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## Documenting the Oral Narratives of Transient Punks

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Documenting the Oral Narratives of Transient Punks

By  
Thomas R. Heffernan

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
Masters of Science  
In  
Ethnic Studies

Minnesota State University, Mankato  
Mankato, Minnesota

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This thesis paper has been examined and approved.

Examining Committee:

Dr. Wayne E. Allen, Chairperson

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### Abstract

The uninitiated do not realize the complexity of the punk rock sub-culture. Outsiders may find it hard to distinguish the subtle lines by which differentiation occurs within the so-called subculture. The “punk rock subculture” is a misnomer; it is not a salient community. The experience of being “punk” is fractal; what it means to be punk and what classifies one as punk is in constant redefinition and there are various different communities with varying ideologies and identities. The punk subculture has absorbed various epistemologies in its 40+ years of existence, modified them, and made them their own. Within this milieu of experience there is a segment of the punk rock population that takes the anti-authoritarian, do-it-yourself ethos of the subculture to its logical conclusion: they drop out of society and “hit the streets” relying upon their wits, the good nature of strangers, and a vast interconnected support network of peers for their survival. There is very little documentation of the lives of this unique population and due to the precarious circumstance that they live in (i.e., the far margins of society), the risk of losing their history is a real threat. To understand why these punks became transient, one must ask them about their life history, ideological beliefs, views on life, family history, and personal experiences within the community (i.e., *their story*). My unit of analysis is the transient punk community. I have created a qualitative analysis of this community by collecting oral narratives of self identifying transients via participant observation. Data was collected by utilizing informal interviews and by snowball sampling.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to first of all thank everyone of the participants of this study. This project was a labor of love for my brothers and sisters in the transient community. Over the years you all have inspired my life so very much that I am happy to be giving this gift back to our community.

I also would like to thank the gatekeepers who were so very vital to the success of this project. For confidentiality reasons I cannot thank you by name—but you know who you are; I have nothing but pure love for the both of you and I wish you the best of luck in your future travels. May the road find you well.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. <u>INTRODUCTION</u> .....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Need for study.....	2
Research questions.....	3
Limitations.....	5
Delimitations.....	10
Assumptions.....	12
Definition of terms.....	16
2. <u>LITERATURE REVIEW</u> .....	20
Distinguishing Transient Youth from Homeless Youth.....	20
Post-subcultural Identity.....	29
Historical Context and Considerations.....	30
Transient Beginnings: 1870s – 1950s.....	32
Revitalization and Transformation: 1950s – 1970s.....	35

	The Fusion of Transient and Punk Society:	
	1977 – 21 <sup>st</sup> Century.....	36
	The Influence of Anarchism.....	39
	Freeganism.....	45
	Fictive Kin, Ethnic Badging, and Reciprocity.....	48
3.	<u>RESEARCH METHODS</u> .....	54
	Statement of Purpose.....	54
	Literary Research.....	55
	Selection of Locale.....	57
	Selection of Participants.....	60
	The Interview Process.....	61
	Data Analysis.....	62
	Autoethnography.....	63
4.	<u>FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION</u> .....	64
	Background Information.....	64
	Demographics.....	68
	Challenges for Female Travelers.....	74
	Songs to Fan the Flames of Discontent.....	79
	Direct Action.....	86
	A Community of Family.....	93
	Traveling.....	99
	Squatting.....	103
	Pets on the Road.....	103

	Misconceptions about the Community.....	105
	Messages from the gutter.....	109
5.	<u>CONCLUSIONS</u> .....	111
6.	<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u> .....	118
7.	<u>APPENDIXES</u> .....	123
	A. Consent Form.....	123
	B. Tables.....	126
	C. Photographs of the Participants .....	130

## LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Demographic Information.....	127
2	Push/pull Factors for entering street life.....	127
3	Family History and Relations.....	127
4	Themes Relating to “the Scene”.....	128
5	Travel History.....	128
6	Negative Themes.....	128
7	Behaviors while Traveling.....	129
8	Themes in Attitudes and Beliefs.....	129

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### *Statement of the Problem*

The punk rock transient community is defined by being in a constant state of flux. The individuals who are a part of this community are homeless and often find themselves moving around from place to place. Because of this reality, the life stories and history of this unique population are under constant threat of being lost and forgotten forever due to the nature of living a transient lifestyle. Some individuals live exclusively on the street—sleeping in public parks, under bridges, at public homeless shelters, or in abandoned buildings (squats). At times transients are able to find temporary shelter at friend/family houses, housing co-operatives, or the homes of strangers who are receptive to their situation. Living conditions such as these are highly unstable and the risk of loss of information is a definite possibility.

While traveling, transients run a higher risk of losing personal items such as journals and diaries which contain their histories. Travel hampers the ability of transients to maintain detailed, accurate records of their life due to their generally nomadic lifestyle. Therefore, most of the information that exists in the transient community today exists primarily in oral narratives which will probably never be written down and will eventually be lost to history. The threat to the loss of these people's life histories is definitely real and warrants the preservation and study of this unique and often misunderstood population.

### *Need For Study*

It is because of the aforementioned realities of the transient community that it is vital that their life stories be recorded and understood within the context of their own society. It has long been the purview of ethnographic field research to document those communities who are in danger of disappearing—especially those whose stories are primarily kept in an oral tradition (Thompson 2007). The transient community's stories *are* largely kept in an oral tradition. Much of the stories that *are* written down exist primarily as personal journals kept by individuals; these are rare and often are neither published nor distributed to large audiences. Members of the transient community have voiced their opinion in their interviews that they understand the importance of documenting these stories in light of the threat posed to the loss of their cultural capital and they are glad that their voice can finally be heard. The reason why the transient punk community should be studied is that there is very little that is known about this population both in academia and the general public. Many misconceptions about this community abound because outsiders use their own cultural lens when interpreting what they see in the community. Everyone has an ethnocentric and xenophobic bias which limits their understanding of people that are different from their own in-group. By understanding the lives of the transient punk “in their own words” while also bearing in mind the social context, we can begin to better appreciate the intricate nature of this subcultural population.

### *Research Questions*

The primary focus of this study is gathering a more complete understanding of the transient punk community as a whole utilizing a multi-tiered approach to the research process that included: establishing and evaluating what documentation of the community there is in the existent literature, independent film documentaries (often made by the transients themselves), on-line transient websites, and asking the participants themselves about their personal life history information. To establish this base of knowledge, the following questions were formulated to guide the research:

- What information exists in the academic community regarding the transient punk community? Is this information reliable and representative of the community?
- What information exists in the non-academic literature regarding this community? Is this information reliable and does it accurately describe the community?
- How does the information supplied by the participants of the study compare to the academic/non-academic literature? Is there consistency? If not, what is different and what are the implications?

The questions for the interviews were set-up in such a way as to allow the participants ample room to share their life history information in a comfortable setting, at their own pace, and (most importantly) on their own terms. Specific questions were utilized to gain insightful information into how they became transient, the factors that led up to them becoming transient, their life and experiences “on the street,” what transient

society is like, the dynamics of the community, their survival strategies, and their thoughts on society, life, politics, religion, ethics, and their future. These questions were constructed so as to yield the largest return of data with minimal interviewer guidance towards specifics. Key areas of interest in the interview were specifically asked of the participants in those circumstances when the information was not “organically” revealed in their depositions. Questions asked of the participants in the study were loosely constructed from the following question models:

- Do you feel the authentic punk rock subculture and its general philosophy of anti-authoritarianism and the D.I.Y. lifestyle inspire you to become transient? What other factors lead you into this lifestyle?
- Are you active in the transient community?
- Is participation in the community important to you?
- How are you able to survive and travel without working a steady job or having a definite source of income?
- Where have you traveled?
- Can you describe the experiences that you had while traveling regarding people you met, places you have been, and/or things that you have seen?
- How do you acquire food?
- How do you acquire clothing?
- How do you acquire shelter?
- How do you secure healthcare?
- What methods of travel do you use to get from place to place?
- How much time do you spend “on the streets” during a year?

- How much time do you spend “off the streets” during a year?
- What does family mean to you?
- Who is your family?
- How are food and other resources distributed in the community?
- Do you find other transients to be receptive and helpful when you come to a new community?
- What misconceptions do you feel the dominant society has about people who are transient?
- What are you passionate about in your life?
- What are your opinions of mainstream society?
- What are your opinions of mainstream politics?
- What do you think the future holds for you?
- If you had one message that you wish you could convey to people, what would it be?

### *Limitations*

Fundamental limitations exist in regards to the study of transient punks. Snowball sampling was a major limiting factor, but also quite necessary. Snowball sampling itself is actually quite akin to a method that transients themselves employ in their day-to-day lives for their survival. Networking is key to success in the transient community; they will randomly run into someone on the street, befriend them, accompany them to other like minded individuals who they then will network with and utilize to become further connected into the community's web. This interconnected network helps them to be able

to support their lifestyle (Finkelstein, Curtis and Spunt 2008: 56-58). Snowball sampling is a naturalistic way of approaching the study because it is not limited to specific locales and allows for a more organic way of meeting and interacting with members of a nomadic community that is not necessarily tied to place (Berg 2007: 186). Snowball sampling at the same time runs the risk of becoming entrenched within a particular enclave or subpopulation which is not wholly representative of the larger community. In order to decrease this possibility various locations for research were established and interviews were made with communities that weren't specifically interconnected. In these instances snowball sampling would start in a particular locale upon arrival and then subsequent connections and leads would develop and be followed up.

Another significant limitation in the study is my own bias to the transient community. I spent a good portion of my teenage and adult years within the punk rock community. The particular scene that I came up in was very receptive to transient punk kids that were riding the rails out of Minneapolis west passing through my home town of Aberdeen, SD. Many of the bands that I went to see professed ideas of giving up everything you owned, burning your bridges, and hitting the road. They also professed ideas about community and support of each other, mutual protection, respect, and above all: solidarity. As my interest in the punk scene grew, I observed that members of the community would put up traveling bands for free in their apartments or –if they found out a transient kid from a distant scene was coming through town—they'd give them a place to stay, food to eat, and in some cases money to get to the next city. I soon began to realize that this was not just something that happened in my own home scene—this was something that was happening nationally. Some of my friends in this era were so inspired

by this that they too dropped out, ran away, hopped a train, and “got the hell out Aberdeen.” They’d come back with these amazing stories, but what most intrigued me was that they did this all with no money and that people in the scene were willing to help them out when they came to town. I knew that there was something special about what was going on here and that has never left me.

Everyone has their bias, and my bias is very much in support of individuals that embrace this lifestyle. I myself have put up many travelling bands and many transients and have gotten to know them intimately over the years. It was this insight into the community and knowledge of its existence that led it to become the subject of this study. I myself am not a transient, but my affinity and access makes me a valuable resource in being able to tell their stories while at the same time being cognizant enough to understand how much of their cultural capital should be revealed to the outside world. The worry that their stories would be misinterpreted and mischaracterized is mitigated by establishing trust and demonstrating my own participation, involvement, and commitment to the scene. I doubt very much that a pure outsider would ever be able to investigate in as much detail as I have been able to achieve with this community. By and large, this community is not welcoming to outsiders asking a lot of “funny questions” about who they are and what they are about. It is precisely because of my affiliation and close relationship to this population that access to their personal information and life histories was possible—but on that note, some individuals didn’t participate because this was an academic study and they feared that mischaracterization may still occur *even with my credentials* as a close associate and friend of the transient community.

While my close involvement within the scene provided me access it still at the same time means that my views towards members of this community and their interactions could be potentially skewed. Realizing this, I found it of utmost importance to have some relative distance preserved between me and the community I was studying while at the same time maintaining a high degree of participation in events and activities. This is a very tricky accomplishment but balance is attainable. I believe, as does Dr. Howard Zinn, that bias is not something that can or should be overcome (Zinn 1997). Outsider investigators have their own cultural biases which cloud their perception of their subject of study. We are all ethnocentric and xenophobic beings and we all interpret reality through our own cultural lens (Allen and Darboe 2010: 183, 191). The question ultimately is who would be better adept at conveying accurately the nature and being of a unique and exclusive population: someone who is a total outsider with *an ethnocentric bias* and little-to-no knowledge of the community, or a closely affiliated individual of the community who's skilled in both worlds (academia and punk), with access to exclusive information, yet *who also has an ethnocentric bias*? It has long been a criticism of indigenous peoples of the globe that anthropological research—particularly ethnographic research—often misdescribes, misinterprets, and misreports the lives of their people (Gwynne 2004: 81). Outsiders bring their biases with them into the field; when they return home to interpret and report on the data their understanding will be limited by their ethnocentrism—their perception will *always* only be the perception of a community as perceived through the eyes of an outsider. Even if an investigator is adept at compensating for this bias, the fact remains that they themselves *are not* members of the community they study and their insights and interpretations face fundamental limits. My

long-term involvement in punk has allowed me *access to* and *understanding of* this particular enclave of the scene. I myself am not a transient punk, but *I am* an anarcho-punk, and there is much crossover between our enclaves in the punk scene (Shantz 2005: 2). I am in close proximity to the community but enough difference exists that I cannot identify as a transient; therein my understanding of the transient community too is limited, but my proximity to the community (both literally and philosophically speaking) offers unique insight into the community while maintaining certain reservations and delineations. The merits and faults of both types of study exist and are very real; the most that can be hoped for is that the investigator is cognizant enough to identify his or her biases and try to not let that interfere with his or her interpretation and reporting of the data. I acknowledge my biases in regards to this community and seek to objectively convey to the best of my abilities the reality of their situation.

Other limitations to the study were a relatively small sample size. Life stories were collected from eighteen individuals in seven U.S. cities. The relatively small size of the population selected for the interviews was primarily due to budget and time limitations. Many transients were also en route to the national “Rainbow Gathering” during the time that interviews were being conducted on the west coast—many who would have otherwise been in the area were absent at that time.

Another limiting factor was the choice to curtail the amount of participants interviewed; this decision was made in the field due to the average length and amount of detail provided in the interviews. Given the constraints of time needed to conduct the field work, transcribe/interpret the data, write and present this thesis, having a smaller

sample pool was far more feasible for managing the study while at the same time maintaining the level of detailed and quality interviews that were being acquired.

### *Delimitations*

The main delimitation in the study was the requirement of authenticity. This is a tricky thing to do because of the nature of the punk subculture generally speaking. It is a common practice within the punk subculture to disassociate oneself with being labeled as “punk” (Clark 2004: 225). It is common amongst contemporary subcultural populations to disassociate themselves from labels that were appropriated by the dominant society; such identities were “watered down” and sold for mass consumption to disaffected White youth looking for a way to be different and dangerous--*but not too dangerous*.

Accordingly, members of contemporary subcultures tend to shy away from these labels and tend to identify themselves as “unique individuals” that don’t need labels to bolster their identity. Identity is fluid in a subculture and can take on many different forms (Stahl 2003: 29). There is no particular “punk” uniform; punk is most commonly described in terms of “making your own rules and living your life on your own terms” and more typically by what punk *is not* rather than what *punk is* (Graffin and Olson 2010: 5; Spheeris 1998; Wojcik 1995: 5). “Looking the way that you want to look” and “doing the things that you want to do” are high priorities of the antiauthoritarian, DIY punk ethos. Most images that come to mind when someone visualizes “what a punk looks like” are stereotypical caricatures that have been proliferated by the mainstream media and are not representative of individuals hailing from the “authentic underground punk” core (e.g.

pink and green mohawks, bondage pants, safety pins through their cheeks, etc...). The reality is that most people who are punks do not necessarily dress that way (although there still are many that do). These traditional icons of punk garb and style cannot be relied upon for determining who is part of the scene and who is not. The transient punks often have tattered clothes acquired from thrift stores, friends, or from dumpsters. Band patches are often sewed on using fishing line or dental floss. Transients often carry travel packs that appear to be in various states of wear and tear. Generally speaking (and this is not a putdown) transients are not very well kempt. Many transients travel in groups and can be seen in public parks known for being occupied by homeless and transient peoples. One can identify transients by the use of specific words and phrases that are primarily used in the transient community. Other ethnic markers include patches of street punk bands such as Leftöver Crack or Citizen Fish, railroad worker patches, expressed knowledge about the punk scene and its idiosyncrasies, and patterns of behavior typical of their community. Initial conversations were held with each of the participants prior to conducting their interview to assess whether or not the particular individual would be a likely candidate.

Another delimiting factor was the decision to interview those transient punks who were eighteen years of age or older. This decision was made to protect those individuals who were not legally recognized adults from possible exploitation. This however severely limited the scope of the study because some transients started off by running away from home when they were still teens; a good portion of the participants indicated that their life on the streets began well before their eighteenth birthday. Due to the limits of university policy, these runaways could not be interviewed because they are minors and

would need to have a guardian sign permission for them to participate in the study. Needless to say, runaways *don't have* guardians with them that can sign-off on such “permission sheets” so they would not be able to be included in this analysis. We can speculate though that many transients do start before they are legally an adult due to the self-reporting of individuals who had that experience. The Finkelstein, Curtis, and Sprunt study on traveler youth was able to capture well the behaviors and attitude of the younger traveler population (Finkelstein, Curtis and Spunt 2008: 51-58). This study, due to the age limitation, was able to capture glimpses of this population as they age into adulthood offering insight into the longevity of the community.

Participants were also selected in specific geographic regions of the U.S. This was largely due to the lack of funding needed to do a comprehensive, nation-wide study of the transient punk community. The decision to conduct the study primarily on the west coast was due to the method of snowball sampling which guided the study initially to various west coast cities (Eugene, OR; Arcata, CA; San Francisco, CA; and Berkeley, CA). Additionally cities in the Midwest were also selected for locales of study due to their close proximity (Minneapolis, MN; St. Paul, MN and Mankato, MN).

### *Assumptions*

The study has focused on key areas of inquiry. The goal is to depict what the lives of transient punks are like within the context of their own society as well as in their words. Since there is very little documentation of this community in the academic literature, the primary expectation was that the interviews would reveal information that

has previously been unknown to all but a very select few insiders within the community. This information is the transient punk's cultural capital and therefore is quite valuable to their community and their way of life. Based on the research and my own previous experience with this community, I also expected to encounter some resistance by certain individuals concerning more sensitive topics (i.e., involvement in direct action campaigns, radical political views, and security culture).

The core hypothesis of the study is that transient punks predominately choose to become homeless. The common perception in the literature is that homeless youth are on the streets primarily because of problems at home that either forced them out or they choose to escape from; these problems usually include a history of parental sexual/physical abuse, drug/alcohol abuse, and divorce/separation. My hypothesis is that transients (and specifically transient punks) choose to go on the street generally for very different reasons than "average" homeless youth; transients have unique qualities that distinguish them from other homeless youth. I propose that these individuals developed this propensity when they came into contact with the authentic underground punk rock scene. It is my view that exposure to the antiauthoritarian, DIY root of the punk scene played a vital role in the development of the lives of these individuals by elevating their social consciousness. This likely caused increasing levels of cognitive dissonance in the individual as they matured in their life as a member of the punk scene. This cognitive dissonance lies between the world in which they, the individual, are expected to participate and extol: mainstream consumer capitalism; at the same time, they are increasingly adopting an emergent, freeing worldview which challenges and seeks to render impotent the toils and excesses of Babylon (mainstream consumer capitalism).

This cognitive dissonance grows in the individual until it reaches a breaking point. It is then that many of these individuals choose to either give up Babylon with all of its trappings and choose to live their life outside of the system, or they begin to seek out another “subcultural lens” which allows them to lessen or eliminate their cognitive dissonance.

I also hypothesize that the transient punk movement arose out of the fusing of the early punk movement of the 1970s with the aging writers of the beat generation. I propose that punk, being a notorious and unabashed cultural appropriator, absorbed much of the ideology of earlier transient communities in American history via the vessel of the writers of the beat generation. I propose that the writings and participation of the beat poets in the scene left a heavy influence on the already antiestablishment leanings of the punk scene and imprinted a very “street” oriented nature to the entire subculture. To “hit the road” and live a life completely removed from the rest of society would appeal to these individuals in the scene as a “more authentic way of living” which was out of step with the rest of society. This aligns well with the punk ethics of “living your life on your own terms, making your own decisions, and always questioning authority.”

