Youth-Subcultural Studies: Sociological Traditions and Core Concepts

J. Patrick Williams*
Arkansas State University

Abstract

The study of youth subcultures has rich histories in the USA and UK, yet has remained a marginal subfield within cultural sociology. In this article, I begin by reviewing the significance of the Chicago school, strain theory, Birmingham school and post-subcultural studies traditions of youth-cultural and youth–subcultural research. I then conceive of a series of significant analytic concepts that over time have proven themselves to be core components of youth-subcultural studies. These analytic concepts include subcultural style, resistance, subcultural space and media, societal reaction, and identity and authenticity. In each analytic section, I explore major conceptual frames and discuss significant empirical research, on youth subcultures including punk goth, straightedge, riot grrrl skateboarding, rave and club cultures, among others.

Youth-subcultural phenomena continue to be popular topics at colleges and universities in the USA, the UK, Europe, and Australia. Sociologists and cultural studies scholars regularly participate in research- and teaching-related seminars on youth cultures and subcultures in conferences around the globe. There has been a plethora of monographs and edited research volumes on youth subcultures in recent years, covering a rich and diverse history of theoretical and methodological traditions. Peer-reviewed research can be found in a variety of journals, and university courses on youth subcultures are well attended. At the same time, however, some scholars have called for the abandonment of the subculture concept in favor of newer alternatives. This has sparked reactions from those scholars who believe in the analytic potential of the subculture concept. Given all this attention, there is a need to take account of the past and present in the field of youth-subcultural studies and to consider the diversity of epistemological, theoretical, conceptual, and substantive issues at hand.

Subcultural studies emerged out of two distinct sociological traditions yet has been affected by and affects many other scholarly fields. The earliest coherent set of subcultural studies was carried out by sociologists at the University of Chicago from the 1920s to 1940s, although these sociologists did not identify themselves explicitly as subcultural scholars.

In Britain, an explicitly subcultural approach to the study of working–class youths was developed at the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the late 1960s and 1970s. In this article, I offer a brief overview of the significance of these traditions for subcultural studies. My intent here is not to artificially narrow the complexity of subcultural studies in either the past or present, but rather to offer a heuristic frame through which to view that complexity. My first goal is to discuss the emergence of the field of subcultural studies and how it is currently situated. My second goal is to outline a set of concepts that over time have come to form the core of subcultural studies and to offer some basic insight into those concepts. I will begin with historical overviews of the American and British traditions of subcultural studies, noting their theor-etical and methodological underpinnings, significance, and weaknesses. I will then discuss the current state of the field by organizing it into a series of nondiscrete analytic topics that covers a range of research being done on subcultures and subculture participants ('subculturalists') today.

Sociological traditions

American subcultural studies

The American tradition of subcultural studies arose out of two strands of academic work: the 'Chicago school' and functionalist theories of strain. The Chicago school represented a tradition of American sociology that extended from the early twentieth century until the 1950s and relied on an ecological model of society in equilibrium and on the belief that subcultures in the US arose in part as a result of urbanization. This argument can be traced to early essays such as Park's (1925) *The City*, important because of its emphasis on collective lifestyles, the relevance of moral order and social control within groups, and the call for in–depth, qualitative, empirical analyses of how cultural life is experienced. Sociolo-gists have argued for and against the idea of a coherent 'Chicago school' tradition (cf. Becker 1999; Faris 1967; Tomasi 1998), while others have drawn attention to some of the Chicago faculty's collective interests in social (dis)organization, social distance and social isolation – arguably all aspects of subcultures.[1]

 Early sociological research on youth subcultures in the USA predomin-antly concentrated on the deviant aspects of youth and is typified by the work of some Chicago faculty and students in urbanism, culture, and deviance.

> Perhaps the most conspicuous aspect of the reputation of the city of Chicago in the 1920s was the magnitude of its crime. Beer wars, bombings, racketeering, holdups, and gang murders made newspaper copy all over the world. ... Since it was apparent that most patterns of criminal behavior are acquired during the criminal's youthful days, research into the origins of juvenile delinquency appeared to be of strategic importance. (Faris 1967, 72)

Significant effort was put into the qualitative study of 'deviant' processes. Thrasher's (1927) *The Gang* and Cressey's (1932) *The Taxi-Dance Hall* are two examples of Chicago–based research into deviant lifestyles among the marginalized urban poor. Social problems such as delinquency challenged the ecological model of society in equilibrium, and the subculture concept became useful in explaining social pathologies. Subcultures were recognized as 'relatively distinct social subsystem[s] within a larger social system and culture' (Fischer 1975, 1323) – with the terms subculture and subsystem being coterminous. Subcultural research emphasized ethnic enclaves, youth, criminals, and other peripheral cultural groups, but did not adequately distinguish normative (i.e., cultural) structures from social organization.

