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“FLYING MY FREAK FLAG”:
A GROUNDED THEORY OF OPPOSITIONAL CROWD IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Affiliating with a peer crowd in adolescence is an important step in identity development. Yet the role of oppositional crowds in identity development has not been assessed. The current study addressed this gap in the literature by focusing on the Goth, Punk, and Emo crowds. Using processes of analytical induction, the current study analyzed interview and observational data from 16 ninth- through twelfth-grade adolescents who self-identified as Goth, Punk, or Emo, and generated a grounded theory of oppositional crowd identity development that includes phases of exploration, commitment, constriction, and reconsideration. This theory suggests that a period of exploration precedes a commitment to oppositional crowd ideals, characterized by unique styles of dress, musical tastes, and ideological worldviews, as well as self-injurious behaviors. These commitments appeared to serve a variety of functional purposes, albeit short-lived ones. When oppositional crowd identity commitments began to be seen as unoriginal, feelings of constriction arose. Those feelings, coupled with shifts in popular culture, increased school-based extracurricular involvement, and self-esteem, prompted a reconsideration of oppositional crowd commitments. These findings offer a framework for understanding the dynamic and multidimensional qualities of oppositional crowds. They also complement recent efforts, guided by the developmental contextual framework, to expand the traditional identity status paradigm. Findings encourage further testing and refinement of this model on other oppositional crowds, and call for greater scaffolding and support for their devotees.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Structuring the Social Environment.....	2
Facilitating Identity Development	5
Statement of the Problem.....	6
Purpose of the Study	8
Research Questions	10
Nature of the Study	10
Conceptual Framework.....	11
Assumptions.....	13
Limitations	13
Summary	15
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	17
Adolescent Crowd Research: An Overview	18
Various Approaches of Crowd Assessment.....	18
General Crowd Categories	20
Characteristics Associated With General Crowd Types.....	21
Crowd Determinants	25
Changes in Adolescent Crowd Orientations	28
Crowds and Self-Esteem.....	31
Critiques of Crowd Research	34

Identity Studies: An Overview.....	38
Rapid Expansion of Identity Studies.....	38
Problematic Consequences of Expansion	39
Erikson’s Framework of Identity	39
Marcia’s Identity Status Paradigm.....	43
Methods of Assessment	44
Critiques of the Identity Status Paradigm	45
Summary	51
Chapter 3: Methods.....	53
Research Design.....	53
Paradigm and Tradition.....	53
Research Questions.....	55
Participants.....	55
Data Collection and Empirical Materials.....	57
Data Analysis	58
Open Coding	59
Focused Coding	62
Theme Emergence	66
Threats to Data Quality.....	67
Ethical Considerations	71
Chapter 4: Findings and Interpretations.....	72
Females	72

Males.....	73
Oppositional Crowd Identity Development	78
Exploration for One’s Social Niche	78
Feeling Isolated.....	78
Trying to Fit In.....	80
Lacking Confidence	81
Recognizing the Futility.....	86
Commitment to Oppositional Crowd.....	87
Rejecting Popular Norms	88
Self-Injury	92
Rejecting Conventional Ideologies	92
Function of Oppositional Crowd	94
Constriction by Oppositional Crowd Norms	104
Growing Weary of Implicit Rules.....	104
Feeling Mislabeled.....	106
From Unique to Unoriginal.....	108
Reconsideration.....	112
Finding Alternative Modes of Oppositional Expression	112
Moderating Ideological Commitments	118
Broadening Conceptualizations of Authenticity	120
Conclusion	122
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	124

Summary	124
Interpretations	125
Crowd-Behavior Link	125
Purgative Functions of Oppositional Crowd Behaviors	126
Models of Identity Development	128
Other Alternative Cultures	133
Recommendations for Further Study	133
Personal Reflections.....	135
Conclusion	138
References.....	140
Appendix A Email or Verbal Script for Recruiting Students	155
Appendix B Informed Content Form.....	156
Appendix C Oppositional Crowd Characteristics.....	158

List of Tables

Table 1 Examples of Meaning Units, Initial Codes, and Condensed Codes	63
Table 2 Condensed Codes and Conceptual Categories.....	65
Table 3 Conceptual Categories and Emergent Theme.....	67
Table 4 Participants' Demographic Data	76
Table 5 Participants' Self-Reported History of Self-Injury and Therapy.....	84
Table 6 Participants' Extracurricular Activity Involvement.....	117
Table 7 Phases of Minority Group Identity Development (Top) and Proposed Phases of Oppositional Crowd Identity Development (Bottom)	132

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

For some time, researchers have been documenting various adolescent peer crowds in American schools, from Jocks and Burnouts (Eckert, 1989), to Dweebs, Headbangers, and Trendies (Kinney, 1993), to Brains, Druggies, Normals, Outcasts, Populars, and Toughs (Brown, Mory, & Kinney, 1994). Although the specific labels for these crowds may vary, the general array of crowds mentioned in past research has been remarkably consistent across gender, regions, and ethnic groups (Sussman, Pokhrel, Ashmore, & Brown, 2007). Indeed, studies spanning several generations and geographic areas have consistently revealed similarly themed crowds, including athletically oriented crowds, deviant crowds, high-status elite crowds, academically oriented crowds, and adolescents who are defined by a lack of affiliation with other crowds.

Most of the research on crowds has adhered to the definition of crowds that Brown and his colleagues (1994) articulated. These researchers have been referred to crowds as “collections of adolescents identified by the interests, attitudes, abilities, and/or personal characteristics they have in common” (p. 121). This definition conceptualizes the peer crowd as a reputation-based group, as opposed to an interaction-based group. From this definition, adolescents who do not interact with one another—but nevertheless share the same interests, attitudes, abilities, and personal characteristics—may identify with the same crowd.

The pervasiveness of crowds in American high schools suggests that these groups may serve unique developmental functions among at least a subset of adolescents. There are differing arguments and theories regarding the importance of crowds, which include reaffirming socioeconomic divisions within society (Eckert, 1989), maintaining allegiance to ethnic group

norms (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), structuring the social environment (Brown et al., 1994), and promoting identity development (Brown & Lohr, 1987; Newman & Newman, 1976). The latter two functions of crowds are among the most cited, and merit further discussion due to their prevalence in the literature.

Structuring the Social Environment

Crowds serve an important relational function during early and middle adolescence, when many youth are entering new schools and interacting with greater numbers of peers (Brown et al., 1994). During this potentially overwhelming time, the crowd system acts as a social map to help adolescents select possible friends and romantic partners, judge the potential success of interpersonal interactions, and maintain peer relationships. From an outsider's perspective, the social map created by crowds is clear. Crowd members commonly occupy or lay claim to particular places or activities in the school (Eckert, 1989). Those identified as Populars, for example, may preside over the student council, while those identified as the Burnouts may occupy the back alleys of the school grounds.

Differing crowd members are also distinguished from one another through styles of dress or fashion. Several qualitative studies (e.g., Croghan, Griffin, Hunter, & Phoenix, 2006; Eicher, Baizerman & Michelman, 1991) have found stark differences in the clothing styles of various crowd types. Although slight variations in style were found within crowds, these studies support the idea that most crowds have a unified and distinct clothing or style theme. Those identifying as Jocks, for example, typically wear athletic clothing, and those who call themselves Punks are commonly seen wearing black leather clothing and T-shirts associated with music groups. These

unique styles differentiate crowds from one another and provide yet another mechanism for sustaining and defining social boundaries.

The above characteristics of crowds are often assigned by outside observers—either ethnographers or field researchers—who observe crowd behaviors within the school context and distinguish those crowds by observable attributes. Yet for adolescents themselves, the meanings of crowds can rarely be interpreted from an outsider’s perspective. Crowds are, for the most part, social constructions: They require adolescents to conjure up meanings for crowds that venture beyond observable features like the ones mentioned above. The social constructions of the Jock crowd, for example, can have positive connotations for some (e.g., athletic, spirited) and negative connotations for others (e.g., “dumb Jock”). The various meanings assigned to crowds are often formed through adolescents’ daily conversations with one another. Interviews conducted by Brown and colleagues (1994) elicited the following responses from adolescents regarding the various crowds of their school, and the attributes that characterize them:

“Oh, yeah; the Populars all wear these tight-fitting jeans and sit around the commons in between classes like they own the place!”

“You’d be crazy to walk down the B-wing by yourself because the Headbangers, they, like, attack you.”

“The Nerds all wear glasses and ‘kiss up’ to the teachers, and after school they all tromp uptown to the library, or they go over to somebody’s house and play some stupid computer game until 9:00 at night – and then they go right to bed ‘cause their mummies make ’em!” (p. 128)

An appropriate way to interpret adolescents' depictions of crowds is from the paradigm of interpretivism. Interpretivism views the truth value of the above narratives to be neither objective nor subjective, but intersubjective, based on the shared meanings and understandings of adolescents themselves (Warren & Karner, 2005). From this perspective, not all adolescents who affiliate with the Popular-type crowd are stuck-up, and not all adolescents who affiliate with the Headbanger-type crowd will attack someone who walks down their hallway. Within the interpretivist perspective, however, those who affiliate with the Popular crowd may exude more superiority than other crowd affiliates (and may give off the impression that they "own the place"), and those who affiliate with the Headbanger crowd may behave in ways that intimidate others. Through the interpretivist paradigm, the descriptions that adolescents give of various crowds should be seen as caricatures of crowds: somewhat distorted, but consensually validated meanings of crowds, based on the shared meanings created by the adolescents themselves.

Like the staked crowd territories or fashion styles, consensually validated meanings of crowds help to structure social interactions. Brown et al. (1994) found that crowds were consensually validated to have particular levels of *desirability*, *permeability*, and *proximity* in relation to other crowds. In the Brown et al. study, adolescents regarded some crowds to be more desirable than other crowds; this belief structured their social interactions, because adolescents wanted to socialize with the most desirable crowd possible. Adolescents also perceived some crowds to have more permeable boundaries than other crowds; this perception structured their social interactions because they were likely to socialize with crowd members who would be open to such interactions. Last, adolescents perceived some crowds to be more proximal to other crowds. The Jock and Popular crowd types, in the Brown et al. study, were more similar, and

hence closer together in what they termed *social symbolic space* (i.e., the figurative landscape in which adolescents arrange different groupings), than the Jock and Nerd crowd types. Crowds that were proximal to one another in social symbolic space were more likely to interact than crowds that were further apart in social symbolic space. Hence, these consensually validated meanings of crowds appear to provide an additional way for adolescents to structure their social environment.

Facilitating Identity Development

Crowds have also been recognized as important facilitators of adolescent identity development. Crowds become particularly important during early and middle adolescence, the developmental period associated with rapid identity development. What is required of the adolescent during this period of life is the relinquishing of childhood identifications and a gradual adoption of his or her own intra-psychic structure—a new configuration that is “more than the sum of its parts” (Erikson, 1980, p. 95), or more than the sum of all one’s childhood identifications.

During this time, theorists have postulated, adolescents use peer crowds as a way station between relinquishing their childish dependence on parents for self-definition and achieving an autonomous sense of self (Newman & Newman, 1976). In de-attaching from parental authority figures, the adolescent experiences a search for membership with similarly aged peers, and an internal questioning about the group of which he or she is most naturally a part. The adolescent asks him/herself: “Who am I, and with whom do I belong?” During this time, peer crowds provide an important template or label for adolescents’ emerging identities (“I am a Jock,” or “I am a Brain”), as well as a context for exploration and commitment, two of the fundamental

aspects of the identity formation process (Erikson, 1968). Within their crowd, adolescents are often able to try out new activities, discuss their ideas and values, and subsequently commit themselves to various ideologies (Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001).

Because different crowds often possess distinct constellations of values, behaviors, and interests, it has been hypothesized that different crowds promote different opportunities for identity exploration (Barber et al., 2001) and different kinds of identity commitments (Johnson, 1987), thus facilitating different identity structures. These different identity structures may be assessed through scores of exploration and commitment across particular identity domains, such as those in vocation, religion, politics, friendship, dating, and sex roles. These assessments have shown a great deal of between-domain variability in levels of exploration and commitment, with individuals reporting high levels of exploration and/or commitment in one domain but not others, suggesting the idea of a “leading domain” for many individuals (Goossens, 2001; Skorikov & Vondracek, 1998). A hypothesis regarding the crowd-identity association is that the particular values associated with crowds may facilitate high levels of exploration and commitment in a specific domain. For example, those who affiliate with the Brain crowd, a crowd associated with high academic achievement, may be most committed to their vocational identity; those who affiliate with the Popular crowd, a crowd often associated with social abilities, may be most committed to their friendship and dating identity domains.

Statement of the Problem

The subject of adolescent peer crowds has enjoyed some popularity over the years, both in popular culture and in social science. A review of the literature, however, has revealed several

limitations in our understanding of crowds. First, the relationship between crowd affiliation and identity has been primarily theoretical; few studies have examined this relationship empirically. Moreover, studies that have examined the relationship between crowd affiliation and identity have not conceptualized the identity construct in any uniform way. The term identity has been used as a boilerplate term for a variety of constructs, such as self-esteem (Brown & Lohr, 1987), psychological adjustment (Barber et al., 2001), or other aspects of mental health. Therefore, the problem is that, while we understand the potential significance of crowd affiliations on adolescent mental health, we do not know how crowd affiliations shape adolescents' identity in any clearly defined way.

Another limitation of crowd research is its neglect of “alternative” adolescents—that is, adolescents who do not affiliate with one of the larger, more conventional groups in school (Kinney, 1999). Crowd research relies heavily on paper-and-pencil questionnaires that contain close-ended questions about crowd affiliations (Barber et al., 2001; Brown, 1990; La Greca, Prinstein, & Fetter, 2001; La Greca & Harrison, 2005). Although convenient, such research restricts participants' expression of their crowd affiliation, as they are typically allowed to choose only one crowd among a finite set of options (e.g., the Elite, Athletic, Academic, or Deviant crowds). Those who identify with crowds not represented in the answer blanks are left to choose an “Other” category, which is often excluded from analyses because of its small size (Prinstein & La Greca, 2002), or combined with a more mainstream crowd to achieve greater power in analyses (Urberg, 1992). Hence, while the characteristics associated with mainstream crowds are well-documented, the characteristics of alternative crowds have received less attention in research.

Purpose of the Study

This study was devoted to examining several crowd types that have received little scholarly attention: the Goth, Punk, and Emo crowds. Affiliates in these crowds can be easily identified by their distinctive outward appearance: dyed hair, multiple piercings, and heavy makeup (Besic & Kerr, 2009). Other commonalities appear to exist among all these crowds. All, for example, have been linked to a preference for angry or somber music (Hodkinson, 2005), and all have been identified as high risk candidates for depression and self-injurious behaviors (Garner, Bootcheck, Lorr, & Rauch, 2006). Despite these findings, few reports have included explanations from the actual crowd devotees themselves about what it means to affiliate with those crowds.

This study was guided by several goals, all of which involved a detailed examination of the Goth, Punk, and Emo crowds. The first goal of the study was to gather descriptions, from Goth, Punk, and Emo devotees themselves, about what it meant to be a part of those crowds. In doing so, this work provides a contribution to the crowd literature, which has previously aggregated these youth into an “Other” category and, hence, curtailed our understanding of the crowds. This approach also contributes to adolescent studies in general, which have been criticized by some (Shanahan, Erickson, & Bauer, 2005) for relying too heavily on sophisticated causal models and not enough on description. Descriptive evidence, as argued by these adolescence scholars, is important so that results can be interpreted in a contextual frame. Descriptive evidence is also important to garner more interest to the field of adolescence, as such evidence is typically more accessible for a broader audience of scholars and practitioners. These

benefits were realized by G. Stanley Hall in his classic work *Adolescence* in 1904 and, as argued by these scholars, should be realized in contemporary adolescence research for the science of adolescence to mature.

The second goal was to understand the identity development experiences of Goth, Punk, or Emo affiliating adolescents. This goal was accomplished through the use of Marcia's (1966) Identity Status Interview, one of the most popular and well-verified measures of Erikson's identity construct. These interviews provided information on the identity domains which these adolescents found important, and provided empirical evidence on an association that has been predominantly theoretical.

An understanding of these adolescents' identities may also clarify the underlying reasons for their behaviors. Individuals who report low levels of identity exploration and commitment, for example, appear to be at greater risk for involvement in health-compromising behaviors such as substance use (Bishop, Weisgram, Holleque, Lund, & Wheeler-Anderson, 2005). Conversely, individuals who report high levels of identity exploration and commitment appear to have a protective layer of sorts against such risky behavior (Schwartz, 2005). Identity exploration, followed by a strong commitment to particular morals and values, provides a sense of self-confidence to avoid health-compromising behaviors, whereas a lack of identity exploration and commitment leaves one more vulnerable to poor choices and risky behaviors. Because of these theoretical ideas and empirical findings, identity would seem to have a great deal of practical value. Indeed, illuminating the identities of Goth, Punk, and Emo affiliates may inform prevention and intervention efforts by addressing crowd members and attempting to structure identity development toward activities that are not risky or health compromising.

For all of these assessments, I employed an in-depth approach that accounted for individual expressions of crowd membership and acknowledged the role of context in adolescents' crowd affiliation. These steps were done before generalizations or abstractions were made. This approach is aligned with classic theorists such as Erikson, who conducted intensive studies on individual subjects. The approach also holds appeal for many contemporary theorists who believe that "individuals must be studied in depth to be understood in general" (Corneal & Nesselroade, 1991, p. 686).

Research Questions

The current study posed two questions:

1. What does it mean to be part of the Goth, Punk, or Emo crowds?
2. What are the identity development experiences of adolescents in Goth, Punk, or Emo crowds?

Nature of the Study

To answer these questions, I collected data from a small sample ($N = 16$) of adolescents who self-identified as Goth, Punk, or Emo. I gathered the participants for my sample through snowball sampling, asking Goth, Punk, or Emo-identifying adolescents to recruit other similarly identifying adolescents, and interviewing each adolescent separately. In these interviews, I gathered detailed information on what it means to be Goth, Punk, or Emo. I also asked participants about their developmental histories, including their family background, their attitudes toward school, and their relationships with their peers.

The method for this study was a qualitative, inductive strategy using grounded theory. This method was most appropriate because the questions for this study have been relatively unexamined in research, and no existing theory fit the phenomenon under investigation. Because little research has examined these topics, a hypothesis-driven approach was not appropriate for this study. Moreover, because the research questions required an explanation in words and not in numbers, a quantitative design was not appropriate. The qualitative approach allowed for an exploratory investigation using detailed narrative accounts; the grounded theory approach provided guidelines for inductive analysis.

Conceptual Framework

Grounded theory research has been viewed as an approach that uses no guiding theory whatsoever. However, a growing number of researchers are disputing that belief. Indeed, the claim that grounded theory researchers should enter the field *tabula rasa* (i.e., with a “featureless mind”) has become highly unpopular. In their book, *Theoretical Frameworks in Qualitative Research*, Anfara and Mertz (2006) argued that “it is impossible to observe and describe the way things really are, free of any prior conceptual scheme or theory... without some theory of what is relevant to observe, how what is to be observed is to be named, and so on” (p. 8). Any researcher, they argued, “no matter how unstructured or inductive, comes to fieldwork with *some* orienting ideas” (p. 17). Those orienting ideas are often conceptualized in a conceptual framework, to guide and clarify observations, data collection, and analysis (Wolcott, 1995). Using this approach, conceptual frameworks guide—but do not dictate—the focus of the inquiry and observations.

Vondracek, Lerner, and Schulenberg's (1986) developmental contextual perspective served as a conceptual framework to guide the current study. This meta-theoretical perspective was born out of a growing dissatisfaction with reductionistic interpretations of development. The developmental contextual perspective takes an integrative approach in the study of development, resting on the idea that behaviors cannot be understood through an isolated factor or variable, but rather through the meaningful integration of multiple, interacting factors (Adams & Marshall, 1996). The developmental contextual perspective is an inclusive approach to understanding human behavior, as it is capable of incorporating various models of conceptualizing context, including Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological view of human development, wherein contextual factors are organized into three major subsystems: the microsystem (settings within which a person develops); the mesosystem (settings in which the person does not interact but wherein developments occur); and the macrosystem (broad social institutional contexts that influence all other systems embedded within it). The developmental contextual perspective also takes a dynamic approach to development, holding that the individual influences and is influenced by these subsystems (Vondracek, 1990).

This perspective was useful for the current study because it provided a more ecologically valid approach to crowd research than has been conducted in the past, wherein multiple layers of context, and their dynamic relationship with the individual, were not acknowledged. It also provided a useful starting point for interview protocol by specifying the sorts of topics to examine. Initially, interviews gathered information on participants' experiences with their family, peers, and school—all variables located within the microsystem. These topics were

adjusted as interviews progressed, but their initial usage made for a clear focus in the beginning of the study.

Assumptions

A variety of assumptions guided my work. First, I assumed that the students who helped me recruit other participants understood my directions for nominations, and that the boundaries of my crowd recruiting instructions were sufficiently delineated. Second, I assumed that nominating students were knowledgeable social-type raters. Third, I assumed that the meanings of Punk, Emo, and Goth labels were socially constructed in similar ways across school settings. Last, I assumed that participants told me truthful stories.

Limitations

Although this study provides several important contributions to the literature on peer crowds, it is limited in several ways. Due to the extensive nature of my observations and interviews, my focus was necessarily limited to only a subset of the student population. There were some crowds (e.g., Juggalos, Vamps, Scene) that have been characterized as similarly radical in dress, music tastes, and behavior that I elected not to study. Hence, my findings describe a limited sample and are not meant to be generalized to all adolescents. And although much was gained from my association with select students, it must be said that my interpretations were based on a partial view of the adolescent social environment.

Other limitations should be acknowledged with my sampling approach, which relied on Goth, Punk, or Emo adolescents to accurately identify other Goth, Punk, or Emo adolescents.

This approach has been critiqued by Brown (1989), who has argued that students of such “marginalized” status are inaccurate social-type raters because they do not know enough classmates to rate others into crowds. For more accurate crowd assignment, Brown has advocated for a broad, representative group of raters. Although Brown’s argument has been contested, with claims that unpopular students are likely aware of other crowds within the school that the popular students are not (Cross & Fletcher, 2007), his concern is valid here, and underscores a limitation of my approach. Accessing a broad group of social-type raters was not feasible in this study. This limitation means that my limited number of social-type raters may have had varied conceptualizations of what it meant to be Goth, Punk, or Emo, and may have failed to recruit some adolescents who fit my inclusion criteria.

This study is also limited in its design. My grounded theory offers hypotheses about the identity development of Goth, Punk, and Emo adolescents across middle school and high school, yet my assessments were not longitudinal. Instead, I relied on high school students’ retrospective accounts of their middle school experiences. Problems with memory recall may have altered the accuracy of their stories. The validity of my theory would benefit from future studies employing a longitudinal design.

Last, this study will be limited in the scope of its theory testing. Although the aim of this study was to create a generalizable theory, the theory I developed is a working theory, and will need further testing on different adolescents in different contexts.

Summary

Adolescent peer crowds have received increased attention over the years, both in popular culture and in social science. Yet there are a variety of limitations in our understanding of crowds. First, the relationship between crowd affiliation and identity has been primarily theoretical; the few studies that have examined the relationship have not conceptualized the identity construct in any uniform way. Because identity statuses can provide valuable information about likely behaviors, intentions, and attitudes in specific life contexts, it is important to examine the crowd-identity association empirically, and through a clearly defined identity framework.

Second, traditional crowd research has given little systematic attention to adolescents who appear to “go their own way” (Kinney, 1999, p. 21) and form alternative crowd types from the more dominant Elite-, Athletic-, Academic-, or Deviant-type crowds. The little research that has focused on the Goth, Punk, and Emo crowds suggests that affiliates of such crowds may be at higher risk for depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicide ideations in comparison to their more mainstream peers (Definis-Gojanovic, Gusic, & Sutlovic, 2009).

The current study addressed these concerns through an in-depth analysis of the Goth, Punk, and Emo affiliates. Analyses examined the characteristics that affiliates ascribe to their crowd; the experiences that contributed to their decision to become Goth, Punk, or Emo; and the ways in which their crowd shaped their identity development. Because little research has examined Goth, Punk, and Emo affiliates on these topics, these investigations were exploratory. The end goal of this study was to generate a theory, grounded in narrative accounts from adolescents, on the identity development experiences of Goth, Punk, or Emo adolescents. My

investigations for this study were situated in a body of work on peer crowds and adolescent identity, and in the following chapter I offer a review and critique of this literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Researchers have described Goth, Punk, and Emo adolescents as “shocking” and “radical” in dress (Besic & Kerr, 2009), and have identified the devotees of those crowds as high risk candidates for depression (Young, Sweeting, & West, 2006). Popular literature has also noted these crowds. Most notable have been the reports of self-harm and suicide that have been connected to the crowds (Definis-Gojanovic et al., 2009), and in reported parental concerns about the music associated with these crowds, with speculations that such music incites reckless behavior (Ashby & Rich, 2005). Yet what has been conspicuously absent from these reports is the explanations from the adolescents themselves who identify with these crowds. To address that gap and demystify these groups, the aims of the current study were to address the following questions:

1. What does it mean to be part of the Goth, Punk, or Emo crowds?
2. What are the identity development experiences of adolescents in Goth, Punk, or Emo crowds?