I also hypothesize that there is a vast support network which allows this community to exist and to thrive. Historically, tramps and vagabonds had similar structures in place that helped to support them and their lifestyle. The punk scene also has this characteristic (i.e., supporting your local scene and touring bands, going to shows, participating in the community, providing mutual protection); the punk community has a vast network of individuals who, by their mutual participation, are able to make the scene a viable and sustainable community. I would venture that the transient punk community

also has similar structures that allow it to be viable and sustainable because its parent communities both have mutually agreeable values in regards to mutual support.

Tied into this support network, I hypothesize that members of the community do not just see each other as a common interest group, but as fictive kin. Fictive kin relationships are well documented in the punk community as well as in the history of historical transients (Anonymous, *Facts (For the Survival of the Planet)* 2000: 3; Depastino 2003: 69; Kusmer 2002: 136; Leblanc 1999: 91-93; Rachman 2006; Spheeris 1998). I propose that this too will be evident in the transient community. With the establishment of kin relationships come certain rights and obligations which are shared along vectors between individuals and corporate entities (Allen and Darboe 2010: 69). I suspect that the transient punk community has some unique practices in regards to sharing of food and other resources.

My null hypothesis is that if transient punks do not actually choose to live on the street and they are there primarily as a result of problems in the family which precipitated their entry to “street life,” then they probably display many of the same characteristics that the majority of homeless youth exhibit. If this is the case, the likelihood of there being a cohesive community with support networks would fall into doubt. If these individuals are trying to survive in a commons space where there is competition between strangers for limited resources, then I would expect to observe the struggle of Hardin’s *Tragedy of the Commons* in the field (i.e., the degradation of commons spaces and their resources by the maximization of returns for individual players). These transient individuals are predominantly strangers and/or loose acquaintances’. It stands to reason that struggle and conflict could likely emerge in commons situations due to these people

being in competition for scarce resources like food, water, and shelter. Historically transients have had individuals in their communities who were very generous, but there were also individuals that were underhanded (Kusmer 2002: 137). In the punk community there are also underhanded individuals who choose to take what they can get at the expense of others (Spheeris 1998). Which traits were passed along to the transient punks of today and to what degree they are represented remain in question because there has not been enough research on this community to establish a baseline of understanding.

### *Definition of Terms*

Anarchism- Direct democratic control in an autonomous, consensus based, non-hierarchically structured form of self-governance.

Busking- street performance art expressed in music, dance, art, juggling, mimicry, etc... for tips. Often mischaracterized in the United States as begging and solicitation, busking has a long history as a legitimate occupation for performing artists in European nations.

Crusty punk- A transient punk who primarily lives on the streets. Crust punks are similar to gutter punks but often are more politically focused and active. They are often aligned with primitivists and eco-anarchists. Transiency appeals to their need to be free of a society which is actively destroying the planet. By their non-participation they do not contribute to this destruction.

Custie- A non-transient person who associates with transients usually to solicit from them drugs. (note: custie is short for customer).

Dipset- A slang term common in the transient community, which means to leave a place quickly and abruptly.

Direct action- civil disobedience against injustice in the tradition of the American Civil Rights Movement involving the disruption of “business as usual.”

DIY- An acronym which stands for “Do It Yourself.” DIY is a fairly universal philosophical component of most punk communities.

Gutter punk- Similar to crust punks, gutters tend to gravitate to urban centers and be more aligned to individualistic anarchism. They generally are less politically inclined and can be fully apolitical altogether. They live on the streets—often in squats and bear a closer resemblance to 77’ punk styles of dress.

Hardcore- A subgenre of punk that was reactionary to the first wave of 77’ style punk, hardcore punk’s music was markedly faster, shorter, more aggressive, and generally more “in-your-face.” This particular form of the subculture arose as a response to the early commodification of punk by mainstream society in the late 1970s; the music functioned as an effective way of “shedding” the poseur crowd and assisted in maintenance of boundaries from outside appropriators.

Kick down- a valued gift that is given to a person on the street (e.g. giving a pack of cigarettes to a transient).

Monoculture- The mainstream consumer capitalist society who’s culture is increasingly defined by products, brand names, and middle class, suburban life.

Nark- someone who reveals information to the authorities about individuals that implicates them in some sort of illegal activity.

Panhandle- A form of passive solicitation for money which is used by homeless and transient individuals.

Post-subculture- The identification that subcultures “do not exist” in the contemporary sense as they did in other eras. In the past subcultures were definable populations of cohorts that were readily identifiable and distinguishable. In the modern era, subcultures have become increasingly fractalized and subsequently are difficult to draw definitive lines around. These lines are easily traversable and can be melded and blended into a plethora of expression, experience and identity.

Punk- An amorphous component of the larger post-subcultural scene that is often described as “being who you want to be and living your life on your own terms.” Punk can be many different things, but is often associated with stereotypical notions perpetuated in mainstream society regarding “punk form and substance.” The reality is that punk is existing in a post-subcultural world where identity is fluid and transitory.

Rigs- Dirty needles used for injecting heroin.

Road dog- A close friend who is a travel partner and close confidant.

Scene- Refers to the cultural milieu that surrounds a particular “post-subcultural enclave.” It encompasses those things that are unique and distinctive about a social cohort as well as those things that blur the “lines” between other distinctive “post-subcultural enclaves.”

Scum fucks- A particular enclave of transient punk society, scum fucks are best characterized as generally unsavory individuals with an obsession with GG Allin culture, heavy drug use, and a propensity to violence. Scum fuck is not an ascribed label from outsiders; it is the terminology that the community self-identifies with.

Security culture- A practice used by those individuals who participate in or are affiliated with direct action groups; security culture is a means of ensuring protection and anonymity of those participating in civil disobedience.

Straight Edge- A philosophy and community within the punk subculture, which advocates for clean and sober living, which they believe, provides them an “edge” because they can clearly think and assess the world around them. Straight edge is often a lifelong commitment, which is taken quite seriously by the “hardliners” of their community. To “break edge” may carry serious consequences for the individual in their community.

Spange- to solicit money from strangers on the street (spare+change).

Squat- An abandoned building that has been illegally entered by homeless or transient persons functioning as temporary or long-term housing.

Transient- Those individuals who embrace the nomadic, traveler lifestyle in the tradition of America’s historical hobos, vagabonds, and tramps.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

*If home is where the heart is—then I live in my upper chest.”*

-Pat the Bunny (Bunny 2005)

### *Distinguishing Transient Youth from Homeless Youth*

Transient youth are representative of a unique subpopulation of homeless youth. Their experience of being homeless is markedly different from the well documented and studied majority of homeless youth. They are a unique population and very little is actually known about their society within academia (Finkelstein, Curtis and Spunt 2008: 48). The acknowledgment of transient youth and their lives is all but overlooked because the literature generally treats all homeless youth as a “homogenous group” (Finkelstein, Curtis and Spunt 2008: 48) that shares an established range of behaviors and characteristics—this, however is a mischaracterization. In reality, homeless youth is a “heterogeneous category.” When the academic literature speaks of or invokes the label “homeless youth” they are referring to a specific category of individuals who are themselves a subset of the larger society of “street people.” Both of these labels are “labels of convenience” –vast generalizations that could never fully account for, or accurately describe the breadth of experience and diversity of identity that exists in these populations. The subcategory of “homeless youth” has much variance in

their population, but these exist within a well documented range of behavior and fairly accurate predictions can be made about these individuals based upon their life histories, pattern of thoughts and behaviors (Falk and Falk 2005: 105; Karabanow 2004: 44; van der Ploeg and Scholte 1997: 6). “Most studies blame the family, suggesting that street kids are likely to have run away from or been kicked out of severely dysfunctional homes (Adams et al. 1985; Dadds et al. 1993; Downing-Orr 1996; Garbarino et al. 1986; Kurtz et al. 1991; Research Triangle Institute 1995; Shaffner 1998; Yates et al. 1988)” (Finkelstein, Curtis and Spunt 2008: 49). Homeless youth are also characterized as often being the victims of sexual/physical abuse by their parents or guardians and tend to have psychological disorders resulting from divorce, parental drug and alcohol abuse, or neglect (Falk and Falk 2005: 105; Finkelstein, Curtis and Spunt 2008: 49; Karabanow 2004: 2; Rothman 1991: 2; van der Ploeg and Scholte 1997: 105).

There are very real problems that have limited the academic understanding of homeless youth populations—mostly in regards to data collection and analysis (Karabanow 2004: 21). Due to these problems, the understanding of the transient youth population is limited at best. “The lifestyles of these nomadic youths present insurmountable problems to the majority of academic researchers who typically recruit their more sedentary study respondents from social programs such as youth shelters and gather their data in clinical or office settings” (Finkelstein, Curtis and Spunt 2008: 48). This fact indicates that problems that exist in being able to understand the homeless youth population as a whole—let alone its most underrepresented and understudied subpopulation. “One problem

faced by researchers in counting homeless youth is that adolescents are frequently shrouded by invisibility. By staying in places where they will not be identified, or by living with friends and sleeping in squats, street youth create a “hidden culture” (Karabanow 2004: 21). By not “hitting the streets,” and doing participant observation, researchers have missed whole segments of the homeless youth population and important nuances present in the community. This brings the figures that represent the amount of homeless youth that are living on the street into question. How reliable can these figures be when the subpopulations of homeless youth (like transient youth) are largely unacknowledged and un-researched? In regards to the total population of homeless youth, the current data has wide variances that shift depending upon who is conducting the research (Baum and Burnes 1993). This makes the findings unreliable and limited in scope--at most these figures can give only conjecture of homeless youth that utilize homeless youth centers, shelters, and government services. Transients generally steer clear of these organizations and accordingly are not well documented by the limited research studies.

The lumping together of all homeless youth into a single category means that a monolithic understanding of this population will emerge which is not representative of the whole. Being a varied community, homeless youth have a variety of backgrounds, experiences and identities. One of these sub-populations is commonly referred to in the literature as “youth travelers” or “transients.” This population does bear some similarity to the majority of homeless youth in certain regards, but in many important ways, they are very different. Many homeless

youth lack a strong sense of self, identity, and community—some are psychologically damaged and lack the self confidence to change their situation; many are also fairly sedentary and stay relatively close to their homes (Finkelstein, Curtis and Spunt 2008: 50; Karabanow 2004: 27).

Transient youth predominately do not have this same experience; they are unique amongst homeless youth and one cannot treat them as if they are synonymous with the larger documented population of homeless youth. Transient youth tend to have a strong sense of identity. There are many different subcultural identities which exist within the transient community but one in particular predominates: transient punks. “Because punk remains the primary subculture among squatter and runaway adolescents, it's community is most attractive to newcomers on the streets” (Leblanc 1999: 91). This observation by Leblanc is widely acknowledged in the non-academic literature of transient society (Nomous 2008: 2) but is virtually non-existent in the academic literature; in the few instances where transients are observed at all, depictions of who and what they are, as well as their defining characteristics, tend to be generally vague and open-ended—that is unless the individuals conducting the study have had long term exposure to and/or direct involvement with the punk and transient subcultures. Having this strong sense of identity is not characteristic of the majority of homeless youth who experience much social isolation while living on the street (Rothman 1991: 36; van der Ploeg and Scholte 1997: 8). Transient punks have a very strong support network amongst themselves which reaffirms their identity;

their peers are in a similar situation and are willing to work together for their common benefit (Finkelstein, Curtis and Spunt 2008: 56; Leblanc 1999: 62)

Another feature which sets transient punks apart from the rest of homeless youth is that they predominately choose to become homeless (Anonymous, Facts (For the Survival of the Planet) 2000: 26; Finkelstein, Curtis and Spunt 2008: 50). This choice is very different than the majority of homeless youth who choose to run away; runaways tend to do so in order to escape a volatile home situation where physical/sexual abuse, parental drug/alcohol abuse, or divorce and separation serve as the dominant "push factors" in the decision to become homeless (Rothman 1991: 33). Transient punks are predominately White and from middle class, suburban families with relatively low levels of physical and sexual abuse, parental drug/alcohol abuse, and other factors which push youth on to the street and instill a low feeling of self worth. (Finkelstein, Curtis and Spunt 2008, 50; Leblanc 1999: 61) Current statistics and analysis of homeless youth indicate that this population is primarily composed of racial minorities from lower class backgrounds with higher levels of the factors which lead to youth homelessness (Baum and Burnes 1993: 13). This ethnic composition is also reflective of the punk scene as well (Rachman 2006). Since punk and transient society is very much intertwined characteristics of both populations appear in each society: they are predominately White and fairly exclusive.

Punk has primarily appealed to middle-class, straight white boys, who, though they are "too smart" for the rock music pushed by the multinational corporations, still want to "rock out." It is also a culture that is associated with alienating oneself from the rest of

society, often times in order to rebel against one's privileged background or parents. (Nomous 2008: 1)

To understand why the punk scene and transient society are predominately White, one must understand the role of commodification and cultural appropriation that was visited upon the early punk scene. The cultural appropriation of punk by the dominant society is very similar to the cultural appropriation of African American cultural property: hip-hop, rock 'n' roll, blues, and jazz. Generation after generation of White suburban youth became so disaffected by their own banal existence that they looked to the "exciting" and "dangerous" ethnic other for their avenue of rebellion. Once the originally Black musical forms of rock 'n' roll, the blues, and jazz became appropriated by White dominant society, it effectively pushed the originators out of the spot light leaving the scene dominated by Whites. The vast majority of kids who listen to hip-hop music are White suburban kids (Hurt 2006) who are exactly the same cohort that have largely embraced punk rock (Clark 2004: 227; Kreilkamp 2003: 26; Rachman 2006; Ramirez-Sanchez 2008: 94-95; Traber 2001: 34). This influx of White suburban kids into the punk scene resulted in the appropriation and commodification of the subculture (Clark 2004: 227; Rachman 2006).

In response to this commodification, punk "faked its own death" and dove deep into the underground and became so crass and anti-corporate that it was virtually unmarketable (Clark 2004: 234). However, many White suburban kids were still attracted to this "dangerous lifestyle" and attempted to adopt it as their own. Ian McKaye of the band Minor Threat stated in the film "American

Hardcore” that there was an original core group of friends in the Washington D.C. area who were a part of what was originally going on. Then all of a sudden these suburban kids flooded the scene. This took the violence at shows to a new level and eventually pushed McKaye out of the scene altogether. Henry Rollins in the same film described these kids as “the high school jock who found punk rock because, they still had this ‘what’s up, dickhead’ attitude” (Rachman 2006). In the 1990s “punk” went through an unfortunate revival in pop culture. Bands with little to no connection to the scene were adopting a “punk” look and attitude which amounted to mere mimicry of the punk subculture. Niche marketing stores such as Hot Topic opened to pander to the White suburbanite youths by selling them pre-manufactured punky styled clothing which perpetuated the stereotypical “punk image” (Rachman 2006). When you go to punk shows today or interact with transients the ethnic makeup is dominated by Whites (Spooner 2003); this is a direct result of cultural appropriation of the lifestyle by middle class, suburban white youth. This does not mean necessarily that the individuals involved in the community are “not authentic,” what it does mean is that there is much variance within the population ranging from those who are “on the periphery” to those who are part of the fully dedicated transient punk core.

Many racial minorities (especially American Indians and Blacks) have complained about cultural appropriation of their cultural capital by Whites whom they call “wannabes” (Aldred 2000: 329). In punk communities there is a similar complaint about outsiders who are making a mockery of their cultural capital; this dialectic is in regards to what distinguishes “a punk” from “a poseur.”

This is contentious ground because of the high degree of variance within the community. Punk has historically challenged labels, borders, and boundaries which confine an individual to a particular type of identity. Punk is more often defined by what “punk is not” rather than what it is (Rachman 2006; Spheris 1998). By understanding what a poser is, we may develop a better understanding of what a punk is by proxy. A “poseur” is often described in terms that denote ignorance, non-participation, or “foolish behavior” according to the unwritten ethics of a particular punk enclave. Punk scenes tend to have regional qualities which make them very unique and complicate identity and status. Alan O’Connor in “Local Scenes and Dangerous Crossroads: Punk and Theories of Cultural Hybridity,” asserts that there is much variance from locale to locale amongst punk scenes and how “punk is done” within their respective enclave. “The punk scenes in Washington [D.C.], Austin, Toronto, and Mexico City are quite different [...] Each city provides a different set of resources and difficulties including the availability of places for bands to play, housing, record stores...” (O’Connor 2002, 232). Dana Williams indicates in “Red vs. Green: Regional Variation of Anarchist Ideology in the United States,” that regional difference exist between Anarcho-syndicalists who are primarily located in the Northeast and Eco-anarchist who primarily are located in the Northwest (2009). That which would classify you as “a punk” in one enclave would be make you “a poseur” in another. Certain academics have tried to establish broad generalizations depicting punk as a fairly uniform experience in the United States (Traber 2001: 31; Ramierez-Sanchez 2008: 89-104; Nomous 2008; 2) but punk is not monolithic in its form. Punk is

always influenced by its geography; the form punk takes in a particular locale is reflective of regional variations and availability of resources (O'Connor 2002: 233; Mateus 2004: 254). Punks dedication to non-hierarchical associations and cultural fusion makes the boundaries of "what is and is not punk" difficult to distinguish and seemingly impossible to define. In fact, if you asked one hundred punks what "punk" is, you would probably receive one hundred different answers. So what is the difference between "a punk" and "a poseur?" In developing criteria one should look at punk as a whole and identify those qualities which are universal to most of their communities. If one were to take into account the vast diversity of thought and people in punk, one could not help but conclude that "punk" is a cultural fusion which that is ever gaining in diversity (Mateus 2004: 248-260). It would be marked by an interest in understanding other people's experiences and developing a broader understanding of the world (Nail 2000: 26). It would seek to be egalitarian and empower the voices of the voiceless (Weirdhui 2009: 5). It would have respect, admiration, and action for their community and would actively reach out to help others attain their own dreams on their own terms (Anonymous, Fiddle Faddle 2009, 12). "A poseur" would not be interested in these things, they would be primarily concerned with their own "liberation" and not seek out new ideas or be willing to step outside their comfort zone. The identity of being punk is amorphous and always shifting in its form. Those people who become transients tend to be interested in experiencing the world, traveling and coming to their own conclusions about reality (Finkelstein, Curtis and Spunt 2008: 51). They too do not want to be pigeonholed to a particular identity

because they see their identity as being constantly emergent. The authentic punk underground has always been a cultural hot bed and a place where different ideas could fuse together into new innovative forms (Rachman 2006; Spheeris 1998).

### *Post-subcultural Identity*

To try to describe either of the communities as a “subculture” is actually a misnomer (though it is a convenient and useful label). In decades past one could speak of subcultures in a fairly meaningful way because their populations were fairly consistent and well demarcated (Moore 1993: 28-29). Contemporary “subcultures” however are more amorphous; borders are blurry and what it means to be anything is in constant flux. Subcultures today are better characterized with the term “post-subculture.” The concept behind “post-subculture” is rooted in post-modern critical theory—particularly the aspects that challenge the notion of inherent worth and absolutes. In post-subcultures there are few, if any absolutes (Clark 2004: 225). The “subcultural phenomenon” is often described as being fractal in nature. This is best explained by the analogy of the Mandelbrot set (a fractal image created by a computer programed to calculate a simple repeating equation that continues into infinity). When you are fully zoomed out on the Mandelbrot set you can see the whole of the fractal; but as you zoom in on any particular point, infinite detail and variation arises—yet there are aspects which appear as you zoom into the fractal that closely resemble the whole (Mandelbrot 2010). “Punk” is one tendril of the “Post-subcultural Mandelbrot set”—as we

zoom in on this tendril to take a closer look, we also see a seemingly infinite variety of forms which arise--but we also see imprints of the “punk tendril” repeated and echos of the larger post-subcultural mandelbrot set. As we zoom into the punk tendril we, come upon transient punks and their identity. What patterns can we see in this community that are reflective of the greater fractal? How is it that transient and punk society became intermingled in the first place? What historical influences created this community that exists today? To begin to understand the community better and to appreciate their perspective, we must have an understanding of factors which allowed for this community to arise and become a sustainable entity. By understanding this we can begin to appreciate more fully why it is that these individuals decided to leave the comfort and privilege of their middle class homes and embrace a very radically different lifestyle.

