created straightedge. Nor do I argue that straightedge could not exist in the absence of America's war on drugs. I do argue, however, that the dynamics of the mainstream war on drugs at very least

provided a latently supportive environment for the straightedge phenomenon to flourish and likely impacted directly many straightedgers' perceptions of the seriousness of America's alleged drug problem. Lending support to my speculations, secondary evidence suggests that most straightedge individuals likely were encircled by and exposed to mainstream war on drugs rhetoric, just as David Matza would predict. In fact, mainstream culture transmitters disseminated information about the drug war at such a rate that it would have been practically impossible for straightedgers of the late 1980s and early 1990s to not have internalized at least some conception of what the war on drugs was all about.

Throughout the 1980s, media coverage of the drug war increased at an astonishingly quick rate, and media coverage regularly drew upon the war rhetoric used by mainstream politicians (see Elwood, 1994: 45; Vila, 1993: 34-35). As evidence of this trend, tabulations of entries in the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature suggest a general increase, from 1980 to 1985, in the number of articles dealing with illicit drugs published in national magazines (Goode, 1990: 1088). In 1986 alone, national magazines printed a total of 280 articles on the topic of illicit drugs. This marked more than a two-fold increase over the previous year and a six-fold increase in less than three years (Goode, 1990: 1088; Jensen et al, 1991: 657). The American televised media similarly followed suit. Throughout the 1980s, the major American television network increasingly broadcast documentaries, special sitcom episodes, and advertisements which strongly adhered to official drug war rhetoric (Bertram et al, 1996: 113; Elwood, 1994; Wisotsky, 1990: 5). Messages from the "Partnership for a Drug Free America" were particularly explicit in their dissemination of drug war rhetoric. A televised message,

entitled "snake," for example, depicts a scenario which focuses on an urban adolescent drug dealer. As the youthful character speaks, his African-American features gradually transform into the head of a cobra, replete with a forked tongue and an accompanying hiss (Elwood, 1994: 89). Another scenario, entitled "Pusher's Plea," takes place in a large urban park in which children are at play. Supposedly addressing the children's mothers, an African-American drug dealer states:

> Mamas like you make my job so easy when you don't tell your children jus' how deadly crack is. 'But my baby's too young,' you say. Yeah. And I'm hookin' 'em younger every day. 'But they don't have the money,' you say. Huh. Once my customers get hooked on crack, they lie, cheat, steal to get more. So thanks for not tellin' Junior about guys like me. I jus' love getting first crack at 'em (Quoted in Elwood, 1994: 89).

Such media dissemination of drug war rhetoric and construction of drugs and drug enemies likely had strong effects upon American public sentiment about the nation's alleged drug problem.

As I briefly mentioned earlier, public concern about illicit drugs soared to unprecedented levels by the late 1980s (Jensen et al, 1991: 655). A George Gallup poll, for example, found that the percentage of Americans indicating that drug abuse was "the most important problem facing this country" increased from only 2 percent in 1985 to 38 percent in 1989 (Staley, 1992: 4). Other polls and surveys garner even more striking results. In August of 1986, for example, a US News/CNN poll found that 86% of all respondents perceived "fighting the drug problem" as extremely important (Jensen et al, 1991: 656). Similarly, in 1989, both an independent Media General/Association Press poll and a Times/CBS poll found that over 60% of all respondents ranked drugs as the nation's leading problem compared to the federal deficit, the economy, the environment, and homelessness (Goode, 1990: 1088; Staley, 1992: 5). Also, in the following year,

Maclean's Magazine found that Americans rated drugs as the second most important national problem (Erickson, 1992: 242). Speaking about these apparent increases in public concern, Wisotsky (1990: xvii) claims that, by the late 1980s, the majority of Americans believed that the drug problem was worse than it ever had been previously.

Further evidence suggests that many American citizens truly internalized drug war rhetoric and sought to confront the nation's drug problem at a very localized and inter-personal level. During the latter half of the 1980s, the print media contained numerous stories of individual Americans (usually ethnic minority inner-city residents) who sought to mobilize their respective streets, neighborhoods, and schools to engage in "local battles" against the drug problem (Elwood, 1994: 54, 55). Similarly, according to Davis and Lurigio (1996: 16, 42), during the late 1980s, residents of "drug-plagued' areas across the United States initiated numerous block watch groups, anti-drug patrols, marches, and vigils. Citizens also implemented drug reporting programs and instituted environmental changes in order to deny drug dealers a favorable environment for conducting business. Although such efforts occasionally led to violent confrontations between citizens and alleged drug enemies, officials frequently pledged their support to such private anti-drug initiatives (Davis and Lurigio, 1996: 17, 40). Indeed, several of these grass-roots initiatives persisted and grew in their size and scope, ultimately achieving some level of entrenched organization. Some examples include Mothers Against Gangs in Communities, Let's Clean It Up, and the Direct Truth Antidrug Coalition (Davis and Lurigio, 1996: 60-61; Elwood, 1994: 55).

In light of the apparent fervor with which mainstream cultural agents embraced the war on drugs, and in light of the sheer number of people exhibiting concern about

illicit drugs, it is likely that all straightedge individuals were at least moderately exposed to drug-war rhetoric, and it is likely that at least some of them internalized elements of that rhetoric. Indeed, given the unprecedented increase in both print and televised media coverage of the war on drugs, it seems unlikely that a majority of the youth who comprised the straightedge subculture in the late 1980s could have insulated themselves entirely from the mainstream drug-war media blitz. These media accounts usually were exaggerated and sensationalized, and they often invoked metaphorical or discursive signifiers of war; the same metaphors and discursive signifiers that later got emulated and transmitted in certain elements of the straightedge music genre.

Consistent with Matza's conception of youth subcultures as "subterranean" traditions, straightedge lyrical references to drugs and drug user, as well as the appearance of the hardline straightedge in the late 1980s, may at least partially reflect straightedgers' exposure to the mainstream war on drugs cultural ethos. Again, I do not argue that the mainstream war on drugs creates outright the general straightedge anti-drug sentiment. I do argue, however, that the war on drugs cultural ethos supported and partially refocused an issue that already was important to most straightedger individuals. The war on drugs cultural ethos provided an environment that encouraged militancy and increasingly coerced new straightedge affiliates into seeing straightedge in terms of a social crusade as well as a personal lifestyle commitment.

It is possible that new straightedge affiliates in the late 1980s derived from the war on drugs cultural ethos certain values that were used to partially reconstruct the straightedge frame of reference and then later became concretized in that frame of reference (where they coerce all subsequent straightedge affiliates). The war on drugs

galvanized around such values and norms as moral purity, judgment, and intolerance. These same values and norms are explicitly manifest in many of the straightedge cultural texts produced during the period that the war on drugs was at its peak. While the direction of this alleged cultural reinforcement is difficult to prove, the argument that it flows from the mainstream cultural form to the subterranean one may be supported by the fact that the mainstream cultural ethos exercises disproportionate control over powerful culture transmitters.

While the straightedge youth subculture likely reflected and received reinforcement from the mainstream war on drugs cultural ethos in significant ways, it is important to realize that straightedge culture also maintains some level of differentiation. At a general level, the straightedge youth subculture differentiates itself by construing morality as a value that supersedes legality. Specifically, straightedge differentiates itself by including legal substances into its broader conception of a drug enemy, and by advocating illegal violence in combating perceived drug enemies. The mainstream war on drugs implies simply that "illegal drugs are bad." They are bad, moreover, because they are detrimental to the moral and social fabric of American society. On the other hand, straightedge youth culture, in its strong commitment to moral purity, maintains that even legalized substances can be detrimental to society's moral and social fabric. Thus, while the mainstream war on drugs utilizes legality as a signifier of morality, the straightedge youth culture, by its aversion to legal substances, construes morality as a quality that supersedes legality.

In line with its adherence to legality as a signifier of morality, the mainstream war on drugs openly advocates the use of force and violence only within the boundaries of

what the American legal system will allow. The straightedge youth subculture, however, diverges or differentiates itself from the mainstream war on drugs cultural ethos insofar as it appeals to higher loyalties such as moral purity (see Sykes and Matza, 1957) and thereby rationalizes (at least within its cultural texts) the use of aggressive, assaultive, and illegal violence.

Chapter Summary

Consistent with strain perspectives of youth subculture, straightedge subcultural boundaries apparently formed and get sustained in reaction to an external cultural ethos. At one level, straightedge is a reaction formation against the nihilism inherent to the punk subculture. At another level, straightedge is a reaction to the mainstream teen culture's celebration of alcohol and drug use as well as its celebration of promiscuous sexual activity. Contrary to the determinism inherent in many strain theories, however, the straightedge reaction formation is actively created through individual challenges and reconstructions of punk identity as well as challenges to normative mainstream teen practices. Thus, straightedge does not emerge by default as the exact opposite of punk and mainstream teen cultures. In the words of Cloward and Ohlin (1960), straightedge is better construed as a "compromise formation." Having rejected punk's nihilism, and having delegitimized central mainstream teen norms and values, straightedge individuals (and especially early straightedge indviduals) actively create and sustain their own distinct cultural spaces. Moreover, straightedge culture shifts over time and space as each individual imparts her or his subjective point of view into the straightedge compromise formation.

Placing straightedge culture in social and historical context, it also is apparent that straightedge cultural boundaries are permeable to external cultural forces. Mainstream drug war rhetoric, for example, likely infiltrated straightedge cultural boundaries via individual straightedgers who were exposed at least moderately to the war on drugs cultural ethos. Thus, while straightedge individuals claim to maintain their cultural boundaries in reaction to particular mainstream and external cultural forces, these forces paradoxically impact straightedge boundaries internally, via individual straightedgers. In other words, straightedgers resist external cultural phenomena, while concurrently serving as a conduit through which the same external cultural phenomena may impact straightedge cultural boundaries.

Chapter Seven

Social Networks, Social Interaction, and Identity Transition

Chapter Introduction

This chapter draws exclusively upon interview data. This chapter is about straightedge identity, and it is organized primarily to illuminate a partial answer to research question number four (how is identity constructed/maintained and how does it shift over time?). The chapter examines individual transitions into and out of straightedge identity, and it examines the ways in which straightedge identity is impacted by social interaction and self-interaction. The chapter also broaches research question number five, with suggestions that micro-cosmic identity transitions are causally linked to broader macro-cosmic fluctuations in straightedge cultural boundaries.

Pre and Post Subcultural Identity: Continuity and Disjunction

During interviews, a remarkable dichotomy emerged in terms of how interviewees described their pre-straightedge identity and lifestyle. A substantial proportion of people explained that they had always lived a straightedge compatible lifestyle, and then discovered relatively suddenly that they had (in their opinion) been straightedge all along. Others, however, described prior histories of drinking and drug use, and spoke about becoming straightedge for the purposes of effecting a healthier and more productive lifestyle. Thus, some people speak as if they become straightedge while others speak as though their straightedge identity was some latent pre-existing phenomenon that they simply happened to discover.

Derek is an individual who discovered his straightedge identity. He explained that he never used alcohol or drugs prior to calling himself straightedge, and that straightedge further validated a lifestyle he already was living: "I didn't do drugs or

anything before I found out about straightedge.... It was definitely something that I would say I found straightedge, straightedge didn't find me, you know. It wasn't like, 'oh, I'm going to stop doing this and I am going to quit doing drugs to be straightedge.'" Janine also explains that becoming straightedge, for her, did not involve a significant lifestyle change, as she already had chosen to abstain from alcohol and drugs: "I've always felt repulsed by drugs and alcohol, and I think I always will." Sarah similarly claims that when she first discovered straightedge, it appeared as a natural fit to her lifestyle: "I found out that it was this drug-free subculture, and it sort of fit with me because I was raised in a drug-free, alcohol-free environment my whole life.... I had to change nothing at all, because I'd never been into any of it, and that's why it seemed like such a natural thing to do." Thus, many straightedge individuals view the straightedge concept as a signifier of who they have been all along. Indeed, some individuals describe the experience in terms of a revelation. They discover that they are straightedge, and the straightedge concept ascribes meaning and legitimacy to what largely is considered a deviant lifestyle (abstaining from alcohol and drugs) within mainstream teen culture.

Many other straightedge individuals do not make claims of being alcohol and drug-free their entire lives. Indeed, many straightedge individuals appear to have been casual users of drugs and alcohol, while others even claim to have suffered serious addictions and substance abuse problems prior to becoming straightedge. Jason, for example, explained to me that alcoholism runs in his family and that he also was developing a drinking problem at about the time he discovered straightedge during the early 1980s. Similarly claiming to have had a problem with alcohol, Allison said to me: "I used to do drugs, and drink, and smoke cigarettes. I struggled with addiction and

alcoholism when I was from the ages of like 16 to about 17. I was sober on and off for that year. I was sober for about a year. I was almost 18, and I didn't claim straightedge until pretty much right before I went to college when I was 18." Daisy, who grew up in a Mormon household, also claimed to engage in heavy drug use prior to becoming straightedge. In particular, Daisy describes a pattern of chronic marijuana use: "I started smoking pot when I was like 13, and then I got pretty heavy into when I was 17 for a couple of years...and then I actually dated my dealer for awhile.... When I was dating the dealer, I was smoking pot like twenty times a day or something ridiculous like that."

28 year old Dawn explains that she first became straightedge in the mid 1980s when she was 14 years old, but that she developed a drug addiction later on during the early 1990s. She received treatment for her drug addiction and again became straightedge in about 1993. Dawn further explains that her claim to straightedge the second time was instrumental in nature, insofar as she sought to rebuild a healthy life: "for two years during, probably ninety to ninety-two, I was a raging drug addict by the way. So, I mean, the goal for me was to rebuild a healthy life, and to maintain it, and to accomplish the things that I wanted to accomplish that I wouldn't be able to do." Other straightedgers, who claimed former problems with alcohol and drugs, also describe straightedge in terms of an instrument of lifestyle transformation. Indeed, Allison claims "I stopped smoking cigarettes, I stopped drinking and doing drugs because they were really harmful in my life." Also suggesting that straightedge helped her to exit a harmful lifestyle, Daisy explained to me:

> I moved down here because I wanted to change my lifestyle, and I wanted to not have all the poisons in my life. I was vegetarian to begin with but I went vegan when I came down here, and I stopped smoking, and drinking, and doing drugs, and then I hooked up with my friend who was

> straightedge. It was just so nice to have a group of people who had the same philosophy as me, and who wanted to be clean and have a good time without having to do all that crap.

Some of the straightedgers with whom I spoke explained that although they never had involved themselves in alcohol and drugs, their decision to live a straightedge lifestyle stems at least partially from their observations of the negative impact that drugs and alcohol has on people close to them. Alan, for example, explains that he finds conviction in his choice to be straightedge having watched his grandmother die from lung cancer, and also having observed the sorts of problems that alcohol causes in his brother's life. Indeed, several of the individuals with whom I spoke mentioned that their aversion to drugs and alcohol largely is influenced by their observations of the problems that alcohol causes in the lives of people close to them. Jason's words illustrate this theme when he explains that his decision to live a straightedge lifestyle stems at least partially from his observation of the effect that alcoholism has had on his father: "He had a big alcohol and drug problem, and I guess I kind of saw myself starting down that same path, and I just told myself this isn't what I want out of life."

In sum, straightedge individuals report different relationships to drugs and alcohol when discussing their pre-straightedge identity. For some people, straightedge represents a radical departure from a former lifestyle and a drastic re-articulation of a former identity. These people often describe straightedge as a means to an end. Straightedge, for them, is a means to a healthy sense of self and a means to achieving goals that might be impeded by drug and alcohol use. Still others form a straightedge identity at least partially in response to their perceptions of the harm that drugs and alcohol cause to people in their primary social networks. In both cases, straightedge emerges at least

partially as a reaction to one's own self, both real or imagined. Straightedgers with former drug and alcohol problems express an aversion to their actual former self, while straightedgers who have observed alcohol and drug problems among friends and family appear to form a straightedge identity in reaction to an imagined potential self. Jason's explanation of his fear of "starting down that same path" as his father illustrates this latter case.

For other straightedge individuals, forming a straightedge identity does not appear to be a reaction to conceptions of the self. On the contrary, for many individuals who had been living a straightedge compatible lifestyle all along, straightedge identity is in fact a self validation. Indeed, in a cultural environment that so thoroughly expects and encourages substance use, a straightedge identity imparts meaning and affirmation to people who always have felt a strong sense of aversion to drugs and alcohol.

Straightedge Social Networks

Many of the straightedgers that I interviewed claimed to have been involved, at one time or another, with relatively dense networks of straightedge individuals in their local community. Some people referred to being affiliated with a local crew, while others claimed that their connections to other straightedgers were forged at hardcore straightedge music gigs. Dawn, for example, described to me her experiences in the late 1980s going to a famous (at least within the straightedge scene) music venue in Connecticut, to meet with other straightedge individuals, and to watch bands perform. Similarly, Dan explains his own experiences forming social networks amidst the hardcore straightedge music scene:

> Once I discovered this incredible music that was so, you know, up and positive, and so just vibrant, we started to look for these particular records. We would go to the local store here and go, 'have you got Minor Threat records?' And they're like, 'yeah, we sure do.' And we would buy it and there would be two other kids buying it, and we'd look at them and go, 'how you doing?' And then we'd start chatting, and they would go, 'hey, you going to see this band down at the [XXXXX] this weekend?' And we'd go, 'yeah, no problem.' So, we'd go to the show and you'd meet thirty other like minded people.

