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Youth Culture and Identity: A Phenomenology of Hardcore

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**YOUTH CULTURE AND IDENTITY: A
PHENOMENOLOGY OF HARDCORE**

By

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B.S. Millersville University of Pennsylvania, 2004

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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The Graduate School

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August, 2006

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Thesis Advisor: Dr. Eric E. Peterson

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented
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This study seeks to explore the experience of individuals who are members of the hardcore youth culture. The hardcore community is a music-centered youth culture that draws its roots from punk. Today, hardcore is also experiencing heightened attention from mass media and popular music institutions, making it an interesting instance in which boundaries between youth culture and hegemonic or dominant culture are being broken down, and the way it is influencing the experiences members of the community have. The project uses data gathered through extensive interviews in order to develop a large pool of experience from which to draw upon. In the end, this study seeks to answer the question: what is it *to be* a part of the hardcore community in Maine?

The study proceeds through four separate chapters. The first takes a look at relevant literature concerning youth (or sub-) culture through various traditions including psychology and cultural studies, and also lays out the workings for a phenomenology of hardcore. The second chapter explains phenomenology as both method and methodology, and also touches on the interview processes used

in data gathering process. The third chapter contains the first two steps (description and reduction) of the phenomenological method. The fourth chapter contains the final step of the phenomenological method (interpretation), as well as concluding remarks.

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INTRODUCTION

In the twelfth grade I went to see The Misfits, an old punk band who decided to play again, at the local club. I had really been into the Misfits for a couple years, along with numerous other punk bands, but had never really gotten into the punk culture. None of my friends were into it, so it was really nothing other than catchy music that I enjoyed. A few weeks before The Misfits played I decided do a little research on the other band playing. They were called Earth Crisis, and from what I gathered from the brief sound clip, they were definitely not a punk band. They were much heavier, the vocals were way more guttural, and the lyrics were angry sounding, very angry sounding. I wasn't really into it at first, probably because it was so different from what I was used to.

A couple weeks later, the show rolled around, and although I didn't get into the club until the very end of Earth Crisis's set, I got a little taste of them. It was intense, and the short glimpse of the crowd I got, there was a portion of the crowd that was definitely into them. At least, I think so, because once they were done, a small portion of the crowd simply left the show. Seems they had actually only come to see Earth Crisis, and didn't care much for the headliner.

I didn't really know it then, but that was the first time I saw a hardcore band, and in part, a hardcore show. It was, however, far from my last. Over the next four years I began to attend more and more shows. Early on I was the person who stood towards the outside. I watched the other people at the show interact. I didn't really know how to break into the group, and in actuality, I didn't really

care. I fell in love with the music, and at that point, had no idea what went along with being into the music.

Over time I became more comfortable at shows, and although I didn't know anyone at the shows, I slowly worked up the courage to participate in the shows myself. I wanted to have fun just like everyone else there. Overtime I apparently developed proficiency for hardcore dancing (I'll discuss this later). If anything, it served as my stepping-stone into the hardcore community in Lancaster, PA. I began to meet more people and go to even more shows. I started to hang out at local diners with the people I was meeting, and could usually count on recognizing a handful of people at every show.

I became immersed in the scene. Hardcore was what I talked about, where I went to have fun, and how I met many of my friends. It defined an entire four years of my life. However, in the summer of 2004, I was to make my way to the town of Orono in northern Maine to start my graduate studies. I was to leave behind many of my friends and the community I had entered and become a part of for two years.

At the heart of this project is my desire to understand the experience I had as a member of the hardcore youth culture. I wanted to find a way to discuss what I went through, and where I was now. Now with six years down I find myself at a different spot in the hardcore community. Some things have changed, and I don't necessarily know how to say them. My own role has diminished. I attend less shows and recognize less people with each show I do attend. I see more and more of the bands I first got into on MTV and notice more and more people wearing the

clothes I thought were unique to hardcore kids. The following is my attempt to explore the experience of the hardcore youth culture.

Chapter 1:
A CONCEPT CLARIFICATION OF
YOUTH CULTURE AND IDENTITY

Punk, both the music style and the social community, has been one of the most studied youth culture phenomenon amongst communication scholars. It is with punk, then, that I begin my investigation of hardcore, as it is important to acknowledge what has come before. Without the musical and philosophical influences of punk, there would be no hardcore scene. Likewise, without the scholarship on the punk culture, there would be no grounds from which to examine other youth culture/music scenes such as hardcore. Before reviewing the communication literature pertinent to subculture and youth culture, I first describe punk, and its relationship to hardcore.

Punk: A Beginning

Punk began as music. Music is the organizing aspect of the punk subculture. It started as an extremely raw, simplistic, and aggressive interpretation of rock and roll. It was a more guitar driven, less structured and sometimes offensive auditory experience. Bands like the Sex Pistols in the United Kingdom, and the Ramones in the United States pioneered the punk sound. Along with this abrasive new sound was a message of anarchy and nihilism, a backlash to the conservative governments of the late 1970s and early 1980s, such as the Reagan administration in the United States. Punk's hostility towards conservatism, and government in general, developed into a politics of anarchy. If there was a political message behind punk music, it was one that

called for the downfall or overthrow of ruling classes, and the governments they supported.

Punk bands were not after radio play (yet), they did not want stadium tours (yet), and they did not want money (yet). Punk, in essence, was a rejection of “normal” society. This rejection is characterized and identified by what is considered to be the ‘punk style.’ Keeping in line with Hebdige’s conception of style, which focused on resistance through modes of dress and ritual performances, this rejection was marked by dress, ritual (i.e. dance), speech, and music, all of which contributed to a sense of identity. The punk identity formed along an array of ‘stylistic’ codes by way of bricolage, or the cooptation of artifacts from dominant culture, for use in resistance. Safety pins and trash bags became clothing. Dancing became bodies in conflict rather than bodies moving together. Music became something to offend the ear, rather than please it.

Punk was, and still is, studied as a movement of resistance. It was once extolled as an example of youth rebelling against the conditions of capitalism in which they found themselves. However, as many have already realized, it did not last. Punk, through cooptation by popular music corporations, has merged with what it originally rebelled against. The idea of being a punk today involves shopping for clothes ready made with the punk aesthetic in mind and watching to see which band made it into the MTV top singles countdowns. The idea of punk identity as resistance has been problematized by its mixing with popular youth culture, and youth subculture, or the music scene. Punk is not the only youth

music culture to find itself in conflicts of identity. Hardcore, one of punk's progeny, is moving down an almost identical popular culture path.

An Overview of Hardcore

Unlike punk, the music scene from which hardcore draws its roots, hardcore has not received the same attention from pop-culture historians. My account for it therefore, is based on personal experience, CD and cassette inserts, message boards, and a narrative oral tradition.

Hardcore emerged from a stagnating punk rock music scene in the United States in the mid-1980s. Bands such as Bad Brains, Black Flag, and Minor Threat (recognized as initiating the Straight Edge movement in the hardcore scene) began to play in various cities across the nation. New York City, Boston, and Washington, D.C. became the locus for this emerging style, which maintained the hard and aggressive rhythms of punk but opted for a more positive outlook in their lyrics. The music became political in a way that punk rock was not. I do not argue that punk rock did not have an agenda, which was political anarchy. Rather than simply condemning all governing bodies as corrupt and evil, hardcore developed a concern for dealing with the problems created by our cultural situation, and early hardcore bands had much more of an element of political change rather than political anarchy that punk exhibited in the early 1980s. This emergence of hardcore would be relatively indistinct from punk to the ears of some if judged from the music alone; however, the shift in the practice of music is clear as this new style was welcomed by younger crowds who left the nihilistic and alcohol induced anarchy of the dive club and took up residence in local fire

halls and VFWs as hardcore spread from the cities out into the surrounding suburban landscapes.

After the initial wave came to a close with the arrival of the 1990s, influences from different social movements as well as musical movements resulted in a more diverse hardcore scene(s). Some important examples include Straight Edge, a movement based on the rejection of substance abuse that gained popularity among younger participants (who could not attend once common over-21 shows) and the youth crew style (characterized by fast guitar rhythms and gang vocals) that emerged with bands like Chain of Strength and Youth of Today. This diversity is maintained even today, and it would be extremely difficult to call Straight Edge a coherent movement, if it ever was at all. Animal rights movements also combined with Straight Edge hardcore with bands such as Earth Crisis, who brought in influences from heavy metal and opted for down-tuned and crushing guitar rhythms, as well as a rather violent minority called hardliners. Hardliners are individuals who hold militant Straight Edge and vegan principles, and for better or worse, are subject to developing into “old wives tales” within the hardcore youth culture (and unknown to outsiders.) On top of this, the scenes of the major cities saw a rise in what is often called tough-guy hardcore, which itself had several different “sounds,” notably one which grew out of the biggest city in the country and was dubbed New York Hardcore (or NYHC). Tough-guy hardcore is a style that embraces the mystique of the gritty and hard working class lives of those in America’s big cities. To this day, tough-guy hardcore remains a very popular and influential sub-genre in the hardcore scene.

Stylistically, the variations in sound, dress and ritual in the hardcore scene continue to evolve. This ongoing change makes it hard to create any sort of definitive taxonomy of hardcore, but it does present a chance to see how hardcore maintains its identity. In my experience, I have seen the scene move from a skate board aesthetic, to a rave-esque fashion when more aggressive dancing styles evolved, and even into a recent phase where men's fashion involved the donning of women's jeans and tight shirts (barrowed from the indi/emo music scenes). Now, however, the (re)introduction of the tough-guy aesthetic has given way to the now popularized hip-hop derived fashions. These examples suggest the difficulty in attempts to describe hardcore according to subcultural style as sought by earlier scholars.

As we can plainly see, the hardcore music scene, originally a sub-genre of punk, had grown into what might be called youth subculture. Much like punk's refusal to be turned into a singular entity, hardcore too defies a singular interpretation as developed by style. Derivations of musical style have been matched up within social communities that espoused similar interests. The idea of a single hardcore scene, if there ever was such a thing, becomes an impossibility as smaller scenes begin to name themselves, often based on areas codes (for example, my home scene is known as "the 717"), indicating a degree of uniqueness as a scene. This is not to say that there is no communication among the many scenes. Quite the contrary, hardcore scenes, with the rise of Internet based communication and the involvement of participants, have developed an expansive DIY (do it yourself) network that allows the music created in one scene

to reach those in others and for members to coordinate events between areas. At this point in time, more connections amongst the participants in the hardcore scenes are being made than before, including those in Europe and Asia. Access to the scene has become easier and easier, resulting in an increase in involvement. Small record labels and distributions companies are able to operate through virtual space rather than the expensive and often unattainable physical spaces.

Where does this leave the hardcore youth culture today? Well, because my involvement with the hardcore scene has spanned the last seven years, the most important change I have seen over the last few years has been an increased attention to hardcore from popular music corporations. The traditionally abrasive sound of hardcore music is mixing with more aesthetically accessible styles, resulting in a more radio friendly sound. Bands are being picked up by major labels and receiving play from radio and television music companies like MTV. As the hardcore sound(s) begins to play out through these channels, those who may not have any serious interest in the scene from whence it came are hearing the music, which was previously only accessible through conscious effort to seek it out. This change has led to a “watering down” of the music in some cases and an influx of new youth into shows. Hardcore is spilling into the mainstream. A once distinct (yet disparate and diverse) youth culture is being marketed as the new product in the popular culture market.

Music and Youth Cultures

At the heart of this project is an interest in the experience of subcultural identity in the Maine Hardcore Music scene. The concept of subculture has

occupied many scholars in an array of communication fields, most notably that of cultural studies. For this reason, I will explore the development of subcultural theory starting with work from Cohen (1955) on youth delinquency and the idea of the learned subcultural identity. Next, I move to the period in which the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) revamped subcultural theory with Marxist theories of popular culture to promote a view of subculture as youth consumer resistance. Finally, I move to a review of scholars who have worked towards a critique of the CCCS approach to youth subculture as well as a discussion of the music “scene.”

Delinquent Youth: The Beginning of Subcultural Theory

Theories of subculture begin with the work of criminologist Albert K. Cohen’s work, notably his book, *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang* (1955). Although he is not the first or only person to develop understandings of delinquent youth and gangs, he exemplifies the effort to develop a theory of subculture. From the start, work on counter- or subcultural formations has been focused on youth, and in Cohen’s period, the focus was on delinquent gangs of young males that began to emerge in the first half of the 20th century. Prior to Cohen, the dominant approach to understanding the social formation of groups emphasized the cognitive states of boys by means of what Cohen (1955) describes as the “psychogenic” approach. The psychogenic approach was a primarily psychological approach that posits the cause of delinquency within the mind of the individual; and for that reason, it is not a communication approach to youth

culture. Although this approach can vary, it simply approaches delinquency as an inborn trait that can be helped to the surface by environmental surroundings.

Cohen explains that this Freudian-influenced method of understanding was limited in its ability to usefully comment on the social factors contributing to delinquency.

Bennett and Kahn-Harris (2004) state this approach as an important move towards challenging the idea of an a priori “criminal personality” that existed in certain youth, causing delinquency. This, however, is not to say that Cohen subscribes to the idea that there is a necessary binary opposition between “psychogenic” and “cultural transmission” theories of subculture. Rather, each approach can yield important insights into the delinquent *problem* depending on the situation. Cohen’s (1955) interest in combining cognitive and social approaches to delinquency is evident in the opening of the first chapter of his book when he states, “delinquency is neither an inborn disposition nor something the child contrived by himself; that children *learn* to become delinquents by becoming members of groups in which delinquent conduct is already established and “the thing to do”” (p. 11). This idea of a learned script for delinquency is what leads Cohen to use the term subculture to describe such a social phenomena.

Cohen’s (1995) declaration of the delinquent gang as a subculture is based on his understanding of culture. Culture, according to Cohen, “refers to knowledge, values, codes, tastes and prejudices that are traditional in social groups and that are acquired by participation” (p.12). A subculture therefore refers to smaller social formations that have “ways of thinking and doing that are

in some respects peculiarly its own” (Cohen, 1955, p. 12). For Cohen, these subcultures can be anything from the subculture of a factory shop floor to the academic world. Our ability to be part of these subcultures is marked by our participation. If we immerse ourselves within a subculture such as the university student, Cohen (1995) would say that we have little other choice than to internalize some of the cultural codes that are held by the group, such as ideas of balances between work and play, ideas of success, and a skewed idea of that world as being normative.

Cohen (1955) believed that “delinquent subculture...is a normal, integral and deeply-rooted feature of the social life of the modern American city” (p. 18). Research, therefore, should both acknowledge its existence and work to understand how and why subcultures form. Cohen (1955) states “the crucial condition for the emergence of new cultural forms is the existence, *in effective interaction with one another, of a number of actors with similar problems of adjustment*” (p. 58). This formulation situates subcultures as an emergent phenomenon based on a group’s frustration with adjusting to the cultural norms and conditions in which they exist. Normative social conventions are taken from the dominant culture and altered or inverted by the emerging group to create new frames of reference that recontextualize values in order to solve a social problem. Through the emergence of these “group standards,” a subculture is created and heightened by the interaction of participants. This understanding of culture posits a dualistic relationship where one interpretation of culture is seen as “good,” and one that is altered, and for that reason, considered bad. This culture is merely

rules and seems to overlook the way in which communication and culture are part of a complex inter-relationship.

The idea that subcultures are maintained through the interaction of members that are in close proximity has had a lasting effect in creating an idea that subcultures must be somewhat geographically bounded. However, it maintained a psycho-social approach to youth culture that downplayed the influence of communicative phenomena. Geography however, has continued to be upheld by scholars during the CCCS period of subcultural theorizing, and then challenged later on by the introduction of concerns over translocalism and globalization. Despite this eventual constrictive element in Cohen's (1955) theory of subculture, he was able to provide a move beyond the dominating influences of psychosocial theories of deviance while still avoiding an entirely cultural-transmission centered view of subcultural formation. It is from Cohen (1955) and other similar efforts that the scholars of the CCCS took their direction.

Resistance through Style: CCCS Approach to Subculture

A large part of the research on cultural and subcultural identity dating from the 1970s and onwards comes from the CCCS. The CCCS inaugurated what has come to be described as the cultural studies tradition. Barker (2000) defines cultural studies as "an interdisciplinary or post-disciplinary field of inquiry which explores the production and inculcation of maps of meaning" (p. 383). Barker's definition is interesting because it posits cultural studies as an "interdisciplinary" or "post-disciplinary" approach to communication. This distinction is important because much like communication theory, cultural studies theory draws upon

fields such as linguistics, semiotics, and Marxism. This definition suggests a concern with understanding how discursive communities or cultures create and recreate meaning structures.

