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# Examining the Portland Music Scene through Neo-localism

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Examining the Portland Music Scene through Neo-localism

by

Tyler James Brain

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Science  
in  
Communication

Thesis Committee:  
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Portland State University  
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## **Abstract**

This study explores the Portland music scene as a context in which local identity is constructed and communicated in a globalized world. Further, this study develops the notion that the impacts of globalization are varied by locality and uses the concept of neo-localism to discuss this variance. Portland bands (n=8) were interviewed concerning their experiences in the local music scene. The results showed that participants conceptualized local identity as being 1) based in community, 2) culturally saturated and 3) connected to musical production. Further, results showed that participants were increasingly aware of this local identity, were aware of a global perception of this local identity and were aware of other local identities. Overall the results from this study support neo-localism as a useful conceptual lens for understanding local identity for Portland bands.

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to all the Portland bands that play for the love of music.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## NEO-LOCALISM IN THE PORTLAND MUSIC SCENE

### Chapter 1: Introduction

The turn of the last century began an exciting time in the Portland, Oregon music scene. Local and global awareness of the scene was on the rise, as local Portland bands were creating music with independent roots and a gritty, homegrown style. To be a band from Portland was beginning to mean something. For example, in 2000, Colin Meloy left his home in Montana and moved to Portland to form The Decemberists, an indie rock band which started gaining national notoriety with their first self-released album, *5 Songs*, in 2001. Their fame grew steadily through the ensuing decade and The Decemberist's latest album *The King is Dead* debuted at #1 on Billboard Top 200 charts in January 2011, selling 94,000 copies its first week (Montgomery, 2011) and removing any doubt that the Portland band had garnered a local, national, and international following.

In 2002, James Mercer moved from his home in Albuquerque, New Mexico to Portland, bringing his up and coming indie band The Shins along with him. Just five years later the band had gained such a national and international following that their 2007 album *Winning The Night Away* debuted at #2 on the Billboard Top 200 charts, selling 118,000 copies its first week (Billboard, 2011). That same year, another Portland indie band, Modest Mouse, released *We Were Dead Before The Ship Even Sank*, an album that debuted as #1 on the Billboard charts (Billboard, 2011). Throughout the course of the



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decade, each of these bands and many more (Blind Pilot, Floater, Horse Feathers, etc.) helped to influence the global perceptions of the identity of the Portland, Oregon music scene.

While the prominence of these bands was impacting global perceptions of the local music scene, a local self-awareness of the Portland identity was growing as well. In 2004 the popular music venue Doug Fir Lounge opened. According to their website this “made a dramatic impact on Portland’s music scene” (Doug Fir, 2011). The impact was that local Portland musicians and audiences were gaining a context in which they could interact and create shared experiences. Other local live music venues were popping up around town as well, such as Mississippi Studios, whose Facebook page states that it is “a venue built by musicians, for musicians and music lovers alike” (Mississippi Studios, 2011). This local awareness and interaction was not just enhanced through live performances, but also through local press and through a new local festival called PDX Pop Now! which showcases local bands. This festival was created when:

...14 people envisioned local music emboldened by local recognition, and were driven to ignite it. The idea: that Portland’s self-sustained scene had reached a level deserving of recognition, discovery, enhancement, stimulation, participation, accessibility and—most importantly—celebration! Thus, the PDX Pop Now! music festival was born in 2004. (PDX Pop Now!, 2011, About section, para. 2)

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As participants engaged in the local Portland music scene, norms of interaction (such as collaboration and supportiveness) began to be established which added to a shared interpretation and perception of local identity among local musicians. For example, the founders of PDX Pop Now! state that the festival “mirrored the collaborative nature of Portland’s music scene; one where cooperation trumped competition” (PDX Pop Now!, 2011, About section, para. 1).

The relationship between musical production and perceptions of local identity has a long, storied history (see Frith, 1978; Frith, 1996; Kong, 1995a; Kong 1995b; Peterson & Bennett, 2004). Kong's (1995b) study of regional identity and musical production in Singapore showed local music to be a powerful way in which locals synthesized their perceptions of local identity. Another study of college undergraduates indicated that even a young generation, assumedly with limited knowledge of the history of American music, consistently associates country music with Nashville, blues with Chicago, jazz with New Orleans, and indie rock with the Northwest (Shobe & Banis, 2010). This naturally leads to questions of how the perceptions linking musical production with local identity are formed and to what extent musicians are aware of a link between their music and their locality. Literature looking at the function of music scenes suggests that they serve to create a context where interaction takes place among scene members (Lewis, 1983). Identity construction literature suggests that this kind of group interaction serves

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to construct shared interpretations of experiences (Burke & Stets, 2009). Further, that these shared interpretations function to establish interactive norms and group identity (Burke & Stets, 2009). This suggests a link between music scenes and the construction of local identity, but it is one that has not been shown in the literature. It certainly seems that for James Mercer and The Shins and a myriad of other local bands there is something about the nature of the Portland music scene that makes playing music in (and *from*) Portland different than playing music in and from other places. Some research suggests that local music scenes may serve as a context for constructing individuals' perceptions of local identity, as well as for creating cultural artifacts (music and band images) which represent that locality to the rest of the world (Kong, 1995b).

The emergence and prominence of local identity in a globalized world is a relatively recent concept, constructed from literature discussing the potential impacts of globalization. This concept of a resurgence of local identity is developed and referred to by many authors (see for example Appadurai, 2006; Gotham, 2005; Lieberg, 1995; Massey, 2005; Murray, 2006; Schuerkens, 2003; Strassaldo, 1992). Of these, several authors have explicitly used the term neo-localism to refer to this concept (Gotham, 2005; Lieberg, 1995; Schuerkens, 2003; Strassaldo, 1992). While neo-localism is a term that has seen increased use in theoretical literature, very little empirical research has been conducted using neo-localism as conceptual framework (Schuerkens, 2003). Literature

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suggests that neo-localism is not fostered because of isolation from the rest of the world, but through increased integration with the rest of the world (Massey, 2005; Murray, 2006). Schuerkens (2003) further argues that neo-localism:

can be found in numerous societal fields: in the economy, politics, environmental movements, cultural values, etc.... it can be an expression of fortification, revitalization or reinvention of local cultural identities and traditions based on ethnic, social, or religious elements they have in common. (p. 217)

Communication is an important aspect of neo-localism in two ways. First, identity construction literature suggests that group communication is a foundational link in establishing the interactive norms which serve to construct shared experiences (Burke & Stets, 2009; Roberts, 2000). So the ways in which groups interact and communicate with each other help them construct shared interpretations of experiences. Thus, identity construction literature would suggest that by looking at groups which are oriented in specific localities, such as music scenes, it may be possible to identify instances of group interaction which construct shared interpretations of local identity for group members. This would be an aspect of local identity understood from a local perspective. Second, local music serves as a cultural artifact which communicates aspects of a local identity to a global audience. The way in which local music scenes communicate local identity to the rest of the world serves to establish global perceptions of what that identity is like.

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For example, prior to releasing their album *Wincing The Night Away* in 2007, The Shins had toured around the United States and abroad in Europe and Australia (The Shins, 2011). This led not only to the success of their later albums, but fans around the world acquired a cultural artifact - The Shin's music - to attach to their conceptualization of Portland. If you are a Portlander trying to communicate and make sense of your own local identity, having a well known band that originates in your city gives a tangible reference point in communicating with the rest of the world and also a means of establishing solidarity with other locals. Over the past decade the success of Portland indie bands has increasingly served that purpose for Portland locals.

In summary, local music scenes serve as contexts for interactions which can go on to construct local and global awareness of local identity. Because of this, local music scenes serve as a useful means of researching neo-localism. Investigating the dialogic relationship between the music of a region and the development of the perceptions of local identity may provide evidence for the ways in which neo-localism is a useful way of discussing the lived experiences of individuals in a globalized world.

### **Justification**

This study is justified based on three grounds. First, there has been a call in recent literature to consider how globalization is changing the way the world communicates (Appadurai, 2006; Lam, 2006). Neo-localism suggests that individuals are

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communicating their identity to the world in new ways. Burgeoning local identities become global means of representation, affecting our communication practices as individuals, communities and cultures.

Second, identity construction is closely tied to communication practices and group interaction (Roberts, 2000). As globalization impacts the contexts in which communication and interaction take place, it invariably affects identity construction as well. Thus, there is a need to understand how globalization is changing communication practices and how this is in turn affecting identity construction.

Finally, this study seeks to provide one alternate narrative of globalization as suggested by Massey (2005), who calls for a re-imagining of both the past and future of globalization. She suggests that the canonized history of globalization in the United States and western Europe has created a trajectory of development against which we compare all other cultural histories of globalization. Thus, this study answers a call to expand our understanding of the multiple scales and experiences of globalization, which are impacted by locality, culture, nationality, and language. Following that reasoning, this study seeks to empirically inform the ways in which neo-localism can be used to discuss the impacts of globalization.

### **Study Goals**

Based on the justifications above, the goals of this research are four-fold. First,

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the research endeavors to understand how globalization is impacting the experiences of Portland band members by using the concepts of neo-localism and identity construction as a theoretical lens for researching the Portland music scene. Second, this research attempts to contribute to our understanding of how globalization affects the contexts in which identity construction occurs, and to what extent neo-localism is an appropriate means of discussing this phenomena. Further, this study attempts to reveal how local identity is constructed through the interactions of the local music scene and how it is communicated globally through local musical production. Finally, this research seeks to offer a new approach to studying globalization, one based on the assumption that the experiences of globalization are highly complex and varied for different populations and individuals.

To meet these goals, this study includes an in-depth review of the literature concerning globalization, neo-localism, identity construction, and music scenes. Based on the gaps in the literature and the calls by various authors for further research related to the goals listed above, a phenomenological study was conducted utilizing semi-structured group interviews of bands from the Portland music scene. The study's method, results and implications are discussed in the proceeding chapters.

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### **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Neo-localism represents a lens for discussing the ways in which individuals experience the impacts of globalization. The thinking behind neo-localism is derived from two distinct pools of literature: that of globalization and that of identity construction. To articulate how neo-localism represents a response to globalization, this literature review first gives an overview and current discussion of what globalization is. Next, the literature surrounding neo-localism and local identity is discussed. To understand how identity may be constructed in local contexts, this literature review then looks at literature pertaining to the ways in which identity is constructed through group interaction. Finally, literature on music scenes is reviewed, especially in respect to how music scenes serve to create contexts for group interaction.

Thus, the following literature review defines and discusses four key variables of this study: globalization, neo-localism, identity construction, and music scenes. Existing literature on the interplay between neo-localism and identity construction is used to emphasize the appropriateness of local music scenes as an ideal context for researching neo-localism.

#### **Globalization**

To understand the relationship between locality, music, and identity construction, we must first turn to the concept of globalization. For the purposes of this literature



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review, globalization will be defined as the accelerated rise of networks facilitating cultural and capital flows across spatial, political, and cultural borders. The networks that enable and constitute globalization are often national and international in scale, spanning distance, language, and culture. Because of this, there has been a tendency to conceptualize the cultural and sociological impact of globalization at that same scale.

Concerns about the homogenization and westernization of culture as a result of globalization have been expressed (for example Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999; Ohmae, 1995). However, there is an increasing amount of literature suggesting that these concerns view globalization too simplistically. Rather, the impact of globalization is highly complex, the flow of culture and capital is multi-directional, and the impacts of globalization are plural in nature and differentiated by locality, ethnicity, gender, and economic class (Appadurai, 2006; Bramanti, 1998; Gotham, 2005; Kong, 1995b; Massey, 2005; Schuerkens, 2003).

Thus, Florida (2008) and Massey (2005) argue that localities mediate the experience of globalization. For the indie rock band The Shins, moving to Portland from Albuquerque meant moving to a locality that heard and experienced their music differently than the New Mexico locality. By playing music in Portland, and identifying themselves as from Portland, they had access to a network of fans, venues, and most importantly a local identity that was becoming globally recognized for producing indie

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rock.

As international communication and travel have become more commonplace, national boundaries have weakened as a means of defining the boundaries of a nation's control and establishing national identity (Appadurai, 2006; Murray, 2006; Schuerkens, 2003). National boundaries have been neutered of their ability to keep people, things, and ideas in, thus defining who they are. They have also largely lost the capacity to keep those things out, which historically helped nations define who they were not. Thus, the function of the nation-state as a means of primary identification for individuals is lessening. In some cases, national identity no longer contains the specificity or nuance that individuals need to establish and understand their place in a globalized world. As nationalism declines it creates a vacuum of representation, and people are looking elsewhere to fill it. These networks have created an international society of increasing connectedness that permeates nearly every social interaction and every social context (Bromley, 2010).

According to Murray (2006), the current understanding of globalization is based on a progression of theories developed in the social sciences over the past century, which pertain to a growing international interconnectedness. These start with early social scientists such as Comte (1957), who was among the first to venture predictions that the global impact of industrialization would weaken international boundaries and spread

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Western culture.

Early theories of globalization were further developed by Marshal McLuhan (1964), who in the 1960's suggested that the continuums of time and space were affected by a progression in human communication and that three key phases of human history could be divided by the dominant forms of communication used at the time: oral, writing/painting, and electronic (McLuhan, 1964; Murray, 2006). Electronic communication had, McLuhan (1964) suggested, resulted in an abolishment of time and space. However, despite general agreement among scholars that these networks and processes are continuing to be established and are growing in magnitude and velocity, there is little agreement about the impact this is having on nations, corporations, communities, and/or individuals.

The growing international connections caused by advancements in communication and transportation technology during the 20th century resulted in an increase in the distribution of cultural and economic artifacts across the globe (Murray, 2006). In many instances, cultural artifacts such as music or food were understood and used as a saleable commodity in the new contexts they inhabited. Thus, corporate interests and monetary motivations play an integral part in globalization (Murray 2006).

Consequently, it is the economic perspective that has often been used to understand the causes and impacts of globalization. However, economic flows across the

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world are not separable from political and cultural flow (Appadurai, 2006; Massey, 2005). For example, while Capitol Records may be able to sell copies of the Decemberists latest album all over the world, the exchange is not just monetary. There is a cultural exchange at play as well, as the music and the image of the band are consumed by a global audience who develops perceptions of the local identity of Portland based on their knowledge of the Decemberists.

The networks which enable globalization are undoubtedly in place (Appadurai, 2006; Florida, 2008; Friedman, 2005; Murray, 2006). However, the impact that this process has on individuals and local identities is a topic that has not often been substantiated with anything more than theoretical postulating. Writers have expressed concern that the impact of globalization on local culture is a homogenizing one in which unique pockets of culture quietly disappear beneath the weight of normalizing, corporate-enforced globalization (Appadurai, 2006).

The argument that globalization is creating a homogenized global experience in places all over the world is an idea presented perhaps most famously by Thomas Friedman in his book *The World Is Flat* (2005). This view of globalization's cultural impact suggests that as transnational corporations (e.g., Coca-Cola and McDonald's) have sought to tap markets in other countries by duplicating brand experiences the lived experience of people all over the globe is becoming more and more similar. The

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reference to a flat world is a reference to similarity of experience due to commercial and industrial development (Friedman, 2005). But this view does not account for the multiplicity of ways in which lived experience is affected by the forces of globalization. Murray (2006) points out that “it is naively assumed that masses of the population of the culturally marginalized will passively accept these transformations” (p. 40).