To help provide a frame of reference for answering these questions, in this chapter, I review the research on adolescent peer crowds and identity. In the first half of the chapter, I review the methods used in past crowd research. I then review the characteristics associated with crowds, the predictors of crowds, and the relationship between adolescent crowds and mental health. I conclude this half of the chapter with a critique of crowd research. In the second half of the chapter, I review the Eriksonian approach to identity, Marcia’s (1966) identity status paradigm, and the various ways of assessing identity statuses. I conclude this chapter by elaborating on the expansions of the status paradigm and by noting its current limitations.

To identify the articles and books utilized in this review of the literature, I conducted an online search through EBSCO databases. I used Academic Search Premier, followed by Academic Search Complete, Education Research Complete, and ERIC databases via the Pennsylvania State University library website. My search terms included the following: *adolescent peer crowds, peer group affiliation, goth, punk, emo, alternative peer crowds, oppositional crowds, social identity, Erikson identity, Marcia identity, identity operationalization, and identity measurement*. For literature on popular culture trends, I used LexisNexis and used the search terms *Stephenie Meyer, Twilight, Hot Topic, vampires, and body modification*. The following is an overview of research that informed my approach for the current study, and illuminated the existing gaps in crowd and identity research.

Adolescent Crowd Research: An Overview

Various Approaches of Crowd Assessment

Crowd researchers have used several methods to identify adolescent crowd names and their characteristics: (a) adolescents' self-report of their own crowd, (b) researcher classification of adolescents into crowds, and (c) peer ratings of adolescents into groups according to the perceived crowd types in their schools. The most popular method of assessing crowd types has been through adolescents' self-report. In this approach, adolescents are given a questionnaire containing pre-existing social categories and are asked to identify which category is most like them. Barber et al. (2001) used the characters from the film *The Breakfast Club* in their self-report assessments, asking adolescents to indicate whether they were most like the Princess, the Jock, the Brain, the Basket Case, or the Criminal. Others have used the Peer Crowd

Questionnaire (Brown, 1990; La Greca et al., 2001; La Greca & Harrison, 2005), which provides adolescents with a list of more generic crowd types along with a brief description of each: Jocks (athletic, on school team), Burnouts (skip school, get into trouble), Brains (do well in school, enjoy academics), Alternatives (rebel against the norm in clothing or ideas, do not conform to social ideals), and None/Average (no affiliation, “just average”). Adolescents are asked to indicate (*yes* or *no*) whether such crowd types were present in their school, to list any alternative crowds that exist in their school, and to select the crowd with which they are most closely affiliated.

Most of the researcher-based classifications of crowds have been ethnographic in nature, conducted through unstructured interviews and naturalistic observation (Eckert, 1989; Eder, 1985; Kinney, 1993). Kinney’s study, for example, of the ways in which “nerds” in middle school became “normals” in high school, involved regular periods of observation from Kinney, wherein he spent time in the hallways, classrooms, and cafeteria of the school in which he was conducting his study. He also attended various after-school activities (e.g., baseball games, academic decathlon competitions; “battles of the bands”) to observe crowd interactions. These frequent observations of adolescents in their natural school setting provided Kinney with information about the crowds with which adolescents seemed to congregate, and supplemented the material Kinney gathered from in-depth interviews. Interviews were conducted with individuals and small groups in natural school settings, such as the cafeteria and hallways, and were free-flowing, asking adolescents’ to talk about their day-to-day social experiences in school.

Approaches that have used adolescent peer ratings to gather crowd information have typically required adolescents to describe, in their own words, the major crowds they perceive in their school, and to then list the classmates whom they consider to be members of each group. Through this approach, adolescents are also asked to name the crowd to which they personally perceive themselves as belonging. These ratings appear to be the least common method of crowd assessment; indeed, only three studies using this approach were identified in this literature review (Brown & Lohr, 1987; Brown et al., 1994; Brown, Von Bank, & Steinberg, 2008). Despite their shortage in the literature, these approaches appear to be useful for gauging the level of agreement between adolescents' self-perceived and peer-rated crowd affiliation, and assessing the effects of self- and peer-rated crowd congruence. From these studies, there is evidence to suggest that the amount of congruence between peer- and self-appraisals of crowd affiliation may relate to a variety of internalizing symptoms. For example, adolescents who are rated by their peers as belonging to low-status crowds, but who self-appraise themselves to be in a high-status crowd, appear to have fewer internalizing symptoms than adolescents whose low-status crowd affiliation is acknowledged through both self- and peer-appraisals.

General Crowd Categories

From the above approaches, a variety of labels have been used to distinguish crowds, from Jocks and Burnouts (Eckert, 1989), to Dweebs, Headbangers, and Trendies (Kinney, 1993), to Brains, Druggies, Normals, Outcasts, Populars, and Toughs (Brown et al., 1994). In order to understand these various crowd labels through a common perspective, researchers (Brown et al., 2008) have proposed a matrix on which all crowd types could be graphed according to two dimensions: adult values and peer values. The adult value system has its emphasis on academic

achievement and compliance to adult authority, whereas the peer value system emphasizes athletic ability, popularity, and the adoption of cultural fads or fashions that are characteristic of the youth subculture.

Within this matrix, all youth can supposedly be classified into one of five general categories: Elites, Athletes, Deviants, Academics, and Others (Sussman et al., 2007). Elites are highly oriented toward peer and adult values, Athletes are highly oriented toward peer values but only slightly oriented toward adult values, Deviants are moderately oriented toward peer values and highly opposed to adult values, Academics are highly oriented toward adult values and relatively low in peer values, and Others tend to report low orientations toward both adult and peer values.

Characteristics Associated With General Crowd Types

These five categories have been distinguished from one another by several general characteristics. The Elites, for example, have been recognized as being a high-status crowd. Members of this crowd are typically comprised of members who are successful in academics and extracurricular activities, who are high in social competence, and who hold a high opinion of themselves (Barber et al., 2001). These characteristics illustrate the Elite crowd's high orientation toward peer and adult values.

Athletes are also highly oriented toward peer values, but less oriented toward adult values than Elites. Athletes have been described as those who are slightly more risky than those in the Elite crowd, particularly in the realms of sexual behavior and alcohol consumption (Miller, Farrell, Barnes, Melnick, & Sabo, 2003). However, they have often been associated with being

popular like those in the Elite category. In fact, some studies (e.g., La Greca & Harrison, 2005) have subsumed the Athletes with the Elites because of their similar characteristics.

Deviants have been described as a crowd that is low in academic involvement. Deviants are the most likely to use tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs, and to engage in other risky behaviors such as involvement in violence (Sussman, Unger, & Dent, 2004). These qualities illustrate the Deviant crowd's strong opposition to adult values. Although the Deviant crowd is opposed to adult values, it is not opposed to peer values. Indeed, the Deviant crowd has been conceptualized in past research as a relatively social crowd—one that more or less behaves and dresses in ways that are conventional with conventional peer norms (Kinney, 1993). These qualities illustrate the Deviant crowd's middle status, and moderate orientation to peer values.

The Academic crowd, like the Deviant crowd, has also been described as a middle-status crowd. Unlike the Deviant crowd, however, the Academic crowd has been identified as a relatively low-risk crowd, one that engages in few health-risk behaviors (La Greca et al., 2001), participates in few social activities (La Greca & Harrison, 2005), and achieves high marks in school (Barber et al., 2001). These qualities illustrate the Academic crowd's high orientation toward adult values and low orientation toward peer values.

The Others category has been identified as a crowd that is relatively low in peer status, social involvement, and academic involvement. The primary characteristic of the Others crowd is its low orientation toward both adult and peer values. Despite this point of reference, the Others has typically been a more amorphous crowd and hence has been more difficult for researchers to define than other crowd types (Garner et al., 2006). This category usually includes the crowd types that could not be classified into any of the four general categories, either because their

sample size has been too small (Prinstein & La Greca, 2002), their members have not been very distinct (e.g., 7th graders or “Whites”), or their norms have been unclear (Sussman et al., 2007). Because these crowd types are often aggregated with other crowds with similarly blurred boundaries for analyses, less is known about their distinct characteristics than is known about the other four crowd types.

From the current literature review, six studies examined adolescent groups that would likely fit into this Others category because of their low orientation to adult and peer values, small sample size, and distinctness from mainstream school culture. The crowd labels documented in these six studies included Punks (Besic & Kerr, 2009; Garner et al., 2006), Goths (Hodkinson, 2005; Selfhout, Delsing, ter Bogt, & Meeus, 2008; Young et al., 2006), and Emos (Definis-Gojanovic et al., 2009). The Punk subculture arose in the early 1970s and is often attributed to the band called the Sex Pistols (Shank, 2006). The aesthetic of the Punk subculture typically includes ripped denim, mohawks, and band-themed accessories (Rawstorne, 2008), and its ideology is characterized by themes of freedom for the individual and anarchy against organized government.

The Goth subculture has its roots in the Punk music scene of London in the early 1980s (Fritz, 2006). Like most adolescent movements, it is readily distinguished by its music and fashion: Goth affiliates often dress in black with ornate makeup. Yet the Goth subculture is remarkable for its longevity, its worldwide prevalence, and its connection to 19th-century romantic literature (Fritz, 2006). The Goth ideology has been associated with themes of individualism, creativity, sexual tolerance, and cynicism (Hodkinson, 2005).

Emo, which is short for *emotional*, appears to be a more contemporary offshoot of the Goth and Punk subcultures. The Emo subculture has been connected to music characterized by feelings of vulnerability and pain. The Emo subculture appears to be distinct from Punk and Goth subcultures in its move away from angry songs of rebellion and disdain for authority to more sensitive performances and melancholy music (Definis-Gojanovic et al., 2009).

Although the descriptions of these crowd types varied across studies, these groups were similar in their general dissatisfaction with both adult and peer values and in their decision to take on whatever qualities would set them apart from “prep culture norms” in their school. Prep culture, in the above studies, emphasized athletic success, physical attractiveness by mainstream criteria, ownership of conservative, expensive name-brand consumer goods, and sufficient academic success to qualify for college admissions.

To distinguish themselves from prep culture norms, adolescents in these Other crowd types have been known to behave in eye-catching ways. Goth crowd members, for example, have often been known to come to school with white face paint, faked bloodstains around the eyes or mouth, or bright green hair. They have also been known to dress in severe, all-black clothing, and wear chains or dog collars around their neck (Hodkinson, 2005). Researchers have speculated that these adolescents behave in these ways to shock, scare, or put people off (Besic & Kerr, 2009). These crowd-based styles have been viewed as a means for “going their own way” (Kinney, 1999, p. 21) and portraying themselves as different.

Although these expressions of rebellion against mainstream culture are often a healthy part of adolescent development and individuation, the extreme measures these adolescents take to differentiate themselves may create problems for them in school (Forthun, Montgomery, &

Bell, 2006). Research suggests that these youths often struggle to find a niche for themselves in the school environment, and that the adults who work with such youth may be hostile or unwelcoming to them. When unable to find appropriate channels for self-expression, such youth may drop out or be “pushed out” of school (Garner et al., 2006).

These reports suggest that adolescents in these crowds engage in rebellious, but relatively innocuous behaviors. Other reports, however, portray a more troubling picture of these adolescents, with evidence to suggest that these crowds socialize their devotees to engage in acts of self-harm. For example, in a longitudinal study, Young et al. (2006) surveyed almost 1,500 individuals from age 11 to age 19, and found that, after adjusting for predictive factors such as gender, parental divorce, substance use, and prior depression, a “really heavy” Goth subculture identification was strongly associated with self-harm and suicide attempts. No other subculture identification was similarly predictive after adjusting for confounding variables. Similar findings have been reported of Punk and Emo crowd affiliates, with crowd membership linked to acts of cutting (Shank, 2006) or suicide (Definis-Gojanovic et al., 2009). The implications of the results should not be overestimated, as these studies were limited. For example, the number of Goths in the Young et al. study was small ($n = 25$). Yet these studies do stimulate an effort to learn more about the Goth, Punk, and Emo crowds and their attraction to its devotees.

Crowd Determinants

Although the unique characteristics associated with each crowd may be the most notable or obvious in adolescence, it is unlikely that these differences first arise in adolescence. Indeed, the differences among individuals who affiliate with particular crowds likely predate adolescence. Those who have examined the predictors of adolescent peer crowds have generally

focused on either childhood personality traits or family backgrounds of crowd affiliates. They have also focused on a limited group of crowds: those considered low-risk (e.g., Athletic, Elite, and Academic crowds) and those considered high-risk (e.g., Deviant crowds).

Childhood personality traits. Adolescents' crowds have been found to be meaningfully related to their childhood personality traits (Lacourse, Nagin, Vitaro, Côté, Arseneault, & Tremblay, 2006; Prinstein & La Greca, 2002). In a 6-year, longitudinal, follow-back study, those who reported relatively low levels of depressive affect, social anxiety, loneliness, and global self-esteem in Grades 4 to 6 were overrepresented in the Athletic and Elite crowds 6 years later in adolescence. The determinants of Deviant crowd affiliations have also been examined in past research. In a 12-year longitudinal study, children who were rated by their kindergarten teachers as hyperactive, fearless, and low on prosocial behaviors were the most likely to affiliate with a Deviant crowd in adolescence (Lacourse et al., 2006). It is speculated that, over time, these childhood personality traits or behaviors shape the reputations that young people earn with their peers; these reputations then determine the crowds to which young people affiliate or are assigned in adolescence.

Parenting characteristics. Family background has also been identified as a predictor of adolescent peer crowds. Results from two studies (Brown, Mounts, Lamborn, & Steinberg, 1993; Durbin, Darling, Steinberg, & Brown, 1993) found that adolescents who were raised by authoritative parents (i.e., high in both demandingness and responsiveness) were overrepresented in the Athletic, Elite, and Academic crowds and underrepresented in crowds that were oriented away from adult values, such as Deviants. In addition, adolescents who described their parents as

uninvolved (i.e., low in both demandingness and responsiveness) were overrepresented in crowds that did not support adult values.

The general conclusion from these studies is that parents play a significant but indirect role in peer crowd affiliations. Presumably, adolescents who have different family backgrounds differ in their social skills, values, and orientation toward academic success and deviance; these qualities, in turn, cause adolescents to gravitate toward similarly-themed crowds. Parental emphasis on achievement, for example, fosters higher school performance, which facilitates association with the academically-related peer crowds. Parental tolerance of deviance, on the other hand, fosters delinquent behavior, which facilitates association with Deviant peer crowds.

These studies provide an important contribution to existing knowledge of crowd determinants. When peer crowds were first noted in scholarly literature in the 1960s by Coleman, they were often cast in fairly simplistic terms—either as uniformly oppositional to parental values or wholly beneficial to young people’s socialization. Contemporary research, however, provides a more nuanced understanding of crowd antecedents, namely, that adolescents are likely to orient themselves toward crowds that reflect and amplify the influence of their own parents.

Individual-environment interactions. Although these previous studies have advanced our understanding of personality-related or family-related crowd predictors, recent findings on crowd affiliations suggest that a more complete understanding of crowd determinants must address the potential interactions between individual factors (such as childhood personality characteristics) and contextual factors (such as family background). For example, children or adolescents who are raised in an unstable family environment *and* who display individual risks, such as mental health disorders or difficult temperaments, appear more at risk of affiliating with

Deviant crowds during adolescence than are those who display only one type of risk (Lacourse et al., 2006). Both individual and contextual factors must be addressed for a more ecologically valid understanding of crowd affiliations.

This move to understand human behavior as a product of person-environment interactions stems from a broader movement by those who adhere to the developmental contextual approach (e.g., Lerner, 1989; Vondracek, 1990). The goal of this approach has not only been to understand different developmental phenomena according to the different surroundings in which they occur (e.g., peer group, family), but also to reflect a dynamic quality between the individual and his or her environment. From this perspective, adolescents' crowd affiliation cannot be understood without acknowledging both the adolescent's individual characteristics and the various contexts surrounding that adolescent.

Changes in Adolescent Crowd Orientations

Although a wealth of data exists on the descriptive characteristics of crowds, less attention has been given to the stability of crowd orientations across middle school and high school. Yet the data from these few studies suggest that crowds are not a stable or static feature of adolescence. Several dynamic features of crowds have been identified.

First, the structure of peer crowds changes across adolescence. Empirical research has found two basic crowd types in early adolescence: a high-status and low-status crowd (Eder, 1985; Kinney, 1993). Those who are not in the high-status crowd typically end up, by default, in a large mass of students labeled "unpopular." Once in the high school setting, crowds become more differentiated, revealing a broader range of crowd types, mapping on to the five general categories of Elites, Athletes, Academics, Deviants, and Others (Brown, Eicher, & Petrie, 1986;

Kinney, 1999; Sussman et al., 2007). This broader spectrum of crowds has been attributed to the greater social opportunities afforded to adolescents in high school. For example, opportunities like chess club and debate, typically not offered in middle school, are often available in high school and provide a context for a new crowd to develop. The broader spectrum of high school crowds has also been attributed to adolescents' more sophisticated cognitive abilities. Cognitively, adolescents in high school are typically able to differentiate themselves and their peers into a greater number of crowd types, as opposed to the two-tiered system, of high-status and low-status crowds, that they had configured in middle school. These assessments are aligned with the developmental contextual approach, as they acknowledge individual-environment interactions.

Second, the relational characteristics of crowds change across adolescence, from rigid in middle school to more permeable and accepting in high school. The rigidity of crowd boundaries in middle school has been examined by several ethnographers (e.g., Eder, 1985; Kinney, 1993), who noted overt displays of hostility between popular and unpopular crowd members. Yet as adolescents progress through middle school and high school, the permeability between crowds begins to loosen, as adolescents begin to treat "out group" members (i.e., those who are not in their crowd) in a more positive fashion than they did in middle school (Brown et al., 1994). This permeability might be selective, though: Kinney (1993) found the boundaries to loosen between certain groups (e.g., Academics and Athletes), but remain strong between others (e.g., Deviants and Populars).

These structural and relational changes in the crowd system are accompanied by changes in the importance of crowd affiliations across adolescence. Research suggests that crowd

membership is most important for younger adolescents, typically those in middle school and early high school (Brown et al., 1994; Brown et al., 1986; Kinney, 1993). During these years, crowds provide an important context for emotional support and social interaction; through these contexts, crowds provide a means for identity exploration and commitment to an identity label. Although the identities formed from these crowds have been seen as overly simplistic (e.g., “I am a Brain” or “I am a Jock”), research suggests that, in the beginning stages of identity development, adolescents prefer these simplistic labels over the more personalized but ambiguous personal identities they will likely form at a later stage of development (Stone & Brown, 1999). By the end of high school, the importance of crowd affiliation decreases. At this time, older adolescents often move away from their crowd affiliation, rejecting any crowd-based identity and instead labeling themselves in more inclusive ways (e.g., as “everyone’s friend” or “a part of every crowd”). This move stems from older adolescents’ growing dissatisfaction with the conformity demands of crowds. Moreover, at this later stage of development, adolescents typically view their established friendship networks as more important than (and replacing the need of) their crowd affiliation (Brown et al., 1994). From these changes, the function that crowds once served in earlier adolescence—that is, of providing a sense of belongingness and a context for identity exploration and commitment—becomes constraining, almost annoying, as the adolescent searches for more idiosyncratic and personally meaningful means of self-expression.

Last, crowd affiliation itself often changes across adolescence, with individuals switching crowd affiliations across middle school and high school. This discontinuity in crowd affiliation has been noted in several large-scale longitudinal studies of students in Grades 10 through 12

(McFarland & Pals, 2005; Strouse, 1999). In both studies, crowd continuity was the strongest among Academic and Elite crowd affiliates and the weakest in Deviant crowd affiliates. In both studies, Deviant crowd members were most likely to shift away from deviant crowd norms over time. In a smaller-scale ethnographic study, Kinney (1993) found a similar change in crowd affiliation among adolescents who self-identified as “nerds” in middle school but reconstrued their crowd affiliation as “normal” in high school.

Several factors have been offered to explain these changes. Kinney (1993) attributed crowd affiliation change to environmental factors, namely, to expanded opportunities afforded to high school students that allow them to interact with a greater number of peers. McFarland and Pals (2005) attributed the change to internal factors, or what they called *perceived external identity imbalances*, defined as an imbalance between their actual self and public self. Strouse (1999) offered no explanation for the mechanism explaining crowd change but identified higher delinquency and lower friendship bonds as predictors of crowd discontinuity.

Despite these findings, developmental accounts are still very much the exception rather than the rule in adolescent crowd research. More research is needed on the ecological factors that might contribute to adolescents’ crowd orientations by the time they are seniors in high school, and adolescents’ experiences in the peer and school context. In essence, a multidimensional model is needed to explain the development of crowd affiliations over time that incorporates both individual and social dimensions of influence.

Crowds and Self-Esteem

Crowd research can be organized into studies that conceptualize crowds as dependent variables (i.e., examining the factors that predict crowd affiliations) and studies that

conceptualize crowds as independent variables (i.e., examining the factors that are believed to be influenced by crowds). Research that has taken the latter approach has examined the role of crowd affiliations on a variety of behavioral or mental characteristics in adolescence. One of the most frequently cited functions of adolescent peer crowds is the facilitation of identity (Barber et al., 2001; Brown & Lohr, 1987; Miller et al., 2003; Prinstein & La Greca, 2002). The basic idea behind this association is that peer crowds provide a means for adolescents to engage in self-reflection and, in so doing, develop a stronger understanding of themselves. A closer review of the literature, however, reveals that the terms identity or self have been conceptualized in a variety of ways, such as psychological adjustment (Barber et al., 2001), self-worth (La Greca & Harrison, 2005), or other aspects of mental health. Indeed, many of the studies that purportedly examine the association between crowds and identity have in fact measured some aspect of self-esteem as their dependent variable (Brown & Lohr, 1987; La Greca & Harrison 2005; Prinstein & La Greca, 2002; Sussman et al., 2007).

Coleman (1961), in his classic study of high school peer relationships, was one of the first to suggest the impact of crowd affiliation on self-esteem. Coleman identified an Elite crowd, comprised of students who were highly regarded by their schoolmates. Students seemed to be aware of the traits that characterized this crowd and many aspired to belong to the crowd. Coleman measured self-esteem by asking students whether they agreed or disagreed with the question, "If I could trade I would be someone different from myself." Despite its simplicity, the item differentiated Elite crowd members from other students, with Elite members tending to disagree with the statement, and non-Elite members tending to agree with it.

Recent studies have found evidence to support Coleman's (1961) conclusions, with adolescents identifying or being labeled as Elite crowd members often reporting high levels of self-esteem (Brown & Lohr, 1987; La Greca & Harrison, 2005; Prinstein & La Greca, 2002). These findings have been explained primarily through the symbolic interaction framework, which holds that the self is socially constructed through day-to-day interactions with others (Mead, 1934/1967). Adolescents who identify as members of the Elite crowd, and are viewed by others as part of the Elite crowd, typically experience daily interactions that are positive. Elite crowd members are often given more praise by adults at school (Eckert, 1989). They are afforded special seating arrangements in the cafeteria (Brown et al., 1994). They are also encouraged to participate in more extracurricular activities than are those who are considered non-Elite (Barber et al., 2001). In comparison, research has found that non-Elite crowd members may be treated by school authorities with less respect (Garner et al., 2006) and may be excluded from social events at school (Brown & Lohr, 1987). The varied quality of these interactions, through the symbolic interaction framework, explains why members of the Elite crowd tend to report high levels of self-esteem and members of the non-Elite report lower levels of self-esteem. Positive day-to-day interactions facilitate Elite crowd members' high self-esteem; negative day-to-day interactions facilitate non-Elite members' low self-esteem.

However, past research has revealed that not all members of the non-Elite crowds have reported low levels of self-esteem (Brown & Lohr, 1987; Kinney, 1993). Indeed, most of the studies included in this review reported on a group of non-Elite adolescents whose self-esteem did not appear to suffer from their lack of Elite crowd membership. These adolescents, who have been referred to as "outsiders" or "floaters," have reported no desire to belong to the Elite crowd.

These findings suggest that other factors may moderate the relationship between crowd affiliation (specifically crowd status) and self-esteem. The value that adolescents place in others' evaluations may be one of those moderating variables. This idea was first established by Rosenberg (1989), who believed that the association between self-esteem and reflected appraisals is stronger if the significant other is highly valued. Rosenberg's framework helps explain why some adolescents' self-esteem appears to be impervious, while others' self-esteem appears to suffer, based on poor evaluations by school classmates: The impact of those evaluations on self-esteem is highly dependent on the value placed on those evaluations.

Another moderating variable in the association between crowd affiliation and self-esteem may be the adolescent's buy-in of the crowd label given to him or her. That is, some adolescents may be viewed by others as belonging to a crowd on the lower rung of the status hierarchy, but if they refuse to accept the validity of that label, such evaluations will likely not influence their self-esteem. Such were the findings in a study by Brown et al. (2008). In this study, low-status crowd members seemed to protect their self-esteem by denying the peer crowd affiliation that was assigned to them by their peers. Studies like these underscore the value of symbolic interactionist principles, and highlight the subjective nature of crowd affiliations. Those who are seen by others as not belonging to the Elite crowd, or perhaps even rejected from the Elite crowd, may avoid the consequences associated with low peer acceptance simply by asserting that they belong to a different crowd than the one assigned to them by their peers.

Critiques of Crowd Research

Past research has generated a great deal of knowledge about the determinants of crowd affiliations. The likelihood of belonging to a particular crowd, for example, may be explained in

large part by one's family background and personality. Crowd research has also provided a deeper understanding on the implications of crowd affiliations on adolescent self-esteem. That is, one's self-esteem may be a reflection of the status of one's crowd in the school hierarchy, as well as one's desire to belong to a particular crowd and the level of importance one attributes to the crowd structure.