However, cultural studies not only fits into what Mumby (1997) terms the “discourse of understanding” approach to communication, which concerns itself with the interpretation of speech communities and their respective systems of meaning. Cultural studies can be located under the umbrella of the “discourse of suspicion.” Barker (2000) highlights this possibility by remarking that cultural studies is “a discursive formation, or regulated way of speaking, concerned with issues of power in the signifying practices of human formations” (p. 383). Under this light, cultural studies is interested in interrogating not only the formation and reiteration of “maps of meaning,” but also how these maps of meaning necessarily include systems of power and domination. This concern with power is not surprising considering cultural studies’ incorporation of work from the Frankfurt School and Marxism, which in turn reflected an interest in understanding the events surrounding the National Socialist Party’s actions in Europe, the rise of Communism, and the resulting conflicts with capitalism. Now that cultural studies has been situated as a primarily “critical” approach to communication, we move to focus on how the cultural studies approaches the phenomenon of cultural identity, or more precisely, subcultural identity.

First, what is culture from a cultural studies perspective? Drawing once again on Barker (2000), culture is seen as “overlapping maps of criss-crossing discursive meaning which form zones of temporary coherence as shared but

always contested significance in social space” (p. 383). From this perspective then, culture is not seen as a fixed entity. Meaning is not pre-established; rather, meanings compete for acceptance within a culture. However, cultural studies does not accept what Deetz’s (1994) terms an “informational view” of communication where those within a culture participate in a democratic market place of ideas. Rather, cultural studies argues that privileged meanings gain dominance through their naturalization by dominant cultural groups. This is not to say that dominant meanings are readily known because, as Barker’s definition to culture suggests, other cultural groups inevitably contest meanings that are considered to be the status quo.

The concept of subculture has been a central concern of cultural studies. Much of the early work on subculture comes from the CCCS. Bennett & Kahn-Harris (2004) explain the aims of the CCCS as a first attempt to develop a “social theory of music and style-driven youth cultures” (p.1). Within this music/style approach to youth culture, subcultures are seen as in opposition to, or at odds with a dominant culture. Prominent examples from this approach are the investigations of teddy boys, rastas, skinheads and punks documented by Hebdige (1979) in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Deviance and rebellion are the heart of these subcultures. Class, more than any other marker of identity, is the leading area of focus for this understanding of subculture. This focus is not surprising, as the CCCS was largely informed by Gramscian Marxism, and was very concerned with how youth cultures were attempting to create what Hebdige (1979) calls “noise,” or disruptions in the “sound” of consumer culture.

This “noise” was created by means of the stylistic tactic of bricolage, which Hartley (2002) explains as the “appropriation of icons originating in the parent or straight culture, and the improvisation of new meanings, often directly and provocatively subversive in terms of the meaning communicated by the same items in mainstream culture” (p. 23). For example, in mainstream culture, safety pins have a rather stable meaning, which is their use for holding a baby’s diaper together. However, the punk subculture of the late 70s and early 80s appropriated the safety pin and created new “stylistic meanings” which included not only their use as accents to clothing, but also as body jewelry, which was seen as subversive to its typical consumer utility.

Identity, from a cultural studies approach, takes the form of what could be called a “project.” Barker (2000) offers a definition of identity from the cultural perspective, stating that it is “a temporary stabilization of meaning, a becoming rather than a fixed entity. The suturing or stitching together of the discursive ‘outside’ with the ‘internal’ processes of subjectivity” (p. 386). Identity is a constant process in which an individual negotiates and reflects on their position in a discursive community. Identity is not innate in this approach. There is no entity within the individual that marks him/her as innately this or innately that. Rather, identity is always being informed by a specific relationship to culture. Although the person possesses agency and can seek out alternative sets of meaning, they are constrained by the choices available to them within the web of culture(s).

Existing sets of alternative meaning, according to traditional CCCS approaches, could be described by the concept of “style.” Hartley (2002) explains style as “the combining of pre-existing codes and conventions in the formation of identity” (p.219). For scholars such as Hebdige (1979), style was seen as a spectacular appropriation of dominant conventions by youth culture to show difference between their own identities and those identities held by the status quo. This includes the appropriation of high fashion by the mods, and the street trash chic of punk. Stylistic conceptions of identity are useful when looking at subculture; however, it is also useful to look beyond the more superficial manifestations of identity so as to also ask questions about how an individual’s position based on social demarcations, such as race, age, ethnicity and so on, contribute to their perception of subcultural identity.

After Subculture: Moving Beyond the CCCS

There exists a movement within cultural studies that seeks to push beyond the understanding of subculture as a geographically bounded and youth consumer resistance understanding. In opposition to the view of *subculture as disruption*, Bennett and Kahn-Harris (2004) adopt a view of subculture as an alternative means to reach similar ends. This idea of “similar ends” is similar to Cohen’s (1955) idea of “problems of adjustment” in which a group merely reframes their social context in order to reach a state that is normally withheld due to social standings. Bennett and Kahn-Harris (2004), summarizing Matza and Sykes, state, “while [subcultures are] deviant in that they offer non-conformist routes to pleasure and excitement, [subcultures] do not challenge or disrupt the dominant

society as such” (p. 4). At the heart of this movement within cultural studies is an effort to shift the idea of subculture from what is seen as a stale approach to “deviant” or defiant groups to one that accepts the idea of subculture as alternative frames of meaning.

Another scholar who can be placed in this new approach is Martin (2004), who works towards a reframing of what subcultures are and how they are identified as such. Martin (2004) states that “‘subcultures’ are not homogenous groups with clearly bounded memberships (as they are sometimes taken to be), but are to be understood as useful ways of *representing* processes of collaborative social action, and characterizing the activities of identified groups” (p. 23). I think this is an important distinction to draw between the post-CCCS scholars and those who drew directly from the CCCS. Instead of the homogenous taxonomies of various subcultures, this new approach is more concerned with how the idea of subculture can offer us a way to understand commonly held (to some degree) “maps of meaning” that are, while not necessarily in opposition to “dominant” meanings, do stand as alternatives to it. Martin (2004) is quick to acknowledge that he is not leaving behind the influence of phenomena such as “power, social structure, and patterns of inequity” (p. 23) as explanations for the formation of these alternatives. Rather, he is merely acknowledging that the term “subculture” can be applied more usefully when reframed to include groups that are not in direct conflict with dominant society and those that defy traditional conceptions of bounded groups, or what some term “translocal.”

As described above, the hardcore scene is one that is influenced by its translocal, and even virtual aspects. This acknowledgement of a multi-faceted social group is captured by the term “scene.” Bennett and Peterson (2004) explain that the use of the term “scene” originated in journalistic practice to report on particular music and dress styles. However, they state, “[the scene] also functioned as a cultural resource for fans of particular music genres, enabling them to forge collective expressions of ‘underground’ and ‘alternative’ identity and to identify their cultural distinctiveness from the mainstream” (p. 2). In essence, the conception of a music scene enables researchers to explore a distinctive social group, while avoiding the pitfall of assuming that there is a single dominant culture according to which one would evaluate the supposed values of one group against another. In fact, as Bennett and Peterson (2004) explain, the idea of the scene is useful because of the way it avoids the presumption that there is a core set of values that participants follow (i.e., the idea that all members of the hardcore scene would have the same political affiliation), a criticism of traditional subculture theories.

Bennett and Peterson (2004) describe three different types of scenes: the local, translocal, and the virtual. They write:

“[the] local scene, corresponds most closely with the original notion of a scene as clustered around a specific geographic focus. The second, translocal scene, refers to widely scattered local scenes drawn into regular communication around a distinctive form of music and lifestyle. The third, virtual scene, is a newly emergent formation in which people

scattered across great physical spaces create the sense of scene via fanzines and, increasingly, through the internet” (Bennett & Peterson, 2004, p. 6-7).

These different types of music scenes have been applied usefully by many different scholars, including Urquia’s (2004) exploration of the authentic salsa dancing identity in the London-based salsa dance clubs, and Hodgkinson’s (2004) investigation of Goth scenes linking up to establish a translocal music scene that allowed for the exchange of the Goth identity between entirely disparate scenes. Each of these studies illustrates the use of the idea of a music scene in order to avoid positioning a group in opposition to a dominant culture and instead focus on how members establish identities in relationship to one another.

Furthermore, one scene (or scenes) can have multiple elements or types of scenes. Straw (1991) argues that scenes can be both local and translocal at once. For instance, the Maine hardcore scene would count as an example of the local scene. It is a bounded entity that can be investigated. However, it also has contact with other bounded scenes, such as those in New Hampshire, and notably, the Boston hardcore scene. In this way, it is translocal. There is an exchange that goes on between these scenes, as well as the countless other scenes in the United States. On another level, the Maine hardcore scene also has contact with other scenes by means of virtual spaces, which include message board forums provided on band and label websites. This creates a virtual scene between the local Maine hardcore scene, and, for example, the hardcore scene(s) in Belgium and other European countries.

Thus, the Maine hardcore scene (and any other local manifestation for that matter), can occupy each type of scene described by Bennett and Peterson (2004). I believe this to be an important point to keep in mind because through this project I am interested in interrogating the experience of the Maine hardcore scene in an effort to understand how issues of identity materialize through rituals which are influenced by the different types of scenes. The influence of the translocal and virtual nature of the hardcore scene are important factors when exploring the creation and maintenance of a “local scene identity.”

Before moving on, it is useful to review the major philosophical influences on current thinking on youth culture that were discussed so far. First, subculture coined as, and was approached as being the result of inborn delinquency in the psyche of an individual. Cohen developed this theory and posited that individuals who held these psychological traits would “flock” together and form communities. This type of reasoning could be used to support the development of criminal or slum-type neighborhoods. This approach ignored the ways in which culture constrained the ways in which individuals could act, and viewed the delinquent activity in opposition to “decent” society by people with “problems of adjustment.” Following this, I discussed the cultural studies tradition, which was split into two major streams. The first, which was championed by the CCCS, approached subcultures as knowing opposition to a dominant culture through stylistic processes. Subculture was pitted against dominant culture in an endless cycle of resistance and cooptation that resulted in the neutralization of one subculture, and the rise of another. The second stream in cultural studies moved

away from the focus on the binary opposition of culture/subculture and began to focus on the subculture itself. Rather than forcing subcultures to only be forms of resistance, subcultures were approached as complex reinterpretations of culture (or just things people liked to do with others that liked to do the same thing.) Subculture in this view became less monolithic, and more everyday. Despite their respective strengths, none of these approaches show much concern for the experience of identity within youth culture. The question of “what is it *to be* hardcore;” is unlikely to come up. For that reason, we turn to phenomenology.

A Phenomenology of Hardcore

What is phenomenology, and why is it useful for understanding identity in youth cultures? The first part of this question will be answered partly in this chapter, and more fully in chapter two. However, the second part is easier to state briefly. Phenomenology is concerned with the experience of communication phenomena. Hardcore, and other youth cultures are communication phenomena. Phenomenology then, can be used to ask questions that seek to find out what it is *to be* part of the hardcore youth culture. According to Sadala & Adorno (2002),

“phenomenology, as discussed by Husserl (2000), is a return to the lived world, the world of experience, which as he sees it is the starting point of all science. Phenomenology purposes that a phenomenon be described instead of being explained or having its causal relations searched for, and it focuses on the very things as they manifest themselves” (p. 283).

A phenomenology of hardcore then is an exploration of lived experience. It concerns itself with how a person experiences what it is to be part of the hardcore

music scene by being *in* the hardcore music scene. As was discussed earlier, the push within cultural studies for an understanding of alternative identities outside the explanation oriented CCCS approach can be found in the foundations of the methodological praxis of phenomenology. Here, the goal is not to draw out implications of how class, race, and gender cause certain subcultural formations, but to explore how those identities are experienced within a frame of meaning that is seen as alternative to mainstream culture. The question then becomes: how can we access this lived experience of a hardcore identity from a phenomenological perspective?

Personal narrative approaches, such as those discussed by Langellier (1989) and Peterson & Langellier (1997) are especially well attuned towards exploring the ways in which discursive formations play a role in our experience of identity. It is through the telling and retelling of personal narratives, or stories, that we can come to be reflective on our lived experiences. Van Manen (1990) explains that “phenomenological reflection is not *introspective*, but *retrospective*. Reflection on lived experience is always recollective; it is reflection experience that is already passed or lived through” (p. 10). Through this process of retrospection, one necessarily must understand the intersubjective nature of experience. From a phenomenological approach, the experience of identity is understood through the relationship of the subject and the backdrop of context, which makes the conscious experience intelligible. Although the other models of subcultural identity had an appreciation for the role in which culture, or context

plays in the formation of identity, it is largely unconcerned with how persons experience that contextual reality.

Particularly useful to a phenomenological study of youth subcultural identity is the criticisms leveled at phenomenological absolutism, which Rubin (1998) explains as the way in which much phenomenological research reifies dominant subject positions. Rubin states, “if, as phenomenology suggests, we recognize that the (discursive) world is renewed and potentially contested each time an individual upsurges into consciousness, then such an approach might point to the possibility of refiguring the discursive formulations that capture and reduce experience” (p. 267). In other words, phenomenology has the potential, unlike the previous models of subcultural identity, to grasp and understand the experience of the person, rather than the singular and privileged subject position of the researcher. This allows for an understanding of a hardcore identity that is multiple and contested by those who experience it.

Phenomenology then, allows the subject to make their intersubjective experience known, rather than submitting to the explanation applied to them. Rubin (1998), who was writing on the experience of transsexuals, explains that as subjects in an phenomenological approach, “we are agents who actively become the selves that we have always been to ourselves by refusing and resignifying the categories given to us by discourse” (p. 278). Through phenomenology then, the subcultural or deviant cultural identity is not reduced to resistance, but simply a *becoming* of who one is. Thus, the hardcore identity need not be one of resistance

under the traditional CCCS approach, but rather, an alternative way of being *in* the world.

Summary

Thus far I have reviewed various approaches to the concept of subculture and subcultural identity. I began with a review of early subcultural theory as described by Cohen (1955), whose work on delinquent youth represents one of the earlier acknowledgements that counter-cultural values may be a learned set of codes perpetuated by the emergent activities of groups attempting to reach societal goals. These ideas of socially transmitted codes of deviance as a potential form of resistance were adopted by CCCS theorists in an attempt to develop a style-driven theory of subculture that focused on the means of resistance. This resulted in an overall emphasis on consumer practices of post-war youth. Not much attention was given to the experience of being part of these groups as much as the taxonomizing of ritual practices.

Next, I discussed the existence of an attempt to move beyond the CCCS theories of subculture and even the term subculture itself. Theorists ranging from Bennett, Peterson, Straw and Urquia have opted for using the concept of the “scene” when examining popular youth culture. However, although it does place focus on practices of making identity within a music driven youth culture, research often fails to take interest in how those identities are experienced.

Finally, a discussion of a phenomenological approach to a hardcore/cultural identity would in fact take interest in the very experiences of being *in* the hardcore music scene. The phenomenological approach is the

optimal model by which to explore how identity is discursively recreated and contested in the hardcore scene(s). Its focus on reaching an understanding of the embodied experience of discourse(s), rather than disembodied explanation of a phenomena make it an exceptional tool at studying human identity.

Research Question

In conceptualizing identity in the Maine hardcore music scene through a phenomenological lens I hope to address some of the oversights often committed by researchers operating out of the traditional cultural studies approaches. These approaches tend to offer up homogenous explanations of subcultural identity that are reduced to consumer practices and the clothes on one's back. Equating subcultural identity with the way one shops and dresses can not only miss the point of why people become participants in these alternative frames of meaning, but if one were to use these research findings, anyone with a Mohawk is punk, and their punk is the same punk as anyone else. As a participant in a different geographically situated hardcore scene, I am sensitive to the way in which most cultural studies approaches assume uniformity in experience, and hope to use phenomenology to get at the important variations in experience that exist within hardcore youth cultures.

A phenomenological approach to identity in the Maine hardcore scene will bring these oversights to task by developing a detailed description of how hardcore is experienced through local voices. In-depth interviews will provide the grounds for an analysis that will allow for individual voices to describe the experience of Maine hardcore identity. It will attempt to bridge the gaps between

the traditional approaches pioneered by the CCCS, and the more post-structuralist approaches forming around the “after-subculture” discussions. However, experience of the lived hardcore world will be the focus, instead of style and spending patterns.