In opposition to the idea of globalization as a homogenizing force, some scholars suggest that regional and local cultures and groups constitute a flow of influence that is multi-directional and does not necessarily parallel economic or political flows (Appadurai, 2006; Kong, 1995a; Murray, 2006). Massey (2005) argues that studies of globalization need to attend to other perspectives – not just economic but cultural and political as well. Further, approaches to globalization should attend to new scales of analysis - not just at the national, international or corporate level, but the local and individual (Massey, 2005). These alternative perspectives and scales of analysis are needed in order to provide a truly contemporary view of the status of globalization. Thus, there is a call to consider how different localities and cultures are responding to the pressures and presence of global networks. Murray (2006) argues that the physical proximity of a locality to networks of goods and money change the experience of globalization for the people residing there.

The concept that different localities react differently to globalization is based in

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the fact that regional identities do not exist statically but are instead practiced (Grazian, 2004). When practiced within the networks of communication and transportation that globalization consists of, regional identities become visible to the world (Murray, 2006). The practice of culture includes everything from locally produced art and music to locally affiliated sports teams. As in the previous example, the Decemberists' latest album release is an example of an artifact of local cultural practice being disseminated to the rest of the world. The practicing of local culture then constitutes an act of communication and cultural influence outward. This is contrary to the model of globalization which asserts that corporate and political powers impose a homogenized set of values and cultural precepts on the rest of the world (Murray, 2006; Appadurai 2006).

An increased flow of information around the world has had the effect of diluting national and political boundaries and yet of simultaneously making regional cultures visible (Appadurai 2006; Murray 2006). As bands in the Portland music scene produce music and disseminate it via the various channels put in place by globalization, aspects of the local Portland identity are communicated to a global audience. For Portland bands, the extent to which local identity is useful as a means of global representation may indicate how the impacts of globalization are being played out at a local level (Murray, 2006).

### **Neo-localism**

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Neo-localism refers to increased awareness and affiliation with local identity in response to the pressures of globalization. This awareness can range from putting locally specific bumper stickers on your car to engaging in local traditions or festivities to intentionally buying or producing local products to using locality as a means of organizing and interpreting global communication (Strassoldo, 1992). In the context of this study, making assumptions about the local identity of Portland based on the music produced by Portland bands would be one example of neo-localism. Or, for a Portland local, choosing to listen to a band just because they were local would also be an example of neo-localism.

The production and consumption of locally produced art and music is a particularly powerful act of communication between and within local identities. Parallel to the fear of the homogenizing effects of globalization has been the recognition that regional cultures have become more accessible and more visible because of the networks that globalization has put in place (Gotham, 2005). Thus, neo-localism not only reveals the aspects of the local that already exist but also congeals regional identities by putting them in the global spotlight. In this way neo-localism can be both descriptive of current cultural communication and also prescriptive of what further communication might look and sound like. Gotham (2005) argues that “local actors and organizations can harness the ‘local’ to produce unique products, establish locally specific social ties and networks,

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and build and enhance place distinctiveness” (p. 309). This progression which Gotham (2005) articulates, in which local individuals use local resources and experiences to produce cultural meanings which they then communicate in a global setting is the essence of neo-localism.

In the past, localism was an invisible phenomena (Bramanti, 1998; Strassoldo, 1992). People, bound to place by lack of access (economic and spatial) to transportation and communication networks instead utilized local resources and community because that was what was available. Bramanti (1998) suggests that historically as transportation and communication technology has progressed preferences towards the local have been considered socially backwards. Strassoldo (1992), suggests that the current trend toward localism reflects a new set of motivations for preferring the local:

Neo-localism is different from old localism. The essential differences are two. The first is that while old localism was ‘primordial’, unthinking, the new one is the outcome of free will, conscious choice; the former is ‘necessary and natural’, the second ‘voluntary and intentional’ (rational). The second difference is that the old localism tended to minimize contacts with the exterior, to maintain a strong closed boundary, while the new localism is quite aware of the rest of the world, and is quite open to interactions with it. (p. 47)

Thus, the former localism which Strassoldo (1992) speaks of is one in which the



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local was chosen because it was close at hand and because mobility was costly. For the same reason that children become friends with the kids who live next door, old localism was based on accessibility. However, globalization has changed the terms of cultural and relational accessibility, making local affiliation more voluntary and intentional because of a growing awareness of other localities. Neo-localism is actively placing elements of the local in the context of the global (Gotham, 2005). Thus, Lieberg (1995) points out “globalization and neo-localism are actually mutually dependent aspects of the same process” (p. 20).

In other words, locals make sense of local identities and cultural artifacts by considering them in a global context. For example, Portland, Oregon locals consume music produced by The Shins or The Decemberists with an awareness that whether or not they like the music stylistically, it is playing a role in representing their locality to the rest of the world. This active role of understanding local cultural artifacts through global contextualization gives rise to a self-conscious regional identity, enhancing place distinctiveness (Gotham, 2005).

Gotham's (2005) case study of Mardi Gras in New Orleans is a great example of locals being aware of the global eye and harnessing the local as means of regional identity. New Orleans' Mardi Gras, an annual city-wide street party, has been made famous (and infamous) through the networks of globalization to the point where other

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cities (i.e., Seattle and Philadelphia) have actually tried to duplicate the experience. In an effort to explain the lack of vibrancy and authenticity surrounding these duplicate Mardi Gras, Gotham (2005) contends that “we can add that it is also the history, the forms and types of community associations, and the intensity and extensiveness of local networks that are different in each city” (2005, p. 322). These different local networks cause different regions to practice culture differently, producing different cultural artifacts. As Gotham (2005) and Hudson (2006) point out, reproducing another region’s culture is nearly impossible, because no two regions share the same local history and social relationships. ~~TOOK OUT THE PARAGRAPH HERE INDICATING DECREASING NATIONALISM - WASN'T NECESSARY~~

Cairncross (1997), through an examination of online social networks, predicted an atmosphere of international dialogue and intercultural awareness in which this regional self-identification could occur. Neo-localism is not a matter of just revealing a regional identity that is already there – it is also the development of the unique social structures that are centered in a specific region and the promotion of those structures through global networks (Florida, 2008; Gotham, 2005; Strassoldo, 1992). The virtual networks that make it possible to self-identify in a global context, and the active self-placement and harnessing of the local to create regional identities (Gotham, 2005), is heavily connected to the online and transnational networks which globalization set in

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place. Thus, localities have become staging grounds for identity as individuals perceive their own locale from the global perspective, and use these perceptions to further present their region to the world (Appadurai, 1993; Florida, 2008).

The concept of neo-localism, in which individuals co-opt aspects of the local to represent themselves to a global audience, is relatively new. Previous eras of transportation, communication and global awareness did not facilitate this level of representation, nor has there ever before been articulated this level of self-awareness of one's own locality and identity. Thus, it is at the level of identity construction that the broad, overarching forces of globalization seem to be impacting the lived experiences of individuals. As locally based groups interact and communicate with each other, and as individuals seek to interpret cultural messages from other localities, perceptions of local identity are established, albeit from multiple perspectives. A brief discussion of the process of identity construction is an important addition to understanding the concept of neo-localism.

### **Identity Construction**

Berger and Luckmann (1967) were among the first to argue that identity construction is dependent upon the ways in which an individual acts within a social context. Maines (1977) argues that there is a difference between socialization and identity construction, specifically that learning the norms, beliefs, and values of a given

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culture is different than using them as a means of representation. For example, a person could live in Portland, Oregon and could be knowledgeable about the music scene there without necessarily affiliating themselves with the locality as a means of representation.

Identity construction is then not simply a matter of gaining knowledge about the social contexts. It is a distinct conceptual process in which individuals decide which of the myriad of norms and beliefs available in society they will acquire and ascribe to self (Roberts, 2000). Roberts (2000) concludes “identity is something which is actively negotiated by oneself or on behalf of someone and that one typically behaves according to the identity that is in search of support” (p. 56). Roberts (2000) further suggests that identity construction is a fundamentally group process and that identities are not arbitrarily taken off and put on at whim, but are dependent on the degree to which those around us support our proposed identity. Burke and Stets (2009) support this theory of identity being housed in group communication. They suggest that as people engage in groups, interactive norms (e.g. the way in which band members interact) are established which serve to create shared interpretations of experiences. These shared interpretations are then embedded in the way that group members construct future communication. For example, as Portland music scene members interact in everything from playing the same venues to hanging out at the same bars, they create norms for how those interactions will take place in the future. Thus, local bands' interpretations of their experiences in the

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music scene are based in how they interact and communicate with other bands.

In the initial conception of social construction (Berger & Luckman, 1967), it is emphasized that shared experiences are essentially shared interpretations of experience. Thus, groups create meaning from implicit agreement on the interpretation of experience (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Blumer, 1969; Kent & Kleinman, 2004; Lewis, 1983). This agreement is reached through group interaction as members communicate with each other to achieve shared interpretations. In identity construction literature, this is where symbolic interaction comes in. Symbolic interaction places meaning and interaction as the foundational units of analysis for understanding social life and for constructing identity (Sandstrom, Martin & Fine, 2004). Thus, as groups create interactive norms and shared interpretations of experience they construct what it means to be a member of the group (Burke & Stets, 2009).

One example of symbolic interaction leading to identity construction is how music scenes create context for group communication to take place, leading to shared experiences of local identity (Frith, 1978; Frith, 2008; Keyes, 2000; Kong, 1995b). The band playing in the Portland pub does not just create an atmosphere that promotes social networking and shared experiences, the lexical and stylistic content of the music itself can have powerful local ties and references which influence locals to interpret their locality in certain ways. It is these shared interpretations of experience which lend to the

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social construction of identity. Ultimately, local music scenes create context for local group communication which contributes to local identity construction both from a local and a global perspective. Local music is an agent which communicates local identity to the world. Further, local music scenes create contexts for group communication which establish shared experiences among scene members, impacting their interpretations of local identity as well.

### **Music Scenes**

Local music scenes are a good discussion point for neo-localism and identity construction because they are a constant source of message production that is tied to a geographical location and group interaction (Kong, 1995b). The practice of the scene is local (though it may be facilitated by virtual networks) in the sense that an individual can go to a real bar, drink a real beer, and see a real local band that is actually contributing to the local music scene (Lippard, 1997). Kruse (2003), for example, in a discussion of locality and independent rock music scenes references the explicit connection many of her interviewees made between specific performance venues and music scenes. Even though the scene was globally known, it was understood by scene members as being very spatially bound.

Though journalists had been using the term loosely since the 1940's largely in reference to the jazz scenes of the South and Midwest (Peterson & Bennett, 2004), Straw

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(1991) was one of the first to articulate and define a music scene academically. He proposed simply that music scenes are communication systems in which cultural meaning can be articulated. Kruse (2003) adds that music scenes are a spatially specific set of social relationships. Having established that music scenes are situated spatially, and consist of a network of social relationships which communicate culture, the following sections address music scenes as contexts for group interaction, identity construction, and particularly the creation of local identity and representation.

**Music scenes and group interaction.** Music scenes represent social networks that revolve around specific shared experiences based in group interaction. In the case of regional music scenes, those experiences are shared largely because of spatial proximity. Peterson and Bennett (2004) define local scenes as:

A focused social activity that takes place in a delimited space and over a specific span of time in which clusters of producers, musicians, and fans realize their common musical taste, collectively distinguishing themselves from others by using music and cultural signs often appropriated from other places, but recombined and developed in ways that come to represent the local scene. (p. 8)

Davidson (2002) further contributes to the articulation of music scenes by suggesting that they are instances in which individuals use and view musical performance as a means of communication and an indicator of group belonging. Members of a local

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scene realize the existence of the scene they are a part of and the local scene is constructed because members are self-aware of their place within it.

Live performances are a central construct around which the group interaction of music scenes revolve. They provide physical, local context for individuals to relate and influence each other as well as common experience and musical familiarity for scene members (Kruse, 2003). The mutual influence of musicians on each other is what gives a local scene its unique feel, sound, and identity (Bennett & Peterson, 2004; Frith, 1996; Kruse, 2003). An evolution of sound is at work, not just a group of musicians isolated from each other who happen to play similar sounding music in a similar geographic region. Rather, they are responding to each other (Bennett, 2009). Regional music scenes are thus built on the actual experiences of performers and audiences interacting. It is this very interaction that contributes to the construction of region-based individual and group identity (Lewis 1983).

The physical venues in which a music scene is set are important because they provide space for group interaction and shared experiences to occur. Brown (2007), in discussing the Portland, Oregon music scene of the late 1960's, noted that "local bands helped make the coffeehouse circuit a vital conduit of musical ideas and cultural values" (p. 246). This conduit of musical ideas implies the important link between local bands and available performance space as the necessary building blocks of reifying local



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culture. Thus, music scenes are dependent on the physical space of performance venues to act out musical dialogue and the social networks within (Brown, 2007). As the Internet has become the network on which music is researched, discussed, and disseminated, the fact that music scenes are spatially oriented is significant (Baker, Bennett & Homan, 2009). Baker et al. discuss these local, physical creative spaces as integral in “the acquisition, practice, and development of stylized forms of collective identity” (2009, p. 151). The physical spaces in which music scenes are acted out play an important role in regional identity formation and maintenance.

Music scenes are unique social phenomenon, in that they are contexts for group interaction which leads to the establishment of local identity. Wienberg (2003) suggests that “culture is essential in crystallizing our social identity and provides the common understandings that allow the social world to have a meaning” (p. 253). Thus, culture and group interaction both contribute to the construction of identity. Neo-localism is a reference to a shift in the way that local identities are utilized and communicated amongst locals as well as to the rest of the world. Just as Roberts (2000) noted that individuals behave according to the identities that are supported by other members of society, neo-localism reflects an increasing shift toward individuals affiliating with local identity when interacting with other locals.

**Music scenes and identity construction.** Many scholars have demonstrated the

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power of music in identity construction as actors use music to communicate their understanding of the world (Lewis, 1983; Kruse, 2003; Frith, 2008). Despite a trend in the literature investigating music culture as an indicator of identity chiefly for the consumer (Gabriellson, 2003), Lewis (1983) proposes that it also serves as a major form of identity for the performer interacting within the local music scene.

Music is a channel for music scene members to communicate their affiliation with the local scene while simultaneously portraying the local identity to a global audience. Lewis (1983) in writing on music as symbolic communication makes a tie between music as a communication form and identity creation by asserting that musical production is “...in fact, a means of symbolic communication that has impact far beyond the concert hall or the radio... and has power in defining or reaffirming actors' views of their social worlds” (p. 133). As recognizable, canonized communication structures, music scenes constitute instances of group and cultural interaction. They are instances of symbolic interaction in which identity is constructed and communicated (Davidson, 2002; Gabriellson, 2003; Kong, 1995a; Roberts, 2000).