Despite these findings, it is difficult to gain consensus about the meaning of crowds because of the methodological difficulties in measuring crowd influence. Similarity between adolescents at any one time may be due either to similar adolescents identifying with the same crowd (selection effects), or to initially dissimilar adolescents identifying with the same crowd and becoming more similar as a result of the association (socialization effects). Several studies (e.g., Cohen, 1977; Epstein, 1983) have found that both selection and socialization contribute to similarity among adolescents. Yet, because studies on crowds are typically correlational in design, knowledge about the directionality between adolescent crowds and their influence is limited.

Difficulties have also been noted in defining what, exactly, a crowd is. Brown (1990), for example, attested that crowds are best defined as reputation-based groupings, whose members do not interact with each other much. Yet Dunphy (1963) contended that social crowds are more aptly defined as collections of cliques, or interaction-based groupings—in essence, comprised of those who have frequent interactions with one another. Thus, the supposed influence of crowds in research may operate differently, depending on the operationalization of crowds as reputation-based or interaction-based groupings.

In reality, crowds may be *both* interaction- and reputation-based. Those who identify themselves as Jocks, for example, are more likely to belong to an interaction-based crowd than those who identify themselves as Loners. The latter crowd may better characterize individuals rather than groups. Yet because studies do not often determine the extent to which social crowd members regularly interact with one another, it is difficult to make predictions about the relative influence of crowds (which are reputation-based) versus close friends (who are interaction-based). Indeed, different phenomena may be under investigation when researchers employ different self- and peer-identification crowd methods.

Research on adolescent crowds has also presented problems with sampling. One of the benefits of quantitative research is that, with a representative sample, one can produce findings that are generalizable to a larger population. Yet acquiring a representative sample is difficult in adolescent crowd research. In comparison to studies of other groups (e.g., ethnic groups), where a researcher can select a sample that approximates the makeup of a particular setting, an adolescent crowd researcher cannot assume such neat boundaries of membership. Cross and Fletcher (2009) described this dilemma using hypothesis-testing logic: To create a representative sample of a single crowd, those who are in the crowd should be accepted and those outside the crowd rejected. Misidentifying crowd membership can result in a Type I error (if an individual is not in a crowd but is incorrectly identified as such) or a Type II error (if an individual is actually in the crowd being studied but is not identified as such). The possibilities for these errors are greatest when the boundaries around a crowd are not sufficiently delineated. As has been mentioned, those boundaries often remain undefined, and findings are lumped together from

studies that conceptualize crowds in different ways. Definitions of crowd membership must be given to maintain the validity of research results.

Lastly, challenges have been noted in the research methods used in adolescent crowd research, mostly in peer ratings and self-report. Assessments based on peer ratings have been criticized for the lack of consensus on crowd placement among peers, with evidence that peer ratings differ by raters. For example, European American students have been found to be more likely than African American students to identify African Americans as a separate group in school (Brown, 1990). Peer ratings also seem to differ by raters' level of popularity, with popular students being seen as more "informed" raters than unpopular students. Stemming from this belief, Brown (1990) advocated that only "leading members" of a school are to act as social type-raters, and argued that "students from unpopular crowds are not good [rater] candidates. Typically, they don't know enough classmates well enough to rate into crowds" (p. 15). Yet this stance has received criticism, with advocates of a more representative group of raters holding that crowd assignment is not truly representative without the viewpoint of unpopular students, and that unpopular students may be aware of other crowds within the school that the popular students are not (Cross & Fletcher, 2009). Regardless of the sample of raters, it is difficult to accept the validity of crowd research results when there is significant disagreement between raters. Clear boundaries around crowd membership would likely lessen this rater disagreement.

Self-identification methods have also received criticism. If crowds are indicative of one's reputation, there are doubts as to whether an individual can know with accuracy his or her reputation. Further complicating matters is the inconsistency of self-identification methods. Sometimes self-identification methods ask what crowd the participant identifies with (La Greca

& Harrison, 2005); other times they ask what crowd others may consider them a part of (McFarland & Pals, 2005). These critiques highlight the unstable foundation of crowd research, and underscore the need for greater specificity in crowd terminology and greater transparency in reported methodology.

Identity Studies: An Overview

Rapid Expansion of Identity Studies

Past research has underscored the significance of crowd affiliations on adolescent identity. The general belief from past research is that crowds provide adolescents with a way station between their child-like dependence on their parents for self-definition and their own independent identity (Barber et al., 2001; Brown & Lohr, 1987; Newman & Newman, 1976). From this perspective, those who are able to affiliate with a crowd are provided a means of self-exploration, whereas those who are unable to affiliate with a crowd are not given such an opportunity. Although this principle is generally accepted, past research on crowds and identity has generally conceptualized identity as a mental health construct, synonymous with self-esteem (Brown & Lohr, 1987; La Greca & Harrison, 2005; Prinstein & La Greca, 2002; Sussman et al., 2007). Thus, the crowd-identity link remains unclear.

Côté's (2006) commentary on the status of the identity field provides some perspective on the lack of consensus on the crowd-identity association. Côté remarked that the field of identity studies has become one of the fastest-growing areas in the social sciences. He illustrated this growth by comparing the number of hits derived from an *identity* keyword search in the 1940s with the number of hits derived from the year 2000. Whereas the keyword identity only

produced 78 hits in the 1940s, by the year 2000 there were over 12,000 hits (indeed, a current search of the literature, from 1960 to 2010, revealed over 80,000 peer-reviewed journals including the term identity). Côté concluded that the number of publications using the keyword identity is now in the tens of thousands per decade.

Problematic Consequences of Expansion

Although Côté (2006) was heartened at the proliferation of identity studies—he wrote, due to the increased attention given to identity studies, that “we have likely come a long way in coming to terms with the puzzle of human existence” (p. 6)—he was also troubled to discover the many and disparate uses of the term. As illustrated in the above findings, identity has been used in ways that make it synonymous with self-esteem (e.g., as with discussions that an adolescent may suffer in his or her “identity” as a result of school bullying). Identity has also been used to refer to in-group allegiances (e.g., with claims that a group may lose its “identity” unless allowed to dress a particular way at school), and the roles an individual occupies (e.g., daughter, friend, employee). Identity has also been used interchangeably with the larger, more amorphous construct of the self (Stryker & Burke, 2000). It has been argued that these usages of the identity term are not necessarily “wrong” so much as they are overextended, and used from a variety of different perspectives, which may lead to confusion. Indeed, this overextension of the identity term is likely why the crowd-identity association is unclear.

Erikson’s Framework of Identity

Scholars of identity who seek a developmental and contextual focus on identity often refer to Erik Erikson’s (1968) conceptualization of identity for theoretical guidance. Erikson’s concept of identity stems from ego psychoanalytic theory, an extension of Freud’s classical

psychoanalytic theory (1923/1961). Erikson's theory, however, places greater emphasis on adaptation to the environment than does classical Freudian theory, which is more concerned with inner dynamics and the unconscious. Instead of the darker, more pessimistic view of classical theory, wherein the individual is seen as contesting society, Erikson's works place the individual within a more or less nurturing social context. Contemporary identity theorists have recognized that he did this to advance the existing Freudian psychoanalytic theory beyond its biological-determinist position, and to establish a foundation for a more interdisciplinary theory of identity (Côté & Levine, 2002; Schwartz, 2001).

Erikson (1968) believed identity to be a multidimensional construct, based on biological and psychological capacities in interaction with the roles and values of a social context. Erikson also believed identity to have a purpose; namely, to provide one with a sense of sameness and continuity across time and place.

Foundation of the ego. One of the key features of Erikson's (1968) multidimensional construct of identity is the ego. Erikson believed the ego to be the most active but largely unconscious agency of the personality (pp. 216 – 221), responsible for behavioral, cognitive, and emotional control. A fundamental claim of Erikson's theory is that we have an innate drive to achieve competence or mastery in our environments; this predisposition provides the stimulus for ego development.

Erikson's (1968) theory traces the development of the ego over the entire life cycle, delineated through eight psychosocial stages. Throughout the life cycle, the ego becomes structured on the basis of the types of challenges associated with stage-specific competence tasks (e.g., trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt). Given meaningful challenges

throughout the life course, and within a relatively supportive environment, the ego is assumed to grow stronger in its ability to master complex challenges.

Ego identity formation. During adolescence, when newfound sexual drives, more sophisticated cognitive capabilities, and societal demands to adopt adult-like roles converge, the individual must confront the task of identity versus role confusion. At this time, the ego is challenged to form an *ego identity*, or a subjective feeling of oneself as a continuous entity, across situations and through time. Essentially, what is required of the adolescent during this period of life is the relinquishing of childhood identifications and a gradual adoption of his or her own intra-psychic structure—a new configuration that is “more than the sum of its parts,” or more than the sum of all one’s childhood identifications (Erikson, 1980, p. 95).

Erikson (1968) believed that individuals work through this stage by engaging in exploration (sorting through various alternatives) and commitment (choosing one or more alternatives and following through on them). He believed that the outcome of this stage is best represented by a single bipolar dimension, ranging from the *ego systonic* pole of identity synthesis to the *ego dystonic* pole of identity confusion. Identity *synthesis* represents a reworking of childhood and contemporaneous identifications into a larger, self-determined set of self-identified ideals, whereas identity *confusion* represents an inability to develop a workable set of ideals on which to base an adult identity.

Multidimensionality of identity. Erikson (1968) believed that an individual’s identity can be observed in several ways. *Ego identity* represents the most basic and fundamental beliefs about oneself that are extremely private, if not unconscious. The ego might represent intrapsychic conflicts that have been internalized from parents and carried over from childhood

(Schwartz, 2001). Because the ego identity resides at the unconscious level of the psyche, its manifestation can only be seen in the individual's personal identity and social identity. *Personal identity* is believed to reside at the intersection of self and context, manifested through the set of goals, values, and beliefs that one shows to the world. *Social identity* is the most contextually oriented level of Erikson's identity, and is manifested as a sense of inner solidarity with a group's ideals, such as a peer crowd. Erikson theorized that the greater environmental support and validation for the ego, the more cohesive and unified one's personal and social identity may be (and vice versa—one's personal or social identity may nurture the ego—as Erikson believed the psychological and social worlds form a dialectic relationship).

Lacking an operational definition. Erikson's (1968) concept of identity is multidimensional and extensive in scope and coverage. However, there is a lack of precision in Erikson's writings (Côté & Levine, 2002; Schwartz, 2001). In all his writings, Erikson did not operationalize his construct of identity, nor did he provide a clearly empirically testable definition of the concept. Erikson may have thought a strict operational definition would strip the identity construct of its richness or theoretical meaning. Alternatively, Erikson's temperament and talents may have been better suited toward conveying the imaginative and artistic impressions of identity over scientifically verifiable statements (Berzonsky & Adams, 1999). Erikson has written that "at times, the reader will find me painting contexts and backgrounds where he would rather have me point to facts and concepts" (Erikson, 1980, p. 16). Furthermore, in an interview, Erikson stated:

Without wanting or trying to, I just happen to have the kind of artistic temperament that in a book leads me to express my experience in my own way. That often is somewhat

seductive for my readers. I've read it over and over again that people felt something, found it very good and found it very convincing, and afterwards they didn't quite know what I had said. So my readers are warned... (Erikson, cited in Stevens, 1983, p. 112)

Erikson's lack of operational definition may explain, in part, the somewhat fragmented nature of the identity field, as well as the lack of research on the association between crowd affiliations and identity.

Marcia's Identity Status Paradigm

The most popular approach to operationalize and measure Erikson's (1968) construct is Marcia's (1966) identity status model. To expand Erikson's conceptualization of identity to an understanding that goes beyond something that an individual has "more or less of," Marcia created four identity statuses based on levels of identity exploration (a conscious deliberation of alternative goals, roles, and values) and commitment (the consolidation of these deliberations as probable courses of future action). The foreclosed status represents a resolution of commitment without exploration; the moratorium status describes a resolution of exploration without commitment; the achieved status represents a resolution of commitment after a period of exploration; and the diffused status represents a resolution that is lacking in both commitment and exploration.

Since the publication of Marcia's (1966) seminal work, a substantial literature has found a link between identity statuses and psychological health (e.g., Archer, 1993; Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Bishop et al., 2005; Kroger, 2007; Schwartz, 2005). From these studies, a positive relationship has been found between identity achievement and psychosocial well-being, such as autonomy, positive self-esteem, and mature intimacy; conversely, identity diffusion has been

associated with unhealthy adjustment, weak family connections, low self-esteem, isolation, and substance abuse. Those classified in the moratorium status have been associated with both adaptive and maladaptive qualities. Although the self-exploration exhibited by moratoriums is generally viewed to be adaptive (promoting exploration and self-discovery), the lack of commitment associated with this status tends to lead to an increase in anxiety, neuroticism, and depression. These findings underscore the important role of identity in an individual's well-being. They also support the distinct qualities of each status, along with their predictive validity.

Marcia's (1966) diffused, foreclosed, moratorium, and achieved statuses are assigned based on adolescent self-reports in a variety of content domains. In terms of the content domains to be measured, Marcia assesses adolescents on occupational choice—as that was a domain in which Erikson (1968) was particularly interested—as well as religion and politics. Since its inception, Marcia's identity status model has been extended to include domains of friendship, dating, and sex roles, as well as those relating to values, philosophical lifestyle, recreation, and family, and ethnicity (Archer, 1993; Schwartz, 2001).

Methods of Assessment

In terms of the measurement of identity, adolescents have often been given one global status assignment (i.e., diffused, foreclosed, moratorium, or achieved) by means of an individual interview. Individuals are often assessed through Marcia's (1966) Identity Status Interview, which assesses exploration and commitment in the three traditional domains: occupation, politics, and religion. Individuals are also commonly assessed through the Ego Identity Interview, developed by Grotevant and Cooper (1981), which assesses exploration and commitment in the three traditional domains as well as in interpersonal domains of friendships,

dating, and sex roles. Individuals may also be assessed through a questionnaire, commonly the Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (EOM-EIS), developed by Adams, Benion, and Huh (1989). The EOM-EIS targets identity status within four ideological domains (politics, religion, occupation, and philosophical lifestyle) and four interpersonal domains (friendships, dating, sex roles, and recreation). The adolescent's global assignment is derived from the levels of exploration and commitment shown within the individual domains specified in the interview or questionnaire.

Critiques of the Identity Status Paradigm

Statuses as outcomes. Marcia's (1966) statuses have commonly been viewed as resolutions or outcomes of the identity versus role confusion crisis (Stephen, Fraser, & Marcia, 1992). The foreclosed status represents a resolution of commitment without exploration; the moratorium status describes a resolution of exploration without commitment; the achieved status represents a resolution of commitment after a period of exploration; and the diffused status represents a resolution that is lacking in both commitment and exploration. But viewing Marcia's statuses as outcomes or resolutions neglects Erikson's conceptualization of identity as an evolving configuration (Erikson, 1980), a dynamic self-structure (Stephen et al., 1992), and a multidimensional construct, sensitive to biological, psychological, and environmental changes. To this end, identity is expected to change and evolve over the life course. Thus, Marcia's statuses may not be appropriately viewed as outcomes, but rather as "moments in a dialectical, developmental process" (Stephen et al., 1992, p. 285), or fluid states that may change, depending on bio-psycho-social changes.

With an appreciation of the stages as dynamic, fluid, and changing structures, another interpretation of Marcia's status model is the stage conceptualization model (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001), based on the developmental hypothesis that a "continuum of ego identity based upon proximity of an individual to identity achievement...[underlies] the statuses (Marcia, 1966, p. 199). From this perspective, diffusion and achievement were assumed to represent "polar alternatives of status inherent in Erikson's theory," and foreclosure and moratorium as "roughly intermediate in this distribution" (Marcia, 1966, pp. 551 – 552). Accordingly, then, individuals are assumed to begin the identity formation process in adolescence as foreclosures or diffusions, then become engaged in identity exploration, thus becoming moratorium, before moving into a committed achievement stage.

There has been considerable support of this hypothesis (e.g., Adams & Marshall, 1996; Berzonsky & Adams, 1999; Waterman, 1999). In past empirical studies, the most frequently occurring transition in the identity statuses has been from the foreclosure to moratorium to achievement status, reflecting the "synthesis of identity elements into a new configuration" described by Erikson (1968, p. 160).

However, a growing body of developmental research (e.g., Goossens, 2001; Skorikov & Vondracek, 1998; van Hoof, 1999) has shown this rather neat picture of a linear, cumulative identity development process to be false. Instead, identity trajectories seem to be better characterized by individual variability and fluctuation. Particularly surprising in these studies has been the discovery of status regression. According to a strict structural position, where ego development is assumed to occur in a hierarchical and invariant sequence, identity regression should not be possible. Yet longitudinal studies have found just that: Achievement status

individuals often regress to developmentally lower statuses of foreclosure and diffusion. These findings call into question the idea that identity may be fixed, or the idea that all individuals will progress from diffused identities to achieved identities, and will forever remain achieved.

Erikson himself did not view identity (or the achievements of any of the other psychosocial stages, for that matter) as closed or fixed.

Scholars have begun to recognize the need for models that acknowledge the process of identity formation rather than the exclusive outcomes of identity development. Meeus (1996), for example, extended Marcia's conceptualization of exploration by proposing that adolescents may continue the process of exploration even after making initial commitments. Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, and Beyers (2006) added to this process perspective by offering two separate dimensions of exploration: one characterized by breadth, typifying the initial phase of exploration; and one characterized by depth, typifying the kinds of exploratory activities that occur after a commitment has been made. Moreover, recent developments in identity status literature have offered a new dimension to Marcia's model reflecting a *reconsideration* of one's commitments (Crocettia, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008). Reconsideration is believed to be distinct from commitment because it involves more than a simple commitment to identity choices; it also involves abandoning some choices and considering new ones. This new dimension has provided an important contribution to the field of identity studies, providing a framework for understanding how adolescents construct and revise identity over time.

Others have offered a process perspective on the status paradigm. Berzonsky (1989), for example, proposed the idea of identity styles. These styles stemmed from the belief that the four statuses represented three different strategies of processing identity-relevant information: an

informational, normative, and diffuse/avoidant style. Information-oriented individuals are likely to be classified as identity achieved or moratorium, and will actively seek out and evaluate self-relevant information. Normative-oriented individuals are likely to be classified as foreclosed, and likely to address identity questions by conforming to normative standards and prescriptions held by significant others, like parents or friends. Diffuse-avoidant-oriented individuals are likely to be classified as diffused, and, when challenged with identity-related decisions, are likely to delay and procrastinate a course of action until absolutely necessary. These styles reflect the dynamic character of identity. Instead of a measuring identity based on previous outcomes (e.g., “I have explored”), Berzonsky’s approach measures identity in terms of one’s continuing decision-making strategies (e.g., “I tend to sort through alternatives”) (Schwartz, 2001, p. 25).

Research on the identity statuses has supported the idea that each status represents a different way of cognitive processing. Individuals who have demonstrated identity exploration, for example—either those in a state of moratorium, or those who had achieved an identity—have been found to display greater “integrative complexity” in social-cognitive reasoning than those who had not demonstrated identity exploration (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000). Conversely, individuals who have been labeled as foreclosed have also been associated with high scores of authoritarianism, a low tolerance for ambiguity, and a rigid belief system. These styles have been viewed as a helpful extension of Marcia’s (1966) identity status paradigm, offering a process-oriented understanding of each status.

Statuses as a reflection of personal identity only. An additional critique of Marcia’s (1966) identity status paradigm is that it focuses almost exclusively on personal identity, with little attention on the other levels of Erikson’s identity construct, such as ego and social identity.

Marcia (1966) himself admitted that the identity statuses deviated from Erikson's construct of identity and that the model focused primarily on personal identity. To address this limitation, other models have been developed that expand on the status paradigm and include components like group identity and social influences. Côté (1997), for example, produced the identity capital model, which highlights the tangible and intangible resources individuals use to acquire social memberships, status, and other societal assets. Côté's work brings a valuable macro perspective to identity studies in its acknowledgment of societal influences on the development of a social identity. In particular, Côté's work highlights the difficulties experienced by marginalized subgroups (e.g., ethnic or sexual minorities) that possess limited identity capital to negotiate and obtain social resources.

Statuses as intrapsychic phenomena. Scholars have also begun calling for more attention toward the role of context in identity development. They have voiced concern that those using Marcia's model have focused too narrowly on the intrapsychic processes of identity formation, portraying "a self-contained individual, developing his or her identity in vivo, free of contextual constraints and resources" (Schachter, 2005, p. 375). These critiques have been grounded in Erikson's view of identity as a bio-psycho-social construct, one that is impacted by context. In response to these critiques, scholars have developed identity models that give a greater emphasis on context. Yoder (2000), for example, created a "barrier" model that acknowledges the conditions over which an individual has little or no control, but which affect his or her developmental options. For example, a woman might be considered foreclosed if she commits to a religious belief without exploring other religious or spiritual options. There is an underlying assumption, however, that this woman has other options. If she is in an environment

that has little tolerance for religious freedom, such a status assignment would not reflect the contextual realities of that woman's life. The barriers approach would assign that woman a more qualified status, foreclosed/exploration barriers, to reflect the underlying circumstances impacting her identity development.

Adams and Marshall (1996) also created a model of identity development with a greater focus on the types of social context embedded in the identity development process. *Micro* contexts refer to the interpersonal exchanges in which personal identity is affected, and *macro* contexts refer to the more overarching cultural contexts in which identity is shaped. Adams and Marshall also posited that identity development occurs at the intersection of two processes: differentiation (asserting oneself as a unique individual) and integration (becoming part of a larger group and feeling connected to others). Within micro and macro contexts, individuals balance their needs for differentiation and integration. Adams and Marshall also posited that identities can be chosen or assigned, with the ratio of assigned to chosen elements a function of individual differences and contexts. From this model, identity change occurs when the individual realizes an incompatibility between the real self and ideal self, either from an imbalance of differentiation and integration, or from a feeling of mismatch in the assigned versus chosen identity elements. This model is exemplary in its extensive focus, as it is guided by the developmental contextual perspective. It also appears to be a closer match to the scope of Erikson's multidimensional identity construct.

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the various approaches to assess and define adolescent crowds, and found that most crowds have been conceptualized into one of five crowd types: Elite, Athletic, Academic, Deviant, or Other. These crowd types have been examined as predictor variables (most often as a predictor of self-esteem) and as outcome variables (either from childhood personality traits or of family background). Although these approaches have generated a broad understanding of the importance of crowd affiliations in development, they have been limited in several ways, for example, by the neglect of adolescents who are categorized into the Other crowd, by the vague definitions of crowds, and by the unclear connection between a crowd affiliation and identity.

In this chapter, I also reviewed the literature on Erikson's identity construct, including the ways his construct has been operationalized and measured. In this review, I found Marcia's (1966) identity status paradigm to be the most popular approach to operationalize and assess Erikson's identity construct, although I outlined the various critiques of the status paradigm, including the conception that the identity statuses measure outcomes or resolutions to the identity crisis, the exclusive focus on personal identity, and the neglect of context in identity development.

In response to these critiques, scholars have called for more comprehensive analytical tools to account for the development of identity, ones that illustrate the dynamic qualities of the identity construct, acknowledge the role of context in identity development, and highlight the other levels of identity development, such as social identity. To further these efforts, I conducted

an in-depth assessment on adolescents from crowds that have been subsumed within the amorphous Other category in previous crowd research. One goal was to provide descriptive data, from adolescents themselves, about what it means to be a part of these crowds. Another goal was to understand the identity development experiences of the crowd devotees. These assessments address several important limitations on crowd and identity research. The next chapter outlines the methods I employed to achieve those goals.

Chapter 3: Methods

The aims of this study were to explore the lived experiences of adolescents in Goth, Punk, or Emo crowds, and to model their experiences through a grounded theory. To fulfill these goals, I collected narratives from adolescents who affiliated with Goth, Emo, and Punk crowds and asked them to describe themselves and their experiences in school.

In this chapter, I describe the qualitative grounded theory design for this study and discuss the rationale for choosing such a design for this study. I also describe the methodology for the study, the participants recruited, and the ways theoretical sampling was used as a strategy for further data collection and theory development. I explain my data collection tools, the processes by which data were collected and analyzed, and the ways threats to data quality were minimized. I conclude the chapter with explanations regarding the ethical protection of participants.

Research Design

Paradigm and Tradition

Qualitative research is generally described as an approach wherein the researcher explores relationships using textual, rather than quantitative data. Qualitative designs also use an inductive, rather than deductive, approach, and often emphasize the lived experience of individuals.

According to Creswell (1998), the qualitative research paradigm should be undertaken based on the following rationales: The topic requires exploration because of multiple variables and/or a lack of theory, a detailed view is needed and not available, and extensive data collection

is possible (pp. 17-18). These rationales are applicable to this study, as my goal was to examine the multi-dimensional nature of adolescents' crowd characteristics and their developmental histories. Moreover, qualitative methods are appropriate for this study because these tools allowed me to generate a descriptive account of the adolescents in oppositional crowds that honors and reflects the adolescents' experiences. Lastly, because of the lack of research on these topics, this qualitative study is aligned with Creswell's rationale that qualitative inquiry be exploratory in nature.

Within the realm of qualitative inquiry, I employed a grounded theory approach to address my research aims. This approach emphasizes an approach of letting theory emerge from data rather than using data to test theory. Grounded theory provided me a framework for data collection, coding, and analysis, which ultimately guided me in the process of generating working hypotheses about the relatedness of the categories being studied.

