

PUNK ROCK AS FAMILY AND COMMUNITY: AN EXPLORATION OF THE
POSITIVE ASPECTS OF MEMBERSHIP IN A MUSIC-BASED SUBCULTURE

by

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ABSTRACT

EYLIN PALAMARO MUNSELL. Punk rock as family and community: An exploration of the positive aspects of membership in a music-based subculture. (Under the direction of DR. RYAN P. KILMER).

Adolescence is often viewed as a tumultuous time. As teens grow more independent, social interaction with peers becomes increasingly important, and friendships with peers are associated with numerous positive outcomes. However, along with teens' emerging autonomy and individuation comes increased social risk. Adolescent members of music-based subcultures are thought to be at increased risk for deviant and harmful behaviors such as substance abuse, violence, and increased sexual risk taking. However, there is little empirical evidence to support these claims.

This work explores the positive aspects as well as the risks associated with the punk subculture from the perspective of adult members who joined as adolescents. Using an ethnography-informed approach, this qualitative study used interviews and field observations to shed light on the motivations for membership into the punk subculture as well as the experience of membership from the perspective of adults who joined as adolescents. The twelve participants represented equal groups of younger adult (age range 19-25) and older adult (age range 33-44) punks. Multiple themes emerged regarding the participants' entry into punk and the punk identity. Members across both age groups identified benefits. The contributions of these findings to the area's limited research base are detailed, their potential relevance to theory and practice is considered, and directions for future research are outlined.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to each and every kid with a penchant for wearing black and dying their hair blue, to every adolescent “art queer” that was ever told by some person in authority that you would have to conform to succeed. I hope the findings here serve as some small evidence to the contrary. Not bad for a first pancake.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the United States, adolescence is viewed as a tumultuous time characterized by individual growth and development, emotional sensitivity, instability, as well as experimentation in attitude, style, and identity (Brown, 2004; Goldstein, 2006; Obst & White, 2007; Sullivan, 2006). As teens become more independent, social interaction with peers becomes increasingly important (Brown, 2004). Building friendships with peers is associated with numerous positive outcomes, such as increased self-efficacy and sense of belonging (Newman, Lohman, & Newman, 2007). However, increased social risk accompanies youths' new-found developmental freedoms and, of course, not all peer interactions or adolescent groups are considered positive. Since the much-discussed tragedy at Columbine High School in 1999, youth cultures deemed subversive or alternative and those associated with underground music have been the targets of considerable negative press and clinical scrutiny (Ogle, Eckman & Leslie 2003; Larkin, 2007). Adolescent members of music-based subcultures, whether labeled "punk", "emo", "heavy metal" or "Goth" are thought to be at increased risk for deviant and harmful behaviors such as substance abuse, violence, and increased sexual risk taking by both the mainstream media and the public at-large (Larkin, 2007).

However, minimal empirical evidence supports these claims. Investigations into youth subcultures have been undertaken primarily in the realms of sociology and anthropology (Baron, 1989; Leblanc, 1999; Moore, 2007). These studies typically frame

youth sub-culture as a reaction to or rebellion against mainstream culture. The handful of investigations based in the social sciences that have researched adolescent music-based subcultures have largely focused on negative traits and maladaptive behavior associated with membership (see, for example, Besic & Kerr, 2009; Mulder et al, 2010). Although considerable anecdotal evidence captures the many benefits to group membership by way of personal accounts, scant empirical works have explicitly explored the positive aspects of group membership in youth subculture and few have formally addressed if psychological intervention is warranted and, if so, how best to approach it. As a result, the helping professions may be at risk for misunderstanding adolescents who identify with a non-mainstream group and misattributing their intent, values, and worldview, on the basis of their outward appearance and little additional information. To address this gap, this paper describes key themes from an interdisciplinary review of the available literature. In particular, this review explores the positive aspects associated with one music-based adolescent sub-cultural group: punk. This review of punk literature provides the basis for the current study, a qualitative investigation of belonging and community within the punk subculture.

Given that youth who identify as members of sub-cultural groups such as punk are drawn to social scenes outside more acceptable mainstream culture, it is likely that group members do, in fact, differ in attitudes and beliefs from other teens. That said, the punk sub-culture also shares many of the values and traits that make for a positive and thriving community. However, few investigations have explored the subculture in these terms. Drawing from the larger psychology literature regarding adolescence and building upon these theories with both qualitative and quantitative findings from disciplines such

as sociology, anthropology, and criminal justice can yield a more complete understanding of the motivations for membership into adolescent sub-cultural groups and the true nature of risks associated with such membership. Although multiple works consider the punk subculture in terms of deviance and/or as a postmodern phenomenon (e.g., Bennett; 2006; Davis, 2006; Leblanc, 1999), to my knowledge few have formally linked the positive aspects of punk membership from theory and findings across disciplines. Taking such steps toward understanding youth communities and subcultures can facilitate the development or modification of models and theories which can, in turn, inform means of better meeting the needs of those members of adolescent subcultures who might legitimately be at risk, but who often times are both suspicious of and resistant to traditional methods of intervention (Mallott & Pena, 2004).

To that end, the sections that follow provide a brief overview of the definition of youth culture and of the history of the punk rock subculture and punk identity. A description of the many benefits of music and how these may be associated with the positive aspects of punk membership will follow. Next, I explore the universal human desire to belong and the ways adolescents find belonging and connection with peers. These sections lay the groundwork for a consideration of how punk subculture aligns with these needs. Following that, with the goal of painting an appropriately balanced picture, the risks and possible negative consequences of punk membership are considered. The remainder of this introduction outlines the reasons that the punk subculture may serve a familial and community role in the lives of its members. With the review as backdrop, a final section frames the rationale for the project; a qualitative study of the positive aspects of punk membership.

1.1 Subculture and Youth Culture

A youth culture is defined as one that is unique to adolescence and which differs from the adult culture (Goldstein, 2006; Steinberg, 2006). Youth cultures are marked by styles of dress, behaviors, and activities which may be deemed disrespectful or out of the ordinary in the dominant adult culture. The roots of youth-based subcultures in the U.S. and U.K. are based in youth movements during the 1920s, as World War I led to the separation of Western European and American youth from their families and exposure to customs, food, and practices that may have differed from those of their families of origin (Fowler, 2008; Todd, 2006). Notably, youth culture was associated with music from the start (Fowler, 2008; Todd, 2006). As specific examples, youth culture of the 1920s was associated with Jazz music, and the youth movement of the 1960s – arguably the most often identified and well known youth culture – is so intertwined with the music of that time that it is impossible to consider the cultural movement without the music.

Although the concept of subculture and its definition are complex, subculture can generally be defined as a culture that exists outside the mainstream culture which has its own modes of style and values system (Goldstein, 2006; Hebridge, 1979; Steinberg, 2006). Most subcultures are considered in terms of differences from mainstream culture and are thought to have come into existence in direct response to a crisis or an event such as war or political tumult. Based on this concept of subculture, which envisions subculture membership in direct opposition to the dominant culture, youth are attracted to punk culture as a means of self-expression as well as an alternative to the mainstream (Cohen, 1970).

In addition, youth subcultures, as in youth cultures more broadly, are marked by shared cultural aesthetic which manifests in style of dress, music and manner of communication (Goldstein, 2006; Hebridge, 1979; Steinberg, 2006). However, youth subcultures differ from mainstream youth culture on all these fronts – that is, they adopt a style, aesthetic and vernacular which not only differ from main stream adult culture but also differ from mainstream youth culture.

Many youth subcultures are associated with specific styles of music. Examples include heavy metal, Goth and emo (short for “emotional”). The members of each of these sub-cultures can be identified by a specific form of dress, a shared set of ideals or values, and their identification with a particular genre of music. The music associated with youth subcultures is generally not played on mainstream radio, and being able to identify artists and music associated with such music is a prime means by which members of the subculture identify and connect with one another (Baron, 1989; Force, 2009; Moore, 2007). The punk subculture is one case in point.

1.2 Punk Subculture

Although it is difficult to pin point an exact time and location of the beginning of a social movement, it is generally accepted that punk music originated in the mid to late 1970s in the United Kingdom and somewhat later in the United States (Sabin, 1999; Thompson, 2004). Punk music began as a response to the perceived over-commercialization of the popular music of the time as well as in direct response to economic turmoil (DeMott, 1988). The first wave of punk rockers was generally comprised of young Caucasian working-class males. Early punk music was politically charged and often contained anti-establishment themes. Although music critics in the late

60s and early 70s first used the term punk to describe a diverse array of rock acts thought to reflect a so-called authentic, daring and/or rebellious nature (Gendron, 2002), the term punk was later adopted by those within the music scene, perhaps because the universally derogatory nature of the term aligned well with the anti-establishment themes of the movement.

Early punk music consisted of short loud bursts of chords played hard and fast generally by untrained musicians. Since literally anyone could play the music, the traditional line between musician and fan was blurred. This egalitarian attitude persists in modern punk scenes in which there is little differentiation among members of the subculture between the performers, fans, and those who produce the recordings (Moore, 2007). Early punk rockers eschewed mainstream expectations of appearance and dressed in a flamboyant and often shocking manner. Punk rock dress consisted of torn black clothing, dyed hair often styled or shaved into unusual styles (the most recognizable of these is perhaps the “Mohawk”, a hairstyle which consists of both sides of the head shaved with the middle portion of hair spiked and sleeked upward). Examples of classic punk rock style include ripped and distressed black clothing, piercings about the body, and safety pins attached to both skin and clothing. This appearance, many would argue, was intended as a form of intimidation, differing dramatically from the style of dress expected of nice young people, as much as protest (Hebridge, 1979; Malott & Pena, 2004). It delineated members of the subculture from “upstanding” mainstream citizens both young and old.

The punk movement might be dismissed as a mere fad had it not continued in somewhat modified form in the decades since its emergence. Although definitions of the

modern punk subculture may oversimplify the diversity of behavior, thought, and appearance inherent to local punk scenes, modern punk is not based solely on a genre of music or a style of dress but on a way of life. A marked mistrust for the mainstream or dominant culture, an egalitarian community, and a do-it-yourself (DIY) ethic (cf. below for discussion of DIY; Leblanc, 1999; Moore, 2007) are embedded in the modern punk subculture. Small local punk communities can be found globally and in many towns, local punk scenes continue to thrive alongside more mainstream communities (Bennett, 2006; O'Connor, 2002).

Punk subculture is of course not the only music-based youth subculture, but it is unique in its staying power. Unlike other youth cultural movements such as the youth rebellion in the 1960s, punk continues to attract new members and support established ones (Bennett, 2006; Davis, 2006). Moreover, many modern music-based subcultures – such as today's Goth and emo cultures – are philosophically, stylistically and musically rooted in punk (Greenwald, 2003; Phillipov, 2006). Punk's rich history and its continued influence on modern youth subculture makes it an ideal context for exploring both motivations for membership and the potential effects of membership over the longer term, including adulthood. Moreover, a consideration of punk subculture can serve as a foundation for investigating the positive aspects of other subcultural youth groups deemed alternative, both music based and otherwise. Members of other youth subcultures such as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) youth culture or even violent subcultures such as gang culture may share with punk culture some base-level motivations for membership such as feelings of otherness, non-conformity to social norms and not having a supportive or nurturing family of origin. Furthermore, these

youth subcultures may likely have positive aspects that may not be often empirically explored.

1.3 Punk Identity

When punk subculture identity has been considered from a sociological perspective, researchers and theorists have highlighted individual factors that may contribute to group membership, including liberal political ideology, a distrust of the mainstream or dominant culture, a DIY mentality, and nonconformity to expected social norms, whether by nature or by choice (Baron, 1989; Leblanc, 1999; Moore, 2007). The DIY mentality is a cornerstone of the punk identity and is described as one of the most valued aspects of the punk community in most investigations of punk as a cultural phenomenon (Baron, 1989; Leblanc, 1999; Moore, 2007). Despite the salience of this aspect of punk identity, a clear definition of the DIY mentality in the context of the punk subculture remains elusive. Nevertheless, those within the subculture provide apt descriptions of this deeply held punk value. For example, Moore (2007) describes DIY as a rejection of merchandise and services viewed as being mass produced or “corporate” in favor of goods created and distributed by friends, individuals in one’s acquaintance and/or small local businesses. In this way, goods and services created by friends and locals are considered more authentic (Moore, 2007) and intrinsically more valuable than products or services that are viewed as mass-produced. Embracing a DIY mentality suggests that you create your own goods and services whenever possible. For example an individual who identifies as punk is more likely to cut his or her own hair or have a friend cut it rather than visit a salon. A DIY mentality suggests that one is more likely to screen print a t-shirt him- or herself rather than go to the local mall to buy one. Perhaps

the DIY mentality is best exemplified in the punk underground music scene, in which independent music labels and artists are almost exclusively favored over acts from major labels. It is important to note that when it comes to music, the individual or group responsible for the production is as important as the scale of the production. To be viewed as authentically punk, one must demonstrate having lived in a way viewed as having embraced a punk mentality, including DIY, regardless of one's level of success.

But the concept of DIY goes beyond goods consumed or the production of music. To put the influence of DIY on the punk subculture in perspective, it is important to note that this mentality influences members of the punk subculture in nearly every aspect of their lives, from where they choose employment, to the individuals with whom they socialize, to their choice of activities. DIY is a concept so deeply entrenched in the punk subculture it is almost synonymous with punk itself (Baron, 1989; Leblanc, 1999). It implies a level of self-reliance, self-efficacy and initiative. Adhering to a DIY value system implies that one relies on oneself or those in one's acquaintance to accomplish desired goals. For example, it is not unusual for members of small punk scenes to create opportunities to play music in towns where few formal venues exist. Further, members of the subculture are not likely to seek permission from outside authority figures to throw such events.

Although members of the punk community may embrace a similar value system, individual attributes that may be associated with group membership have received minimal attention from a psychological perspective. The few empirical studies that have tackled this issue focus on traits which may contribute to negative or anti-social behaviors of the individual, such as poor social skills (Besic & Kerr, 2009) and substance

use (Mulder et al., 2010). It should be noted that such studies have approached punk membership in terms of maladaptive youth development, not as a subculture, phenomenon, or community.

Ethnographic studies provide a more nuanced perspective of punk membership. These accounts suggest that factors in a youth's broader environmental context may influence subculture group membership as much as individual traits (see, e.g., Moore, 2007). Contextual factors, such as an unsupportive or unstable home environment and economic hardship are frequent themes in qualitative work involving this population (Leblanc, 1999; Moore, 2007). Moreover, reports growing out of this work frequently mention a sense of otherness and of either resisting or not being able to meet the expectations of the mainstream youth culture (Leblanc, 1999; Moore, 2007). However, assumptions of common individual and environmental factors among members may be an oversimplification, as group members of the punk subcultural community are likely to hold a variety of ideals and come from diverse backgrounds (Baron, 1989). Put another way, there may be substantial within-group variability in the punk community, and such broad descriptors may not adequately account for the diversity of background and characteristics of individual members in the community.

As the punk subculture has generally been studied as a forum for rebellious working class boys to assert their aggressiveness and anger or as a means by which to protest social norms (Leblanc, 1999; Thompson, 2004), few studies have considered the positive psychological aspects of punk membership. However, in her fieldwork investigating the experience of girls in the punk subculture, Leblanc (1999) found that girls involved in the punk community had a sense of empowerment, (i.e., what she

framed as a sense of being valued and having a unique and respected voice) and belonging that they felt was denied to them in other social contexts. Furthermore, Baron (1989) found that although there was marked distrust for mainstream values within the punk community, not all group members were engaged in rule breaking behaviors such as substance abuse or delinquency. This same exploration found that the community was quite diverse, with members differing both in terms of risk factors and social factors such as economic means and family conflict. That is, although the early punk community may have been in large part made up of members who were predominantly young males from working-class families, modern punk scenes consist of a much more diverse membership in terms of race, gender, age and family background (Baron, 1989; Bennett; 2006; Davis, 2006; Leblanc, 1999).

1.4 The Power of Music

Music-based youth subcultures may seem mysterious or even intimidating to mainstream outsiders. Although it may be the case that the mode of dress adopted by punks and other music-based subcultures is purposely designed to distance members from the mainstream, the love of music embraced by young punks may be a universal phenomenon. There is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that listening to music can be beneficial, and evidence is mounting to support what many individuals experience in their daily lives. That is, music, an art form deeply rooted in culture, can be an agent for social connection in the form of shared experience and can also be profoundly associated with both positive and negative personal experiences (Batt-Rowdan, 2010). Music of some type can be found in nearly every culture (Clift & Hancox, 2006) and is thought to be a vital component of the universal human experience (Hanser, 2010).

The social aspects of music stem from the shared experience in which music can provide the context for social interaction. For many, a group musical experience operates not simply as a soundtrack for a particular occasion, but as a catalyst for a shared emotional event. Consider the youth protest movements of the 1960s in the U.S. Much of the music being created by the musicians of that generation was fueled by political ideology that in large part solidified the movement and rallied the community to action. In much the same way, for members of the punk community, the shared affinity they have for music facilitates bringing together like-minded individuals (Bennett, 2006; Force, 2009; Leblanc, 1999; Selfout et al., 2009). A love of music may be the foundation for building relationships that might extend beyond providing a soundtrack to social interaction and may in part explain why modern punk scenes have moved from protest and adolescent rebellion to full-fledged functioning communities.

Beyond the group experience, music can have profound effects on the individual. Music has been found to be positively associated with both physical and psychological health (Bauer, Victorson, Rosenblom, Baracas, & Silver, 2010; Cooke, Moyle, Shum, Harrison & Murfield, 2010; Longhi & Pickett, 2008; Nguyen, Nilsson, Hellstrom & Bengston, 2010; Tseng, Chen & Lee, 2010) across many realms. Indeed, evidence has long suggested that music can serve to calm nerves and facilitate relaxation (Longhi & Pickett, 2008). More recent explorations suggest that listening to music can aid in pain reduction (Nguyen et al., 2010), buffer the effects of depression (Cooke et al., 2010), enhance motivation (Nakamura, Pereira, Papini & Makamura, 2010) and lessen anxiety (Bauer et al., 2010, Nguyen et al., 2010; Tseng et al., 2010) for individuals with many

different kinds of challenges, presentations, and disorders and in a multitude of contexts and circumstances.

The many beneficial effects of music appreciation, may in part explain why many youth are drawn to the punk genre and community. Punk youth often speak of the experience of listening to music, whether recorded or performed live, in almost spiritual terms. As legendary American musician Ian MacKaye related to Azerrad (2001, p. 46), “There are few things that affect me more powerfully than a roomful of people singing with a band.”

1.5 The Need to Belong and Social Connectedness

The desire for social interaction may be a basic human drive as fundamental to well-being as proper nutrition and shelter (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Baumeister & Tice, 1990; Deci & Ryan, 2007). Our desire to commune with others is commonly referred to as social connectedness, a term which encompasses concepts such as social support and sense of community. Generally defined as a feeling of kinship and a sense of belonging with others (Lee, Draper, & Lee, 2001), in practical terms, social connectedness refers to a feeling of social acceptance or group membership, as well as the feeling that one has for others with whom he or she can commune in both good and bad times

This powerful and basic human need to form social attachments stems from the evolutionary drive to survive and thrive and the need for relatedness (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 2007). Social connections offer advantages such as shared resources and responsibilities (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Conversely, the failure to form social attachments might leave individuals vulnerable and unable to defend or

protect themselves and their kin adequately (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Baumeister & Tice, 1990).

Beyond yielding practical benefits, social connectedness offers a social schema by which individuals see the world and themselves (Lee & Robbins, 1998). Individuals who feel connected with others are better able to cope, are less prone to anxiety and depression, and have better overall physical health (see, e.g., Lee & Robbins, 1998; Seeman, 1996). Moreover, social connectedness has been associated with lower disease incidence and severity and faster disease recovery (Seeman, 1996). Conversely, a low sense of social connectedness is associated with interpersonal behaviors that lead to psychological distress and low self-esteem (Lee et al., 2001).