When lived experiences are shared because of spatial proximity and common history, as they often are in a local scene, the music that is generated not only communicates past experiences, it also creates further experiences. Kong (1995b) argues that local music has a unique duality of structure in that it is both a conveyor and a

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product of experience, and it functions to both affect and produce social structures (see also Abrams, 2009). Music not only creates group contexts in which identity is constructed through communication, it is also a medium through which identity is communicated (Frith, 2008; Lewis, 1983). When local musicians gather in a local pub in Portland to listen to indie rock, they not only make social connections with other local musicians, they also then share an experience of what local music sounds like. This adds to the solidarity of local identity – when locals think of local music, they all be thinking of (increasingly) the same thing, and likely then creating similar music in response.

**Music scenes and local identity.** Local music scenes are an excellent discussion grounds for neo-localism in that neo-localism is the expansion or development of local identity in response to the pressures of globalization (Kruse, 2003). Local music scenes with distinct local identities exist all over the world - from New Orleans' jazz scene to Chicago's blues scene, from Washington D.C.'s grunge scene to Manchester's rock scene (Peterson & Bennett, 2004; Kruse, 2003). The Northwest United States is notable for the Seattle-based grunge and punk scene, and Portland, Oregon has recently been recognized for its thriving independent rock scene. All have distinct regional identities which have experienced increased visibility through the process of globalization (Peterson & Bennett, 2004; Shobe & Banis, 2010). Further, Kruse (2003) suggests that music scenes have a strong relationship with locality by showing that “variations between localities due to

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scene histories and current influences mean that the reception of any band or type of music will vary from one local scene to another” (p. 133).

Finally music scenes may represent an interesting example of neo-localism in that they occur in a local setting but are generally known by a global audience. Peterson and Bennett (2004) argue that local music scenes are one aspect of locality that helps it become a functional means of representation and differentiation for individuals in a globalized world. Music lends uniqueness to places, just as places lend uniqueness to music. If music is played differently in Portland, it is also heard and understood differently coming from Portland. If for a moment we look at music as culturally produced messages originating in specific places, it is interesting to note that these messages are interpreted differently based on where they originate. Kong (1995b) supports this, suggesting that music is interpreted by a global audience based on where it originates. Music as means of communication is not divorced from the underlying culture which produces it. This is a phenomena that makes local identity a force that ultimately allows individuals to negotiate new ways of communicating and representing themselves (Kong, 1995a; Schuerkens, 2003).

While music scenes are created and defined by the tangible acts of local public performance by local people with a local musical dialogue, they also serve to communicate local identity to a global audience. Thus, the increased identity of both

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locality and local music scenes through the recent years is not only explained by, but also dependent upon, globalization and the increasing awareness of what it means to be local. This suggests that music scenes are a context for investigating instances of neo-localism.

### **Conclusion**

Localities can no longer be discussed outside of the influence of globalization. However, the traditional view of globalization as a simplistic uni-directional pressure on culture is outdated and inaccurate. New conceptualizations of how globalization has impacted the lived experiences of individuals are rising, and neo-localism is one interpretation that provides insight into the complex effects of globalization on local identity and music scenes more specifically.

While there is a pool of literature discussing the notion of neo-localism, it is still largely conceptual, and empirical research studies are needed to add more insight. Especially missing is research carried out with the intent of understanding how local identities and profiles have increased as a result of the pressures of globalization rather than decreased and how this increase in itself constitutes neo-localism. This is in line with Massey's (2005) argument for re-imagination of the impacts and experience of globalization from a multiplicity of perspectives. Thus, there is a need for subsequent research to flesh out the essence of neo-localism as a phenomenon that is shaping the ways in which people communicate local meanings and identify themselves with local

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identities in a globalized world. Local music scenes have retained a vibrancy and strong local tie in the face of globalization largely *because* globalization makes local cultural artifacts available to a broader audience (Bromley, 2010).

Further, music scenes play an important role in communicating culture and identity. It permeates culture in a way that makes it an ideal grounds for discussing social trends. Neo-localism is a social phenomena which warrants further discussion, and local music scenes offer a lens with which to do so.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions are derived from my analysis of the literature on neo-localism, identity, and music scenes. These questions seek to flesh out the concept of neo-localism by using it as a lens for discussing the interplay between local music scenes and local identity in a globalized society. The two primary research questions are:

RQ 1: In what ways does the Portland music scene act as a context for constructing local identity for Portland bands?

RQ 2: In what ways is neo-localism evident in the way that Portland bands communicate about local identity?

### **Chapter 3: Method**

As the purpose of this study is to understand the experiences which relate to neo-localism, it is logical to seek to understand the essence of those experiences by focusing on a study population which is likely to be particularly aware of local identity. Local music scenes represent a form of cultural production that may be especially impacted by the networks and flow of globalization. The current literature suggests that music can be both representative of a group of people as well as communicative about local culture.

Actively interacting in a local music scene is a group activity which generates shared experiences and perceptions among group members. There is, however, a gap in the literature informing how local music scenes act as context for constructing local identity and the extent to which this may be an example of neo-localism. Studying this experience requires adopting a research lens that allows for the broader theme of neo-localism to emerge as music scene members make sense of their experiences. The interpretive paradigm is a lens that many scholars have employed when attempting to understand the essence of human experience, as it allows the researcher to reflexively build understanding throughout the research process (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Thus, with the interpretive paradigm the essence of the experience of music scene participation can emerge over the course of the investigation.

This chapter outlines a qualitative group interview method from an interpretive

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paradigm designed to investigate experiences and awareness of local identity through conversations with local bands engaged in the Portland music scene. The interpretive paradigm and phenomenological methodology used in this study are explained below with justifications for their appropriateness. Further, participants, procedures and data analysis are described in detail.

### **The Interpretive Paradigm**

The orientation by the researcher towards the nature of knowledge for this study is that of the interpretive paradigm. Graneheim and Lundman (2003) point out that an assumption underlying the interpretive paradigm “is that reality can be interpreted in various ways and that understanding is dependent on subjective interpretation” (p. 106). Thus, in every text, context, or situation there are multiple possible interpretations of reality. Because of this, in qualitative research it is important for the researcher to have an understanding of the participants and the content being researched (Graneheim & Lundman, 2003). Further, this paradigm suggests that interpretation is about analyzing how people make sense of what has happened rather than documenting the logistical physics of what has happened. Thus, the assumption of the interpretive paradigm is that though there are multiple ways to interpret any single scenario or text, the researcher is making an effort to make interpretations that are an accurate reflection of the way participants make sense of their world. The interpretive paradigm is fitting because this



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study seeks to explore local identity as defined by members of a music scene.

Phenomenological methodology pairs nicely with the interpretive paradigm because it offers a process for categorizing and investigating the human experience that the interpretive paradigm recognizes as knowledge.

### **Phenomenological Methodology**

Historically, phenomenology refers to a philosophy about the nature of human experience and the meaning of existence (Goulding, 1999). It has its origins in philosopher Soren Kierkegaard's (1959) observation that human experience makes sense to those living it prior to their conscious interpretation of it (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Patton, 2002). Just as empirical events are considered to contain inherent meaning which can be discovered through empirical research, phenomenological methodology treats human experiences as containers for structured meaning that can be discovered through qualitative research (Patton, 2002). For example, in quantitative research a scholar may attempt to document the number of albums sold, the number of gigs played, and perhaps the amount of traffic that a particular band gets on their website to determine the band's popularity and cultural impact. The underlying proof of social impact of the band would be assumed to be discoverable through these positivist research methods.

Phenomenology on the other hand is based on the underlying assumption that lived experience makes sense to the people living it without conscience effort (Lindlof &

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Taylor, 2002; Schutz, 1967). In phenomenology, the underlying experience of the band members gives clues to how the production of their music relates to local identity. Thus, the assumption of this methodology is that experiences contain an integral set of meanings that can be discovered and understood by a researcher. This study employs phenomenology as the methodology for three reasons: 1) it seeks to understand human experience rather than explain it, 2) it assumes that there is logic in how humans make sense of those experiences, and 3) it employs a double hermeneutic in which the researcher interprets the interpretations of the participants.

To further explain this, Dukes (1984) suggests that a phenomenologist's job is to seek to understand human experience, rather than to explain it in terms of causality or correlations with other phenomena, which is often the goal of positivist, empirical research. For the current study, the assumption of this methodology is that the lived experiences of music scene members can shed light on the interplay between the structures and networks of globalization and the awareness and construction of local identity. Phenomenology is a useful lens for this study because it allows the researcher to look at neo-localism not just as a set of abstract networks, structures, or processes, but also as a set of meanings that help individuals make sense of lived experience.

Second, in conducting a phenomenological research method, Dukes (1984) emphasizes the importance of “seeing the inherent logic of human experience and

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articulating that logic or sense faithfully, without distortion” (p. 198). Lindlof and Taylor (2002) argue that from a phenomenological perspective, experiences have a structure that is recognizable and discoverable, regardless of the contextual facts surrounding them.

Thus, conducting research from a phenomenological perspective includes the assumption that the root experience of a particular phenomenon will remain the same, despite differences in context, and thus will be discoverable in any one instance.

The third element of a phenomenological methodology, that applies specifically to this study of neo-localism, is what Smith and Osborn (2009) call a double hermeneutic, in which while “the participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world” (p. 53).

Thus, understanding is subject to two layers of interpretation – the participants' interpretation of their own experience and the researcher's synthesis of that interpretation. The strength of this structure of investigation is that a trained researcher, being an outside observer, can have insight into an experience that a participant is less aware of (Smith & Osborn, 2009).

In the present study, the local musicians were not able to accurately and explicitly relate their experiences in the local music scene with the broader processes of identity construction, neo-localism, and globalization. Relating those experiences to the broader conceptual framework is done in the following chapters by the researcher. In a study of

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neo-localism and a local music scene, understanding the experience of identifying oneself and relating one's music with a particular locality is an important piece of understanding how people are negotiating life in a globalized world.

### **Participants**

**Criterion.** To be qualified for this study bands had to meet criterion regarding 1) whether they were an active band and 2) whether they affiliated themselves as being from Portland, Oregon. For this study, being an active band was defined as engaging in the local music scene either by performing at least one time within the Portland metro area between January 1 and April 30, 2011 or indicating that they were in the process of recording during that same time frame. Further, being an active band meant that the bands were identified by a consistent, recognizable name and consisted of the same core musicians each time they perform or record. While it is typical for musicians to organize and attend open jam sessions in which a variety of musicians are invited to attend and participate, bands in this study were part of closed groups comprised of select musicians who acted under a formal or informal consensual agreement to produce music together. This allowed them to develop a band identity and also to have a history of experiences together. It is for this reason that the unit of analysis in this study was the entire band, rather than individual musicians or randomly generated focus groups. While individual musicians would likely be able to share meaningful reflections on their experiences,

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interviewing band members as a group allowed the participants to assist each other in articulating their interpretations of the experience of engaging in a local music scene.

The criteria of affiliation with the local identity of Portland was verified by checking the band's Myspace, Facebook, or personal websites. It is typical for bands to provide their local affiliation on these sites, and this was found to be the case for each of the bands in this study.

**Sampling method.** Participants for this study were recruited by the researcher via a purposive and snowball sampling method. According to Smith and Osborn (2009) purposive sampling works well for interpretive research because this sampling method “finds a more closely defined group for whom the research question will be significant” (p. 56). The purposive method works well for a phenomenology because it intentionally selects participants who are likely to have considerable history with the experience being studied (Dukes, 1984). The goal of the purposive sampling method for this study was to identify and recruit participants who are engaged in the local music scene in order to mine their underlying experiences of neo-localism and globalization. Additionally, to increase access, the researcher incorporated a snowball sampling method by asking participants for references to other local bands. Of the eight bands interviewed, two of them were identified and selected via snowball sampling.

**Sample.** For this study eight bands from the Portland, Oregon music scene were

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interviewed. This sample size is in line with that suggested by other researchers, who recommend a sample of three to ten when conducting a phenomenology (Dukes, 1984; Smith & Osborn, 2009). Band size ranged from 2 to 5 members, with a mean size of 3.3 band members. In all, 27 individual band members participated in this study, 10 (37%) females and 17 (63%) males. The average age of all participants was 28.6 years, with an age range of 22 to 38.

Portland was selected as the research locale because of its dense concentration of music venues and its prominent local music scene. All of the venues used in this study to identify potential bands fell within the Portland city limits. However, the identity of Portland as a locality is better described as between the suburb of Hillsboro on the western side of the city to Gresham on the east to Tigard on the south to the Columbia River on the north which also serves as the boundary between Portland, Oregon and Vancouver, Washington (see Appendix A). These boundaries effectively orient the study in the city of Portland; however, it should be noted and allowed for that the musical culture in question is not necessarily confined nor affected by these largely imaginary political geographic boundaries.

### **Procedures**

First, bands for this study were recruited by analyzing the online booking schedules of several local venues which featured independent rock in Portland, Oregon

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(see Appendix B). These venues serve as hubs for the social, geographical, and musical interactions that make up the local music scene in Portland, Oregon (Brown, 2007).

Second, contact information for these bands was generated via the band's MySpace or personal webpage or via contacting their booking agent. Third, an initial email was sent to each of the bands, introducing the researcher and the focus of the research (see Appendix C for recruitment script). Lastly, interviews were set up with bands who responded to the solicitation, and the subsequent group interviews were conducted in a variety of neutral settings (i.e. local coffee shops, pubs, and the band's own rehearsal space).

**Interview technique.** A semi-structured interview technique was used to conduct group interviews (Huntington, 1998; Patton, 2002; Watts & Ebutt, 1987). The following section discusses the rationale for why group interviews were the most appropriate method for collecting data, and then describes the semi-structured technique which was utilized in conducting those interviews.

Group interviews have been found to be most effective in situations where individuals with a common history are interviewed simultaneously to better access their shared or common experiences (Huntington, 1998). Watts and Ebutt (1987) warn against conducting the group interview as "several individual interviews simultaneously" (p. 25) but instead encourage interviewers to facilitate an exchange of ideas and memories

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among the group, to best capture shared experiences. Huntington (1998) points out that:

...in the group interview, the participants are able to encourage each other to recall specific events, to spur each other's memories, and to discuss the details of a particular item in order to arrive at a consensus based on their knowledge of the area and of each other (p. 240)

This proved to be the case in this study as well, as band members were able to dialogue amongst themselves as they communicated and made sense of their experiences. They were also able to help each other articulate their experiences, as well as offer alternative narratives for many of the experiences being discussed. Just as the entire band engages and performs in the local music as a group, interviewing them together as a group was an important aspect of accessing their experiences of local music scene participation.