The grounded theory approach, advocated by Glaser (2009) for novice researchers, was appropriate because conducting a grounded theory study requires an openness to new ideas and a willingness to explore questions in novel ways. The core requisites for grounded theory, wrote Glaser, are "some good conceptual sensibilities and cognitive flexibility—the capacity to rapidly undo your way of construing or transforming the data and to try another more promising track. These requisites fit the novice grounded theory researcher perfectly" (p. 3). These qualities, furthered Glaser, are not often found in experienced researchers, who have become partial to "pet theoretical frameworks" or particular procedures of data analysis, and "hence, block good grounded theory" (p. 3). Charmaz (2006) has also argued that novice researchers create good grounded theories because they have a high tolerance for ambiguity and confusion—qualities

that are necessary when one is immersed in massive amounts of textual data. Before this project, I had conducted little independent research on my own, and subsequently possessed the openness that Glaser recommends to see fresh new patterns in the data and produce a theory that is truly grounded in the lives of individuals. Moreover, my novice researcher status gave me a high tolerance for the feelings of ambiguity and confusion that arose in the creation of my grounded theory.

Research Questions

The current study posed two questions:

1. What does it mean to be part of the Goth, Punk, or Emo crowd?
2. What are the identity development experiences of adolescents who call themselves Goth, Punk, or Emo?

Participants

Because I used theoretical sampling to gather my participants, my initial sampling criteria were relatively simple: I sought to interview Goth adolescents around the Upper Midwest who were between 14 to 17 years old. As interviews progressed, though, my criteria expanded a bit. The adolescents I interviewed informed me that the Goth label was dated. “Goth feels like it should be something older,” one adolescent told me, “It always seemed like Goth was something that happened before, that we used to hear about.” Another added to this sentiment: “I don’t know any Goths anymore. It seems like they’re extinct.” Instead of the term *Goth*, adolescents used other labels (e.g., Emo, Punk) to describe themselves or what once was viewed as the Goth aesthetic. From this information, I expanded my search criteria to include adolescents who were

seen as Goth, Emo, or Punk in their schools. I included the possibility for these minor amendments in my IRB application (approval # 33006, doc. # 1001).

To recruit these adolescents, I used snowball sampling, a technique recommended for gaining access to populations that are difficult to find (Creswell, 1998). The first participant, whom I knew through a friend, helped me recruit several of her peers, who in turn, helped identify and recruit several of their peers who were part of the Goth, Emo, or Punk subculture at their school. After interviewing 7 participants at this school I had exhausted the number of willing participants; at this point, participants helped connect me with their peers in two neighboring schools. I provided each adolescent the same recruiting script (see Appendix A) to nominate their peers and instructed them on the boundaries of eligibility. Although I made it clear that adolescents did not have to recruit their peers, all were willing to help me recruit.

The recruitment script ensured that adolescents were informed about the study and would not be pressured to participate. Those who were interested in participating contacted me via e-mail, at which time I scheduled a meeting to discuss the study. At this meeting, I discussed my research goals, the time commitment for participating in my research, and information about participant compensation. I gave consenting adolescents a consent form (see Appendix B), and asked them to return the consent form to me with their signature and their parent or guardian's signature. Once I received consent forms, interviews commenced.

Recruitment continued from February to July of 2010 until I had interviewed a total of 16 adolescents (8 female, 8 male), ages 14 to 17, across three high schools in adjoining districts in the Upper Midwest. All adolescents were identified by their peers as having the reputation of being Goth, Emo, or Punk in their schools. I stopped recruitment after 16 participants. I was

confident of this sample size because no new themes were being generated, and no new properties or dimensions were emerging from my continued coding and comparison. It was at this point that I considered my data to be “saturated.”

It should be noted that the concept of saturation is a bit elusive. Recommendations have been made for the qualitative sample sizes ranging from as few as six participants for phenomenological studies to 30 for a grounded theory study (Creswell, 1998), yet no rationales have been given for those recommendations. I could find only one study that investigated saturation in a quantifiable way, examining the point in data collection at which codes were created and the point at which the distribution of code frequency stabilized (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). In this study, no new codes emerged after 12 interviews; in fact, basic codes were present as early as six interviews. Although Guest et al.’s (2006) results were not meant to be generalized to all qualitative studies using nonprobabilistic samples, their findings increased my confidence in the sufficiency of my sample size.

Data Collection and Empirical Materials

My data came primarily through semistructured interviews with adolescents who self-identified as either Goth, Emo, or Punk. These interviews took place outside of school, either in coffee shops, record stores, or adolescents’ homes. I met with each adolescent between two and four times for about 60 minutes apiece. I personally conducted every interview. I started each interview by discussing the general areas I wanted to explore. These included crowd characteristics, developmental histories, and ideological commitments (see Appendix C for interview questions). To maintain dependability, I asked all adolescents the same general

questions. As interviews progressed, though, I expanded my battery of questions to address and fill in emergent categories that interested me but were relatively “thin” (undefined or unsubstantiated) in my analyses. For example, in my first few interviews, I learned about the growing prevalence of *cutting* among high school students. This information opened up a new set of questions with subsequent interviewees, where I asked more about this practice. I audio-recorded all interviews and transcribed them verbatim. This process—of personally conducting and transcribing each interview—was an explicit choice, as I wanted to hear each interview multiple times to identify content salient to my research questions and any emerging themes. I followed Graneheim and Lundman’s (2004) definition of a theme, conceptualized as “threads of underlying meaning” throughout the data (p. 105).

Aligned with Glaser’s (2009) dictum that “all are data,” I treated other sources of information as data for grounded theory, such as my field notes from attending several punk and heavy metal concerts, e-mails from participants, and popular articles on the rise of the Goth-inspired movies, music, and fashion in popular culture (I modified my IRB application to include these other data sources). These data allowed me to cast a wide net so that I could fully understand and explain the experiences of Goth, Emo, or Punk adolescents. I loaded these data, along with my transcribed interviews, into NVIVO, a software program for managing qualitative data.

Data Analysis

As required by grounded theory procedures, data analysis was not reserved for the end of data collection. Instead, analysis began with the first interview and continued through the entire

data collection process. After conducting each interview, I listened to the audio recording and wrote an observational memo where I reflected on the sensory experience of the interview—what I saw, felt, or experienced during the interview—as well as any arising values, feelings, mistakes, embarrassments, or personal insights I had on making sense of the data. I then transcribed the interviews and sent the completed transcripts via e-mail to participants to verify their accuracy. This practice enhanced the trustworthiness and validity of my research by showing that my interpretations have been validated by others.

Open Coding

Once the initial verbal data were transcribed and verified by participants, I commenced with the process of open coding; that is, examining the data closely to identify salient fragments of text meaningful to my a-priori research questions and also fragments of text reflecting emergent ideas. Essentially, this was a “bottom up” approach of writing descriptive memos, selecting meaningful passages of text, labeling those passages, and then integrating this information to identify recurrent patterns of meaning within individual interviews, across interviews, and across the entire data set.

This process began with *tagging*, where I selected segments of text that I considered relevant (Baptiste, 2001). This process did not necessitate that I tag each line of text (as the lines were arbitrarily set by the transcript margins); instead, my focus was on the bits and pieces of material that satisfied my curiosity or supported the purpose of this study. Defining what constituted a segment was a difficult decision. Some theorists define segments on a word-by-word basis in order to perform a formal linguistic analysis of the data (e.g., Jaccard & Jacoby, 2010). I defined a segment as a meaningful thought about a topic. These *meaning units*

(Graneheim & Lundman, 2004) could be several paragraphs in length, a single paragraph, a sentence, or part of a sentence. To most of these units, I created and assigned a code, which I defined as a *heuristic device*—one that provided a condensed but still distinguishing mark to a meaning unit. For example, I coded the following units *outsider alignment*:

- My dad owned a tattoo shop, and I had piercings, and I painted my nails, and did weird things.
- I dressed differently and talked differently, and I got singled out.
- I had a bigger vocabulary than everybody else, so I just never fit in.

On others meaning units, I assigned *in vivo* codes that participants uttered themselves. For example, I coded the following units *flying my freak flag*:

- Then I started flying my freak flag. I was just letting myself come out more than I had before.
- A lot of [my dress] is shock value. And...let's do the weirdest thing we can. Like, for the hell of it.

Open coding served a variety of purposes. The inclusiveness of open coding (tagging and labeling all meaningful units of text) minimized the possibility that I would myopically focus only on a priori ideas and miss important emergent ideas. It also allowed me to see which direction to take in my theoretical sampling before I became too selective or focused on a particular problem. For example, early in my coding, I learned that the Goth aesthetic was still prevalent, but the Goth label was not. Because of the inclusiveness of open coding, I attended to those initial narratives from participants and broadened my sampling criteria to include adolescents who dressed in similarly Gothic attire but used a different label (i.e., Emo, Punk) to

describe themselves. During this process, I followed Glaser's (1998) prompts and continually asked myself, "What are these data a study of?" to make sure that the data, and not any preconceived notions, were guiding my analyses.

As a researcher, this process was uncomfortable. I felt uncertain about labeling my codes, and had moments where I was overwhelmed by the amount of data and with concerns of "worrisome accuracy" (Glaser, 2009). My feelings of uncertainty began to subside, though, with continued efforts at analysis and with memo writing. Writing memos after each interview helped me to capture my ideas about the codes I was finding. It was also helpful to code my memos first, and my transcripts second. Holton (2010) recommended this approach to avoid the "coding chaos" that can often ensue in the initial stage of open coding detailed transcripts (p. 25). Coding my memos first and interview transcripts second directed my focus toward codes that were on a higher conceptual level, and kept me from getting distracted by endless descriptive and superfluous detail in the interview transcripts. Throughout this process, patterns began to emerge.

I initially generated 39 codes through open coding of data collected and analyzed between March and June 2010. Some of these codes were highly descriptive and, in some cases, somewhat repetitive. At the outset of my fieldwork, for example, I coded the following unit *rejecting big religion*:

- I can't really get into that stuff, like the big religious type of things. I mean, I don't really believe in God, like, at all.

I coded the following unit *disillusioned by political parties*:

- Politics. I'm a little disillusioned, I guess (laughs). I think that, on one level, this is so

big. Everything is so big, and trying to make this function, with all these different groups of people, and people are so flawed...

These codes would later be collapsed, but at this stage, I kept them distinct. The high number of codes stemmed from my efforts to remain as open as possible to what was emerging from line-by-line coding. I also did not want to run the risk of precluding what might have been a relevant detail in the emerging theory.

Focused Coding

In the next stage of analysis, I collapsed some of these earlier descriptive codes into slightly broader codes. For example, I collapsed the codes on *rejecting big religion* and *disillusioned by political parties* into a more parsimonious code: *rejecting conventional ideologies*. Similarly, I collapsed other highly descriptive codes such as *making fun of preps* and *snide and elitist populars* into the more parsimonious code: *subversion to pop culture*. Between May and August 2010, a reduced list of 18 condensed and significant codes emerged. Table 1 illustrates three of those 18 condensed codes, along with the meaning units and initial codes from which they arose.

Table 1

Examples of Meaning Units, Initial Codes, and Condensed Codes

Meaning Unit	Initial Code	Condensed Code
I was bullied a little bit in 6 th grade. Not totally, but I felt alone. And girls would kind of gang up on me. Like, nothing super dramatic, like people didn't, like, take my clothes and hide them in the garbage and the locker room. But it was there. I knew people were talking about me. I knew people thought I was a loser.	Bullied	Feeling isolated
Middle school is kind of when everybody's like, "ah ha! That's so gay. Gay sucks, gay means homosexual, homos suck." And I didn't fit in anywhere, because there was no one like me, I mean. I was, you had your normal cliques, you had the Jocks, and the Preps, and...	No one like me	
I never had a place to fit into much. I was more of the odd ball out.	Odd ball out	Trying to fit in
Like, I've gone throughout my life trying to fit in. So I went through the little bit of ghetto stage, and all my best friends were all ghetto, so I tried to fit in with them...	Went through a ghetto stage	
I just started going through certain phases when I was, like, 12. I went through this phase of, like, wanting to wear, like, BabyPhat, and listening to rap music—just wanting to fit in with everyone. And most of the time, it was okay. But certain times, a lot of people found it disrespectful, I guess. Because they were like, you're not ghetto.	Went through a rap phase	
I used to wear spandex, 'cause I wasn't sure if they were, like, pants or not. So, it was like, I wore a really big shirt and spandex, and I'm like, I didn't realize that it was really nerdy up until like 7 th grade.	No fashion sense	Lacking confidence
I used to have a lot of awkward situations, only because I was a very awkward little kid. I was so different. Oh, man...I seriously looked like a ball. My face was huge and my body was...I was seriously like a ball. So there was that kinda weird thing.	I was awkward	

From those codes, I began to form broader conceptual categories. Although distinctions between codes and categories have not always been clear, the main distinction is that categories encompass “putatively dissimilar but still allied” codes (Larossa, as cited in Daly, 2007). For example, I subsumed the codes *rejecting conventional ideologies* and *subversion against pop culture* into the larger category of *oppositional crowd commitment*. Forming these categories required skills of abstraction (raising codes to a higher conceptual plane) and synthesis (condensing and organizing data into meaningful groupings). In this process, I worked toward saturating that category, or coding to the point wherein no new properties or dimensions emerged for each category. I also worked towards saturation by creating the most parsimonious categories—those that would provide the simplest representation of my ideas while also accounting for the most information.

Although focused coding ultimately resulted in fewer, more parsimonious codes and categories, this was not a linear process. Some respondents made explicit what was not clear in earlier transcript narratives. For example, my interviews with younger participants, which occurred later in data collection, illuminated a distinct kind of crowd allegiance that I had not identified in my initial interviews with slightly older participants. Revelations like these prompted me to return to my earlier data from older participants to explore topics that had been glossed over. From this process, I began to cluster those codes into broader conceptual categories to represent, roughly, distinct phases of oppositional crowd allegiance (see Table 2).

Table 2

Condensed Codes and Conceptual Categories

Condensed Code	Conceptual category
Feeling isolated Trying to fit in Lacking confidence Confined Recognizing the futility	Exploration for one's social niche
Subversion against pop culture Self-injury Rejecting conventional ideologies Function of oppositional crowd	Oppositional crowd commitment
Growing weary of implicit rules Feeling mislabeled From unique to unoriginal	Constriction by oppositional crowd norms
Finding alternative modes of oppositional expression Moderating ideological commitments Broadening conceptions of authenticity	Reconsideration of oppositional values

As I was forming conceptual categories, I alternated between collecting more data and writing conceptual memos. These memos were less observational and allowed me to brainstorm and document my thinking about the development of my categories. As Richardson (as cited in Daly, 2007) noted, writing is thinking, and that adage applied to my analyses. As I progressed toward creating categories from codes, I often wrote memos to compare the “fit” between existing categories and new codes. Simply writing these memos stimulated the development of my ideas and helped me to recognize new areas to address in future interviews. The back-and-forth process of data collection, coding, and memo writing also kept me from collecting redundant data. For example, learning about *posers* early on in my interviews kept me from focusing solely on the Goth, Punk, or Emo label and directed my attention towards broader themes of authenticity in subsequent interviews.

During this stage, I began to assess the categories I had developed, examining the relationships within and between categories and asking how they might relate to each other as hypotheses in a theory. This involved paying close attention to each category, and identifying the core “axis” upon which each category was built. Vondracek et al.’s (1986) developmental contextual framework provided a helpful starting point for making these linkages. The framework helped me to be inclusive to a variety of contextual spheres in participants’ lives: their family, peer groups, school setting, and greater community context. It also guided my “systemic perspective” (Vondracek, 2007) of the bidirectional influences between participants and the concentric contextual spheres around them. This framework was particularly helpful in directing my attention toward the dynamic interactions between participants and micro-level factors, such as the peer group, and macro-level factors, such as popular culture.

However, while the framework provided a starting point of looking *at* my data, it did not offer automatic codes for actually analyzing it. I had to remind myself to keep my focus primarily on the data, making sure that each idea *earned* its way into my analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Holton, 2010). This meant that I had to do heavy analysis first without applying the developmental contextual perspective unless the data supported that framework. This also meant that some contextual spheres were given extensive attention in my theory, while others were not incorporated. The factors included in my model reflect those that were at the heart of participants’ experiences.

Theme Emergence

Constant comparison and focused coding slowly gave way toward a singular, overarching theme of my categories. This overarching theme has also been referred to as the *core category* or

the “*narrative spine*” of the theory, as it has the ability to pull together all categories to generate a central explanation (Daly, 2007, p. 236). My categories of *exploration*, *oppositional crowd commitment*, *constriction*, and *reconsideration* gave rise to a *process* theme, one that delineated a developmental arc of oppositional crowd identity (see Table 3).

Table 3

Conceptual Categories and Emergent Theme

Conceptual Category	Emergent Theme
Exploration for one’s social niche	Process of oppositional crowd identity development
Oppositional crowd commitment	
Constriction by oppositional crowd norms	
Reconsideration of oppositional crowd norms	

Verifying this emergent theme took time and much coding and analysis, but once identified, I could delimit my remaining codes, only coding that which was relevant to my emerging core categories. I stopped the constant comparison process of data collection, memo writing, and coding when no new properties seemed to emerge in my analyses. At this point, I considered my theory saturated.

Threats to Data Quality

The process of textual analysis has been linked to several nonscientific metaphors. Narrative researchers have been likened to sculptors who shape a lump of clay or seamstresses who weave together patches of fabric (Fraser, 2004). These metaphors are helpful because they illustrate some of the concrete tasks of textual analysis: shaping or weaving together narrative data into a coherent whole. They also reject the “scientific illusions of objectivity” in the analysis of narratives (Fraser, 2004, p. 184) and emphasize researchers’ active role in making sense of the data. Lastly, the metaphors imply that qualitative writing, like sculpture or tapestry, should be

aesthetically pleasing. Ellingson (2009) wrote of “the beauty of a good qualitative research report” and advocated for a “blurring of boundaries between art and reporting, when using conventional research writing forms” (p. 162). These remarks resonated with me and expanded my conception of aesthetically pleasing writing to analytic as well as creative texts.

Yet an important distinction must be made with these metaphors. Unlike sculptors and seamstresses, those who analyze textual data must produce more than an aesthetically pleasing product. They must also defend the validity of their work—in essence, the credibility of their descriptions, conclusions, explanations, or interpretations. This definition of validity does not imply the existence of some “objective truth” to which accounts can be compared but, instead, the possibility of testing the ways in which accounts might be *implausible*. A key concept for the validity of my study is thus the validity threats, or the ways in which I might be wrong. To establish validity, I identify two common threats and present the strategies I used to rule them out.

Two types of validity threats often raised in qualitative studies are researcher bias and reactivity, or the effect of the researcher on the individuals studied. Researcher bias is typically a problem when a researcher selects data that either fit the researcher’s preconceptions or simply “stand out” to the researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 263). In both of these scenarios, there is evidence that the researcher has been subjective. However, in qualitative research, the goal is not necessarily to eliminate the subjectivity of the researcher but, instead, to understand how a particular researcher’s values and expectations influence the conclusions of a study while avoiding the negative consequences of those values and expectations (Maxwell, 2005; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Smaling, 2002).

Reactivity occurs when the researcher is believed to have influenced the setting or individuals being studied. Quantitative studies try to control for the effect of the researcher because the goal of such studies is to prevent the researcher from influencing the outcome variables. In qualitative research, especially in interview studies, the qualitative researcher is an inescapable part of the world he or she studies, and what a participant says is always influenced by the interviewer. Because of this inherent reactivity in qualitative interview studies, the goal in qualitative interview studies is not to eliminate the influence of the researcher, as that is not possible. Instead, as discussed previously for the threat of researcher bias, what is important is to understand how the researcher influences what participants say, and how that influence affects the validity of the inferences drawn from interviews.

To help minimize the threats of researcher bias and reactivity, I must be transparent about my own situatedness in this research topic; hence, a brief note on my personal background is in order. To begin, I never affiliated with an oppositional crowd in high school. I never wore the heavy makeup, spiked my hair, or listened to Korn or Marilyn Manson. With that said, I feel a connection with adolescents in these groups that stems from the perception that, perhaps like all adolescents, I grew up feeling like an outsider in school. This feeling may have contributed to some bias and reactivity. Yet this effect may not have been negative. Indeed, my self-perception as an outsider may have been more of an asset than a liability, drawing out detailed narratives from participants who seemed to view me as a compassionate listener, and conveying a sense of “emotional credibility, vulnerability, and honesty” that has been valued in creative social science work (Ellingson, 2009, p. 154).

Beyond this self-reflection, there were still a variety of strategies I employed to establish the trustworthiness of my findings. One criterion of trustworthiness is *confirmability*, which addresses the core issue that “findings should represent, as far as is humanly possible, the situation being researched rather than the beliefs, pet theories, or biases of the researcher” (Gasson, 2004, p. 93). I worked towards confirmability by engaging in meticulous data management and recording. I transcribed each interview verbatim, made careful notes of my observations, and wrote memos on all theoretical and methodological decisions. With access to these detailed accounts, readers will be able to follow the actual sequence of how my data were collected, processed, condensed, and displayed for specific conclusion drawing.

I also took intentional steps to establish *credibility* in my work. Credibility refers to the internal validity or “truthfulness” of a study, where the core issue is “how we can ensure rigor in the research process and how we communicate to others that we have done so” (Gasson, 2004, p. 95). In a sense, a study’s credibility answers the question, “Why should we believe you?” To bolster my credibility, I gathered a diverse sample (ranging in age, split by gender, and residing across multiple schools) and stayed intensively involved in the field. I interviewed each participant at least two times, typically more. I attended several of their music concerts. Many of my interviews took place in participants’ homes, where I had the chance to meet a family member or two, see photos on their refrigerator, even scratch a pet’s head. From these relaxed encounters, I amassed a wealth of data from my participants (transcripts averaged 50 single spaced pages). These detailed, “thick” descriptions help establish my understanding of the research phenomena (Geertz, 1973). Moreover, my intensive involvement provided me with

more opportunities to develop and test alternative hypotheses during the course of my research, and ruled out the possibility that my conclusions were based on biased theories.

To strengthen my credibility, I also triangulated multiple data sources. Along with individual interviews, I collected observational data from my time at participants' music concerts and archival data from popular magazine and newspaper articles on Goth, Punk, or Emo culture. Triangulation is seen as a helpful approach to acquire greater richness, breadth, and depth in one's data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morrow, 2005). It also helped rule out the validity threats to my theory. Last, I engaged in "member checking" with my participants and collaborated with my committee members as my theory began to emerge. This cooperative approach helped ensure that my interpretations are not solely my own, but have been validated by others.

Ethical Considerations

I am ethically bound to The Pennsylvania State University, which sanctioned this study. No participants were contacted, and no data collected, until I received approval of my dissertation from my advisor, dissertation committee members, and Internal Review Board at this institution.

I took a variety of steps to assure participants of their rights. I asked their permission to record the interviews. When I felt that certain answers were worth quoting, I asked participants for their permission, right then, to use those quotes. I protected their confidentiality by replacing their names with pseudonyms, and kept all data for this study in a password-protected computer or in a locked file cabinet.

Chapter 4: Findings and Interpretations

Sixteen adolescents (8 boys and 8 girls), attending one of three high schools around the Upper Midwest participated in this study. For the most part, participants were evenly spaced across 9th ($n = 3$), 10th ($n = 4$), 11th ($n = 5$), and 12th ($n = 4$) grades. All were European American and from middle class socioeconomic backgrounds. All identified as being part of either the Emo, Goth, or Punk crowd in their schools. These crowds were not nested within schools; a mixture of crowds was found within each school¹. Below I provide a brief biographical profile for each participant, clustered together by gender.

Females

Rachel, 14, is an average student, receiving mostly Bs. Rachel's parents were divorced when she was 10. Her mother started college but did not complete the coursework for a degree. Her father went to college and now runs a computer software business. Rachel currently lives in a house with her mother and twin sister.

Rosannah, 14, is an average student, receiving mostly Bs and Cs. Rosannah's parents were divorced when she was 10 years old. An only child, Rosannah lives with her biological mother and stepfather on the weekdays and her biological father on the weekends. Both of her biological parents went to college.

Lucy, 15, has a history of aggressive behavior in middle school, although she is currently doing well in school, earning mostly Bs. Her parents were divorced when she was 13 years old. Neither of her parents went to college. Lucy's mother was recently laid off from her job; at the

¹ Because school context played a less salient role in the phases of oppositional crowd identity development, I have left out the crowd breakdown by school.

time of the study, Lucy and her mother were currently living in an apartment with a relative until her mother could save enough money to rent a place on their own.

Phoebe, 15, is an average student, receiving mostly Bs and Cs. Phoebe's parents got divorced when she was a child. Her father went to college but her mother did not. She currently lives in a house with her mother and stepfather.

Courtney, 16, is an excellent student: She has a 4.00 G.P.A. and is enrolled in several advanced placement courses. Courtney's parents were divorced when she was 11 years old. Her mother earned a college degree; her father went to college but did not finish his coursework for a degree. Courtney currently lives in an apartment with her mother and 5 younger sisters.

Zoe, 16, is an average student, receiving mostly Bs and Cs. Her parents were divorced when she was a child. Her father went to college but her mother did not. Zoe currently lives in an apartment with her mother and stepfather.

Emily, 17, is an excellent student, receiving all As in school. Her parents are divorced. Both dropped out of high school. Emily currently lives in an apartment with her biological mother.