Sense of community (SOC), one aspect of social connectedness, was first conceived of by McMillan and Chavis (1986) to explain the sense of belonging and influence one experiences within his or her neighborhood. More recently, the definition of SOC has been expanded to include the sense of belonging, influence, and connection within any social group to which one feels a strong identification and connection (Obst & White, 2007). This expanded definition has more recently been termed psychological sense of community (PSOC). The theory of psychological sense of community posits that necessary elements for PSOC consist of identification, belonging, bi-directional influence, shared values, shared history, and emotional connection. There is some evidence to suggest that these elements exist within the punk subculture and that a psychological sense of community within the scene is in part what draws youth to membership (Leblanc, 1999; Moore, 2007).

Given that most adolescents are naturally drawn to seek out peers with similar tastes and interests, such as musical preferences (Selfout, Branje, ter Bogt & Meeus, 2009), it stands to reason that punk subculture may provide a psychological sense of community for those youth who may not feel a kinship with peers in more main-stream youth cliques. In support of this notion, many first-hand accounts by punk subculture members cite experiencing a kinship and place to belong upon entering the culture for the first time (Leblanc, 1999; Moore, 2007). This is not to imply that the punk subculture is devoid of risk or harm for disenfranchised youth. Punk is not immune to the social clashes that play out in the dominant culture. Like elsewhere, there exists within these heterogeneous scenes conflict and marginalization in the forms of sexism, racism and classism in varying forms (Leblanc, 2002; Mallott & Pena, 2004; O'Brien, 1999). As with any culture, underground or mainstream, there are also factions which are extreme in ideology. There are groups, such as skinheads, who subscribe to a Nazi-like ideology (i.e., rhetoric of racial purity and superiority) and engage in dangerous and violent behavior. However, predominantly, the reports from members of the subculture are couched in positive terms, where like-minded youth find a context for belonging and camaraderie outside a seemingly unwelcoming mainstream culture. Leblanc succinctly captures this in her personal recollection of entry into the punk subculture in her prologue to her investigation of the experience of punk girls, "with ease and simplicity (punks) adopted me as one of their own, just another rebel in the ranks of high school rejects" (1999, p.4).

1.6 Cliques and Crowds: Adolescent Peer Interaction

This need to commune with others is not unique to punk youth. As children develop toward adolescence, they turn away from seeking support from their caregivers or elders and look to their peers as a primary means of social connectedness and belonging (Brown & Klute, 2003). Therefore, it is not coincidental that punk youth, like many of their mainstream peers, are engaged in a process of individuation to establish their own identities and assert their independence.

As peer interaction becomes increasingly important, adolescents are faced with an ever more complicated social world wherein peer influence can lead to increased risk behaviors such as substance use, violence, and unprotected sexual activity (Bahr, Hoffman & Yang, 2005; Ciairano, Rabaglietti, Roggero, Bonino & Beyers, 2007; Leblanc, 1999; Newman, Lohman, & Newman, 2007; O'Donnell et al., 2006). That said, peer influence can also have positive effects on youth such as increased mental health and an increased sense of social belonging (Obst & White, 2007).

It is generally acknowledged that there are three levels that describe the structure and nature of adolescent social interaction (Brown, 2004). The first consists of one-on-one friendship dyads, that is, friendship between two peers. The second level is referred to as cliques, small groups of peers who identify each other by name and have close interpersonal interactions. Crowds are the third level of peer social interactions, that is, larger groups of adolescents, who may share common appearance, values and interests. Mainstream crowds such as “jocks”, adolescents on school sports teams, and “brains”, adolescents who achieve academically, are generally too large for every member to know one another. The labels used to identify members of crowds serve as a means of social

connection for those within them and also as a means of identification from the outside.

It is important to note that most mainstream youth would not necessarily label or identify themselves solely as a member of one clique or crowd, however, many adolescents would be quick to label peers with whom they are not familiar or friendly in terms of the clique or crowd in which they appear to affiliate (Brown, 2004). Also, the extent to which identifiable cliques and crowds are present in a given school appears dependent on many variables including geographic location, size of school and diversity of student body.

Peer group interactions are difficult to track as relationships are dynamic and membership shifts often (Poulin & Chan, 2010). However, members of cliques and crowds generally are embedded in larger social systems such as schools and neighborhoods (Brown, 2004). Aside from sharing similar interests and aesthetics, members of adolescent peer groups tend to be from similar cultural and socio-economic backgrounds (Closson, 2009).

Adolescents, who developmentally are still working out their personal preferences, tastes, and interests are more readily swayed by their peers than are their adult counterparts (Brown, 2004). For this reason peer influence is an important aspect of adolescent social interaction. It is beyond the scope of this review to consider the many factors that contribute to negative peer pressure and bullying, however, the methods peers use to positively and negatively influence each other in peer groups are of relevance. As a means of identification, peers model behavior and style for new would-be group members, and new members tend to adopt the behaviors and styles of those established members (Kichler & Crowther, 2009). Peers also tend to model behavior and style in reaction to peer groups to which they are opposed or they feel they are dissimilar (Eckert,

1989). For example “druggies”, youth cliques who are associated with recreational drug use and poor academic achievement, tend to dress and wear their hair in a much more casual style in direct and calculated reaction to their more popular and arguably better coiffed counterparts. This tendency to adopt an appearance and attitude in opposition to mainstream culture is very much a tenet of the punk subculture. As Sinker (1999, p. xx) aptly recalls, “all choices – what you ate, how you walked, when you slept, who you liked – were to be rated primarily against their likely immediate effect; what reaction they provoked in who”.

Another form of influence, normative regulation, refers to the direct and indirect reactions of peers that influence behavior and style. For example, a new pair of shoes worn by an adolescent may illicit snickers or compliments from peers, and these reactions, in turn, are liable to affect the likelihood of that pair of shoes being worn again. Punk authenticity strongly relies on an adoption of a particular aesthetic both in the clothing and music that is consumed. Members of the scene regulate each others’ behavior and style in subtle and direct ways, through verbal banter, and one-upmanship (Force, 2009). Poking fun at a peer’s overly hip clothing choice or engaging in debates regarding the minutiae of a band’s discography are both ways of demonstrating membership and influencing others’ behavior in the community (Force, 2009).

Peers also influence one another’s behavior by structuring or initiating social occasions that provide opportunities to engage in certain activities. A classic example of this is a party, where peers may engage in substance use and sexual activity outside of the purview of adult supervision. Given that the punk subculture is unified by a love of music, punks often create opportunities for social interaction in music venues. Where

these opportunities do not exist, punks find ways to congregate in coffee shops, record stores, and members' basements. These contexts provide opportunities for new punks to learn behaviors such as how to act during a performance and how to interact with other, more established members of the scene (Bennet, 2006), much in the same way that a freshman can be acculturated by watching seniors at a high school dance.

Although much discussion of adolescent peer influence is couched in negative terms, evidence also suggests that peer influence can be positive and adaptive. Group membership has positive effects on youth when the group supports positive adolescent adjustment (Newman et al., 2007; Obst & White, 2007). For instance, peer groups can influence individuals to strive for better grades and get along better with others (Masten, Juvonen, & Spatzier; 2009; Padilla-Walker & Bean, 2009). Moreover, peer group membership is associated with fewer adolescent behavioral problems when individuals view their group membership as important and positive (Brown & Klute, 2003; Obst & White, 2007). This is not to suggest that groups viewed as positive and/or important by members are devoid of negative activities, influence, or consequence. Rather, some evidence suggests that, even within adolescent peer groups generally considered harmful (such as gangs), group members often identify positive and protective benefits of group membership such as a sense of family, influence, and belonging (Omizo, Omizo, & Honda, 1997).

In general, the findings that highlight positive aspects of group membership in subcultures suggest that the quality of group membership is as important as membership itself. The many instances in which feelings of kinship, belonging, and camaraderie are cited in personal accounts of members of the punk subculture suggest that for these

individuals, punk provides opportunities for community many have not experienced in other peer social groups (Leblanc, 1999; Moore, 2007).

1.7 Developmental Systems Theory, Resilience, and Punk

The sense of kinship and belonging reported by members within the punk community may be a major draw for youth as well as one of the reasons adult punks continue to identify as members of the community long after adolescence (Bennet, 2006; Davis 2006). Along with the need to belong, adolescents interact with their environment and act upon their environment in multiple and varied ways. The bidirectional influence of individual and context is the crux of ecological and systems theories, which posit that the relationships between individuals and their world are ever expanding, nested spheres of influence (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Farmer & Farmer, 2001). In these schema, the personal characteristics of the individual and their many contexts and environments interact to create opportunities for risk or resilience (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Farmer & Farmer, 2001).

Individual well-being is determined by myriad factors and in turn, the effect individuals have on their environment – specifically, the likelihood that their environment will be a supportive and healthy one – is influenced, at least in part, by the ways in which individuals react and interact with those around them. Those closest to the individual (e.g., the friends and family with whom they regularly interact) are their proximal influences; those influences can impact them directly. These social spheres expand to include more distal influences, such as smaller groups of individuals such as educational classes, local organizations such as churches, and larger contexts such as neighborhoods. In this way, the individual and his or her contexts interact and influence one other in a

multitude of ways. Although proximal influences such as friends and family are readily seen as having an effect on the individual and his or her development and adaptation, an important component of the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 2005) is the understanding that more distal influences such as the politics, social norms, laws, rules, and values of a given culture can have profound effects on the individual as well, largely by impacting the individual's larger ecology (including proximal influences). Youths' developmental trajectories are dependent on the interaction of these many factors, from aspects of the individual such as genetic proclivity and temperament to outside factors such as family life, peer friendships, neighborhood quality, and school experiences (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Farmer & Farmer, 2001). Given this perspective, there are likely multiple factors, both proximal and distal, that contribute to a given youth gravitating to a subculture such as punk.

Belonging, connection, and influence are key components to understanding how social contexts affect individuals (and vice versa). Consider a child whose family has newly immigrated to the U.S. illegally. From the time that child arrives on U.S. soil, a complex set of societal factors act upon that child and in part determine where she goes to school, the quality of health care to which she has access, how she will be treated by others, and the kinds of people with whom she will have the opportunity to interact. These factors will, of course, be mitigated by aspects of the individual; her level of intelligence, personality, appearance, as well as her ability to form social connections with others will all interact with the contextual factors of her environment.

In a similar vein, a young person who might ascribe to political views or cultural values that differ from his or her family of origin, may find him or herself treated as an

outsider, thereby reinforcing his or her own feelings of otherness. When youth do not find the sense of belonging they desire in the family system or mainstream peer interactions, they are likely to seek it elsewhere (Luthar & Brown, 2007). Moreover, according to theories of resilience, youth are more likely to rise above life challenges when they have close nurturing relationships with others (Luthar & Brown, 2007; Masten, Best, & Garmezy 1990; Masten & Coatsworth; 1998). Indeed, it bears mention that many characteristics and competencies associated with youth resilience and positive adaptation, including self-confidence, a sense of one's own efficacy and perceived competence, and adaptive problem solving skills, are embedded in the do-it-yourself value system of the punk subculture.

For those youth who do not have close adult family role models, non-family mentors can be extremely beneficial to development (Eby, Allen, Evans, & DuBois, 2008). For an adolescent who otherwise has no one to whom he or she can turn, providing just one person whom they trust can have great benefits even in dire circumstances (Luthar & Brown, 2007). Many adolescents who are drawn to the punk community may come from less-than-optimal home circumstances (Leblanc, 1999; Malott & Pena, 2004; Sabin, 1999). Moreover, given that most members of the punk subculture do not readily identify with expectations of the mainstream culture, they are also likely to reject offered help from formal channels of support such as school counselors, faith-based community leaders, and child psychologists. This rejection may be fueled, in part, by the tendency of many of those in the helping professions to misattribute or mislabel punk characteristics, such as presenting style of dress and preference for underground art and music, as indicators of risk or harm rather than as a

form of self-expression (Ogle, Eckman & Leslie 2003). This bi-directional mistrust of professionals and punk youth highlights a barrier for punk youth in connecting with those in the mainstream culture. The cyclical nature of the relationship insures that punk youth will continue to resist help from mainstream professionals as long those professionals are perceived as being disrespectful of the punk value system that punk youth hold dear.

As punk youth may be likely to reject traditional mentors, membership in the punk community may provide much more than an opportunity for peer interaction and acceptance. The sense of community and camaraderie reported by members of the subculture may act as a proxy for family ties not found elsewhere (Leblanc, 1999). In support of this notion, Leblanc found that her informants often described their entry into the punk culture in familial terms. For instance, she writes, “(many) punk girls used familial metaphors when describing punk as their family, or when referring to their entry into punk as an adoption” (Leblanc, 1999, p. 71).

Although youth look to peers for social support and camaraderie as they mature, considerable evidence suggests that the family system remains a vital aspect of adolescent adjustment and development. Teens with a stable and supportive family infrastructure are less likely to engage in risky behavior and are more likely to have more adaptive and effective coping skills (Sullivan, 2006). However, adolescents who do not have supportive or nurturant family connections tend to seek social connections elsewhere. Moreover, for some youth who do not feel like they ‘fit in’ with mainstream expectations even though they may have supportive relationships with family members, the punk rock subculture may be attractive as it offers empowerment as well as community and camaraderie in an atmosphere very unlike that experienced in formal

institutions (e.g., school) or home environments. Furthermore, the punk rock community may offer a place of acceptance for those individuals who do not identify or feel comfortable with mainstream cultural ideals of how teenagers should appear and behave (Leblanc, 1999). For example, the DIY ethic of the punk subculture may offer an alternative social context for adolescents who are not drawn to sports, clubs or other traditional teen activities. In addition, the punk subculture provides opportunities for artistic expression both visually and musically (Sabin, 1999). Punk youth tend to embrace the counter culture and creative aspects of this aesthetic which may reflect a value system that some might view as separate from healthy mainstream social development. However, whether the punk lifestyle contributes to maladaptive development that is harmful or fundamentally different from mainstream youth culture remains to be seen. Thus, while some evidence suggests that many punk youth possess skills and talents that crossover to mainstream success in adulthood (Bennett, 2006; Davis, 2006), there may be an element of danger and risk associated with the subculture (Mulder et al., 2010; Tanner, Asbridge & Wortley, 2008)

1.8 Bad Behavior: Potential Risks Associated with Punk Membership

This review focuses on the little explored positive aspects of punk subculture membership. This is not to dismiss or diminish the potential risks that might be associated with punk or adolescent subculture scenes in general. Although research on the subject is scarce, evidence suggests that certain adolescent music-based cliques may be at greater risk for delinquency (Mulder et al., 2010; Tanner et al., 2008). However these risks might be a bi-product of peer interaction rather than a consequence of group membership *per se*. For instance, in an exploration of adolescent music preference and

substance use, Mulder et al. (2010) found that the relationship between adolescent substance use and music preference was mediated in large part by perception of peer substance use. This finding was most prevalent for adolescent peer groups who listened to alternative styles of rock and rap music, two broad music genres that are often portrayed as harmful or deviant in the mainstream press (Mulder et al., 2010). This study highlights the “chicken and egg” problem of exploring the relationships between music-based subcultures and risk. That is, is it a question of a few adolescents influencing the behavior of others with similar musical tastes, of alternative music fostering ideas and affecting youth motivations to engage in negative behaviors, or of individuals prone to deviant behaviors fueled by alternative music likely to be drawn to one another with the intent of engaging in risky behavior? Given the limited existing research results, the question of whether or not musical preferences facilitate or incite violence or other negative behaviors is up for debate. However, the challenges inherent in identifying root causes of adolescent peer group deviance are not limited to studies which focus on music-based adolescent groups. As a case in point, a rich criminal justice literature addresses whether peers who tend to engage in delinquency, substance use, and crime seek out like-minded others or whether deviant individuals influence non-deviant peers to participate in deviant actions (McGloin, 2009, Moffitt, Caspi, Harrington & Milne, 2002)

Explorations of youth who engage in risky behaviors reveal that it is very difficult to determine whether deviant-minded youth are likely to seek each other out or whether communing with deviant youth might influence an individual adolescent to engage in deviant behavior they otherwise would not (McGloin, 2009). However, longitudinal studies of the adult trajectories of deviant youth may put the question of how peer groups

influence individual behavior in perspective. That is, a substantial body of work in examining “deviance” and criminal offending suggests that most individuals who engage in criminal or risky conduct as youth do not continue this trajectory into adulthood (Moffitt et al., 2002). Those who do generally show signs of behavioral misconduct and social disadvantage early on, including the inability to form close personal relationships with others (Moffitt et al., 2002).

The punk rock movement began in part as an outlet for young working class males to express their dissatisfaction with the status quo, and much of the activities described by these individuals in personal accounts of that time include violence, substance use, and petty crimes (Leblanc, 1999; Phillipov, 2006). There is little doubt that there was and still is an edge of rebellion and mayhem embedded in the culture. However, for all the bravado – and, perhaps, the reputation – there is no evidence to suggest that members of the punk community are any more likely to become lifelong criminals than any other group of adolescents. In fact, it should be noted, that there are sub-scenes known as “straight edge” scenes within the punk subculture whose members are dedicated to substance free and/or non violent lives (Azerrad, 2001). Punk rockers may have gained entry into the community as a form of rebellion or, as Malott puts it, “feeling and being outcasts of society we constructed our own norms and values according to our sense of justice, as a form of survival and resistance” (Malott & Pena, 2004, p. 7). For those who stay within the community as adults, few report continued criminal or risk-taking activity (Bennett, 2006; Davis, 2006). That is, most adult punk rockers hold jobs, have relationships and, for all intents and purposes, report living as productive members of society (Bennett, 2006; Davis, 2006). For adult punks, it may be

that the fleeting and sporadic mischief-making associated with youth in the subculture is far outweighed by the deeply engrained social ties which may last a lifetime.

1.9 Punk Scenes: Crowd or Community?

The modern punk rock subculture is global in nature; the larger punk community is composed of local scenes (O'Connor, 2002). These scenes are predominantly located within North America and the United Kingdom where the movement got its start; however, they are not limited to these regions. Punk rock scenes can be found throughout Asia, Europe, and South America, among other locations (O'Connor, 2002). Across these different scenes, the DIY aesthetic is a cornerstone of local punk movements and deeply ingrained in the punk value system. Fueled by DIY, members of punk rock scenes produce and support their own goods and services, or what anthropologists and sociologists term "cultural artifacts" (Moore, 2007). In the case of punk rock, a thriving local scene can support artists such as musicians as well as businesses such as music stores, art galleries, restaurants and live music venues. These businesses are likely to be locally owned, and the music, clothing, art, and other goods offered at these businesses are generally locally produced. This reliance on local talent and products may in part explain why many local punk scenes have thrived for decades despite economic and social trends.

The adolescent members of these local scenes tend to come from various areas throughout a town or region. In this way an adolescent punk community often differs from more traditional adolescent cliques or crowds in that its membership is not bound to a particular setting or institution such as a school, team, or place of worship. Moreover, although most members of the punk scene have gained entrance during their teen years,

local scenes generally consist of a number of members well over the age of 30 (Bennett, 2006; Davis, 2006). These older members can play a range of roles within the scene from active to occasional participation (Bennett, 2006; Davis, 2006). This loyalty, commitment, and longer-term investment in the scene may reflect the resonance of punk's core values with its members. For instance, key values of the punk sub-culture, such as DIY, may serve to foster leadership skills, creative thinking, hard work, and good business sense which may in part explain why older punks generally own the businesses and venues that help keep a thriving scene afloat (Bennett, 2006; Davis, 2006; Force, 2009).

In fact, studies of older punks may reveal some of the reasons behind the punk community's sustainability. Qualitative studies of older members of the subculture suggest that for many, punk values, such as the DIY ethic, the strong support of aesthetic goods offered outside the mainstream, an adherence to liberal political ideology and, above all else, a love of music, do not disappear upon reaching adulthood (Bennett, 2006; Davis, 2006). Many older members of the scene find various ways to stay connected to the subculture while balancing adult responsibilities such as career and family (Bennett, 2006; Davis, 2006).

1.10 Summary and Conclusions

The community and familial aspects of the punk rock subculture warrant further investigation. Learning more about the shared and unique traits of individuals drawn to this subculture may reveal the motivations of membership as well as the specific pathways by which individuals choose the punk community in particular. The persistence of the punk rock subculture throughout the past four decades makes it an ideal

community to begin to explore how individuals who may not feel welcome in more mainstream social groups find each other and build thriving communities of their own. Moreover, themes associated with family can be found throughout the personal accounts of members of the punk community and qualitative explorations of punk, which suggests that although most individuals gain entry to the community during adolescence, punk may serve as more than a passing fashion fad or social clique for many.