Group interviews fit well with the semi-structured interview technique in that "the participant or participants are guided in the discussions by the interviewer, but the direction and scope of the interview are allowed to follow the associations identified by the participants" (Huntington, 1998, p. 238). Thus, while the loose topic was set (i.e. Portland identity and the local music scene) and maintained by the interviewer, there was also a very reflexive component (Huntington, 1998; Patton, 2002). As interviewees began to diverge relevant experiences and knowledge, the interviewer asked probing questions that directed the conversation towards the most relevant topics. For example,



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the first prompt on the interview guide (Appendix D) asked bands to take a few minutes and tell the history of the band up to the current moment. This history often provided a long set of follow up questions (Why did you move there then?, What prompted you to change your band name?, etc.). Further, Huntington (1998) suggests that a list of topics and questions is a useful guide as long as the interviewer is flexible in working with the participants to guide the participants towards areas of their own experiences and expertise (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

According to Lindlof & Taylor (2002) and Patton (2002), semi-structured interviews should last for approximately 60 minutes. The average interview length for this study was 59 minutes and 15 seconds and the interviews ranged in length from 31 minutes and two seconds (31:02) to one hour, 26 minutes and 51 seconds (1:26:51). This time frame allowed enough time for the participants to be able to discuss their experiences without topic fatigue. For each group interview the researcher outlined the general topic of the research and the basic concepts that were to be explored before the interview begins. The researcher then acted as a discussion guide, keeping the conversation focused on the list of topics and questions pertinent to the research questions (Huntington, 1998; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Patton, 2002).

Before the group interview began, participants' rights and anonymity were discussed by the researcher, and each participant was given an informed consent waiver

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which included permission to audio record the interview (see Appendix E). Once all members gave consent, the band was interviewed. During the group interviews the researcher documented the event by taking field notes and recording the interview with an audio recording device.

This process of recruiting participants and conducting interviews was repeated until the researcher believed that theoretical saturation was met. Theoretical saturation occurs when the core themes identified in the interviews are repeatedly found in each interview, and no further themes appear to be emerging (Patton, 2002). In this study, theoretical saturation occurred at five group interviews. At that point, three additional interviews were conducted to fully flesh out the themes and to more easily identify outliers. As this was a phenomenological study, these themes reflected the underlying variables of the experience of neo-localism.

**Supplementary questionnaire.** In addition to the group interviews a questionnaire was filled out by each individual band member to gain background demographic information. The questionnaire collected information regarding length of residence and affiliation with Portland, demographic data, band history, and a few questions regarding the local music scene and took approximately 10 minutes to complete (see Appendix F for full questionnaire).

The questionnaire served as a preliminary orientation to the topic for the

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participants, and it helped to eliminate close-ended and potentially awkward questions from the interview agenda. This helped the participants save face with the interviewer and the rest of the band and instigated an open conversational environment (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). This open environment was key for helping the participants articulate their involvement and association with the regional music culture without feeling that their status with that group was in anyway compromised.

### **Data Analysis**

The final data set yielded 474 minutes of audio recording. Each of the interviews was transcribed verbatim, netting 319 pages of data. All of the transcripts were identically formatted in 12 point font, double spaced with one inch margins and averaged 39.8 pages in length. The longest transcript totaled 68 pages and the shortest totaled 26 pages. Seven of the interviews were transcribed by a paid transcription service, while one the transcriptions was done by the researcher. Random sections from each transcription was then checked with the original audio file to ensure for accuracy.

A thematic analysis of the data was conducted, in which the transcripts were read through in four stages. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) define a themed analysis as "a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon" (p. 82). Further, Boyatzis (1998) defines a theme as "a pattern in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at

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maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon” (p. 161). With this in mind, the first stage consisted of taking notes on potential themes and flagging possible themes with color coded flags. The second stage consisted of further describing each theme and re-flagging quotes or flagging new quotes as necessary. The third stage consisted of flagging the key quotes for each theme which were likely to be used in the results section. The fourth stage consisted of reading back through the transcripts with an open mind to ensure that no themes had been overlooked. This process allowed themes to emerge and develop naturally without being forced.

**Verification.** Lindlof and Taylor (2002) suggest that there are several different ways that a qualitative researcher can ensure credibility. Verification of the results was established through using thick, rich descriptions of the themes, auditing by a fellow trained researcher, and by conducting member checks (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). First, credibility was established through providing thick, rich descriptions of the emerging themes in the results section. These included extended quotes from the bands, as well as descriptions by the researcher of how those quotes fit into the overall data. These thick, rich descriptions contain nuanced details that help to guard against oversimplification of the data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

The results were also audited by a fellow researcher familiar with the data and the research method to ensure that the themes were credible and accurate. This helped to

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guard against researcher bias in interpreting the data and in identifying emergent themes. Themes and results were confirmed by the audit, adding credibility. Lastly, member checks were used to verify credibility. Member checks consisted of checking the themes and results back with participants to ensure that they concurred with the conclusions being made by the researcher (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Several sections of the results containing quotations and interpretations were brought to the respective bands and verified for accuracy. Participants verified that the themes and results deduced by the researcher were consistent with their original intentions and that the conclusions made by the researcher were accurate representations of their experiences.

The data collected using this method produced several themes which work to answer the research questions. Those themes indicate that the study sample is aware of the local Portland identity and is able to articulate their experiences of playing in the local music scene as well as talk about instances in which the local scene interfaces with local identity. The following section provides thick, rich descriptions of each emergent theme, as well as an explanation and summarization by the researcher of how those themes answer the research questions.

### **Chapter 4: Results**

Given that the goal of this research is to better understand how local identity is constructed and perceived by Portland bands, this chapter outlines the way in which the themes from the data serve to answer the two research questions. Specifically, in the following pages each theme is described in detail and then supplemented with several quotations before being distilled by the researcher. The research questions are discussed below in sequential order. To preserve the privacy of the participants, all band and participant names used in the results and discussion are fictional.

The benefit of the group interview method was clear in the data set. Nearly every prompt elicited responses from more than one band member, and participants were able to dialog and help each other articulate complex experiences. Not every study population would consist of tightly knit groups with common experience the way a music scene does; however, the method worked well for this population.

The results for the first research question unpacks the way in which the Portland music scene acts to construct Portland identity for the participants. This question – in what way does the Portland music scene act as a context for the construction of local identity for Portland bands? – drew on descriptions from the participants articulating the way they perceived local identity and how that identity is connected with the local music scene. Three overarching themes emerged from the data: community, cultural saturation,

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and musical production. Participants discussed each of these themes as an important characteristic of the local music scene which impacted their experiences and interpretations of the local Portland identity.

### **Community**

One of the most prominent themes to emerge from the data was that of community. Participants articulated community as a set of place-specific norms for the ways in which scene members interacted and communicated with each other. Bands described these communications as being housed in the context and activities of the Portland music scene, and it was clear from the data that this concept of community was foundational to their perceptions of the local identity of Portland.

Further, the idea of community was constructed by participants as being a spatially oriented group in which the norms of interaction (e.g. band members socializing at a live performance) were generally collaborative and supportive. The spatial orientation was tied to Portland because that is where the majority of face-to-face group interactions, such as live performances and recording, took place. Participants talked about how their interactions in the scene were overwhelmingly positive and welcoming and indicated that their response to these norms was to reciprocate similar support to other bands. Because this type of interaction was centered in Portland, participants connected these experiences with their perceptions of local identity. This aspect of

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community is explicated by Acoustic Juice, a band whose members had spent time living in Los Angeles and had some experiences in other localities to compare the Portland community to:

(Acoustic Juice, lines 351 – 362)

Keith: People live in Portland because they like the community. It's like a collective of like "hey, this is a place where I can do art" but it's like there's, this is a really inspiring community at the same time. There's always stuff here that, and people who are almost similar in mind, y'know, at least that's what we've experienced.

Bruce: Yeah it is kind of a different feel. It's almost like more in L.A., in a sense, like, people treat themselves more as like individuals, y'know? I've noticed that everything from like when I go and visit my parents, going for a walk, saying hi to people and people are just like, don't want to say, things like, y'know, and to a point it's like most people aren't trying to be unfriendly, it's just like the culture is a lot different. Maybe that plays kind of a role where people are a little more open, y'know, say thank you to bus drivers and, like, in Portland compared to like L.A., if you're on the bus and you don't have a car it's this total different, like, woah kind of thing, y'know, it definitely has something to do with the community I would say.



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Here Acoustic Juice has articulated two key understandings which relate to community. The band clearly understood community as being 1) based in interactive norms and 2) attached to the local identity of Portland. They are emphasizing that the interactive norms for Portland are different than those in Los Angeles. They also highlighted that the nature of these interactions is what characterizes their perceptions of the local Portland identity. This close relationship between the way in which people interact and local identity is emphasized similarly by the band Sheriff of Nottingham:

(Sheriff of Nottingham, lines 463 – 466)

Tim: I've found the difference between the people here in Portland and anywhere else is Portland's more of a very creative city, you know everyone seems to be um, everyone's super supportive of everyone, everyone's open to ideas...

The quotation above emphasizes that Tim understood the nature of people's interactions as being supportive, and this carried on to his perception of the Portland identity as a whole. Further, data shows participants understand these interactive norms as community. The fact that the open, supportive interactive norms of the Portland music scene were understood and conceptualized as community by participants is further elaborated by Franklin:

(Prince of Pieces, lines 344 – 347)

Franklin: Yeah, but I don't, it [Brooklyn] doesn't have the same community base

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that I think Portland has. It's... there's a good music scene there but it's not like how everybody in one place and the sense of community you get with bands in Portland...

Interestingly, the above excerpt indicates that a functional music scene exists in Brooklyn, but that the interactions of that scene do not necessarily constitute a community (at least for Franklin). This quotation articulates the point that, while the community that exists in the Portland music scene is an integral part of the local identity, it is possible for music scenes to fully exist and function without the existence of a coinciding community. Because community is built upon the norms of interaction and the ways in which scene members communicate, the context of a music scene can exist without the parallel existence of a community if the interactive norms do not foster or support it. Thus, for participants in this study, the interactive norms which made up their concept of community also functioned to construct their perceptions of local identity. Participants thus perceived the Portland music scene as not just different than other music scenes, they perceived the existence of the community component as something other cities did not possess. Community then emerged as a key component of how participants experienced and constructed perceptions of local identity.

Participants showed that they saw interactive norms as being what constituted community by emphasizing that the interactions were group centered in the Portland

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music scene (which fostered community) as opposed to individually centered (which was associated with no community) in other music scenes. For example, in the following quotation Acoustic Juice talks about how in Los Angeles the focus is on gaining individual notoriety:

(Acoustic Juice, lines 703 – 721)

Keith:...San Francisco just totally has a different feel in terms of, y'know, and L.A. We grew up there. Totally different feel in terms of music [scene]. L.A. is a competition. Everybody, it's like pay to play most of the time. Everybody's like just trying to get into this place and y'know, there's this level of hype that people want kind of associated with their project that, y'know what I mean?

This focus on the individual performer is different than the community based interactions of the Portland music scene which are brought out here by Jessica from The Krafters:

(The Krafters, lines 315 – 319)

Jessica: There's a... I don't remember what African language, but the word for music and dance are the same, and so I don't know I've been thinking of that right now, how it [the Portland music scene] is such a community based thing and if a musician is playing then everybody's dancing and it's not about being a rock star, it's more about the whole picture, the group, the community aspect and I think I'm drawn to that.

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As the above excerpts show, participants indicated that part of the uniqueness of the Portland community stems from the way in which bands perceive their role in the community and the ways in which they act those roles out in group settings. In the above example, Jessica is suggesting that the role of being a scene member means being part of an audience as well as a musician. Ultimately, Jessica is suggesting that in the music scene context, performers and audiences are not separate entities, but that the roles are equivalent and that they are distinguished by the way in which they interact and communicate with each other (i.e. supportively and collaboratively). These supportive interactions which take place in the spatial environment of the music scene were perceived by Jessica and other participants as community.

As scene members act according to the recognized norms for scene involvement, their interactions construct shared interpretations of their experiences. These shared interpretations are a central part of how bands perceive the local Portland identity. Band members also indicated that they use these shared meanings of local identity when communicating amongst themselves in the local scene. Participants indicated that live performances in the Portland music scene often attract audiences which are comprised of musicians from other local bands. Thus, when one band plays, they are often playing for an audience of other band members. The following excerpt connects this mutual influence to community interaction:

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(The Krafters lines 300 – 303)

Zach: That was also part of my reason for relocating [to Portland] too, I've been really trying to look for that in music, that kind of feedback loop and that ability to go up there and play your art, that also begets other art from like everybody else just keeps that thing turning where sometimes you just go to a show and are like "well, that's pretty" y'know?

Zach here is indicating that the activities of the local music scene are rooted in mutual influence. This influence occurs through the group communication (i.e. both songs and interactions) of the music scene. As musicians participate in the community both as performers and audience members it affects the music they then create as well as the ways in which they interact. The interactive norms of the local scene are based on a previous history of interaction. When they are acted out, this norms communicate meanings about local identity to scene members as well as a global audience. When prompted by the researcher to explain why the interactive norms in the Portland music scene are different than other places Franklin suggests that it is:

(Prince of Pieces, lines 285 – 290)

Franklin: Cause we're all in the same boat.

Gregory: Yeah.

Franklin: We're all broke, we're all trying to make music. What it comes down to

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is we all have this idea that we want to do. I've never been in any place in my entire life where there's like a city full of people that feel the same exact way. It's pretty amazing....

This quotation suggests that the interactive norms which characterize the community in the Portland music scene are partly due to similarity in life situation and in goals held by the musicians. This points to two sub-themes of community which emerged from the data: non-competitiveness and economic relief. These subthemes fleshed out the ways in which participants saw community as the connection between the music scene and local identity. Thus, the following describes the subthemes and how they support the idea of community as a whole.

**Non-competitiveness.** A sub-theme of community that emerged from the analysis was the degree of competition (or rather lack thereof) that existed in the interactions of the Portland music scene. As established above, the data suggests that the Portland music scene creates a context where local bands interact, creating a community, and that as this interaction plays out it constructs the participants' perceptions of local identity. Non-competitiveness emerged as a descriptor of the norms of communication and interaction which take place within the Portland music scene. Non-competitiveness as a sub-theme exemplifies how central communication is to group interaction and identity construction within the Portland music scene.

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Participants used the idea of competition in group communication styles to contrast their perception of Portland with other local identities. The transcripts discussing this theme suggest that music scenes in which bands compete for individual attention, and in which the goal is to “make it” (participants repeatedly referenced Los Angeles and New York), had substantially different norms of interaction and ways of communicating than the Portland music scene, and that the difference was the degree of competition which existed between bands. For example in the following quotation, Jared from Acoustic Juice contrasts the degree of competition in the Portland scene to that of Los Angeles:

(Acoustic Juice, lines 710 – 721)

Jared: Yeah, but it is. It may or may not exist, but, you get a little y’know feeling of that and it almost sounds really cliché to be like “oh, L.A., everybody’s trying to make it” and stuff but that’s not even so much what it is....but people, yeah, it’s [the community feel] just a different feeling. It’s almost like, I mean, it [community] does exist there too, when we played in L.A. we had a friend on the bill who, our friend Britton who plays with us, she met at South by Southwest like a few years ago, they had set it up, and it was great, it kind of had that [competitive] feel, and everybody, not to say that people aren’t cordial either, other places, it was, it was a great evening, everybody’s really respectful and

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everybody's exchanging kind words and it's a great thing, but it's, maybe just because we live in Portland to experience more I felt like the community aspect of it...