### *Historical Context and Considerations*

*You can choke on easy ways while we stay up every night  
and every day,  
It doesn't matter what you say 'cause your ways are so  
fucking lame.  
Yeah we're all coming over while we watch you take your  
pills --watch you fall asleep.  
Yeah, and we're all going to dig the sound of the new beat.*

*There's no way that  
you're going to make it out of here in time,  
Only lovers,  
Only lovers are going to be left alive. (X2)*

*Do you feel that heat that we are all talking about?  
A realization of our wildest schemes.  
Your lack of passion and your lack of dreams,  
pretty much made you obsolete.*

*No more sitting down, shutting up, taking shit  
--we could never dream of it! (X2)*

-The (International) Noise Conspiracy (T(i)NC 2000)

The modern transient society that we see today did not develop in a vacuum. Many factors have served to develop this modern society of contemporary hobos and tramps. Transient society has a long history in the United States that far exceeds its relatively recent contemporary manifestation. Many of the greatest stories of American literature were based upon the stories of young men (and women) who went against the grain of society, struck out on their own to seek “authentic life experience,” and dictated the course of their own life on their own terms (e.g. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Walden Pond, Of Mice and Men, The Catcher in the Rye, On the Road, etc...*); many of these stories feature the lives of individuals who were transients or similarly “ranaway” to find themselves and develop a fuller understanding of the world. The underlying spirit of the nation (the “American Dream”) is depicted in the image of “the self made man” who started out with nothing and made a success of themselves by their own power and determination. This is a prevalent archetype that permeates not only the American consciousness—but is also prevalent throughout the world. The lives of individuals who strike out on their own and overcome great trials and tribulations on their journey to becoming “whole people” resonate with us all on a deep level. Most great stories in society have an “underdog” that one can stand

behind and root for. The lives of transients are full of danger and pitfalls; they are that “underdog” that must struggle to survive and pass insurmountable odds on their journey to finding liberty, self-determination, and autonomy. These people are the disillusioned ones who know in their heart of hearts that “all is not well” with the world and are seeking the answer—a different way of living. This theme is very strong in the history of transients in America and we can track it as a casual connecting line from the past, to the present, and into the future.

*Transient Beginnings: 1870s-1950s*

We can see the theme of autonomy and self determination strongly in the tales and accounts of the early American fronteer. Those people who were brave mavericks set out into the “wilderness” of North America taking on what challenges came their way such as Indian attacks, robbers, traversing dangerous terrain, and in the process became “rugged and self-sufficent.” This theme is also picked up in the highly over-exagerated history of the American west. Cowboys represented a closely related icon simmlar to the “trail blazers” of the past; they too were independent, survived by their wits, and “lived by their own set of rules” (Depastino 2003: 117-120; (Baum and Burnes 1993: 94-95).

The Civil War and the development of the steam-engine were major events that solidified the transient community. Following the Civil War, many of the soldiers who survived had no homes to come back to. Many individuals that fought in the war were newly arrived immigrants from Europe who were

conscripted shortly after their arrival to the nation. There was no effective government support for these people and many were forced to “ride the rails” in search of work (Kusmer 2002: 35-37). These individuals became known as hobos. The word “Hobo” is said to have a few different etymologies, some hold that the word is an acronym for “*HO*meward *BO*und” soldier; others contend that the acronym means “*HO*e *BO*y’s”—a reference to these individuals being mostly composed of itinerant workers (Baum and Burnes 1993: 97). Regardless, what the literature shows about this particular class of transient was that they were those particular individuals who were actively seeking work in the volatile period following the Civil War. Contrasting the hobos were the tramps. Tramps were regarded as individuals that were not actively seeking employment and would “live off the fat of others.” They would seek out help from public services, shelters and panhandle for money. They also were known for picking through the trash for food and clothing, were hustlers, and were characterized by the masses as only being interested in “having a good time” at the expense of others. Tramps existed at the same time beside hobos, traveling the same rails and having quite similar experiences because of their itinerant lifestyle. Though there was much similarity, tramps were characteristically less inclined to actively seek work (Baum and Burnes 1993: 97; Depastino 2003: 5).

While the number of tramps and hobos were limited at first in the post-Civil War era, their numbers and visibility quickly grew during the unstable financial times of the 1870s. “It would take a Wall Street crash in September 1873 and five subsequent years of bankruptcies, wage cuts, layoffs, strikes, and mass

unemployment—the first international “great depression”—to thrust the tramp army to the fore of public consciousness” (Depastino 2003, 4). During this time homelessness was rampant and the numbers were beginning to rise. Rather than respond positively to the needs of this growing population, the tendency was to see these individuals as vagrants that are undeserving of essential services (Baum and Burnes 1993: 98; Depastino 2003: 22). Strict vagrancy laws and tramp acts were put in place around the country to punish those people living on the street with incarceration. The Pinkertons brigades were established to persecute individuals that were caught riding on trains—many times these individuals paid with their lives. The transient population stayed fairly stable and experienced a decline in the years of relative prosperity in the 1920s. However, the stockmarket crash in 1929 and the subsequent “Great Depression” put millions of Americans onto the street. Once again there was a resurgence of individuals who took to riding the rails to find work or to at least escape destitution. Sympathy overtook the prevailing negative stereotypes of the homeless and the harsh laws began to be (temporarily) rolled back. Roosevelt’s “New Deal” package offered many person’s out-of-work opportunities to at least provide for themselves which relieved some of the strain that was put upon the system (Depastino 2003: 204). The 1940s and 50s were boom eras for America; the military industrial complex created vast amounts of new jobs and helped America to recover from the ravages of the Great Depression. The transient society shrank into the background of the American consciousness as consumerism, television, hollywood, movie stars,

suburbia and fast cars increasingly became White privileged America's "monoculture" of banality and tasset brutality.

*Revitalization and Transformation: 1950s - 1970s*

Interest in the transient world did not die out completely, a small group of writers, poets, and philosophers embraced the lifestyle and gave it new life. Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, and Allen Ginsberg had very close interactions with transients during the late 1940s and 50s. Kerouac crisscrossed North America and documented his experiences in the classic work, "On the Road." His travels revived in the hearts and minds of America's disaffected youth the possibility of escape from the banality of modern America (Depastino 2003: 236-240). This work influenced several generations of youth who are "seeking something" which can not be found in the trappings of the modern world (Staller 2006: 51-69; Bockris 1998: 185-188).

Runaways were viewed in progressive communities of the 1960s and 70s as children who were logically escaping a repressive culture. These activist often times took these kids under their wing and provided them with radical guidance that was steeped in the more "fringe elements" of the 1960s countercultural movements. Yippies and Diggers embraced elements of transient society as a vehicle of radical demonstration against the repressive state (Staller 2006: 21). Once again, the beat poets where deeply involved in these countercultural

movements; their affiliation and writings about transients and their commitment to social activism were the spearhead of the movement.

*The Fusion of Transient and Punk Society: 1977- 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

During the late 1970's and into the 1980s the United States began going into another severe recession. At this point in history homelessness once again began to grow; it was at this crucial point in history that punk came on the scene. Punk came as a response to the failure of the "60s countercultural (de)volution." Following the political strife of the prior twenty years the disaffected, young White, American public quickly became washed in the ethos of the "me generation;" a time typified with excess and wealth starkly contrasting with the realities of poverty, racial strife, and political corruption. (Rachman 2006).

The children of this era identified their parent's hypocrisy; the former "radical hippies" became business executives, stock brokers, and government workers in the very institutions that they fought against. The hippies did not seek to destroy the establishment, rather it was a "holiday in the sun," an escape which allowed them to turn a blind eye to reality while embracing the first intensely commodified pop cultural explosion. These White liberals claimed to be a part of the Civil Rights movement, but they allocated for themselves a separate liberation which was focused on "enlightenment of the self." It became fashionable to be antiestablishment and rebel against your "oh so ignorant and repressed" family situation (Rachman 2006). The hippies had grandiose delusions about the type of

future that they wanted. Ironically, this future was not too different from the desires of their parents. Both the hippies and their parents wanted the world shaped according to their own selfish vision and have subsequently developed grandiose memories of their own significance. In the film “SLC Punk” (a story of young punks coming of age in early 1980s Salt Lake City, Utah), Steveo (the protagonist) has a conversation with his former peace-loving hippie—now yuppie—corporate lawyer father. Steveo confronts his father for the hypocrisy of being anti-establishment in the 60s and then “selling out” to become a greasy corporate lawyer in the 80s. After he was duly chided, his father responded stating, “Remember son—I didn’t sell out, I cashed in” (McDonald 1999). This response typifies the rationale of the “me generation,” they wanted the world their way and they’d get it anyway they desired – even if that meant compromising their “staunch beliefs.”

Popular culture reflected this decadence in art and music. Corporations interested in increasing their profit margins began to cultivate music and art to gain the highest returns. They normalized decadence, drug and alcohol abuse, sexualized child stars, and cultivated an obsessive consumer culture of “off-the-rack,” carbon-copy fashionites. It was the “*artistic*” equivalency of the arms race – you had to do it bigger and better than what came before (Leblanc 1999: 35). Gradually little meaning or integrity remained in these grotesque images which were so far removed from the art of their origin. These images became the model for how one should be: shallow and trite. Marketing and consumerism became the status quo as the “me generation” became ever more focused on themselves

(Clark 2004: 223). They abandoned the concept of community, family became secondary to careers and prestige, and the children were either being completely alienated or were swept away by the dazzle of the consumer cultural model. It is from this cesspool that punk was born.

At this crucial point in history, punk challenged the mores and norms of society. Punk was an affront against a decadent, self righteous society which offered great promises to those that could afford it— while everyone else had to fend for themselves. Punk started in New York on the barrios with inner city kids who were predominately homeless, jobless, and *literally* had no future (Rachman 2006; Leblanc 1999: 35). Realizing this, many of them came to the conclusion that they should not try to fit in with Babylon at all and instead make something for themselves. Students and artists also began to embrace this burgeoning subculture contributing literary and philosophical influences to the developing scene. At this time the surviving writers of the beat generation became involved in the developing punk scene. Burroughs and Ginsberg were quite influential on key members of the early punk scene (Bockris 1998: 171, 181). Allen Ginsberg himself sang for a punk band and collaborated with *The Clash* on a track (Clash 1982; Ginsberg 1982). This contact and influence with the beat generation had the effect of imprinting the entire scene with many attitudes and behaviors that were common amongst historical tramps and hobos; today these attitudes can still be seen in punk enclaves as disparate as straight edge (sXe) and gutter punk (Haenfler 2006: 12; Leblanc 1999: 61). Punk and transient society all have a strong tradition of antiauthoritarianism, providing mutual protection/community

support, anti-racism, DIY, and a deep desire to explore and understand the world that is around them via “authentic experience” that is not reliant upon the dictates of modern society (Leblanc 1999: 61; xevasionx 2001: 16).

### *The Influence of Anarchism*

*'Cause baby, I'm an anarchist,  
and you're a spineless liberal.  
We marched together for the eight-hour day,  
and held hands on the streets of Seattle,  
but when it came time to throw bricks  
through that Starbucks window,  
you left me all alone—all alone.*

-Against Me (Against Me 2002)

*Just because I'm an anarchist  
doesn't mean that I won't burn a black flag.  
While you're wishing for utopia...  
I just hope the cops don't search my paper bag.*

-Johnny Hobo and the Freight Trains  
(Bunny, Not my Revolution (oi oi oi) 2005)

Transient society has always had fairly radical and collectivist leanings. Many of the early reports of tramps depicted them as being willing to take what they needed in order to survive. This attitude was very reflective of several elements of Anarchist philosophy. This particular attitude is reflective of the works of the then contemporary anarchist philosophers Prodhun, Kropotkin, and Lafargue who advanced the assertion that property is theft (Gambone 1996: 2), work is a form of wage slavery (Kropotkin 1920: 3), and that one has the “right to be lazy” (Lafargue 1883: 16) Hobos and tramps also were known for collectivism

that allowed for their mutual survival. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century's "hobo jungles" and "hobohemia" were made shift villages that were temporary housing for its occupants. It was an expectation that if you were staying in the camp that you would help maintain it. Hobos and tramps would bring back to these encampments supplies and food that would be for everyone's use. Hobos and tramps also had to look out for each other because it would provide a system of support that was mutually beneficial (Depastino 2003: 70).

Hobos and tramps also were very much aligned with anarcho-worker organizations like the International Workers of the World (IWW). Representing the population of individuals that is most often forgotten, discarded and legislated against—hobos and tramps would stand to benefit from social movements that sought to create equity and justice throughout society. This history of radicalism still continues today in the contemporary transient punk society.

Today's anarchists have rejected some of the traits associated with Western civilization. These activists have rejected [...] not just what might be regarded as negative features of that civilization[...] but also what mainstream culture typically deems as positive aspects.[...] Technology and the "domination" of nature, language and rationalism, politics and work—all of these phenomena have been criticized, if not abandoned, by today's anarchist theorists. (Williams 2007: 306)

By not consuming, you are boycotting EVERYTHING! All the corporations, all the stores, all the pesticides, all the land and resources wasted, the capitalist system, the all-oppressive dollar, the wage slavery, the whole burrito! That should help you get to sleep at night! (Koala: 3)

The form of Anarchism prevalent today amongst punks tends to be focused on the praxis of direct action, pragmatic decision making, the creation of "temporary

autonomous zones,” and disassociation with dominant culture (Anonymous, Rolling Dumpster: An Anarchist Comic of Dangerous Living 2009: 1-16; Terra\*ist 2011: 19-21; Bey 2001: 404-405). Being punk is simply “a principle of self-determined action and creation in the world, motivated by dissatisfaction with the commercial, consumerist mainstream” (Kreilkamp 2003: 25). Central to the core identity of the transient punk subculture is the ideology of anarchism. Many of the nuances of the subculture revolve around this philosophy and lifestyle practice. Like so many other aspects of the transient punk subculture, anarchism is highly misunderstood. Common contemporary and historical conceptions of anarchism envision it as a world without order, that without government there would be chaos in the streets, crime would be rampant, morality would slip, violence would rule the day, etc... (Russell 1919: 32; Doyle 2001: 437) The claims that government exists for the fundamental good of the people or that government is a necessary evil are positivist statements; those who make these claims must accept the burden of proof. Those that claim government makes the lives of people safer, aids in the smooth functioning of society, and is essential for assurance and maintenance of justice often accept this premise as self evident—these claims are not self evident, they are positivist in nature and this requires they be held to verification and falsification. By asserting that these are “self evident realities” means that they cannot be falsified; The assertions of the “inherent need for government” are on par with other unfalsifiable assertions like creationism, intelligent design, and the existence of God which also are dependent

upon circular logic and non sequiturs to buttress their assertions (Graffin and Olson 2010: 93).

States exercise the supreme right to revoke a person's liberty and their life. Capital punishment and war are forms of state sanctioned murder which are permissible under certain conditions which the state alone establishes. To the anarchist these are arbitrary distinctions because of the problem of universality—what the state can do is restricted to the individual and actions that are permissible for individuals in a certain context (such as killing a person in war) are not permissible in another (killing a person outside of war). The state has the supreme authority to utilize violence (or the threat of violence) against other nations and against their own people.

What is permitted to the State is forbidden to the individual. Such is the maxim of all governments. [...] Crime is the necessary condition of the very existence of the State, and it therefore constitutes its exclusive monopoly, from which it follows that the individual who dares commit a crime is guilty in a two-fold sense: first, he is guilty against human conscience, and, above all, he is guilty against the State in [allocating] to himself one of its most precious privileges. (Bakunin)

The difference between the mafia and the state is hard to distinguish by examining their characteristics alone. The mafia uses violence, coercion, and extortion to attain its wealth and dominance in a geographical area. There are other mafia groups which are also vying for this power and they are prone to outbreaks of violence against each other. The same is true of governments—the difference between the two is merely volume. All states are composed of

individuals who were able to secure enough power by using violence and coercion—that they were able to capture control of vast tracts of land (sometimes whole continents) and the valuable resources they contained. Through acts of violence and coercion, they were able to subordinate the masses and extort (collect taxes) as tribute and allegiance to the state. States are the number one purveyor of violence (Chomsky 2003: 3). Noam Chomsky elucidates on St. Augustine’s famous observation on Pirates and Emperors.

St. Augustine tells the story of a pirate captured by Alexander the Great, who asked him “how he dares molest the sea.” “How dare you molest the world?” the pirate replied: “Because I do it with a little ship only, I am called a thief; you, doing it with a great navy, are called an Emperor.” The term “terrorism” came into use at the end of the eighteenth century, primarily to refer to violent acts of governments designed to ensure popular submission. [...] Whereas the term was once applied to emperors who molest their own subjects and the world, now it is restricted to thieves who molest the powerful (Chomsky 2003: 3).

Anarchists are fundamentally opposed to violence. Violence is the tool of the state; an underlying core principle of anarchism is the non-initiation of violence. To utilize violence against another person is immoral to the anarchist because violence is used to limit the liberties of others. To violate the liberties of others would be utterly opposed to the core principles of anarchism, but to protect oneself from violation of one’s liberty is another matter.

“We at the NSF [Nihilistik Survivalist Front] realize that now multi-adaptability is paramount. We will prepare, blackmarket, hide, flee, defend, group, loot, ambush, forage and scavenge as necessary. We urge you to do the same. However, this is not an

excuse to become monsters! The day you see us raping and pilaging like Milosilveic's butchers in Kosovo, please shoot us. We'll Deserve it. Violence against property is acceptable. Violence against individuals excluding self-defense is not"

(Malicious 2000: 2)

Wage slavery is also another major concern of anarchists. To be forced to trade hours of your life in exchange for the means (capital) by which to sustain your life is not a choice at all (Anonymous, Facts (For the Survival of the Planet) 2000: 33). For anarchist—this is slavery in its most pervasive form. We have the illusion that we are in fact “free labor,” and ultimately we can control who we work for and for how long we work for them—this is a fallacy. Anarchist theorists such as Bob Black advocate for the abolition of work all together.

Work makes a mockery of freedom. The official line is that we all have rights and live in a democracy. Other unfortunates who aren't free like we are have to live in police states. These victims obey orders or-else, no matter how arbitrary. The authorities keep them under regular surveillance. State bureaucrats control even the smaller details of everyday life. The officials who push them around are answerable only to higher-ups, public or private. Either way, dissent and disobedience are punished. Informers report regularly to the authorities. All this is supposed to be a very bad thing. And so it is, although it is nothing but a description of the modern workplace. (Black, 1985)

Transient punks have taken all of these lessons to heart and have begun to construct new ways of living. They are not preoccupied with envisioning how this new society will look. They are busy taking the steps that they can take right now to create a better world with the resources that are available to them. The pragmatism of the transient punk lifestyle has allowed these individuals to create

space in which they are able to free themselves from the confines of society. They are quite literally a new cultural formation. Anarchism is highly idealistic, but for it's practitioners it is also a demonstration of their commitment to freedom and responsibility.

“What is new about today's waste liberation movement, sometimes known as 'Do It Yourselfers' (DIY) or just plain old anarchists, is that it is part of the larger movement against global capitalism, a movement made most visible when they gather en masse at G7 meetings and other iconic events of the global economy." These DIY movements, which are international in scope, consist of a variety of practices, including dumpster diving, geared towards building alternative social relations that are, as much as possible, lived beyond the dictates of states and markets. As Essig (2002) suggests: "Do It Yourselfers are not just living off the grid, but off of the excess that the grid produces. In an incredibly idealistic act of faith, they believe that by redirecting consumer capitalism's 'waste stream' to those in need, they are actually dismantling the master's house with the master's tools.” ” (Shantz 2005: 2)

### *Freeganism*

“I take pride in being able to live fat off of others’ wasteful habits. Scavenging, reclaiming, recycling, and refashioning the used into something new just makes good sense” (Mills, 2007: 121).

Many transient punks are freegans. “Freegans embrace community, generosity, social concern, freedom, cooperation, and sharing in opposition to a society based on materialism, moral apathy, competition, conformity, and greed” (Freegan.info 2011). Freegans are Vegans who try to limit their participation in the economy as much as possible. They see the connection between their potential purchasing power and the ghastly effects of global capitalism.

Freegans are being pragmatic in their problem solving skills. They understand that society will continue to produce more waste than can possibly be reused or redistributed. However, they understand the importance of not letting food, clothing, and reusable/recyclable items go to waste in a landfill. They understand that with every dollar they don't spend, they do not support an ever increasing system global dominance and oppression (Anonymous, Facts (For the Survival of the Planet) 2000: 30).

Freegans are actively trying to create more spaces where food can be grown by participating in spontaneous collective actions such as guerrilla gardening. This strategy makes use of public spaces within cities that are not being used. They cultivate crops on these properties for themselves and also for others in their community. Often these individuals form collectives (such as Food not Lawns) and utilize multiple sites for growing food in the city.

