LIFE AFTER SUBCULTURE

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Youth culture and youth-oriented subcultures have long captured the attention of social scientists, popular media, and concerned parents alike. Yet, even as the majority of punk's 1970's pioneers and the counterculturalists of the 1960's have long left community and defining elements of style behind, we still only know little about how individuals' adult lives might nonetheless be informed by involvements such as these. My dissertation draws upon 44 face-to-face in-depth interviews with individuals who transitioned out of *straightedge*—a clean-living youth scene that has been associated with punk and hardcore music since the early 1980's based upon a lifetime pledge to abstain from intoxication. Interview data show former straightedge adherents believe their time as straightedge, an affiliation they have all categorically relinquished, has nonetheless laid bases for the ways they currently see themselves within the world and the lives they

profess to be leading in their post-straightedge years. Rather than being part of an

exploratory period that ends as many scholarly understandings of both youth subculture

and adult transition indicate, findings suggest that elective youth identities may instead

significantly influence how the transition to adulthood is negotiated and how adulthood is

configured in the longer-term, which, arguably marks among the larger changes in the

process of aging since the middle 20th Century. Deeper in this vein, where it is generally

understood that individuals are exploring greater amounts of identities, consumption

phases, and communities in the course of their lives relative to prior generations, there

has been surprisingly little inquiry into the potential significance of those that are

relinquished. Here, findings indicate that retrospective interpretive inquiry into

relinquished identities can shed unique light upon elective cultural affiliation, both as a

facet of subjective life history and with regard to what larger identification nodes can

potentially mean.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS & DEDICATION

To Bruce Torkelson and Charlene Torkelson, my parents.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A sunny and unseasonably warm morning in February of 2012 found me snaking my way from my Brooklyn apartment through a series of unfamiliar highways to meet with Marcus, a 28-year-old recently unemployed resident of a mid-sized Eastern Pennsylvania city who I had been communicating with off and on via e-mail the previous two weeks. Like a fair amount of others I would meet during the two waves of face-to-face interviews I conducted in 2007/2008 and 2012/2013 for this study, I initially came into contact with Marcus following a solicitation I had posted on an internet messageboard associated with the region's local music scene.

When I finally located the downtown pub Marcus had suggested we meet at for lunch, I texted him to indicate my arrival, secured a table, unpacked my things, and waited. Not long thereafter, I spotted a heavily tattooed individual sporting a crew cut and donning a "Wisdom in Chains" t-shirt confidently saunter into bar area—all very loose and malleable signs to be sure, but ones that nonetheless can be associated with the (sub)culture(s) we were meeting to discuss. Though I had never met him before, I guessed immediately that this was Marcus based upon his style and demeanor, so I called him over.

Much as I did with every individual like Marcus that I spoke with across the United States and Canada in the course of my research, I introduced myself and gave Marcus an opportunity to ask me any further questions he may have about our scheduled

conversation as we sat down. As inquisitive in person as he was over e-mail leading up to our meeting, Marcus asked me once more about what I could possibly hope to accomplish by talking with him about his formerly being straightedge, something that he had not been a part of nor identified with since he was 18, among other things. For the uninitiated, straightedge is a clean-living mostly middle class, Caucasian, and youth subculture primarily associated with hardcore and punk music in which adherents commit to leading an intoxicant free lifestyle, and generally do so with the intention of remaining drug free for life. Straightedge, or more directly individuals, who, like Marcus, at some point in their lives identified with and participated in straightedge but no longer do, provide the central focus of this study. In total, I talked with 44 people drawn from a variety of locations, age groups, and walks of life about their former involvement with straightedge as well as any other such—youth, or other—identifications that might be relevant to them now or in their pasts.

Although Marcus was certainly in the minority among those I met in the course of my research regarding his initial incredulity toward the benefits of talking with him about his being removed—in this case a full decade—from an affiliation like straightedge, his skepticism appears to be largely shared by those who have taken more formal or academic approaches to things that might be considered to be "youth subcultures" up to this point. Classic scholarship on youth subculture, for instance, tended to read subcultures and subcultural identities as comprehensive, immutable, and as providing authentic group resistance to status quo institutions and norms (Hall and Jefferson 1976), leading to a focus so heavy on what scholars perceived as "active" subcultural groupings that the possibilities that might rest in the time "after" subculture was never really

considered. By contrast, scholars have more recently come to emphasize flux, multiplicity, and fluidity as contemporary youth in the (post)industrialized world play with and explore the myriad identity options now on offer (Bennett 1999; Muggleton 1997; Redhead 1990). Yet here too, the possible significance of life and identity after possible affiliations are left behind remains largely unexplored as little longer-term significance is attached to what is ultimately conceptualized to be more a series of fleeting trends for individuals to enjoy than anything on these terms.

To these points, as Marcus ultimately began to tell me his personal story, he came to talk about his path into and—especially—out of straightedge in terms that were far from inconsequential as he saw it, and in the process made reference to the varied pathways of others who similarly became a part of what he envisioned as a larger straightedge "culture".

> I think it's just as life altering a decision to not be straightedge as it is to become straightedge. I guess it's a little easier to kinda wander into it than to wander out of it…from being involved in a culture that doesn't necessarily stick…A lot of people will fall and rise being straightedge, or just stay the same

Marcus also told me at one point that being on the other side of straightedge enabled him to talk about it in terms that he does not believe he would have been able to access as an active participant, even to the point of telling me he might even be more serious about what he used to be in the present day.

> It gives me both sides of the coin to think about/.../ I mean it is super serious, it's a choice, however minor or major it is, it's a choice. I'm considerably more serious about it now, considerably more informed now, not having been straightedge for a decade. So yeah, it's definitely given me a better perspective being older and not being straightedge

In addition to the ways Marcus believed his hindsight look back upon straightedge marked his account as distinct to the standpoint of retrospect, like many others I talked to, we can also see Marcus discussing his former relationship with straightedge in a manner that hinted toward a measure of enduring significance. Going a bit further here, two months after my conversation with Marcus on another—much more distant—detour I made down to Nashville we can see these sentiments being echoed more fully by Micah, a rather gregarious 32-year-old local librarian who was straightedge from ages 16-23. Micah not only told me that he feels his being straightedge and eventually finding straightedge community in his younger years provided him with valuable confidence and "strength", but also that it continues to "shape" his adult life.

> It [straightedge] was my strength....I feel like straightedge saved my life and I feel like its the most important decision I ever made...it was this real strong thing to me and it became even stronger as I started getting out and going to hardcore shows and being around people who were also this kind of level of strength, and it became a family

Indeed, at another point during our conversation, Micah directly told me that he believes straightedge still impacts his approach to his current life, even though he is 9 years past being straightedge. He also conveyed these perceptions in terms that indicated that he feels the same may be the case with others who also experienced straightedge as far as their coming into adulthood. He said:

> That age period, its a molding time for youth. And I think that you can keep yourself grounded and level-headed, which I think straightedge does. I think it helps shape you as a better adult, even if you aren't straightedge later...I think later it shapes decisions you might make

Even in this vey brief introduction to my conversations with Marcus and Micah, we can see both conceptualizing and referencing a broader straightedge culture or grouping yet also indicating individual variation within regarding who stays and who moves on from it. One can also see Marcus and Micah speaking of a distinction that they did move on from, but in terms that indicate their experiences with straightedge remain subjectively significant, even roughly a decade after-the-fact in both cases. Somewhat further in this vein, as Micah hinted at in his reflections and Marcus explicitly described, I was receiving an account of each individual's relationship with straightedge that may have been fundamentally different than if I had interviewed them during the time they were active participants in straightedge—both were not just older, but crucially also able to speak in fuller hindsight terms about an identity they had moved on from.

It is not that Marcus or Micah's narratives are in any way particularly remarkable as far as what my 44 interviewees ultimately told me in the course of my conversations with them about their time as and path out of straightedge. In fact, most aspects of my talks with Marcus and Micah—the abovementioned sentiments included—came off as ordinary and unspectacular in the larger context of my sample. It is, rather, that even these snippets provide a tiny flash of the unique angle and potential empirical richness that can come from paying more attention to and studying the time "after" youth affiliations are left behind as told through individuals' retrospective reflections upon them; and perhaps by extension, experiences related to many other elective identities more generally might be cast into new light via this standpoint.

As Marcus also told me as we talked, and as his style seemed to also indicate to me when I first noticed him in the bar, he remained involved in what he conceptualized

as the hardcore music scene, an affiliation that he told me was still a substantive part of his life in the present day even as he has aged. By contrast, Micah told me that his participation in the hardcore music scene had significantly diminished over the years, but that he now occupies a fair amount of his leisure time performing as an electronic music DJ, and that he also now feels tied to the Goth subculture to a fair extent. Thus, both Marcus and Micah remain involved in what could be thought of as subculture or alternative sensibility regarding their continued professed affinities for other possible "subcultural" affiliations, and therefore could certainly be characterized as current and active "subculturalists" by some accounts—hence, "exes" in relation to straightedge, but not as far as subculture more broadly conceived might be concerned. Here, there was considerable variation as far as the extent to which the ex-straightedge individuals I spoke with felt involved in other possible affiliations. Very much like Marcus, I spoke with many other ex-straightedgers who told me that they remained involved with hardcore and/or punk to varying degrees. Others told me that they had left hardcore and/or punk behind as they had straightedge, and, much like Micah, moved onto and explored other affiliations and sensibilities. Another sizable number in the sample told me that they weren't involved with anything they would characterize as being similar to any of these sorts of distinctions their current lives. In spite of this range as far as staking claims to current possible subcultural involvement (or altogether professed non-involvement) is concerned, the extent to which individuals did or did not subjectively report feeling involved with what they perceived as other distinct (sub)cultural groupings in their current lives did not appear order how they spoke of straightedge—and their being an "ex" in relation to straightedge—specifically in retrospect.

Remaining in this vein, although this study is primarily centered upon those who have left straightedge behind, it is also touches upon mobility, multiplicity, separation, and/or aging in the context of whatever other possible identity distinctions or identification sensibilities my interviewees told me have applied to the course of their lives—be they related to straightedge like hardcore, punk, other, hybridized, or even just difficult to define. Here, the prevailing theories through which much sociological work on identity is—if even often just tacitly—couched have more broadly tended toward trying to get a handle on the identities or identification phases individuals might pass through primarily either in terms of free-floating ambivalence, parody, and consumption (Bauman 1992; see also Bauman 1996, 2000; Baudrillard 1994) or continuously revised self-narrated quests aimed at feelings of authenticity and identity continuity (Giddens 1991; see also Beck 1992, 1994). However, both predominant frames possess a forward-looking bent that diminishes the implications of the elective affiliations that are left behind where, in contrast to Marcus and Micah's reflections, both frames gloss over the ways individuals might uniquely look back upon relinquished identities and the ways individuals might be affected by them longer-term. Contemporary scholars of youth (sub)cultures more specifically, themselves quite attuned to the possibilities of identity mobility where they indeed pick up on these larger theoretical formulations, likewise have less unpacked identity's "other side" than they have paid increasing attention to issues of identity, community involvement, and/or style for those who are aging *within* what might more commonly be thought of as subcultural groupings (Bennett 2006, 2013; Davis 2006; Haenfler 2006; Hodkinson 2011; Bennett and Hodkinson 2012) or synchronic transitions between partial affiliations (Muggleton 2000).

This study is situated within these developments on "aging within" and transition where applicable to my respondents' narratives, but it also goes beyond the confines of merely "aging within" an identity or community and forward-looking identity movements by additionally engaging (the potential significance of) "former" affiliations as far as what individuals' reflections might be able to say uniquely say about them from the standpoint of fuller retrospect. Straightedge arguably provides an ideal starting point to piece together a preliminary conception of the time "after" elective affiliation to branch from, since formal separation from straightedge is often marked by a very clear and unmistakable break, one that we can see both Marcus and Micah speak of in enduringly substantive terms. Indeed, leaving straightedge, often referred to as "breaking edge" or "selling-out", is very clearly defined, in most all cases simply by the inclusion of intoxicants into one's life in any capacity (Haenfler 2006; Wood 2006).

In the pages that follow I first comprehensively review prior conceptualizations of youth subcultures or youth scenes, and how treatments of youth identities in these works have led to the long-standing oversight of the ex-subculturalist. In contrast, I highlight how the inclusion of the ex-subculturalist can open the way to new empirical and theoretical avenues of inquiry in this study and for (youth sub)cultural studies more broadly (Chapter 2). I then discuss how subculture is approached conceptually in this study while describing how retrospective accounts of relinquished identities can benefit social scientific understandings of elective identity more generally. In doing so, I also underscore how such a framework can inform the extensive interview data gathered (Chapter 3). Before I delve into the data, I more comprehensively introduce and describe straightedge in terms aligned with outlined conceptual bases (Chapter 4).

Chapter 5 then overviews the ways interviewees came to envision and draw boundaries within the broader world they perceived around them in their younger years as this intersects their decisions to become involved with straightedge, and their changing relations to these—more youthful—perceptions as they grew past and ultimately relinquished them. In process, I sketch the ways that identity nodes like straightedge can be differentially animated in hindsight, which helps address a long-standing lag in attending to the phenomenology of "ex-hood" in sociological approaches to elective identity. In Chapter 6 I grapple with conceptual tensions related to elective identity in both academic and lay discourses surrounding singularity/multiplicity, mobility/fixity, style/substance, and individuality/group commitment, among others, in terms of my interviewees' perspectives. In doing so, I also illustrate the ways a highly substantive foregrounding referent like straightedge can well contextualize respondents' dispositional orientation toward identity where they are able to relay to me complexities, intersections, compartmentalizations, and shifts in their adoption of "modernist" (e.g. Giddens) versus "postmodernist" (e.g. Bauman) sensibilities across various spheres when looking back upon their life identification autobiography, both in terms of discrete identities like straightedge and in broader attitudes of self-understanding, where applicable. Given the focus population, issues of transitioning to adulthood are germane. Chapter 7 thus focuses on interviewees' experiences of the transition to adulthood for how the youthful affiliations many believed contravened the conventional adult world are reconciled (or not) with their eventual path into adulthood.   I further discuss how interviewees' subjective conceptions of their own adulthoods can be shaped by their former participation in straightedge (and other distinctions) while unpacking the implications of

the gathered data for understandings of adult transition and "subjective adulthood" where cultural artifacts may play a significant role in mediating the experience of contemporary adulthood and adult transition for many. Chapter 8 considers the ways that interviewees do reject aspects of their former affiliation(s) yet also potentially remain residually shaped by their former experiences, in many cases in surprisingly extensive and meaningful ways. Finally, Chapter 9 lists some of this study's limitations and provides some concluding thoughts on the implications of this study for scholarship on straightedge itself, for conceptual understandings of contemporary (youth sub)culture, and for approaching the contours of contemporary elective identity more broadly.

Before diving into the Chapter 2 literature review, however, there are a few additional issues that merit attention at the outset. For one, it is conceivable that many already familiar with straightedge culture might come to a study of former straightedge adherents specifically expecting to find it chock full of—if not outright centered upon— dramatic stories of individuals who "turn a 180", "go off the deep end", and/or otherwise become a fundamentally different person once they renounce their commitment to straightedge, especially as far as their usage of intoxicants is concerned[1]. Such fantastical imagery and ideas about direct pivot and betrayal seem to stem from the connotations that inhere in the label "sell-out", which is what is typically conferred upon anyone who leaves straightedge by remaining adherents as well as varied others who might be familiar with straightedge. Admittedly, here, the possibility of researching the sort of fundamental and sharp transformations surrounding the notion of the "straightedge sell-

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[1] In fact, whenever the topic of my research was broached even causally with individuals who possessed some prior baseline knowledge of the matter, I often found myself greeted by quips and comments that conveyed to me an appetite for precisely these more outlandish stories of radical change with the presumption that these would indeed pervade the final product.

out" is largely what initially attracted me to dabble in a study of former straightedge adherents in the first place. Yet, from my in-depth conversations with ex-straightedgers themselves, I found that the more extreme sell-out might be more an exaggerated caricature or prevailing mythology of sorts through which the transitions of others might be slanted toward and/or interpreted through than anything.

While almost all of the ex-straighetdgers I interviewed either referenced the image of the more radical sell-out or told me about individuals they knew who they thought might fit the bill in passing, only a small handful told me that their leaving straightedge involved extensive immediate usage of intoxicants or more comprehensive withdrawal from the friendship circles they were in when they were straightedge. As for those who characterized their leaving straightedge as more of an "about-face", many told me that they felt that they had eventually come to achieve balance in their lives after a period of post-straightedge experimentation, and some even told me that they had come to tap into and draw upon the discipline they learned from straightedge to approach their current lives and more healthily incorporate intoxicants into them in the present day! This is not to deny the prospect or existence of individuals undergoing radical changes upon leaving straightedge; this can certainly be the case for some. It is rather that these cases may ultimately be more limited than many familiar with straightedge culture might otherwise assume; and that the radical "sell-out" may more an inflated thought-object than common occurrence born out of our tendency to notice, latch onto, and project forward what strikes us as juicy rather than what comes off as mundane.

It could nonetheless still be the case that more extreme ex-straightedgers would avoid talking with me and/or that former straightedgers might avoid divulging

information that would otherwise denigrate their character. However, in the pages that follow one will find a diversity of very forthcoming perspectives on (leaving) straightedge that stem from what were in most all cases lively and candid discussions about (life after) straightedge across the United States and Canada. While those expecting striking stories about straightedge individuals turning abrupt cold shoulder upon (aspects of) their former convictions might find some of what they are looking for in this study, they may ultimately perceive there to be a disappointing dearth of these. Instead, one will find more stories about coming of age in relation to the subjective boundaries and forms of cultural elaboration that were large facets of many of my interviewees' formative years, their current reflections upon these, and the ways their present lives may have been shaped by their (former) involvements/experiences.

My research found me gathering interviews where I could—and in as varied locations as was possible—to better allow for a range of perspectives to come to the surface in the final product. I conducted the bulk of the interviews in the Northeast—New York City, upstate New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia, Washington DC, Pennsylvania. The Midwest region was also a fruitful recruiting ground—Minneapolis, Cincinnati, Chicago, Iowa, North Dakota. A handful of interviews took place in Canada—Toronto, Winnipeg. A few interviews took place in the South—Raleigh, Nashville. Only one interview took place on the West Coast—Oakland. My larger hope is that individuals who have transitioned out of straightedge will find themselves reflected in this study in some way or another in the midst of this geographic diversity. More directly, I hope that those who I have spoken with would find their perspectives represented in a manner in which their initial intentions and spirit are preserved.

By virtue of being in the business of academic analysis, there remains the lingering risk of my respondents' meanings becoming unrecognizable in the process of being recontextualized under the imperative of a larger study such as this one. I would hope here that any disjuncture my respondents might perceive between the analysis and their own sentiments is based more upon issues of immediate recognition than any sort of distortion or misinterpretation. I have made every attempt to follow suit with the general procedures laid forth by interpretive sociologists whereby the researcher presents their analysis as based upon concepts of a "second degree", which are constructs derived from research subjects' native schemas and meaning systems, but taken to a context not necessarily intelligible back through the frameworks that ordered subjects' original accounts (Luckmann 1973; Schutz 1963)[2].

Finally, and further in keeping in line with the spirit of the phenomenological bases through which the presented data, central concepts, and conclusions are gleaned, some sociologically trained readers of this study might raise a skeptical eye in certain areas where I refrain from externally complicating the narratives of my respondents with meta-critiques that bring distinctions akin to the discipline's holy trinity of structural analytical anchors—e.g. race, class, gender—directly into the fold. Issues like gender, race, class, and sexuality undoubtedly apply to my interviewees' conceptions of their position within social space and experience of straightedge among other things, and these can provide valuable launchpads for further research and qualifications to or extensions of this study's conclusions. However, in addition to the ways the imposition of such external variables would betray a study that prizes "second degree" concepts (Luckmann 1973; Schutz 1963), where external variables might take center stage in ways that depart

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[2] Further details surrounding possible methodological and interpretive issues are spelled out in Chapter 3

from the indigenous salience reported by subjects themselves, in no small way would this study's more novel contributions pertaining to ex-identity, adult transition within cultural artifacts, and the view of relinquished cultural affiliation from hindsight risk losing measures of stand-alone clarity in process.

The former straightedge adherents I spoke to were highly reflective with regard to and had a lot to say about coming into and coming out of straightedge as well as other potential distinctions in many cases. The presence of youth subcultures like straightedge in Western societies might be taken-for-granted in most circles in the present day, and this was certainly the case with the 44 individuals I spoke with. However, the phenomenon of "youth subculture" itself—be it straightedge or other—as it is more commonly conceived actually largely emerged from within a very specific set of historical circumstances that paved the way for young people to be seen and to see themselves as more internally variant and able attain new types of distinction, potentially even to the point where they might ultimately be able to comprise "subcultures" according to their own and certain other accounts. Upon a review of academic accounts of subculture, to which I now turn, a good majority of previous analysts have themselves arguably unduly imposed external attributes upon (self) identified subculturalists when situating subculture within these historical transformations, which, informs why so little attention has been paid to relinquished (sub)cultural identities up to this point.

CHAPTER 2

SEEING LIFE "AFTER" SUBCULTURE, AND ITS IMPLICTIONS

Differentiating Youth (Sub)Culture(s) in the Post-War Era

Soon after the curtain had fallen on the Second World War, much of America—and soon thereafter, Western Europe—found itself swept up in a period of unparalleled economic growth. These were times where the middle class enjoyed relative affluence; leisure and life expectancy rose sharply; lives were transformed by new technologies and other conveniences that were being churned out at mind-boggling rates. In America, the suburbs assumed the cradle of the "American Dream". Consumption was undoubtedly becoming more central to everyday life. Indeed, as many prominent social theorists have commented, leisure, social status, and belonging in post-war mass society have come to revolve around negotiating and keeping up with an ever expanding—and shifting—torrent of commodities that piece together and broadcast one's identity (Baudrillard 1994; Bauman 1992; Beck 1992; Bourdieu 1984; Giddens 1991; Jameson 1991).

Amidst these broader developments, the category of "youth" took on added meanings as well, and became fundamentally altered in the process—the "teenager" emerged, both as it was perceived as a viable new marketing niche and as it came to be looked upon as a social problem in new ways (Griffin 1993; Rattansi and Phoenix 2001; Valentine, Skelton, and Chambers 1998). The period of youth after one's immediate childhood was no longer thought of as an inert experience in any way, nor was it necessarily idealized in homogenous terms (e.g. Parsons 1942). Rather, it became

constructed as a colorful domain where young people had space to explore, find their identities, and importantly distinguish themselves both from adults and their peers as they navigated their way through an increasingly vast ocean of magazines, clothing, musical recordings, and other commodities geared toward their youthful sensibilities.

Social scientists, cultural critics, mass media, and concerned parents alike have all paid a good deal of attention to the variegated phases and forms Western post-war youth has subsequently assumed, especially where these relate to music, style, and argot that break with what various commentators have put forward as the main thrusts of culture. In the eyes of the mass media and general public, for instance, such youth images have certainly remained significant for the attention—and ire—their more perceptually spectacular qualities can engender. Here, some emergent youth configurations over the years have even incited varying degrees of "moral panic", to use Stan Cohen's (1980) classic phrase, through their ostensible departure from predominant societal ordering and value systems (see also Thornton 1995).

By contrast, academic treatments of these phenomena have generally been focused upon trying to get a handle on things like the extent to which youth are active agents in making their worlds, and whether youth are constructing highly individualized identities through their own eclectic consumption or whether youth are instead affiliating themselves with distinctive and more coherent groupings. At the crux of these tensions there has rested another more specific set of overarching questions surrounding authenticity as far as the degree to which the contours of youth expression—group or individual—are primarily molded by the flows of late capitalism's systems of cultural production, and whether it is even possible for youth to fashion micro-cultures that are

resistant to or that possess an existence immune to the workings of what the Frankfurt School theorists saw as "the culture industry" (cf. Adorno 1991; Horkheimer 1947) and/or what could just be thought of as mainstream culture more generally.

It is precisely these issues—of group commitment versus individualism and passive consumption versus cultural innovation at the intersection of ideas about authenticity—that have hallmarked the bulk of previous academic analyses on the larger topic this study is situated within: youth "subculture". Indeed, as Williams' (2007) review of the field in particular underscores, whether deliberate or implicit, scholars of youth (sub)cultures have been making very varied claims about the (in)authenticity of individual or group style, resistance, space, identity, and deviance from the foundation of subcultural studies onward.

At this point one can already begin to see how difficult it is to definitively map the terrain of subculture as far as just what it is, what it is not, and just where its dividing lines are to be drawn, and so any kind of consensus or definitive mapping of its shape, formation, and implications, remains elusive. In this vein, more broadly speaking, some of the most predominant currents in the history of youth (sub)cultural studies and theory—and likewise the key debates that have characterized the field and continue to exist therewithin—can reasonably be casted as differences in concept and conceptualization with regard to what ideas various cartographers of subculture have chosen to foreground in their respective analyses and which they have, in turn, silenced and buried underneath the images they have constructed.

Much of the reason for the continued ambiguity and disagreement rests in the difficulty that inheres in the term itself. In assessing the possibility of nailing down a

more definitive understanding of even the word "culture" for instance, Raymond Williams (1976) notably deemed culture to be one of the most "complicated" and perplexing words in all of the English language due to the sheer range of the ways it can be invoked across different disciplines and contexts. Given this, we should perhaps not be surprised that the development of its conceptual epiphenomena—like *sub*culture— might find itself open to multiplicities of abstract and competing definitions, the sheer volume of which might arguably extend even beyond those that surround other contested categories in the social sciences.

All these larger issues beg a host of questions that require careful attention in approaching subculture. If our conception of culture is so fuzzy to begin with, just what prospects are there for the study of a concept that can only be understood in relation to it, as a *sub*section of it, and/or as a mere secondary ordering of it—an added layer of fuzziness that compounds upon existing fuzziness? How can we productively move forward in empirical studies such as this when footed primarily on a conceptual pillar as seemingly wobbly as "subculture"? And, how can we furthermore purport to handle the additional messiness that comes along with designating and grappling with notions of "ex"-hood from a base such as *sub*culture as is the case in this particular study?

To these points, hope for such pursuits is not nearly as lost as it might seem at this glance. For one thing, in surveying the history of prior subcultural studies one finds a wealth of empirical and theoretical work that offers a conceptual toolkit that can potentially provide excellent articulations of (aspects of) various (sub)cultural configurations in specific instances. Yet a review of the field, to which I now turn, can also bring forward some lingering issues to consider, issues that inform the

underdevelopment of the "ex" in conceptions of what youth subculture is that can open the field to new empirical directions and perspectives (e.g. Chapters 5-8) when addressed through the balance engaging the time after subculture can potentially provide existing understandings. Generally, with the possible exception of a small handful of very recent empirical studies (e.g. Bennett 2013; Bennett and Hodkinson 2012; Hodkinson 2011), there has been a continued conceptual preoccupation with what subculture "is" or is "not" that has led to a focus so heavy on possible "active" subcultural phenomena that the possible significance of the "after" has all but been elided for the most part. Related to this potentially significant oversight, a look at previous predominant models of youth subculture also shows the fundamental importance of the analyst laying bare their conceptual dispositions and possessing a mindfully critical relation to these in the process of approaching the target(s) of their research (Chapter 3). On these issues, straightedge can provide an excellent center upon which to begin piecing together an examination of life and identity after subculture (Chapter 4), both in empirical (Chapters 5-8) and theoretical (Chapter 3) terms. Before delving further, it is necessary to review how youth subcultures like straightedge have been treated conceptually up until now.

Dividing and Deconstructing Lines: Predominant Approaches to Subculture

Although the earliest scholars of youth subculture began their work as far back as the earlier part of the Twentieth century in sociological theories of delinquency, the most notable canon of subculture came together in the 1970's in terms where subcultures were thought to be authentic group responses to contradictions within the post-war economy and consumption. Since these times, analysts have for the most part rejected these

traditional visions of subculture and turned toward seeing phenomena that might more commonly thought of as subcultural in more hybridized and individualistic terms, ultimately leading to questions about the extent to which individualized and overlapping identities can provide any sort of meaningful or real distinction in the media saturated milieu of late capitalism. Despite their larger differences, these general perspectives can be seen to share common threads relevant to the conceptualization of subculture in this study, and by extension potentially many others. Namely, predominant conceptualizations throughout the history of subcultural theory and studies tend to: (1) locate subculture in larger structural and/or cultural transformations and privilege these considerations over the lived social experiences of those that might be participants; (2) focus on assessing the (in)authenticity of more "active" subcultural phenomena, thereby not inviting analyses of the possible significance of life and identify "after" possible affiliations are relinquished; (3) not possess precise conceptual means of weighing possible both group and individual-level coherence/substance against fluidity/diffusion; and very much relatedly, (4) not provide a satisfactory discourse for engaging considerations of the group and individual at the same time, wherever appropriate.

Foundations of Traditional Subculture Theory

The first scholarly forays into notions of "youth subculture" came together in America and stemmed primarily from the University of Chicago School's model of urban social ecology and various iterations of Robert Merton's (1938) ideas about social strain. Although these strands of thought were not situated within youths' relations to the development of the post-war economy (in fact most works pre-date these shifts), they

certainly influenced the post-war conceptions of subculture that followed. At their core, the classic American conception of subculture is largely a means of explaining deviance away as a rational and practical response to the social predicaments faced by lower class young men; and in this regard, the American tradition was largely intended to provide an alternative to the psychological models of individual delinquent pathology that prevailed at the time (e.g. see Lombroso 1911).

As for ideas about social ecology, early twentieth century urban ethnographers at the University of Chicago realized that different areas of cities possessed distinctive social orderings and patterns of behavior. Individuals living within certain—particularly underprivileged—sects of cities were thought to naturally and inevitably form social solidarities based upon shared experiences and interests specific to their geographical and social locale (Park 1925; Gordon 1947). Ethnographic studies of street gangs and street corner groups that employed the ecological perspective depicted young men as being dependent on one another in their localities and developing value systems that demonstrated rejection of—if not outright disdain for—the larger culture's systems of authority (cf. Thrasher 1927; Whyte 1943; see also Shaw and McKay 1927). Rather than strive for success in terms of the predominant culture's standards, emergent norms within these groupings were largely believed to be articulated in ways that provided young men alternative goals, that, unlike those of the larger society, were actually attainable from their social location—e.g. toughness, street smarts, among other possible markers of lower class status (cf. Cloward and Ohlin 1960; Cohen 1955; Miller 1958). The more deeply social actors became enmeshed in the subsystems they were thought to occupy, the more they imbibed the demeanor, argot, and outlook that was privileged in their

particular locality, and more their groupings ran contrary to the larger "square world" (see Cohen 1965).

The finer focus of each theorist in the classic American tradition ultimately varied somewhat, but all emphasized norms, interactional patterns, and value systems that were believed to be the result of the conditions, constraints, and stresses surrounding status failure within lower class urban life; and these importantly were furthermore thought to mark a definitive break from mainstream society, thus necessarily making them "subcultural" in nature.

The classical American works on youth subculture possessed an underlying positivist and deterministic slant which casted subcultures as relatively stable and authentic entities born out of their fixed location under the constraints of larger social structures. In their attempt to provide alternative explanations for delinquent activity contrary to psychological pathology, the American tradition privileged notions such as social ecology and strain over the perspectives and experiences of supposed subculturalists themselves. Individual lives and life courses were thus inexorably locked into and only understood in terms of the trajectory of the groupings analysts believed they were mapping. As a result, subculture members were relatively undifferentiated and had little choice but to be affiliated with any grouping analysts perceived them to be a part of. The early American paradigm does, however, possess a fair measure of enduring significance in establishing the analytical dimensions of class, structure, authenticity, mainstream boundary, group identification, locality, and deviance in subcultural studies, all of which continue to remain relevant in present day conceptualizations.

Subcultural Orthodoxy: The Halcyonic Period of the CCCS

In response to the American conception of subculture, the 1970's saw the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in Britain (CCCS) reject notions of subculture as independent subsystem and favor a perspective where youth subcultures interact with the dominant culture (Roberts 1976) as a rather spectacular mode of resistance to it. CCCS theorists drew most heavily from contemporary neo-Marxists (cf. Althusser 1971; Gramsci 1971; Barthes 1972) and the semiotic structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966) in their establishing what has ultimately become the orthodox view of subculture, giving rise to the field of Cultural Studies more generally. At the crux of its break from its American predecessors, the British turn in subcultural theory can furthermore be distinguished by its interrogating—rather than taking for granted as value-neutral—the very ideologies within mainstream society that mark deviance and status failure in the lower class in the first place (cf. Cohen 1972).

The rethinking of class and ideology in these conceptualizations certainly stems from the neo-Marxist theories that were in vogue at the time in Europe. In particular, CCCS theorists drew perhaps most heavily upon Gramsci's (1971) conception of hegemony whereby subordinate classes are not just ruled by things like the legal and judicial system, but also—if not primarily—by their perceiving existing social arrangements as natural, thereby giving "consent" to their own subordination and allowing the power that perpetuates social hierarchies to remain concealed and unencumbered. Put in other terms, by being able to produce prevailing discourses, the dominant—upper class—culture is able to define itself as "the" culture under which the

lower classes quietly and unconsciously acquiesce (Gramsci 1971; see also Althusser 1971; Barthes 1972).

From this perspective, CCCS theorists argued that the British working class was experiencing unique tensions in the economic boon that followed the Second World War. In particular, hegemonic ideological currents were thought to have led the main of the working class to have long believed in possibilities that were ultimately materially unattainable from their particular social locale. Generational timing, though, was a variable that could rupture such compliance. In contrast to the older generations of the working class, CCCS theorists believed that post-war working class youth possessed a relationship to the larger economic transformations around them that was fundamentally distinct from their parents based upon their growing up amidst—rather than before— them (cf. Corrigan and Frith 1976; Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, and Roberts 1976; Murdock 1974). The broader post-war emphasis on youth commodity and the proliferation of youth culture was thought to provide working class youth vital impetus for distinguishing themselves from both the ideologies of hedonistic consumption that pervaded the dominant culture and the working class Puritanism intractably embedded within their "parent culture", or the local sect of the working class culture in which youth lived (Cohen 1972; Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, and Roberts 1976). Though the emergent groupings varied from the mods to rockers to teddy boys and other groups in the eyes of the CCCS, it was from grappling with precisely these larger contradictions that the CCCS theorized working class youth developed varieties of authentic and spectacular subcultures that provided them channels of resistance to the predominant institutions in

British post-war society in ways that also enabled them to starkly contrast their parents' passivity (Cohen 1972; Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hebdige 1979).

The primary vehicle of resistance for working class youth then was through their subcultural style (cf. Hebdige 1979). Following Barthes' (1977) insight that objects and images do not possess intrinsic meanings, youth were thought to have borrowed artifacts that were actually available to them from within their respective parent culture(s) and recast them with new meanings that reflected their distinctive positioning in between hegemonic culture and their respective parent culture. The resultant "bricolage", where existing objects are assembled in new ways (cf. Levi-Strauss 1966), of recontextualized working class signs and symbols were theorized to ultimately provide working class youth contrarian homologies of style, demeanor, and argot that were meaningful from a particular a subcultural standpoint but that agitated the outside established status quo where they infringed upon taken-for-granted mainstream sensibilities (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, and Roberts 1976; Hebdige 1979; Murdock 1974; Willis 1978).

The CCCS' vision of youth subculture was certainly one exceedingly romantic in its seeing working class youth in heroic terms regarding their purported engaging in "semiotic guerilla warfare" (Hebdige 1979, p.105) as a means of resisting the complacency believed to pervade mass society under post-war consumer capitalism. Yet, their analyses also possessed qualifying elements that remain significant in the state of contemporary subcultural theory. For one thing, it was largely recognized by CCCS scholars that resistance could only be oblique in that it could not provide concrete redress to the larger problems presented by post-war society—it was rather an indirect or "magical" solution (see Cohen 1972) that provided youth a coping mechanism by

fostering group affinity (see also Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, and Roberts 1976). For another, it was also acknowledged that subcultural innovation risked appropriation—and thereby flattening through massification—by the culture industry (cf. Adorno 1991; Horkheimer 1947) as it became more marketable. Once caught in the channels of consumer capitalism, subculture was thought to be reduced to mere commodity through its disassociation from the meanings of its original referent context (Clarke 1976; Hebdige 1979), a process John Clarke (1976) called "diffusion" and "defusion" with which subversive potential is defused inasmuch as it becomes diffused across larger geographic contexts under mass consumerism.

Although CCCS theorists were able to solve the issues of cultural disempowerment and status failure that plagued the classic American studies, they continued to present subcultures as non-contradictory and bounded groupings that were shaped underneath larger structural shifts. In this vein, individual subculturalists were still given little leeway to choose whether or not to affiliate with or leave particular groupings under the CCCS' analytic privileging of invariance and authenticity in subcultural groupings over possible considerations of fluidity and/or seeing the individual as an agent. Furthermore here, in seeing subculture as only seen as authentic during the times working class youth were innovating and elaborating their groupings, no analytical importance was tied to any notion of life "after" subcultural participation. The subcultural orthodoxy did nonetheless importantly foreground style, resistance, and notions of substantive affiliation as being tied to immunity from the predominant culture's consumption patterns and systems of cultural production, all of which have carried through to larger contemporary conceptual models of youth subculture.

Critique, and Postmodernism

The subcultural orthodoxy sustained a good deal of critique that has directly fed into current conceptualizations on what youth subculture is (not). For one thing, it was largely only assumed that subcultural participants understood the meanings of their "bricolage" equally and that they more comprehensively occupied the subcultures they were presumed to be a part of rather than mixing and matching their styles and possibly even incorporating conservative elements into them (Cohen 1980). There was similarly no explanation as to why female—just like race or sexual or other—subculture could not be authentic if common marginal sociological distinctions like class were (McRobbie 1991). In addition, the analytic leap from a desire for a solution to class contradictions to stylistic innovation lacked fuller explanation, and the reification of subcultural categories through what theorists perceived as "spectacular" was similarly problematic in that it silenced those wearing subcultural styles and fixed their identities underneath external neo-Marxist readings of them (Clarke 1981; Waters 1981).

Indeed, traditional subculture theory largely ignores the potential for multiplicity, mobility, hedonism, and elective or part-time subcultural affiliation. In response, some studies of possible youth subcultural groupings concerned with these issues in the 1980s pointed to the fact that some might indeed hold origins other than those that are class-based (Baron 1989; Stratton 1985), that there can be great variation in meaning and commitment among participants (Baron 1989; Fox 1987), and that even musical genres associated with subculture themselves had an emergent tendency to fuse and overlap with one another (Chambers 1985).

Subculture around this time was furthermore particularly prone to criticism from perspectives skeptical of universalizing knowledge schemes rooted in Enlightenment principles—be it Marxist, positivist, rooted in social ecology, or other—in transitional terms toward a postmodern era more generally speaking. For instance, in an influential treatise illustrative of this turn in thought, Jean François Lyotard (1984) contends that the time of totalizing "metanarratives"—like those we might find in knowledge systems articulating traditional subculture—has passed under the increasing rapidity of technologic cycles, "atomization", and the greater emphasis on symbolic production in mass society. To Lyotard, only a plurality of competing narratives—or different ways of interpretation—remain as claims toward accessing and harnessing objective truth have become increasingly untenable underneath larger shifts toward what is commonly thought of as post-industrialism (Lyotard 1984).