Many straightedge individuals describe such local social networks as an important source of friendship and support. Janine, for example, tells me: "I'll just meet someone who happens to also be straightedge, and that's a lot of support, you know. I feel, you know, understood by other people, instead of having other people just think, 'she's different.' You know, someone who's straightedge can relate to what I'm going through." Similarly describing his straightedge friendships as a source of support, Thomas says: "I have a few really good friends who are straightedge, and... my girlfriend is straightedge. So, that's a very, very good thing."

Thus, for some straightedge individuals, local social networks are crucial in constructing and maintaining a straightedge identity and a commitment to straightedge lifestyles. Indeed, in the midst of a relatively antagonistic mainstream teen culture, networks facilitate for some individuals a sense of belonging, security, and acceptance. Recalling Cohen's (1955) conception of mutual conversion, as well as Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) conception of conversation of gestures, it is probable that straightedgers interacting with one another (in concrete social networks) communicate and transmit straightedge norms and values as well as subjective rearticulations of the straightedge frame of reference. Through such processes of communication, straightedge cultural boundaries get maintained and modified, and individual straightedgers likely receive a

sense of identity affirmation, which in turn leads to a continued and strengthened commitment to the straightedge cultural ethos.

Some straightedge individuals are able to accumulate moderate to sizeable local straightedge social networks. To my surprise, however, a number of the straightedgers with whom I spoke claimed to have no or very few other straightedge friends. Neil, for example, explained to me that he is not friends with any other straightedge individuals, and does not know of any other straightedgers in his community. He heard about straightedge through music, and made a claim to straightedge in isolation from other straightedge individuals. Similarly, Leo explained to me that most of his friends smoke or drink, and that none of his local friends describe themselves as straightedge. Indeed, other straightedgers explain that they maintain a straightedge identity and lifestyle in the absence of a dense concrete social network of straightedge individuals. Vessel, for example, says that she is "the only straightedger in [her] town." Similarly, Alan told me that he is the only straightedge individual at his college.

While some straightedge individuals do not have access to local straightedge social networks, some of these people maintain social links with the straightedge community in other ways. The very fact that I first made contact with most of these individuals on an Internet straightedge message board is testament to straightedgers' use of alternate means of networking. Indeed, for many of these self-professed solitary straightedgers, the Internet is an important medium. Confirming this importance, Alan says: "name a straightedge site on the web and I have probably been there. I am all about learning about how other straightedge kids live, what their true beliefs are." Sarah is another straightedge individual who is not networked with a sizeable local straightedge

group of individuals. Sarah, however, constructed her own Internet straightedge message board: "it's basically a glorified chat room.... They just post messages and other people respond to them, and you can post pictures or websites and things." According to Sarah, approximately twenty people post on her message board on a regular basis.

These variations in social networks are both telling and interesting. Strain and interactionist perspectives on youth culture and subculture assume that subcultural affiliation emerges and gets sustained through face-to-face interactions with other subculturally-affiliated individuals. Indeed, face-to-face social interactions obviously are important to at least some self-professed straightedge individuals. The straightedge case suggests, however, that face-to-face interaction is not necessary for an individual to affiliate him/herself with a subcultural group. On the contrary, the straightedge case suggests that the only really necessary component for subcultural affiliation is some form of conduit into the subculture's frame of reference. This conduit may emerge in the form of an individual, or it may emerge in some other form such as a song. Once the individual taps into the straightedge concept and internalizes it, he or she may maintain a straightedge identity in the absence of face-to-face social contact. These sorts of solitary affiliation processes likely will become more prominent as new media and technology render the subcultural frame of reference more accessible to socially isolated individuals.

Interactions with Non-Straightedge Individuals

The straightedge phenomenon has been the object of much media deviantization in recent years. Some media accounts suggest that contemporary straightedgers engage in brutal violence as a means of enforcing straightedge subcultural ideology (Levinson,

1997). Portraying straightedge as a violent phenomenon, an early 1998 edition of the popular news program, 20/20, for example, draws upon the opinions of alleged experts who describe Salt Lake City straightedgers as a criminal gang. Indeed, there does exist at least some evidence of brutal straightedge violence. Straightedgers in the Salt Lake City area, for example, used knives to carve an X into the back of a marijuana smoker. A Salt Lake City straightedger also was charged with first degree murder in 1998.

Of the 23 straightedge individuals that I interviewed, only Alan expressed limited support for the use of violence against non-straightedge individuals. Even then, he outlines a set of very strict criteria for the use of violence. Alan limits his support of violence to situations where "people are mocking the X." To illustrate what he means by this, Alan outlined the following scenario for me:

> Say I am at a party. Someone sitting next to me is smoking a cig [sic]. I'll be like, I will either: one - move; two - ask him to put it out, or to blow it opposite of my direction. Then, one of two things are gonna happen. Either they're gonna move, and blow opposite to me. Or, they're gonna blow it back in my face.... Of course, it's automatically gonna set me off. He knew what I was, he knew I disagreed with it, yet he blew it back in my face. And, nine times out of ten, I'm gonna break his nose.... Usually the fighting always ends up because it's the respect issue. People are always disrespecting it. That's the reason I fight now.... It's just because they are disrespecting my life, right in my face.

Here, Alan elaborates a vocabulary of motive that articulates his use of violence as a legitimate defense in situations of sudden provocation. Indeed, drawing upon the phenomenological theories of Jack Katz (1988) one could argue that Alan's use of violence is a defensive act of transcending a perceived threat to his moral existence.

While Alan now uses violence for defensive purposes or only when provoked, he explained to me that he did not always in the past use violence in the same manner. Indeed, according to Alan, even though he claims to disagree with such actions now,

when he was younger he was prone to offensive acts of violence against drinkers: "There's been times when me and some of my friends have gone to parties looking for fights. We do our share of disrespect.... When you feel as strongly about something as I do and my friends do, its really hard not to preach. I used to be really like preaching to people.... A lot of times I would start it so I could beat up a drunk. That's wrong."

Alan was not the only straightedge individual who related to me past experiences of violence. Ian MacKaye, for example, explains that violence was not uncommon in his local punk scene during the early 1980s:

> There was a period of time when there was a lot of fighting going on and I consider that as part of the friction of something that's new, but we were being beat up by marines. We became very defensive and sort of circled our camp. So then we would go to shows, and people who were misinterpreting punk rock as a place to come fight, and if they came to fight, they would get one. We did an awful lot of fighting at that time. We were not a gang and I don't think that we went out looking for fights. Although, by 1983 or '84, people who we were friends with, or who we identified ourselves with, or who identified themselves with us, became sort of offensively violent. Like they would go out and attack people, whereas we always had this sense of being defensively violent. We were always prepared to step up to someone if they were attacking us.... It was this whole idea of not being scared to fight, not being scared to be physically confrontational with people, but also not being malicious.

Ian further explained to me that he changed his views on violence in the scene, and has since chosen to avoid violence completely:

> I realize by 1983 or '84 when these younger kind of kids got involved, and they were starting to beat the crap out of people for no reason at all that I could tell, and I confronted them. I was like 'what the fuck are you guys doing?' And they said, 'well, you know, you used to defend the scene, and now we are'.... And I realized at that time that violence as a form of communication is flawed..... I was like, 'that's it.' I'm not gonna fight again. From that point on I've never fought. I just don't fight.

Porcell, who certainly does not advocate violence currently, explains that in past years he could have been moved to hold violent sentiments towards straightedge antagonists:

> One of the next trends was sort of this hard-line, tough guy, I am gonna kick your ass if you're not straightedge type thing. In my early years, I was as guilty as the next guy about that, because I think it is sort of a reactionary thing. Especially in the hardcore scene or when you're going to school. There's so much peer pressure on you to drink, you sort of have to put out this other peer pressure. Like, 'no, I'm not gonna drink. You're a jerk for drinking, and freaking screw you, I am straightedge. I can really see where the mentality comes from.

Here, Porcell explains how straightedge confrontation with non-straightedgers may be at least understandable if one looks at the situation from a straightedge point of view

Despite media implications about the proliferation of violence within straightedge cultural boundaries, and despite the fact that a few of the people that I interviewed described some level of past or present involvement in violence, interview evidence suggests that most straightedge individuals likely are non-violent. Indeed, most of the straightedgers with whom I spoke explained that they view the use of violence as deplorable. Furthermore, some people questioned the straightedge authenticity of self-professed straightedge individuals who do use violence to enforce straightedge ideals. Leo, for example, tells me: "I would never hit someone because he smokes. I think that's very idiotic." Also expressing an aversion to violent straightedgers, Derek (who organizes music gigs in his area) explains to me: "If somebody did that here, they'd be banned. Like, where I book shows, if somebody tries picking a fight like three times in a row, you're out and you're never coming back. As long as I'm doing shows, you're out."

Indeed, far from exhibiting violence, most of the straightedge individuals that I interviewed exhibited a high level of tolerance for people who do not live a straightedge lifestyle. Leo, for example, explained to me: "People know that I don't like smoking and people know that I don't like drinking. But at the same time, if someone's like, 'oh I'm having a party,' I'm still going to go there. I know that people are going to drink there....

I accept it as long people understand my reasons for not doing it." Even Alan, who claims to be occasionally defensively violent towards straightedge antagonists, reveals that he is able to tolerate people with non-straightedge lifestyles, as long as they respect his decision to be straightedge: "I've got a friend who smokes cigars. He's not straightedge, he doesn't agree with it at all. I respect his decision to smoke, and when he smokes, we're nowhere near each other.... I respect his decision, so long as he respects mine."

Jason is another straightedger who explained to me that, when he was younger, he experienced difficulties tolerating drinkers and drug users. Jason further explains, however, that as he grew up, he developed a high level of tolerance for individuals who do not live a straightedge lifestyle: "Just because someone has a drink, or smokes a cigarette, they're not a bad person. It's not preventing them from living their life.... Whereas when I was younger, I kind of viewed everyone, 'well, they're only having a drink or two now, but give them a few years, they'll be a raging drunk.' Just pigeon-holed everyone like that." Similarly, Jeff claims: "Most of my friends are that way [not straightedge].... I don't think somebody is, you know, a shit of a person just because they may have a beer or a glass of wine with dinner every so often.... Each person has good things about them that are worthwhile, whether they believe exactly the way I do or not."

On the issue of tolerance, other straightedge individuals, while certainly non-violent, suggest that it is difficult at times to set aside prejudices about non-straightedge individuals. Janine, for example, explains to me:

> Like I had a friend who smoked and I refused to talk to her until she quit. At the time, I thought it was a good idea to try to like force other people to agree with me, and to explain to them what's wrong with it, and how it's unhealthy..... But now I've come to realize that people have to make that

> decision on their own....Yeah, I can tolerate them. I respect other people's decisions to live their lives the way they want to, but I still think less of them for it. I guess that's kind of rude, but I do. I can't help it.

Here, Janine suggests that tolerance of non-straightedge individuals is a difficult task.

Thomas outlined for me a similar scenario of conflict with friends who do not live a straightedge lifestyle: "There were rocky times with my friends when they drank and smoked.... Their idea of hanging out for a night was just sitting in a car and getting drunk or getting high. That's not really all that appealing to me, so it's hard to be friends with people like that." Also describing situations of tension between herself and her non-straightedge friends, Vessel explained to me, "I don't have a friend who lives the full straightedge lifestyle.... I try not to condemn them for it, but it is hard for me. I see them trying to cure their problems by using substances and that's really not the way, because the problems will just be there again once the effects wear off. I think also that pain is a part of life, and that people should learn to deal with it in more positive ways."

Other straightedge individuals describe negative interactions with non-straightedge individuals. Sarah explained to me that many people are skeptical about her straightedge lifestyle. In particular, according to Sarah, since drinking is thoroughly engrained and normalized among contemporary youth culture, people are skeptical of her claims to have never consumed alcohol: "A lot of times people can't believe that I have never been intoxicated." Derek, who organizes vegan dinners at his college to raise money for his local animal shelter, explains that he often gets harassed for his vegan beliefs when selling tickets: "Everyday people yell something....Nothing terribly creative, but just trying to upset us." Derek further explained that people occasionally are awkward around him because they misunderstand what straightedge is all about: "I was

wearing a straightedge shirt, this one girl I kind of know looked at me and said, 'is that shirt a joke?' And I'm like,'what?' 'That straightedge shirt, is that a joke?' And I'm like, 'no.' And she said, 'aren't those people that beat people up or kill people or something?"

Some straightedge individuals claim that their most negative experiences emerge from interactions with friends who decide to give up the straightedge lifestyle. Janine, for example, described to me the disappointment she felt when her boyfriend began to smoke and drink after going away to college:

> At the beginning of college we made an agreement to stay together (we go to different schools), and we also agreed since we have so much respect for each other, among other things, that we'd stay straightedge since that was something we both wanted to continue. Well, a few months ago, my boyfriend admitted that he succumbed to the pressures of college or boredom or whatever he called it, and starting drinking and smoking. That pretty much broke my heart and ruined the trust and faith I had in him.

Thomas also explained that he felt extremely disappointed and even angry when some of his friends began to involve themselves in smoking, drinking, and drugs:

> There was a time about a year after I got home from college when all my friends were pretty much straightedge, although they didn't consider themselves straightedge. Like they didn't use the word straightedge to describe themselves, but they didn't drink or they didn't do any drugs. Slowly but surely, they all kind of slipped back into drinking and smoking, and none of them really wanted to tell me. And so it kind of popped in my face all at once, because they felt kind of weird that I didn't know. And so, one night, all my friends got together, and got me in a room and said, 'we're sorry but we all drink and do drugs again'.... I felt a lot of anger and a lot of frustration.

In sum, most straightedge individuals apparently confront and shape their straightedge identities in interaction with non-straightedge individuals. Taken together, straightedge interactions with non-straightedgers span a continuum, ranging from tolerance and respect to and antagonism and even extreme violence. Regardless of the nature of the interaction, however, straightedge individuals are forced to profess and even

confront their sense of self when interacting with non-straightedge individuals. Recall Leo's comment, for example, about attending parties where he knows that people will be consuming alcohol. In these situations, Leo explores the meaning of alcohol to him (i.e., I am straightedge. Drinking is stupid and it is a waste of time), and then he acts on the basis of that meaning (i.e., I won't drink even though others will). In this miniscule interaction, a straightedge individual such as Leo is constrained to explore the boundaries of his straightedge identity and he may choose actions that buttress, support, and affirm his straightedge identity. Indeed, Leo further explained to me that he feels a sense of pride, satisfaction, and strength in adhering to his straightedge convictions when his friends and acquaintances bring him into situations involving drugs and alcohol.

Processes of interaction with non-straightedge individuals may lead to instances of identity transformation as opposed to instances of identity affirmation. Recall Jason's comment, for example, that he became increasingly tolerant with age, as he encountered "good" people who happened to smoke or drink occasionally. Thus, as straightedgers encounter situations that challenge or contradict the past meanings that they attach to social objects, such as alcohol, these individuals may modify meanings and consequently experience a transition in their own sense of straightedge self.

Accommodating Competing Identities

When examining subcultural groups, especially ones with distinct ideological and normative boundaries, researchers should be cautious about inadvertently essentializing the people being studied. Just as I am not only a student, a straightedge individual is not only a straightedger. Illustrating this idea, a twenty year old straightedge individual,

named Leo, said to me: "I am straightedge, but its not my life." Indeed, it is apparent from interview data that straightedge individuals, to varying degrees, balance a straightedge identity with other important and potentially competing identities. Straightedgers, for example, make claims to political identities (e.g., vegan, vegetarian, feminist, activist), religious identities (e.g., Christian, Krishna devotee), and gender identities. Furthermore, as I mentioned earlier, straightedge individuals in the early and mid 1980s often saw themselves as punk rockers.

Interview data also suggest that straightedge individuals must balance or accommodate competing subcultural identities. Two straightedge individuals, for example, explained to me that they either currently or in the past identified themselves in terms of both straightedge and skinhead. Dawn, for example, claims that she is a non-racist skinhead. Furthermore, she explains that her attraction to the skinhead phenomenon stems from an awareness that she has about her own class position: "To me it was definitely like this whole blue collar pride thing. This whole like, you know, work ethic that was instilled in me by my father, and a way to kick pride in the face of people who thought I was white trash completely." Dawn further explained that she views herself as being on the periphery of skinhead culture: "I have a lot of problems with the skinheads I know. I definitely stay on the fringes of it because I don't like follow the party line. I don't necessarily like having to dress a particular way and I don't like the whole crew oriented thing."

Benjamin is another straightedge individual who, for many years, identified himself as a SHARP skinhead. Similar to Dawn's explanation, Benjamin says that he was attracted to skinhead culture because of its emphasis on class awareness. He further

adds that he admired the skinheads' willingness to act on the basis of their beliefs:

> I think there was pride in identifying yourself as working class, which is kind of a little, I think, a little rebellious in our society which so worships upper middle class values and culture.... And the other appeal for me was really willing to stand up for what you believe in, particularly in regards to anti-racism..... I think the politics surrounding skinheads really resonated strongly for me. The fact that skinheads were willing to stand up for their beliefs and would not back down under any stress or pressures.