Organization of the Study

Because, as Rubin (1998) states, “phenomenology remains committed to lived experience as one legitimate source of knowledge” (p.272), the basis of this study will be personal narratives of participants in the Maine-area hardcore scene drawn from in-depth interviews. These interviews will serve as the *capta* (that which is taken) for the following phenomenological analysis. The interviews will focus on the individual’s experiences involved with hardcore shows (concerts). In particular, I will be soliciting the experiences regarding various aspects of the hardcore community involved with going to, being at, and participating in the event of hardcore shows in Maine. These personal narratives will allow for reflections on the participants’ lived experiences in the Maine-area hardcore, which will subsequently provide a space for meaning to emerge through the phenomenological method.

The second chapter of this study will further illuminate phenomenology as both methodology and method. It will focus first on the philosophical movement developed by Husserl, and later, Merleau-Ponty. After this discussion, I will describe the phenomenological method based on the work of Lanigan and Catt. Chapter Three will focus on the description and reduction steps of the phenomenological analysis of hardcore. I will thematize the descriptions of lived

experience provided by participants, and attempt to reduce them into a single statement, which captures the voices of the individuals. Chapter Four will then move to a phenomenological interpretation of these themes. Included in this interpretation will be a reflection on the historical contexts in which hardcore emerged, as well as a look to the current condition of the hardcore scene and its position between youth music culture and popular consumer culture.

In the end, I hope the study will provide a fresh look at what it is to be a participant in a hardcore scene. As a long time participant in the hardcore scene, I have a personal investment in this study. I have seen how at one time the hardcore music scene provided a relatively alternative way to participate in music culture to youth. However, as time has passed, and knowledge of the hardcore scene has become more and more accessible through technology, the corporate eye has turned to a once ignored group. A hardcore identity is being extracted based on what can be sold by means of MTV music videos. Clothes, hairstyles, and even tattoos are being marketed as the hardcore identity. For this reason, I find it particularly imperative to plumb the Maine-area hardcore scene for experience so as to provide a description, albeit one filled with contestation, of a hardcore identity.

Chapter 2:
PHENOMENOLOGY AS METHOD
AND METHODOLOGY

The exploration how identity is constructed and contested requires both method and methodology that is expressly concerned with how meaning is constituted through discourse. Phenomenology presents both of these qualities. Through this chapter I review the methodological development of phenomenology, as well as its application to the study of Maine hardcore identity. I begin by reviewing the philosophical foundations of phenomenology set forth by Heidegger and Merleau Ponty in order to show how the methodology understands emergent meaning in discourse. Following this section, I describe how the three-step phenomenological method works through the work of Lanigan and Catt. After the discussion of method, I outline the interview procedure used in this study. Finally, I finish by discussing the contextual issues that contribute to the interview procedures.

Reviewing Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a methodology of communication inquiry that holds *description* as its main goal. As Polkinghorne (1983) explains, “the term *descriptive* is used to refer to a group of research endeavors in the human sciences which focus on describing the basic structures of lived experience” (p. 203). Description does not necessarily seek to *explain* or account for causes but to discover what those lived experiences are, and what makes or constitutes those experiences. Sadala and Adorno (2001) state, “phenomenology shares with other

orientations the building up of knowledge in a process of development” (p. 283). Phenomenology, then, is concerned with developing rigorous descriptions of conscious experience in order to understand them.

Husserl is credited with first developing phenomenology as a human science methodology, and subsequently, its notions of consciousness. Phenomenology “is a return to the lived world, the world of experience, which as [Husserl] sees it is the starting point for all science” (Sadala & Adorno, 2001, p. 283). Consciousness is always turned towards the lived world in a reflective process that allows an individual to make sense, or meaning, from experience. It is reflective because once one’s consciousness is turned to an experience it has moved beyond it and can only look back. According to Polkinghorne (1983), Husserl viewed consciousness as an “independent realm” in which experience becomes ordered and meaningful. For Husserl then, consciousness is the means by which to reach meaningful descriptions of experience that occurs in the lived world.

Husserl’s notion of an “independent” position, or “pure consciousness” from which to experience the world, poses a problem because it requires an transcendental subject position from which to experience a world that is separate. This assumes that a purely transcendental stance is attainable from which to explicate the meanings of experience. Just as this notion was criticized in the positivist human science paradigms, so too does it hinder a phenomenological approach’s ability to explain the constitutive construction of meaning.

In order to move beyond the problem of separating consciousness from the lived world, Merleau Ponty and Heidegger developed what is called the “existential turn” in phenomenological philosophy. According to Polkinghorne (1983), Heidegger was first to correct Husserl’s notion of an “independent realm” of consciousness. Polkinghorne explains, “Heidegger proposed that consciousness was not separate from the world and instead was a formation of historically lived existence” (p. 205). In other words, Heidegger was calling for an existential revision of phenomenology that brought together consciousness and the lived world. Consciousness of experience is thus tied to our being-*in-the-world*.

Polkinghorne (1983) moves on to explain how Merleau Ponty brought further development to the existential revision by directing emphasis to the intersubjective nature of consciousness. Merleau Ponty sought an “emphasis on the relationship between the structures of experience and the embodied condition of human existence” (p. 205). This emphasis, then, was a desire to bring further focus to the ways that meaning emerges from the positions of personal embodiment as well as the social structures of experience. Sadala and Adorno (2001) explain that the world “results from how I perceive the world and from how the other perceives me in the world, and from how I perceive the other, which results in an objective subjectivity that we would call *intersubjectivity*. Constituting the world, therefore, is intersubjective phenomenon” (p. 287). It is important to recognize that the “other” in this definition does not necessarily indicate another single subject position but includes our relationship to historical

socio-cultural subject positions. Therefore, what is meaningful is not merely dictated by an objective subject position but also how that individual subject is positioned in the world.

This notion of intersubjectivity is directly related to the idea of what one takes as meaningful in phenomenology. Whereas those operating from neo-positivist methodologies purport to gather objectified data based on observation, the phenomenologist must approach from a different understanding. Because consciousness is intersubjective, it carries an element of uniqueness due to the researcher's position but is made intelligible by their historical position. For information gathered this way, the term *capta* is used. *Capta* refers to *that which is taken*, whereas data means *that which is given*. Whereas neo-positivism embraces the goal of explanation of the world as it appears, *capta* reflects phenomenology's interest in understanding conscious experience of the world as *lived-in*.

Merleau Ponty explains that there are two basic existential structures that constitute our experience of the life world (Polkinghorne, 1983). The first of these structures is space-time. All conscious experience exists at some place and at some time. Space-time can be understood as the relationship between spatially-bounded social conditions, while time can be understood as time-bounded cultural conditions. The second basic structure is embodiment, which relates to the way that conscious experience is contingent on a body that is in the world. It is through these two basic structures, our position in space-time and our embodied being-*in* the world, that experience is made meaningful.

By approaching youth culture identity from the methodological standpoint of phenomenology I hope to make similar advances as have been made in the understanding of illness. Polkinghorne (1983) reviews the ways in which the discourses of medical professionals and the discourse of ill individuals differ. Traditionally, medical professionals find meaningful in *data* in the observation of symptoms. Based on these observations, treatment is given without much attention to the ways in which the patient lives with those symptoms. Polkinghorne (1983) explains, “instead of classifying according to symptoms, this existential-phenomenological approach attends to the life structures through which experience is organized and made meaningful” (p. 206). This problem was taken up in Hirschmann’s (1996) study of the experience of CFIDS (Chronic Fatigue Immune Dysfunction Syndrome) in women. Hirschmann turned her attention to how the women talked about the experience of illness in an effort to free their experiences from those meanings dictated by the dominant medical discourse.

Traditional cultural studies approaches relied mostly on the classification of stylistic markers in order to explain what constitutes subculture. Although it is common to acknowledge the influences of space-time on the emergence of a subculture, it has rarely, if ever, been used to explain the lived experience of youth culture. For this reason, phenomenology offers the most useful standpoint from which to understand how hardcore is constituted through lived-bodies in a particular space-time. Phenomenological methodology allows greater

understanding of how youth culture identity is experienced rather than simply displayed.

Communicology: Phenomenology and Communication

Before moving on it is important to explain why the human science methodology of phenomenology is compatible with the field of communication, or more accurately, communicology. According to Catt (2006) “communicology is the science of embodied discourse” (p.1). The field of communicology emerged out of the need to move beyond message transmission centered perspectives that became synonymous with communication inquiry. This desire to move beyond the message/control perspective of communication is also voiced by Deetz (1994), who seeks to attend to human communication as a constitutive process of meaning creation. Adding to this understanding of communicology, Catt (2006) argues that this turn is a shift to the methodological and theoretical foundations of semiotic phenomenology. Communicology is a result of the extension of phenomenological concerns with embodiment, into the semiotic, or linguistic realms of human communication.

Phenomenology, then, is applicable as a methodology for communication studies because both are concerned with understanding meaning of experiences, as they constituted through discourse. In fact Lanigan (1994) states that Husserl is responsible for turning the human sciences toward communication. Lanigan states, “Husserl is the first scholar to suggest that the central research importance of focusing our critical thought on the human comportment and cultural behavior that we call *communication*” (p. 109).

When approached from the field of communicology, phenomenology is finely adapted to appreciate the way in which youth culture identity is constituted through the bodily experiences of the discursive practices of a particular local community. As VanManen (1990) explains,

“Phenomenology appeals to our immediate common experience in order to conduct a structural analysis of what is most common, most familiar, and most self-evident to us. The aim is to construct an animating, evocative description (text) of human actions, behaviors, intentions and experiences as we meet them in the lifeworld.” (p. 19)

Phenomenology grounds a communicological approach to human interaction and meaning making that allows for the development of a vivid description of consciousness based on the experience of a collective of voices. Much like Rubin (1998), I find this approach to be invigorating due to the possibility of freeing the voices of those who live-in the lifeworld of the hardcore youth culture to speak for themselves with the goal of understanding their experience.

Phenomenological Method

Lanigan (1988) explains, “Phenomenological method is a three-step process that is synergistic in nature” (p. 8). By synergistic, Lanigan means that each step in the process entails each of the other two steps. The result of this synergistic nature, explains Lanigan, is “relationships are created between ‘parts’ and these relationships become new ‘parts’ to be added into the total scheme” (p. 8). In other words, by moving between two steps, you create a relationship between the two steps that constitutes the third step. Lanigan explains that all

consciousness is synergistic, and when we move from one step to another, the relationship, or contact between parts, is where meaning springs.

The first step of the phenomenological method is called a phenomenological description. Lanigan (1988) explains the inclusion of “phenomenological” in the naming of the step is used to remind the research that it is *capta* that is being dealt with rather than *data*. During this step, the researcher is tasked with bracketing off the experience to be described in a process that Husserl called *epoche*. This bracketing off is designed to cut away at what is considered the unessential elements of the object of study.

The goal of the phenomenological description is a more essential description of an already given description. These already given descriptions are the transcribed text of interviews, which, although they may have been gathered as descriptions of the experience, still contain excesses and repetition that must be removed. In the case of an interview, the researcher must separate out the parts that are not considered to be important to experience.

Polkinghorne (1983) provides a discussion of Giorgi’s understanding of the description phase, which helps to clarify this process. First, the researcher reads through the entire transcript in order to get a feel for the whole. Second, the researcher reads over the description a second time and begins to delineate shifts in meaning. Third, the researcher begins to cut out the redundant parts of the description, along with thematizing sections with similar, yet distinct statements. Following this pruning and thematizing action, the research must reflect on what each part says about the phenomena. Finally, the researcher synthesizes the

insights into a “consistent description” about the essential structure of the phenomena.

During this step it is important to let what is important reveal itself, less the researcher choose what appeals to pre-given goals, which would detract from the spirit of a phenomenological study. A phenomenological analysis would scarcely be necessary if one were simply using it to “prove” or “explain” the phenomenon. The process of discovery must emerge rather than be looked for in terms of pre-given categories.

The second step is called a phenomenological reduction, which Lanigan (1988) describes as having the goal to “isolate the object of consciousness—the thing, person, emotion, and so forth, that constitutes the experience we have” (p. 10). This process is referred to as *imaginative free variation*. “This procedure consists in reflecting on the parts of experience that have cognitive, affective, and conative meaning, and systematically imagining each part as present or absent in the experience” (Lanigan, 1988, p. 10). In other words, one must take the themes that were developed during the phenomenological description and imagine each statement being present or absent in order to discover whether or not they contribute to the understanding of the essential structure of the phenomena. By doing this, the researcher further reduces the description in a single, encapsulating statement.

The third step of the phenomenological method is termed a phenomenological interpretation. Lanigan (1988) explains, “In a general sense, this step is an attempt to specify the ‘meaning’ that is essential in the reduction

and description of the conscious experience being investigated” (p. 10). In a sense, this is the first time that the researcher explicitly brings their intersubjective position to the essential structures of the phenomena that were developed from the *capta*. Thus, the interpretation seeks to establish an understanding of how meaning is generated through the experience of consciousness.

Interviews as a Qualitative Research Procedure

The interview as a qualitative research procedure is well attuned for gathering experiential data needed to conduct a phenomenological analysis. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) explain, “interviews are particularly well suited to *understand the social actor’s experience and perspective*” (p. 173). Because I am interested in the experience as it presents itself to the consciousness of participants in the hardcore youth culture, the interview presents itself as the most direct and descriptive way to access that experience.

The interview allows for the participant to be asked to reflect on their experience and offer up descriptions. These descriptions take the form of narratives, or stories of experience, that not only reveal details asked for in the questions but also how the participant orders their experience based on social structures. Narrative interviews, a type of interview procedure, will be used for this study. In particular, I am interested in the narrative interview that solicits personal narratives, which Lindlof and Taylor (2002) explain as using “not monologue but, rather, conversational interaction as its method for producing interesting stories” (p. 180). In a discussion of the methodological concerns of personal narratives, Peterson and Langellier (1997) outline three major areas of

concern. These issues include concerns about the text/context relationship, transcription, and performance.

In the case of this study, these concerns must be acknowledged due to the way that interview questions will be solicited. First, narratives themselves are not merely facts called up as a response to a question. “Personal narrative is not ‘given’ as a text; rather, personal narrative is a strategic practice of textualizing and contextualizing performance” (Peterson & Langellier, 1997, p. 141). Thus, personal narratives are not to be understood as data but as *capta*, which is in line with phenomenology’s methodological foundations. The second issue, which relates to the transcription of personal narratives is especially important, but once again, acknowledged in the methodological foundations of phenomenology. Just as personal narrative is subject to intersubjective notions of what is important, so, too, does the transcription of what is essential. One’s position as the researcher will play an equal role “in transcribing and analyzing what happened—that is, in ‘taking’ what is significant and meaningful and making it reappear for study” (p. 141). Finally, the issue of performance is one of embodiment. The production of personal narrative is in and of itself a practice of “grasping the world, in a recontextualizing movement” (p. 146). In other words, when the participant and researcher are engaged in the creation of personal narrative during the interview procedure, they are performing the co-construction of a meaningful understanding of the discourse under investigation. This emphasizes the notion of personal narrative as a dialogue rather than a monologue.

Narrative interviews are less structured than other types of interviews. This is not to say that the interview lacks any type of guidance. Without any questions it would be easy for such an interview to stray from the immediate, and even surrounding topics of interest. Because of this constraint, I constructed the interview in a way that would be both conducive towards generating narratives, while also allowing the participant enough “creative room” to engage in the dialogic creation of the narrative. It may be that the latter of these concerns is even more important as it is necessary for the phenomenological researcher to withhold immediate judgment of what is important and what is not, and let the interview produce its own significant meanings.

Research Participants

My study of the hardcore youth culture identity involves multiple participants in the local Maine hardcore scene. All participants have been active in the Maine hardcore scene and regularly attend shows (concerts) in Bangor, ME and surrounding areas. All participants are from Maine; however, some have spent time living in other areas, or have attended shows in different states including Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New York, and Maryland. The participants included seven males and one female, between the ages of 18 and 26. All participants are high-school graduates and currently attending higher-education institutions.

I made contact with participants through multiple channels. These included calls for research participants on hardcore related internet forums, as well as approaching individuals at hardcore shows and handing out flyers

explaining the study. When discussing the project with potential participants I explained that I was interested in creating something that allowed for the participants voices to mold the understanding of their experiences, and that interviews were based around talking and telling stories about their experiences in the Maine hardcore scene. Some participants volunteered after listening to my explanation of the project, while others were recruited through friends to come and help. All interviews were voluntary, and all participants were asked to review and acknowledge the projects Informed Consent form (see Appendix A.)

