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# Every Town Is All the Same When You've Left Your Heart in the Portland Rain: Representations of Portland Place and Local Identity in Portland Popular Lyrics

Meghan Andrea Kearney  
*Portland State University*

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Every Town Is All the Same When You've Left Your Heart in the Portland Rain:  
Representations of Portland Place and Local Identity in Portland Popular Lyrics

by

Meghan Andrea Kearney

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

Master of Arts  
in  
Communication

Thesis Committee:  
Leslie A. Rill, Chair  
Lee Shaker  
Hunter Shobe

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## PLACE AND LOCAL IDENTITY IN PORTLAND POPULAR LYRICS

### **Abstract**

This study looks at how place and local identity of Portland are described within music lyrics from Portland, Oregon popular indie-rock artists. Employing a constant comparative analysis on a set of 1,201 songs from 21 different popular Portland indie-rock artists, the themes of landscapes and climate were found to represent place, and themes of lifestyles and attitudes represented local identity. Reviewing the uncovered themes showed a strong connection between representations of place and local identity within lyrics and common stereotypes or understandings of the city of Portland and its indie-rock music scene. The results of this study illustrate how place and local identity are communicated through popular but locally-tied music lyrics and how these lyrics may describe cities.

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### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Portland, Oregon is a city quickly becoming one of the most desired places to experience, booming with unique and celebrated cultures. Neighborhoods, restaurants, pubs, shops, events and more showcase the city of Portland and its community members on a daily basis. Within this, one of the strongest community ties recognized within the city and across the globe is the Portland music scene. Portland offers a tight knit community of local musicians and local fans who participate in performances nightly at venues like Portland's Doug Fir Lounge and Mississippi Studios, each situated in one of Portland's distinct neighborhoods. Each summer, local festivals like Musicfest Northwest and PDX Pop Now bring together thousands of community members across the city for a celebration of Portland artists. Portland's music scene is as much a part of the local community as the individual community members themselves, and those most responsible for making these connections are the artists.

As far back as recorded history allows, music has played a role in the communication of ideas, expressions of power, social happenings (Cooper, 1991) and endless forms of messages created by an artist and played to its listener. Dating back to 13 BC, designs found on tombs, walls, or pottery depicted figures with musical instruments (Cox, 1990). These depictions are thought to have displayed those of high power showing that even then, music and art were believed to have influential roles over culture, and those creating these influences were in a spotlight. Connecting this power of artist to a community, allows the artist to speak directly to local communities and express ideas about their own personal identifications with their communities. However, with the

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emergence of new technologies and globalization, geographic spaces and local music scenes now include *popular* artists whose work reaches well beyond their geographic boundaries.

The works of popular music artists have been endlessly exemplified as having distinct influence over audiences. These influences span from the way listeners dress to mirror artists, as in the punk rock genre (Hebdige, 1979), or to the way listeners live their daily lives based upon expressions of artists' personal lives through lyrics (Kubrin, 2005). The ability for popular artists to create works that are meaningful to them, communicates to mass audiences a sense of the artists' identity. This in turn helps shape the personal identities of listeners as influenced by these messages (Hebdige, 1979, Frith, 1992). When these messages are tied to specific geographic locations, mass audiences may shape ideas and identities about these places. With this, community members and global audiences retain understandings of place as depicted through popular music lyrics which are then incorporated into their personal lives.

In Portland, Oregon popular music artists are known for their extreme attachment with and involvement in their local communities, fostered through their recognition and ability as a popular artist to contribute to the community. This involvement is frequent and well-known locally, exemplifying Portland as one of the more notable and community oriented music scenes in the United States. For example, Chris Funk of the popular Portland band The Decemberists founded a children's variety show which hosts performances by Portland musicians where families can come and experience the Portland music scene through music, art and dance (Tabitha, 2012). Another popular

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Portland band, Pink Martini is heavily involved in the Portland community through participation in fundraisers for local radio stations, or hosting performances to raise awareness of local issues such as art and music programs. Former Portland mayor, Sam Adams, hosted concerts inside City Hall by some of Portland's best-known artists. This was done in effort to help bring together the Portland music scene and community members to gather in the physical center of the city, a notion that could be viewed as a way to bring together community members with their local governments and other community leaders, especially in the local music scene.

These examples are just a few that help explain how involvement with and ties to the Portland community from Portland popular artists remains strong. Despite an emerging global market, the frequent travel during touring and their ability to reach audiences outside of Portland, ties to a Portland artist's home city still seems to hold value. Though apparent within their physical involvement in the culture of Portland, one must ask if these connections with geographic place and the artists' local identities appear within their musical work, a focus that has been scarcely neglected in the field of communication and popular music.

### **Justification**

The purpose for this study on popular music is important within the realm of popular music, place, identity and communication research because of the connections between popular music (Hebdige, 1979, Frith, 1992, Bennett, 1997), place (Cresswell, 2004; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1974) and local identity (Lynch, 1960; Relph, 1976; Stamm, 1985). To view these concepts as related to the field of communication, these connections



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will be looked at as mass mediated messages found within lyrics of popular music artists.

As literature on musicology and ethnomusicology has shown, music plays a significant role in the shaping of cultures and identities among its listeners (Frith, 1981, 1992; Bennett, 1997).

The study will address an area of communication that is lacking within research: communication of music lyrics related to geographic place by locally tied popular music artists. In communication and popular music studies, a wide range of research has analyzed mass mediated content such as printed or televised news reports, television shows, books, or social media messages as a common starting point for analyzing messages in the communication field. Popular music lyrics are another, but less prominently researched form of mass media. Previous studies on popular music lyrics have looked at depictions of gang violence (Kubrin, 2005), aging (Aday & Austin, 2000) or physical place (Carney, 1998, Romig, 2009). However, one aspect that is lacking within research is looking at how artists depict the geographical place where they live within lyrics. When looking at these representations as descriptions of local being depicted to global audiences, it is important to understand how and what these artists are communicating about place.

This study will take a look at the lyrics of popular music artists from the city of Portland, Oregon. The goal is to uncover how the concepts of place and local identity are represented within these lyrics. As discussed above, Portland, Oregon is known for having a strong culture and community tied tightly to artists and local life. Portland also has a number of highly influential and widely recognized (by *College Music Journal*

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charts) popular music artists. These aspects make the city of Portland a solid representation of a city whose artists are likely to communicate depictions of place and local identity. Additionally, because these artists have the ability to write about their home city, and opportunity for these writings to span across global audiences, Portland popular music offers a justified starting point for research on this topic.

### **Study Goals**

The overall goal of this study is to shed light on the way popular music lyrics are used as a tool by localized popular artists to communicate representations of place and local identity of Portland, where these artists live. The lyrics of popular artists (whose music has appeared on national music charts) were chosen, rather than lyrics of local artists to provide this study with a medium which reaches mass audiences. Themes of these representations will first be uncovered from lyrics of popular artists from Portland, Oregon using a qualitative, constant comparative method. They will then be separated into categories by theme.

The first goal of this study will be to uncover how locally tied popular music artists depict place within their music lyrics. Using previously discussed definitions of place based in literature, lyrics will be reviewed for related representations. They will then be categorized into common themes and qualitatively assessed. These results will help shape an understanding of how the concept of place is represented within locally tied popular music lyrics.

The second goal of this study will be to understand how the concept of local identity is represented in locally tied popular music lyrics. Similarly to the above,

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previously defined understanding of local identity will be utilized in uncovering representations in lyrics. These findings will then also be categorized by theme. Results will help to illustrate how local identity is presented within popular lyrics, and how these lyrics portray the local identity of Portland.

The final goal of the study will be to determine what the uncovered themes of place and local identity depict about Portland, Oregon. This will be done by assessing the uncovered themes and breaking them down as mass messages representing Portland to global audiences. This will help explain how Portland popular artists depict the city of Portland and to determine the existence of a connection between what is commonly understood of the city and what is found within lyrics.

In conclusion, this study will take into account previous research on place and local identity and apply them to popular music. The main purpose of this study is to address the lack of research on these theories within popular music lyrics, with the aim of determining how place and local identity are represented within popular music lyrics. Additionally, the uncovered themes will help to better explain how music lyrics are used as a tool to shape understandings of places to mass audiences.

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### Chapter 2: Literature Review

#### Popular Music

In the realm of music research, popular music is one of the newest areas of study. Popular music was considered different from the types of classical music genres that dominated the field of music studies. Across the field, the term has been given a number of varying definitions, but is typically viewed as a form of music which is known by a wide audience. Early scholars like Bourdieu (1984) discussed popular music in terms of its artistic value. Kant (1911) describes the aesthetic theory which Bourdieu (1984) debated does not apply to popular culture. Within this argument, Bordieu (1984) splits music into high and low culture which divides music into a more legitimate art form (as in composers like Bach) verses popular music, which would be considered of lower cultural and social status. Kant's (1911) theory however looks at art and aesthetics as controlled by one's own imagination and interpretation (Gracyk, 2007). Being that popular music was first perceived as a low-art form carrying less cultural value than classical music, for example, its importance in the field was and still is debated.