Similar to Dawn's description of being on the periphery of the skinhead culture, Benjamin said to me that he has disaffiliated himself as a skinhead. He explains that this disaffiliation stems largely from his aversion to the dogmatic nature of skinhead codes of conduct: "The whole subculture's so restricting and so confining. You have to dress in a very, very specific style. You have to listen to sort of only very specific kinds of music, you have to drink beer, you have to love soccer. And that, aside from the class identity, a lot wasn't really resonating for me.... I was straightedge before I was skinhead, so drinking was out of the question."

Apart from maintaining and balancing different subcultural identities, many of the straightedge individuals with whom I spoke explained that they integrated or concurrently maintained political activism with their straightedge identities. Indeed, confirming the distinctly political and public quality that veganism holds for many straightedge individuals, a number of the people with whom I spoke claimed to be politically active on the basis of their vegan beliefs. Derek, for example, explains that he founded an animal rights group on his college campus: "I'm a member of PETA and the National Anti-Vivisection Society, but they don't really do too much, and there was no animal rights club here....So my friends and I took the stand and we started an animal rights club."

Derek further explains that the membership of his club has expanded greatly over the past year: "Last year there really wasn't any, and then this year I think we have over a hundred people on our email list. Every week we volunteer at the animal shelter. Every semester we host a vegan dinner....We limit it at 50 people so we sell tickets and give all the proceeds to an animal shelter." Also explaining that he is active in a local animal rights organization, Alan says: "we go out and protest the circus, we protest fur stores." Daisy similarly explained that she is active in PETA [People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals] and several other animal rights and environmental awareness social movement organizations.

Some of the straightedgers whom I interviewed claim to be politically active in ways not related to animal rights issues. The most striking and most prominent example of straightedge activism takes the form of anti-racism. Leo, for example, claims to be active in an organization known as Anti-Racist Action [ARA]:

> Where I live right now, there are no ARA chapters which automatically means that I have not been physically involved. I have been on-line involved....people from all over the world that support ARA go there and just talk to other people online. I am actually an operator there, which means that I am in charge of kind of the channel's safety and security.... For me going to ARA is a way to learn more, become a better person, and also to help other people.... I've met lots of straightedge people online, which is kind of interesting because I never equated the anti-racist movement with straightedge.

Despite Leo's surprise about meeting other straightedgers through ARA, a number of other straightedge individuals that I interviewed also involve themselves with Anti-Racist Action.

Benjamin, for example, who formerly was a SHARP skinhead (Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice), is a long time member of ARA and talked with me about ARA's anti-

racist tactics:

> One of the more successful strategies that we've been using out here in [XXXXX] is outing Nazis.... If we find out that a new Nazi is living in a particular location, and we have a good knowledge of the activities they've been involved in, we'll go to their neighborhood with posters and with their pictures and address on it, put them up around the neighborhood, talk to all their neighbors, and make sure they know they're living next to a Nazi, and what that Nazi has been up to. And then we'll go to their house and tell them what we've done. And I think the idea is to try and get the neighborhood involved in ostracizing them.

Benjamin further explains that some of his straightedge acquaintances do not agree with his ARA activism: "Well, they thought, you know, we were invading their privacy and that we were just as bad as them. But, our position is, if you go out with crow bars and beat up Asians, you forfeit your right to privacy."

In sum, the presence of overlapping identities, both cultural and political, should cause researchers to exercise caution when discussing categories of youth culture. When conducting case study research, observers run the risk of drawing boundaries around the group in question in something of a 'cookie-cutter' fashion. Boundaries of subcultural affiliation and identity are fluid, thereby allowing an individual to maintain multiple affiliations at the same point in time and space. Thus, it may be useful to look at cultural affiliation in terms of identity salience. Straightedge individuals may maintain different cultural affiliations, each one assuming a more or less salient nature in the individual's identity repertoire. Subcultural identity is not something that necessarily is either present or absent. It is something that ebbs, flows, wanes, or rejuvenates in a diachronic fashion. Furthermore, subcultural identities need not be viewed as mutually exclusive categories. Indeed, researchers may find it far more fruitful to examine the interactions and dynamics between the component and fluid parts of the individual's sense of self.

Identity Ambiguity and Identity Transition

As further illustration of the fluidity of subcultural affiliation and identity, many self-professed straightedge and formerly straightedge individuals explained that the straightedge concept resonates differently for them in different times and spaces. During an interview with Ian MacKaye (who was 37 years old at the time of the interview), he explained something that might surprise most contemporary straightedgers. McKaye explained that he does not actually see himself as a "straighedger:"

> I am not a straightedger and I never have been a straightedger, because I have never considered [straightedge] a thing. I thought of myself as straight, and Straight Edge is a song. It is a semantical point, but I never thought of myself as a straightedger. However, I said that I have GOT the straight edge. . . . I am still straight.

Here, MacKaye describes straightedge not as something that he is, but rather as something that he has. In other words, according to MacKaye, the condition of being straight (no drugs or alcohol) bestows upon the straight individual an advantage or edge over others who do not maintain a straight lifestyle.

Other straightedge and formerly straightedge individuals explain that straightedge resonated differently with them as they grew older and as the general meaning of straightedge evolved. Jack, for example, who was involved in straightedge during its earliest years, explains:

> I mean, I'm 37 now, and I mean as far as calling myself straightedge? No, probably not, because the general spirit of it has changed over the years.... If I called myself that [straightedge] now, I mean, it doesn't really have any meaning for me, you know what I mean? Calling myself straightedge in public, people would get the wrong idea..... It just becomes so cloudy and convoluted that no one really knows what it is anymore.

Similarly, while he does not completely reject the straightedge label, another

straightedge individual, Jason, claims that the concept does not assume the same sort of master status in his persona as it once did: "A lot of times like I don't really even call myself straightedge.... Like I said, I'm not as vocal about it. Don't tell everyone about it now, because I think once you get older that there's a lot of people out there that, just because they don't know what that [straightedge] means, they still agree with you and live their lives the same as you. It doesn't really have to have a name."

Other individuals claim to be former straightedgers, and claim also that their lives reached a particular point where straightedge no longer fit or made sense: Pete, for example, drifted away from straightedge while on tour with his band [Verbal Assault]:

> By the time we went to Europe for the second time I still didn't drink, but I realized that I felt that I kind of missed out a lot of times that people in the band had during the first trip.... I realized that I would rather stay up until six in the morning drinking with a band from Norway, and talking with them, than go to bed early.... What I'm saying is that by 1989, I found that I would much rather be involved with experiences around me than stick to an idea or a kind of philosophy I had in the back of my mind (Pete quoted in Lahickey, 1997: 198).

Another former straightedge individual, named Drew, explained that he felt as though straightedge stifled his creativity as a musician and generally limited his ability to fully experience things in life: "I thought to myself, 'You know what, I have to try things in my life.' At that point, I was really sick of it anyways. I would go to shows and see the reaction that I would get from kids I would think, 'I don't want you to look to me as an icon for straightedge, I want to shoot it down now. I want to shoot it down because I'm sick of what it's come to.' All these kids with X's on their hands, it's becoming an army of bullshit" (Drew quoted in Lahickey, 1997: 187).

Dawn, who drifted from the straightedge culture and then returned several years later, explained to me that she began to drink and use drugs when she left her local

hardcore scene to attend college:

> The [XXXXX] closed in '90 for a lot of reasons, and the scene kind of fell apart around here. This was also the time that we were all graduating from high school. A lot of my friends were scattering to college... and really quickly that whole scene, for me anyway, lost a lot of cohesiveness.... So, I lost track of a lot people really quickly. I went off to school and didn't fit in there at all. Just really unhappy about a lot of things in my life. Felt sort of betrayed in a way by these people who were kind of like, they talked about unity... and they weren't following it. And then, one day, I just got really annoyed and I said, 'you know what, I've never had a drink, I don't even know what it's like'.... So, I went and got drunk, and then I proceeded to get drunk every single night for the next few years.

Thus, Dawn explains that her involvement in drugs and alcohol at least partially was motivated by her feelings of being disconnected with and abandoned by her straightedge peers, who also began drinking and using drugs when they left for college.

The words of these straightedge individuals, who question their straightedge identity and perhaps even transition out of that identity, illustrate a crucial concept that already has been explored in some depth by Birmingham School scholars. At a general level, Birmingham scholars suggest that subcultures emerge at particular periods in history through the intersection of very particular trajectories and configurations of structure, culture, and biography. What most Birmingham scholars do not make explicit, however, is the plausible fact that structure, culture, and biography, and the intersections of these phenomena exist in a state of perpetual flux and motion. Indeed, one's subjective biography constantly intersects with changing social structures and shifting configurations of cultural norms, values, and beliefs. Furthermore, biography continually changes as a result of these intersections. Thus, as the straightedge frame of reference gets reconstructed and as life experiences shape the biography of the individual straightedger, the idea of straightedge and what it means to be a straightedger may lose

resonance with the individual. As straightedge assumes less and less salience in the individual's sense of identity, straightedge simply may dissolve over time as an element of the individual's identity repertoire. Hence, we see individuals who are former straightedgers.

Straightedge Women's Reflections on Gender Inclusion and Exclusion

One of the striking things about at least the early iteration of the straightedge phenomenon is its distinctly male-oriented quality. Indeed, looking at the prominent bands in the straightedge music genre, practically all are comprised of males, and straightedge songs often include references to bonds between brothers as well as straightedge as a brotherhood. Some of the straightedge men with whom I spoke also touched upon the brotherhood theme. Alan, for example, says that once somebody claims straightedge, he is "considered a brother." In my own on-line browsing of straightedge web-sites and Internet message boards, I have encountered a few examples of outright antagonism towards straightedge women. On one message board, for example, someone (likely a male straightedger) had written, "no clit in the pit." Presumably "clit" is meant as a reference to the female clitoris and "pit" is meant as a reference to the mosh pits that invariably form at straightedge music gigs.

Apparently, gender discrimination is not an unusual occurrence among the straightedge music scene in particular. Some of the straightedge women with whom I spoke explained that at times they have felt invisible and unaccepted at straightedge music gigs. Dawn explained to me that, in many ways, straightedge is a "big male bonding thing":

> If you were the sort of girl that they wanted to go out with, then you were accepted. But, even then, they thought you were going to hold their coats at the back.... If you were up there dancing and stuff, like they almost thought it was really gross, like icky, like you were a brute or something.... So, I wasn't the girl that they wanted to go out with and they felt kind of threatened because I knew just as much about hardcore as they did. You know, I knew the bands, and I went to the shows, and I sang along, and in a way they found that very threatening I think.

Here, Dawn suggests that she was highly active and visible in her local straightedge hardcore music scene during the late 1980s, and that some male straightedgers found her involvement threatening

Allison also relayed her experiences of being marginalized within the straightedge music scene: "In the scene, I've often felt invisible, and I think I can attribute that to people treating me a certain way because of my gender. For example, I'll show up at a show with like four of my guy friends and they'll be talking to someone in a band who they just met, and the person will be introduced to all the guys but not me." Allison further suggests that this differential treatment might stem from stereotypical conceptions of a female's role within the straightedge music scene: "I think what often goes assumed is that a girl who's there at a show is there because her boyfriend's into it. Her boyfriend's in a band or she wants to meet to guys, and I think that's a really big misconception."

It is difficult to verify Allison's claims about the stereotypical role of women in the straightedge music scene. Other observers, however, insist that these are not misconceptions, claiming instead that the majority of women active in the music scene are there only because of boyfriends. Dawn, for example, says: "the quickest way into acceptance into this scene is [to] find a hardcore boyfriend, preferably one that's in a cool band. Unfortunately, the majority of girls on the scene are willing to go that route." Dawn is a veteran in the hardcore straightedge music scene and admits that she

occasionally is biased against women newly entering the scene: "I'm probably a lot harder on the girls in the hardcore scene than I am on guys. I hate when a girl shows up on the scene and just immediately tries to find a boyfriend as a short-cut in.... And I don't like it when I go to shows and I see all the girls standing up on the stage, squealing. And, you know, there's a lot of that around here."

Allison explained to me that other's conceptions of women have made it difficult to garner recognition as a legitimate and authentic actor within the straightedge/hardcore music scene: "It has definitely forced me to extend myself where I think guys don't have to go a lot of the time. It's made me have to be a lot louder in my voice." To this end, Allison and her friends have formed a band with music geared towards the female experience in the hardcore/straightedge music scene: "We started a band because we felt that, literally, our voices weren't heard in the scene. Our female voices in general, not just OUR female voices. But female voices weren't or haven't been equally represented... and so we started a band. All we're talking about in our music are the experiences of being female in the scene."

Similar to Allison's experience, Janine explained to me also that she occasionally had a sense of being invisible in the straightedge scene, and especially at straightedge music gigs. "I definitely got ignored by a lot of the guys. Like I wasn't taken seriously sometimes just because, I don't know, I guess it was just because I was a girl and they thought that, you know, girls don't count or whatever. I did have to stick by my boyfriend, especially at the shows.... I think they wanted it to be like an all guy bonding thing."

While some straightedge women apparently feel marginalized at times, other

straightedge women explained to me that they have not experienced discrimination and feel completely accepted by other straightedgers and within the straightedge scene in general. When I asked Vessel if she had ever experienced any form of discrimination or gender bias as a straightedger, she replied: "Actually, not particularly. I think the people within the scene are usually pretty cool about accepting women and girls into it.... I think a lot of the [straightedge] songs are pretty much geared towards males because that is the majority of straightedgers. But, they're not necessarily biased against women."

In sum, while some women claim to experience no discrimination whatsoever in the straightedge music scene, other women claim exactly the opposite. Conditions of gender conflict likely reflect situations where women, relative to men, disproportionately get coerced by a straightedge subcultural frame of reference that privileges the perceptions and experiences of men. As I argued earlier, subculture boundaries get erected at least partially in resistance to the encroachment of incompatible and perhaps even threatening external cultural phenomena. For some straightedge women, however, resistance occurs also within straightedge subcultural boundaries, as other straightedge affiliates transmit and internalize gendered stereotypes and role expectations. Thus, straightedge women may be relegated to a paradoxical position where they develop a straightedge identity in reaction to external mainstream cultural expectations, and yet the authenticity of that identity gets challenged internally by other straightedge affiliates. Consequently, some straightedge women may feel not fully accepted within the parameters of straightedge culture, or they may feel that they must work doubly hard to gain acceptance and rearticulate the straightedge frame of reference in a way that accommodates a female straightedge experience.

Chapter Summary

Contrary to the monolithic representations of subcultural groups that one encounters in both academic literature and mainstream media, this chapter suggests that subcultural identity is highly fluid and variable. The straightedge case suggests that different people may be propelled to a straightedge identity through near opposite prior life experiences. Indeed, as this chapter illustrates, straightedge identity may be congruent or wholly discongruent with one's former lived experiences. Straightedge identities may converge or diverge on the basis of social context, social networks, gender, life experience, and in the presence or absence of competing identities. Moreover, apart from identity convergence and divergence between individuals, these same individuals may find that their own straightedge identity converges and diverges as they accumulate age and life experience. Similarities and differences in identity aside, however, it is clear that identity gets constructed via processes of interaction. This includes interaction with likeminded and antagonistic others, interaction with objectivated and concretized elements of straightedge culture, as well as interaction with perceptions of the self.

Chapter Eight

Straightedge Symbology:

Concretization, Coercion, and Boundary Signification

Chapter Introduction

This chapter may be viewed as a semiotic analysis of straightedge symbols. In particular, this chapter examines straightedgers' use of the X symbol, and the ways in which straightedgers reconstruct iterations of the X. Broaching research question number one, I argue in this chapter that straightedge ideology can be communicated and transmitted in a symbolic form. This communication and transmission, in turn, has the effect of expanding and distinguishing straightedge cultural boundaries. Moreover, partially illuminating research questions four and five, I suggest that symbolically encoded straightedge ideology may have the effect of constraining straightedge identity or it may serve as a conduit for the expression of a novel reconstructed straightedge identity.

The X

Often referred to as "X-ing up" some straightedgers draw wide black X's on the tops of their hands using a felt marker (Irwin, 1999: 369). Confirming this, a 48hrs documentary portrays straightedge youth X-ing up prior to going to a straightedge music gig (Lagatutta, 1996). Similarly, a documentary film of a United States tour by straightedge band Strife includes footage of numerous "X-ed up" straightedgers queued outside live music venues (Victory Records, 1996).

Some straightedge youth embrace the practice of X-ing up to relative extremes, tattooing the symbol on their hands and other parts of their bodies. Confirming the prevalence of tattooing among straightedgers, Neil explained to me that he had a tattoo on his forearm with an image of a clenched fist with an X on top (similar to the tattoo

shown in figure 6 - this is a common straightedge tattoo). Another straightedger, Alan, claimed to have Xs tattooed on his neck Numerous other straightedgers, with whom I spoke, claimed also to have straightedge tattoos. Pictures of straightedge merchandise, in a 1996 copy of the Victory Records mail order catalogue, as well as my own observations at straightedge music concerts, further reveal that straightedge youth, in addition to tattooing their bodies, often wear X shaped symbols on their shirts, jackets, and hats.