The Chicago school model was not the only iteration of subcultural theory in the USA. Merton (1938) also theorized deviance within a functionalist framework, positing that disjunctures between the cultural goals of a society and the ability of its members to achieve those goals caused psychological strain for individuals. His strain theory linked deviant individuals' behaviors to dominant social structures through various potential types of action. The type of 'deviant' actions in which they engaged vis-à-vis the dominant culture's goals depended on the type and effect of anomie people experienced. Relying on unconventional means to achieve mainstream cultural goals or rejecting mainstream cultural goals and strategies promoted the formation of subcultures.

Cohen (1955) developed Merton's strain theory to describe how deviant behaviors continued to occur in the face of psychological strain by claiming that subcultures represented *inverted* sets of values and norms that participants internalized. A new subculture brought psychological and emotional well-being to its 'members'. Cohen's version of strain emphasized that subcultures emerged when 'a number of actors with similar problems of social adjustment interact with one another and innovate new frames of reference' (Cohen 1955; cited in Thornton 1997, 13). This conceptualization highlighted social fragmentation within modern urban areas and emphasized that both social structures and cultural milieux combined to shape both the problems youths experienced and their possible solutions. The work of Cloward and Ohlin (1960) on delinquent subcultural youths also began by asserting disjunctures between mainstream cultural goals and working–class youths' marginalized opportunities. However, in their theory the inability to succeed was not understood by individuals as their fault, but rather as the fault of the system, which caused individuals to lose faith in the legitimacy of the dominant social order. When a critical mass of similarly disenfranchised individuals was reached in a given geographical area, a subculture (or multiple subcultures) would emerge. Whereas Cohen (1955) argued that subcultural participants inverted mainstream cultural values, Cloward and Ohlin (1960) insisted that subcultural participants had the ability to create new *alternative* subcultural frames of reference.

In sociology, the subculture concept was further elaborated in the 1960s and 1970s through the concepts of counterculture and contraculture, among others (see Roberts 1978; Yinger 1960). With the passing of the hippies in the early 1970s, however, the youth subculture concept moved away from mainstream sociology and into criminology, where *deviance* remains a key analytic variable. The sociological study of subcultural youths has since developed in North America within the field of criminology. Criminological work often takes youth culture at face value, focusing on correlations and effects rather than on cultural processes (e.g., Baron 2007), although some criminologists remain analytically interested in culture (Ferrell 1999). Most problematic from a subcultural studies perspective is the criminological interest in the links between subculture and crime (e.g., Holt 2007), which represents youths as a social problem.

The first wave of American subcultural studies suffered from several weaknesses. Early ecological and strain theories were overly deterministic, conceptualizing subcultural formations primarily as reactions to mainstream or dominant cultural forces. Strain theories tended to limit an explanation of subcultural emergence to the disjunctures between the desire and means for economic success, discounting or minimizing other variables. Analyses were also limited to poor and/or minority populations in large cities. Development of the subculture concept in the USA slowed in the 1960s and 1970s, just as a radically different approach to subcultures was emerging in the UK.

British subcultural studies

During the 1960s and 1970s, the interdisciplinary field of cultural studies emerged in the UK, particularly at the CCCS (Sparks 1998). There, a group of scholars with backgrounds in the social sciences and humanities researched, among other things, various aspects of working–class youth cultures. Their collective work analyzed a variety of British youth subcultures, including teddy boys, mods, rockers, hippies and punks. Their subcultural theories represented a break with the American traditions of structural functionalism and deviance, preferring instead a neo–Marxian approach to class and power. CCCS work explored how subcultures provided symbolic solutions to working–class youth (Clarke et al. 1976). Subcultural participation was no longer understood as deviant, but as a form of resistance that reflected larger class struggles: 'the most fundamental groups are the social classes, and the major cultural configurations will be, in a fundamental though often mediated way, "class cultures"' (Clarke et al. 1976, 13). Subculture and class were only analytically separable as two sides of the same coin.

The CCCS's goal was to explain the emergence of youth subcultures in post–World War II Britain, not all subcultures across time and space. Accordingly, they believed that British subcultures represented working–class

youths' struggles to differentiate themselves both from their parents' working-class culture (dead-end jobs or unemployment; alcoholism and family strife) and the dominant bourgeoisie culture (lawmakers and police; bosses and teachers). Subcultures were therefore framed not in terms of strain, but as sites of resistance to cultural hegemony – the struggle between the bourgeoisie and proletariat for cultural and social power. Subcultural youth formed sites of resistance on the street corners, in the dance halls, on the open road, and in the weekend holiday spots. But while these sites offered space and time for youth to do their own thing, the subcultures failed to offer them anything more. At the end of the weekend, working-class youths likely had only vocational school or their dead-end jobs to which to return (Willis 1981).