While there is some disagreement among postmodern thinkers as to whether or not Enlightenment or modernist principles were ever analytically appropriate at any point in time rather than mere intellectual inventions, one thing appears to be agreed upon: much as Lyotard's pronouncements indicate, recent times appear to be different than before and they are characterized by rapid change and destabilization.   Here, a good many prominent postmodern commenters have more directly characterized consumption and identity in the latter portion of the twentieth century by flux, ephemerality, fluidity, and hybridity, ultimately indicating that it may be increasingly difficult to get a responsible analytical grip on certain aspects of contemporary culture and identity without a thawing of more traditional—ostensibly reified—constructs (cf. Baudrillard

1994; Bauman 1992; Harvey 1990; Jameson 1991), not the least of which might be "subculture".

Two more specific strands of thought regarding these ideas about postmodernity as a period can furthermore notably be linked to sustained skepticism toward traditional conceptualizations of subculture. First, post-war systems of production have drifted away from Fordist standardization to state of "flexible accumulation" (see Harvey 1990) where diversity and novelty are emphasized as a means of meeting the rapidly individualizing—increasingly aesthetic driven—consumer preferences that have supplanted the bygone modernist era's uniformities (Bauman 1992; Harvey 1990; Jameson 1991; Polhemus 1996). Related to these shifts, traditional identity codes, and the possibility of possessing authentic or coherent ties to them, have furthermore been thought to have been irreversibly uprooted from their original referent contexts in the face of media and market saturation (Baudrillard 1994; Jameson 1991). Indeed, postmodern consumers are now conceptualized by many as free to construct highly (pseudo)individualistic and eclectic identities as they wade their way through multitudes of changing styles and commodities. In Baudrillard's (1994) view, all now is "simulacra", or a state where cultural images have reached a point where they can only copy one another to the ends of producing an aestheticized "hyperreality" that is ultimately absent any sort of underlying concretized referential anchor. Under such a condition, authentic cultural innovation becomes impossible where cultural tropes— conceptualized as free floating and referring only to one another rather than any core reality—comprehensively mediate social life, thus effectively sapping potential for any sort of "real" (sub)cultural innovation to find the sort of grounding necessary to sprout

forth (Baudrillard 1994). In Jameson's (1983, p.115) terms, it is only "pastiche"—or parody without humor—that remains "in a world where stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum."

Neo-Tribes and Similarity in Difference: Postmodern Subcultural Conceptions

Such criticism and notions of popular postmodernism coalesced into a new conceptual paradigm of subcultural analysis deliberately constituted against modernist— primarily CCCS—models where subculture is treated as inauthentic, redundant with the dominant culture, multiplicitous, unstable, apolitical, heterogeneous, and driven more by individual aesthetic and hedonistic concerns rather than any underlying message (Redhead 1990; Muggleton 1997). Although postmodern subculture theorists might not necessarily agree on the extent to which authentic subculture may have ever existed in the first place, the condition of postmodernity in any case is thought to have found subculture at a point where individuals attach to the signs of what is commonly thought to be subculture at their own will and in whatever configuration suits their—possibly even very transient—aesthetic desires. In contrast to the singularity and linearity wired into traditional subcultural codes, all stylistic, musical, and identity differences are understood to melt into one another, and provide nothing deeper than nostalgia inasmuch as they even come to resemble prior forms (Muggleton 1997; Polhemus 1997). In no small part channeling Jameson's assessment of pastiche, as Muggleton (2000, p.44) describes the situation from this perspective, subculture and "subcultural styles [now] have two

options: they can feed off each other in a cannibalistic orgy of cross-fertilization, destroying their internal boundaries in the process; or indulge in stylistic revivalism".

Postmodern subculture then is thought to be utilized for the looks it provides, its "bricolage" is a self-conscious mix-and-match game, and whatever creativity bricoleuers might exhibit is ultimately largely perceived to be individualistic and detached from resistance, especially insofar as the signs of subculture are—at least in part—channeled through the circuitry of systems of marketing and "cultural production" (cf. Peterson 1994; Peterson and Anad 2004) and/or the "culture industry" (cf. Adorno 1991; Horkheimer 1947) rather than existing independently (Redhead 1990, 1997; Muggleton 1997). In this vein, newer mass media technologies—particularly the internet—are furthermore thought to have made subcultural images more readily available for youth in diverse contexts to try on (cf. Bennett and Peterson 2004) amidst what has generally been perceived to be a steady weakening of traditional boundaries as sites of identity in the West since the end of the Second World War (see also Featherstone 1995).

From these general premises, there have been many attempts to better grip contemporary youth culture's multivalent contours rather than continuing to rely on "subculture" as an imprecise "catch-all" term to describe the intersection of youth, style, and music, in whatever form these may take (see Bennett 1999). Several theorists have advanced alternative terms designed to better capture fluidity, hybridity, diffusion, and individuality in youth (sub)cultural forms like "proto-communities" that are based upon situational fun and shared ideas (Willis 1990), "clubcultures" hallmarked by fluidity and fragmentation that supersede the remnants of traditional subculture (Redhead 1997), trans-local interconnected "scenes" of alternative sensibilities (Straw 1991), pseudo-

individuated "post-subculturalists" who revive flattened styles at their own discretion (Muggleton 1997), "lifestyles" undifferentiated from any dominant culture with respect to their being based upon consumption choices (Chaney 1996), or perhaps relatedly, "style surfers" making their way through a postmodern "supermarket of style" (Polhemus 1996, 1997).

While all of these concepts certainly do not exactly mean the same thing, they remain bound in their efforts to move the conversation beyond traditional invocations of subculture. Perhaps no concept, though, captures the main thrust of the collected movement against the strictures of orthodox subculture—nor has any received the volume of formal theoretical traction and elaboration—as "neo-tribe". Most notably developed by Michel Maffesoli (1996) and also taken up by Zygmunt Bauman (1992), unlike classic anthropological tribes, contemporary urban neo-tribes are conceptualized as relatively ephemeral affectual nodes of identification that overlap and that individuals float among in the course of their lives. Rather than coherent, bounded, or politically grounded then, contemporary tribes are thought to reject the ostensibly lifeless— finalizing—logics of traditional identity schemes and are ordered instead by the "ambiance", "affect", and power of "being together" that emergent aestheticized—often transitory and ideally heterogeneous—group forms can elicit for participants (Maffesoli 1996). Akin to configurations like varieties of modern day hobbyists, enthusiasts, and/or fashion circles, senses of belonging are established through the affinity individual's feel toward what come to be recognizable—largely passing—rituals and aesthetic signs; and while this certainly provides tribes the sort of scaffolding needed for a tribe to persist, at

the same time, movements toward overarching uniformity, nominating rigid

identification, and comprehensiveness are vehemently resisted (Maffesoli 1996).

Bennett (1999) has most notably applied Maffesolian neo-tribalism to youth

culture by arguing that subculture as an analytic construct—ostensibly irrevocably tainted

by its orthodox connotations—imposes a "hermeneutic seal" around musical and stylistic

preferences in a postmodern world of rapid change, hybridity, and more loosely defined

preferences. In positing that youth (sub)cultural phenomena cannot be differentiated

from other shifting affiliations and consumption practices that favor appearance under

post-war consumption capitalism, Bennett (1999) argues that the analytical deployment

of neo-tribalism upon youth culture can allow for the multiplicitous and changing nature

of youth consumption preferences as well as heterogeneity in group forms to better

breathe in analyses. Though highly fluid and potentially very fickle, it should be noted

the "emphatic sociality" and "passional logic" that inheres in prevailing conceptions of

neo-tribalism does not necessarily preclude the possibility of meaningful localized

interaction in their elaboration for youth or others in Bennett's treatment of the concept

(see Bennett 1999, 2000, 2006).

Postmodern perspectives on youth (sub)culture are able to capture the fluidity,

individuality, and logics that doubtlessly permeate a good many contemporary youth

cultural configurations and other social forms. Like their predecessors, however,

postmodern conceptions of subculture continue to privilege larger cultural shifts—those

related to late consumption capitalism in this case—over the experiences and

perspectives of possible subculturalists (or purported neo-tribalists) themselves. The

underlying concerns of traditional subculture theory furthermore can be seen to persist as

orthodox views of style, the grouping, resistance, and authenticity are deliberately inverted in postmodernist formulations. Yet, in spite this, postmodern conceptions of subculture do nonetheless tend to retain the orthodox assumption that cultural configurations—youth or other—cannot have substantive qualities if they possess any relationship to the systems of cultural production in late consumption capitalism. Postmodern subculture theory furthermore heavily emphasizes the individual and does not see the subcultural social—or grouping—as comprising much beyond a series of disjointed and aestheticized moments for individuals in what are ultimately heterogonous settings. Here, regarding this study, postmodern subculture theory has better opened the way to notions of "ex" membership by emphasizing mobility through shifting preferences; however, analysis of life after (sub)cultural affiliation is not invited because it is conceptualized to be more of a passing—and not exactly coherent or necessarily nominated—trend for individuals, one that is not perceived to be of particular analytical importance or consequence in the long run in any case.

<div style="text-align:center">Toward a Concept of Subculture with an Ex</div>

Given the main theoretical currents in the field, it is perhaps not exactly surprising that not much attention has been paid to the ex-subculturalist and the possible significance of life after subculture. In their purer forms, the benchmark frameworks that have dominated the history of the subcultural studies are conceived in terms that leave little leeway for the ex-subculturalist to be of much analytical relevance. The modernist emphasis on subculture as static, cohesive, and comprehensive essentially rends the ex-subculturalist a conceptual blindspot under the fixity of its group-level pronouncements.

Similarly, the postmodernist turn toward positing a highly reflexive and diffuse free-floating (dis)individualism itself reads little significance into the relinquishing of what are ultimately conceived to be cycles of partial and ephemeral taste preferences.

To be sure, the more recent postmodern conceptual movements certainly can certainly articulate many contemporary trends as well as a provide a step in the right direction as far as moving analyses beyond the stagnancy of comprehensive identity models. Yet, the hesitancy to engage social structure risks individualist interpretations of what might potentially be more substantive and social-level phenomena in some cases, even if these are not necessarily exactly lasting fixtures in individuals' lives. To that end, one can see that there similarly remains little in the way of a larger discourse for describing (aspects of) youth (sub)culture as both a group and individual-level phenomenon simultaneously, wherever such a consideration might be appropriate. Indeed, the possibility of non-comprehensive elective affiliations sustained by cohorts of differentiated participants that revolve around relatively durable shared sets of—possibly even splintering, directly conflicting, and evolving—values, ideologies, norms, rituals, and/or spaces that more substantially anchor a more definitive sense of collectivity are very much understated through frames like neo-tribalism and likewise certainly can not be accounted for with orthodox understandings of subculture.

In this vein, the continued larger emphasis upon the state of contemporary mass culture in constituting predominant conceptions of youth (sub)culture over accounts of the lived (inter)subjective experiences and identities of supposed subculturalists or neo-tribalists) themselves, though still valuable and informative, seems to have reached well past the point of saturation where analytical returns are diminishing. Ground-up visions

of how youth (sub)culture might be configured based on reported lived experiences can potentially productively counterweigh the images provided by these top-down conceptualizations.

Implicated youth are disempowered when theoretical characterizations of youth (sub)culture are constituted in their absence (Muggleton 2000; Valentine, Skelton, and Chambers 1998; Widdicombe and Woofit 1995). Thus, *a priori* assumptions taken in subculture's predominant theoretical frames risk missing potentially important indigenous meanings that accrue from individuals' experiences. Taken on this level, it is problematic for theorists to prescribe what subculture "is"—in the case of modernist ecological and neo-Marxist theories—or is "not"—in the case of predominant postmodern characterizations—and stop the analysis here. While certain youth (sub)cultural configurations may or may not possess elements of coherent political resistance or be fully sapped of all such potential in a milieu where only hybrid nostalgia is possible, solely conceptualizing phenomena like "subculture" as the passive byproduct of cultural power in either case glosses over the import of the social (cf. Cerulo 1997), which, in this case is the (joint) experiences, sociality, and understandings of those implicated in analyses.

Regarding the subcultural "ex", I indeed agree with others (cf. Muggelton 2000; Widdicombe and Woofit 1995) who have commented that understandings of youth culture must include accounts provided by purported subculturalists themselves; and I add that these can certainly include notions of exes in many cases. I further put forward that we can achieve a more telling analysis by embracing a measure of ambivalence when conceiving of subculture through subjects' narratives by mindfully aiming for sketches of

schematic possibility over the sort of totalizing impulses toward positing what subculture "is" or "is not" that have hitherto largely led to the underdevelopment of the ex-subculturalist in the first place. A more responsible approach to subculture then, I argue (and further detail in Chapter 3), is one that requires attention to—if not a heavy emphasis on—phenomenological levels of analysis with an eye for *potentiality*, or what subculture can potentially be for either individuals and for groups insofar as conceptions overlap and group-level pictures or schematic congruities emerge in subjects' accounts. An approach focused on schematic sedimentation and potentiality can grapple with shared conceptions, experiences, and identities related to possible affiliations while at the same time allowing individuals to be aligned, unaligned, or move on from and put any of these in their pasts to varying degrees.

Avenues for Researching the Ex (Straightedge) Subculturalist

On these matters, based upon my interview data as they relate to other scholarly and documentary forays into straightedge (cf. Atkinson 2003; Haenfler 2006; Irwin 1999; Lahickey 1997; Mullaney 2012; Peterson 2009; Petrarca 2006; Kuhn 2010; Williams and Copes 2005; Wood 2006)[3], (leaving) straightedge can not be very well related to some comprehensive or authentic mode of resistance to hegemonic culture nor is it necessarily relatively inconsequential trend for the majority of participating individuals, even in the face of the fact that most do ultimately move on from straightedge. In all, rather than focusing upon—either upraising or deconstructing—the more "active" ends of possible (youth subcultural) identity nodes, a more concerted effort toward elaborating upon the time "after" individuals move past various elective distinctions as based upon (ex)

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[3] See chapter 4 for further detail

participants' narratives is aimed for here, and this can open the way to largely unexplored research questions and conceptual avenues in the study of affiliations that possess self-identified exes like straightedge as well as potentially many others by extension. Regarding these issues, the following sub-dimensions beg explicit attention in light of data analysis: relinquished (youth) cultural affiliation from the view of fuller retrospect, experiences of substance and style in cultural affiliation across the life course, the transition to adulthood as mediated by cultural artifacts, and the possibilities of residues that extend beyond the boundary of direct identification.

(Subculture and Youth) Identity in Retrospect

A handful of recent empirical studies that have pressed upon subculture theory's temporal boundaries by focusing largely on aging within various possible subcultural distinctions (cf. Andes 1998; Bennett 2006, 2013; Bennett and Hodkinson 2012; Davis 2006; Haenfler 2006; Hodkinson 2011; Muggleton 2000), though none have more fully embraced notions of "after" subculture (but see Torkelson 2010, 2015). Ex-subculturalists' accounts of their (former) involvement(s) can potentially shed new light onto distinctions inasmuch as individuals make sense of their (former) participation in ways they might not have in the past. In contrast to simply "aging within", the narratives of self-identified exes can potentially draw sharper contrasts and qualitatively differ to the extent that meanings and understandings are no longer ordered by a relinquished subjective identity, instead of focusing on one an individual evolves with as they age.[4] Here, the narratives gathered can arguably provide an avenue to a more balanced empirical picture of a particular affiliation like straightedge—and perhaps by extension,

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[4] These notions are further parsed out in Chapter 3 and carried through the empirical analysis

other elective identities as well as subculture more broadly conceived—in bringing forward the "after" in complement to the "active".

The dimension of ex identity remains largely underdeveloped in the social sciences despite that elective identities have been studied for generations; yet its possibilities might have much to offer when fleshed out in many cases. Along these lines, I chart the contours of what a(n imagined) youthful subcultural world looks like in retrospect from my interview data. Inasmuch as identification with straightedge (and other potentially relevant distinctions) was a subjectively substantial facet of individuals' lives, the meanings through which they contextualize their worlds may have become fundamentally altered—yet perhaps at times also indelibly marked—through the process of leaving them behind. I seek to get a handle on how individuals get into and out of straightedge—and other subjectively relevant elective (subcultural) groupings/identities—as these relate to the sorts of boundaries that were once important to them at the time, and especially how, if at all, their conceptions of these boundaries might differ when narrated years after-the-fact. In engaging what leads up to exiting straightedge and the relinquishing of its core precepts, I maintain an eye for where I might be able to responsibly chart these processes where they might potentially be profitably applied to other sociological forays into (sub)culture and identity.

Touring and Traveling in Retrospective Identity Autobiography

As the postmodern critique has shown, youth (sub)cultural affiliation is not best characterized in singularizing and comprehensive terms. Rather, negotiating (sub)cultural identity is often a multiplicitous, serial, and/or temporary enterprise for

implicated (young) people. At the same time, though many indeed do, this does not

necessarily mean that every relinquished affiliation or cultural form evaporates in the

past's ephemera on the level of individual subjectivity. In this regard as my data show,

the insights of the postmodernists should not preclude the possibility of more subjectively

substantial stops in individual's reported identity autobiographies, or the coexistence of

these with the more transient and superficial forms of identity play more akin to what is

indicated by postmodern formulations. To these ends, the former straightedge

individuals I spoke with also identified themselves with various distinctions they felt

were substantial—often straightedge, but also others—as well as various kinds of trends

either currently or in their pasts as they laid out their elective (sub)cultural identity

autobiographies for me.

While frames like those presented by postmodern subculture theorists may aptly

encapsulate and square with varieties of identity play my interviewees might have at

times invoked, at the same time they do not adequately depict claims of meaningful ties

to current or former affiliations—like straightedge—where they conceptualized a

definitive referent as anchoring a larger grouping or community they feel part of

elaborating. As far as approach to identity is concerned, Sweetman (2004) usefully

distinguishes between "tourists"—who embrace parody—and "travelers"—who adopt a

modernist search for authenticity—that navigate their way through the same postmodern

milieu. As for parsing notions of definitive community versus more individually oriented

phenomena, Hodkinson (2002, 2004) has usefully argued that measures of shared

distinctiveness, commitment, identity, and relative autonomy may indicate the persistence of more bounded subcultural substance in communities in certain instances[5].

Here, I also trace my interviewees' sensibilities—either as tourist and/or traveler—throughout their life histories as these relate to what many conceive to be still existent broader communities that they have either left behind or have eventually moved into. In conversations with my interviewees, Hodkinson's and Sweetman's concepts provided valuable reference points upon which to differentiate potentially substantial individual "stops", ties to community, and the intersections of these from other forms of sociality in my interviewees' journeys. The formerly straightedge individuals I spoke with overwhelmingly discussed straightedge in substantive terms, both individually and as a grouping, and this provided a valuable methodological benchmark in conversation for assessing the ways they navigate(d) identity through series' of other possible affiliations and images. More generally, if we chart how these sensibilities can coexist and multiply, research on elective identity can better come to approximate how individuals navigate contemporary identity in ways that go beyond the confines of larger identity models which tend towards positing a more comprehensive compulsion toward coherence (e.g. Giddens 1991) or reflexive ambivalence (e.g. Bauman 1992) on the part of a subject as they piece together their lives.

Transitioning into (Subjective) Adulthood

It could be said that adulthood has possessed a longstanding and looming presence in the study of youth subculture. However, this presence has largely been a silent one. Theoretically, while youth and adulthood are distinguished in both the

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[5] these ideas are further elaborated upon theoretically in Chapter 3

American and CCCS paradigms, the path into and shape adulthood takes for subculturalists has never been developed. As for American models, one might infer that the contours of—moving into—adulthood were preordained by the larger social structures that produced strain and subsystems of alternative values, leaving subculturalists moving inexorably into a deviant adult life. As for the CCCS, adulthood was conceptualized as the "parent culture" (cf. Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, and Roberts 1976) that subculturalists were fundamentally distinct from. Yet, little attention was paid to what this adult culture would look like for youth as they inevitably age into it as adults themselves. In terms of postmodern theory, one can infer that (the path to) adulthood is largely redundant with changing of consumption patterns as individuals' tastes and personal preferences unfold in the course of their lives.

Empirically, however, lest we fall victim to the pitfalls the CCCS model's inert presentation of adulthood, we might be able to see adulthood as a very significant part of subcultural studies to the extent that subculture can be a subjective rejection of some vision of a predominant (adult) culture for participating individuals that is potentially susceptible to immense flux and revision when subculturalists are situated within a life course perspective. Other studies, have, in some form or another, indicated that affiliating individuals seek distinction from what they conceptualize as a homogenized mainstream—and perhaps conventional adult—world, especially in their younger years (cf. Becker 1963; Fox 1987; Haenfler 2006; Muggleton 2000; Thornton 1995; Torkelson 2010) and that oppositional commitment and style often changes over time as individuals age (Andes 1998; Bennett 2006; Fonarow 2006; Haenfler 2006; Hodkinson 2011; Muggleton 2000).

Attaining subjective adulthood as individuals age can be a significant process for those coming of age more generally speaking, particularly in the post-World War II period where "adulthood" itself has destabilized (cf. Arnett, 2004; Carr and Kefalas, 2009; Hartmann and Swartz, 2007; Mollenkopf, Waters, Holdaway, and Kasinitz, 2005; Waters, Carr, Kefalas, and Holdaway 2011). For those who are oppositional to a subjective vision of conventional adulthood, such as (former) adherents to straightedge, the process of navigating these sentiments in the face of inevitable aging into some form of adulthood can perhaps especially be pronounced.

Most all ex-straightedge individuals I interviewed had strong feelings on adulthood, and many said their affiliation with straightedge was a means of asserting their difference from and disaffection with what they saw as conventional adulthood in their younger years. Here, I discuss the ways that my interviewees negotiate aspects of adult life they once might have rejected, how they reflect upon their former conceptions of adult life, and how they yet still at times find their adulthood to be shaped by their former participation in straightedge and/or other possible distinctions they find to be subjectively meaningful that they may have similarly left behind or aged within. In doing so, I underscore how attentiveness to the currently understated potentialities of transitioning into adulthood might enrich other inquiries into youth (sub)culture. Many indeed believe that their relation to conventional adult imperatives and structures has been altered by their participation in straightedge, whether they believe they remain involved in any such (sub)culture as they age or not.

Residue

If the majority of individuals believe their former affiliation with straightedge was a more substantial piece of their life histories, then it should follow that their leaving it behind involves a rejection of it to a large extent. Yet, at the same time, it remains possible that more subjectively substantive identifications may have a lasting impact on individuals' lives, even after they are relinquished. Here, I map out the ways interviewees reject straightedge and other distinctions that may have been meaningful (or not) to them but also find their current lives informed and shaped by them. From the interviews, it appears that residue from a former affiliation can serve as an indicator of a grouping's relative (sub)cultural substance as well, and thereby extend Hodkinsons (2002, 2004) framework of (sub)cultural substance (overviewed in detail in the following chapter).

Conclusion

The study of youth subculture up to this point has not exactly been hospitable to inquiry into life after subculture. Yet, we can already begin to see possibilities for the ex-subculturalist if we simply favor—or just attend to as complement—the potentialities that may lie in the perspectives of those professing ex-hood over predominant conceptual emphases on cultural transformation, "active" (in)authenticity, and more totalizing assertions positing diffuse individualism versus a rigid collective. There remain further issues related to the specific project of contextualizing ex-elective identity and approaching it methodologically in research, to which I now turn in the interest of detailing the conceptual bases upon which this study proceeds.

CHAPTER 3

STUDYING IDENTITY IN REVERSE: CONCEPTUALIZING AND

RESEARCHING EX (SUB)CULTURAL IDENTITIES

As we have seen, what youth experience and perceive has arguably been underrepresented in theoretical treatments of youth culture. Regardless of whether youths' worlds are authentic or imagined, as Thomas and Thomas (1928) remind us, the consequences of subjects' conceptions and the actions that may stem from them can be quite real on a practical level. Following this line, it is important to be mindful of the lived experiences and perceptions of reality held by the subject, especially to the extent these and whatever consequences may emerge from them might not square with overarching theoretical characterizations. Here, where the dimension of "ex-hood" is additionally specifically focused upon, points of departure from the prevailing currents of existing theory and research include—but are certainly not limited to—the 1) possible lingering subjective significance individuals may attach to affiliations from their pasts 2) as well as the ways individuals may understand relinquished affiliations in ways that are distinct to a fuller retrospective standpoint. Just more generally, the possibilities that may lie in subjective ex identity require overdue attention in sociology. To parse this issue conceptually, it is crucial to give due attention to the bases upon which elective social identities are accomplished and rendered intelligible to the identifying subject, and from there to others.

A Phenomenological Approach to Elective Social (Ex) Identity

In moving toward such ends, Max Weber's (1922) analytic device of "ideal types" and method of *verstehen*—"to understand"—are both certainly foundational. For ideal types, Weber's aim is to construct exaggerated mental models—radicalized caricatures of sorts—that distill the essential elements of any event, process, or case in the interest of obtaining the best sort of nomenclature that can most sharply articulate whatever phenomenon is in question. Weber's idea here is that the most purely formed conception of any phenomenon, though impossible to attain in the actual lived world, could best capture its most essential characteristics and thus be able to more precisely pinpoint the extent of its real manifestations when applied back upon reality. Ultimately, ideal typical analysis then is meant to simultaneously describe both a phenomenon's essence and the particularities of any real world manifestations where these are measured against the larger "type".

The deployment of *verstehen* complementarily seeks to explain human action— defined as that which requires some measure of conscious reflection in contrast to behavioral reflex—by coming to understand the thought processes, meanings, and motivations that lead up to whatever (social inter)action is under consideration. From the standpoint of Weberian sociology then, the task at hand for the social scientist is to inquire into what people believe about a situation and what meanings underlie their actions, and principally do so with regard to the kinds of typifications they hold that ultimately organize and inform social action (cf. Weber 1922).

Weber's sociology, however, ultimately proceeds upon the premise that the researcher can always fully understand what's going on in their research subject's

mind—and access their "inner being"—regarding *why* they do what they do simply because the researcher and subject alike are fellow humans. In this vein, in critically expanding upon Weber's premises, Alfred Schutz (1967, p.8) notes that "Weber makes no distinction between the *action*, considered as something in progress, and the completed *act*…[and] he does not ask how an actor's meaning is constituted or what modifications this meaning undergoes for his partners in the social world or for a nonparticipating observer". With this comment, Schutz is identifying 1) the importance of situating social actions—and the meanings that might be attached to them—in relation to a past, present, and future that vitally informs them, as well as 2) highlighting the ways meaning attached to action can differ immensely from person to person, especially where consociates' otherwise potentially intersubjectively rich—and perhaps even esoteric—meanings can appear flat to, or even be interpreted entirely differently by, an outsider.

Regarding such differential meanings attached to action and the complicating dimension of time, the philosopher Bergson's (1965) contrast between *duree*—free-flowing, heterogeneous, and temporally unbounded durational consciousness—and the discontinuous images that individuals ultimately use to consciously make sense of things with time-space human constructs is especially illustrative. Most significant for elaborating how elective social identities are accomplished here is the implication that the common-sensically intelligible world is always based upon "past (or passed)" moments. Ands that this applies even when moments are understood in terms of an immediate "present" since ordering constructs must necessarily be applied after-the-fact—if just to

the smallest degree—via intentionality, or reflective effort required to tame the *duree* via the imposition of the categorical constructs within which experience is lodged[6].

Although Bergson is chiefly concerned with the inner psychical components of consciousness, we can extract from this standpoint that meaningful social experience is only possible with the sort of reflection he is concerned with—intentional and always to some extent retrospective upon "past (or passed)" occurrences, no matter how immediately understood—as ordered by the typifying social categorical schemata available and related to the individual's past, present, and future comprising the meaning-context[7] that filters their subjectivity. If we are to intersect this basic notion with commonplace conceptions of subjective elective identity in the social sciences, a subjectively held social identity is in many ways then the product of multitudinous "past (or passed)" actions or intentionally interpreted liminal moments that, cumulatively, are (pre)reflectively typified and ordered through an individual's larger meaning-context as congruous with and geared toward their perceived spatial and temporal positionality, which no doubt includes their self-concept and subjective (continuous achievement of) projected social identity/identities.

While such reflection and action are certainly always situated within individuals' pasts and futures as Schutz (1967) and notable others (cf. Emirbayer and Mische 1998)

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[6] Here, additionally important for the application of this principle upon the "accomplishment" of projected elective identities, it is worth noting that such actionable intentionality need not necessarily manifest on the level of what Giddens (1991), for example, later called "discursive consciousness", or that which is self-reflectively verbalized or intellectually considered. The typification of experience can, in various contexts, indeed become routinized to the point of ossifying into habit, ultimately making it more pre-reflective or second-nature in these instances (see Schutz 1967).

[7] Meaning-context in Schutz' parlance refers to the repository of social/cultural schema built over an individual's life available to them to make sense of and situate themselves in social world around them across the dimensions of time and space.

have elaborated, with regard to drawing a further distinction between a current and former subjective elective identity, the qualitative phenomenal difference—if not possible direct discord—between reflections upon the "past (or passed)" actions that comprise the immediacies of a <u>current</u> subjective identity and reflections upon the "*past*" actions of a <u>former</u> (ex) subjective identity can potentially mark a significant break in where schemata drawn from one's meaning-context filters and orders perceptions of self in social space and time.

I delineate two additional basic concepts pertinent to inquiring into (ex) identity on phenomenological levels in the coming analysis of data: *confluent typification* and *broken typification*. Regarding *confluent typification,* we have "past" as a more common-sensically immediate passing of time which applies within the confines of a current identity, but that also potentially can hold form when applied back upon former identity. In contrast, regarding *broken typification*, we have a situation where *past*—temporally displaced beyond what is liminally "passed"—reflections upon a relinquished subjective ex-identity and perceptions of the former understandings and social actions attached to it are no longer ordered by the same schematizing reflective framework they once were, and this can be especially sharp insofar as the parameters of a relinquished social identity once played a significant role in the constitution of an individual's meaning-context. In distinguishing between the "past (or passed)" from *past* (in the latter sense above) in the domain of subjective (ex) identity then, we can see that individuals' constructions of former identity and events related to former identity can involve emergent—if not altogether new—sets of after-the-fact typifications/projections that can potentially lend a unique phenomenal/narrative slant that is not necessarily accessible to or intelligible in

presentist—"past (or passed)"—during-the-identity "active" terms, or just that what I call *broken typifications* can be applicable.

The significance of this difference for a study primarily focused upon ex-identity such as this is twofold. For one, and as the pages that follow will show, an individual's basic reflective meaning-context can be fundamentally altered—yet perhaps at the same time perhaps in some ways indelibly marked—to the extent that relinquished identity once ordered their intentionality upon abdication. For another, subjective interpretations of "*past*" actions and identity are not necessarily squared with former interpretations of the very same "passing" actions related to identity during the time an individual was aligned with it—it indeed may be the case that typification is either broken or confluent across the boundary of where one accomplishes an elective social identity versus when they no longer do. In any case, phenomenological inquiry into the "other side" of elective identity stands to shed unique light onto the contours of discrete (former) elective social identity nodes themselves (e.g. straightedge) as well as delve more deeply into the extent that former identity might dually alter yet residually shape the subjective reflective meaning-context through which an individual interprets experience and constitutes meaningful social action/identity.

To be sure though, as we can see in Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh's (1988) landmark study on the often multi-step processes of rethinking and exiting subjectively significant social roles, change in one's reflective meaning-context need not necessarily be confined solely to any one moment or to a single act of turning away from a subjectively held identity. Meanings, like the salience of any social identity or elective affiliation are continuously susceptible to flux, revision, and reflective reassessment that can vary

immensely both contextually and qualitatively over time. Our ways of understanding

ourselves through narrative indeed can change under the weight of cultural and

interpersonal influences at any point throughout the course of our lives, and these

changes are liable to lay down reconfigured characterizations of and routes to past

memories (Bruner 2004) regardless of whether issues of remaining within or leaving the

confines of any particular elective identity are at stake. Yet, as a reading of Ebaugh's

(1988) work on leaving social roles also underscores, in no instance is such

reconfiguration perhaps sharper or more significant than through the subjective act (or

process) of disaffiliating with and relinquishing precepts related to an elective identity

inasmuch as it was an identity that was subjectively salient in the first place. Although

Ebaugh does not concentrate upon individuals' retrospective reflections upon former

identity categories, she shows us varieties of individuals—be they ex-nuns like Ebaugh

herself, former professionals, retirees, transsexuals, and many others—very actively

wrestling with new ways of thinking about themselves, coming to grips with new sets of

meanings related to their self-understandings, and ultimately anticipating transition into

new and ostensibly discrete social identities (cf. Ebaugh 1988).

Regarding Schutz' (1967) other concerns regarding differential meaning attached

to action as a barrier to intersubjective understanding in social scientific research, an

approach that privileges subjects' meanings is furthermore necessary if we are to access

and responsibly reflect native understandings related to whatever identity in question as

well as the processes of leaving it behind. On the level of accurately reflecting the

meanings held by the social actors being studied, social science constructs can be

problematic insofar as they deviate from the indigenous meanings of the subjects under

consideration, whether this stems from the imposition of larger *a priori* theoretical dictums or from the sort of cultural impediments that stand in the way of researchers squaring their own meanings with the common-sense reality of research subjects. In either case, the social scientist must endeavor to base their own thought objects upon the common-sense thinking of their research subjects as these are articulated through subjects' typifications of their worlds, thereby giving the researcher constructs of a "2nd degree" that apply to and are derived from the phenomenal worlds of the lay individuals being studied, but need not necessarily be intelligible to them (Luckmann 1973; Schutz 1963). Hence, the task at hand is less about ensuring that subjects immediately recognize the way their conceptions are being contextualized under the imperative of social scientific analysis, but more of the extent to which analytical constructs stem from and ultimately square with the commonsense meanings subjects possess.

To accomplish these ends, inquiry is most preferably conducted by an individual who is already highly familiar with the sorts of typifications that research subjects might utilize, if not someone of full insider or participant status. Some measure of preexisting familiarity with the typifications salient to a particular grouping or demographic can i diminish—if not eliminate—the extent to which meanings become distorted or lost in the translations to academic analyses. An insider researcher is furthermore ideally one who remains critical of their own possible presuppositions and biases related to the grouping or phenomenon under consideration as they translate and contextualize meanings for other social scientists. Such an approach can not just facilitate understandings of the meanings and experiences that are relayed to the researcher and help preserve the spirit

underlying their intent, but also holds the added advantage of assisting the researcher in gaining access to and trust from respondents in the first place (Blumer 1969).

Application in this Study (and Situating within Prior Others)

To that end, in applying these principles in the context of studying youth (sub)cultures like straightedge and similar others that may intersect or surround it, it is important to be mindful of the fact that youth can possess their own discourses, assumptions, and values that may be very real to them during the time they hold onto them (Thornton 1995; Widdicombe and Woofit 1995) despite how superficial or vague they may appear at times to outsiders. Following this line, some benchmark studies of youth (sub)cultures have indeed proceeded with an emphasis on phenomenological levels of analysis and privileged the narratives of subculturalists over theory and other possible modes of gathering empirical data (Muggleton 2000; Widdicombe and Woofitt 1995) while others have complemented subjects' narratives with ethnography and contextualized what youth say critically (Thornton 1995; Hodkinson 2002).

The primary critique that emerges against studies that strictly take subculturalists' narratives at face value as this study does rests in that such an approach may risk overrating the accuracy of accumulated accounts, which can in turn paint a less accurate portrait of a particular grouping or the broader phenomenon of non-mainstream sensibility more generally. Relevant here is the benchmark finding that many purported subculturalists resist categorical labels because they find such labels—and the act of aiming to align oneself with labels via performing "typical" subcultural tropes—to be a marker of personal disingenuousness that inauthentic others who "try too hard" strive for

(Clark 2003; Hodkinson 2002; Muggleton 2000; Thornton 1995; Widdicombe and Woofit 1995). By contrast, studies find that more genuine authenticity is often perceived by subculturalists in widely ranging individual heterogeneity that runs contrary to what is conceived to be a homogenized and conventional mainstream "other" (Muggleton 2000; Thornton 1995). While those like Muggleton (2000) who strictly emphasize the words of his sample argue this to be a sign of a more general postmodern ambivalence and move toward stylistic individuality here, others taking a more "critical insider" (cf. Hodkinson 2005) ethnographic approach (Hodkinson 2002; Thornton 1995) have pointed out that the emphasis interviewees place on their authentic individuality can, at the same time, lead the analyst to miss potentially significant and coherent aspects of possible groupings under investigation.

This leads to two possible general methodological objections to proceeding as this study does primarily upon the face narratives of ex subculturalists as gathered by someone who never affiliated with straightedge: 1) that research should be done by an individual of full participant status, and 2) that it should include an ethnographic component. Regarding participation, though I myself have never been straightedge—the grouping centering this study—and thus can not exactly lay claim to fully possessing a "complete membership role" (Adler and Adler 1987), I am nonetheless highly familiar with and possess years of vital experience with the social and trans-local circuitry of music culture primarily related to straightedge—the hardcore music scene. I was very actively involved in the hardcore music scene for years based in Minneapolis and continued to participate in a more causal fashion in the New Jersey scene upon moving there for graduate studies. I attended shows with regularity, even played in some

hardcore bands myself, and often participated in a wide range of other social events with people associated with the hardcore scene—many, if not most of whom were straightedge at the time—in these and other localities on a far better than weekly basis through the better part of my twenties.

The totality of my involvement in hardcore and proximity to straightedge provided me the sort of "cultural competence" (Hodkinson 2005) required to smoothly and effectively communicate with research subjects as I eventually transitioned into the role of researcher. I found that my experiences afforded me a pre-existing easy familiarity with many of the larger "possible lines" of schema within straightedge culture (cf. Bruner 2004) that interviewees invoked in the course of the research. This proved vital—especially in the earlier phases of my research—during the times interviewees shared accounts that somewhat contrasted with my own expectations and lines of questioning because I was able, in response, to draw upon my own direct knowledge and develop the kind of rapport needed to better get to the heart of interviewees' meanings (see Denzin 1989). Ultimately, while I was perhaps not technically a "full" insider to the target population under consideration, my position of nonetheless being a close outsider[8] gave me the tools necessary to reassess and reconfigure my conceptions in both the empirical and theoretical tracks of analysis as the project unfolded (see Alford 1998).

I did not conduct an ethnography for logistical reasons, and in any case I found that interviewees were actually rather forthcoming and candid when talking in retrospect about their potential youthful naiveties regarding their past concerns for individual authenticity and processes of personal change. In this vein, against claims of

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[8] outsider at least in the context of being straightedge but close in the sense of possessing a good deal of personal experience with both active and former straightedge adherents in my life

needing an ethnographic component to counterweigh possible disingenuous accounts

subculturalists might put forward, it seems there is a diminished compulsion to narrate

oneself with a veneer of authenticity upon relinquishing youth subcultural ties. Thus,

the potential analytical pitfalls where others have found subculturalists' emphasizing

individuality or downplaying spectacularization to preserve a sense of current self-

authenticity do not appear to apply as much when subcultural identity is put in

retrospective terms. Regarding retrospect, it is precisely the possible difference that

accompanies individuals' characterizations of the *past* that is of most direct interest in

this study, precisely where interviewees are compelled to place themselves into a

conversation with what they now envision their youthful counterpart to be. In this

regard, straightedge presents an instance where adherents readily identify when they

participate and dis-identify in rather unambiguous terms when they disaffiliate

(Haenfler 2006; Wood 2006), making it an ideal base for the present inquiry.