Permaculture is also a technique that some freegans use when creating green spaces. It involves the growth of multiple types of plants in an area which is conducive to overall optimum growth of food over extended periods of time.

Permaculture started out as **permanent agriculture**, the principles on which it is based can be applied to anything we do, and now it is thought of as permanent culture. It has grown to include: building, town planning, water supply and purification, and even commercial and financial systems. It has been described as 'designing sustainable human habitats.' (Whitefield, 1993)

Freegans who practice permaculture tend to be individuals who have been able to establish a more permanent settlement. This may come about either through

successfully squatting an abandoned building or by pooling together monetary resources to purchase or rent a building. It has been noted in the literature and in the participant interviews that most transient punks envision themselves as being able to one day be self sufficient and independent but often also a member of a community that shares their values and works collectively to benefit each other.

Many freegans actively recycle and reuse the items which they acquire to the fullest extent possible. There are even detailed zines which describe how to compost human waste for fertilizer and directions on how to set up the waste water from your sink and bathtub to irrigate over your garden (Anonymous, Facts (For the Survival of the Planet) 2000: 56). The ultimate goal of freeganism is to be able to create a society which is sustainable for the long term. However, there is much work to be done and the best way for them to accomplish their goals is to lead by example.

The most widely publicized freegan activity (and probably the most misunderstood about the subculture) is dumpster diving. “Dumpster diving is [...] an attempt to do something that is useful, providing food, clothing or household goods to people who need it, while also sending an overt message about the importance and possibility of conservation” (Shantz, 2005: 1-2). The amount of waste which exists in the modern world today is staggering. According to a 2004 study by the University of Arizona, 40-50% of all edible food is wasted in the U.S. every year. (Harrison, 2004) Many freegans admit that there is no way that they can even begin to keep up with the amount of food that gets wasted. Many will take excess food and set out boxes on street corners for the homeless to pick-

up. Anarcho organizations such as Food Not Bombs (FNB) also take to the dumpsters to aid the community. FNB has gone global with representation in a thousand cities around the globe. The spirit of direct action politics run deep within the transient punk/freegan community so much so that even the way they choose to live their lives is a political action.

Many people who are not freegan are timid to try this lifestyle because of the perceived threat of eating rotten food. The vast majority of food that is thrown away in dumpsters is perfectly edible food. Much of the food thrown away at wholesale grocers has only reached their ‘sell by’ date (Freegan.info 2011). Most food is edible eight to ten days after this date. Many zines on dumpster diving encourage the diver to use common sense when selecting food from the dumpster. The “sniff test” is highly regarded (Anonymous, Facts (For the Survival of the Planet) 2000: 43). Many different sources suggest washing the food very well before eating it (the packaging as well), avoid canned foods that spray when opened, as well as the suggestion to avoid eating meat. Some freegans will be willing to eat meat, but most avoid this if at all possible. Some vegans will collect rotted foods to use for composting in their gardens at home.

### *Fictive Kin, Ethnic Badging and Reciprocity*

The review of the literature has demonstrated that collectivism, survivalism, pragmatism, and consensus decision making are strong elements of the transient punk community. What it means to be a transient punk is amorphous

and uncertain on the specifics, but what is evident is the observable attitudes and behaviors of contemporary transient punks. In the dominant literature on homeless youth there are vague references to certain homeless youth who have created their own “hidden culture” (Karabanow 2004: 21). There have been observations made about youth that choose to runaway for adventure and self discovery who have a supportive community—often they are referred to as “positive runaways” (van der Ploeg and Scholte 1997: 9). Yet very little attention has been paid to this community in regards to the phenomenon amongst transient youth of establishing fictive kin relationships with each other.

Punk historically has described its self as a “large extended family.” Various factions and alignments exist in the punk subculture (Wojcik 1995: 22) and like minded individuals gravitate to each other. They are common interest groups and they tend to back each other up and provide mutual support and protection (Leblanc 1999: 91; Haenfler 2006: 79); the fact that they refer to their peers as “brothers and sisters” is significant and has implications about rights and obligations. By establishing fictive kin relationships one is creating a system of rights and obligations. sXe society is an excellent example of this. When one declares to their peers that they have decided to be sXe they are making a very bold declaration and promise. For the dedicated sXe, asserting to abstain from drugs, alcohol, and promiscuous sexual behavior is literally a life long commitment. To break edge and “sell out” is the ultimate taboo in sXe society and warrants serious consequences which may or may not include ostracism or in some cases physical assault. Those individuals who mock sXe amongst the

dedicated militant factions of their society also risk personal injury in extreme circumstances (Haenfler 2006: 40-42) But if you are a member of this community, you can rely upon other sXe kids to provide you with protection, support against making “poor decisions,” and a portal into the community. If you are a sXe living in Seattle, you could move to Denver or Florida and be able to be quickly incorporated into the local sXe community. At the shows sXe kids are bumped, hit, kicked, stepped on in the pit. People jump over each others backs and begin “piling on” –signing together their comitiments to the lifestlye. The show is a right of passage for the sXe community which builds comorodery and solidarity within the community; often this continues outside of “the show” by the things that members of the sXe community do in public (i.e. social activism, community projects, publication of zines, and the exchange of ideas).

Reputation matters very much in punk communities. If you ahave a bad reputation, that will tend to follow you where ever you go. The communities are so interconnected that word can quickly spread about the conduct of any particular person within the scene. This phenomena occurs in all punk enclaves and manifestations—it is a fairly universal reality of the subculture (Leblanc 1999: 91). To be able to survive and thrive in the transient community one must be willing to work with each other for their mutual survival. By adopting each other as fictive kin, they increase their overall chances of survival. It has been scantly reported in the academic literature, but in the transient punk literature and in the testimonies of the participants of this study it has been revealed that the entire community of transients tends to see itself as a large extended family. When

transients go to different communities they can be fairly well assured that other transients will be able to provide them with information that will make their survival possible (e.g. good places to dumpster dive and fly a sign, good places to hitchhike from, what times trains are coming by and where they are going, locations of public feedings, good places to squat etc...) It has also been observed in some academic writings but largely reported in transient punk writings that the sharing of resources such as food and water is a free transfer. The reciprocity that typifies this community regarding these types of resources is generalized reciprocity and balanced reciprocity. Generalized reciprocity is characterized by the freely giving of resources without the expectation of an equal return; this reciprocity is common amongst kin relationships—usually this reciprocity is returned to the giver in time but there is no direct expectation of repayment (Allen and Darboe 2010: 184). Generalized reciprocity is visible in the system of rights and obligations that exist between kin. Balanced reciprocity also exists in the transient punk community usually expressed in the form of barter and trade (Allen and Darboe 2010: 180)—but also in the exchange of money, but this is usually a very limited exchange—transients tend to shy away from the use of capital in their exchanges and typically try to limit their involvement in the “formal economy.”

The interviews have revealed that there are certain individuals that do not follow this general rule of conduct—not surprisingly these individuals do not enjoy the same level of support in the community because of the aberrant behavior. This reciprocity can be conditional in this regard to those that abuse it—but

generally speaking, transients will tend to help each other out. There has been a long tradition of this in transient history—even in the hobo jungles of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century reciprocity and reputation were very important in the community. This characteristic has persisted in the community to the present day (Depastino 2003, 70-71; Finkelstein, Curtis and Spunt 2008: 56).

Another prevalent theme is the persistence of ethnic marking and badging in the transient community; this is yet another characteristic that draws heavily from the history of transiency and also from the punk subculture. Historically tramps and hobos used different markers called “the hobo alphabet” to communicate to each other useful information about the area such as if a particular farmer will let you sleep in his barn or that the police are present in the area. These symbols also let other hobos and tramps know that there were others like them in the area—this would often clue these individuals in on where to go to locate these individuals. Punk society also has many symbols that clue in others to their alignments or their presence. Anarcho-graffiti communicates much information to those in the know about a community and the punks that are in the area. Patches, band shirts, and icons also communicate to those in the know what a particular individual's alignments are, who they associate primarily with, their general beliefs about the world, and their philosophical outlook (Wojcik 1995: 11-21). Tattooing is also a common feature of the transient punk subculture—many of these are made using home-made tattooing guns by individuals that are not professionals. Visible tattoos on hands and the face are also fairly common and

indicate that an individual has made a permanent life decision which will disallow them from re-entering Babylon forever (Wojcik 1995: 50).

One of the best descriptions that exists in the academic literature concerning transient punks was written by Leblanc in "Pretty in Punk: Girls' Gender Resistance in a Boys' Subculture." Leblanc describes some important aspects of this subcultural enclave:

Throughout the 1980s the most hardcore (both in the sense of being fans of hardcore and being committed to the punk subculture) of hardcore punks often adopted forms of street living, squatting in abandoned buildings or "couch surfing" from one's acquaintance's home to another's. This type of subcultural population evolved, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, into its own faction of the punk subculture, whose members are known as "street punks," "crusties," "travelers," or "gutter punks." [...] Gutter punks adopt[ed] an itinerant lifestyle, traveling throughout North America by hitching rides, jumping trains, or obtaining gas vouchers. [...] Gutter punks tend to travel a circuit that links Seattle to San Francisco to Austin, Texas wintering in New Orleans (or at least arriving for Mardi Gras), and often ending up in New York City. Gutter Punks tend to travel in small groups of two to five, often splitting up and serendipitously reuniting with friends in other cities. [...] Today, punk survivalism flourishes, with small groups of gutter punks traveling together, while larger groups share a squat, food, and the proceeds of their dumpster diving, panhandling, and busking. When members of the group are threatened, other punks can be counted on to help them by physically defending them. Punks help hide runaways from the police, and assist their peers in leaving town if they get in trouble with the police. [...] both gutter punks and punk rockers I spoke with characterized members of their subculture as being like-minded and supportive. They describe punks as a family, one in which bonds of support were often stronger than those posed in their own families. (Leblanc 1999: 61, 91)

### CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

#### *Statement of Purpose*

The purpose of this study was to document the oral narratives of the transient punk subculture, analyze their stories for themes, and present an accurate portrait of their society. The lives of transient punks are not well documented and there is a real risk that if these stories are not collected, they will eventually disappear forever. Transient punks represent a unique population of homeless youth who have a very different experience of being homeless that does not accord well with the literature describing the prevalent characteristics of youth homelessness. By utilizing a narrative analysis, patterns in the stories of these individuals' lives have been able to come into focus; this has offered insight into the community which has previously been unknown. These interviews throw into relief the accuracy of academic and non-academic literature on their population—by comparing the findings of the interviews with the existing literature we can begin to understand what is accurate and inaccurate about current understandings of this community. This ethnographic study has been done to establish the identity politics of these marginalized peoples.

### *Literary Research*

Both academic *peer-reviewed* publications and non-academic *peer-reviewed* publications were utilized to establish a base of understanding about the community. Very little information about this community exists in the academic community but there is substantially more that has been written by the individuals that are participating in the scene. Both publication types are subject to peer-review, analysis, and criticism—both have their own degrees of exclusivity which make access to these materials hard for the general public. Academia has an *in-group bias* towards their publication and review process. To be published in a reputable publication which is visible to the rest of your peers for evaluation and critique is an important factor when considering the validity of a study. These publications are largely unavailable to the general public who do not typically have subscriptions to academic journals or access through a university library system. Though these articles are *peer-reviewed* they often are in circulation to a very privileged few.

The non-academic publications of the transient punk community (zines, poetry, lyrics, art) are also fairly exclusive and difficult for the common man to acquire. Like the academics, unless you are a part of the community, access to these publications that *are peer-reviewed* (according to the process developed by the community) is difficult. These non-academic publications can be verified for validity based upon the response that these publications yield from the rest of the transient punk community. The transient punk community does not have a hierarchal structure, anyone can voice their opinion at any time—direct

democratic processes are involved in the response to publications in the community; everyone can have their say and input on the validity of a claim because there is no hierarchy in the community. They don't need a title or degree to qualify them for expertise. Those publications that are most relevant are the ones that are most prevalent in the community (i.e. the more popular a particular publication is the more it gets copied—the more it gets copied, the more it circulates—the more it circulates, the more relevant the publication is). Excerpts have been taken from a variety of non-academic sources, some being more popular than others; content is varied in these publications but exists within a range that is typical of transient punk subcultures of interest (which itself is quite varied). It is hoped that by using a wide range of sources from the non-academic transient punk literature that one may be able to begin mapping the diversity of the community and gather a wide range of opinions to help triangulate core themes.

That their publications would be considered “unacademic” would be perceived to some as an *ad hominem attack*. Many of these publications provide heavy citations to outside sources and are fairly holistic in their scope of research; other publications however, can be just the opposite—polemics and rantings with little substantive material. Discerning these types of publications from each other is no great task; but the “ranting” and “raving” of some of these publications does represent part of the community's cultural capital and should be taken into consideration as well.

Transient punks do not worry about whether or not their publications are considered valid by the academic community—they are relevant to their community and they understand that academia is an institution *which reifies the state* ultimately. These individuals by far do not acknowledge the state as a valid institution—they do not need the approval of the state in any other realm of their lives, why would they need the state to give *their writings* about *their own lives* validity? Just as academia has an in-group bias in how they establish validity, the transient punk subculture has an in-group bias that renders the state and its accompanying institutions invalid and obsolete. The transients show that the “man behind the curtain” is only a man and the state has validity only as long as you give it validity.

### *Selection of Locale*

The field research undertaken to document the oral narratives of the transient punk community was decided to be done by participant observation and snowball sampling. I had already had connections with individuals who were transient punks prior to initiation of the study. Two individuals who were both participants in the study were selected as gatekeepers to the community. These individuals were vital in being able to identify locations to conduct the study, establishing connections to individuals within the community receptive to participation, and contributed unique and innovative insights while in the field. One of these individuals was living in a friend’s RV in San Diego, California—he

borrowed a ride from a friend, traveled back to Minnesota, and came to join me on the trip out west. The other individual was living as work-trader at a housing co-operative in Eugene, Oregon where several transient punks were living there as work-traders or were passing through the city and were crashing on the porch. We received an invitation from the gatekeeper and the co-operative that we were welcome to conduct our research there. Eugene was also selected as the first location for study because it has a reputation as being a “hub” for transients and traveler youth. In Eugene, there are very many travelers and youth that are living on the streets; this city has a long history of transients within it’s community. Interviews were primarily collected at the housing co-op; tours of the city and interactions with other street people were also documented.

The second location selected was in Arcata, California. Initially the second location was to be a squat in Seattle that we had been directed to by several participants. Seattle too also has a history of transients frequenting the metro area. However due to money and time restrictions, Seattle was not going to be possible. We had received a connection with a specific participant in Arcata who suggested we come down because we may be able to interview some of the individuals who were doing “direct action” in the region. This however did not pan out, at the last minute the potential candidates decided that they would decline interviewing to maintain security culture. Subsequently we only collected one interview in Arcata. While in Arcata, field notes were taken of interactions with a large gathering of transients in Redwood Park.

The third location was an originally scheduled destination: People's Park in Berkeley, California. We timed our arrival to coincide with FNB's feeding for that day. An original plan was to seek out FNB in the cities we visited because it is frequented by transient punks and chapter members tend to be aligned with and familiar with people in the transient community. We arrived shortly after FNB finished their feeding but quite a few transients remained in the park. Interviews were conducted with individuals who had gathered around a particular bench area that was shaded in; field notes were also taken on the goings on in the park and with the transients.

The fourth location for data collection was the Haight-Ashbury district in San Francisco. Several transients were interviewed in this area, in the surrounding parks, and on the street. Haight-Ashbury has historically been a gathering place for transients in the latter 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century (Staller 2006: 22, 78). The surrounding parks are lush and provide plenty of locations where transients can congregate; the tourist attraction of Haight-Ashbury allows many transients to be able to sustain themselves by solicitation of tourists.

The fifth and sixth locations were Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. Minneapolis has in recent decades become a mid-nation hub for transients. Minneapolis also has a strong activist community and was ground zero for the National Republican Convention in 2008; transient activists converged on the city of St. Paul from across the nation and the world to protest the Bush administration and what many in the activist community perceived as "a continuation of the Bush Doctrine" in the Republican candidates for President.

The seventh location was the city of Mankato, Minnesota. Mankato was selected because I personally knew individuals in the community who were transient punks. These individuals were in various stages of transition—some were just coming back from the road, others were just about to go on the road for the first time.

### *Selection of Participants*

Selection of the participants for the study was done on a case-by-case basis. While in Eugene, one was able to be in the vicinity of these individuals for an extended period of time. By establishing contact with these individuals I came to know more about them in time, once I had felt confident that this particular individual would be a healthy candidate, I would approach them to be in the study. Very often these individuals would comply with my request while others I had come to know declined for a variety of reasons including time, interest, and security culture. Another advantage of this particular location was that everyone was fairly familiar with each other and were able to direct me towards individuals they felt would be good to interview. This particular co-op also has a zine which they produce which is exclusively about their members and work traders which gives a biography of each of the individual at the housing co-op. This zine was useful in determining the accuracy of individuals statements as well as providing insight into how the individual is perceived by their community in their co-op.

Participants that were interviewed on the street were selected initially by their “ethnic badges and markers” which are displayed in the form of tattered clothing, hand sewing of patches, traveler backpacks with tents and/or camping gear visible. Some individuals had pets with them with make-shift leashes for both dogs and cats. cursory conversations were had with these individuals to assess if they may be good candidates for the study. Some individuals approached on the street were not interested in being interviewed, but generally speaking—most people were happy to at least talk.

Individuals interviewed in Minneapolis/St. Paul were people that were former travelers primarily; these individuals were selected because transients are not just transients *when they are on the street*. Many of these individuals still retained much of the spirit and ideology they had while on the street and some even envision going back at some point. Their stories are still valid and important to capture as they are already transitioning out of the community.

### *The Interview Process*

Interviews were semi-structured. Each interview began with basic information about the participants demographics and then shifted to a broad question regarding the origin of their becoming a transient. The participants were reminded that the interview is about their life as member of the transient community and that the content of what they wished to reveal was entirely up to them. They were informed that they could not answer any question they wanted to

and that they could end the interview at any time they wished. They were encouraged to be as candid as possible. I purposely let the interviews be guided primarily by the participants because I wanted them to be able to tell their own story on their own terms. Specific questions were asked when necessary to collect specific information of interest that was not directly revealed in their story. Interviews would range in length from 15 minutes to 2 ½ hours. Some of the interviews were extremely detailed while others were less so. Longer interviews were associated with individuals that had longer initial exposure time to my presence than those who had just met me in passing on the street.

Establishing rapport and trust with the participants was key to successful interviewing. This community is fairly exclusive and is reluctant to reveal information about themselves to those they perceive to be outsiders. Even though I have a long history of association with the community, I don't have this long history with the individuals in the field—sharing my personal story and experience in the scene with the participants was important for establishing trust that I am genuine in my intentions and cognizant of how to handle the information.

### *Data Analysis*

Narrative analysis was utilized to organize and understand the data. Themes in the life stories of the participants were identified and compared with the existing information on this community. Push/pull factors for becoming

homeless, survival strategies, philosophical tendencies, and behavioral patterns were revealed in the interviews.

### *Autoethnography*

An important aspect of the analysis of this study is the influence of autoethnography. I am a member of the punk rock subculture and have maintained a close relationship with and have much respect for the transient aspect of our community. My experience doing field work in the community has help given me a more personal understanding of who and what I am in the larger punk rock community. The stories of the participants are their own story, but it is also in many ways my story as well. I could have easily have choosen to take the path of transiency myself; I entertained this possibility for quite some time (and to an extent I still do). The findings of the study are written in such a way as to present some demographic information about the population, but it is far more focused on capturing the spirit of the community in the words of the individuals that are there living it. Because of my experince I have unique insight into the community. “Autoethnographers are priviledged with a holistic and intimate perspective on their “familiar data.” This initial familiarity gives autoethnographers an edge over other researchers in data collection and in-depth analysis/interpretation” (Chang 2008: 52). That being said, Chang asserts that there are certain pitfalls to autoethnography that must be taken into consideration. Autoethnography has to maintain a focus upon a community, autoethnographers must be careful not to

allow their part in the story doesn't overshadow the rest of the community. Autoethnographers must also make sure that the narrative aspect does not interfere with the conveyance of their findings. (Chang 2008: 55)

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *Background Information*

I was sixteen when I first was introduced to the punk scene. I had been a social outcast in my rural community in South Dakota so I sought out friendships with individuals that were living in nearby Aberdeen. Some of the people I met were part of the punk scene in Aberdeen and they felt that I would probably be interested in checking it out. I had already been identifying as an anarchist for a couple of years and was craving adventure; my interest in what was going on in Aberdeen began to grow. I went to my first punk show at Cobain's Arcade in downtown Aberdeen; that night several straight-edge hardcore bands were playing and the music and energy of the show grabbed me immediately. It wasn't long before I was starting my own band, playing my own shows, writing my own poetry, and participating in the local punk community. I felt as if I had stumbled on something very important that virtually no one else knew about except for the people that were in my scene.