To the extent that subcultural youths did engage in resistance, it was allegedly most obvious in their style, which was seen as a symbolic resource for youth insomuch as the dominant culture dismissed, marginalized, or rejected its appropriateness (Clarke 1976b; Hebdige 1979). This is the major methodological difference between the American and British traditions of subcultural studies: instead of an ethnographic approach, CCCS studies were primarily grounded in semiotic analyses of style. The semiotician's job was to deconstruct the taken-for-granted meanings that were attributed to subcultural objects and practices. This deconstruction required the semiotician to interrogate how taken-for-granted meanings were created, distributed, and consumed. The meanings of cultural objects and practices arose through hegemony as the ruling and working classes struggled over definitions of reality (Gramsci 1971). Within this struggle, subcultures appropriated and inverted cultural meanings, often through the consumption of clothing, music, and other leisure commodities. Through 'rituals of consumption ... the subculture at once reveals its "secret" identity and communicates its forbidden meanings. It is basically how commodities are used in subculture which marks the subculture off from more orthodox cultural formations' (Hebdige 1979, 103). From this perspective, all meaning was suspect – even the subcultural youths themselves did not always understand what their objects and practices 'really' meant. Only the trained semiotician could see the ideological dimension of subcultural style.

CCCS theorists acknowledged at least three problems with studying youth subcultures. First, they argued the importance of making 'the distinction between subculture and delinquency' (Cohen 1972, 30). Second, they pointed out that most youth never entered into subcultures, hence, there was little if any generalizability to youth culture available from subcultural analysis. Third, they recognized that subcultural participation was not necessarily rooted in a desire to achieve economic success through noninstitutionalized means, nor was resistance always first-and-foremost on participants' minds. Like many preceding American researchers, British scholars focused primarily (if not exclusively) on

lower–class culture, as well as limiting their analyses primarily to males and whites. Researchers' focus on class limited their ability to make sense of how different subcultures used different sets of symbols to resist dominant culture from within the same working-class parent culture. CCCS theorists were also charged with being overtheoretical and failing to rely on adequate empirical data. Finally, subcultures were theorized as static and homogeneous entities vis–à–vis a dominant cultural regime, and subcultural variability was explained away as ideological struggle rather than an area to be empirically explored. The CCCS tended to ignore what subcultural participants actually said or did, focusing instead on 'reading' their resistance through style and ritual.

Contemporary subcultural studies

Despite the critiques leveled against the American and British traditions, each tradition has been fundamental in building theoretical, conceptual, and methodological bases for the study of youth subcultures. Numerous theory and research strands have emerged over the last 30 years in both the USA and UK. Although a review of them all would require more space than is available, it is worth mentioning that research in symbolic interactionism, conversation analysis, sports sociology, and cultural studies (itself divided into several theoretical strands, including 'post-CCCS', 'Manchester school', and 'post-subcultural studies') have each furthered social scientific understanding of youth-subcultural phenomena. One significant feature of subcultural studies today is the critical insider perspective that has emerged (Hodkinson 2005). Much criminological research on youth subculture is etically framed in terms of gangs, violence, or delinquency. In contrast, subcultural studies collectively seek to emically explore the functional, participatory, and lived aspects of young people's material and non-material cultures.

Perhaps the most significant debate in subcultural studies in recent years concerns the conceptualization of contemporary youth collectivities. Relegating subculture to a useless 'catch-all' concept in favor of the term neo–tribe, Bennett (1999, 2005) argued that youth 'grouping which have traditionally been theorized as coherent subcultures are better understood as a series of temporal gathering characterized by fluid boundaries and floating memberships (1999, 600). Scholars have weighed in on the debate in various ways, usually either by additionally criticizing the CCCS's subcultural studies (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004; Weinzierl and Muggleton 2003) or by defending the concept's continued relevance (Gelder 2005; Hodkinson 2002). At least two problems, themselves contradictory, continue to plague current polemics. The first is a lack of proper attention to previous work by sociologists in the development of the subculture concept. Scholarship by Irwin (1977) and Fine and Kleinman (1979), for example, is decades old, yet offers clear analytic inroads to the useful

development of the subculture concept. For the most part, however, their work has been ignored by British scholars who have given themselves over to what Gelder (2005, 1) refers to as a 'rhetoric of newness'. The second is an avoidance of the fact that multiple layers of analytic concepts must be usefully employed to make sense of the incredible diversity of youth–cultural phenomena being studied today. Rather than pit concepts against one another as if they were all epistemologically equal and competitive, scholars might instead focus on the cleavages and boundaries among concepts, recognizing that some youth phenomena may be best under-stood as subcultural, and others not.

Core concepts

Reviewing the literature makes it clear that, regardless of the strands to which individual scholars subscribe, a number of analytic issues are signi-ficant in the field of subcultural studies. In order to provide insight into these issues without being overly pedantic, I have divided the remainder of the article into a series of analytic topics. I consider these to be core concepts of the field because much of the current scholarship being done in subcultural studies today seems to utilize one or more of them. They are style, resistance, space and media, societal reaction, and identity and authenticity.

