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## **I. Introduction: From Popular Culture to Youth Subculture**

From television to music, magazines to advertising, images of youthfulness have increasingly come to dominate popular culture in late capitalist society. Youth are frequently depicted as rebellious, resisting social norms and flaunting unconventional styles in music and fashion. These images, however, reflect an amalgam of different styles and genres – a glance at Billboard’s music charts reveals how no single musical style can be pegged as “pop” or “mainstream,” as the top singles encompass hip-hop, R&B, pop punk, and nu-metal. Even a reference to these genres calls to mind distinctive youth styles – from baggy pants and backward baseball caps to dyed, spiked hair and studded belts. Of course, these images embody stereotypes that do not necessarily represent the majority of young people. But “popular culture,” it seems, is becoming indistinguishable from “youth culture,” and can no longer be conceived of as homogenous, even at the most commercially successful, mass-produced level.

These diverse youth styles draw on youth subcultures such as punk, mod, rave, metal and goth as symbolic resources, appropriating and recombining elements of style to produce individual looks and identities (Willis 1979, Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003). Indeed, the study of youth subculture has figured prominently in the field of cultural studies, and continues to draw both scholarly and popular attention alike. This research was pioneered by Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and others at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (the CCCS, known as the Birmingham school) in the 1970s, and was rooted in the sociology of deviance and delinquency among urban youth. For Hall et al., youth subcultures could be conceived of as homogenous, stylistically distinctive wholes,

easily identifiable to researchers. These highly visible urban youth, such as mods, teddy boys and skinheads, represented a working-class response to changing social conditions, primarily social and economic reorganization in the period following World War II (Hall et al. 1976).

More specifically, youth subcultures expressed their disaffection with the dominant culture through leisure and consumer activities, such as personal style, slang and social rituals. In particular, youth subcultures were viewed as appropriating dominant codes, and recontextualizing them to subvert their meaning. According to their Neo-Marxist perspective, however, such resistance is ultimately limited by its inability to address the real relations of capital and production, as style is confined to the symbolic. Later CCCS researchers such as Dick Hebdige contested this view to some degree, arguing that in a social world of symbolic meaning, the subcultural appropriation of dominant codes may allow for meaningful resistance. Hebdige focused on punk style in particular, as a form of “bricolage” which recombines diverse cultural elements to create new meanings (Hebdige 1979). Hebdige emphasized a semiotic and structuralist interpretation of punk style, yet continued to approach youth subcultures as clearly bounded wholes.

Through the work of Hebdige, Hall, and others, the central body of research in subcultural studies has embraced a Neo-Marxist and structuralist account of postwar youth subcultures. However, this approach is predicated on the existence of a dominant culture against which subcultures can agitate. This dominant culture is equally considered homogenous and monolithic, the alleged “mainstream” that emphasizes conformity and consumerism. This conception of popular, or dominant, culture draws on the mass culture critique of Adorno, Horkheimer and others at the Frankfurt school, who viewed industrialization and the mass production of culture

as destructive to artistic authenticity. Mass culture, Adorno argued, creates a conditioned and standardized public, a public which then comes to prefer the familiar and the formulaic (Adorno 1938). This discourse of authenticity persists in both academic accounts and in popular culture more generally, and depends on an opposition to the conforming influence of the mainstream.

Recent research has begun to critique this view of the mainstream, however, identifying its role in subcultural discourses of resistance. Thomas Frank describes the popular academic thesis of “co-optation” in his analysis of the 1960s countercultural revolution, and its relationship to the advertising industry and popular culture (Frank 1997). The co-optation thesis parallels the Birmingham school’s contention that subcultural style is ultimately mass-produced and diffuses into the mainstream, defusing its subversive power (Clarke 1976). Frank contests this narrative in which capitalist interests ultimately co-opt countercultural (or subcultural) resistance. Instead, he proposes that the values of the sixties counterculture actually infiltrated business interests, giving rise to new ideologies of youthfulness, novelty and leisure, which fueled accelerated consumerism and have come to dominate popular culture.

Sarah Thornton, in her influential work on British rave culture, similarly argues that the mainstream is actually a construct against which subcultural participants position themselves (Thornton 1995). These participants view other groups as homogenous and inauthentic, while viewing their own crowd as diverse and legitimate. Thornton suggests, instead, that Bourdieu’s work on cultural knowledge and social stratification can offer better insight into how subcultures operate. Bourdieu identified how cultural knowledge and consumption become markers of class position, through learned aesthetic preferences (i.e., “taste”)

(Bourdieu 1984). These tastes are acquired at home and through the educational system, but are internalized to appear natural and inherent.

While such tastes determine cultural preferences in the “high culture” sense of the arts (music, theatre, fine art, etc.), they equally prefigure consumer choices in the domestic sphere (for example, home décor, dress and cuisine). While taste may carve out social boundaries most clearly at the level of the arts, it operates most insidiously at the more personal level of domestic consumer choices. The aesthetic preferences of the dominant classes, moreover, contain all others, as a cultural expression of the dominant ideology. This control over aesthetic preferences allows for control over cultural markets, and through this economic control, the elite maintain their dominant social position.

Bourdieu thus employed an economic model in his account of cultural consumption. He described accumulated cultural knowledge as a form of capital, comparable to economic capital (and frequently convertible into financial means). He termed this “cultural capital,” and distinguished it from “social capital,” which refers to the accretion of social connections that improve social position (and frequently, increase economic capital). Bourdieu’s work here offers a sophisticated poststructuralist understanding of how cultural knowledge and practices structure society. Thornton concludes that this account can equally benefit the study of subcultures, and describes the specialized knowledge of cultural goods and practices which structures them as “subcultural capital” (Thornton 1996: 11). Paul Hodkinson, in his ethnography on the British goth scene, further applies this notion of subcultural capital to interpret subcultural discourses of credibility and authenticity (Hodkinson 2002).

This emphasis on subcultural style and consumption, however, fails to account for the creation and distribution of cultural knowledge and practices. Subcultures cannot be approached as homogenous wholes with clearly marked boundaries, as different members participate to differing degrees and in a variety of ways. Moreover, no single interpretation of subcultural style can account for the range of explanations members themselves may invoke. Much of the current literature on subcultures has shifted to a “post-subcultures” approach, reconceptualizing subculture as a pastiche of elements and styles which individuals appropriate to construct their identities (Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003). While this view addresses some of the limitations of the earlier research, a revised theoretical approach remains necessary to understand more fully how subcultures operate.

To this end, subcultures can be analyzed in terms of social interaction as well as style and consumption. According to the interactionist model, subcultures represent social networks, interlocking clusters of participants defined by social affiliation through individual association (Fine and Kleinman 1979: 1-20). Subcultures can be considered “communities of practice,” social groups mutually constituted by both membership and the common practices in which members engage (Eckert 2000). Linguistic practice in particular reveals social boundaries and illuminates social interaction. According to Manuel Castells, post-industrial society at large can be considered a “network society,” in which social organization is structured by information and telecommunications technologies. These high-speed technologies allow for communications networks in which “patterns of contact” are “created by flows of messages” (Castells 2004: 4).

According to this model, media play an integral role in youth subcultures as technologies of circulation, spreading subcultural tastes and styles. This approach

better explains the consistency of such subcultures across geographic distance, as local subcultural scenes tend to have parallel counterparts in other cities (and countries) which display similar styles and norms. Such remarkable similarity, however, appears to develop with no centralized or global organization, leading Hodkinson to refer to these subcultures as “translocal” rather than global.

While this approach focuses more attention on mediated networks, style, taste and social ritual retain their centrality to youth subculture. These defining aesthetic preferences, however, can be more clearly comprehended when viewed along lines of communication and interaction. Instead of emphasizing the meaning of style and other subcultural activities, the interactionist approach suggests that participants may value in-group affiliation over some nebulous cultural resistance. Perhaps Bourdieu’s conception of social capital figures into subcultural practices and style as much as cultural capital does. Style and other subcultural markers may serve to reinforce group identity, creating social networks which may not tie directly into dominant power structures, yet still benefit members socially.

In this way, subcultures can be better understood in terms of both cultural capital and social networks. In order to investigate this conceptualization of youth subculture, I have endeavored to apply social network theory to existing ethnographic literature, and to conduct original research which emphasizes this approach. Through a series of five interviews with seven subcultural participants, I was able to explore aspects of youth subculture that have often been overlooked, posing open-ended questions which emphasized social participation and media, rather than the significance of style or social ritual. This approach permitted participants their own voices, and revealed some of the diverse ways in which youth are active in such subcultures.

My own experience as a subcultural participant conferred both strengths and disadvantages to my research. As Hodkinson has described, I can be considered a “critical insider” (Hodkinson 2002: 6), familiar with the norms of certain subcultures, yet approaching my subjects from the critical perspective of an ethnographic researcher. I drew on my familiarity with specific local subcultures (primarily, the goth/industrial scene) both to recruit participants, and to navigate the cultural norms which dictate subcultural interaction. This familiarity with subcultural styles, music, venues and local personalities allowed me to establish rapport quickly with informants, as I was often already acquainted with the topics and issues that arose in the interviews.

This benefited me by enabling me to interpret subcultural codes and meanings easily, but probably undermined my critical perspective to some degree. An outside researcher might be better positioned to identify some of the norms which familiarity has rendered transparent to me, raising questions and lines of inquiry that I may have overlooked. As Hodkinson suggests, my individual relationship to the subculture may have shaped my understanding of what constitutes “the scene,” as my perspective remains contingent on my previous experiences. This undoubtedly influenced how I recruited my participants, and may be reflected in the common tastes and styles of those contacted through snowballing.

My research was further limited by its small scale, and offers more of a pilot study which suggests directions for future research. Overall, the interviews yielded data which were informative and helped illuminate the mediated networks through which subcultural knowledge and practices are produced and disseminated. More extensive interviewing would necessarily provide a broader and more comprehensive picture, and participant-observation would be invaluable to more fully appreciate



the operation of such networks. While this study was inevitably incomplete, the questions posed succeeded in revealing aspects of youth subculture that have not yet been sufficiently considered in cultural studies.