Straightedge music sometimes describes the straightedger's relationship to the X as one that approximates crucifixion. A straightedge band called Bold, for example, writes: "Straightforward actions, common goals -- working together with straight clean souls -- NAILED TO THE X" (Bold, 1988b). Similarly, in a song called "Forged in the Flames," Earth Crisis sings: "Ascension from evil with a heart that's true and strong -- Through the veil of shadows, the light of truth is my only guide -- A knight unyielding, to the X I'm crucified" (Earth Crisis, 1993b). At a later date, in a song called "Fortress," Earth Crisis (1995c) further adds: "Crawling through the ashes as their profane creation collapses in upon itself -- Unscathed I have not partaken -- The X symbolizes my lifetime commitment to live free from their poisons -- I've built myself to last -- Fortress." Indeed, numerous other straightedge bands refer also to the symbol of the X.

For at least some straightedge youth the X delineates symbolically the subculture's social network boundaries. The X likely is a means by which straightedge youth identify one another, and it likely serves also as a means by which straightedge youth demarcate themselves from perceived "outsiders." Moreover, according to straightedge music, the X is a means of self-identification, insofar as it symbolizes one's commitment and dedication to straightedge philosophy and straightedge lifestyles.

Indeed, some sources imply that the X is something that gets claimed as opposed to merely displayed: "X on your hand, now take the oath -- To positive youth, to positive growth" (Youth of Today, 1986a).

Having presented definitive evidence that at least some straightedge individuals display or lay claim to the symbol of the X, readers should be aware that many straightedgers do not. Indeed, a number of the straightedgers with whom I spoke either do not directly utilize the X, or they do so with some reservations. Indeed, many straightedge individuals apparently do not invest a significant amount of sentiment in the symbol of the X. For example, Daisy, a 22 year old female, explained to me: "I hold this [straightedge] philosophy, but I don't see myself... wearing Xs on my hand." Allison, also 22 years old, does own some X paraphernalia: "I am wearing a belt right now with an X buckle and I have sweatshirts. I have a straightedge sweatshirt, I have an X sisterhood sweatshirt... I have a necklace." Allison, however, explained to me that her ownership of these items, rather than being consciously pursued, instead is more a latent manifestation of being part of the straightedge scene: "[T]hey're just kind of something that worked [their] way into the rest of my wardrobe that I don't really think about. It's just on my sweatshirt, y'know?" Allison further explains that she has never really entertained the idea of getting X tattoos because she was "brought up Jewish, and [according to] our religion, you don't tattoo your body."

Origins of the X

During my interview with Ian MacKaye (of Minor Threat), I asked him if he had a sense of where and when the connection between the X and straightedge first appeared.

He explained to me that it gained much of its initial momentum in his own local hardcore scene in Washington DC during 1980. In particular, MacKaye explained that the X stems from efforts of underage punk rockers to gain admission to punk shows held in bars and other establishments that prohibited minors:

> In DC there was a law that says no minors were allowed in a bar; no one under the age of 18 which was the drinking age at the time. But there was a loophole, because also in the District there was a law that says if you serve alcohol you have to serve food. Then technically there was no such thing as a bar... all of these places were actually restaurants. They refer to them as popcorn laws because the food they would serve was popcorn. So we were trying to figure out how we could convince them to let us into these damn gigs, and since we had the legal basis for it.... The bar owners at the time, they were going with what they saw as the less riskier law to break. There was less of a risk to them to deny entrance and like basically breaking a discrimination law, versus chancing having a kid drinking in their club, which is a liquor law, which is a much more serious thing to deal with. So we had to figure out a way to get into these clubs. So we went down and met with the club and said 'look let us in, we will not drink and we will put these Xs on our hands, to clearly demark the people who are under age.' We told them, 'we don't drink,' I mean the young kids we didn't drink, we were playing music, and we were doing magazines, we were not involved with getting high, we were just working and creating something. And we felt like music was not something that we should be forbidden to absorb, or to see, or to be around just because of our age. So we had been to California in 1980 and... went to a club there where they had this X on the hands. So when we came back we said, 'look, let us in, we'll put the Xs on our hands.' And the club said 'yeah'.... They said, 'let's give it a shot.' And we lived up to our end of the bargain, which was that none of us drank. . . . That was where the X came from, it had a total pragmatic thing. . . .The X was really not so much to signify straightedge as it was to signify youth.

Thus, according to MacKaye, the X initially was not intended as a symbol of straightedge. Instead, it originally was utilized as a practical means for young people to gain access to bars and drinking establishments that hosted live punk rock music. The visibility of the X also was functional for the owners of these venues as it helped ensure that they did not inadvertently break any liquor laws by serving alcohol to minors.

Despite the pragmatics that surround the earliest iteration of the X, MacKaye points out that the X gradually assumed an added level of meaning: "I turned 18 in 1980. I was even old enough to drink. All of us punk rockers, even if we were 25, were putting Xs on our hands, to sort of show solidarity to the concept that there was a certain segment, a large segment, of the audience that was just not going to drink." Thus, very early on, during the genesis of the straightedge phenomenon, the X became something of a basis for solidarity and a symbol of unity among those punk rockers who simply did not wish to drink in the first place.

Cultural Transmission of the X

Just as MacKaye and his friends first encountered the X in California, and then brought the idea home with them to Washington DC, it was probably similarly transmitted throughout punk scenes across the United States, Canada, and other Western countries. Transmission of early straightedge symbology likely occurred through informal social network ties, touring straightedge bands, as well as through fanzines and music recordings, which can be distributed widely in a relatively short period of time. Even a casual perusal of fanzines, gig posters, and jackets and paper inserts from straightedge music recordings reveals that these materials are literally rife with images of the X as well as numerous variations.

Porcell, former guitar player for Youth of Today, explained to me in an interview his own observations of the X as evidence of the cultural transmission of straightedge. In particular, speaking of his experiences in the mid-1980s, Porcell explains:

> We [Youth of Today] came out and we were very vocal, we were very straightedge, and we put these big black X's on our hands. This was

> before there was a whole straightedge movement; there was a few straightedge bands. . . . I can remember, Youth of Today, our single came out, and I remember playing CBGB's and thinking, 'oh my God, am I going to put this X on my hand, or am I gonna get beat up by 15 skinheads if I do?' Then I remember, 'Break Down the Walls' [an album] came out, and we did a whole tour. And then we came back to New York, and I couldn't believe it. We were playing the same CBGBs that less than a year before I was scared to put the X on my hand. We show up and play, and there's like tons of straightedge kids, with Xs on their hands, and singing along to 'Thinking Straight.' And I remember thinking this is amazing. I never thought that it was actually going to take off into a whole sort of thing where Youth of Today could go on tour around the country, and every single show that we play, there's a contingent of the hardcore scene with Xs on their hands, and the whole straightedge look I guess, and they're singing along and they know every word. I can't really explain it myself, but it was a real phenomenon.

Here, Porcell describes something of an organic process of cultural transmission and emergence. Indeed, he implies that within the space of a year, straightedge symbology approximated a near normative status among the mid 1980s New York hardcore scene. Furthermore, Porcell's observation that American youth, nationwide, were able to sing along word for word with Youth of Today suggests the centrality of music in transmitting the X as well as a general straightedge cultural ethos.

Iterations of the X, and the Coercive Effects of Cultural Transmission

The idea that straightedge culture gets transmitted receives additional support from the fact that, beyond the early 1980s, the X appears to be continually reconstructed or reiterated by straightedge individuals. These iterations often take the form of a standard looking, although usually bold typed, letter X, surrounded by words or slogans intended to communicate a particular type of straightedge stance. Other times, iterations comprise common objects, superimposed in the image of an X. Some notable examples

found on the covers of straightedge fanzines and music recordings include crossed judge's gavels (see Judge, 1989b), crossed baseball bats (see Diehard, 1989), crossed shovels (see Six Feet Deep, 1994), and crossed hockey sticks. The latter example is associated with a straightedge band called Slapshot. Occasionally, on gig posters and album covers, the crossed hockey sticks get superimposed against or beside an image of a shattered hockey goalie's mask.

Images such as these, combined with the band name, for some observers may merge together in a system of interlocked meaning. Crossed baseball bats along with the name Diehard (see Diehard, 1989), for example, together may communicate a stance of defending and holding one's ground. The crossed bats may indicate impending confrontation, as well as a gate through which transgressors must pass. While I only can speculate, it is plausible that these implied meanings reflect something of the band members' personal life experiences. Indeed, in an interview (that I did not conduct), Dwid, a former member of Diehard, reflects upon some past experiences that appear to parallel the Diehard theme:

> [P]eople would put us down, me and my friends.... [T]hey'd try to insult us, and some people would take it in stride. [B]ut I'm not the kind of person to do that and I'd get into fights....When I would retaliate against the jock guys, or the mainstream people...I'd be the one to get all the punishment. After a few instances of defending my friends' names, and my own name, I got expelled (Dwid cited in We Shall Fight in the Streets, 1995).

Thus, for Dwid, fighting and defending himself against antagonists became, at least for awhile, a regular facet of his lifestyle. The implied militancy of the Diehard name and logo, therefore, may have resonated strongly with Dwid's own life experiences at the time.

37 year old Jack (whose stage name is Choke) is the lead singer of Slapshot, and I asked him about the origin of the band's name as well as its associated symbols. Jack explained that the name stemmed originally from his love of hockey as well as his appreciation of the popular film, Slapshot: "I've always been a hockey fan.... we were thinking, like how about ice hockey terms? Power play, cross checking, and then it was like, hey, how about slap shot? We love the movie! It [the name and the symbology] all went together." Thus, in the case of Slapshot, the name simply made sense. It reflected something of the band members' personal tastes, they perceived it as humorous in its connection with a popular film, and it sounds appropriately straightedge in its implied militancy. The band's associated images of crossed hockey sticks and smashed goalie masks are simply a logical outgrowth of the hockey theme within a distinctly straightedge context.

Mike, the lead singer of the now disbanded Judge, explains his own perceptions of how the band's name and associated symbols originated. In an interview with Beth Lahickey (1997: 78-79, 87), Mike explains that Judge at least partially emerged in response to the negative reactions that straightedge garnered among elements of the hardcore music scene during the late 1980s:

> The ideas that I had at that point were kind of negative because I was a little pissed off the way Youth of Today [another straightedge band] was treated. It was kind of stupid of me, I guess. I was mad at these people who were saying that we were these elitist, Nazi-type straight edge guys. Instead of trying to do something to prove that they were wrong and that we weren't like that, I guess we went the full other circle and decided to give them a little bit of what they thought we were about....They want something elitist, and they want something militant, then what could be more elitist and militant that calling the band, 'Judge'?

Thus, according to Mike, he consciously contrived the themes surrounding Judge in something of a counter-reaction to his experiences of hostility and misinformed criticism from other elements of the hardcore scene.

While at least some straightedge symbology is subjectively constructed according to the perceptions and life experiences of its creators, evidence suggests that constructions and reiterations of straightedge symbology can be coercive upon those who receive or apprehend them. Mike (in Lahickey, 1997: 79), for example, speaking about his observations of violence at music gigs, alludes to the coercive effects of the meanings and images surrounding Judge: "People had these perception[s] of what I was about and what Judge was about. In some cases they might have been a little bit right, but they just expected something different than Judge or what Judge was about. When we got there, there was a whole lot of fights everywhere. . . . There was so much violence at all the shows."

During another interview (that I conducted), Porcell, who is another former member of Judge (as well as many other bands), confirms Mike's observations, suggesting also that the symbolism of the band might have had a coercive effect upon audiences:

> The last tour we ever went on in America, it was completely disheartening, because there was just so many fights at every show. Y'know, a kid with an X on his hand would come up to me after the show and start telling me how he just beat the crap out of some guy that had a beer in his hand. . . as if he was impressing me or something. And I tell you, at the end of the tour, me and the singer, I remember we even had a little meeting about it, we were just like, we're gonna break up. . . . It's such a horrible thing to know that you could have impacted a person in such a negative way. . . . Even if people are misunderstanding the message, it's still not worth it.

Porcell's words suggest that while straightedge culture is subjectively and socially constructed, it may be latently coercive upon future affiliates. Things like symbols, lyrics, band names, and normative cultural practices may culminate together into a system of reified and objectified meaning. Thus, while Judge, for example, to some extent emerged as a subjectively constructed counter-reaction to criticism and perceived hostility, the implied militancy of the Judge concept emerges over time as an unintended partial frame of reference that may define for at least some individuals what straightedge is all about. It becomes a latently coercive concept insofar as it may structure and constrain how people form for themselves a straightedge identity as well as how they interact with others on the basis of that identity.

In sum, straightedge symbology likely reflects its creators' personal perceptions and life experiences. Furthermore, the fact that the X gets reiterated suggests that, by definition, meanings of the X are both transmitted and then rearticulated by the receivers of the transmission. Having made this assertion, however, I must caution other readers against over-politicizing straightedgers' reconstructions of the X. Indeed, band names may be contrived because they are convenient and readily available. Furthermore, iterations of the X are bound by certain practical constraints, including the distinctly finite number of objects that can meaningfully be crossed into an X.

The X as Identity Categorization and Signification

According to Fiske's (1990: 116-117) interpretation of Levi-Strauss' ideas, people make sense of the world through the construction of binary oppositions. Fiske explains:

> A binary opposition is a system of two related categories that, in its purest form, comprises the universe. In the perfect binary opposition, everything

> is either in category A or category B, and by imposing such categories upon the world we are starting to make sense of it. So category A cannot exist on its own, as an essential category, but only in a structured relationship with category B: category A makes sense because it is not category B. Without category B there could be no boundary to category A and thus no category A (Fiske, 1990: 116)

Fiske (1990: 119-120) goes on to explain that the vital importance of boundaries between categories has produced in all societies a series of boundary rituals designed to ease the transition between them. A marriage ceremony, for example, might be seen as a boundary ritual signifying the transition between the categories of single and married life.

Based on Fiske's interpretation of Levi-Strauss, I argue that the act of claiming the X, and the X in and of itself (at least within a straightedge context), represents something of a boundary ritual. The X demarcates straightedge boundaries, and it demarcates those who have made a personal transition into a straightedge lifestyle and identity. Indeed, the X distinguishes the wearer from perceived outsiders and it signifies various levels of meaning. In the first instance, it embodies something of a public claim about the wearer's identity. The X, however, not only displays to others the message, "I am straightedge," but it is also an act of self-affirmation. To the person for whom the idea of straightedge holds resonance, the act of displaying or claiming the X may constitute an ontological prodding of the self. It signifies to the wearer that he or she has in fact crossed a boundary, and facilitates the person's own self-categorization.

Having made this argument about the X as a boundary ritual, I must also emphasize the fact that people are variable. Probably not all straightedge individuals require the X as signification of their straightedge identity. Indeed, as I mention earlier, many straightedge individuals do not wear the X, and to many of them its presence in their lives is simply a latent manifestation of being around straightedge culture.

Sociologists of religion often address the issue of internal versus external religious affiliation, meaning that some people place a great importance in focussing upon external symbols and observable practices of religious life, and that other people instead emphasize the internalization of religious beliefs and values (Kirkpatrick, 1993). In the same way, it is plausible that some straightedge individuals may be more prone to emphasizing either an external or internal affiliation with straightedge. Thus, rather than being a face-value measure of one's "straightedgeness," it is possible that the X simply is more likely to be utilized by externally affiliated straightedge individuals when compared to those who are more highly internally affiliated. In those cases, however, where the X does get claimed and displayed by straightedge affiliates, it becomes a powerful and effective transmitter of straightedge ideology.

The X and the Transmission of Straightedge Ideology

Ideology gets defined in a number of different ways, often depending on the theoretical stance of the definer. Among distinctly Marxist theorists, for example, ideology gets construed "as a category of illusions and false consciousness by which the ruling class maintains its dominance over the working class" (Fiske, 1990: 166). Indeed, this viewpoint especially pervades Marx' (1969) The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, in which he outlines how in 1851 Louis Bonaparte secures his dictatorship by representing and articulating the interests of the French small land holding peasants through an ideological appeal to *idees napoleoniennes*. In this particular work, Marx implies that ideology is composed of "sentiments, illusions, modes of thought, and views of life" (Marx, 1969: 47) that define the superstructural parameters of the dominant

classes; the very same superstructural parameters that insert the subordinate classes into a state of false consciousness. Thus, from a Marxist stance, ideology by definition is oppressive in its nature. While I tend not to concur completely with a Marxist stance about ideology, Marx' ideas are crucial insofar is they outline the probable fact that ideology shapes and structures social interaction.

Collective behavior theorists, in their use of the ideology concept, build squarely upon the notion that ideology is significant in its structuring power. Gary Marx and Douglas McAdam (1994: 32), for example, explain that ideologies are systems of belief that mobilize people into action. Furthermore, as I explore further into this dissertation, ideology serves as a schema for articulating both individual and collective life experiences and integrating them into a broader context of meaning (Wood, 2000).