Style

The study of subcultural style is best known through work done by CCCS scholars in the 1970s. CCCS theory tended to emphasize leisure over other social realms, such as the family or school, because leisure spaces were relatively free of dominant cultural forces (at least in youths' minds) and thus were where subcultural expressions were most likely to appear. And it was in the leisure sphere that style emerged as subculturally significant. Cohen (1972) identified four dimensions of style: dress, music, ritual, and argot. These modes can be usefully recategorized into cultural objects and cultural practices. Style is not an *essential* quality of any of these dimensions:

> The various youth sub-cultures have been identified by their possessions and objects. ... Yet, despite their visibility, things simply appropriated and worn (or listened to) do not make a style. What makes a style is the activity of stylization – the active organization of objects with activities and outlooks, which produce an organized group-identity in the form and shape of a coherent and distinct-ive way of 'being-in-the-world'. (Clarke et al. 1976, 54)

Thus, for CCCS theorists, style's significance lay in its capacity to solve problems. Mod style represented the ideological contradictions of desiring a middle-class lifestyle on the one hand and a commitment to their

working-class background on the other, while Skinhead style attested to disdain for middle-class culture altogether. In short, CCCS theorists conceptualized style as an essential subcultural component.

Studying clothing has been common in subcultural studies because sartorial distinctiveness is highly salient in everyday life – one can spot a punk or a goth a mile away, so to speak.[2] Why some young people choose to dress in ways that alienate them from many of their peers is partially explained by the concept of *bricolage*: 'the re-ordering and re-contextualization of objects to communicate fresh meanings ...' (Clarke 1976b, 177). Sub-cultural members do not attribute the same meanings to their clothing that 'outsiders' do. Therefore, when punks draw a swastika on a jacket or jeans, they may not mean to signify fascism, but rather simply to shock narrow-minded parents, teachers, and peers. Some youths may wear black clothing to signify a collective identity (Hodkinson 2002), while others wear it because, 'maybe when I get up in the morning I'm feeling pissed off' (Bovone 2003, 209). This basic distinction represents a shift by some scholars from more communal studies that highlight collective identities and practices to postmodern approaches that emphasize the precarious nature of stylistic choice. In one example of this postmodern line of research, Muggleton (2002) focused on how clothing styles are used to distinguish individuals not only from mainstream culture, but from other subculturalists, for example, as forms of 'distinctive individuality'.

Youths' subcultural practices become meaningful through stylization, from slang terms and secret hand-signs to food preferences, music and dance forms. Music has proven to be a particularly potent aspect of meaning-making among young people. Speaking about music's import-ance for adolescents, Ian MacKaye (member of punk bands *Minor Threat* and *Fugazi*) once said that 'music is the soundtrack for the transition' to adulthood (Berwick n.d.). Music was identified by Chicago school scholars as a dimension of subcultural activity. Cressey (1932) studied the devolution of young women's moral careers through participation in the taxi-dance subculture. In that research, music was a backdrop for deviant behavior. Subsequent Chicago-trained scholars, however, brought music to the foreground. Becker's (1963) research on jazz musicians is an exem-plar of how music stylization functions to maintain cultural boundaries between 'hip' subculturalists and the 'square' mainstream. Contemporary scholars have identified a complex web of music and culture that includes the increased feasibility for youths to make their own music (Bennett 2001), commitments to consuming particular music genres (Kahn-Harris 2007; Sardiello 1998), the use of music as an identity-making resource (Bennett 2000; Cushman 1995) and the relations between music and political–economic structures of power (Grossberg 1992; Rose 1994).

Subcultural style-as-practice goes far beyond creating and consuming music. For participants in the modern primitive subculture, the practice of body modification – tattooing, branding, and piercing – is as important

as its objective effects on the body (Winge 2003), while skateboarders, bike messengers, and graffiti artists resignify urban environments through their leisure practices (Borden 2001; Kidder 2005; MacDonald 2001; Peralta 2002). Such practices are ineffably subcultural, as one graffiti artist points out: 'the politics and rationalization of [such practices] are indiscernible to the outside world' (Teck, cited in MacDonald 2001, 153–4). Subcultural slang systems (Gelder 2007, 14–17; Johnson et al. 2006; Miller 2004), dietary choices (Cherry 2006), and even digital signature files (Williams 2003) represent ritualized and stylized practices that set participants off *intersubjectively* from mainstream society. Yet, stylization results in objective effects as well. Young people are regularly labeled as deviant for their stylistic choices (see 'Societal reaction' below) and abhorrent behavior is often reduced to an individual's clothing or habits, as it was in the case of the Columbine shooters being linked to Goth–subcultural participation.

Resistance

For many youth-subculture participants, style operates as a form of resistance to the adult world. From 'obnoxious' hair styles and clothes to 'obscene' lyrics, many youths revel in how uncomfortable mainstream folk become when confronted with difference. But analytically speaking, is a hair style a form of resistance? And if so, resistance against what? Some youths' behaviors might signify a pleasurable phase of 'rebellion' between childhood and adulthood, a moment of 'deviance' from the norms of society, or 'contestations' direct against specific agents of control (Raby 2005). For others, it might represent a liminal aspect of their adolescence or a struggle with inequalities and injustices they experience in their everyday lives. Subculture scholars have considered a variety of activities as resistant, rebellious, or deviant, depending in part on their own academic perspectives. In each case, concepts are predicated on complex relationships between human actors and their social environments. What they all share is their framing of resistance as a sign of opposition or alternative to existing power relations.