It was during this early period that I became introduced to some of the first transient punks that I had ever known. I met a guy at a show one night that had a two-foot-tall blue and purple mohawk, wearing a lace nighty, combat boots and a straw cowboy hat with a large anarchy symbol painted on the front with beer bottle caps crimped into the brim. Patrick and I became friends over the years and he shared with me that most people thought that he was gay, but he really wasn't. Patrick actually was transitioning from male-to-female and had been for a number of years. He had been hitch hiking and jumping trains for quite some time between South Dakota and Texas where he was undergoing the process of transitioning from one gender to another. As the years passed, Patrick would be gone for long periods of time and then all of a sudden show up on your door step. Patrick lived with me in an apartment for a few months, at this point she no longer was identifying as a male and had asked everyone to start calling her Patricia. Patricia introduced me to a lot of street punk music, Howard Zinn, Mumia Abu-Jamal, and direct action. Today Patricia is still in transition from male to female and still is hitching.

Another friend of mine named Ray also was a traveler. Ray lived on a small farm outside of Fredrick, South Dakota; One morning when Ray was driving to school he approached the stop sign at the end of the dirt road leading away from his parents farm. Instead of turning right and heading to school, Ray decided he'd head left towards Aberdeen. Upon reaching Aberdeen, Ray decided that he'd drive to the Coffee Cup in Sisseton (approximately seventy miles east of Aberdeen just off of I-29. After spending sometime at the gas station, Ray

decided that he'd just drive to Sioux Falls for the day (some 200+ miles from his home). When he got to Sioux Falls, Ray abandoned the car, emptied his bank account, and booked a one-way ticket on a bus to Ashville, North Carolina. When Ray arrived in Ashville he knew no one. He crossed the divided highway and walked into the city center and eventually found himself outside of a coffee shop. While there he met some other punk kids and they helped him find some food and a place to stay. For the next three weeks Ray stayed with these punks, got some "kicks," and eventually came back to South Dakota.

I was always amazed by the stories that I had heard from Patricia and Ray. I found it intriguing that they had the bravery to just pick up and leave on a cross-country adventure with nothing at all to support them and no idea of what would happen on the way. A couple years after my initial exposure to the transient community, a fateful event happened in the Aberdeen punk scene's history. A large black bus came rolling into town with a group of traveler punk musicians called the "Psalters." The Psalters were an anarchist Christian group that musically was very influenced by Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, gypsy, punk and neo-tribal culture. They were anti-globalist and were strongly against the looming war in Iraq. They produced their own zines about dedication to God and distrust of the state. Everyone in the scene was sporting their anti-flag patches and becoming more aligned to transient life. Our scene was always known for being very genuine and high energy and the local kids left quite an impression on the Psalters. Originally hailing from Michigan, the Psalters would criss-cross the country as "psalm singers" spreading their ideas about community, God, and

living outside of society. Many of the members of the Psalters would come back through Aberdeen over the years by hitch hiking or by riding the rails. Eventually more and more of my friends started hitching and Aberdeen quickly became known as a friendly place for traveler punks to come to. Travelers coming into town were being put-up at the local art & music house that was leased to punk kids by the owner of the Red Rooster. This house was located right by the train tracks, and it became a regular stop for many transients that were passing through. Vagrant, a participant in the study, lived at this art & music house during this period of time and recounts his experience and it's influence on the course of his life.

When I was living up in Aberdeen, this is about four years ago, we got a lot of train hoppers. The apartment that I was living in was right next to the train yard, so we had homeless kids coming up and chilling out with us. That was kind of the inspiration spark to get shit rolling. (Vagrant)

I always knew that there was something that was special about this community and I made sure that I was doing my part to help these kids out when they came through town. I eventually moved away from Aberdeen but the influence of transient society always stayed with me. In my undergrad I would hold heated arguments with individuals who thought that all homeless people were mentally ill or that they were on the street because they were burnt out drug users. I knew that there were people out there that had made the choice to become homeless because I knew them personally. As I entered into graduate school, it became clear that this population would become the focus of my thesis. I had always

wanted to spend more time with these people “in their element” and this was the perfect opportunity.

What follows are the life stories of the transient punk participants of this study. The names of the participants have been changed to protect the anonymity of the respondents. In certain special situations the details on the exact locations where parts of the study were conducted have been obscured so as to protect the autonomy and anonymity of these communities.

The following pages should not be taken as “instructions” or a “guide” on how to live an itinerant lifestyle. *Hitch hiking, train hopping, dumpster diving, squatting, direct action, etc... are potentially dangerous activities which are often illegal, hazardous, or potentially deadly.* It is not my intention to encourage any one to partake in these activities—these activities are strictly the cultural capital of the transient punk community and *should not* be intruded upon by outsiders.

### *Demographics*

The transient punk community is fairly diverse in its form. Many different people from many different backgrounds are represented in this population but the vast majority of individuals are White. Only one of the participants in this study was of a racial minority (Latino) however this is not representative of what had been observed in the field. In San Francisco there were several transient punks who were racial minorities in Haight-Ashbury. One individual was a Black punk with

an afro-mohawk who was hanging out on the corner while interviews were being conducted. He had a full pack of Camel cigarettes that he got kicked down to him and was walking around the street handing out cigarettes to transients. He was wearing combat boots, a torn shirt and a trench coat that had been fully splatter painted in a variety of different colors in a Jackson Pollock-esque motif. In the film "The Decline of Western Civilization: Part III," several gutter punks were interviewed "in their element" on the streets of Los Angeles in 1996; many of the punks in the film were racial minorities (Latino, Black, and Asian). These individuals described their experience in the scene as being a welcoming environment (Spheeris 1998). The film "American Hardcore" also has documented racial minorities within the punk scene and the film "Afro-Punk" specifically focuses on the lives of Africans in the scene (Rachman 2006; Spooner 2003). Exact numbers regarding the ethnic composition of the transient punk community is difficult to pinpoint but what can be stated with certainty is that the transient punk community is predominately White in its ethnic composition.

Establishing what the population of this community is also very difficult. Until effective ways of measuring populations of people that are nomadic and generally unreceptive to participation in such ventures are developed, speculation will continue about what the exact numbers are. Even amongst transients speculation about the size of the community is very divergent. Some individuals say that it could be as low as three hundred people nationally while high end speculation is around 50,000-100,000. Many of the participants fall somewhere in between but no one expressed certainty about these figures. Low end speculations

seem unlikely because of the amount of individuals observed in the field—this observation was made by Steven, a participant in the study who had been traveling for three years but had left the road two years ago. Steven also was quite vocal in his interview about how he feels that *no one* should go onto the street; this was not because he had a bad experience or thought it was especially dangerous—his interests were clearly in preserving the community from ignorant “thrill seekers.”

I see it [transient society] as an underground community, punk is not underground—It has websites and books written on it—every one knows about it. There are some traveling websites too, but until you actually go out and do it—you don’t know if you can hack it. It’s fun and challenging—but it’s also miserable. Most people can’t hack it. I make fun of “summer time squatters,” Anti-flag wrote a song about it, unless you’re a “winter warrior” and travel year around, I just can’t take you seriously. But that’s the way I like it, because it *is* underground...people aren’t online telling you what to do to get by. Someone posted the crew change online (laughs) he got *the shit* beat out for that one. It’s a *fucking felony* to even *own one* and he photocopied it and put it on his website, I mean, how stupid can you be? (laughs) I think if your gonna do it, then your gonna do it and theres nothing I can do to stop you. If you think its just gonna be fun, just *stay home* , go *back to school*, and *don’t* loose your *teeth*—cause that’s whats gonna happen if you go out on the road, you’ll have no teeth by the time you’re done. Is it fun, is it worth it? Yeah. But there’s no fucking around with it. (Steven)

It is reasonable to suspect that the lower estimate that was given by Steven was partly due to his motives for protecting the community; this behavior is fairly common in the scene. Many transients were observed while in the field. In Eugene alone transients could be seen throughout the city—particularly near the library and the Whitetaker region which had denser populations of transients. In

Arcata, which is a relatively small city on the coast of Northern California, transients were observed with fair regularity in different parts of the city. At People's Park in Berkeley and Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, several transients were observed in these locations as well. While on the road transients were observed with more regularity than I had experienced in the past. Several participants in the study indicated that they too have been noticing quite a few more people joining the transient contingent in recent years. Bertrand asserted in his interview that this is one of the largest uptakes of transients since the 1960s. Although we cannot come to a coherent conclusion on the exact numbers, what can be gathered is that the community is currently growing in size this may be due to the economic recession—in the early 1980s there was a large recession and the amount of individuals taking to the street increased substantially. Financial instability is very common in this community—though that does not appear to be a limiting factor in the life that transients live, to the contrary this is often a key *liberating* factor.

The age of the transient population is also difficult to establish. There is some evidence in the literature that these individuals enter the street in their teens. Since the study was limited to transients over the age of eighteen, the more youthful transients were not included in the study. Observations in the field as well as personal testimony from the participants indicates that the transient community is largely composed of younger individuals. This study interviewed 18 transients and the average age was 20 with the median age being 22.5; the range of age was 18-27. Observations in the field also indicate that there is a

substantial population of older transient punks (over 30) who also are still actively traveling and living on the street. Once again, due to the inherent problems in documenting a largely nomadic population that is largely unreceptive to such inquiries makes establishing a baseline of information on this population difficult. Future comprehensive studies will hopefully be able to shine more light on this aspect of the transient community.

Demographics of sex in the community also face the same problems. Eleven of the participants in the study were biological males and eight were biological females. The transient community is quite progressive and is generally opposed to the use of defining labels—this should also be taken into consideration with future studies of this community. The literature indicates that there is a substantial amount of intersexed people within the community as well as individuals that are transitioning between genders. Visibility of these individuals in the transient community is far more prevalent than in dominant society. Because punk historically has challenged absolute states of being and restrictive labels of identity—this community has been one of the greatest supporters of these “non-mainstream” identities. Though the participants of the study are biologically speaking “male and female,” one cannot speculate on if this is how they identify. The co-operative in Eugene that was visited is a pro-consent, pro-sex environment. In their co-op zine is a section entitled “Do It Yourself! How to: Mend a broken heart in the (name of the co-op withheld)” one of the tips that is suggested is:

## 2. Sleep with your roommates

I know what you're thinking: "I don't shit where I eat!" I said that once, too. But here's the thing—you're gonna do it eventually, trust me, and it would be best for you to do it when you have a excuse the morning after. Just say the word "rebound." and everyone will applaud your constructive mourning. Think of your broken heart as a good opportunity to do really inappropriate things without repercussions. Is there something different you've been wanting to try? A new room—the roof, perhaps? Bisexuality or polyamory? Shit, grab a basket of condoms from the health center and have some fun while you can (P. 2010: 27).

Identities are fluid within the transient community and this includes sexual identity as well; what one identifies as can be quite varied or a composite of many different things into a unique identity. Anarchist communities tend to be quite accepting of all manifestations of sexuality as long as it is between consenting persons (Anonymous, Fiddle Faddle 2009: 3). Two of the participants spoke on their sexual identity, observations of sexuality in their community, and community attitudes regarding sex.

I had this GF I was in a open relationship with and we went to this festival and were like, "Ok, lets go have some fun with whoever we want," and we both ended up hitting on the same girl! (laughs) It was pretty hilarious! Out of like 400 some people we find the same person. The three of us started dating, basically. I dropped out because the semester ended and I felt like I just couldn't go back. [...] My girlfriend and I hitched down to see this girl [we met at the Brattleboro Festival, at her home] in upstate NY and we stayed for a while at the crimethinc collective there—that was when I first started traveling. [Steven]

It [the sexuality of the transient community] is very open very free...*in a good way!* (laughs) *You gotta be careful though* because you don't know where they've been! (laughs) Most things are mutually accepted and pleasurable. The community is very open to

all sexuality; If your gay, straight, bi, transgender they accept you. It's like—free love, *we'll kick your ass*, but we'll give you loving first. The more love you give the more is received. [Harlan]

### *Challenges for Female Travelers*

Another topic of interest in the realm of sex and sexuality is the experiences of female travelers. Some of the participants shared their feelings about what it like to be a female traveler and patterns emerged in their accounts. One predominating theme was being viewed as being a sex worker and being solicited by men on the street.

Some guys try to pick you up for sex. It's not like "you're cute and adorable"—it's, "how much do you want for sex." It's weird I've noticed people cruising for travelers; It's almost like I'm wearing hooker boots, carrying a tiny purse, and a short mini skirt. *It's an alternative universe*. It's strange, the offers for sex and to work for sex are fairly common. It happens so often, some people will be alarmed, I'll see a guy walking up to me in a park and I'm like, "That guy is just coming up to see if I'll have sex for money." And the other people are like, "Really, you think that is what he wants?" And sure enough he asks me to have sex for money and no one else would have called it—I can smell it a mile a way that this guy just wants to pay me for sex. Before I started traveling I asked some traveling girls what I should know—they told me to never hitch with a skirt on, at night, or alone at night. Never hitch with a skirt on or dressed provocatively. You don't want a ride from someone looking only at your skirt. Always trust your intuition. I've turned down rides before because I felt uncomfortable. I don't hitch by myself, I seem to attract a bunch or weirdos. I traveled with men for a long time for protection—we'd spilt off for a day or two in the city and as soon as they'd leave, I'd get offers again. It's annoying and hard to get used to at first but now I know how to handel it. Some girls are afraid to travel because they fear people asking them to have sex for money but that's not a good enough reason for me to abandon this lifestyle. It wont stop me from doing what I want to do. (Eve)

Some people will prey on you because you are a woman and you travel, they assume that you're a prostitute. It's something that makes me angry, don't assume that because I live outside and travel that I'm a whore! Fuck off, don't treat me like that! Other's are like, "That takes a lot of courage, let me help you out." I travel with others to be safe. When I'm alone, creepy guys come up and want to take me home. There's a balance though, a woman hitching alone is gonna get a ride faster than a dude—that's a plus! They tend to be kinder because they want to know you're ok. Somedays you meet creeps, other days you meet really awesome people. It's like that in all groups, but there's a higher risk because I don't have a house I can go hide in if things get bad. (Remy)

The potential for abuse to happen to women in relationships in this community is also very real. More research should be done to assess the scope of this problem in the community. Observations in the field indicate that the potential for abusive relationships in the community is a definite possibility. Some primitivist have received a bad reputation for "being pro-rape" characterizing it as a "natural state" of humanity and justifying it when it happens. Generally speaking the community is very protective of female travelers and are quick to react if they are being harassed. More often it seems these abusive relationships are hidden from community view. Andromeda spoke at length about the abusive situation she found herself trapped in when she went to Omaha, Nebraska to meet up and travel with her boyfriend. On her arrival they broke up and were sharing the same space in his trailer. He was a heavy drinker and would become belligerent and violent with Andromeda. They never actually went traveling because his alcoholism deepend while she was with him for those two months.

One night, oh shit it was a really bad night. This night he was upset about something and he was pushing me out of the house. I was like, “Fuck no, I’m fighting back.” [...] He tried to push me out of the house and I chased him into the bathroom and I sank my nails really deep into his skin and he slammed the door shut on my arm. I yanked it out, I broke my wrist I’m pretty sure. It hurt really bad for a long time. I didn’t go to the doctor or anything; I didn’t have money or health insurance. He pushed me out of the house, locked the doors, and I was upset—yelling and screaming. Pretty soon the cops showed up. [...] They get him to the door and tell him to give them a call again if this *crazy lady* starts acting up again—that happens a lot, the person who is the victim ends up getting charged. That culminated in a three day drinking binge. I had bruise all over my body. [...] I woke up and he walks into the trailer and opens the door and slams it and calls me “a cunt ass bitch”—that day he called me that at least ome hundred times. He said, “Look at what you did to me bitch,” and showed me the scratches on his arm. I’m like (she begins to start crying), “Josh, do you not see all these bruises all over my arms and my back?” He said I did it to myself. “Are you kidding me, I didn’t do that to myself. You did that to me you fucking asshole!” That day he smashed my guitar [...] once I found out about him killing my guitar, I knew I was leaving. [...] I was glad I was sober beause I can outrun him and I had my wits about me. [...] He came down the trail, goes in the house and went outside again. I walked back into the house and I see this shadow running up behind me. I run through the house and he screams, “I’m gonna spray you with tear gas. You better fucking hide.” So I ran and hid, I called this girl—I was so glad she was in Omaha. (Andromeda)

Andromeda was eventually able to leave her abusive relationship after another short two week encounter which resulted in further violence. She was able to get in contact with her friends in Oregon and they decided that they would help her.

They called me and asked if I needed a ride. I said, “You don’t have to come drive halfway across the country to get me.” They said, “I know, but do you want a ride?” I told [my ex] that they were coming for me and he said, “they’re driving half way across the country just to to get *you*? And from then on, I wasn’t taking

shit from him anymore. The day I left—oh God, the day I left... I slept thru my alarm and [her friend in Omaha] was there; I woke up twenty minutes before my bus was going to leave. “Omaha is trying to hold me there and make me miss my bus!” [She] took me there. [...] When I was on the bus there was a feeling of relief. My friends picked me up at the bus station. I go back to the house and immediately I had four strong women putting their arms around me and holding me. Oh my god, it was two months, but it felt like a fucking year—it felt like such a long time. (crying) We spent the next few days traveling back and it was the most empowering thing, we broke down in the Badlands and had to push it 3 miles back to the highway. It was scary, it was this haunted area with ghost hitchers and shit. We pushed the car to the nearest town and called AAA and stuff. It was great traveling back with those women, traveling back made it all worth it. People cared for me to drive *thirty hours* for me. She was, I don’t know, I didn’t even *know* friendship like that could exist. (Andromeda)

Solidarity amongst female travelers is another major theme in the narratives. Many women in the community feel that need to have a man, travel in groups, or have a dog with them when they are on the road in order to provide protection. This was observed in the field-- female travelers were rarely seen traveling alone. Female participants in the study have voiced that they want to experience traveling on their own or with groups of women. There appears to be a rising consciousness about this issue in the community and the women are coming up with innovative ways of protecting themselves while traveling alone.

We had it figured out, “you sit in the front and I sit in the back with a knife; if they try anything funny, I’ll put the knife up to his neck.” [...] I had this feeling that if anyone tried to fuck with me I’d cut their fucking balls off. I’m not scared, I’ll fight for my life—that comes from traveling on the road, “don’t fuck with me I’m not afraid to pull a knife.” Other things I’d do is get their license plate number and text it to a friend and I let them know that if I don’t call in three hours to call the cops. Then I can say to

people that pick me up, “If they pull shit with me that I sent their license number to my friend and they’ll call the cops if I don’t call in three hours.” One tip I was given was to have a real *bad ass* attitude, like always having a knife visible when approaching a car on the outside of your clothes so they don’t fuck with you. [...] I’ve never been attacked while traveling. I’ve been attacked five blocks from my house in Hawaii, but not the road. Society likes to act like the streets are a lot scarier and meaner than they are. [Eve]

Eve’s statements were verified in the field. As Vagrant and I were traveling through Wyoming we came across a group of five travelers (two women, three guys) outside of a gas station. They were looking for a ride and didn’t want to break up their group, unfortunately we didn’t have enough room in our vehicle, so we gave them a couple packs of cigarettes instead. When the lead female approached the car with her map to discuss a route to Los Angeles with us she was holding the map and a large knife in the other hand leaning on Vagrant’s window. She kept the knife visible the whole time while she was conversing with us. This technique used while traveling may come across as intimidating, but it is necessary behavior to ensure one’s safety on the road. Further study on female travelers is currently being done by a colleague in Eugene who was traveling cross-country collecting the stories of female travelers exclusively. Her data should reveal even more information about the female transient community.