For the purposes of this dissertation, my take on ideology is an amalgamation of other definitions. Ideologies are cultural systems in which words, ideas, and allusions are interwoven in ways that latently reflect the context of their production, as well as manifestly reflecting the subjectivity of the producers (Goode, 1992). Once constructed, ideologies can be internalized and reconstructed by subsequent individuals, wherein the ideology organizes the individual's attitudes into a coherent pattern (Fiske, 1990: 165). Once they are internalized, ideologies are highly structural insofar as they mobilize people into action and articulate and integrate their life experiences into a framework of meaning that exists outside the realm of the individual's own subjectivity.

Symbols, such as the straightedge X, are a central component of ideology. In a discussion of the relationship between symbols and ideology, John Fiske (1990: 171) explains that symbols give concrete form to ideology, and in doing so, symbols both

endorse ideology and make it public. Furthermore, according to Fiske, in using symbols "we maintain and give life to ideology, but we are also formed by that ideology, and by our response to ideological signs." Thus, according to Fiske, the use of things such as cultural signs and symbols translates into a situation where ideology becomes a form of practice:

> In participating in the signifying practices of my culture I am the means by which ideology maintains itself. The meanings I find in a sign derive from the ideology within which the sign and I exist: by finding these meanings I define myself in relation to the ideology and in relation to my society (Fiske, 1990: 172).

Based on Fiske's ideas, the X may be a powerful transmitter of straightedge ideology, as well as a marker of expanding straightedge subcultural boundaries. In claiming the X, the individual communicates the existence of straightedge, and makes a public claim that "straightedge is here, now, in this time and space." Indeed, some persons, when encountering the X, may simply look through it. For many people, perhaps it holds no resonance, and consequently they feel no need to engage the symbol in any way whatsoever. For example, perhaps you, the reader, have encountered a straightedge individual. Perhaps you have actually observed straightedge displays of the X, and perhaps you looked right past the symbology because it simply holds no meaning for you. Conversely, however, you may have encountered the X in circumstances where you feel compelled to engage it. Suppose, for example, that you have a teenage child, and that child suddenly begins to draw a black X on his or her hand every single morning. You ask your child why she does this, and she explains to you that she does it because she is straightedge. In that instant, something of straightedge ideology gets transmitted, suddenly, as if it were an electrical impulse crossing a synaptic gap. From that moment

on, you likely will engage the X at some level of meaning, each time you encounter it.

Cultural transmissions, in crossing the gap from one subjectively oriented individual to another, lose traces and components of their point of origin. By definition, one person can not fully know the subjectivity of another. Thus, while two people displaying the X may encounter one another, and while both people understand the symbol within the context of the straightedge cultural ethos, each person's claim to the X will be at least slightly different. Each person will assimilate the symbol in a slightly different manner. Furthermore, each person will transmit a slightly different claim to the X. Hence, we see variations and iterations of the X, each with its own implied or suggested meanings.

The X as Boundary Signification

Transmitted iterations of straightedge symbology contribute at least partially to the shifting scope of straightedge ideological boundaries. In this regard, recall my earlier definition of a subcultural frame of reference as a socially constructed, and objectivated corpus of ideals, values, and proscribed norms that delineate generally what a subculture is about as well as what it means to be a subculture member. The X, and its general association with straightedge, stems to all prospective affiliates from the subcultural frame of reference. The X exists in an objectivated coercive sense as the primary symbol of straightedge youth subculture, and its objectivated condition is a reflection of years of subjective, expressive human activity. Each time somebody internalizes (gets coerced by) the objectivated X, rearticulates it into his or her own version (crossing novel objects into an X symbol), and then transmits that rearticulated symbol on to somebody else, the

original objectivated X gets transformed in at least a miniscule way. Furthermore, insofar as rearticulated symbols differ in their implied meanings, rearticulation of straightedge symbology results in at least a minor fluctuation in the frame of reference that coerces all future prospective straightedge affiliates. In this way, the use of symbols contributes to the fluidity and diachronic nature of straightedge ideology.

Not only does the X facilitate and signify shifts in straightedge ideological boundaries, but it also is an important signifier of straightedge structural boundaries. Indeed, recalling Porcell's comment about contingents of 'X-ed up' youth at each stop in Youth of Today's American tour, the geographic dispersal of straightedge symbology likely suggests the local to global dispersal of straightedge culture in general. In one sense, the geographic transmission of X symbology serves as a "common ground" and a point of unification for all North American and even international straightedge youth. In another sense, however, as the X became more geographically dispersed, it is apparent that it increasingly got utilized as a signifier of the regionality of straightedge culture.

As an example of the possibly regional nature of straightedge culture, different geographic areas apparently house specific straightedge subcultural franchises, sometimes known as "crews." One straightedge individual, for example, refers to straightedgers in the Montreal area as "the 514." He goes on to explain to me that "[t]he 514 is... a local sort of straightedge clique." As further example, certain members of the Cleveland, Ohio straightedge scene are alleged to comprise a franchise known as the "One Life Crew." Confirming the existence of crews, straightedge bands in the New York and Connecticut areas refer to such straightedge subculture franchises as the "New York Crew" and the "Youth Crew." As further evidence of this confirmation, when I

interviewed Porcell, he referred to the New York / Connecticut straightedge scene of the late 1980s as "the youth crew days". Some crews apparently denote themselves using their own iterations of straightedge symbology. Pictures on the covers and inserts of music recordings, for example, suggest that some self-professed One Life Crew members signify their crew affiliation with a symbol of crossed baseball bats. Printed respectively at the angles of the top and two side intersections of the bats, one may observe the words "1 – Life – Crew" (see Integrity, 1995).

Chapter Summary

Straightedgers commonly identify themselves as well as their cultural spaces and artifacts with an X or objects crossed to resemble an X. Straightedge ideology gets transmitted through X symbology, and iterations of X symbology denote shifts or variations in straightedge ideology. Indeed, particular straightedge individuals as well as localized straightedge subculture franchises may articulate novel variations of the X as a means of communicating a subjective or regional stance on the straightedge issue (e.g., two crossed baseball bats may signify a claim to militancy).

While many straightedge individuals actively and consciously don X symbology, many other straightedgers do not. Indeed, some straightedge individuals maintain no identification with the X in any way whatsoever, while for others the X infiltrates daily life only as a latent consequence of being immersed in straightedge culture. It is plausible that people who do and do not place great importance on X symbology can be distinguished respectively by external and internal affiliation with straightedge ideals. For externally-affiliated individuals, claiming the X likely embodies a boundary ritual

symbolizing the individual's transition into a new identity.

Regardless of individual or franchise level associations with X symbology, the X encodes and concretizes a subjective straightedge stance that ultimately coerces others who later apprehend that symbol. Recall Mike's explanation that the band Judge, as well as its trademark X consisting of crossed judge's gavels, was consciously contrived as a reaction to hostility and prejudice allegedly directed towards straightedgers in the New York area during the late 1980s. Mike and other band members explained, however, that the militant themes and meanings surrounding Judge served to incite hostility and even violence within the straightedge music scene. Thus, while Judge reflects the subjectivity of the band members, Judge embodied certain themes and meanings that ultimately coerced and constrained at least some straightedgers who later affiliated themselves with Judge as well as Judge symbology. Thus, iterations of the X are based upon past subjective expressive human activity. These iterations, however, get objectivated and ultimately may coerce future straightedge affiliates who apprehend the symbol and its objectivated meanings.

Chapter Nine

Theoretical Synthesis:

Subcultural Genesis and Permutation

Chapter Introduction

Drawing upon earlier analytical chapters, the goal of this chapter is to provide answers to research questions five and six (What does the straightedge case reveal about processes of subcultural genesis, transformation, and identity formation? Does the straightedge case hold implications for a reconceptualization of the subculture concept?). The chapter begins with an elaboration of chaos theory as an alternate framework for conceptualizing subculture. The chapter then synthesizes a theoretical explanation of diachronic subcultural processes such as emergence, permutation, and schism. Throughout the chapter, I argue that broad subcultural processes are causally linked to processes of social interaction and individual identity formation.

Chaos Theory as an Alternate Conceptualization of Diachronic Social Phenomena

Confirming traditional strain explanations of subculture, the straightedge phenomenon does in fact comprise a corpus of norms, values, and beliefs. It also comprises an identifiable group of individuals as well as artifacts, texts, and spaces that communicate this corpus of norms, values, and beliefs. Straightedge culture, however, is not static. On the contrary, as predicted by the interactionist reconceptualization of the subculture concept (see Fine and Kleinman, 1979), the subcultural system is fluid in nature. Persons and information flow across the boundaries of the subcultural system, entering and existing at both regular and irregular intervals. Nonetheless, the fluid and changing straightedge cultural system somehow hangs together under the umbrella of the straightedge frame of reference, which itself is malleable and permeable.

My analysis of the straightedge phenomenon suggests that straightedge culture is relatively externally stable yet internally variable. While groups of straightedge affiliates often share common experiences and perceptions, each potential affiliate by definition brings with him/herself a unique biography. Unique biographical standpoints, in turn, by definition, lead to each individual apprehending and articulating a distinct conception of what straightedge is all about as well as what it means to be a straightedger. People sharing similar biographical elements may congregate together under relatively common apprehensions and articulations of the straightedge concept. These internal subculture clusters, however, may distance and consciously distinguish themselves from other straightedge clusters that galvanize around a different biographical commonality. Furthermore, certain biographical commonalities appear to be more prominent at particular socio-historical moments than at others.

My analysis further reveals that straightedge culture endures dynamic shifts in terms of time, space, and even momentum. Straightedge individuals affiliate for different lengths of time and with varying degrees of intensity, and external factors have differential impacts upon the respective biographies of individual straightedgers. Individual straightedgers concretize and transmit their ideals in different ways, and individual straightedgers get impacted differentially by the artifacts, texts, and practices that concretize and transmit straightedge ideals. The salience of straightedge identity forms, ebbs, flows, and dissolves over time and space. Indeed, internally, straightedge is highly variable and unpredictable.

This dynamism and fluidity, however, exists within a framework of relative stability. Among straightedge affiliates, the existence of straightedge is itself a universal.

All straightedge affiliates construct their identities and affirm their own stance about the subculture's boundaries in relation to the overarching idea of straightedge. Thus, while the straightedge phenomenon emerges and transforms in an organic and highly variable manner, it somehow hangs together. Internally it is fluid, but it is bounded by a relatively stable, yet malleable, conceptual skin. In other words, straightedge concurrently is both globally stable and locally indeterminate.

Some contemporary theorists are extracting ideas from the mathematical sciences as a means of better conceptualizing externally bounded yet internally variable phenomena. In particular, social scientists are adopting concepts from mathematical chaos theories as tools to better explain the paradoxical condition of social phenomena that are globally stable yet locally indeterminate. Chaos theory is a relatively long established paradigm in the mathematical sciences. Applied to the social sciences, however, chaos or complexity theory is a newly emerging perspective that is yet to be fully consolidated. Nonetheless, a number of researchers over the past decade have used complexity concepts to illustrate and model complex socio-cultural phenomena (see Andreev et al, 1997; Arrigo, 1994; Dooley et al, 1997; Milovanovic, 1996; Passerini and Bahr, 1997; Walters, 1999; Young, 1991).

While certain postmodern sociologists recently have attempted to apprehend or incorporate complexity theory into post-modern analysis (see Dobuzinskis, 1992; Milovanovich, 1996; Sardar, 1994; Young, 1991), the complexity perspective is by no means a distinctly post-modern perspective. On the contrary, rather than opposing the very foundations of the social scientific method, complexity theory merely acknowledges that causal chains and connections between social variables are far more complex, non-

linear, and unpredictable than traditional sociological methods and theories typically imply.

In his elaboration of the foundations for a post-modern criminology, Dragan Milovanovic (1996) adapts concepts from chaos theories to outline a crucial and novel conceptual model for the social sciences. Milovanovic's model is able to model social phenomena that are fluid, diachronic, internally variable, yet globally stable. Indeed, where other cultures and subcultures theories largely are unable to capture the dynamism of cultural phenomena, Milovanovic's chaos model easily can be adapted to capture culture and subculture in its entirety. At the most general level, Milovanovic writes in reaction to the linearity inherent to traditional, modernist sociological theories and statistical methods. Milovanovic advocates a form of post-modern analysis. Rather than privileging linear effects and homeostasis, post-modern analysis is more likely to assume non-linear effects and far from equilibrium conditions in the social world (Milovanovic, 1996: 567). According to Milovanovic (1996: 570), linear models and modes of investigation of the social world, in pointing out the variance explained, overlook many other minor contributing factors. Indeed, researchers often attribute substantial explanatory power to only two, three, or four variables. All other unexplained variance often gets discounted as insignificant "noise" with no major contributing effects.

Milovanovic explains that much of the difficulty surrounding linear models stems from the tendencies of sociologists to construe the social world in terms of point attractors. Complex social phenomena, such as crime, get construed as synchronic and static points in time and space. Construed as simple point attractors, complex social phenomena get utilized as dependent variables, which exhibit changes that are directly

proportional to the manipulation of one or more external parameter values. According to Milovanovic (1996: 570), however, there are other types of attractors that are better used to conceptualize complex social phenomena, and that rarely get considered in mainstream social science:

> Various attractors exist. Point attractors are those in which phenomena settle down to some region approximating a point. Cyclical attractors... are those which converge to an oscillating cycle. In torus attractors, one witnesses quasi-periodicity. Chaotic attractors... are bounded (have global stability), but internally the trajectories are unpredictable (they display local indeterminacy). Here [referring to a chaotic attractor] a very small change in some crucial control parameter [dependent variable], even a difference of .0001, will produce unexpected results after a number of iterations

Thus, according to Milovanovic (1996: 574) complex social phenomena are better construed as regions, patches, or moments (as opposed to simple points) that endure transformation in time and space through processes of iteration.

Iteration is a central concept of the newly emerging chaos or complexity paradigm in the social sciences (see Stroup, 1997), and it refers to situations where, in historically diachronic social equations, the outcomes continually act back upon the allegedly independent variables (see Milovanovic (1996). As iteration and re-iteration proceeds, the results of the computation change slightly with each cycle, likely as a consequence of the noise and insignificant effects that go unaccounted for in static and linear modernist systems and models. In this way, chaos theory applied to social science challenges the modernist notion of proportional effects. Instead, chaos theory suggests that disproportional effects and outcomes will emerge over time, even with the application of identical parameter values. Thus, through processes of iteration and re-iteration, what social scientists construe as point attractors actually will often split and bifurcate into

chaotic attractors. Indeed, the outcomes of an equation, plotted over time, do not converge upon the same point, but rather bifurcate and ultimately oscillate chaotically within a relatively bounded and eternally stable outcome basin.

The straightedge case illustrates the operation of iterative feedback as well as the emergence of a straightedge identity outcome basin as a result of sustained iteration. The straightedge concept begins with the ideas of a single individual, Ian MacKaye, and those ideas get concretized in a few songs during 1981. Thus, the straightedge phenomenon begins with the straightedge identity construction of one single individual. Other individuals, who subsequently encounter the straightedge concept in MacKaye's music, construct a straightedge identity that at least partially is coerced (although not completely determined) by MacKaye's own identity construction. In this way, the outcome of one equation (MacKaye's identity) is fed back into subsequent other identity formation equations, and the outcomes of these are then fed into still other identity formation equations. Indeed, the idea is similar to others predominant in sociological thinking, including Berger and Luckmann's (1966) now classic social constructionist idea that subject expressive human activity becomes objectivated and ultimately constrains subsequent subjective human activity.

The outcome of continued iteration, in the straightedge case, is that an independent and reified straightedge frame of reference ultimately is socially constructed as a sort of coercive conceptual umbrella under which future straightedge identities and interactions get formed. The straightedge frame of reference generally binds and cements straightedge culture, yet within the boundaries of this socially constructed and reified conceptual umbrella, the outcomes of straightedge identity equations vary infinitely. In

this way, through the sustained iteration of identity construction, straightedge identities vary within a framework of external global stability. As I will explain, however, the internal variability of straightedge identity constructions bend and shape the straightedge frame of reference over time and space. The straightedge frame of reference, however, itself is diachronic and gradually shifts its form over time and space (see Wood, 1999a).

The straightedge case suggests that diachronicity of cultural boundaries emerges at a micro-cosmic level from a multitude of identity constructions and interactions occurring across time and space. When prospective straightedgers encounter the straightedge frame of reference (perhaps in a song or through another person) they rearticulate the elements of the frame of reference (its embedded values for example) into an identity that resonates with their own life experiences. Thus, referring back to the data presented earlier, one observes people who use straightedge to transform an existing identity and one observes other people who apprehend straightedge to validate an existing identity. Moreover, the reader will recall that straightedge holds different meanings for different individuals and that unique individual identities form as the straightedge concept comes to resonate in a distinctly different way for each individual. Each time a straightedge identity gets constructed or reconstructed, it impacts in at least a minor way all other identity constructions. The individual encounters and internalizes straightedge and rearticulates a subjectively reconstructed expression of the straightedge concept which others may encounter in their own identity constructions.

Thus, the straightedge phenomenon hangs together across time and space, united by the existence of a straightedge frame of reference. The frame of reference, however, over time and space experiences fluctuations, ripples, and bulges as a result of the myriad

of micro-cosmic social interactions and identity formations occurring within its boundaries. This sort of cultural diachronicity taxes the scope of existing subcultures theories. The cultural diachronicity of straightedge culture, however, can easily be accomodated with an adaptation of rhizomic models recently utilized in the social sciences.