We must first determine whether youth practices are resistant. Subcultural resistance was first theorized by CCCS scholars. On street corners, in dance halls, on the open road, and at weekend holiday spots, teddy boys, skinheads, mods, and rockers created social spaces and stylistic practices that represented resistance to dominant culture at the symbolic level (Clarke et al. 1976). The skinhead style of work boots, jeans, and suspenders, for example, was seen as an ideological desire to reconstitute the traditional working-class community that in real life was deteriorating (Clarke 1976a), while the teddy boys' appropriation of Edwardian suits represented the disjuncture between economic and cultural capital.[3] In short, their styles were conceptualized as *merely* symbolic or 'magical'

insomuch as they ultimately failed to improve the youths' lives structurally. While not untrue, the magical solution thesis' structuralist, neo-Marxist approach ignored how resistance may be framed social psychologically or culturally. Lowney (1995) studied a group of teenage Satanists in a small town in the American South and found that their practices were less about a commitment to Satanic worship and more about a desire to upset the local Christian, sports-oriented high school culture that they found so oppressive. At one level, their resistance appears magical because their religious style does not improve their status or educational outcomes. Yet, through style (including appearance and rituals) 'they generate a form of collective identity ... outside that ascribed by ... education. This is ... in no sense a real material solution, but one which is solved at the cultural level' (Brake 1985, vii).

Other scholarship has critiqued this thesis by noting that many subcultures, including punk, straightedge, and riot grrrl, are explicitly framed in terms of sincere desire for social change (Copes and Williams 2007; Haenfler 2004; Moore 2007; Schilt 2003). Such active resistance occurs at the micro-level of individual action, but is often supported at the meso-level by subcultural frames of reference. In their research on the straightedge subculture, Haenfler (2004), Williams (2003, 2006), and Wood (2003) independently found that many participants framed resistance in terms of personal lifestyle choices, that is, that their desire to resist mainstream culture preexisted their subcultural participation. Haenfler went on to explore how this individualized resistance is often balanced by an outward-focused political orientation that does emphasize broader social change (see also Martin 2002).

Schilt (2003) also explored the personal and collective dimensions of resistance by studying the cleavages between covert and overt forms of resistance among riot grrrls. Subculturalists sometimes express defiance and disgust through overt channels such as political activity, yet marginalized communities often prefer to engage in more covert resistance through private rituals, out of site of adults and voyeurs. This type of resistance, like Lowney's Satanists, may appear relatively passive, offering an empowering identity or community of friends to social outcasts without changing the larger social structure, but it is not simply magical. Schilt found that resistance was not simply covert or overt, however, and used the concept of 'c/overt' to signify how resistance incorporates aspects of both at the same time. Girls may publish fanzines with only a small group of friends in mind for example, yet the personal changes that occur may diffuse across readers' other social worlds.

Research on resistance is often framed to some extent in terms of class, race, ethnicity, or gender. Early Chicago school work focused on immigrants, African Americans, and the working poor, while CCCS scholarship was grounded explicitly in terms of British class struggles. Whiteness and maleness, however, remained an implicit focus (cf. McRobbie and Garber

1976). Recent research has been more inclusive. Ruddick (1998) and Hetherington (1998) each studied subcultures that were economically separated from mainstream middle-class culture, but in different ways: the former emphasizing resistance *within* urban environments and the latter emphasizing resistance *to* them. Warren and Aumair (1998) and Lucas (1998) used the concept of moral panic to relate fears of racialized Vietnamese and Hispanic youths in Australian and California, respectively. These two studies, as well as Rose's (1994), explored the intersection of class and race vis-à-vis white 'dominant' culture and how subcultural practices resist through the appropriation of space and meaning. Riot grrrls have served in recent years as go-to material for gender analyses of youth subcultures, not least because they highlight the collective strength that is possible in a girls-only subculture. But the popularity of riot grrrl among researchers partially obscures other significant research that has focused on the embodied experiences of female punks (Leblanc 2000; Roman 1988), rockers (Schippers 2002) and skateboarders (Porter 2007) as well as young women in other societies, such as Kogals (Miller 2004; Suzuki and Best 2003). Masculinity is beginning to receive more critical attention as well (e.g., Buechele 2006; Haenfler 2006; Macdonald 2001). This new wave of racialized and gendered subcultural studies has brought increasingly complex theorizations of resistance with it.

Space and media

Gelder (1997, 2007) has noted a distinction between a 'romantic' view of subcultures as '*dis*-placed – as homeless or nomadic' in the sense of Mayhew's (1968 [1861–2]) work, versus subcultures as firmly rooted in space and/or place. Many subcultural activities today seem divorced from familial and other controlled spaces, but a review of the literature suggests that most subcultural studies have either explicitly or implicitly tied space and culture together. From the urban street corner to festivals and conventions to internet forums and peer-to-peer networks, we can usefully distinguish types of subcultural space in local, translocal, and virtual terms (Peterson and Bennett 2004).