Ultimately, I think this approach will lay the framework for a more extensive understanding of contemporary youth subcultures, combining the existing ethnographic research with the growing literature on social networks. Given the ideologies of youthful resistance which increasingly dominate popular culture (particularly in leisure and consumption), the study of youth subculture has further implications for our understanding of popular culture generally. Moreover, in questioning the existing cultural category of “subculture,” we must reconsider our conception of “popular culture.” From this perspective, ongoing ethnographic research into youth subcultures will continue to benefit the field of cultural studies, and the anthropology of culture and media.

## **II. Theoretical Models: Youth, Media, and Subculture**

In cultural studies, popular culture has often been conceived of as a monolithic realm of commercially produced media that appeal to the standardized and unsophisticated masses. This model, however, has not sufficed to account for the spread of cultural knowledge and practices, or the ways in which societies are stratified by cultural distinctions. Popular culture can no longer be approached as a homogenous whole, but can better be understood in terms of social networks. Moreover, popular culture has come to be dominated by “youth culture,” an increasingly mediated space of leisure and consumption. In order to understand how popular culture is structured, we must consider the cultural logics of the youth subcultures that have come to characterize both youth and popular culture, in terms of media and social networks.

### **Youth in Popular Culture**

“Youth” as a term has often been invoked in cultural studies literature without sufficient attention to how this concept operates as a social category. Images of youthfulness seem to dominate popular culture in late capitalist society, spurring consumer desires and blurring the distinctions between “youth culture” and “mainstream” culture more generally. In media and advertising, youth are portrayed as hip, cool, and knowledgeable about the latest fashions and consumer goods. At the same time, adolescence is commonly assumed to be a transitory period of tumultuousness, rebellion and even violence. This conception of youth, however, has developed as a part of other modernizing forces, which produced a new life stage – and social category. Historically, these modern constructions of youth and

adolescence emerged in nineteenth and twentieth century Europe and America, and are spreading along with other globalizing processes (Keniston 1972; Kett 1977; Liechty 2003).

When considered in this historical perspective, it becomes clearer how “youth” really indicates a social category, rather than some inherent, universal human life stage. As such a category, youth comes to reflect and embody current social anxieties, particularly those concerning social reproduction. As a biological process, adolescence conflates the potential for physical reproduction with that of social reproduction. According to both historical and ethnographic literature, this conflation can intensify during periods of social change and uncertainty, when social reproduction is at issue. While this capacity may not be culturally specific, the particular content assigned to youth is. In late capitalism, youth have come to embody being cool, savvy, desirable and modern, while simultaneously being saddled with fears about violence and precocity. In rethinking the literature on youth subcultures, we must keep in mind the distinctions between youth as a social category, and the actual lived experience of young people.

For Hall, Jefferson and others at the Birmingham school, it was the postwar emergence of stylistically distinctive working-class youth that caught their attention. These youthful groupings, primarily male, were characterized by the CCCS as youth “subcultures.” (Hall et al. 1976) According to Hall et al. these youth formed subcultures in which musical taste, sartorial style and social ritual coincided homologously to represent a particular focal concern or interest. Youth subcultures were defined by how their working-class members expressed resistance to class position through consumption and leisure activities. These youth communicated their resistance to the dominant culture by appropriating mass-produced consumer

goods and recontextualizing them to subvert their dominant meanings, from the snappy suits and scooters sported by the mods, to the heavy Doc Marten boots favored by skinheads.

According to this Neo-Marxist and structuralist narrative, it was postwar social reorganization which undermined traditional working-class social supports, and hence produced frustrated, disaffected, and often unemployed, working-class youth. Ultimately, however, subcultural style was co-opted by capitalist forces, who repackaged subculture for the masses and defused its subversive power. At the same time, these youth failed to resist capitalist hegemony because they could not channel their resistance effectively to alter the underlying conditions of material production.

This account of youth subculture has become, in many ways, a product of its time. However, this literature raises some important themes, connecting youth culture and consumerism in a modern, urban context. More recent research has critiqued many aspects of the Birmingham school argument, such as the myth of the monolithic mainstream (McRobbie 2000, Thornton 1995). In particular, the work of Thomas Frank offers us a revised way of thinking about the rise of youthful consumerism in the postwar period.

Frank contests the narrative in which consumer interests simply co-opt grassroots expression of resistance.<sup>1</sup> Instead, he uncovers the history of business and advertising in the same time period, suggesting an alternate narrative in which the business industry was itself transformed by emerging countercultural values. Advertising, he argues, embraced the mass culture critique of the Frankfurt school, and began to offer products in a way that appealed to consumers' desires to

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<sup>1</sup> Although Frank focuses on 1960s "counterculture" in the United States, only briefly referring to British youth subcultures such as the mods.

differentiate themselves. As noted by the Birmingham school, leisure and consumption were emerging as new sites of identity and self-expression. For Frank, the nonconformist values of the sixties counterculture came to dominate popular culture and consumption, resolving the tension between the Protestant ethic of capitalist production suited to the workplace, and a new ethic of pleasure and play necessary to perpetuate consumption.

Frank terms the solution to these opposing ethics “hip consumerism,” and suggests that it was sixties’ youth culture in particular that drove the taste for novelty necessary to the accelerated consumption of late capitalism (Frank 1997: 26). What was cool, modern and current became inseparable from ideas about youthfulness – a particular configuration of youth as rebellious, nonconformist, and creative. Although Frank locates the emergence of these new consumer values in the youth counterculture, he acknowledges that “youth” came to represent an attitude, a “posture,” “think[ing] young,” and a symbol that appealed to many (Frank 1997: 119).

The rebellious, resistant youth cultures of the postwar period, it seems, offer us a new configuration of youth that is at once grounded in historical attitudes toward urban and working-class youth, but has now become imbricated in consumer capitalism. Youthfulness has emerged as a new ideology that drives consumerism and dominates popular culture, blurring the lines between what constitutes “popular culture,” “youth culture,” and modernity more generally.

When considered historically, a complex understanding takes shape of youth as an emerging, and flexible, social category. Clearly, changing social and economic conditions have contributed to the development of youth in a variety of modern

contexts.<sup>2</sup> Broadly speaking, youth appears to provide a site for the articulation of concerns regarding social reproduction, and fears about youth are tied to uncertainties about the future. More specifically, however, the content of these anxieties often revolves around issues of class and consumerism. While working-class youth have often been tarred as violent and dangerous, they, along with middle-class youth, have also increasingly become targeted as consumers. Regardless of actual lived experience, youth has emerged as a new ideology that dominates the field of popular culture, drives consumer capitalism and defines conceptualizations of modernity more generally.

### **Youth Subculture as Social Network**

Given the role of youth in consumer culture, it becomes increasingly critical to understand how youth culture operates, and to understand the interplay between conceptions of youth as a social category, and the actual lived experience of young people. In order to rethink youth subculture in specific, I have argued for conceptualizing subculture in terms of mediated social networks and interaction, in which media act as technologies of circulation for cultural knowledge and practices. Youth subcultures are produced and defined through social networks, which are formed at the level of social interaction.

When analyzed in terms of media and social networks, therefore, we can benefit from employing an interactionist model to reconceptualize subculture. Social network theory relies on the symbolic interactionism of Goffman, construing social organization in terms of individual interactions. These interactions depend on pre-

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<sup>2</sup> See Mark Liechty's *Suitably Modern* (Princeton University Press: 2003) for a treatment of youth, class and consumerism in Kathmandu, Nepal.

existing social scripts and roles, in which different actors occupy relational social positions. The work of Fine and Kleinman describes the how this social network model can be applied to youth subcultures in particular (Fine and Kleinman 1979: 8).

Fine and Kleinman suggest conceiving of subcultures in terms of the individual interactions which produce interlocking social affiliations. This model accounts for differing levels of subcultural knowledge and participation, and also suggests how such knowledge and practices are distributed. Cultural content is itself produced, defined and negotiated through social interaction. This view of subculture permits us to grasp how individual participants can be more central or peripheral, and how salient their participation may be to their identity. Individual participants, moreover, can be involved in other communities of practice, such as work, school, home, and even other subcultures.

Conceiving of subcultures as social networks also requires that we take into account language (and other semiotic channels) as the medium of social interaction. Sociolinguist Penelope Eckert has explored the formation of community and identity at the level of linguistic and interpersonal interaction, particularly among high school students. Eckert suggests considering social groups as “communities of practice,” mutually constituted by shared linguistic and cultural practices (Eckert 2000: 35). Such communities do not form homogenous, clearly bounded wholes, but rather overlap and interpenetrate. Different individuals take on different roles according to context, and may be active in multiple social arenas.

These linguistic approaches allow us to consider subcultures in terms of multiple language genres. Bakhtin, in theorizing the use of language in literature, has suggested considering linguistic practices in terms of heteroglossia and voicing,

in which variations in language use allow individuals to signal social position and identity (Bakhtin 1981: 291-3). This notion of heteroglossia enables us to examine the diverse ways in which language can be employed to denote particular positions within a given field. Through vocabulary and language use, different worldviews are represented by overlapping languages in different social contexts. Language, he suggests, is stratified by context and intention. Moreover, these different linguistic registers are constantly in dialogue with one another.

In some ways, subcultures like goth, industrial, punk and rave represent genres, and constitute a set of aesthetically coherent cultural positions. These subcultures primarily revolve around music and fashion, and, as noted by the Birmingham school, tend to present a consistent aesthetic across different forms of cultural expression. Hall et al. also suggest that such subcultures are often in dialogue with one another, as well as with the purported “mainstream.” Over time, however, these subcultures have fractured and diversified, so that they are often comprised of multiple genres. Punk can now be characterized by hardcore, punk rock and crusty punk (LeBlanc 1999: 48), while the rave scene has come to span a wide range of music styles (house, trance, psytrance, jungle, etc.). Goth is similarly wracked by inner tensions between the fans of industrial music on the one hand, and those committed to a particular vision of goth on the other, resulting in a confusing panoply of subgenres (such as darkwave, synthpop, powernoise and deathrock, to name a few).