Conceptualizing (Straightedge) Subculture

Somewhat further in this vein, one will see many interviewees in the coming

pages even go so far as to discuss the ways that they subjectively believe straightedge

continues to be somewhat of a real distinction insofar as it pertains to other—mostly

younger—individuals who currently participate in and sustain straightedge culture, even

if interviewees themselves are no longer involved or necessarily feel the same way about

straightedge they once did while they were younger. These accounts do not exactly

square with prevailing theoretical ideas of individually oriented and ultimately superficial

consumption amidst market appropriation, nor do they point toward any sort of core existent or immutable authenticity.

Here, some scholars have recently situated works on you (sub)culture critically within postmodern theoretical developments as a means of attempting to assess the analytic value of concepts like neo-tribalism in various contexts as these contrast more orthodox invocations of subculture (cf. Carrington and Wilson 2004; Greener and Hollands 2006; Muggleton 2000; St John 2003; Stahl 2003; Sweetman 2004). The resounding conclusion that stems from these collected efforts is that a fairly high degree of fluidity and hybridity no doubt pervades certain contemporary youth (sub)cultural configurations, yet the usage of constructs like neo-tribalism in more wholesale terms can lead the analyst to gloss over meanings as well as miss aspects of some groupings and their forms in certain instances (more generally see also Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004; Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003). As Weinzierl and Muggleton (2003, p.18) summarize the implications of such works, it is becoming clear that while "the CCCS cannot explain the economic, cultural, and political dynamics of contemporary subcultural movements, neither can an uncritical, unreconstituted post-modernism". To this point, although the central thrusts of these recent critical analyses have possessed immense value for underscoring potential shortcomings in historically predominant approaches to youth (sub)culture, they have for the most part not gone quite as far in putting forward a clearer alternative discourse that can get beyond what could be characterized as an increasingly intractable tension between modernist and postmodernist paradigms (see Hemondhalgh 2005).

Maintaining an Eye for (Sub)Cultural Substance

Perhaps the most notable theoretical exception to this general pattern comes in Hodkinson's (2002, 2004) reworking of the term "subculture" through his ethnographic work on Goths. Hodkinson (2002, 2004) argues that certain (sub)cultures, like Goths, can continue to possess relative boundedness and stability in the face of larger shifts toward mediation, market saturation, and individualization. Throughout this study I use (sub)cultural substance as a means of parsing difference against spheres of identity and self-understanding that might better be characterized through postmodern frames, while simultaneously sidestepping the binds of orthodox subculture theory.

Specifically, Hodkinson argues for removing the problematic connotations that have come to inhere in the term "subculture" via its orthodox treatments—essential style, homology, structure, class locality, resistance, concerns for etic authenticity, resistance, homogeneity—but retain its eye for cultural substance through four *relative* indicators (Hodkinson 2002). *Identity* indicates a situation where participants (inter)subjectively believe they are involved in a distinct cultural grouping and experience shared feelings of identity with one another, resulting in a like-mindedness of sorts where boundaries against the "other" are constituted. *Commitment*, for its part, refers to continuous involvement for participants and largely internal social networks that anchor things like free time activities, friendship circles. social events, and usage of social media. *Consistent Distinctiveness* furthermore relates to more durable sets of values, tastes, style, and preferences that for the most part carry over across individuals, time, and place. Hodkinson lastly considers *Autonomy* to indicate substance to the extent a grouping exhibits a fair measure of independence in productive and organizational activities, often

as these are taken up by enthusiasts rather than profiteers (Hodkinson 2002, 2004). I additionally argue that *Residue* can indicate group substance to the extent that a grouping can continue to impact (former) participants' lives and senses of self after they disaffiliate (see Torkelson 2010)

In total, these non-essential indicators of substance can effectively provide a framework that can more suitably describe (aspects of) certain groups that might better be typified by their more substantive qualities, much as appears to be the case with straightedge. In aiming to capture *relative* markers of group coherence, more precise articulations of certain youth (sub)cultural phenomena can be attained in a manner that circumvents the theoretical pitfalls that have hindered others' ability to see the fuller possible importance to "ex"-subculturalists in the first place. Ultimately, maintaining an eye for indicators of substance when approaching youth subculture in this study—and by extension others—can responsibly parse (aspects of) relative substance and coherence within certain elective affiliations as these (aspects) contrast those that might better be characterized by instability and heterogeneity.

Potentiality

Furthermore here, in contrast to the alternative concepts that push toward attempting to encapsulate what youth (sub)cultural phenomena are (or are not) in more all-encompassing terms (e.g. Bennett 1999; Chaney 1996; Featherstone 1991; Muggleton 1997; Polhemus 1996; Redhead 1997; Straw 1991), Fine and Kleinman (1979) very perceptively argued some time back for conceptualizing subculture as a corpus of knowledge that is heuristically valuable only up to the point where it takes on material or

essential properties. To that end, I proceed by conceptually approaching subculture for what it might be, or for what it can perhaps *potentially* be, rather that what it is or is not.

For one thing, simply aiming for heuristic sketches of potentiality gets beyond longstanding issues surrounding reading a full essential static subcultural subject versus positing one that is strictly diffuse in predominant theories. Relatedly, this also gets beyond possible problems associated with stratifying group members to assess core membership as some have (e.g. Fox 1987; Sardiello 1998), which, as Muggleton (2000) has rightfully argued, only unduly imposes outside holistic standards upon individuals who might subjectively affiliate with any grouping. Since those who might be perceived as over-committed and those who are perceived as only part-time can equally define one another as inauthentic in terms of "trying too hard" versus being "uncommitted" to any grouping or sensibility, it is important to be able to simultaneously engage conflict that exists within these indigenous perspectives (see Muggleton 2000; Thornton 1995). There is certainly variation in meanings that youth might come to possess (cf. Baron 1989; Clark 2003; Hodkinson 2002; Haenfler 2006; Wood 2003, 2006) and embracing what subculture might potentially be for different participants rather than what it is (not) is vital if the individual is to be able to be able to breathe under the weight of whatever group-level constructs emerge. In contrast to reified notions of social boundary then, an emphasis on potentiality engages the ways *both* groups and individuals may designate and negotiate boundaries that symbolically distinguish themselves from others. Akin to Bourdieu's (1984) articulation of how social classes struggle over symbolic resources in the interest of justifying their own symbolic system as the most legitimate, in subculture this involves accounting for competing visions of what subculture is among identifying

individuals as intra-subcultural struggles to legislate varied understandings of subcultural space as "the" most legitimate can often be central.

Relevant also is Lamont and various other writers' analytic emphasis on the constitution of "symbolic boundaries" as conceptual distinctions through which people construct objects, practices, categories, and spaces that ultimately serve as the means by which both groups and individuals delineate—and/or perhaps struggle to delineate—the (inter)subjective conceptions of reality that are vitally important to senses of belonging and the construction of valued identities (cf. Lamont 1992; Lamont and Fournier 1992; Lamont and Molnar 2002). Echoing Bourdieu (1984), Lamont and others are primarily concerned with the implications of these processes on issues of broader class and economic stratification, which do not necessarily apply to youth (sub)cultural groupings. Yet, much as Sarah Thornton's (1995) treatment of "subcultural capital" as a valued form of credibility possessed by certain individuals within British urban dance cultures that can not exchanged for economic capital as is the case in Bourdieu's initial formulation of "cultural capital" hints toward: charting the potentialities of subcultural symbolic boundaries can effectively sketch the contours of larger subcultural group value systems in a manner that allows competing intra-group tensions to analytically breathe while avoiding both the pitfalls of externally stratifying participants or flattening meanings via deploying a more vulgar version of postmodernism.

As far as going about determining what subculture might potentially be via group and/or individual symbolic boundaries then, at a phenomenal level, the extent to which conceptions of affiliation overlap or conflict over issues can responsibly lead to heuristic group-level sketches that lend various participating individuals leeway to be aligned to

varying degrees (or unaligned altogether) with whatever array of group-level pictures—

potentialities—might emerge, be these substantive or more transient. Such an approach

can help the analyst simultaneously take on and assess both the group and the individual

as well as both substance and fluidity—for example, whether a grouping appears to

sediment into substantive forms at all, and from there the extent to which an individual

moving through it may or may not subjectively experience it aligned with the

predominant terms of others' accounts.

Analytically Branching from (Straightedge as) a Substantive Referent

In addition to just maintaining an eye for substance and potentiality, there may be

a benefit to centering a study of subculture upon one grouping, but not necessarily

leaving the analysis strictly within such confines. Focusing upon a singular—potentially

highly substantive—grouping like straightedge can provide a window into other

groupings/stylistic sensibilities/cultural forms interviewees might associate with (or have

more difficulty articulating their association with) currently or in their pasts. Even if one

is affiliated with a highly substantive grouping and is very committed, it still remains the

case that affiliation is not comprehensive. This multiplicity is important to engage if

sociology is to responsibly claim knowledge on how contemporary elective identities are

navigated.

On the one hand, if the analysis is focused fully in terms of one grouping, other

possible affiliations and pursuits individuals may find subjectively relevant to their lives

are greatly diminished, and potentially large facets of their individual (sub)cultural

identity autobiographies may be silenced. On the other, approaching subculture without a

potentially highly substantive grouping foregrounding and anchoring the analysis does

not invite the construction of a nomenclature to articulate and differentiate between

various affiliations in both the process of empirical data gathering and any subsequent

analysis. For example, Muggleton's (2000) otherwise indispensible study on non-

mainstream style concludes that contemporary subculturalists rarely attach specific

values to groupings that would differentiate them from other groupings, ultimately

indicating less coherence in values associated with subculture than might assumed in

traditional terms. Yet, by conceptually approaching subculture and gathering his sample

under the more general umbrella of just non-mainstream sensibility without one

particular grouping foregrounding the analysis, it should not be surprising that his data

and analyses are couched in more abstract formalistic and individualist terms that

diminish shared substantive ties to any particular grouping. Indeed, a sampling criterion

as diffuse as unconventional style—and any generality that may be extracted out of it—

does not possess much potential for conclusions that go much beyond generic

mainstream/non-mainstream boundary on the level of individual research subjects'

subjectivities in the first place. This approach thereby risks flattening the depth that may

otherwise come together if the analyst instead focuses upon accounts taken from multiple

identifying participants around a singular potentially substantive referent, which

respondents can then use to weigh relative depth and depthlessness in other identification

spheres. Thus, by centering focus upon a singular more substantive referent and

branching the conversation out from there, it may be possible to get a better handle on

possible differences between various elective groupings and affiliations that interviewees

discuss—or have difficulty coherently discussing—as both the analyst and informants can jointly weigh these against one another.

My approach is not the only way to approach subculture, but the the potentialities within and relative shape of a grouping can come into a better focus when a central—ideally highly substantive—referent anchors analysis. For instance, when interviewees discussed their time being straightedge in highly significant terms regarding commitment and community, as the reader will see was often the case, it became easier for them to compare and contrast these feelings with other things they have involved themselves in at various points in their lives, and ultimately assess similarities, differences, and possibilities spanning different distinctions. In all, this allows a picture of how the contemporary terrain of identity is navigated by respondents to emerge that is inaccessible from the standpoint of studies that solely focus on one grouping or that do not foreground a substantive referent.

Sampling Information and Methodological Procedures

The interviews I conducted aimed to emphasize the retrospective reflections and meanings interviewees attached to straightedge as well as other possible affiliations and they may have also been involved with or are currently involved with as they age. Interviews privileged indigenous language, categories, and meanings of interviewees, which is of paramount importance to understanding and acceding the meanings individuals attach to their affiliations (Muggleton 2000; Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995). All interviews were face-to-face and took place in a location convenient for the interviewee, which, in most cases was a coffee shop or bar in the area where they

currently resided. All discussions with informants were tape-recorded and transcribed prior to analysis.

Interviews were collected in three distinct phases. The first of these came in the form of three largely deductive pilot interviews conducted in the Spring of 2007 where I attempted to get a sense of the prospects that might rest in a study of former straightedge adherents. From analyzing the transcripts of these discussions, I was able to develop some preliminary hypotheses and a tentative survey instrument for further interviews. Throughout 2008 I gathered another 17 interviews, cross-checking what informants were telling me with prior hypotheses and refining the project conceptually as it unfolded through these next 17 interviews (Alford 1998). The final phases consisted of 24 additional interviews were collected throughout 2012 and 2013. The first 20 interviews provided the bases for added direct conceptual lines of inquiry in the third and final wave, resulting in the final—more expansive—survey instrument in APPENDIX A[9].

Interviews were semi-structured based upon this instrument and discussion often went in a variety of directions. As a result, the questions were not necessarily asked in any particular order. Rather, the order of questions was adjusted to where the discussion went in most cases. Frequently interviewees preempted some of the larger conceptual lines of inquiry bracketed within the survey instrument itself[10], and this provided openings for smooth transition into new topic areas and indicated to me which avenues of inquiry might be more or less applicable to a particular individual. To that end, I did not always pose questions verbatim, but instead tailored them with tie-ins to themes relevant to particular interviewees' narratives. At many points too, interviews became quite

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[9] Although a different—shorter—instrument was brought into the first 20 interviews, the majority of the questions and lines of questioning used carry through and remain the in the final version in APPENDIX A.
[10] This was especially the case during the latter phases of the research.

casual, and even delved into moments where I would find common ground with informants via recounting my own experiences with the hardcore music scene or straightedge as these were thematically relevant to the direction of our conversation. These back-and-forths proved to be vitally important for gathering data as they frequently led to follow-up lines of questioning or discussion that further clarified or extended the meanings that informants were conveying to me.

Since there is not exactly a formal directory of former straightedge adherents that includes their contact information, my 44 respondents were gathered out of convenience in several primary ways. First, I interviewed some personal friends and acquaintances who were no longer involved with straightedge and were willing to talk to me. These ten individuals constitute 23 percent of the final sample size. Other interviews were collected simply by word of mouth through socializing with both acquaintances and others where causal conversation surrounding the topic of my research garnered me referrals to qualifying individuals. Lastly, I was able to gather the bulk of interviews from active recruitment on internet messageboards associated with hardcore music in various localities. Some individuals who actively utilized these messageboards contacted me volunteering for interviews while others referred me to individuals who did not use these messageboards but did fit the criteria for the study[11].

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[11] Messageboards that yielded at least one interview are:

http://www.thenjscene2.com/viewforum.php?f=3
http://www.pahardcore.com/boards/index.cfm
http://moshnycproboardscom.proboards.com/index.cgi?board=general
http://ontariohardcore.freeforums.org/
http://nchc.proboards.com/index.cgi
http://www.515crew.com/msgbrd/index.php
http://www.chicagohardcore.net/board/viewforum.php?f=3
http://www.theb9.com/board?PHPSESSID=39fa456398de28ec5e7681be0d193d3a
http://fargohardcore.proboards.com/index.cgi

After each successful interview, I employed snowball sampling by asking interviewees to refer me to other individuals they may know that qualified. Like convenience sampling more generally, a potential pitfall with snowball sampling is that it can yield a biased picture by being confined within a particular network of people whose preferences are similar to one another but not representative on an entire target population (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981). These possible shortcomings, however, are offset by the differences in both the recruitment strategy pursued and the large range of locations in which interviews took place, which ultimately yielded a diverse sample. For instance, although all informants identified as ex-straightedge, some still felt actively involved with hardcore and/or punk music; others felt they were involved but to a significantly lesser extent post-straightedge; some others believed that they had moved onto and explored entirely new things since leaving straightedge behind; and still others voiced to me that they did not feel involved with any kind of distinctive grouping, to any degree. Similarly, a sizable chunk of informants had experimented with intoxicants and cigarettes prior to becoming straightedge while many others had not tried any such substance prior to relinquishing straightedge.

Fifty-nine percent of interviews too place around the East Coast—New York City, upstate New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia, Washington DC, Raleigh, Pennsylvania; thirty-two percent took place in the middle portion of the country—Minneapolis, Iowa,

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http://www.thenjscene.com <defunct as of 2012>
http://members4.boardhost.com/tchardcore <defunct as of 2012>

Messageboards solicited but that did not directly yield interviews are:

http://cthardcore.proboards.com/index.cgi
http://winnipeghardcore.proboards.com/
http://denverdiy.proboards.com/index.cgi

Cincinnati, Chicago, Nashville, North Dakota; a small handful also took place in Canada—Toronto, Winnipeg; and even one interview took place on the West Coast—Oakland. The course of the project found me gathering interviews where I could, often doubling up planned leisure visits to other cities for other purposes with work if I was able to locate qualifying interviewees in various locations I was traveling to. I also found myself making long detours when traveling cross-country by car to meet with some respondents.

Each new setting provided not just a new starting point for interviews, but it also illustrated how individuals move out of (and look back upon moving into) straightedge in different areas. More generally, regarding the above-outlined conceptual bases that are utilized in this study, it is vitally important to come to grips with geographic specificities in how (life after) straightedge might be articulated—if there are any—and, conversely, to strengthen claims to group substance via the extent to which substantive group markers cohere across geographical boundaries, especially as trans-local iterations of identity contrast the more localized social bonds thought to characterize neo-tribal sociality (see Bennett 2000).

The demographic profile of respondents was diverse regarding their locality and their career paths listed below in TABLE 1. Informants' residences are listed here and throughout the rest of the analysis at the city-level if it ranks among the top 50 US or top 10 Canadian metro areas. In the interest of preserving anonymity, a respondent's residence is referred to more generically at the state level if the individual does not reside in one of the top 50 US metro areas (all Canadian respondents had continuously resided within the top 10 Canadian metropolitan areas). The first round of 20 interviews

averaged about 50 minutes in length and ranged from as little as 25 minutes up to 85 minutes in length. The following 24 interviews averaged about 75 minutes and ranged in length from as little as 30 minutes to as much as 140 minutes. In terms of the entire sample, interviewees' participation in straightedge ranged from as little as 2 years to as much as 14 years. The temporal distance from holding straightedge identity at the time of interviews ranged from as little as one month to as much as 23 years. Respondents ages varied a good deal as well, with the youngest respondent being 18 and the oldest being 43. The average age at the time being interviewed for the entire sample was just under 28. The ages interviewees claimed straightedge ranged from as young as 10 to as old as 29 with the average age first claiming straightedge being about 15 and the average age relinquishing straightedge being 22.

TABLE 1: Interviewee Information[12]

Name	Age	Ages sXe	Occupation/Field	Int. Residence[13]	Yr Int.
Heidi	27	16-19	Undergraduate	New York, NY	2007
Rob	31	10-18	N/A	Brooklyn, NY	2007
Jim	32	14-28	Professional	Philadelphia, PA	2007
George	22	16-21	Undergraduate	New Jersey	2008
Joey	30	16-24	Accounting	New Jersey	2008
Dave	25	18-23	Restaurant Manager	New Jersey	2008
Ashley	25	14-16	Professional	E. Pennsylvania	2008
Mike	29	14-20	Television	Brooklyn, NY	2008
Sean	27	14-24	Bartender	Minneapolis, MN	2008
Jawsh	26	15-23	Artist	Minneapolis, MN	2008
Randy	26	17-22	Waiter	Minneapolis, MN	2008
Mason	20	14-18	Social Work	North Dakota	2008
Tom	21	13-21	Undergraduate	Minneapolis, MN	2008
Shawn	33	14-23	Cook	New Jersey	2008
Joe	26	14-25	Bartender	Minneapolis, MN	2008
Billy	23	17-19	Graduate Student	New Jersey	2008
Derek	25	16-21	Musician	Minneapolis, MN	2008
Danny	27	17-23	Professional	New Jersey	2008
Christian	28	14-22	Graduate Student	New York, NY	2008
Stefanie	25	13-19	Retail	Philadelphia, PA	2008
Natalie	32	16-26	Photographer	Minneapolis, MN	2012
Donny	27	14-19	Restaurant Worker	Minneapolis, MN	2012
Margaret	28	14-23	Attorney	New Jersey	2012
Aaron	25	12-18	Advertising	Brooklyn, NY	2012
Jay	25	14-24	Undergraduate	Toronto, ON	2012
Todd	21	14-19	Undergraduate	Toronto, ON	2012
Raul	29	18-27	Social Work	E. Pennsylvania	2012
Marcus	28	12-18	Worker's Disability	E. Pennsylvania	2012
Thrasymachus	31	14-27	Philosopher	Washington, DC	2012
Curtis	30	15-29	Govt. Worker	Washington, DC	2012
Roosevelt	25	19-23	Graduate Student	Cincinnati, OH	2012
Simon	29	14-22	Human Resources	New Jersey	2012
Jared	27	15-25	Social Work	Oakland, CA	2012
Navin	28	20-27	Librarian	Upstate New York	2012
Dan	18	13-16	High School Student	W. Pennsylvania	2012
Brad	30	13-27	Technician	Nashville, TN	2012

[12] other localities where interviewees told me they had lived while participating in straightedge that are not represented by their current residences where the majority of face-to-face interviews took place include various non-major metropolitan areas within the states of Wisconsin, South Dakota, Florida, New Hampshire, Virginia, Michigan, and Kentucky, as well as the notably larger metropolitan cities of Milwaukee WI, Boston MA, Louisville KY, Charlotte NC, and Chicago IL.

[13] All but two interviews took place in the location listed as each informants' current residence or "Int. Residence"

Micah	32	16-23	Librarian	Nashville, TN	2012
Mark	21	16-21	Undergraduate	New Jersey	2012
Steve	43	15-20	Body Artist	Iowa	2012
Claudette	27	14-18	Catering	Winnipeg, MB	2012
Ed	24	13-23	Banker	Pittsburgh, PA	2012
J-Dub	31	17-30	Graduate Student	Brooklyn, NY	2012
Johnie	28	15-21	Makeup Artist	Brooklyn, NY	2012
Costanza	26	14-21	Non-Profit Worker	Chicago, IL	2013

Conclusion

Since previous analysts' conceptual decisions have led to the underdevelopment of the ex-subculturalist to this point, I have presented a careful conceptual and methodological mapping of the way to the ex-subculturalist. In brief, a ground-up emphasis upon native discourses and value systems while maintaining an eye for substance and its potentialities, where applicable, can open the possibilities of ex-identity through the ways former identities can potentially shape current lives and the ways that former identities like straightedge can be cast into a different light once relinquished. While in following suit with these bases, the primary contribution of this study does rest in charting life after straightedge, there nonetheless exists a wealth of documentary accounts of active adherents to overview in the interest of providing the sort of contextualizing background necessary for the reader to more fully understand the typifications used by respondents, and thereby the conclusions presented in the upcoming empirical chapters.

CHAPTER 4

ON STRAIGHTEDGE (AND HARDCORE)

(I) Don't smoke,
(I) Don't drink,
(I) Don't fuck,
At least I can fucking think.

I can't keep up,
I can't keep up,
I can't keep up,
Out of step with the world. (Minor Threat 1983)

Rebellion against Punk (Non)Rebellion

Straightedge first developed in the early 1980s from within the punk rock music

scene, most notably that in Washington DC. During these times class divisions were

growing, the political climate was becoming increasingly conservative with the rise of

Reaganism and Thatcherism, and Cold War threats of nuclear conflict loomed over youth

as they grew into and past adolescence. Against this backdrop, punk rock's prevailing

strands—in both Britain and America—came to be hallmarked by a rejection of a

perceived dreariness in traditional work and family goals, at times an outright embrace of

nihilism, but perhaps most significantly lifestyles that often emphasized hedonistic self-

indulgence to their greatest excesses. The early 1980s in America were also a time whtn

saw the War on Drugs was in full flower, and the contemporaneous emergence of the

Christian Right to the center stage of American politics itself placed an indelible mark

upon youth culture and youth values more generally speaking (see Liebman and

Wuthnow 1983), both of which prior analysts seem to agree provided at least added latent

support for an anti-drug punk movement to evolve (Haenfler 2006; Wood 2003, 2006).

In any case, many punk rockers of the day channeled their rejection of what they

saw as status quo lifestyles into excessive intoxication and adherence to a "live fast, die

young/no future" ethos. This came to be seen by some within the punk scene—who were

themselves equally discontented with the mediocrity they perceived in mainstream

cultural goals and expectations—as no real rebellion at all against a larger society that

itself glorifies alcohol, intoxication, cigarettes, and casual sex (Haenfler 2006; Peterson

2009). These—perhaps at the time collectively fomenting—sentiments questioning (the

efficacy of) punk indulgence are well captured in this interview excerpt from Porcell,

founder of seminal 1980s New York straightedge band Youth of Today, as he reflects

upon the state of the punk scene when he first moved to New York City:

> When I first got to New York I hated the [punk] scene. Where was the punk, the
> alternative? I mean, the clothes were dirtier and people had weirder haircuts, but
> basically they were doing the same things that every burnout in high school was
> doing—listening to music, getting drunk, and getting in fights. They reminded
> me of my older brother, only he'd get plastered and go to OZZY shows, and
> punks would huff glue and go to CB's. So what's the difference? I had gotten
> into punk to get away from all that junk in the first place. I think that's why the
> whole straightedge thing caught on in the city. People were ready for a real
> alternative. They wanted something with substance, with a message,
> something that was going to help them rise above their miserable surroundings,
> not get them deeper into it. – Porcell in (Lahickey 1997, p. 130 - 131)

In Washington DC like-minded sober teenage punk rockers found themselves in a

situation where they were either not allowed into punk shows by clubs owners because

owners feared the fines they would incur should underagers be caught consuming in their

venue, or if they were allowed in, they were subject to having large black magic marker

X's drawn on the backs of their hands as a means of distinguishing them from those who were of age. These youth soon appropriated the X, first as a practical means of gaining access to shows, but shortly thereafter as a marker of collective identity. On gaining access to shows, Ian Mackaye, former bass player for the DC-based Teen Idles and vocalist for Minor Threat who is also credited with coining the term straightedge, recounts:

> They [the club owners] were in this peculiar position. There is a loophole in the law in DC—its says that minors are not allowed to be in bars but it also says that if you're going to sell alcohol then you must sell food. So technically in Washington DC there is no such thing as a bar, there are only restaurants. The reason clubs were not admitting people underage was that they knew the penalty for serving minors was far more severe than discriminating against them by not letting them in. The second reason was if you have a bar, and a kid cant drink, they're not going to buy a drink and it would be an economic faux pas to let them in. So we found out about this law and went down to this club, and we basically said 'hey legally we can be in here, but we know we can't drink. So we're not going to drink, and to prove it we are going to put these X's on our hands.' They dug it and said 'OK'. so we did it, and it worked. –Ian Mackaye in (Lahickey 1997, p.103)

Image 1

The black magic marker X was featured on the Teen Idles' (1981) album cover (see

Image 1) and was linked to straightedge as its primary and most distinctive emblem when

Mackaye later posited the physical and mental benefits of living drug free while singing

for Minor Threat in the song "Straight Edge". In the lyrics, Mackaye screams:

> I'm a person just like you.
> But I've got better things to do.
> Than sit around and fuck my head.
> Hang out with the living dead.
> Snort white shit up my nose.
> Pass out at the shows.
> I don't even think about speed.
> That's something I just don't need.
>
> I've got the straight edge.
>
> 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 ideas.
> 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 1981)

From this song, "straightedge" became a discursive tool for those tending toward sober

lifestyles in the punk scene to simultaneously identify as distinct from their punk peers,

their schoolmates and/or coworkers, and what they perceived as the goals of the

mainstream adult world. Many of those adopting straightedge soon began "X-ing up", or

placing black X's on the backs of their hands on their own accord (as shown in Image 1),

as a marker of identity and shared pride, regardless of whether they were underage or

their admission into a venue was at stake.

Straightedge soon proliferated to other numerous other localities through Minor Threat's music, the circuitry of things like punk rock pen pals, and coverage in punk rock fanzines or "zines"[14], among others. The drug free message of straightedge was taken up by a host of other bands from coast to coast in the early 1980's who themselves helped foster straightedge communities in their respective localities as well as in the areas they toured through—perhaps most notable among these early bands being Nevada's 7 Seconds, Los Angeles' Uniform Choice, and Boston's SSD (Society System Decontrol) and DYS (see Haenfler 2006; Kuhn 2009; Peterson 2009).

It wasn't necessarily the case that these—and other—bands were playing music that was sonically, aesthetically, and lyrically similar to their punk contemporaries with the addition of occasionally promoting a drug free lifestyle. Many earlier bands bearing the banner of straightedge were also coming toward a decidedly faster, more abrasive, and louder brand of music, one where more radicalized politics, issues of self-actualization and social change anchored lyrical themes. Indeed, in rejecting the complacency they perceived in punk's nihilistic hedonism, the earliest hardcore bands were very much attempting to do much more than merely shock with any sort of sound or appearance.

Movements: Enduring (and Shifting) (Hard)Core Straightedge Values

Given its origins, it is nearly impossible to isolate straightedge from hardcore music, or to discuss straightedge without reference to hardcore. To be sure, straightedge

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[14] Schilt (2003) defines zines as small independently published fan magazines with limited distribution that are typically free or sold for a token price, most often printed on cheap newsprint. Kuhn (2009) perhaps correctly identifies the international "Maximumrocknroll" (1982 – present) and Minneapolis-based "Profane Existence" (1989 – present) as being among the most prominent, enduring, and far reaching—if not outright canonizing—zines in the history of straightedge.

and hardcore do not possess any sort of necessary or essential linkage; they can certainly exist independently—there are many who either strongly affiliate with or casually enjoy what is thought of as hardcore music who have never associated with straightedge, and likewise, it is conceivable that some straightedge adherents may not like or associate with hardcore music at any point in their lives. Yet, straightedge and hardcore arose very much connected to one another, and their continued mutual relationship up through the present day perhaps cannot be overstated. Hardcore music, artifacts related to hardcore, and hardcore shows continue to provide the primary media through which straightedge's messages are proliferated, adherents gather to socialize, and certain thematic core values are retained (Haenfler 2006; Irwin 1999; Peterson 2009). For these reasons, my interviewees as well as myself also frequently reference hardcore when speaking of straightedge throughout the rest of this manuscript.

Shifts and persistent themes in straightedge are closely tied up with those that have occurred within hardcore music more generally from its early 1980's inception onward. Though prior estimates vary somewhat (cf. Haenfler 2006; Kuhn 2009; Peterson 2009), straightedge and hardcore can be loosely divided up into four—mostly— successive eras that I approximate as: old school hardcore punk (1980 - 1985), youth crew positivity (1984 - 1992), 1990's politically correct (1991 - 1999), and globalized diversity into the 21st Century (2000 - present). Each movement is generally hallmarked by its own distinctive slant on 1) style 2) sonic and ritual aesthetics, 3) foci for ethics and politics 4) as well as internal schisms and tensions; and each is fundamentally shaped by and a response to its forerunner. In no way are these distinctions necessarily comprehensive, closed to degrees of reasonable disagreement, or as temporally

circumscribed as presented, nor should they be treated as such—it is certainly impossible to provide a definitive account that can unfurl every layer of complexity or exhaust the horizons of all possible experiential exactitudes that may be related to these phenomena. Yet, a historicizing overview of the spirit underlying these movements can nonetheless capture certain core themes, typifications, and potentialities within straightedge and hardcore.

The elements in each era, though of their time in straightedge (and hardcore) culture, tpersist in some form—if just on a smaller or retrenched scale—past the time of their predominance. Some adherents favor elements of older style, values, and/or ethics; and it is not uncommon for adherents coming of age in later eras to delve into straightedge (and hardcore) history and latch onto elements that were predominant in earlier iterations, sometimes leading to periodic revivals (see Haenfler 2006). The elements that arguably distinguish each loosely defined era of straightedge have certainly led to various—even hybridized—individual iterations of straightedge, and it is often the case that differing—at times opposing—meanings related to straightedge are picked up by different adherents. There remain, however, common threads that cross-cut and inform differences and variations in straightedge, and through these we can also characterize it as a relatively substantive referent in terms of Hodkinson's (2002, 2004) framework outlined in the prior chapter, especially through the cultural durability it has exhibited now moving through its fourth decade.

Old School

What we might call old school hardcore punk arose along with straightedge more or less in response to what was perceived as superficiality in the excessive intoxication and image-centered spectacularism that pervaded punk at the time. The earlier 1980's (roughly 1980 - 1985) saw hardcore punks and old school bands distinguish themselves from their traditional punk counterparts in a variety of ways. Many did so in large part through the vehicle of straightedge, but also by favoring a plainer mode of self-presentation and coming toward more abrasive politically-infused music. These emphases are core themes that persist in straightedge culture.

In no small way contradicting the CCCS and Hebdige's (1979) notion of "semiotic warfare", hardcore punks largely rejected the notion that much of anything could be accomplished by shocking with any sort of look or image such as that found in punk's mohawks, safety pins, or ripped clothing (Lahickey 1997; Peterson 2009). Instead, earlier hardcore punks favored a more pared-down look less at odds with mainstream stylings of the day—plain t-shirts, jeans, shaved heads, and military boots chief among them (Peterson 2009, Wood 1999). This deliberate rejection of pretension and emphasis on simplicity is also reflected in the sound and constitution of the earliest hardcore bands. Band membership was idealized as accessible and open for all to explore due to an overt rejection of musicianship and technical prowess; song structures in early hardcore music were straightforward and purposively uncomplicated much like those in punk music, but old school hardcore bands crucially broke from their punk predecessors by playing decidedly faster, coarser, and angrier (Peterson 2009).

Lyrical themes followed suit with an increasing emphasis on more pointed social criticism and self-actualization, often underscoring the notion that one cannot be true to oneself or meaningfully separate from or begin to take on the pitfalls of the modern world if they are distracted by things like intoxication and various other perceived superficialities. Early Boston straightedge outfit DYS echoes these sentiments and hints toward a belief—perhaps emerging among many adherents at the time—that straightedge can be a means to a greater end in their song "More than Fashion"

> More than X's on my hand
> More than being in a straightedge band
> I see no good in my mind getting fucked
> A needless vacuum, I won't be sucked
> Straight Mind
> Razor Edge
> Firm footing on a social ledge (DYS 1983)

The values of inclusivity and self-actualization are reflected in the Do It Yourself (DIY) ethic that participants emphasized in constructing the straightedge and/or hardcore community. Enthusiasts following this ethic might do anything from arranging venues for shows, volunteering time to distribute flyers, creating and distributing independent fanzines, or adhering to what has come to be understood as a "support your scene" ethos by simply supporting bands through continued attendance at local shows (Haenfler 2006; Peterson 2009).

DIY shows were typically booked—and continue to take place—in smaller, more intimate venues where physical distance and distinction between bands and audience was

ideally as limited as possible[15], ultimately casting both as relatively equal actors in a larger unfolding act (see Goffman 1959). Regarding intimacy in these instances, old school hardcore punk shows mirrored that of their punk predecessors and contemporaries via audience members showing their affection for bands primarily via slamdancing, a ritual "in which participants (mostly men) violently hurl their bodies at one another in an area known as a 'pit'" (Tsitsos 1999, p. 397) typically located very close to the area where the band plays to the ends of sustaining a reciprocally constitutive energy between band and audience during the performance of music (see also Scott Simon 1997). This sort of ritual communion—perhaps especially[16]—alongside other emphasized modes of accessible participation paved the way for participants to envision and subjectively experience distinctive community and inject meanings into straightedge that extended beyond simply living drug free much in the same vein as DYS pushes toward in their lyrics.

Like all movements in straightedge, it would be an overstatement to characterize the old school era as providing any sort of comprehensive or independent network for adherents. Yet its impetus vitally established the centrality of hardcore music and hardcore music shows to straightedge, the idealization of the DIY ethic, the budding idea that straightedge could provide a vehicle to ends greater than simple abstinence, and the notion that some mutually identifying community beyond individual straightedge adherents existed. Though each of these elements more or less continue to characterize

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[15] Indeed, the physical barriers and formal security characteristic of larger concert venues are generally met with disdain, and are perceived as impediments to the ritual closeness idealized between audience and band.

[16] On the level of community potentialities, these rituals—in their varying iterations throughout the history of straightedge and hardcore—can in many ways be likened to the liminal generativity Turner (1967, 1969) outlines in his writings on "communitas" and manifest in accord with what Durkheim (1912) earlier conceived of as "collective effervescence".

prevailing iterations of straightedge, they also laid the groundwork for additional political and ethical meanings attached to straightedge to emerge, and face internal contestation.

Youth Crew

Many straightedge adherents participating in the elaboration of what is often called the youth crew era (1984 – 1992) took both the notion of community and the idea that straightedge could be a means to a greater end much further than their predecessors, especially in the domain of what was thought to be forging larger social change through clean living. It was increasingly believed among straightedge adherents that living a moral, drug free lifestyle would enable them to make a positive impact on the surrounding world during the mid 1980s (Peterson 2009). Also, slogans like "True Till Death" popularized by Chain of Strength's (1989) song of the same title cemented the idea that straightedge was to be taken on as a lifetime commitment during this era.

The DIY ethic continued to be a focal point in youth crew hardcore, but notions of distinctive community were further solidified in frequent appeals to "unity"—both lyrically and in the ritual of the show—in the middle to late 1980's (Wood 1999, 2006); and many were seeking to extend the sort of energy and passion they experienced participating in hardcore show rituals positively to the outside world (Haenfler 2006; Peterson 2009). This era saw the "sing-along" rise to prominence where show goers emphatically flood the stage area—often piling on top of one another—and share in singing songs with their favorite bands, most often to refrains or slogans built into song structures that either employ or call for group vocals to bring the room together (see Image 2 for a visual example from a performance by 1990s Seattle straightedge act

Trial). Exemplifying the themes of commitment, unity, and positive change around the

sing-along slogan "Nailed to the X" is New York City hardcore outfit Bold in their

(1988) song "Nailed to the X"

> Straightforward actions, common goals
> Working together with straight clean souls
> Working for a common cause, the youth unite
> Join with us in our fight
> NAILED TO THE X (repeat 4 times)
>
> We have goals in our minds we're not blind
> Working for the better youth,
> we're the future of mankind
> Working for better youth, the best we can
> Join with us, we have a plan
> NAILED TO THE X (repeat 8 times) (Bold 1988)

Youth crew hardcore also marked more definitive sonic and stylistic break from punk

through an even harder sound and an often deliberately straight-laced look—things like

crew-cut hair, letterman's jackets (often featuring an X and/or the word "straightedge" on

the back), hooded sweatshirts, and high-top basketball shoes were quite common, among

other things (Haenfler 2006; Lahickey 1997). As for pathways to self-actualization and

social change, vegetarianism, spirituality, and abstinence from promiscuous sex became

very prominently linked to straightedge for many during this time as well (Haenfler 2006;

Wood 2006).