Adorno & Horkheimer (1944) critiqued popular music as more of a product of industry and capitalism, or a connection between producer and consumer, rather than art. Adorno & Horkheimer (1944) place a major focus on the role of popular music within the culture industry (Krimms, 2003). Here, the literature critiques popular music as a standardized product, lacking in artistic value and mass produced by those in control of the industry. Capitalistic and hegemonic control was said to pull popular music even farther away from being considered an art form. These scholars provided a basic

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understanding of the role and importance of popular music in both communication and cultural studies, especially in the area of popular music products, which this study will focus on.

Over time, popular music was studied with even more depth. Scholars began looking at popular music in terms of its value and experimenting with different forms of popular music analysis. Theories were split between musicology, with a focus on music theory and ethnomusicology which focused on the culture of popular music, fandom, and authenticity (Moore, 2003). Ethnomusicology more importantly aims to study popular music as representative of both “the self and other” with the ability to both “mediate sameness” and “transform otherness” (Bohlman, 2005, p. 206). Today, it is still debated how to properly analyze popular music but more acceptance of popular music and its cultural and communicative effects have appeared in literature. As popular music continues to grow, especially with the extent of globalization, the topic becomes even more relevant to communication studies.

**Popular music as global.** Globalization has often been a term used to describe how life, culture, production and other typically localized practices become homogenous in nature and span the globe (Albrow & King, 1990, Appadurai, 1990). Roberston (1992) describes globalization as a process which creates a singular society, usually determined by the ruling class or processes such as Westernization, for example. Chrisman (2008) explains that globalization fosters inversion, where “the domestic is international and vice versa” (p. 14). In this, production is based upon profit, and expression is limited to what fits into a popularized idea of commodity (Chrisman, 2008). Media and technology have

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been two of the major outlets supporting the spread of globalization (Appadurai, 1990).

Advances in technology (beginning as far back as transportation) have allowed ideas, products, cultures and visions of communities to spread across the globe. During this period, the world has experienced a change in various practices in and understanding of the world around them.

Globalization has in some way affected all media and communication industries around the world. In the news industry, online journalism has opened up means for global audiences to access news from outlets across the globe. Thurman (2007) explains the *Jerusalem Post*, *The China Times* and the UK's *Guardian* online newspapers received 90%, 60-70% and 78% of readership from overseas, respectively. The advertising industry has also been affected, showing strong representations of global messaging. Nelson and Paek (2007) found in a study of advertisements in the global magazine *Cosmopolitan* that advertisements were significantly multi-national (72.2%) as opposed to domestic (27.3%). They also found that a significantly greater number of multi-national advertisements adopted global languages rather than domestic. With new global audiences, media outlets are being forced to appeal to global audiences or risk dying out. Understanding the threats of globalization explains the importance of research on popular music a global medium.

The popular music industry is one that has been greatly affected by globalization (Yazıcıoğlu, 2010). For the purposes of this study, globalization is relevant to the audiences that popular artists reach in global markets. How audiences are reached plays an important role in popular music studies because of the ways popular music has been

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shown to connect with society. Globalization of the music industry offers both a new global market for artists to reach, and allows audiences to obtain music from across the globe. Taking into account globalization, the idea of globalized music provides a new way to define popular music. Rather than viewed as a particular genre, popular music will be defined as music which is popularly recognized through high sales, available to and accessed by mass audiences or otherwise overwhelmingly globalized. Popular music under this definition has been relatively neglected within research, especially when assessing the ways in which the work of popular artists is affected.

According to certain research, music entering a more global market threatens the local aspects of music. Fairley (2001) explains some instances of local music as performances in local community space, local musicians whose music is globally available through small local companies, or multinational companies impeding into and potentially exploiting local scenes. In many of these instances artists are still defined as local, retaining some form of locality even when breaking into a global market. With this, an artist's personal locality should still be expected to play a role in their musical creations. With this connection at play, few studies have looked at how artists portray their local communities within a global market. Two concepts that help explain locality are place and local identity. These two concepts play a strong role in communication and cultural studies fields but have yet to be explicitly addressed in popular music studies in relation to cities of origin.

Popular music becoming a global outlet affects these ideas of place and local identity, based on the threats of globalization as discussed above. As technology, media

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and in this case, music, spread ideas of place and local identity across the globe, distant groups are able to conceptualize physically distant places. Yazıcıoğlu (2010) suggests that the globalization of the music industry takes away from the understanding of cultural identities through music. Though globalized music may represent a global language or sound, it remains a tool by which listeners shape identities and understand place and boundaries even if not their own (Yazıcıoğlu, 2010). In order to understand better the dynamic between popular music, place and local identity the two concepts must first be defined.

### **Place**

The idea of place most relative to this study refers to a physical location. That being said, place is a concept that has been primarily researched within the field of geography. It is a concept that plays a major role in the way individuals and groups make connections between community, culture, communication and other related fields. Cresswell (2004) addresses place as more closely related to sociology and communication fields as a physical but also cultural concept. As a physical concept, place refers to geographical constructs like landscapes boundaries and surfaces, whereas socially, place is defined as both influential to social structures within it while also influencing these social structures. Socially, Cresswell (2004) explains place as less tied to boundaries and physicality, but more defined by the way it is conceptualized and meaningful to humans. These ideas help develop an understanding of place as grounded within physical landscapes, but not singularly defined by them. Rather, these two realms work together to explain the connections between place and people, highlighting the



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importance of place in culture and further defining the different ways that place is understood.

Within literature, a number of different ways to understand place have been discussed. Most relative to this study, the concept of place should be understood as a way to make sense of environment (Tuan, 1974), understanding separation of territories (Harvey, 2001), the significance of place compared to other spaces (Oldenburg, 1999, 2001) and finally the mental mapping of place (Cresswell, 2004, Lynch, 1960, Stamm, 1985). Each of these discussions plays an important role in explaining why place is important to communication and culture, how the role of place within these fields are pertinent to this study and how to best understand place as it is perceived and communicated about by humans.

To begin, Tuan (1974) explains place as the way one makes sense of their environment, the attachments and connections they feel with their environments, or topophilia; a sense of place. This is explained through five categories: a general perception of one's world, the interaction between environment and culture, extracting environmental attitudes and values, historical changes in environmental evaluation and the meaning or history of aspects like city, suburb or wilderness. Overall, Tuan (1974) explains place as an idea through which humans respond to, perceive of and value their physical environment. Much like Cresswell (2004) defines place as a physical concept, Tuan (1974) also addresses such connections with surfaces and landscapes and argues that perceptions of such vary from person to person. These perceptions stem from senses like visualizations (seeing three dimensions, lightness or shadows), touch (i.e. how one

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feels different surfaces), and hearing (the sound of rain on a surface), all of which play a role in human understandings of external realities. These understandings of environment furthermore vary from place to place, explaining that as humans make sense of their environment, they also make distinctions between places.

The distinctions that humans make between one place and another allow place to be understood as both unique from and relative to other places. This begins with such physical connections and separations of territories like nation, state, regional or other varying forms of geographical locations (Harvey, 2001; Romig, 2009) that are typically divided by written or physical boundaries. As place is uniquely understood, knowledge of inhabitants and happenings associated with these places are also understood to have unique qualities as connected to that place. Within these places, both individuals and groups become subject to certain connections with their socially constructed community, or ways through which they identify with these communities and spaces. For example, Harvey (2001) looks at structures of power within geographical locations and the ways through which they shape such aspects as government, social services, commercialism, population, and well-being of inhabitants, to name a few. Social aspects such as these help individuals further make sense of territorial boundaries both internally and externally. These connections will be explored in relation to culture later in this paper, but for now help define understandings of place as both physical and social constructions.

These above definitions of place shape an understanding of space as geographically significant, separated by boundaries and encompassing significant social constructions within them. With this in mind, a more micro understanding of place has

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also been discussed within literature. These understandings help explain place based on what appears within physical boundaries and better define how space is perceived from within. Oldenburg (1999, 2001) explains that the physical aspects of a community play an integral role in making geographical space significant to the lives of individuals within them and as compared to other geographical spaces. Oldenburg (1999, 2001) exemplifies this through the term third places, which describes where community members come to gather, associate, to celebrate goings on, and to build relationships with other members of the community. Third places are considered by Oldenburg (2001) to be centers of community life, providing outlets for the social functioning of the community. They are physical places such as bars or coffee shops that community members come to recognize and form a familiarity with, distinguishing their community from others, and solidifying their own personal connections with the physical community. Furthermore, physical spaces within boundaries such as these, as well as those expanding beyond, play a role in cognitive or mental mapping of physical space.