The benefits of punk membership may extend beyond an opportunity for social connection, in terms of belonging and camaraderie. Punk may provide additional benefits by providing members of the community with an alternative context to mainstream youth crowds in which a do-it-yourself aesthetic and liberal political worldview are valued and accepted. An appreciation of music may serve to fuel the social connections of members of the punk community by way of shared experience, identity, and information exchange. Within this community, punk youth may discover a kinship with like-minded peers and may find informal mentoring available to them by way of older individuals who share their ideology. Taken collectively, these possibilities suggest that, counter to common wisdom, some youth who do not identify with or conform to mainstream expectations, may in fact be quite resilient and be adapting well. Considered from this perspective, the sense of community young punks attribute to the scene may serve as a healthy foundation for successful adult endeavors.

1.11 Context and Approach

The current study relies exclusively on qualitative research methodology to explore the interactions, values, and experiences of members of the Charlotte, NC punk rock community. Qualitative methods can be defined as research methodologies which

consist of various types of first hand perspectives and experiences of participants via interviews, observation and interaction (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lindoff & Taylor, 2002). Ethnography is a qualitative research method which can be utilized to create an in depth, nuanced impression of a phenomena or cultural experience (Van Maanen, 1988) by describing and interpreting cultural values, practices, and behaviors (Wolcott, 1995). True ethnographic research can include total immersion on the part of the researcher in a culture of interest over an extended period of time (Wolcott, 1995). As this work will be undertaken as a project for a dissertation, practical constraints will necessarily limit the time spent in the field. Therefore, this work embraces the values inherent in ethnography such as a respect for diverse cultural phenomena and a commitment to understanding complex cultural interactions, within the practical limits of the doctoral dissertation process.

Although qualitative methods have been embraced in many social science and health related fields such as anthropology, sociology and nursing, these methods have just begun to gain acceptance in psychology over the past decade (Stein & Mankowski, 2004). Community psychology has been a leader in this trend in recent years where qualitative- and ethnography-inspired methods have been viewed as a preferred means by which to gain important in depth information from which to build valid and reliable quantitative measures (Maton, 1993) as well as a respected method of investigating complex social phenomena (Stein & Mankowski, 2004; Trickett, 1996). In recent years, qualitative methods have been utilized in community psychology to explore a wide range of human experiences including domestic violence (Allen, Watt & Hess, 2008), perceptions of neighborhood quality and safety (Dahl, Ceballo & Huerta, 2010), and

psychological sense of community experienced by those living in political turmoil (Brodsky, 2009).

Qualitative research is particularly well suited for exploring issues of interest to community psychologists as it is a discipline that recognizes and values the importance of lending a voice to those who may be otherwise unheard, under represented or misrepresented (Stein & Mankowski, 2004). Simply put, creating an opportunity for individuals to tell the stories of their experiences in their own voices can allow for a more nuanced, detailed and genuine account of a phenomena of interest (Stein & Mankowski, 2004). It is with the respect for the diversity of human experience in mind that the current study was undertaken.

1.12 Research Questions

The qualitative study will explore the positive aspects as well as the risks associated with membership in the punk subculture. It is guided by two primary clusters of research questions.

Research Question Cluster 1

- (a) What positive, if any, aspects of membership in the punk rock subculture do members cite?
- (b) If interviewees discuss positive aspects of membership in the punk rock subculture, what themes emerge as most salient?

Research Question Cluster 2.

- (a) For those interviewed, are there differences between the themes that emerge in the narratives of younger members of the punk rock subculture

(i.e., those members between 18 and 29 years of age) and older members of the punk rock subculture (i.e., those members over the age of 30)?

- (b) If there are differences between themes discussed in the narratives of younger and older members of the punk rock subculture, what differences are evidenced?

CHAPTER 2: METHODS

2.1 Overview

This work is a qualitative study inspired by ethnographic principles that explores the positive aspects as well as the risks associated with membership in an adolescent music-based subculture group, specifically, the punk subculture. Study eligible adults fell into two age ranges: (1) those aged 18 – 25 years, and (2) those over 30 years, who identify themselves as having been members of the punk subculture in adolescence and may continue to identify themselves that way or participate in the punk scene in adulthood. Younger adults may shed light on motivations for membership whereas older adults can share valuable information about their experiences as a punk youth, how those experiences shaped the adults they have become, and, if they are still active participants in the scene (or still define themselves as punk), the elements of involvement in the scene that lead them to maintain that involvement. This study relies exclusively on qualitative research methodology to explore the interactions, values, and experiences of members of the Charlotte, NC punk rock community.

2.2 Participant Recruitment Procedures

Participants were recruited from the Charlotte, NC punk community using the snowball method of sampling, by which one participant identifies another for recruitment (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). It should be noted that the researcher of the current study has conducted qualitative work previously in the community of interest. Because of this

previous work, credibility and trust with the community has been established. Building trust within the community is vital for successful qualitative work (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Due to the relationships forged within the Charlotte punk subculture, initial participant recruitment relied in great part on the assistance of participants from previously conducted work. Although participants from previous research efforts were not eligible to participate in the current study, they were contacted as a means of identifying other members of the Charlotte punk culture for recruitment. These past participants had previously provided verbal permission for the researcher to contact them again if need be. However, contact information for some of these participants was not available or had changed since the time of the initial data collection. Therefore, it was necessary to gain contact information for some participants. Participants from the previous study were contacted via e-mail or phone and asked if they could recommend people in their acquaintance in the eligible age ranges who they felt might have views or experiences of relevance to the study. Since local punk rock scenes tend to be insular and close-knit communities (Baron, 1989; Bennet, 2006; Leblanc, 1999), it is expected that past participants likely recommended individuals who are prominent and respected within the scene.

Once the names of prospective participants were identified, the following methods were used as a means of recruitment. Each prospective participant was contacted via the e-mail address or phone number provided by participants from the previous study. Initially, the researcher contacted these individuals via e-mail only if available, as a relatively non-invasive means of soliciting their participation. If both e-mail and phone contacts were given, and there was no response via e-mail, then the researcher attempted

to contact via phone. The following general script was used in this initial contact. It was modified as appropriate for phone contact so that these interactions were conversational in tone. Specifically, the researcher said,

"I am interviewing people in Charlotte about the local music and punk scene. _____ suggested that you are someone I should talk to. I am interested in how you came to be a part of the local scene and what the local scene is like. If you are interested please contact me."

The researcher provided an e-mail and phone number as contact information. Only upon hearing from participants did the researcher provide detailed information regarding the study. This information was relayed either in writing or via telephone, depending on the method in which the potential participant contacted the researcher. If an individual declined to participate, that person was not contacted by the researcher again. If a potential participant did not respond to the initial e-mail, a follow-up e-mail was sent. If no response was received after the second e-mail, that individual was not contacted again.

For those participants who wished to participate, an interview time was set up and written consent documents were provided, explained, and signed at the interview site before the interview took place. The interviews were conducted with 6 participants between the ages of 18 and 25 and 6 participants over the age of 30, for a total of 12 participants. Recruitment took place until 12 participants, 6 in each age range, were recruited. Given the time constraints of doctoral dissertation work, the number of interviews was capped at 12, in order to allow for ample time for data transcription and analysis.

2.3 Data Collection

This study seeks to learn more about the phenomenon of subcultural membership and the role such membership plays in the lives of adolescents. The possible social and psychological aspects of adolescent subculture membership (i.e., social connectedness, sense of community, empowerment, camaraderie) were investigated. Consistent with ethnographic principles (Wolcott, 1995), the primary qualitative method used to explore this subject was interviewing. Additionally, researcher observation and field notes were utilized as a means of providing context.

As in all qualitative explorations, it is understood that the researcher brings to this work a specific set of perspectives, training, experience and knowledge. Although it is acknowledged that complete and absolute “objectivity” is impossible to achieve in any scientific study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), the researcher made every effort to minimize bias and to increase what Corbin and Strauss (2008) term “sensitivity”. Sensitivity refers to the researcher’s ability to “to pick up on relevant issues, events and happenings in the data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 176), regardless of their own feelings or beliefs. In regards to that, it is important to acknowledge that although I was unfamiliar with the Charlotte punk scene when I began the pilot study that laid groundwork for the development of this dissertation, having identified as a punk in my youth I have some first hand knowledge of and personal experience with the larger punk subculture. This means that I did bring with me some expectations about the individuals and community I was studying. Although this was an asset in some respects, as it allowed me to easily establish rapport with participants, collaborating professionals were enlisted throughout data collection and analysis process to insure research standards.

Interviewing was conducted by the researcher at a place and time determined by the participant. This was done to insure interviews took place in a location that was comfortable for the interviewee. The majority of interview locations included individual's homes as well as public establishments such as bars, restaurants, and coffee shops. Additionally, two interviews were conducted at participants' places of employment (e.g., a skate park and a tattoo parlor) and one was conducted virtually via Skype video conferencing software. The interviews were unstructured; the interviews were designed to give participants the freedom to tell the interviewer about their experiences as members of the punk community and to explain what is most salient and important to each individual in his or her own words. This does not imply that the interviewer approached the interviews with no clear subject matter, topics of interest, or questions. The general goal of each interview was to explore how the participant first came to be a member of the punk subcultural community, a general exploration of what the experience of membership in the community is like, and ways in which members of the community interact. For example, open-ended prompting statements included, "tell me about when you heard your first punk song", or "tell me about the first time you experienced punk". Participants were asked informational questions regarding age of entry into the punk subculture or location of a certain event when details like these were unclear but relevant and were prompted to clarify intent or meaning where response seems vague or non-specific. For a list of sample interview questions please see Table 1.

Each interview was audio recorded using a digital recorder. Consent for audio recording was included in the written consent form. Interviews were conducted for approximately one hour with each participant. However, time spent interviewing was

flexible, depending on individual differences in levels of self disclosure and responsiveness. The interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 2.5 hours in length. The quality and length of unstructured interviews and, in turn, the depth of the discussion, were contingent in large part on the ability of the researcher to establish rapport with interviewees. For that reason the general tone of each interview was conversational and informal.

To get an overall impression and provide necessary context for interpreting and framing study findings, I observed the Charlotte punk subculture community in various settings. Since one of the cornerstones of the punk subculture is a respect for authenticity, it was important that I, as the researcher, did not enter the field in disguise or under false pretense. Therefore, although I dressed casually (i.e., in jeans and a t-shirt) I did not alter my appearance in an effort to fit in. Consistent with ethnographic techniques (Wolcott, 1995), observations were conducted at social gatherings identified by the members of the community. Observation locations included local record stores, restaurants, and music venues. This was generally done in the presence of one of my interviewees. Field observations from the initial study provided context and background for study findings.

To record observations as well as researcher thoughts and notes during data collection, a field journal was kept by the researcher throughout the data collection period. Written field notes, consisting of impressions and reconstructions of observed events and interactions of interest (Lindlof & Taylor; 2002; Wolcott, 1995), were taken during field observations as well as directly after interviews. These provided a means by which impressions were remembered in order to provide context for interpreting and

framing study findings. When socially awkward or inappropriate to jot notes during field work, notes were written within 12 hours of the observation. Given the study's focus, field notes were used as a means of remembering witnessed instances of support, camaraderie, and conflict among members of the community as well as any other cultural practices and interactions of interest.

Given the small number of participants and the close knit nature of the Charlotte punk scene participants were asked to consent to the use of their first names in study results. Consent for the use of first names was included in the consent form. Study participants were given the option of requesting that an alias be used if they did not consent to the use of their first name so that others would not have access to identifying data regarding participants. All 12 participants consented to the use of their first names in study results.

Verbatim transcription of interviews was completed by a paid professional transcriber. It is understood that both participating and non-participating individuals may have been inadvertently identified by full name by participants on the audio recordings. In order to establish an additional level of confidentiality protection to study participants, the transcriptionist was required to read, agree to, and sign a confidentiality agreement (please see Confidentiality Agreement Transcription Service Form) .

2.4 Approach to Analysis

Interview data were analyzed using the grounded theory method of analysis, in which themes emerge from the data collected (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). According to Charmaz (2006, p. 2), grounded theory methods “consist of systematic , yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data” with the ultimate goal

of developing theories directly from the data. Although historically grounded theory methodologies were guided solely by the data (Charmaz, 2006), modern grounded theory methods allow for the merging of hypothese-based analyses as well as data driven thematic analyses (Charmaz, 2006). The coupling of the two allows for flexibility in the use of the grounded theory which can include confirmation of previous findings as well as the discovery of new themes and phenomena. Qualitative data analysis consists of coding and recoding transcripts and notes until themes emerge. The transcribed interviews were coded for themes utilizing NVivo and Excel software.

Data were analyzed and coded in stages. The first stage of coding, open or initial coding, consists of unrestricted first round coding. The purpose of intital coding is to establish preliminary themes that can be used as a basis for more detailed coding efforts in subsequent rounds of analyses (Charmaz, 2006). After initial coding, categories and decision rules were developed and applied in the focused coding stage (Charmaz, 2006). Within the focused coding stage preliminary coding is examined more closely for thematic content and decision rules are applied in an effort to categorize data more distinctly. Axial coding is the next stage; it reflects the method by which connections between coding categories are made (Charmaz, 2006). Negative case analysis, consisting of testing developed categories against new data (Strauss, 2006), was used to test categories as transcripts were entered. If new data were consistent with previously entered data, then the argument for the categories developed is strengthened; if new data refute it, categories may need to be revised (Strauss, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

As previously stated, qualitative data analysis is an inherently subjective process. As a means of assessing credibility of the coded themes and in order to minimize bias,

two collaborating professionals were asked to review and comment upon excerpts of two transcripts each, as a means of ascertaining the codes and themes they identified and, in turn, gauge the accuracy of the emerging data categories throughout the analysis. In the event that reviewers and the researcher differed in their coding decisions, themes would be re-analyzed and checked against other coded data until a consensus was reached. However, there were no substantial differences between reviewer and researcher coding schemes. As another way to insure analytic integrity, final themes were shared with selected participants to gain valuable feedback and clarity. These member checks were conducted in person with 3 willing respondents at both the initial coding stage and the focused coding stage. Minor section order and wording suggestions from member feedback were incorporated into the final results.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

3.1 Participant Demographic Information

Participating members of the Charlotte punk community in the younger age group ranged in age from 19 to 25. These include Hunter, age 19; Dan, age 22; Neal and Nick, age 24; and Matt and Kelly, age 25. Interviewees in the older age group ranged in age from 33 to 44. These include Laura, age 33; Candice, age 36; Mike, Tim and Rodney, age 38; and Fred age 44. A complete list of participant names and ages can be found in Table 2. Participants included 10 males and 2 females. Both females, Laura and Candice, were over 30 years of age. One participant, Tim, identified as Filipino, the remaining 11 participants are Caucasian.

All those interviewed had completed a high school level of education or its equivalent. Eight of the 12 participants had at least some college level education, with 7 reporting that they completed college. Two interviewees, Tim and Candice, hold graduate degrees.

All interviewees reported being employed at the time of the interview. Participants were employed in diverse fields, ranging from what might be considered working class employment (e.g., Dan reported working as a sandwich maker, Neal and Matt work in the screen printing business) to professional careers (e.g., Candice works in a bank, Tim is a health care professional). Many of the jobs held by participants included some element of craftsmanship or artistic expression (e.g., Laura is a hair stylist, Rodney

is a tattoo artist). Several participants, such as Rodney and Fred, reported holding more than one job. Two participants, Mike and Rodney reported being self-employed at the time of the interview.

3.2 Participant Background

All but two participants (Rodney and Candice) reported that they spent the majority of their adolescence in Charlotte or the surrounding area. Rodney spent his youth in rural South Carolina, and Candice grew up in the Washington, DC suburbs of Virginia. All but two interviewees were currently active in the local punk and/or music scene at the time of their interview. Both participants (Tim and Mike) who were not currently active in the local scene reported being active members of the Charlotte scene in adolescence and early adulthood; both were in the older category of participants. Mike was an active member in the punk scene in Madrid, Spain at the time of his interview. Mike, who resides in Spain, was the only participant not currently living in Charlotte although as previously stated he grew up in Charlotte. Eight participants, Mike, Rodney, Fred, Hunter, Nick, Matt, Kelly and Dan are musicians. All but Kelly were actively playing in bands at the time of their interview. All but one participant (Tim) reported actively seeing local live music frequently.

3.3 Results Overview

The qualitative analysis used in this investigation allowed for a deeper understanding of how membership in the punk subculture and associated phenomena are perceived and experienced by those directly involved in the Charlotte, NC punk scene. The results reported here reflect the collective narratives of the 12 individuals

interviewed, and the themes identified emerged directly from the interview data collected.

All excerpts in the sections that follow are direct quotes from those interviewed. Incorrect grammar and colorful language have been left unedited in order to preserve the individual voices of each interviewee. It also bears mention that at times there were nuances to language and intent that are not easily conveyed in written form but were much more easily gleaned in person through nonverbal communication cues. Where not obvious in the text, I have noted instances of sarcasm and humor for clarification purposes. As a last note, many of those interviewed were articulate, talkative and forthcoming. However, there were others who, no matter how seemingly engaged, tended to answer questions briefly. In order to best reflect the collective intent of those interviewed, some voices may appear more than others. In all instances I have selected the sections of the transcripts that I feel best reflect the highlighted theme or concept.

Seven broad categories from the qualitative interviews will be highlighted in this results section. These include, *Path to Punk: Entry to Identity*, *Punk as Community*, *The Meaning of Punk: Punk Music*, *The Meaning of Punk: Punk Values*, *The Charlotte Punk Community: A Tale of Two Scenes*, *The Pifalls of Punk*, and *Punk for Life: Advantages and Challenges of Adhering to a Punk Lifestyle*.

Path to Punk: Entry to Identity reflects the multiple contributing factors that lead to initial exposure to the punk subculture as well as the paths by which individuals come to identify as members of the punk subculture. An artistic nature and a sense of otherness in youth precede a love of punk music. Familial influence is also evident. Families may unwittingly contribute to youth's interest in punk subculture by nurturing both artistic

talent and musical interest. In some cases, reportedly conservative families of origin provided a first opportunity for rebellion.

Next, the theme of *Punk as Community* is explored. Participants discuss the sense of *Belonging, Empowerment, Shared Interests and Emotional Connection*, and *Shared History* they have experienced as members of the Charlotte punk subculture.

The third and fourth themes consider *The Meaning of Punk*, separated because of their two distinct prime foci. *The Meaning of Punk: Punk Music* is an exploration of punk lyrics and music structure, as well as why the music appeals to those in the subculture. Consistent with definitions of subculture (Goldstein, 2006; Hebridge, 1979; Steinberg, 2006), members of the Charlotte punk scene note that punk has a value set and aesthetic which differs from the mainstream Charlotte culture. *The Meaning of Punk: Punk Values* explores the aspects of the punk subculture deemed significant such as *Antiestablishmentarianism*, a concept that encompasses a disregard and distrust of mainstream consumerism, politics, and social norms. Moreover, punk values such as, *Individuality, Hard Work* and *Substance Over Style* are explored.

The fifth theme, *The Charlotte Punk Community: A Tale of Two Scenes*, explores the similarities and differences between the reported experiences of younger and older punk subculture members. This content is divided into four subthemes as older and younger interviewees discuss what the Charlotte punk community means to them. *From Ghetto to Punk: The Plaza Midwood Neighborhood* is a discussion of the Charlotte neighborhood cited as an epicenter for the punk scene by older participants. *Bringing Punk Home: House Parties* reflects on the importance of the DIY music scene to younger participants. *Separate but Equal Scenes* frames participant thoughts on why there seem to

be generational differences in the Charlotte punk community. Lastly, *Scene Exclusivity* explores whether or not there exists a scene-wide sense of exclusivity in the local punk scene.

Scene Exclusivity serves as a springboard for an exploration of some of the possible negative aspects of the Charlotte punk subculture. This section, entitled *The Pitfalls of Punk*, includes aspects of the punk scene mentioned by those interviewed as having potentially dangerous, harmful or stressful consequences. These include *Substance Use, Risk of Violence, and Family Conflict*.