Image 2

The infusion of these varied forms of politics can be largely attributed to the influence of hardcore bands of the time that championed these ideals like Youth of Today, Shelter, and 108 among others. Certainly already among those influential in grounding the more general philosophy that straightedge was a pathway to personal empowerment that could better society, Youth of Today notably introduced vegetarianism into straightedge by taking issue with the ethics of consuming meat in their song "No More" from their third studio album. The band also shot a music video for the song that was passed through the scene trans-locally on VHS tapes at the time, and in

which the band also places above-mentioned ritual and straight-laced aesthetics front and

center alongside their message[17]. In the song, singer Ray Cappo pleads

> No More (repeat 4 times)
> Meat eating flesh eating think about it
> so callous to this crime we commit
> always stuffing our face with no sympathy
> what a selfish, hardened society
> No More just looking out for myself, when the price is the life of something else
> No More, I won't participate
> No More (repeat 4 times)...
> ...our numbers are doubling in 88
> cause the people are starting to educate
> themselves their friends and their families
> and we'll have a more conscious caring society
> are you with me? if you're with me, say No More! (Youth of Today 1988)

Vegetarianism became inextricably linked with straightedge culture after the release of

"No More", and this remains the case up to the present day; Youth of Today's Porcell

recounts the time

> After the Youth of Today 'No More' song came out, practically the whole scene
> went vegetarian. When we wrote that song, we weren't sure if kids would be into
> the idea or completely turned off by it. But we didn't care. It was such an urgent
> message, and we figured that if people were really serious about not poisoning
> their bodies and polluting their minds, they'd take to it. Pretty soon being a
> vegetarian became synonymous with being straightedge. It really inspired me to
> think that others were actually taking the message of the music to heart. Things
> were starting to change, and it really gave us a revolutionary spirit. We were out
> to change the world.– Porcell in (Lahickey 1997, p. 131)

Minor Threat's Ian Mackaye also saw compatibility in straightedge's eventual linkage to

vegetarianism. In reflecting back upon straightedge as a vehicle for change in his own

life, Mackaye commented

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[17] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFUqrzCZOuo

> I think vegetarianism was a logical step for straightedge, For me, it was logical.
> To me, its a process. The idea in my life, of the process that is, is re-examining
> things given to me and seeing if they work and constantly working to try to make
> myself better—do a better job in the world. So it just seemed to make sense, it
> was logical. – Ian Mackaye in (Lahickey 1997, p.103)

The introduction of vegetarianism and animal rights prompted many to reconsider some

taken-for-granted aspects of the world around them, often to the ends of exploring other

avenues of personal change. Proliferating outward from New York City, a notable

amount of straightedge adherents explored spirituality through Hare Krishna toward the

end of the youth crew era. Krishna already overlapped with straightedge culture in its

forbidding meat, intoxication, gambling, illicit sex, and its emphasizing the illusory

nature of existence (Wood 2006). Krishna oriented albums like *Perfection of Desire*

(1990) by Shelter and the more metallic sounding *Holyname* (1992) from 108 were

particularly influential in putting Krishna on the straightedge hardcore map and inspiring

a host of other Krishna bands to form into the 90's. Many adopting Hare Krishna made

spirituality the central focus of their lives, and openly advocated Krishna consciousness

within straightedge and hardcore (Peterson 2009). For those drawn to it, Krishna added

the notion that straightedge was ideally practiced with deep existential introspection and

spiritual actualization. As the sentiments expressed in this excerpt from the Krishna

fanzine *War on Illusion* illustrate

> 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 have to dig back into the mire of
> false pleasures? – (cited from Wood 2006, p.56)

The closer fusion of vegetarianism, spirituality, and other things like abstinence from promiscuous sex with straightedge were not universally accepted among straightedge adherents, nor were they without controversy. In fact these spawned debate, deepened reflections on contradictions between ideals of straightedge and its lived reality, as well as outright backlash (see Peterson 2009). Many felt that the tenets of Krishna—or any organized religion for that matter—ran contrary to the self-driven individual freedom they idealized in straightedge, and perhaps so also much in line with straightedge forefathers Minor Threat's denunciation of organized religion as being "full of shit" in their (1981) song "Filler". Additionally, by the time the heyday of the youth crew era had passed, many were beginning to question and become cynical toward things like the relatively silent position of women in straightedge and hardcore in the face of its ostensible equalitarian spirit of inclusion (see Kuhn 2009; Peterson 2009). Likewise, the increasing range of ancillary attachments to straightedge that emerged in the youth crew era fostered an environment prone to varied internal claims regarding (in)authenticity based on levels of commitment, one where an "edger-than-thou" brand of one-upsmanship began to push toward intolerance (see Haenfler 2006; Lahickey 1997; Perterson 2009)[18]. While many grappled with and idealized reconciliation of these issues, others—perhaps most vociferously Boston's Slapshot—eschewed them and favored an iteration of straightedge that tried to divorce itself from the emerging politics of youth crew era straightedge.

Regardless of how one approached any in this range of issues though, their predominance in the youth crew era most significantly forced most straightedge

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[18] See also Hodkinson (2002) for an application of this phenomenon in Goth and Thornton (1995) in dance cultures.

adherents to develop ethical, moral, and spiritual positions on them through frameworks most outsiders crucially would certainly not likely find intelligible or easily relatable at first glance.

The 90s

The 1990s (particularly about 1991 - 1999) saw the politics in straightedge multiply, radicalize, and further splinter. Themes of deep commitment to straightedge persisted, an imperative of direct political activism even became attached to straightedge for many, and an air of political correctness abounded predominant strands of the scene. More broadly, the ideal that hardcore was to include substantive ideas was fully established during this time (Peterson 2009). It was not uncommon for hardcore bands—straightedge or not—in the 90s to spend considerable amounts of time between songs expounding upon lyrical meanings and speaking about issues they found significant; DIY hardcore shows likewise often featured activist tables and even invited speakers to raise awareness and foster discussion around a variety of issues—chief among these being animal rights, the environment, feminism, globalization, imperialism, anti-racism, anti-homophobia, and anti-sexism (see Peterson 2009). Likewise, donating the proceeds from hardcore shows to charities like homeless or women's shelters itself was not infrequent in the 90s (Haenfler 2006).

Whereas straightedgers in the youth crew era may have dabbled in vegetarianism, in the 1990s strict veganism became a salient part of straightedge in many cases, and scores of individuals and bands fervently bore the banner "vegan straightedge" and latched onto related overtly politicizing themes (see images 3 and 4). Though there are

many noteworthy vegan straightedge bands that emerged in the 1990s—Birthright,

Abnegation, Morning Again, Chokehold, Framework, and The Path of Resistance among

them—none are credited more for establishing and lending traction to "vegan

straightedge" in the earlier 1990s than Syracuse's Earth Crisis. In the song "New Ethic",

for example, vocalist Karl Buechner posits a moral imperative in abstaining from animal

derived products

> This is the new ethic.
> Animals' lives are their own, and must be given respect.
> Reject the anthropocentric falsehood that maintains the oppressive hierarchy of
> mankind over the animals. It's time to set them free.
> Their lives reduced to biomachines in the factory, farm and laboratory.
> Dairy, eggs and meat, fur, suede, wool, leather are the end products of torture,
> confinement and murder. I abjure their use out of reverence for all innocent life...
> Veganism is the essence of compassion and peaceful living.
> The animals are not ours to abuse or dominate...
> I abjure their use out of reverence for all innocent life (Earth Crisis 1995)

Image 3

Image 4

The move from vegetarian diets to unmitigated veganism mirrors that of other substantial

thrusts in straightedge culture through the 90s. Pushing straightedge and its ancillary

attachments toward their logical limits was becoming common among some adhering

youth in the 1990s. For instance, some reading purity and virtue in bodily discipline into

their commitment to a drug free lifestyle also started abstaining from things like

prescription medication and caffeine as part of straightedge (see Haenfler 2006).

The positive approach to social change through straightedge of the youth crew era likewise gave way to more militant stances, exemplified again by Earth Crisis in their rallying cry to cleanse society of drugs, alcohol, and the social problems they can create. Here, in the landmark song "Firestorm", Buechner screams:

> Street by street. Block by block. Taking it all back.
> The youth's immersed in poison. Turn the tide counterattack.
> 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 innocents' defense is 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...
> Corrupt politicians, corrupt enforcement, drug lords and dealers; all must fall.
> The helpless are crying out. We have risen to their call.
> A firestorm to purify. (Earth Crisis 1993)

Although never directly advocated by Earth Crisis, for some smaller factions of straightedge, the tendency toward militancy and the strictly linear radicalization of moral precepts resulted in a more full-fledged intolerance, ultimately culminating in "hardline". Hardline is typically a term used to describe straightedge adherents who are intolerant of persons who are not straightedge, violent, and/or militant about their beliefs more generally (Wood 2006), but in the 1990s it also became a point of identification and means of amplifying ideology for a minority of straighetdgers. Hardline propounded a comprehensive "in defense of all life" stance that justified violence against what was taken among hardliners as a "natural" orderings of things, ultimately deeming intoxication, consumption of animals, non-procreative sex acts, environmental degradation of any form, among other things, as unnatural and/or unethical (see image 5).

In this excerpt of the "Hardline Manifesto" penned by Southern California's Vegan Reich

hardline is

> ...a belief system, and a way of life that lives by one ethic—that all innocent life is sacred, and must have the right to live out it's natural state of existence in peace, without interference. This single ethic ensures that all life, from a foetus, or a grown human (black, white, male or female), to an animal, or it's habitat, is guaranteed equal rights, with liberty for all, regardless of someone's personal bias against them. Under the principals of the Hardline ideology, all shall be permitted to do as they please as long as their actions do not harm, in any way, the rights of others. Any action that does interfere with such rights shall not be considered a "right" in itself, and therefore shall not be tolerated. Those who hurt or destroy life around them, or create a situation in which that life or the quality of it is threatened shall from then on no longer be considered innocent, and in turn will no long have rights.
>
> Adherents to the hardline will abide by these principals in daily life. They shall live at one with the laws of nature, and not forsake them for the desire of pleasure—from deviant sexual acts and/or abortion, to drug use of any kind (and all other cases where ones harms all life around them under the pretext that they are just harming themselves). And, in following with the belief that one shall not infringe on an innocent's life—no animal product shall be consumed (be it flesh, milk or egg). Along with this purity of everyday life, the true hardliner must strive to liberate the rest of the world from it's chains—saving life in some cases, and in others, dealing out justice to those guilty of destroying it...[19]

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[19] accessed and excerpted online 11/4/12 <http://www.angelfire.com/ok2/sxethic/hlmanifest.html>

Image 5

Hardline was highly controversial both within straightedge culture and eventually to the

outside world. Within the scene, though not always necessarily politically charged, more

militant factions of straightedge formed "crews"—perhaps the most notorious of these

being the Midwestern-based "Courage Crew" and the East Coast's "F.S.U"—in the 90's,

or exclusive male-dominated groupings that are often likened to gangs in their being

hallmarked by hypermasculinity, territoriality, various sets of shared fetishized symbols,

a propensity toward violence, and the degrees of "mythafacation" their presence can

attain (see Purchla 2011). While the emergent minority of militant tendencies within the scene—be it in mutually identifying crews or not—toward intolerance, judgementalism, and/or violence fostered an intra-scene divide against the more politically correct ends of straightedge, the hardliners also put straightedge on the radar of mass culture via creating a handful of widely publicized moral panics toward the end of the 90's. Notable among negative media attention included an appearance on America's Most Wanted and straightedge was even classified as a full-fledged gang by the Salt Lake City police department. Indeed, straightedge militancy arguably hit its crescendo in 1990s Salt Lake City in particular where local straightedge militants attacked fur industry outposts around the city and assaulted various community members for intoxicant consumption, carving an "X" into one victim's back in one instance and even stabbing an intoxicated local 15-year-old leaving a Halloween party to death in another.

The sonic, ritual, and stylistic aesthetics associated with major strands of hardcore music in the 90s echoed these violent overtones, tendencies toward rigidity, and tribal mentality. For style, tattoos (straightedge or other)[20], camouflage shorts, matching clothing—perhaps most notably jackets—displaying hometown pride that demarcated one as part of a localized straightedge sect by way of slogans like "Syracuse Straightedge" or "New Jersey Straightedge" and bandanas—at times worn across the face as a means of striking an intimidating pose—were in vogue. A good deal of hardcore music fused with traditional elements of heavy metal where heavily distorted guitars, chugging riffs, and song structures that required a greater measure of precision and cleaner execution were favored. Sing-a-longs and lyrical sloganeering remained popular,

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[20] Straightedge tattoos became a means of affirming permanence and lifetime commitment for many adherents by the 1990s. For a fuller treatment of straightedge tattooing see (Atkinson 2003).

but with the rise of what is often referred to as "metalcore" there also developed a more technical style of dance that has become the cornerstone of most metal-oriented hardcore shows since the 1990s. "Hardcore dancing" typically takes place in larger open spaces in front of bands during live performances to slower metal-injected chugging guitar riffs called "breakdowns" where individual audience members show affection for bands—as well as the messages they may be advocating—via performing "windmills", "floorpunches", and more generally pantomiming fighting against the air via kung fu style kicking and punching in rhythm with the breakdown's chug, ultimately feeding off the energy of both the band and other dancers but generally remaining confined to individual space in an open area designated for dancing that is most often bordered by standing audience members (Driver 2011; Haenfler 2006, Purchla 2011, Tsistos 1999).

None of this is to say that straightedge could best be characterized as a violent movement in the 1990's. The era's political bent only led a smaller minority to radicalize precepts associated with straightedge to the point of intolerance or outright deliberate acts of violence. On the contrary it may be argued, the wider range of moral, ethical, and political issues that were injected into 1990's hardcore may have actually prompted most exposed to conceive of and sift their way through an increasingly complicated world as they came of age debating their place within issues like animal rights, environmentalism, protest, the usage of violence, gender. Thus, it is perhaps precisely the direct repudiation of certain hypermasculine and militant tendencies in straightedge that may have led many to develop more nuanced, critical positions on these issues to the ends of actually heightening the political correctness that is generally understood define the 1990s hardcore and straightedge scene (see Haenfler 2006, 2012; Peterson 2009).

Further in this vein, by the time the 90s came to a close, straightedge had also moved online, which expanded its reach and fostered a much larger discussion about issues within and outside of the scene (cf. Copes and Williams 2007; Haenfler 2006; Williams and Copes 2005; Wilson and Atkinson 2005). For one example, as the mission statement from XsisterhoodX—an online community launched in the 90s aimed at making young women feel welcome in straightedge and confront the above-outlined masculinist tendencies —reads: "XsisterhoodX strives to be a positive force in a scene divided. Our goal is to create balance and eliminate the biases which exist in today's global scene" - cited in (Kuhn 2009, p. 238).

Diverse Global

The increasingly digitized new century has seen straightedge proliferate and grow (roughly 2000 – present) in ways that adherents from prior eras might not have ever thought possible. Straightedge is now very much a global phenomenon accessible to all with an internet connection[21], and it has even attained a measure of commercial viability in the 21st Century (see Haenfler 2006; Kuhn 2009). For one thing, a greater number of bands—straightedge or other—with hardcore scene roots began receiving—and taking—increased opportunities to tour with more mainstream metal and punk acts in the 2000s on larger corporate "package tours" in commercial clubs with barriers and formal security, with appearances in North America's largest summer touring festivals like the Ozzfest and Warped Tour becoming regular occurrences. A small handful of bands,

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[21] Straightedge now possesses a sizable presence online. Messageboards and Facebook pages linked to local hardcore scenes aside, one encounters a torrent of (interactive) websites run by enthusiasts dedicated to straightedge upon a search of the term "straightedge websites", even including an exclusive straightedge dating site: dateedge.com (accessed 12/25/12).

including New York's H20 and Connecticut's Hatebreed, even signed on with major record labels in the earlier 2000s.

Perhaps in line with this expansion, the 2000s have also witnessed a move toward diversity and hybridity in hardcore. Now it is common for some scene bands to incorporate elements from other genres into their music, blending sounds from emo, indie rock, pop punk, grind, goth, and even death metal with various iterations of hardcore. A substantial contingent of others have taken a sharp turn toward outright heavy metal in the 2000s, becoming largely indistinct from metal in their embrace of its highly technical song structures and guitar leads. Some such metal oriented bands, like Southern California straightedge metalcore stalwarts Bleeding Through, even added keyboards into their sound. Prominent hardcore record labels like Victory, Bridge 9, and Equal Vision likewise all expanded their roster to include indie rock, emo, and varieties of other more profitable bands. As for style, the highly marketable "fashioncore" look developed in the earlier 2000s drawing upon metal, goth, and emo stylings and fusing them into an effeminate pose where tight black shirts, tattoos, dyed black hair, girl-fitted jeans and in some cases eye shadow and nail polish rose to popularity among youth of all genders (see Haenfler 2006), both inside and eventually outside hardcore circles.

Straightedge has even come to possess a bit of ubiquity in the 21st Century. A straightedge merchandise industry has hit full stride and its products have made their way into suburban malls at Hot Topic outlets world-wide. The term straightedge itself has perhaps found itself a niche in threads of the popular vernacular where it is now much more commonly recognized as connoting drug free living in places like school hallways and elsewhere. Even World Wrestling Entertainment has used straightedge as a

marketing gimmick by regularly penning a straightedge character named "CM Punk" into its act who has been soapboxing about his drug free lifestyle to wresting fans since 2006 (see Image 6).

Image 6

The developments of the past decade and a half have sparked new debates about and approaches to straightedge (community). While some embrace the proliferation of

straightedge's message and celebrate the fact that some bands now can make a modest living, others bemoan commercialization and believe that the purer intentions and transformative efficacy of straightedge have been watered down (see Haenfler 2006; 2012). The increased commercialization of hardcore and its concomitant professionalizing impersonality have likewise been met with great disdain among those who feel it betrays the DIY ethic and the spirit of egalitarian inclusion idealized by the movement's forbearers. Degrees of professionalization, commodification, and commerciality are perhaps not surprisingly perceived by some to be indicators of inauthenticity upon which counterclaims to possessing authenticity are in turn staked. At the same time hardcore and straightedge are expanding online and flirting with wider-reaching and ultimately more marketable forms, revivals that retrench and seek to keep prior ethics, sounds, and stylings alive tend to emerge in response. There are some straightedgers that disavow digitized music altogether in the present day, tend to only buy records direct from bands or other collectors, boycott package tours, and generally only follow bands that stay the course with ostensibly purer versions of older sonic aesthetics; and for every record label or band that expands into the mainstream they seem to be replaced by others who attempt to remain relatively confined to more DIY channels.   In any case, in the face of this mix in the present day, it is hard to argue against the notion that claims to straightedge have taken on a greater range of forms than ever before, the multiplicities of which extend beyond and thus perhaps—most significantly—even subsume those of earlier times inasmuch as they include and/or touch upon them.

Substantive (Sub)Cultural Variance

Since straightedge has evolved a good deal over the past 30 years yet has continuously manifested older forms, (and in spite of what some adherents might say to the contrary) it should be clear at this point that there is no one definitive way to be straightedge at any point in any time—there exists no formal leadership or necessarily fully agreed upon boundaries, and individuals' relationships with straightedge can change over the course of their lives (Haenfler 2006; Wood 1999, 2006). Beyond general abstinence from cigarettes, alcohol, and drugs, straightedge possesses an individualistic bent and can potentially mean different things to different adherents. Some see straightedge as more of an individual means of positive personal change; others see straightedge as largely providing connection with a larger community. Likewise, participation in hardcore is significant for many, but not highly important for others. Some directly attach veganism, activism, positivity, spirituality, a contrarian ethos, abstinence from sex, caffeine, prescription medicine, among other things to straightedge whereas other adherents do not pursue such attributes. Even for those who do not take up additional attributes that extend beyond intoxicants, almost all are compelled to develop positions on them.

Though internally variant in these ways, the central thrust of the movement finds the majority adherents aiming to attain disciplined control over their bodies and pursuing some vision of self-actualization through a lifetime commitment to clean living in the face of a larger culture that they perceive glorifying intoxication. In this way, as Haenfler's (2006) analysis concludes, straightedge shares in the emphases on purity and commitment in youth evangelical movements but does so via punk rock's "question

everything" mentality to the end's of tending toward the moral and ethical concerns of the New Left. Further, though many straightedgers share in the view that the larger modern world is dreary, mediocre, and unfulfilling much as the hippies and their punk peers, there is an overwhelming rejection of achieving self-actualization through things like sex and drugs, which are ultimately perceived as artificial avenues to these ends (see also Lahickey 1997; Peterson 2009).

In spite of the changing—and even at times competing—typifications or ordering schemaesin straightedge, it can be seen as a durable and *relatively* substantive referent. Straightedge adherents have generally readily identified (if not often outright emphatically so in many cases), constructed connection to and/or participated in a larger straightedge community, and developed their own discursive repertoires to account for and affirm their perceived difference from others. Straightedge adherents have likewise maintained a degree of distinctiveness through their continued rejection of intoxication as well as the usage of the X as a shared marker of solidarity. Straightedge has idealized autonomy since its inception and many continue to adhere to the DIY ethic. Relatedly, commitment has been a persistent theme throughout the whole of straightedge history as well where adherents use things like the space of hardcore shows and—more recently—cyberspace to coordinate relatively internal social networks (Cf. Atkinson 2003; Copes and Williams 2007; Haenfler 2006; Irwin 1999; Kuhn 2009; Peterson 2009; Wilson and Atkinson 2005; Wood 2006).

"Selling Out"

Despite its referential persistence and consistent surrounding absolutist rhetoric of lifetime commitment, the reality is that most adherents do not participate in straightedge into their 30's (Mullaney 2012; Wood 2006). Somewhat derisively typified as "selling out" or "breaking edge", leaving straightedge is generally a permanent transition that is most often marked by the usage of intoxicants or cigarettes. Even one drag off a cigarette or one drink of an alcoholic beverage is generally perceived to result in a clearly defined and permanent loss of straightedge identity (Haenfler 2006; Irwin 1999; Wood 2006).

Reactions to and perceptions of sell-outs are varied within straightedge culture, though most read fundamental change into the individual breaking edge. For instance, when members of prominent straightedge bands sell out, they are often seen as "fallen heroes" among remaining adherents (Haenfler 2006). Rumors and stories likewise abound of individuals who break edge and quickly became a different person, in some cases outright ruining their lives with alcohol and drugs.

In the context of mutually identified straightedge community, selling out can come to be viewed as less of a personal slip-up or change than a fundamental betrayal of friendship or insult to straightedge more generally. The website howsyouredge.com in the late 90s and early 2000s, for example, served as a looming and watchful repository where straightedge adherents would promulgate the names and stories behind the edge breaks of their sell out peers for the whole world to see.

In this vein, selling out most often does not lead prior friendships to dissipate; in fact good-natured ribbing on the matter is all that may result among friends. In some cases though, especially among more militant straightedgers, sell-outs can be treated as

outcasts and outright shunned by the larger group (Haenfler 2006). Slogans like "if

you're not (straightedge) now, you never were" are often applied to sell-outs, connoting

fundamental longstanding disingenuousness and inauthenticity on their part[22]. Calls for

violence against sell-outs do exist in some straightedge texts and a small minority of sell-

outs have doubtlessly faced violent backlash, though these are quite rare. Nonetheless,

perceptions of betrayal and fundamental change in sell-outs pervade straightedge culture.

For example, even Seattle's Champion, who was seen by many as among the primary

torchbearers of outwardly positive youth crew revivalism in the earlier 2000s exemplifies

these themes in their lyrics in the song "The Decline"

> I was reliving all those times we shared
> And it's hard, because there's nothing left of you
> And I can see you're not the same
> You used to be so strong, but time has changed you
> You turned away
>
> I keep on trying and trying to escape from the past
> Because those days used to mean so much
> We stood side by side and nothing else mattered
> We were Straight Edge and at least I still am
>
> Did you forget about what we said?
> Or did it just not mean that much?
> Sitting here with my head in my hands
> Wondering what happened to us
>
> Now only a whisper remains of the person I once knew
> We came, we conquered those days
> But now, now you're gone
>
> Don't tell me that you're the same
> Because you gave your heart away
> And in return you got nothing. (Champion 2002)

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[22] In fact, in the course of soliciting interviews with ex-straightedge adherents on internet messageboards for this project, on multiple occasions I received the response from messageboard users that my research is based upon a flawed premise given that there is no such thing as an ex-straightedger since if one is not straightedge now, they never were in the first place.

Conclusion

Though not all straightedge adherents leave the identity behind (see Haenfler 2012), the majority eventually does. Yet, at the same time, when a straightedge adherent breaks edge, another youth typically takes their place, and straightedge is now arguably more widespread than ever before in the present day. This overview should show that straightedge has undergone changes over the last three decades but has retained certain core values and ethics along the way that continue to expose adherents to and/or embed them within varieties of relatively distinctive frameworks and intra-scene issues that are often significant in contextualizing their worlds and situating adherents . Like other youth (sub)cultures, a fair amount of attention has been paid to documenting aspects of straightedge for active participants. Much like these other possible groupings, what is largely understated is what is it like to leave straightedge, what does straightedge look like to former adherents in hindsight, how does straightedge relate to other possible affiliations individuals might latch onto, how does adulthood comes to be articulated on the other side of an emphatically youthful identification like straightedge, and how might individuals be residually impacted by their former involvement with something like straightedge? It is to these issues, that I now turn.

CHAPTER 5

YOUTH (DIS)ILLUSIONMENT AND (STRAIGHTEDGE) IDENTITY IN RETROSPECT

As outlined in Chapter 3, a premise of this study is that reflections upon former identity affiliations can potentially animate these in ways that are distinct to the standpoint of retrospect where *broken typification* applies. This can shed unique light upon the contours of an abdicated identity both as a facet of an individual's subjective life history and as far as facilitating the interpretive researcher being able to access the fuller range of what a particular cultural form—like straightedge—can potentially mean. In this chapter I empirically trace interviewees' present-day reflections upon their youthful understandings of their broader world and the boundaries they once constructed within it, related growth surrounding and erosion of such perceptions, as well as the ways individuals may or may not believe distance and hindsight actively inform their current accounts.

This chapter begins with respondents' more descriptive narratives of straightedge aimed at 1) more comprehensively charting the processes by which individuals come to relinquish straightedge relative to prior scholarly and documentary accounts, while also 2) extending the scope of meanings interpretive inquiry has gleaned from straightedge via attending to meanings that might come into better view for individuals "after" straightedge is left behind, where applicable. From the more descriptive data, I turn back to applying theory to provide a preliminary formalistic (in the Simmelian sense, see

Simmel 1950) mapping of the cognitive strategies individuals deploy in now making

sense of the schematic boundaries that formerly ordered their subjectivities as these might

lead to a fuller, more balanced understanding of a cultural affiliation like straightedge.

By extension, presented data here support the claim that similar inquiry may be able

round out understandings of other elective through the ways the view "after" can

complement current theoretical tendencies toward emphasizing the "active" elements of

identification.   In particular, I find there are 1) differential understandings of self across

social time, 2) subjective (re)contextualization of social place, and 3) an altered relation

to and deployment of typifying schemes.

(Looking back upon) Constructing Youth Distinction

A common theme in empirical youth (sub)cultural studies is that youth carve out

spaces they believe provide them authentic distinction or desired self-image that is

measured against what is ultimately perceived as a mainstream conventional "other"

(Brake 1985; Muggleton 2000; Thornton 1995; Widdicombe and Woofit 1995); and it

could be said that is from these bases that that subjective social reality is often constituted

and lived for such youth (see Berger and Luckmann 1966). Much in line with this

perspective, when my respondents looked back upon what ultimately led them to get into

straightedge, they almost unanimously recounted feeling a need to assert—and oftentimes

emphatically so—separation from aspects of conventionality and/or elements of this

larger "other" they perceived in the world around their youth.

For a noteworthy some, their taking on straightedge ordering concepts, at least in

part, stemmed from direct experience with drugs and alcohol. In most of these cases,

exposure to straightedge through hardcore or punk music made straightedge a readily available option from which to more easily achieve distance from drug and alcohol culture via intoxicant disavowal. For example, Raul, a 29-year-old social worker from Eastern Pennsylvania who was straightedge from 18-27 said of growing up: "I came from a culture of alot of drugs and alot of alcohol abuse and what appealed to me about it was that it [straightedge community] was a support system for people who wanted...to straighten out and not follow the path I saw many of my friends going down". Where Raul references experiences with friends, there were others who specifically attributed relations with family members as leading them to want to use straightedge to categorically disassociate from intoxicants. For an example here, Brad, a 30-year-old technician living in Nashville who claimed straightedge from ages 13-27, told me his "father was a pretty big alcoholic and...seeing him act the way he did when he got drunk" had "stuck with" him and shaped the boundaries he formed alcohol consumption in his formative years, which culminated in the adoption of straightedge once he learned about it upon entering his local hardcore scene as a youth.

While some like Brad saw straightedge as compatible with a preexisting disposition toward intoxicant abstinence, there were others who only took it on after a period of experimentation (Wood 2006). Of those who had experimented with drugs or alcohol prior to committing to straightedge, most, like Navin, a 28 year-old librarian from Upstate New York who was straightedge from 20-27, said negative experiences with intoxicants had made outright separation from them appealing. In this vein, he recalled

When I was younger...I would drink socially with friends and at that time I would say I was a little bit like hypersensitive about issues and things like that. I would

get drunk and be upset. I was the unhappy drunk kid, I was sad depressed, and I was like what good is coming with this...this isn't a positive influence on my life

Overwhelmingly, though, the desire to construct distinctiveness through straightedge recounted by my sample stemmed from antipathy they directed at peers. This came in several forms. Perhaps like their old school hardcore punk forbearers, there were some, like Billy, a 23-year-old New Jersey graduate student who claimed straightedge from ages 17-19, who at least in part sought to forge a path different from the mindlessness he saw in the more drunk or nihilistic punks he encountered. Billy told me he particularly wished to distinguish himself from certain "people in the punk rock scene, the gutter punks, the crust punks…people who would literally go to people's houses where they were having shows and...destroy their bathroom, break beer bottles and get into fights".

The majority of respondents, however, most centrally invoked the ways they saw intoxication becoming glorified by peers—often ones they already felt apart from or marginalized by—in middle and high school as something they wanted to distinguish themselves against. For example, Randy, a 26 year-old Minneapolis waiter who was straightedge from ages 17-22, told me that straightedge was "a conscious decision...to separate myself from the herd in my mind" in reference to his high school classmates. Likewise, Jawsh, a 26-year-old Minneapolis artist who claimed straightedge from 15-23, looked back upon his earlier straightedge days providing "something to be involved in rather than be involved in the typical school activities and be something more than the normal standard and conforming to the norm". Jared, a 27-year-old social worker in Oakland that affiliated with straightedge from ages 15-25, echoed these sentiments but also perhaps better articulates the ways he, like the vast majority of my informants, once

believed the signs of straightedge provided him tools upon which he could assert

definitive difference from his peers at school regarding intoxicant consumption

> The people that were at my school were drinking and doing drugs. So in a way it was setting myself apart from them, and I think that's why the label fit so well, and why I liked the label, and the fact that you can wear a [straightedge] shirt or "X up" at school on 4/20... it was kind like a way to separate yourself from the people you don't like, because I hated everyone that I went to school with. Its a great way to separate yourself from the norm when the norm is that teenagers drink and they do drugs or they smoke or whatever it is.

In exploring abstinence as a broader social form, Mullaney (2006) finds that abstinence

can particularly become meaningful or discursively nominated when a contrasting

expectation of "doing" becomes prevalent. Here, it was not just the perceived

glorification of intoxication within mainstream youth culture that anchored tendencies

toward abstinence through straightedge for respondents, many also frequently referenced

synchronicity between what they saw as their archetypical schoolmates at the time and a

larger culture that they recalled their younger selves starkly seeing as equally mired in

superficial pursuits. For instance, Christian, a 28-year-old graduate student living in New

York City that participated in straightedge from 14-22, described straightedge as

providing a reference group he could use to stand out against the—in this case

suburban—social context he grew up in at the same time as separating from his

immediate peers in his age cohort. He touched upon the similarities he perceived during

this time in both his school and hometown culture when telling me

> I hated the social structure of high school. I hated everything I saw, I was angry, I was the guy who thought that everyone else's priorities were all fucked up—they don't care about anything that matters. I just remember feeling in like 10th grade...all the kids around me were like "whose older brother can buy us beer" on a Friday afternoon at 5pm/.../I hated where we were growing up. I mean it was

cool until you reach the level of conscious thought, like it's a great place to be a kid and be raised but once you realize that something is missing, it becomes brutal. It's a cultural and intellectual blackhole and I'm like "ok I need to get out of that"….It [straightedge] not only provided a group of people who had the same feeling, but also provided a means essentially.

It was common for interviewees' perceptions of their peers and larger society to further feed into the idea that one's ability to grow as a person or achieve their potential would be severely hampered if pursuits like intoxication are incorporated into their lives, to any degree. In this vein, Mike, a 29-year-old Brooklyn resident who was straightedge from ages 14-20 and who now works in television, represented feelings more fully when discussing the ways he, perhaps much like Jared, used straightedge as a direct confrontation tool with his former schoolmates

I mean its not like I was this little Bolshevik but...at the time I went to school with all these rich kids and being straightedge was kind of like in their faces. They could have their parents buy them booze whenever they wanted to have their parties...I was kinda pissed at that, like they could get cars whenever they wanted, they could get booze, they were happy with their life, like they didn't want anything more. That's what I would definitely talk about [to them], like is that all you care about? Like getting some beer? To me, I felt like taking that out I would accomplish more as a person. And I think that's where I sorta got the superiority complex, from that...like I'm gonna get stuff done cause I'm not out like getting shitfaced and I'm gonna feel fine tomorrow

Mike was far from alone in saying that he understands straightedge as providing him feelings of moral superiority as a youth. Aaron, a 25-year-old living in Brooklyn who was straightedge from ages 12-18 and works in advertising said that looking back: "I didn't just feel like I was distancing myself. I felt like I was putting myself above". While Aaron's reflections upon feeling "above" the negative influences he perceived in the world at the time are self-focused, others recalled conceiving of a larger mutually

identifying straightedge community when conveying such feelings. Margaret a 28-year-old New Jersey attorney who claimed straightedge from 14-23 told me that she can see that she "did feel in some ways...that we [straightedgers] were better than other people [and] we made more sense in my opinion, and I felt that we were more responsible than other youth".

Through interviewees' reflections back upon the boundary-work they engaged in as youths, we can see accounts that strongly align with the general conclusion that youth tend toward constructing opposition against a perceived homogenous mainstream "other" while they affiliate with subculture (Brake 1985; Muggleton 2000; Thornton 1995; Widdicombe and Woofit 1995). Thus, there is strong congruence exhibited between the conclusions of previous studies focused on "active" subculturalists and how youthful boundary-work is recounted in fuller hindsight in this data. At the same, there were significant aspects of interviewees' reflections upon their youth boundaries that were distinct to asserted distance and retrospect, and that are thereby not well represented in existing literature[23].

Recent scholarly studies on individuals who retain identity and age within various traditionally youth-oriented cultures has shown that older participants often temper their youthful conceptions in a manner that is compatible with the inevitabilities of aging into and engaging the adult world (cf. Bennett and Hodkinson 2012). In this vein, while it is certainly not uncommon for older adherents of straightedge or other like-subcultures to idealize a purer "back in the day" time (Haenfler 2006, 2012), those who left the affiliation in this study's sample couched their reflections in a stark and almost

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[23] The manner in which an affiliation like straightedge is animated differentially from asserted hindsight is parsed more fully at the end of this chapter following the present descriptive focus

mythical—and perhaps even longing—light, especially as far as the extent they told me

they see their younger counterpart as believing they had the world figured out through the

precepts of straightedge. Joey, a 30-year-old accountant from New Jersey who was

straightedge from ages 16–24, told me he felt he was in "an awesome dream world"

while straightedge. Dave, a 25-year-old New Jersey restaurant manager who claimed

from 18-23 called straightedge "living the dream". For her part, Johni, a 28-year-old

Brooklyn make-up artist who was edge from ages 15-21, invoked the intersection of punk

when she said: "when I found punk, I thought that it was like this…promised land".

Heidi, a 27-year-old college student from New York City who was straightedge from

ages 16–19 perhaps articulates her changing perceptions of finding an authentic place

within a more fully settled world through the precepts of and community provided by

straightedge best when she said

> I kind of had this idea in my head that straightedge and punk were this place, this
> fictional place. Well, it was real; it was real to me *at the time*, [a place] where I
> would be accepted….I mean, this is the idea I had in my head; that these are
> people that know what's up, and they like this music, and they're not distracted by
> drugs and alcohol. And then I also saw all the really popular people who I hated
> [at school] who just gave me shit all the time and they were just always getting
> wasted, and the girls were all big sluts, and I had bad run-ins with them when I
> was younger.

When relaying to me what they now see as the view through the eyes of their *past* self,

interviewees frequently contextualized their former typifying schemes in strikingly black

and white terms around the crux of identification with straightedge. This was particularly

pronounced when informants reflected upon the initial phases of their participation

in/identification with straightedge and its role in constituting what they see as their

youthful counterpart's self-concept. Much as Heidi's excerpt illustrates, such perceptions

of straightedge did not last—she also told me she chalks them up to "the beauty of being young or totally uncompromising and have ideals". Likewise, Mike, the Brooklyn resident who works in television, looked back with a sense of humor upon his former beliefs that "drugs are clouding people's minds" and that he and his straightedge contemporaries "could change the world" when he told me he eventually "saw that people also could be drunk and change things (laughs)." And Billy, the New Jersey graduate student who expressed antipathy for drunk punks, continued on to say about his initial perceptions of those punks that

> I don't really know how much was due to drug use or due to alcohol use. It's not necessarily a causation but more of a correlation. Those people just happened to be destructive and they happened to be toxic people to be around and they happened to do drugs. At the time I'm sure I equated one causing the other. In retrospect I'm not sure that's what it was. These kids might have been as destructive as they are without having done drugs. *At the time* I saw it that way, and I wanted to distance myself from them.

Boundary Erosion: From the Mundane to Fantastical

Interviewees discussed a number of issues that drove ultimate change in the ordering constructs that once guided their accomplishment of straightedge. Distinct—though not necessarily exclusive—themes emerged that overlay and inform these departures. Despite ranging from a more mundane fading significance in the course of aging to more deeply intellectually considered introspective reflection, respondents' looks back upon the processes that led up to their abdication of straightedge were, crucially, generally placed in terms that were far from inconsequential as interviewees saw it, especially insofar as the erosion of straightedge boundaries marked a fundamental

break in where they subjectively perceived themselves in social time and space over the

longer run.