Place is best defined by the way humans conceptualize of space as a whole as discussed above. These conceptualizations occur for both community members and non-members and showcase how humans understand and communicate about physical place, but more importantly explain how space is mentally mapped and visualized. Lynch (1960) found that the five most common categories for mental mapping of cities were based on paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks. These five categories were found to be predominantly represented by physical aspects like streets, buildings, and other

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identifiable reference points throughout physical communities. These categories are examples of both how people perceive of space, but also communicate about it.

Cresswell (2004) furthers this idea of how place is understood and communicated about with an explanation of how place is referred to in everyday speech. These references play a role in the basic communication and understanding of place by humans, further helping create mental images and maps. By using descriptive words to discuss a place, it represents some kind of common reference or understanding of that place (Cresswell, 2004). Similar to the categories defined by Lynch (1960), Cresswell (2004) explains connections people make with physical spaces based upon hearing names. For example, a name such as Central Park triggers mental images of the landscapes and happenings that are typically associated with Central Park. This understanding of place highlights how communication and cognition play an important role in understandings of physical space, especially when understanding place as an integral part of the everyday lives of humans within their physical environments. With a clear understanding of the concept of place the first research question will be:

*RQ<sub>1</sub> What themes related to the concept of place appear within lyrics of Portland popular artists?*

Places, recognized as part of a physical community play a role in the daily lives of community members and allow for creations and relationships to grow within the community. Physically and socially constructed understandings of place are only a small aspect in the overall understanding of a community. The concept of community is a more abstract term that reflects how people coalesce within place. With this idea, the

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importance of actual community oriented and cultural goings-on within physical space are also valuable aspects of place (Erlmann, 1998, Stamm, 1985). The conceptualization centralized around these concepts can be defined as the local identities individuals and groups associate with place. Though a distinct characteristic of place, this concept is a unique in explaining such things as lifestyles and attitudes that help give unique identification to specific places.

### **Local Identity**

Local identity has been referred to in a number of ways by scholars. For the purpose of this paper, it will be understood as the more abstract connections that humans make with place. Lippard (1997) provides a broad definition of local identity as identification with a geographical area. Part of having a sense of place, local identity comes in the forms of experience, immersion and intimacy with a place. Schnell and Reese (2003) address this concept also as a sense of place, or distinctive connections community members feel that set one place apart from others around the globe. The major difference between understandings of place and local identity is the lived experience that occurs within place. These experiences, usually more culturally and socially oriented, are what shape the human identification and allow people to define place not by its physicality but by the experiences they identify with place. These definitions have strong commonalities with the way place is defined as both physical and social (Cresswell, 2004, Tuan, 1974) constructs but must be broken down as differential and significant from place. The following section will define local identity through collective consciousness (Cerulo, 1997, Hoffman & Eveland, 2010, Stamm, 1985),

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community attachment (Putnam, 2001, Stamm, 1985) and culture (Hebdige, 1979; Scott, 2000), provide examples of how local identity is understood and expressed within place and explain its importance to place and culture.

To begin, Cerulo (1997) explains local identity as tied to collective conscience first introduced by Durkheim, and the class consciousness theories of Marx. His ideas address social environments of individuals and groups also similar to those explained by Bourdieu (1993, 1984). These theories have also led to the concept of a collective identity which helps explain certain group-relative identities important to geographical communities. Cerulo (1997) claims that collective identity “addresses the ‘we-ness’ of a group, stressing the similarities or shared attributes around which group members coalesce” (p. 386). This theory is sometimes perceived as defining homogenized culture within a geographical location. This in turn creates a collective local identity for inhabitants of the place itself, and furthermore may help define the way outsiders develop identities with the location. Depending on the different lifestyles within a given geographical location, inhabitants are influenced by similar local identifiers and construct a collective identity regarding their particular locale.

This understanding of a locally tied, collective identity must happen within similar groups of individuals or what can be referred to as community. Within this study, communities are reflected as those within a specific place, in this case a city. Erlmann (1998) addresses the idea of a community within Kant’s aesthetic communities (the notion that communities fall into an aesthetic balance of ethics, tradition and contingency among groups of individuals). Within this idea, Erlmann (1998) explains that locality

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plays an important role in society and social structure, though the idea also varies among how people perceive of local space. He states that styles and culture within localities offer a glimpse into understanding identifications with place. Within these physical local communities as individuals participate in localized culture, an understanding and recognition for one's own community develops.

Within this study, community plays an important role in that it defines, in this case, a group of people who share residence in a singular geographical space. Within a community both groups and individuals are able to build local identities around various beliefs or practices, for example, which happen in shared space. Furthermore, this notion influences a person's overall attachment with their community within place. This happening is commonly referred to in literature as community attachment. This concept is described as the bond between a person and their community, for example in the form of abstract situations such as connections with neighbors (Hoffman & Eveland, 2010). Stamm (1985) similarly conceptualizes local identity as cognitive community ties where one experiences a sense of belonging to a place. The act of cognitively placing oneself into a community, especially when it is defined by physical space, helps shape how an individual identifies with and feels a part of the social and physical world around them. Community attachment plays a major role in how and through what factors community members are able to shape their own local identities.

Local identity is also fostered through local cultural aspects of place. Scott (2000) analyzes the ways in which culture organizes itself in specific places. The role of both economic and cultural issues is integral in both the formation of a city and its continuing

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growth. “Cities have exhibited a conspicuous capacity both to generate culture in the form of art, ideas, styles and ways of life, and to induce high levels of economic innovation and growth” (Scott, 2000). Within highly urbanized cities, for example, being centralized spaces for industry and production, an argument can be made that geographic locations, especially cities, can in turn produce highly distinctive cultures bound by and flourished within the physical community. Scott (2000) assesses a number of different criterion through which place affects the nature of cultural productions such as conditions of life, modeling of contextual conditions and the socialization and social profile of practitioners and audiences. He uses Paris and Hollywood as two cities dependent on groups of writers, actors, directors and others to make up their contemporary industries. In this example, notions of power structures are also at play in the control of social and cultural identities. “Place based communities such as these are...active hubs of social reproduction in which crucial cultural competencies are maintained and circulated” (Scott, 2000, p. 33). Many major and minor cities around the world hold such distinctive identities as those described of Paris and Hollywood, and these identities depend on local cultures, attitudes and lifestyles to shape their identity.

The above definitions help offer an understanding of the role that local identity has amongst communities and why its role is an important factor in the understanding of place and groups of people within them. Local identity, however, is not restricted to a definition of internal communities alone because as cultures and understandings of local culture are shaped within today's communities (via globalization and technology) these understandings have the ability to be portrayed externally. That being said, the specific



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outlets through which local identity is experienced internally and representative of local space externally must be addressed. The distinction between identifications of place and identifications with place is explained in that "identity is a basic feature of our experience of places which both influences and is influenced by those experiences" (Relph, 1976, p. 45). Though different, identifications of and with place develop from similar situations. These understandings of local identity will be supported by the above ideas of collective consciousness and community but will be the most pertinent ways to address how local identity is specifically exemplified as related to this study both with and of place.

With an understanding of the role local identity plays in place and the communities within them, specific examples of place-bound happenings responsible for development of local identity must be discussed. Overall, local aspects like politics, religion, civic happenings, work, and urban space play significant roles in defining how people identify with specific physical places. Relph (1976) explains static physical settings, activities, and meanings as the three basic elements of identity with place, all of which are based upon the human experience. To exemplify these three elements, Relph (1976) cites aspects such identification with earth, sea and sky, recognition of a coal-mining town or mountain region, or associated interests and viewpoints, respectively. Relph (1976) also distinguishes individual and group identification with place arguing that while the two are different from one another they maintain similarities. For example, a pedestrian and a driver may experience or identify with a street in two different manners while one is walking and the other is driving, but in one way or another both

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experience the same street (Relph, 1976). This example builds an even stronger argument for the collective types of identity that are experienced within locally-bound space.

Putnam (2001) addresses many of these locally-bound aspects of place which help make local identities distinct from others. The success of communities depends on such things as the existence of political parties, civic gatherings, places to participate in religion, and the workplace, to name a few (Putnam, 2001). These community aspects are furthermore examples of the role of place-based power structures. Within place, these are areas within which local identity is fostered and thrives. For example, civic gatherings give way to political identities both dominant and marginalized that help define the experience of particular place, further shaping identity with and of place. In research, local identity has been exemplified through a number of connections with these unique identities of and with place.

Harvey (2001) exemplifies such aspects as local and global class relations which help to shape local identity. These relations define a dominant class, and further shape an identity of not only the different classes of people within specific places, but the power relations between classes. Other factors of place that help shape local identity are aspects such as gender or race. For example, Radcliffe (1993) refers to the role of women in Latin America, where women were identified here as being mothers, keeping up with household chores, and having restricted privileges under the local military. The treatment and roles of women within this community expressed an identification that could be tightly tied to the specific place. In contrast, more micro level identification with such place-based activities like sports have also been discussed as playing a role in the

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construction of local identity. Shobe (2008) discusses the way that football clubs, specifically Football Club Barcelona, plays a major role in the cultural and political identification of both city and nation. By making connections with teams, stadiums or players, for example, and the shared experiences of match participation, collective identities are shaped around the locally tied sport. Other studies have made similar connections to the ways that music helps bring together place and local identity. This concept is most closely related to the study at hand and is best exemplified within the ideas of music scenes.