*Our cities seem to function quite the same: sweeping ghettos under one big rug makes them easier to contain, so the upper-middle class can sleep (or shop in peace) and convince themselves that "trickle-down" will solve this poverty.*

*Yes, murderers walk our streets; their weapons are their pens,  
desks, policies, and P.R. campaigns (fed by the spoils of war)  
against the "lazy, shiftless" populations of the poor.*

*This system cannot be reformed!  
(so why don't we try something else?)*

-Propagandhi (Propagandhi 1996)

### *Songs to Fan the Flames of Discontent*

For many who eventually hit the street and adopt an itinerant lifestyle, the influence of the punk scene was instrumental in the formation of their identity and their conception of the world. Fundamentally, punk music challenges the listener on several different levels. The music style itself is often coarse and so is the subject matter. The lyrical content of the music can be quite radical and politically charged—challenging the state, the status quo, morality, and the banality of middle class “monocultural” existence. Pat the Bunny is former singer and song writer of the group “Johnny Hobo and the Freight Trains,” his song “Church Hymn for the Condemned” captures well the antiauthoritarian sentiments which permeate this subcultural population.

*Life's like the feeling when you had a point, but forgot it.  
Had a ticket for my train of thought, but I lost it.  
God gave me instructions on how to live my life,  
but I could read his handwriting, so I burnt them last night.*

*But I'll take the beauty of chaos over ugly perfection.  
I've woken up on the wrong side of the bed every day since 1987.*

*I can feel myself slipping away from any chance of redemption,  
but that's okay 'cause if it's where Falwell goes, then I don't even  
want any part of heaven.*

*A guy on TV offered to save my soul for free  
But that would have required getting up off the couch,  
so I was too lazy.  
Instead I wait in the bushes outside of a cop's house holding a  
twelve gauge,  
God isn't dead, but I'll get that bastard someday!*

*And I'll take the beauty of my chaos over anyone else's perfection.  
I've still woken up on the wrong side of the bed every day since  
1987.  
Nothing scares me as much as the fact that I don't give a shit for  
redemption,  
but that's okay 'cause if it's where Limbaugh goes then I don't even  
want any part of heaven.*

*Hail Satan!*

*-Johnny Hobo and the Freight Trains (Bunny, Church Hymn for  
the Condemned 2005)*

Pat the Bunny is by far not the most shocking of punk performers, but his music and lyrics reflect much of the sentimentality of the contemporary transient punk scene. There is a sense of loss and searching that are revealed in the lyrics and the desire to break free from the barriers that hold you back from the essential experience of freedom. His homage to Satan at the end of the song has little to do with worship of demonic forces; it is a metaphor for resistance in the face of unyielding, supreme authority. The music, art, and philosophy of punk is intimately tied into street life and culture with strong antiauthoritarian tendencies. For those who are questioning the reality in which they find themselves, punk serves as a useful tool and guide for questioning authority. Seventy-eight percent of the participants in this study reported that their involvement in the punk scene

played a crucial role in their eventual adoption of an itinerant lifestyle. Mr. Smith and Gerry, participants in the study, share how punk influenced their lives.

I got into stuff in high school; I guess I was your average angry high school kid [pause] I started thinking about things and that got me into the punk scene and that introduced me to traveling and stuff and the lifestyle and things. Then from there just, I don't know, hit the road. [...] For me, it was more activism that led to the punk scene... I was reading anarchist literature in zines and stuff and I was like, "Oh, there's anarchist bands out there, bands like Minor Threat and that kind of stuff. [...] that's how it started and there was this punk house in Salem, I went to shows there. (Mr. Smith)

Yeah, punk inspired my political side. It's through punk that I learned how fucked up the world really is and then, [pause] knowing about hitching and traveling thru punk. That summer before Denver, I went to Planet-X Fest in Indiana. Planet-X is this DIY record company, they decided that they will have a week long punk camp in Bloomington and it was wicked amazing! I went down there—I hadn't really hitched out of Indiana and Michigan—that's when I met most of the punk traveling kids. [pause] I found out I can go anywhere and I found out about the atrocities around the world... lots of workshops and all that played a huge part in where I am now... (Gerry)

Sometimes for these individuals, their exposure to the punk scene was quite accidental and serendipitous—coming at just the right time to guide the course of their lives.

I was 12 when I started listening to punk. At 12, I was like my parents suck, I hate school and I want to do what I want to do! My cousin gave me a shoebox of CDs that had the Ramones, Dead Kennedys, the Sex Pistols, Screeching Weasel, NOFX, Rancid and a few other albums like that. Anti-flag, that was *my music* right away. I remember my step sister going to an N'sync concert and I was like "N'sync sucks, I know it's cool now, but it sucks and Spice Girls suck too. And then punk came and I was like, "*this is really good*" and it affected my views and I'm so glad I got that box of CDs. I was a kid that *needed* punk rock, it affected me. I

didn't understand the Dead Kennedy's album I got at first...*Kill the poor*, what does that mean? The older I got the more it made sense and the more I loved it for what it was. (Eve)

Other push/pull factors were identified which indicate that the punk scene and its politics were important factors for those who became transient. Eighty-three percent of the participants in the study indicated in their interviews themes indicating that they felt there were fundamental things that were wrong with society and seventy-two percent indicated that they felt as if they were outsiders or somehow separate and different from everyone else. Seventy-two percent of the participants also felt that a primary reason for adopting an itinerant lifestyle was so they could go see and experience the world; eighty-nine percent of the participants indicated a primary reason for becoming transient was a need to “find themselves,” their travels being both literal and metaphorical. The interviews have revealed that the majority of transient punks entered the street (and have remained on the street) because of cognitive dissonance. Sendai revealed in his interview that multiple factors lead him to enter street life.

I realized that after twenty-three years of living in So Cal [Southern California] where *everyone's* hearts are *dead* that I needed to step away from all that jazz. [...] I got to northern California, went thru Humboldt for a while and then came down to LA, stayed for five months and that was all I needed to remind me why I left. Down there you're lookin' at a world where you're taught everyday to be afraid and to hate each other, be stand offish, or were better or worse than anyone else. There's this constant *divide divide divide*...because the only way to control the masses is to let them fight amongst themselves so they ignore the true problems. I had *seven* dead friends before I was out of high school—look at all these fucking gang bangers out there that are trying to bang for their hood and all this *shit*—they're fighting for neighborhoods *they rent their house on!* You know, they're

fighting for the *crumbs* while these fat-cats are doing their thing up there creating a disconnect... and if these kids could just realize, “You know what, I’m just like this kid down the street—we both got families, were both banging for stupid shit... If they could see who the true enemy is, the guys on top would be *fucked*. And that’s why they keep us fighting, and watching TV, and eating shit food—you know it makes us stupid and lethargic... putting fucking liquor stores everywhere, throwing crack out into the ghetto now, that shit’s really happened. The CIA were bringing heroin over in body bags in Vietnam—they got more sophisticated... there’s plenty of heroin in Afghanistan too you know. (Sendai)

Sendai’s experiences were major factors that helped push him onto the street. He is able to tie the violence in his home community to macroscopic violence that occurs at the local, national, and international level. He is perceptive and realized that another way of living existed that allowed him to not be a larger part of this destruction. Shirley also shared similar sentiments indicating that she would experience extreme cognitive dissonance if she were to reenter mainstream society.

If I’m living in a mainstream kind of way, I feel very oppressed—It’s *basically* illegal to not live somewhere in this society...transients are picked on by cops. If you live in mainstream society you need a *job*, and you need a *car* to get to the *job*, and you need a *job* to pay for the *car*—it’s just a vicious cycle of giving your hours of life away; and *that’s* why I do what I do, because I can’t live like that anymore. I’m *unable to*... I feel sad and depressed and uninspired if I’m living in a mainstream way. I’m not dogging on people that live that way, if I did I’d be a fascist. I don’t want to dog on them because I get my money from people who have jobs. So it’s like, a lot of times when I’m on the road I feel that I inspire people to challenge the values they have to find out what’s important in life. [...] Your out here not having a job because you disagree with the government, so you live a lifestyle that challenges what that is and people have said they are inspired by it... There’s people that I’ve met who are now on the road because they met me. Hell, *I’m* on the road because I’ve met people that inspired me to do it! So I’m not dogging on people that

are doing it. I hope that one day there will be *no people* to give me money because everyone will be living a free flowing natural lifestyle in the world and in nature. Working with people will be living and working with each other as human beings, being more cooperative, and making this world a beautiful place. (Shirley)

It is clear from this passage of Shirley's interview that she was experiencing cognitive dissonance between the society she was expected to be a part of and the world that she envisions in the future. Bertrand, expressed that he feels the transient subculture itself is very much oriented against the system. That many transients share similar sentiments is indicative that they choose this lifestyle to distance themselves from society.

I think punk rock has played a pretty huge pivotal role for me, most transients are coming from a "fuck the system" [angle], It's definitely a "*fuck the system*" culture. Everyone who's traveling faces some sort of state repression and that embitters one towards states, towards laws. There's *tons* and *tons* especially in the younger traveling scene. Like, *who doesn't* have a "Rock the 40 Oz." Leftover Crack patch?! (laughs) (Bertrand)

Bertrand is referring to a particular song that is very well known in the community of transient punks. The band, Leftover Crack was known for their radicalism, anti-state, anti-cop, street punk lyrical content. This particular song is reflective of the isolation, frustration, and sense that something is wrong with the world that is commonly expressed in the community of transient punks.

*Shoot the kids at school, leave a bloody pool.  
I'll show the teachers too, 'cuz they can't tell me what to do.*

*Getting C's and D's, saying "thanks and please."  
You broke the golden rule, you're staying after school!*

*Life is real estate, to the ones I hate.  
Cops say you must refrain, from squattin', drinkin', and hoppin'  
trains.*

*Drink but don't drink this, it ain't beer it's piss.  
Rock the 40oz., It's the change that counts.*

*When we get there on the train,  
We'll get some booze and start again.*

*Living in the past, goin' nowhere fast.  
Jesus has a place for me, a life of sin and infamy.*

*Droppin' out of school, teacher is a fool.  
So you run away, livin' day to day.*

*Doin' whatcha gotta do,  
and what makes you happy too.*

*Fallin' prey to drugs, sportin' body bugs.  
Rock the 40oz., it's the change that counts.*

*Just don't get locked up in jail, 'cuz no one's gonna have the bail.*

*Takin' time to break the laws, then I'll lick my dirty paws.  
Dodging all the lies I'm fed, I'll live my life and then I'm dead.*

-Leftover Crack (Leftover-Crack 2004)

Leftover Crack is quite a well recognized band within the transient community because they speak very much to their experience. This song reveals push and pull factors which brought this person to the street. Feelings as if one is an outsider, antiauthoritarian leanings, feeling as if something is wrong with the world, the need for freedom, and the desire to understand the world “by figuring it out” on

your own are key themes to this piece. This song also indicates that this is what this person wants in their life and that not being a part of “normal society” brings them happiness. A strong theme correlated with these push/pull factors is the subject of freedom. ninety-four percent of the participants in the study had themes in their stories pertaining to freedom. Clearly the ability to be autonomous and live one’s life on one’s own terms is a major psychological component present in these individual’s life stories. Punk was something that was felt. It was the feeling that something wasn’t right about society. These children were social pariahs and had no interest in being like everyone else. They were marginalized for their differences by their cohorts and began to seek out like minded individuals. The art and music they created was a reflection of their disdain for the hypocritical social contract which promised such great things for the dominant society at the expense of everyone else. They relinquish the life and luxury of mainstream consumerism to instead free themselves by living off of the waste that system produces.

### *Direct Action*

Other themes were revealed through the interviews that demonstrate how these individuals were able to cope with their cognitive dissonance by taking action. Ninety-four percent of the participants had indicated in their stories attitudes and behaviors which align them with freeganism. In the opinion of Cybil, a transient work-trading at a housing co-op, more people are embracing this aspect of the subculture. So very much food is wasted in the United States

that many of the respondents feel that they do not want to further contribute to this. By utilizing food and other resource that would otherwise crowd the swelling garbage dumps of the nation, these individuals reduce their overall consumption.

I think the more people that are living off the excess--I mean, that's what traveling is to me, in this country so much is wasted, you know... For example, people throwing out there food and me eating it—like that— it's me just living off of something that would have totally been wasted. Or someone driving their car alone across several states, I'm like, hopping in and getting in on that ride, it doesn't cost people anything. I think the more people that are thinking about that kind of life style the better. (Cybil)

This is a very common sentiment in the transient punk community and is reflected in several of the interviews. The primary focus is located on the amount of waste that is being produced; Several participants indicated that they thought it strange when they encounter hostile workers and city ordinances that restrict access to food that is just going to be wasted. One hundred percent of the participants in the study have indicated that they dumpster dive for resources they need. The diversity of things one can find in the dumpster is staggering, especially if you are in a college town around “Hippy Christmas,” the end of the semester.

We just had hippy Christmas, it's disgusting how much people throw away. It's not right in my opinion. (Sampson)

If you're in a college town, students throw out a massive amount of stuff because their parents will buy them a laptop computer and they just throw it in the trash! I've found full liquor bottles mini-kegs, laptops, full working hookahs, clothes—anything you can think of you'll find in the trash, it's insane! (Shirley)

Bertrand: I really only dumpster dove from food dumpsters and gas station dumpsters cause they throw out a ton of shit. Most dumpsters, especially in small towns because there isn't a large dumpster diving population... you can usually get a lot of good shit and, uh... (laughs)

Eve: What about Crusty Christmas?

Bertrand: "*Crusty Christmas?*" You mean Hippy Christmas?

Eve: It's "*Crusty Christmas?*" too...

Bertrand: When all the college kids leave they throw out all their stuff, you can get a laptop—I got a hookah! I found that even dumpster diving sporting goods stores have some good shit. I had a friend that found a fold up titanium fishing rod and a four season, three-man tent out of the dumpster. (Bertrand & Eve)

Dumpsters are most often used for finding food. Janet Kalish, a contributor to the New York Freegan Chapter, shared a poem which captured very well the problem of food waste.

Free. What is the price of a bunch of bananas that Dole bought Salvadoran forests for? Removed the forests to provide Salvadoran Farmers with good jobs. Salvadoran farmers planted, watered, and, followed orders from Dole, sprayed with chemicals that render them impotent. Bananas that were immersed in vats of water twice, taped at the stems, packed in plastic, boxed, put in trucks, driven to the airport. Boxes received at Dallas Airport, repacked and sent to JFK Airport. Trucks bring boxes to Hunts Point Market, Bronx, NY. More trucks bring to Gristedes Supermarket Murray Hill, 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue Manhattan where shelves are full and bananas are packed, finally into the trash. Free. I dumpster dove for a treasure trove. As I opened the trash I stared at the stash. Sushi, apples, pears, and potatoes. Melons, salads, bread, and tomatoes. Partiers, students, professional passed by, I felt their pity when I caught their eye. Dog walkers passed me, nobody asked me "How much are those bananas?" No, they watched their manners. I yearned for the question to give the suggestion, "Inside it's pricey but out here it's all free." Free. Coffee grounds splattered over packaged knishes. Styrofoam cups reunited with napkins once together on a shelf inside. They match with my rosy pink lipstick. What have you got?

Jackpot! Cookies and cakes and organic bread. Here are grapefruits if you like instead. And I feel free, like a bunch of these bananas.

(Anonymous, Facts (For the Survival of the Planet) 2000: 50-51)

Gerry indicated that something which gave him a lot of pride was his involvement in FNB. FNB takes food that would go to waste and redistribute it to the community primarily in the form of vegan/vegetarian hot meals.

FNB is great! They're the first radical thing I got involved in. With all the activism you're doing sometimes it's hard to be positive because you don't see the end result, with FNB you know you're helping people directly and at least those people are getting food..it's rewarding..FNB, I have a lot of respect for it. Back home we didn't have FNB so we started it up. We were going out and getting dumpstered food or getting food that would go to waste from restaurants. You take that food, cook it vegan or veg meal and its served in public spaces, street corners, to all passing by. In Salt Lake City they get so much stuff they just pick it up at the store 4 days a week. What they do is go to the park and make a line of boxes and people come and get groceries. FNB feeds punks and hum bums but because there's more groceries, it pulls in more families and homeless and helping ethnic communities there...They are feeding entire families out there, they have a communal house there and they still have enough to feed everyone out there. (Gerry)

Other individuals were able to find ways other ways to ease their cognitive dissonance by taking part in direct actions to better the world. forty-four percent of the participants narratives contained stories which directly spoke of participation in direct action. However, sixty-one percent of the participants in the study indicated involvement in politically oriented actions while only twenty-two percent were either vocally apolitical or demonstrably so. Direct action can be many things from writing a zine to eco-defense to protesting globalism.

I'm always reading zines. I recently published a zine exclusively for the community of (city name withheld). Last winter I stopped traveling for six months to winter there and I thought I was done and that I'd do cool shit in my home town. I was tired of planting seeds in one community and not seeing the fruits...It was the worst winter ever, I hated it. The first three months I was squatting there and it was cold as shit and then I was going to do work share to stay at the co-op there. They had a strong activist staff, but they were students. My work share was putting together events and info shops for activism in the co-op house. That zine I wrote was on my experience in my hometown and the growing I've done [...] It was about how this city feels compared to other places ...I'm a huge advocate of consensual sex and I realized my community had no zines on this, so I decided to write on that for the community. (Gerry)

Connected to freeganism is eco-defense. Freeganism seeks to reduce, recycle and reuse that which is already existing. Eco-defense seeks to preserve nature and our environment from destruction by Babylon.

As far as direct action goes, I recently this last weekend went to a direct action camp that is part of (name withheld) and it's partially for the (name withheld) and they were putting on this camp for tree climbs, tree sits, and the politics behind it—what the forest service is actually doing with our forest. (Shirley)

Shirley is referring to a local group of activist that are trying to preserve the natural habitat of the Spotted owl. While in the field I attended a benefit punk show at a warehouse that was raising funds to help support this local group of activist. The show was held behind the warehouse where acoustic punk and gypsy punk bands played long into the night around a large fire made of scrap wood and pallets next to a defunct touring bus. These types of events are common in the community for raising funds and awareness on local issues. Eco-defense is one

way in which these individuals are able to lower their cognitive dissonance by participating in things which they can see a direct result from.

Some of the more ambitious transients are able to alleviate their cognitive dissonance by taking part in the actions and demonstrations against globalism, war, police brutality, etc... Being transient without the trappings of mainstream life (car, job, home, bills) allows these activist in the community the necessary freedom to partake fully in these events.

I first participated in the big anarchist call outs, mobilizations, and demonstrations. I was able to go to the G-20 in Pittsburg and Vancouver, and the Olympic protests in D.C., tree sits in Humboldt and anti-police brutality protests in Portland and various other large things. They've been great and cool to connect with people and it's cool because I saw *a lot* of the G-20 traveling punks there and I was impressed and kept running into people at Folk Life in Seattle—they seemed familiar and it turns out I met them at the G-20. I keep running into people I meet at these things...they intersect. (Eve)

Cognitive dissonance plays a major role in the reasons why these youth choose to adopt an itinerant lifestyle but also in the reasons why they choose to maintain their lifestyle. Eleven of the eighteen participants in the study have been traveling for 2-5 years. Sixty-six percent of the participants have indicated that they plan on continuing in this lifestyle for the foreseeable future. Some of the older generation of transient punks are still out on the road doing what they do well into their thirties. One such individual was thirty-five years old during the time of the study, but was unable to participate do to time restrictions. In Minneapolis/St. Paul I've recently come across a cohort of older street punks in their mid-thirties—they too are still doing many of the same things which the

younger transient punks crowd is currently doing. Some individuals are clearly in it “for the long haul.” An older punk I met and interacted with at People’s Park in Berkeley had a large bat wing tattooed on the right side of his face running from below his eye and around to the top of his head. Tattoos such as this function as ways of making sure that one does not go back to mainstream society. Eve explains the significance of her tattoo.