Many sociologists have studied subcultural activities in specific social spaces. Cressey (1932) focused his attention on the taxi-dance hall as a social setting where young women developed and played out 'retrogressive' moral careers. Other examples include Baron's (1989) study of street punks, Cohen's (2002 [1972]) study of mods and rockers, Gaines' (1992) study of heavy metal kids, and Leblanc's (2001) research on punk girls. These studies highlight the significance of bounded geographical spaces for embodied, situated social action. Other research has mapped out local spaces themselves, as in the example of Fonarow's (1997) geographic analysis of indie music gigs, Marsh et al.'s (1997) social analysis of soccer stadiums, and Lincoln's (2004) analysis of girls' bedroom culture.

However localized embodied practices may be, youth subcultures typically cover wide geographies. The skinhead subculture, for example, evolved in both the USA and UK and to some extent, its evolution was facilitated through various transatlantic interactions (Moore 1993). However, skinhead subculture evolved *differently* in different locations, with the US containing significant numbers of nonracist skinhead groups that are subculturally distinct from racist skinheads (Wood 1999). Punk, hardcore, straightedge, goth, and other contemporary youth subcultures are also translocal, with participants from around the globe. Peterson and Bennett (2004, 6) describe translocality as 'widely scattered local scenes drawn into regular communication around a distinctive ... lifestyle'. To analytically distinguish between cultural levels, Fine (1979, 734) distinguishes between an *idioculture* – 'a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group' and a *subculture* – a larger set of idiocultures that are interlocked through networks of direct and indirect communication (Fine and Kleinman 1979). Translocal subcultures may, thus, be understood as networks of local idiocultural groups that are interlocked through the distribution of music, traveling groups (such as touring bands), and conventions and festivals (such as Burning Man or Rainbow gatherings) among others.

Scholars also study subcultural spaces that belie traditional geographic sensibilities. For some time, scholars have been critically aware of 'virtual' spaces – formations in which people that are physically dispersed create a shared identity and culture. In his ethnography of a straightedge subcultural internet forum, Williams (2006; Williams and Copes 2005) found that the internet has enabled new possibilities for subcultural participation, allowing people to participate in subcultures through an internet connection rather than in a face-to-face scene. Before the internet, fanzines functioned for decades as 'the quintessence of subcultural communications' (Thornton 1996, 138). Fanzines, or 'zines, are typically homemade collections of subcultural news, insider accounts, scene information, and first-person opinions, produced in paper or electronic form (Leonard 1998). Several scholars have noted the significance of virtual spaces (in print and digital media) as sites of resistance (e.g., Garrison 2000; Kearney 1998; Leonard 1998; Schilt 2003). Virtual spaces such as internet forums and 'zines allow people to keep up-to-date in their local scene as well as facilitate translocal interaction that may be regional, national or global' (see, for example, Hodkinson 2002; Jenkins 1992; Williams 2007).

Societal reaction

The types of media I have just described represent what Thornton (1996, 137) calls 'micro-media': media utilized by subcultural insiders. Most popular information about any particular subculture, however, is generated by 'outsiders'. Outsiders are responsible for categorizing, labeling, and

either marginalizing or spectacularizing subcultural styles, events, and actions (see, for example, Moore 2005). As previously noted, a significant amount of subcultural participation is grounded in a pragmatic conception of resistance to the mainstream. Yet, some youth objects and activities get defined as resistant from outside, thus 'requiring' or legitimizing adult intervention.

Cohen (2002 [1972]) first explored how mainstream, 'dominant' culture constructs youth subculturalists as folk devils through his study of the moral panics surrounding mods and rockers in England in the 1960s. Cohen lays out the steps through which moral panics develop:

> A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes less visible. (Cohen 2002, 1)

Of particular interest to Cohen are the news media, which regularly sacrifice accuracy of information in exchange for higher ratings. But as his model suggests, the media not only builds up negative portrayals of subculture, their constant coverage results in subcultures becoming normalized and banal (see also Hebdige 1979, 92–9).

Subcultural youth are especially prone to stereotypification when their styles differ from the cultures that surround them and gross simplifications of youths' actions and motives are common. In a study of urban youths in Melbourne, Australia, Warren and Aumair (1998) found that adults labeled many young people as gang members based on the youths' race and choice of clothing. Significantly, adults reported receiving most of their information about those youths through either hearsay or the news media (see also Lucas 1998). Paterline's (2000) research on Deadheads showed significant correlations between media representations of subcultural deviance, public restrictions on Deadheads' use of public space, and the numbers of arrests made by police around concert venues. He similarly reported little direct interaction between subculture members and local mainstream populations, except law-enforcement officials.