### **Music Scenes**

The importance of popular music as an agent of mass communication and the importance of place and local identity shaping views and understandings of space and culture is apparent within literature as discussed above. These concepts melded together are best explained through the concept of the music scene. Music scenes play a major role in shaping the way that place is perceived by global audiences when connected to music. The music artists who play strong roles in these scenes may also have a strong hand in shaping these understandings and perceptions of place. By uncovering how place and local identity are presented within popular music, a stronger connection can be made between popular music and a specified place. Understanding how place and local identity are connected to a particular music scene can provide an even more in-depth way to assess the connections between popular music artists, place and local identity.

Music scenes represent a large portion of the music industry in the United States and scenes of major U.S. cities across the country employ the majority of music artists in

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the country. In an analysis of music employment (as defined by any type of employment within the music industry, i.e. record labels, venues, groups, etc.) in cities around the United States, Florida and Jackson (2010) found that 31 major metropolitan regions (New York City showing the largest numbers and Santa Fe, New Mexico showing the smallest of the 31) made up 62.5% of all music employment in the country, while the top 14 regions made up 52.5%. Through these findings, Florida and Jackson (2010) discuss that music scenes are “geographic locations where the market, broadly defined, exists in microcosm, comprising producers and consumers, buyers and sellers, and all sorts of intermediaries, who interact socially as well as economically, and in a defined geographic space” (p. 318).

In number, music scenes are strong representatives of small centralized communities of a broader music industry (Florida & Jackson, 2010), each with their own unique qualities. Within these scenes, those involved shape identities with and understandings of the place and culture of community that are experienced within the music scene. Bennett and Peterson (2004) describe the local music scene as an area within a city where the community is able to participate in an overall set of happenings related to artists. Fans are able to participate in local promotions and volunteer work, for example. Similarly, artists are tightly bound to their music scene through performance. Bennett (1997) explains the importance of local pubs, much like other local physical performance spaces, as one of the most integral pieces of a music scene. These places for music performance were places where audience members and performers alike could

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come to share in the experience of music and their local community, all within the boundaries of that community (Bennett, 1997).

In this case, the local music scene plays an important role in popular music in that it is a distinct local, place oriented group that artists, even popular ones call home. The shared experiences within the scene are relatively similar for artists across the board. Studying the work of popular artists from a singular music scene may uncover equal similar articulations of place and local identity thus giving more value to the connections between music scenes and popular artists. Understanding the concepts of place and local identity within popular music will similarly provide a better understanding of the role of popular music as a mass communicative tool depicting local identity. With this, a second research question is posed:

*RQ<sub>2</sub>: What themes related to the concept of local identity appear within lyrics of Portland popular artists?*

### **Place and Local Identity in Popular Music**

As discussed earlier, place and local identity share distinct connections. The following discussions expand beyond just the local music scene, looking at popular music as an important mechanism for shaping place and local identity. A connection between popular music, place and local identity can happen in a number of ways. Shobe and Banis (2010) highlight the importance of music and geographic connections through exploration of the ways that music helps shape people's understanding of place and stereotypes within specific geographic locations. To understand the importance and existence of this connection, they asked participants to create mental maps of music

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regions and place. Results showed that participants were able to mentally map certain music genres to specific areas inside the United States with notable overlap. Shobe and Banis (2010) argue these results explain the important connection between music and geography. Music helps inform listeners about place, and place helps shape an understanding of music. A topic further covering this connection is referred to as music geography.

### **Music geography**

As discussed above, geographic place helps foster physical communities and local identities that develop within physical place. The importance of music's connection to culture, in combination with the concepts of place and local identity, shows a distinct and relative connection between popular music and place. This happens when people within a community form ties and identities with the physical place they live in. When these identities are reflected back through such creations as music, they also portray a depiction and understanding of the location to other audiences. Though often neglected in the whole of related research, this type of connection has been previously looked at by some scholars.

In literature, this concept of music geography covers the most important ways through which music and place meld together. Music and place connect in many unique ways that potentially contribute to formations and understandings of place and local identity between residents of place and listeners of popular music with ties to place. The way that these ideas are communicated *through* music *to* residents of place help shape these connections. In this field, popular music is assessed as being a part of physical and

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spatial landscapes. This is important when taking into account how local identities and community are formed within specific geographical space, making a connection between the two concepts and popular music.

Carney (1998) explains the breakdown of music geography studies among nine categories that relate to the music itself: styles, structure, lyrics, performers and composers, centers and events, media, ethnic, instrumentation, and industry. In addition, the study of music geography is broken down by ten general premises (Carney, 1998) which aid in an argument as to why music and place hold important cultural connections. The first assesses the physical geographic boundaries of music regions and their interpretations. This notion links place to sound and sound to place. Carney (1998) exemplifies such representations of this category as the attachment of Polka music and the American Upper Midwest or Jamaica and Reggae. The second category looks at place-specific music and its evolution such as Seattle and Grunge or Nashville and Country. Third, music geography can also represent origins and diffusions of music such as Blues music holding origins in the Mississippi Delta region and its path of diffusion to Chicago. Similarly, the fourth category looks at the spread of music along migration, transportation and communication routes.

Looking at music geography from the point of view of music dominance over place, the fifth category looks at representations of a place within music. This idea is most specifically relative to this study. For example, this is seen in such elements of music as lyrical portrayals of the surf rock lifestyle of 1960's Southern California. The sixth category looks at the effects of music on place, such as creations of music venues,

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while the seventh focuses on the connection between music industry and place, such as locations of record labels or radio stations. The eighth category reviews music and the natural environment of place, such as certain instruments being crafted from a region's natural materials. The ninth category looks at expression of nationalism within music and the tenth similarly connects music to such geographically oriented cultural aspects as politics or sports. Together, these categories explain the types of connections that can be found between place and music, and offers a number of ways to view and assess these connections as related to music, place, and local identity. The most pertinent of Carney's (1998) ten categories as relevant to this study explains the ways in which music reflects place. This idea assumes the role of the music itself as being significantly important to the shaping of identities with place and these depictions are best displayed through popular music lyrics.

### **Popular music lyrics**

Shobe and Banis (2010) state the important role of music in the "social construction and maintenance of identities that tie people and places together" (p. 88). Similarly, Hudson (2006) argues that music helps foster a sense of place and helps to shape attachments with place. The role of music making these connections with place is best uncovered through music lyrics. Lyrics play the role of a communicative text and verbally based outlet through which popular music can express the ideas of place and local identity to audiences. Relph (1976) explains mass understandings of place and local identity as constructs created by opinion leaders and spread to outsiders via mass media. In this case, music lyrics are the mass-mediated tool expressed to global audiences, with



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the songwriters working as opinion leaders. Following Relph's (1976) assessment, place and local identity as portrayed via popular music lyrics are highly influential to those who decode these conceptualizations about place and further build identities with and of place. Reviewing lyrics has been a method through which previous studies have researched the way in which place, local identity, and related concepts have been expressed via music.

As an overall assessment of music lyrics as a communicative tool, Pettijohn and Sacco (2009) describe lyrics as “an important form of communication, serving a variety of purposes as documented in the psychology of language literature. Lyrics tell stories and communicate with audiences in a manner similar to how people have conversations with each other” (p. 298). As related to geography, Romig (2009) describes lyrics as having the ability to create geographical themes which allow listeners to perceive of physical place whether explicitly or through vivid imagery. In addition to place, through a study of local identity of Newfoundland music, Moore (2003) found "the deliberate fostering of local identity in popular music can be accomplished both musically and lyrically. Newfoundland Heritage may be emphasized by the use of provincial place names, phrases and words in a song's lyrics" (p. 6).

Representations of place and local identity are often uncovered within popular music lyrics. These ideas are typically found within lyrics as reference or overall themes of songs, written by artists in order to represent or make connections with places that are personally meaningful to them (Hayes, 2009). In a study of popular music and representations of place, Hayes (2009) analyzes representations of four U.S. regions, the South, Midwest, West and Northeast. Findings showed that California was heavily

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represented in popular music, typically portrayed through either its positives (land of opportunity) or its negatives (consumerism and homelessness). This was exemplified in songs from popular artists such as The Beach Boys (“California Dreaming”), 2Pac (“California Love”) or Bob Dylan (“California”). The West was similarly represented through songs about Las Vegas (Tom Waits, “Straight to the Top,” Sheryl Crow, “Leaving Las Vegas”) focusing on topics deeply tied to the city such as prostitution and gambling. The Midwest was heavily represented through lyrics depicting Chicago focusing on its blues scene and crime (especially related to Al Capone).