Straightedge as a Rhizomic Variable Trajectory

Studies that examine a particular subculture at a particular point in time generate a partial cross-sectional view of the phenomenon. These partial cross-sectional views, at best, comprise what Milovanovic (1996: 574) refers to as a "phase portrait." While a phase portrait may accurately represent a cultural phenomenon at a precise moment in time and space, it can not portray the culture in its diachronic entirety. Cultures and subcultures are complex systems of social interaction, that are best construed as chaotic attractors. Indeed, the culture or subculture is better viewed as a variable trajectory that develops across time and space. Moreover, the momentum of subculture trajectories need not be viewed as linear and two-dimensional. On the contrary, Milovanovic suggests that complex social phenomenon can be viewed as multi-dimensional world-tubes: "This world tube represents an infinitely complex process of a structure in movement and development which is centered in a region indicated by the boundaries of the tube" (Bohm cited in Milovanovic, 1996: 584). World-tubes also can be conceptualized as rhizomes. Milovanovic describes a rhizome in terms of a continuous line of variation along which there exists a perpendicular range of variation, all bounded by a relatively stable yet malleable and permeable sort of skin. Along the rhizomic tube,

parallel and perpendicular lines of variation converge, diverge, or endure iteration through feedback loops. Variable trajectories may gain or lose momentum. They may congregate into novel and unpredictable constellations and configurations, which subsequently dissipate at another period in time and space along the rhizome. New factors may enter the rhizomic tube with each advance in time and space.

Imagine straightedge culture as a rhizomic, tubular variable trajectory. All ideas, practices, people, artifacts, and texts affiliated with the straightedge concept emerge, exist, develop, and disappear (with varying degrees of momentum) along a time space trajectory that is loosely bounded and cemented by a relatively stable yet historically shifting idea of straightedge. Along this continuum, one observes cultural feedback loops, that can be conceptualized in terms of Berger and Luckmann's social constructionist theories. Straightedge individuals, for example, apprehend objectivated and concretized meanings of straightedge, re-articulate those meanings, and then transmit them to others. This process of apprehending and re-articulating the straightedge frame of reference is an ongoing process and, over time, results in a re-iteration or novel evolving constellation of straightedge culture (when viewed through Milovanovic's model). Along the rhizomic variable straightedge trajectory these iterative feedback loops manifest themselves as various evolving and dissipative cultural configurations. My analysis of the straightedge phenomenon, for example, suggests that, at certain socio-historical moments, novel and likely unpredictable iterations and constellations of straightedge culture emerged, including both the hardline and Krishna Conscious variants. These iterations and constellations ebb and flow in terms of size, scope, or salience. In other words, cultural iterations experience different levels of momentum.

Different cultural iterations occur at infinitely variable speeds, and these iterative feedback loops in time may all but fizzle out.

The momentum of cultural iteration gets fueled differentially by external influences unpredictably permeating the straightedge culture's rhizomic boundaries (for example, the influence of the war on drugs cultural ethos). Indeed, change and transformation of straightedge culture does not occur in a proportional and predictable manner. Stimulus for change can present itself from a seemingly infinite number of external factors, all of which are socially and historically contingent. Moreover, external influences do not generate an evenly distributed proportional effect upon all elements of straightedge culture. Thus, the potential for straightedge cultural iteration is infinite, and small changes in initial conditions (the straightedge frame of reference in this case) change the long-term behavior of the system (the dynamics of straightedge culture as a whole).

Despite the internal dynamism of straightedge, the subculture somehow hangs together through time and space. Somehow, despite apparent internal chaos, straightedge culture persists. The concept itself binds a fluid and dynamic cultural phenomenon across time and space because the idea of straightedge continues to hold meaning for people. Indeed, this chaotic attractor, known as straightedge, will dissipate and cease to exist only when its meaning runs out for all people. Until that time, straightedge will persist and continue to permutate in the continued frame of reference apprehensions, identity reconstructions, and social interactions of people who organize at least some element of their existence in relation to the idea of straightedge.

Chaos theories can assist researchers in describing cultural and subcultural groups at a general and broad level. In other words, chaos theories can provide an answer to the question, what is a cultural group? The answer, from a chaos perspective, is that a culture is a locally indeterminate yet globally stable system of complex social relations shifting across time and space. Thus, chaos theory can help conceptualize the diachronic nature of subcultures. It offers very little, however, in the way of explaining why particular diachronic shifts occur at particular socio-historical moments. Indeed, while notions of iteration and evolving and dissipative structures are useful concepts, there remains the issue of how and why processes of cultural iteration, evolution, and dissipation actually occur in the first place. Evidence presented in this dissertation illustrates that processes of cultural iteration, evolution, and dissipation do in fact occur within straightedge cultural boundaries. In particular, and at the most general level, these processes manifest themselves in the schisms and factions that seem be characteristic of the straightedge phenomenon since the mid to late 1980s.

Conceptualizing Subcultural Schism

Applied to the social sciences, schism is the division of a social group into two or more relatively distinct and opposed factions (Gustafson, 1978; Stark and Bainbridge, 1987: 128; Stark and Bainbridge, 1985: 101). Much of what researchers know about schism among social groups and organizations stems from studies of conflict and sectarian tension among religious groups and movements. Indeed, spanning topics such as the socio-cultural forces influencing the great ninth century Christian schism (Barbu, 1996), Protestant intra-denominational tension (see Hood-Brown et al, 1991; Starke and

Dyck, 1996), and fragmentation among obscure and allegedly cultic new religious movements (see Bainbridge, 1978; 1991), schism is a primary topic among social scientific studies of religion. Schism, however, occurs not only among religious groups.

Studies suggest that schismatic processes and conditions prevail particularly among a number of contemporary and allegedly deviant youth subcultures. Researchers conclude, for example, that the American and Canadian skinhead subcultures fragmented during the 1980s and 1990s into a number of ideologically distinct factions including racist skinheads, anti-racist skinheads, communist skinheads, and non-political skinheads (Coplon, 1988; Craig & Young, 1997; Moore, 1993; Wood, 1999; Zellner, 1995). Similarly, researchers of the British skinhead subculture suggest that it evolved from the hard mod subculture, and that the hard mods themselves emerged at least partially as a schismatic faction of the larger mod subculture (see Brake, 1993; Cohen, 1972; Hamm, 1993; Kinsella, 1994; Moore, 1993).

This dissertation reveals the emergence of several schismatic straightedge factions over the past twenty years, as well as providing evidence of potential future schismatic factions. During the very early 1980s, the straightedge phenomenon emerged amidst the American punk rock scene and galvanized around a militant opposition to alcohol, drugs, and casual sex. During the mid to late 1980s, straightedge scenes across the United States apparently began to seek some level of distance and separation from the broader punk phenomenon. Furthermore, into the late 1980s and early 1990s, at least two relatively distinct factions emerged. These include the ultramilitant hardline straightedge, as well as the straightedge culture's Krishna Conscious variant. Moreover, into the mid and late 1990s, it seems that at least a small minority of straightedge

affiliates were forging ideological links to the allegedly satanic organization, The Process Church of Final Judgement. Denoting a rift in the subcultural frame of reference, each faction galvanizes or relates in some way to the straightedge concept, yet articulates a different meaning of straightedge and elaborates a different conception of what being a straightedger is all about. These factions and rifts represent evolving and dissipative structures. They emerge as non-linear iterations and constellations of straightedge culture. These processes of iteration, however, have their bases at a micro-cosmic level. In particular, iterations emerge from interactions between individual straightedgers, and also from the interactions of individual straightedgers with their own identities.

Social-Psychological Bases of Subcultural Schism

Although subcultural schism denotes an organizationally entrenched rift at the level of subcultural frame of reference, schism has its roots in localized social-psychological subcultural dynamics. New recruits to an already established subculture may affiliate themselves with the group because they are attracted to its subcultural frame of reference. The potential straightedger, for example, for one reason or another, may be attracted by the prospect of what it means to be straightedge as well as what the straightedge subculture is all about. Explained in terms of transcending perceived threats or challenges, the potential straightedger perceives the subculture as a vehicle or mechanism for overcoming a perceived threat or at very least a sense of discontent. The individual, for example, may have grown up in, and still reside in, an environment where alcohol and drugs get constructed by others as wrong and immoral. Thus, upon initial contact with straightedge culture, the recruit already might be grappling with a fear or

discontent about alcohol and drugs. In turn, the straightedge frame of reference articulates the potential recruit's discontent, delineating the source of the discontent, construing it as a threat, and proscribing a supposedly reversionary set of norms, values, and beliefs.

As long as the subcultural frame of reference properly articulates the individual's discontent, he/she will remain affiliated with the subculture. When and if the individual continues to feel discontented, however, he/she may withdraw from subcultural affiliation. Thus, subcultural schism finds its earliest points of genesis when the subculturally-affiliated individual continues to feel discontented or continues to perceive a threat, but the subcultural frame of reference fails to provide a sufficient level of articulation and resolution. In these instances, the subculturally-affiliated individual may seek to modify the subcultural frame of reference.

The case of the straightedge culture's Krishna Conscious off-shoot is an excellent example of this process. Indeed, speaking with straightedgers turned Krishna Conscious devotees, it is clear that many of these individuals distance themselves from straightedge culture because its ideals come to resonate differently with them. As example of this, Porcell explained to me that, prior to becoming Krishna Conscious, he was "getting introspective about why [he] was straightedge in the first place," and that he felt incredibly jaded with the straightedge scene in general:

> All the straightedge kids grew up [referring to the late 1980s New York straightedge scene], and they started going to college, and they grew their hair out, and then straightedge became like an un-cool thing. . . . And, you know, then you see like there is these other straigthedge kids, and they're assholes, and they're beating people up. And there's other people that drink and they seem pretty cool. So, what actually is the goal? Is the goal to become straightedge, or is the goal to become a better person? So, I was starting to realize that, just drinking, it wasn't the end, it wasn't the all

> in all. And I just thought that [straightedge] was a good foundation for something else.

Porcell further explains that straightedge did not properly facilitate a lifestyle based on his ideals, and that Krishna Consciousness helped him to attain a lifestyle that is consistent with his ideals and principles: "I was always idealistic, but I didn't always live perfectly up to my ideals. . . . And I am in a band singing, 'make a change, make a change, make a change,' and I am finding it difficult to even make a change in myself. And that's when I realized, it's not enough to scream, 'make a change.' You have to learn how to do that."

Ray Cappo (lead singer for Youth of Today), also communicates a sense of being deeply frustrated with the straightedge scene prior to converting to Krishna Consciousness: "The straight edge scene got so big, but it seemed to be more like a fashion statement, rather than anyone seriously trying to improve themselves. . . . I thought the whole scene was getting misguided. I don't know if I misguided it, or if people in general misguided it, but they were getting into straightedge for the wrong reasons. It wasn't for self-purification, it was more for ego trips and fashion" (Ray Cappo quoted in Lahickey, 1997: 30-31).

After becoming Krishna Conscious, both Porcell and Ray Cappo express a sense of satisfaction with the transition. Ray in particular, was able to reconcile his discontent with the straightedge music scene, as well as his role as a musician within that scene:

> The Krishna philosophy isn't to renounce anything falsely, but if you're good at something, you should use it in the service of Krishna, not just neglect it. So I tried to renounce music, but its part of my nature to do music, to write music. So you use the same music, but you do it spiritually. That's what I think Shelter is. . . . It's the same exact thing, but with more of a spiritual twist. At the same time, we follow certain spiritual principles; we're celibate, we're vegetarians, we're straight" (Ray Cappo quoted in Lahickey, 1997: 31, 33).

Also asserting some level of discontent with his involvement in the straightedge scene,

Porcell made it very clear to me that his identity as straightedge did not fully allow him to satisfy his ideals and principles. Porcell explained to me, however, that after becoming Krishna Conscious he lived on a Krishna Conscious farm where his lifestyle became much more satisfying:

> It was such a different lifestyle. Such a higher lifestyle than I was used to living; y'know, waking up at noon and watching TV and stuff like that. It was such a boost, and plus I felt really good about myself, because now I am really living up to what I believe. I was against pollution, I was against the whole way that American's live their life, it's just so horrible. From packaged foods; its just like people have no concept of working with the Earth and not against the Earth. It was great, we were growing all our own food there, we had cows, we were taking care of all kinds of animals. And I really felt like, now, I am living a lifestyle that's conducive with everything I think and believe.

Here, in addition to expressing a heightened sense of satisfaction, Porcell suggests that Krishna Consciousness enabled him to live a lifestyle more congruent with the principles that he had held all along

Thus, as explained by Porcell and Ray Cappo, the amalgamation or transition from one cultured identity to another emerges from a process of identity confrontation. The existing frame of reference no longer satisfactorily articulates the affiliate's sense of self and identity. Thus, the shift from one cultural affiliation into another is a practical attempt to relieve a sense of dissonance about one's own identity as well as a means of re-articulating feelings of discontent that lead to the initial subcultural affiliation. Indeed, Porcell explains that his feeling of discontent with society and with his own lifestyle initially lead to him to affiliate with straightedge. Ultimately, however, straightedge was insufficient in bringing about the changes that he sought, and so he encountered the

Krishna Consciousness movement as an alternate avenue of realizing his goals and articulating his discontent and perceptions of the social world.

In sum, it is plausible that schism, at the most basic level, begins when the subcultural frame of reference no longer articulates the affiliate's sense of discontent. Consequently, the discontented affiliate may seek to modify the subculture frame of reference, or he/she may seek an alternate frame of reference that can articulate the individual's sense of discontent and also offer some level of threat resolution.

Ideological Induction and Alternate Frames of Reference

When speaking with Porcell about his conversion to Krishna Consciousness, he mentioned that he encountered it near the end of a thorough spiritual and religious search. Indeed, he explained that he felt a sense that spirituality was lacking in his life, yet all bodies of spiritual and religious thought seemed to him inadequate until he encountered Krishna Consciousness. During our conversation, I found myself wondering what was so different about Krishna Consciousness, and why Porcell chose it over any other form of religion or spirituality. Porcell answered my unvoiced query. He explained that living a Krishna-Conscious lifestyle not only made sense, but also was a relatively easy transition to endure as a result of already having lived a straightedge lifestyle for so many years. In fact, according to Porcell, the transition was facilitated by the fact that straightedge and Krishna Conscious lifestyles are similar in a number of fundamental respects:

> To me it was just like a natural progression of straightedge. . . .To me it like clicked, you know what I mean? So, in that sense it wasn't such a big progression because basically all the basic tenets of Krishna Consciousness I was already following. . . .To me it's sort of like the culmination of what straightedge really should be. What is the purpose of straightedge? The purpose of straightedge is not to put something in your

> head that's going to screw you up and make you think unclearly. Okay, once you've cleared your head, now what? Now what are you gonna think about? It's not an all in all, it's just a means to an end.

Here, Porcell suggests that the ideological similarities between Krishna Consciousness and straightedge directly facilitated his conversion experience. Krishna Consciousness seemed like a natural progression for Porcell, because, according to him, it validated a lifestyle he had been living all along. In other words, Porcell was predisposed to convert to Krishna Consciousness as a result of his prior internalization of straightedge ideals and lifestyle tenets.

The basic Krishna Conscious lifestyle tenets share remarkable similarities with straightedge. According to A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (d. 1977), the founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, all Krishna devotees are called to abide by four regulatory lifestyle principles. These include: 1.) no eating of meat, fish, or eggs; 2.) no gambling; 3.) no sex other than for procreation within marriage; and 4.) no intoxication, including recreational drugs, alcohol, tobacco, tea, and coffee (Prabhupada, 1993: 113). According to official movement teachings, not living in accordance with these regulative principles "disrupts our physical, mental, and spiritual well being and increases anxiety and conflict in society" (Prabhupada, 1993: 113). Living in accordance with the four regulatory principles, however, allegedly enables individuals to control "the insatiable urges of the mind and senses" (Prabhupada, 1993: 113) and thereby achieve spiritual enlightenment (Prabhupada, 1993: 3). Thus, with the exception of prohibitions against gambling, the Krishna Consciousness movement's regulatory principles strongly resemble the fundamental straightedge lifestyle tenets (abstinence from alcohol, drugs, promiscuous sex, and sometimes abstinence from meat

and animal products). Indeed, implying the significance of these ideological similarities, Porcell further explains that conversion to Krishna Consciousness happens often among the straightedge scene: "I know a lot of kids that got into it seriously. I know a lot of devotees who were straightedge kids. I am not just saying this, but it seems to be that the people from like back in the whole youth-crew days, who managed to stay straightedge, I'd say like most of them are devotees."