In this passage, Jared is referring to a recent experience playing a show in Los Angeles while on tour. Looking at the last sentence of that quotation, Jared contrasts the competition of the L.A. music scene (in which everyone is trying to make it) with the community aspect of living in Portland. For Jared, the degree of competitiveness in the way people communicated was central to his experience of what constituted community for both Los Angeles and Portland. Lack of competition in Portland is a characteristic of the community which he is associating with the local Portland identity. To re-iterate the connection between non-competitiveness and music scenes, the data revealed that music scenes create a context for interaction. As this interaction takes place, the way in which scene members communicate with each other establishes interactive norms. The music scene then becomes understood as a community of people who interact according to those norms. This creates shared experiences which band members associate with local identity, because that is where the music scene is oriented.

This theme also highlighted examples in the data in which band members referred to music scene identity as synonymous with broader local identity. For example, non-competitiveness was a key interactive norm in the local Portland music scene, which



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Jared also applied to his understanding of the broader local Portland identity. In the example above, this is shown in his comparison of the music scene in one place (L.A. in this example) to the local identity of another (Portland in this example). Ultimately, Jared references differences in communication and interaction styles in an effort to illustrate differences between local identities. Warren from Prince of Pieces expounds on the same point:

(Prince of Pieces, lines 356 - 359)

Warren: Yeah, I think that's what I was trying to say, people are facilitative and helping each other out here whereas in New York you're not gonna tell this other band that you're playing a show because they're gonna play a show and try to get your crowd or something.

Warren distills this idea further by speculating that similarities in goals and in living situation in Portland may contribute to establishing the non-competitive feel of the local community:

(Prince of Pieces, lines 280 – 290)

Warren: It's just... everyone who's moving here is like going here for a reason, and I think everyone's really facilitative of kind of helping each other out and stuff. It's not like this dog eat dog type of a thing that you get I think in different music scenes.

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This conceptualization of the local music scene as being an integrated part of the community of Portland was also articulated by contrasting it with the way other regional music scenes worked. Bands contrasted the welcoming, nurturing communication norms of the local Portland music scene with the competition of other music scenes. This highlighted how their perception of other local identities (L.A. and New York for example) was impacted by their awareness of how the local music worked.

**Economic relief.** The second sub-theme which emerged as an integral part of the community was the way in which cost of living in Portland gave participants more time for creativity and allowed participants more interaction in Portland music scene activities. Ultimately, participants indicated that the relatively low cost of living in Portland in comparison to other cities allowed them to spend more time participating in creative endeavors and scene activities than they could in other cities with music scenes. For participants, increased creativity and more free time results in more involvement in the community (i.e. through practicing, performing or attending live shows) which are environments of group communication and interaction which serve to construct local identity. The band Friend of a Friend made the clear link between cost of living in Portland and ability to spend time practicing:

(Friend of a Friend, lines 40 – 46)

Interviewer: So what was the, what instigated the move from L.A. to Portland?

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Jeffrey: Um, lots of things. We wanted to have cheaper cost of living because we were touring a lot more, so we wanted to be able to keep our apartments and also just be able to work less day job and spend more time playing music and we couldn't really do that in L.A., we were all working a lot. We were up to almost forty hours a week, Molly was working a lot. So there was just, practice was always at ten o' clock.

Molly: Ten o' clock, ten to midnight or one. So really late.

Several bands also described the connection between creativity and the cost of living in Portland as being a unique aspect of the Portland music scene. Participants emphasized the logistics of not having to spend as much time working as was needed in other cities affected the nature of the community in Portland. Participant's suggested that having more time to devote to musical creativity in Portland made the Portland music scene more creative on a whole. The Quails outlined a great example of this:

(The Quails, lines 582 – 588)

Mark: This is... this city's gotta... you can compare a lot of places in New York, Williamsburg, places like that... you can pair parts of San Francisco to Portland and people do it all the time, except for the price tag that's attached to those analogs is, it's insane! They're like "oh yeah, we have that too!" But I'm like "yeah, but you can't... \$2000 in rent?" And it's so tiny. And you pay two grand

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for that. That's not the same. You're missing something. The reason why Portland is what it is is because of being able to have an ongoing adolescence because the level of responsibility isn't a \$2000 rent.

The Krafters agreed, and extrapolated on this thought by explaining the rationale behind choosing where to live as a musician:

(The Krafters, lines 69 - 81)

Jessica: Yeah, I thought about San Francisco and New York and ended up here because I know people and it was just easier financially, so. And I like it, I lived here before, so...

Zach: That, financial reasons really play into it, because it's hard to work and like afford to play music and stuff. You have equipment you have to upkeep 'cause there isn't exactly a lot of money out there for, like, work right now. For any type of work, I'm not just saying for musicians, but...

Jordan: And there's a good reason there's that, like, Portland stereotype of working in a coffee shop and like playing in a band, y'know. Here that's a really possible thing to do. If you try to live in New York you're going to work in a coffee shop and a restaurant and then you're going to bar-back until 5 am and then you go home, if you go home, between your bar back shift and your coffee shop shift, y'know? And then you'll never have time to play music. And I mean

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the same thing with Brooklyn being such a hipster Portlandesque place, it's like cheaper and you can live there on one job and do art things that don't pay.

Data from this sub-theme suggested that the effect of cost of living on community is two-fold. First, the increased time for creativity afforded by low cost of living allowed bands to spend more time interacting in the music scene and the region in general. Second, participants indicated that they were attracted to the Portland music scene because it afforded a good ratio between working and creating music. These factors communicated perceptions of the Portland music scene as being a place where creativity was nurtured, and where a large community of musicians resided.

Ultimately, there can be logistical differences that create barriers that keep people from living in certain places or encourage them to live in others. Cost of living is one of them. Of the eight bands interviewed, half of them moved to Portland after forming in a different city. Of the bands that moved to Portland after forming, two of them directly cited cost of living as the reason for moving, without a prompt from the interviewer. However, even among bands that formed in Portland or moved there for other reasons, cost of living was referred to as a key factor that made the Portland music scene conducive to community interaction and musical production. This illustrates that both the local and global audiences are aware of the Portland identity as a place which is conducive to creativity. Participants saw this a factor which influenced the kind of

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interactions which took place in the music scene.

Non-competitiveness and economic relief were integral components in creating community, which is then a key aspect of the local identity of the Portland music scene. As bands in the Portland music scene create music, the music communicates local culture and meanings. This increases the profile of the local Portland identity, which draws more bands. Participants indicated that this cycle has led to so many musicians residing in Portland that the sheer density of local bands has affected their perception of the local identity. For participants, Portland was a place that was culturally saturated.

### **Cultural Saturation**

Cultural saturation as a theme emerged as an intense cultural productivity brought about by a high concentration of artists and musicians. This contributed to participants' understanding of the tie between the music scene and the local Portland identity. For the Portland bands in this study, this saturation added to the potential of interacting with others in the music scene, but also decreased the likelihood of gaining local popularity. The Llama Wackers explained it this way:

(Llama Wackers, lines 400 - 408)

Bob: There's so many artists that have moved here the last few years, it's the new Mecca, the place to live so...

Lindsey: The place is saturated.

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Bob: Yeah.

Interviewer: Saturated, you mean...

Lindsey: Culturally saturated, I guess, and people producing culture. And for that reason that's where the Akron thing comes into play. And not that I want to be the hottest thing in Akron Ohio, I'd rather be living in Portland 'cause I'm a West Coaster, and enjoying the culture here. Not that I have anything against Ohio, they have great rest stops.

The reference to Akron Ohio in that quotation refers to an explanation given earlier in the interview in which the band is describing how lower levels of cultural production and lower density of musicians and artists in a city affects the way the city receives live music. Lindsey is indicating that a smaller music scene, such as that in Akron, Ohio with relatively low cultural production, would receive the music produced by individual bands in a different way than the Portland music scene does. Lindsey explained the Akron, Ohio reference earlier in the interview as:

(Llama Wackers, lines 333 - 336):

Danny: It's just Portland's a really hard town to be an artist in.

Judy: There's a lot [of cultural production] going on.

Lindsey: I always use Akron Ohio for some reason. I always get, like, if any one of our friends' bands went to Akron Ohio, they're the hottest shit in town. Hottest

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shit.

This comment summarized the common sentiment that while cultural saturation helps to create a large supportive community in the Portland music scene, it also makes it much more difficult to gain individual fame within the local scene than it would in a place where fewer bands existed. Further, while there was a general (wry) acknowledgement among participants that they themselves were adding to the saturation, they also expressed that their experience was impacted by the fact that there were so many bands playing so much music. While many bands acknowledged that a global perception of the Portland music scene was that it was culturally saturated, the reality of how this saturation played itself out in the music scene and how this impacted the bands' perception of local identity was based in firsthand experience. Franklin emphasized this point:

(Prince of Pieces, lines 348 - 352)

Franklin: ...I mean it [the community in Portland] can kind of get over saturated a lot at times, can kind of be uninspiring because there's so many amazing bands here and you don't know what to do with yourself, but... And it also kind of gets a little overbearing when everyone in the same city does the same thing you do and there's a lack of diversity that way, but it [the community] is, it's definitely night and day between New York and Portland...



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Again, the participant is emphasizing how the high density of local musicians creates a situation where a relatively large amount of music is being produced, because the local identity has attracted so many musicians.

For Portland bands, cultural saturation was seen as a high density of musicians which led to a high level of creative output. This creative output led to shared experiences for band members which resulted in both the band members' construction of identity and a global perception of a Portland identity. This points to the highly circular relationship between Portland bands, the community interactions within the Portland music scene, and local and global perceptions of Portland local identity.

### **Musical Production**

When exploring how the Portland music scene provides a context for the construction of local identity, a final theme emerged focusing on how the geographic landscape and the cultural heritage of Portland serve as fodder for musical production. A main way in which the music scene community interacts with local geography, culture, and identity is by using it not only as a means of representation but also as a means of inspiration for producing music. Participants used local culture and artifacts in constructing the messages which they communicated with their music. In their production of music, participants related how locality served to instigate creativity:

(The Krafters, lines 424 – 430)

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Jordan: I like having this city in my head for artistic purposes. I think it's important to, it's really easy to lose sight of like what it is that you're doing. But being here kind of like we were talking about earlier kind of like, I want these people in my head when I make decisions about things, you know? I think it's a, a good city for art.

The setting of the community in the cultural and geographic landscape was also seen as an important draw for band members. Band members related how the local physical beauty of the region was personally inspiring in their music production:

(Friend of a Friend, lines 288 - 295)

Jonathon:...and I've done a lot of walking here and walking in Portland. I've gotten these moments, maybe five or four in the last seven months, in the seven months that we've been here, where I've just been completely in the city walking down Lincoln or something in South East or whatever and just been struck by the natural, exquisiteness of where I'm at, like in the fall it was like, leaves just like golden leaves covering the ground and like just a few days ago walking on my street, fifty second, south east fifty second, totally in the city, and there's this big thick wooden tree with all these white blossoms on it and petals falling to the ground and I'm listening to beautiful music and I'm like "I can't believe I have the privilege of...it's really beautiful here, so.

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Similarly, the band Under The Table described the local identity of Portland as being connected both to the natural landscape and the community of musicians and providing great inspiration for music making:

(Under the Table, lines 810 - 819)

Cecily: just for the fact that you can walk down the street and see an incredible show is just, there's already so much beauty being created here that even if we weren't in a band there would be no reason to leave because you're being so poured into all the time if you choose to be.

Olivia: And even poured into in the fact that we're an hour from vineyards and an hour from the mountain and an hour from the beach, you know what I mean? Like, poured into beauty wise with that too. That there's so much inspiration around us. When we were listening to the mastered version for the first time together we drove up on Mount Tabor and just drove through the woods and just cried listening to it because we're... everything involved, Mount Tabor, notes together, all of it, so.

In this excerpt, Under the Table emphasizes that their perception of the local identity of Portland is based on their firsthand experiences in that locality. These experiences range from the ability to walk down the street to see an "incredible" show to Portland's proximity to natural geographical features such as mountains or the ocean. Under the

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Table is emphasizing that these experiences are unique to Portland and could not be experienced by people living in other localities. Thus, participants suggested that the uniqueness of the music was due in part to unique features of the Portland locality.

In summary, the first research question revealed that the Portland music scene serves to construct local identity through community, cultural saturation, and musical production. The community was characterized by participants as being non-competitive. Not only is local identity something that the music scene helps to construct for band members, it also serves as inspiration for musical production which then goes on to represent the Portland music scene to a global audience. However, as musicians join the local community it becomes saturated and harder to gain recognition as an individual band. Finally, cost of living has a significant impact on the time that is afforded to create music, which in turn affects the overall feel of the local community and communicates the perception that a certain type of band thrives in Portland. Overall, this theme highlighted that the community of musicians residing in a locality draw on their perceptions of local identity in producing music.

Having identified the key components that constitute local identity for the participants (community, cultural saturation, and musical production) the second research question looks at the way in which this identity is used by participants in making sense of the world at both a local and global level. For this question - in what way(s) is neo-

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localism evident in the way that Portland bands communicate about local identity? – three themes emerged. First was the participants' own awareness of local Portland identity. Second was the bands' perception of the local Portland identity from a global perspective. Third was the scene members' perception of other local identities.

### **Awareness of Portland Identity**

Local identity (framed by participants as community, cultural saturation, and musical production) was frequently used by participants to describe the nature of the Portland music scene as well as other regions and music scenes. While the overall theme centered around an awareness of the Portland local identity, this was often articulated by contrasting it with other local identities. New York and Los Angeles were common comparisons in the data. An important point that emerged in this theme was the way in which both locals and non-locals were aware of the local Portland identity. Awareness of a Portland identity was also evident in bands' articulation of how their own values aligned with what they perceived to be values of the community in the Portland music scene before even moving there:

(Acoustic Juice, 1008 – 1015):

Keith: And we do really like it. I do feel like a very strong tie to, caring about the community and everything in a long term sense. Not just...

Nathan: 'Cause even though we may not have been here for very long we all

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wanted to come here so some part of us was here before we actually were. This was a place that I think our values aligned with and we thought that we could be comfortable, so I think in that way we could be a Portland band before being a Portland band.

Keith: Yeah, there's definitely a deeper connection that we feel with this place in particular.

This is a clear example of how Acoustic Juice was aware of a Portland identity both as residents but also before moving there. Further, the aspect of the identity which they were aware of was that of the community. Nathan articulated that before Acoustic Juice moved to Portland they had perceptions about what the local identity was like, based on their knowledge of the community in the music scene. However, rather than stating what their values were (i.e. honest, collaborative etc.), Acoustic Juice simply identified themselves as a "Portland" band, implying that they perceived the local identity of Portland as a representation of their values and interactive norms. This perception was based in the idea that communities have interactive norms and that those norms reflect on local identity. Ultimately, this shows how local bands affiliate themselves with a local identity based on their perceptions of what that identity represents. For Acoustic Juice, what the Portland identity represented was derived from the ways in which the people there interacted.