**Finding themes within lyrics.** Themes within music lyrics are commonly analyzed in popular music studies to uncover cultural representations. Kubrin (2005) conducted a content analysis of lyrics from platinum selling rap albums from 1992-2000. In his study, he found that a set of six “street codes” (p. 363) previously uncovered from an ethnography of inner-city morality (Anderson, 1999), were commonly presented in the sample of rap songs. Results uncovered that themes of respect, violence, material wealth, violence retaliation and nihilism were presented within anywhere from 22-68% of songs. Based upon the already established cultural codes (Anderson, 1999), these results showed a connection between the lived identities of inner city life and themes presented within rap music, a favored music genre of the demographic (Kubrin, 2005).

In a similar study, Aday and Austin (2000) conducted a content analysis to determine how country music made positive or negative references related to aging. Using top-selling country music songs according to Billboard sales, the authors uncovered seven categorical themes related to aging: “physical attributes, mobility and

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reaction time, mental health, reminiscence, loneliness and isolation, quality of relationships and mortality (p. 139)”. They then assessed the categories for positive or negative portrayals and found such correlations as aging being depicted more positively when it was in reference to an elder family member, for example. The researchers’ argument stated that depictions of stereotypes in popular music lyrics were influential to listeners in terms of fostering stereotypes. Finding the presence of these themes helped craft an argument as to how popular music may influence listeners’ cultural beliefs about aging, showing the importance of thematization of lyrics about topic.

Lyrics relative to place and local identity have been common findings within music. For example, Nocke (2006) explains the connection between Mediterraneanism and Israeli popular music highlighting the presence of strong Mediterranean themes and rhythms. Mediterranean artists aimed to create authentic representations of culture even during periods when music of certain segmented cultures was considered marginalized. These pieces of music helped to both shape and represent the cultures within this geographic location. Nocke (2006) explains “the commitment to the idea ‘one nation—one culture’ was dominant, and art, literature, and music alike were tuned towards the expression of a new locality. The search for the specifically local demonstrates the longing to become part of the region, to find a ‘natural’ place within the space, and to understand where society is located vis-à-vis its neighbors and vis-à-vis the entire world (p. 148)”.

A number of studies have researched the connection between music and place through both audience perceptions and feelings regarding the connection, to the ways

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artists represent physical place through themes within music lyrics. Pesses (2009) draws on a connection between Los Angeles, California and the popular rock act The Red Hot Chili Peppers, from Los Angeles. The study addresses both depictions of the city and its culture within the band's lyrics and the connection between the city and its influence on the band's music. Through review of both song lyrics, as well as music videos, Pesses (2009) uncovers a number of themed connections between the music of The Red Hot Chili Peppers and the city of Los Angeles. Examples of some of these themes include the personification of the city itself in the popular track "Under the Bridge" as well as the lyrical representations of an influx of individuals to L.A. in the hopes of becoming a Hollywood star in the song "Tell Me Baby." Through analysis of these lyrics, Pesses (2009) exemplifies lyrical connections between popular music and Los Angeles, offering a useful glimpse into the way popular music represents place and local identity.

Romig (2009) looks at popular songs about California to signify the use of music and lyrics as representations of the state. Though data was collected from songs not necessarily created by Californian artists, this data provides a helpful assessment of further representations of place within popular music that help to shape place and local identity. Through content analysis used to uncover themes, Romig (2009) classified six major categories representing California from 27 Billboard top twenty hits from 1955-1999. These themes included 1) escapism and far-away romance, 2) exuberance in the surf and drug era, 3) experimentalism and the summer of love, 4) downhearted and downtrodden in Hollywood, 5) hedonism, partying and the voyeur, and 6) masculinity and the Gangsta's paradise. These categories were represented through these popular

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song lyrics while directly representing cultural goings-on and practices of California during the time periods of popularity of the chosen songs.

Though these studies offer a way to look at popular music lyrics depicting place, there have been few studies which look at how the concepts of place and local identity are communicated through lyrics related to a specific place. These concepts in lyrics, especially via popular artists are important in what they portray of the artists' home locale. The aim of this study will be to not only uncover overall themes that may relate to place and local identity within popular music, but also to understand how and what they depict about a specific place to local and mass audiences.

**Effects of place and local identity in popular lyrics.** Finally, an important realm of study within popular music and lyrics is an understanding of how it relates to the culture of a city. As discussed earlier, globalization has caused major changes within communication, mass media, and specifically within the music industry. The ability for popular artists to spread and communicate rapidly across a global medium potentially causes them to reach an overwhelmingly large audience. This leads to a debate regarding loss of place and local identity representations within music lyrics or a devaluation of such across global audiences. Fairley (2001) suggests two perspectives regarding the ideas of globalization and popular music. The first defines it as the “process in which local musicians may be seen to lose their soundscape, from ‘transnational’ musical forms (like rock)” (p. 273), while the other perspective is defined as “the way in which global musicians adopt local sounds, and may appropriate local ‘traditional’ copyrights” (p.

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273). Both issues here have the potential to take away from the representations of place and local identity in lyrics that have since been discussed within this paper.

These ideas not only bring about a question as to whether or not popular musicians change their lyrical representations as they gain popularity but also creates the notion that place and local identity references to cities of origin now speak to audiences in distant places. When thinking about popular music, no previous research has looked at changes in popular artists' depiction of their home locations over time, some research has looked at common popular song lyrics and broad changes over time. Though this study will not view changes over time, the use of popular music will aid in explaining how lyrics are used as a mass tool to shape perceptions of a city via place and local identity references.

In a study of top Billboard songs between 1960-1969, Cole (1971) found that the theme of love and sex was found in 71% of songs. They also looked for themes of violence, religion and social protest, but with low appearance numbers deemed these topics as *deviant* and not appearing within popular music lyrics. Cooper (1991) analyzed a large sample of popular Billboard hit songs between 1950 and 1990 to uncover common topics that were written about. He posited that popular music lyrics tended to focus on themes such as social change, human interaction, technology and intellectual development. Through his findings he determined that some common topics depicted in popular lyrics focused on railroads, education, food and drink, death, and rebels/outsideers, to name a few. Pettijohn and Sacco (2009) analyzed a sample of number 1 Billboard songs using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count Analysis to find matching

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patterns between socioeconomic ups and downs and lyrics. They determined that these popular song lyrics matched the United States' economic condition, shifting through related themes. During threatening times they found more comforting themes of happiness or positive outlooks, themes of the future and social processes.

These findings speak to the lyrics of popular music as being a tool to speak to the masses, or follow themes, such as love, that will appeal to all audiences. Through these analyses, it is clear that extremely broad topics such as love, education and death (topics that most human beings can relate to) are common themes among popular music lyrics. This furthers the importance of taking a look into if and how popular music artists communicate about more personalized topics like place and local identity, as it shapes perceptions of these concepts across the globe. If present within lyrics, it is important to note what themes of place and local identity actually articulate about cities of origin for popular artists.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, popular music has been relevant in a wide range of communication and sociological research. It has also played a role in geography studies. Similarly, the concepts of place and local identity have been widely looked at. Popular music can be viewed as a mass medium based on the effects of the globalization of the music industry. Though previously researched through a number of varying connections as discussed, a combination of popular music, place and local identity has rarely been studied with a focus on a specific cities and popular artists who originate from them. As popular music lyrics have been a common starting point for research on popular music and cultural

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connections like place and identity, they play an important role in the assessment of how to evaluate these concepts in popular music. Specifically, these ideas may provide a better understanding of if and how popular artists communicate place and local identity, especially when they have local ties. As popular music and lyrics as mass messages continue to live as global mediums, assessing these fields together may help provide a new understanding of how to make sense of representations of local space and culture at a global level.



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### Chapter 3: Method

The purpose of this study is to uncover the ways in which popular music artists from Portland, Oregon write and communicate about Portland place and local identity. The focus on these concepts within popular music lyrics is lacking within research, and therefore has no established categorical or thematic schema to follow. This chapter will explain the steps taken to apply a constant comparative method to a sample of lyrics written by Portland artists. It will address why these methods were best suited for the topic at hand and how they have been utilized in popular music studies and communication research prior to this study. Second, this chapter will provide an overview of the sampling technique used to determine which artists and units of analysis will be studied. Third, the procedures used within this study will be explained. Lastly, this chapter will cover how the data pulled from the sample using these methods will be analyzed to aid the researcher in reaching conclusions for four research questions.