Gretchen, 17, is an average student, receiving mostly Bs and Cs. Gretchen was adopted as a baby. She currently lives at home with both of her parents, who are married.

Males

Dustin, 14, is an average student, receiving mostly Bs and Cs. Neither of his parents (who are still married) went to college. He lives in a house with both parents.

Cody, 15, is a poor student, receiving mostly Ds and Fs, and is in remedial classes to improve his grades. Cody recently ran away from home and spent about a week under a bridge in the city. His mother recently earned a degree at a nearby community college. His father never went to college. Cody currently lives in a house with both his parents, although at the time of the study, they were getting divorced.

Isaac, 16, is an average student, receiving mostly Bs and Cs, and lives in a house with his mother and two siblings. His mother went to college, but his father did not. His parents divorced when he was a baby. Isaac has never met his father.

Theo, 16, is an average student, receiving mostly Bs and Cs, although he has experienced some problems in school, including a suspension for bringing a weapon to school. Theo was recently diagnosed with ADHD. Theo was adopted as a baby. He lives in a house with both of his parents, who are married. Both went to college.

Liam, 16, is an average student, receiving mostly Bs. Liam's parents were divorced when he was 5 years old. He currently lives in an apartment with his biological mother and stepfather. Both his parents went to college.

Seamus, 17, is an excellent student, receiving all As, although he has a history of behavioral problems, including a suspension for talking back to a teacher. Seamus's parents were never married and have not lived together for several years. His father never finished high school; his mother earned a college degree. Before Seamus was born, both his parents spent time in prison for selling narcotics. Until last year, Seamus lived with his father. He currently lives in an apartment that he shares with several classmates.

Toby, 17, is an average student, receiving mostly Bs. His parents were divorced when he was a child and, until last year, he has lived with his biological mother and stepfather. Last year he moved into an apartment. Both his parents earned a college degree.

Ben, 17, is an excellent student, receiving all As. He currently lives in a house with both his parents, who are married. Both his parents earned a college degree.

In total, 11 participants had divorced parents, 4 had intact parents, and 1 had parents who were never married. In terms of living environments, 14 lived at home and 2 in their own apartment. Mothers' education varied, with 2 having less than a high school education, 5 with a high school diploma, and 9 with a college degree. Fathers' education was similar, with 2 with less than a high school education, 5 with a high school diploma, and 9 with a college degree. The educational histories of participants were varied: Eleven were average, 4 were excellent, and 1 was poor. Three had been suspended. Demographic data for participants are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Participants' Demographic Data

Participant	Age	Educational status	Parents' marital status	Composition of Household	Parents' education	
					Mother	Father
Females ($n = 8$)						
Rachel	14	Average	Divorced	Mother and twin sister	High school	College
Rosannah	14	Average	Divorced	Mother and stepfather	College	College
Lucy	15	Average	Divorced	Mother and younger sister	High school	High school
Phoebe	15	Average	Divorced	Mother and stepfather	High school	College
Courtney	16	Excellent	Divorced	Mother and five younger sisters	College	High school
Zoe	16	Average	Divorced	Mother and stepfather	High school	College
Emily	17	Excellent	Divorced	Mother and foster brother	Less than high school	Less than high school
Gretchen	17	Average	Married	Mother, father, and sister	College	College

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Table 1 (cont')

Participant	Age	Educational status	Parents' marital status	Composition of Household	Parents' education	
					Mother	Father
Males ($n = 8$)						
Dustin	14	Average	Married	Mother and father	High school	High school
Cody	15	Poor	Divorced	Mother and younger brother	College	High school
Isaac	16	Average	Divorced	Mother, brother, and sister	College	High school
Theo	16	Average	Married	Mother, father, and brother	College	College
Liam	16	Average	Divorced	Mother and stepfather	College	College
Seamus	17	Excellent	Never married	Apartment with friends	College	Less than high school
Toby	17	Average	Divorced	Apartment with friends	College	College
Ben	17	Excellent	Married	Mother, father, and brother	College	College

Oppositional Crowd Identity Development

Grounded in the experiences of middle and high school adolescents who self-identified as Goth, Emo, or Punk, I developed an emergent theory of oppositional crowd identity development. This grounded theory outlines four major phases of oppositional crowd identity development: exploration, commitment, constriction, and reconsideration. Globally, these phases suggest that adolescents experience a period of exploration prior to labeling themselves as Goth, Punk, or Emo, and committing to the ideals of an oppositional crowd. A commitment to the crowd label and crowd ideals is initially adaptive. Doing so enables adolescents to deal with existing conflicts in their social environment and provides them a sense of belonging, empowerment, and protection. Yet committing to these crowds has several implications: Appearance changes take place, stereotypes form, and the freedom of identity exploration diminishes. Meanwhile, the dynamic qualities of oppositional crowds—both in meaning (from authentic to commercial) and salience (from comforting to restricting)—prompt feelings of constriction and subsequent reconsideration of crowd norms. This process incorporates both individual and environmental factors. Below I provide an explication of each phase.

Exploration for One's Social Niche

Feeling Isolated

All participants described their middle school experiences in bleak terms. As Emily said succinctly, "Middle school sucked." Ten of the 16 were bullied. For the boys, this bullying was physical. Theo, for example, recalled getting stapled to the wall by some of his classmates. For the girls, the bullying was emotional. "I was bullied a little bit in 6th grade," Courtney said. "Not

totally, but I felt alone. I knew people were talking about me. I knew people thought I was a loser.” Equally hurtful as the bullying was the isolation they experienced in middle school, where they felt like “the odd ball out” from their classmates. Many described their loneliness by explaining their struggles at lunch. The lunch hour was typically the worst time of day, as the cafeteria lunch tables became territorial, solidifying the social boundaries between crowds. “At lunch time, I wouldn’t have anywhere to sit,” Courtney said, “and it was awful.”

Some skipped lunch altogether. Others accepted their lot, acknowledging that they sometimes preferred all the alone time. Seamus, Emily, and Rosannah, for example, talked about imaginary friends they created or the Monopoly games they played by themselves. Yet most struggled with the alone time, feeling deeply isolated from their peers. “Middle school was really, really hard for me, socially,” Courtney said. “I didn’t really have friends. I couldn’t really find my niche. I felt alone. That’s a big thing, like, I felt really alone. Like, I was kind of watching the world, kinda, but I couldn’t really interact with it.” For Emily, Gretchen, and Ben, who came out in middle school, their isolation was magnified, as their middle school environments were not accepting toward their sexuality. Emily explained:

Middle school is kind of when everybody’s like, “Ah ha! That’s so gay. Gay sucks, gay means homosexual, homos suck.” And I didn’t fit in anywhere, because there was no one like me.

Participants’ narratives of this time often resembled *personal fables*, where they would describe their problems as greater than those of their peers. “In middle school, I felt like nobody understood me,” Zoe said. “Nobody had the problems I had,” said Rachel. Even when they acknowledged that middle school is often a time of heightened insecurity and stress for all

adolescents, they maintained the belief that their troubles were truly worse than those of their peers: “Everybody likes to think they’re different,” Courtney said. “You know, everyone’s like ‘I’m alone in the world, no one understands me!’” Yet she insisted that her experiences truly were unique: “But I think I am actually a little different.” Emily expressed a similar sentiment: “Nobody has the same personality,” she acknowledged. “But my personality is *really* different.”

Participants’ narratives about their middle school experiences were characterized by a sense of identity confusion. Isaac described his middle school years as “kinda dark,” an apt characterization for a time when things were unclear. They were unclear about why they felt so frustrated or lost in their social milieu. “I had a lot of stress issues in middle school,” Ben said. “Sometimes I would cry before I went to school, and scream and yell. And I didn’t know why I didn’t want to go to school. I just didn’t.” Others described having panic attacks before school but not knowing why they had them. Without professional help to counsel them through this period, many dismissed their feelings of isolation and loneliness as craziness. “I didn’t have anyone to go to when I was young,” Liam said. “I was just like, ‘oh, I’m crazy.’ And then I just got used to it.”

Trying to Fit In

To rise above their social status and achieve a sense of clarity in their social niche, participants tried to fit into several larger crowds at their school. Yet they described these attempts as unsuccessful. Lucy, for example, tried to fit into a Ghetto crowd consisting of predominantly African American students but was told that she was being disrespectful to the race because she herself was not African American. “They were like, ‘you’re not Ghetto,’” Lucy said, suggesting that to be Ghetto meant to be African American. Emily, Courtney, and Seamus

talked about extreme dieting to fit in, yet to no avail. “No matter what I did, I just wasn’t good enough,” Emily said. Despite their efforts, adolescents were labeled still as outsiders in these groups. “I was a strange bird among seagulls,” Seamus said.

Participants attributed their failed attempts to fit in to their lack of socialization skills. “I didn’t know how to make friends,” Courtney said. “I was totally socially inept.” Gretchen, Lucy, Courtney, Rachel, and Emily talked about their tomboy status, and how their interest in sports precluded their relationships with girls. Lucy and Rachel both described their physical fights with other girls in their class. One of Lucy’s fights drew the principal’s attention and she was suspended. Theo, too, was suspended: once for his aggressive behavior and once for allegedly bringing a gun to school (which he denies, attesting that a classmate wrongly accused him).

Others talked about how their behavior was simply seen as bizarre, and how their uniqueness seemed to inhibit their social acceptance by others. “I’ve always been out of the box,” Emily said, then went on to tell me about how, when she was younger, she would sew plastic baby doll arms onto her shirts to make it look like she had very small arms. Seamus commented on his uniqueness in the middle of his small town: “My dad owned a tattoo shop, and I had piercings, and I painted my nails, and did weird things,” Seamus said. “I dressed differently and talked differently, and I got singled out.” Courtney talked about her slightly advanced intelligence—“I had a bigger vocabulary than everybody else,” she told me—“so I just never fit in.” Through these experiences, participants perceived themselves as outsiders in their school.

Lacking Confidence

Participants talked about their middle school experiences with a mixture of mild amusement and embarrassment for the ways they dressed. This time was characterized by a lot of

fashion experimentation, with mostly unsuccessful results. “I used to wear spandex,” Emily chuckled. “I didn’t realize that was really nerdy until 7th grade.” Zoe, too, shook her head in seeming bewilderment when I asked her to recall her fashion styles in middle school. Zoe described her attire as consisting of “super baggy shirts” that “had, like, colorful stuff on them” when she was in middle school. She was also embarrassed to recall how “super ugly” her hair was before she died it black. “I always kept my hair in a ponytail. It was just, like, ugly, pretty much. I wasn’t comfortable with myself.”

Others recalled their socially clumsy behavior in middle school. Gretchen talked about how “awkward” she was in social settings, and how she was seen as just a “funny, goofy kid” in middle school. Courtney talked about how she used to follow a group of popular girls around school in the hope they would befriend her. “I had the tendency of following people around,” she said. “I’m getting better about that, but back then I didn’t know what to do with myself. That was probably the biggest issue. And I’m really embarrassed about that...” These perceptions led to some self-esteem problems for the adolescents, which in turn, led to a negative view of others. Seamus’s narrative of his middle school experiences illustrates this theme:

It wasn’t so much that I hated other people, or that I hated my school. I hated myself to the point where I was externalizing it. So, the world within is the world without. The way you perceive yourself is the way you’re going to perceive the world. And so I perceived it as hellish. And it just got me down. I didn’t think that my ideas were of value, or that I was of worth.

Seamus began cutting himself during middle school. He used a small razor blade to nick his forearms. Eight others (Emily, Courtney, Zoe, Phoebe, Dustin, Lucy, Rachel, and Isaac) also

engaged in self-injurious behaviors during middle school. These behaviors ranged in severity. Most cut themselves on their forearms or thighs—areas of their body they could conceal from others. Others engaged in different acts of self-harm. Rachel, for example, used the studs in her earrings to pierce the skin behind her ears. Emily cut herself, overdosed on her mother's prescription pain medication, and pulled out small patches of her hair (i.e., trichotillomania). For Courtney, Seamus, Emily, and Lucy, their self-injuries were nearly lethal: During this time, all four were hospitalized for attempted suicide, either by cutting their wrists or overdosing on pain medication.

During this time, Lucy was raped and later sent to a youth transition program; Emily was sent to a juvenile detention facility for a month for allegedly molesting her two younger brothers (Emily denies this allegation, attesting that her stepmother disliked her and wanted her out of the house). All participants, with the exception of Gretchen and Ben, described family conflicts, where parents were openly hostile with each other or in the process of a divorce. Rachel, Lucy, Courtney, Emily, Cody, and Isaac all talked about their absent fathers. Nine began seeing a counselor or therapist for their poor mental health. In sum, this was a bleak time for these adolescents. Table 5 provides a breakdown of participants' self-reported history of self-injurious behaviors, the ages at which they recalled initiating those behaviors, and their experience, if any, in counseling or therapy.

Table 5

Participants' Self-Reported History of Self-Injury and Therapy

Participant	Self-Injury	Type of Self-Injury	Age of Self-Injury Initiation	Suicide Attempt	Received Therapy	Mental Health History
Females ($n = 8$)						
Rachel	Yes	Piercing skin with jewelry	14	No	Yes	Depression
Rosannah	No	-	-	No	Yes	Possible autism
Lucy	Yes	Cutting	13	Yes	Yes	Depression
Phoebe	Yes	Cutting	13	No	No	-
Courtney	Yes	Cutting	13	Yes	Yes	Depression
Zoe	Yes	Cutting, banging head on the wall	14	No	No	
Emily	Yes	Cutting, drug overdose, trichotillomania	12	Yes	Yes	Depression, Obsessive compulsive disorder
Gretchen	No	-	-	No	No	-

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Table 2 (cont')

Participant	Self-Injury	Type of Self-Injury	Age of Self-Injury Initiation	Suicide Attempt	Received Therapy	Mental Health History
Males (<i>n</i> = 8)						
Dustin	Yes	Cutting	13	No	-	-
Cody	No	-	-	No	-	-
Isaac	Yes	Cutting	13	No	No	
Theo	No	-	-	No	Yes	Aggression
Liam	No	-	-	No	-	-
Seamus	Yes	Cutting, drug overdose	14	Yes	Yes	Depression
Toby	No	-	-	No	Yes	Depression, Anxiety
Ben	No	-	-	No	Yes	Obsessive compulsive disorder

I coded many of these narratives as *confined*, as participants talked about the lack of outlets for them to express themselves. Lucy described her middle school as “claustrophobic,” despite her large class of 300 students. Others truly came from small schools. Gretchen and Toby, for example, talked about coming from middle schools of only 50 or so students. They described the people in these small communities as having a “small town mentality,” where athletic prowess was the only means of acknowledgment. “Like, if you were athletic, then you were cool,” Toby said. “But it was such a small school. That was all there was.” Neither Gretchen nor Toby was involved in sports. Hence, they had few opportunities for positive acknowledgment from others.

Recognizing the Futility

Toward the end of middle school, all described a point in time when they seemed to recognize the futility of fitting into mainstream school norms. “I threw in the towel,” Phoebe said. At this time, they began a period of more radical experimentation in self-expression, with distinct styles that were not worn by fellow classmates. Some began to experiment with hair dye; others explored new music. Others began to take on the aesthetic qualities of bands like Korn, Nine Inch Nails, and Marilyn Manson. “I got black clothes, and those spikey things, and stuff. And it just felt cool,” Theo said. “And exciting and new. ‘Cause where I was at, in that school, it was so isolated, and no one was doing that, so it made me feel original. And just cool.”

The end of this phase of exploration was connected to participants’ discovery of Goth, Punk, or Emo bands. Marilyn Manson represented a key figure for Lucy, Liam, Seamus, Toby, and Ben. His Gothic music, costume-like clothing, and confrontational behavior were inspiring to these adolescents. Liam recalled a Facebook posting on Marilyn Manson: “So I went and

looked him up, and I was like, he looks amazing. And then I looked up his music, and that's how I got started. On everything." These adolescents liked Marilyn Manson because "he's himself." They also liked how provocative he was to mainstream culture. Toby explained: "People dislike him because he goes on stage and dresses up like a woman, and stuff like that, and people don't like that." These adolescents also liked Marilyn Manson's fearlessness: "He does something like that, and they don't like it because he's not afraid of them."

Isaac, Gretchen, and Theo were inspired by Punk bands like Green Day and Rancid. These bands exuded a similar message as did Marilyn Manson, one that was antiestablishment. As Gretchen would say, their music was "angsty." Emo bands like Fall Out Boy and My Chemical Romance were inspiring to the other participants (Rachel, Rosannah, Courtney, Cody, Dustin, Emily, Phoebe, and Zoe). These bands were seen as less "hard core" than Punk or Goth music, but similarly themed in their songs on pain and teen angst.

Commitment to Oppositional Crowd

During this time, participants' allegiance to these bands created a bridge to group cohesion with other like-minded peers. Rachel, Rosannah, Cody, Courtney, Emily, Zoe, Phoebe, and Dustin were aligned in their similar tastes for Emo music. Lucy, Seamus, Ben, Toby, and Liam were connected in their enjoyment of Goth music. Similarly, Gretchen, Isaac, and Theo enjoyed Punk music. Along with an allegiance to those bands, participants began to call themselves Goth, Punk, or Emo.

Subtle differences distinguished these groupings. For example, in my sample, the Punk affiliates typically wore "skinny jeans," whereas the Emo and Goth affiliates wore baggy "trip pants" with wallet chains. Punk affiliates usually wore punk and black metal-themed t-shirts or

accessories representing various bands, whereas Emo or Goth affiliates did not listen to this music.

Beyond those distinctions, the aesthetic of these groups was relatively similar: All wore black clothing. Almost all had numerous facial piercings, including *snake bites* (two piercings just under the bottom lip: one on the left side and one on the right side) and *gauged ears* (piercings on the ear lobe that are stretched to enlarge the lobe). Many dyed their hair black and wore heavy makeup (including males). Moreover, all saw themselves as being in stark contrast to—indeed, opposing—the mainstream, prep crowds at their school. Because of those similarities, I viewed these 16 adolescents as belonging to an *oppositional crowd*, as they all defined themselves in a hostile and rejecting relationship to both prep culture and the larger mainstream culture. Participants' initial commitments to their oppositional crowd began in late middle school. These commitments are explicated below.

Rejecting Popular Norms

Besides adolescents' adoption of the Goth, Punk, or Emo label, one of the most prominent signs of the commitment phase was adolescents' complete rejection of mainstream or the identified popular norms. This stance was largely personal, stemming from participants' past interactions with popular students. Lucy, for example, harbored ill will toward her popular peers because they had treated her poorly in middle school. "When I met people who were preppy, they looked at me like I was human scum. So I'm like, I hate you. I'm never going to like a prep." Popular students were also viewed as superficial, consumed with worry over name-brand fashions and pop culture. "Prep kids dress in, like, Hollister [a popular clothing chain], and they try to be cool," Cody said. To Cody, the popular fashions were a badge of unoriginality. "They

try and they're just like the fake people," he said. The mass appeal of name brands like Hollister also made popular students seem uniform and nondescript. Phoebe described popular students to fit in, as those who "all look the same." She described a time when she was with a group of popular students, but because of their nondescript characteristics, "couldn't even remember their names." Through subversion to the monolithic mainstream, these adolescents became aligned.

In this phase of commitment, participants used sweeping generalizations to describe their popular peers, classifying them all as unintelligent. Courtney, Emily, and Phoebe used stereotypical "dumb blonde" voices to describe the behaviors of their popular peers, cocking their head to the side, pretending to chew gum, saying phrases like "Oh my God!" and "Josh is such a good football player!" and "I'm gonna go to cheerleading practice!" and pantomiming twirling long strands of hair in their fingers. They also viewed popular students—particularly popular girls—as overly happy and annoying. "They're so positive and stuff," Rosannah said. "It just drains me." They usually followed these quips by rolling their eyes and expressing their disdain for those who behaved in such ways. "I just want to punch them so hard," Phoebe said. "[The preps] make me want to throw up," Rachel said.

Ironically, participants couched these popular-people rants in their own insistence that they were kind and sensitive, qualities that distinguished them from their popular peers. Rachel, for example, described her crowd as "the ones who usually get along with everyone." She contrasted her crowd's acceptance with the popular crowd's exclusivity: "If you go up to a preppy person, they'll be like, 'Shut up! I wanna talk about me now!'" She conceded that she was presenting a rather crude stereotype with that description, but insisted that the stereotype was relatively accurate: "a lot of preps really *do* tend to have the world revolving around them."

To distinguish herself from the popular crowd, Rachel wanted to convey herself as accepting of others.

This phase of commitment was also characterized by a strong aversion to popular or preppy fashion. For example, when I asked Lucy to describe her style of dress, her reply told me less about what she liked to wear and more about what she did not: “I really don’t like Hollister, or Abercrombie, or American Eagle.” It was important to Lucy that I know how she did not dress: She did not wear popular fashions. Other girls also wanted to distance themselves from name-brand and expensive clothing, which often characterized popular styles of dress. “I’ve noticed, like, other kids will go out and buy \$70 sweatshirt or something from Hollister. We don’t do that, really,” Courtney explained. Phoebe shared a similar sentiment: “I see all the Hollister magazines and stuff, and I don’t get the point of it. Why would you wear a shirt, just because it says Hollister? Like, why would you pay \$50 for that?” These sentiments illustrate the significance of popular fashion to adolescents in the commitment phase. In this phase, wearing name-brand clothing had become an emblem of uninformed or blind affiliation with mainstream culture.

The cost of these name brand clothes was nonsensical to these adolescents because the result of those expenses was an image that was mass produced and conventional, qualities these adolescents shunned. “We think it’s stupid, really,” Phoebe said. “Like, why would you spend that much? We don’t want to fit in. We don’t want to conform.” These adolescents defined themselves primarily by their ability to stand out. Wearing Hollister or some other popular name brand clothing meant fitting in with the “masses,” and symbolized a loss of authenticity.

Adolescents in this phase were committed to a darker aesthetic than that worn by their popular peers. Many wore black t-shirts and large baggy trip pants with chains. Zoe wore a black cape to school. Rachel wore a tall black hat. Others embellished their look in other ways, with heavy black makeup or jet-black hair. These trappings underscored their disdain for popular fashions, which were typically bright and cheery. They also served as a clear indicator that they were defining their own social place in school. Whereas popular students were seen as minions to pop culture fads—as “slaves to fashion”—oppositional adolescents in this initial commitment phase made it clear that they cared not what others thought of them. “I feel comfortable, so they can just accept me or stay away,” Isaac said. “I don’t care.” These feelings represent a dramatic leap from their feelings in the exploration stage, when they sought approval from their popular peers.

In this phase of commitment, adolescents’ rejection of popular music was also part of their pledge to the oppositional crowd. Popular music was seen as easily accessible music, heard on the “top hits” radio stations. Participants did not like that level of accessibility because it appealed to the masses. The heavily synthesized and “glossy” sounds of popular music repelled these adolescents. They were also bothered that much of popular music was created not by the artists but by a wealthy music producer. Kanye West and Lady Gaga, artists who were commonly heard on popular radio stations, were seen as such musicians who were “guilty” of creating music for the masses. These artists were shunned because of their lack of authenticity and mass appeal. Phoebe told me that she would not date anyone who liked Lady Gaga. “I’m kind of a music Nazi when it comes to music,” she told me. “If they really like music that I don’t like, like Kanye West or Lady Gaga, and they’re like, *you wanna go out?* I’m like, *nope*. I mean,

there are definitely a lot of music rules when it comes to that.” Liking a popular artist like Lady Gaga symbolized a lack of creativity or uniqueness. Phoebe did not want to be associated with that. Her preference was for darker, more somber music, and she loved talking about her music collection. Phoebe had also recently joined a garage band where she played the drums. Gretchen, Theo, Isaac, and Courtney were also in bands; each of which played metal or punk music. In this phase, it was important to not only understand the music, but to play it, too. “My music is deep,” Isaac told me. “You can go to the concerts, but to really understand it, it helps to play.” In this phase, an immersion in Goth, Punk, or Emo music was a signifier of allegiance.

Self-Injury

Many Goth, Punk, or Emo bands were known for their violent behaviors on stage, as well as their practices of self-mutilation. Members of the band Sex Pistols, for example, seen as the “grandparents” of Punk, would carve a name or slogan into their chest with razors before a show (Shank, 2006). Contemporary bands engage in this behavior, too. One of Isaac’s favorite new albums was called “The Pleasure of Self-Mutilation.” Theo’s favorite band, Mayhem, exploited a fellow member’s suicide by using photos of his dead body on one of their album covers and then making necklaces out of his skull. These displays of violence inspired my participants and validated their own private practices of self-mutilation. Although most of them cut in secret, and kept their cutting scars hidden from others, the act of cutting was powerful. Cutting symbolized boldness, like the singers in their favorite bands, and lack of fear.

Rejecting Conventional Ideologies

In this initial phase of commitment, adolescents rejected conventional ideological beliefs, such as those involving religion and politics. Christianity was the epitome of organized groups

and was subsequently a target for denigration. “Punks aren’t into the organization thing,” Gretchen told me. “And Christianity is a huge organization.” Others dismissed Christianity as simply a waste of time, saying that their attempts to be religious went unrewarded: “I don’t believe in God,” said Rosannah. “I feel like if I send him prayers, but he doesn’t do nothing about them. He’s letting me suffer here. So there was no point.” Cody added, “I’m not gonna waste all my time thinking about this, if it’s not going to do anything. Why would you waste your time, like, praying when you could try to make things better yourself?” Still others associated Christianity with hypocritical behavior. Dustin criticized Christian principles, as they “preach love and peace but have been responsible for countless wars.” They were also bothered by the behavior of Christians around them: “The church I was going to was very gossipy,” Phoebe said. “You’re not supposed to gossip, right? Well, they didn’t follow that. I just didn’t see it. There was preach, but there was no practice...like, I mean, if you really believe something, practice it. That’s my thought. And so, I stopped going to Sunday school.”