These interviews reflect the experiences of individuals with the Maine area hardcore scene. As descriptions of a particular scene, they are not generalizations that explain the experience of individuals in other scenes around the world. However, rigorous analysis of these experiences constitutes an exemplar that yields understanding and insight into the hardcore music scenes as it is lived at this moment in time.

Interviews

All interviews were conducted in a conference room in the Department of Communication and Journalism at the University of Maine. Before beginning the interview session, all participants were asked to review the Informed Consent forms (see Appendix A.) These forms reviewed the nature of the project, described measures to assure of anonymity, as well as security details for handling and storing the recorded interview material. Each individual was reminded that they could refuse answers to any questions, and that if need be, they would be able to call an early end to the interview. Some questions were not

asked for individual participants due to the time that other questions took to discuss. Participants were allowed as much time on particular questions as they felt necessary. When answers became repetitive, new questions would be introduced to steer the narratives back into line with the focus of the project.

The interviews typically last between 45 minutes and one hour. They consisted of open-ended questions (see Appendix B) that were designed to elicit focused yet open answers. These questions included questions that focused on introduction into the hardcore scene such as, “How long have you been attending shows?” and “How do you see yourself within the hardcore scene?” Questions also included those about participation and knowledge of activities common to hardcore shows such as, “Is there a “right” and “wrong” way to dance?”, “How would you explain the difference to someone that doesn’t know?”, as well as “How did you learn these differences?” Finally, questions about their perception of Maine as an individual scene were asked. For example, participants were asked, “Do you ever go to shows outside Maine?” and “What are/were they like?” Before closing, each participant was asked if there was any other information that they wished to add about the stories given.

Analysis

The analysis of the interviews was conducted through the three-step phenomenological method. These steps include a phenomenological description, reduction and interpretation of the *capta* taken from the interview transcripts. All interview transcripts were derived from multiple sessions of listening to the interview recordings and personally transcribing sections of relevance to the

study. Multiple sessions were conducted because it was likely that single runs or electronic transcription would miss or misread important sections.

The process of description began by searching through the transcripts for significant statements and moving them into a separate document. Once this was done, I clustered all significant statements into a series of twenty-six themes. Examples of these themes are provided through the use of significant statements that captured the important experiences. These examples are included with the description of the themes and appear in the format of the original transcriptions. Within these transcriptions the use of the ellipses (...) is used to mark pauses in the original recordings of the interviews. Once this was completed, I moved into a reduction step where each of the themes were defined into a single statement that reflected the essential structure of the theme. Finally, I moved towards an interpretation step that attends to the intersubjective nature of the researcher and participants, and to the historical and social contexts of youth subcultures. From this analysis, I developed a phenomenological interpretation of meaning about the experience of identity in the Maine hardcore youth culture. The first two steps of this process are discussed in Chapter Three. The phenomenological interpretation is then taken up in Chapter Four.

Chapter 3:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION
AND REDUCTION

This chapter contains both a phenomenological description and reduction of the capta obtained from the interviews conducted with the eight participants of this study. Following the transcription of the eight interviews, I read each interview with the goal of extracting statements that appear to hold significant meaning. It is important to recognize that statements were taken on the basis of meaning, not on content. Rather than simply coding the interviews for the frequency of some pre-given topic or variable, the interviews were examined on the level of meaning. Thus, I ignore multiple, or superficial mentions of, for the sake of an example, hardcore dancing, and privilege the statements that convey a deeper experience of intersubjective meanings circulating around hardcore dancing. This distinction is what makes the initial phenomenological analysis of capta different from content analysis studies.

Once this initial gathering of capta was completed, I developed thematized groupings of statements that conveyed similar meanings. The result of this clustering of statements is the basis of this chapter. From the eight interviews, I located over 150 distinct statements and grouped them into twenty-six distinct themes that cover issues of hardcore identity that range from communal identity, ritualized performance, to the impact of popular culture on the hardcore youth culture. I clustered together themes with similar meanings on the topics of hardcore identity, hardcore dancing, as well as issues of popularitization. Each

theme is presented in three parts. The first part can be thought of as a preface. I first introduce the theme and describe how it emerged in the interview.

The second part presents selected statements from the interviews. Because I do not provide all the possible examples for each theme, I select those statements that best capture and explicate the meaning of the theme. Each statement is accompanied by a reference code. The reference code has three parts separated by hyphens. The first number is an indication of the interview in which the statement took place. The second portion acts as a timestamp to indicate the point in time that the statement was given. Finally, the last number is used to differentiate between minutes in which two or more statements were taken.

The final portion of each theme is what will be labeled as a “summarizing statement.” This represents the phenomenological reduction, which is the second step in the phenomenological method. Through the examples for each theme, I explicate and reduce the meaning of the theme into a single statement using, in part, the words of the participants themselves. Doing so allows for the preservation of the meaning as it appears in the conscious experience of the interviews.

Following this chapter will be the final step of the phenomenological analysis, which is referred to as the phenomenological interpretation. Thus, the following chapter serves as a reflection on the reduction of meaning generated in the current chapter.

The Maine Hardcore Scene

The themes described in this section range greatly; however, they share an overall perception of the Maine area hardcore scene. Issues raised in these examples range from how one finds hardcore in the state of Maine, how participants feel when going to shows, to reflections on the social atmosphere of the Maine hardcore scene.

Theme 1

This first theme covers the participant's discovery of hardcore as a style of music, as well as a youth culture music scene. Across almost every single interview, participants discussed how their finding of hardcore was a process that was sparked by the helping hand of friends, family, and acquaintances. It was common to hear a participant remark about a single band or song that someone had shared with them that proceeded to set off a chain reaction that led them into the hardcore scene. Some examples include:

“I had some older friends when I was... I was starting to go to shows when I was 13... I didn't start dancing or anything like that until I was 15, 16... I just had some older friends, I didn't have any older brothers or anything... but I used to always... there weren't many kids to hang out with... there were a couple kids into metal and a couple kids into old school hardcore and I kinda picked it up from them...” (5-0:00-1)

“One of them was someone I met at the first metal show I went to... she goes to Umaine... Um... Yeah, she just introduced me to new bands like Blood for Blood and 25 ta Life... stuff like that... she was like, “check

this stuff out, it's a lot different from what you're listening to, but I think you'll like it..." and then from there it just kind of grew and grew and I just started going and checking out more shows and going to as many as I could possibly go to..." (4-0:00-1)

"There was this kid, his name was Dave, that was in my cabin, and he had an older brother who was into it... and he brought his CDs because during downtime he liked to draw and listen to music... and I was flipping through his book of CDs and I noticed the "All Out War" EP by Earth Crisis and was looking at the artwork and I was fascinated by it.... And he let me borrow that CD and said bring it to church next weekend... and I went home and listened to it and was hooked instantly... I actually flipped through the book in the back where they give their thanks and I picked out all the bands who sounded cool, sounded man... and we had just gotten the internet and I went through and tried to find as much shit as I could from these bands... snowballing effect... not really realizing, ten years ago, where it would lead me today... I just thought it was music and I liked it and didn't know it was this whole fucking life, this subculture..." (7-1:00-1)

Each of these examples reflects an experience where an individual other than the participant acts as a catalyst, or gatekeeper, to introduce hardcore youth culture. The participant received aid from another in the form of a CD or a suggestion that catapulted the participant into the world of hardcore.

Summarizing Statement: There was this kid, he/she had me listen to some music

I hadn't heard before, and I was hooked instantly and kept listening to this...
hardcore.

Theme 2

The idea of finding hardcore is usually chalked up to word-of-mouth and the helping hand of a friend. However, some people described their progression into hardcore as more of a journey taken on by themselves. They searched through CD booklets and Internet sites to find different bands that might be similar to the initial track or band they were introduced to. Examples of this theme include:

“And I would pick up a Strife record, or a Fury of Five record, or whatever... and uh, I just kept getting into it... and artwork, a lot of that... the street oriented hardcore bands are all into graffiti and I love it... anything I could get my hands on I would buy it, and anything I couldn't get my hands on I would pester the shit out of the record store until they ordered it... it was kind of like a mission, like an Easter egg hunt... you never knew what you would get sometimes...” (7-4:00-1)

“For me, yeah, the high school I went to this didn't exist, hardcore didn't exist... Um, its just the community, it wasn't there, so I wouldn't hear about it from word of mouth... I didn't have the... Usually when I hear about how people got into hardcore, they got like the older brother that played them Agnostic Front or something... I didn't have that, I'm and only child, it was something I had to find myself...” (1-3:00-1)

This theme describes a different way of getting into hardcore than the previous theme. Here, the individuals search on their own to find new hardcore music. Summarizing Statement: Finding hardcore was like a hunt; I had to find it for myself because the community wasn't there.

Theme 3

The next theme describes the feelings of total immersion within the hardcore youth culture experienced by multiple participants. Responses included mentions of how hardcore influences every aspect of the participant's life. They wake up listening to hardcore music, they converse about hardcore with their friends, go to shows on the weekends, and fall asleep to the sound of hardcore.

Examples of this theme include:

“Just music that makes me feel something... like... I've seen a lot of my friends that may be burnt out with life, with music... they've fallen into this kind of cycle... I can hear bands I've never heard of before and it will just hit a chord with me and I'll listen to it for months... and it's the greatest thing that ever happened” (1-29:00-1)

“It's pretty much everything... it's my network of friends, it's going out of state to play a show and kids letting us crash on their floor... it's the music... the bands we've played with, the bands that we go see... it's my life...” (7-41:00-1)

“I think it's something that's going to be in my life forever... I always love the quote from Madball where uh... it's something like, “someday I'm gonna grow up, go to college, and get a job and forget all about

hardcore,” but I um, its just funny... I think it will always be something I do... I will probably always go to shows and I’ll probably force my kids to like hardcore too... and, but uh, right now its huge.” (5-42:00-1)

“I realized I listen to 90-hours of music a week... I have it on all day, all night... I sleep with it on... I go to, I put on my hood and listen to it in class... Its just... it allows me to think... it allows me to like, do my work a lot better... hardcore is pretty much one of the biggest things in my life...” (6-28:00-2)

Each of these responses describes the participant’s feelings of immersion within the hardcore youth culture. Whether it is their dedication to attending as many shows as they can, or their constant listening to hardcore music, it plays a defining role in their lives. Summarizing Statement: Hardcore is pretty much one of the biggest things in my life, it’s the shows, the bands, the friends and the music; right now it’s huge, it’s my life.

Theme 4

Although many participants found their total immersion within the hardcore scene as a positive attribute, others expressed feelings of a loss of individuality that comes along with such deep involvement. These statements described a sense of need to keep to the perimeters of the scene, and a less serious attitude in order to “be myself.” Examples of this theme include the following statements.

“I see myself on the outskirts of it, I think that... I was thinking about this the other day, just while I was uh, talking to some friends online... It’s, I

think that the outskirts of the scene is the only way you can really be an individual in the hardcore community...” (1-5:00-1)

“I mean, everybody like... I think everybody when they start going to shows wants to be cool and fit in... everyone goes through that phase... but it’s kind of annoying because I’d rather just... I wish people would act like themselves... cause you see that show over and over again and there’s really nothing special about it...” (2-4:00-1)

This theme relates a feeling that too deep of an involvement can lead to a loss of individual identity. Deep involvement can lead to adopting a prescribed “hardcore” identity that is created through the hardcore community itself. In order to maintain your own identity outside of hardcore, you need to be able to distance yourself from the middle of it all. Summarizing Statement: Some people just try to hard to pull of the hardcore identity, and you need to be able to step back if you want to keep your individuality.

Theme 5

When asked about the first hardcore show ever attended, participants often mentioned an “energy” they felt or witnessed. These descriptions often include the participants’ feeling of an overwhelming atmosphere where people come into close contact with one another to the sound of fast-paced and aggressive hardcore music. Although overwhelming, participants describe the allure of it all, and how they desire to keep coming back to experience the feeling over and over again. Examples include the following:

“Insane... Wow... ya know... its been said before, but that was... I was there, and I was like, “this is so fucking cool, this is what I need to do, this is where I need to be...” everybody is like best friends... ya know what I mean? Especially back then it was way more posi then it is now... and it’s, you needed to be there... I wanna keep coming back and doing this if it’s gonna be this cool every time, then I’m gonna keep doing it...”

(5-3:00-1)

“Um, I remember getting there, and the show started a little bit early so we were just getting there and paying at the door and going in... it was at the Asylum... and we went in and Thursday was already playing and kids were singing along... not all the kids because they were a pretty new band... at least for this area at the time... and it was just nice to know all the words when everyone else didn’t... it was nice to know, ya know, the songs, they were about things that made sense to me... things I could relate to... and there was just a really good energy there...” (1-5:00-1)

“Besides overwhelming, definitely high energy... um, instense... that’s really all I could think of... it was something I never experienced before so... I just kinda didn’t know what to do with myself... it was a little over the top, a little too much at the time... but I enjoyed it...” (7-8:00-1)

Each of these examples describes a feeling of an uneasy or curious allure to the overwhelming energy of the hardcore show. The feeling of closeness with others and the intense environment that the gathering produces creates a feeling that each participant enjoys and seeks out, even though at first it may have been

intimidating. Summarizing Statement: Even though it was a little too much at the time, I enjoyed the energy that was created during the hardcore show, and I wanted to come back over and over so I could experience it all again.

Theme 6

Despite the positive feelings expressed by participants in the previous themes, some seem to view them as past glories. Hardcore, as the interviewees get older and experience youth culture for longer, begins to change. They tell stories of their friends dropping out of the hardcore scene, and of going to shows and not recognizing many of the faces. These descriptions paint a picture of change, whether moving on or growing up while being heavily involved with the hardcore scene in Maine. Examples include:

“I go to a show now, and I don’t recognize maybe 80% of the kids... It all changes... when I started going to shows there was this tight knit group... maybe between 35 and 60 kids I guess you could say... and they all knew each other and they would give each other rides to shows... they were all friends... and most of those kids are either gone now, or ya know, in bands...” (1-21:00-1)

“I really really hate when people say this sort of stuff, but I’m not as into it as I used to be... I mean, it used to be like I’d call out of work to go to shows... It’s a different crowd and most of the people that I started going to shows with lost interest and are not going anymore, so... I think that happens to a lot of people... they have lots of good memories of people that they started going to shows with and they start getting phased out and

they lose interest too... and I guess that's happening in Maine..." (2-1:00-1)

"But a lot of kids have just grown up and stopped listening to hardcore... and all the kids that said they'd be there forever, they're gone... its just weird watching all these kids move away or get out of Maine... in the grander scale of things you have to leave Maine I guess... and now it's all just new faces... sometimes I go to shows and I can't even wave to anyone, it's just weird..." (1-21:00-2)

Each of these examples presents a member of the hardcore youth culture dealing with the idea of "growing up." This phenomenon, according to the descriptions appears to involve watching people (often close friends) as they enter the hardcore scene and then move on or stop attending hardcore shows. The third example also appears to convey the idea that in the scheme of things, getting out of Maine (and hardcore), is something that "they have to do." Summarizing Statement: A lot of people have all these good memories of the people they got into hardcore with, and it's weird watching all of these kids move away of get out of Maine. They grew up and now it's all just new faces.

Theme 7

Along with the theme of growing up and dropping out is another theme that describes a feeling of not wanting to invest as much as they once did in the hardcore scene. The statements in this theme involve participants not being as interested in talking about or attending hardcore shows. Heavy participation in

the hardcore scene is viewed as negative, although interest in and dedication to “the music” remains part of their experience. Examples of this theme include:

“Just because I don’t want to let anything take over my life... and ya know... I don’t wanna, like, be worried about going to every single show... but even when I don’t really want to go, I just go to it... so it’s probably... it’s probably been a bigger impact on my life then most anything... because it’s not expensive, and I get bummed out on it sometimes, but... sometimes it’s embarrassing to... I don’t know... people ask you what you do, and I say “I go to shows...” and then they... they don’t really know what its about... and you try and just be like, “I listen to music” and not worry about it...” (8-26:00-1)

“I think to be, in the focus, you have to have a certain amount of vanity in you that you need... I don’t know, I just don’t want to jock the same ten bands that everyone else is jocking... I listen to what I like... I don’t know, I don’t care, I don’t need everyone to look at me when I go to a show... I don’t need all the Myspace friends... it just doesn’t matter...” (1-4:00-2)

“It’s weird cause... I’m sure you can relate... it’s sort of something, in one way or another, it’s something that you think about everyday... think about regularly... if it weren’t for my friends, I’d probably be thinking about it less... it’s still all around me.... And like I said, I hate hate hate people saying they moved on... but that fact is, I’m losing interest... I’m

not sure I wanna be moshing when I'm like 25 ya know? There's better stuff to do..." (2-26:00-1)

Each of the examples used in this theme represent a personal loss of interest in hardcore, whereas Theme 4 conveys the idea of watching others lose interest. Each example illustrates how the participant loses interest in some of the more social aspects of the hardcore youth culture, such as shows and hardcore dancing. Summarizing Statement: I don't need everybody to look at me when I'm at a show, I don't want hardcore to be the only thing that defines me. I'm losing interest in the social aspect of hardcore, and there is better stuff do.