#### **Constant Comparative Method**

**Rationale.** The purpose of this study is to uncover themes that represent the concepts of place and local identity of the city of Portland, Oregon in popular music lyrics written by artists who live in Portland. In order to uncover these themes, a constant comparative method was used on a sample of song lyrics from popular Portland artists. This helped to determine how popular artists write about aspects of place such as geographic spaces, events, communities or cultures for example. Constant comparative method is an inductive, grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) process which allows

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the researcher to review content and make comparisons and distinctions (Charmaz, 2006). By comparing data with other data, the researcher is able to classify various categories and codes that are apparent within the data. Glaser (1965) describes the process of constant comparative method in stages, where the researcher first codes data for as many categorical instances as possible, integrates categories into further examination, sets limits of the theory (or assures full saturation of the categories) and finally, creates the new theory.

This method is used as a grounded theory approach in the field of communication typically to analyze text. Texts represent purposeful constructions of "social, economic, historical, cultural and situational contexts" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 35). In this case, lyrics are beneficial in that they are considered extant texts, or their construction is not affected by the researcher (Charmaz, 2006). Analysis of extant texts aids in determining how texts are produced, what do they represent, how do they portray reality, and what comparisons can be made between texts.

The use of textual analysis in grounded theory was exemplified by Thompson (2008) in a study of inter-student communication related to academic support during high school-to-college transition. Using constant comparative method on a set of text-based interviews, Thompson (2008) was able to uncover sets of themes within six categories including causal conditions, support processes, context, strategies, intervening conditions and consequences. The utilization of this method allowed the researcher to grasp a deeper understanding, along with a concise set of categorical themes, for two concepts that had no prior applicable set of classifiable categories to be used in music lyrics. Similarly,

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Bright et. al (2012) used a constant comparative method on transcripts from interviews with aphasia patients. From the transcripts they narrowed down expressions of experiencing hope from transcript text. They then established the theory that feelings of hope in dysphasia patients were experienced either by *having hope* or *actively hoping*.

The advantage of using constant comparative method by reviewing and coding data side-by-side is that it provides both fit and relevance which can then be applied to future data (Glaser, 1965). Developing codes and categories and constructing a proper framework for analysis makes the study fitting to the empirical world. It also assures that processes and usable structures are relevant based on the framework created (Charmaz, 2006). Constant comparative method similarly guarantees that data is deeply looked at and well thought out. This may help uncover meanings which ordinarily seem hidden become explicit within the data.

Specifically, the concepts of place and local identity have not been defined categorically in terms of their use in popular music lyrics. Using constant comparative method on a broad data set of lyrics will allow the researcher to review how the concepts of place and local identity are written into lyrics and tied to a popular artists' place of origin. These findings will be used to better understand how place and local identity are communicated through popular music lyrics and how this reflects and helps to construct understandings of Portland. Developing theory through constant comparative method may be useful for future studies in the fields of communication, geography and popular music studies. With this study specifically, understandings about how place and local

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identity are portrayed by locally tied artists may arise, along with how music lyrics portray places and local identities to audiences.

### **Sample**

This study looked at the lyrics of popular artists from Portland, Oregon. The city of Portland was chosen based upon a combination of its strong music scene and local culture (Brown, 2012, Rose, Grube & Davenport, 2009, Clark, 2007) which greatly connects to the ideas of place and local identity as discussed in the literature review. Portland has experienced a thriving music scene both globally and locally dating as far back as the 1950's (Brown, 2012). Locally, music was a cultural experience Portlanders participated in at local coffee houses that booked artists for live performances. Portland has been referred to as "America's indie rock mecca" (Clark, 2007) with a music scene described as "industrious, smart, savvy, clever and totally weird" (Rose, Grube & Davenport, 2009). Portland is home to a number of nationally and internationally recognized artists such as Elliot Smith, The Shins, Pink Martini, The Decemberists, M. Ward and many more. Though recognized as having origins in Portland, many artists span national and global audiences. This notoriety separates certain artists from the local Portland music scene, giving them the ability to regularly reach audiences beyond Portland's physical limits. Despite this, they still maintain a certain connection with the local aspects of Portland.

Portland's culture today is described by Speer (2009) as:

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Rightly among the nation's most progressive cities. It is routinely rhapsodized in national top-ten lists as a kind of eco-bohemia, with sprawl-inhibiting urban-growth boundaries, bicycle and pedestrian friendly streets, a culinary tradition built around organic produce and sustainable farming, and as rich a cultural life as can be had in most any American city its size. (p. 20)

These themes are present throughout the city and both displayed physically around the city and experienced within the city's coffeehouses, farmers markets, and bookstores to name a few (Speer, 2009). They represent some of the ways that both locals and non-locals experience Portland as a place and grow to identify with the city. These qualities reflect the goals of this study based upon the uniquely classified place and identity of Portland combined with its influential music scene. With that, the study will aim to determine how the concepts of place and local identity of Portland are communicated through lyrics.

The population for this study was the entire set of music lyrics written by all artists from Portland, Oregon. The researcher began with a list of 127 artists (Portland bands) whose origins were known to be from Portland, Oregon. To justify artists from this list as popular, the researcher established a second list based on CMJ's end-of-year Top 200 list for the years 2002-2012. If artists from the original population appeared within this frame, they were selected for the study. These lists are compiled from "charts of non-commercial and college radio airplay" (About CMJ, 2012) around the United States. This ten-year time frame was chosen in order to select bands that are most relevant to the past decade of popular Portland artists and best mirror the current culture

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of Portland (Brown, 2012, Rose, Grube & Davenport, 2009, Clark, 2007). Appearing on this list solidified that these artists span a vast audience as determined by college radio charts from around the country.

Once the list of Portland popular artists was created, a census of music lyrics for each artist was collected. To achieve this, the researcher retrieved the complete discography of each artist and compiled a list of all tracks from each album with the individual songs working as units of analysis. The goal for the census was to generate a sufficient quantity of units of analysis to both represent Portland artists' lyrics and be able to achieve full saturation of themes. Using this as a basis, a specific sample size was not set, but rather a census was used to incorporate all albums from the population.

After compiling a list of Portland artists listed on the CMJ end-of-year charts between 2001 and 2012, the researcher added in each artist's studio album by title in chronological order from oldest to newest. For each album, track listings in their entirety and full lyrics for each song were then added in. This final list consisted of 21 Portland artists (Appendix). In total, 107 albums were analyzed from the chosen artists ranging from 1 to 9 total albums per artist providing 1301 units songs to be reviewed.

### **Procedures**

When the list of songs was compiled, the researcher first collected lyrics online from each artist's official album sleeves or webpages, if available, to maintain accuracy. If unavailable, an online lyric database, [www.songmeanings.net](http://www.songmeanings.net) was used. According to SongMeanings About page:

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SongMeanings is a community of thousands of music lovers who contribute lyrics, discuss interpretations, and connect over songs and artists they love... In 2011, we began licensing over a million lyrics from various artists, record labels and copyright owners. While licensing provides us with accurate lyrics, it also allows artists and musicians to earn revenue off of their lyrics. (All about SongMeanings, 2012)

Second, when all lyrics were collected they were printed out and analyzed as text by theme using constant comparative method. Berelson (1952) describes a theme as “an assertion about a subject.” Relevant themes will be governed by understandings of place and local identity as pulled from the literature. The researcher anticipated uncovering such aspects as physical space, events, or happenings (Lynch, 1960, Oldenburg, 1999, Putnam, 2001) as representations of place. Local identity was anticipated to be represented through such concepts as beliefs, lifestyles, or practices, for example, which are experienced within place (Lippard, 1997, Schnell & Reese, 2003, Scott, 2000, Stamm 1985).

Based on the notion that there are no established variables related to place and local identity that have previously been analyzed for their use in popular music studies, the constant comparative method was used as a tool to uncover how, and through what types of themes these concepts appear within popular music lyrics. To do this, the researcher reviewed lyrics side-by-side following the guidelines described for constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2006).

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The process of organizing the data sample incorporated three techniques, *theoretical sorting*, *diagramming*, and *integrating*, as proposed by Charmaz (2006) to achieve full saturation of data when using grounded theory. The first procedural step using these techniques was done through *theoretical sorting* and the creation of analytic memos through coding. This helped make a stronger analysis and better sorting of theoretical links within data which transitioned into comparisons between categories. Theoretical sorting was done by making initial notes on the printed lyrics, while making memos of apparent themes that related to place and local identity found within the literature.

The second step was *diagramming*, which allowed the researcher to achieve a visual representation of the categories found during theoretical sorting. Charmaz (2006) argues that by using visual aids such as charts or maps, relationships within data can be highlighted based upon strengths or weaknesses, and both micro and broader level conditions. To achieve this, the researcher hand wrote a diagram of potential categories and sub categories as they appeared within the data set. Additionally, the researcher made note of common references or topics that were appearing to better formulate the types of themes and lyrics that would later be organized into the established categories based on diagramming.