I got this upside down cross on my arm...I was like, “I’m gonna do it spur of the moment!” But I had been thinking about it for a while, this symbolizes that I’m outside of society. I’m retiring at twenty-one, like the Black Flag song—“*I’m done with you guys!*” And that’s what I like about punk transients marking on their face or hands—or subversive tattoos, which is a beautiful way of saying “I don’t need you anymore society and *I’m free of you* and I’m *never* coming back—I *won’t* be your wage slave again!” People with huge upside down crosses don’t get jobs for corporations and it ensures that it will make it difficult to go back and become a yuppie—which I don’t think will happen, but this ensures against it. It’s a real dedication to rejecting capitalist society. That was a turning point...this is who I am. It’s cool to see others out there doing it. The guy who gave me this tat was in New Orleans at a church. We were both trying to find food at this church feed and I saw he had an upside down cross at this feed; he seemed like a guy I could hang with. He gave me a tattoo for food stamps. There’s this whole other universe out there and they don’t talk about it on ABC News, they don’t want you to know about it because they are examples of living outside society and doing what you want to—they don’t like that. We’re gonna live how we want to live and we don’t care about debt or money—it’s psychological warfare. (Eve)

Transient punks employ many methods to reduce their levels of cognitive dissonance, even going so far as to permanently ensure that they are unable to re-enter society. This behavior sends a clear message to self and others about their

dedication to their beliefs while at the same time providing themselves with relief that they wouldn't be able to reenter society in the future even if they wanted to.

### *A Community of Family*

Of much interest in the transient punk community is the phenomenon of establishing fictive kin relationships. Eighty-three percent of the narratives collected in the study had themes indicating that members of the transient community establish fictive kin relationships with each other.

I was raised to be super conservative Christian and I felt that was not a part of me at all and so they kicked me out because of that and because, god forbid, I smoked *pot*. I don't see much of them, they aren't super psyched on me traveling around or living here--but you know, there are other families to be found. In a way I feel like I had gotten adopted when I really needed it and these people took me under their wing and they feel much more like a family than my biological family ever did. (Cybil)

Family to me is people that are close to you but not necessarily blood relation. I'd say ninety percent of the people I'm blood related to I don't consider part of my family, like my brother, he's selfish and a piece of shit—he's not a part of my family...I don't want to talk about him. My mom is a part of my family and I may consider my dad to be too. But I'd say that people that I've met, friends that I hold really close that I know I'm going have a lifetime connection to—those people are my family, the people that will be there for me. Those are the people who understand me and understand the world I'm coming from [...] family are people that you will have a lifetime connection with; I think family is who you want it to be. (Shirley)

Were at People's *fucking* Park...every day you see a lot. It's amazing how much weirdness goes on in such a little place—they all want to be free. Some live here and these people out here are

like family and I've got a better feeling for that than a lot of people or places. (Sendai)

With the establishment of fictive kin relationships, an informal system of rights and obligations emerges in these communities. The statistics of the study are strongly grouped together regarding this topic; eighty-three percent of the narratives revealed themes indicating the establishment of fictive kin relationships. Seventy-eight percent indicated that the transient punk scene tends to see each other as an extended family. Eighty-three percent indicated patterns of reciprocity in the community. Protection is another form of reciprocity that exists in the community; seventy-eight percent of the participants indicated this in their narratives. The narratives also indicated that because of these fictive kin relationships and subsequent reciprocity that food sharing is quite a common feature of transient behavior that is accordant with their professed opinions on the subject. Several times in the field this practice was observed. In Redwood Park in Arcata, California a large group of twenty-three transients had congregated to in the southeast corner of the park. While at this park a woman sitting next to me in the circle pulled out a large tub of yogurt and poured granola all over it. She took a few bites and then began passing the yogurt around to anyone who was hungry in the group. When she handed the yogurt to me, I thanked her for being so gracious for sharing her food with me. She gave me a funny look and said, "Well of course, that's just what you do." At People's Park, an older hum-bum walked up to the group of transients that we were speaking with. He pulled out of his pants three large frozen steaks that he had just stolen from a grocery store in the

area. Very shortly someone started up a portable, gas powered stove and began frying up the steaks for everyone. Another individual at the park told us that one day FNB didn't show up and a lot of people were hungry so he went to the grocery store with his food stamps and bought \$200 worth of groceries and brought them to the park to give out to others.

I've been in situations where I was traveling with seven people, a baby, and three dogs... We only had two avocados and we had to share them between five people... The baby had her own food, but you know –you have to share *a burger* with five people, I mean you have to look out for each other you're like a family... We're a family, we all do the same thing we all gotta take care of each other. It's a weird bond with people I've never met before... I never had that before and it's really interesting. [...] People's Park is interesting but people definitely look out for each other here.  
[Remy]

What I like about the traveling community you see each other and identify with each other; you see their passion as an anarchist travelling punk band and you know that you're both poverty stricken and traveling and defying society and standing up for what you believe in. That is a strong identifying factor and I see with travelers meeting up. That has been really nice because travelers that meet each other across the country treat each other like family. We share food with each other. Like, when I was in New Orleans there was a shit ton of travelers around and when I couldn't find vegan dumpster food I'd go down the street and find someone and you share—that's just how it is. When you don't work and don't sell your life away for possessions, you're less likely to care about giving it away. It's a really nice thing that happens on the road, so there's a lot of feeling of family and community I think amongst homeless people in general. (Eve)

The best situation I've seen is in Bloomington and Tucson. It's great when there's a crew of kids who dumpster and then the first thing that goes thru their mind is to get it to multiple places and split it up equally and if they know people that are hungry they would stop by and give them food... they'd go to the punk house and give them food. (Gerry)

Fifty percent of the transient population in this study identified that they thought their fictive kin relationships were closer bonds than what they shared with their families. One hundred percent of the participants indicated that transients in other communities are generally willing to help or provide assistance when someone new comes into town. There are exceptions to this, not everyone is receptive to helping out others. Thirty-nine percent of the participants reported that there are some individuals in the community who they feel are not interested in helping out other transients or are hostile to them; this appears to be largely dependent upon the individual players that are interacting with each other on the street.

It depends also on where you are. The bigger the city more traveling kids you'll find and traveling dicks also tend to stick to cities. [...] This one time in Portland I had this one train hopper, he's like a train hopper for years he was like, "Fuck you, I'm not gonna tell you what lines are which, you gotta figure that out for yourself; fuck you this is my train and my rails." And this guy who's been train hopping for eighteen years, he's totally laid back—he's got these Frankenstein stitches across his whole head and he's like, "You're fucking stupid, everyone's got a right to train hop." So it kind of goes both ways on that, I'm not sure, almost anytime you're going through a rural part it doesn't matter what kind of traveler you are, you'll normally help each other out or at least sit down and smoke a bowl and talk. (Bertrand)

Yeah I've never met transients that weren't supportive or cool. I met some people that weren't too cool [...] mostly everyone is pretty cool. In Portland I was hanging with friends for two weeks and I realized that wandering around downtown. I'd asked for the time or "can you help me find this place," and they'd help me but I was treated pretty coldly. When I was ready to leave, I put my pack on and then I got like five cigarettes bummed to me right away and everyone started to help me out. It was a weird dynamic,

they were ready to help me once they knew I was a traveler.  
(Gerry)

I've always had good luck, I don't know. I find people that know how to get around and stuff. We hitched from Brussels to Amsterdam and ran into these kids biking around and we asked if they knew a place to squat at—they thought we were stupid college backpackers and a lady was hanging out of the window [of this squat] and told us to fuck off. We heard about this squat that had a fire and if you'd do the dishes and help clean the place up you can stay there. We were sitting there and this girl was speaking in a Midwestern accent [...] I asked her where she was from, she said she was from (city name withheld) [note: the participant is from the same city] and it turned out that I had heard about her and she knew people that I knew. She helped us out a bunch, we told her about how we were told to fuck off at this one place and she said we could stay with her at her squat. It turned out to be the same one we were told to fuck off from. (laughs) [...] On the road you meet people and hang out and they'll help you out, You'll ask for good places to hitch or fly a sign and they'll hook you up with all this information and stuff especially if you're new to that city. Generally the bastards are the ones that are junkies, they don't really go anywhere and they just stay under the bridge...they don't really go into the city too often. They have ulterior motives. In my situations I've found more helpful people than assholes. (Jameson)

Within the community of transient punks there is much variation and diversity of alignments between individuals. The closer that an individual is to you, the more rights and obligations there are. Road dogs or crew members share the tightest connections, alignment to transient enclaves are in the next circle (e.g. gutter punks, sXe vegan train hoppers, scum fucks, etc...), the transient punk community is even further out, and members of the greater transient community and the majority homeless are on the extreme periphery. Though there are tighter associations towards the core, the transient community is fairly cohesive and consistent as an extended family.

Like all extended families, there are people that you associate with more and then there are also those ones that you try to avoid like the plague—but when push comes to shove they will generally back each other up or lend a helping hand—especially if they face a common enemy. In People’s Park, such an incident occurred while I was conducting an interview. Earlier in the day, a younger street punk couple was snuggling, talking, and smoking cigarettes in a group of about thirty people. As I was interviewing Sendai, Harold came up to Sendai—he was visibly upset. Sendai had asked him what was wrong and Harold said, “He just punched her in the face and broke her fucking nose!” “Who broke who’s nose?” replied Sendai. “This guy over there, he was play fighting with her...she was throwing fake punches and he just slammed her in the nose.” Sendai responded by saying, “We’ve got deal with this shit right now, who saw this?” “Everyone did, there were like thirty people there when it happened,” replied Harold. Sendai and Harold walked over to this individual, waited for the cops to leave the south side of the park, and Sendai punched this guy once in the nose and dropped him to the ground (Sendai weighs at least 350 lbs.). Once he regained his feet, Sendai told this guy, “Get the fuck out of People’s Park and never come back, we don’t need that kind of shit in our community here.” The man picked up his belongings and left the park very quickly. This behavior is quite common in the community. Several of the participants had shared similar stories about dealing with troublemakers in their community. Transients do not tend to go to police for matters like this. Attitudes towards law enforcement tend to be generally negative. Sixty-six percent of the participants expressed negative

opinions about police officers; only eleven percent of the participants indicated positive sentiments towards police officers—the other twenty-three percent either did not mention the police or were indifferent to them. The need to look out for each other is a way that each individual assures their survival on the street. The participants generally indicated that those individuals that do not share or participate in the community tend to be those individuals who have serious problems with drugs and alcohol—these individuals are more focused on getting a fix and are not very trustworthy. But when it comes to looking out for each other's wellbeing, few stories can quite compare to the selflessness of Raven.

Most people are really cool, “hey, what you got I got,” as long as you give it back they'll help you out as long as you give it back when you got more than you need. I got a huge kick down in Boston—this guy gave me a \$1001 dollar kick down, he just walked up to me on the street and gave me this stack of bills and I looked at it and I thought it was a stack of ones [...] so I put it in my pocket and forgot about it. Then later we all wanted to get some beer and I pulled out the stack of ones and saw that it was actually a bunch of hundreds, so I handed them all out to my friends and kept one of them. It's all about what you give and receive. I don't think I'd have gotten anywhere if I didn't manifest it... [Raven]

### *Traveling*

Themes of different modes of transportation were talked about frequently in the participants interviews. Five primary modes of transportation were identified: hitch hiking, train hopping, sharing/borrowing rides, rubber tramping, and biking. Hitch hiking is by far the most preferred mode of travel, eighty-nine

percent of the participants have used (or currently use) this way of getting from place to place.

The first time I really got out hitchhiking, it was the summer after I graduated from high school. I hitchhiked out to New York and back for kicks. I had never been off of the west coast before so I did that, and since then just during summer. I leave and get out and travel somewhere, I think I feel very claustrophobic if I stay somewhere too long. (Cybil)

Train hopping is the second most popular mode of transportation according to the findings of this study, sixty-one percent of the participants have used (or currently use) this mode of transportation. Some of the respondents were less inclined to use this because of perceived danger involved. Those that are frequent train hoppers tend to view it differently than those that do so less frequently. However sometimes things do not go according to plan.

We went and waited outside this train yard, the first boxcar rolled up on the junk and we were like, “should we do it?” Then we all jumped on, my first experience jumping a train was with nine people, we had booze, and weed and it was really cold but really fun. (Eve)

So I was the first one to hop on the train, it was on the fly and the train was going about twenty miles an hour. I hopped on with a forty pound pack on and when I went to throw my pack in I realized we were riding suicide. [note: riding suicide means the boxcar has no bottom] and I was like, “Oh, *shit!*” So I finagled my way onto the train and was holding onto it. At this point it turns out only [Cadillac] got on the train, [Ronny] got dragged by the train for about 120 feet and nearly went under several times, so he nearly died. And this train takes us first to a federal prison and we’re all like *FUCK!* Every bull in the yard is radioing us in, a day a half waiting and it goes to a fucking prison, *why didn’t we look this out?* [...] We end up hopping off and I’m like, “Shit we gotta book it.” [...] so we ended up jumping over this small cliff

overhang and we got away and I was like, “I don’t know where we are, the cops are probably looking for us—but at *least* I have my wallet,” and then I reached into my pocket and realized I left my wallet on the train for them to ID me. (laughs) So we end up walking into town and the first thing we see is this redneck “brown-bagging” a bottle of whiskey. We were like, “Excuse me sir, but *where the fuck* are we?” He’s like, “You’re in Dell Rapids boy, you just get off that train?” “Yeah I did, where exactly the fuck is that?” “It’s about twenty miles north of Sioux Falls,” and we were like, “*Fuck*, it wasn’t even going *the right way!*” (Bertrand)

Sharing rides or borrowing rides from family or friends were expressed in fifty-six percent of the participants interviews. When this form of travel is available it often is the form of travel that has the least amount of hassle involved.

The street story starts out from a random ass trip to San Diego some time during the last six months or so. I headed out there, lived in an RV for about the two months that I was down there and then just started running across people that ended up traveling around the country, deciding to do random cool shit. I decided that I would hop aboard and travel along with them and do so for as long and for as free as possible. (Vagrant)

Rubber tramping was a less featured mode of travel in the community, thirty-three percent of the participants indicated that they had traveled in this way.

Rubber tramping can be a tricky endeavor as is explained by Shirley.

Rubber tramping is a form of travel by car but its different from a road trip because on a road trip people have their amenities set up—they have food setup, lodging setup, money. Rubber tramping is different, it’s going out with a vehicle, usually illegitimately—usually people don’t have a license or insurance on the car and have no money due to being a transient person. It’s traveling with no money in a car. How you get money is just going up to people at gas pumps and telling people your situation or having a line for

them or like, selling handmade jewelry or have instruments and play for them. You basically asking for money, you busk for money, or spange for money, spare change. “Hey I’m traveling I’m running out of gas can you help me out with a couple dollars? There’s no obligation.” If you’re in a big city you can do street performance or fly a sign to get money for your troubles. But if you’re rubber tramping and your car breaks down you either get money to fix it or pack your backpack with your shit and start hitch hiking. (Shirley)

Riding a bicycle is also another form of travel used in the community, thirty-three percent of the participants indicated using this as a form of travel. Bike travel is mostly relegated to shorter distances but some individuals have used them for lengthier trips.

I went to Salem on a tandem once. We had a six foot trailer with a sound system blasting metal and jazz the whole time. It broke down halfway there but it was a lot of fun though. I went to Fall Creek [...] Fall Creek is about twenty miles away. I’d go out for the day and camp its fun. (Sampson)

Transients employ various different techniques when they travel from place to place. These travels utilize transportation modes that reduce the impact that these individuals have on the environment and/or allows them not to contribute to the economy. These modes of travel are essentially free and transients tend to make pragmatic decisions on which form of travel would be the best at any given point in time. Many of the individuals in this study indicated that they use several different forms of travel but some tend to stick to the forms of travel that they are most comfortable with.

### *Squatting*

Many of the participants in the study revealed in their interviews themes indicating involvement with squatting, seventy-eight percent of the participants were engaged in these activities. Squatting can either happen when one is traveling or else it can be more permanent. Squatters have some fundamental protection under the law but often they face harassment by landowners and the police. Squats can vary in their quality and comfort. Bertrand described a squat that he stayed at in Oakland, California. As he approached the building, he began seeing *rigs* lying around. It turned out that these people were really strung out on heroin so much so that they could no longer inject into their arms but were instead shooting up in their armpits. Gerry described squats that were much more akin to communes. In San Francisco there are squats which have been maintained and successfully occupied for over fifteen years. New York City is also well known for its squatting community.

### *Pets on the Road*

It may come as a bit of a shock to those who are unfamiliar with the transient community, but having pets (especially dogs) on the road is fairly common. Pets serve more purposes than just mere companionship (which is also very important). Pets also offer protection and a way of connecting with people that would otherwise never talk to them. Often passersby on the street will give the pet owner a sandwich and some money to buy dog food with or visa-versa.

People will feed your dog more often than they will you. People give you money to feed the dog, lots of times they'll get your dog food and you food too. It helps, they're your friend on the road. Dogs bridge social gaps, most people pass by but when they see a dog they'll maybe interact with you. (Remy)

I have a sleeping bag and my dog, any place is safe so he lets me know if anyone is within thirty feet of me. He'll wake up and move around and let me know if anyone is getting too close. [...] If I need to get him dog food and I have no money I'll go into a pet store and slit a couple bags with my knife. After the store closes I come back to the dumpster and get the dog food. Bags get cut like that all the time when they open up the packages of food at pet stores, so no one ever knows or can do anything about it. (Raven)

Raven has a 70 lb. brown pit-bull named Bucket. The gatekeepers and I met Raven and Bucket in Haight-Ashbury. Raven was originally from a city in Minnesota and had been traveling for five years and had spent the prior six months in the San Francisco bay area. She asked when we were heading back to Minnesota and if she could maybe catch a ride. We agreed to this so Raven, Bucket, Vagrant, Shirley, and I crammed into the vehicle to head back to Minnesota. What struck me about the trip was how well-behaved Bucket was. Raven had trained him very well, he mostly hung out in the foot well of the passenger seat with his head on Raven's lap. Bucket is the most calm and collected dog I've ever met. It is very important that transients dogs are well trained. Because they spend so much time together, it is vital that both dog and master work together as a team. Some people think that these dogs are in real danger without a home. But because transients don't have a home or a job they spend much quality time with their pets and develop attachments and bonds that are just as healthy, if not healthier, than most dog owners who are not transient.

Dogs were the most prevalent pets seen in the field, although Raven's road dog in San Francisco had a pet cat that rode on her shoulders that she kept on a make shift leash made from a set of shoe laces. The cat's behavior was very similar to the dogs we encountered, she would come when called and displayed an even temperament. Pets in the transient community may seem counterintuitive and potentially dangerous to the animal, but because these individuals have an exorbitant amount of free time—they are able to put much of that energy into caring for the animals. These observations are generalizations; like any community, there are individuals that will abuse animals but this is probably less prevalent in this community because many transient punks are advocates for animal rights. It stands to reason that they would be extra vigilant in making sure that their pets were taken care of and that others in the community were taking care of their pets.

#### *Misconceptions about the Community*

The participants in the study had identified several different things that they feel are the most widely held misconceptions about the community. The primary misconception that is commonly leveled against them is that all transients are alcoholics or are drug addicts. Based upon the narratives and observations of behavior that were made in the field, I have found that thirty-three percent of the participants have substance abuse issues. Some of these individuals' problems are more pronounced than others, but this is still a significant number. Shirley

indicated in her interview that she actually is more sober when she goes on the road than at any other point in time. Not everyone who admitted to or were observed drinking or doing drugs were included as abusers in this analysis; this is a fairly subjective realm and definitions of abuse are varied. In my opinion, substance abuse means that very real damage is being done to an individual by their habits and/or it is interfering with what they want to do with their life. There are those in the transient community that are sXe and do not partake in any of these behaviors. However, we did hear about a faction of the transient punk subculture known as “scum fucks.” We did not get an opportunity to interview any scum fucks but their presence is well known in the community. Participants in the studied have characterized scum fucks as being generally unsavory people with an unhealthy obsession with self-destruction. The participants have stated that scum fucks consider having bad teeth, infections, sexually transmitted diseases, and addictions to hard drugs to be “badges of honor.” They also have been identified by multiple participants as being particularly violent and heavy drinkers; they have no political affiliations and are not above taking what they need regardless of who it’s from—even other transients which is a major taboo. While in the field, I observed something very counter-intuitive; one of the punks sitting at the picnic table in People’s Park with about thirty other people pulled a large, crumpled wad of money out of his pants and set it on the table. He then got up and left for a about twenty minutes, I was intrigued to see what would happen. During the time he was gone, not a single person took his money—as a matter of fact they completely ignored it’s presence. Jameson told me in his interview that

if he saw another traveler picking through someone's backpack while they were asleep that he'd personally "beat the shit" out of them. Stealing from each other is a major taboo in transient society.