Mainstream populations' negative biases toward subcultural participation result in objective consequences for young people. Run-ins with police are one objective effect of being labeled subcultural, as the studies above indicate. Other subculturalists from diverse modern nation-states have experienced similar treatment. In their study of swing kids, Wallace and Alt (2001) explored how middle-class German youths in the late 1930s and early 1940s, many of whom had parents who were active in the Nazi Party, were subjugated to resocialization efforts or forced into labor camps because of their consumption of American Jewish and black music. In the

1980s, 'csöves' punks in socialist Hungary were imprisoned for 'public incitement to disaffection' based on their style (Krokovay 1985). At the same time in California, heavy metal and punk youths who failed to abandon subcultural fashion, including wearing studs, leather, or band T-shirts were implicitly threatened with admission to mental health facilities or juvenile detention (Rosenbaum and Prinsky 1991). In the 1990s, three heavy metal teens (known as the West Memphis Three) were convicted of murdering three young boys in Arkansas. The media stirred a moral panic around alleged Satanic activity, and the prosecution used discreditable 'experts' to tie heavy metal style to murderous inclinations (Berlinger and Sinofsky 1996).

Societal reaction may also spectacularize youth-subcultural processes in more positive ways. As Thornton (1996) studied the media's responsibility for acid house's mutation into rave culture, Bennett (2000) explored how the growth in popularity of ethnic Punjabi music in the UK resulted in an increased number of venues and events upon which young fans could rely. The rise of rap's popularity has similarly allowed for the global spread of a racialized and classed black sensibility that stands ostensibly in contrast to a white, middle-class culture (e.g., Decker 1994).[4] In my own discussions with young people who participate in a variety of subcultures, they have repeatedly told stories about how they first learned about a particular subculture through a TV show, a radio program, or by surfing the web. These examples suggest the roles that large-scale media may play in facilitating the growth and/or change of youth subcultures.

Identity and authenticity

Once studied primarily by social psychologists, identity and selfhood have become increasingly popular as analytic concepts in recent decades with the cultural and discursive turns in the social sciences.[5] American subculture scholars were concerned with the relationship between subcultural participation and its impact on the self, at least implicitly, from the beginning. The Chicago school's emphasis on naturalistic inquiry and the empirical study of experience led to early insights into the social and experiential dimensions of subcultural participation. In recent decades, many subcultural studies have framed identity in terms of insider/outsider dichotomies or internal hierarchies.

Insider/outsider distinctions have a long history in the study of culture. This is partly because of an underdeveloped conceptualization of subcultures as interactionally embedded within larger social and cultural networks. But equally if not more importantly, many subculturalists' objectify insider/outsider distinctions by describing their identities in contrast to a mainstream or dominant culture. In his study of jazz musicians, Becker (1963) articulated the insider's perspective that jazz players possessed a degree of 'hipness' that separated them from mainstream

'squares.' Identity discourse may be further differentiated into two analyt-ically distinct layers: a social identity that people use to identify themselves as members of groups; and a personal identity that people used to identify themselves as unique subculturalists, separate even from fellow participants (Williams 2006; see also Widdicombe 1993). Some sociologists have inad-vertently objectified subculturalists' talk about identity into reified identity categories. For example, Fox's (1987) study of 'real punks and pretenders' concluded that subcultural identity was simultaneously dichotomous (there were such things as 'real' and fake punks) and hierarchically structured ('pretenders' served various functions on the periphery of the subculture). Her analysis failed to consider the contingent nature of subcultural boundaries and identities. Recently, a more nuanced understanding of identity has emerged, partially from the sociological study of social identity (Jenkins 2004) and partly from the cultural study of taste and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984, 1986).

Thornton's (1996) study of club cultures in the UK extended Bourdieu's concepts to the idea of 'subcultural capital', capital that insiders use to both distinguish themselves from outsiders and internally differen-tiate themselves from others in the scene. Subcultural capital may be either objectified, for example, through hair styles or record collection, or embodied through knowing how to talk, dress, or dance in appropriate ways. Both forms – objectified and embodied – are purposively used by young people to express the personal and social layers of subcultural identity. As a method of insider/outsider distinction, subcultural capital is either present or absent. As a method of creating internal hierarchies, it is valued, traded, and expressed in specific situations. Subcultural capital thus signifies a more general social–psychological practice of social identification.

Thornton's work also highlights the negotiated value attached to claims of authenticity. The concept of authenticity was used by CCCS subculture scholars as an antonym for mass culture. According to Hebdige (1979), subcultures were authentic because they signified unadulterated, 'pure' resistance the mainstream. That authenticity, however, only existed at the moment of the subculture's creation; too quickly, participants' styles and identities were commodified and resold to them for profit, thus killing the authentic version of the subculture. Subsequent work has either teased out some of the details of Hebdige's assertion (e.g., Jasper 2004), or argued against it, primarily by highlighting the socially constructed nature of authenticity as a standpoint ontology. In a decidedly postmodern approach to identity, Muggleton (2002) found that British youths believed in an authentic subcultural self even when they did not follow typical subcul-tural styles. His approach is very different from more modernist con-ceptions of subcultural authenticity such as Lewin and Williams's (2007) conceptualization of authenticity as the transcendence of style altogether, or McLeod's (1999) social constructionist approach to American hip-hop,

which focused on the semantic dimensions of authenticity (social-psychological, racial, political-economic, gender-sexual, social-locational, and cultural) from which participants crafted subcultural identities. Like each of the preceding concepts, identity and authenticity do not have fixed meanings within the subcultural studies literature; each concept is deployed in multiple (and sometimes antagonistic) ways.