Finally, the researcher used the *integrating memos* technique allowing the initially sorted data to be placed into the developed categorical diagrams. This helped develop a clearer perception of how categories fit or did not fit together when dealing with numbers of different categories. To achieve this, the researcher physically cut out themes from full



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pages of printed music lyrics and split them into categories to further search for any apparent sub-categories as related to each variable. These themes were sorted into the visual diagrams previously created by writing headings on post-it notes for each major category (beginning with place and local identity) and then creating sub-headings under each section to sort the cut-out lyrics into. These headings were organized physically on a table and lyrics broken up by theme were then sorted into their most relevant categories or subcategories. The researcher was then able to begin data analysis using the thoroughly read-through and organized categories and subcategories of themes pulled from the music lyric data set.

### **Data analysis**

The data analysis process using grounded theory began immediately after creating the data sample, and as the researcher completed steps to sort the data, coding was used to make initial analyses. This analysis process coincided with the procedural aspects of theoretical sorting, diagramming and integrating memos and was done through coding. Charmaz (2006) explains three grounded theory coding processes utilized in data analysis which are interrelated and overlap during the process of data analysis: *initial coding*, *focused coding*, and *axial coding*. These three steps aided the researcher in uncovering what the data suggested, and what theories were indicated within the data (Charmaz, 2006) as it was split into categories.

To carry out theoretical sorting, the researcher first used the initial coding analysis technique to code song lyrics line-by-line for theme (Berelson, 1952). Charmaz (2006) explains initial coding as a way to look at data without preconceived ideas, and find

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emerging themes. This was done by first reviewing the sample of lyrics page by page and making memos in margins or highlighting themes that initially seemed related to place and local identity.

Once the full sample was reviewed once through and initial codings were made, the researcher then began the second step of focused coding which aided in the continuing process of theoretical sorting. This was done using a second full read through of lyrics with an initial understanding of the common themes in mind. Reviewing the lyrics a second time using focused coding allowed the researcher to connect early initial memos to the rest of the notes throughout the sample. This allowed for a more succinct analysis of the data and assured no themes were left unrecorded. Through focused coding, initial notes were compared and the most frequent and sensible categories were better refined and organized.

Thirdly, the researcher continued the theoretical sorting process by using diagramming to help better visualize and establish categories. This was done by physically cutting each theme and separating them into relevant piles following common key words or ideas as codes to determine the categories each theme belonged in. After setting aside the excess lyrics, the researcher reviewed the entire set of relevant lyrics and split them into their related categories and sub categories. Two major sections of themes were split into *place* and *local identity* related categories before being broken up into subcategories for each. The researcher was then able to continuously develop codes that determined where categories and subcategories fit or did not fit amongst one another.

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Lastly, the fourth analysis step was done through axial coding which aided the researcher in integrating memos and bringing the data full circle from the initial steps. Axial coding allowed the researcher to review the different categories and subcategories from the initial and focused coding processes and assure that all categories were correctly organized based on initial notes. This process helped coherently organize the data set and assure any last themes were removed or included based on their fit.

Using these steps, the researcher was able to achieve full saturation of the data. Glaser (2001) argues that saturation occurs when the researcher is able to uncover different properties within a pattern, until no new properties emerge. According to Charmaz (2006) “categories are ‘saturated’ when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of your core theoretical categories” (p. 113). Within the four above listed steps the full data set was read-through two full times, and then the selected themes were read through two more full times during the process of sorting. This process concluded 2 major categories for *place* related themes (n=319) and 2 major categories for *local identity* related themes (n=189).

With the data set fully analyzed and split into the categories and subcategories that emerged, the researcher then reviewed the coded data to make conclusions about each research question that aided developing theory. To answer RQ<sub>1</sub> the researcher reviewed and made conclusions about the different themes that were categorized as related to *place* of Portland. To address RQ<sub>2</sub>, the researcher reviewed and made conclusions about the categorized data related to *local identity* of Portland.

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### **Chapter 4: Results**

The goal of this study is to determine how the concepts of place and local identity related to Portland are described in music lyrics of Portland popular indie-rock artists. Previous research has shown that place and local identity are two concepts that, in the fields of communication, sociology and popular music help to shape understandings of place and understandings of cities. These two concepts have previously been studied in terms of how they appear within music lyrics, but have yet to be looked at within lyrics of popular artists at the local level. In this study, place is a concept that first reflects how one understands or imagines physical space. It also reflects local identity, a term in this case that refers to a more abstract sense of relation to a place. The results of this study showcased findings that detailed some understandings of how place and local identity were communicated through lyrics written by indie-rock artists from Portland.

Finding themes related to these concepts within the music lyrics of locally tied indie-rock artists help establish an understanding of how lyrics represent and communicate place and local identity, and what those lyrics describe of a city. Specifically in this data set, themes related to place were represented by physical references to landscapes and climate, while local identity was represented by references of lifestyles and attitudes. This chapter will review, in detail, these themes that were uncovered within the data set as related to each of the research questions. Overviews of these themes will include specific examples from the lyrics which will be cross-referenced with any corresponding details about the city of Portland. Specifically, this

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section will describe thematic categories for references of place and local identity and explain how they relate to and communicate an understanding of Portland as a physical place and the local identity of the city.

### **Place**

The first research question asked how themes of place appeared within lyrics of Portland popular artists. Place plays an important role in how people understand and conceptualize ideas and images of a city. Being that aspects of local identity also help shape how place is perceived, notions of place were also embedded throughout the categories of local identity. To begin, two major themes that described place and emerged from the data focused on physical landscapes and climate and will be discussed separate from those classified within local identity. Within these two categories, subcategories emerged that helped develop more specific understandings of place described through references to landscapes and climate. References of place found within this data set directly described many physical qualities of Portland. This showcased that descriptions of landscape and climate were embedded within the writing of these artists and were then communicated out to audiences as descriptions of place which may conceptualize Portland. Below, each category will be defined and discussed both individually and as it appeared to be related to other themes, direct examples will be included, while reflecting on how these themes specifically relate to Portland.

**Physical Landscapes.** Physical landscapes reflect one way in which place is represented. Results showed that physical landscapes were referenced as tangible physical features. These references cover landscapes from natural, ecological landscapes

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to man-made structures such as streets or buildings. Themes of physical landscapes appeared in the data in two ways. The most prominent subcategory reflected references to ecological landscapes, while the second related to man-made structures. Ecological references included representations and discussions of such elements as the sea, mountains, rivers, trees, or forests. These references may be considered important because of the many similar elements of ecology around Portland.

The most telling lyrics found within the data are those that make explicit connections with Portland. These explicit references may also help explain further references of similar landscapes within the data, especially with an understanding of Portland's actual landscape. To shape an understanding of the natural aspects of the city, Portland is bordered by two major rivers and countless smaller rivers in close proximity to the city. The Willamette River runs north to south in the direct center of Portland. It separates the city's east and west sides and runs underneath the ten major commuter bridges in the city center. The larger, Columbia River is north of the city, running east to west and separating the states of Oregon and Washington. As these two rivers are prominent within the understanding of Portland as a place, the frequent references to rivers within lyrics may help describe these aspects of the actual city.

Furthermore, Portland is home to one of the largest city parks, Forest Park, with over five thousand acres of forestry partially inside city limits as well as numerous wooded parks throughout the city. Similarly, three major mountains are geographically close to the city including Mt. Hood, Mt. St. Helens, and Mt. Adams, which can all be seen from the city as well as feed into the rivers surrounding Portland. Portland is also

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short distance from the Pacific Ocean connected by a set of both large and small rivers feeding from the mountains to the East and out to the sea. Specifically, Portlanders refer to the sea or Pacific Ocean often as “the coast,” which typically reflects the entire span of Oregon’s coast and is a common travel destination for some groups of Portlanders.

To begin, direct references to natural landscapes and climate were first and foremost the most apparent themes to emerge describing physical aspects of place. Within the data, references to these different natural landscapes and climates were often found clustered together and in some instances alongside direct references to Portland and surrounding locations. Overall, references to natural landscapes appeared more often as mere mentions of a word (like river, mountain or forest), while others gave great detail to landscapes, and the most salient to this study made explicit connections with Portland. Some, less common examples of the more explicit references to Portland and natural landscapes were found in such lyrics from the song "City of Roses" specifically describing the city of Portland. "A rolling river bringing goods from the sea. A mountain hooded in snow silently watching over me" (Spalding, 2011, track 11) showcases the artist describing the city of Portland via these references to Portland's natural landscapes. The lyrics "snow banks and drifts down the hillside for you, slides inside Sandy River before the day is through. And before evening falls I may find myself there too" (Ward, 2005, track 11) references Portland's Sandy River in the East of the city explaining its waters as coming down from hillside snow, potentially describing a nearby mountain. It also showcases the artist's of visiting the river which also help shape the lifestyles of Portlanders which will be discussed later.