The final theme discussed in this study, *Punk for Life: Advantages and Challenges of Adhering to a Punk Lifestyle*, includes two subthemes, *Punk for Life* and *Mainstream-Underground Balance*. *Punk for Life* reflects a desire on the part of the younger participants in this study to adhere to a punk lifestyle as they mature. Both older and younger participants discuss the challenges of maintaining a balance between mainstream practicalities (i.e., holding a job, getting along with others) and punk subcultural membership (i.e., anti-establishment values, independence) in the subtheme section *Mainstream-Underground Balance*. Each of these broad themes along with their corresponding subthemes will be explored in detail in the sections that follow.

3.4 Path to Punk: Entry to Identity

My sister comes home and she brings me two records. She and her boyfriend, they walk in with the first Murphy's Law record and a Partisan's record. Partisan was like an old English boy band. And, of course, Murphy's Law was New York hardcore originators. And they walk into my bedroom and they're like, 'listen to these records - a lot'. (Rodney, Age 38)

As Rodney suggested, entry into the punk subculture generally happens in adolescence and is often facilitated by an older adolescent, such as a sibling, classmate,

or other peer. However, exposure to punk music in and of itself does not appear to be the only factor associated with punk membership. The phenomenon of entry into the punk subculture encompasses an interaction among several factors. Along with peer influence, every individual interviewed reported that both a love of music and a sense of otherness (i.e., a sense of not quite fitting in with one's mainstream peers) preceded their introduction to punk. Family and parents also appear to have influenced and affected those interviewed. Many interviewees reported that music was an integral part of their familial home life. In addition, several interviewees credited parents with encouraging and supporting their artistic and/or musical talents. Families may have unwittingly contributed to young punks' sense of otherness as well, as many participants reported feeling different from or rebelling against conservative family values.

Whatever the path taken to punk exposure, once a young person experiences punk music and culture and finds them to his or her liking, he or she begins to feel a kinship with likeminded peers. Those interviewed reported that this kinship develops into a sense of belonging and, in time, a deep identification with the punk scene.

Before wholeheartedly embracing punk, many of those interviewed report a love of music in childhood and early adolescence.

Dan: I used to like Elvis a lot when I was like real little, then I liked country when I was real young, radio music when I was in middle school probably. And then I remembered older kids in my school were into classic rock so I was like, oh, I'll do that. And then I kind of progressed into like 70's, 80's music, like the Stooges and stuff like that.

The youthful love of music sets the stage for openness to punk music. This love of music is influenced in large part by family members, particularly parents. Many of those interviewed recall that their first exposure to music was radio or recordings played in

their home when they were young. As Candice puts it, “My mom always loved music. She played guitar, and she loved the Beatles. So I grew up with all that 60s music. So, that was a big influence. And I still have some of her albums.” Music is cited as an important element of family life for many interviewees. Rodney shared a memory of watching professional music with his family.

Rodney: My granddad played music, so the first time I ever saw music, my family went somewhere to watch music, my granddad was a part of. I don’t even remember what the situation was, but you remember Doc Severinsen, the guy who used to be on ‘The Tonight Show’? His band was playing at Furman University. And some group my granddad was playing with opened up a set at a show for him. So I was like four years old, went and watched the Doc Severinsen Orchestra and my granddad.

Although not every one interviewed was fortunate to have a relative who was a professional musician, for many of those interviewed, a first concert experience was generally reported to be in the company of a parent, as Candice remembers.

Candice: My mom took me to see Bob Dylan when I was in the 6th grade, so when I was 12. I remember going to a Grateful Dead show when I was in 8th grade. So, I started pretty young (with) parental supervision.

Another prominent experience reported in varying degrees by all of those interviewed was a sense of otherness in adolescence. They expressed perceiving a general feeling of not quite fitting in with mainstream peers. This sense of otherness preceded any exposure to punk music and culture. The punk members interviewed described this sense of otherness in varying ways. For instance, Matt referred to his early adolescent self as an “art queer,” and he elaborated upon his experience as follows.

Matt: I was well liked. I was friends with all the soccer players, but I was the only kid at my high school that was into what I was into. So I grew up all through middle school and high school without really cultivating a scene. I kind of developed my own identity. I wouldn’t say I was reacting against any of the people I was hanging out with. I just knew that that wasn’t where I was at.

Although Matt felt that the sense of otherness he recalls in his youth was not a negative or painful experience, other adult punk members reported conflict with their adolescent mainstream peers. As Candice recalls, “High school was horrible. A lot of the older girls were mean to me. And it’s not like I did something.” She went on to express in detail how she felt in high school.

Candice: I probably always felt different, you know? And I don’t really know what – maybe the way I looked. I think you kind of feel a little different anyway, a little bit removed. Like maybe the conversations are going on about prom and stuff. I didn’t give a shit about prom.

According to participants, their families also influenced the sense of otherness experienced by would-be punks. Participant reports indicated that this would happen in two main ways: the first reflects a family of origin’s acceptance and valuing of artistic and/or individualist expression, and the second involves a reaction on the part of the youth against parental values deemed conservative or restrictive.

Family nurturance of artistic expression was generally preceded by some childhood indication of artistic talent. For example, Rodney pinpoints the moment he realized that artistic expression would play a role in his life.

Rodney: One of my earliest memories is my parents taking me to church. I was a spastic child. But when this little tow-headed kid sitting in the pew at church bouncing all over the place and my dad’s always driven heavy machinery. So my dad grabbed one of the programs for the church service that was going on. And he takes a pen and he draws a profile of a front-end loader with a track loader with a big bucket on the front. And then he gives me the pen. So I start drawing his tractors. And it was immediately like it made sense to me. Like oh, I mean, not that I was some intense draftsman at that point. It was the music that calmed the savage beast. I stopped jumping around and stopped being a spaz and I just started making marks with his pen.

Many punk members interviewed credit their parents with nurturing their burgeoning artistic tendencies. Rodney elaborates on the parental role in fostering his love of art, and Fred echoes these sentiments in relating his own path to becoming a musician.

Rodney: My parents being good parents that were paying attention to what their child was doing said ‘all right, we found something this kid likes. Let’s farm this,’ you know? So they took me and my sister and we both went and had some painting classes and, you know, just made sure that we had supplies to do things.

Fred: About 12, my parents signed me up for some guitar lessons and rented me an acoustic guitar. And I took some guitar lessons which, of course, inevitably at 12 years old, leads to buying a crappy electric guitar, and, you know, then you turn into a punk rocker ‘cause heavy metal’s too difficult to play.

A sense of otherness was also expressed by many as reaction against conservative family value systems (i.e., adherence to conservative political ideology and/or strict Christian religiosity). This interaction is viewed as the first opportunity to question mainstream cultural norms and values. As Laura put it, “I mean my parents were very much the conservatives, looking at tattoos and crazy hair like, oh my God. Hell bound in a hand basket.” Neal described his parents as “super Christian pastors” and Fred explained how his sense of questioning and otherness stems from his religious upbringing.

Fred: My parents, they weren’t mean, oppressive people by any stretch. But, you know, I had a fairly religious upbringing and that experience and that time frame opened up my eyes to going against the status quo, I guess, you know?

The role and course of family conflict as it pertains to punk is explored in greater detail in the *Pitfalls of Punk* section below. But it is worth noting that most of those interviewed did not report permanent rifts between family members due to cultural or value differences. An acknowledgement of those differences and familial acceptance in

time is more typical of the experiences of those interviewed. This is reflected in Dan's recollection of a recent family interaction.

Dan: My grandparents and my uncles were in town a few weeks ago, and my uncle introduced me to some of his friends and he was like, 'yea, this is my nephew Dan, like he's the liberal guitar playing hippie amongst us'.

A love of music and sense of otherness precedes an individual's openness to punk culture. The first exposure to punk is generally in the form of music. As previously stated, this is nearly always introduced by an older adolescent or peer. For many of those interviewed the first time they reported having heard punk music was in the presence of an older sibling. As Matt explained, "I had older brothers that were into punk and I think that's a lot of people's story, that your older siblings' interests get kind of trickled down on you." Matt's sentiment is echoed by Mike, Rodney and Tim who all recall being influenced by older siblings, both in musical taste and fashion.

Mike: My sister was listening to punk before I was. So she's three years older and she had records and the first time that I probably went and took one of her records and really knew that I was listening to punk officially, that would be around 1986 and the record I know I never sold it, I still have it. I can tell you actually I never gave it back. It is a compilation of mostly English bands. I think the only American band on there is The Dead Kennedys.

Rodney: My sister is three years older than me and she's certainly had a huge effect on my upbringing, my (comeuppance) in the world. I was exposed to things that she was doing first, you know, before I was old enough to know to do them. So when I was young, she's listening to punk rock records and stuff like that. And nobody in Easley, South Carolina was doing that. And she was, in 1985 probably '86, you know, she was wearing 14 hole tall Doc Martens and has her hair fucking green or something. And, you know, that certainly was not the norm.

Tim: I remember when Michael Jackson's Thriller got really big and everyone was really, really into it, and everyone their like, you know, like their little Members Only jackets and stuff like that. And I thought that, you know, it was interesting or whatever. But my sister, my older sister, she's four years older than me, she had obviously a huge influence on my life. And she was kind of like one of those people who's like he's alright but, you know, I'd rather listen to Duran

Duran. So that's kind of like where I started out with that, was like, yea, Michael Jackson's okay. But I'd rather listen to Duran Duran.

For those interviewed who do not have older siblings, initial exposure to punk music generally came via older peers, as Dan recalled. "I remember older kids in my high school, a few of them were into punk or metal, and I'd be like oh, that sounds cool. I want to do that. That's kind of how I got into it." Punk music is also experienced for the first time in conjunction with peer-related activities, such as skateboarding. Punk music is often featured in skate videos and magazines and, according to those interviewed, there is a long-standing history between the two interrelated subcultures. Kelly and Fred recalled the influence skateboarding had on their exposure to punk.

Kelly: I didn't have a lot of friends at the high school that I went to, but through mutual friends we used to go skateboarding and stuff like that. Skateboarding and my political interests in high school was probably where I first got introduced to punk rock music, you know? We'd go skate and watch skateboard videos. That's where I heard about a lot of the bands that I was listening to.

Fred: I'll blame skateboarding for at least 75% of that, you know, because I was skating. I started skating at six, and so all the skateboard magazines were, you know, The Plasmatics, and gosh, The Surf Punks. I never even heard of those guys but I remembered seeing them in the magazines, Devo, and then, of course, I got into heavier stuff after that. That was a natural progression, to be a skater kid and get into punk rock.

Obviously, exposure to punk music does not necessarily a punk make. For those who eventually identify as punks, the music speaks to them both lyrically and musically. Adolescents relate to both the anti-authority themes of the songs as well as the music itself which is often described using words such as "raw," "loud," and "authentic". Or, as Kelly put it, "The pace of the music, just like how fast it is. Like the rough textures, like the anger in the lyrics. It all just is a very great means of expressing discontent". Tim echoed this sentiment as he recalled his initial response to punk music.

Tim: I think the lyrical content kind of spoke to me 'cause some of the lyrics, you know, were about disillusionment. And then some of them were very anti-establishment. And, you know, 12, 13 year old kid, I mean that spoke very loudly to me. There are a lot of aspects the authoritative hierarchy that I didn't particularly care for. And (The Dead Kennedys) addressed that in a way that no other band that I'd listened to previously had. And also they had talked about the alienation that most, tweeners and early teen people would feel, I guess, and continue to feel to this day I imagine.

Regardless of the path that each individual takes, there appears to be a transition from piqued curiosity to active identification with the punk music scene. At some point in this journey, young punks seem to experience a sense of being a part of something significant, as Nick related.

Nick: I got into it through really bad bands when I was in high school here. Like I'd go to a show and there'd be like screaming over something. I was 15. It's live music. I'd rarely seen that before in a small venue. You can tell that something about it was raw. And like having it be your first live really niche music experience makes it kind of difficult to figure out what you want to take away from it and figure out what's good. But you just know that you're part of it so you keep going.

As Nick suggested, feeling a part of something appears to keep many adolescents coming back to the punk scene. Young punks find like-minded peers and a sense of belonging as members of the subculture. The sense of belonging first experienced by punk subculture members in adolescence may contribute to a lasting sense of community well into adulthood, as Tim put it.

Tim: A show would come around and it would be like being around your own kind. I mean it seems kind of silly in retrospect but at the time you'd walk into a club and you'd see all these Mohawks, and all these spikes and stuff, and you're just like this is cool. This is who we are. This is how we have a good time.

3.5 Punk as Community

It was definitely a unity thing. Even in the bands that didn't want unity. They were creating a unity thing. People are there saying I hate everybody. I hate the whole world. You can relate to that. I hate the world too. (*Mike, Age 38*)

People want to be around people like them. Even if they hate everybody, they want to be around other people that hate everybody. It's just the way of the world. (*Rodney, Age 38*)

Some of the necessary aspects of sense of community include belonging, shared interests, emotional connection, a sense of duty, and shared history (Obst & White, 2007). According to those interviewed, the punk subculture provides the context and opportunity for many of these elements of community to take root.

Belonging

For adolescents who feel disconnected from mainstream youth culture, finding like-minded peers and a sense of belonging may be an important aspect of healthy adolescent adjustment and development. Adolescent peer relationships and the sense of belonging they provide often supply the foundation for feeling a part of the larger punk community. Tim and Mike discussed what it was like to go from feeling alienated from mainstream youth culture to finding belonging with like-minded peers.

Tim: So I guess punk was kind of an outlet for us. Another thing we used to connect was we would always get picked on by the popular kids, the football players, basketball players or whatever. So I mean we had that collective thing going as well. Naturally, we would just gravitate toward each other. You know, safety in numbers I guess.

Mike: We were all nerds. So all of the sudden we had this thing and all of a sudden we aren't nerds anymore. In fact, not only are we not nerds, we've got members all over town now and older people, too.

As Tim and Mike suggested, along with belonging comes a sense of empowerment. They indicate that punk provides teens with a preferable alternative identity to that of being considered "othered" or outcast in the mainstream teen culture. This new identity also provides a safe harbor from the negative adolescent peer interactions that go with that outcast status. Moreover, within the punk subculture,

adolescents may find peers who share interests beyond the love of punk music, as Candice and Matt suggested.

Candice: I mean I obviously liked that music better than anything else. I don't know if that defines a whole scene, but I felt more comfortable in it, you know. I just found my niche. So I think that's when I kind of shifted gears into like the kind of people I wanted to hang out with. And so I started having more artist friends and that kind of stuff.

Matt: I guess you just kind of knew from going to those shows and of seeing the same faces enough, you know that you're into the same shit, I guess. But yea, from weird sociology students and – and going to shows downtown, I guess, you learn who at least who your people with the same interests are, or similar enough interests.

Participants reported that, before long they started spending the majority of their free time immersed in the punk scene. For instance, Nick recalled as an adolescent using much of his free time to explore this history of punk music and going to shows.

Nick: So I would spend most of the week nights and stuff just learning and like nerding out about this kind of stuff and on the weekends go to DC and hang out with like actual people that like this kind of stuff. I wasn't like exclusionary or anything, it was just like this is what I really enjoy spending my time on. This is what I'm going to spend my time on. And it was really rewarding.

Many of those interviewed spoke of similar experiences - of a kind of immersion into punk culture in adolescence. Nick's dedication to all things punk was evident when speaking to him. He boasted an intricate knowledge of punk history and would often stray off topic to speak enthusiastically about the discography of an obscure band or discuss how a particular set of albums were pressed and marketed. This kind of dedication can be the basis for connection with others. Young punks exchange information and knowledge about both music and culture and finding others with a whole-hearted level of interest can reportedly be satisfying. Among the younger punks interviewed, Nick was considered extremely knowledgeable and this seemed to give him

some prestige within the scene. He was the individual most suggested by others as someone within the community to whom I should speak.

Shared Interests and Emotional Connection

The “rewards” Nick spoke of reportedly comes from the social connection young punks feel with each other and the sense of belonging that follows. Neal articulated the feeling of belonging, shared connection and comfort he feels within the local scene.

Neal: I enjoy the music scene (in Charlotte). I think since I’ve been here for so long, it’s just a part of me. I know everyone that I see on a regular basis. If I go to a show it’s seeing everybody and catching up with everybody. It’s not like I’m a stranger and I’m trying to make new friends or struggling to fit in or trying to meet somebody, and it’s (a) real comfortable environment.

This sense of having shared interests and values are the cornerstone of punk community. As Tim put it, “It was welcoming. It was very comfortable. It helped that everyone there (had) a shared interest there. You know, when you’re at a pep rally at school, there’s not a shared interest”. Nick and Kelly explained the importance of finding other individuals who share your interests.

Nick: I don’t really subscribe to a bunch of regular world stuff that is more than anything like the need to make more and more money to be happy. And I think that’s a silly thing that doesn’t work for some people. Now when you find other people that also agree it doesn’t work for them, it’s awesome because, you know, you have some sort of brotherhood and fraternity where you’re like – I don’t know, you just feel better about it.

Kelly: It’s a social gathering, you know? And you’re there with a lot of likeminded people who are of similar age and you’re all there for the same reason. But on top of that, it’s not just a party. Like there’s something to be seen and there’s like a spectator event on top of that, too. And so to that extent, it could kind of be like a church service. Like I say, you’re there with a bunch of people that are there in your social circle and have the same views as you, and you’re all there to see and do this thing, which is watch these bands and have fun. And you’re talking about things like music, what you did in the past week, politics.

Although many of those interviewed reported an opportunity to interact with those with shared interests and adolescent socializing in the punk scene, there are also arguably deeper connections. Neal explained one way community connections are formed, through creating social opportunities such as cook outs.

Neal: I always did these monthly parties where we'd have everyone in the music scene or Charlotte scene come over, cook food and just hang out, have bonfires and stuff, which in turn, brought a lot of community basis to the shows. We all (were) just kind of laid back. We went to shows and we all knew who each other were. It wasn't a mystery as to who this guy is in the corner is because he came to the house and we played a huge ass game of hide and go seek and just kind of got to know each other from that.

Beyond the fun times that many youth experience together there is a sense of kinship and duty. Candice recalled how teens took care of each other within the scene in which she grew up.

Candice: it's almost an odd maturity level like you have teenagers kind of providing a community and stuff for kids. Like my boyfriend in high school got kicked out. He lived with pretty much other kids. And he was young to be doing that. So, they all took care of him. They share, they have jobs. If you need money, food, like they all worked at different food places so we would always have food. So you take care of each other that way. You know?

Shared History

Many of those interviewed reported having found punk rock at a crucial time in their adolescence. For these individuals, the social connections among punk community members forged in high school lasted well beyond adolescence. Those interviewed suggested that the shared history and emotional connection with their adolescent peers cemented long lasting friendships and connections to the Charlotte punk community. As Laura put it when she spoke of her feelings about the scene in Charlotte. "Yea, just being home. And then I mean that core group of friends here, you know, that'll never change." Mike articulated this feeling of life-long connection in detail.

Mike: We went through a lot of stuff together at a really crucial time in our lives. Even though maybe we didn't realize it was a crucial time, but it was. We formed a bond in that way. And also we've stayed in touch. Just staying in touch and making an effort to stay in touch was another really important thing as well. We saw a lot of crap and crazy things happen. And I think when you go through these things with people and then you stay in touch, stay in touch with them. That's what did it. Definitely. I feel just as close to people in Charlotte now as I did then. There's no question.

This deep-seated community connection persists as members of the punk scene mature. In Charlotte, many of the older punk community members have started businesses. These are generally housed in the Plaza Midwood section of the city. Plaza Midwood is located about a mile from the center of Charlotte. This formerly disadvantaged neighborhood has experienced resurgence in the last decade. Currently thriving, this neighborhood boasts successful businesses, such as record stores, restaurants, retail shops and bars. Here a punk rock sense of community is infused into the neighborhood as many of the businesses were started by long-standing members of the punk scene. Rodney explained.

Rodney: Here, you have a long-standing community of people that have spent years watching out for one another. You've got tons of restaurants and bars and tattoo shops and stores and there's used book stores and used clothes stores and antique stores and a record store and everything's owner operated. So you're going to meet the owner of a place when you walk in. They're going to cook your food, pour your drink, ring you up at the register.