Theme 8

One participant in this study happened to hold a less common position within the Maine hardcore scene. She is female. Significantly fewer numbers of women and girls participate in hardcore. According to the single female interviewee, this limited number of women and girls constrains how she can participate within the Maine hardcore scene. The following statements illustrate these constraints:

"It's just, I mean, it takes awhile for people to be like, "she's here because she

likes the music..." its just obvious they think that girls can't dance or be tough, or... ya know, it's real easy for guys to come into a scene and be like accepted right away, but then, sometimes girls have to act a certain way to be accepted... they have to feel like they have to act tough...

which I still believe is true... if you are a girl in hardcore you can't be all

fluffy... You have to be kind of on the boyish side and still have your feminine qualities, which I think is important to keep..." (4-4:00-1)

"I mean, I think that... coming from a girl's perspective, hard for girls to gain respect from the guys sometimes... but I think that over the years people have seen me and I've talked to a lot of people and they've gotten to know me, so I think through being part of the scene for so long I've gained a lot of respect from people... and I'm not just seen as another one of those girls that goes to shows for guys or whatever..." (4-3:00-1)

"Because guys are just there, and they don't have to work at it to be accepted... I don't know... I'm trying to think of an example... I can't think of one, but... guys can pretty much dress... there are so many ways that guys can dress in hardcore... there's like the NY hardcore or Boston hardcore... they dress kind of thuggish... you know what I mean... and then there are kids that are like the posi kids... so its different for guys, but for girls, they have to conform to one type of thing..." (4-6:00-1)

The descriptions given by this participant paints a picture of female participation that is limited in opportunities for expression when compared to "the guys." Choices are limited and other participants are often skeptical of a female's motives for attending shows and being part of the hardcore community.

Summarizing Statement: It's different for girls then it is for guys, girls have such a limited choice in how they can be hardcore, and everyone doubts their intentions (even other girls.)

Theme 9

According to participants, the Maine hardcore scene is one that is constituted by smaller groups of people, or cliques. These cliques are fostered by the geographically large state of Maine and the great distances between pockets of individuals who are part of the hardcore scene. Because of these factors, there are often quarrels, and the Maine scene is looked at as hostile to new or unknown individuals. Examples include the following:

“Once, I guess, it wasn’t something you could just come across in Maine. Because there no, the scene here isn’t big... And it’s not something you just hear about from other kids, it’s very inclusive...” (1-1:00-2)

“I guess there were always fights... but like, they were fights between kids over girls, normal reasons that stupid people fight... but now it definitely has progressed to, “if you are different then us, you don’t belong here...” (5-9:00-1)

“it’s like high school dance, it really is... it’s really cliquey... my group of friends, nobody knows us... we’re from Rumford... they know the guys in our band, but none of the other guys we bring to shows... and I mean, the friends we bring to shows, they listen to hardcore and metal and stuff, but they aren’t into the scene, really, at all... so we always talk about how tonight could be the night... because if anyone punches one of those kids... it’s fuckin done ya know, it’s over right now...” (5-12:00-1)

Each of these statements illustrates the way that Maine, through its geography and population locations, has contributed to the creation of a scene that

is defined by cliques. These cliques lead to hostile confrontation between groups of people simply because they don't know one another. People from one town could be going to shows for years and not know some individuals from another town. But because the scene is so small in Maine, those who are unknown are treated as people who don't belong. Summarizing Statement: Maine is a big state with a small scene, and if I don't know the group of kids from a different part of the state, then I question whether or not they should be here.

Theme 10

One of the divisions that were revealed through the interview process was the formation of northern and southern Maine within the hardcore youth culture. The state is divided into two portions, and anything north of Bangor is considered northern Maine, while anything south of Bangor is considered southern Maine. This division is created through the large distances between the major cities of Maine, which are considered to be Portland and Augusta in southern Maine, and Bangor in northern Maine. Although this division is acknowledged, members of the Maine hardcore scene see it as pointless and counterproductive. Examples include the following:

“the southern Maine kids don't know the northern Maine kids and the northern Maine kids don't really know the southern Maine kids, and the kids in the middle of the two, sorta where we're from, nobody really knows them... and if you don't know anybody, you're not going to back down...” (5-33:00-1)

“It doesn’t really matter to me... it’s normally certain people that talk about it... and usually they’re people I don’t really want to talk to anyway... but, I don’t know... considering how many shows go on in Bangor, Maine, as opposed to Portland, Maine... there’s way better bands that play Bangor than Portland... and if you don’t like it, don’t up here, because I don’t want to deal with that...” (8-14:00-1)

“socially, it’s kind of fucked up that the northern Maine kids hate the southern Maine kids... get over it, you live in the same state... who cares...” (7-22:00-1)

The examples of this theme illustrate an acknowledgement of the development of a socially constructed division between northern and southern Maine based on the ignorance of people within the hardcore scene. It is seen as a pointless argument, and the division does nothing positive for the hardcore scene in Maine as a whole. Summarizing Statement: There is a social division between northern and southern Maine, but it is nothing more than a creation between groups that are not familiar with one another.

Theme 11

Some participants see the scene in Maine, as well as the shows, as different than those in surrounding states, such as Massachusetts and New Hampshire. These shows, and the scenes they take place in, are seen as more interesting because of their greater connection to hardcore music circuit. Shows are more common there making them less of an event, and at the same time, result in a more aggressive atmosphere. Examples include:

“and like later that year I saw Dillenger Escape Plan down there [Worcester, MA] and I was thinking, these kids are a lot tougher than Maine kids without a doubt... it’s not... I don’t know if it’s a matter of tougher, or just more belligerent... because ya know, anyone can punch someone who’s not fighting back... but they seemed much more aggressive... and that didn’t come to Maine for maybe a year or so...” (1-16:00-2)

“Usually its more fast-paced and aggressive out of state, but at the same time, well run... when you go out of Maine, you are going to people who have shows a lot more often... they have that opportunity... um... people up here... it seems like there are a lot of people that only go to Kave shows... I mean, if you’re going to go to shows, there are no rules or anything like that, but I mean... not everybody has the same free time or money, but you should at least get out and check out other places...” (2-22:00-1)

“I’ve only really been to a lot of shows in Mass... and those for me are funner because I don’t know anybody... and I don’t have to deal with stupid people mostly... the scene in Mass is way bigger than in Maine... way better bands play there, often... the venues are usually bigger... I just tend to have fun at them...” (8-11:00-1)

“Shows at the Kave bum me out... because a lot of retards show up there... you kind of get out of this area and people seem to be a little

more chill... out of state shows are always a lot of fun... not so much New Hampshire, but Mass is usually a good time... it's you know... they run smoothly... they have shows there all the time... it's no big deal... you don't get a lot of bone-heads..." (2-3:00-1)

The statements in this theme describe the Maine hardcore scene as different than other hardcore scenes. This difference is based on of the remoteness of Maine and the infrequent shows that occur, which contribute to a less seasoned hardcore community. Summarizing Statement: Shows out of state are different, they are more frequent and better run than those in Maine, and because of that they are more appealing.

Theme 12

Although participants admit that shows outside of Maine have the potential to be different than those in Maine, there was also a sentiment that regardless of where you are from or where the show is, hardcore is the same feeling for all participants. Despite different social structures and stylistic elements, deep down, we all experience hardcore the same way. This statement is an example of this theme:

"I mean, it's a universal feeling... no matter what state you live in, you're going to feel the same way if you are passionate about the music... no matter where you live, you're gonna like it... so I think that everybody is the same that feels that they love hardcore... I definitely think it's the same everywhere for that..." (4-18:00-1)

This theme is an example of an attitude that everyone who is part of the extended (and by that I mean all the way up to the international level) hardcore community experiences their love of hardcore in a similar way. Deep down, hardcore music is hardcore music, and those who feel passionate about it share that passion in common. Summarizing Statement: Despite any differences between individual hardcore communities, passion for hardcore is a universal feeling, and a common bond between all scenes.

Theme 13

The last theme in this section is similar to the themes described the sense that there is an inevitable “growing up” that shifts one’s perspective on the importance of being in the hardcore scene. The following theme builds on this by creating a sense of division between hardcore music and hardcore youth culture. Hardcore music is seen as something that will always stay the same, whereas the scene is looked upon as stifling and eventually pointless. Examples of this theme include:

“I wouldn’t say it’s as big as it was two years ago... but it’s still there... I listen to hardcore everyday... at some point or another; I still go see bands that I love... I’ll still drive to Mass, Rhode Island, whatever... I’ll drive a good four or five hours to see a band that I really care about and I don’t see that changing...” (1-20:00-1)

“The new kids, the douche bags, the people you don’t want to associate with... like if you see someone you really don’t like, and they are into your style of music you’re all like, “Ahhhhh!” And you sort of ignore it,

but, like I said, I do everything with music... If the scene didn't exist I'd be fine... I like some of the kids, like, I like two, three dozen people at this school that are considered scene..." (6-28:00-2)

"I'm at the point now where I just know a lot of people... when you first go you don't really know anyone... and if you do it's because you knew them anyways... and now I just know a lot of people, but other than that, I just like to go and hang out and see bands... I don't care if I talk to a lot of people... it doesn't much matter to me..." (8-3:00-1)

"It's always been the music... even if there were never shows in Maine, I would still listen to these bands... Even if I had never seen anyone mosh... or like a band go berserk on stage... I'd still love the music..." (1-20:00-2)

The examples of this theme describe a feeling that when you boil it down, hardcore is and always will be about the music. Even if there were no youth culture attached to this style of music, the participants in the Maine hardcore scene would still listen to it. Summarizing Statement: Hardcore is music, after all is said and done, the music is all that matters.

Hardcore Dancing

During the interview process all participants were asked about their experiences with hardcore dancing. Hardcore dancing is a common occurrence at shows and operates on many different levels. Although hardcore dancing was mentioned earlier, let me briefly describe it.

Hardcore dancing, to the outsider, would appear to be violent maelstrom of moving bodies and thrashing limbs. To those on the inside, it still looks like a violent maelstrom of moving bodies and thrashing limbs. However, to those who participate in the dance, it is a highly intricate activity where lack of knowledge leads to personal injury. Although the movements that are part of the dance are chaotic, they are often planned through particular dance steps that are often referred to as moves. These moves range anywhere from martial arts style kicks, acrobatic tumbling, and more random arm movements that would appear to be simple flailing. Participants engage in these moves throughout the performance of bands; however, the rhythm of the guitars and drums often dictate the possible moves that can be performed. The prime example is the breakdown, which is often the all-encompassing dance part of a song. Here the band switches up control of the beat to the guitars, which belt out crushing riffs at varying speeds. Knowledge of these mechanics is crucial to those participating in the ritual, and those who lack that knowledge risk harm both on the physical and social levels. Other instances that fall into this category of hardcore dancing include stage diving (often referred to simply as “diving”), and sing-a-longs, which can include large pile-ons where participants will continually try to build up the pile to greater proportions.

The following themes are descriptions of how interviewees understand hardcore dancing.

Theme 14

The first theme in this category illustrates the participants' feelings of community gained through the enactment of hardcore dancing. This idea of community is heightened by the inherent danger that participants take on when stepping out into the pit. Those who participate show both their support of the band and their camaraderie with others in the hardcore scene. It was common to hear participants speak about the positive energy that surrounded them during their enactment of hardcore dancing. They were enthused by entering into such close physical space and coming into contact with others who felt the same way they did. Examples include:

“a lot of times when you see Bane, well two or three time I’ve seen Bane... if you go to a large crowd... you can, people sing along like all around you... almost everybody there is singing, it’s pretty cool... just some bands that know how to get people going... I’ve always loved that... you don’t hear it a lot because I mostly go to metalcore shows, but it’s always cool to hear hardcore bands and voices all around you...” (2-18:00-1)

“I’m going to say that my favorite times dancing have been when there is a really good vibe in the club, everyone is stoked on every band on the bill... and you look around while you’re dancing and everyone has a big fucking grin on their face... they’re just doing their thing... that’s really probably the best part, because you know they’re in the same fucking mind-set, same mentality as you are...” (7-19:00-1)

“there were maybe shows two years ago, where I would dance at shows and it’s almost this quick, immediate, but artificial at the same time, bond, between kids that are in the pit... you’re instantly buddies with these guys.... Um, but it’s not, like you know, it’s like you see them at a show, “what’s up?”... pat on the back... but it’s this link, because, I don’t know, maybe you have the guts to do this, maybe you, I don’t know... It’s just a common bond I guess...” (1-8:00-1)

Each of these statements illustrate the way in which participants feel they are part of something larger through their participation in the ritual acts of hardcore dancing. Whether it is through their immersion in the collective voices of show goers, or through the close contact with people who are demonstrating a common interest in a bands performance, or pride for their youth cultural practices. Summarizing Statement: Hardcore dancing is a common bond between the kids that are in the pit, maybe because you have the guts to do this, maybe because you know they’re in the same fucking mind-set, same mentality as you are.

Theme 15

On top of the already existing communal function, many participants also discuss how experiences with hardcore dancing act as a release. These statements included mentions of letting it out through the music, or cooling off from outside pressures by forgetting them in the high-energy environment of the mosh pit.

Example statements include:

“the reason why I listen to hardcore music most of the time is just to release a lot of aggression I have in me... to relax in some odd way... and the dancing just goes hand in hand with it sometimes... you find yourself dancing by yourself... it makes me feel better... it’s more for peace of mind...” (6-8:00-1)

“I look forward to shows because I come here, I know everybody, there are seventy, eighty, a hundred kids that I know, and we all beat the shit out of each other, giving each other black eyes or whatever... it’s kind of an outlet for me..” (7-11:00-1)

“I think I was very angry for the last five years and I think it’s just starting to level off... and some friends talked me into it... they hadn’t danced before either and we were like, “what are we waiting for? Let’s give this a shot.”... and we did it... and we all sucked by the standards that applied to that, but... it was something... it was nice to vent after a long week of school, whatever, it was a nice way to let it out to something that was really important.” (1-6:00-1)

The examples of this theme provide a description of how participants find what could be described as an inner balance through the aggressive movement of hardcore dancing. Engaging in the performance allows them to vent their anger and frustration with other people who they know and feel close to. Summarizing Statement: Hardcore dancing is kind of an outlet for me, it makes me feel better by allowing me to vent my aggression and stress with people I know, for something that I care about.

Theme 16

Another theme that developed out of the interviews was a feeling that individuals who participate in hardcore dancing need to be doing it for the right reasons. Interviewee's statements in this theme relate feelings of disappointment or annoyance at other individuals for dancing for the wrong reasons. These statements are examples of this theme:

“I don't know... you start questioning yourself... the motivations behind it... what it means... are you doing it for you? Are you doing it for other people? Are you fitting into a certain cookie cutter that someone says, “this is the way it is...” Like I said before... what's good dancing? What's bad dancing? Why is this, why is this even here?” (1-7:00-1)

“I don't care what people think anymore... most people don't... well most of those people, as shitty as it sounds, don't count to me... its just how I feel... but I think some people are putting a little too much effort into stuff like that... trying to be too hard... I wish they'd just chill out and act like themselves...” (2-41:00-1)

“I'm gonna go out on a limb... it seems like everyone is just going through the motions... they're not into the music... gotta be tough and mosh and dive and shit like that...” (2-4:00-2)

“I don't know... you just have to wonder why you're doing it, and if you're doing it because you want... because you have too.. if you have to I would say do it... if the music moves you and you have to move, I say

that's wonderful... but if you have ulterior motives, status, showing off, being a tough guy, whatever, I can't support that." (1-9:00-1)

This theme illustrates a concern with the motivations behind an individual's decision to dance at a hardcore show. The statements described feelings of annoyance with members of the hardcore community when they engage in hardcore dancing to gain status within the community. Summarizing Statement: Dance because the music moves you to dance, not because you want to be cool, to be known by everyone else.