Other research strongly suggests that ideological similarities, such as those evidenced between straightedge and Krishna Consciousness, may disproportionately predispose straightedge individuals (relative to non-straightedge individuals) to convert to Krishna Consciousness. On the topic of conversion experiences to Krishna Consciousness, for example, researchers suggest that conversion stems not primarily from movement structure or recruitment activities (see Rochford, 1983: 298; Rochford, 1982: 408; Snow et al, 1980: 787; Snow and Machalek, 1984: 182). but rather from what the Krishna Consciousness movement has to offer ideologically (Wallis and Bruce, 1982: 104). For example, Rochford (1985: 68) discovers that a substantial number of Hare Krishna devotees (in his sample) "emphasize the linkage between their pre-movement cognitive orientations and the [Krishna Consciousness] movement's ideology and way of life." In particular, Rochford finds that "82 percent of the devotees either were vegetarians or had at least attempted to regulate their consumption of meat before joining ISKCON. . . . [O]thers also found the movement's stance against drugs and other intoxicants appealing" (Rochford, 1985: 72).

Kent (1993) similarly finds evidence that some individuals' pre-conversion cognitive orientations were compatible with the ideals of the Krishna

consciousness movement. During an interview, a former political activist reports to Kent: "[a] strong part of the attraction of devotees for me was their sheer defiant other-wordliness. Because. . . my ideology basically was just [that] the world as it is is just in such bad shape that it's not worth saving " (quoted in Kent, 1993: 48). Thus, my own analyses, as well as the findings of other researchers, suggest that one's preconversion beliefs and ideals likely are linked to the probability that one will convert. In other words, preconversion ideals and beliefs may ideologically pre-dispose the individual to convert.

In two studies about American former political activists' conversion to new religious movements during the early 1970s, Kent (1988; 1993) provides groundwork for a more elaborate conception of ideological predisposition. According to Kent (1988: 114) the power redistribution movement of the late 1960s and the new religious movements of the early 1970s "shared the same basic goals." Thus, claiming that many former political activists adopted the means and norms of new religious movements as an alternate mode of achieving social movement goals, Kent (1988: 114) concludes: "[r]eligious ideology. . . provided the cognitive avenues by which many former activists reduced the dissonance caused by their commitment to an apparently failed social movement[.]" During a second study, Kent (1993: 45-46) further implies that new religious movements attracted former activists by incorporating the "radical rhetorics of opposition" characteristic of the politically oriented social movements of the 1960s.

Kent's assertion about the similarity of social and new religious movement goals, coupled with his allusion to continuities between secular and religious movement discourses, implies that former 1960s political activists ideologically were susceptible to

joining new religious movements of the 1970s. Indeed, Kent (1988: 114) construes former activists' conversions to new religious movements as "shifts of allegiance." He implies thereby at least some level of compatibility between converts' pre and post conversion ideology. Stated simply, some converts' pre-conversion ideals facilitated their transition into new religious movements.

Consistent with other researchers' findings, and as I described earlier, the pre-conversion ideals of straightedge converts largely were Krishna Conscious compatible. Having said this, however, I do not mean to imply that all or even most straightedgers will seek to become Krishna Conscious. Instead, what I do mean to say, is that the ideological similarities between the two cultural forms increase the probability of conversion. Viewing straightedge culture in terms of the chaos theory/postmodernist rhizome, Krishna Consciousness is an unexpected element that permeates the rhizome's skin as an intersecting perpendicular region of variation. As individual straightedgers encounter Krishna Consciousness and re-articulate their own identities in relation to it, an evolving cultural constellation appears in the body of the rhizome through processes of iteration. Furthermore, insofar is the presence of Krishna Consciousness effects the general meaning of straightedge, it cause ripples and waves in the straightedge culture's rhizomic skin.

Social Network Cliques

Thus far, I argue that schism and change in subcultural phenomena stems initially from the individual's sense of unarticulated or persisting discontent. The discontent of one individual, however, can not sustain the emergence of an entire subcultural faction.

Borrowing concepts from the sociology of religion as well as the sociology of social networks, it is possible to explain how micro-cosmic, individual level sentiments evolve into the emergence of a full blown subculture faction.

In elaborating their general theory of religion, Stark and Bainbridge (1985: 101) claim:

> all [religious] organizations [comprise] social networks, which consist of the interpersonal relationships among members of the organization.... Groups differ in the degree to which their members are attached to one another.... Individuals within a group may differ not only in their number of attachments to others, but in the distribution of their ties to others. . . . If we map the complete set of attachments within a group, we may find cleavages - lines of weak attachment between cliques (subnetworks that are internally strongly connected) - persons being attached mainly to members of the same clique.

Adopting the Stark and Bainbridge description of religious group cleavage, I propose that, through sustained interaction, clusters of similarly subculturally affiliated, yet discontented, individuals may form intra-subcultural cliques. Cliques provide early momentum to the emergent subcultural schism. Bainbridge (1978) also implies the schismatic quality of network cliques in his comprehensive study of the Process Church of Final Judgement. In particular, detailing the evolution of the Process church from the ranks of a pseudo psycho-therapy group, Bainbridge claims that the cult emerged through a process of "social implosion" (Bainbridge, 1978: 51).

According to Bainbridge (1978: 51-52), "in a social implosion, part of an extended social network collapses as social ties within it strengthen and, reciprocally, those to persons outside it weaken. [Social implosion] is a step by step process. . . . [that] may be set off by more than one kind of circumstance." Thus, through sustained interaction, clusters of subculturally-affiliated yet discontented individuals may form a subculture clique. Given the right circumstances and mitigating factors, in a process of

social implosion, the clique members will strengthen their ties with one another while concurrently dissolving attachments to subcultural members affiliated outside the clique boundaries. Consequently, the clique becomes relatively free to construct its own version of the original subcultural frame of reference.

Theorizing about the emergence, evolution, and schism of new religious groups, Bainbridge (1997: 260) proposes, "frequently a group will add and subtract culture in order to differentiate itself from another group that owns the original culture. " Applying this idea to cases of subcultural schism, I posit that schismatic cliques add, subtract, or modify subcultural symbols, artifacts, and events. Racist and non-racist factions of the American skinhead subculture, for example, stylistically remained similar, yet each faction adopted different subcultural symbols. Racist skinheads marked their bodies, clothes, magazines, and subcultural spaces with distinctly Nazi symbols such as the swastika and the death's head (Hamm, 1993). Non-racist skinheads, however, adopted symbols which communicate themes of racial harmony. A common example among non-racist skinheads is a nylon patch depicting white and dark hands clasped in greeting (Wood, 1999b). In the same way, it is apparent that certain straightedge franchises and network cliques re-construct straightedge symbology to communicate a subjective and novel stance on the meaning of straightedge.

Once established, the schismatic clique's alternate subcultural frame of reference (along with its demarcating social and material phenomena) may entice new subcultural recruits. Moreover, the schismatic subcultural frame of reference may be transmitted to members of distant subcultural franchises who apprehend it as a means of alleviating unresolved discontent. Thus, over time, with the accumulation of new recruits and the

cooptation of formerly rival subcultural adherents, the original clique may evolve into a relatively large subcultural faction replete with a distinct subcultural frame of reference and comprising possibly numerous subculture franchises. At this point, the subcultural schism is entrenched.

Culture Engines and the Genesis and Permutation of Subculture

According to Bainbridge (1997: 251), "occasionally in human society a special configuration of social relationships, motives, native talent, and ideas can generate culture at an extremely rapid rate." Bainbridge (1997) refers to such configurations as "culture engines." Thinking again in terms of Milovanovic's postmodern rhizomatic model, a cultural engine is an iterative feedback loop characterized by a disproportionately rapid momentum. The reader may recall my earlier discussion of the apparent timeliness of straightedge. In particular, Ian MacKaye and other straightedge individuals explain that the initial idea of straightedge tapped into a latent sentiment present among the American punk scenes. MacKaye's song was something of a spark that ignited a rapid organic cultural growth. In other words, in the rhizomatic variable trajectory of punk culture, MacKaye's ideas were fuel for a straightedge culture engine. His ideas comprise the genesis of an iterative feedback loop which evolved into a distinct straightedge culture. Furthermore, over the subculture's history it is apparent that other ideologues have been influential in generating novel iterations of straightedge culture.

Subcultures do not necessarily appear or evolve in a slow and incremental manner. On the contrary, the initial subcultural configuration appears rapidly within the space of months or a few years. The punk case supports this assertion. While various

underlying conditions and influential factors primed or facilitated the emergence of punk, it is a phenomenon that appeared in its explicitly self-professed form in the space of a year. Similarly, while numerous underlying social factors primed the emergence of straightedge, the straightedge phenomenon appeared very quickly during the early 1980s. Indeed, the same pattern characterizes the emergence of distinctly racist and anti-racist skinhead subcultural factions in America during the mid to late 1980s. These cases illustrate the importance of latent conditions in priming the genesis of subculture. More importantly, however, these cases illustrate the importance of culture engines (in the form of ideologues, for example) in mobilizing latent sentiments, and thereby igniting a rapidly iterating cultural feedback loop that culminates in the appearance of an identifiable manifest subcultural configuration.

Apart from processes of subculture genesis, culture engines play a crucial role in generating and sustaining change and schism within subculture boundaries. Unless a group of subculturally-affiliated yet discontented individuals seeks to modify the existing subcultural frame of reference, a schismatic faction will not arise and consequently a subculture schism will not occur. Not all discontented subculture cliques, however, will induce a subcultural schism. On the contrary, only those subcultural cliques that can generate culture at a sufficiently rapid rate will succeed in bifurcating the subcultural frame of reference. In order to bifurcate a subcultural frame of reference, a schismatic subcultural clique must become a culture engine. In other words, the clique must generate alternate norms, values, and beliefs and successfully recruit or coopt new members at a rate sufficiently quick enough to resist a two fold threat that all schismatic factions must surmount. Like the entrenched subculture, the schismatic subcultural

faction maintains an ongoing resistance to mainstream acculturation. More immediately, however, the schismatic faction must combat the encroachment of the original subculture and possibly other competing schismatic subcultural factions. This latter struggle may involve battles for domination of territorial spaces, pools of potential recruits, or the subcultural frame of reference in general. Only those rare factions that successfully become culture engines can surmount this two-fold threat.

Discontent is a necessary yet rarely sufficient condition for a subcultural clique to become a culture engine. Culture will not generate in a vacuum. Discontent results from perceptions and experiences of unresolved moral and/or material threat. Alternate schismatic culture emerges as a by-product of threat resolution. Thus, unless the members of the discontented subcultural clique acquire, construct, or engage in an alternate subcultural solution to their feelings of unresolved threat, they will remain discontented, they will not form a culture engine, and subcultural schism or transition ultimately will not occur.

In order for the clique to evolve into a successful schismatic culture engine, the subculture clique must apprehend a guiding ideology that articulates the clique member's feelings of discontent and unresolved threat. Suitable articulating ideologies, however, are contingent upon numerous intersecting and changing psychological, social, cultural, and historical factors and trajectories. Schism, therefore, is difficult to predict. This aside, several contemporary fragmented subcultures provide insight into at least a few primary facilitators of schism.

In some instances, articulating alternate ideologies stem from external organizations and ideologues that seek to engineer a subcultural schism for the purposes

of coopting at least one of the schismatic subcultural factions. The cooptation of American skinheads by the White Aryan Resistance is a good example of this possibility. Researchers claim that the American skinhead subculture generally did not galvanize around racism during the early 1980s (Coplon, 1988; Wood, 1999b). During the middle and later 1980s, however (following the British National Front's successful cooptation of skinheads in the United Kingdom), leaders of the American-based White Aryan Resistance (WAR) actively sought out skinheads for the purposes of revitalizing the dwindling ranks of the racist right in America (Hamm, 1993). Thus, noting WAR's vigorous skinhead recruitment and indoctrination campaign, researchers identify White Aryan Resistance ideals as a primary facilitator of the dramatic increase in skinhead racism and active racist skinhead subculture franchises during the late 1980s (Hamm, 1993).

Viewed through the paradigm presented in this dissertation. White Aryan Resistance ideology provided an alternate threat resolution for a sufficiently large number of discontented American skinheads, and the schismatic racist skinhead faction emerged as a result. Subcultural schism, however, need not be an intentionally fabricated process. Indeed, the case of the straightedge subculture's Krishna Conscious variant suggests that schism can result from chance ideological similarities between a subculture and an outside group that largely is unaware of the subculture's existence.

Partially validating Matza's (1961; 1964) "subterranean" conception of subculture, the straightedge case suggests also that budding schismatic subcultural factions may derive a necessary alternate articulating ideology from the dominant or parent culture. There exists evidence of this in the apparent links between straightedge

discourses and those that characterize the American "war on drugs." Indeed, one could argue that mainstream American war on drugs ideals provided early straightedge-punks a requisite alternate ideology to form a schismatic culture engine, and thereby transcend a commonly perceived threat posed by the nihilism and liberalism of punk culture as well as the general moral decay of mainstream culture.

In sum, processes of subculture schism derive impetus from a number of different sources, either alone or in combination. Indeed, the examples discussed above are only several of arguably infinite possibilities. The principle of ideology as articulation, however, remains consistent throughout. Without an appropriate and alternate guiding ideology, discontented members of a schismatic subcultural clique will not generate culture at a rate sufficient to facilitate or sustain a subcultural schism.

Chapter Ten

Conclusion

Chapter Introduction

Two overarching research goals inspired this dissertation. First, responding to a substantive gap within existing subcultures literature, it was my goal to conduct an intrinsic and highly substantive analysis of the straightedge subculture. Simply stated, my goal was to describe straightedge and its historical and contemporary dynamics. To this end, the following research questions served as a guide for parts of my analysis: 1) How is the straightedge phenomenon culturally and socially bounded? 2) To what extent and in what contexts have straightedge boundaries shifted over time and space? 3) How and in what context did the straightedge subculture first emerge? 4) How do individuals construct and maintain a straightedge identity, and to what extent might that identity shift over time?

My second and more instrumental goal was to utilize the straightedge case for the purposes of understanding and explaining diachronic subcultural processes. In addressing this goal, two additional research questions served as a means of interpreting the results of my analysis: 5) What does the straightedge case reveal about processes of subcultural genesis, transformation, and identity formation? 6) Does the straightedge case hold implications for a reconceptualization of the subculture concept?

Guided generally by these research questions, earlier chapters describe and explain the straightedge subculture in depth. I offer this concluding chapter as an evaluative summary of my findings.

Emergence of Straightedge Cultural Boundaries

Straightedge finds its genesis in the American punk scenes of the early 1980s. The initial impetus for straightedge stems particularly from the ideas of Ian MacKaye as well as from the dynamics of Washington DC's local punk scene. Early straightedgers describe the profound impact of MacKaye's lyrics, and they explain that MacKaye's ideas inadvertently mobilized existing anti-drinking and anti-drug sentiments among segments of the punk population. During the early 1980s, following MacKaye's initial articulation of the straightedge concept, straightedgers became a visible presence especially among East Coast punk scenes, and apparently identified with several pioneering straightedge rock bands including Minor Threat, 7 Seconds, DYS, and SS Decontrol.

Many early straightedgers describe feeling discontented with the nihilism inherent in the early 1980s punk culture, as well as feeling an aversion to the proliferation of drinking, drug use, and casual sexual activity within mainstream teen culture. Many of these individuals explain feeling that they were unable "to fit in" with either punk or mainstream youth culture, and they describe their initial reaction to Ian MacKaye's conception of straightedge as an epiphany. The straightedge concept allowed these discontented punks as well as discontented mainstream teens to resist and reject norms and values that legitimated drinking, drug use, and casual sex.

Early straightedgers further describe that straightedge appeared rather suddenly and ultimately spread rapidly throughout the American punk scenes. The straightedge case, therefore, illustrates the crucial importance of latency in the genesis of novel youth cultures, as well as the role of ideologues in quickly mobilizing latent sentiments and facilitating the emergence of culture engines that sustain the early creation of subculture

boundaries. Straightedge began as a localized culture engine. Early straightedgers utilized the straightedge concept to rearticulate the meaning of punk, and during the early 1980s, a distinctly straightedge subcultural frame of reference began to emerge.

Straightedge Identity Formation

Individuals form a straightedge identity, in all cases, because the straightedge concept resonates with some aspect of their personal life experience. In other words, straightedge articulates at least some aspect of the person's sense of self or desired sense of self. Many straightedgers apparently form their straightedge identity in reaction to a former lifestyle that they now evaluate negatively. The reader will recall, for example, that a number of straightedge individuals explained to me how they had been heavily involved with alcohol and other drugs prior to claiming a straightedge identity. For these individuals, straightedge is a means to a healthier life and a means of achieving goals that otherwise would be unattainable. Another substantial proportion of straightedgers do not have a prior history of alcohol and drug use. On the contrary, these individuals explained that they had been living a straightedge compatible lifestyle all along, and that straightedge for them appeared as an identity revelation. Thus, some people feel that they become straightedge while others have a sense that they always have been straightedge. Still others form a straightedge identity in reaction to the problems experienced by people in their primary social networks as a result of living a non-straightedge lifestyle.

Straightedge individuals often balance or incorporate other non-straightedge identities. Some straightedge individuals, for example, maintain different subcultural identities at the same time (e.g., straightedge and skinhead). Other individuals maintain

important political and religious identities. In some cases, straightedgers report minor conflicts between straightedge and other competing identities. The reader will recall, for example, that some female straightedgers explained to me that straightedge occasionally does not openly accommodate their identities as women. The straightedge case should alert researchers to the importance of identity salience when discussing subcultural affiliation. Straightedge is not a quality that must be either present or absent in one's identity. On the contrary, the salience of one's straightedge identity is something that ebbs and flows across time and space.