Rather than represent monolithic wholes, then, youth subcultures can be conceived of as linguistic communities of practice, in which language and other semiotic codes are used to voice individual positions, which are always located in relation to other positions. This linguistic model allows us to understand the fluidity



that characterizes current youth subcultures, rather than viewing their diversity as evidence of mainstream co-optation. This approach to reconceptualizing subculture also offers us a better understanding of how individual participation structures subculture. When conceived this way, it becomes increasingly clear how media function as technologies of circulation, and operate as distribution networks to disseminate cultural knowledge and practices.

The internet, for example, has come to occupy a key position in connecting subcultural participants, and spreading information regarding new music, events, and current styles in fashion and slang. Online media such as websites provide spaces for bands, labels and DJs to promote themselves, while chat programs and message boards permit participants to communicate directly with one another. Small-scale print media continue to connect and inform as well, from flyers distributed in clubs, to D.I.Y fanzines<sup>3</sup> and specialist magazines. Cd-burning technology now allow participants to create mix cds cheaply for their friends, and even commercially produced cds contribute to the spread of new looks and styles (as well as sounds in music, of course). But these media cannot be expected to reach all participants equally, and are instead restricted to the extent of users' interest and involvement.

Ultimately, this interactionist model permits a fluidity and complexity that better reflects the lived experience of subcultural participants, construing subculture in terms of social networks instead of monolithic social groups. When viewed this way, it becomes more apparent how media act as distribution channels for cultural

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<sup>3</sup> "Do-it-yourself," an ethic promulgated especially by punk. "Fanzines" refer to fan-made magazines, although improved desktop publishing capabilities have begun to blur the line to some degree between mass-produced "niche" magazines, as labeled by Thornton (1995: 117) and smaller-scale specialist productions.

knowledge and practices, such as styles of music and fashion. Media play a key role in defining the contours of a given subculture, more than the semiotic codes embedded in those styles. The arenas of music and fashion most clearly illustrate how cultural practices depend on media channels to spread new trends, but slang, social activity and even styles of dance operate similarly. When reconsidered in terms of social networks and communities of practice, it seems possible that these cultural practices may play a more critical part in producing in-group affiliation and identity than resulting from some kind of symbolic resistance.

### **Media and Subculture**

Far from simply distributing cultural knowledge, however, media are actively constitutive of subcultures. The work of Benedict Anderson and of Michael Warner both suggest ways to approach the relationship between media, particularly print media, and social groups. Anderson argues that texts invoke “imagined communities” in their readers, by bringing about a collective awareness of shared identity (Anderson 1983: 10). He suggests, moreover, that modern print media in particular (such as novels and newspapers) produce a particular perception of the world that allows for a sense of simultaneity. Anderson, for example, locates nationalism in this collective imaginary, which he argues is represented in print texts.

Warner similarly identifies the advent of print media as key to changing awareness of social identity. Specifically, however, it is temporally circulating print media that have produced the modern sense of the “public” (Warner 2002: 57-66). Publics, he argues, are the self-organized, voluntary audiences of mediated texts. Publics depend on being addressed to exist, and are therefore somewhat temporary

and fluid. They also depend on relations between strangers – imagined others who are plausibly conceived of, but not fictional. Lastly, publics are interactional, defined by the “reflexive circulation of discourse” that creates social space (Warner 2002: 62). Through address, therefore, public discourse attempts to realize social worlds.

While the imagined worlds of youth subcultures may not be organized primarily around print texts, media undoubtedly contribute to the sense of shared identity. Music in particular provides a common medium through which fans can identify themselves with imagined peers. Most of my study participants considered themselves active in the “goth/industrial scene,” a subculture defined primarily by its central musical genres, goth and industrial. In my interviews, informants emphasized their own particular musical tastes, but also discussed consuming music communally through social activities such as clubs or concerts. While most of my participants interacted primarily with a small circle of local friends, they all seemed cognizant of both the larger local scene, and the “translocal” nature of the subculture (Hodkinson 2002: 26-7). This awareness was derived both directly, through traveling to music festivals or attending club nights in other cities, but also through the frequent reliance on online media which further produced a sense of extended subcultural community.

Publics as defined by Warner tend to reflect the values and ideologies of the dominant culture. But they can alternately represent those of subordinated social groups through “counterpublics” (Warner 2002: 80, 85). Warner suggests that youth cultures can constitute such counterpublics – an oppositional space for the circulation of discourse with its own speech genres and mediated forms. We might thus consider youth *subcultures* as counterpublics, fashioning subcultural subjectivity through the circulation of mediated discourse. This discourse may take

the literal form of a goth band addressing its audience during a performance at a nightclub, through technologically-mediated discourse such as online discussion boards, or in mediated texts such as cds and fanzines.

These models for reconceptualizing subculture facilitate our understanding of the constitutive role played by media in producing a shared subcultural identity. Admittedly, my research suggests that youth subcultures do not rely primarily on print media to imagine themselves, and instead are increasingly inseparable from club or music cultures (or “scenes”) which rely on music as the central medium of circulation. This is especially true of “disc cultures,” as Thornton has dubbed youth cultures that revolve around dance clubs, recorded music, and DJs (Thornton 1995: 29). Print media do occupy a significant role in the construction and maintenance of subcultures, but to a large degree, it is the production and consumption of shared music media that constitute most current youth subcultures.

### **Subcultural Capital**

Finally, Bourdieu’s work on cultural capital deserves some discussion as a theoretical model relevant to the study of youth subculture and media. In particular, subcultures can be conceived of as specialist fields of production, with their own internal schemes of distinction and cultural logics. Thornton has offered the term “subcultural capital” to denote cultural capital specific to subcultural fields of production. Such capital takes the form of subcultural “credibility,” the ability to distinguish what is legitimate and authentic in “underground” or “alternative” cultural forms. Specific subcultural knowledge and expertise are necessary to demonstrate subcultural capital, for example, through record collections, fashion choices, or styles of dance. As one of my contacts explained:

I have a dozen friends in the community who are DJs, or are just really into the music... and I can talk to them about it. There are certain places that you learn to trust... I mean, you go to the Metropolis [Records] [web]site, and you know what you're going to find...it's easy to get that kind of information if you know who to talk to. (Ryn, 23)

According to Thornton, media play a crucial role in the distribution of subcultural capital. While discourses of authenticity characterize subcultures, issues of access are equally key to maintaining schemes of distinction, by which certain participants can separate themselves from others and gain status. Cultural knowledge and practices bestow the least credibility which are easily available to a large audience, while those that require special knowledge to acquire afford the most. Mass media, therefore, retain the ability to over-expose subcultural practices and undermine their legitimacy, and subcultural capital, as in elite culture, is a moving target. Youth subcultures must constantly generate new styles and trends to preserve the value of subcultural capital.

Exploring the role of media in youth subculture permits us to glimpse how these subcultures are structured. To do so, I have focused mainly on ethnographic research concerning current club cultures. Not all subcultures, however, employ the same media, or emphasize certain media to the same degree. D.I.Y. fanzines, for example, may occupy a more central position in subcultures such as punk and riot grrl than in the goth/industrial scene. Even within club cultures such as goth/industrial and rave, the role of recorded music (and its relationship to live music) differs, such as the emphasis on vinyl versus cds. Online media may similarly be positioned more or less centrally. To this degree, I would recommend a relatively broad approach to the use of media in youth subculture, one which can account for

the ways in which different media entail different consequences for communication and perception.

Ultimately, this broad look aims to address the constitutive role taken by media in the production of subculture, as distributed along social networks. I have suggested conceptualizing subcultures in terms of these networks, where media act as technologies of circulation to disseminate cultural knowledge, styles and practices. This approach furthermore reveals how media create audiences (such as counterpublics) that transcend local boundaries, and how these audiences imagine themselves as subcultural communities. To this degree, social networks determine cultural production within youth subcultures.

This view of youth subculture, however, recasts the role of class resistance as identified by Hall and others. Youth subcultures are produced through active participation and social interaction, rather than through the symbolic rejection of shared social position. Instead of comprising homogenous, clearly bounded wholes, subcultures may represent diverse audiences, capable in certain social contexts of exhibiting similar styles and shared cultural practices, such as nightclubs and other subcultural events. This model for thinking about youth subculture, moreover, pertains directly to the broader field of cultural production in which such groups are situated. There may no longer exist (if there ever did) a monolithic mass that can be termed the “mainstream” of popular culture. Reconsidering popular culture in terms of media and social networks may confer an understanding that better accounts for the complexity, fluidity and diversity of genres that have come to characterize popular culture.

### III. The Study: Cultural Capital and Social Networks in the Goth/Industrial Scene

In order to consider youth subcultures in terms of cultural capital and social networks, I conducted a series of ethnographic interviews with subcultural participants from Chicago, San Francisco, Boston and Madison, Wisconsin. While the theoretical applications of this research need not be limited to a specific youth or club culture, I drew on the existing networks with which I was already connected to recruit participants. This approach allowed me to find informants through established channels used to spread subcultural knowledge and practices. It also restricted me, however, to those subcultures with which I was already familiar. This prior exposure benefited my research as well, by facilitating my ability to establish rapport with my informants, and compensating to some degree for the research methods I was unable to employ, such as participant-observation. My data, therefore, are limited to a somewhat narrow segment of youth culture, while providing a more in-depth look at the social networks of my informants.

Specifically, I am personally acquainted with the “goth/industrial” scene, a broad term for a small but internally diverse subculture. Some of my participants were also involved in overlapping subcultures, such as the fetish (or BDSM<sup>4</sup>) scene and role-playing games and science-fiction/fantasy fandom (although these latter two cannot be considered club cultures, and revolve more around gaming and fan conventions than music or style). While all participants described the goth/industrial scene (or just industrial, in one case) as the umbrella term for their club culture, their participation, tastes and particular areas of emphasis varied from informant to informant. As one noted:

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<sup>4</sup> An acronym for Bondage/Discipline, Dominance/Submission and Sado-Masochism.