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An integral part of participants' awareness of local identity was their insistence that local identity, especially the aspects of community and musical production, could be known only through firsthand experience. For The Quails for example, true awareness of local identity was tied with actual experiences and with specific knowledge about the local music scene. In the following quote, Sally emphasizes that people in other cities do not know how to talk about Portland and implies that they do not have an accurate understanding of what the community or music scene really is. She also points out that local experiences give locals the ability to know what is representative of a place and what is not by insinuating that non-locals may perceive the Decemberists as representative of the Portland music scene, which she clearly does not:

(The Quails, lines 264 - 269)

Sally: But if they talk [people in other cities] about Portland they talk about it in funny ways. They will talk about, they think that all the bands do sound like the Decemberists or something. This is a funny thing. Everybody says "we're the Portland of the East Coast". I hear that about everywhere we go. "We're the Portland of the Midwest."

Mark: "We're the sister city"

Sally: "We're the sister city..." I'm like "No, you're not!" [laughs]

This emphasizes the way in which firsthand experience was central to the participants'

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perceptions of local identity, whether of community, cultural saturation, or musical production. For example, Sally emphasized that people outside of Portland without experiences in the local music scene would not know the kind of musical production which was actually representative of the scene. For her, firsthand experience gave a depth of local knowledge which she saw as unattainable for non-locals. This quote is one example of many that emerged from the literature which emphasized the importance of local experience in understanding the Portland local identity.

Awareness of local identity was also evident in the extent to which band members understood their own musical production to be representative of the local music scene.

For example:

(Under the Table, lines 380 – 398):

Hannah: Yeah, I'm trying to, 'cause, the Pacific Northwest, the folk kind of sound that comes out of that is very, like, set apart almost in a way. Like, correct me if you think I'm wrong...

Cecily: Oh yeah, it is.

Hannah: Fleet Foxes, Horsefeathers, all these kind of sounding bands are coming out of this Pacific area of the US and I think they've kind of, I would agree that our sound is similar to that, so they see these bands that are coming out of this area and I kind of see them lumping us into that, being like "oh, here's a rising



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band, here's a new band from the Pacific Northwest that sounds like the Pacific Northwest and, cool! I like this sound, this is very, this area of the U.S. just makes sense, cool."

Cecily: It's nice to be able to represent our area, too, because if we played California surf rock or anything else it would just be tough. I think it would make it a lot harder for people to even hear of us because...

Hannah: I think it's kind of a nice coincidence that the music we love is the music that actually is doing well in this area.

Cecily: And people far away long for the trees and the ocean, all these things that we have, the mountains and the fact that they can get a slice of that in a song is something that probably is really cool."

Here, Under the Table shows an awareness of the Portland local identity and the fact that there is mutual representation between their own musical production and local identity. They are representing Portland with their music, but they are also represented and understood by an outside audience due to the fact that they affiliate themselves with Portland. Further, they point out that not every style of music would be representative of the Portland local identity - for example "California surf rock" could conceivably be played by a Portland band, though Cecily points out it would be harder to promote themselves to a global audience since they would not have a local identity to affiliate

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themselves with in that instance.

While participants showed a complex awareness of local identity which they articulated in describing the community, cultural saturation, and musical production of the local music scene, they also showed an awareness of the global perception of Portland's local identity.

### **Global Awareness of Portland Identity**

In reminder, the concept of neo-localism "is quite aware of the rest of the world, and is quite open to interactions with it" (Strassaldo, 1992; p. 47). Further, neo-localism is the idea that individuals look to local identity not because it is the only option available, but instead choose local identity amidst an awareness of many other local identities and the realization that their affiliation with local identity will be meaningful to others. This is why Gotham (2005) suggests that as local identities gain global recognition, elements of the local can be used as representation in a global world. Thus, this section looks at how participants talked about the global awareness of the local Portland identity. For example:

(Under the Table, lines 174-180)

Cecily: We're so lucky to be in Portland as a band, y'know? I mean, there are so many people from around the world that see Portland as this huge mecca for artists, and just to be already born here as a band is a huge blessing that, why

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would we just try and skip over that huge part where bands play here for like ten years before they're recognized nationally, and that's a beautiful thing. I'd much rather have like ten wonderful years as a successful band in Portland than tour everywhere and kind of have some people know who we are, y'know? I would rather focus on this beautiful city that we're in.

Here it is clear that Cecily's awareness of the global perception of Portland identity is that there are aspects of the local music scene which are accommodating for musicians. She also points out the irony that while the music scene in Portland is globally recognized, gaining global recognition as a band is much more difficult. She summarizes that success within the local scene precedes success outside of it. This emphasizes her understanding of the local Portland music scene as having global notoriety, yet the interworkings of that scene are not evident to a global audience. In her example, she suggests that a band could play for ten years in the Portland music scene before becoming nationally known, despite the fact that the music scene itself is nationally prominent. This again emphasizes that participants understood global awareness of the local Portland identity to be vague compared with the depth and specificity of knowledge that came with experiencing it firsthand.

In the following quotation, Prince of Pieces explains how a global perception of local identity seems to contain awareness of some of the aspects of local identity which

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participants articulated. In this example, community and musical production is the focus:

(Prince of Pieces, 123-137)

Warren: No, it's really funny because I'd been, when I was living in Connecticut for years people would be like "have you ever been to Portland Oregon?" And like "no, I've never been." They're like "I think you'd really like it." And it was just kind of like how we were there and we moved to Portland and it was all of a sudden like kind of surrounded ourselves by a lot of people who were like us, I guess.

Brian: It's kind of the typical Portland story.

Warren: Yeah.

Gregory: Yeah, it's so true.

Brian: It's like everyone here is so much alike.

Gregory: When we would tour people would always mention Portland too.

They'd be like "you guys would fit in really well." And it's just funny because we'd never been there. I think that's why we wanted to come here, we were like "man, everybody says it's so cool, everybody says that our music fits in, so why don't we just try there?" Instead of a place like, nobody ever says to us "you guys would fit in really well in L.A., man. You guys should totally go."

Gregory is suggesting that there is a global awareness of the type of musical production

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associated with the local Portland music scene, and that global audiences showed a desire to associate Prince of Pieces' music with Portland, even before the band moved to Portland. This shows a strong national or even global familiarity with what the Portland local identity is and that this identity is associated with the musical production that takes place there. Bands then take advantage of the global awareness that local musical production is tied to the Portland identity:

(The Krafters, lines 663 – 673)

Jordan: Portland's a well respected place to be from, I think that people, I've heard this from people, in different towns, "I saw you're from Portland, Portland makes awesome music, you know I figured it would be at least of a certain caliber." I've heard it from people. It's usually in small towns. You know, people in like, southwest or something, New Mexico or something would be like, I seemed to think Albuquerque was where I heard somebody say that, I don't know. I think that the kind of quality of music, look at the PDX Pop compilation, and, whether you like every song on there or not, is pretty evident that like our bottom floor even for music is really good. If you can put out forty songs from bands in Portland every single year, new bands, and have it be at least like pretty good, you know, most of it, is like pretty miraculous, so I think people understand that and respect the town. I'm definitely happy to use the fact that we're from a

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town like this.

By indicating that they are using the fact that they are from a town known for musical production, Jordan is implying that local identity gives The Krafters a set of meanings with which to represent themselves to a global audience. This is also an example of the complex reciprocal relationship between the Portland music scene and local identity, because while on one hand the participants use local identity for representation, it is also their music which helps to define what the local identity is for a global audience.

Further, this quotation sums up a general consistency in the data in which the global perception of the Portland local identity was based around perceptions of the musical production and was much less informed by perceptions of community and cultural saturation. Thus, band members indicated that the global awareness of the local Portland identity was one-dimensional. Participants discussed global awareness as being associated with certain bands (like the Decemberists) or a certain kind of musical style, as opposed to the complex, interactive community aspect of local identity which was so prominent for participants:

(The Quails, lines 218 - 224)

Mark: I think, what the rest of the world, the rest of the country or the rest of the world thinks, there is like a, they do think it [the Portland music scene] is like folky, acoustic guitar driven...

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Sally: Well because all the bigger bands are.

Mark: Yeah, like Blitzen Trapper and Decemberists, I think that they probably think “oh yeah, they [Portland musicians] all have beards and they all...”

Sally: They did for a little while! [laughs]

Mark: Pretty much.

There was agreement in the data that it is the musical production as well as the cultural artifacts associated with musical production which the global audience is most aware of. For example, Bruce from Acoustic Juice states:

(Acoustic Juice, lines 304 - 305)

Bruce: [In thinking of the Portland music scene] people like beards and dust and pine trees and Jesus and campfires and jugs of unlabeled alcohol and all the good fairytale parts of the west and the old timey.

Bruce is implying that communication (i.e. songs and band images) produced by the Portland music scene aids global audiences in formulating a perception of Portland's local identity.

There was an example in the data of a negative case, in which the band Friend of a Friend suggested that local identity may not play such a big factor in how a global audience understood their music:

Interviewer: Do you guys feel like when you tour people ever come out to see

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you because of where you're from? Either back in the day when you were from LA or from here?

Jeffrey: I don't think so. I mean, not that I know.

Molly: LA gets a bad rap...

Jeffrey: I think if anything people would not go to see us cause we're from LA.

Interviewer: How about from Portland? Do you think it's different playing from here?

Jeffrey: I doubt it. I mean, maybe.

Molly: Maybe!

Jeffrey: I don't know, I just don't relate to them [local identities] like that.

Molly: Cities are more excited when you're like "and we came HERE!" and they're like "YEAAAHH!" Whatever city you're in you're like "hello, Austin!" and they're like "Austin RULES!"

Though Jeffrey suggests that he does not see local identity as being a differentiating factor for how he views global audiences listening to their music, this was not the case for other bands in this study. Further, it should be noted that while Jeffrey indicates that he does not perceive local identity as being a representational tool, this is directly after he has suggested that being from Los Angeles may be a negative stigma for bands. Thus, even in this negative case there is some evidence for local identity being a factor in how



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global audiences perceive cultural production.

However, there was no indication from participants that the global perception of the Portland identity held the same depth of understanding of community and cultural saturation which was so central to their own perceptions of local identity. This further established the importance of interaction in the local scene as being central to participants' construction of local identity. Brian from Prince of Pieces emphasizes that people in other cities may think they know a lot about the local Portland identity, but that local experience is necessary for full knowledge:

(Prince of Pieces, lines 292 - 294)

Brian: Everybody thinks they know a lot about Portland, they never come and visit from other areas, they never come visit it. They want to go to the Northwest and then they see Portlandia [a television show set in Portland] and they're like "oh, that's exactly what it's like."

This theme suggests that distilling local identity into cultural artifacts that are easily communicable via the internet or through musical production - artifacts like musical style, beards or acoustic guitars - can often fail to convey the original complex set of interactions which created those artifacts. Participants expressed that global awareness of the Portland local identity makes it a useful means of representation. However, global awareness is often based on a less than full understanding of the

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underlying experiences and interactions which serve to construct that identity.

### **Awareness of Other Local Identities**

A central theme in identity construction literature is the ways in which individuals construct their ideas of self based on their perceptions of the other (Burke & Stets, 2009). By looking at how participants talked about other local identities, it became evident that constructing a sense of the other contributed to establishing an understanding of the Portland identity. The following data offers support for the concept of neo-localism in that it suggests that for participants in this study the local Portland identity was understood in terms of an awareness of other local identities. Thus, this section considers the ways in which participants understood the Portland local identity by contrasting and comparing it with their perceptions of other local identities. For example, Acoustic Juice clearly acknowledges the importance of understanding a band in connection with a local identity:

(Acoustic Juice, lines 886-888)

Keith: when I get to know a band, I like to know a few things, I like to know where they're living, where they're from, y'know, for some reason. I don't know why.

Andy: That always matters to me too, and I don't know why.

Here, though they do not offer an explanation in this passage, Acoustic Juice is pointing

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out that learning where a band is physically from creates an understanding of that music scene and serves as a reference point for making assumptions about the local identity.

Jordan from The Krafters echoed this as well, emphasizing that bands were understood through their relationship with the local identities of the places they were from:

(The Krafters, lines 697 - 702)

Jordan: It [locality] makes a difference. I mean, you hear about Montreal all the time. We were in Austin I stuck around because I wanted to hear a band that was from Montreal. That was like, “well, they’re playing the Brooklyn Vegan stage, and they’re from Montreal.” And we ended up having to leave so I didn’t get to see the band, but I’m still bummed that I didn’t get to see that band because we had to leave, even though I have no clue what they ever sounded like, but they were from Montreal.

This emphasizes that local identities have underlying meanings attached to them and that in a globalized world people use local identity in understanding and consuming musical production as well as in communicating their own identity. An audience may not know anything about a band as was the case with Jordan’s interest in the Montreal band, but if they are familiar with the locale that band is from, the audience will have expectations for what that band will be like. The audience can then use this knowledge to drive decision making for behavior as small as what band to listen to and as large as what city to move

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to.

In answering the second research question the data revealed three themes in general support of the presence of neo-localism in the Portland music scene. These were an awareness of local identity by participants, global awareness of local identity, and awareness of other local identities by participants. The participants indicated that local interactions and experiences were an important aspect of how local Portland identity was understood and communicated. Participants emphasized that the global perception of the Portland music scene was based almost solely on cultural artifacts which were communicated through musical production. Further, participants contrasted this global perception with the depth of their own experiences and interactions and their awareness of how community and cultural saturation are also foundational to the Portland music scene and the construction of local Portland identity.

Bands were keenly aware of the local Portland identity and of the global perception of this identity. They consciously used this identity when communicating their own identity in the national and global settings. By affiliating themselves with the local Portland identity, bands were able to efficiently identify themselves, the kind of music they played, and the culture they represented.

Music scenes provide context for interaction - in Portland, those interactions have created a community which is central to Portland bands' awareness and affiliation with

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the local Portland identity. This community produces cultural artifacts in the form of music and band images, which communicate local identity to the rest of the world.

Increased perception of local identity by both local and global audiences provides general support for the concept of neo-localism. The following chapter discusses these themes derived from the data and considers the theoretical and practical implications of these results.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

The underlying purpose of this research was to understand more fully how globalization is impacting both global and local awareness of local identity and to consider in what ways the concept of neo-localism was a useful framework for discussing this increased awareness. While scholars have suggested that an increased awareness and affiliation with local identity is taking place in response to globalization, very little empirical research has been carried out using neo-localism as a theoretical lens to explore this phenomenon (Lieberg, 1995; Strassaldo, 1992). In addition to literature on neo-localism, the theoretical framework of identity construction and music scenes provides a useful tool for understanding the ways in which individuals are aware of, and affiliated with, local identities in response to the pressures of globalization. Thus, the following sections will summarize the findings related to each of the research questions and then discuss how these findings have implications for neo-localism, identity construction, and the role of communication in globalization.

### **Summary of Findings**

**Research question one.** Before looking at the ways in which the interplay between Portland bands and local identity are an example of neo-localism (RQ2), the first research question explored what constituted local identity for the participants and how it was tied to the local music scene. In answering this question the analysis yielded the

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overarching themes of community, cultural saturation, and musical production.