Individual straightedge identities apparently change over time and space. As the straightedge individual's biography develops in tandem with shifting social contexts and through interaction with non-straightedge individuals, the idea and meaning of straightedge may resonate differently. Indeed, while some interactions with outsiders may support and buttress one's straightedge identity, other interactions may render that identity more permeable and amenable to change. There is evidence of this potential for identity change, for example, in straightedgers' claims about becoming increasingly tolerant of non-straightedge individuals through the discovery that those individuals are not necessarily "bad" people.

Each identity transition, whether it is someone transitioning into a straightedge identity, or altering an existing straightedge identity, by definition affects at least a miniscule fluctuation in the straightedge frame of reference. When transitioning into a straightedge identity, the prospective affiliate receives messages about the meaning of straightedge as well as what it means to be a straightedger. These messages stem from symbols (such as iterations of the X), culture transmitters (such as music), and from other

straightedgers. At the very moment that the prospective affiliate internalizes these messages, they lose at least trace elements of their intended meaning and at least trace elements of the subjectivity of past others who contributed to the creation of the message. Each prospective affiliate as well as each current straightedger internalizes messages and incorporates those messages in a way that resonates with their own unique biography. Each person alters the meaning of straightedge, at least slightly, such that it fits with her or his own subjectivity. Straightedgers may share certain collective meanings. All straightedgers, for example, likely will agree that drug issues have some relationship to the straightedge concept. Nonetheless, each straightedger views drugs in a slightly different way, and he or she imputes that slight variation back into the original shared meaning. This imputation occurs, for example, whenever a straightedger communicates his own subjective stance to others via conduits such as music, behavior, or symbols. In this way, straightedge is a perpetually evolving compromise formation to which each affiliate adds, detracts, or reconstructs.

Strain and interactionist theories of subculture often assume that identity formation occurs only in the presence of a concrete social network that sustains the identity. Indeed, the reader will recall that several straightedgers explained to me the importance of interacting with other straightedgers in formulating and maintaining a straightedge self-identity. Interactions occur at music gigs, more recently in cyberspace, and through the formation of "crews" and other social network cliques. Such interactions likely have facilitated the spread and globalization of straightedge culture since it emerged in the early 1980s. Some individuals, however, affiliate with the straightedge concept in the absence of face-to-face interaction with other straightedgers. Instead,

some individuals apprehend straightedge ideology via a number of easily accessible and dispersed culture transmitters (including music recordings, fanzines, and Internet web-sites) that provide prospective affiliates with a conduit into the straightedge frame of reference.

Permutation of Straightedge Subculture Boundaries

Since the early 1980s, straightedge individuals have held different opinions, definitions, and meanings of the straightedge concept. On the one hand, some individuals view straightedge as a personal lifestyle choice that can be adapted and modified to subjective experiences and preferences. On the other hand, some individuals view straightedge in terms of a structured set of rules, all of which must be followed in order to legitimately claim a straightedge identity. Indeed, in straightedgers' claims about "being true" or in their references to such things as "the MacKaye edge," there is evidence that the meaning of straightedge gets contested by members of the subculture.

While opposition to drinking, drugs, and casual sex persists among straightedge individuals since the early 1980s, subsequently, other ideals assume(d) a central position in the straightedge ideological repertoire. In particular, during the late 1980s, vegetarianism and veganism for many individuals became an important facet of straightedge identity, and this trend continues among contemporary straightedgers. Not all straightedgers, however, adhere to a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle, and this variation appears to be the basis of at least some intra-subculture tension. Indeed, largely on the basis of animal rights issues, a minority of straightedge individuals distance themselves from traditional meanings of straightedge. Instead, these individuals subsume themselves

under the label, hardline, which is best construed as an orthodox and relatively militant re-articulation of the straightedge concept. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Krishna Consciousness movement also facilitated a notable schism within straightedge culture, as a number of self-professed individuals rejected a straightedge lifestyle for a Krishna Conscious one, or incorporated Krishna Consciousness with their former straightedge identity.

Permutations of straightedge cultural boundaries stem generally from shifting intersections of structure, culture, and biography. Since its emergence, the straightedge phenomenon as a whole is exposed to and permeated by external, non-straightedge cultural phenomena. These cultural phenomena, such as the war on drugs cultural ethos, permeate straightedge cultural boundaries, and consequently affect the ways in which straightedge individuals reconstruct those boundaries at future points in time. Thus, as the host social contexts (within which straightedge is embedded) shift over time and space, and as straightedgers individually and collectively are exposed in different ways to various elements of those social contexts, straightedge cultural boundaries experience varying degrees of fluctuation.

More dramatic boundary fluctuations, such as the emergence of schismatic factions, stem from micro-cosmic processes of interaction among discontented straightedge affiliates. The prospective straightedger affiliates because straightedge articulates his or her own life experience. Perhaps the prospective affiliate always has abstained from alcohol, and perhaps he or she is ridiculed by drinking peers as a result. For this individual, the straightedge frame of reference may articulate the individual's sense of discontent and ascribe legitimacy to her/his non-drinking lifestyle. Ultimately, as

a result of this early articulation of life experiences, the individual may fully commit and explicitly identify her/himself as straightedge. When the existing frame of reference ceases to provide sufficient articulation, however, the individual straightedger might disaffiliate or shift affiliation to a competing cultural group (such as the Krishna Consciousness Movement). That discontented straightedger might also try to reconstruct the straightedge frame of reference in such a way that it does provide sufficient articulation of his/her life experiences. If a sufficiently large number of discontented straightedgers sense in one another a similar state of discontent, they may form a network clique, and ultimately may evolve into a culture engine that successfully bifurcates the existing straightedge subcultural frame of reference. Consequently, one observes schismatic factions, such as hardline, emerging from the broader cultural ethos.

Implications for the Conceptualization of Subculture

I conducted this dissertation as a disciplined-configurative case study analysis, and throughout this project I have drawn upon a number of concepts and different subculture theories. I did not conduct this analysis for the purpose of testing theory. On the contrary, my goal was to use relevant theoretical perspectives and concepts to understand and explain a relatively unstudied social phenomenon.

At a general level, this study lends support to the recently unpopular and traditional subcultural strain perspectives. As predicted by early strain theories, straightedge emerged and evolved largely in reaction to a number of external cultural phenomena. Contrary to the determinism inherent to early strain perspectives, however, and consistent with later strain and Birmingham theories, straightedge culture is not a

predetermined reaction, but rather is an actively negotiated cultural compromise. Confirming Matza's subterranean theory, straightedge culture reflects encircling and permeating external cultural environments in significant ways. Moreover, in line with the ideas of theorists aligned with the Birmingham school of cultural studies, straightedge culture gets constructed out of the intersections of individual biography with encircling cultural and structural phenomena. My analysis of the straightedge subculture especially validates the largely overlooked interactionist conceptualization of the subculture concept. Straightedge culture, including each of its component ideas, norms, symbols, and spaces gets created through social interaction. Interaction occurs between individual straightedgers, it occurs between straightedgers and non-straightedger, and it occurs between straightedgers and their own identities. Interaction also occurs between straightedgers and non-human social objects such as texts, artifacts, ideas, and interfaces. These interactions all culminate together, in an incremental fashion, into a perpetually shifting social construction of straightedge culture. Moreover, once socially constructed, straightedge culture may become objectivated, and consequently it may coerce and constrain future prospective straightedgers.

Straightedge culture is not a synchronic, homogenous entity, and that is why a diverse range of subculture theories can explain or account for particular elements of it. No single theory, however, can properly predict or explain every aspect of the straightedge phenomenon. Far from being a synchronic and homogenous entity, straightedge culture is diachronic and infinitely variable. While some form of a straightedge reference persists across time and space, its meaning perpetually shifts and transforms as a result of the multitude of social interactions occurring under the umbrella

of the straightedge concept and as a result of intersections between straightedge culture and external cultural phenomena. Straightedge culture, and all cultural groups for that matter, can be viewed as rhizomic variable trajectories, externally bounded and relatively stable, yet internally chaotic. Within the confines of the rhizomic skin, imagine each social interaction as an equation. Each outcome feeds back into the original equation resulting in a slightly different outcome. Each interaction changes the straightedge frame of reference, and each change in the straightedge frame of reference affects subsequent straightedge interaction. In this way, the straightedge rhizome expands and twists across time and space, its boundaries permeable to outside forces. Moreover, occasionally within the boundaries of the rhizome, iterative feedback loops occur with enough magnitude and momentum to result in a novel cultural constellation within the straightedge culture's rhizomic boundaries. Hence, observing the straightedge rhizome's progression across time and space, one may observe the rhizomic skin bulging and branching into new tubular trajectories, and forging capillary links with existing non-straightedge rhizomic trajectories.

Suggestions for Further Research

For the time being, I leave the exploration of these rhizomic trajectories to future researchers of the straightedge phenomenon, and I encourage other researchers to re-explore the subculture concept in light of the chaos frameworks presented in this dissertation. Indeed, this dissertation's application of chaos theory to the straightedge case suggests that chaos approaches to subculture may be useful in modeling those

diachronic and complex cultural processes that tax the conceptual scope of existing theories and models.

Having made this suggestion about the modeling utility of chaos theory, I must caution researchers that chaos theory does not in and of itself hold significant explanatory power. Indeed, chaos theory can model processes such as individual identity transition, yet it can not explain why and how an individual constructs a subcultural identity in the first place. Thus, bearing in mind both the uses and limitations of a chaos approach to subculture, I conclude with the following suggestions for other researchers. First of all, researchers should utilize chaos theory and the paradox of global stability and concurrent local indeterminacy as an interpretive backdrop. In other words, researchers must be sure to foreground the idea that subculture is, at the same time, both fluid and stable. Second, in order to actually explain and predict the internal and global dynamics of subculture, researchers should revisit existing perspectives that emphasize momentum and feedback (such as social contructionism and symbolic interactionism). Researchers should forge a link between these fluid perspectives and others that emphasize structuration and constraint (such as classical strain perspective and the Birmingham school of cultural studies). Having done this, researchers will be better equipped to understand the diachronic nature of subculture as well as better able to explain and contextualize the complex causal dynamics occurring within subculture boundaries.

This dissertation argues and offers evidence that straightedge culture has experienced periods of emergence, transformation, and schism. Moreover, this dissertation posits that these broader processes are causally linked to individuals' identity transitions. It remains to be seen if these processes are general to all or even most

subcultural groups. This dissertation, for example, argues that punk in many ways served as a subcultural precursor to straightedge; punk norms and values informed early straightedge culture directly, and in both negative and positive ways. My analysis of straightedge, however, on its own does not provide conclusive evidence that all instances of subcultural emergence are facilitated by the influence of some precursory subcultural group. Thus, future researchers might address the generalizability of the straightedge case by investigating the extent to which the diachronic processes and relationships discussed in this dissertation hold true for other subcultural groups.

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APPENDIX A:

Interview Schedule

Questions for Straightedge Affiliates

1) When and how did you first hear about straightedge?

Probes

a) from a friend?
b) at a music gig?
c) from a music cd?
d) in a "fanzine"

2) What did you think of straightedge when you first heard about it?

Probes

a) What did it mean to you?
b) Why was it meaningful?
c) Was it already compatible with the lifestyle you were living at the time?
d) Did you reject it at first?

3) When did you first consider yourself as a straightedger?

Probes

a) Can you recall a time that you first identified yourself as straightedge?
b) Did you make a verbal commitment to somebody else?
c) What did you do or say at the time, that indicated to yourself that you had indeed become a straightedger?

5) What does "straightedge" mean to you?

Probes

a) What does one have to do in order to be a straightedger?
b) What sorts of things do you say or do that affirm to you (and others) that you are in fact a straightedger?

6) Why do think that you decided to become a straightedger?

Probes

a) Was their any particular aspect of the straightedge philosophy or lifestyle that particularly resonated with you?
b) Did straightedge help you to address any problematic issues or struggles that you were experiencing in your life at the time (e.g. drug addiction)?

7) Tell me what you know about when and why the straightedge phenomenon first emerged

Probes

a) Where and when did the term straightedge first originate?
b) Did early affiliates call themselves straightedge?
c) Were early affiliates also affiliated with other groups/subcultures (e.g. punks, skinheads)?

d) Was there anything going on in our society that prompted early affiliates to adopt a straightedge philosophy and lifestyle?

8) Sometimes in our society, groups called social movements form in order to address some sort of commonly experienced problem. The civil rights movement, for example, was a response to a commonly experienced problem of racism. Would you say that straightedge is also a social movement?

Probes

a) Do straightedgers share common goals
b) What are those goals?
c) Do straightedgers commonly perceive similar problems in the social world?
d) Describe those problems?

9) What proportion of your friends are also straightedgers?

Probes

a) When you first became a straightedger were your friends also straightedgers?
b) Thinking about your friends who are straightedge, would you say that they are strongly committed to straightedge ideals?
c) What sorts of things do your friends say or do that reflect their level of commitment to the straightedge lifestyle.
d) Do your straightedge friends live geographically close to you?
e) Is it important to you to have straightedge friends?

10) Do you spend a lot of your time with other straightedgers?

Probes

a) When you hang-out with other straightedgers, what sorts of things do you do?
b) Do you spend any of your leisure time with people (other than family) who are not also straightedgers?
c) When you hang-out with straightedge friends, what do you usually talk about?
d) Do you talk about straightedge sorts of things (e.g. straightedge music, vegan recipes)?

11) How do you communicate with other straightedgers?

Probes

a) Do you talk with them in person?
b) Do you talk with them on the phone?
c) Do you meet with them at straightedge events (e.g. music gigs)?
d) Do you write letters?
e) Do you communicate over the internet?
f) How often do communicate with other straightedgers?

12) In your opinion, do all straightedgers agree on the meaning of straightedge?

Probes

a) Do straightedgers all commit to the same lifestyle choices (e.g. vegetarianism)?
b) Do straightedgers argue with one another about the best/correct way to be a straightedger?
c) If straightedgers do in fact disagree, how are the conflicts resolved?
d) Do they express their disagreements in fanzine articles?
e) Do they physically fight with one another?

14) Thinking about your experiences with people who are not straightedge, how would describe the ways in which those people react to you when/if they find out that you are a straightedger?

Probes

a) Describe any positive reactions
b) Describe any negative reactions
c) Has anyone ever physically attacked you for being a straightedger?

15) What do you think of people who are not straightedge?

Probes

a) Do think that everybody should be straightedge
b) Are you indifferent?
c) Do you respect them?
d) Do you dislike them?
e) Have you ever been tempted to physically attack someone because they disagree with your lifestyle as a straightedger?
f) Have you ever tried to persuade someone into adopting a straightedge lifestyle?

16) When you became a straightedger, did you make any important changes in your life?

Probes

a) Did you keep the same friends?
b) Did you eat the same food?
c) Did you hang-out in the same places?
d) Did you spend your money on the same things?

17) If you think about how you see yourself, as well as how other people see you, how important is your identity as a straightedger?

Probes

a) Is straightedge the most important thing in your life?
b) Do you think that you will always be committed to straightedge?
c) Do you have other important goals in your life that are not related to straightedge?
d) Are there other important aspects to your identity (e.g. being a Christian, being a Reformer, being a writer)?
e) Are their other important activities in your life (e.g. going to church, going to school, holding a job/career) ?

Additional Questions for Ideologues

18) How/why did you first explore the idea of straightedge?

Prompts

a) What was going on in your life that prompted you to explore the idea of straightedge?
b) Would you say that you were the first or perhaps one of the first people to explore the straightedge concept?
c) Did you tell other people about straightedge?
d) How did you tell them?
e) Where did you tell them?

19) Did you ever notice that the straightedge phenomenon had grown beyond your own personal commitment?

Probes

a) When did you first begin to notice that other people began to gravitate towards the idea of straightedge?
b) Did these early affiliates cross-over from other groups?
c) Did the idea of straightedge remain consistent, or was its meaning at least partially contested?
d) Did you agree with other straightedgers about straightedge ideals and lifestyle principles?
e) How did straightedgers respond to other straightedgers who disagreed?
f) Were you ever aware that splinter groups and factions were forming among the straightedge scene?
g) Were you ever aware that the straightedge phenomenon was growing larger over time?
h) How would you describe its growth?

20) Are you still a straightedger?

Probes

a) Why have you remained committed to straightedge after so many years?
b) or Why did you stop identifying yourself as a straightdger?

Additional Questions for Former Affiliates

21) Why did you stop identifying yourself as a straightedger?

Probes

a) When you stopped identifying yourself as a straightedger, was it in any way associated with your introduction to a new belief system (e.g. Krishna Consciousness)?
b) Can you explain why this new belief system/lifestyle was more appealing than straightedge?
c) How did you first learn about this new belief system/lifestyle?
d) Did you learn through your friends?
e) Did you learn through media (music, fanzines)?
f) Around the same time, did any of your friends also stop identifying themselves as straightedge?

22) Did others support your decision to reject straightedge/embrace a new belief system?

Probes

a) How did other straightedgers react to your decision to leave straightedge?
b) How did they react to your decision to join the new group/belief system/lifestyle?