I guess it's just more where you choose to put your focus... what part of the subculture you choose to understand. (Garrett, 23)

### **The Subculture(s)**

Some basic familiarity with the goth/industrial subculture is required to understand how my informants construct their subcultural identity and involvement, particularly the separate origins of the goth and industrial scenes, and how these two genres emerged as one larger subculture. The goth scene has been described in some detail by Paul Hodkinson in his ethnographic research on British goths (Hodkinson 2002). Hodkinson largely treats industrial as a subgenre within goth, though all of my participants described their scene as “goth/industrial.” This terminology immediately highlights some of the flaws in the homogenizing theories of the Birmingham school:

I mean, it's weird, because you call it the goth/industrial scene, even though, like, goth and industrial are components, and they're not the only things that are going on there, and like even, right now, they're not the most interesting things going on there, anymore, but it's the name that you continue to use.... (Ryn, 23)

As Hodkinson has outlined, the goth scene developed in Britain in the late seventies and early eighties in the wake of punk, and distinguished itself through a darker aesthetic in both music and fashion (Hodkinson 2002: 35-7). Post-punk bands such as Joy Division and Siouxsie and the Banshees took a darker, more macabre turn with their lyrics, sound, and looks, and were dubbed “gothic” by the British music press. In 1979, Bauhaus released their first single, “Bela Lugosi's Dead,” which helped define goth as a distinct new musical genre. In the early eighties, London nightclub The Batcave featured house bands such as Specimen, Alien Sex Fiend and Southern Death Cult, whose members arrayed themselves in black and



white makeup and dramatic ensembles of torn fishnet and leather, often influenced by the androgynous glam looks of David Bowie and others. Both the nightclub, its patrons and associated bands all received significant attention from the music press, the BBC, and British national television, media outlets which appear largely responsible for producing “goth” as a new subculture comparable to punk or mod.

While Bauhaus’ lead singer Peter Murphy has since insisted that their lyrics were intended as campy humor,<sup>5</sup> their macabre aesthetic was embraced by fans, who began appearing at concerts attired like the musicians on stage. Siouxsie Sioux (of Siouxsie and the Banshees) and Robert Smith (of the Cure) in particular spread the use of heavy black eyeliner, and teased, ratted black hair. Punk elements remained in common use, though, including studded collars, bondage accessories, brightly dyed and shaved hairstyles, combat boots, military surplus gear, and so on. By the mid-to-late eighties, the goth look involved pointy-toed boots, crimped hair, black eyeliner, silver jewelry, and layers of ripped fishnet under black vinyl, leather or lace. The music crystallized into “goth rock,” characterized by droning guitars, simple baselines and often synthesized drum beats.

The history of industrial music and its attendant scene, however, has not been as well documented by scholars of popular culture. Some limited accounts do exist in various alternative media (including new media such as Usenet and websites like Wikipedia.org<sup>6</sup>), mostly tracing the genesis of industrial music. This genre developed contemporaneously with early goth rock, and was termed

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Murphy was quoted in 1994 saying “‘Bela Lugosi's dead, undead' – it's hilarious. The mistake we made is that we performed it with naive seriousness! That's what pushed the audience into it as a much more serious thing” (Thompson and Greene 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Such as the Usenet group rec.music.industrial, whose Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) document presents a brief overview of the history of industrial music, available at: <http://www.faqs.org/faqs/music/industrial-faq/part1/>, or the Wikipedia.org entry on industrial music at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial\\_music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_music).

“industrial” when a coterie of experimental artists established Industrial Records. This independent label featured acts such as Throbbing Gristle and Cabaret Voltaire, who experimented with found sounds, samples and tape loops to create dark, harsh and aggressive music. By the eighties, however, musicians such as Front 242 and Skinny Puppy were producing more accessible, danceable industrial music. Belgian act Front 242 pioneered a subgenre dubbed “Electronic Body Music,” or EBM, which combined industrial sounds and samples with more danceable electronic beats. Skinny Puppy, Ministry, KMFDM and other North American artists were at the same time writing more guitar-based industrial rock, which gained wider popular appeal (for example, appearing on soundtracks for popular films including *The Crow* and *Mortal Kombat*).

I would suggest that during the mid-to-late eighties, fans of industrial music and fans of goth music (who most likely consumed punk, post-punk, new wave, and glam as well) overlapped – and often became the producers of music that self-consciously sounded “goth” or “industrial” (and frequently, both). This appears to have been instigated by bands such as the Fields of the Nephilim, Children on Stun, Skinny Puppy and others from the late eighties and early nineties, who intentionally reproduced the look and sound of the artists initially labeled goth or industrial. While goth music had declined in broader commercial popularity by the late eighties, nightclubs offering goth and industrial music continued to exist, albeit independently of the general alternative nights that had once featured these genres (Hodkinson 2002: 37, 88). Goth and industrial music fans overlapped with those of other subcultures as well – punk, metal, fetish, science fiction/fantasy and gaming fandom, and so forth. By the late nineties, goth and industrial had fused into one

diverse but aesthetically similar scene – dark, often brooding music with correspondingly dramatic fashions.

This fusion of subcultural genres persists under constant tension, however, and the scene suffers frequent fragmentation into subgenres. This pattern can be aptly described by the “fractal recursivity” theory of Judith Irvine and Susan Gal, in which genres tend to divide into binary opposites, in dialogue with one another.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the goth/industrial scene is commonly discussed by participants in terms of gendered binaries of soft/hard, sad/angry, romantic/aggressive, and so forth. Frequently, participants invoke homologies similar to those Clarke, Hall, and others saw in the mod, rocker and teddy boy subcultures to explain the relationship between music and style within a given subgenre.

Goth, for instance, is described as more romantic, morbid and “mopey,” the music conceived of as melodic, “swirly,” and flowing, matched by long, draping outfits in luxurious fabrics like velvet and lace, and by slower, undulating dance movements. Meanwhile, industrial purports to be “stompy,” aggressive and harsh, the sound and lyrical content of the music matched by utilitarian military gear, heavy boots, spiked jewelry, short hair, and more energetic dancing. These binaries are unquestionably gendered, although there exists considerable room for genderplay among participants. Goth boys may swish and mope in skirts and eyeliner, while tough-looking girls posture in big boots, spiked hair and muscle-tees.

While subcultural homologies do persist to some degree as conceived of by Clarke and others, the subcultural participants I interviewed move through scenes which appear more fluid and diverse than homogenous and monolithic. Participants

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<sup>7</sup> Irvine and Gal define fractal recursivity as “the projection of an opposition, salient at some level of relationship, onto some other level” (2000: 3).

also exhibited divergent levels of familiarity with subcultural genres, styles, and practices, depending on a variety of factors such as length of involvement in the scene and emphasis on particular areas of focus (for example, music, dancing, or socializing). Overall, participants' musical tastes were not homogenous, although emphasis on particular genres may indicate the salience of that subculture (or aspect of subculture) to their identity.

### **Subcultural Capital**

The goth/industrial scene, though rooted in the club cultures of the eighties, has remained neither static nor homogenous (if it ever was). The "scene" itself has depended on cultural producers, reproducible media and subcultural audiences to exist (and persist). As both Hodkinson and Thornton have noted, it is often "mainstream" media attention that contributes to the emergence of a new subculture (Hodkinson 2002: 111; Thornton 1995: 116). The music press in the eighties helped produce the genre of "goth" by applying the label to a group of loosely related bands. The term was then sustained by the consumption of goth music (and media, and fashion) by fans who began to conceive of themselves as goths, conscientiously mimicking and reproducing the look of the bands they admired. Often, new subcultural participants are recruited through the more accessible media outlets (such as broadcast television, radio and the niche music press), media which then become responsible for baptizing new genres and exposing consumers to new artists.

Within these subcultures, however, cultural knowledge and practices contribute to niche economic markets, and to social status. Cultural capital as conceived of by Bourdieu aptly models how cultural practices structure value within subculture. Thornton has suggested the use of the term "subcultural capital" to refer

to the specific field of cultural production of individual youth subcultures (Thornton 1995: 11). Subcultures, like counterpublics, do not necessarily offer capital that can be converted into value outside their specific sphere. However, within youth subculture, cultural capital operates comparably to that described by Bourdieu.

Though popular briefly in the eighties, goth quickly lost its appeal as a commercially successful music genre. As Bourdieu has noted, whatever is novel and in style must constantly shift, as value depends on limited and elite access to knowledge of current styles. Emerging subcultures like punk, goth and rave may temporarily be developed by the culture industry because they represent new and “authentic” styles that drive consumerism in popular youth culture. At the same time, the goth/industrial scene appears to have developed a sufficient fan base to sustain itself as a small-scale club and music culture, in which promoters and DJs organize events and shows at clubs during less popular timeslots (for example, on weeknights). Hodkinson outlines how the goth scene in Britain survived as a subculture when the music press had moved on, and both goth and industrial music were no longer featured in general alternative clubs (Hodkinson 2002: 86).

Within the goth/industrial scene, however, taste and style have continued to change and evolve. In the nineties, for example, the dramatic clubbing looks of the British rave scene began to influence goth style. Stacked platform heels replaced pointy-toed “winklepickers” (leather boots with narrow pointed toes and numerous buckles) and voluminous crimped black hair was replaced by colorful hair extensions. Baggy pants adorned with straps, futuristic tops, and blacklight-reactive accessories also made an appearance. Goth/industrial club music saw comparable changes – industrial dance music began to incorporate elements from trance, producing new subgenres such as “futurepop” and “electro-industrial.” Gothic rock

similarly became more electronic, spawning “electro-goth” bands like the Cruxshadows and Clan of Xymox. The emphasis on guitars shifted to a predilection for synths and sequencers. The term “cybergoth” emerged to describe the fusion of goth style with a more futuristic and electronic aesthetic in both music and fashion.