Backgrounding, Aging, and Life Exposure

For some, moving past straightedge—either partly or more fully—involved its

simply receding to the backburner of their consciousness. For these individuals, the

identity diminished in salience and ordered their understandings of self in fewer contexts

over time. Straightedge was indicated as eventually being relegated to the domain of

habit in these instances, where the active boundary-work that fueled its initial impetus

largely faded out of day-to-day relevance. To these ends, Danny, a 27-year-old New

Jersey professional who was straightedge from ages 17-23, described a slow fading

importance as he aged, up to the point where he decided to leave straightedge behind

when he said

> I guess as far as relinquishing the identity I had kind of grown apart from thinking
> of myself in those terms, and over time straightedge wasn't like something that I
> guess that I defined myself by as much—it was a part of my life but it wasn't a
> central part of my life, and eventually it wasn't that important to my
> life...straightedge definitely gave me something to cling to when I was
> younger, it/[which] wasn't something that occurred to me at the time

Others more directly invoked community and the changing shape of friendship circles as

feeding into straightedge's weakening significance in their daily lives, particularly at the

intersection of participation in hardcore or punk. Complementing Haenfler's (2012)

findings that individuals who retain straightedge identity into their 30's and 40's recast it

with meanings aimed away from community, my sample indicates those whose

identification with straightedge rested more heavily with a larger collective than as an

individual enterprise were more prone to move out of the identity. Micah, the 32-year-old Nashville librarian introduced in Chapter 1, described what it was like to leave straightedge behind by taking his first drink at the age of 23 in relation to a community that had, by that time, largely faded out of his view

> By that point...I don't know that I really thought about straightedge much. I wasn't hanging out with anybody who was straightedge [any longer], I wasn't surrounded by those people. Most of those people quite frankly had either plucked off and were no longer straightedge or had no interest in the hardcore scene. So most of my friends were basically gone. I maybe knew one or two of those people, but they were basically gone...so it wasn't something like where I had really thought about it. So having that drink was kind of like "ok"...it [straightedge] ran its course almost.

In line with Micah's belief that straightedge community had run its course in his life, and partly echoing revisions that individuals make as they negotiate youth-oriented cultural distinction and adulthood (cf. Bennett and Hodkinson 2012), the compatibility of an assertion like straightedge and one's sense of place in the context of the inevitabilities of aging into the adult and/or younger adult world weighed in on many respondents' narratives. Some were in fact quite blunt about this. Natalie, a 32-year-old Minneapolis photographer who was straightedge from ages 16-26, retrospectively reflected "maybe I was just growing up" regarding her eventual exit from straightedge. Similarly, Sean, a 27-year-old Minneapolis bartender who was straightedge from ages14-24 said of straightedge distinction that "when I was younger I needed that separation a little bit more". For his part, Navin, the Upstate librarian, told me that he simply no longer necessarily perceived the culture and type of person he initially sought distance from as being relevant to his life as he aged, leading him to rethink the need to affiliate with

straightedge. In also indicating a belief that his experiences here are far from unique, he

said

> The type of person, the type of crowd I didn't want to hang around with, the type
> of culture I did not want to be a part of...when you get older, that's not the culture
> you're immersed in anymore. I'm 28 yrs old, I'm not immersed in bar culture, I'm
> not immersed in drinking culture with young kids anymore, so its not like I have
> to worry about having this boundary to separate me. It's not my peer group any
> longer. I think that's kinda part of the decision why I'm not a straightedge kid
> anymore/.../ To me, being 28 years old and living the life I do, calling myself a
> straightedge human being sounds silly.

In an attempt to explain the process of identity conversion, Bankston, Forsyth, and Floyd

(1981) have contrasted the effects of such "cumulative drift" with more "institutionally

structured" "status passage". Here, while those like Navin, Micah, Sean, and Danny

perhaps indicate a more general waning—"cumulative drift"—of the need for

straightedge boundary in general terms of aging, others directly referenced life transitions

that placed them in new institutional contexts as being relevant to change. Indeed, those

who actually moved past the identity overwhelmingly described experiences and

exposure to aspects of life in new social contexts as conflicting with the perceptions they

described their adhering—younger—counterparts as possessing. Prime among these for

many was the transition into university, where applicable. Stephanie, a 25-year-old

Philadelphia retail worker who claimed straightedge from ages 13-19, exemplifies the

impact that new life contexts like college can have as prompting the rethinking of one's

sense of social place through an identity like straightedge when she told me

> When I became straightedge in the first couple years, like 14 and 15 years old,
> and having this new identity and having it make sense to me in a way that
> anything up to that point hadn't [was important], and it became such a part of
> my life that it took over...when I had gone off to college and the scene had started

> to do its whole change over...I didn't like immediately start drinking, but I'd say between the ages of 19 and 20 I started to really struggle with what being straightedge meant and what it was and how it played into my life.

In unpacking issues of temporality with currently identifying American straightedgers, Mullaney's (2012) work shows the legal drinking age of 21[24] to be significant among persisting adherents as far as their staking internal claims to authenticity where being able to "stay true past 21" is perceived to mark a more genuine relation with straightedge in the face of life transitions that occur outside immediate community, like entrance into college and bar culture. In contrast to holding onto these conceptions as they moved past 21, many indicated they believed their personal sense of "self-authenticity" would have been betrayed through continued—perhaps stubborn—retention of straightedge identity, past age 21 or in other social transitions.

For example, there are conflicting opinions within straightedge as far as the extent to which an imperative of abstinence from intoxicants as a social practice should extend beyond their own bodies (Haenfler 2006; Wood 2006). Of those who at one point idealized this imperative of abstinence onto others, many invoked life exposure that altered their views. In reflecting back upon his former views of intoxicants in light of subsequent experiences, Jim, a 32-year-old Philadelphia professional who was straightedge from ages 14-28, said that "having never drank or done drugs there was almost a mythology around drinking. Yeah, almost like, I didn't really have a good idea of what that meant...it doesn't necessarily translate, it's not necessarily reality." Simon, a 29-year-old New Jersey resident who works in Human Resources who was straightedge from ages 14-22, likewise told me that he "was under the impression that if someone had

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[24] My Canadian respondents discussed the age 18 here

one or two beers that there was like a switch" that changed them; he then went on to

elaborate these perceptions and how they changed in college via "seeing how the other

half lived" through experiences with his roommates while they drank beer

> I was like all everyone who drinks is such an asshole and is always gonna act like
> an asshole, and they're incapable of doing anything that is meaningful, and can't
> have a meaningful conversation if they've had two beers because they're in an
> altered state. Once I started to see that's not the case, I would hang out with
> people who would drink, but it was, a party at college is way different than like
> hanging out and 3 dudes are drinking beer, it was way different, like you didn't
> even really notice [they were drinking]/.../once you realize that there are just these
> two parts to people, then you start going into shades of gray

This hindsight caricaturizing typification—and blurring—of former straightedge

boundaries as overly-rigid is echoed by 21-year-old Toronto undergraduate Todd who

was straightedge from ages 14-19. For Todd, though, the contextual changes that led up

to his reconsidering his boundaries stemmed from moving from a smaller town to a large

urban metropolis, where he befriended a wider range of individuals

> When I moved away...I just saw it [intoxicant usage] as less destructive. Like I
> had older friends who would go to school, have normal lives, and smoke weed on
> the weekends, and they really seemed to normalize drugs. And I started seeing
> more the adult use of alcohol, where it wasn't kids getting blackout wasted every
> weekend, like people would have social drinks. I started seeing them as less
> destructive. Its like things started becoming less black and white more of a gray
> area, not just like right and wrong

Others invoked coming to know specific individuals outside straightedge or hardcore

culture as being significant to their recontextualizing their relation to straightedge. Mark,

a 21-year-old New Jersey university student who was straightedge from ages 16-21, for

example, referenced a recent romantic relationship with a girl who regularly consumed

drugs and alcohol as playing a similar role in his reassessing his understandings of the

world and place in it as straightedge. In the course of discussing how seeing his former

girlfriend live functionally with intoxicants made him in part rethink his commitment to

straightedge, Mark also connects with themes of fading community, diminishing identity

salience, and more general aging that interviewees introduced thus far have

foregrounded. Mark told me

> I was dating this girl who definitely wasn't straightedge, and I guess I kinda
> realized...I just didn't wanna be straightedge anymore...I think I was past the
> alienation I felt growing up and I just kinda felt like I didn't want to stand out
> anymore/.../I wasn't into it [straightedge] for the community aspect anymore—its
> just who I am, I'm just not someone who has a disposition to drink, and that's
> basically how I rooted it for like a year and a half, and then eventually I had a
> change of heart. I was dating this girl, I respected her, and she lives like a
> lifestyle far from straightedge and she manages to live her life well

Finally, there were some noteworthy others who referenced experiences with cultures

abroad as providing the sort of context that made them significantly rethink their

commitment to straightedge. For one example of these, Jim, the Philadelphia

professional, told me that an imperative of activism was a part of his straightedge. On an

activist trip to rural Ireland, Jim described experiencing a watershed moment that

fundamentally altered his understandings of straightedge's bases upon being offered a

beer by a local man following a long day of work.

> At the end of the day we walk up to this pub and get some food, only he unlocks
> the door and goes behind the bar...and he brings out 4 beers, and he puts them all
> down and I'm the only one not drinking. And I just told him that I really didn't
> feel well because here's this beer in front of me and this guy's been doing
> awesome stuff for us all day and actually all week. Here he is with ya know with
> a couple thousand years of his culture and I'm gonna turn down his hospitality
> because of some politics that even if he did understand it probably wouldn't make
> any sense to him anyway....Afterwards I had to think long and hard about that.
> Outside of the context…of the suburban American environment that I grew up in,
> what sense does this make? What am I doing?...And thinking about the energy it

took to not drink and to sort of keep this up in the face of everything else, it was sort of like overwhelming and I didn't really see a point to it anymore

Generic processes of aging, a slower general waning of significance, and varieties of life experiences in social contexts external to straightedge community indeed led many interviewees to change their understandings of self and world through straightedge over time. Unlike those who retain straightedge affiliation (see Haenfler 2006, 2012; Mullaney 2012; Wood 2006), we see the possibility that the retention of unrevised straightedge over the long run can be an impediment to individuals who otherwise possess unfolding orientations toward self-authenticity, or that these sensibilities can supplant more rigidly defined understandings of self for many over time.[25]

Diminishing Returns and Impingement

It was not just that boundary erosion in the forms presented thus far came to animate straightedge as somewhat of a superfluous appendage for individuals who eventually exited the identity. Where the majority of former adherents reported varieties of gains from affiliation in community, politics, and self-understanding in ways they (once) value(d), these gains were not just frequently understood to reach a tipping point of saturation in hindsight, but were even often described as becoming sites that inhibited the kinds of growth interviewees once idealized in them in the first place.

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[25] To be sure, as Haenfler's (2006, 2012) analyses have shown, adherents who retain the identity into adulthood themselves overwhelmingly recast it with more individually-oriented meanings. Though variable regarding the continued incorporation of some form of straightedge ethics, both sensibilities echo Mattson's (2001) analysis locates the longer term significance of punk through personally constituted lifestyles—and perhaps rebellions—that begin with oneself and against which acting beyond oneself is measured as "inauthentic".

Among the more resounding insights that can be gleaned from Muggleton's

(2000) study is that, regardless of specific affiliation(s) or demographic profile, those

who we might deem to be contemporary subculturalists overwhelmingly value a sense of

freedom[26] in their constructing lifestyles that they feel are uninhibited by ostensibly

conventional structures, and do so above all other considerations. To this point, while we

can see straightedge adherents often reflecting upon once seeing straightedge as an

effective tool toward attaining *freedom* in both this and other studies (Haenfler 2006;

Wood 2006), most former adherents also referenced reaching a point of marked decline

in these terms in hindsight; and for a notable many, retaining straightedge even began to

run contrary to the *freedom* they once idealized and believed it provided them at one

point. These emergent perceived strictures took both internal and external forms in

respondents' retrospective accounts.

In terms of internal or personal forms, particularly those who described their

(former) straightedge as a vehicle toward broadening their interpersonal, cultural,

political, and/or experiential engagement with the world (perhaps much in the ways

straightedge has been idealized from the youth crew era forward) in ways that extend

well beyond simple abstinence, many respondents reported a critical saturation point in

gains. For instance, Navin, the Upstate librarian very simply told me that it was great

going to "shows for ten years, and meeting alot of great people, seeing alot of great

things, seeing young people be active in certain communities, making strides for positive

things. Nothing I'd ever say I'd regret, but...its diminishing returns." Mike, the 29-year-

old Brooklyner who works in television, perhaps goes further in summing up "both sides

of the coin" where he told me that the distinction he felt from straightedge as a youth

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[26] Muggleton's emphasis p. 167

outright prompted him to explore other cultures, but that he experienced waning returns

in the domain of straightedge distinction over time, which led up to his taking his first

drinks in college

> There was a point where I just kept getting older and older in college and...I just
> didn't see it [straightedge] in that high school way of like "these are the cool kids
> and the cool kids will be mean to me"…In college, like nobody is gonna care if I
> drink or don't drink. I think that was literally my feeling that night, I was like I
> can always try it ya know and if I don't like it I mean I can always just stop if I
> don't like it. And nobody was forcing me, nobody cared whether I drank or not
> that why it was made easier. I was like "let's see what happens", and then there
> was no turning back

For those like Mike and Navin, diminished personal returns were frequently also narrated

alongside feelings of constraint and limitation. J-Dub, a 31-year-old Brooklyn graduate

student who was straightedge from ages 17-30, cast straightedge as a interpersonal

impediment when he told me he eventually found himself experiencing "difficulty

of/[from] overvaluing straightedge as a personality or a trait in other people, [and] that

made it incredibly difficult to find people for various things" as he grew older. Perhaps

none, though, articulated these sentiments to me better than 31-year-old Washington DC

philosopher Thrasymachus as he reflected on his being straightedge from ages 14-27.

Like J-Dub, Thrasyamachus came to see straightedge as interpersonally constraining, but

voiced his misgivings in the specific context of a romantic relationship. Like many

others introduced thus far, Thrasymachus described his coming to a point of reflective

reassessment as being tied up with processes of broader life exposure in addition to the

narrowness he began to perceive in his militancy. In perhaps taking the path opposite

Mark regarding a romantic relationship, he told me

Some years down the line I began to question whether never drinking was actually harmful, whether it was doing damage to relationships. It did do some damage, my hardline, or rather my kind of borderline militant hostility with any drug or any alcohol consumption at all definitely damaged a romantic relationship in college and really introduced alot of conflict and alot of bitterness, and it very importantly kind of contributed to the demise of that relationship. That made me take a step back and reevaluate things a little bit. And then meeting people later/..../ who were otherwise like-minded and who I thought were great people...the fact that they sometimes consume alcohol to be a check in the negative column of the ledger or whatever, that's absurd!

Also much like Mike and many others[27], Thrasymachus believed that he had gained much from straightedge in that he felt straightedge facilitated his becoming a critical thinker during his formative years. Yet, also like many other respondents, the continued deployment of straightedge as a means of conceptually ordering his sense of place across social time and space—particularly his describing his world as once being "filtered through straightedge categories"—became suffocating in the longer run and an outright barrier to growth in the very same areas he believed it once facilitated personal and social growth. In these regards, he told me that straightedge was a significant

...influence on my becoming what I am: a free-thinking critical person, [it was] an avenue toward being critical and...an independent thinker. Eventually I found being that and being straightedge were incompatible for me. So I abandoned it when that sense of incompatibility became really salient to me. My experience, my observations of what it did to my relationships, and the way that I tended to judge other people in this kind of knee jerk way that was filtered through straightedge categories. It was one influence on my trajectory that made me more attached to being an independent thinker and being critical and stuff, and eventually I came to see that being committed to straightedge and that lifestyle and that prohibition was an obstacle to being open and critical and questioning in the way that I wanted to.

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[27] Perceiving continued post-straightedge gains even in the longer term was quite common despite the critical tenor of some of the recharacterizations presented here. The residues and longer term significance of straightedge are treated in fuller detail in Chapter 9.

Indeed, for Thrasymachus and those many others I interviewed like him, it was often at the point where they felt their *freedom*—in Muggleton's (2000) sense of the term—was being breached or inhibited that they reconsidered and later potentially exited straightedge. Further in this vein, beyond the presented personal forms diminishing returns took, on the level of community, many also referenced coming to feel controlled or regulated by a larger watchful straightedge collective, especially as some came to perceive it as defining or enforcing their behavior in various ways.

Regarding these external factors, in his historicizing work on the—diffusing—contours of discipline into its most modern forms, Foucault (1977) highlights a shift toward what he called "carceral culture" where surveillance over the subject—or the looming threat thereof—acts as a major social organizing principle inasmuch as proper behavioral and bodily protocols become imbibed and/or enacted by the subject. As far as the ways ex-adherents discussed the community eye as relating to exit from straightedge, Foucauldian carcerality is present in their narratives. For those many that described community as salient to their (leaving) straightedge, it was not uncommon for them to profess the feeling that their *freedom* became inhibited by the collective's watch and/or that they developed a distaste for intra-community policing that made them rethink sticking with the identity.

Several spoke of excessive external enforcement of straightedge's precepts. For instance, Dan, an 18-year-old Western Pennsylvania high school student who was straightedge from 13-16, very bluntly said about his behavior being monitored for slip-ups "I guess you can say that being straightedge, everyone is always watching you". The narrative put forth by Steve, a 43-year-old Iowa body artist Steve, who participated in

straightedge from ages 15-20, suggests that these sentiments can be well echoed by other cohorts of former straightedge adherents. Dan's senior by a full quarter Century and a participant in straightedge before Dan was even born, Steve went so far as to place the external regulation he perceived in Orwellian terms when he said "everybody is in everybody else's business, that whole scene is a small town on steroids, and they're all big brother, they're all waiting to inform, its like a real 1984 nazi police state".

Respondents expressed varying degrees and brands of distaste for the community's watchful eye. Johni, the Brooklyn make-up artist, directly discussed her dislike of the extent to which governing figures within her local hardcore scene were able to impose definitions about the nature of the scene consistent with their own interests (cf. Foucault 1977, 1983). In particular, she identified unspoken rules determined by what she called the scene's "top dog[s]" surrounding who could and who could not participate in certain sing-a-longs that valorized straightedge at shows. Johni also elaborated upon how she now views the constitution of such authority structures in terms where she indicates that she was largely blind to them as a participating youth when she said

> [Straightedge] was a self-policing community that was incredibly, what's the right word for it, Stalin-esque, kind of? I mean it was very policed. I mean there were very, very strong rules on what you could and could not do...based on who was top dog in the social structure at the time, and what their values were...It was like if you weren't straightedge and didn't outwardly mark yourself as such you couldn't sing along to certain songs or couldn't do this or that, and that's something I always had trouble with...Being a young teen, you're conditioned to not block authority, so we created our own authority structures within our subculture which was not quite what we were all going for, but as humans we fell into the structures that we were accustomed to, just within a different vibe I think.

Of note in Johni's account is that we can infer a process—or point—of awakening where the operation of authority within her local hardcore scene materialized into her view.

Further, her recontextualized account casted the community she was involved with in terms more redundant with the dominant culture than she believes her younger adhering counterpart would have likely articulated. Narrative processes or points of such disillusioning awakening regarding community were shared by a strong majority of respondents.

For a substantial amount of respondents here, these feelings played a central role in their leaving straightedge identity behind. For instance, Roosevelt, a 25-year-old Cincinnati graduate student who was straightedge from ages 19-23 told me that he remained straightedge longer than he otherwise would have because of the expectations of those around him, particularly his closer straightedge friends. For Roosevelt it was gossip about him that finally pushed him to relinquish straightedge; he said that toward the end of his time as straightedge

> [I didn't] really have a good reason [not to break edge] other than what will my friends think, that was the constant thing in my head "what will my friends think"?...I kinda talked about it with one of the guys before and, we were in Iceland and I kinda hinted that I was thinking about it, so one of my friends texts me "hey I heard you drink now", "hey I heard you drink now". I hadn't even done it yet, and for me that was the point where I was like "ya know, fuck this". I don't see a point; that was the thing that kinda pushed me over the edge.

Deeper here, Curtis, a 30-year-old Washington DC government worker who was straightedge from 15-29, even went so far as to characterize his former relation to the community as becoming outright deferment at a point. Curtis discusses moving past such acquiescence not just in terms of *freedom*, but also life experience and exposure voiced by others when engaging new social contexts related to his job that jointly animated his (formerly being) straightedge differently.

> I think for me its all about having the autonomy to make those choices for myself. The second I took on straightedge I sort of lost that autonomy as I was deferring to a collection or community of straightedge individuals...And this is a scope issue, my life now is a studying the world's most atrocious circumstances in austere environments, so the scale issue is that its a bunch of privileged kids in suburban settings defining themselves through made-up rules that really doesn't have as much punch now that I'm seeing people dying every day with causes that far outweigh anything that we will fortunately ever have to endure.

There were some who placed leaving the constraints they came to perceive in straightedge in mundane terms, but others who saw very specific gains from moving past the identity as this related to their *freedom*. Perhaps representative of this contingent is Derek, a 25-year old Minneapolis musician I spoke with who was straightedge from 16-21. Much like the experiential, cultural, and interpersonal growth many idealize upon entering straightedge, Derek sees these as facilitated by his leaving straightedge for both him and his friendship group

> My friends now, we don't take ourselves too seriously, we don't are open-minded people and straightedge is very constricting by definition. It forces you to kind of think a certain way in order to keep it going for yourself. You have to close off different choices and ways of thinking that other people have so that you can be comfortable with living your lifestyle. I'm really open-minded, I like to explore things/.../ I never really had an appreciation for life til I wasn't straightedge, so a lot of how I developed my life is from the result of not being straightedge. When I was straightedge I was more idealistic...now I'm a little bit more introspective and I take everything in and ultimately it comes down to what I think, and not being straightedge has helped me.

(Coming to see) Militancy

We have seen many arrive at a point where they came to view straightedge and their place in it in different terms through their broadening engagement with the outside world and changing ideals toward how an authentic self is constituted. For many,

continued ties to straightedge can become stagnant or limiting, and that these factors can lead to a point where some discard the identity. Just as intolerance was a theme for Thrasymachus, in their looking back, no phenomenon cross-cut interviewees' reflective reassessments of straightedge and their decision to leave straightedge than did the issue of militancy or hardline fanaticism. Once more, hardline is a term typically reserved for those who radicalize straightedge precepts to their—often narrow and linear—logical excesses, and it is also typically used to describe adherents who are intolerant of persons who are not straightedge, violent, and/or just militant about their beliefs more generally (Wood 2006). The (eventual) conceptualization of straightedge militancy weighed heavily on many respondents' narratives as far as their questioning the authenticity of straightedge, their individual tie to straightedge, and/or the space they once believed it provided them from mainstream culture. Much like the ways individuals described coming to feel their *freedom* breached by community and identity stagnancy, perceptions of militancy materialized in both external and internal forms in respondents' accounts.

Regarding community, many reporting wanting to disassociate once they came to perceive fanatical behaviors in other adherents around them. Like understandings of community watchfulness, these perceptions were more gradual in their materialization according to respondents. For Claudette, a 27-year-old caterer from Winnipeg who was straightedge from 14-18, being judged by what she came to see as intolerant straightedgers for making non-straightedge friends in her later high school years made her look upon straightedge differently, and ultimately in part made her want to disassociate from the community. In describing to me her decision to break edge she said that

My best friends at the time, they all drank, and they all went to shows, and I definitely remember a couple of my [straightedge] guy friends saying like "why are you hanging out with them? You're gonna start drinking aren't you? You're probably drinking now" or something like that. I definitely felt that I was being judged. I looked at these [straightedge] guys that I was friends with, and realized they're just so unhappy and they're just big assholes...I probably think that kinda led up to it—[breaking edge]

While Claudette references eventually experiencing some of her straightedge peers as just being unduly judgmental, the repudiation of the kind of straightedge intolerance that included physical violence—or possessed the looming threat thereof—was especially pronounced in interviewees' accounts; and such ire was most often directed at "crews" and the gang-like elements that inhere in them (see Purchla 2011). Again, crews are exclusive, mutually identifying and mostly male groupings within the hardcore scene that demarcate social and symbolic space much as a traditional gang claims turf and various symbols they restrict access to (Purchla 2011). As for straightedge crews, perhaps none are more notorious, and none were invoked as frequently by respondents, as the Courage Crew—a straightedge brotherhood that proliferated out from Ohio since the 1990's with a reputation for group violence and physical intimidation, both inside and outside the context of hardcore shows (Haenfler 2006). Micah, the Nashville librarian recounted his experiences with the Courage Crew in his local hardcore scene and his distaste for the violence and intolerance he saw in them while he was straightedge

There were alot of inroads for Courage Crew around that time, in my friend group even. I recall a specific time where I saw more of a hardline approach where people were smacking people's faces who were smoking and shit like that, it was really hardline during that time period. It was a time period where they [the Courage Crew] were very actively telling their members that they needed to own guns and that they needed to train once a week. And...I went on the news to talk about how it [straightedge] wasn't necessarily violent; I would talk about it in the

newspaper. I made up t-shirts that said "non-violent straightedge." I got punched in the face for wearing one of those, at a Strife show...They took offense to that, like obviously they took offense because they were violent/.../I never understood the violence element...directed at people who weren't straightedge, that hardline mentality was a big deal to me, it still is. I would hate to think that straightedge got worse with that.

In Micah's account we can see him invoking an ideal of what he (still) thinks straightedge should be, or what standards straightedge should live up to as this contrasted the fanaticism of the Courage Crew members around him. Perhaps much like Johni's comments about eventually seeing elements of straightedge as redundant with what she saw as mainstream culture, in that vein, many saw precisely the machoism, intolerance, and violent tendencies they read into straightedge militancy as presenting them with some of the very elements they were seeking distance from through becoming straightedge. Joe, a 26-year-old Minneapolis bartender who was straightedge from 14-25, described to me that he had seen people get beat up by straightedge militants, and that seeing such behavior made him embarrassed to continue voicing his claim to straightedge

It was very similar to why I claimed straightedge in the first place. They [the militants] were representing something that was very similar to what I wanted to set myself apart from/.../Eventually I just got jaded, especially as the crews came about. The whole militant movement, it really soured me, even from telling people I was straightedge when I would talk to them

Likewise, Shawn, a 33-year-old New Jersey cook straightedge from ages 14-23 who told me he was especially influenced by the political awareness the youth crew and 1990's movements in straightedge fostered, also told me he felt that the militants "jockified" straightedge and created a "jock kinda bonehead version of straightedge" from which he

came to perceive qualities in straightedge that he initially wished to avoid through his

initial claim. He told me that eventually

> I just got turned off from it, like the violent aspect, like the tough guy kinda
> bullshit, just being ultra close-minded toward people who do other things...It's
> hard for me to respect this ignorant type of straightedge I see in some places.
> Like these kids are "straightedge" but they but they aren't politically aware,
> socially aware, they don't care about racial issues, or like vegetarianism too. It's
> like they are straightedge but what are they doing with straightedge? Unless
> you're taking that as a springboard to further yourself or educate yourself further
> it's almost like a waste, what's the point?

Like other youth-oriented (sub)cultures (cf. Andes 1998; Fonarow 2006; Thornton 1995),

younger straightedge adherents often exert a good deal of effort to enact the identity or

"look the part" (Haenfler 2006), potentially to the ends of blinding them the

contradictions around them in the earlier phases of their straightedge career; and often as

they age, possible conceptual redundancies with ostensibly mainstream culture can

materialize into view (Kahn-Harris 2004)[28]. Whereas some internalize or individualize

the identity in the face of inconsistencies even up to the point of siphoning off ties to

community as a means of retaining it in a context where collective contradictions are not

present (see Andes 1998; Haenfler 2012), for sizable others these issues clearly provide

critical impetus for a direct break. Christian, the 28-year-old New York graduate student

highlights the contradictions he came to see in straightedge militancy.

> It [militancy] factored in when I finally decided to stop claiming it [straightedge]
> and break with it. I was getting really fed up with that association. When I first
> encountered it, I was like "this is ridiculous, I can't believe anyone actually takes
> this that seriously"...So at first I took it with a grain of salt and then as I became
> more aware of how prevalent it was, I was like "this is horrible, I can't do this

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[28] Or as Hardin (1995) has indicated more generally, the "other" is needed to induce the notion of the
different self; and when that which surrounds the self becomes normal and routine, it no longer guides
behavior as strongly.

anymore"...Every time I would encounter it, I would think about it and get angry, that these people are claiming the same lifestyle as me, like they're claiming the same label. There's no way for me to claim this and not have that connection...[I felt like] maybe I should just have a drink...and I'm like "alright, someone just pour me a drink" and everyone's like "what?" and I'm like "someone pour me a drink, I think I need a drink"

In her study of role exit, Ebaugh (1988) delineates a pathway narrative where doubts lead

to a turning point from which one exits an identity. Here, while Christian couches his

rejection of militancy as leading up to him leaving straightedge in more abstract

conceptual terms and as a more slowly growing awareness of it around him, for others

like Tom, a 21-year-old Minneapolis undergraduate who was straightedge from ages 13-

21, it was a very specific instance where he witnessed the violent behavior of Courage

Crew members that directly spawned a trip to the liquor store to break his edge

> Since moving out to the [Twin] Cities I really like had seen first hand like some of the ugly shit that happens with straightedge. I witnessed like the Courage Crew...coming back and it has a lot of members now...[At a recent show] during one of the band's set the Courage Crew kids were sucker punching people and stupid shit like that, it kinda turned me off from it. A lot of like my friends that kind of influenced me to become straightedge became kinda hardline and I just didn't really want to associate with it anymore...[After the show] I waited a few days and I just decided I'd drink. I just went out and bought a 6 pack and had a couple beers

It was not just that the (eventual perception of) fanatical behavior in "other" adherents

made respondents reconsider straightedge, at the same time interviewees' (eventual)

perceptions of their own radicalized performances, where applicable, led to similar

reflective reassessments. Todd, the 21-year old Toronto undergraduate who also self-

identified as a former militant, for instance, simply looked back his former militant

behavior in a new light and with a measure of candid embarrassment when he said "when

I was a teenager, like 16 years old, [I was] super militant, like hitting beers out of peoples

hands thinking I was a badass. [I was] really into the bring back prohibition thing,

thought that was super cool/.../I was a douchebag for sure". For his part, Steve the 43-

year-old Iowa body artist told me that he grew tired of the effort it took to live up to the

excessive tropes he was expected to enact when enmeshed in the militant side of the

culture, particularly where physical violence applied

> I just got tired of feeling like I had to dress a certain way, that I had to act a
> certain way, that my behavior was somehow relegated to me by some style or
> subculture/.../Then with crews...someone always wants to have control, and its
> like some big mafia thing, and I'm like ya know what I'm sick of your shit. I'm
> tired of the phone calls at 3 o'clock in the morning like "hey dude, so and so said
> this and this and this, come on lets go beat them up", I was like "I don't give a rat's
> ass", so it was kind of a progression of that.

As for the 26-year-old Minneapolis waiter Randy, who also self-identified as a former

militant, coming to see his own tendencies as overly militant and needlessly violent led

him to reflect upon whether or not straightedge was even real. Randy told me that at one

point he had to ask himself

> What am I holding on to? I'm holding onto some stupid label that gives me the
> right to kick somebody in the face. I lose my license to kick [if I break edge]. And
> I said, "that's stupid; there's not even such a thing as straightedge."…The ideal of
> it, like the actual thought process of it…is great but unfortunately I don't think
> anyone has what it takes to have that as their life. There's a few people who
> probably really do exude it, but they're probably just those pricks that think that. I
> don't think there is someone who is out there that is truly in it for themselves and
> doesn't have a negative view on anyone else

In their studies, Muggleton (2000) and Fonarow (2006) in particular found that

individuals who display too little or too much commitment to an affiliation (or

affiliations) can be perceived as inauthentic by others. Similarly, in following Bourdieu

(1984), Thornton's (1995) work on rave and dance cultures found that individuals who put forth effort beyond a certain point to attain legitimacy, hipness, or status were likely to see diminishing returns in terms of their "subcultural capital". When looking at these issues through the specific standpoint of hindsight with former straightedge adherents, though, it appears that the effort put forth by more militant individuals not only can lead observers to question the authenticity of militants' ties to straightedge, but that militants' extreme performances can lead militants themselves to eventually question *their own* relationship with straightedge as well. This suggests that both exposure to *and* participation in fanatical performances of subculture can make a group or affiliation as a whole appear less authentic. Moreover, it would appear that these understandings tend to materialize of over time and that these are best viewed through a retrospective lens. In other terms, coming to perceive certain subcultural performances as effortful can lead participants to see their own identity differently, and distancing oneself from the fanatical can, in some cases, also lead to a rejection of identity entirely.

Further, antipathetic attitudes toward militancy can endure beyond the boundary of affiliation. For some, continued disdain for militancy persisted insofar as they continued to feel they were treated as cast-outs. Donny, a 27-year-old Minneapolis restaurant worker who was straightedge from ages 14-19, for example, told me he continues to feel shunned from community even though he has not been straightedge for 8 years. He remarked about the initial community reaction to his edge break as it relates to treatment he feels he continues to receive up to the present day

> Its like when you are and when you're running with the pack. Or ya know, when you're a part of that group. Its strange how when you disavow that, people who can be close friends with you for years, like the treatment you get. It varies, its

different from person to person—cause [its like] there's definitely people where you're married and you just got divorced. [I] don't really exist to them/..../For instance, the guy that gave me my ill-begotten straightedge tattoo[s] spoke loudly to other people about how he's basically abduct me and cut 'em off, and its all just probably big talk but its strange that people get so worked up about that, its fucked up.

It was not uncommon for former straightedgers to perceive substantial—or even increased—measures of intolerance from community such as Donny's experience from the other side of the identity. Further here, the Washington DC philosopher Thrasymachus told me that he still gets angry when he is called a "sell out" by remaining adherents even up to my conversation with him 4 years after his relinquishing the identity. He also told me

> It's exactly that word, that word "sell-out" that's a perfect illustration of exactly what I have against this whole culture because by its very nature that word implies that one lacks integrity. You're not a sell out unless you sold something out that is worth not selling out. Selling out implies having forfeited or betrayed something of value, and that its a failure of integrity. The idea that by giving up on something that once meant something to you and walking away from it, regardless of what you take your reasons to be, to have done something that constitutes a betrayal is a dogmatic outlook. That's a fundamentalist shit way of thinking about judgment and ones changing relationship to issues that matter to them...I didnt give up straightedge for just any old reason. I thought long and hard about it, and I have fucking good reasons...You're going to call me a sell-out for changing my mind based on reasoning that I take to be valid and that I can fucking argue for effectively? And that for me, it still, it incenses me!

The Potential Significance of Ex (Straightedge) Identity in Retrospect

In the only more comprehensively oriented sociological foray into identity exit to date, Ebaugh's (1988) analysis is framed through Metonian (1949) "social role" theory and role transition while elaborating social patterns that cross-cut specificity in a manner akin to Simmel's (1950) "formal sociology". Ebaugh's (1988) work is in turn rife with

valuable conceptual insight into varieties of stages exiting subjects tend toward like initial

doubting, imagination of alternatives roles, as well as turning points like trauma, burn-

out, last straw scenarios, and temporal factors as these indeed structure the process of

exiting swaths of social identities. Although additionally sensitive to the prospect of

"role residuals", described as "leftovers from a previous identity that cloud and impact on

one's current role" (Ebaugh 1988, p. 174), on the relinquished side of identity, the work

possesses a strong forward-looking tilt, under which the possible added significance of

the subjective backward glance upon identity remains idle and somewhat obscured.

Thus, while the process leading to identity exit that Ebaugh outlines are important

(and certainly abundantly evident in aspects of the data presented thus far), additionally

attending to subjective hindsight reflection upon relinquished identity stands to add a

dimension to our understandings of (ex) identity's contours to the extent *past* or broken

typifications break with antecedent ordering schemes and thereby animate identity in a

way that can only be accessed from the standpoint of retrospection. As the reflections of

Thrasymachus and others have hinted, such differences across the boundary of an

elective identity like straightedge potentially manifest in 1) differential understandings of

self across socially constructed time, 2) subjective (re)contextualization of social place,

and in 3) one's relation to and deployment of related typifying schemes. Though not

necessarily mutually exclusive, attention to these domains—to whatever extent they

might materialize in retrospective accounts—can complement understandings of (ex)

identity via the avenues the "look back" can open alongside the more forward-oriented

impulse of existing approaches to identity and identity transition, where applicable.

The Look Back Upon (Straightedge) Identity: Recontextualizing Self, Social Place, and Meaning Context

To be sure, not all former straightedge adherents neatly fell into these categories. Yet, the majority of respondents did voice a belief that they were giving me an account of (their former relation to) straightedge that was different—and in some cases, fundamentally so—from what I would have received if I had spoken with them while they were straightedge. To these ends, Billy, the 23-year-old New Jersey graduate student very bluntly said to me "I understood straightedge differently after I broke edge". Likewise, Joey, the 30-year-old New Jersey accountant outright said on the matter of his present understandings of straightedge "I think that I learned more from breaking edge than I did from being edge". Donny, the 27-year-old Minneapolis restaurant worker laid out some of the differences in his personal perceptions more fully in this excerpt from our talk where he recontextualized his straightedge in light of his current understandings. In particular, Donny likens his former experiences and orientation toward straightedge as akin to that of a devout—and perhaps enthusiastic—religious adherent, but he now sees the affiliation as being somewhat "immature" when he looks back.

> It's not like you got up and had a worship service or something, but it [straightedge] was like something that you were...Everyday that's what I was. I was very exuberant about that at that age.
>
> **JT: How about now?**
>
> Honestly, it just seems like some sort of immature club. Something that, you look at people who go to college and they join a fraternity and some people think its awesome and other people think its that you're paying to have friends. So its sort of thing a where its...young and hivemind-ish, you're going for some sort of status quo because it feels like it fits; it feels like that's where you wanna be/.../ Its just a way to validate yourself. Instead of being a nameless, faceless part of something...You can even compare it to something like an eagle scout. Its not the coolest thing in the world, you have to work along time to get there, that's a lot of

time cub scouting. That happens when you're 17 or 18...Everyone wants to distinguish themselves. People either wanna be the punk rocker the jock, the super hot chick….the smart guy is gonna be a doctor or a lawyer and brush you under their feet someday. If you're a burnout you're gonna be the biggest fucking burnout, hair on fire sniffs glue in class and people laugh at you just cuz

Regarding the dimension of social time, given the analytic population's being distinguished by exit from a predominantly youth-oriented affiliation, issues related to aging and socially-sanctioned life course transition like those Donny indicates can not be ignored. Though less concerned with the specificities of elective identities, sociologists of the life course themselves have largely followed suit with the forward-looking bent one find's in Ebaugh's work (for relevant reviews see Mayer 2009; Shanahan 2000). As we have seen, many can indeed differentially contextualize life transition markers and former identities into different terms; and for a notable contingent of these in the present case, like Donny discusses, such shifts can be located in what they now see as youthful naiveties in their (former) orientation to the world through straightedge. In this vein, Claudette, the 27-year-old Winnipeg caterer told me that she now sees straightedge as a phase—much like any other—that she went through as a youth in contrast to the lifetime endeavor she once thought it was. She reflected

> I don't wanna say that I was young and naive but I [now] think... I became straightedge b/c I kind of wanted to follow a group too, and I thought these guys were older and they were into cool music so I was like yeah, I wanna be what they are, that's awesome/.../when you are young you go through so many phases, and I hate to say that straightedge was a stage, but it was. I mean it was a really good stage and it was really good for me—I'm glad I was. But yeah, again, I hate to say that it was a stage; but its definitely something that I just grew out of and went to the next stage

Similarly, the 28-year-old Brooklyn make-up artist Johni ultimately sees her former

affiliation as being in many ways driven by a desire to "fit it" that she necessarily did not

perceive while she claimed straightedge. Despite, like Claudette, now seeing

straightedge in a light that might make it tempting to dismiss the affiliation on the surface

as a largely inconsequential phase in the longer run, Johni also hints toward the

simultaneous enduring significance it possess for her[29]. On the matter of aiming to fit in,

Johni also echoes the youthful exuberance Donny invokes in saying

> At the time I don't think I thought that at all; I thought I was going toward
> something. Now looking back on it being a little older I would say that I was, I
> think it was all about fitting in for me really which sounds like I'm downplaying
> the importance of what that subculture was for me. But finding a group of people
> who I thought were like-minded and were interested in the same things that I was
> on a bigger level was really exciting, and I think a really important thing for me.
> And I also got the feeling of wanting to explode, which is how I would describe
> myself when I found punk rock

For his part, the Philadelphia professional Jim feels he is now able to contextualize the

persistence of his straightedge as being linked to his straightedge friendship circle and the

driver of his becoming straightedge as being rooted in the geographic and social qualities

of suburbia, where he grew up. Jim reflected

> I think it's largely a suburban phenomenon because of boredom, and straightedge
> is like a backlash....You couldn't drive til you were 17, now it's 18 but a lot of
> other suburban places, you cant go anywhere without your parents driving
> you…And what kids do is get hi and get drunk and screw each other...I think if
> you'd ask me then I wouldn't be able to give any more than a vague answer about
> it [straightedge] being important for me personally or physically, like health-wise.
> I think it was more important as like being a part of, having a peer group/.../In
> retrospect it's a lot more difficult to do if you don't have a sort of like support
> group.