This sense of camaraderie and community was evident during my time in the field. It was not unusual to witness locals frequenting establishments and staying for an extended period of time to exchange small talk, gossip, and banter with the proprietor, often the individual working behind the counter or bar.

At one point I visited a nearly empty Plaza Midwood bar during a weekday afternoon. The few people there included the bartender and his girlfriend. Another

couple came in with their small dog. The woman told her partner that she was going to work and set up her laptop in a corner booth. While the bartender's girlfriend fussed over the other couple's dog, the two men spoke of local politics and neighborhood safety. From the comfort and familiarity of the foursome, I got the impression that this was not an unusual way for them to pass an afternoon. It is just this sort of causal way of doing business that seemed to infuse the neighborhood with a friendly, small town feel.

Perhaps because it is such a insular scene, there is a certain amount of local pride in Plaza Midwood. This is a product of a Do-It-Yourself attitude and is a key component of the punk rock culture, the concept of which is explored further in the sections that follow. First, punk music and lifestyle is described and defined by those interviewed.

3.6 The Meaning of Punk: Punk Music

The most obnoxious music going regardless of what it sounds like, whatever at the present time is the most obnoxious shit you can get your hands on. That's the punk music. (*Fred, Age 44*)

Those interviewed describe punk music as a unique listening experience. The reasons why this genre of music appeals to those who enjoy it can be hard to pinpoint. When pressed, many of those interviewed cite punk lyrics, which boast angry and/or anti-establishment themes, as well as the raw musicality (i.e., hard driven, unsophisticated, non-melodic sounds) of the songs. As Fred explained, "the lyrics were at least intelligent. I mean as a high school kid, they probably seemed profound to me. You know, they had some lyrics (of substance), definitely catchy parts. And then they were super fast." Mike went on to articulate this notion further.

Mike: You know the energy. There's a lot of energy, you know. There's a lot of feeling. You can relate to it particularly when you're young. And maybe you understand only 25% of the words, but it didn't matter, because those 25% of the words, you're going to be able to relate to something in your life. It's something

about getting screwed over and you're going to pick up words here and there and you're going to say yeah. You know what? That's what I'm going through.

Beyond that, there seems to be a sense that the music is atypical and not easily understood. Being able to wholeheartedly and genuinely digest and embrace punk music is a source of a certain amount of pride. Put another way, as Fred's comments at the beginning of this section suggest, punks like that punk music is not for everyone. They even report some pleasure when it tends to annoy those deemed ordinary or mainstream. Nick explained this idea as follows.

Nick: Punk is not easy listening, you know. And my dad likes (Black) Sabbath and stuff. He's not scared of stuff that's ominous and it's not like what I do is like low-fi or crappy sounding, it's just there's a certain urgency and rawness that most people aren't comfortable with.

Along with the sense that punk music is not for everyone, it is understood by those interviewed that the punk lifestyle is also not necessarily what most mainstream people would choose. For adult punks, punk reflects a certain cultural aesthetic that goes beyond youthful rebellion and fleeting fashion trends.

3.7 The Meaning of Punk: Punk Values

For me punk was more about how you carried yourself and your attitudes toward establishment. I'm not necessarily anti-establishment or anything like that, but I do tend to be a little more cynical when it comes to those types of things culturally. To this day there are things that I tend to avoid that are very popular in mainstream. Not necessarily because I dislike it but because I take a lot of pleasure in saying that I'm just not into it. (*Tim, Age 38*)

In some ways punk culture can be understood in terms of what it is not.

Participants described punk values as being in opposition to perceived mainstream values such as consumerism, social norms, and mainstream politics. This is not to suggest that punk is devoid of its own cultural identity – punk has a unique value system, fueled by a

do-it-yourself (DIY) ethic, in which authenticity and hard work are held in high regard. Key elements of what it means to be punk are explored in the sections that follow.

Antiestablishmentarianism

Anti-consumerism, according to those interviewed, essentially comprises a general disregard for what is perceived as the dominant American capitalist system. Anti-consumerism is marked by an aversion to the merchandise that symbolizes mainstream success. Items coveted in the mainstream culture such as large homes, new cars, expensive clothing, and other fad products are regarded as unnecessary. Advertising for these products is viewed as selling a flawed lifestyle, and those who actively pursue and embrace a capitalist way of life are seen as inherently shallow and inauthentic. Nick explained these ideas.

Nick: You just don't buy into like total consumerism. You sort of do inside your little bubble world and consume the shit out of records or whatever, but you know that that's going directly to who it's going to. You don't really give a shit about a grander scale how economics works and how many things you are feeding. Most of the people (in the punk scene) probably don't go to Outback Steak House. You don't have the need to do what you see on a commercial.

The rejection of mainstream values and commercial merchandise is considered an indication of individuality and authenticity, which are both important aspects of punk culture. Also, as with punk music there is some amount of pleasure taken in differentiating oneself from the mainstream. Below, Fred expressed both his disdain for indicators of mainstream success and his feelings about how others might react to his way of life.

Fred: I don't really aspire to drive a particular vehicle, or buy nice clothing. Status quo stuff, I guess. It doesn't make any difference to me whether I make a lot of money, whether I have a career. It's individualism, you know? But even crass is individualism. Being yourself to the point of aggravating other people with it, you know, just turning your nose up at quote unquote normal folks.

Anti-consumerism is just one aspect of the dominant culture that punks reject. Many social norms embraced in the mainstream are viewed with skepticism. Social norms such as marriage, traditional career paths, and conventional wisdom about what constitutes appropriate recreation and entertainment are viewed with skepticism. Those in the mainstream are described as “lemmings” or “mindless followers”, as Rodney explained. “(Most people) don’t have original thoughts, and don’t have any ingenuity to come up with a plan of action versus just going to work, hitting 40 hours a week and then going wherever somebody tells them to go.” Dan agreed. He describes the way he views many of the mainstream denizens he encounters.

Dan: I work at a restaurant and see people that come in that kind of just seem like just bogged down. They work crappy jobs, and do all this stuff. And like it’s kind of like what they’re told to do and I mean, that’s kind of what is expected, like college, and all this stuff, and it’s kind of like oh, like you’re supposed to graduate college, go do this, go get married, and have kids, make my parents’ grandkids – like work at a job ‘till I’m 57, or like 60, and then retire.

This disdain for people deemed “ordinary” or mainstream was evident in many of the conversations with those interviewed. There is a definite preference for those who are perceived to think “outside the box”, as Rodney suggested.

Rodney: You have people that want to walk in the lines. And you’ve got people that don’t want to walk in the lines. You know, like people that want to be expressive, and be allowed to be themselves.

When asked to explain what he meant by “people who are allowed to be themselves”

Rodney stated, “They are people with a liberal attitude, and I don’t mean that in a democratic or republican kind of way. It’s just that desire to have freedom and be with people that allow you to be free.”

As Rodney’s comments suggest, punk attitudes toward politics tend to be liberal, but not necessarily in the traditionally democratic over republican sense. Most of those

interviewed expressed a distrust of politicians, the American political system, and the traditionally prominent political parties. As one case in point, Kelly spoke in detail of how he became disillusioned with politics.

Kelly: (I thought) this Obama guy might actually hold it down and do right by people and not just run the United States like via corporations. And so I went out and I actually volunteered for his campaign and I registered people to vote and stuff like that. And by the time it was a year in, I was just kind of already fed up. He made it pretty obvious that he was just going to be like Bill Clinton 2.0 where, you know, yeah, he's a Democrat. He's not as bad as George Bush, but still puts corporations ahead of public interest. And so like around that time, I kind of decided I was going to stop voting.

Others expressed what they felt was a certain amount of skepticism regarding mainstream politics. This was expressed as a questioning of the status quo. Fred explained.

Fred: And the Government's all wrong all that stuff. A lot of these alternative ways of thinking have really stuck with me because I've just learned to question what's going on around me.

However, those interviewed expressed these values more broadly, not just centered on government. For example, they reported valuing free thinking, choice, and alternative views and lifestyles. For instance, in the statement below, Tim echoed Fred's sentiments about politics, but also went on to describe his views on social issues such as sexual preference and religion.

Tim: I'm certainly more cynical when it comes to socio and political events. I think that I have a healthier attitude towards minority groups. Not necessarily just race or anything, but I certainly like to think that I'm much more accepting of alternate lifestyles – gays, transgenders - that sort of thing. And also I think that I'm a little more accepting of alternate religious views.

Tim's views are evidently shared with many other adult punks and former punks within the local Charlotte scene. During my time observing the scene, I noticed many individuals who might not be readily accepted or embraced in the mainstream culture. For instance, at events in the Plaza Midwood neighborhood it is not uncommon to see

men in full drag and make-up or two women holding hands. This acceptance of what Tim terms “alternate lifestyles”, may in part explain why punk scenes tend to boast a noticeable diversity. To the uninitiated, the Charlotte punk scene might feel like a collective of grown up “art queers”, band geeks, and theatre kids from high school. Given that all of those interviewed reported not fitting in with their mainstream peers in adolescence, punk communities may reflect a more inclusive community in which all those who felt “othered” are welcome. Further, punks, as a rule, accept a certain amount of diversity in their subculture because individuality is something they hold in high regard.

Individuality

Those interviewed expressed a deep respect for individuality. As Tim suggested, individuality is considered the antithesis of “normal” or “mainstream”.

Tim: I think that’s an aspect of what punk, whatever that means, is. It’s more a matter of not blindly following your peers and actually picking and choosing what you think is important, the aspects of your life. I think that’s a better reflection of what punk is as opposed to like, you know, the music or the clothes that you wear.

Punk subculture members appreciate the freedom that comes with not having to conform to mainstream rules of conduct. Neal elaborated below.

Neal: (Punk) is a lot more laid back, I guess. There’s no uniform to it. Like you can come in as you are. You don’t need to go shower, you don’t need to shave your beard or cut your hair. It’s more free spirited. You can always do as you will, be as you are.

Those interviewed expressed a deep respect for people they view as possessing individualistic qualities. Nick explains, “The people that you meet through this kind of stuff - I think you find a lot of people that are more or less level headed, independent,

laid back in the right ways.” “The right [kind of] ways” reflects an acceptance of others and a willingness to be yourself. Candice elaborated in the statement below.

Candice: I think that’s something with the punks. It was so inclusive. As long as you weren’t a total idiot or hurting people or something, you were accepted. But back then (when I was a teenager), it’s like everybody had their own individuality so you were almost applauded more for that than you were (for conforming).

Along with valuing individuality, punks reportedly embrace the concept of hard work.

This may be attributable, at least in part, to the working class roots of the movement as well as DIY which, when embraced as a lifestyle, necessitates a sound work ethic and ingenuity.

Hard Work

If you’re involved in punk at a young age, you learn a work ethic, especially being in a band or you’re booking shows, you learn how to organize. You learn how to fend for yourself and work to do something. It’s definitely something where if you’re in high school and you’re in a band or you’re helping book a friend’s band, you don’t expect it to happen on its own. You know you need to do it. You know that you have to do it to make it happen and it’s instilled with a work ethic at a younger age because of that. (*Matt, Age 25*)

The punk subculture has working class roots that can be traced back to the start of the movement in the United Kingdom. The influence of this cultural heritage is evident in the Charlotte punk scene. Many of those interviewed spoke of the importance of possessing a personal work ethic and how this contributed to their success not only in finding and keeping employment, but, in their creative endeavors and contribution to the scene. As evidenced by Matt’s comments above, those interviewed felt their approach toward work was directly attributable to their punk roots. As Matt suggested, by utilizing a DIY work ethic a young person can quickly appreciate the benefits and results of their efforts. Many interviewees also attributed their work ethic to their upbringing, as Neal explained.

Neal: I've always been taught to work and it's always been an ethic that I work - especially working since I was 15. I always knew if I wanted to keep a job or excel in a job placement I'd have to work to get there. I can't slack off or goof off. I need to earn the right to work.

Some of those individuals interviewed spoke of the satisfaction of working hard to achieve success. Rodney discussed at length the challenges of starting a second business - an art gallery. In the statement below he expressed not only a sense of fulfillment in having achieved his goal, but a pride in being able to do something he deems meaningful and important through the direct efforts of his talent as a tattoo artist.

Rodney: It's something that didn't come quick, and it didn't come easy. But it did come, you know? With all the stresses that've been created by trying to get this other business off the ground, I have the consolation that the thing that I have to do to make the money to pay for that is the thing that I love.

In the Charlotte punk scene, younger members express a sense of respect for those older members of the scene who were able to achieve success while sticking to the values of their punk roots. Neil spoke of his former boss, a restaurant owner.

Neal: (My old boss) did all those jobs, and then saved up and opened a restaurant, and does really well. He employs all punks. And so it's like ultimately your mom may not like the fact that you work in a restaurant and you're 27 or whatever, but you do, and you like who you work for, and you know what's coming out of it, and you know that they treat you better, and pay you better, than most other restaurants would because the guy's on the level and not out to make a ton of money off of you.

The tendency of punks to favor other punks contributes to the sense of community evident in the local Charlotte scene. Throughout the interviews, those cited as people to admire were those individuals who, despite having achieved some success, adhered to punk principles, treated others with respect, and above all else were devoid of the perceived pretensions of mainstream life. For members of a subculture that is often

associated with flamboyant and unusual styles of dress, those interviewed consistently conveyed a strong value for high personal integrity, or substance over style.

Substance Over Style

Punk style was reported to be a fleeting trend in most individual's lives, a style of dress adopted in high school and generally shorn by the time they reached college age. Although many of the adults interviewed could be identified as non-mainstream by a large number of visible tattoos or piercings or by more subtle fashion clues such as a pair of skate shoes or Doc Martins (a brand of British work shoe universally favored by punks), none of those interviewed (whether younger or older) appeared to be traditionally "punk". This stylistic metamorphosis is generally described as a normative process attributed to growing up. Mike described his personal transformation from kid punk to adult punk, which involved one simple step, which he demonstrated for me.

Mike: Well, for me it was pretty easy, because I never went the piercing route. I never did the punk piercing and I never did the tattoos. So, it was pretty easy. For me it was the hair and clothing thing. And really the number one thing, I'll show you right now. Hold on. There ya go. No longer wearing this (puts on black studded leather jacket). Taking this jacket off and not putting it on anymore, was really all that did it, basically. That was it. But really I didn't do much else. I didn't have much other of a look than that jacket

In the same vein, Nick explained how he can spot someone who is truly punk.

Nick: For example, people dress really punk for a little while but that's less important. What's important is if you can tell when people get something out of it. Like you can tell when they're watching a band if they're getting something out of it. It's hard to feign that. I think you can see it in people's eyes, people stand real close. Maybe they stand far away but you can see they're like entranced. They're not drinking beers outside while bands are playing.

As evidenced by Nick's comments, according to Charlotte punk members, punk is an attitude not a fashion statement and, although fashion can be an overt means of

expression in youth, it inevitably gets left behind in favor of more substantive means of expression. Tim explained further in the statements that follow.

Tim: I think the fashion aspect of it just sort of came with it. You know, if you're going to listen to that kind of music, you're probably not going to be wearing Sebago's and a polo shirt, or whatever. I mean in retrospect, nowadays, it's like, well you know, punk is an attitude. It's not really a look.

It seems to be that a person's real worth and clout in the scene lies in who an individual is and how they conduct him- or herself, not what he or she appears to be. This notion may be best exemplified in the ways in which those I interviewed described the other individuals with whom they recommended I speak.

Consistently, the individuals most suggested as potential participants were those who were seen as successful but who were considered to possess some measure of personal integrity. They were the individuals viewed as most inherently punk. Rodney, easily one of the most recognized members of the local scene, was described as a fair businessman and boss, a talented artist, a hard worker, and a genuinely nice guy. Nick, who is involved in booking many of the bands that play in Charlotte and who plays in several bands himself, was revered for his musical knowledge, his talent, and his tireless work to improve the local scene. It bears mention that neither of these men appear to be classically punk. Rodney although heavily tattooed, otherwise appears clean cut. Nick resembles a somewhat disheveled college student, the type of which is ubiquitous on any American college campus. The concept of substance over style is conveyed below by Fred, in characteristically tongue and cheek manner.

Fred: So, I guess I'm still pretty punk even though I don't have any spiky hairdos or anything. I still have a cheap guitar and a really loud amplifier. So I think for a middle-aged white American, I'm pretty punk.

In fact, members of the Charlotte punk community police the scene. Simply adhering to a style of dress does not automatically gain one access to the local scene. Although the community seems to be welcoming to many diverse peoples, this close-knit scene does not tolerate those deemed to be “jerks”, no matter what their appearance. Or as Laura puts it, “You can look the part, whatever that part may be, but if you are a piece of shit, it’ll get figured out and that’s when the unwelcome wagon comes up, you know.” Like any other social group, the Charlotte punk community has both positive and negative aspects, many of which are explored in greater detail in the section that follows.

3.8 The Charlotte Punk Community: A Tale of Two Scenes

There are just good people in (the Charlotte scene). I feel like everyone that’s involved in the scene here, or most people at least, are pretty genuine people. Like they care about what they’re doing. (*Kelly, Age 25*)

Younger and older punk subculture members were very similar in terms of how they reportedly came to be members of the punk community and in their expressions of kinship and loyalty to the Charlotte punk scene. However, there were differences between the two age groups in what they cited as community. Many older participants spoke of community in terms of the Plaza Midwood neighborhood, the businesses and venues located there and the individuals who frequent them. Although younger participants acknowledged the influence of the Plaza Midwood neighborhood and the older generation of punks, they were more likely to cite a small group of friends as their community and speak in terms of house parties and supporting local music as activities important to their scene.

From Ghetto to Punk: The Plaza Midwood Neighborhood

Older members of the Charlotte punk scene discussed what it was like to become part of the scene at its beginning. Mike remembered it as being a somewhat difficult scene to navigate in the context of the larger social climate in Charlotte at the time, and Tim recalled the punk scene as sparse with few places for youth to gather.

Mike: Punk was really old at the time but it wasn't old in Charlotte. In Charlotte it was brand new, and no one had really seen that. So you got Mohawks and things, and people don't really know what to think about that. A lot of insults and a lot of trouble. People were just not understanding, and maybe we didn't understand what we were doing either but it was actually quite difficult I think now. It didn't seem so difficult at the time because that is what you want to do.

Tim: When I was growing up, there were very few places where you would go and hang out. Obviously we weren't old enough to go to the bars. We weren't old enough to drink. But, there were the clubs and the places that would have the live music. We would go and hang out whether or not we had enough money to get in. We'd hang out in the parking lot if we couldn't get in.

In time, the scene became more cohesive. As scene members matured, several people started businesses in the Plaza Midwood area. As Laura recalls, "A lot of the people that hang out in that neighborhood have known each other for years. So that's like the core of it, you know - your friends opening businesses." However, that area of Charlotte was not known as the most inviting or safest neighborhood in Charlotte, as Rodney remembered.

Rodney: So you get a community like this where when I came here 12 years ago, it was it was a sketchy assed community. Well, not community but it was a sketchy assed neighborhood. Lots of pawnshops, and tattoo shops, and a couple of little restaurant and bars. It had nowhere near what it has now. And a lot of people didn't see it as the safest place.

Those new to the neighborhood made a concerted effort to improve this formerly troubled area. Rodney told a story of how some individuals actively sought to make Plaza Neighborhood a safer environment for young people to gather.

Rodney: (A friend of mine) took it upon himself to start walking the neighborhood in hopes of making sure that people weren't going to get abused, and beat up, and robbed, and all that. And it was something that he needed to do because he had a business here. So while there's a monetary kickback to his making the place safer, that wasn't the key. That was a side note. Like it will grow up our business, of course, but beyond that, it's gonna help our friends, you know? Like this little girl that comes in here and eats a Dixie chicken sandwich doesn't need to walk to her car and get, you know, assaulted, or robbed, or raped. She needs to be able to get to her car safe. And if she can get to her car safe, then we can all get to our car safe. And our cars will be safe, you know?

As Rodney went on to say, "It's only the way it is because people give a shit. Everybody here is invested in the community. I'm very proud to be a part of it." The egalitarianism and local pride reflected in Rodney's statement is echoed by Laura who referred to the Plaza Midwood neighborhood and the businesses located there as her "home away from home."