In this initial phase of crowd commitment, many were also cynical of American politics, perceiving President Obama as a figurehead who wielded little actual power. Their attitudes toward politics were tightly bound to their skepticism toward human nature in general, doubting man’s ability to “do good” in the midst of political power and wealth. Dustin expressed this disillusionment of government’s functionality: “Everything is just so big,” he said. “Trying to make this function, with all these different groups of people, and people are so flawed...Like, could it ever really work? It’s insane.” Participants’ political ideals highlighted their dislike toward anything rank-based. “I don’t like ranks in general,” Rosannah said. “I think they’re stupid. Like, just because I’m not president doesn’t mean I don’t mean something in the world.

Or just because I'm not Lady Gaga or Britney Spears doesn't mean I don't mean anything. Everybody's equal," she insisted.

Seven of the 16 participants had, at one time or another, called themselves anarchists. Phoebe and Dustin sewed upside down American flag patches on their jackets to illustrate their political ideals. Adolescents' political dislike stemmed from their frustration toward traditionally conservative values such as anti-abortion or anti-gay rights. Based on those nihilist ideals, it was antithetical to affiliate with both the Republican party and an oppositional crowd in adolescence: The two were incompatible.

Function of Oppositional Crowd

Belonging to an oppositional crowd served a variety of purposes. The most commonly discussed reason for doing so was distinction: The norms of these crowds provided them the opportunity to be different from their peers. "Being Emo," started Dustin, "it's just a way to stand out. Like, when I'm in a huge group of people, it's really hard to make people notice me, so I wear stuff that's going to catch attention." Fitting in, to these adolescents, was boring; some seemed to equate fitting in with failure. "I don't want to fit in," Phoebe said, "I don't like feeling like I'm the same as someone else, because then I feel like, 'Crap.'" This mentality is in stark contrast from the hopelessness expressed in the initial exploration phase. Pledging allegiance to an oppositional crowd gave these adolescents a lot of power.

Others explained that embodying the images of these crowds was an easier way of conveying their individuality than was verbally communicating that information: "It's like, I'm not going to be able to go around and tell everyone exactly what I think to make myself different from everyone else," Courtney said, "so if I dress different, as soon as I see a person, they know

that I'm not just like them." Some interpreted this style of fashion as being "more real" than the fashions of the popular crowd because it is based on authentic choice and not a desire to copy mainstream styles. "I mean, it [my clothing style] is kind of bizarre for other people," Cody said. "But it's kinda like, you're being more real, because that's what you like. It's not like, oh, this is popular, I'm gonna do this." Conceptions of popular or mainstream images were almost always negative. Being popular was synonymous with homogeneity, lack of creativity, and inauthenticity. By grounding one's choices in what is not popular, the assumption was that one's decisions are more genuine and authentic.

Fitting in with the popular crowd was not only undesirable, it was too difficult. Fitting in required wearing name brand clothing, but it was beyond the investment in a popular culture uniform. Fitting in had not worked for these adolescents in middle school. Doing so meant following a set of implicit social rules, including where to spend weekends and how to behave during unstructured school time, such as who to greet in the hallways. Several participants told me about a "hi" list that should be followed to abide by mainstream norms. Courtney explained this term to me in greater detail:

A: A "hi" list?

C: Yeah. Like, who you do and don't say hi to each other in the hallways. 'Cause like, you don't go, like "Hi!" "Hi!" "Hi!" to everybody in the hallway. You'll say "hi" to your friends, of course, and you'll probably go over and talk to them, and you'll say "hi" to people you're kind of friends with. But if there's somebody I say "hi" to, I try not to say "hi" to them so much, because I don't want them to think I'm stalking them. And it's awful when you say "hi" to somebody, and they don't say "hi" back. It is so awkward.

‘Cause you’ll be like, “Hi!” And they’re like, they just walk by, and sometimes they just don’t notice you. But sometimes they do see you, and they don’t want to say “hi” back...

A: That’s cold.

C: Yeah, and all they did was not say one word.

Fitting in, then, required adolescents to dress a certain way and abide by rules like the “hi” list.

In this respect, committing to the ideals of an oppositional crowd was an agreeable alternative, with fewer restrictions and rules. Indeed, committing to an oppositional crowd gave adolescents a sense of permission for engaging in certain behaviors, such as cutting. “If you cut yourself,” Dustin said, “you could be Emo. And Emo was like this whole spectrum of, ‘I can do what I want.’ And people can say, ‘Oh, you’re Emo. That’s cool. That’s what Emos are expected to do.’ So it was like, I was living up to a standard.” These narratives suggest that committing to an oppositional crowd provided adolescents a “free pass” to engage in certain behaviors, in particular, destructive ones like cutting. The feeling of allowance they were given in their crowd allegiance empowered them. They could do what they wanted.

Rosannah commented on the ease of dressing in the Emo aesthetic. “It’s easy to dress the way I dress. Because no matter what I don, it’s gonna match. And it would all just fit together. I don’t have to be like, what would look cute with this? Does blue go with orange, does orange go with purple, blah dee blah blah blah. I can just wake up and do my thing.” This mentality was interesting to me, as my participants’ attire (i.e., lots of makeup, dramatically styled hair, heavy chains) certainly did not look effortless. Yet my assumption that these crowd styles were difficult was quickly rejected. An excerpt from my conversation with Zoe illustrates this point:

Z: I don't have to worry [about what to wear]. It's easy. It's so easy.

A: That's interesting, because I think a lot of people wouldn't see that, as such. They'd be like, why are you going to all this work to dress in that way?

Z: That's so stupid. I mean, I wear these trip pants, you know, and everybody is like, "How do you wear those? They're full of chains. How do you get into them?" And it's like, you put them on like pants. It's just pants. It's not hard (laughs). It's like, people think that I'm being so complicated, when really, it's just simple with a different look.

Again, a major underlying reason for committing to these styles was simplicity. Their look was not effortless, but in this phase, it was touted as such.

Committing to an oppositional crowd also provided these adolescents a sense of belonging with other like-minded peers. Phoebe described her sense of belonging when she and her friends began calling themselves Emo, especially when she discovered that one of the norms of Emo was self-mutilation. "I was like, 'I cut. Does that make me Emo? Oh. Awesome. I fit somewhere. I belong.'" Dustin added to this:

In middle school, I was less mature and more...I was still exploring different parts of my identity. But I was very in-the-throes...I mean, it's middle school. You're discovering who you are. So I would stick to certain labels, like Emo, because it made me feel cool, and it made me feel attractive. And it made me feel accepted. So it was about feeling confident.

In this commitment phase, adolescents were able to combat their isolation by aligning themselves with their oppositional crowd.

Lucy also commented that calling herself Goth helped her to find some belonging:

“Everybody’s unique. It’s just the people who really show that they’re unique are freaks. You’re marked as weird. You’re avoided. But if you’re in a group, it’s usually okay.” Before she committed to the Goth ideals, Lucy felt alone; her uniqueness was labeled “freakish.” By channeling her uniqueness through the norms of her crowd, she felt more comfortable. Being in the Goth crowd gave her sense of belonging.

This sense of belonging was particularly important during the transition from middle school to high school, when participants were surrounded by greater numbers of peers. Seamus felt overwhelmed when he started high school, and needed a few like-minded peers to ease his anxiety: “We have such a large population [at my high school],” he said. “So, when things start getting bigger, little sects break off, here and there, because you want so badly to belong. And you’re in this big ocean, and you’re like, where’s my school of fish?” For Seamus, being part of the Goth crowd, even though it was small, gave him a “school of fish,” and a sense of belonging.

Committing to the aesthetic of an oppositional crowd also provided adolescents a level of protection against unwanted interactions. “I wear what I do because I just like it,” Gretchen said of her Punk styles, “and I don’t want anyone to fuck with me. I actually had a shirt with a smiley face on it, and it said, ‘I Hate You’ underneath it. My parents hated that shirt, but I thought it was hilarious.” Cody’s commitment to the Emo fashions also provided him some protection from unwanted interactions.

I don’t wanna...everybody else knowing everything about me. Like, all my problems and stuff. ‘Cause if you dress how I do, people will just kinda leave you alone, and don’t really ask you a bunch of stuff. People’ll look at you and be like, “that kid’s kinda scary,

I'm gonna stay away from him." And it's kind of like...you don't have to worry about bullies or anything.

When I asked other adolescents about their decisions to dress in eye-catching attire, they verified this belief: "[Keeping others away is] kinda part of the reason why I do it," Phoebe said. "Yeah," chimed in Zoe. "I don't want sympathy from people. Usually I just want people to leave me alone."

Committing to the radical fashion choices of an oppositional crowd also stemmed from a desire to attract others' attention. "My mohawk, used to kinda be like, I was doing it just to get those weird looks on the street," Gretchen told me. "I'd be walking with my dad or something, and he'd say, 'Did you just see that look?' And I'd be like, 'Yeah.'" Adolescents in this phase of commitment were empowered by those "looks" on the street. Many of their clothing choices stemmed from the fashions worn by their favorite band members. At all three of my interviews with Theo, for example, he wore band t-shirts with graphic and violent images on them. On one of the days of our interview, Theo sat back in his chair and stretched out his black t-shirt so I could see the full image: "It's a Cannibal Corpse t-shirt from their first album," he said. "It's kinda scary looking. It's got this zombie on the cover. He's tearing a chunk out of his arm flesh. It's cool looking." Emily, too, expressed the same sentiments toward her favorite band, Insane Clown Posse, when she wore one of their t-shirts for one of our interviews:

E: [My shirt] is kind of creepy. This shirt is the creepiest thing I own.

A: It is creepy.

E: I know. Sorry.

A: Who is that?

E: Insane Clown Posse. Don't look them up, they'll scare you.

Theo, Seamus, and Ben described their favorite band members as “corpse-like” in their makeup and violent in their lyrics. Even the names of their favorite bands (e.g., Cannibal Corpse and Dying Fetus) underscore the morbid themes of their music. One of Theo's favorite band members, for example, ate a pig's head on stage. Theo made clear that he would not personally do such a thing, but he loved the shock value of such displays. “My music is incredibly violent, and incredibly gruesome,” Theo said. “It's kinda scary.”

Gretchen discussed a similar desire to shock others when she played music with her punk band. A few months after I had met Gretchen, I received an e-mail from her about an upcoming show in which she was playing. I took my husband, Andy, to this concert, located in a record shop in a nearby city, in a back room intended for small gigs. The room was small, about 30 feet by 50 feet, painted in black with a small raised stage flanked by huge speaker. Gretchen's band began to play, at which time the majority of listeners (about 30) moved to the edge of the stage and started running in a counter-clockwise group motion, swinging their arms, and violently colliding with one another. Feeling a little freaked out by this swirl of activity (which Gretchen later told me was *slamdancing*), Andy and I pressed against a wall to keep from getting swept into the pit. Not that we ignored the music. It was hard not to be drawn in to the powerful sounds coming from the stage. Gretchen and her band mates were good, too. They played some complicated music with surprising finesse. Yet while we were impressed with their musical talent, we were also a little unnerved when the band sang songs like “Kill the Children,” or when the lead singer of her band continued to call all of us in the audience “cunts.” We tried to conceal our grimaces at that word, but there was little point in doing so. The slamdancing, the violent

music, and the audience insults were meant to unnerve everyone there. Those actions were all part of a ritualized display of antagonism that gave Gretchen and her band mates a lot of power.

These narratives suggest that adolescents' commitments to the fashion and music of their crowd became a figurative dance, stemming from a simultaneous desire to be left alone (“don’t look them up”) and to shock other people (“they’ll scare you”). For example, Zoe dressed in ways that insulated her from interactions with her “preppy” peers; yet she wanted to rattle them, too: “People are always judgmental and stuff,” she said, “so I like to push people, and sometimes I do it to annoy them. Just because it’s like, get over it, it’s what you’re going to have to deal with.”

The reactions elicited from these behaviors and stories were typically negative. Indeed, adolescents were often bullied for their choice of dress. They were called names or were physically harassed. Instead of backing down from their dress or behavior choices, though, such attacks emboldened their decisions to rebel, and empowered them to keep shocking others. Dustin described a recent encounter when he was harassed for his Emo clothes: “I was walking down the street once, alone, and there were some college kids in a nearby car, and they just started yelling 'faggot' at me.” When I asked him if that kind of harassment would make him reconsider his clothing styles, he responded with an adamant “No!” He added: “It makes me want to put on extra eyeliner.” In this phase of commitment, attacks served to reinforce adolescents' decisions to dress in shocking ways. This phase illustrates a transformational experience from their earlier stage of exploration. Adolescents in the exploration phase felt impotent. They felt overwhelmed by their surroundings, and some cried before school. In this commitment phase, adolescents displayed a “bring it on!” attitude.

Emily shared a similar story about the impact of her first few facial piercings on those around her:

When I was 12, I got my first piercing. And everybody was like, “Oh, God. She's so...weird!” You know? Like, “She's getting piercings on her face. What a weirdo.” And so, like, a few weeks after that, I got the right side pierced, and people were like, “What?” After that, then it was like, “This is what I want to do.”

Her first piercing startled other people; so did the second. After that, Emily decided that she would not stop. She had found a sense of control in the reactions she elicited from others. Emily quoted Marilyn Monroe when talking about her decisions to dress the way she did: “If you can't handle me at my worst, you don't deserve me at my best.” Her fashion choices allowed her to test others' open mindedness.

Lastly, committing to oppositional crowd norms provided a purgative function for these adolescents, dissipating their accumulated frustration and anger. Gretchen's narrative illustrates this function:

Whenever I talk about being Punk, I have to clench my fists like this. Because age-ism is just so strong, and all that crap. Like, when you're this young, you can't really do a lot of things. But there's this song by this punk band called Rancid—and there's a line that says, *where do you go now when you're only 15?* And when I was 15, I would just yell that out, like “where do I go now when I'm only 15?!” And then I'd calm down.

Listening to those lyrics provided an important outlet for Gretchen's frustrations of being young and relatively powerless. Lucy, Theo, Cody, and Isaac shared similar stories about the effect of their music on their moods. These adolescents all expressed their affinity for Cannibal Corpse,

Black Sabbath, and Dying Fetus, bands known for their violent lyrics. They listened to the music from these bands when they were angry, and it consistently had the effect of making them less angry, of calming them down. Cody explained that his favorite music, which he described as “scream-o,” helps him “escape from reality.” Lucy, too, loved scream-o music, as well as death core or grind core—bands that, she described, “do pig squeals, deep inhaleds, exhaleds, grunts, and screams.” And she too felt soothed by the heavy music. “I think [the music] makes you feel like—‘cause you feel like everyone doesn’t really understand you—the music can connect to you, and help you feel better.” Going to metal concerts and “throwin’ down” in the mosh pits was also a therapeutic experience for these adolescents.

Not all participants engaged in self-injurious activities, but for the ones who did, their acts of cutting or self-mutilation were the most therapeutic for them during this commitment stage. Isaac felt a sense of satisfaction in seeing the results of his cutting. “It’s just...at the time, you, like, you’re just like, oh, man, that was satisfying...to have my own blood all over my own arm.” Emily, too, was comforted by the blood from her cutting. “Like, when I cut,” Emily explained:

My parents were fighting, and I was in the middle of it all. But it made me feel control. I was in control of my physical pain. I could do something. And the blood...there's something about seeing it, made me think, oh, that's my security blanket. Bleeding lets me know that I'm still alive, and I still feel things, and I'm not dead, you know?

In sum, the initial commitments made to these oppositional crowds were functional. They provided adolescents with a sense of belonging with a small group of like-minded peers. The aesthetic norms of these crowds also had some utility, in both attracting attention and keeping

unwanted others away. Lastly, listening to some of the music and engaging in the behaviors associated with these crowds provided adolescents an important release from feelings of frustration and helplessness and a feeling of empowerment that they were in control.

Constriction by Oppositional Crowd Norms

The norms associated with these oppositional crowds were functional for a while, particularly during the transition to high school. For the younger participants (Rosannah, Rachel, Lucy, Phoebe, Dustin, and Cody), their initial commitments to their crowd were still adaptive. The narratives from the younger adolescents suggested they were still in the initial commitment phase to their oppositional crowd. The narratives from older participants, though, were different. For these adolescents, some of their crowd norms had begun to feel binding and time consuming. They were becoming aware that their crowds were becoming stereotyped, too, and were bothered that others were misjudging them by those stereotypes. Adolescents in this phase were also becoming concerned that the norms of their crowd were becoming mainstream or even popular. These developments all contributed to a new phase of oppositional crowd identity development, one characterized by adolescents' feelings of constriction by and growing dissatisfaction with the original commitments made to their oppositional crowd.

Growing Weary of Implicit Rules

Adhering to the norms of an oppositional crowd takes time. Although the adolescents in my sample felt liberated from the norms of popular crowds (e.g., wearing name brand clothing), those who had been part of the oppositional subculture for several years started to view the styles associated with their oppositional crowd as equally binding. For example, being Emo was associated with a particular way of styling one's hair (i.e., swept in front of the eyes). Those who

were Punk were generally expected to get snakebites. Being a member of the Goth crowd meant dressing in all black at all times. Moreover, being part of *any* of these crowds meant that prep images were “off limits.” Most participants expressed some excitement, in their initial phase of commitment, about these fashion boundaries. As Toby said, the styles of these crowds were seen as “cool, exciting, and new.” Yet committing to these styles was not easy. Nor were they inexpensive. Doc Martens shoes and studded wallets, for example, were becoming more expensive (in a quick online search, I found the shoes to run around \$100 and the wallets, \$30).

In order to maintain the aesthetic, adolescents moving toward constriction had fewer claims regarding ease of use. Gretchen described spending hours styling her hair into a mohawk. Theo complained about how long it took him to paint his nails black for concerts (although he admitted that his manicure skills had gotten better over the years). In this phase of constriction, the effort required for their crowd styles began to feel tiring. Zoe explained this aesthetic constriction: “I got the label of Emo, like, a little more than a year ago, and I spent all my time, like, looking up videos, how to do makeup, how to, like, look more Emo, wear clothes, what haircuts to get...and I spent my entire time doing that. And then eventually, I got tired of it.” Gretchen added to this sentiment, expressing her discontent at putting so much effort into what she perceived to be an increasingly stereotypical image: “I would obsess about Punk styles all the time. Like, when I would try to be Punk, I would try to do all these things that are stereotypically Punk. And then finally, I was just like, this is really annoying. I don’t want to have to try to do this.” The time required to adhere to these norms, which once was welcomed, became burdensome and not worth the effort in this constriction phase.

Feeling Mislabeled

This phase was also characterized by adolescents' concerns that they were being misjudged by their crowd label. After several years in the oppositional subculture, adolescents began to view their crowd label as unidimensional. Courtney and Gretchen saw their crowd as a crude indicator of who they are as developing individuals. "Emo has become, like, cry about it, and whine," Courtney said, "And I don't like to be called Emo because I don't think I'm that sad. I just get really annoyed with people." The Emo label oversimplified and essentially misdiagnosed who Courtney was. Gretchen expressed the same discomfort with the Punk label: "I wouldn't necessarily call myself Punk," she added, "mostly because it kind of locks you down. Because if you're Punk, then people will put this whole personality to you. And I don't like that. Only because I don't completely agree with what Punk people do. Because I'm not always angry. I get annoyed, but I'm not always, like, you know, fuck the government, and all that." These narratives suggest that commitment to an oppositional crowd becomes more complicated in the phase of constriction. It is multifaceted and aspects become less appealing and more limiting.

Adolescents in the constriction phase began to perceive the hostile norms of their crowd as excessive. The norms that provided an important purgative function in the commitment phase had begun to feel *excessively* rebellious. Isaac illustrated this mentality with his growing discomfort about the Punk crowd's unquestioning antagonism toward authority: "Being Punk is typically about defying authority," Isaac said, "but you know, right now, the way the masses are flowing, it's kind of flowing in a direction that I think everyone can agree with." Isaac found it illogical, for example, to argue against the government on issues like protecting the environment.

He found it nonsensical to use drugs “all the time,” a pastime that he had briefly enjoyed with his Punk-mates:

I’m not necessarily against drugs, but I hate the idea of myself being in a group that just does drugs all the time. If they wanna do drugs, that’s their thing. But I’m not gonna hang out with them while they’re doing that. I don’t want to risk getting in trouble because I was at the same place as somebody who was smoking weed, or doing Ecstasy or something stupid like that.

These narratives illustrate some of the experiences of the constriction phase. Courtney, Gretchen, and Isaac felt constrained by the norms of their respective crowds, either by the time commitment required to embody their crowd’s image, the narrow array of characteristics they associated with the crowd, or the overly bizarre or rebellious activities in which their crowd-mates were engaged.

In this phase, adolescents were also feeling constrained by the stereotypes increasingly associated with their crowd. “Being Emo has definitely become a bad thing [at my school] now,” Zoe said. Even the “really open-minded” students in her school were starting to associate a variety of stereotypical behaviors to her and her friends:

They’ll see me and my friends and think, “Wow, those kids do drugs, they have sex all the time, and they have bad grades.” And that’s not true at all. And it’s like, no, that’s not true at all. It’s like, I’ll dress that [Emo] way—and I might be depressed, but I’m not just gonna not do my homework because it’s stupid or whatever. It’s obviously going to get me somewhere in life. And it’s like, if I think something’s not gonna help me, then I’ll ask the teacher.

Zoe was starting to perceive that her Emo status was leading to misjudgments by her peers; these misconceptions made her feel like she could not fully express herself. The only accurate alignment between Zoe's personal identity and the stereotypical characteristics of her Emo crowd was her depression. As far as the other characteristics that had become linked to Emo, (e.g., getting bad grades, have sex "all the time"), she perceived those as a stereotype, and an exaggeration of who she was as an individual.

From Unique to Unoriginal

This phase was also characterized by adolescents' concerns that their styles were no longer original or unique. From the time these participants entered high school, the vampire-themed *Twilight* series had become immensely popular, with its books taking the five top slots in a list of the 100 children's best sellers for last year (Harrison, 2010) and its movie ticket sales reaching over \$500 million worldwide (Sherman & Bravo, 2010). To my participants, they attributed this rise in the vampire-craze as encroaching on their territory, as the *Twilight* aesthetic (somber and black) was very similar to theirs.

The store Hot Topic, a California-based clothing chain that has been "following the pulse of the alternative teen demographic more closely than most any other big company," has become increasingly popular, too, illustrating the shift of participants' styles from unique to mainstream ("Hot Topic Brings Teen Angst to a Suburban Mall Near You," 2003, para. 3). With the boom of Gothic-themed movies like *Twilight* and the emergence of commercial stores like *Hot Topic* that sell Punk-, Goth-, and Emo-themed clothing, the once-unique aesthetic these adolescents had adopted became commercialized, and their idiosyncratic ideals less unique. Over time, crowd labels that once represented something unique and individualistic became mainstream and hence

popular. “It just becomes another fad,” Liam said, suggesting that his small group’s idiosyncratic styles had become mainstream. “[My style] has become completely commercialized,” said Toby.

As the aesthetic of their crowd became less unique, adolescents felt constrained to adhere to their crowds’ aesthetic norms. Theo, for example, felt constrained by the images of his crowd when many of his peers started to emulate him:

Like, I started the whole purple and black hair thing here. Like, bright purple. Pretty nice. Pretty nice. And then, like a week later, somebody did black hair with a purple and pink hue, and all of the sudden, there were like eight kids with black and purple hair, and I was like, are you kidding me?

Courtney felt similarly frustrated when the Emo style became popular at her school: “Once other people started calling themselves Emo, and it started being bad, I guess, we moved away from that.” Being Emo had originally provided her a way of being unique, but when her mainstream peers adopted the Emo style, the uniqueness dissipated. Being Emo had diminished in its utility to differentiate who was “unique” and who was part of the common masses.

In this phase, adolescents were highly aware of the students they called “Emo posers.” Liam defined Emo posers as those who “have a perfect life,” and who “claim to cut, but don’t.” Toby defined an Emo poser as “someone who is trying to embody those things without any sense of self-expression.” These narratives suggest that Emo posers are those who align with the Emo aesthetic but have no authentic understanding of pain or rejection. The rise of Emo posers was a harbinger to these adolescents, signaling that their once-unique ideals were becoming commercialized and popular. Gauged ears had become common. “Even preps have gauged ears now,” Emily said. Moreover, even cutting had become popular, furthering adolescents’ feelings

of constriction to the previously held commitments to their crowd. “[Cutting] is really common,” Gretchen said. “You can look in about one in every five high school students, at their arms, and you’ll see scars or some sort of self-mutilation. Like, from cutting or burning or anything.” Empirical research supports these adolescents’ observations, with prevalence rates of cutting ranging from 12%-21% in adolescents (Heilbron & Prinstein, 2008).