Through both interviewing and personal experience, I was exposed to the new currents and trends currently transforming the goth/industrial scene. In order to maintain distinctions within a taste culture, new trends must arise which require specialized knowledge for participants to negotiate, acquire and exhibit, and access to this knowledge must be limited (for instance, regarding new bands, record labels, and fashions). This club culture is characterized by a constant chasing after “cool,” comparable to the “coolhunt” Malcolm Gladwell has described in the national apparel industry (Gladwell 1997). And while the goth/industrial scene may not necessarily replicate more commercially dominant styles, it certainly draws on trends from outside of the scene (both from other subcultures and from more popular influences).

This constant flow of new music and new styles relies heavily on mediated networks for dispersal and distribution. The internet has taken an increasingly pivotal role in subcultural communications, but more traditional print media remain prevalent, such as flyers and posters. Moreover, specific individuals figure more prominently into the production and distribution of subcultural practices, committing energy and resources into accumulating subcultural knowledge. DJs, bands, promoters, and specialist retailers spread styles and trends through online and print media and communications networks, as well as through physical travel such as touring and festivals.

## The Participants

Through interviewing, I pursued lines of inquiry related to these communications and media networks, and their role in producing and distributing subcultural knowledge and practices. Moreover, I considered how this differential distribution allows for schemes of distinction through which social status can be enacted. My informants were recruited through existing networks – primarily, through ads posted to online subcultural communities.

Specifically, I turned to an online journal and community website called Livejournal.com, which is popular with teens, students and various youth subcultures. Livejournal.com permits users to create personal journals, which they can share publicly or solely with other registered users. It also allows for the creation of “community” journals to which multiple users can post entries, and has increasingly come to replace the use of earlier online forums, such as Usenet, bulletin boards and regional mailing lists. Similar “social networking” websites like Friendster.com, Tribe.net and MySpace.com are also gaining in popularity among different communities to keeps members connected and informed, for example by allowing users to post information about upcoming events.

On Livejournal.com, I posted to my own personal journal, and to regional Chicago goth/industrial communities such as “chicago\_gothic.”<sup>8</sup> Through both online advertisements and word-of-mouth (i.e., snowballing), I recruited seven participants, one in San Francisco (while I was there visiting), four from Chicago, and two visiting Chicago from out of town (one from Madison and one from Boston). Four of my participants were female and three male, and their ages ranged from 22 to 32. All

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.livejournal.com/community/chicago\\_gothic](http://www.livejournal.com/community/chicago_gothic)

described themselves as involved in the goth/industrial club scene (except one, who specified industrial solely), regularly going out to local clubs featuring goth or industrial music (and usually both). Most agreed to use their existing pseudonyms, a practice common in the scene (such pseudonyms often represent online “handles” or DJ monikers, but can also simply constitute nicknames), and otherwise I selected one.

I met all of my informants either at cafés or in private apartments, outside of the club setting. They dressed in a range of styles, from casual black, to the more dramatic looks reserved for club nights. Style seemed to correlate both to context (i.e., which activities they were engaging in) and to some degree, subcultural commitment. As Hodkinson has elegantly demonstrated, subcultural participants frequently indicate the depth of their involvement in their scene (and lifestyle) by the extent to which they display more extreme or dramatic styles. This can take the form of elaborate outfits, but also of more permanent bodily alterations. Clothing and accessories require insider knowledge to assemble properly, and outfits garner less credibility which resemble the ready-made fashions sold at chains like Hot Topic. Stylistic choices rank most highly which cannot be toned down outside of subcultural spaces, such as permanently dyed hair, mohawks, unnatural-looking extensions, body piercings and tattoos. These stylistic elements are not unique to the goth/industrial scene, though, and must be arranged in subculturally appropriate ways to encode the intended subcultural meanings.

“Blaugirl,” 23, and a DJ and promoter in the San Francisco Bay area, was my only informant actually en route to a club night when we spoke. She arrived attired mostly in black, with turquoise blue accents including layered fishnet knee-highs and ripped up D.I.Y. (do-it-yourself) armwarmers. Her hair was longer in the front



and dyed black, but shorter and platinum blond in the back. By contrast, “Crush,” currently a lawyer in Chicago, was dressed in more business-appropriate attire when I met her in a café after work. Still, I was easily able to identify her by her red-tinted hair and lacy black knit top over a black shell. I similarly arranged to meet “Pathogen,”<sup>24</sup> at a café one weeknight, who arrived in a dark grey shirt and black slacks, with short bleach-blond hair.

“Gremlin,” a 29 year old Chicago DJ, came by my apartment on a weekend afternoon, and was more casually dressed in a black fitted tee-shirt and long pinstriped skirt, with long curly hair she dyes a vibrant shade of dark purple. She also sports a lip ring and multiple ear piercings. The last three informants, “Havva,”<sup>22</sup>, “Ryn,”<sup>23</sup>, and “Garrett,”<sup>23</sup>, I interviewed together while Ryn and Garrett were visiting from out of town. They were probably dressed the most casually, primarily in basic black with less dramatic hairstyles and visible modifications like piercings. Ryn and Havva both keep their hair long, while Garrett wears his short and brown, and Havva’s nose is pierced with a small stud.

### **Music Networks**

Among these seven informants, four were DJs in the goth/industrial scene (Gremlin, Ryn, Blaugirl and Pathogen). Ryn began as a radio DJ in college, but all four actively DJ in clubs. Gremlin, Blaugirl and Pathogen frequently participate in promoting club nights and events, although not to my knowledge as a form of full-time employment.<sup>9</sup> For my other informants, Crush, Havva and Garrett, music

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<sup>9</sup> In fact, DJing and promoting in a small subcultural music scene can cost money rather than earn it – cds, equipment, and flyers all require time and money to procure or produce.

remained an important medium in their subcultural activities and involvement, but sometimes seemed less central to their experience.

Musical taste also correlated with length of participation in the scene, to some degree. My two most senior participants, Crush and Gremlin, were a few years older than the others, and had each been involved with the goth/industrial scene for at least a decade. Crush had attended goth clubs most frequently in the mid-to-late nineties, and still prefers to listen to the older goth and industrial that were featured more prominently then – Bauhaus, Siouxsie and the Banshees, Love and Rockets, artists on the Wax Trax label (a well-known label based in Chicago, home to popular bands like Ministry and KMFDM), and others. Crush describes having difficulty finding new sources of music, as the music scene has become either “too fragmented and specialized,” or “too homogenous.”

The younger participants, however, have primarily been involved with local club cultures in the last five years. Overall, they focused on newer music, such as the emerging powernoise/hard EBM genres – a series of related subgenres that are gaining popularity in the scene right now (sometimes called “terror EBM,” “aggrotech” or “industrial noise”). Musical preference, however, was tempered by personal emphasis and participation. Gremlin enthusiastically seeks out new music to introduce at club nights (such as powernoise), despite being both older than the other participants, and having been involved in the scene for longer. On the other hand, much younger Garrett prefers what he terms “classic industrial” (early EBM such as Front 242 and Frontline Assembly), and placed less emphasis on staying current with new music.

Aside from goth and industrial, a majority of my informants admitted to consuming non-subcultural music as well. Gremlin enjoys other forms of

independent music, describing herself as “an absolute music lover” who will listen to “anything good” which she defines as possessing “musical talent.” This extends from powernoise, EBM and other electronic styles to goth, punk, ska, indie rock and folk. Other participants similarly describe owning and listening to genres of music outside the goth/industrial rubric, from classical music and jazz to more commercial “alternative,” as well as genres associated with other current youth subcultures (techno, trip-hop and downtempo, trance, etc.). Active participation in a particular scene did not preclude consuming unrelated styles of music, but rather determined participants’ primary social activities.

Overall, the four DJs exhibited the strongest interest in current music, and were oriented toward newer industrial and electronic styles such as powernoise and hard or harsh EBM. This music is characterized by taking the harsh, experimental electronic genre loosely known as “noise,” and rendered it more danceable and accessible (powernoise), or fusing elements from noise with club-friendly EBM (“Electronic Body Music,” also known as “industrial dance,” industrial sounds and samples over dance beats). As Pathogen describes:

I think something with a name like industrial should have some kind of edge... some kind of hardcore aspect to the music... so I spin harder stuff, [with] a little more statement behind it, very aggressive....”

The DJs I interviewed, like the other participants, all rely on various social and communications networks to uncover new music. These networks require insider knowledge to identify and navigate, and cannot be easily accessed through popular channels such as broadcast television, commercial radio stations or the billboard charts. These limits to accessing subcultural information are precisely what lend value and authenticity in the form of subcultural capital to certain styles of music (and the bands, labels, and DJs that produce them). Of course, both popular

and niche media can have (and have had) a role in the initial production and legitimation of youth subcultures. And certainly, not all subgenres of music or styles of fashion develop into substantive subcultures or music scenes.

But within a subculture such as the goth/industrial scene, internal networks remain critical to the production and reproduction of the scene. Still, my participants did not all rely on identical networks, or use them in the same way. Blaugirl describes two DJ friends from Germany, who keep her informed about new music.<sup>10</sup> Although she occasionally hears new music in a club, Blaugirl specifies that she prefers to spin “stuff that’s not yet played” and is “less accessible.”

Gremlin also looks internationally to find new music, particularly through attending music festivals. While there are a few smaller industrial music festivals in North America (such as Providence Noisefest and Saturation Bombing in Toronto), a much more substantial festival circuit exists in Europe, centered around Germany. Wave Gotik Treffen stands out as the largest and best-known of these, featuring bands and DJs from all the numerous subgenres which divide the scene. Smaller festivals like Noisefest and Maschinenfest in Germany emphasize certain styles of music over others, such as powernoise and hard EBM. Gremlin describes “going for the headliners you already love,” but then arriving early each day to hear the newer bands which play as openers. Gremlin also relies on media such as mix cds and local radio.