As captured by the statements above, older members of the Charlotte punk scene tend to consider the Plaza Midwood Neighborhood the epicenter of the punk community. Younger members of the Charlotte punk subculture speak of the Charlotte scene with much the same enthusiasm and pride, but their scene seems to be centered on a small insular group of friends rather than a geographic location. This is not to say there was not any crossover or consensus between the two age groups. Most of those interviewed would agree that there are punk venues of note in Charlotte that are not located in the Plaza Midwood neighborhood. For example, The Milestone, a small bar located in a residential neighborhood on the West side of Charlotte, far from Plaza Midwood, was mentioned by nearly all those interviewed as a place of significance. Laura recalled finding The Milestone after high school. "So then I come across The Milestone once I hit my 20s - I'm like, where were you all my life?" Dan, who is from the outskirts of the city, remembers The Milestone as the first punk venue he went to in Charlotte.

Dan: And then (my friends and I) drifted over to more punk music. When a lot of us moved down here, we were all I guess 18 and 19 at the time, we started going to The Milestone more, and I guess we started meeting the (punk) people around (Charlotte).

With the exception of The Milestone, which most members of the Charlotte punk community can agree upon, younger punk members are more likely to associate the punk scene with small scale punk concerts known as house shows and people not directly related to Plaza Midwood.

Bringing Punk Home: House Shows

For younger interviewees, the house show is the epicenter of the punk social scene. House shows are exactly what the name suggests: they are small-scale, live punk concerts given in homes instead of music venues. All the younger punks interviewed favored attending house shows over going to see music in more traditional performance spaces, as Dan, explained. “My mentality of having house shows is do-it-yourself (and) counter culture. That’s what I consider punk now.” Matt went on to describe the concept of the house show.

Matt: House shows are bands coming to play at a non-legal venue which is a home or a practice space or any kind of warehouse space. The house show’s a little different than a show at like The Milestone or at a music venue ‘cause it’s really do it yourself. You supply the place and people come.

In other words, cutting out the venue, the booker and other people associated with traditional music tours is viewed as more authentically punk in the younger punk scene in Charlotte. Matt explained further why he favors house shows, “(Having house shows) is always nicer it seems. Not always more profitable and not always more clean as maybe you (would) like it, but it’s always more fun.” Hunter agreed, “Well usually I most often

prefer a house or a basement setting. (Because) it's something to do with being on the same level (as the bands playing). It's like there's no boundaries, barriers."

Dan and Kelly echoed these sentiments:

Dan: You kind of just have fun and it always just seems more intimate of a setting than like going to the venue and paying \$7 to stand around and pay \$4 for a drink every time you want one. It always just seems more fun. Usually the band's are local and maybe an out of town band. A few weeks ago there was a great show at this real crappy basement, and it was hot, and sweaty, but it was just the most fun that I've had in a while at a show. The energy's just way different 'cause people are way more off guard and tend to get way more into the music than if you're at a big venue. It just seems a little more raw and energetic. House shows are way more fun.

Kelly: You're in this tiny cramped basement with 30 other people jumping around and loud music. It's playing so loud you can't think and you just go crazy. I would say that you almost leave more with an impression than with like concrete memories.

Nick suggested that one of the main reasons he likes living in Charlotte and being a member of the local punk scene is the frequency of house shows in the area.

Nick: More and more people just come out of the woodwork. The reason why I really like living here now. (My friend's) house is perfect for shows. It looks just like the basement from 'Decline of Western Civilization'. And he lives off Fourth Street so the cops don't care as long as he's not dealing drugs there.

There are drawbacks to a small DIY music scene as Nick suggested. "This is a giant city but the amount of people that want to do something that's sort of a subculture is actually kind of small." In turn, when people move away from Charlotte, it can leave a gap in the social order. Kelly elaborated. "There's a lot of talk about people moving from Charlotte to other places in the next year or so. If some of these people move, it'll be a real drag, because they do a lot here." Or as Dan put it, if one person who serves multiple roles within the scene moves away it can cause issues.

Dan: I think people've kind of learned their lessons about like stretching yourself too thin with too many bands, or having the same members in every band. Like 'cause if one of those people move, it's like two bands are pretty much screwed.

Ultimately, the ebb and flow of the Charlotte punk scene may be part of the natural order of things. It might also explain why younger and older punks appear to be members of separate scenes, or as Fred mused:

Fred: I don't think Charlotte has changed that much as I've grown out of it, you know. It's just, there's always a line of people who are a little bit younger coming in as the older people are phased out. And that might be necessitated by situation (or) by choice.

Separate but Equal Scenes

Although Fred's statement suggests that it is natural for younger punks to take over as older punks become less active in the local scene, Nick attributed the separation to global underground music trends of the 1990s.

Nick: It's because so much horrible music was made in the 90s. You know, you either got into like country kind of stuff which has its merits, or you went down this weird straight-edge metal path that was huge in the 90s, and not fun. It's cancerous. There's nothing positive that comes out of (that kind of music). Most of the people that you'd meet at those shows are jerks, and out to punch people and stuff. That's not fun. That's not cool. That's nothing I want to be a part of. I think in other cities, like even in Raleigh, that generation gap was there. Nothing happened in most places in the United States punk wise worth mentioning.

Candice, however, attributed the differences between the two generations to the socio-political climate "The younger generation now is not politically charged. You know, mid 80s, early 90s was so political. And now, forget about it." Whatever the reason for the gap in the scene between age groups, there does not seem to be any real animosity between the two groups. Dan explained below.

Dan: I get the feeling that the older generation feels that there's more of an animosity than the younger generation feel. And the older generation of people feels like they've maybe been snubbed or something. But, you know, it's one of those things where it's just they're doing their thing and people my age are doing

ours. I don't think anyone's necessarily leaving anybody out. I mean, you go to some of these house shows and there's going to be a bunch of silly young kids acting wild as hell and I can certainly imagine that if you're in your mid to late 30s, you probably don't want to be around that shit. I wouldn't blame you at all, you know?

It should be noted that none of the older punk members interviewed spoke of having negative feelings toward younger punks. In fact, most did not broach the subject when asked about changes in the Charlotte punk scene over time. Nick and Neal suggested that when older punks do attend house shows, it is not a cause for concern.

Nick: I don't think it really changes anything. It doesn't even process. (When an older punk comes to a show), he's just somebody I know. You know, Punk Rock Wednesday is really cool, and that's how I've met a lot of the older people. I think for me, after I was going to shows for like six months, age doesn't process.

Neal: I mean (some of the older guys) are still around. It's definitely not like the majority. It's definitely a minority. But whoever is still around is definitely still here. It's not like they're going to be going anywhere.

Meanwhile, older punk subculture members seem to take a rather philosophical view of their role in the punk scene. Mike suggested that it is quite all right to continue to attend punk shows as one ages.

Mike: You can have someone my age and be into it. In Charlotte in the late 80s you didn't go to the show and have anyone there over the age of 23 or 24. Those were the oldest people at the show. You don't really stop, because punk allows you to get old too. Go to a show now, there's old people at shows. You can be old and be a punk rocker. It's okay. 1988, you couldn't do that. It wouldn't have made any sense. It would have been stupid. Now it's okay.

So it would seem that older punks are more or less welcome in the younger punks' scene. However, despite reportedly embracing individuality and diversity, there are reportedly elements of the Charlotte punk scene that are viewed by some as exclusive or unwelcoming

Scene Exclusivity

Candice, who moved to Charlotte as a young adult, recalled what it was like when she first arrived in Charlotte.

Candice: (When) I just moved here I remember trying to make friends. You don't know anybody, and I would go to shows and if people don't know you, they're not going to talk to you necessarily, at least here. That was my experience here.

Some of those interviewed do acknowledge a certain sense of arrogance or exclusivity within the local scene, as Kelly explained.

Kelly: Sometimes I've gotten a vibe that there's definitely a difference between people that are in bands and people that aren't in bands. It's not anything serious. It's natural, honestly, I think, because if you're in a band with someone, you're traveling with them. You're spending time practicing with them maybe almost as much as like three or four times a week. You just spend a lot of time. You become very close, whereas if it's someone outside of this group of people that you play music with, you see them far less frequently. You don't have as tight of a bond. Not to say that I don't mean in any way to insinuate sort of looking down upon it or elitism at all. I don't find that to be the case at all. But, I think it's entirely natural that that would be the case.

Both younger and older members of the Charlotte punk scene are aware that there is a general sense that the local scenes may seem exclusive to people not already established socially within the community. Laura suggested that this reputation comes from established scene members protecting the scene from negative outside influences.

Laura: A lot of people are 'ya'll are just exclusive'. Like, 'oh you're not part of this neighborhood.' No, we're not. We're not. Nobody's exclusive. (It's not like) if you're an outsider, 'you get out of here', you know. But if you come in with an attitude, it's like, 'oh. I've got your shit right here'.

Dan struggled somewhat when he attempted to explain the tendency for people to be less than welcoming to new individuals. He attributed this tendency not to a "pecking order" but to being in such a tight knit community and wanting to protect what had developed.

Dan: It makes it a little more harder for people to be included when you kind of like are a little skeptical dealing with other people I guess, or like – not dealing... it's not (exclusive) on purpose I don't think. It's just kind of like out of habit. Like if you don't really think about it all the time, of being like, 'oh yea, I

mean the 30 people I know that are at the show, that's a good turnout like for a show.' I know it used to be like that a lot. Like new people came to shows and (people would) be like who are you? What are you doing here?

Nick suggested that any exclusivity within the Charlotte scene may be due to the urban sprawl of a modern Southern city. He said, "There's no exclusion here. It's just there hasn't been a chance to interact because the city's so spread out and closed off."

In my time in the field I did not witness overt signs of exclusivity within the Charlotte punk scene. However, I did sense a more subtle, less than friendly attitude at some of the punk music venues in Charlotte. If I accompanied one of my participants – all established members of the scene – to a show, I was nearly universally welcome. Their friends and the people working at the venue were generally friendly. However, when I arrived at a venue myself to meet an informant, I was not as readily welcome. This changed subtly as word spread about my project and as I became better known within the scene. It seemed that as I spoke with more people and more people grew to know me, the more welcoming the scene became.

My experience in the field suggests that protection of the community rather than ill-intent may be at the center of any perceived exclusivity within the scene. Beyond that characteristic, participants also reported other negative factors associated with the Charlotte punk scene.

3.9 The Pitfalls of Punk

So my parents started to see that having a tattoo or stretching your ears out didn't automatically make you rebellious or make you a bad person. You didn't start doing drugs automatically. (*Neal, Age 24*)

Although members cite many benefits to being affiliated with the punk community, not all aspects of the adolescent punk subculture are reported as positive. As

Neal suggested above, for those interviewed, negative aspects of punk do not seem to have long lasting effects nor do they outweigh the advantages of community and membership. However, nearly every interviewee cited some exceptions. The three negative aspects of the punk subculture noted most frequently by those interviewed were drug use, violence, and family conflict.

Substance Use

Given punk's tendency to disregard mainstream rules and norms, it is perhaps unsurprising that there is generally thought to be a certain amount of adolescent drug use associated with the subculture. Whether or not there is more substance use in the punk subculture relative to other adolescent groups remains to be seen. For most participants in this study, drug and alcohol use were cited as recreational or, as Matt put it, as a "byproduct of youth". He explained:

Matt: I think drugs might be a byproduct of youth and not really knowing what you want to feel like and being fucked up feels pretty good and so you just end up doing that as much as you can.

Despite Matt's suggestion that recreational drug use is mostly harmless, several participants admitted to some fairly serious drug use in their late teens and early twenties, as Mike revealed.

Mike: It took me a few months to get into drugs, though. I didn't get into drugs immediately. It took probably until the spring of '93 to start really into the heavy cocaine use. That was it, though. I lived in the lower east side, right in the middle of everything. And it was just so easy to get drugs. It was just so unbelievably easy that I started doing a lot of drugs and smoking a lot of weed.

Of those interviewed, one interviewee casually smoked marijuana during the interview. This was the only blatant incident of drug use I witnessed in the field. Most participants did not specifically talk about their own personal history of drug use, and those who did

suggested that drug use was not a significant part of their current lives. In fact, several participants went out of their way to mention that they did not do drugs, and at least one of those interviewed identified as “straight edge” in youth. There were no obvious signs of drug paraphernalia at any of the participant’s homes I visited. At gatherings of both younger and older punks, the recreational drug of choice appeared to be alcohol, although it was rare to witness evidence of extreme intoxication such as people slurring words or evidencing impairment of motor skills (e.g., struggling to walk). Although there seemed to be plenty of alcohol available, the atmosphere at most social events was akin to a backyard barbeque. Despite this, nearly every individual interviewed recalled at least one cautionary tale or a friend lost to substance use.

Tim: There was a time in my life where there were a lot of friends just dropping off, you know, for one reason or another. It was like, one was driving drunk, one was, trying to clean up but couldn’t, one overdosed or something like that. For a while there it was just one friend after another. At the time, most of us just thought, that’s what happens when you’re a punk rocker or whatever, you know? You’re just going to lose some friends to some lousy decisions and that was just something that we kind of accepted at the time. Nowadays I don’t accept that at all. I think that the decisions you make aren’t a result of any attitude. It’s just poor decision making on an individual.

Tim’s statement captures the broader sentiment conveyed by those interviewed. With the wisdom of age, the death of an old friend due to drugs is viewed in terms of a personal struggle as opposed to a product of the punk life style. In fact, as might be expected of a scene comprised of anti-mainstream members, most of those interviewed expressed what might be considered liberal views of recreational drug use (along with many other liberal political ideologies); however, no one cited drug use as a main reason for getting involved with or staying in the punk scene. It must be noted that those interviewed went on to live productive, albeit non-traditional, lives post-adolescence. The

reasons for choosing punk and the course of one's life in the scene may have differed dramatically for those punk members Tim lost due to "lousy decisions". Unfortunately, many of those same individuals were no longer available for participation in this study.

Violence

It was probably just dangerous in general. I mean, I figure you could probably have gotten injured greatly at a show - which I never saw too much injuries, but it could have happened. (*Mike, Age 38*)

One of the most often cited hazards of the punk scene is the threat of violence.

Experiences with violence within the scene range from the comparatively innocuous dancing at live music shows known as "slamming" or "moshing", where injury is seen as a byproduct of a cathartic group experience, to the serious threat of severe harm from both those inside and outside the scene. Live music shows are a central part of the punk community, and much of what takes place both on stage and off might seem like outright chaos to the casual observer. To young punks, however, the form of controlled violent dancing is an integral part of the experience. The group reaction to the music and the resulting injury is often described in euphoric terms, as Kelly and Nick explained.

Kelly: It's real easy to get a couple of bumps and bruises at a show and be sore the next day. I kind of dig that, though. It kind of just reminds you that you're alive. It's so easy to just kind of sleepwalk through life these days, you know? When you wake up the next day and you roll over on one side and that side's really sore or you like bump into your door or something and remember that your whole forearm is bruises. It kind of reminds you that you're here, you know? Take advantage of it. I don't want to sit here and say something like I like pain or something, but it serves its purpose. I don't necessarily desire to inflict pain on anybody either. That's kind of a little bit much. But I'm not going to complain about getting beat up at the show, a little blood, a little bruise.

Nick: It just really shows how raw it is, you know, and – and that's like the violence. I don't think it's anything like you're terrified of getting beat up by skinheads. I've been to shows like that. That's not fun. I don't want to be a part of that. But when you're like 'I don't really know what to expect about this' and just like the music is really raw, but there's physical rawness too. Watching

somebody singing that moves around and puts it all into it is way more interesting than somebody who just stands around a mic stand.

As participants point out, those involved in moshing at live punk shows do so voluntarily and with full knowledge of the potential consequences involved. I attended several shows during my time in the field and, although it was not unusual to witness mild injury such as a scraped limb, the people taking part did not seem overtly aggressive or menacing. In fact, they all seemed to be enjoying themselves, and I often witnessed small kindnesses such as people helping up individuals who had fallen down.

The Charlotte punk members interviewed did not describe most shows as violent. However, there were some notable exceptions. Interlopers or those outside the scene were cited as sources of violence both at live shows and in the community in general. Neal recalled about shows he attended in high school, “We always had problems with NTI (Nascar Tech) kids who would come, start fights ‘cause they thought it was funny, and they were like jock high school kids who would come in and try to start stuff.” Mike also recalled his high school years when the threat of violence came from those outside the punk scene.

Mike: Well it was mostly at school you got a hard time and it seemed like there were adults that were giving us a hard time too but everybody at that age looks old. Everybody looks old. So the people that were screaming out their pickup trucks, you know, yelling, I considered them to be adults but maybe they were in their early 20s. They were probably not that old really. But it seemed like we were getting it from every end.

There was a very real element of danger from within the punk scene as well. For those interviewed, this threat came in the form members of a subscene of punks known as skinheads. The tenets of skinhead punkdom are difficult to define, as the term has different and somewhat conflicting meanings within punk culture. Members of the

mainstream culture might recall skinheads solely as a group of punks who adhere to a Nazi-like, white supremacist ideology. By participants' accounts, these types of skinheads had some presence in Charlotte in the 1980s. However, the term "skinhead" has evolved over the years, so that individuals who are non-violent and non-racist may use the term to describe themselves.

Several individuals interviewed, both in the younger and older groups, described themselves as having been a skinhead or having associated with skinheads in their youth. They qualified these social connections by stating that these skinheads were "straight edge" (i.e., individuals who do not drink, do drugs, or eat meat) or SHARP (i.e., skinheads against racial prejudice). Whether adhering to a racist ideology or not, skinhead punk subculture seems to be more likely to embrace wholeheartedly punk's more violent tendencies. In the excerpt below, Candice recalled attending a skinhead show while still a teenager.

Candice: I remember (the singer in the band) swinging an ax around and then we couldn't get out of the club. So it was scary in that sense. The bands were kind of off the charts. But the people too. I mean they would fight too. I mean there would be fights, so you don't want to look at anybody wrong.

For some, the threat of violence is real and personal. Tim, who is of Filipino descent, recalled in vivid detail his experience with skinhead punks during his adolescence.

Tim: It was a difficult time for me because I'm not white. I got beat up by skinheads. I used to get a lot of things thrown at me, spat on at shows, at parties. I'd get threatened all the time. I got chased away from several parties because there were, more skinheads there than there were (people I knew). They were bigger than us too so they were bouncers at the club. So, we got out of line, we'd get thrown out on our ear. There was another friend of ours that we hung out with who was black. So, we were always hanging out or whatever and whenever we would see something weird, if it made us uncomfortable, we'd just hang out in the parking lot. And if something got really hairy, we'd take off. We had to really

watch ourselves because we weren't numerous enough to defend ourselves very well. It was much easier to live to see another day than wake up in a puddle of blood again.

Interestingly, Tim seems to have come to a certain amount of understanding about these interactions, as he went on to explain in detail.

Tim: A lot of those people who were skinheads back then they're not skinheads any more. I'd have to say I'm actually friends with some of them. One of the ones who assaulted me, I saw him a couple of nights ago. I gave him a little bro hug That's always been one of my big things is I don't tend to hold grudges and I know that if people really want to change that they can. That and the fact that I know that on some level they were just searching for an identity, the same as I was. Now it happened to be an identity that didn't mesh too well with who I am obviously, but if they're will to admit that they were just being stupid and if they are man enough to apologize to me, I'm man enough to accept the apology.

Family Conflict

My parents would call me rebellious but compared to a lot of my friends, not at all. I mean I grew up in private school, you know, like going out with people from a different school was rebellious. (*Laura, Age 33*)

As Laura's comments suggest, choosing a punk lifestyle is often in direct opposition to family expectations and norms. Participants reported everything from relatively minor altercations and general disagreement, as Laura related above, to outright dissention between family members and conflict with parents. It should be noted however, that almost all of those interviewed reported close ties with at least one family member, and some suggested a supportive relationship with parents throughout their lives.

Much punk-parental conflict appears to grow out of disagreements over one's expected life course, as Tim recalled, "(My father) wanted me to go for something related to science and math or something practical. So, of course, I decided to get an English degree. That was my way of rebelling against him, I guess." These kinds of conflicts are

not unique to punk youth. Other sources of disagreement, such as choice of friends, style of dress, and desire to get tattoos are arguably more serious and are more easily attributed to a punk lifestyle. Several participants reported some fairly serious teen rebellion in the form of running away. Fred framed one of his regular weekend activities while still in high school as running away from home on a weekly basis. As he explained it, he would leave school to go to an older friend's apartment in the city.