The increasing prevalence of cutting was disturbing to these adolescents, not so much because of the injuries their peers were sustaining (as none of them interpreted cutting as particularly dangerous), but because the cutting was gratuitous. These adolescents lamented the prevalence of Emo posers who showed off their scars from cutting. Sometimes these displays were covert. For example, some Emo posers would wear clothing that exposed their forearms, wrists, or other areas of their bodies that had been cut. “They’ll be like, ‘did you see the way I wear my hoodies in the summer? Did you see the way I hike up my sleeves so you can see my scars?’” Emily said. “They point it out, even though they’re hiding it.” Other Emo posers would display their scars in more overt ways: “They’ll run around, like, ‘oh my gosh, look at my huge scars!’” Zoe said. Still others told stories of Emo posers who would cut themselves in public, for example, in the lunchroom or in class. During one of our interviews, Liam told me that a student next to him at lunch was cutting himself with a plastic fork. Liam and Zoe added a story about their experience in science class that day:

Z: I’m not gonna name names, but today I was sitting in science, and I looked over, and there was this girl...I don’t know how to describe her...she’s kind of...

L: --She’s a prep. Okay? She’s a prep. And she cuts. And then you have this other kid, where he-he tries to cut himself with wood chips.

These displays of cutting encroached on a behavior that had once been experienced only by a select few people, and adolescents like Zoe and Liam were offended by it. They interpreted this publically displayed cutting as inauthentic, as it was done solely to attract attention and receive pity from others. Many felt that Emo posers were unjustified in their cutting. Unlike their own lives (“like, I’ve actually had bad things happen in my life,” said Zoe), the adolescents I talked to perceived Emo posers as having easy and untroubled lives. “They want to say that they hate their family,” Zoe explained, “but they really have a perfect life. They’re just upset with everyone. So they say things like, ‘I have an abusive boyfriend, or I cut myself’, so people give them sympathy. Happens all the time.”

All of these perceptions led to feelings of constriction. Participants felt constricted that they were being associated with Emo posers because they saw themselves as distinct from them. Participants perceived their decisions to cut or self-mutilate as more legitimate than the decisions of Emo posers. “There are two big reasons why people cut,” Emily told me, “You’ve got the people who are serious about it, like me, and then you’ve got people who are like, ‘I’m gonna cut so that people pity me.’ It’s really sad.” Emily’s insistence that her cutting was more “serious” than the cutting of Emo posers did not mean that she cut herself more (although perhaps she did); it was that her cutting meant something very special to her. Her cutting was private. Her cutting was empowering. Yet Emo posers had essentially taken that power away from cutting and cheapened it. Cutting was now being used to attract attention for the wrong reasons—that is, for pity and not for a genuine display of strength.

Reconsideration

For these adolescents, feelings of constriction facilitated a new phase of development, during which they reconsidered what it meant to belong to an oppositional crowd. For many, this phase was characterized by minor adjustments in their social identity. For example, some rejected their label of Goth, Punk, or Emo, preferring broader labels such as “fringers” or “outcasts” to identify themselves. Others retained most of the aesthetic elements of their crowd but made distinctive efforts to distinguish themselves from Emo posers. For others, this phase was characterized by broader shifts in crowd norms, including the adoption of more moderate ideological beliefs and more inclusive definitions of authenticity.

Finding Alternative Modes of Oppositional Expression

Adolescents in this phase were in a greater period of discernment in terms of the norms they would adopt and reject from their oppositional crowd. For example, many still dressed the same, but had begun making their clothes instead of buying them. Almost all participants in this phase expressed a growing interest in these do-it-yourself (DIY) fashions. For Gretchen and Emily, DIY jackets were particularly important. These two spent a lot of time making their own jackets, gluing spikes down the sleeves (the bigger the better) and sewing patches of their favorite bands across the back. They saw designs that were eclectic or mismatched as desirable, and took pride in the finished project because they were difficult to make. The jackets required time and effort to push studs into the thick fabric of the jacket and were done without the aid of a sewing machine. By reinventing their style in minor ways (making their jackets instead of buying them), they were reconsidering the norms of their crowd. They were still opposing mainstream norms; they were simply doing it in a slightly different way.

DIY hair dyes and piercings were also valued for the same reason: They were seen as a reinvented symbol of authenticity and toughness (respectively). Gretchen had begun to dye her hair different colors and liked telling people that she did the dye job herself. Similarly, Seamus, Liam, and Toby seemed to enjoy telling me about their decision to do their own piercings instead of get them done at the local mall or piercing studio. During the time of our interviews, all of them were working to expand the holes in their ear lobes to a larger “gauge.” Larger gauge holes appeared to be symbolic for toughness. Plus, the DIY aspect of enlarging the piercings showed their reconsideration of an older (and now common) fashion choice, and made clear that they were still unique.

Ben, Seamus, and Toby all expressed an interest in DIY “zines,” or self-publication magazines, where they had begun to submit poems or comics. Ben gave me one of his zines, which included articles with titles like “Anarchism: Arguments For and Against”; “If it Ain’t Cheap, it Ain’t Punk”; and “Things are Meaning Less”. The zines illustrate the desire for self-expression, not for profit, and parallel the growing discomfort from those in the reconsideration phase for anything mass-produced.

Adolescents in this phase were also more discerning about the meaning behind their behaviors, particularly with cutting. Theo still engaged in cutting but insisted that, in contrast to the public cutting of Emo posers, his cutting “meant something” more. Some of them dropped cutting altogether, explaining that cutting was “a phase” they went through and were now embarrassed that they did it. Emily explained this regret:

I hate that people will look at me, and they'll see my arm, and they'll be like, “You are a worthless piece of crap.” Like, “You are not--you cut and you don't respect your body.”

And they judge, and then, I'm put in a lower place. And that's pretty much part of the reason why, um, I regret it.

In the initial commitment phase, Emily was not bothered by those hostile opinions of her. Indeed, she was emboldened by them. In this reconsideration phase, however, she showed some remorse. This shift in her self-perception curtailed her cutting.

Others discovered other outlets of release, such as writing or music or art. "I'll do that [cutting] sometimes," Zoe explained, "but most of the time, just writing or crying makes it better." Similarly, Isaac explained that he has replaced cutting with listening to heavy metal music as an outlet. To him, music was a more satisfying outlet. He also expressed some regret about the scars he gave himself from cutting.

You look at this...this permanent mark that's there for the rest of your life, and you're just like, "Wow, that was really dumb. I shouldn't have done that." Like, I can't change that. With metal, it's always there, in the back of your mind, but it's not visible. Nobody can see metal. It's there.

Adolescents in this phase were also reconsidering their musical tastes, showing an increased affinity towards local music. Adolescents in the reconsideration phase viewed their once favorite Emo bands like Fall Out Boy and My Chemical Romance as too mainstream. Punk bands like Green Day had similarly developed into "pop punk." In the reconsideration phase, adolescents were careful to disassociate from these bands. The music they liked was "underground," meaning it was locally produced and written by the musicians themselves. Underground music was also difficult to find, usually produced in small, underfunded studios and distributed at local record stores. Toby used the terms "raw," "poetic," and "complex" to

describe the music he currently listened to, contrasting it with commercialized music which was “whatever is hot” and “doesn’t take any skill at all.” Courtney’s crowd created a Facebook page, *“I liked them before anyone liked them and now they’re popular,”* to illustrate her affinity for discovering unknown artists.

Adolescents in the reconsideration phase were beginning to re-evaluate the crowd labels to which they had initially committed. They acknowledged that others still referred to them as Emo, Goth, or Punk, but they personally did not. At the time of our interview, most of them had begun to shun those labels, preferring simply to be known as “outcasts” or “fringers.” Both Zoe and Toby used the phrase, “I’m not a soup can; I don’t need a label” when I asked them to define their social identity. Courtney provided a similarly inclusive answer: “We’re very, very ‘out there’ people, with no definition whatsoever.”

Participants’ dislike toward those labels represented a desire to move away from specific terms and move toward a more inclusive social grouping. During this reconsideration phase, adolescents were expressive about the functions and limitations of their crowd label, acknowledging that it had helped them during a difficult emotional time, but that it had become a “simplifier” for who they were. Said Liam: “It carries information in one word. It’s easier to explain myself as Goth rather than explaining for hours who I am. I mean, as you get to know me, I can say, ‘Okay, I can take off this label now, because you know who I am.’”

Experiences of oppositional crowd reconsideration were associated with increased opportunities afforded to adolescents in their high school. Gretchen and Theo had discovered new bands through their high school peers. Courtney and Liam had become involved in their school’s theater department. Seamus had been working on a portfolio of his art work that was

being nicely received by his art teacher. Zoe joined a club in her school that repaired old bicycles, and Emily had begun organizing a poetry slam event at her school, where she and a few others were able to present their poems or short stories. Table 6 provides a list of participants' current extracurricular activities, with participants separated by phase of oppositional crowd identity development. The table findings suggest that extracurricular involvement is associated with a shift in oppositional crowd norms. Extracurricular involvement seemed to contribute to adolescents' growing self-esteem and a feeling of liberation from the implicit rules they had initially adopted from their crowd. Although adolescents in the reconsideration phase still dressed in many of the same ways, they were undergoing some changes, either by modifying their previously used crowd label (making the leap from Goth to "Fringer") or by changing the behaviors they felt constricted by during this transitional stage.

Table 6

Participants' Extracurricular Activity Involvement

Participants	Extracurricular Activity
Commitment Phase	
Rachel	Shopping
Rosannah	None
Phoebe	None
Dustin	None
Cody	None
Reconsideration Phase	
Lucy	Hockey
Courtney	Choir, theater
Zoe	Bike repair
Gretchen	Battle of the bands, journalism
Isaac	Battle of the bands, German club
Theo	Battle of the bands, ultimate Frisbee
Liam	Theater
Seamus	Painting
Emily	Poetry slams
Toby	Painting
Ben	Poetry slams

Adolescents in this phase were essentially giving themselves permission to listen to what they want and dress the way they want: “I’m a lot more comfortable with who I am now,” Gretchen said, comparing her current interests to those from previous years. “And it seems like, when you’re comfortable, you can really expand yourself. Like, I’m really into jazz, and I’ve recently gotten into acid jazz techno stuff. It’s really fun. I like that stuff a lot. I still love Punk, but I love a lot of other stuff.” Adolescents in this phase were able to explore different realms of experience that seemed unavailable to them in previous phases, when they had confined themselves to a more narrow set of crowd-affiliated values. “I’m done stereotyping,” Courtney said. “I used to think it was cool to be Emo or Goth, and then I’m like, I can listen to this music and dress how I want. We don’t all have to be like that.”

Moderating Ideological Commitments

In my discussions with some of these older adolescents (Gretchen, Seamus, Ben, Emily, Courtney, and Zoe), I also found their current ideological commitments to be shifting. While the group as a whole was still wary toward organized religion (Ben argued that, in the “ideal world,” people should not be guided by “a religion that tells you how to think about something”), all were becoming more appreciative of the benefits of religion than they had been in the past. Ben could appreciate the advantage of “being around like-minded individuals who view the world the same way.” Seamus acknowledged the utility of a religion’s guiding tenets, expressing that “even close-minded religions” provide “important grounding ideals.” Zoe talked about the nurturing community aspect of religion: “I think I understand the reason that people have religion,” she said. It’s, at least partially...a community. And, um, not being lonely.”

These comments suggest a reconsideration of their prior rejection of religion, even if their

peers still rejected the idea. Ben described some of his friends as “bigoted” who are unwilling to appreciate the greater complexities of religion. Courtney, too, expressed her growing discomfort about aligning herself with the religious beliefs of her peers. “My group thinks religion is crap,” she said. “It’s another commercial thing—or, not commercial—but something that everybody else does. It’s kinda part of the right wing thing. They make fun of it. They make irreverent Jesus Christ jokes. And honestly...I feel insulted sometimes.” Courtney had stopped participating in these barbs. For her, these evolving ideas came from a religion class she was taking at her school, which required her to think more critically about her religious beliefs. When I asked her if religion was becoming more important, she nodded: “I think, I guess it *is* kind of important to me. It’s not a huge factor, but it’s there. I think.” Courtney was still cynical toward religion, but she had grown equally uncomfortable with her previous stance of unquestioningly critiquing it.

Some even acknowledged that their cynicism toward religion stemmed from their lack of personal experience with a religion. In one of my last conversations with Gretchen, for example, she conceded a desire to be affiliated with a religious group:

G: I kinda wish I belonged to a group, but I can’t really get into that stuff, like the big religious type of things. I mean, I don’t really believe in God, like, at all. But I’m very deep with what I do. If I get into something, I really get into it. If it’s something like religion, I think it should be really personal. I mean, my parents celebrate Christmas, but they don’t believe in God at all.

A: Does that bother you?

G: Yeah, it kinda does. Because I think that religion should be something that you cherish, and it should be yours. And it shouldn't be something like, you're like, "you don't believe in God? I hate you. You should believe in God!"

A: How do you feel about the organized bit of religion? The structure, the tenets, the rules...?

G: That bothers me, but only a little. But that's only because I myself haven't found anything.

Instead of rejecting religion altogether, many of those with longer tenure in oppositional groups were broadening their system of belief. Ben talked about baking bread as a spiritual practice. Isaac expressed some interest in Buddhism because he thought it has "the most realistic usability" for calming people and making them happy. Seamus explained that he was "more along the lines of a Sufi, which is accepting of all forms." Zoe told me that she had recently become interested in Sikhism, which is focused on personal meditation.

Older adolescents supplied descriptions about religion that were thoughtful and meditative. Theo, for example, found that his questions on religion begot more questions. "There's always, you take one turn, there's eight more turns. You take one of them, there's eight more." Seamus, too, expressed that he was "just at the beginning" of a new spiritual journey, one that would likely take him a lifetime of searching. Still, most of them were skeptical of religion, being wary of any group-based system because of its likelihood of becoming "power hungry" or creating "a lot of dogma."

Broadening Conceptualizations of Authenticity

My interviews with Ben and Isaac provided one last property of this reconsideration

phase: expanding definitions of authenticity. These two boys showed little hostility towards those who were seen as Emo posers. In fact, they were compassionate towards them. This change can be illustrated most clearly by first highlighting the more narrow conceptions of authenticity displayed by some of the younger participants, who became hostile toward anyone who was seen as an Emo poser. Cody, for example, felt threatened when students perceived to be Emo posers started to dress like him. “I hate them,” he said:

Like, they’ll go up to you and be completely Preppy, and they’ll be like, “Oh, where did you get your snake bites?” And I’ll be like, “Oh, I did them myself,” or I’ll just make something up, because I don’t want them to go to the same people, and then the next day they’ll show up at school with snake bites, and I hate it.

In comparison to Cody, Isaac and Ben had begun to expand their conceptualization of authenticity. In one of our last interviews, Isaac recalled the times when he got angry at Emo posers, which he now views as being misplaced:

I used to be like, “Wow, those people are so dumb.” And I got riled up about it. But now I look at it, and I’m like, “Wow, that was really immature.” Who cares if they’re trying to find something like this that I found and enjoy? I mean, why shouldn’t I even try to help them along in finding something awesome? They’re just trying to find themselves still. They’re still looking. The poser kids are just looking for themselves. They still haven’t found it. That’s all there is to it.

Isaac was more compassionate towards those who might be labeled as Emo posers. He also acknowledged that the “poser” phenomenon might be a more universal, and hence less offensive, experience. Ben also shared this sentiment. In Ben’s opinion, people become “posers” to

experiment with an image they found appealing. He also speculated that “in any culture...you’ll have people who accuse others of being posers.” With this mentality, Ben expressed some discomfort in calling anyone a poser. “Who am I to say what they are?” Ben said. “It’s hard to call people posers when they’re exploring themselves. Who am I to say what’s genuine? And who am I to say that there’s one objective expression of “alternative?” People have their own interpretations of it.” The elasticity shown in these narratives is not in evidence in the initial stages of commitment, despite adolescents’ protests from that stage that they were “more accepting than the preppies.”

In sum, these narratives suggest that reconsideration can mean a variety of different things. For some, reconsideration means minor changes in oppositional crowd norms, with smaller efforts taken to remain distinct from any mainstream norms, such as through DIY fashions or underground music. For others, reconsideration may also mean a less hostile attitude toward conventional ideologies, such as organized religion. And for others, such as Ben and Isaac, reconsideration means still broader changes, with a rejection of the mentality that the only way to be authentic is to oppose mainstream values. For these two boys, aligning with even popular norms can be meaningful and authentic.

Conclusion

Grounded in participants’ narratives, I developed an emergent theory of oppositional crowd identity development that includes phases of exploration, commitment, constriction, and reconsideration. Each phase is characterized by a different set of behaviors and perceptions, reflecting the multidimensional nature of a crowd affiliation. The process-oriented explanation of my theory also reflects the dynamic nature of an oppositional crowd affiliation.

This theory provides no causal claims about the factors that lead to an oppositional crowd orientation. It does, however, provide the context for the immense loneliness and isolation that set adolescents on the road to oppositional crowd commitment. Before they found peers who shared their unique interests, these adolescents struggled to be in relationships. Many reported experiences of self-loathing and insecurity. These feelings could be illustrated in their behaviors: Among the 16 total participants, nine had engaged in cutting or other forms of self-mutilation and three had attempted suicide.

Participants' family backgrounds could also profile as high risk: Over half of the sample (69%) reported that their parents were divorced or separated. Half reported that their parents had not earned more than a high school degree. One came from parents who spent time in prison. These findings suggest the need for greater support for such students, and underscore the importance of more research on the antecedents of their high-risk behaviors.

Yet in terms of their oppositional crowd identity development, I found little support for the pathological cast often associated with Emo, Goth, or Punk adolescents. Rather, the data fit a developmental model of ample exploration, a process which has been associated with ego integrity and mental health (Schwartz, 2005). The model I propose suggests that a period of exploration—characterized by loneliness and insecurity—precedes a commitment to oppositional crowd ideals, which serves a variety of functional purposes, albeit short-lived ones. When their unique styles become unoriginal and mainstream, the functionality of these crowd norms wanes, and feelings of constriction arise. Those feelings, coupled with shifts in pop culture, increased opportunities afforded to adolescents in school, and growing self-esteem and personal interests, prompt a reconsideration of oppositional crowd commitments.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

Adolescents in the Goth, Punk, and Emo crowds have been identified for their strikingly unusual or even shocking appearances (Besic & Kerr, 2009). Self-identification with these crowds has also been linked to self-harm and poor mental health (Young et al., 2006). These findings have raised concern about the consequences of Goth, Punk, and Emo memberships, with some researchers suggesting targeted interventions (Fritz, 2006). Yet almost no research has asked the affiliates of these crowds directly what it means to be a part of those crowds, or how their crowd affiliation has shaped their development. My work represents a first step toward addressing that gap in the literature. Grounded in the experiences of 16 Goth, Emo, and Punk adolescents, I developed an emergent theory that highlights the lived experiences of belonging to one of these crowds, and outlines four major phases of oppositional crowd identity development: exploration, commitment, constriction, and reconsideration. These phases underscore the dynamic quality of oppositional crowd affiliations and provide a framework for understanding the rise and fall of these particular subcultures.

In this chapter, I relate my findings to the larger body of literature on peer crowds, heavy metal music, and self-injury. I also relate my theory to other models of personal and social identity development, and compare my findings on the Goth, Punk, and Emo crowds to another “alternative” culture, the rave scene. In doing so, I illustrate the ways in which commercialization challenges the authenticity of these groups. Lastly, I acknowledge the limitations of my study, offer recommendations for further research, and provide some personal reflections on conducting this study.

Interpretations

Crowd-Behavior Link

Crowds are believed to share “interests, attitudes, abilities, and/or personal characteristics” (Brown et al., 1994, p. 123), and this belief has been substantiated in the literature. Researchers have found a link between crowd affiliation and a variety of behaviors, such as alcohol use or sexual activity (La Greca et al., 2001; Sussman et al., 2004). A link has also been found between crowd affiliations and mental health (Brown & Lohr, 1987; La Greca & Harrison, 2005), as well as crowd affiliations and vocational aspirations (Johnson, 1987). Two basic tenets have been offered to explain these associations: socialization effects, wherein behaviors, attitudes, or goals from one individual become “contagious” to another individual; and selection effects, wherein adolescents tend to associate with those who are most similar to themselves.

I, too, found a link between the Goth, Emo, and Punk crowd affiliation and a variety of behaviors. All participants were similar in their dress, musical tastes, and ideological commitments. Some of these similarities were attributable to socialization effects, seen in their gradual adoption of fashion styles and musical tastes in their commitment, constriction, and reconsideration phases. For the most part, though, participants seemed to have engaged in these behaviors before they were committed to their crowd. Indeed, most participants described their fashion styles, musical tastes, and ideologies as stemming from a difficult childhood, a broken family, or their experiences of isolation from popular students in middle school. These experiences—not a crowd affiliation—seemed to guide participants toward behaviors like

cutting, an affinity toward darker music, and a rejection toward mainstream or conventional ideas. This finding supports the notion of selection effects to explain the association between adolescents' behaviors and their crowd. It also supports participants' insistence that their behavior was original, not group-driven.

Purgative Functions of Oppositional Crowd Behaviors

Erikson (1980) held that identifying with a peer group is a healthy part of adolescent development, as the peer group provides an intermediate step in the process of de-attaching from parental figures and forming an independent identity. My work corroborates this notion. For each participant, the Goth, Punk, or Emo crowd was an important, accepting social support during a time of isolation and emotional distress. But these crowds provided more than a sense of belonging. Through their music and, surprisingly, their self-injurious behavior, these crowds served a purgative function, dissipating adolescents' accumulated anger and frustration.

This effect was particularly evident with scream-o music and heavy metal. Participants listened to this music when they were angry, and it consistently had the effect of making them less angry and of calming them down. These findings are similar to those of other researchers (Arnett, 1991; Miranda & Claes, 2009; Saarikallio & Eerkkila, 2007), who found that adolescents' choice in music was largely related to the ways they coped when they were frustrated or anxious. These findings might seem surprising, given the growing parental concern about this music and the belief that such music incites reckless behavior (Ashby & Rich, 2005). Yet my findings suggest that adolescents' music choices might be a reflection, rather than a cause, of their despair. Moreover, these findings suggest that, at least for some adolescents, listening to this music might provide them a helpful outlet. Lucy spoke to this possibility: "[The

music] makes you feel like—‘cause you feel like everyone doesn’t really understand you—the music can connect to you, and help you feel better.” The adolescents in my study found something consoling in the themes of their scream-o or heavy metal music, even if those themes were based on alienation or pain.

A similar function was found from adolescents’ self-reported cutting behavior. Contrary to the assumption that cutting increased pain, my participants used cutting as a strategy to alleviate feelings of acute pain. They also used cutting as a way of “feeling something,” either through the sight of blood or the physical sensation of cutting, thereby regaining a sense of self and a feeling of control over their bodies. These findings coincide with the research on the functions of deliberate self-harm, which has speculated that self-injury may also be used as a way to influence or manipulate people in the self-injurer’s environment, for self-punishment, or for sensation-seeking (Klonsky, 2007; Skegg, 2005).

That cutting was a common link in my sample was not surprising. Their age range, experiences with interpersonal difficulties, and history of depression fit the identified profile of “self-harmers” in the literature (Klonsky, 2007). Moreover, research suggests that self-harm is rife in young people in general. In a meta-analysis of self-harm prevalence, Skegg (2005) found that one fifth of high school students reported at least superficial self-mutilation (i.e., behaviors that result in mid-to-moderate tissue damage). Among clinical samples, prevalence estimates of self-harm range from 21% - 61% in youth (Heilbron & Prinstein, 2008). Researchers have attributed the rise in self-harm prevalence to a “contagion effect,” suggesting that adolescents are more likely to cut themselves if their peers are also engaging in cutting (Heilbron & Prinstein,

2008). As cutting seemed to be a prevalent practice in all three schools I visited, this contagion effect might partially explain my participants' behaviors.

With that said, my participants adamantly denied that they cut because their peers cut. To them, cutting that stemmed from a contagion effect was poser-like behavior and represented an obvious gesture of inauthenticity. Indeed, my participants insisted that their cutting was not to attract others' attention, and they were highly agitated by those who publically cut or who blatantly revealed their cutting scars. Participants seemed to be aware of the growing stigma towards deliberate self-harm, and that, too, has been reported in the literature. In a recent study, researchers presented a vignette to medical students, describing a young female who self-harmed through abuse or drug misuse (Law, Rostill-Brookes, & Goodman, 2009). Students who were told the self-harm was from drug misuse believed the girl to be responsible for her self-harm, and reported higher feelings of anger and a lower willingness to help her than did those who were told the self-harm was from abuse. As self-harm has been linked to lethality and suicidal intent (Skegg, 2005), these findings are troubling, as they suggest a level of ambivalence—or anger, as was shown in Law et al.'s (2009) study—toward self-harming adolescents who seek medical care.

Models of Identity Development

Despite the functionality of these crowds, there were trade-offs to crowd membership that, over time, began to feel burdensome for adolescents. The fashion norms began to feel time consuming. The ideologies began to feel constricting. In addition, the image they had once regarded as radical and different began to seem commercial, even mainstream and popular. These changes, coupled with growing opportunities for extracurricular involvement and

adolescents' growing self-esteem, appeared to facilitate a new social identity structure—one that was still oppositional to mainstream values, but with slightly more moderate ideals.

These changes highlighted a developmental process of crowd identity that has been implied, but never made explicit, in previous peer crowd research. Kinney (1993), for example, highlighted the ways in which “nerds” became “normals,” but put forth no developmental model. Kinney's focus, too, was only limited to environmental factors, such as the amount of clubs or structured groups available in high school as compared to middle school. McFarland and Pals's (2005) work also examined the factors associated with peer crowd identity change, yet their results only attributed perceived identity imbalances for facilitating identity change. My work, following the tenets of Vondracek et al.'s (1986) developmental contextual framework, provides a more comprehensive analytical tool in accounting for both individual and contextual factors associated with oppositional crowd identity development.