Another stereotype that the participants identified as being a major misconception regards to stealing. It is the opinion of the participants that most "normal people" think that all transients are robbers that will try to take anything you've got at any time. The findings of this study have indicated that few transients actually steal anything. Twenty-eight percent of the participants indicated in their narratives that they had stolen. It is significant that none of these thefts were perpetrated against individuals or other members of the transient community; thefts were perpetrated against stores (primarily corporate chains). Many of these individuals that choose to steal have described what they do not as "stealing," but as "liberating." These are assertions are direct references to the anarchist philosopher Proudhon who declared private property to be theft. These transients who steal feel fully justified in what they are doing because they conceptualize property as being public and to restrict access to this *is the criminal act*—liberating these products from their stores is a direct action against the confines of a restrictive society.

Police are a major problem in the transient community. The participants indicated a strong theme of negative attitudes about police officers (seventy-two percent). Statistically significant was that only eleven percent of the participants indicated positive interactions with the police (but these individuals also reported negative interactions). Some of the participants had either had no opinion which

they'd like to share about the police or were indifferent. Seventy-eight percent of the participants reported harassment by officers while on the street.

Kansas, it took us so long to get through there! There were cops everywhere we'd go, couldn't fly a sign, couldn't do anything. This trucker gave us a ride to this gas station and we were in Kansas for two days. There was two cops, the first one was horrible—he kept harassing us and coming back to us repeatedly saying, “I thought I told you guys to move on.” We were like, “Shit man, were trying as hard as we can to get out of here. I don't want to be in this fucked up little town any longer than I have to be.” So we ran into a lot of stuff like that on the road in Kansas.

(Mr. Smith)

I think it was at the RNC 08 that we planned this protest for about two years and we got fucking stomped on you know, by the might of the state. [...] During that time multiple non-lethal weapons were deployed against us, concussion grenades, tear gas, rubber bullets—the whole nine yards and then they detained 250 of us. The detainment process was particularly brutal, more or less psychologically. They'd lower the cell temperature down to 55 degrees and then in a holding cell of thirty people they'd thrown in four blankets. It was really sadistic shit they did just to fuck with us. I got to see, at one point—I think it was on day two and we started chanting for vegan food and the guard told us to “*SHUT THE FUCK UP* or one of us is going to get it.” And so we got louder and they singled out a kid and beat the living shit out him [...] they took him, incapacitated and bleed profusely from the head, out of the jail. This is the kid that was in for assaulting an officer when the officer *ran into him* with his bike. He was also loosely affiliated with crimethinc and he was questioned in an interrogation room and had a black bag put over his head—fucked up interrogation tactics—so that was the kind of state repression that I ran into and it was just like, “Holy shit, there is no reasoning with the beast.” Its merciless as anything; it was a good opportunity to see the velvet glove come off and see the iron fist beneath. (Bertrand)

*Messages from the Gutter*

One of the more interesting aspects of the interview process was a particular question that is brought to members of this community on a fairly regular basis: “Why do you do what you do?” This question goes straight to the heart of matter for these individuals because most of them are doing what they do because of a specific reason. This reason is often something that is very important to them and many of the participants take these opportunities when people ask this type of question to reveal something that has personal significant meaning in their lives. This question was put to them by asking the participants, “If you could tell someone who knew nothing about you or about transients what would you tell them?” The following are some of the responses which the participants wished to convey.

For me, it’s about getting out there and experiencing more of life than what you normally could. (Vagrant)

If I could convey anything I want people to personally analyze themselves and I want them to take a subjective look at their surroundings and ask themselves if the current situation is something they want to be a part of and if the answer is yes—then *GO FUCK* yourself (laughs). But if the answer is no then I’d ask them to find the inner strength, get educated, and be active in the fight against it. (Bertrand)

Most people don’t ever consider this life style or like, consider possibilities other than the super typical “I’m going to go to high school, I’m going to graduate and then I’m going to go to college, jump on the career path and get married and have a family,” that whole thing. [...] When I took off I met such a wide spectrum of really amazing people that it really changed my mind about that, I

guess. There definitely are good people out there, a lot of them. And it still is possible for you to go and live off of the excess and meet people who are going to help you out... (Cybil)

Don't judge. Talk to travelers, don't be afraid—most times they're nice people that are trying to make their own path—not the one made by society. I think it's amusing that people want to hear our stories and are intrigued because something about our lives make them feel alive... I want adventure and to meet new people. (Eve)

Do what my momma taught me: Have fun, don't get caught, don't hurt anyone, don't steal—bible shit....(laughs) (Sampson)

Mainstream culture is bullshit, everyone's trying to get rich and control everything with capitalism. Get more money, more power, more money, more power; Instead of putting energy into controlling shit, I wish people would uh...I mean why don't we put our energy towards being receptive to new things? Become sympathetic and empathic—You can't control everything, so don't try to. I want people to be more hopeful. (Mr. Smith)

Traveling is still possible and it's up to everyone to make it possible. If you see someone hitching, pick them up, it'll make them want to hitch more and you'll pick them up more. In Humboldt, we've got the best eco-defense location in the world. If you want to spend a couple months living in a tree, stop on by sometime! (Candid)

Life wants us to succeed and whatever that connecting thread is, it wants us to fucking succeed; all we have to do is believe [...] Most of what people talk about is bullshit most of what they believe is bullshit: believe nothing. But feel it out and use the logic to make that work and use compassion above all and try to understand that we're all humans in this weirdness...this isn't the way we want to live, this is just how we live now. (Sendai)

You can be happy, that's what I try to show people. When people look at you and assume you're unhappy they don't understand.

They think that you're unhappy, but I really am. The less you have you'll be happier. I want the people I live with to wake up and say, "Yeah, I love doing what I do!" most people aren't like that and I want to communicate that...Do what makes you happy. (Remy)

Do what you want and fuck the law...just live your life! (David)

A lot of people don't take the time to stop and ask someone how there day is...they forget your humanity. We're human, we have emotions. People in mainstream society, 9 to 5, going for the American dream—they couldn't handle it, not at all. There is an amount of mental strength that you need to be on the street as a traveler. You have to have amazing coping skills you have to understand how to handle stress. (Raven)

These kids don't take shit from no one. The capitalist got rich because they took what they can get, [transients are] no different than anyone else...I consider them *real Americans!* (laughs)  
(Steven)

Try to look at people with kid's eyes and see past the bullshit. There are people out there that tend to doubt or question things, don't be jealous of other people's freedom. (Harlan)

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

Thomas: Can you tell me about your experiences of being on the road, what was it like?

Gerry: I think a friend of mine put it best, "It's the highest highs and the lowest lows;" it's a lot of really inspiring points and then there's dark creep shit...its highs and lows. (Gerry)

The transient punk community is a diverse subpopulation within the punk rock and transient youth subcultures. That this particular subculture is actually better understood as a post-subcultural formation is far more useful when coming to understand this community. Post-subcultural communities are *transient* in their nature. There are no sharply defined boundaries, post-subcultural identity can be several different identities existing simultaneously in the same space. Labels do not mean much; identities are fluid. Transients have been able to combine many different epistemologies into their own personal life narrative. These individuals are not interested in common ways of being, their driving ambition is to always keep developing and unfolding. In every city there is someone new to meet, new experiences to be had, and new paths to walk down. By adopting this lifestyle transients are free to pursue their interests whatever they may be. Interestingly enough, a major theme amongst the participants of this study was the goal of autonomy and freedom. Virtually all of the participants indicated that they wanted to create more permanent communities which are sustainable and self-reliant. Transient punks are living in the present with their eyes on the future, they take pragmatic steps to accomplish their goals, they are often very centered and thoughtful people who are willing to accept the bad with the good.

I can say with confidence that the hypothesis that punk was a key factor that developed a raised consciousness in those who were *exposed to* and *receptive of* the radical messages embedded in the anarcho-punk community. The interviews of this study indicate that many of these individuals became involved precisely because of punk. The interviews also indicate that cognitive dissonance

played a major role in why these individuals decided to pursue an itinerant lifestyle and why many of them have maintained it. There is also a strong supportive community that provides support to these individuals as they live their life on the street. This simply is not the case for the vast majority of homeless youth. This study didn't find conclusive evidence that transient punks entered the street primarily because of problems at home. The vast majority come from homes where the parents have been supportive of their decision to travel; they may not condone it and they may be very worried, but the vast majority of transients stay in contact with their families. This indicates that family life prior to them deciding to go on the road generally was fairly good; problems that did come between parent and child were more often ideological. The participants did not indicate in their narratives that sexual/physical abuse was present; however this was not a topic area that was directly addressed during the course of the field work. There were a couple of individuals that did indicate that they were kicked out of their homes and these cases were associated with family drug/alcohol abuse and separation. The participants also indicated that they knew quite a few people that were kicked out or that ran away because their home life was very turbulent. Based upon the interviews and the literature review, one can come to the conclusion that transient youth and homeless youth tend to have very different family histories but that there is some crossover for these populations. This is an area which requires more research to develop a fuller understanding of the factors that lead these individuals to the street.

My second hypothesis also seems to hold water as well. It has been fairly well documented that the beat generation was deeply involved with what was going on in the early punk scene. The beats have been involved with and influenced every radical generation from the 1950s to this day. The beats were on the ground floor when punk began to develop and they too left their lasting mark on the community. The beats instilled “street consciousness” in the early punk scene; this seed germinated and grew helping to inform DIY, antiauthoritarianism, and the spirit of taking to the streets to find out what the world “is really all about.” Characteristics that were present in the historical transient communities of hobos and tramps also appear in today’s manifestation—that punk also has many of these same characteristics indicates that the Beats interaction with the punk scene was the fusion point of these two ideas. Punk has a history of absorbing other cultural forms, reshaping them, and making them their own. Because principles of solidarity, radicalism, fictive kin, and interconnected support networks are fairly universal to all punk enclaves, we can conclude that this propensity developed very early on in punk’s development—that historical transient communities had similar structures indicates that this propensity in the punk scene emerged when early punk became entwined with the Beats.

My third hypothesis was also validated; the interviews clearly indicated that there is a vast support network which helps support this community. This network is composed of individuals who envision themselves as members of an extended family. Because they have established fictive kin relationships, a system of rights and obligations has developed in the community; this system is what

allows the community to stay vibrant and sustainable. When everyone generally looks out for the best interest of each other, the chances of an individual's survival increase. There are individuals in the community who abuse or do not participate in this system, as a result of this these individuals do not enjoy the same support that more active members do—though it is unlikely that the community will utterly abandon an individual, unless they have perpetrated a particularly egregious trespass.

Though there are important exceptions to the findings which indicate high levels of heterogeneity in the community, this does not validate the null hypothesis. The data that has been collected from the interviews indicate themes that bolster the core hypotheses of the study. In the field, hoarding of resources was not observed. The individuals being studied did not indicate that this was a common practice—rather the very opposite is the case. The testimony of the participants and their observed behavior are accordant with each other. Food and resources are shared in commons situations because these individuals view their community as an extended family. Because they *are* “extended family” they provide mutual support of each other because it is beneficial to their mutual survival.

The academic literature is very limited when it comes to understanding this community; transient youth are a relatively unknown population in academic studies on homeless youth. The academic literature that does mention this population is often not solely focused on this population but is covering the punk subculture and end up briefly discussing the community. Future studies of this

community should be conducted to help establish a baseline of understanding for the community.

The “non-academic” literature that exists in the transient community about itself is, unsurprisingly, far more accurate in describing this subcultural population. Fairly often in the interviews participants made statements that were almost exactly verbatim matches of zines cited in the study. This indicates that the community itself is highly reliant upon zines to communicate ideas throughout the scene. The zines speak far more truly of the experiences of transient punks than any other publication; this is undoubtedly because the individuals writing the zines are also the ones who are involved in the community.

The transient punk community is truly a fascinating community with much dimensionality. This being a cursory study of the subculture one can only begin to scratch the surface of what is happening in this community. Further studies of this population will hopefully be able to uncover more dimensions that will give us all a better understanding of the community. Perhaps in the future we also will not have such a repressive state (or one at all) which will precipitate the need for security culture. Unfortunately many of the most inspiring and exciting aspects of the community cannot be fully documented due to the current political climate—hopefully this situation will improve in the future. Security culture is absolutely essential at this point in history because if too much information becomes available about the community in the present time, the long term security of this population could falter. The lives that these individuals live are fascinating, beautiful, and inspiring—hopefully they will not be lost to history. But

realistically all of humanities achievements will be lost to history someday.

Sendai said it best when he shared his thoughts of the future.

I already know that I'm king of my world and I'm gonna do what I want to do, that's all that matters, man. I don't want to write a book, but I want a life that's *worth a read though*. But one day this will all be decimation—it'll *all* be dust and what name will be remembered *then*? Who's gonna care then anyway, you know? This is our chance to see it *our* way—everything I've done has been done a billion times before, but not exactly in the way I've done it and *not* by me; this movie is for us to see thru our own eyes and *no one* else can share that. That's what's beautiful about life and that's great and that's what doing this shit is for...the acclaim all that other shit, it's filler maybe it makes your life more fun, but in all reality—who gives a *fuck* about being remembered? (Sendai)

*I'd rather be forgotten, than remembered for giving in.*

-Refused. (Refused 1998)

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APPENDIX A

Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study to help document the life stories of transient punks. You are a potential participant for the study because you either: self-identify as, fit the criteria of, or have been identified by others as a “transient punk.” We ask that you read the following before agreeing to be in the research.

### **Purpose**

The goal of this study is to acquire information about your life history as a transient and present this information in your own words. We hope to uncover patterns in these stories which will give us all a more accurate understanding of the transient subculture.

### **Procedures**

If you agree to be in this research, and sign the consent form, we ask you to participate in an informal interview session which should take a relatively short period of time to complete. You are welcome to share whatever information you wish, but if you feel at any time that you do not want to answer one or more questions or decide to end the interview you will not be penalized. Interviewees will be tape recorded, photographed and/or videotaped with your consent. If you choose to be tape recorded, photographed, or videotaped please indicate which below. If you choose not to be tape recorded, photographed, or videotaped there will be no penalty.

### **Risks**

The risks involved in this study are less than minimal. You will only be referred to in the final write-up by the number in which your life story was recorded (e.g. participant one, participant two, participant three, etc...); The information you provide during the interview will be coded in such a way that only I (Thomas Heffernan) and the principle investigator (Wayne Allen) will be able to identify the participants; no real names, addresses, aliases, or other identifiers will be included in the final write-up; any and all private information will only be shared between the principle investigator (Wayne Allen) and the student investigator (Tom Heffernan); Consent forms will be stored in the field in a locked box accessible only by the student investigator (Tom Heffernan) and the field notes will be stored under lock and key for at least three years at the principle investigator’s office at Minnesota State University- Mankato. All audio/visual records will be stored in the principle investigators office for three years following the study at which time they will be destroyed.

### **Benefits**

Much stigma and misunderstanding exists in the dominant society perception of transients; this study will provide a unique opportunity for you to better communicate who you really are, what you think about the world, and why it is that you do what you do. All too often these stories are lost to history and are never recorded. This will give you an opportunity to preserve your knowledge and experience for future generations.

INFORMED CONSENT

You are invited to participate in this study of your own freewill. Due to the fact that the study is about your personal life story, if at any point you feel that you wish to not continue in the study or prefer not to answer one or more questions, there shall be no penalty. If you feel that information you provide may be used to identify you in any way, we ask that you do not reveal this information. By signing this document and answering the questions you imply your consent. This study is open only to those persons who are eighteen years of age or older.

One copy of this form will be retained by the student investigator and a second copy will be given to the participant. Attached to this consent form is contact information for the student investigator, the principle investigator, and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Administrator. Please contact the primary investigator (Wayne Allen) or the student investigator (Thomas Heffernan) for information regarding the research or the IRB administrator (Anne Blackhurst) for information about the treatment of human subjects. An additional contact information sheet will also be provided to you should the consent form be lost.

Tape recording, Photography, and Video Taping Consent

*Please check all that apply:*

- Please check this box if you consent to being tape recorded.
- Please check this box if you consent to being photographed.
- Please check this box if you consent to being videotaped.
- Please check this box if you prefer not to be tape recorded, photographed, or videotaped.

By signing below, I consent to participation in this study and am fully aware of my rights regarding participation in this study.

Name (print) \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

*If you have any question about the research please contact via email: [wayne.allen@mnsu.edu](mailto:wayne.allen@mnsu.edu) (primary investigator) or [thomas.heffernan@mnsu.edu](mailto:thomas.heffernan@mnsu.edu) (student investigator). If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human subjects please contact [anne.blackhurst@mnsu.edu](mailto:anne.blackhurst@mnsu.edu) (IRB Administrator). Thanks again for your participation.*

Student Investigator contact information

Thomas Heffernan

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Faulton, SD 57438

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Appendix B

Tables

Table I: Demographic Information

Gender information	Biological Males	11/18
	Biological Females	7/18
Age information	Average	20
	Mean	22.5
	Range	18-27

Table II: Push/pull factors for Entering Street Life

Needing to find one's self	16/18
Feeling like they area an outsider	13/18
Feel that something was wrong with society	15/18
Boredom	6/18
Exposure to the punk rock scene	14/18
Desire to see the world/ new experiences	13/18
Problems in a relationship	6/18

Table III: Family History and Relations

Child abuse	0/18
Drug/Alcohol Abuse	4/18
Sexual Abuse	1/18
Divorce	2/18
Relatively Happy Childhood	10/18
Relatively Sad Childhood	6/18
Family supports travels	11/18
Family unsupportive of travels	9/18
Currently communicates with parents	16/18
Does not communicate with parents	4/18
Ran away from home	3/18
Was kicked out of their home	1/18
Choose to go on the street	16/18

Table IV: Themes Relating to “the Scene”

Direct participation within the transient scene	15/18
Direct action	8/18
Zines	9/18
Perceives the transient community as kin	14/18
Believes they are closer to fictive kin than biological family	9/18
Believes that transients practice reciprocity w/each other	16/18
Establish Fictive kin relationships	15/18
Indicated a system of rights and obligations	15/18
Indicate transients provide mutual protection	14/18
Indicate the practice of food sharing in the community	15/18
Themes of ethnic markers	14/18
Indicated that other transients would help you out	18/18
Indicated that transients wouldn't help you out	7/18

Table V: Travel History

< 6 months	2/18
6 months – 1 year	2/18
1 - 2 years	3/18
2-5 years	9/18
> 5 years	2/18

Table VI: Negative Themes

Drug/Alcohol Abuse	7/18
Harassment by the police	14/18
Abuse and Discrimination	9/18
Crime	8/18

Table VII: Behaviors while Traveling

Hitch Hiking	16/18
Train Hopping	11/18
Rubber Tramping	6/18
Riding bicycle (long distance)	6/18
Sharing Rides	10/18
Squatting	14/18
Dumpster diving	18/18
Flying a sign	9/18
Panhandling	7/18
Busking	11/18
Spanging	9/18
Attending public feedings	10/18
Utilize food stamps	9/18
Stealing	5/18
Couch surfing	9/18
Had to “figure it out” on their own (how to travel/survive)	13/18
Learned to survive by “Word of Mouth”	10/18

Table VIII: Themes in Attitudes and Beliefs

Negative attitudes toward work	13/18
Positive attitudes towards work	6/18
Freedom	17/18
Minimalism	12/18
Anarchism	9/18
Apolitical	4/18
Political involvement	11/18
Freeganism	14/18
That they expect their lifestyle will be long lasting	12/18
Negative attitudes towards police	13/18
Positive attitudes towards police	2/18
Having pets on the road	5/18
Religion	9/18
Sex	7/18

APPENDIX C

Photographs of the Participants



Photo 1: Cybil took Vagrant and I on a tour of the co-op she is living at. Cybil is quite a talented artist and shared her work with us (the two paintings behind her on the wall). Cybil may be paying to stay here, but she has future plans of going back out on the road later in the summer.



Photo 2: Original work by Cybil



Photo 3: Original piece by Cybil



Photo 4: Gerry in Eugene; he's couch surfing until he can hitch out.



Photo 5: Sampson has traveled extensively throughout the country.



Photo 6 (left): Vagrant, one of the gatekeepers of the study, is taking some well needed time out of the vehicle on our return back to Minnesota.

Photo 7 (right): Raven and Bucket are also stepping out to stretch.



Photo 7: Harlan is rolling a cigarette at Washington Park in Mankato, MN.



Photo 8: A glimpse of an anarchist bathroom.