Fred: Every Friday I would run away from home and I would go to (my friend's) apartment. And then every Sunday night, I would call my mom and say I'm ready to come home. And she'd come get me. Since I was running away, there was nothing they could do about it because I was running away. They couldn't stop me. I skateboarded (to get there), or mostly walked with my skateboard. Sometimes somebody'd give me a ride, you know? But, I mean, I think it was probably my senior year of high school that was pretty much every weekend. And good gosh, it was fun.

Although Fred suggested this activity was fun, he went on to describe some serious risk taking behaviors during his weekend excursions to his friend's house. These included hanging out with older adults, firesetting and drug use.

Mike shared perhaps a more typical story of running away. He recalls a level of rebellion growing up that caused issues with his parents. Like Fred, he suggested that his parents had little or no authority to modify or influence their young punk adolescent's behavior.

Mike: My mom was kind of absent. She had a lot of problems. It was very easy to go out and be a punk rocker with my mom. This is one of the things that she is constantly talking about to this day, that she did not have enough control over us. She should not have let us do this and should not have let us do that. My mom didn't even know about half the punk things I was going and doing. She didn't know. It took until the Philadelphia thing for it to get serious, because I had to write and tell her about that. And I'm going to go to Philadelphia. It wasn't like a big secret. I come back and go, 'went here'. No. I told her. There was no run away in that. That's when things got kind of heavy and we started to see that this was getting to be too much maybe. She tried to stop that trip. Everybody tried to stop that trip. My father intended to stop that trip. Everybody said that that was the

wrong thing to do. But me and my ex at the time, we did it anyway. Came back. Met the Ramones. Got let into the show with the Ramones back stage. Obviously for us, we had done the right thing. There was no turning back. After that, we were more convinced than ever. That's when mom started to wake up and started to cause a little bit of problems, but I think that I was too convinced. They wouldn't have been able to stop me no matter what they did. And she eventually realized that as well. And she backed off, but right before going to New York, she backed off and said, 'Okay'. I can't stop you. I hope you don't die. And that was the attitude she took towards it and like I said, today, she comes back and says, 'maybe I shouldn't have taken that attitude', but no. You had to take that attitude, because if you didn't, we would split forever maybe.

Mike's story suggests that having a somewhat absentee parent may have made it easier for him to partake in particularly risky behaviors, but he went on to state that things may have gotten even worse had his mother attempted to intervene further.

Others reported parental discipline in an attempt to modify rebellious adolescent behavior, as Neal recalled.

Neal: My dad was like 'well, whenever you get home, you know you're going to have to look for a place to live.' They consider it like a big disrespect at that time 'cause I had a younger brother who they didn't want him to follow suit...and get tattooed up and do their own thing. But when I left, about six months in, my brother got his ears pierced which was a big deal with my parents. He didn't get kicked out 'cause he didn't get a tattoo so he started stretching his ears. My parents didn't like that. They got to the point where it was like an inch and a half and he was 16. I was like 'are you going to kick him out?' Like no. And then they made a deal with them they're like, 'well you can get a tattoo if you stop stretching your ears.' So he got a tattoo. And then after that, once they met like more of my friends and got to know people instead of just being on the outside circle and just judging, they accepted it. Like they never questioned it or argued it.

Neal's story of initial parental anger and then parental acceptance over time is echoed by Laura who spoke of her relationship with her parents before and after the death of her father. One source of contention was Laura's penchant for tattoos.

Laura: The angel wings and the symbols I have on my back are for (my dad) for his sickness and his death. He got mad at the last one I had gotten before he passed and he was like, 'Laura, can't you just express it in some other way?' And I was like, 'no. This is how I do it.' And my mom when I started to get my arm worked on, that was the first time that she has not cried with me getting tattooed.

Every other one, like the backs of my legs, every other one she has cried about. But which kind of breaks your heart but it's like, come on. This shouldn't be shocking, you know.

In time, Laura's mother came to accept her daughter's seemingly rebellious ways. Laura continued to note:

Laura: (My mother) was like, 'Laura, I finally accepted that no matter what you look like on the outside, you're still that same sweetheart on the inside that has a good heart, and is always caring and loving towards other people. So I'm going to try to not let what's going on on the outside affect me anymore.' You know, and that was one of the biggest days ever.

Laura is not alone in her desire to be accepted by her parents. Many of those interviewed reported that family was important to them, regardless of past history or cultural differences. In fact, the majority of interviewees describe acceptance from their parents either initially or in time, as Dan related.

Dan: My parents don't care. Like they're past that stage of caring. Like when I came home at 18 with a tattoo, my dad was just like, 'oh, cool'. And my mom was like, 'oh, it's so pretty - I want to get one'. My parents are really cool.

3.10 The Advantages and Challenges of Adhering to a Punk Lifestyle

Punk definitely led me where I am. And it influenced me, because being at that age and listening to these bands that are telling you to do what you want to do, I think I still have it in my head, even if I don't think about it. That definitely influenced me a lot. There's no question. (*Mike, Age 38*)

All those who participated in this study were adults, and all but one still identified strongly with punk culture. Even Tim, who stated that he no longer considered himself punk, admitted to having significant ties to the subculture, evidenced by both his long-standing friendships with punk members and his anti-establishment sentiments. Younger participants were more likely to express idealistic views of the punk subculture, while older participants spoke more often of a balance between punk ideals and the challenges of adulthood. It should be noted that both younger and older participants acknowledged a

need to conform to at least some mainstream cultural expectations in order to thrive and succeed in adulthood. Despite this conflict, as Mike relates above, many of those interviewed attributed much of their adult success to punk.

Punk for Life

If I'm alive, I'll be (doing) something related to (punk). Yea. It's cool. Like to find out exactly what you get the most out of early on in life 'cause I remember being 16 and being, 'well, I like this kind of music, or I like doing this, or I like reading about cars, or I like football.' And then when I got to (punk), it was just like oh, kind of like you think you're in love in high school or whatever, and then you actually like fall in love with somebody, yea, it's just like that. And then you'll know, oh, this is it. (*Nick, Age 24*)

Each participant 25 years of age and under expressed a sincere desire to continue in the punk subculture and, to an individual, none could foresee any life event that might change this course. As Matt put it, "I don't see anything making me too disillusioned with punk like to where I'd want to get out of it". Hunter agreed.

Hunter: I have no idea (what I will be doing when I get older), probably play shows, maybe do a tape, a demo on tape, maybe do a 7 inch, probably not much after that. I don't see much after that for me. Then I'll probably start more bands.

Dan and Neal both echoed a similar sentiment.

Dan: I wouldn't really want to be doing anything other than music and being involved with people that I'm involved with, I won't be like walking around wearing boots. I won't be more punk than I am now. I'll have the same mentality probably. I won't be like a conservative like tea totter. I know I won't be like that. I don't know. I'll probably be just as punk as I am now.

Neal: I'll still listen to all the same music, still promote or not promote, still support all the bands that come through here that I can. It's still the same ideals. I wouldn't think that's gonna ever leave my lifestyle.

Younger interviewees seemed to consider punk a lifelong lifestyle choice, one that was inherently tied to their personal value system and identity. This deep-seeded identification with punk subculture was evident in discussions of punk with both younger

and older punk members. The main difference between the two groups was that many of the older participants focused on the ways in which punk and the realities of adult life (i.e., taking care of family, maintaining a job) were not always easy to balance or reconcile. Still, each older participant interviewed noted making some conscious effort to balance punk ideals with mainstream demands. Although the topic of mainstream - underground balance was not nearly as salient for the younger group of interviewees, many of the younger interviewees were quite aware that some future lifestyle adjustment might be necessary as they get older.

Mainstream-Underground Balance

The people that you tend to hang out with, they're not necessarily punk, you know? But some of them are. I probably hang out with fewer people that I would consider punk and much more normal people than I ever have. But, I mean, shit I'm married and I've got three kids. So, you mature to a point and if you want to survive, you've got to adapt and not flip everybody off. (*Fred, Age 44*)

As Fred's comment suggests, many older members of the punk scene are adept at finding a balance between their punk roots and adult success. Most of the older individuals interviewed held jobs that would be considered respectable in the mainstream culture, such as business owner, hair stylist, and financial advisor. Several of those interviewed were highly successful by most standards. This is not to say that they came to their adult lives by typical means or by the standard path. Indeed, many of those older adults interviewed describe a roundabout method of choosing their current career. These tales generally involve a combination of initiative, DIY ethic, and fearlessness. As an example, Laura tells the story of how she became a hairdresser.

Laura: I guess I've been in the salon now for about 5 ½ years. So I guess it was about 6 ½, 7 years ago. I was messing around one day and I cut my roommate's hair. She had a really short haircut and I actually made it look pretty good with kitchen scissors. And I was like, well holy crap. And (my friend) who owns Bang

Bang (Salon) was my stylist at the time and we had become friends. And I said, ‘... you’ve got to come over here and see this’. And so she came over to the house and saw her hair and she was like, ‘girl, go to school. I’ll hold a booth.’ And I was like, oh why not? If I hate it, I hate it. If I love it, I love it. Let’s do it. So I did it and here I am.

This initiative is witnessed in the ways younger punks speak of their endeavors as well.

For instance, Hunter applied this same fearlessness to learning to play music. He had recently joined a band at the time of his interview.

Hunter: I just decided like hey, I like these beats. I’m going to try to imitate that so I just brought a drum set and I started doing it and it eventually it worked. (There is a certain beat - it’s called a D beat – that gets in my head. I’m always just wanting to tap my fingers and stuff like that. So finally I was like, ‘yea, I should probably get a drum set and like actually really do this.’

Likewise, Rodney, a nationally-recognized tattoo artist who owns several businesses in Charlotte, spoke to me about how he came to learn his trade.

Rodney: I didn’t really get an apprenticeship or anything like that, but I did get the equipment I needed and I got the information from (established tattoo artists) on what to do. I’d go down and watch them tattoo and just, you know, try to soak up whatever I could soak up.

Rodney went on to explain his business philosophy. “It’s simple. It’s just a matter of knowing what you have in common and having some manners and understanding the grander scheme of how the other parts of the society work.” The idea of having a working knowledge of how business is done may seem discordant coming from those who subscribe to a seemingly anti-social subculture. However, as previously noted, a work ethic seems to be ingrained in the punk culture and many of those interviewed seemed acutely aware of what might be required of them in order to operate in mainstream society. This does occasionally cause tension with others within the subculture. For example, Mike, a private English language tutor and dialect coach in Madrid, Spain, tells of an old friend’s reaction to his current life.

Mike: This good old friend came to visit me. I was wearing a button-down shirt and nice pants. I did wear the Doc Martins. They were clean. But he saw me (at work) one day, and he couldn't believe it, because people in New York, especially from then, say, 'You're a teacher? How are you a teacher?' This is nothing like you were in your world. And he said to me, one of the best things that I still think about all the time. 'So do you have to go off to your job now, don't you? You've got to go off to your job now that you created for yourself in this country where the people don't know you're really just a punk rocker.' And my attitude is exactly the same as my friend's, but I do look nice. I look the part. I look like I can walk into businesses. I wanted to do that. I'm not required to do that. I started doing that five or six years ago, because I thought that would be the right thing to do. There's no reason to go in and make a statement in these places. That would be ridiculous. I'm getting old now. What I need is to eat, too. Not everybody has a job in this country right now, but I do.

Tim who tells a very similar tale, echoed this sentiment.

Tim: A couple of years ago there was one guy that I went to high school with that I ran into and he was asking me, you know, what have you been up to or whatever and I told him. Went got a degree, and then I went got another degree, and now I'm working in healthcare. And he was just like, 'that doesn't sound like the punk rock dream to me.' I'm just like, 'I grew up.' What do you want me to do? I'm not going to sit around and just bounce from restaurant job to restaurant job just so I can make enough money to get some more pot or whatever, you know? I'm not just going to sit around and drink malt liquor and get high for the rest of my life. I don't really think that's very fun. What I think is fun is hanging out with my wife, going and traveling, meeting new people in other countries and stuff like that.

As Tim and Mike suggested, participants viewed the adoption of some aspects of mainstream life as a natural byproduct of maturing, and most did not report finding the balance to be a source of angst or stress. In fact, most of those interviewed expressed a certain amount of pride in their accomplishments. Although, each individual had his or her own specific reasons for courting mainstream success, most of these boiled down to a desire to have basic needs met as well as to have the freedom to pursue those endeavors deemed important. Candice explained below.

Candice: I think you realize as you get older too, depending on what kind of life you want to live - like for me, I want to have art, a decent house, and I want to be able to travel. I don't want to have to worry about money.

Younger punks also seemed aware of the fact that some aspects of mainstream norms have to be adhered to in order to thrive, as Dan suggested.

Dan: It's not really better to form a 'fuck you' mentality where it's kind of like I don't really care what you think. I mean I do care. I do. I'm not gonna walk around like flipping off babies, you know?

Dan's tongue and cheek delivery, typical of punk expression, belies the seriousness of the concept of growing up and living in a more typical or mainstream manner. As Nick implied in comments below, there is no real honor seen in making a statement by sticking to your punk values and staying poor your entire life. However, there is some measure of respectability in having the means to live the kind of life you want.

Nick: You can be as idealistic as you want about detesting the way that kind of stuff works, but at some point you sort of have to get onboard if you want to do the things that you want to do. I think that's something that everybody comes to. I don't think most people work as dishwashers all the time.

Most of those interviewed acknowledged that some success in the mainstream culture is necessary to gain the freedom to live life on one's own terms and, as evidenced above, most seemed to feel that that freedom was an essential element of being punk.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

4.1 Research Questions

Positive Aspects of Punk Subculture

This qualitative study explored the positive aspects as well as the risks associated with membership in the punk subculture. Research Question Cluster 1 addressed the extent to which (a) positive aspects of membership in the punk rock subculture were evident, and (b) what positive aspects were noted by those interviewed.

Interviewees noted many positive aspects of membership in the punk subculture. According to participants, beginning in adolescence, punk provides the opportunity for otherwise disenfranchised youth to find a sense of belonging and identity. Fueled by a DIY mentality, young punks learn the benefits of hard work through endeavors such as playing music in bands and booking tours. Also, many of those interviewed suggested that a DIY ethic and punk contributed to adult successes. Furthermore, friendships formed in adolescence provided the basis for social connections and community that continued well into adulthood. In Charlotte many older punks now own businesses in the thriving neighborhood of Plaza Midwood, which is reportedly the epicenter for the punk community for many. Although younger punks report a separate social scene, a sense of identity and community within that scene is equally evident.

With varying specific reports across individuals, all of those interviewed reported not fitting in with mainstream peers in adolescence. This is consistent with findings that

suggest a sense of adolescent otherness is often a precursor to punk membership (Leblanc, 1999). In considering their entry into punk, many participants also discussed both an appreciation of and a desire for artistic expression. Many of those interviewed considered themselves artists or musicians. Others expressed a love of art and music. The punk subculture has a long history of providing an outlet for visual and musical expression (Baron, 1989). Indeed, the punk subculture was built on music, and a love of music seems to be one of the central ways by which those interviewed came to the punk subculture.

The value in which they hold freedom of expression is also evident in punk subculture members' appearance. Although none of those interviewed sported the classic Mohawk or spiked leather jackets associated with the punk subculture, many had visible tattoos and piercings or other means that identified their style as nontraditional. Those who did not wear some token article of punk clothing such as skate shoes or a band t-shirt. These subtle and overt signs of punk rock reflect an important aspect of punk: those who subscribe to the punk subculture value individuality and tend to consider personal expressions of individuality a reflection of one's authenticity (Force, 2009). As an example, many of those interviewed spoke of the personal meaning expressed in a tattoo or clothing choice. Through this type of creative self-expression, a punk lifestyle seems to infuse many of its members with a sense of pride and esteem.

Taken collectively a sense of otherness and an artistic nature may in part explain why some individuals are drawn to punk in youth. Furthermore, given that most adolescents are drawn to peers with similar tastes and interests (Selfout, Branje, ter Bogt & Meeus, 2009), it stands to reason that punk youth would seek out peers with similar

musical preferences. Participants described how finding likeminded peers and a social context for which to belong in adolescence contributed to personal identity formation. These findings are not unique to punk and are in line with previous studies that suggest that peer friendships foster identity formation and that identification with peers contributes to a sense of belonging (Brown & Klute, 2003). There are many advantages to belonging in adolescence. For punk youth, belonging provides safety and support. Furthermore, for those interviewed, finding a place to belong in youth reportedly leads to life long friendships and a sense of community in adulthood.

Thus, punk may be embraced in part because it is perceived to provide a community which allows its members to be authentically themselves. In turn, this subculture that values individuality and provides a means to connect may be particularly appealing to those youth who feel they do not fit in the mainstream youth culture. These findings suggest that, although perceived by the mainstream culture as maladaptive, the punk subculture, at least for some members, may be a healthy and adaptive social environment, providing similar opportunities for peer interactions and belonging as more mainstream adolescent groups, albeit in a different context.

In support of this notion, many of those interviewed credited membership in the punk subculture and values associated with punk, such as hard work and individuality, with successful endeavors both in adolescence and adulthood. In particular, punk's DIY ethic, which reflects a value system that favors individual effort over mass production (Force, 2009), seems to provide punk youth with an opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the community. Many of those interviewed credit booking bands, playing music, and designing advertisements for shows with teaching them a work ethic.

Learning to work with others, meeting deadlines, and trouble-shooting are all facets of DIY in the punk context; they also reflect skills and competencies that may translate well into other work environments. Furthermore, punk music is laced with lyrics that encourage individuality and freedom of expression. These sentiments seem to have affected the life course of those adult punks interviewed, who show signs of self-efficacy, perseverance, and initiative as they tackle new endeavors.

In support of this notion, although many of those interviewed found a pathway to career success through traditional means, such as higher education, many who were not formally educated took it upon themselves to learn a trade. Mike's story is a fine example of this. He set out to learn Spanish, did so in New York, and has built a lucrative business as a private English teacher and dialect coach in Madrid. He pursued this path and accomplished this success, despite having only a high school equivalency diploma.

Risks

Although participants discussed many benefits of membership in the punk subculture, several risks were cited. These include violence, drug use and family conflict. Violence and drug use have long been considered part of the punk subculture where anti-establishment sentiments coupled with a disregard for mainstream rules may contribute to a tolerance for antisocial or risk taking behaviors. Although within this particular sample illegal substance use did not appear to be a major factor in the scene, several respondents recalled friends from their youth who had become addicted or had overdosed.

Similarly, reports of harm and tales of violence, reflecting skinhead activity and threats from those outside the scene, were more likely to be mentioned by older participants in accounts of their youth. None of the participants reported that violence was a current issue in the Charlotte punk scene. The other form of violence most mentioned was in the context of slam dancing or moshing at live shows, where accidental injury was seen as a byproduct of dancing. This may bear consideration as several younger participants suggested that moshing was cathartic and that minor pain and injuries sustained during moshing were associated with feeling alive. These kinds of sentiments are similar to those reported in studies of adolescents who engage in self-injurious behaviors, however these activities, viewed as maladaptive in the literature, are generally done secretively and in private (Nock, Prinstein, & Sterba, 2010). Therefore caution should be used in making associations between moshing and self-injurious behavior based on the limited available information.

Several but not all of those interviewed reported conflict with family. This was generally time limited in adolescence, and only a few participants reported family conflict serious enough that it resulted in them being kicked out or leaving their family's home. These findings are counter to much of the literature on punk rock youth which suggests that many come from non-nurturing and conflict-ridden home environments (Leblanc, 1999; Moore, 2007). Some reasons why reports of family conflict may differ from other studies are explored in detail in the limitations section.

Differences between Younger and Older Participants

Research Question Cluster 2 addressed the question of whether or not there were differences between the narratives of younger and older generations within the punk

subculture. Among those interviewed, the themes that emerged were overwhelmingly similar between the two groups. Participant groups did not differ dramatically in terms of how they reportedly became members of the punk scene. Both groups of individuals spoke of a love of music, a creative spirit, and anti-mainstream tendencies. Moreover, younger and older participants expressed dedication to their local punk scene and an adherence to punk cultural values. Despite these many similarities, the two groups differed in two prime ways.