The Portland music scene was tied to local identity by Portland bands in that it provided a spatial and social context for communication to take place between scene members (i.e. community). This communication led to shared experiences and shared interpretations of local identity. The norms which guided that communication in the Portland music community were characterized by the participants as particularly collaborative and non-competitive. This affected the participants' experience of the music scene community and was closely tied with participants' perceptions of the local identity of Portland as being a supportive, collaborative environment. A second sub-theme, more logistical but still important, was economic relief. This was the relatively low cost of living in Portland compared to other cities with music scenes. Participants indicated that this allowed them to spend less time working and more time interacting in the scene and producing music, both of which increased community networks and facilitated awareness of local identity.

A second theme which emerged for research question one was cultural saturation. Bands indicated that the Portland music scene had a high density of musicians performing and producing music, and that this clustering of musicians led to a greater output of music as well as to the vibrancy of the local music scene which impacted the participants' perceptions of local identity.

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The last theme linking the Portland music scene and local identity was musical production, which related to those aspects of the local geography and culture which served as inspiration for creating and performing music. Participants articulated this as local natural beauty as well as the general artsy vibe of the city of Portland. Band members indicated that these aspects of the locality of Portland were a source for creativity and musical productivity. This musical production was a key way in which participants understood local identity.

**Research question two.** The second research question then turned to exploring the ways in which neo-localism shed light on the participants' articulation of local identity. These results emphasized that local identities serve as a useful way of organizing participants' understanding of music, place, and cultural artifacts. As discussed in the literature review, neo-localism is regionally specific cultural awareness that surfaces as an extension of the pressures of globalization. By affiliating themselves with the Portland local identity, bands are able to mobilize a set of local meanings that help potential listeners place their music in a greater context. Neo-localism suggests that local identity is a particularly meaningful way for a global audience to interpret and organize cultural artifacts. Local identity thus impacts the interpretations of communication (i.e. music and band images) by a global audience. Whether the communicating entity is a band or a blog, participants emphasized the importance of



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knowing the local orientation of a message source to fully interpret it. This research revealed a strong awareness among participants of the Portland local identity as well as the local identities of other places. Further, it revealed that participants found local identities a useful means for talking about differences in culture and the norms which guide interaction.

### **Theoretical Implications**

**Identity.** This research reveals that community facilitates the interplay between local identity and the local music scene. Further, it indicates that community is understood as a set of interactive norms. The norms for interaction dictate the type of community that a given locality possesses. As communities are acted out, they serve to construct identity for the community members who produce cultural artifacts which go on to represent a locality to the rest of the world. However, this research suggests that locally oriented cultural artifacts like music and band images, when perceived by an outside audience, do not always carry with them the underlying complex meanings about the nature of the community which produced them.

As bands interact in the Portland music scene, they construct a set of shared meanings surrounding local identity and the local music scene. Thus, the results from this study are in line with the original ideas put forth in Berger and Luckman's (1967) theory of social construction. As band members participate and interact in the local

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music scene, series of shared experiences are generated, which lead to a shared interpretation of Portland local identity. Burke and Stets (2009) argue that there are specific social meanings tied with being a member of a group such as a music scene and that awareness of these meanings is derived through group interactions.

This research further suggests that participants with experience in the Portland music scene show a complex awareness of the interactive norms for that group and that as band members act according to those norms it serves to construct the local music scene identity. In this way, this research largely supports current literature on group identity construction and suggests that music scenes function as identity building groups. These are important findings because they imply that, at least for music scene members, identity construction is still largely based in face-to-face interaction. Scene members emphasized the importance of firsthand experience in the local music scene on constructing accurate perceptions of local identity. This was juxtaposed with the perceptions of local identity made by a global audience, which participants indicated was based solely on popular music or other artifacts from popular culture. One example of this would be how Sally from The Quails suggested that there is a global perception that all bands from the Portland music scene look and sound like the Decemberists, whose music is a local artifact with wide global distribution.

(The Quails, lines 264 - 269)

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Sally: But if they talk [people in other cities] about Portland they talk about it in funny ways. They will talk about, they think that all the bands do sound like the Decemberists or something. This is a funny thing. Everybody says "we're the Portland of the East Coast". I hear that about everywhere we go. 'We're the Portland of the Midwest.'"

Mark: "We're the sister city"

Sally: "We're the sister city..." I'm like "No, you're not!" [laughs]

Her conclusion, however, is that the global audience does not know Portland, because they have not experienced it firsthand. Thus, these results imply that the social construction of identity is most powerful in face-to-face communication, and that this is where transference of group interactive norms happens. Just as Stets and Biga (2003) suggest, as scene members become aware of the interactive norms related to the local group identity, they likely communicate and present themselves in ways that are consistent with that identity. It is important to note that spatially oriented groups like music scenes are integral parts of how individuals construct identity in a globalized world. As more and more interaction and communication moves online (a seemingly non-spatial environment), the fact that place-based interaction is still a key component of identity construction is worth mentioning.

However, in regards to the examples of identity construction in this study it is

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important to consider the difference between awareness of local identity and actual affiliation with that identity. While band members' affiliation with local identity was deduced from their websites for the purposes of sampling in this study, in terms of actually self-identifying with the local identity of Portland it was difficult to determine the difference between awareness and affiliation. As Maines (1977) established, there is a difference between being aware of social norms (socialization) and actually identifying oneself with the groups that those norms are associated with. Further, literature suggests that identities are plural and fluid and are put on and taken off according to the context which individuals find themselves in (Burke & Stets, 2009). It is possible that locality functions less as a means of affiliation for individuals and more as a means of describing other more prominent identities. For example, the primary identity for participants in this study may have been as "musicians," and "Portland" may have served as a descriptor or a qualifier of that identity, rather than as a separate identity altogether.

That being said, these results indicate that the concept of neo-localism is useful in several ways. First, neo-localism suggests that the reason why band members were aware of their own local identity, and why they understood it in the context of a knowledge of other local identities was because of increased global interconnectedness. These results also shed light on the extent to which neo-localism and time-space compression are compatible lenses for discussing the impacts of globalization.

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**Neo-localism.** In line with the projections of Strassaldo (1992), the participants in this study not only showed a keen awareness of the local identity of Portland, but they also routinely made sense of this identity by comparing it to their knowledge of other identities. This is in line with a foundational assumption of neo-localism that local identity is not merely chosen because it is accessible, or because individuals are not aware of any other local identities, but it is chosen in the context of a global knowledge of many local identities. Further, though Massey (2005) did not explicitly use the term neo-localism, it bolsters her suggestion that part of how individuals understand the local is by placing it the context of the global, which others have suggested is a defining aspect of neo-localism (Strassaldo, 1992). For example, Prince of Pieces, a band which originated in Connecticut and later moved to Portland, discussed how their understanding of the Portland music scene is based on their understanding of other music scenes:

(Prince of Pieces, lines 280 -283)

M2: Apples and oranges, it's like, it's so much better. It's just... everyone who's moving here is like going here for a reason, and I think everyone's really facilitative of kind of helping each other out and stuff. It's not like this dog eat dog type of a thing that you get I think in different music scenes.

A second way that this research reflects upon neo-localism is in the extent to which it addresses the importance of first hand experiences for true knowledge of the

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local identity. For example, several participants emphasized that their awareness and affiliation with the local identity was based on experiences which could only be had by those living in Portland. For example, Cecily from Under the Table talked about how Portland was a city where you could walk down the street and see a great show, or Jonathon from Friend of a Friend mentioned the inspiration gained from seeing a tree in bloom in the middle of the city. These excerpts emphasized experiences which were exclusively shared by the scene members living in the actual locality of Portland. This suggests that time and space have retained the agency to exclude a global audience from the true, complex knowledge of local identity. This is an important finding in that it suggests that interpretations made using the lens of neo-localism may be in direct contestation to interpretations made using the lens of time-space compression, which is also a theory widely used to discuss the impacts of globalization.

Time-space compression is a central concept that many have used in discussing the impacts of globalization (McLuhan, 1964). As neo-localism is also a concept for discussing current global impacts, it makes sense to look at the ways in which these results inform both neo-localism and time space compression. Literature on time-space compression has largely emphasized the increased accessibility of other places and cultures (McLuhan, 1964; Murray, 2006). The ability to communicate instantly with anyone in the world, or to fly anywhere on earth within 24 hours is typical of the kind of

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emphasis this phenomenon generally carries (Murray, 2006). While these observations may be accurate, this study suggests that interpreting data using the concept of neo-localism highlights a different emphasis.

Across themes, the data revealed that the meanings which participants associated with local identity were deeply tied with their actual experiences in the local music scene. The participants' awareness of the local community and their deep knowledge of the cultural saturation and musical production in Portland were tied with participants' actual experiences in the local music scene. Thus, neo-localism suggests that there is a limit to time-space compression and that time and space are still experientially exclusive. That is, time and space still have the agency to exclude the global audience from the actual experiences of local participation. Even in a globalized world, it is the uniqueness of local experience that differentiates one place from another and contributes to the interactive norms which construct local identity. Judy emphasized this by referencing a recent television show set in Portland:

(Llama Wackers, lines 422 – 428)

Judy: It's like, um, Perfect Couples or something like that. Or like Perfect Pair or Perfect Couple. It's on after Community so it's in the 8:30 slot. It's set in Portland. Like I watched it one night and I saw a shot of Portland and I was like "woah, wait, what?" And then I watched again the next week and they reference,

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they're like, let's just go back to Portland. Y'know? Like, they were out camping and they're like "let's go back to Portland." I was like "none of these people are Portland!"

[laughter]

Judy: None of these people are Portland that I know.

Judy is referencing the fact that knowing a place based on experience is different than drawing perceptions from the outside based on popular media or digital communications. It takes thoughtful communication to include underlying meanings when using cultural artifacts. This research showed that local bands tend to be very aware of the complex meanings associated with places through their own experiences.

Neo-localism is a useful lens for understanding this example in that it indicates that despite increased access to information (such as regionally oriented television shows) and the ability to travel quickly around the globe, space and time still create exclusive sets of shared meanings among those with firsthand experience. These shared meanings serve to enhance awareness and affiliation with local identity for scene members, supporting the notion of neo-localism as a useful theoretical framework.

However, to be communicated and understood outside of that locality, those meanings tend to be reduced to cultural artifacts and symbols. This is why Sally suggests that the Decemberists are seen as representative of the Portland music scene by a global



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audience but not at all representative by local scene members who have a rich, complex experience in the local scene which cannot be represented by the music of one band. And while this meaning can be attached to symbols, it often, at least originally, also has a more complex meaning associated with experience. For the participants of this study, that deeper meaning is housed in the interactions of the local community. This community is based on shared experiences which are played out in a myriad of local activities from live performances to a shared appreciation for the geographical landscape. These experiences represent a classic case of "you'd have to have been there" to really understand the underlying meaning. This supports the usefulness of neo-localism as a means of making sense of the experiences and interactions which individuals are using to build meaning and construct identity are based in locality.

Part of what participants drew attention to was the fact that that kind of community was created in Portland in a different way than it was elsewhere. The reason the theme of community was important was because it is possible to have a functioning music scene in a locality without the community aspect. This was often the case in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York, where participants pointed out that the interactions of the music scene were based on competition and rivalry, rather than collaboration. Thus, Los Angeles or New York would represent instances of music scenes – with all of the components such as performers, audience and venues that

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constitute a scene – but no community. This further emphasized the importance of scene communication norms for building group cohesion and establishing local identity.

Ultimately what this suggests is that differences in communication norms between music scenes resulted in different perceptions of local identities. This supports literature which relates group communication with identity construction (Burke and Stets, 2009) as well as suggests that just because similar contexts for communication exist (i.e. the similar music scenes of Portland and Los Angeles) communication norms which are established in those contexts will not necessarily be similar.

This also brings attention to the fact that participants often constructed their ideas of the Portland community, and further their own identities, by referencing and contrasting it with their ideas and experiences about other local identities. The construction of 'self' in contrast to the 'other' was evident in this data. Neo-localism suggests that the local is chosen despite knowledge and access to other local identities, which is evident in this data (Gotham, 2005; Strassaldo, 1992).

Participants indicated that the way that bands in Portland interacted with each other was different than the ways in which bands interacted in other music scenes, which impacted their perceptions of the local Portland identity. Increased differentiation between local identities is fully in support of neo-localism, and the fact that it is based in the way that local groups (i.e. music scenes) communicate is of note. In summary, even

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with highly similar contexts, the norms of communication and interaction vary based on locality, suggesting that local identities are seen as distinct (a major precept of neo-localism) and that this distinction is based in the communication norms of local groups.

**Music scenes.** Several authors have suggested that music scenes function as canonized communication structures and thus as instances of symbolic interaction which serve to construct identity (Davidson, 2002; Gabriellson, 2003; Roberts, 2000). This was supported in this study by examples in which scene members referred to the supportive, collaborative community of musicians that was housed in the context of the Portland music scene. This study also suggests that while those norms may be associated with community and collaboration, participants also indicated their experiences of other local scenes (New York and Los Angeles in particular) in which the communication norms were much different. Thus, local music scenes should be considered a context for interaction, the norms of which can evolve in any number of ways.

In this study it was also evident that the local music scene, and the community which was housed in it, gave bands a point of origin – a “from-ness” – which they used to orient themselves and their music in relation to the rest of the world. Similarly, participants understood communications from other places, whether it was music or blog posts, in terms of where the communicator was from. For example, one participant talked about being in a band in which most of the members were from Sonoma,

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California. They originally identified themselves as from Sonoma, but found that most audiences did not know where Sonoma was, which affected the way people received their music:

(Krafters, lines 677 – 693)

Jordan: My other band when we were from Sonoma, we just got ignored cause we were from Sonoma. It was like where the hell is Sonoma?

Zach: Is this winery music?

Jordan: I mean, what is this? is not a jam band? ...Yeah, we changed it [music scene affiliation] to San Francisco.

Clearly, changing their affiliation to the San Francisco music scene allowed a better understanding for their audience of how to interpret their music. Similarly, the data showed that the global perception of Portland local identity seemed to be connected only to the cultural symbols related with the Portland music scene - the beards and plaid shirts, or local bands who had gained global notoriety, such as the Decemberists - rather than with the actual ideology or values which could be known through experiencing the local music scene.

Thus, the results from this study suggest that the sets of meaning associated with a given locality are not merely geographical or political. Clearly, when Portland was referred to by the interviewed bands, the underlying set of meanings was not merely a

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medium sized city in the state of Oregon. There was also a strong cultural and ideological set of meanings housed in the usage of “Portland” as well. This is significant in that it contests much of the literature on potential impacts of globalization which suggest that as cultural homogenization occurs, references to locality will become less culturally specific, and thus less useful in differentiating the lived experiences and value systems housed in specific places. However, it was clear in the data that bands understood local identities as references to culture, ideology, and shared values, which were housed in the idea of the local community. The contrast by nearly every band to the difference between Los Angeles and Portland is one example of this.

The results from this study indicate that neo-localism offers a promising lens for discussing the complex impacts of globalization. The first-hand experiences of individuals in a locality – such as the experiences of the participants in the local Portland music scene – are integral to how people are identifying themselves in a global world. The following section looks at limitations of this study, as well as directions for further research.