Theme 17

Another theme related to hardcore dancing is the way in which one learns to engage in the activity. It seems that the overwhelming opinion on how individuals become aware of how to dance is through a combination of observation (both of the movements and of the reactions other people have towards those movements), and simply building up the guts to get out there on the floor and "just do it." Examples of this theme include:

"I would say you should probably just watch... just check it out and watch what other people are doing and once you are comfortable with the idea that you can do that, try it... that's all I could say... the easiest way to learn is to just do it..." (4-14:00-1)

"I was really really nervous at first because I don't want to look stupid... first of all, I'm a girl, so what will they think? And second of all, what will I look like doing it? Cause you see some people and you're like, ewwww... But I mean, you just have to do it... there is no other way

really... you just have to go out there and do it... and every time you do it, you get better and you'll feel more pumped... or both, so... I just went out there and did it one time and it gets easier and easier every time..." (4-7:00-1)

"One of my friends who was into it would say, "You know, I don't think you are actually feeling it. You look like a robot. You are not feeling the music. You're just thrashing around." I really thought about that at the time... it meant something then... you just had to... you could only learn it by doing it really... you can't... everyone makes the bedroom mosh joke, but that doesn't really count until you're out there and there's people watching you..." (1-14:00-1)

"Just, ya know... You go to a show and there would be like ten or fifteen people there and you'd just try it, and so you didn't look like an idiot in front of a lot of people... and if someone was like "whoa dude, that was so cool," or something like that... and I don't know, you just keep doing it..." (3-4:00-1)

"Um, you learn them from persecution from other kids, like, ya know... You get laughed at behind your back and you realize it's because you dance like a jack ass... "What are you doing? Don't do that..." You just learn from watching other kids." (1-13:00-1)

These statements suggest that learning to hardcore dance is an observational practice that must be followed up by putting that observation into practice. Along with that description is an undercurrent that one must actually be

into it for the right reasons, or they will not be able to perform the movements in the expected fashion. Summarizing Statement: You learn to dance from other people, by watching how they do it, how they feel the music, and once you think you can do the same thing, do it, again and again.

Theme 18

A major theme that came out of talking with the participants about proper good and bad dancing was that it doesn't matter whether someone dances badly as far as aesthetics go. Rather, dancing is meant to be fun. This theme is similar to the idea that dancing functions as an outlet for emotions, but is distinct in that is more related to *how* one dances rather than *why* one dances. Examples of this theme include:

“I went to a show in Kingfield that the lead singer of Outbreak put on, and I remember just screwing around there, nothing real serious, I was just trying to have fun... I thought it would be more fun to be active at a show then just stand in the back and look like an idiot...” (8-3:00-2)

“So I mean, I don't know, everyone will have their own style... to say if its good or bad, or how scene it is, I don't give a shit... Because they're just having fun...” (7-25:00-1)

“If I were to see someone... or to tell someone how to do it right... I don't know... watch other people and just try to pick up what they're doing and maybe do something similar... just have fun...” (3-7:00-1)

In the end, dancing is about having fun. Whether you look good or not, or whether you are doing the movements expected of you, as long as you are having

fun, you are hardcore dancing the right way. Summarizing Statement: Everyone has their own style, if you are having fun while you are dancing, you are doing it right.

Theme 19

Some of the interviewee's expressed feelings of disappointment when dancing and other elements of show participation are taken too far. Although interviewees admit that hardcore is an aggressive style of music and is matched by an equally aggressive style of dance, mindless and over-the-top violence is seen as a negative element in hardcore, and one of the quickest way to end the good vibes one experiences at hardcore shows that have been described in earlier themes. Examples of this theme include:

“There was a show at the American Legion in Lewiston/Auburn one time... I think it was just A Life Once Lost metalcore stuff... and some local kid who thinks he's a tough guy kept kicking into the back of the crowd and there were kids there that were probably friends of the openers... they didn't know what was going on... so they tried to fight back and one of the... the tough guy kid just punched one of them out... and he was out... and they had to pull him out and he was bleeding all over himself... I don't know... it just sucked...” (1-10:00-1)

“Sometimes you just expect more of the people in the bands and you don't always get that... you think that they'd be more caring... recently, I saw, saw the lead singer of The Hope Conspiracy take a microphone stand, he's a pretty big guy, and he threw it across the stage and it hit this dude Austin

in the head and pretty much knocked him out... and that just kinda... I was really excited to see them because they haven't really been playing shows... and then I just saw that, and it just took, it was gone..." (8-8:00-1)

The statements used to illustrate this theme convey an attitude that hardcore, despite its aggressive nature, does not need violence for the sake of violence. People getting hurt for now reason is not a positive element of hardcore and the idea that one is tough because they beat up the kid who didn't know it was coming. Summarizing Statement: Hardcore is an aggressive youth culture, but whether it is the band, or the crowd, mindless violence serves no purpose.

Hardcore Youth Culture and Popular Culture

As discussed earlier, the popularization of the hardcore youth culture is one of the major areas of interest for this study. The intersection of the hardcore youth culture and popular culture occurs in two main areas: the Internet, and television. Websites such as Myspace.com and hardcore news sites have allowed Internet users to connect with other people and access information about hardcore scenes across the world. At the same time, television giants such as MTV have tapped into the hardcore aesthetic through airing videos by hardcore bands. The following themes describe the feelings of participants in the hardcore youth culture and how they see popular culture affecting the Maine hardcore scene. Issues of accessibility, change, and style are the focus of much of the following themes.

Theme 20

The first major theme reflects a feeling that popular media, such as MTV and *Rolling Stone*, have tapped into and are marketing the hardcore youth culture to a wider audience. People who may not have had any chance of being exposed to hardcore are catching glimpses of the youth culture. Many participants relate feelings of apprehension and disappointment with this development because they feel that these major media outlets are taking something special to them, and configuring it into a marketable product that only superficially resembles their scene. Statements of this theme include:

“I think it [MTV] neuters it... you can find so many good bands if you just look outside the box... like, lots of local bands are great... local music is becoming my favorite thing right now... it’s a slow process, but, I mean when I was in high school I thought Linkin Park was awesome because MTV told me so... I think it just sort of, like I said, neuters it and makes it unenjoyable... like go to one of your favorite bands that has been around for awhile and then they get on MTV and they’re crowded...”
(6-19:00-1)

“It’s weird thinking about how those two things crossed... I guess that’s how it’s going... It kinds of sucks because... it kind of pisses me off because I open up *Rolling Stone* and see terms like “Straight Edge” and “scene” and... bands I’m familiar with and stuff... I mean its cool they’re making money... I’m all for people making money if they can...”

but it still sucks because it seems like a bunch of fuck heads invading... it sounds selfish but its just how I feel..." (2-8:00-1)

"it's getting played out and it's getting over saturated by things we willingly trusted in... and I think that makes... I know it makes me kind of frustrated... and my friends too, its just... no one like to see something they really care about get dragged through the mud and commercialized..." (1-24:00-1)

"I think it made it a lot more accessible to everybody, even outside of Maine... I mean, you go into, you go to the fucking mall and you see... you go to Hot Topic and you're seeing Converge, and Bane, and Terror, whatever, and a lot of it is because of places like Purevolume.com, Myspace.com, and Hardcoremp3.com... kids are bored and just checking out music and it's starting to work its way into the mainstream... more the metalcore stuff then the hardcore, unless you're talking about giant hardcore bands like Terror and Hatebreed... you know, it's... I don't know, maybe, it's... maybe it will lead to fucking its demise you know?" (7-32:00-1)

Each of these statements portrays feelings of invasion, exploitation and concern for the future of the Maine hardcore scene. Participants respond negatively to the popularizing of something they consider their own. Whether it is the broadcast medium of MTV, or print journalism from magazines like Rolling Stone, the hardcore youth culture it being broken down to easily purchasable commodities. Summarizing Statement: Popular media has made hardcore a lot

more accessible to everybody, but hardcore is being sold as a product and dragged
though the mud by a bunch of fuck heads.

Theme 21

Despite the negative opinions that participants have towards the more popular forms of media, the Internet is viewed as a positive force in the Maine hardcore scene. Participants shared thoughts on how the Internet has allowed for easier contact between individuals, and has also helped to bridge some of the gaps between the geographically disparate Maine hardcore scene by downplaying the role that word-of-mouth once played in getting information to members of the scene. Examples include the following:

“Stuff like Myspace.com, it’s a simple program and it lets people know when the shows are going to be so they can plan months in advance of what they want to go see... it sorta creates a schedule for what’s going on... you don’t have to read flyers anymore... or hear from word-of-mouth when stuff is going on...” (6-22:00-1)

“as for finding new hardcore, I mean it’s easy to go on there and search for bands... I mean type a category that you want and there you are... there’s bands right there introducing you to new stuff... which is really awesome I think... you can find out about this little band that’s in like, Montana and through them you find another one and you are finding new music that you would not have heard any other way... and in that way I think its really awesome... and you can network with so many people and so many different bands... as for it in Maine... I mean.... Obviously the

same thing.... It's like kids in Maine can find music elsewhere and bring it back to Maine and introduce it to people..." (4-30:00-1)

"it's a good and an evil... it has helped a lot of bands get heard that otherwise would not have gotten heard... prime example, look at Outbreak, they live in the middle of the fucking woods... if it wasn't for the Internet, kids would not have heard them as much, except for close friends in Kingfield..." (7-32:00-1)

"I think that places like that [Myspace.com] are great for hardcore... you can just go to a band's site and hit add and have their song playing on your Myspace.com site and someone else will see it and find out about them and then someone else and someone else... that's really cool" (3-13:00-1)

"Yeah, some people say Myspace.com has done a lot of bad things... but in my opinion Myspace has been good... because I've heard a lot of new bands and I can check out what they're doing, if they are releasing an album, if they put on music..." (8-18:00-1)

Interviewees express positive sentiments towards the use of the Internet within the Maine hardcore scene. There is recognition that there are bad parts to it, but on the whole they related feelings of gratitude towards the multiple functions the Internet can play for information exchange. Summarizing Statement: The internet has helped a lot of people in Maine, word-of-mouth no longer keeps people in the dark when bands and promoters move to the geographically unbounded realm of the Internet to get the word out.

Theme 22

An interesting variation on the positive attitudes shared concerning the influences of the Internet, some negative sentiment was expressed towards the Internet. Within hardcore, the use of message boards has been adopted to share information and keep people in touch with one another. These venues however, can also be used to fuel what is considered “Internet drama” of personal conflicts that only seem to be aired through disconnected channel of the message board.

The following statement illustrates this theme:

“At the same time, it starts a lot of shit because people run their mouth and people find out who it is, and that’s when fights happen... there’s been so much shit that I’ve seen over the past six years that I’ve actually started paying attention to what’s going on... so much shit has happened because someone was so and so and someone was running their mouth to so and so, and it just inflates to something it shouldn’t even inflate to and kids get fucking hurt...” (7-31:00-1)

This theme provides a description of instances where the Internet is used within the hardcore scene to instigate conflict between individuals that while at first has no immediate consequences, has escalated to the point of physical conflict between members of the Maine hardcore community. Summarizing Statement: The Internet is good, but it definitely gives you the ability to start pointless conflicts with other people while hiding behind the keyboard.

Theme 23

Interestingly enough, based on the influences of the Internet, some participants shared feelings that were less harsh towards “the invaders” who learned about the hardcore scene through the Internet. Feelings of authority or protection of the hardcore scene were recognized, but looked upon as fruitless and stifling to individuals who were breaking into the scene through Internet information gathering. Examples include:

“I’ve definitely seen... it seems like... in the time I’ve been going to shows when the Internet became a part of it for some reason... well, I can’t say that... I haven’t been around before... but what I was trying to say was like... it’s kind of a little bit of an explosion... you see more of the kids from MTV or this or that kind of background... but whatever... I really really believe that you get into whatever kind of music through something commercial... it’s all around you... you can’t really avoid it...” (2-37:00-1)

“Basically I think it’s cool... I used to get pissed off at a lot of like, like the youth crew and edge kids because they didn’t want anybody talking about hardcore... it’s like friggin Fight Club or something... “Don’t tell anybody about hardcore, we don’t want anybody new coming into this, this is our scene, we don’t want anybody else here...” that drives me insane... I think it’s cool that they are opening that up for people to see and understand... and ya know, maybe if their taste is good taste they will get into other stuff as a result...” (5-39:00-1)

This more open attitude towards the Internet stands in contrast to the ones held regarding mass media. Although it seems contradictory, members of the hardcore scene in Maine distinguish between them on what appears to be a basis of control and access to a means of production on the internet. This issue will be taken up in the next chapter. Summarizing Statement: The Internet is opening hardcore up to a wider audience who wants to find it; this isn't Fight Club, so if you find it, it's yours as well.

Theme 24

Style is seen as an issue with the popularization of the hardcore aesthetic by the popular media. One major theme relating to hardcore dress style is its increasing uselessness as an indicator of whether or not someone may be into the hardcore scene in Maine. Examples of this theme include:

“you can go to the mall just about anywhere and see kids... and like five years ago you would say they go to shows, but they don't probably... you probably wouldn't see them at shows... I mean, I think its less of a counter-culture thing now...” (2-38:00-1)

“most definitely... like, emo kids dress like hardcore kids now... like... even like metal heads are wearing military covers now... camo is like everyone's favorite color... and it definitely has degraded your ability to figure out if someone listens to hardcore or not...” (5-43:00-1)

“there is a certain image that they are saying that girls who are into ”core” music, not necessarily hardcore, they are saying... cause you see it at almost every show you go to... the girls with the necklaces and dressed

a certain way and they think that's the way they're gonna dress because that's how you get accepted... so that's the way they are told to dress, but I mean, through TV, media, whatever... but I don't think that's necessarily.... I mean, if a girl that dressed like that was honestly into hardcore or she was out there or whatever, fine, dress however you want to dress, but when they are standing there, you don't really know..." (4-24:00-1)

These examples relate a feeling that dress is no longer a part of hardcore style that can be used to easily identify someone as belonging to the hardcore youth culture in Maine. Particular articles of clothing that were adopted by the hardcore youth culture have been stripped of their meaning and sold in popular clothing styles as the new thing and subsequently, become more ambiguous as indicators of the hardcore youth culture. Summarizing Statement: Popular culture has degraded the ability to use dress as an indicator of someone belonging to the hardcore youth culture.

Theme 25

Along with the growing inability to use dress as an indicator of belonging to the hardcore scene, there appears to be a backlash towards dress as an element of hardcore style in the Maine scene. Many participants attribute these negative attitudes towards dress as originating from the way that many individuals coming into the scene through popular media "over do" style. The participants saw this emphasis on dress as superficial and counter productive towards being a part of the hardcore youth culture. Examples of this theme include the following:

“Most people I guess probably think they are dressing hardcore or whatever, but really, hardcore is all about yourself and has nothing to do with how people dress or anything... a lot of people wear girl pants and have their hair half across their face, and that’s not what it’s all about...”

(3-14:00-1)

“that’s stupid, it’s ridiculous... just... if it takes you more then an hour to get ready to go to a show and you spend the entire time at the show worried about how you look or how your hair is, that’s ridiculous, then you are there for the wrong reasons...” (8-25:00-1)

“But at the same time you get pigeon holes and everything with ya know... camo shorts and Terror shirts and stuff like that, it’s... kids see these things and think ya know, that’s all it takes... thât’s all it takes to get in... and that’s... that’s what it’s about... that’s what frustrates me maybe... there is this misunderstanding that that’s all there is to it... that it’s a way to dress and act...” (1-31:00-2)

“Personally, it makes me sick to go to shows and see these girls in their little skirts and their little tights, and pearl necklaces and have them think that’s what it’s all about... I think the mainstream is telling them that’s what it is and you can go to Hot Topic and here is what you can buy and that’s hardcore... but its really not what it’s about and I think that mainstream is really trying to exploit it which pisses me off, because frankly it’s something that most people are passionate about and they want

to keep it to themselves and it's something that they have that is special to them..." (4-24:00-1)

"Look at labels like Victory... ten years ago they fucking owned hardcore, they were like the fucking hardcore label ya know? Look at em now... it's because hardcore is not selling, metalcore is, and screamo, and emo, whatever the fuck they call it... and they're just quick to sign shit and kids are like, "Weeee! New band, I'll buy it, I'm into it!" (7-37:00-1)

The general feeling expressed through these examples is that style and dress have been co-opted and sold to individuals who see their jeans and their hair as the defining aspect of being in the hardcore scene in Maine. Long time participants in the scene, however, feel rather negatively towards this sort of mentality and see it as a negative force introduced by new members of the youth culture. Summarizing Statement: Dressing hardcore is not being hardcore, that's not what it's all about, and if that's what you are concerned about, then you have missed the point and don't belong here.