The first difference was reflected in how participants viewed the local punk scene. Older participants were much more likely to speak of the Plaza Midwood neighborhood when discussing the current Charlotte punk scene. Younger participants spoke of a tight knit group of friends and of attending house parties when referring to the local scene. It was almost as if the two age groups were referring to two different scenes. In this respect, there seemed to be very little crossover between the two. The second main difference evident in participant narratives was the ways in which participants spoke of their feelings regarding the punk lifestyle. Younger participants were more likely to speak of their future plans and loyalty to the scene. Older members of the Charlotte punk subculture were more likely to frame their feelings about punk in terms of finding a personal balance between punk values and mainstream demands. Although studies comparing younger and older punk subculture members are scant, the literature suggests that for older punks finding a balance between mainstream success and adherence to punk values is an integral part of remaining a member of the scene (Davis, 2006).

Older and younger punks seem to be operating in almost completely separate social realms within the Charlotte punk scene. Older participants, many of whom grew

up in Charlotte and have reportedly been members of the punk subculture since adolescence, appear to have come to consider the Plaza Midwood neighborhood the central community of the punk scene. The preference for this neighborhood may be fueled in part by the fact that many of the businesses located in that neighborhood are owned and staffed by older punks. For many of those interviewed, a night on the town involves social interaction with old friends. Older punks cite Plaza Midwood as an example of the kind of thriving community that can be built on punk values. Rodney was the one interviewee who is a business owner in the area; however, several other people interviewed work and/or socialize in the neighborhood. The Plaza Midwood neighborhood seems to be a “home away from home” for several participants and is a source of pride for many of those interviewed.

The neighborhood provides opportunities for social interaction, of course. Many locally-owned businesses are located there as well. Participants spoke of the importance of knowing the people who run the businesses and of trust and community within the neighborhood. From these descriptions, Plaza Midwood seems to be much like a traditional neighborhood community in which personal relationships and social interactions are as important as conducting business.

In my time in the Charlotte punk scene I witnessed many examples of this. My interview with Rodney was conducted at his tattoo parlor while he was working on a client. He had many visitors during the 2 ½ hour interview, many of whom stopped by simply to say “hello”. While I was there, he took a phone call from a potential customer who he could not fit in to his busy schedule. He referred this individual to a newer tattoo shop run by a friend. I listened as he rattled off the phone number of the other shop.

Outside of this tight knit community, it is hard to imagine a business owner referring a client to the competition. But Rodney, who has a reputation for being a savvy businessman and a “good guy,” seems to see this kindness as the right way to do business. He has built his own business to the point that new personal clients are unnecessary, but a new shop may succeed or fail on referred clients. As Rodney puts it, “people in this neighborhood, they stick together. They watch out for each other.”

Younger interviewees shared older punks’ dedication to the local punk scene, but their focus was a bit different. All the younger scene members interviewed spoke of the Charlotte scene in terms of a very small and close-knit group of individuals. The central activity of this community is the house show. Many of those interviewed were involved in booking bands, playing in bands and providing space for bands to play. House shows provide the younger group of interviewees with an opportunity for social interaction. Along with that, those interviewed describe the experience of seeing live music in these small unofficial spaces as almost cathartic or spiritual.

Young punks reportedly like the freedom of house shows, which are not patrolled by bouncers or club owners found in more typical live music venues. House shows are generally run by young people and there is a feeling that the band and audience are on equal footing as bands are often playing in very intimate settings. Touring bands are generally provided with a place to sleep by people in the scene, so bands can tour inexpensively. Many of those interviewed spoke of a national and international community of punks who provide places for bands to play.

Those in the scene had several theories as to why the local Charlotte punk scene seemed to be segregated by age. Some suggested that older people held some resentment

toward younger punks, but several interviewees, both young and old, felt that the separation between the two groups was simply due to the cyclical nature of the punk scene. They felt that, as younger people entered the scene, there was a tendency to build a community of their own rather than simply becoming a part of the older established community. The implication is that punk provides the opportunity for young people to build the community they want in their own way instead of just stepping into something previously built or blindly following what has been done before. The younger individuals' pride and passion for their local scene seems to support this notion.

The second main difference between the younger and older group of participants may, at its core, reflect differences in levels of maturity. Young interviewees spoke of a love of punk and a desire to continue to adhere to punk principles as they matured. Many could not foresee being a part of any other community. Older participants were just as passionate about their punk community but tended to discuss the punk lifestyle in terms of balancing punk values with the practicalities of adult life. They described the many ways in which they adhered to mainstream values in order to make money, succeed in business, and get along with others. Older participants discussed changes in style of dress, and modifying attitudes in order to fit in and succeed in the adult world. Many suggested that these changes were a personal choice motivated by a desire to live comfortably, feed their children, or have enough financial security to travel. There was a general feeling that, once they reached adulthood, adhering to mainstream values was not all that difficult to do. Any lingering discomfort with the balance between punk and mainstream was expressed as disbelief from old friends and not as a personal identity

crisis. This finding supports the notion that, for some, punk appears to help provide the foundation for mainstream success rather than hinder it.

4.2 Study Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, the findings here reflect the life stories, thoughts, and feelings of those 12 people interviewed. Participants were limited to the Charlotte, NC area and, therefore, there is no way to know for certain that the themes that emerged are reflective of other punk scenes or of the punk rock subculture in general. It is possible that punk communities with larger membership or in more urban locations may have very different kinds of punk communities. Past studies of punk scenes were generally undertaken in large cities such as London (Davis, 2006) and Montreal (Leblanc, 1999) or in areas with a long-standing and visible punk presence. The relatively tight knit, conflict free punk community described here may be as much a reflection of the greater Charlotte community as it is of the punk subculture. Secondly, the 12 participants of this study were all successful, intelligent, and thriving individuals.

Many of those interviewed reported some arguably serious risk taking behaviors in adolescence, such as running away from home and drug use. Despite these reports, most extreme risk taking was limited to adolescence. Likewise, family conflict occurred most often in the teen years when young punks were experimenting with altering their appearance. All those interviewed reported having healthy family connections with at least one family member from their family of origin at the time of their interview. In fact, despite past issues, family seemed to be an important aspect of participants' lives. It is worth noting that all those interviewed were over the age of 18. Therefore, reports of familial conflict were retrospective. It may be that family conflict would seem more

salient and serious to an adolescent experiencing it, whereas recollections (sometimes years later) may be less dramatic in retrospect because they are no longer of immediate concern. Although it is generally believed that punks come from troubled households, to my knowledge there is no definitive study on the home lives of punks. It is difficult to know if the experiences of these participants generalize to the larger punk subculture.

Furthermore, all participants reported being brought up in working class and middle class households and none reported extreme levels of poverty or deprivation. Some studies suggest that there is a fair amount of diversity in the families of origin of punk youth (Baron, 1989; Leblanc, 1999; Moore, 2007). As such, it is difficult to say whether the prevalence of working to middle class backgrounds found in this study is typical of other punk communities.

I did not set out to deliberately interview a relatively advantaged group of punk subculture members. I simply asked of informants, “Who should I talk to in the scene?” Individuals were recommended to me for various reasons. Generally, it was each individual’s level of past or present involvement and presence in the local scene that was cited as the reason they were recommended. It may be that well-adjusted people are likely to associate with other well-adjusted individuals. Another plausible hypothesis is that those who are actively involved in the local scene – the business owners, bookers, and musicians – are the individuals more likely to be motivated, business-minded, and visible in the scene. It is also possible that individuals interviewed are an accurate representation of the Charlotte punk scene. In my time in the field almost all of the individuals I encountered were articulate and well-mannered. Even those who wore ripped jeans and old soiled band t-shirts were cordial and polite. Because this was a

relatively privileged sample, it may be that some of the more positive findings (i.e., regarding the sense of community and belonging, the valuing of hard work) are indicative of class or upbringing and are not an accurate reflection of the typical punk experience. Thus, while the present findings address a prime research question and highlight positive aspects of punk subculture membership, they must be viewed within this context. For instance, in light of the characteristics of my sample, I was not able to capture the experiences of those struggling with substances, adjustment difficulties, and the like. However, it should be noted, that several of those interviewed cited examples of old friends who had overdosed or died of other causes while young. It may be that the lives of many of the more troubled individuals in the Charlotte punk scene took a very different path than those interviewed. These individuals may have either passed away or lost touch with those in the local scene. As such, the present sample – and the findings that emerged from these interviews – may not be representative of, or generalizable to, the larger punk subculture.

Another limitation that bears mention is the lack of female participants included in the current study. There seem to be many women present in the Charlotte scene – at shows, in bands and working at various venues. Although women were sporadically mentioned in interviews and in some cases were present in the home or venue where an interview took place, when asked to whom I should speak in the community, women were rarely suggested. Candice and Laura, the two women who were interviewed, were the only two recommended by older members and only one younger woman was recommended by those interviewed. Perhaps coincidentally, she was the only potential participant that did not return my messages. This may not be unusual as past explorations

suggest that the punk subculture may still be predominantly made up of men (Leblanc, 1999), and other studies have failed to recruit any female members (Davis, 2006).

However given the presence of women in the Charlotte scene the sample here may not be representative.

In addition, it is necessary to underscore that this was a study of the punk subculture in particular. Although there are likely similarities between the stories of punk individuals and those in other music-based subcultures such as “Goth” and “emo”, caution should be used in making broad generalizations regarding the findings summarized here to other youth subcultures. Likewise, given socio and political forces, the experiences of individuals who identify with non-music based youth subcultures such as the LGBT community may be dramatically different. Although more research is needed to fully explore the similarities and differences between various youth subcultures, this project reflects the beginning of such efforts. My hope is that it will provide a springboard for future explorations.

4.3 Contributions and Future Directions

Despite these limitations, the findings of this study contribute to understanding of a youth subculture. Although the findings here reflect a relatively small sample from a specific geographic region, results indicate that for at least some individuals, punk can have a positive life long influence on a person’s life. Most notably, punk provides a means of expression and a sense of belonging and community for otherwise disenfranchised youth. Although certain risks were noted, such as violence and drug use, those interviewed reported that these risks tended to be time-limited in adolescence. On

the other hand, core punk values such as an appreciation for hard work, DIY ethic, and individuality appear to influence punks well into adulthood.

Those interviewed attribute much of their adult successes to their punk rock roots. Despite subscribing to an alternative or counter culture lifestyle, all the adult punks interviewed appeared to be thriving adults, who hold jobs and take care of themselves and their families. Older adults in particular are adept at finding a balance between the ideals of punk and mainstream demands. In fact, many punk values (e.g., hard work and individuality) seem to translate well to mainstream success.

It should be noted that, although some conflict was reported in youth, many of the individuals interviewed report good relations with their family of origin. Having a relatively stable and supportive family of origin may contribute to healthy peer relations. This finding is consistent with a host of findings within the developmental literature, which confirms that parent–child relations are absolutely imperative even under the most dire of circumstances (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Many of those interviewed describe parents supportive of their burgeoning artistic and musical tendencies in childhood despite conflict regarding tattoos, piercings, and hairstyle later in adolescence.

To my knowledge there scant research that specifically explores the relationship between familial support and subculture membership. In fact, adolescent subculture membership is generally viewed in terms of reaction to deficits in family connections (Baron, 1989; Leblanc, 1999; Moore, 2007). However, the adolescent literature suggests that parental support in adolescence can contribute to self-efficacy, and those with sound parent-child relations are better able to form lasting relationships with peers (Brown & Klute, 2003). For this reason, this relatively well-adjusted and thriving sample can

provide some new insight into how and why some adolescents may prefer subculture membership over other adolescent peer groups.

More research is needed to explore the relationship between family of origin and punk subculture, but it is plausible that the sense of community and belonging reported by those in the punk scene may aid in maintaining healthy family relations long after punks' more rebellious phase in youth. Punk seems to foster a sense of self-worth and efficacy. Several interviewees spoke of families' acceptance of their punk appearance upon the realization that their children's core values and personality remain unchanged by punk. These findings may provide some clues as to how best to support disenfranchised youth who are not fortunate enough have supportive families of origin.

In the absence of healthy family relations, other adult connections can provide youth with much needed support. The punks in this study were more likely to find support from peers than older punks. However, the kinds of support reported ranged from emotional support such as mutual understanding to tangible support such as shared resources indicating the young punks seem to be capable of a sophisticated social support community.

One of the most often cited reasons for choosing punk seemed to be a combination of the freedom to be who one is and a feeling of belonging. These are important aspects of healthy adolescent adjustment (Brown & Klute, 2003). Also, it is noteworthy that outward appearance seemed to matter less to punks as they matured and it never was cited as a major identifying factor among subculture members. Still, those interviewed were appreciative of instances when parents and friends viewed them as good decent people, despite the fact that many interviewees sport tattoos, piercings, and

the like that mainstream individuals may view as indications of rebellion or toughness. This indicates that acceptance and respect are important to punks both in youth and in adulthood.

This finding may help to inform how those in the helping professions might approach punk youth. Negotiating relations with punk youth may bring challenges. Given the rebellious nature of punk, most young punks will be likely to associate anyone from counseling, psychology and social work professions as agents of the mainstream. Since respect is an important aspect of the punk subculture, if school counselors and the like approach punk youth as if they are frightening, weird, or unstable, they are more likely to reinforce this view and be met with resistance. On the other hand, there is nothing punks like more than to talk about punk. Expressing a sincere interest in a punk youth's endeavors and respecting their beliefs on politics and social concerns may go a long way to beginning to establish rapport.

Further research is needed to explore the positive aspects of subculture membership. It is possible that familial and community aspects attributed to the punk subculture by members of the scene may be found elsewhere. Future investigations might include explorations of the positive aspects of membership in other music-based subcultures. Moreover, investigating other youth subcultures, such as LGBT community, whose members might share with punk an ideology of otherness or being outside the mainstream, may begin to illuminate mechanisms supporting resilience and adaptation within those subcultures. Lastly, the positive aspects of punk subculture membership may have implications for violent and risk taking youth-based groups such as gangs. There is some evidence to support the notion that many of the youth associated with

gangs are drawn to that subculture by a similar shared sense of community, camaraderie, and belonging not available to them elsewhere (Omizo et al.,1997). Better understanding this draw may help to establish new techniques and theories for prevention and intervention.

To build upon the present findings, future research might focus on the relationships between family of origin, adoption of punk values, and life course. Longitudinal explorations that follow the life course of punk youth into adulthood may reveal the differences between those who thrive in the punk subculture and those who do not.

Furthermore, given the importance of community found in this study, future explorations might focus on the extent to which those who identify with punk have connections to the larger punk community. Given that punk values include individualism and anti-establishment sentiments, a person who is attracted to punk culture but who fails to establish social connections with others may be at risk for a host of negative outcomes. Studies have found that the failure to make social connections is associated with vulnerability and can lead to low self-esteem and psychological distress (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Lee et al., 2001). This may have implications in particular for youth with under developed social skills or in remote geographic locations.

The key finding from this study may be that for at least some people, punk rock does not appear to be detrimental or, at one extreme, fatal. In fact, the values inherent to punk may provide an opportunity for healthy adaptation and adult success. Moreover, punks search for and value many of the same things in their communities that most people do, identity and belonging, mutual respect, shared history and, emotional

connection. This finding suggests that despite holding views that may be deemed counter culture or anti-mainstream, members of the punk subculture may strive to meet basic psychological needs, such as competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2007) through membership in the community. This indicates that there may be more positive and adaptive about the punk subculture than maladaptive. The fact that the adult individuals interviewed for this work continue to identify with and contribute to the local punk scene indicates that the punk community is more than a fleeting fad for many.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM



Department of Psychology
Phone: 704-687-4731
Fax: 704-687-3096

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte**University Committee for Review of Research with Human Subjects****Consent Form:****Punk Rock as Family and Community: An Exploration of the Positive Aspects of Membership in a Music Based Subculture**

I am contacting you because you agreed to answer questions regarding your membership in the punk community in Charlotte, NC. I would like your consent to use the information from today's interview for a research project.

This study is an exploration of factors associated with adolescent subculture group membership. By interviewing adults aged 18 – 25, and those 30 and older who identified themselves as members of the punk subculture as adolescents and perhaps still do, we can begin to shed light on the experience of adolescent subculture group membership.

I am interested in finding out what the experience of being a punk adolescent is/was like and what impact that experience may have on your life. To that end, I will be asking questions about why and how you were first drawn to punk music and punk culture, what the punk community was and is like, how you feel about it, and what advantages and disadvantages you feel you have experienced as a member of the punk community.

You must be 18 years old or older to give consent to participate in this study, and special steps will be taken to protect your privacy. All responses are confidential. Only persons connected with this research project will see the information. All study data will be coded with numbers and your interview will be assigned an alias so that no real names will be used. Any papers with names will be kept in a locked file cabinet. Reports will never mention actual names. No identifying information about you will be included in reports or elsewhere.

Participation in this project is entirely voluntary. You can ask questions at any time, and you may choose not to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. If for any reason you wish to discontinue the interview, please just let me know and I will do so immediately and without question.

You may not receive any direct benefit from participating in this project. However, by sharing your story you will help increase knowledge about and understanding of adolescent members of subcultural groups. Knowledge gained from this study may help reduce stigma for adolescents who may be misunderstood.

This interview will be recorded using a digital audio device. Recordings will be transcribed to paper in order to gain a better understanding of similarities in content among interviews. All interview data will be coded with numbers and an assigned alias so that no real names will be connected to your interview transcript. Reports will never mention actual names. No identifying information about you will be included in reports or elsewhere. Written documentation associated with this study will be shredded within 5 years after this study is complete.

If you have any questions about this study, please call me, Eylon Palamaro Munsell, at UNC Charlotte for more information at (704) 287-3019 or my supervisor on this project, Dr. Ryan Kilmer (704-687-3689). In addition, UNC Charlotte is eager to ensure that anyone in a research study is treated fairly and with respect. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights or how you are being treated in this project, you may contact the Office of Research Services at (704) 687-3311.

The general nature of this study has been explained to me, and my questions (if any) have been answered by the researcher. If I have any more questions about the study, I know that I can call Ms. Eylon Palamaro Munsell at 704-287-3019 or her supervisor, Dr. Ryan Kilmer, at 704-687-3689. In addition, I know that if I have any questions or concerns about my rights or how I am being treated in this project, I may contact the Office of Research Services at (704) 687-3311. A copy of this consent form will be given to me.

My signature below means:

I freely give permission for the researcher to interview me today and for data gathered from today's interview to be used. I give permission for the researcher to contact me in the future.

I am willing to have this interview digitally recorded.

Signature of Participant: _____

Please Print Name: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B: TRANSCRIPTION CONFIDENTIALITY FORM



Department of Psychology
Phone: 704-687-4731
Fax: 704-687-3096

**Confidentiality Agreement
Transcription Services**

I, _____, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentation received from researcher Eylin Palamaro Munsell related to her study on Punk Rock as Family and Community: An Exploration of the Positive Aspects of Membership in a Music Based Subculture.

Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents.
2. To not make copies of any audio recordings or computerized files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by Eylin Palamaro Munsell.
3. To store all study-related audio recordings and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.
4. To return all audio recording files and study-related documents to Eylin Palamaro Munsell in a complete and timely manner.
5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any backup devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement and for any harm occurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber's Name (printed) _____

Transcriber's Signature _____

Date _____

Table 1: Sample Questions for Qualitative Interviews

Open Ended Questions	<p>Tell me about the first time you heard a punk song</p> <p>What does being punk mean to you?</p> <p>Tell me about the people you hang out with.</p> <p>Tell me what it's like to hear your favorite band play live.</p> <p>What is the scene like in Charlotte?</p>
Informational Questions	<p>How old were you when you went to your first show?</p> <p>What do you do for a living?</p>
Clarifying Questions	<p>You said that your first show was life changing. Tell me more about that experience.</p> <p>You mentioned that the Charlotte scene is very close-knit. What did you mean by that?</p>

Table 2: Participant Names and Ages

<i>Younger Participants</i>	<i>Age</i>
Hunter	19
Dan	22
Neal	24
Nick	24
Matt	25
Kelly	25
<i>Older Participants</i>	<i>Age</i>
Laura	33
Candice	36
Mike	38
Tim	38
Rodney	38
Fred	44