### **Transferability**

Because the unique community in Portland was cited by participants as the connection between the local music scene and local identity, it is unlikely that the results from this study transfer directly to any other locality. However, this is not necessarily a

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limitation of this study, given that the assumption behind neo-localism is that each locality will respond to the pressures of globalization differently. In fact, if these results were found to be transferable to other localities, it would call into question whether this study represents a true contestation to cultural homogenization. Consistent with the assumption that globalization affects everyone differently, the intention behind this research method is to understand the way in which a very narrow population experiences globalization. However, what is transferable from this study is the approach to thinking about globalization as having complex and highly diverse impacts on different localities, and the use of neo-localism as a theoretical framework for empirical research. This study suggests that neo-localism is an important means of understanding the impacts of globalization.

### **Limitations**

A limitation that should be considered in reading this study is my own position as a researcher, which impacted the study design from concept to execution. Having previously been a member of a band in Portland, I was aware of the community of musicians and of some pressure to identify as a Portland band. This insider perspective is also what instigated this research design to see where that pressure was coming from, which in turn grounded the study in globalization and neo-localism. Thus, there is undoubtedly researcher bias in the research execution. However, this bias is tempered by

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my training as a researcher, by using open, non-leading questions in the interview protocol, and ultimately by the richness of the data set. The information derived from interviews had a level of complexity and nuance that could not be fabricated.

A second limitation worth mentioning is the interview protocol. While this protocol returned responses which were generally centered around local identity, it certainly could have been fine tuned further before starting the research. It was tested in a sample interview prior to conducting the actual research, but several sample interviews with a variety of potential participants would have been helpful for fleshing it out. While conversations often contained good sections which related to local identity, there were times when the protocol allowed the conversation to sway off topic or for the bands to answer the questions without giving information which warranted a follow up from the researcher. However, a strength of the protocol was the beginning question which asked participants tell the history of the band up to the current moment. In every interview, their responses gave the researcher solid directions for follow up questions which allowed for a focus on how bands were interacting with local identities.

Lastly, though the sampling method was purposive, bands were not recruited based on how long they had been centered in Portland, Oregon. Thus, the sample reflected a wide range in length of local residency from bands who had played in the local music scene from a year (Acoustic Juice) to over a decade (The Quails). Thus, one

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potential limitation to this study is that it did not consider how length of residency may impact the participants affiliation and understanding of local identity.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

This study has laid the groundwork for further research on neo-localism, especially research which uses this method on other sample populations. There are three population samples which would be useful extensions of this study. First would be to utilize the same research method on a music scene in another locality. Because the Portland music scene was contrasted so heavily in the data with the Los Angeles music scene and the New York music scene, the natural extension to this study would be to interview bands from those music scenes. The goal would be to understand how musicians in those scenes interact and how they understand local identity, and to ultimately to consider the differences between those scenes and the Portland scene. The assumption would not be that the results from research in other music scenes would parallel the results from this study. Other localities have their own unique identities, their own logistical features (such as cost of living) and cultural features (such as saturation of musicians) which affect the people living there, just as Portland does. Ultimately the power of this research approach would be confirmed if this same method used in another music scene generated quite different themes regarding the nature of the local identity. Results differentiated by locality represent a strong contestation to the homogenized



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model of globalization and confirm the precepts of neo-localism.

A second possibility for an alternate sample would be to use a population other than musicians. Musicians were selected as the population for this study because they were likely to have a high awareness of local identities in general. This awareness is due both to the extensive traveling that many bands undertake in touring and to the need to identify and represent themselves while playing outside of their home town. Thus, the logic for choosing this local population was that their interaction with local identity was an experience which they were likely able to articulate. This may or may not be representative of other groups' relationship with local identity. For that reason, a logical next step would be to use the same research method with different local groups. Anything from the local bicycle riding population to local quilting clubs would add dimension to how local identity is understood and utilized.

One last sample possibility would be to conduct research in localities not likely to have a strong local identity. How are rural populations and residents in smaller towns (Akron, Ohio for instance) interacting with local identity? Despite global shifts towards urban living, rural and suburban dwellers still represent large portions of the world's population. Understanding the impact of globalization on the identity structures of those people would be an important supplementary piece to this research.

Another direction for further research other than testing a variety of samples

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would be to consider the ways in which local awareness is related to or different than local affiliation. A possible direction for looking at neo-localism in the future would be to develop a quantitative measure of regional identity. This would allow an equitable comparison of the degree to which a sample population actually identified with a local identity, rather than just possessing awareness of local identity or displaying a propensity to use local identity as a description of other primary identities.

### **Conclusion**

The logistical reality of globalization is no longer just a theory. Money, culture, people, and communication move around the world faster and more fluidly than ever. Channels of communication and transportation move cultural artifacts across national and international borders with ease. Via the internet, people have access to information and images from every other place and culture on the planet. However, the impact of all of this on culture and on the life experiences of individuals, especially their experiences of their own locality, is something that has been debated in the literature. Many have suggested that globalization is a homogenizing force, and the cultures and localities are becoming more similar. More still have discussed the impact of globalization on individuals to be more or less universal, whatever their demographic status. Neo-localism is one concept which responds to Massey's (2005) call to re-conceptualize the impact of globalization as highly differentiated by place, culture, ethnicity, and gender

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(Strassaldo, 1992). An important finding of this research is that local identities are in fact strengthened and differentiated in response to globalization, which supports neo-localism as a promising means of discussing the impact of globalization in the future (Gotham, 2005).

This research also reinforces the idea that group interaction and communication is central to identity construction. Further, these results suggest space and time are important constructs within and across which interaction takes place. The implication of this is that where you live (and the local groups which you interact with) impacts the kind of culture you are likely to identify with. For example if you are a band, it matters where you play music from, not only in how an audience receives you but also in the kind of support you receive from other musicians.

Growing awareness and affiliation with local identity, whether through perceptions gained from a television show or through actual experiences, points to locality as a way in which people are organizing meaning in a globalized world. Thus, neo-localism aids in our understanding of how people are interacting with local identity and gives an understanding of how society is constructed and what meanings individuals are mobilizing to make sense of their world. Further, as more and more interaction takes place in a digital environment, it makes sense to emphasize those things that still take place outside of it. The face-to-face interactions and experiences of the local Portland

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music scene were shown in this research to be an integral piece of how bands made sense of the world.

Participants' experiences led to their perception of the local identity of Portland. This is an example of how time and space are not fully compressed and how face-to-face interactions still shape local identities, which indicates that neo-localism is an alternative way of thinking about the impact of globalization. The exclusivity of space and time for creating unique experiences may seem obvious beyond mentioning, except that a growing perception is that one *can* get a full idea of what another place is like without being there. Thus, neo-localism adds a new perspective to discussing research on the impact of globalization.

This study also represents an important liaison between the disciplines of geography and communication and shows that each of these fields of study can offer valuable perspective for the other. Using a communication perspective in looking at geographical concepts reveals how the meanings surrounding places are used by people to construct identity and make sense of the world. Conversely, the geographical perspective is valuable for communication scholars in that it emphasizes the ways in which communication is spatially bound and oriented. Neo-localism itself, traditionally seen as a geographical concept, is deeply tied to communication in that it represents the ways in which communication and interaction norms can be associated with place.

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The most important contribution of this research is that it represents a new way of understanding globalization. Rather than assuming that globalization has had a similar impact everywhere and on everyone, the assumption behind this study is that the impacts of globalization are influenced by many factors, including local identity. The results from this research confirm that individuals from the Portland music scene are aware of the local identity and of the global perception of that identity and are using that identity to represent themselves to a global audience. Although these results may not be transferable to any other locality, it merely confirms Massey's (2005) call for a re-imagining of globalization as a force with many trajectories and many different impacts depending on many different factors. Showing that these impacts are highly complex and localized is a first step towards a better understanding of how the world is communicating and constructing identity in an age of globalization. Perhaps Jordan from The Krafters sums it up best:

(The Krafters, lines 768 – 772)

Jordan: Yeah, so it's weird, 'cause your location really does, it really does affect it [the experience of creating music]. I mean those guys [the LA band Cold War Kids] have to work hard to stay real in that town, and I think they have and I'm not here to talk about whether Cold War Kids are cool or not, but that's a hard job in that town, yknow?

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Interviewer: It's not as hard here?

Jordan: It's not hard here, you just do your thing and people like it.

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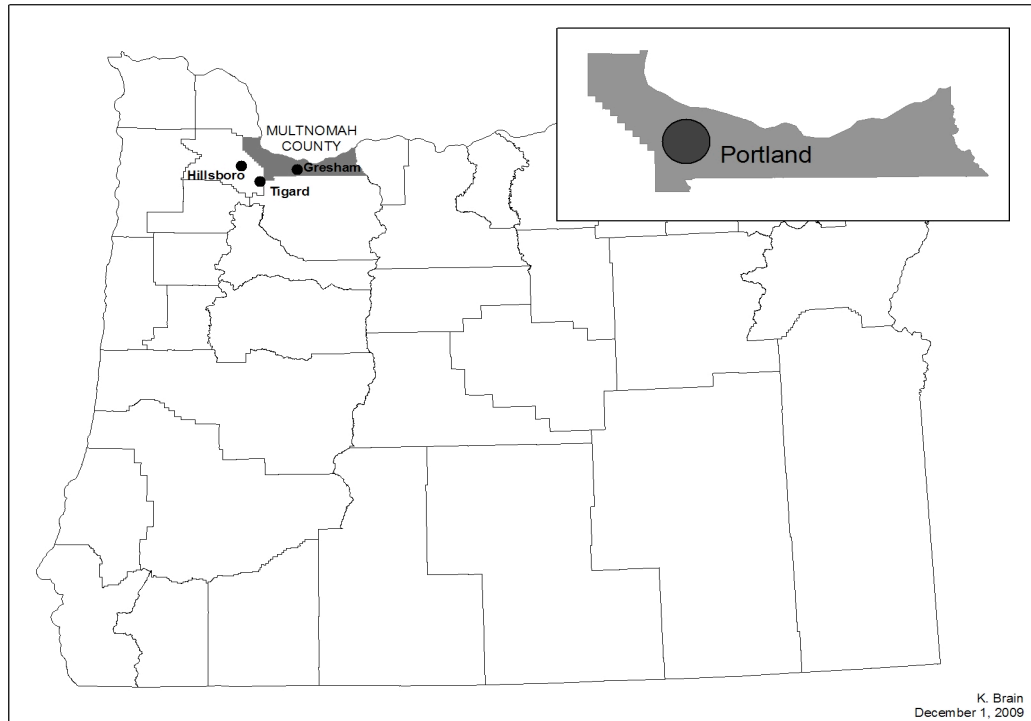
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## Appendix A: Geographic Setting



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### **Appendix B: Performance Venues**

Alberta Rose Theater  
3000 NE Alberta St., Portland

Bagdad Theatre and Pub  
3702 SE Hawthorne, Portland

Doug Fir Lounge  
830 E Burnside, Portland

Mississippi Studios  
3939 N. Mississippi St., Portland

White Eagle Tavern  
836 N Russell St., Portland

The Wonder Ballroom  
128 Northeast Russell Street

The Woods  
6637 SE Milwaukie Avenue, Portland



**Appendix C: Recruitment Script**

Dear (Band's Name)

I'm a graduate student at Portland State University doing research on the role of local bands in globalization and local culture. Turns out, the Portland music scene is an ideal place to conduct that research. As part of my study I'm conducting group interviews with several local bands, and I would be thrilled if you'd be willing to participate.

All that this would require is an hour of your time, as a full band. I'd like to sit down with all of you together and discuss your experiences as a band in the Portland music scene. The interview will be audio recorded, and I'll be taking notes. Nothing high pressure, and there are no right answers. I'm just interested in hearing about your experiences of creating music in a local music scene.

If that sounds agreeable, let's set up a time. Before a practice or after a gig, I'm flexible. You can call me at 503-953-2170, or email me back at [tjbrain@pdx.edu](mailto:tjbrain@pdx.edu).

Looking forward to talking with all of you,

Sincerely,

Tyler J. Brain  
Portland State University  
Communication Department

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### **Appendix D: Interview Guide**

RQ1: In what way does the Portland music scene act as a context for constructing local identity for Portland bands?

RQ2: In what way(s) is neo-localism evident in the way that Portland bands communicate about local identity?

Take a few minutes and tell me the history of your band, up to this point.

What was the impetus for beginning?

Where?

When?

What are your goals for your band – what do you see success looking like?

How would you characterize your music?

How would you characterize your band outside of music?

How has audience response been to your music?

Have you played outside of Portland?

If yes – how has audience response been there?

Do people hear your music differently in other cities? How so?

What other bands have been most influential on the style of music that you play?

When you think about promoting your band, what are the main parts of your band's identity that you find yourself promoting?

**Appendix E: Informed Consent**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Tyler J. Brain from Portland State University, Communication Department. The researcher hopes to learn in what ways the Portland music scene is impacted by globalization. This study is being conducted by the researcher in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a master's degree, and is being carried out under the supervision of Dr. Leslie Rill, a faculty at Portland State University. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a member of a band that met the requirements of participation.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to be involved in an audio-recorded group interview that will last approximately one hour. The audio recording will be used for transcription purposes only. You may not receive any direct benefit from taking part in this study, but the study may help to increase knowledge about the interplay between locality and global networks which may help others in the future.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be linked to you or identify you will be kept confidential. This information will be kept confidential by creating code names for each participant during transcription, so that neither your name nor you band's name, nor any identifying information such as song names or album names, will appear in the final research document. Further, the audio recording will be protected by being stored only on a password protected online data storage system.

Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study, and it will not affect your relationship with Portland State University. You may also withdraw from this study at any time without affecting your relationship with Portland State University.

If you have concerns or problems about your participation in this study or your rights as a research subject, please contact the Human Subjects Research Review Committee, Office of Research and Sponsored Projects, 600 Unitus Bldg., Portland State University, (503) 725-4288 / 1-877-480-4400. If you have questions about the study itself, contact Tyler J. Brain at tjbrain@pdx.edu, 503-953-2170.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the above information and agree to take part in this study. Please understand that you may withdraw your consent at any time without penalty, and that, by signing, you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this form for your own records.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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### Appendix F: Local Music Scene Questionnaire

1. What is your age?
2. What is your sex?
3. Are you currently a student?  
If yes, what level/grade?
4. What is the zip code of your current address?
6. If you were asked "where are you from?", what response do you feel is most accurate at this time in your life?
7. Would you consider yourself a Portland local?
8. Are you currently a member of an active band?
9. How often does your band practice?  
Less than once/month   once/month   once/week   twice/week   more than twice/week
10. How often does your band perform?  
Less than once/month   once/month   once/week   twice/week   more than twice/week
11. What style of music best characterizes your band?  
  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. What do you consider your primary musical instrument? (circle all that apply)  
Guitar   Piano/Keys   Bass   Drums   Strings   Brass   Other
13. How many live music shows do you watch per year in the Portland metro area?
14. In what venue do you most often watch live music?
15. In what venue do you most often play live music?
16. What bands do you feel most represent the local Portland music scene?  
  
\_\_\_\_\_