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[29] Issues related to the longer run significance of ex (straightedge) identity are explored more fully in
Chapter 9

The Eastern Pennsylvania social worker Raul too saw a certain measure of youthful naivety when looking back upon his lifetime commitment. Here, Raul echoes the narratives of others in his seeing straightedge differently from hindsight, but his perceptions caution against any impulse to read stricter fuller-picture wisdom into after-the-fact accounts where some aspects of straightedge are better characterized during affiliation. He said

> All teenagers think everything is for life. And if you're still in it [straightedge] you cant reflect on the end of it/.../Now I can like kinda look back with hindsight and kinda realize what was going on with me at the time. But I also think that there's something that I don't have now that I had then that would be much more authentic to talking about it

Finally, there were many whose differential understandings of self across social time and changing conceptions of directly altered or inverted typifications attached to straightedge and straightedge culture. Jay, a 25-year-old Toronto undergraduate who was straightedge from ages 14-24, exemplifies this relatively succinctly. In looking back Jay told me

> Its funny to think about it retrospectively, cause like at the time it [straightedge] was like this perfect message that came to me that allowed me to find this group of people and find out about this music, but then as I got older I was like I realize it was just like an awesome way to "fuck you" to everybody.

He then went on to describe his current perceptions of older adherents. Like many who came to see intransigence in militance, Jay, and others now characterize continued affiliation with straightedge—which they mostly once very much valorized—as stubbornness. In also reflecting others' feelings about growth inhibition, Jay said of older straighetdgers he knows

> I have other friends who are still straightedge and are like 34 or whatever and it just seems like they're stubborn, they're stubborn, and they done wanna deal with it, and they don't wanna grow up. And its just so much of their identity that they can't walk away from it, or even face that, and they still have a lot of aggression if you try to talk to them about that kidna stuff. Just like that stubbornness, that unwillingness to reevaluate, its just like such a terrible thing in general I think. When I saw that in myself I was like "oh shit" I do want to reevaluate…and then yeah, it happened. I saw it was a detriment to outside thinking.

And for one more example of a break in typifying framing at the intersection of recontextualized self and categorical understandings across time, The DC philosopher Thrasymachus who told me his life was once "filtered through straightedge categories" told me

> I reject the ideas that I then was so attached to. I'm not straightedge anymore. I think its a kind of infantile compensatory affectation that makes sense for me to have been drawn to and makes sense for alot of people to be drawn to with similar circumstances, but I don't any longer identify with it for alot of reasons....When you're young and insecure and you need a firm, stable sense of who you are because you're searching for that, that's religion. When you're disoriented with everything that goes on as a teenager you more prone to hold onto an identity that has an aspect of permanence. That's why straightedge to me is kind of a manifestation of this juvenile need for stable horizons of identity

When the perspectives of those looking back upon an already relinquished affiliation like straightedge are foregrounded, we can see individuals 1) providing differential accounts of self and identity through the lens of socially constructed time and life course 2) (re)contextualizing their perceived (former) social place through after-the-fact understandings of their (former) motivations, dispositions, and their ultimate location within varieties of larger cultural space(s) and 3) possessing a distinctively distanced relation to (aspects of) an affiliation's typifying schema that also can combine with emergent—post-identity—ordering concepts to the ends of yielding a unique phenomenal

slant on (former) process, action, and identity. These altogether can potentially open the way to a range of possible indigenous meanings related to an affiliation, identity, or role that extend beyond those that can be accessed during the time of participation via attention to those that may be connected to—if not possibly outright exclusive to—the standpoint of retrospect; or, put more simply, how the view of the "after" can complement and further that of the "active".

More broadly speaking, the meanings actors attach to varying practices, identities, and social relationships have informed interpretive sociology from the time of Max Weber up through the frameworks established by vanguard symbolic interactionists (cf. Blumer 1969; Mead 1934; Stryker 1980). Though no doubt possessing its own specificities, straightedge is a cultural artifact or node like many others in which individuals associate in some form, adhere to varying degrees to related—typically mutually understood and largely defining—precepts or sensibilities, and construct community or imagine similar others. The point in emphasizing the hindsight gaze upon a phenomenon like straightedge here is to allow (understandings of) the fuller possibilities of the (inter)subjective meanings that may be attached to it to properly sediment via allowing those that might best be characterized as retrospective in nature breathe freely alongside those that may be more salient or actionable during the times individuals accomplish identity. Where the goal of interpretive social science as it considers elective social identity is to unpack the possible meanings actors attach to things like shared identities and relevant surrounding practices, then those meanings that actors find more significant in retrospect should be engaged if the analyst is to provide a fuller, balanced account if what the phenomenon means.

Once more, although meanings are uneven and consistently revised throughout the course of any elective affiliation, identity, or social role, as the interview data further underscore, in no case are breaks in meaning as potentially pronounced or sharp as those spanning opposing sides of association; and this is perhaps especially so when a measure of apostasy is involved (see also Ebaugh 1988). The preliminary conceptual framework sketched in this chapter is certainly not exhaustive or comprehensive. This chapter does, however, show that due attention paid to exes' accounts in terms of social time, place, and typifying schema can extend the range of meanings attached to any subjectively salient identity, role, or affiliation that is relinquished in ways that may be applicable to those who have opted out of other cultural institutions like marriages, religions, political groupings, voluntary associations, among conceivably many others.

Conclusion

This chapter should leave little doubt that hindsight reflections can potentially provide a narrative slant upon identity that is not necessarily accessible to the subject while they actively affiliate, and that broken typification can be a valuable concept when applied to relinquished identities in certain cases. We have seen former straightedge adherents providing differential understandings of peers, self, social boundary, intoxicants, community, performance, fanaticism, and political meanings among other various other things that pertain to their (former) experiences of being straightedge that are informed by looking back. Changes in respondents' accounts tended to be ordered by differences in the accomplishment of their perceived self across the dimensions of social time, social place, and in their relation to the typifying concepts that (formerly) structured

their understandings of their worlds. More generally, it is not unreasonable to speculate from here that attention paid to the time "after" an identity like straightedge is relinquished might complement existing social scientific identity models'—if at times just tacit—emphasis on the "active" in certain instances through the ways it might expand the purview of meanings that may be attached to any identity or affiliation.

As previously detailed, much of the reason for the continued understatement of the possible significance of the ex-subculturalist rests in theoretical tensions over notions of popular postmodernism at the intersection of youth, style, and culture. Further, much of the reason phenomenological inquiry into the possibilities that may rest in the look back upon elective social categories has remained understudied rests in the forward-looking and formalistic bent one finds in the scant social scientific work on identity role transition. Here, predominant sociological models of identity that attempt to capture how individuals navigate identity within late capitalism also possess a forward-looking impulse in assessing how subjects move serially through various identities or identification sensibilities in the course of their lives.

Most interviewees have affiliated with and continue to affiliate with other possible distinctions in their (sub)cultural identity autobiographies outside of straightedge. Additionally, for the vast majority of individuals, straightedge was a means of constructing fixity and entrenchment, which as a dispositional orientation toward identity may or may not extend beyond or carry over into post-straightedge life. As a relatively substantive identity, however, straightedge provided a useful foregrounding referent that aided interviewees in assessing other identities or identification sensibilities

they may have passed through in their lives. It is these issues that anchor the next

chapter.

CHAPTER 6

CONTEXTUALIZING IDENTITY AUTOBIOGRAPHY: TOURING VERSUS TRAVELING THROUGH THE (POST)MODERN MILIEU

In this chapter I explore what grounded empirical accounts based on a substantive referent like straightedge can reveal about how individuals engage the broader project of identity and how they conceptualize various identities and identification sensibilities they have held over their life histories. Of particular focus is where these issues straddle debates over transitions into postmodernity regarding how identity is configured within such transformations to the extent such shifts have indeed taken place (e.g. Baudrillard 1994; Bauman 1992, 1996; Beck 1992, 1994; Giddens 1991; Jameson 1991; Harvey 1990).

We saw in the previous chapter that straightedge was—at the least in their *pasts*—very much modernist in orientation identification for the majority of respondents. From this this edifice, in this chapter I 1) assess the extent to which a relatively substantive referent like straightedge can provide a meaningful point of context that can reasonably bring interviewees' indigenous understandings of self-concept and identity into dialogue with the core thrusts of theories that situate identity within notions of postmodernization or high modernity. I then 2) consider issues surrounding singularity/multiplicity, mobility/fixity, style/substance, and individuality/group commitment that have long been central to (youth sub)cultural studies in terms of how interviewees look back upon their larger "identification autobiography". Lastly, 3) I build upon the bases laid in the first

two sections and extend focus toward where interviewees are able to contextualize shifts, compartmentalizations, and intersections of modernist and postmodernists sensibilities as dispositions across their longer-view of their life identification autobiographies from hindsight.

This chapter is focused on multiple sites of identity and the ways respondents weigh these against one another, and the focus here is on overarching conceptual concerns. Further of note before proceeding, given the dynamism required to capture the issues of this chapter, the presentation of data necessarily often involves considerably longer exemplary back-and-forth-exchanges between interviewer and interviewee than in other portions of this study. From here, I briefly outline the abovementioned pertinent conceptual issues in a more detail, and bring representative interview excerpts into dialogue with each successively.

Substance as a Methodological Base to Differentiate Identities and Identification Modes for Phenomenological Sociology

Where interviewees discussed their (former) relationship with straightedge in manners that resonate with Hodkinson's (2002, 2004) model of cultural substance in the last chapter[30], here I turn toward assessing the extent to which this base can sufficiently provide respondents with a nomenclature to distinguish more bounded communities or identity affiliations taken to be subjectively substantive from those they might characterize more by transience, play, and diffusion, be it those they have dabbled with in their own lives or just what they conceive more generally.

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[30] Briefly again, where commitment, consistent distinctiveness, autonomy, and identity are jointly taken as relatively salient.

In this light, hallmark studies exploring potentially subcultural social forms analytically foregrounding locality (Bennett 2000; Thornton 1995) or identity multiplicity (e.g. Muggleton 2000) have established the centrality of seriality and unfolding heterogeneity in contemporary elective identification. Such studies have, however, diminished the extent of shared substantive ties to any particular nominated referential grouping in favor of mining for formalistic conclusions that can cross-cut multiplicities of possible distinctions. Key here is that the diffuse nature of the start-point conceptual and sampling filters found in such works—e.g. unconventional style more generically conceived, or localized gatherings that favor heterogeneous ambience—risk flattening more substantive potentialities that may be applicable to any one referential grouping that might be taken as subjectively salient to any individual subject being implicated or studied. At the same time, other previous benchmark (sub)cultural studies that have focused on documenting singular affiliations in a manner that conveys relative measures of substance in various groupings (e.g. Hodkinson 2004; Haenfler 2006; Fonarow 2006) have not fully examined how affiliating individuals' orientation or disposition toward the study's central substantive identification node/community may apply (or not) to other spheres of their lives, notwithstanding the frequent requisite nods in these works to the certain existence of other possible identities that subjects may explore of course. Despite some degree of emphasis on phenomenological analysis in studies on either side of this divide, where (potentially evolving) intersections and coexistences of more substantive identification spheres might rest alongside cultural forms that might be better characterized as hybrid, ephemeral, or as more ordered more by Maffesolian (1996)

social logics have not been carefully attended to on the level of the research subjects'

accounts.

Furthermore, the extent to which implicated subjects are even able apprehend the

terms of these very theoretical distinctions researchers have abstracted from and

generalized back upon them is something that has not been directly addressed, despite

influential and frequently cited voiced concerns in this regard (cf. Widdicombe and

Woofit 1995; Muggleton 2000). Undoubtedly, a major reason for the dearth of direct

empirical attention here is the inherent difficulty in closely bridging on-the-ground

narratives with the deeper complexities of identity conceptualizations that are driven by

arguments situating subjectivity within macro transformations in culture, economy, and

sociality across a vast historical stretch[31]. In any case, there is very little empirical data

available showing just how individuals navigate possibilities of identity entrenchment

versus fluidity in crafting the elective components of their identities.

There may, however, be some promise for beginning to better parse this issue by

extending the focus of the type of studies which have foregrounded a potentially highly

substantive identity referent outward into other areas of identity insofar as doing so may

equip respondents with a contextualizing conceptual anchor from which to weigh other

spheres of identification across their lives in the course of interviews. Where the present

inquiry departs from these prior such studies (e.g. Hodkinson 2004; Haenfler 2006;

Fonarow 2006) then, is in bringing these conceptual concerns into interview design,

interview execution, and data analysis, thereby going a step beyond documenting

substance and providing descriptive articulation of a single grouping as the primary

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[31] This is especially perhaps thorny empirical territory where the more recent departures of postmodernist
sensibilities are thought to defy linear articulation.

analytical endpoints. Though the retrospective standpoint of the presented data is not essential to accessing this particular aspect of this chapter, it nonetheless arguably aided in subjects' ability to make distinctions within a conversation in which they weighed (changes in) their relationships with other identities and identification sensibilities as taken over the longer-view of their entire lives up to this point.

The data support the baseline claim that a substantive referent like straightedge can provide a benchmark for respondents to weigh other potential distinctions in terms that align with aspects of larger identity theories. In one respect, straightedge lended interviewees the ability to conceptualize other potential affiliations they saw as equally distinct or substantive when prompted, either in their own life or more generally. For example, in my conversation with the Brooklyn advertiser Aaron, we see him reflecting upon his former affiliation with straightedge in terms of autonomy, community, distinctiveness, and identity (Hodkinson 2002, 2004), which, upon prompting, then allowed him to deploy these relative terms upon the potential for substance and substantive identification in other domains he has either explored or just conceptualizes around him in his post-straightedge life—mostly namely here, in certain strands of hip-hop culture. The excerpted exchange begins with Aaron discussing straightedge and hardcore while growing up:

> A: Back then it was like everything. It was what you did on the weekends. It was the top searches in your browser. It was the clothes you wore; I mean your haircut, your favorite record labels. It was the reason I worked at a record store. It was really just the impetus for what I did, until I discovered new things.
>
> **J: So what are you into now? What styles or music are you into now?**
>
> A: gosh, I'm into alot of different things at this point. Like I listen to alot of different hip-hop. I like to write pop songs with my friends, and on my own time

I've gotten involved with computers, advertising, gaming; I'm curious about social media and how relevant it is now. I mean there's a million different things…

J: So any of these other distinctions that you've thrown out there, are there any ways they are similar to or different from straightedge?

A: Alot of them are very similar. There's differences in every one of them. Like hip-hop for example. Really like any of them. I've met many people having dabbled in all of those things that identify or align themselves strictly with that. One of the last roommates I had, he's rapper, and its really all the guy cares about. I mean he smokes everyday because of hip-hop. He writes rap. He spends alot of his free time in the studio. He's dressed to fit the culture. There's no way he could really be more dedicated to that ya know. And to pick something that's a little less music or pop culture oriented, the people I work with now in advertising, they strictly focus on making money and selling advertising, making money, and selling advertising. They've taken all these things beyond hobby or beyond job or career, to lifestyle. When they get off work they go to rap shows. And when they're at work they are at work they're working at rap labels, or studios where they record rap music, or they're working at an office where they're advertising and then they go to a party where they're with a bunch of advertising people. I just don't dedicate myself to any of those things as much as I [once] did.

In this exchange we can see Aaron using his conceptualization of and experiences with straightedge culture to weigh the relative substance of hip-hip subcultures and other cultures as group-level distinctions when prompted. Further, he assesses the extent to which he and his former roommate possessed more (or less) substantive ties to hip-hop as individuals in terms of their participation in direct cultural elaboration. His comment that he no longer "dedicates" himself to things the way he once did also foreshadow the broader identity issues pertaining to "touring" and "traveling" that cap this chapter.

Parleying off Aaron's comments, the Eastern Pennsylvania resident Marcus perhaps takes the notion that substantive affiliation opens the way to being able to subjectively measure other kinds of cultures a step further. In particular, Marcus discusses what he believes to be the essentiality of subcultural participation in his being

able to properly understand and assess other (sub)cultures on their own terms. In this excerpt, we see him discussing how he believes his own affiliations might appear flat to the—ostensibly conventional—outsider while at the same time professing a belief that these have allowed him to learn about similar affiliations and, in his mind, properly contextualize sensibilities that are not "subcultural" in his view. Some of his comments pivot around the substance he perceives surrounding the New York City hardcore band The Cro-Mags.

> M: You tend to learn about other types of cultures when you are in a subculture I've found. Like alot of people will just listen to radio music or something like that or maybe they'll even go to a few hip hop shows or something like that, but Ill know about all that kinda music they know about and they wont even grasp hardcore or punk…You'll listen to a band like The Cro-Mags and they'll say "its like a headbanging Marilyn Manson music" or something. And its funny to listen to people be so naive about something like that, and you [by contrast] understand about their culture…You learn about other cultures besides just the one that you're in
>
> **J: just so I get you here, you feel that its been able to help you see the minutiae or like the details of other possible things**
>
> M: absolutely
>
> **J: where people on the outside cant possibly grasp how deep it can go?**
>
> M: …Go pick five people at this bar and ask them about Krishna or something like that…They'll probably just label it as some dudes that stand at the airport who hand out pamphlets. While, I went to see The Cro-Mags and the guy who headed the club was Krishna, so you learn about that kinda stuff…and then hip hop, and hardcore, and metal…Ya know, cultures.

Where the above pieces of my conversations with Aaron and Marcus demonstrate that discussing substance can enable interviewees to conceive of other distinctions in similar terms, it enabled respondents to differentiate these from other sensibilities in their lives. On one basic level that merits note before moving forward, it simply allowed

interviewees to distinguish potentially similar affiliations and leisure pursuits that they do

not conceptualize possessing exceptionally substantive ties to. Here, the New Jersey

Human Resources worker Simon exemplifies this point when discussing his relation to

the indie rock scene relative to his former degree of participation in the hardcore music

scene, which he told me he largely transitioned out of much as he had exited straightedge.

> **J: Still into hardcore now?**
>
> S: Not so much…Its so like typical, I'm like super into indie rock, but I was always into indie rock even when I was into punk and hardcore. I like electronic music and ambient metal; I've always liked metal…I have friends who are still in [hardcore] bands currently, so Ill go see those bands when they come around, specifically, but if they're not playing I don't care.
>
> **….**
>
> **J: What makes say indie rock as an affiliation similar to or different from straightedge?**
>
> S: …Its just music; its something that I enjoy doing as opposed to a lifestyle. Even though I read music blogs and am into music, I can always put that stuff on the backburner and just like listen to music and enjoy it...

Still, Simon's articulation about indie rock (among other genres) as being a "hobby" and

"just music" when compared to the depth of his former relationship with straightedge and

hardcore, while well exemplifying relative partiality and diminished commitment,

nonetheless does not align as fully with purer postmodern characterizations positing

contemporary (youth) identity roughly as liminal repertoires of unfolding individually-

oriented taste preferences ordered more by ambiguity and diversity than any coherency

(cf. Muggleton 1997, 2000; Bennett 1999, Redhead 1990; more generally, see also

Bauman 1992; Maffesoli 1996). Straightedge too notably provided a base from which

some interviewees could identify facets of their life and identity that were more ordered

by the ambivalences indicated in these theoretical formations where applicable, even

though these were by their nature more difficult to articulate. This piece of my

conversation with the Minneapolis restaurant worker Donny illustrates interviewees'

potential sensitivity toward these dispositions through weighing them against

straightedge. In this excerpt, we can see Donny reflecting upon other leisure pursuits in

his youth that extend beyond straightedge like BMX biking, skateboarding, and pop punk

music. More in line with certain aspects of postmodernist claims, he voiced to me that he

approached these with ambivalence, saw them as part of an unfolding facets of life yet

did not see any substantial defining boundaries in them that he took as meaningful, and

struggled to articulate just how these forms intersected one another. Most notably,

Donny rejected that these were part of any coherent identity project, particularly where as

he asserts below that none of these could directly make one "anything" in his mind as he

conceptualized straightedge potentially could. When I asked him what other things he

had been or was interested in throughout his life, he said that:

> D: …In junior high I was way into [the record labels] Fat Wreck and Epitaph, sort of like what I think of as pop punk…bands like NOFX, shit like that, Bad Religion. Me and my friends in junior high, we liked to skateboard and BMX…but that wasn't something that was related to anything…
>
> **J: I know its hard, I know kinda what you're talking about, its like a thing…**
>
> D: it's a thing, but its not something that *made you anything*
>
> **J: What might have made this other distinction similar to or different from straightedge?**
>
> D: well its not…an exclusive thing. There was no club name for it. There's no, whatever, its open to anyone, there's no constraints on it…it was not exclusive. It was not, there wasn't a club to join.

J: What about, a word that is floating around in my head is coherency; do you feel like there was less coherency to it?

D: Its just like life, like day to day…It was just life instead of like a direct message…It was nothing like that./…/Its [straightedge] just more of a rigid lifestyle. You can listen to No Use For Name and just be a fan of theirs and just be a fan of that. Or you can also listen to Earth Crisis and have that be your favorite band, but, if you smoke cigs, even if you don't drink, you're on the outside looking in.

Contrary to certain implications of some grander—if frequently excessively "either-or"—theoretical pronouncements upon the contours of contemporary elective identification in many popular and sub cultural studies, it would appear that substantive and non-substantive sensibilities can well coexist on the level of subjectivity to varying degrees, and that individuals can at times moreover well-apprehend such theoretical distinctions when speaking in reference to a relatively substantive referent as a benchmark from which they can them assess their varied approaches to other aspects of identity and identification. The perspectives from Aaron and Marcus, Simon, and Donny that surfaced in the dynamic of our exchanges well exemplify the primary ways in which interviewees distinguished facets of their identity over time. By branching outward from a substantive referent, the data gleaned from these conversations provide a different perspective on how people engage in serial identification and identity multiplicity relative to other accounts that have primarily emphasized synchronicity to this point. Also, the data here vitally provides a base that can contextualize interviewees' broader orientational approaches toward entrenchment (or not) in self-concept.

Contextualizing (Subcultural) Identity Autobiography

Inasmuch as interviewees were able to distinguish highly subjectively salient—substantive—identity affiliations or aspects of their self-concept from those either less substantive or more fully reflective of postmodern sensibilities, this dynamism allowed for a somewhat novel look at their identity autobiography to surface in their narratives relative to previous (youth subcultural) studies, particularly where nominated facets of their identity evolved in their subjective conceptualizations from hindsight. Muggleton's (2000) study remains the most focused and comprehensive attempt at empirically grappling with elective identity multiplicity and seriality as unfolding over time on the level of research subjects' narratives. Muggleton's broad conclusion is that, in contrast to traditional—rigidly structuralist—formulations of authenticity, it is through identity uniqueness, mobility, multiplicity, and change—albeit gradual rather than abrupt—that individuals construct authenticity within the (pseudo)individualizing conditions of postmodernization. The larger premise being that if authenticity is subjectively perceived to be a genuine expression of self reflected in appearance, identity, and action, then the self must also be mobile and multifariously constituted over time, as, by contrast, a wholly static self is viewed as stereotypical and suffocating in the contemporary milieu. This emphasis on authenticity through individuality and mobility in Muggleton's research leads him to conclude that contemporary subculturalists rarely attach specific values to groupings that would differentiate them from others, and he took this this as an indicator of less coherence in values associated with subculture than might assumed in traditional—CCCS or other similar—terms.

My data show that there is an element of Muggleton's characterization of authenticity, but there are also frequent invocations toward cultural substance and potentialities in subjectively substantive identity affiliation. Where other studies foregrounding a singular substantive referent with mostly "active" participants have not gone as far in explicitly grappling with identification multiplicity then, this section extends the scope of Muggleton's expressedly synchronic account by engaging potentially subjectively "substantive stops" across respondents' identification autobiographies, which, may instead better characterize certain (aspects of) elective identity histories. Such a standpoint can additionally facilitate seeing how "substantive stop" sensibilities can potentially coexist alongside or even intersect with spheres better approximated by partiality or pastiche, thus adding conceptual sensitivity to what is essentially an epistemological blindspot in Muggleton's study and other similar postmodern works—the possibility of subjective substantive depth aimed at community within serially unfolding elective identification.

Some interviewees described a more expansive view of substance beyond just straightedge, either as a larger unfolding identity project possessing multiple stops or within subjectively held intersections of multiple identities. Regarding the possibility of holding multiple intersecting subjectively substantive identities, and in contrasting Muggleton's assessment, the New York graduate student Christian, for example, voiced to me that he conceived of himself as simultaneously a punk, a skinhead, and straightedge in his formative years. He also stated, despite otherwise discussing straightedge in significant terms on both personal and community levels, that

C: Straightedge wasn't what [primarily] defined us. Like it was an aspect of what we were, but conceptually in our minds we thought of ourselves as other punks or skinheads or whatever, and straightedge was just an aspect under that file.

JT: So it sounds like you file straightedge under the broader category punk guy, do you feel that adopting straightedge identity under the punk identity that it provided more or no extra distance from the rest of the world?

C: To me it was almost a natural extension of it. It was taking the concept of rebellion further, in the sense that the majority of subcultures preceding this had massive amounts of chemical consumption as part of their rebellion and they achieved nothing. And if you take a step back and look and see if what you're calling rebellion is actually the norm, then it's not rebellion so this is the exact opposite, so this is rebellion/…/ I saw it as the new face of rebellion; it was like that. I see punk rock as being founded on this rebellion and I saw straightedge as the next extension of rebellion.

Where Christian's basic discussion of his uniquely fashioned self within his conceptualization of his peer group indicates subjective substiantive multiplicity, this sort of baseline reference to substance well contextualized other autobiographical stops or becomings that individuals explored across time in their histories that they also took to be subjectively salient. For one orienting example here, the New Jersey cook Shawn's autobiography is couched in terms where he moves from one perceived substantive stop to another. Shawn explores other cultures and his beliefs about his becomings indicate a serially unfolding trajectory bound together by substance and explicit value-systems rather than partiality as Muggleton's study and other postmodern thinkers (see especially Polhemus 1996, 1997) have influentially argued. Also exhibiting the process of "fade" outlined, we see Shawn telling me of his coming into Krishna Consciousness through exposure to youth crew straightedge that

I got into straightedge probably like most people, like through hardcore, punk. I got involved with hardcore punk probably in 1986 through ya know skateboarding. Kinda like if you skated you listened to punk music….it just kinda

went hand in hand. Initially, the first bands I got into weren't straightedge bands, they were west coast style punk like Suicidal Tendencies, Black Flag, Circle Jerks, stuff like that. Then later I found out about more of the east coast bands and straightedge like Minor Threat, Dag Nasty, Bold, Chain of Strength, Youth of Today, that kinda stuff. I was influenced to make a choice to be straightedge./.../ [There werel a lot of the burnouts or people who were getting wasted and whatever every weekend or getting hi at school and I kinda wanted to utilize my energy in a different way…Then, when I was 16 I got involved with the Hare Krishna's, so then like spiritual study and lifestyle practice became important to me and the straightedge was a part of it because they [Krishnas] don't use any intoxication whatsoever. I was straightedge, but it was like the straightedge label's importance was kinda pushed aside, it was there but it was something that I never really thought about because these other types of pursuits like mantra meditation, and studying scripture, and becoming vegetarian, and learning about different cultures and stuff was becoming more important to me than straightedge

These sorts of trajectories were also intersected with or described alongside less value-driven or more aesthetic-oriented sensibilities and transitions in other instances. One domain where many interviewees exhibited this was in the finer sub-distinctions they made in their musical taste preferences and scenes they cycled through. For example, in the below exchange, we see Costanza, a 26-year-old Chicago nonprofit worker who was straightedge from ages 14-21, describing himself as somewhat whimsically "bouncing around" from one sphere to another as based upon what was more broadly popular or taken as "cool" within his broader friendship network at the time. Yet, in the same breath, we can also see Costanza describing maintaining a consistent commitment to his straightedge. When I asked him what other tastes and identities he had explored throughout his life, he said

C: When I was younger, I bounced around… but I guess, when I was younger I was really into youth crew which then translated into me also liking the typical…beatdown bands, like the heavier stuff, that sort of like spoke to my love of metal and death metal all of that stuff. I kinda like bounced around…I was vegan for a little too while was younger too…

J: it sounds like there's some consistency in there, but there's also some blips, what led to changes?

C: I think it was, I honestly feel this general trend to where the music was headed. So if you're around 2002, 2003 where metalcore was really big and that transitioned to hardcore kids that like youth crew, and its kinda shifted back and forth. I think one thing I've noticed is that like straightedge in that entire time period became something was cool, then it wasn't cool, then it was cool, and it wasn't cool, and I kinda stayed away from falling into that. But I think the shift in the music was just more about what kinda people I was friends with would listen to, what bands were producing...

For another example perhaps deeper in this vein, regarding self-presentation, the

Winnipeg caterer Claudette told me that, while she saw straightedge as a fundamental

marker of her identity while she affiliated, that she did not attach much value to the

fashion norms in various music cultures that she and her friends cycled through, despite

their adherence to these norms. She reflected on these shifts

Like we all dressed the same, we all had tattoos. It was pretty bad back then (laughs). All the girls had these little Prince Valiant haircuts, and we all wore little bandanas, and cuffed our jeans, and we all looked exactly the same, we're all wearing the same kind of shoes/…/I find alot of [people]…like to jump from one little group to the other. Like I have friends who were into ska one day and then they were super hardcore and then they dressed like punks and then they were rockabilly

Identity Disposition and Navigating the (Post)Modern Milieu: Touring here, Traveling there, a Traveler always, or a Tourist now?

Where we see interviewees being able to subjectively apprehend distinctions and

aspects of self-concept they take to be substantive from those they do not, and from there

characterize their multiplications, intersections, and/or changes as these serially unfold

over time, there rests a larger overlaying issue of *broader disposition* toward identity and

identification within social theory that merits attention. Social theorists have long

conceptualized pre-modern identities as direct givens and as relatively stable—if even simple—ascriptions within the development of organized modernity into the mid-20th Century (cf. Durkheim 1893, 1912; Weber 1922; Parsons and Shils 1951; Giddens 1991; Bauman 1996; Baudrillard 1994), but there is considerable disagreement regarding the ordering contours of identification in the destabilizing time since, where, most theorists find themselves roughly settling into one of two camps: as either tending toward something akin to Giddens' thesis of reflexive modernity and individualization, or the disindividuating—similarity through difference—claims of cultural postmodernism. Of particular focus here then, is how elective identification relates to *subjective (non)entrenchment* in the contemporary post-World War II milieu in which more identity options are available than for individuals to fashion highly distinct selves.

At the crux of this theoretical divide arise two dispositions toward identification and (non)entrenchment that roughly correspond to each perspective. Paul Sweetman (2004), drawing in no small part on Bauman, usefully classifies these types. On one hand, in line with cultural postmodernism, an individual's approach toward identitification might tend toward a "tourist" orientation—a term coined by Bauman (1996; see also Bauman 1992) to capture the parodic, unsettled, always-on-the-move, and even carinvalesque possibilities available in the typification of contemporary identity—in which individuals readily embrace the ephemera of what they take to be the free-floating, self-referential identity options on offer. On the other hand, the individual may embrace a "traveler" orientation where typification and reflective self-understanding better align with Giddens' (1991) concerns for ontological security, knowing, authenticity, and fixity, where individuals construct elective lifestyles that give form to a particular self-image

through a continuously revised self-narrative that features successive spheres through which entrenchment is constructed over time (on reflexively constituted identity, see also Beck 1992, 1994).

While the tourist embraces frivolity and exhibits a postmodern sensibility toward their self then, the traveler is concerned with authenticity and entrenchment as they move through their lives. As Sweetman (2004, p.91) puts it, "where the tourist accepts, acknowledges, and openly celebrates the superficial, postmodern environment, the traveller seeks—and *claims*—authenticity on the basis of greater depth in involvement— whether real or imagined—with various stop off points on his or her itinerary." These respective orientations can be thought to occupy the same metaphorical space for all intents and purposes—that of the high modern or postmodern West where subjects navigate an increasing torrent of identification options. They can furthermore be thought to reflect distinctive the approaches—embracement of parody versus a modernist search for authenticity—that are encapsulated within the very larger theoretical identity models that—even tacitly in many cases—underpin and drive the bulk of empirical work in sociology and cultural studies possessing operational with issues of identity. Where these dispositions have largely been treated as distinct, in isolation, and/or taken-for-granted in previous work, here I grapple with the extent to which both of these respective sensibilities can be represented, coexist compartmentalized, intersect, or even give way to one another on phenomenological levels.

Thus far there is strong evidence to suggest that *both* the tourist and the traveler as dispositional types can characterize modalities by which individuals approach the terrain of contemporary identity. In some cases, very much in line with the central claims of

reflexive modernization, a consistent traveler sensibility was voiced. This manifested

primarily in terms of community ties and/or other diverse arrays of individually-focused

subjective constructions of entrenchment. Regarding community traveling, the Brooklyn

graduate student J-Dub told me he once found fixity in straightedge community but that

he now finds it in what he conceptualizes as computer tech community, and that he

continues to search out feelings of connection to a defined community as he has done so

his entire life.

> At any given point in my life…I definitely think of myself as being part of communities. I think when I was like 16 or 17 I was definitely seeing myself as being a local New York hardcore kid, going to local hardcore shows, I was involved in that… I was very involved with the local vegetarian hardcore kids…When I lived in Europe…almost all the people I got to know were people in the hardcore community…At this point Id say that the people I hang out with are in a community…its a local tech start-up community/…/ Like nowadays, like the same way there was a small community of kids where everyone knew everyone at the shows, that was the like the small community of the people I know here where everyone is friends with everyone and everyone works on [tech] start-ups. To me, in many ways its the same type of insular community that Ive always found myself in. Its not one that is ostensibly about style…

Like J-Dub, the Upstate New York librarian Navin voiced feelings of entrenchment

regarding his ties to the music communities of his youth. When I asked him what, if

anything, in his present life might conjure similar feelings, he responded with a turn away

from community involvements in contrast to J-Dub, but nonetheless retained a traveler

sensibility when nominating an individually-focused domain of entrenchment. The

extent of his response's departure from the anchoring context of this study—youth

cultures—perhaps best illustrated the potential variation in areas where subjective

entrenchment can be constructed for the traveler. In course of discussing straightedge

and hardcore community, Navin told me that he was once—but no longer is—an

emphatic participant at shows in particular, characterized in his retrospective comments

that "shows were your social life", and a place where "you'd really feel you were

amongst friends", among other things. I then asked:

JT: So, anything in your current life that makes you feel the same way?

N: ummm, catching fish (laughs). I don't wanna say that's taken over my life. I don't eat fish but I've enjoyed fishing since I was the tiniest of tiny kids. Last year I bought a large boat. I fish all winter long, I go to Lake Ontario for salmon. It consumes my time, it consumes my money, almost everything about me now. Maybe I have an addictive personality, but I get into something but all of my resources are put into it

However, traveler orientations were not necessarily separate from those that might better

be approximated as those of the tourist. For instance, the Nashville librarian Micah

reflected continued traveling, but this coexisted alongside emergent touring sensibilities.

Regarding possessing an orientation geared toward continuing to explore sites where he

derived entrenchment and substance, Micah compared his former commitment to

straightedge and relationship with straightedge community to his marriage, and very

much displayed traveler continuity here when he said:

…It [straightedge] was my strength…I feel like its the most important decision I ever made...It was this real strong thing to me and it became even stronger as I started getting out and going to hardcore shows and being around people who were also this kind of level of strength, and it became a family and that was the biggest thing…Its kinda like the concept of marriage. I'm married. That's a distinct name that's gonna keep me from stepping out on my marriage, and that's huge—that commitment is huge; and straightedge to me was kinda like being married to that.

At the same time, though, Micah distinguishes this from his increasing stylistic

promiscuity and diversifying musical tastes preferences as he ages, all of which he

discusses in relatively inconsequential terms. When I asked him about other affiliations he may have explored in his life, he told me that he had begun to explore "EDM [Electronic Dance Music] and Goth" a bit more deeply as a aged, telling me of his leisure time that "I am now an electronic music DJ, I make this weird gothy techno kind of hybrid thing". In discussing these leisure pursuits, he digressed toward his personal style, which he told me has become an increasing mixture of varied sensibilities that he has approached with greater ambivalence over time. Specifically, Micah compared his more recent sensibilities to his youth counterpart who he felt had possessed more of a need to fit in through style

> …I felt like I needed to belong in the early days. As I kinda changed…I guess I was finding out about different kinds of music more, and I was hanging out with different kinds of people. And I think we all kind of borrow our fashion from other people, and what we're into. So I would borrow from skateboarding, I would borrow that look; I would borrow from the punk rock scene; I would borrow from hardcore. I would borrow from all different kinds of fashions or alternative culture fashions that incorporated and kind of ended up leading up to the way I dress now. So yeah, I just got backfrom Northern California , and this shirt is very California to me…I've got whatever…Its a mish mash!

Where Micah's more direct comments reflect touring and traveling orientations in relatively distinct domains, the Brooklyn makeup artist Johni better demonstrated instances where subjectively conceptually discrete identification sites underwent dispositional shifts over time. In particular, Johni recounted a decidedly traveler orientation to the intersections of style, fashion, and identity in her formative years, but described style as having given way to a tourist sensibility in her current life. This shift in her sensibilities and approach to identity is particularly apparent in this piece of our exchange, which begins with her discussing possessing modernist dispositions toward

style at the intersections of fashion and straightedge while younger, but ends with her not just voicing postmodern sensibilities when describing her current approach to style, but even demonstrating a measure of sensitivity toward understanding where her abdication of consistency in stylistic identity might foster ontological insecurities when she characterized viewing her postmodernist sensibility as "a very scary place for a lot of people to live".