Theme 26

The final theme for this cluster illustrates a feeling that the popular media introduces individuals to the hardcore community in a superficial and simplistic way. Newcomers are unknowledgeable due to only receiving superficial information about that hardcore scene, and display a naive outlook on the scene in general. Examples of this theme include:

"It's almost like anything I think in that, you think kids need to earn it before they can start kicking or punching you... I dance more than my

friends do most of the time... and I know like [name removed] and [name removed], my drummer and guitarist get wicked pissed because they don't dance nearly as much as me and they'll get hit by some kid and they'll get wicked pissed and be like, "What the fuck? I've been here way longer than you, you don't know who you're screwing with right now." (5-31:00-1)

"I don't know, people who, I don't want to sound like a jerk, but the newbies or the new jacks like getting into it and coming in and thinking, "give me this respect right away because here I am now listening to your music..." I don't think that's how it works... you need to gain respect from people and that's how it works..." (4-32:00-1)

"Because the ones that you feel got it from... I mean the ones that I'd say I feel got it from MTV have this certain naïve nature to them with everything... it's... maybe I'm just confusing that with youthful... being exposed to something new for the first time... but they seem to ooze this... you can just tell someone by looking at someone... if they're into it or not... you can just tell that... why, what motivation or you can tell if they need it or if they don't need it... it's just a feeling that you have..." (1-25:00-1)

These statements show how members of the Maine hardcore scene feel that popular media introduces individuals to the scene in simple and superficial ways. Such participants know little about the community that they wish to enter. Superficial understandings result in an ignorance of the social structures and rules that exist within the hardcore youth culture. Summarizing Statement: The ones

that got it from the popular media are naïve; they lack the understanding. They just never took the time to learn about what they are trying to be a part of.

Summary

Through out this chapter I have provided a phenomenological description of twenty-six major themes through the use of textual examples taken from the interviews conducted with eight participants in the Maine hardcore community. These themes were related to multiple areas of interest including general conceptions of how one comes to be part of the Maine hardcore community, the difference between hardcore as music and hardcore as youth culture, the social practice of hardcore dancing, and finally, the influence and effects of popular media on Maine hardcore. After each theme was outlined through the phenomenological description, the examples were reduced to a single statement that attempted to drop out all nonessential parts, and convey the meaning of each theme.

There were three major areas in which the themes were clustered. The first, which is comprised of themes 1 to 13, is more of a general overview of hardcore, and how those who participate in the hardcore youth culture experience the community and their identity within it. These themes covered topics ranging from how participants found hardcore, to how they view growing up and through the hardcore youth culture, to how the Maine hardcore scene is distinct (as well as the same as) other hardcore communities. The second major area, which is comprised of themes 14 through 19, deals with meanings relating to the phenomenon of hardcore dancing. These themes covered topics that deals with

feelings of community and identity gained through the participation in hardcore dancing, to ideas of what is good or bad dancing, and to attitudes towards motivations behind hardcore dancing. The final section, which is covered through themes 20 to 26, deal with issues surrounding the collision between hardcore as a youth culture, and hardcore as a popular culture commodity. These themes cover topics ranging from the influence on and attitudes towards popular media and the hardcore community, to the influence of the Internet on the Maine hardcore scene, and to attitudes towards individuals finding hardcore through the popular media.

In the next chapter I move to a phenomenological interpretation of the themes developed in this chapter.

Chapter 4:
INTERPRETATION AND
CONCLUSIONS

Now that the *capta* has been taken through the first two steps of the phenomenological method (description and interpretation), it is time to move onto the third and final step of the procedure. This step, the phenomenological interpretation, is a process of situating the themes that were developed in the previous chapter both spatially and temporally. That is to say, I now will move to contextualizing the conscious experiences described and reduced thus far in order to get at the meaning behind it. This means that I will be interpreting the twenty-six themes through my intersubjective position as both the researcher and an experiencer.

In order to approach this in an orderly fashion, I structure this chapter in a way similar to previous one. Themes will be discussed in clusters in order to show their inter-relationship, as well as the way in which some of them create contradictions surrounding the participants' experience of the Maine hardcore scene. I hope to develop the ways in which hardcore functions to create (or at least provide the possibility of) youth cultural identity, as well as how in that very creation, creates difference between youth culture and dominant culture. Through this then, I will show how at this moment in time, hardcore is at a point of rupture (both in the context of Maine hardcore, and hardcore in general) and the boundaries that once demarcated points between hardcore and popular culture are being realigned.

The Process of Hardcore

Themes 1 and 2 cover the first area I will approach. Both of these themes represent the way in which participants find and then become a member of the hardcore community in Maine. First, the differences between Theme 1 and Theme 2 is that in the first theme, the hardcore community is represented as being somewhat controlled by gatekeepers. The hardcore community of Theme 1 appears to be already known, but breaking into it takes the knowledge of another individual. Finding hardcore in the first theme then is contingent on one's relationship with others who are already part of the hardcore youth culture.

On the other hand, Theme 2 presents the idea that one must actively seek, or hunt out, the hardcore community. Under this theme, no one is necessarily there to help you into the scene. Whether there was no local scene for the participants to have a friend in, or the participant was from a more rural portion of Maine, the youth culture simply didn't exist in a geographically feasible form. Given this, it fell on the participant to actively pursue information and knowledge about the community through music. In this way, the participant was able to increase the knowledge of the music and the community to the point where they needed no one to usher them in.

Although the two themes relate two different ways in which the individual finds their way into hardcore community in Maine, both represent the hardcore community in Maine as a bounded phenomenon. In Maine, you don't just run across it like you might run across an enjoyable hit single on the radio. Regardless of what theme one is looking at, hardcore is something one must

actively pursue through the help of another, or on one's own. Because of this, hardcore situates itself as separate from other communities.

Because hardcore is seen as a separate entity, distinct from the dominant culture and popular youth cultures, it becomes something in which individuals can invest. It becomes a way of life, an alternative interpretation of the world. Theme 3 captures this feeling well. It reads, "Hardcore is pretty much one of the biggest things in my life, it's the shows, the bands, the friends and the music; right now it's huge, it's my life." It is easy to see that participants feel total immersion within the community. However, a closer read of the statement reveals a sense that such feelings exist simply in "the now." Although some participants' related feelings of hardcore being a part of their life forever, the majority expressed either changing understanding of what the community meant to them, or a loss of interest. Those feelings were captured in Themes 6 and 7, which specifically deal with feelings of disinterest and change. In short, although there is a time when hardcore becomes the center of someone's life, when measured up against time, it often loses its luster. However, themes 6 and 7 could also be attributed to the issue of the rupture that has and is taking place between hardcore as a youth culture community and hardcore as popular culture music. This issue will be taken up later, but for now I am more interested in the idea of shifting feelings towards to social aspect of the hardcore community.

At the heart of things, hardcore as a youth culture is tied to looking at it in a generational sense. It is a community that is centered on youth; both in the way it provides something for bored adolescents an avenue for expression and pleasure

(i.e., social belonging, friendships, courtships), and the way in which its rituals center on the body and activity that is most suited towards the energy of youth (i.e. aggressive and energy filled music, violent dancing). Because of this, it should not be surprising that as members grow older, they will be increasingly prone to making statements like Theme 6 and Theme 7. I suppose as youth begins to fade away, members find the use of hardcore as an identity, as a way of life, increasingly unfeasible. When they come to realize that hardcore cannot offer them a way to escape from the post-modern condition of capitalism, they begin to lose interest in, and even question why others would be so interested, or “try so hard” to be hardcore (Theme 4).

In the end, it appears that members who “grow up” fall into two categories regarding the community aspect of hardcore. The first watches the hardcore community fall to nostalgia about the way things were (Theme 6). The second seems to relate feelings of annoyance and anger (or maybe it’s disappointment) at those who still want to invest in the hardcore community (Theme 7). The difference it seems is that one avoids admitting that a hardcore identity cannot provide a feasible way of existence (in terms of hegemonic interpretations), whereas the second is angry at that very realization.

If we approach the Maine hardcore community as a youth culture that results in a process in which each new generation of participants signals the “growing up” of an older generation that is either unwilling to admit that they really did “grow up” (or angry that they had to), it is not surprising but very interesting that Theme 13 developed. This theme reads, “Hardcore is music, after

all is said and done, the music is all that matters.” Reading this theme as inter-related with those that I have mentioned thus far, seems to show the end of one of the possible progressions of those who participate in the Maine hardcore community. This progression moves across each of the themes covered so far. It begins with the initial finding of hardcore (Theme 1 and 2), which presents itself as an alternative way at being in the world. Newcomers to the hardcore scene seek it out as something they can be, and because it is fresh and new, they put all their effort into it. It becomes their reason for being, and they call it their life (Theme 3). As time moves on, however, participants are faced with the fact that they are becoming “old heads,” which is something you can achieve as young as twenty-one and above. As they become seasoned veterans of the scene, they also begin to question its feasibility as the lifestyle they desired when they first entered into the scene. Over time, the fact that youth cultures focus on just that, the youth who make up the culture, they begin the journey out of the scene. This journey often takes the paths discussed above, which are echoed through Theme 6 and Theme 7. Interestingly enough, even though many find themselves eventually uninterested (and maybe alienated) from the community they once were a part of, they boldly state that in the end, it’s just music. Regardless of anything they ever felt about the community, it is be reduced down to music. This is not to say that they do not feel strongly about the music, or the music’s power, but it does to some degree show admittance that some of what the music was about is either pointless or futile.

The Hardcore Identity

Although it seems as if I have already rendered some sort of judgment about the fate, or maybe the usefulness of Hardcore as a youth culture identity, I don't believe for a second that one can deny that it *is* an identity, or at least at some point in time it is. Perhaps I myself have gone down that path of nostalgia because I cannot dismiss the function that the hardcore identity played in my own life. For that reason, I wish to now discuss just what it is that people experience during that point in their life where Theme 3 is a dominant feeling in the participant.

Based on the interviews, the dominant reason why people subscribe so passionately to the hardcore community is simply that, because it is a community. It is a place where they can find a place. Oftentimes, the first exposure goes along with the feelings expressed in Theme 5, which reads, "Even though it was a little much at the time, I enjoyed the energy that was created during the hardcore show, and I wanted to come back over and over so I could experience it all again." The hardcore show is the central piece in the hardcore community. It serves as an outlet for both performers and audiences to participate in the creation of a community that lasts at least as long as the band continues playing music.

As I have just said, the show represents a temporary establishment of community through joint participation. One of the forms of participation that strongly contributes to the community identity is hardcore dancing. Theme 14 directly conveys this idea, and reads, "Hardcore dancing is a common bond between the kids that are in the pit, maybe because they have the guts to do this,

maybe because you know they're in the same fucking mind-set, same mentality as you are." This is a strong statement, one that proposes that because the individuals are out there, engaging in the performance of hardcore dancing, they share the same ideological stance, the hardcore way of life. Unfortunately, this common bond appears to be fairly superficial when looked at as it is related to some of the other themes developed in the previous chapter.

For instance, Theme 16 acts as a qualifying statement. It reminds us that just because you are dancing does not mean you are doing it for what is considered the "right reasons." If varying motivations for dancing exist, then it is likely that participants do not necessarily share the same mind-set, or hardcore outlook on things. It is explained through Theme 16 that you should be dancing because the music moves you, not for status or personal gain. If this is the case, then I suppose we could say that these types of motivations are at tension with the hardcore identity. To seek them out through participation in hardcore dancing is wrong to the members of the Maine hardcore community.

Interestingly enough though, Theme 18 conveys an idea that one can dance however they want. Style is meaningless as long as it is done for the sake of fun. That's not to say that those who dance well from an aesthetic point of view do not receive notoriety or enjoy a sense of popularity (but it's ok if they did not engage in the activity with those things as goals).

In fact, when discussing how one learns to dance, participants shared feelings that the best way to learn is through the imitation of others. This idea is contained in Theme 17, which explains a process of trial and error learning by

way of observation. Something that was not always identified though was whom to observe. For instance, would you, upon observing individuals engaging in hardcore dancing, choose to imitate the person who receives looks of disgust, ridicule or confusion as a result of their movements? Probably not. Rather, you would watch the person who is greeted with smiles, nods of approval, or pats on the back for their performance. Because of this, only certain ways of performing the act of hardcore dancing are actually acceptable if you are to meet the expectations of the hardcore identity created through this process. In this way, the hardcore identity as it is related to hardcore dancing is constrained by a cycle of performance/performativity that is perpetuated by the slow pace of change in the hardcore community.

A similar situation occurs with the idea of gender identity in the hardcore scene. As I have related previously, the hardcore community is one that is dominated by males. Because of this, the hardcore identity is closely related to traditional performances of masculinity. This is evident in the aggressive tone of the music as well the aggressive and physically demanding show environment. I do not wish to condemn the hardcore community for this because on its own it does no harm. The idea of an aggressive youth culture built around music is no more detrimental than that of the world of sports which holds similar attitudes. Theme 19 expresses this idea through its admission of the aggressive nature of the community, while at the same time explaining that aggression accompanied by violence is not the purpose of hardcore. Rather, it is an aggressive and high-energy youth culture geared towards having fun. The demanding physical

requirements of participation are part of that fun. For the sake of no better analogy, it's like a runner's high that is experienced by marathon runners. After a couple miles down, or in this case a couple songs, the movements bring pleasure to the participant.

However, this dominant masculine identity does serve to constrain the ways in which women and girls can participate within the hardcore community. The single female participant in this project related these feelings of constrained participation through Theme 19. Within the hardcore scene the males in the community often make assumptions about females. These assumptions usually circulate around the idea that women and girls are either in it for the large amount of men and boys that could quite possibly give them attention, or, that if they are indeed in it for the music, that the female simply can't play with the "big boys." This creates an environment where females are either just there to hook a boyfriend, or they are just trying too hard.

The result of this process of constraint is a community that expects women to adhere to particular identities in the hardcore community. In the end, it seems that women are either looked at as being there for the wrong reasons, and if they are there for the "right" reasons (i.e., "for the music") they are looked at as overstepping their expected conduct. Even though it may be hard to admit, hardcore has not been a place in which much progress has been made when it comes to gender identity. Perhaps its because much of what I have just discussed is not explicitly talked about by members of hardcore communities, and for that reason, possibly thought not to exist, or just not be important by participants.

Another interesting area that was touched upon in multiple themes were issues of divisions or boundaries that exist within the experience of a member of the Maine hardcore community. These boundaries are drawn both within the Maine hardcore community itself (Theme 10), as well as between Maine and other states/scenes (Theme 11.) Each of these divisions are created around different issues and require separate discussion.

The first boundary that becomes important to the experience of the members of the Maine hardcore scene is the one that goes on within the community. It is typical of the hardcore scenes across the nation to demarcate their own scene based on the area code. For instance, the scene in Maine is often referred to as “the 207.” Usually this marking is used to create distinction between closely neighboring scenes. An example of this would be the eastern part of Pennsylvania, which has multiple area codes (717, 610, and 570). That being said, the three area codes just mentioned are all geographically close to one another. They are all relatively densely populated areas that have enough participants in hardcore to consider themselves distinct scenes. The distinction is important for some because certain areas could be said to carry more credibility than others. For example, the 610 area code covers the Philadelphia region, which is a primary site for emerging hardcore bands and has a long-standing hardcore scene. Compare that to an area such as the 717 or 570 area code, which represent north eastern and central Pennsylvania. These are areas with smaller cities, who, although they may have long-standing scenes, are not looked at as major hubs for the global hardcore community.