Pathogen takes advantage of growing online media, such as band websites, and also listens to compilation cds (often produced by small labels to promote their artists). He relies on gossip and word of mouth as well, although he does not specify

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<sup>10</sup> The goth/industrial scene in Germany is substantial, producing both many prominent artists and a large fan base that sustains multiple popular music festivals annually.

if this communication takes place online or in person. Ryn similarly uncovers new music by turning to online resources, as well as knowledgeable friends. He reads the setlists posted by other DJs (on websites site as Livejournal.com, or on regional mailing lists), and looks to the websites of labels such as Hive and Metropolis Records. He points out that he can “trust” what kind of music will be represented, because of the stylistic consistency of the artists offered on these labels, and thus determine whether or not new music will be to his taste:

There are certain places that you learn to trust... I mean, you go to the Metropolis [Records] [web]site, and you *know* what you're going to find....

But moreover, he recounts seeking out DJs and friends who are “really into the music,” because in his experience, people particularly enjoy discussing music they like:

I have a dozen friends in the community who are DJs, or are just really into the music... and I can talk to them about it.

Specifically, however, it is through time and involvement in the scene that newer participants learn whom to approach to discuss music, who both share your tastes and devote energy to keeping informed.

While the other participants did not emphasize finding new music as much as those who frequently DJ, subcultural music still figured prominently for them.

Crush and Garrett both turn to more knowledgeable friends to introduce them to new music (friends who are “very into the music” according to Garrett), sharing or downloading electronic media such as mp3 files (a compressed digital file format for music):

Since I don't go and look for the albums myself, I like to ask people who do know what's good. (Garrett)

Garrett particularly channels his effort into finding new music to download online. Havva, like Gremlin, has benefited from going to music festivals such as Noisefest, and like Ryn, finds that small labels provide music she consistently enjoys, and seeks out sampler cds from these labels.

Despite the considerable time and effort all my informants direct toward seeking out and accumulating music, none were solely consumers of bands that fall under the goth/industrial rubric. This touches on a key aspect of understanding how youth participate in subculture. Overall, most of my informants (but particularly the DJs) directed the most energy toward amassing music (and knowledge of music) that is primarily produced within the goth/industrial scene. But most also mentioned owning and listening to other genres – classical, jazz, indie and alternative rock, techno, trance, trip hop, and so forth. Some of these genres do overlap with the goth/industrial scene – some DJs will spin music influenced by techno genres such as trance, breakbeats and IDM (“intelligent dance music,” which may be neither of those things), and trip hop and electro-pop have both become popular in goth clubs, such as Massive Attack or Miss Kittin. Pathogen expressed a common sentiment:

...at home, I’m... more diverse than what I’m looking for when I go out.

While Ryn at one point had interjected:

We should mention Defmatch, though, because that was something that introduced me, anyway, to stuff I wouldn’t’ve heard of otherwise... they go and they hold this breaks night, and, like, kids from the goth scene happen to go and attend it....

But while their musical tastes may be broader than those genres represented within the subculture, most participants only sought out social events within their scene. Two of my participants were actively involved in other (but somewhat related) subcultures – Garrett regularly attends local fetish/BDSM events, while Gremlin is

also involved in activist and gaming communities. Gremlin, however, was one of the few participants to cite actively pursuing music events unrelated to her subcultural affiliations (such as a local indie rock festival). Otherwise, my participants preferred to attend events such as parties and club nights which featured goth/industrial music (and usually those also attended by their friends).

At the same time, many felt that the club nights they patronize do not always emphasize the specific subgenres of goth or industrial music they prefer. Ryn particularly expressed this sentiment, joking that “it’s a special occasion” when the powernoise he enjoys is heard in a club:

I’m more interested in the music a lot of the time, even though a lot of the music that I’m much more interested in is rarely going to get play, but when it does, it’s a special occasion, you know, I feel happy about it.

Blaugirl estimates that about two-thirds of the music she hears in clubs is also music she enjoys listening to at home. And Crush mainly seeks out events which still offer the older goth/industrial music she consumed when she was more active in the scene, such as “Back in the Day,” a retro goth/industrial event in Chicago.

Overall, musical taste did not appear uniform among my informants, although those who focused on upcoming musical trends tended to prefer the same subgenres (such as powernoise and hard EBM). While all participants relied on mediated networks to acquire new music, some clearly devoted more effort to developing and maintaining subcultural capital in the form of extensive and current musical expertise.

### **Youth Subculture and Social Capital**

By considering the goth/industrial subculture as a social network, the interplay between identity and participation becomes clearer and more comprehensible. My informants were not a homogenous group of youth sporting the same subcultural

fashions (although there was some consistency in look), nor do they consume the same music or attend all the same events. Some were more invested in certain aspects of the scene, and devoted more energy to accumulating subcultural capital in music, fashion or other cultural forms.

Those who were not DJs actively participated in other ways, for example. Crush was very involved on a local mailing list in the D.C. area, organizing social events such as “Freak Day at the Zoo” (when list members would congregate somewhere like the zoo), or planning a “goth prom.” She also describes her passion for dressing in dramatic goth styles, and owns five different corsets to wear at clubs. She recounts how, at 15, she first encountered someone displaying a similar style, which she found “exciting” and “attractive,” and which motivated her to adopt a similar look. She specifically refers to subcultural style as a “sense of fashion or identity,” in describing friends who have moved successively through a variety of different scenes. Tellingly, she acknowledges not wanting “to be seen out of character” when she was newer in the scene, and admits to “feel[ing] like I’m in costume” when dressed more conventionally for work. While Crush may not have pursued subcultural capital as extensively through musical knowledge, she still carved out status for herself through fashion and social activity.

For both Havva and Garrett, their involvement in the scene reflected differing personal interests and priorities. Havva was socially very active in the goth/industrial scene in Boston, initially through performing at the Rocky Horror Picture Show.<sup>11</sup> Graduate school, however, has restrained her leisure time, and since

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<sup>11</sup> A favorite cult-classic film with fetish overtones, which some independent theatres will screen at midnight on weekends. Screenings are usually accompanied by amateur actors costumed as the movie’s characters, who encourage participation from the audience.



moving to Chicago, she primarily attends club nights to go dancing, avoiding too many social connections:

...I enjoy the scene, but I would avoid, like, becoming part of the social network for the most part, like, the way I used to... I don't have enough time to devote to it.

And Garrett has begun shifting his emphasis to the fetish and BDSM scene (which often overlaps with the goth/industrial scene, as many club nights with fetish themes feature industrial music and attract participants in both scenes):

There are other scenes I'm active in, but they're sort of involved in the same general concepts... going to the club is an excuse to see the people which I would see at the more kink-oriented parties.

He is actively pursuing becoming an accomplished dominant in the fetish scene, but considers himself a "dilettante" musically:

As I said, I'm not really up to speed on the music scene, I consider myself, I consider myself very much of a dilettante when it comes to music in the goth/industrial scene.

Among those who gained considerable subcultural capital through DJing, some appeared more invested in fashion than others. Blaugirl and Gremlin displayed the most distinctively subcultural looks, with brightly dyed hair and multiple piercings. As described, Blaugirl was attired for venturing to a club night after our meeting, which partly accounted for her more elaborate outfit. My other participants were dressed within subcultural parameters, but in more basic black ensembles, and with more subtle piercings and hair coloring. Pathogen and Crush had both met me after work, and had successfully blended appropriate professional attire with the darker, somber colors preferred in the scene.

Despite my small sample size, there was a notable disparity in the use of subcultural style between male and female participants. Fashion is employed by

both women and men in the scene to express subcultural identity and commitment, including striking makeup, sheer clothes, unusual footwear and creative hairstyles. Gender lines are additionally blurred by men who favor long skirts and corsets, transgressions that do not necessarily signify crossdressing or transgender identities. The androgynous look permitted to men in the scene can be traced to the influence of glam rock, in which male performers invited the sexualizing gaze customarily reserved for women, such as David Bowie. Feminized styles have usually dominated the goth side of the scene, prescribing androgyny for men but hyperfeminine looks for women – tight corsets, stacked heels, long hair, and copious amounts of jewelry.

A more traditional gender disparity emerges, however, at events emphasizing industrial music such as live shows and festivals. While female participants display dramatic hair extensions and futuristic “cyber” outfits, the musicians on stage are predominantly male and dressed more plainly. Unsurprisingly, dominant gender norms are often replicated in the goth/industrial subculture, in which “men act and women appear” (Bordo 1999: 220). For male DJs like Ryn and Pathogen, subcultural capital can be accumulated sufficiently through musical taste and knowledge, although it may be augmented with subculturally appropriate looks. While fashion occupies an important role in producing and displaying subcultural capital, involved styles are not pursued equally in the scene, along lines of gender and degree of participation.

### **Subcultural Identity**

My emphasis on participation allowed my informants to describe their subcultural involvement without feeling pressure to classify or categorize themselves.<sup>12</sup> In their linguistic research on youth subcultures, Widdicombe and Wooffitt found that their interview subjects resisted labeling themselves when asked to identify their subcultural style or affiliation. In fact, the youth they spoke to on the street attempted to “perform ordinariness,” demonstrating to the researchers that they were, in fact, perfectly normal kids (Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995: 94-100). My own interviewing touched on this resistance when discussing with Crush the identity of her friends. She remarked that most would deny being a goth if asked, which she referred to as “the ‘I’m not a goth’ thing,” a familiar phenomenon in which goth fans eschew the label. Some of her friends would claim “I’m just me,” while others preferred the term “angsters” (with which I was not familiar), “p.i.b.” (people in black), and more generally, “freaks” (still a somewhat common umbrella term in a variety of youth subcultures).

Yet few if any of my participants hesitated when asked about their scene, musical preferences or choice of club nights. This tendency, I would suggest, supports the notion that youth subcultures have become sites of cultural production and social interaction in which identity is formed through participation, rather than resting on some internal sense of self. Subculture is produced through the active involvement of its members, writing and performing or DJing music, displaying subcultural fashions, dancing according to particular styles, and interacting with one another both privately and in social settings. It requires the active collaboration

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<sup>12</sup> See the Appendix for the Interview Question Guide used to direct the interviews.

of its participants, what Hodkinson considered subcultural “substance,” defined as a combination of identity, commitment, distinctiveness and autonomy (Hodkinson 2002: 28-9).