> JO: It [was] very much about identity, I mean there's no easier way to outwardly say "I am a part of this" than with your clothing, because that's how we always judge each-other is externally, and that's the whole concept behind the X's on the back of your hands. Like yah it started as thing that they did in clubs to show that you we aren't old enough to drink, but by saying that you automatically said I am a part of this, and so there you have that assertion going, and so clothing was just an extension of that. The band shirts that you wore could tell someone the kind of music you liked, or it could tell alot about you….
>
> **JT: How do you dress now then?**
>
> JO: It depends. For me, as a storyteller, fashion is just an extension of that. It depends on who I want to be on that day, and I think that's a very scary place for a lot of people to live. But I have a wide variety like, Ill be gothy and weird one day and Ill have the shit to wear for that, and I have the stuff that I like that's a little bit softer and more feminine and a little less edgy maybe. But my fashion sense, and fashion has become a big thing for me, it changes based on ya know what Im into at that time. I allow myself to be a bit more of a chameleon for that…
>
> **JT: So compared to before, your younger counterpart had more of this "I am this" sort of relation to dress, whereas now it's sort of opened up to whatever the fuck?**
>
> JO: yeah…yeah!…

Conclusion

There is ample evidence to support the claim that a relatively substantive referent like straightedge could provide a conceptual anchor from which respondents can parse

the perceived substance (or not) of communities and identities they affiliate with across their life. The retrospective standpoint of the present data furthermore well allows these possible subjective shifts in sensibility and self-understanding to be well contextualized. Future studies of identity serialtiy might benefit from mindfully including substantive potentiality, if applicable, as this can open the way for the analysis to see depth and "substantive stops" in individuals' autobiographies as these might depart from other sensibilities.

My conversations with former straightedge adherents indicate that the core sensibilities posited by either the postmodern disindividuation and reflexive modernity thesis are not all-encompassing, and so future research into elective identification should be wary of deploying either of these frames in more wholesale terms. Rather, it appears that each orientational disposition can potentially inform aspects of individuals' lives over a longer-view, and that these sensibilities can even give way to one another. Contrary to certain "either-or" operational/conceptual tendencies we might find in social theory and much sociological research that follows suit with prevailing theoretical formulations of identity, my data would indicate that an approach mindful of the possibilities that *both* dispositions may inform subjects' self-concepts, and that these dispositions can change over time, might best lead the analyst understandings of just how individuals are navigating the terrain of contemporary elective identity in various contexts.

However, to be sure, the view presented in this chapter remains limited. The need to begin with substance by its nature perhaps inhibits the ability to access instances where individuals move from a tourist into a traveler sensibility. Nonetheless, the data

presented here well indicate that continued traveling is possible (both more generally and when applied to discrete identities), that both sensibilities can coexist compartmentalized, and that traveling sensibilities can give way to identity tourism (both more generally and when applied to discrete identities).

Where we do see the fixity of the traveler give way to the tourist in particular, it somewhat contravenes—through inversion—the stoicism and finality that inheres in (the transition to) "adulthood" as a metaphysical structure. Identity and consumption aside, the transition to adulthood itself has undergone substantial destabilization within the post-World-War II cultural transformations. These issues are moreover particularly germane given this study's focus population, and provide the focus for the following chapter, which will turn somewhat back toward the specificities of straightedge culture and engage theoretical issues that do not require as much multi-level interviewer-interviewee dynamism to access and represent.

CHAPTER 7

SEEING (TRANSITIONS TO) ADULTHOOD IN YOUTH (SUB)CULTURAL STUDIES THROUGH THE EYES OF FORMER STRAIGHTEGDE ADHERENTS

You waited long for 21.
For me the fight has just begun
You get in clubs, drink alcohol,
It makes you feel you're ten feet tall.

I don't wanna grow up,
I'm never getting old.
I'd rather work from 9 to 5
Than drink to stay alive.
I'm gonna stay young until I die!

You grew up fast, now you'll die soon.
I'll never fucking be like you.
You finish college, grab a wife,
You're dead before you're 35.

(7 Seconds 1984)

...How much does it cost, the booze and
drugs you need? Put your life on pause.
Is it that much fun? Maybe for some.
I think its dumb to let anyone or anything
slow me down or prevent me from
living my life. Not getting younger,
getting older—it's scary.
Swept out from your feet and your youth's
gone and you wonder why!
Work machine makes us old before our time
I don't consent, that's how I feel, because
life's too short, so I do what I can to get by.
I'll decide where my time is spent and you
can bet there'll be a smile on my face.
How about yours? How about yours!
TIME FLIES BY!

(Gorilla Biscuits 1989)

...These memories will outlive the maturity that you seek. Losing touch in your adult
world, growing older every week...I'll stay true to what I've said, even if you're not
fucking there. There's no shame in having fun, and staying young!

(In My Eyes 1998)

...Still lost, still hurting, still searching, so desperate for answers
But you have to know they're out there, you just have to keep on looking
Still growing up, still fucking up, still lost and desperate for answers (repeat)...

(Betrayed 2005)

Regarding the issues of adulthood and adult transition, it is only very recently (cf. Bennett 2013; Bennett and Hodkinson 2012; Hodkinson 2011, 2013a) that scholars of youth subculture have begun to more directly scratch the surface of what is often inevitably youth (sub)cultural participation's "other side"—adulthood. A survey of the literature from the last century or so, however, shows that adulthood has nonetheless possessed a significant—perhaps even looming—presence throughout the history of youth subcultural studies, albeit a relatively silent and certainly understated one to this point.

In this vein, perhaps among the more resounding conclusions that can be gleaned from the recent attention paid toward individuals aging in relation to ostensibly "youthful" cultures is that the conceptual activation of this phase of life can provide a more complete and balanced picture of various affiliations individuals may latch onto in their more younger years and/or continue to find significant as they age into the inevitabilities of adult bodies and responsibilities (cf. Bennett 2013; Bennett and Hodkinson 2012; Hodkinson 2011). This chapter is firmly situated within these developments. However, I extend the larger focus on intersections with the more conventional "box-check" adult metrics like career, child bearing, marriage, body, and style found in these works by more deeply connecting with scholarship that directly emphasizes meanings attached to subjectively constituted adulthood, where individuals engage direct questions such as "what does it mean to be an adult" and "to what extent am I (becoming) an adult" in terms of what has helped and hindered them along their way (see Arnett, 2004; Carr and Kefalas 2009; Hartmann and Swartz 2007; Mollenkopf et al. 2005; Shanahan et al. 2005; Waters et al. 2011). In addition, this study centers upon

those who have categorically disaffiliated from a referent like straightedge which further departs from the tilt in these recent works toward examining issues related to aging *alongside* style or *within* community.

In this chapter then, I explore the ways a more conceptually active and careful treatment of adulthood that considers individuals' trajectories into adulthood, its potentialities, and the constitution of subjective adulthood can benefit understandings of youth (sub)cultures in providing a more balanced and complete picture of various phases and affiliations individuals may latch onto in their more younger years and/or continue to find subjectively significant as they age into—potentially uniquely fashioned— adulthoods. Much as the view of an identity from the standpoint of the ex can elucidate aspects of particular identities the standpoint of retrospect, the look at adulthood—be those who believe they are adult, still coming toward it, or other—in relation to the specifically "youth"-based foci of youth subcultural studies can potentially bring forward unique issues that pertain to adulthood and becoming adult.

As the lyrics from influential straightedge bands 7 Seconds, Gorilla Biscuits, Betrayed, and In My Eyes above indicate, for those coming of age in the context of certain youth scenes like straightedge, adulthood may present an image against which participants construct vigorous distance that may shape the meanings they attach to adulthood, the schemas they deploy in constructing their own subjective adulthood, and the tensions they may experience during transition in ways that depart from selected populations in existing studies of subjective adult transition.

Studying Transitions to Subjective Adulthood

Smooth transitions into traditional adulthood through markers like home ownership, marriage, parenthood, and stable employment, among other things are indeed becoming increasingly rare in the modern West even more generally speaking. In turn, interpretive inquiry into subjective adulthood has largely developed as a means of getting beyond possible analytical shortcomings that can accompany "box-check" benchmark operationalizations of adulthood (e.g. Hogan and Astone 1986) in this contemporary transitional milieu, where, many young persons now take highly individualized paths to adulthood and may not even aspire to any adult fixity or aspects of its conventional iterations. Scholarly treatments reflect this potential diversity where some have argued a "new adulthood" ambivalent toward finality and conventional stoicism is materializing (Hartmann and Swartz 2007), another notable contingent have posited "emerging adulthood" as a discrete and altogether new post-adolescent life course category (Arnett 2004; Arnett and Tanner 2006), and still others see this phenomenon as a revised and distinctively "young" adulthood (Settersten et al. 2005). Regardless of specific frames, all forays into subjective adulthood roughly explore issues related to Arnett's (2004) characterization of the transition process as being hallmarked by feelings of in-betweenedness, instability, identify flux, and self-focus; and the core thrust of empirical inquiry centers upon what enables and holds individuals back in these terms through questions like "What does it mean to be an adult to you?", "Are there any ways you feel you are (becoming) an adult?", and "What in particular helped or hindered your ability to

attain adulthood?", for some sensitizing examples (Arnett 2004; Carr and Kefalas 2009; Waters et al. 2011).

Regardless of how it is characterized, it is clear that space for a greater range of paths to and configurations of subjective adulthood has opened in post-War Western societies (Waters et al. 2011; Torkelson 2012). Social scientists have in turn begun considering a greater range of (pathways into) subjectively constituted adulthoods through a—still growing—wealth of interpretive work that prizes the accounts and definitions of transitioning adults themselves (cf. Arnett 2004; Arnett and Tanner, 2006; Carr and Kefalas 2009; Hartmann and Swartz 2007; Mollenkopf et al. 2005; Waters et al. 2011), grapples with what enables and holds individuals back along their way (Arnett 2004; Carr and Kefalas 2009; Danziger and Rouse 2007; Osgood et al. 2005; Waters et al. 2011), and engages direct questions like "What does it mean to be an adult?", "Are there any ways your understanding of adulthood differs from the past?", "Are there any ways you feel you are (becoming) adult?", and "Has anything in particular helped or hindered your ability to attain adulthood?", for some examples.

Studied populations have ranged from those who embrace a more circuitous path to adulthood to those who continue to aim for a traditional trajectory, and have furthermore largely been selected and distinguished where individuals' perceptions diverge along the basis of general sociological variables like race/ethnicity (Arnett 2003; Waters et al 2011), gender (Arnett 2004), and social context (Carr and Kefalas 2009; Waters et al 2011), among many others. The focus on commonplace social variables— and their intersections—has yielded excellent insight into distinct perceptions of adulthood and transitional experiences for individuals situated within differing

demographic backdrops. To the extent overlaying trends emerge across these variables, educational attainment and gainful employment broadly appear to be persisting as meaningful "box-check" facets of subjective adulthood, while child bearing, marriage, and home ownership are declining in salience (Arnett 2004; Carr and Kefalas 2009, Hartmann and Swartz, 2007; Waters et al. 2011; Furstenberg et al. 2004).

Beyond just these traditional sociological categories, however, the chosen affiliations, communities, and texts upon which youth constitute identity undoubtedly also pertain to the field's binding cornerstone emphases of exploration, self-focus, and feelings of transition. Inquiry into subjective adulthood anchored in and selected from certain youth cultures then can potentially access transitional interpretive schemas that somewhat depart from the field's established purview. Taken further, a study of those who might more actively construct distinction against adulthood, such as participants of youth scenes like straightedge, may illuminate a transition process containing tensions and possibilities extending beyond the foci of existing studies. However, if chosen youth identities have been somewhat underrepresented in perspectives on subjective adult transition, once again, adulthood has possessed a longstanding silence—yet nonetheless looming presence—in conceptualizations of youth scenes until only recently.

(The Silent Presence of) Adulthood in Prevailing Conceptual Models of Subculture

When reading through the subcultures literature with an eye for adulthood and adult transition, one sees each major conceptual paradigm reading its own brand of unique—if not outright "emphatic"—youthfulness into youth subculture that is constituted against what is largely an unstated notion of adulthood. Each thus underplays

the potential analytical import of "adulthood" and the process of transitioning into adulthood in implicated life trajectories, both as far as its longer-term possibilities of subculture are concerned and the ways individuals must come to reconcile their "emphatic" youthfulness—and its sensibilities—with the eventualities of becoming adult in some form or another.

Regarding the American paradigm of subcultural studies (cf. Cohen 1955; Cloward and Ohlin 1960; Gordon 1947; Miller 1958; Park 1915), younger urban men were indeed conceptually separated from their older community counterparts, and one might reasonably infer that the contours of—moving into—adulthood for underclass youth in this model were preordained by social structures related to the models of social ecology and strain anchoring American conceptions of subculture, leaving subculturalists moving inexorably to a deviant adult life. Yet, just how aging and becoming adult may (or may not) alter youths' more delinquent tendencies or values—the primary bases upon which youth were distinguished in the first place—was never given much attention despite that it was precisely this distinction that made "youth" subcultures an object to study in the first place.

Similarly, the canonizing 1970's work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham (CCCS) distinguished youth from their older counterparts but did not elaborate upon what adulthood—or more precisely, the local cultures in which youth were theoretically located—might look like as subculturalists inevitably age. In following suit with the neo-Marxism that was in vogue at the time, the CCCS model situated working class youth subcultures within post-War class contradictions where youth simultaneously resisted the larger hegemonic culture's values

and their "parent culture"—the local sect of the working class in which youth lived that was complicit with predominant ideology—via stylistic homologies that CCCS theorists believed recontextualized the world in a way that was meaningful from subculturalists' own standpoint but created semiotic "noise" that infringed upon mainstream taken-for-granted adult sensibilities (cf. Cohen 1972; Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hebdige 1979; Murdock 1974; Willis 1978). Although these modalities were centrally thought to lead subculturalists to experience the world in ways that were "uncompromisingly youthful" (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, and Roberts 1976, p. 51) and thereby sharply distinguish their dispositions and coming of age from that of the "parent culture" above them, no direct attention was ever paid to what adulthood might look like for youth either as they transition into or eventually outright assume the parent culture.

In turn, the post-subcultural theoretical developments wriggled the "youthfulness" the CCCS identified free from the confines of such structural and class-based entanglements by instead locating it in partial, ephemeral, heterogeneous, and hybrid patterns of consumption that are more driven by the affect and ambience postmodern cultural forms can elicit for participants (Bennett 1999; Muggleton 1997; Redhead 1990). Yet, here too some notion of (transitioning into) adulthood can reasonably be inferred insofar as perspectives under this rubric characterize implicated trends and configurations as "youthful" or as youth-oriented taste preferences that individuals might eventually move on from. When placed more strictly in even these terms, though, becoming adult is merely treated as redundant with shifts in consumption patterns; and the possible longer-term significance of various youth affiliations or the ways that leaving certain youthfully-oriented spaces might differ from those that are not is somewhat deemphasized.

As already mentioned, a handful of recent works have begun to add balance to these conceptualizations, but these are largely focused on aging, largely as it intersects "box-check" metrics and plays out "within" the context of various (sub)cultures. The takeaway from these studies is nonetheless perhaps threefold for the present case. For one, regarding inquiry into conventional spheres, it would appear that the affiliations of one's youth can impact style, politics, family, and career later in life (Bennett 2013; Hodkinson 2013a; Haenfler 2012; Davis 2012; Gregory 2012; Torkelson 2010). Regarding aging "within" subcultures, the assumption that music and style scenes are exclusively reserved for youth is increasingly untenable as communities are seeing individuals well into their 30s and 40s comfortably participating (Bennett 2006, 2013; Hodkinson 2011; Holland 2004). Likewise, older participants may use scene rituals as means of resisting the strictures of socially constructed aging in leisure (Bennett 2013; Taylor 2012; see also Thornton 1995).

Across all dimensions, participants can clearly continue to be impacted by communities of their youth as they age (see also Haenfler 2014, Hodkinson 2013b). Further, in line with the field's consistent emphasis on "youthfulness", and as the lyrics at the outset of this article indicate, we might see "adulthood" as possessing a long-standing presence in youth subcultural theory and youth scenes insofar as its attendant sensibilities—particularly some separation or rejection thereof—define core boundaries. Indeed, much as the jazz musicians in Becker's (1963) now classic study distinguished themselves as "hip" in contrast to the "square" world, empirical research consistently finds some image of (adult) conventionality anchors similar conceptions in youth scenes (Brake 1985; Haenfler 2006; Muggleton 2000; Thornton 1995).

Subculture and Adulthood

In all, direct attention paid to meanings attached to becoming "adult" relation to such boundaries, how subjective understandings of adulthood might be reconfigured in the transition process, and what helps and hinders individuals along the way may be central to unpacking the fuller range of meanings that may stem from various scenes, particularly where sensibilities derived from (former) community may carry over to (transitioning) adults' self-concepts. In particular, the data presented in this study will extend beyond the "box check" foci found in many of the newer works on aging and youth subcultures.

Bracing, Bargaining, (Dis)comfort

To be sure, regarding adulthood, a few former straightedgers told me they had conceived of and embraced a more or less traditional iteration of adulthood their whole lives. The vast majority of respondents, however, expressed that they possessed—often quite pronounced—negative feelings toward the notion of adult conventionality, particularly when reflecting from the standpoint of their straightedge self. For instance, the Cincinnati graduate student Roosevelt said "to me, at the time, when I was straightedge...adulthood was giving up on what made you an individual...going with the herd, getting real excited for causal Friday, those sorts of things". The Eastern Pennsylvania social worker Raul echoes these sentiments, but, like many others, more explicitly tied them up with his participation in straightedge and hardcore when he told me "I never wanted to grow up/.../my participation in hardcore punk rock and straightedge was a direct result of me not wanting to grow up or be a part of the adult

regular community". Not surprisingly, others further associated drinking alcohol with

adulthood and as a practice they sought to achieve distance from. In tapping into the

outlook of his more youthful counterpart here, Toronto undergraduate Todd summed up

these perceptions nicely

> I would have been like 14, maybe 13 [when] I was first starting to learn about
> straightedge. I had this friend who was a couple years older in high school, and I
> remember talking to her on MSN one day...about how she was drinking with her
> friends that night, and...I was really blown away, like kids actually drink? That's
> messed up! Why would you wanna do that?   I just found it completely abhorrent,
> like why would you ever wanna drink, it seems like such a shitty adult thing to do

Such potentially intense subculturally-rooted antipathy toward adulthood laid bases that

shaped the transition process in a variety of ways. For one, when assuming the

standpoint of their former selves, there was a "bracing" for adulthood voiced among

many that worked to keep them tied to the conceptual schema they developed through

straightedge culture while transitioning. The Washington DC philosopher Thrasymachus

well exemplifies this when describing his ritually listening to straightedge pioneers Minor

Threat's self-titled song at midnight from his 18-21st birthdays as a means of

recommitting to certain contrarian ethics and refuting the advancing specter of adulthood

> It [adulthood] was ugly. I despised the idea. In fact when I turned 18 and 21 I
> listened to like "Minor Threat" the song at midnight/.../between the ages 18, 19,
> 20, 21 at midnight on my birthday I'd play that song and listen to it intently to sort
> of like reaffirm my commitment to being young at heart and...the spirit of
> hardcore. I said fuck being a grown up, fuck selling out in that sense. Fuck
> resigning yourself to conventional expectations and the expectations of family life
> and being well-behaved and adhering to authority, and fuck all that, they can
> shove that up their ass. I don't want anything to do with that. I'm gonna be a
> pissed off, impulsive, disaffected, idealistic, malcontent my whole life; and
> that was something I was into

At the same time, even the most trenchant of interviewees here, Thrasymachus included, told me they eventually envisioned some form of adulthood for themselves, albeit one that was frequently negotiated or perceived as alternative to ostensibly predictable trajectories. Perhaps similar to some of the older fans of various popular music genres in Bennett's (2013) study who successfully combined (aspects of) career with their passions, for a notable amount of ex-straightedgers, maintaining distance from adult conventionality—at least initially—involved aspirations to maintain space within hardcore or punk through the modest livings they saw possible through playing in touring bands and/or by moving into more formal productive and organizational roles.

Emblematic of this mindset is the Brooklyn advertiser Aaron who told me that he planned—and eventually followed through—on starting a record label as a means of finding an adulthood he could reconcile with his desire to stay "outside" the conventional adult world. Akin to the perspectives of others introduced thus far, in retrospect, Aaron described his younger counterpart as thinking adulthood was "evil", "for suckers who didn't have a higher calling or more focused idea of what their future should be", "an easy way out", and that

> I thought that for sure, that without a doubt, that I could just keep doing exactly what I was doing—I thought that I could just keep going to hardcore shows. Adulthood to me was just starting a hardcore label, and instead of going to hardcore shows, maybe organizing them and making money off hardcore. I obviously never expected to get rich but I was convinced I could just do hardcore in all of the things I needed to do to be an adult

Whereas recent studies on aging within scenes detail how scene affiliation can be revised to accommodate inevitable adult responsibilities[32] and community reconfigured into multigenerational forms (Bennett 2013; Bennett and Hodkinson 2012; Hodkinson 2011), the explicit focus on meanings toward adulthood from the standpoint of retrospect in this data shows that more ardently held boundaries can produce pronounced tensions during adult transition that may prompt individuals to outright shed distinction and/or leave community.

For example, Margaret, the New Jersey attorney, said of the onset of adulthood that "when something is a lifestyle [and] not a hobby, you have to consider things...As I grew up and as I wanted a nice job, and as I wanted to own a home, straightedge became more of a hobby and less of a lifestyle". For his part, Shawn, the 33-year-old New Jersey cook and recent father, told me that since his son was born the amount of time he was able to put into the hardcore music scene was becoming increasingly "rare" and was now articulated in forms that departed from his past. He said "For me hardcore now is like I do an online blog 'zine and we are working on a documentary right now and I do music, and that's how I contribute at this point. I can't go out to everybody's show, I don't have time to do it". While Shawn continued to carve ways to age alongside some of the scenes from his youth (see also Bennett and Hodkinson 2012; Hodkinson 2011), many others found their more youthful mindsets and certain related affiliation(s) somewhat unsuited with the experience of aging and engaging aspects of what they saw as the adult world. Here, Margaret further stated of her departure from straightedge and hardcore that "I do think that its incompatible with adulthood...if you're an adult, it just doesn't work".

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[32] Where more uncompromising ex-straightedgers voiced hindsight misgivings about former scene involvement, it's perhaps not surprising Haenfler's (2012) study of aging straightedgers in particular shows substantially revised affiliation is common among those who retain identity

Likewise Mike, the television worker from Brooklyn, combines the outlined "diminished returns" of straightedge distinction with subjective adulthood, which he told me led him to eventually seek out other—less rigidly defined—music cultures that he felt were more aligned with adult sensibilities. Mike told me

> I guess that as I've grown up and like I've had to do more adult things...like doing my job and paying my rent. I don't think that anyone would really care that I was straightedge, they would just be like "do whatever, do whatever you want, who cares" and I think that's the kind of attitude as I get older. I still meet people who are straightedge but it's not like it used to be...it's like it doesn't matter like it used to...It's definitely much more important in high school to have labels

And for his part, Oakland social worker Jared described feeling that straightedge no longer "fit" him as he aged and came to present impediments in his romantic life and in his ability to forge connections with acquaintances like coworkers. He remarked upon the encroaching feeling that

> If you're post-21 and straightedge...you're a weirdo. Like its so difficult if you meet a girl even...its not like the best first date to go out with a chick order a diet coke...like I don't want a chick to get loaded and be like the creepy guy around her, or she's gonna be like holding back and like not having fun because she's uncomfortable with me not drinking...[Social drinking], its just one of those things of bonding that people have...Like when you go out and people offer you things, they wanna offer, they wanna give you hospitality, and you're like giving a middle finger to some people [by declining]

Hindrance, Help, Alternative

This is not to say that the boundaries ex-straightedgers might have drawn around adulthood in any way necessarily eroded wholesale or yielded to the sort of ostensible conventionality that was emphatically opposed in some cases. On the contrary, interviewees frequently expressed a belief that their involvements with straightedge and

other—most often related—affiliations presented unique impediments, opportunities, and pathways to adulthoods they felt non-participants from their age cohorts did not necessarily have access to or would even more fully understand. In this vein, Washington DC government worker Curtis speculated that he and many of his peers were going through what he labeled a "punk rock hangover" that carried into their early adulthoods where

> You grow up punk rock and you just kinda go to shows...all of a sudden you turn back and you go: 'ok I played in a touring band and I did whatever, umm, where am I now? oh shit!'. And so the hangover part would be: 'it was really fun to be punk rock til age 30 but what was I really doing? I mean have I wasted this time?'...I think alot of people are going through that.

The carry-overs Curtis describes potentially impacted subjective adulthood in several notable ways. Some believed scene involvement hindered their ability to attain longer-term desired adulthood. Here, there was a "crash and burn" effect voiced by those who believed they had placed themselves too unyieldingly within bargained alternative trajectories in hindsight. Perhaps consonant with the finding that educational attainment and gainful employment are the primary "box-check" markers that have persisted as markers of subjective adulthood (Furstenberg et al. 2004), where respondents voluntarily drew upon conventional nomenclature in discussing scene-specific hindrances, they tended toward referencing education and employment. For example, Brad, the Nashville technician who once played in an internationally prominent straightedge band and recalled as a youth believing "adulthood was not being in a hardcore band to me...it was consistency, which at that time I didn't want. That's why I joined bands...to not be I guess you could say 'normal' [or] consistent" also told me that eventually "finding a job for me

was pretty hard because...I didn't have much work experience. It was bad. If I saw myself at 24...[I would say] now is about the time you need to get out". Much like Brad and even Aaron, the Minneapolis restaurant worker Donny once aspired to a fuller intra-scene life. While Brad discusses practical obstacles to entering the traditional work sphere upon his wishing to leave the touring circuit, Donny describes how the comprehensivity of his scene attachment may have led him to miss certain life opportunities that relate to his current feelings that he had not yet attained adulthood.

> It kinda leads you down a narrow path...I mean you can tour in a band or you can be a tour manager for a really sweet touring band. And then you can make enough money to pay your bills 6 months out of the year and be gone all the time and have this sort of glamorous aspect to your life, but then you have to be home for 6 months and you have to work at fucking Burger King, or a coffee shop, or a temp job, or whatever. There isn't much stability in that. For me at least, I just absolutely failed to see that as a disenfranchised youth...Where does that end? 35? Finally you go holy fuck dude, what do I do? What can I do now? There's nothing/.../If I could go back in time and convince myself otherwise, I would have been the guy who got stoked about going to school

Andes (1998) postulates subculturalists go through "commitment careers" that culminate in a stage of "transcendence" in which only those possessing organizational or strong intra-scene authority retain substantial ties and identity. Where Bennett (2013) has since found those who successfully continue with scene participation tend to find ways to manage "sustainable fun" by rearticulating leisure pursuits and scene passions in ways that are compatible with ageing bodies and adult responsibilities, in terms of subjective adulthood, it would appear that a "crash and burn" effect can be felt by even those in leading roles if they do not revise their participation as they age to such an extent that it may outright push some from sustained affiliation and identity.

At the same time though, informants resoundingly believed their experiences aided them in fashioning adulthoods they felt crucially set them apart from many of their immediate peers in ways they value. For instance, even Brad, despite his voiced reservations and leaving scene life behind, reflected these sentiments when comparing his past to what he still sees as conventional life trajectories when he said "if I go...downtown and stop a business man and say where have you been aside from this office building? They sit in their office and they don't really get anywhere". Beyond just such experiential possibilities contained in intra-scene roles in straightedge culture, many more described their current mindsets as out-of-step with the adult goals or rhythms of others, and often attributed this difference to their prior affiliation with straightedge and/or other distinctions. Reflecting these others, the Brooklyn graduate student J-Dub stated that his growing up within straightedge afforded him a balance that has carried over to his current life and enabled him to circumvent certain pitfalls he has long associated with standard adulthood

> To me straightedge was like a middle ground between too much partying when you were young and too little partying when you're old. Its like here, I can goof off a bit, but not goof off so much that I'm gonna have to make up for it to the point where my life is gonna suck...There are tons of people that I've grown up with who were bonkers about [partying but are now] the most boring parents imaginable, and the reaction against that was something I did when I was young and I think I'm still reacting against it. I still support the idea.

Akin to J-Dub's narrative, coming of age through straightedge provided many with schematic tools they believed were necessary to achieve valued adulthoods. Career choice and subjective adult definition are particularly noteworthy here. Regarding career choice, the DC philosopher Thrasymachus reported mindfully retaining the underlying

"spirit" that drove his former affiliation with straightedge into his selection of and current

approach to career

> Being a philosopher is my effort to do something professional and be a grown
> up and have a career while not betraying this spirit of youthfulness in the sense of
> [being] maybe idealistic, and critical...that whole spirit, that commitment that I
> think alot of people are kind of talked out of or bullied out of by the institutions
> associated with adulthood in this society.

Further in this vein, a lingering commitment to focused self-determination outside of

conventional adult definitions in some form was common. For example, the Brooklyn

make-up artist Johni prided herself on finding a career where she could "have no home

base", "travel for a living", and attributed her lifestyle to her youth when saying "I think

the things that I took out of punk, which is I do it my own way—the DIY ethic is

incredibly important to me as an artist and as a person, so I definitely pull that with me

everywhere I go…I wouldn't be the person that I am today if I hadn't had those

experiences". Likewise, the Nashville librarian Micah told me that he had picked up a

"question everything" ethos and a desire to seek experiences that depart from mainstream

expectations from straightedge. He exemplifies the potential lasting definitional

influence of youth scenes on subjective adulthood well while also perhaps further

underscoring the "spirit" and measured self-determination underlying the narratives of

Johni, Thrasymachus, and others when saying of his career

> I feel like an adult but I feel like I have my own definition of adulthood so I guess
> I'm totally fucked....Every day as a librarian I'm researching something new, and
> that's like, that's awesome....I think that sums up the way I feel an adult should
> be...not even just [within] the subcultures, I'm talking politically, I think you
> should just always be striving for information, and you shouldn't just be
> something because you're supposed to be as an adult...So that's adulthood to me

Wolves in Sheepskin, and Envisioning Diffuse Formative Collectivity

Frequently intersecting interviewees' pervasive belief that they had constituted

some form of alternative adulthood that—at least in part—stemmed from affiliations like

straightedge was the oft professed feeling that this piece of the self was delicately masked

under the interactional protocols and modes of presentation associated with traditional

spheres of adult life. At its most basic level, this was articulated as a generic bifurcation

of things like certain leisure pursuits and adulthood, where applicable. For one example,

Ed, a Pittsburgh Banker who was straightedge from ages 13-23, reflected this more

general sentiment when stating "I feel like an adult because I graduated from college, I

wear a tie to work everyday, a suit jacket; I'm a Banker I guess, it feels weird to say that,

but then at the same time I just got drunk and headbanged at a metal show." While this

sort of boundary-work is certainly quite common as a larger social form (see Nippert-Eng

1996), many former straightedgers further conceived of a critical core self that was

fundamentally counterposed to their performances of adulthood. Beyond Ed's

description, The Oakland social worker Jared touched upon these feelings a bit more

deeply when reflecting upon the ironies he perceived in his comportment and self-

presentation in relation to others for a job interview he had the week prior to our talk

> So I'm wearing interview attire, and I'm walking around San Francisco, and
> there's like these yacht looking guys, just pompous assholes around me. And its
> funny because I look identical to them, yet I'm like walking past them and I'm like
> staring them down like "look at this piece of shit" ya know, but we look identical

The Brooklyn graduate student J-Dub, however, perhaps best articulated the formative

role youth (sub)cultural ties in the transition process played in his perceptions. When

describing his current self in relation to adult social spheres he said

> I definitely see myself as the wolf in sheep's clothing. Growing up amongst a
> bunch of people who were straightedge, like that kind of person, was something
> that made it much easier to...take a grown up job and have real responsibilities
> while at the same time not having to embrace that role. With hardcore you're in
> an insular space where you could do a bunch of things that adults wouldn't
> do...Hardcore provided this community...[and when] you went back to the outside
> world you could sort of behave the way it required, but not be that

Goffman (1967) described "facework" as a process in which an actor navigates "front-

stage" social life via claiming social values—and thereby assuming a "face"—in line with

what others assume the actor has taken during social interaction. Where Goffman's saw

such ritual as tacit and largely unconsciously executed, similar to J-Dub's

characterizations, many ex-straightedgers conveyed a strong—perhaps heightened—

awareness of their position within these processes in the context of eventual adult

performance, and often attributed this to their coming of age through straightedge.

Further, where adulthood was noted as an interactional mask, some interviewees directly

referenced specific values, politics, and personal philosophies they developed and carried

forward from the scenes of their youth as constituting their underlying self. The New

Jersey graduate student Billy, for instance, stated his time as straightedge helped

introduce him to veganism and political dispositions that he carries into his subjective

adulthood, and of his performances

> I feel actually about the same distance away from the rest of the world now. I just
> feel like I'm better at putting on a facade about it. Like I'm able to go in and
> teach a class and people kind of don't know that I'm any different than them, but

> if you were to really examine my personality and really examine the things I believe, like I'm vegan and I've been vegan since I was 15, and for most people that doesn't even come into play, and I'm increasingly liberal as the days go by. And I don't mean liberal in the sense that I'm gonna vote for a Democrat, I mean its like I'm for socialism and I think that's a great idea

Finally, where such underlying perceived self-distinction rested, many envisioned likeminded others also hidden from immediate view in adult social spheres. In their recent studies Hodkinson (2011) outlined changes in Goth community as participants aged to facilitate sustained connection while Bennett (2013) described "affective scenes" of aging music fans who imagined association with others through continued consumption of things like musical recordings after leaving community. These concepts certainly applied to those in my sample who still participated in music communities or occasionally consumed textual artifacts from their youth. The focus on ex-members in this data, however, additionally opened the way to some who claimed to have left both community and texts behind altogether. This contingent nonetheless tended toward envisioning a broader "formative collective" of others navigating adulthood in ways dispostionally similar to them due to perceived autobiographical and experiential commonalities rooted in transitioning through the same referent scenes. Here, the New Jersey university student Mark told me about himself and his other formerly straightedge friends that "we all try to distance ourselves from hardcore now...but everyone knows there's something different about these kids...You can like tell there was a past behind them, there's something different". Further here, the Upstate New York librarian Navin, who like Mark, stated he moved past scene involvement, directly spoke of formative bonds he envisions with other exes across diverse post-scene life trajectories because he takes their growing up through the same chosen scene-context to be salient.

> Some people are just entering college because they were touring in their bands back then and some people [who] weren't in bands back then and in college are at the point in their life that I am. There is that collective ageing. Which direction we're going in that ageing is all different, but we can look at each other and say "wow we've grown up a little bit differently from others"

Conclusion

Ex-straightedgers had much to say regarding their former and current conceptualizations of adulthood, their understandings of what it means to be an adult, what they believe has helped or hindered them, and the ways they negotiated their path into what can be perceived as a uniquely fashioned subjective adulthood. The textual emphasis on "staying young"—among other possible recurrent values—in straightedge culture generally informed these processes and presented individuals with trajectories into adulthoods they often perceived to be fundamentally distinct from others in their age cohort who have not affiliated with straightedge or any similar distinction, even though interviewees may no longer participate in any of these themselves.

In all, the vast majority of informants reported strong subcultural influence on their path into and constitution of subjective adulthood, regardless of whether they believed they possessed any other subculturally-oriented affiliation post-straightedge. Ultimately, the narratives provided by ex-straightedgers support and extend the recent turn toward analyses of aging in relation to various traditionally thought-to-be "youthful" scenes (Bennett 2013; Bennett and Hodkinson 2012; Hodkinson 2011) where the underlying spirit or "emphatic youthfulness" overlaying prevailing understandings of youth subculture can be shown to shape adulthood even for those who profess to have categorically relinquished ties to it. The foregrounding of meanings attached to

adulthood complementarily shows that further studies on scenes might benefit from grappling with subjective constructions of "adulthood" itself as these may shed light onto aspects of scene transitions not necessarily best approximated through "box-check" metrics as analytic starting points, be in facets of bracing, bargaining, facework, envisioning formative community, or scene specific helps, hindrances and alternatives, among other possible yet-to-be parsed dimensions. The precise extent to which the reported transitional trajectories and constructions of adulthood held by ex-straightedgers are unique or similar to those from different scenes or even larger observed ambivalences toward conventional adulthood in other—even ostensibly mainstream—populations, however, is not yet fully clear, but should provide a fruitful avenue for future research for transition to adulthood researchers.

Deer in this vein, insofar as a look at the "other side" of youth scene participation via meanings attached to adulthood can potentially provide a more balanced and extensive view of scenes like straightedge, it also indicates that work seeking to get a handle on the multiplicities of (paths to) adulthoods emerging in the 21st Century West may benefit from accounting for the formative role elective youth identities may play in the constitution of contemporary adulthoods. Beyond vanguard sociological variables, the cultural identities youth choose can clearly play significant roles in adult transition in certain instances; and studies of adult transition should attend to the possible formative influence of consumed elective identities during transitional exploration. Straightedge provides a standpoint for evaluating the extent to which meanings attached to adulthood and subjective adult disposition can be influenced in the context of just one traditionally thought-to-be "youth" culture. Nonetheless, the case of straightedge may broadly show

that accounting for youth (sub)cultures, even those left behind during transition, may be central to grasping the fuller picture of adult transition and eventual adulthood.

Adulthood, or the believed trajectory into and eventual shape thereof, was not the only dimension in which former straightedge adherents saw their (former) participation in subculture as leaving a lasting impact on their lives. It is to other such political, philosophical, and personal meanings—and the rejection and revisions upon—that I now turn.

CHAPTER 8

"RESIDUE" AS (SUB)CULTURAL SUBSTANCE

We have thus far seen interviewees refashioning their relationship with straightedge in ways that exhibit pronounced personal change or even outright repudiation of central precepts when the identity is left behind. At the same time, we have also seen straightedge as potentially possessing a fair measure of enduring significance. In this chapter, I more fully examine the notion of *residue* from former affiliation with straightedge and elaborate the concept's more general fit with the conceptualizations of (sub)cultural substance that have anchored this study. Roughly, *reisdue* as an indicator of substance refers to the ways a substantive elective identity affiliation can indelibly mark the reflective framework through which their later experiences are lodged, lastingly configure dispositions, and/or foster values individuals take with them despite the abdication of direct identification. I first again briefly overview (sub)cultural substance to anticipate this chapter's conceptual contribution for (sub)cultural studies. Then, I outline the types of residue that emerged as most salient to life after straightedge from my data: 1) personal growth and disposition 2) the potential enduring significance of straightedge's possible ancillary attachments, and 3) self-disciplinarity and mastery. I conclude with comments on this concept's import for (sub)cultural studies more broadly.