In the case of Maine, we have a large state with a fairly dispersed population grouped around several small cities (i.e. Portland, Augusta, and Bangor.) All of these are considered to be part of the same scene because each holds so few participants in the hardcore community and is represented by one area code. Because they do not have the typical ways in which they can mark distinction between scenes, a division based on location in the state developed. North and south Maine (Theme 10) appear to be used in place of the area code convention. All of the participants in this project were from, or most closely considered themselves to be part of the Bangor area, or northern Maine scene. As the Theme 10 reduction conveys, the division is real in the fact that it is recognized by participants in the Maine hardcore community. Southern Maine is marked off from Northern Maine and depending on where one is from, or where one attends most of their shows, one will find yourself belonging to one or the other. Some participants related experiences where small fights (most often carried out through words) were waged, but that in general, it just seems like each portion of the state treats the other with a kind of prejudice. Those who participated in the interviews also described the division as pointless and petty. As far as I can tell, it seems that the division serves the same purpose as the typical area code convention. It works to mark off people who believe that they are different from another group. It would appear, however, to be rather counter-productive to the idea of developing a youth culture, but the sheer distance between the major centers of the hardcore community in Maine seems to almost necessitate these divisions in order to show possession by smaller scenes.

The second boundary that is developed is the one between the Maine hardcore community as a whole, and those scenes that exist within the neighboring states (i.e. New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut). This boundary is covered in Theme 11, which makes this boundary seem like it falls to the old “grass is greener over there” type of thinking. Many of the participants in the Maine hardcore scene who participated in this project were older and had experienced the scenes of other areas. A major feeling for them was that shows outside of state (and the scenes they occurred in) were usually more fun or more pleasurable than those in Maine. Reasons for the increased pleasure ranged from the simple fact that shows in areas such as Massachusetts are run well, to the feeling of leaving behind the drama and the social atmosphere of the Maine hardcore community. This creates a boundary between the Maine hardcore community as less active and fun, and those outside of Maine as more connected and pleasurable. It would seem that as members become more accustomed to the hardcore community they desire a more active scene in respect to shows, bands, and other types of community building, and grow tired to the small atmosphere of the Maine community.

Despite the sectioning off that occurs from within the Maine hardcore community, as well as the bracketing off between the Maine scene and those in other states, members of the Maine hardcore scene do not think the divisions created mark a difference in their experience of and participation in the hardcore youth culture identity. Theme 12 reads, “Despite any difference between individual hardcore communities, passion for hardcore is a universal feeling, and

a common bond between all scenes.” At the root of this theme is an outlook that views the adoption of the hardcore identity as something that every member of any given scene can adopt to an equal degree. It is the passion for the music that the scene is built around that is important to *being* hardcore.

Although we have come back again to the idea that it is hardcore music that is the single most important factor to being “hardcore,” it seems that it would carry some inconsistencies. If we look back to the discussion of hardcore dancing, which was said to be a major contributor to the idea of youth and pleasure in the hardcore identity, we also see how there are constraints put on the way in which one can *be* hardcore through participation in hardcore dancing. There are expectations that have to be met before the “all that matters is that you are having fun” clause. Also, the divisions that are created within and outside of the Maine hardcore scene also seem to be counter-intuitive to the idea of the hardcore identity as “whatever is fun as long as it’s for the music.” If another scene is better, or one is seen as less hardcore than the other, how do we reconcile that with the idea of “passion for the music” as the center of the hardcore identity? I don’t know if I can answer this question yet. For that reason, I will move now to a discussion of another boundary that represents a fundamental way of talking about youth culture. This boundary is the one that exists between the hardcore youth culture and popular music culture.

Popular Culture Meets Hardcore

Two different trends have had serious effects on the hardcore communities across the world. These trends are the introduction and adoption of the Internet by hardcore communities, and the increasing attention being given by major record labels and popular music broadcasters. In general, both of these trends work towards increasing the ease at which individuals can find hardcore. They have provided the hardcore youth culture with a heightened profile through expansive Internet music and networking sites, as well as music television programs which highlight the “underground sound” of hardcore music. These trends play an important role in what Grossberg (1997) would consider a “rupture” in the boundary between the hardcore youth culture, and the dominant, or hegemonic, capitalist culture of the western world. In this section I develop an interpretation of the themes that deal with this rupture in order to understand how the fading boundary between youth culture and dominant culture informs the Maine hardcore identity.

Throughout the interviews I asked participants about their feelings of how the Internet and mass media broadcasting has affected the hardcore scene in Maine. In general, all participants expressed that the Internet and mass media have made hardcore more accessible to individuals who might be interested in becoming a part of the hardcore community. Several themes, including Theme 20, 21, and 23, all support this idea, however; there are several areas of concern.

First, it appears that there is a sharp distinction between attitudes towards hardcore being expanded through the Internet and the way it has been popularized

through mass media. The Internet in general is seen as a positive force within the Maine hardcore scene. It has led to increased community building between the highly dispersed populations in Maine, which has allowed for an introduction of an Internet-mediated word-of-mouth. Before the Internet, hardcore communities relied on word-of-mouth to spread information about shows, bands, and record releases. In more densely clustered scenes, this would not be a problem. A trip to a record store could provide a month worth of shows and record release schedules. However, in Maine this is more difficult when record stores or venues could be located one hour or more away. Through the Internet, all of this distance is collapsed. There are sites that gather news about touring bands, record deals, and record releases. Venues have detailed schedules posted online for easy reference. There are even large networking sites where individuals can meet new friends within the hardcore community, and keep in touch with old ones. These sites are even introducing large networks of bands so that users can listen to bands they may have previously never heard of, or just not had access to their recorded material. Disregarding the issue of access, the Internet has provided a community that relied on a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) approach, a crucial tool with which the community can build and maintain their scene. Maine then, is a hardcore scene that is characterized by heightened use of the Internet to counteract the effects of having a dispersed scene.

Although the attitude towards the Internet is generally positive, Theme 22 does recognize the negative implication of open Internet forums within hardcore community. Due to the fact that hardcore is in fact a youth culture, the anonymity

of the Internet allows for adolescent and immature “drama” to be carried out over the Internet. From personal experience, this is not a phenomenon unique to the Maine hardcore scene. The introduction of the message board and the protection of the user name seem to lead some into the position of “Internet Tough-guy.” In general though, this is looked down upon by most members of the hardcore scene and viewed as oppositional to the drive towards community building and unity.

Whereas the Internet is viewed as helping the Maine hardcore community overcome serious issues presented by the sheer size and dispersal of its members as well as providing the community with a hand in the way the hardcore community is portrayed to the outside world, television and mass media are viewed as negative. Mass media is seen by many as being the downfall or demise of the hardcore scene (Theme 20.) Grossberg’s (1997) discussion of rock and roll and cooptation provides a useful way of looking at the situation presented to the hardcore youth culture. He maintains that cooptation is an ongoing process between rock and roll (youth culture,) and the music industry (hegemony.) Because youth culture is imbedded within hegemonic society, its counter-hegemonic conventions are often recuperated by the music industry in order to capitalize on what they previously could not. It is a process that results in the rupture of the boundaries created by the participants of a youth culture. Once the boundary is broken, the youth culture typically reforms.

As an example of this process of boundary loss we have the issue of style, or dress, in the Maine hardcore scene. Although many participants often found the idea of style being a primary convention in hardcore, they did relate that due

to style being one of the easier things for mass media to sell to people, hardcore styles of dress were becoming less and less useful as an indication that a person may be part of the hardcore community. This clearly represents a rupture in the boundary between the hardcore youth culture and mass culture. What could once be considered a mark of distinction, is now widely sold in any given mall across the nation.

Compounding this feeling that the hardcore community is losing their distinction from dominant culture is the fear that the selling of hardcore as a product is introducing people to the culture that have little interest what members' considered the hardcore identity, or the "passion for the music" idea discussed above. Instead, people are coming into the scene as if it was a new way to dress (Theme 25). This is regarded as an overwhelming naïve understanding of what it is *to be* hardcore by already existing members (Theme 26.)

In short, the Maine hardcore community seems to be one that is experiencing two different trends when it comes to issues of popularization. On one hand, we have the Internet which represents feelings of empowerment and has worked towards providing Maine hardcore scenes a vital tool in community building and giving a sense of connection and togetherness. On the other hand, there is mass media, which represents the process of cooptation. This ongoing dance between youth culture and dominant culture often marks the eventual death (which is usually followed by a rebirth in a newer form) of a youth culture. Participants worry about the dedication of new members who found hardcore through the mass media. It would appear, that the Internet represents a way in

which members of the hardcore community can show their distinction, and the mass media represents a force that works towards breaking that distinction down.

Summary

Before moving on to my concluding remarks, I would like to summarize what has been developed through this chapter. First, I began with a discussion which was termed “the progression” of hardcore. Through this I developed that the hardcore community is one that individuals experience as a progression. It begins with the initial discovery of hardcore, a subsequent immersion in the life style of the youth culture, and the eventual departure from the youth culture. In a place like Maine and any other place in the world, the hardcore identity is one of transience. It is not permanent. Although for a time it appears to provide a stable place in an unstable world, it cannot last. Eventually one either leaves to maintain the idea of what hardcore is, or they stay too long and begin to resent what hardcore has become despite that the only person it may have changed for is them.

Following this I attempted to get an idea of what it was like *to be* hardcore during that stage of immersion. In the end, it seems that to adopt the hardcore identity is to have passion for the music. This passion is held above all else. It is a passion for the organizing element of the youth culture. The passion is closely aligned with the idea of pleasure and fun, and subsequently, it informs how people see themselves as hardcore. To take things too seriously is an indication of being in, or approaching the hardcore identity in the wrong way. This can be seen in the way people view attitudes and actions surrounding the way people

participate in the community. The hardcore identity is also one of distinction. Whether it is based on location, style, or performance, the bounding of hardcore as different from everything else, including the differentiation of scenes within hardcore, works towards providing the hardcore identity a sense of Self (through the continual creation of Others as non-hardcore).

Finally, I discussed the way in which current trends in the popularization of hardcore have led towards both feelings of empowerment and fear. The empowerment is created by the increased ability to create and maintain a community that defies typical conventions of geography in youth cultures through the Internet. The fear is gained through the realization that mass media has broken the boundaries and distinctions that members of the hardcore community worked to create. In the end, the process of cooptation has been started (if it ever actually stopped), and hardcore is faced with the problem of reforming, or moving on.

The hardcore identity, as far as this study is concerned, is one that I would call permanently temporary. It can never be held on to in the sense that the hardcore you know will always be the hardcore you came into. The postmodern world has a way of splitting things apart, and things like mass media are far more adept at dismantling the boundaries created around the hardcore identity, then participants in these communities are at maintaining them.

Missing Pieces

As a brief aside, I would like to mention a few items that were either not covered in this project, or that could not be fully considered within the scope of

the research. Based on my personal experience within various hardcore communities, I am privy to some knowledge that another research may not be. For that reason, I would like to quickly discuss some of the things that were *not* said, and the implications they have on potential future research.

The first missing elements circulate around topics of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and class. In the early days of hardcore there was a push for various political designs. I would not try to say that they were all the same, but there definitely were politics involved with being a member of the hardcore scene. It seems, however, that at this time much of the politics involved have dropped out of the hardcore scene. Its participants have turned attention off topics involved with race, sexuality, and gender as if they do not matter. The overwhelming presence of white heterosexual males in the hardcore scene appears seems to go on unquestioned by participants under this blindness to politics of difference. I am not trying to say that the hardcore community is one that actively engages in racist or sexist actions, but due to the drive towards sameness, has stopped questioning these issues. In other words, hardcore appears to have come under passivity, and this aspect did not necessarily come through overtly through the interviews or analysis, and even if it was a focus of the project, may have been difficult to get at. Perhaps in the future a more ethnographic approach would lend itself to getting at this aspect of the hardcore scene through adding a participant observation element to the research.

Other issues that did not come out as much as I had hoped, included the constraints put on the few people who exhibit cultural difference in the hardcore

scene. In particular, the treatment of women and girls within the hardcore scene needs further study. Simply by looking at the demographics of the interview participants one can observe the downplayed role of females in the hardcore scene. Perhaps by bringing in some feminist methodologies would have made it easier to look into these issues. As it stands, this project was not able to get at such issues explicitly. Only through my personal experience in the hardcore scene have I been able to observe the way that women, when they attempt to gain equal treatment in the discourse of sameness that exists in hardcore, are subjected (in many, but not all circumstances) punishments for they traversal of the lines between difference and sameness.

In the end, I believe that it would be extremely useful to bring in a combination of feminist methodology, and the research methods of performance ethnography to dig deeper into these issues of race, class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality that are almost completely absent from talk both within the interviews that were conducted for this project, and my own experience with the discourses within the hardcore community. Doing so may help to gain deeper insight into some of the more idiosyncratic elements of this youth culture built up around a community that seeks sameness.

Conclusions

The purpose of this project was to attempt to understand what it was to be a part of the Maine hardcore community at this point in time. It was my hope that approaching the topic of youth cultures from a phenomenological perspective would provide me with a method that highlights experience and meaning, not

trends in variables or response averages. I believe that I have achieved that goal. What I have come to understand about the hardcore youth culture (a community that I myself invested a considerable amount of time) is like many of the other youth cultures that have come before it. It is a community that when one first manages to discover it, it is seen as something that you can invest your life into. It is a community that celebrates youth and provides its members with pleasure. You go to the shows, you listen to the music, you dance, you dive and you sing-along while surrounded by others who just want to have fun. It is an escape from the idea of growing up and walking in line with everyone else.

In the end, though, it is evident that people grow up. Eventually you do have to leave hardcore if you want to “do it for the music.” If you don’t, hardcore must then be turned into a way of living. You will have to make a living through dominant culture. This is how hardcore enters into the cycle of cooptation. Once it becomes a source of income for people, it must begin to adhere to dominant capitalist practices. I don’t think it is possible to fault those who wish to make hardcore their life, but in doing so, they start the process that ends hardcore as a youth culture, as an escape. Just as punk experienced that same process and reformed into several different scenes, so will hardcore (if it already hasn’t). It seems then, that the only way to be hardcore, as far as those I interviewed define it, is to leave it behind.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

INFORMED CONSENT

You are requested to participate in this research study, which is analyzing the construction of identity through the act of storytelling. You will be asked to share stories about your experience surrounding the act of hardcore dancing (or “moshing”) with researcher, Brian Kochan (University of Maine, MA Candidate). The estimated time required for your participation is about one (1) hour. If at any point you must terminate the interview session, you are free to do so, and will not harm the research. The interview will be guided by a set of loose questions that will serve both as a focusing agent, and to encourage you to only disclose that which you are comfortable disclosing. The interview will be documented through audio recording.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomfort to you, as you will not be expected to disclose anything that you do not wish to.

Benefits for participating in the study include having the opportunity to share your experience and stories with other people.

The audio recordings will be kept confidential only to the researcher and participants. The researcher will keep the recordings indefinitely, though they will be converted into the electronic .mp3 format, which will be stored on a password protected computer possessed by Brian Kochan. Any notes or transcriptions of the recordings will also be stored on the same password protected computer.

If there are any questions regarding the study in any capacity, they may be directed to Brian Kochan, 89 Brunswick St, Old Town, ME, 04468 or (717) 951-4894 or brian.kochan@umit.maine.edu. You may also direct questions to the advisor of this project, Dr. Eric E. Peterson, 414 Dunn Hall, Orono, ME, 04469, or (207) 581-1934.

If at any time the participants wish to cease participation in the study, they are completely free to do so with no harm to them as this study is completely voluntary. If you wish for the researcher to use a pseudonym in place of your name for research purposes, please feel free to ask at any time during the dinners or privately by contacting her by phone or e-mail.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Gayle Anderson, Assistant to the Protection of Human Subjects Review Board, 581-1498, gayle.anderson@umit.maine.edu.

Appendix B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did you get into the hardcore scene here in Maine?
2. How long have you been attending shows? How do you see yourself within the hardcore scene?
3. Do you remember your first show? What was that like?
4. Do you dance at the shows? How did you start doing that? (If not: what experiences have contributed to you not dancing?)
5. What was the most memorable experience dancing (or not dancing) at shows?
6. What is the worst experience you have ever had at a show?
7. Is there a “right” and “wrong” way to dance? How would you explain the difference to someone that doesn’t know? (If participant dances: How did you learn these differences?)
8. How do you get ready for a show?
9. Do you ever go to shows outside Maine? What are were they like?
10. How big a part of your life is the hardcore scene? Is it just the music, or is there more to it for you?
11. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Brian Kochan was born in Takoma Park, MD on April 12, 1982. He was raised in Lancaster, PA and graduated from J. P. McCaskey High School in 2000. He went on to attend Millersville University of Pennsylvania where he received a B.S. in Speech Communication. Following this he began study at the University of Maine, and is currently finishing up work for his M.A. in Communication. Brian is a candidate for the Master of Arts degree in Communication at The University of Maine in August, 2006.