Moreover, this approach to youth subculture calls into question the alleged target of subcultural styles. Are subcultural youth attempting to reject the purportedly homogenous dominant culture by appropriating and recontextualizing dominant cultural codes? Who is the target of the dramatic styles in fashion and the sometimes harsh and inaccessible music? While rejection of the “mainstream” does often characterize subcultural discourses, this mainstream often functions more as a foil against which youth can define themselves. As Thornton has demonstrated, this mainstream culture is notoriously difficult to locate, since no one identifies themselves as such – it is always reserved to critique imagined others (Thornton 1995: 5).

Crush illustrates these tensions in the subculture over resistance and subcultural identity in recounting her crowd’s field trips to the zoo. She describes how strangers would sometimes stare or comment on her and her friends’ appearance. There was a divide, she explains, between those who would “yell back,” and those who accepted some level of increased attention when dressed up goth in public (rather than in the relative safety of nightclubs). In fact, she was offended by her friends’ reactions, and felt it was more appropriate to accept the consequences of displaying a subcultural look (although she adds that she never felt in danger, even when wearing corsets on the subway en route to the club). And at the end of our interview, she mused a bit on how she is now viewed – for instance, whether or not sales clerks at local alternative shops perceive her as an insider, or if her coworkers would be surprised if she mentions something specific about her past subcultural

involvement. In particular, she describe the mutual recognition she once exchanged with a stranger, an older man who still projected cool. His confidence in his identity, she says, is something to which she aspires.

Hodkinson likewise found that his respondents voiced a desire to be recognized by their subcultural peers, while resisting outsider attempts to construe personal style as indicative of particular political or social views (Hodkinson 2002: 41, 62-67). Instead, the British goths he studied interpreted common subcultural styles as correlating to similar tastes and values. Pathogen articulated his own involvement in the industrial scene similarly:

I'm fairly disillusioned... pretty disenchanting about things culturally, that's the reason I got into it, because I could find like-minded people....

In this way, taste and style become markers of identity that permit subcultural youth to identify fellow participants and to distinguish themselves from the homogenous and superficial mainstream of popular culture. Through this discursive construction, subcultures form counterpublics, communities which operate comparably to the dominant culture, but conceive of themselves as oppositional. Although some subcultures may embrace a more political focus, the goth/industrial scene primarily emphasizes social and cultural pursuits – music, fashion, clubbing and other kinds of creative and social endeavors. For most of my participants, their social circle was comprised mainly of other participants in their scene – people they interact with regularly in clubs, at parties and at smaller and often more intimate events (barbecues, movie nights, trips to the zoo). Pathogen sums up his feelings regarding being a DJ in the club scene:

... first and foremost, beyond, you know, a socializing thing, a scene with all your friends in it, it's a customer-driven – it's an industry – you really can't think about yourself, you have to think about the people you're serving.

People like to say ‘it’s all about the music’ and, or, they want to copy an attitude that ‘it’s all about me’ – the personality DJs and the people that want, that think they know what people should be listening to and what they should be dancing to, and those are both really, really incorrect ways to go about it in my opinion.... You have to realize that first and foremost the people you should be caring about are the people in your club trying to have a good time.

The less central the club scene was to their life, though, the less this was the case – Garrett differentiated between his “true” friends, whom he has known longer and spent more time with, and the more casual acquaintances he has since made through the fetish scene:

They’re my best friends, they’re the people who I know I can trust... but they’re not part of my scene

Still, he adds that he seeks out clubs partly in order to meet new people, some of whom are slowly becoming closer friends.

Gremlin’s social circles are more spread out across the various communities in which she participates, although she notes that her closest friends are a small group of “geeky gamer goths” within the larger club scene. She describes how she consistently sees familiar faces when regularly attending political events, or at gaming conventions, the latter which she refers to as a “friends-based” culture. For her, much of the joy in traveling to yearly events is “hooking into” a scene, making friends and then reconnecting with those friends the next year, as a sort of “weird family reunion.”

Most of the other participants did maintain a few friendships separate from their subcultural scene, but overall, their social lives revolved around subcultural activity. Moreover, increasing involvement in the club scene often led to increased social connections. Ryn explains how he has met most of his friends through the club

scene, or related social interactions, and recounts the constant parade of parties, barbecues, and other private social events:

Most of my friends are people who I've met through the clubs, and other such social interactions that spread out from there.

He quite explicitly refers to how he “came into the world” when he moved to Boston from western Massachusetts. This dovetailed with comments he had previously made about how increased familiarity and interaction with other clubgoers allowed for a more sophisticated insider knowledge of subcultural music.

For Crush, the Roxy nightclub in D.C. constituted her “primary social base.” Her regular attendance there granted her access to a mailing list whose membership was restricted to patrons of the first incarnation of this club (the goth/industrial events were later revived when the venue was remodeled and re-opened). She confesses that this closed mailing list helped to “solidify in-crowd status” in the local D.C. scene. Since then, Crush has moved to Chicago and become less active in the club scene (and more focused on her career). Still, the mailing list has survived and comprises some of her closest friends, with whom she still visits regularly. For Havva, the intensity of subcultural social activity has spurred her to avoid making social connections while in graduate school.

To this degree, youth subcultures appear to confer social capital as well as subcultural capital. This social capital may be limited by the bounds of the subculture (as defined by social interaction), but within that can allow for a strongly defined sense of community identity and participation. As Ryn summed up:

I really enjoy having that kind of connection to a whole club full of people, even if I don't really speak to any of them half the time.

Moreover, social and subcultural capital clearly augment one another, as access to social connections increases one's familiarity with a given subculture, and credibility

in subcultural music and fashion confers insider social status. When reconsidered this way, it seems possible that subcultural styles are more often targeted at other participants, rather than the perceived dominant culture. Ultimately, subcultural youth may be more concerned with in-group affiliation, being recognized and identified by their peers, rather than being reviled by outsiders. This calls into question the role resistance plays in the formation and reproduction of youth subculture.



#### **IV. Research Conclusions: Rethinking the Meaning of Style**

Not surprisingly, research conclusions tend to reflect the theoretical presuppositions and methodological approaches that produced them. The Birmingham school identified stylistically distinctive youth as homogenous groups, and provided a Neo-Marxist and structuralist interpretation of their stylistic predilections and leisure activities. This approach helped to generate the category of youth subculture as an analytic concept, without necessarily interrogating its relevance to actual young people.

Of course, in the intervening years, many scholars have questioned the assumptions of the Birmingham school. Angela McRobbie revealed how the emphasis on street youth overlooked the “bedroom culture” of teenage girls, and their participation in “teenybopper” culture. Thornton has effectively critiqued their homogenizing view of the mainstream, as derived from the mass culture critique of the Frankfurt school, while Frank has offered a more nuanced account of the relationship between images of youthful resistance and popular culture. Still, when Widdicombe and Wooffitt set out to conduct linguistic research on youth subcultures, they approached young people on the street who fit their existing notions of subcultural youth.

The risk, then, remains that researchers will project their own analytic categories on their subjects, seeking out youth who meet their expectations for youth “subcultures.” The ethnographic work of Hodkinson and LeBlanc has been able to redress some of these issues, since both researchers had experienced their respective subcultures as participants before studying them as anthropologists. Still, certain drawbacks limit the scope of the critical insider, as personal experience and position

within a given scene inevitably contribute to a particular understanding of that subculture.

Ultimately, no single position can provide a comprehensive view of any social group. Given this limitation, however, a shift in approach can suggest additional ways for conceiving of subculture, and youth culture more generally. Although I have retained the term “subculture,” I have redefined the category in poststructuralist and interactionist terms. In this sense, a subculture refers to a limited, specialized field of cultural production, usually organized around a particular genre (or other common interest). Music and fashion may constitute the most visible aspects of a youth subculture, but subcultures are comprised of a set of aesthetic preferences that allow for schemes of distinction. Status is enacted through taste, in music and fashion especially, but also in home décor, styles of dance and other cultural forms.

Moreover, subcultures are structured by the social interactions of participants. Style alone does not suffice to define a subcultural grouping or to outline its boundaries. Instead, the internal networks of media and communication allow for the unequal distribution of subcultural knowledge and practices, such as styles of music or fashion. Participation and involvement, therefore, determine subcultural identity and contribute to status and credibility. When reconsidered this way, the ethnographic data on youth subcultures begins to suggest a different picture from that described by the CCCS researchers.

To apply my revised theory, of course, I had to approach subcultural youth directly. My research methods certainly reflected my own theoretical biases, as I pursued questions related to subcultural participation rather than identity. I also benefited from existing social networks to recruit participants, which may have

screened out youth who identify as goth but do not attend local clubs or socialize extensively with others in the scene. Still, my data can suggest at the very least how a shift in approach can yield different results.

As I have described, though, my research was limited in scope and extent by some specific constraints, and therefore primarily suggests directions for future investigation. More comprehensive ethnographic study would provide a fuller representation of how participants interact, ideally in both club and private settings. Interviewing permits participants their own voices, but limits the researcher to observing how informants describe themselves and their activities. Participant-observation could afford a better sense of context in which to analyze informants' accounts of their own subcultural involvement.

Moreover, my study focused on the subcultures with which I was already acquainted. While I have already described both the benefits and disadvantages of my insider position, I have paid little attention to the operation of subcultures beyond the purview of this study. Previous researchers have collected ethnographic data which can provide some understanding of subcultures such as rave and punk, and Thornton's study in particular considers issues of subcultural capital. However, more extensive research would be necessary to apply social network models more thoroughly to current youth subcultures. Data on both punk and rioters, for example, suggests a greater role for the production and circulation of D.I.Y. fanzines than in the subcultures I examined, as well as more emphasis on live shows over club nights. A broader look might consider the varying roles of different media and social spaces, which could provide an expanded view of how youth subcultures operate more generally.