Personal identity development. The phases in my theory also tie into the broader literature on personal identity development, which has put increasing emphasis on the dynamic, process-oriented nature of identity (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Bosma & Kunnen, 2001; Meeus, 1996). Identity theorists who have studied domains of personal identity development under Marcia's status model have argued that identity is not simply achieved after initial periods of exploration and commitment. Instead, current commitments are often reconsidered, especially during times when commitments are no longer satisfactory (Crocettia et al., 2008). The idea of this reconsideration phase guided my own work, and provided me with a definition that had shared meaning with other identity theorists' work. Porfeli, Lee, and Vondracek (2010), for example, found the reconsideration phase to map nicely into their assessments of vocational

identity development when they found themes of reassessment in adolescents' career plans.

Others have identified a reconsideration phase in highly anxious adolescents, speculating that higher anxiety may be related to weaker initial commitments and a greater likelihood of revising them over time (Crocetti, Klimstra, Keijsers, Hale, & Meeus, 2009). I included a reconsideration phase in my model because it conceptualized the ways participants revised their oppositional commitments. When they became more thoughtful about their existing crowd commitments, they were doing more than simply exploring, because they were revisiting existing commitments. Similarly, when they found new ways of crowd expression, they were doing more than simply committing, because they were abandoning some choices and considering new ones. Reconsideration was an apt term for these changes, as it highlighted a distinct phase of development.

Minority group identity development. My work also complements other models of minority group identity development. Phinney's (1989) ethnic identity development model, for example, theorizes that ethnic minorities experience a period of unexamined ethnic identity issues, often characterized by an unquestioning preference for the dominant culture, followed by a period of exploration to an achieved or committed ethnic identity. Models on the development of sexual identity development have also been proffered. Cass (1979), for instance, created a homosexual identity development model that theorizes that sexual minorities (e.g., those who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual) experience a period of sexual identity confusion, sexual identity pride, and finally, sexual identity synthesis with other aspects of the self. Yet another example of minority identity development comes from Downing and Roush's (1985) work on feminist identity development. Their model, which provides a framework for understanding the processes

women go through in confronting sexism in contemporary society, starts with a period of passive-acceptance of traditional sex roles, moves toward a period of anger over female oppression and dualistic thinking, and progresses toward a period of restraint, relativistic thinking, and synthesized feminist and personal values.

Each model focuses on a different minority group identity, and highlights different environmental constraints or influences on the developing individual. Yet these models share a variety of characteristics: All situate the development of a minority group identity in the context of mainstream norms (e.g., for ethnic identity, it is White culture; for feminist identity, it is the “White male system”; for homosexual identity, it is heterosexism). All incorporate experiences of discrimination or stigma. Additionally, all view the minority group identity to be a dynamic construct, one that follows a general arc from a phase of identity confusion, to extreme group expression, to a synthesized group identity with a more integrated sense of self.

In many ways, my model of oppositional crowd identity development parallels these models of minority group identity development (see Table 7 for commonalities across these models). The development of an oppositional crowd identity, like a feminist identity, homosexual identity, or ethnic identity, occurs in relation to a mainstream group. In the current study, that mainstream group was the prep crowd. Similar to the other models, progress through my model is characterized by initial identity confusion, followed by a complete rejection of mainstream norms, and followed by a more integrated social identity structure.

Table 7

Phases of Minority Group Identity Development (Top) and Proposed Phases of Oppositional Crowd Identity Development

(Bottom)

Cass's (1979) sexual identity	Sexual confusion	Sexual identity comparison	Sexual identity tolerance	Sexual identity acceptance	Sexual identity pride	Synthesis of sexual self with other aspects of self	
Phinney's (1989) ethnic identity	Unexamined ethnic identity	Ethnic identity search			Achieved ethnic identity		
Downing and Roush's (1985) feminist identity	Passive-acceptance of traditional gender roles	Revelation of traditional gender role injustices		Embeddedness-emanation: "sisterhood is beautiful"	Synthesis	Active commitment	
Oppositional crowd identity	Loneliness, isolation	Social niche exploration		Oppositional crowd Commitment	Feelings of constriction	Reconsideration	

Other Alternative Cultures

My model includes a sociological component in its acknowledgment of popular culture. Participants' movement from their original commitment phase to the phase of reconsideration was strongly connected to their awareness of shifting popular culture norms. Vampire-themed movies like *Twilight* and commercialized Punk and Emo- vendors like Hot Topic spurred the commercialization of an aesthetic that was once unique. Because of these broad, sociological changes, many of my participants lamented that the authenticity of their crowd was lost. This decline in authenticity has been noted in sociological literature, which is filled with studies on popular music scenes and speculations on the ways in which an alternative subculture becomes mainstream. Anderson (2009), for example, noted a transformation in Philadelphia's early rave scene, noting that the commercialization of the scene—illustrated in the shift from grass-roots parties in obscure locations with egalitarian DJs to big city clubs with professional DJs—brought out the rave scene's decline. Anderson also attributed this shift to young people's feelings that the scene had become "too alternative or deviant for its own good" (p. 322). My theory complements Anderson's work by illustrating the evolution of several other oppositional cultures. And like Anderson's work, my theory underscores the importance of studying individual development in context.

Recommendations for Further Study

My theory was developed from post hoc descriptions from a small group of adolescents, and was limited in its scope of oppositional peer crowds and in its reliance on a narrow group of social-type raters to recruit participants. Due to these constraints, my model should be considered

emergent and in need of refinement. More work should be made to test the model's validity and generality, ideally with a longitudinal design. Longitudinal methods may reveal a more sophisticated developmental process, with more than four phases to account for an oppositional identity.

Further tests of this model are also needed to clarify the effect of chronological age on the acquisition and reconsideration of an oppositional crowd identity. In the current study, expressions of initial crowd commitment came from the younger participants; expression of reconsideration came from the older participants. Future research may reveal the possibility of entering the reconsideration phase at a younger chronological age.

This model should also be tested on a variety of other oppositional crowds. It would be interesting, for example, to see if these phases of development would apply to Gangsta cultures, which express lower-class African American culture; greaser, stoner, or druggie cultures, which express lower- or working class White culture; and hip-hop culture, which fuses elements of gangsta culture across racial/ethnic and class groups.

This theory provides more of a process-oriented explanation of oppositional crowd identity than it does a variable-oriented explanation. Yet variable-oriented explanations come into play at each phase of this developmental process, and my focus on them was heavily guided by the developmental contextual perspective—a perspective that highlights the dynamic interaction between the individual and variables from multiple contextual spheres (Vondracek, 2007). For example, hostility to mainstream norms (a macro-level variable), tumultuous family and peer group relations (micro-level variables), and poor self-esteem and mental health (intra-personal variables) were common themes in the narratives of adolescents who had committed to

an oppositional crowd. Future studies that test my model would benefit by assessing the role of macro-level variables of popular culture, micro-level variables of family and peer group relations, and intra-personal variables of self-esteem and mental health in the shift from exploration to oppositional crowd commitment.

Future studies should also test the variables associated with the shift from an oppositional crowd commitment phase to the reconsideration phase. In my model, that shift was associated with feelings of constriction, which were characterized by an awareness of shifting popular norms (a macro-level variable), growing school opportunities (a micro-level variable), and increased self-esteem (an intrapersonal variable). Future tests of my model should examine the role of these variables in the shift from oppositional crowd commitment, to constriction, and finally to reconsidered oppositional norms.

In summary, my emergent theory provides a process-oriented explanation of oppositional crowd identity development, but also provides descriptive detail of each phase of development. In so doing, I have laid the groundwork for future research. The phases I outline in my theory, and the factors associated with movement through each phase, can be tested with a focus on the intra-personal, micro-, and macrolevel variables specified above.

Personal Reflections

By far the most satisfying aspect of this process was meeting the adolescents and hearing their stories. I was grateful that they would open themselves up to me, someone who had the status of an outsider. Truly, my outsider status was my biggest concern in this project. The literature has described Goth-like crowds, with distinct tastes and behaviors, as having more

rigid in-group/out-group boundaries than other crowds. The collective identity around those shared characteristics has been associated “with an equally intense suspicion of outsiders” (Hodkinson, 2005, p. 135). As I was clearly an outsider, I wondered if recruitment would be a challenge, and once I had recruited these adolescents, whether they would be willing to talk with me.

Some of these concerns were realized. Several adolescents were skeptical of me, at least initially. Lucy was definitely of that mentality. At the end of an interview, Lucy confessed her initial skepticism toward me, expressing that she was only interested in meeting with me to earn the few dollars I would pay her for participation. By our second interview, though, she was more receptive. “Now,” she said, “I just like talking to you, because you seem very friendly, and that’s nice, because I haven’t been around a lot of nice and bubbly people.”

This skepticism was the exception and not the rule. For the most part, adolescents seemed to recognize that participation would provide them a unique opportunity: to talk about themselves in a non-therapy-based environment. Many had extensive experience in therapy, but few had been given the opportunity to talk with someone who simply wanted to know their stories. “It’s nice to talk to someone who hasn’t read, like, my whole file,” Zoe told me:

I have a file, like, this big. My therapist has it, and I think the school has it, but...I’m like, I think it’s better if you heard from the person instead of reading the file. It’s basically, like, mental health issues, and they have to report that. But I wish I could just tell people my story instead of them looking at my papers and judging me. And I know you’re not judging me, but other people are like, “Is she okay? What’s goin’ on...?”

Emily conveyed a similar attitude: “Like, I’ll talk to a counselor [about myself], and they’ll be

like, okay, you've been through hard stuff. But you're just like, 'oh, wow!' And it's like, thank you, Annie. I like that you like to listen to me."

My casual dress and demeanor seemed to relax the boundaries between my role as a researcher and adolescents' role as participants. Indeed, I think they viewed me as a friend. "I'm glad you aren't all humble-jumble about this project," Emily wrote to me in an e-mail, "and you're willing to get down to us kids' level to actually speak (ACTUALLY speak) with us." These responses made me hopeful that participants saw me as a person in whom they could trust. They also increased my confidence in the validity of my findings, as I believe their stories to be honest and rich in detail.

Many viewed their participation as a means of greater self-understanding. After reading my manuscript, Seamus wrote me a note of thanks:

I just have to say thank you for giving me the opportunity to do this. It was very informative for myself. Reading this gives me an awesome little window into myself and what I was thinking then and what I see now.

Others simply felt validated by my attention. A touching moment came when I received a note of thanks from the father of one of the participants:

Thank you so much for the time that you took with Rosannah. I realize of course that this was for your research and not for her benefit, but you can understand how someone who feels herself such an outsider feels validated by your attention. I would be very interested to see your thesis when it's done, if you can spare an extra copy. Thanks again for showing such interest in my girl.

Despite my role as a researcher and not a therapist, participants still tended to view our interviews as therapeutic. When I asked Courtney if she would be willing to meet me for an additional interview, she seemed eager to meet, simply for the opportunity to vent about the problems in her life. “Meeting would be great,” she wrote. “I’ve got a lot on my mind, if that’s all right with you.” It was almost as if Courtney wanted me to brace myself for a long and emotional interview. And brace myself I did. I often used the time in my car to prepare myself, both mentally and emotionally, for each interview. After each interview, back in my car, I would also take a few moments to myself, jotting down some notes or just closing my eyes and take a couple deep breaths. These moments of self-care were important. This process was tiring. Completing this project while maintaining a full-time job was challenging enough, but the subject matter of this study—rife with stories of self-harm and depression—made the challenge seem even more draining.

When I would get weary, though, I would reenergize myself with the reminder that I was giving these kids a voice. They had rarely been heard. Little research had illuminated their feelings and experiences. “[Participating in this project] will be super awesome,” Rachel said, “‘cause nobody has ever come to me, and been like, ‘‘I’m in college, and I wanna research your kinda people.’’” Those statements meant a great deal to me. They validated my choice to research an understudied group, and kept me motivated to see this work to its completion.

Conclusion

Adolescent peer crowds are a relatively new feature of society, affecting most American teenagers only since the 1930s (Cross & Fletcher, 2009). Since that time, efforts to assess these

crowds have abounded: the characteristics of peer crowds (e.g., Brown et al., 1994); the predictors of crowds (e.g., Lacourse et al., 2006; Prinstein & La Greca, 2002); how peer crowds are related to behavior (e.g., La Greca et al., 2001) or mental health (e.g., Sussman et al., 2004); and the function of crowds (e.g., Eckert, 1989; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Brown & Lohr, 1987). A wealth of knowledge has been generated from these studies and has informed recent methodological considerations on ways to better define and measure crowd affiliations (Cross & Fletcher, 2009).

Despite these works, little scholarly attention has been given to the small, “alternative” crowds that form in many schools and fall outside the larger, more conventional crowds in American schools. Moreover, almost no research has asked the affiliates of these crowds directly what it means to be a part of those crowds. My work addressed this gap in the literature. By employing an in-depth approach that accounted for individual expressions of Goth, Punk, or Emo crowd membership and acknowledged the role of context in adolescents’ crowd affiliation, I provided an emergent theory that highlights the lived experiences of belonging to an oppositional crowd. There are important research questions to be addressed, such as the iterative nature of these phases or their applicability to other crowd types, but my hope is that this study brings some conceptual clarity to the area of crowd identity development and stimulates further research on these interesting crowds.

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Appendix A

Email or Verbal Script for Recruiting Students

A graduate student named Annie Pezalla is doing research for her PhD at Penn State University to learn about high school crowds, and she's particularly interested in learning about the Goth, Punk, or Emo subcultures. Annie is trying to contact anyone who might know about these subcultures, to see if they'd be willing to participate in this research. Because you have the reputation of [insert oppositional subculture], I thought you might be interested in participating.

The research project would require a couple hours of your time. Annie would meet with you after school for 2 one-hour interviews. You'll be paid for your time in the study.

If you are interested in participating, please contact Annie by telephone or e-mail to discuss the details of the research project. Because you are under 18, she'll need your parent or guardian to sign a consent form before interviews.

Appendix B

<p style="text-align: center;">ORP OFFICE USE ONLY DO NOT REMOVE OR MODIFY THIS BOX IRB# 33006 Doc. # 1001 The Pennsylvania State University Institutional Review Board Office for Research Protections Approval Date: 02-04-2010 JDM Expiration Date: 02-01-2011 JDM</p>

Informed Consent Form**Implied Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research**

The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Exploring the Meaning and Impact of the Goth, Punk, or Emo Crowd: A Grounded Theory

Principal Investigator: Anne E. Pezalla, M.S., Doctoral Candidate, Department of Health and Human Development and Family Studies, South 110 Henderson Building, University Park, PA 16802; (952) 426-0484; aer180@psu.edu

Advisor: Dr. Sherry Corneal, Department of Health and Human Development and Family Studies, 211 East Henderson, University Park, PA 16802; (814) 272-0777; ccc3@psu.edu

1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research study is to understand how you came to affiliate with the Goth, Punk, or Emo crowd, and how you identify yourself.
2. **Procedures to be followed:** You will be asked to participate in several in-depth interviews. The first interview will assess your background history; the second interview will assess your identity commitments. These interviews will be audio-recorded. The audio recordings will be stored in a locked office, and only I will have access to these recordings. The recordings will be destroyed in 2015.
3. **Discomforts and Risks:** There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.
4. **Benefits:** This study is not only beneficial to the scientific psychological literature on adolescent identity development, but it may also benefit you in deepening your understanding of yourself.
5. **Duration:** Your participation in this study will last approximately several weeks. We will meet two times for interviews. If unanswered questions exist after these two meetings, an additional interview may be required.
6. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential. No personally identifiable information will be shared with others as a result of your participation. The Pennsylvania State University's Office for Research Protections and Institutional

Review Board, and the Office for Human Research Protections in the Department of Health and Human Services may review records related to this project.

7. **Right to Ask Questions:** Please contact me, Annie Pezalla at (952) 426-0484, or my advisor Sherry Corneal at (814) 272-0777 with any with questions, complaints or concerns about this research. You can also call this number if you feel this study has harmed you. If you have any questions, concerns, problems about your rights as a research participant or would like to offer input, please contact The Pennsylvania State University's Office for Research Protections (ORP) at (814) 865-1775. The ORP cannot answer questions about research procedures. Questions about research procedures can be answered by the research team.
8. **Payment for participation:** The sum of \$25 will be paid to you for your participation. The sum will be paid at the end of the study.
9. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise.

Please sign both copies of this form and keep one copy for your records.

Print child's name _____ Date _____

Parent Signature _____ Date _____

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of Principal Investigator _____ Date _____

Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix C

Oppositional Crowd Characteristics

- What should I know about what it means to be part of the Goth, Punk, or Emo crowd?
- What drew you to this crowd?
- Are there particular beliefs or attitudes that might be seen as Goth, Punk, or Emo?
- What kinds of music do you like? Is there a particular kind of music that most Goth, Punk, or Emo teenagers listen to?
- Tell me about what you're wearing. How do your clothes represent your crowd's subculture?
- Tell me about your day-to-day activities. Are there things that you like to do that are shared by other teenagers in your crowd?
- How does being part of your crowd affect your relationships? Your spirituality? Your ideas for your career?
- Tell me about the different crowds in your school. How does your crowd interact with these other crowds?
- Are there other Goth, Punk, or Emo students in this school? If so, do you interact with them?

Developmental History Form

Questions crafted by Dr. Sherry Corneal, and adapted from the Youth Evaluation Form from the Center for Youth Studies and Social Policy, Penn State University

Demographic information

- Where are you currently living? Have you always lived there? If not, where else have you lived?
- How many siblings are in your family?
- How many people (grand total) live in the household? Who are the people in your household?

Family

- Describe your upbringing with your family. What are some noteworthy memories of growing up with your family?
- How would you characterize your parents' relationship?
- Do you feel listened to/understood by your family?
- Can you talk about problems with your family?
- Does your family respect your privacy?
- If problems occur in your family, what, in your judgment, causes them the most frequently?
- Do you have any strong negative feelings toward your family members? If yes, what are those feelings? Do you have any strong positive feelings?
- What would you change about your family?
- How would you describe your relationships with each parent? Each sibling?

Relationships with Peers

- Have you had any problems finding and maintaining good relationships with youths of your own age? If yes, what are those problems?
- Do your friends have serious problems of their own or create big problems for you in some way? If yes, what are those problems?
- Do you have a best friend? Tell me about that relationship. What does it mean to be a good friend?

School

- What events stand out when you think back to your days in elementary school and middle school?
- Have you recently had or do you presently have any strong feelings about school that make (or made) it difficult to attend school? If yes, how would you describe the problem?
- Have you recently had or do you presently have any particular problems doing your school work? If yes, what were those problems?
- Do you have any strong negative attitudes or feelings toward people in positions of authority over you (e.g., police, teachers, school principals)? If yes, who are those people and what are those feelings?
- Have you ever received counseling from anyone in school? Out of school? If yes, from whom? How was that experience for you?

Identity Status Interview

Questions adapted from Grotevant and Cooper's Extended Identity Interview Manual from the Family Process Project, University of Texas at Austin

A few introductory comments:

I'm going to ask you about your current thinking on six different topics: your future plans, religion, politics, friendships, dating, and men's and women's roles. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions; I just want to know what you think about these issues.

This interview usually takes about 45 minutes and will be taped. Your comments will be kept strictly confidential. Only my advisor and I will listen to the tape.

Do you have any questions before we start?

Introduction:

What school do you go to? What year are you in?

How far along did your father get in school? What does he do now?

How far along did your mother get in school? What does she do now?

Occupation:

What are you going to do after high school?

Are you planning to go to college? Do you know what you will major in? What do you plan to do with it?

When did you come to decide on (career choice)?

What people or experiences have been major influences on your plans for the future?
(Probe re: teachers, parents, reading, etc.)

Did you ever consider anything else? What? Anything besides that? What seems attractive about _____?

Most parents have plans for their children, things they'd like them to go into or do – do yours have any plans like that for you?

How do your folks feel about your plans now?

What kinds of difficulties or problems do you see associated with your decisions to _____?

If these things were to become difficult, what would you do then?

Religion:

Do you have any particular religious affiliation or preferences or philosophy?

How about your folks?

How did you come to be a _____?

What people or experiences have influenced your thinking about religion?

Were you ever very active in your church? How about now? Do you get into many religious discussions?

How do your parents feel about your beliefs now? Are yours any different from theirs?

Was there every a time when you came to doubt any of your religious beliefs? When?

How did it happen? How did you resolve your questions? How are things for you now?

Do you anticipate that your religious beliefs will stay the same or change over the next few years?

Politics:

Do you have any particular political preference?

How did you come to that decision? How long have you been a _____?

Are there any issues you feel strongly about? (Probe re: National level, state, local, or school, but DO NOT suggest specific issues to react to.)

Have you ever taken any kind of political action – joined groups, signed petitions, written letters, participated in demonstrations about politics or political discussions – anything like that?

How about your parents' political preferences?

What people or experiences have influenced your thinking about politics?

Have there been times when you have felt differently about your political affiliation (or issues)? When? What made you change?

Do you expect your political involvement or attitudes to stay the same or change over the next few years?

Friendships: (Clarify whether adolescent has same-sex or opposite-sex friends; find out about both, if possible)

Do you have 1 or 2 close friends – people who you spend a lot of time with?

How long have you known them?

What do you do and talk about together?

What are the important things a friend should be? (Ask for explanations of qualities like “trust”)

What do you value especially about your friends?

Would you say that your close friends are similar to you or different from you? In what ways? (Probe re: How about the rest of your friends and acquaintances?)

Is your idea of what a friend is or should be the same as it used to be, say, when you were in middle school? How?

If your closest friend changed in some way that you didn't, would you still be friends? (for example...)

Why is it that good friends sometimes grow apart?

Do your parents encourage you to spend time with your friends? (Probe re: How frequently do you friends come to your home?)

What kinds of friends do your parents think you should have?

How do they feel about your friends now? (Probe re: Do they trust them, like them, encourage you to be with them, make an effort to know them?)

Have you and your parents ever disagreed about whether your friends are responsible or level-headed?

Have you ever begun a friendship or maintained a friendship with someone of whom your parents disapproved?

Was this disagreement resolved in some way? How?

Dating:

Do you date from time to time? How often?

Who decides where you go or what you do on a date?

What are you looking for in the people you date?

Has that changed since you started dating? How?

How does that compare to what you look for in a friend?

How important is it for your dates to talk about feelings with you?

How important is it for your dates to be ambitious or intelligent?

What qualities do you *not* like your dates to have?

What experiences or people have influenced your choices?

What other standards or unwritten rules do you follow on a date?

Are there rules or standards that are discussable or that you would be willing to change in order to maintain a relationship?

How do your rules compare to that of your friends?

Have you changed your rules or standards since you started dating? If yes, what brought about those changes?

Have your parents ever disapproved of someone you dated?

Was this disagreement resolved in some way? How?

Men's and Women's Roles:

Some people feel that men and women are basically different in the way they think or behave or act with other people. Do you think men and women are different? How?

Men are often thought of as having strong goals and being forceful and direct. How do you feel about women who act this way? Do you know any women who act this way?

Women are often thought of as people who express their feelings and emotions openly toward their friends. How do you feel about men who act this way? Do you know any men who act this way?

Now I'm interested in finding out how you think married couples should deal with the many tasks involved in the family.

Who should take care of the young children (infants or preschoolers)? Who should provide financially?

How should major decisions, such as buying a car or house, be made? What if only one person makes the money?

Are there some situations where one member should have more voice than another?

When?

Do you anticipate situations where your answers could be different? What situation?

How do your parents handle each of the family responsibilities we have been discussing?

Do you discuss these issues with your parents? With your friends or dates?

What other people or experiences have influenced your thinking about men's and women's roles?

Do you expect that your ideas about men's and women's roles will stay the same or change over the next few years? Have your ideas changed over the last few years?

Curriculum Vitae
Anne E. Pezalla

EDUCATION

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY, University Park, PA
Ph.D. in Human Development and Family Studies, *May 2011*
M.S. in Human Development and Family Studies, *April 2007*

SAINT OLAF COLLEGE, Northfield, MN
B.A., *magna cum laude* in Family Studies, *May 2003*

PUBLICATIONS

Raup-Kreiger, J., Pezalla, A. E., & Mooreland, J. (2009). The places we are: A communication theory of identity perspective on rural cultural identity among adolescents. Manuscript in preparation.

Pezalla, A. E., & Miller-Day, M. (2008). Teens communicating identities: High school may not be so confidential. *Communication Currents*.

Pezalla, A. E., Pettigrew, J., & Miller-Day, M. (2008). Methodological considerations of the 'researcher as instrument' metaphor: An exercise in interviewer self-reflexivity. *Southern Communication Journal*. Manuscript in preparation.

Miller-Day, M., & Pezalla, A. E. (2008). The presence of children in communication research: A content analysis. *Journal of Family Communication*. Manuscript submitted and under review.

PRESENTATIONS

Pezalla, A. E., Walsh, M. L., Brown, M. (2011, February). Assessing the assessors: Determining a model for effective asynchronous writing feedback in doctoral programs. Paper presented at the Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education.

Walsh, M. L., Pezalla, A. E., & Holland, N. (2010, January). Assessing the impact of a writing center consultation on the reduction of errors on a doctoral paper: A quasi-experimental study. Paper presented at the Walden Residency Research Symposium, Dallas, TX.

Pezalla, A. E., Pettigrew, J., & Miller-Day, M. (2009, May). Methodological considerations of the 'researcher as instrument' metaphor: An exercise in interviewer self-reflexivity. Paper presented at the Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, Champaign, IL.

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