Conclusion

Sociologists at the University of Chicago began studying the collective, cultural dimensions of young adults' everyday lives nearly a century ago. Since then, a diverse set of theoretical and methodological perspectives have been used to further that research. Today, the interdisciplinary field of subcultural studies is a robust, growing area of scholarship. Yet, there remain gaps between academic disciplines, as well as between academic and popular conceptions of youth subcultures. In terms of the latter, subcultural youth are often vilified in the news media. Especially when some act of youth violence occurs, reporters and editors assume that subcultural connections will be uncovered to 'explain' the behavior (e.g., Canham 2004; Goldenberg 2006). As for academics, we remain divided in how we approach and frame youth-subcultural activities. Cultural studies work tends to emphasize the positive (almost heroic) aspects of participants, partially because of the growing numbers of insider researchers, while criminological research still tends to construct youth cultures in terms of delinquency and/or criminal behavior. Meanwhile, young sociologists with subcultural interests (i.e., 'insiders') often take a naïve stance in their research because they are unaware of the research literature that already exists. In this article, I have given a broad overview of some of that literature with a focus on some of the field's core concepts. Identifying these concepts is an important part of moving the field of subcultural studies forward.

The interest in youth culture and subcultural studies is currently strong, yet more research needs to be done to build our sociological understanding of youth-collective behaviors. I advocate cultural sociologists looking both inside as well as outside the discipline in search of theories and concepts that offer insight into subcultural phenomena. In this article, I reviewed work in sociology, cultural studies, social psychology, geography, and criminology, and more briefly in communication studies and anthropology, among others. There is and has been much research in these other fields that will offer us new insights. Second, I advocate that more studies of non-western, non-white, non-male, non-'spectacular' subcultures be added to the literature. Subcultural studies has retained its white, male history all too well. Lastly, I advocate for the continuing use of the subculture concept to the extent that it remains analytically appropriate. While 'scenes', 'neo-tribes', and 'club cultures' may be increasingly common

on the youth cultural landscape, subcultures *also* remain highly salient and significant. Subcultural studies will strengthen as scholars bring insights from interdisciplinary and cross-cultural research to bear in their analytically precise research.

Short Biography

J. Patrick Williams earned his PhD from the University of Tennessee after studying in the departments of Sociology and Cultural Studies, and is currently an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Arkansas State University. For several years, Dr. Williams has focused on the social–psychological and cultural dimensions of authenticity in youth subcultures, most notably the straightedge subculture. He has published ethnographic research on youth subcultures and digital culture in several peer-reviewed journals, including *Symbolic Interaction*, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *International Journal of Deviant Behavior*, and *Media International Australia*, as well as in two edited books, *Gaming as Culture: Essays in Social Reality, Identity and Experience in Fantasy Games*, and *Youth Subcultures: Exploring Underground America*. Dr. Williams is also the coeditor of two books, *Gaming as Culture: Essays in Social Reality, Identity and Experience in Fantasy Games* (2006), and *The Players' Realm: Studies in Video Games and Gaming* (2007), both with McFarland Press. He is currently preparing a new book, *Subculture Studies: An Introduction* for Polity Press.

Notes

* Correspondence address: Department of Criminology, Sociology, and Geography, Arkansas State University, PO Box 868, Jonesboro, AR 72467, USA. Email: subcultures@gmail.com.

[1] The 'Chicago school' and the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Chicago are not synonymous. I do not wish to assert that the Department as a whole had a collective interest in a narrow set of epistemological and methodological premises (e.g., pragmatism; ethnography). I do wish to assert, however, that pragmatism and urban ethnography influenced specific scholars in the department, and that their legacy is collectively recognized as the 'Chicago school'.

[2] Subcultural affiliation and identity is often reduced to clothing. Research by Muggleton (2002) and Widdicombe (1993, 1998; Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1990, 1995) took sartorial distinctiveness as the basis for studying the extent to which young people self-identified as subcultural.

[3] Teddy boys were a rough-and-tumble culture of lower working-class youths, most of who were children during the hard years of World War II. The Edwardian suits they preferred had been expensive upper-class fashion a few years earlier but had fallen out of style and became available through thrift stores at a fraction of their original price. Teddy boys were manual laborers who earned a relatively good living during the postwar economic boom in England, their income quickly outpacing their cultural upbringing.

[4] Of course, the rap songs most likely to hit the Top 10 are those least likely to valorize a subcultural or countercultural logic. Instead, radio rap typically celebrates the accumulation of wealth and the objectification of women.

[5] Unfortunately, 'identity' has also become a buzzword that some subculture scholars utilize uncritically. The title of Epstein's (1998) book, for example, contains the word 'identity', yet there is no explicit reference to identity as a sociological or social psychological concept in his writing.

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