Additionally, greater context might be furnished by a more in-depth historical account of the emergence of recent youth subcultures. Media coverage, for example, might be examined for its role in producing subcultures such as mod, punk, rave and goth, as well as the activities of both major and independent record labels in marketing and promoting new genres. Former subcultural participants and promoters might also be able provide personal accounts of their early involvement in local club and music scenes in the seventies and eighties, such the patrons of the Batcave in London, as well as the DJs, musicians and music journalists. These methods would provide a richer background for the analysis of the roles of cultural capital and social networks in youth subculture.

### **From Cultural Capital to Social Capital**

While I hesitate to over generalize based on a few interviews, it does seem that these methods have raised the possibility of alternate explanations for the role of style in youth subculture. Overall, my informants expressed little concern for their reception outside of their particular scenes. They relied heavily on their friends to keep them informed about new music and social events, and in turn relied on their subcultural activity to introduce them to new acquaintances. Long after Crush left D.C. and shifted her focus from the goth scene to her career, she continued to maintain her membership on a regional mailing list, using the list to stay in contact with the social circle that had formed in D.C. And when faced with the taunts of outsiders while at the zoo, she discouraged her friends from reacting strongly, elucidating to me that she accepts the consequences of dressing so differently from dominant cultural norms.

Two of the other participants did express some desire to critique the status quo. Gremlin accomplished this more directly through activism, admitting that she found more punk crossover at feminist political events than from her own goth/industrial scene. Within the club scene, however, she emphasized social activity, music consumption and cultural production as a DJ and promoter. Pathogen expressed the sentiment that a genre called industrial should have an “edge,” but pursued this conviction in his choice of tracks when spinning, seeking music with a harder, more aggressive sound. He specifically voiced his disaffection with dominant cultural forms, describing himself as “disillusioned.” But “mainstream” society did not appear to be the target of his musical preferences – instead, his tastes dictated both personal consumption, and the musical choices he selected for others. His views then, primarily affected his aesthetic choices within the bounds of subcultural activities, directed at fellow participants.

While my study focused more on music than fashion, Hodkinson has already noted how British goths dress more dramatically for clubs and larger social events than for everyday. I was able to glimpse this briefly in my interviews, and this tendency correlates to my own experience as a scene participant. One informant, Blaugirl, presented a somewhat more extreme appearance than the others, including bold makeup, layers of fishnet and large platform boots. She had indicated before arriving that she was en route to a local San Francisco club night afterward, to which I attributed her look. Like Pathogen, her sartorial efforts were intended for friends and other club patrons to view and appreciate. I would suggest, then, that subcultural styles in music and fashion signify subcultural identity and commitment not to outsiders, but to other participants.

This was further illustrated in my discussion with Crush about labeling. She jokingly referred to how friends would resist identifying with a particular label such as goth, preferring more generalized terms such as “person in black” or “freak.” This calls to mind the difficulty Widdicomb and Wooffitt had when asking kids on the street to describe themselves. Yet none of my participants hesitated to tell me about the various scenes in which they participate. They sometimes expressed some ambivalence about the particular terms used to describe their scene – Ryn, for example, noted that the subgenres of music he prefers can not necessarily be classified as goth or industrial, and Pathogen distinctly rejected the term “goth/industrial,” associating himself solely with the industrial side of the scene. But when it came to identifying the styles of music consumed or types of clubs attended, none seemed terribly conflicted, even when they were uncertain of how to classify a particular band or kind of music (like Garrett).

These data motivate me to question the elaborate theories of class resistance formulated by the Birmingham school. For the subcultures I was able to examine, railing against the perceived dominant classes did not appear to figure significantly into the stylistic choices and social rituals of my participants. Furthermore, my small sample was not exclusively or even primarily working-class. Class may be somewhat slippery to define in this context, and I did not specifically collect data on my participants’ economic or educational backgrounds.

However, at least five of my seven participants had attended (or were attending) college, and at least two had gone on to graduate or professional programs. One, Crush, works as an attorney, and another, Pathogen, holds a white-collar management job. This data is supported by Hodkinson’s findings, based on a survey administered at the Whitby Gothic Weekend in October of 1997 (a prominent

goth/industrial festival in Britain).<sup>13</sup> The majority of his respondents were either students or held professional or management jobs, and only a quarter held blue-collar jobs or were unemployed. This contrasts sharply the picture painted by Hall et al., of working-class youth escaping to nightclubs for a respite from dead-end jobs or unemployment.

In fact, the preponderance of students in the scene suggests that these youth can be more closely compared to the middle class “counterculture” described by Hall et al., a more diffuse milieu in which middle class youth contest the dominant cultural norms of their elders. To some degree, my participants seemed to be creating for themselves an alternate culture in which to participate, if not quite an entire alternate society as envisioned by Hall et al. While status may be enacted through taste and consumption as in society at large, this alternate cultural space provides participants with a smaller scale arena in which both to produce and consume culture.

The boundaries of this cultural space further offer a means to create and sustain a community of practice, and are defined by both individual taste and participation. Through common taste, participants establish friendships and social circles, which then allow them to forge further social connections. This taste, of course, may not entirely precede involvement in the scene, as a process of acculturation usually characterizes entry into a subculture. In fact, appropriate subcultural tastes may be acquired as new participants become more active, presumably learning about subcultural styles through more knowledgeable friends.

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<sup>13</sup> About a third of his 99 respondents identified their occupations as management, administrative or professional, while another 40% were students (graduate and undergraduate). Less than 15% held blue-collar jobs, and about 12% were unemployed.

As Ryn and others described, increased social involvement permitted them greater access to subcultural knowledge, for example, of musical styles. And conversely, substantive familiarity with the appropriate music augmented subcultural capital, bestowing participants with greater social status.

Social connections and subcultural knowledge, then, appear to exist in a symbiotic relationship. This suggests that part of the benefit of subcultural participation is not the expression of social angst, but rather, the accumulation of social capital. The discourse of “underground” versus “mainstream,” as identified by Thornton, provides subcultural youth with a basis to form exclusive communities for themselves, communities of interest and aesthetic preference. It lies beyond the scope of this work to speculate on the value of such community for participants. It will be left to further research to examine the benefits of subcultural social connections, and what value those connections may have beyond the reaches of the particular subculture which produced them.

If youth subcultures, however, serve to create community and social capital rather than articulate youthful resistance to class position, how does this relate back to youth culture more generally? My research highlighted not only flaws with the class-based arguments of the Birmingham school, but also their use of “youth” as a category. My participants ranged in age from 22 to 32, and Hodkinson similarly found that the majority of his participants were between 21 and 30.<sup>14</sup> Most goth/industrial clubs, in fact, only allow in patrons over the age of 18, and many in the United States restrict entry even further to those over the legal drinking age of

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<sup>14</sup> 19% were between 16 and 20, 40% between 21 and 25 and 35% between 26 and 30, dropping off to 6% over 30.



21. The “youth” who comprise these subcultures, then, rarely include high school students or teenagers – despite popular media coverage depicting teen “tribes.”

Perhaps what defines club and music cultures as youthful according to our cultural norms is not specifically age, but how we perceive the activities in which participants are engaged. Attending nightclubs during the week, regularly staying out late to drink and dance, dressing provocatively – these behaviors may communicate youthfulness, immaturity, and a resistance to becoming adults who must take responsibility for full-time jobs or families. For many of my informants, however, leisure offered a site of creativity and meaningful interaction, what Willis has termed symbolic creativity. To this degree, my informants sought meaning and value through their leisure activities, but not necessarily at the expense of more “mature” pursuits such as careers and graduate education. For Frank, this highlights the tension between work and play which “hip consumerism” resolves, in which a new ethic of hedonistic indulgence through consumption allows late capitalist workers to “rebel,” without interfering with the more sober work ethic necessary for economic production.

My research begins to suggest, then, the disparity which exists between cultural images of youthfulness, and the lived experience of actual young people. My informants did seek meaningful activity through leisure, and expended considerable energy to make new friends, discover new music, and regularly attend social events. Yet most also pursued education and meaningful work. The images of youth which dominate popular culture instead draw on cultural conceptions of youthful styles as rebellious and resistant. As a result, a disconnect arises between cultural perceptions of youthful styles, and the lived experience of those actively involved in music and club cultures.

While the research methods I have proposed can augment our understanding of youth subculture, we must also reconsider the nature of youth culture more broadly. Images of youthfulness must be interrogated separately from the lives of actual young people, while simultaneously considering the impact of such conceptions in people's lives. Moreover, this reconceptualization of subculture raises questions about the nature of popular culture more generally. The profusion of looks, styles, and genres that characterize popular culture cannot be easily divided into "mainstream" and "underground," even if these remain useful tropes for both the culture industries and youth subcultures alike. Instead, we might take a closer look at the mediated networks that produce and disseminate cultural styles and practices, similar to what Liechty has termed the "media assemblages" of images, genres and consumer products. These networks may better reveal the complex interplay between status, style and consumption in popular culture.

## Appendix

### Interview Questions Guide

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you lived in this area?
3. Are you involved in a specific music or club scene, or other subculture? If so, which ones?
4. What kind of music do you enjoy listening to?
  - 4b. What are some recent bands you listened to at home?
  - 4c. How about when you go out, such as shows or clubs?
  - 4d. How do you find out about new music that might interest you?
5. In what ways do you participate in this/these scene/s?
  - 5b. For instance, do you go to club nights or live performances? How often, and what kind?
  - 5c. Have you ever put on an event or performed at one (as a DJ, musician or artist, for example)?
6. How about your friends – do you attend these kinds of events together, or see people you know there?
  - 6b. Do they go the same kinds of events, dress similarly, listen to the same kind music? How would you describe them?
  - 6c. Can you tell me more about how you and your friends spend time together, such as outside of clubs and shows?
7. How do you find out about events?
  - 7b. Do you use any online resources, such as mailing lists or websites?

- 7c. How do you decide which events to go to, for instance, when you see an ad online or pick up a flyer?
8. Do you read any scene-specific/subcultural magazines?
- 8b. Which ones? What do you like about such magazines?
9. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

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