Carving Conceptual Space for Seeing Substance *after* Affiliation

Regarding subculture theory, a small handful of scholarly works (e.g. Muggleton 2000; Carrington and Wilson 2004; St John 2003; Stahl 2003; Sweetman 2004) have made effort to ameliorate some of subculture theory's arguably intractable—if even over-rehearsed—conceptual inadequacies and debates (see Greener and Hollands 2006) by situating themselves more directly between postmodern theoretical developments and earlier subculture theory in an attempt to parse out the import of postmodern concepts like "neo-tribalism" as these relate to previous invocations of "subculture" (e.g. Hall and Jefferson 1976; Bennett 1999; Muggleton 1997). Broadly speaking, these works collectively indicate shortcomings in both paradigms, but have been shorter on developing clearer alternative concepts that can remedy the conceptual inadequacies they identify.

The indicators of (sub)cultural substance developed in Hodkinson's (2002, 2004) ethnographic work on Goths has been the most notable exception. Once more, substance is found where group *identity* is highly salient and participants believe themselves to be in a distinct cultural grouping; *commitment* is demonstrated by largely internal social and internet networks; *consistent distinctiveness* is maintained where some level of collective problem solving and style is present; and *autonomy* is evidenced by a group retaining a good measure of independence in its own productive and organizational activity (Hodkinson 2002, 2004).

Hodkinson's four-pronged conception of "substance", however, is very much limited to the time individuals affiliate with substantive groupings, and thus shares the "active" bent found in youth subcultural studies and in predominant sociological theories

of identity. Regarding how grappling with the time "after" affiliation might potentially counterweigh and provide balance to the overwhelming emphasis on the "active" ends of identity and subcultural affiliation here, no study yet has focused upon individuals after they have fully disaffiliated with a referent subcultural group, their hindsight reflections on their participation in that group, and how their prior experience with a particular group might still affect them in terms of substance as this one does.

In moving through these untilled grounds, I present *residue* in this chapter as a fifth indicator to add to Hodkinson's valuable framework otherwise focused on the "active" that can likewise help analytically separate contemporary cultural forms where considerations of substance versus non-substance is applicable to the time "after". Of particular focus is where an elective identity affiliation taken to be subjectively substantive by an individual at one time—straightedge or other—can nonetheless indelibly mark the reflective frames through which later experiences are lodged, lastingly sediment enduring dispositions, and/or foster values individuals take with them despite their abdication of direct identification.

Straightedge perhaps provides an ideal focus population here given that straightedge is not just a highly substantive affiliation in terms of identity, commitment, autonomy, and distinctiveness as this and a reading of other studies can well-establish (Haenfler 2006; Wood 2006; Atkinson 2003; Williams and Copes 2005; Wilson and Atkinson 2005; Irwin 1999; Mullaney 2012; Torkelson 2010), but in that it provides a test case where the loss of affiliation is very clearly defined through the culture's unambiguous markers of affiliation versus disaffiliation that pivot around the notion of "breaking edge" (Haenfler 2006).

Residue

To be sure, not all former straightedge adherents fit neatly within the following presented categories, and there was certainly variation with regard to degree or intensity where they applied. However, the bulk of interviewees did touch upon residual dimensions in some form or another, even where their sentiments coexisted alongside those rejecting or repudiating aspects of their former relationship with straightedge. Straightedge was narrated in hindsight as having provided a substantial avenue of personal growth that had in part or in full introduced many interviewees to a variety of things that they still hold onto like vegetarian/vegan diets, forms of politics and activism, different perspectives on sex and drugs, and/or various personal philosophies, among other things.

General Influence: Personal Growth and Disposition

Regarding general life influence, at its most generic level, straightedge was simply narrated by ex-adherents as a facet of their past that had laid bases for what they saw as their current self by mere virtue of the fact that they had once affiliated with straightedge. For this substantial majority of individuals, straightedge was a piece of their life history that altered the course of their lives much as any affiliation or experience might have. For instance, as Raul, the Eastern Pennsylvania social worker very simply told me that "I don't have any regrets…Ya know I was into it [straightedge] for a really long time and I kinda grew up with it…it [straightedge] definitely was my whole childhood." Likewise, Danny, the New Jersey professional voiced to me the basic sentiment that "I think for the period of time that I was straighetdge it definitely helped

me keep a level head in terms of dealing with the rest of my life. I don't have any

regrets…It was something that I needed at that point in my life and in that way it will

always be meaningful". And for his part, George a 22-year-old New Jersey

undergraduate who was straightedge from ages 16-21 stated, "it kept me out of trouble

and help me focus on things that were important".

In going beyond these references to generic influence, Jared, the social worker

from Oakland, more directly began to elaborate upon how the baseline experience of

having been straightedge impacted his general outlook later in life. Jared's sentiments

here are representative of the strong majority of the total sample when he said

> It [straightedge] was definitely a good experience and it definitely will always be
> a big part of who I am even if its still isn't, if I'm still not involved with it. I'd
> imagine that…I would have had a lot different experiences had I not been
> straightedge that whole time…I wouldn't have the same perspective/…/Being
> straightedge as long as I was, I was a lot more observant, I paid a lot more
> attention to things going on.

Much as Jared begins hinting toward, many other respondents referenced more specific

domains where they believed straightedge shaped personal and political dispositions or

affected their personal growth in manners they explicitly tied to their former involvement

with straightedge culture. On the matter of personal growth, a good deal of interviewees

spoke of this in terms of what they felt straightedge enabled them to do in the past as

youth and how that relates to their current self. Jawsh, the 26-year-old artist from

Minneapolis sums up these sentiments well when discussing how he spent his time while

straightedge as it relates to the person he believes he has grown into in the present day:

> I felt I got a lot more done than if I was drinking and smoking in high
> school and middle school. I felt like I was able to accomplish a lot

because my priorities laid elsewhere. Like being an artist, being an activist, and traveling…I really enjoyed it [straightedge] and it helped me as a person, it made me a better person, and it helped me grow as a person. And I was able to do a lot of things to get me to where I am today/…/It was a part of growing up. It will kind of always have an importance in my life as a big part of my life for like 8 or 9 years. I think it has helped me become a stronger person. It's a way of growing up….it helped me make myself more aware of life in general I guess. Like I was thinking a lot more about what was going on around me, how I was growing up, the stuff I'd get into. Ya know, it wasn't just like abstaining from alcohol and tobacco and whatever else, it was a part of me growing up and just I guess being aware and being informed about a lot of stuff, as just a person growing up.

Where Jawsh's narrative is focused on general processes of growth, the Brooklyn television worker Mike discussed more specific ways that being "inside" straightedge and looking out at the rest of the world introduced him to the counter-cultural ideals that are still highly important to him to this day. In addition to telling me that straightedge valuably introduced him to feminism, Mike told me that

It [straightedge] made me very independent and secure in who I was…I feel like being straightedge when you're being young is kind of a good thing because it forces you to think about things…Being a part of a counter-culture was so interesting to me. When you're inside of something like that you see everything from a different perspective. Like being straightedge made me want to go…experience what other cultures were about, like explore the roots of punk, or where did goth come from? Or the roots of communism/…/It was so many different kinds of music, or art shows, or film screenings, or just stuff like that. I would not have ever thought of going to like performance art. It's all like out of one day me being like *I'm straightedge*

As for personal dispositions others, like the Brooklyn graduate student J-Dub, discussed how their time as straightedge sedimented lasting dispositional facets of the self taken to be valuable on the other side of straightedge. In J-Dub's case, he describes how he

believes being straightedge had made him able to be more direct with others and more inclined to take risks in his present day life. As he described the situation

> I tell people all the time…it [straightedge] makes it easier for you to be around people and interact, and I would be like it would be valuable to learn how to interact with people without alcohol; that seems like a positive skill to develop…Making myself have to learn how to do all these things without having any alcohol was really positive…I have to learn how to be risk taking despite the fact that I haven't done anything to dull my sense of the risk…It was really valuable, it brought alot more openness and alot more sort of directness and just in general a willingness to take chances at things that I don't think I probably wouldn't have developed otherwise.

Ancillary Potentiality: Beyond Intoxicants

In course of describing her remaining vegetarian 6 years after relinquishing straightedge, the 25-year-old Philadelphia retail worker Stefanie indicated residue regarding straightedge's ancillary attributes to me in very broad strokes when she said "It [straightedge] made me a more open-minded person in the long run. It…opened my mind to like vegetarianism, veganism, different types of activism, and issues in the world". As many other interviewees have referenced thus far at various points in the manuscript and as other scholarly and documentary forays into straightedge have well established, most prime among the ancillary attributes individuals intersect with straightedge are political activism, contrarian personal philosophies, abstinence from promiscuity, and vegetarianism/veganism (Haenfler 2006; Wood 2006; Atkinson 2003; Williams and Copes 2005; Wilson and Atkinson 2005; Irwin 1999; Mullaney 2012; Torkelson 2010).

Akin to Stefanie's general comments, these domains in particular—activism, abstinence from promiscuity, contrarian personal philosophies, and/or

vegetarianism/veganism—were very frequently referenced in various configurations as influencing interviewees' lives beyond the boundary of straightedge, and thereby merit specific attention. While the incorporation of intoxicants into one's life is generally understood to result in a permanent loss of straightedge identity (Haenfler 2006; Irwin 1999), these ancillary attributes that adherents often come to through straightedge need not necessarily be relinquished and can even take on new forms if and where they persist post-straightedge. While in some cases individuals held onto ancillary aspects of their straightedge as ardently as when they identified, many others refashioned their involvements here in ways that they believed were more compatible with their current lives. In either case, the endurance of ancillary attributes former adherents attached to former identity indicates residual substance.

Regarding individuals who see certain things straightedge introduced them being as important now as during the time they identified as straightedge, the New Jersey cook Shawn stated that straightedge has played a highly formative role in constituting his current political views and personal philosophies even though he has not been straightedge for more than 10 years. We can see him referencing the enduring influence of ancillary attachments when he told me

> It [straightedge] is meaningful because I took a lot of other things away from straightedge. Like straightedge to me wasn't just you don't drink, you don't smoke, you don't do drugs; vegetarianism was a part of my straightedge, spirituality was a part of my straightedge, and somewhat of a counter-culture philosophy was a part of my straightedge. All those things were a part of straightedge to me. All that stuff I take with me./…/Straightedge was my introduction to that whole thought process

While the residual influence Shawn reference spans numerous domains, others indicated

residue in specific contexts. Mason, a 21-year-old social worker from North Dakota who

was straightedge from ages 14-18 told me that abstaining from promiscuity was part of

his straightedge and that

> M: I feel like that's still special between two people. I [still] don't like go out and get drunk at parties to meet someone just for sex
>
> **J: Do you think that straightedge played a role in forming those opinions?**
>
> M: yeah…

Where Mason abstained from promiscuity, the government worker Curtis voiced to me

that veganism remained salient to him in his current life and that the individualistic

activist spirit he developed while straightedge is something that he has carried with him

into his current career. Curtis also draws upon the "wolves in sheepskin" concept when

he said

> Veganism, that's a big one for me…As far as activism, certainly that was always something that was part of my punk and hardcore and straightedge life—this has got to be a part of something bigger, like we're gonna change something or do something positive…we're gonna do something good for this world, and I think my form of activism isnt necessarily like occupying anything or protesting or anything like that …Its sort of how did you translate your punk and hardcore values into actionable careers? Some people did just do activism, like PETA or whatever, but alot of people are running companies or working at higher levels of companies and involved with government and all over. And I think that personally was more appealing to me ya know, rather than just shunning this entire system, which, effectively your country is its government and businesses; why not use yourself?

Whereas the examples of Shawn, Mason, and Curtis roughly show respondents who

described ancillary attributes they have taken from straightedge as being as highly

important to them in the present day as when they identified with straightedge, other

interviewees took things away from straightedge that they still believe are a part of their

lives, but are now just less pronounced than when they were straightedge. To that end,

McAdam's (1988) work suggests that political movements tend to continue after they are

finished, just in smaller forms. Following McAdam, it appears that some former

straightedge adherents take things away from straightedge that are now just expressed in

more rolled back ways. These individuals seem to have chosen certain things that once

intersected their former involvement with straightedge and rearticulated them in ways

that are more compatible with their current lives. For example, Jim, the 32-year-old

Philadelphia professional told me the activism that was once a significant part of his

straightedge identity persists to the present day, but in a lesser form:

> I'm not so much involved in political activism on a global or national
> level. Like going to marches, after a couple years of it, I started to realize
> that it's just the same thing over and over and over again and no one is
> fucking doing anything…It takes an incredible amount of money, of
> energy, people get really burned out and the most you can hope for is to
> get a Democrat elected. I've sort of retreated from that and I spend a lot
> more time acting locally because that's what I can change, tomorrow, next
> year. So I'd say that I'm still active but not in the way that I was back
> then

Likewise, Heidi, the 27-year-old New York college student stated that she attached

activism and veganism to her straightedge identity and that she, like Jim, has carried

these attributes with her in smaller forms even though she has not been straightedge for 8

years. She said:

> (I'm) still into activism as much as my time allows me but…I'm trying to
> find the right place for the activism so it's not just me beating my hands
> because it makes me feel better. I'm kind of like looking for was to solve

> problems I guess. Not vegan or vegetarian…but I still eat vegan stuff all the time because I like it and I try to eat healthy

And for one final example, the Brooklyn graduate student J-Dub echoes the sentiments of Heidi and Jim on matters of activism and animal consumption, but more directly referenced enduring affinity for the value developed while straightedge in these domains, and thereby reflects both potentiality in straightedge's ancillary attachments and dispositional endurance as outlined from the preceding section at once. He told me that when straightedge he

> …had friends that were in the Animal Liberation Front. There was a point where I was 18 or 19 where I was going to protests, but I think pretty early on I stopped…Vegetarianism was a huge thing for me, women's rights was a big thing for me. In general, I was pretty active in politics around the world, mostly Central America with the work I was doing before getting into the punk rock years. And yeah, I still hold those issues very dear...I'm not a vegetarian anymore, I eat fish, but I never feel good about it

Where there is overlap between those who retain ancillary values in fuller form versus those who exhibit subcultural residue in rolled back forms, it perhaps rests in the process of individualization as individuals refashion their politics to fit their current lives. Here, Mattson (2001) has speculated in his work that the longer-term significance of punk, in part, rests in it having sensitized many individuals to the intersections of culture and politics and its frequent valuation of private commitment to social change over a more collectively consistent political agenda. While one might arguably be able to find flickers of political coherency related to straightedge during the time certain individuals participate (cf. Haenfler 2006; Peterson 2009), it appears the elements that continue to affect former adherents' lives and identities post-straightedge are more personal and

individualized in character; and specific to straightedge, much of this can generally be found in ancillary attributes (see also Haenfler 2012 here).

Disciplinarity and Self-Mastery

A final noteworthy form of residue related to straightedge came in lingering disciplinarity and self-mastery. Here, many told me that straightedge discipline had provided a baseline level of confidence that they carry with them to the present day and/or that they draw upon the discipline they developed through straightedge in their post-straightedge lives. Billy the 23-year old New Jersey graduate student described these feelings well when discussing how straightedge enabled him to face peer pressures in his younger years; and how facing that peer pressure with straightedge has given him lasting confidence that he carries with him. In particular, Billy told me of what he saw as an enduring "uncompromising" approach to his life that

> B: You can put yourself in a situation where you're (expected) to do the things that everyone else is doing and…effectively stand up for yourself and say *no, I'm not drinking, or I don't drink, or I don't smoke, or I don't do drugs*. To put yourself in that position and stand up for yourself I think is valuable for anyone to do...it's definitely a lasting, important facet of who I am. I don't make concessions in everyday life
>
> **J: And straightedge is a major factor in you being able to do this?**
>
> B: Definitely

Some interviewees even more explicitly described tapping into this discipline after-the-fact and putting it to use in areas of their current life. The New York graduate student Christian, for example, stated that straightedge had enabled him to discover and apprehend his underlying self-discipline when he said "I had to have had a core discipline

somewhere within me I just didn't know how to access it…It [straightedge] provided my first experience of trying to find some self-discipline." Parleying off of Christian's comments, others actively invoked specific domains where they channeled self-discipline. For the New Jersey attorney Margaret, she told me that described straightedge discipline as having laid groundwork for her to more effectively perform her work in the present day when she said

> I don't really have any strict restrictions anymore, but there are things that I have as far as drive goes that relate to being able to control myself when I was younger. I can sit down and read an entire book, especially if it's a legal book that's extremely dense. Its just something that I can force myself to do things. Personally I feel like I have a much better balance…

More pointedly, Derek, the 25-year-old Minneapolis musician, described being able to draw upon the way he once "set his mind" to accomplish being straightedge to "set his mind" toward accomplishing opening a business in the near future:

> Those were formative years and I think it was very helpful in that I proved to myself that I can set my mind and be this way. I still know that if I want to I can do the exact same thing. I can still do the same thing to this day. Right now I've been setting my mind to certain things…and I have to kind of take up what I was doing then and pretty much take up specific tasks and make sure those happen. That's something that I developed in those years because of straightedge

Finally, also illustrating the differential animation of identity in hindsight through *broken typification*, and much as the unemployed Eastern Pennsylvania resident Marcus hinted toward in the introduction to this manuscript, the Brooklyn make-up artist Johni not just shares with the others in this section a belief that she possesses a baseline self-discipline that she developed through straightedge that aids her in her present life, but she also told

me that she best—if outright solely only—understands this from the "other side" of her affiliation with the identity. Johnie told me of her ability to monitor excess in her current life as it pertains to her having once been straightedge that

> That ethos of straightedge being about not self-medicating and being present is the most important thing to me as a human being still, and that doesn't, and that I definitely carry away from that world. I don't think I could have articulated that or identified that as early on as I did had it not been for straightedge. I don't do…things to excess...What straightedge was to me has never gone away even though I've stopped identifying with that subculture...

Conclusion

Almost all former straightedge adherents told me that they had taken something with them from straightedge. Interviews show that most ex-straightedge adherents profess to have taken values and personal meanings with them that persist long after exiting straightedge, particularly in the domains of more general political and personal growth, the possible enduring significance of possible ancillary attachments to straightedge, and in self-disciplinarity and mastery. Though both the intensity and content of residual meanings and values varied considerably from person to person, the fact that most professed to take some residual elements from straightedge illustrates the possible analytical importance of life after subculture to gaining a more complete understanding of an affiliation like straightedge. Inasmuch as interviews accomplish this, they also show that residue from former subcultural affiliation can potentially be a significant indicator of group substance. Not only is it clear that straightedge can be meaningful to individuals while they participate, interviews show that experiences with straightedge can be so meaningful that they can impact the lives of former participants long after they leave the identity and relinquish its core principles.

As a whole, the data from this chapter indicate that *residue* from former subcultural affiliation can be an analytically important marker of a group's substantive potential. Involvement in straightedge can be so impactful that, in many cases, it can affect life and identity well beyond the time individuals leave straightedge. In this vein, *residue* can potentially serve as an indicator of substance to distinguish groupings such as straightedge from cultural forms that might be better characterized through postmodern frames. Here, the concept of residue can build upon conceptualizations of "subcultural substance" where certain elective groupings might best be characterized by their relatively higher levels of things like identity, commitment, consistent distinctiveness, and autonomy (cf. Hodkinson 2002, 2004). Straightedge appears to present a case of a grouping where these relative markers of substance can apply to and matter for many while they participate; and straightedge also appears to be a case where various elements derived from participation can continue to be significant for many long after they leave straightedge and its central precepts behind.

It is likely the case that some of the specific types of residue presented here are particular to straightedge. However, straightedge is just one conceivable grouping where life after subculture might be of analytic importance with regard to residual substance. The extent to which other affiliations cohere to varying—and perhaps yet to be articulated—measures and degrees of substance and residue to this point is not fully clear, and grounded empirical inquiry into life on the other side of otherwise substantive identity affiliations through residue should lead future (sub)cultural studies and other inquiries into elective identity toward fertile grounds.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Due to the depth of unwavering conviction adherents have been known for voicing over the course of straightedge's now-better-than 35 year history, I came into this study expecting that I would chart social patterns of apostasy with narratives of direct repudiation considerably more than I would explore the terrain of contemporary elective identification. I was surprised by the extent to which I instead found straightedge to potentially lastingly impact life, disposition, values, subjective adulthood, and politics even long after direct ties are severed, among other things. My interview data on the whole did show ex-adherents perceiving straightedge as an identity that formerly ordered their subjective understandings of self in potentially far-reaching and substantial ways, and that displacement from these modes of accomplishing self enabled them to reflect upon straightedge culture and related schematic boundaries they once held on to in ways that were distinctive to the standpoint of retrospection. However, where this hindsight standpoint animated the parameters of (interviewees') straightedge affiliation in new lights, reflections were situated within concerns over growth, *freedom*, principle, and unfolding self-authenticity in the context of emergent perceived personal and community contradictions considerably more than the sorts of fuller betrayals that pervasively inhere in the image of the "sell-out" in straightedge culture. While some interviewees' *broken typifications* presented in this manuscript well exemplify measures of repudiation, the very same individuals frequently also voiced strong residual influence they value and that they often only understood to materialize on the "other side" of affiliation. Of even the

small minority in my sample who did not report residue from straightedge or believe it impacted their current lives, retrospective characterizations were themselves not necessarily negative. For instance, Rob, a 31-year-old Brooklyn resident who was straightedge from ages 10-18 and did not perceive substantial enduring significance from straightedge stated "I would definitely recommend it to any kid". Likewise, Ashley, a 25-year-old Eastern Pennsylvania professional who claimed straightedge from ages 14-16 continuously referred to her time as straightedge as a "necessary experiment" for her to have undertaken while growing up during our discussion.

In course of conducting this study, it became increasingly clear that the time after straightedge affiliation is abdicated is better approximated by its substantive potentiality than anything, and that more generally paying direct attention to elective identities or identification sensibilities after they are relinquished may provide a more fruitful avenue of inquiry than the bent in predominant theoretical formulations of identity might otherwise indicate.

In Chapter 5 we saw the forms of cultural elaboration and—often stark— subjective boundaries pertaining to straightedge that interviewees recounted situating themselves within as youths, their reported changes in these conceptions over time, and their current reflections upon former boundaries from retrospect, which, at times provided a narrative slant upon (their relationship with) straightedge that was not necessarily accessible to them while they affiliated. Changes in respondents' accounts stemmed from emergent personal and community contradictions they came to perceive over time, and were ordered most saliently by related changes in subjects' perception of self in social time, social place, and in the typifying schemes that structured their world.

The data in Chapter 5 ultimately lend support to the claim that accounting for the time "after" identity is relinquished can extend the range of meanings an analyst can glean from a referent identity.

In chapter 6 we extended from straightedge as a substantive identity referent to contextualize and explore the contours of depth(lessness) in interviewees' larger cultural identification autobiographies, which provided a somewhat novel look at just how individuals approach the project of identity in the contemporary milieu relative to prior studies, particularly where the standpoint of retrospect opened the way for respondent' longer-view identification histories to be accounted for. In contrast to certain operational tendencies toward adopting theses like reflexive modernity or postmodern disindividuation in more wholesale terms, we found that individuals can well-apprehend the dispositions indicated in these theories and weigh their approaches to their (former) cultural affiliations when a substantive referent foregrounds their assessments. In their doing so, we saw that both postmodernist and modernist sensibilities can potentially simultaneously be embraced, coexist compartmentalized, intersect, and even give way to one another over time on the level of subjects' perceptions. The data in Chapter 6 then support the claim that both modernist and postmodernist models of identification correspond to how subjects understand and piece together facets of their identity, and that inquiry into elective identification should attend to each if it is to responsibly reflect just how contemporary identity is being navigated on the ground. Methodologically, it appears that such a—more expansive—view of identification is made possible where the analyst can draw upon a relatively substantive referent in course of data gathering and prompt respondents to weigh other spheres of their lives.

Chapter 7 in turn showed the ways that even chosen youth cultural affiliations like straightedge can lastingly impact how longer-term adulthoods are constructed and elaborated.   Contrasting scholars who characterize adult transition as a post-adolescent exploratory period that "ends" (e.g. Arnett 2004; Arnett and Tanner 2006), my data would suggest that even the youth identities that are left behind in this phase of life may instead actually lay among the most enduring bases that influence how adulthood itself becomes articulated longer-term (see also Hodkinson 2013b; Haenfler 2014).   The data in chapter 7 would indeed indicate that scholars trying to get a handle on the deepening fractures of adult transition should attend to consumption and cultural identity—even artifacts that individuals fully relinquish—in addition to conventional demographics and positions within the economy if they are to more fully grasp changes in how contemporary adulthood and adult transition are being constructed.

Finally, in Chapter 8 we more fully assessed "residue" from relinquished cultural affiliation as a marker of (sub)cultural substance that can build upon Hodkinson's (2002, 2004) useful framework and distinguish cultural forms that are not well characterized through postmodern concepts that emphasize partiality, ambivalence, and/or ephemerality. The forms and extent of residue indicated in the Chapter 8's data also suggest that knowledge of substantive (subc)cultural affiliation is incomplete without understandings of individuals who have moved past identity, and that inquiries into groupings that appear to possess substance should attend to potential patterns of residue in ex-members if the analyst is to glean the fuller picture of a grouping's potentiality.

More generally, this study underscores the potential value of inquiring into (sub)cultural affiliation and identity with an emphasis on phenomenological levels of

analysis as well. To this point, as detailed in Chapter 2, the predominant conceptual

models of subculture—both modernist and postmodernist—that have led to the

literature's long-standing deemphasis on ex-subculturalists have not invited analyses of

life after subculture nor have they sprung forth from the participants of implicated groups

and cultural forms. Rather they originate in broader theories of deviance and social

ecology, neo-Marxism, and most recently, popular postmodernism. In contrast,

analytically privileging the experiences and meanings of self-professed (ex) participants

can be effectively used to sketch areas where boundaries and subjective perceptions of

reality overlap, which in turn can allow more appropriate generalizations to emerge.

As the data do bear out, it is best to take generalizations that might arise from

respondents' accounts, like possible indicators of group substance, as potentialities.

Many former straightedge adherents professed that they believed straightedge provided

them an authentic or necessary cultural space while they were young, that they now

differentially reflect upon these notions, that straightedge provided them a context from

which to assess other spheres of identity in the course of their lives, and that their prior

affiliation with straightedge has impacted their lives in potentially far-reaching and

extensive ways. Certainly not all former straightedge adherents fit neatly within these

categories, and of those who did there is certainly variation with regard to how significant

these attributes are. However, almost all interviewees did in fact touch upon these areas

to some degree; and bringing forth the extent to which these concepts are important to

some respondents puts together a picture of what groups like straightedge can *potentially*

be for many others, to some degree or another. As has been outlined extensively in

Chapter 3, such an approach can grapple with both the extent to which subcultural

identities are fluid as well as the ways these identities might possess more substantive

group-level schematic coherency, which can facilitate understandings of certain

groupings the *a priori* usage of more theoretically driven constructs otherwise risk

missing.

Further regarding noteworthy conceptual advantages in this approach, the

intersection of substance and potentiality evinced through this manuscript also sidesteps

longstanding issues in previous subcultural studies where group members are unduly

stratified in terms of "core" and "periphery" membership (e.g. Fox; 1987; Sardiello 1998)

while also not falling victim to a standpoint that can not access potential substantive

depth subculturalists might tie to a centralizing referent (e.g. Muggleton 2000).

Indigenous accounts of what constitutes authentic affiliation undoubtedly evolve,

splinter, conflict, and give way to new schemes like those we see coming forth once an

identity like straightedge is relinquished over time, both in individual life histories and

where individuals' perceptions do overlap into group-level coherency. The potentially

immense variation in accounts of authenticity mirror Bourdieu's (1984) articulation of

how groups and individuals—up to social classes—struggle over symbolic resources to

legislate their own configurations of and dispositions toward forms of capital as the most

legitimate, but within the context of subculture via the contestation of "subcultural

capital" (see Thornton 1995). As we saw in the chapter 4 overview of straightedge and

throughout this manuscript, widely competing definitions of authentic affiliation not

necessarily readily intelligible to outsiders can characterize groupings like straightedge,

and these can crucially lead affiliating individuals to take positions on ranges of issues

that may be largely distinct to a particular (sub)culture. In turn, it does appear that

accounting for and conceiving of subculture through whatever competing schematic visions of subcultural authenticity emerge from those who positively identity can also avoid pitfalls of externally imposed stratification standards while simultaneously allowing the possibility of varied forms of non-essentialist affiliative depth to be accounted for via degrees of exhibited substantive potentiality.

A methodological domain pertaining to authenticity where inquiry into ex-affiliation may be distinct is with regard to debates over whether subculturalists' accounts should be critically contextualized with ethnographic observation or by a researcher of full "insider status" since subculturalists might exaggerate in their accounts to achieve a particular vision of authenticity (see Clark 2003; Hodkinson 2002, 2005; Thornton 1995; Muggleton 2000; Widdicombe and Woofit 1995). In contrast to these concerns, however, and as I do think the very forthcoming and candid perspectives presented throughout this manuscript well-demonstrate, respondents speaking from the standpoint of full ex-hood may be considerably less compelled toward any such imagistic disingenuousness. Interviewees appeared to look back upon straightedge with much humor, nostalgia, and celebration when recounting what they now take to be the standpoint of their *past* self, which seemed to indicate that the fuller hindsight accounts I was receiving were not substantially ordered by any need to manufacture an exaggerated veneer of authenticity, either to self or interviewer.

I have made every attempt to ensure that the concepts developed in this study correspond to—and ideally sprout from—the perspectives my respondents provided me in the course of our conversations, and I sincerely hope that any of my respondents reading this manuscript would find the intentions of their words well represented. More

generally, I would hope that any former straightedger would find core elements of their own transitions and approach to identity after straightedge to be included in the analyses. Still, it would be strange if ex-straightedgers found fuller agreement that this manuscript was a fully exhaustive account of life and identity after straightedge. There was, though, notably remarkable consistency in the reflective schema used by adherents across locality in particular as well as across age, gender, and race in describing (exit from) straightedge to the extent any such variation was represented in the final sample.

It is precisely at some of these points, however, where limitations about where the generalizability of some of this study's conclusions/avenues for further research arise. Throughout the course of this manuscript, I have refrained from critically contextualizing my respondents' narratives with variables like race, class, sexuality, and gender upon where they do not apply to the face of self-reports. I do feel that some of this study's more novel contributions pertaining to ex-identity, reported identity disposition in autobiography, adult transition through chosen cultural artifacts, and the view of relinquished cultural affiliation from hindsight would risk losing substantial measures of stand-alone clarity if these variables were imposed into the analysis as external complicating factors.

Nonetheless, whether respondents are aware of these considerations or not, think they apply to their self-characterizations or not, all remain raced, sexualized, gendered, and classed subjects; and such distinctions undoubtedly affect how individuals are situated within what they take to be their commonsensical worlds. This can furthermore likewise even inform how and why largely white, masculinized, and even middle-class cultures like straightedge emerge and become elaborated as such in the first place (see

Haenfler 2006). To some degrees, we have seen heteronormativity and gender—particularly hypermasculinity—informing individuals' decisions to exit straightedge where many came to see straightedge militancy as unappealing, but the domain of race in particular was somewhat more strikingly absent in interviewees' accounts on the whole.

In drawing upon the insights of critical whiteness studies in her work on white middle class suburban youth, Amy Wilkins (2008) notably suggests that, because whiteness operates as a blank and normative default that affords whites freedom from the kinds of external definition raced groups are subject to, that white youth are more likely to seek out identity through cultural affiliations of their choosing. In this light, it is unclear to just what extent many of the conclusions presented in this manuscript on the shape and form of contemporary elective identification apply to or are as salient to individuals affiliating with (sub)culture's elaborated predominantly by non-white racial and ethnic groups where the process of understanding self and conceiving of identity through elective consumption may be less significant. From here, I do think, in any case, that grounded phenomenological research that explores the extent to which the concepts and conclusions in this study pertain to self-identity and the possible significance of relinquished identities within other possible groupings situated in differing racial, ethnic, and even post-colonial contexts (among others) is warranted to specify broader generalizability.

At the same time, it does remain the case that the proliferation of lifestyles and idealizations of electively constituted selves through consumption that took ahold of America and in turn Western Europe following the Second World War have not just become increasingly prevalent in the time since, but these have very much expanded

outward into what is an increasingly global(izing) world. If the identification phases and identities available for individuals to move through in their life course have indeed been multiplying in this fold, and if individuals are indeed taking on greater arrays of chosen elements in their constitution of self at any one time, then perhaps it is perhaps becoming especially important for social scientists and cultural theorists to catch up to these transformations and better account for the possible significance of elective identities and identification phases that individuals leave behind them, be it through the uniqueness the standpoint of retrospect can potentially provide or other channels. Though the extent to which other elements of ex-identity not captured here might emerge from other angles of inquiry, and that the extent to which those detailed in this manuscript actually do apply elsewhere is unclear, my hope is that a very useful starting point has been provided through the present data and analysis.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE
(sXe = straightedge)

I
-Current age?
-Employment?
-Area of Residence?
-Area(s) of residence while sXe?
-Ages sXe?

II
-How did you get into sXe?
        -PROMPT-anything in particular that led you to becoming sXe?
                -what made sXe appealing?
-Was there any type of person you felt you were distancing yourself from by being sXe?
-What did the rest of the world look like to you back then? Now?
        -PROMPT-how did you feel against the backdrop of the rest of the world back
        then?
-Are there any ways straightedge important to you back while you claimed edge?
        -PROMPT-what did sXe mean to you during the time you were sXe?
        -did you see it as a lifetime commitment back then?
                -IF YES-any ways that holding that commitment was meaningful to you?
-What does one have to be to be sXe?
        -PROMPT-definitionally
        -Has that definition changed?
-Was/Is sXe real?
        -has this perception changed?
-While you were edge, what did you think of sell-outs?
        -did you ever have close friends sell-out while you still claimed?
                - IF YES-at the time, how you felt about them?
        -What would your former straightedge self have to say to you right now if he/she
        were here (on the topic of you not being edge anymore)?
-Were there any ways that you felt the world was more black and white in your younger
years in relation to your participation in sXe (and/or other mentioned past groupings)?
-Care to comment on militancy?
        -IF YES, what is sXe militancy to you?
        -Have you ever had any experiences with militancy?
                -to what extent are you describing your former self when you describe
                militancy?
-What led up to you not being sXe anymore?
        -what's your "sell-out story"?
                -can you remember what went through your mind at that moment?
        -You do not need to disclose information that would put you at legal risk if you do
        not wish to, but would you care to comment on the extent that you consume
        intoxicants in the present day?
-Stories of other persons selling out?

III

-There are a lot of different types of groupings/cliques/style communities/music cultures people might affiliate, do you currently or have you in the past identified with any aside from sXe?

>-which now and which in the past?
>-what led up to you getting into (or out of whatever respondent nominates)?
>>-PROMPT what made (other distinction/s) appealing?

-In what ways are these groups/distinctions similar to or different than sXe?
-In what ways are these groups/distinctions related to or divergent from sXe?

>-PROMPT -Was there anything that made straightedge different from any other groupings to you back then?
>>-How does this compare to now?

-(If applicable) are there any other ways these are distinctions were or are important to you?
-Are there any ways you feel/felt (whatever other distinction/s) separate(d) you from the backdrop of the rest of the world?

>-In what ways, if at all have your feelings changed?

-Style, How did you dress? Compared to now?

>-PROMPT Any particular kinds of styles that you've identified with in the course of your life?
>-Have you gone through any stylistic phases?

-(If applicable) what led up to you disaffiliating with (whatever other distinction/s)?

>-In what ways was this process similar to or distinctive from leaving sXe?

-How did other people become aware that you were sXe (or affiliated with other distinctions respondent nominates) back then?

>-PROMPT-were there any ways you made your sXe affiliation knowm?
>-(if applicable)How do people know that you're are or were affiliated with other distinctions?

-Do you have any sXe tattoos?

>-IF YES, care to show?
>-what led up to you deciding to get a sXe tattoo?
>-how do you view it now?

-Did you ever X up?

>-what led up to your decision to do so?

IV

-How was sXe personal, and how was it a collective thing to you while you claimed?

>-PROMPT-were there any ways you made sXe personal? How do you/did you see it as a collective thing?
>>-brotherhood or girl/sXe question

-Was music a large part of your life while you were edge?

>-(If yes), what scene(s) (hxc, punk) and bands were important to you?
>>-how often do you listen to these bands/this style of music as compared to before?

-what do you think attracted you to this music?

-in what ways were you involved in *whatever music scene respondent nominates?*

-PROMPT how often did you go to shows? How often now?

-PROMPT play in any bands?

-What were shows like when you claimed sXe?

-How did you feel when you were at shows back then, tell me what were they like?

-Are there any places where you get those same feelings now?

-How did you perceive others (and/or your relation to others) at shows?

-How did you behave at shows?

-(if change is nominated) What do you think of your former self's behavior at shows? What would you say to yourself?

-Were there any ways shows were important to you? Now?

-Were there any ways your participation has changed?

-(if applicable) what led up to your perception of shows changing?

-Do you go to shows of some variety now?

-(if applicable) What attracts you to the shows you go to now?

-(if applicable) Are there any ways you feel shows are a different experience for you now?/What are the differences and similarities between the shows you attend now versus then?

V

-Tell me about your days while you were edge.

-what did you do for fun?

-how does this differ from now?

-what was your take on drinking/drugs back then?

-how did you generally react to being offered beer, smokes, weed, etc?

-PROMPT-did you say "no thanks" or "assert that you were edge

-downplay or deny abstaining?

-What did adulthood look like to you when you were sXe? Now?

-What were your feelings on adulthood while you claimed sXe? Now?

-In what ways do you or do you not feel like an adult currently?

-Are there any ways moving out of straightedge (or out of and into other applicable distinctions) relate to your feelings (or non-feelings) of adulthood?

-how much was your friendship circle based around the scene while you were edge?

-how many of your friends were edge back then?

-PROMPT most? All? None? Few?

-How about now? What has changed?

-What would you say to your sXe counterpart if s/he was sitting here right now?

-Regarding adulthood, what would your sXe counterpart say to you if s/he was sitting here right now?

VI

-Are there any ways that being sXe is still meaningful to you today?

-IF YES-how so?

-PROMPT-has it in anyway shaped you as a person? Or does it have nothing to do with who you are today?

-IF YES, how so?

-PROMPT-did you ever once get into vegetarianism, activism, abstinence

-IF YES, did sXe play a role in getting you into these things?

-are you still *whatever respondent* nominates today?

-(if applicable) how has your participation in other groupings affected you, if at all?

-Is it as easy for you to tell me that you're definitely not a part of these groupings like it is for sXe?

-Are there any ways in relation to other groupings that sXe (or any other more substantively narrated affiliation) has impacted you/is still important to you to this day?

-Are there any ways you feel that sXe you might still be there in some capacity?

-Are there any particular contexts where that kid emerges?

-Do you feel you would view the world the same today had you not participated in sXe?

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-Are there any ways you feel you might be better equipped to discuss your time as sXe after-the-fact as compared to your time as sXe?

-Are there any ways that you feel your being sXe was affected by the place(s) you lived in?

-If yes, in what ways?

-All in all, looking back now, how do you view now your days as sXe?

-To end, I'm gonna give the floor to you and let you just talk if you care to, any closing thoughts on sXe in general? or anything you think that's important to say about your personal story from being edge and back that we haven't touched on?

-Pseudonym?