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In the song "My Home Town," written by Blitzen Trapper's Eric Earley who has lived in Portland since childhood (Caldwell, 2009), the lyrics "I'm goin' back to my home town. Gonna sit right down and take a look around. Tall trees talking all along the shore. Where the wood meets the river at the forest floor the grass hangs heavy all full of rain" reference a number of different natural aspects of place and climate which when connected to the artist's home town, showcase descriptions of Portland. Similar overlapping references and mentions of the city or town were also found in Blitzen Trapper's "Wild Mountain Nation" in the lyrics

Like wind on the water with me, come out from the city, come out from the town.  
Build stone by stone a wild mountain home. When the red moon wains we'll be  
moving on the plains through the tall grass out to the sea. And we'll cross that  
water my wild mountain lover, like wolves running silent and free

(Earley, 2007, track 2). This section of lyrics in particular depicts ecological landscapes of Portland in a number of ways including a place in the mountains where one would live (also helping to describe a lifestyle) or plains and grass expanding out to a sea. Other examples of natural landscapes in proximity to cities for example, "and the colored mountains lining the freeway" (Harris & Seim, 2012, track 4), describe a place where multiple mountains can be seen from a freeway, possibly describing the highways with the city of Portland that offer views of the three mountains surrounding Portland.

Some other lyrics, though not explicitly mentioning Portland described similar depictions of natural landscapes such as "Oh, gray river, your waters ramble wide" (Meloy, 2009, track 13) and "the river you just can't ignore, we spread all up and down



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the shore” (Earley, 2007, track 10). These lyrics personify a river as massive, present or not to be ignored potentially describing the two of Portland's larger rivers. In addition, lyrics of Portugal. The Man similarly used landscape references in the song “Everyone is Golden,” with “diamonds shine like stars beneath the ground, little rivers run in rings around this town” (Gourley, 2009, track 9) potentially describing many of the smaller rivers that run through the surrounding landscapes of Portland. Additionally, the lyrics “drove this car to the sea, spend the night as high as I can in a towering hemlock” (Mercer, 2012, track 4), help to describe the sea as accessible by car as an overnight trip may also be used to describe the actual proximity of the sea to Portland and the commonality of traveling to the coast from Portland.

The next sub-category of references to physical landscapes was found in references to man-made structures. These references tended to be more Portland specific and were found through street names, names of local buildings, nicknames of the city or references to local events. References of real locations appeared in lyrics such as the street names in "Driving around, up and down Division Street. I used to like it here. It just burns me out to remember" (Smith, 1997, track 8) or “Now on the bus. Nearly touching this dirty retreat. Falling out 6th and Powell, a dead sweat in my teeth. Gonna walk, walk, walk. Four more blocks, plus the one in my brain” (Smith, 1995, track 1). Finally the song Alameda describes

You walk down Alameda shuffling your deck of trick cards over everyone, like some precious only son... You walk down Alameda looking at the cracks in the sidewalk, thinking about your friends. How you maintain all them in a constant

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set of suspense...Walk down Alameda brushing off the nightmares you wish could plague me when I'm awake" (Smith, 1997, track 2).

Though these direct references are vague and open for a number of interpretations, as discussed in the literature review these direct references to streets (all larger, busier streets in Portland) along with descriptions of activity occurring on them, describe artist-narrated scenarios tied to these locations. These lyrics pinpoint specific locations in Portland which may help audiences shape an understanding of specific locations that can be tied to Portland.

Other Portland-specific place references were found as descriptions of neighborhoods. Portland neighborhoods maintain their own unique cultures and activities around the city and for most locals the uniqueness of these neighborhoods is relatively known. In popular culture and mass media, these neighborhoods are also depicted as unique within the city. One common reference was to the downtown neighborhood referred to as Old Town. This neighborhood was mentioned in lyrics like

Among all the urchins and old Chinese merchants of the Old Town. We reigned at the pool hall, with one iron cue ball. And we never let the bastards get us down. And we laughed off the quick tricks. The old men with limp dicks. On the colonnades of the Waterfront Park. As 4 in the morning came on, cold and boring. We huddled close in the bus stop enclosure enfolding. Our hands tightly holding" (Meloy, 2004, track 9)

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or "So this is a toast to the Old Town drunk. To the bums on the Broadway Bridge"

(Meloy, 2010, track 4). Another song describes "well, it's a brand new day and I'm walking around Old Town. I feel cool as shit, because I got no thoughts keeping me down" (Taylor-Taylor, 1998, track 5). Another similar reference is found in "dead on his feet he hits the streets of Old Town without a dime" (Coomes, 2003, track 1) describing a type of character in association with the neighborhood. The lyrics "you ask me if I want to get high. Couple of bags down in Old Town. You tie your arm and. Ask me if I wanted to drive" (Alexakis, Eklund & Montoya, 1995, track 6) depicts the use of drugs tied to the neighborhood.

This set of lyrics is perhaps the most relevant within this study of explicitly depicting both place and local identity of Portland. They portray a feel of the Old Town neighborhood, and describe a number of similar activities associated with the location. This may explain Old Town to audiences as a leisurely, maybe downtrodden area full of merchants, drunks and bums. It depicts an area where people hang out at pool halls, for example, possibly out until late hours of the night drinking or doing drugs. These lyrics directly mirror the neighborhood of Old Town, a spot of prominent nightlife, directly bordering another Portland neighborhood, Chinatown, and just off the Broadway Bridge. The area is also a prominent spot for transients in the city, a reference that was also found in the above lyrics.

Similar to neighborhood references, place was also described through direct references of locations in close proximity to, but outside the city limits of Portland. The most frequent direct place references were to coastal cities, which as discussed earlier are

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locations commonly visited by many Portlanders and may help also explain certain

lifestyles of locals. Place references to coastal cities were seen within lyrics like "We got married in the water. Into the battle now here we go, And even in Arcadia: Ego! Ego! Ego!" (Bechtolt & Evans, 2011, track 4), "There is this rumor about. They say you're leaving Nehalem" (Alexakis, Eklund & Montoya, 1995, track 10) and "If I could only coax you overboard, to leave these lulling shores, to get you Oceanside. Oceanside, Oceanside, oh" (Meloy, 2001, track 1). These direct references are all cities along the Oregon coast. Nehalem is just North East of Portland along the coast, Arcadia is a state park in one of Portland's most popular coastal destinations, Cannon Beach, and Oceanside is part of another popular Portland destination, Tillamook. These lyrics reference places that are not in Portland's city limits, but their references to coastal cities may help depict places relevant to Portland and potentially valuable to its inhabitants. These coastal references when connected to Portland artists may help describe certain lifestyles tied to place, referencing the traveling to or residence in these coastal towns possibly as vacation spots, rather than places considered to be home.

Similarly, references to California were found in "take a long drive with me, on California one" (Meloy, 2002, track 10) and "so glad to meet you, Angeles" (Smith, 1997, track 9). These two lines reflect the departure from one place and movement towards or entrance into California. This describes the geographical proximity of California to Portland and may suggest California as a popular destination for Portlanders to travel to. The lyrics "life is full of grey here...so I find myself back in California" (Coomes, 1998, side 2) and the song titled "Santa Monica" (Alexakis, Eklund &

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Montoya, 1995, track 4) with lyrics “I do believe I’ll find myself a new place...I just want to see some palm trees” reflect a seeking out of something absent from what is to be considered here, home or current place of residence, in this case assumed to be Portland.

Finally, results showed a small number of Portland events represented within lyrics. This may help further exemplify Portland as place in that it depicts imagery of Portland as a physical place, as these references help give life to physical landscapes. These references also help tie together place and local identity in that descriptions of events help better explain lifestyles found within Portland as associated with place-based events. The annual Rose Parade was described in the lyrics

They asked me to come down and watch the parade. To march down the street like the Duracell bunny with a wink and a wave from the cavalcade. Throwing out candy that looks like money... People were shouting and pushing and saying. Traded a smoke for a food stamp dollar. Ridiculous marching band started playing...The trumpet has obviously been drinking. 'Cos he's fucking up even the simplest lines. They say it's a sight that's quite worth seeing. It's just that everyone's interest is stronger than mine. When they clean the streets I'll be the only shit that's left behind from a song titled "Rose Parade" (Smith, 2007, track 7). These lyrics describe the event from the artist's point of view portraying participants in the parade as pushy, shouting, and even drunk. These lyrics describe the parade as being worth seeing, but the artist depicts no interest, which may display a disconnect between what is portrayed of a more collective love for the parade verses the artist's feelings. A second example of references to Portland events is the Saturday Market. Lyrics like

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Down along the river, weekend market. On sunny Saturdays the water front comes alive. The street vendors and hippies they keep a hemp sack flying. All the people you could wish for or imagine from the Farmer in the city selling fresh corn beans. Musicians hustling to make sure that there's a thriving jazz scene (Spalding, 2011, track 11)

express detail of the Portland event along the waterfront. It similarly describes the type of people participating in the market as hippies and jazz musicians furthering the depiction of lifestyles of participants in the Portland event.

Lastly, a small amount of more internal references to Portland were made. Place is seen here through direct references to more physical areas of Portland but rather that use local language. Lyrics like "So take up your makeup and pocket your pills away. We're kings among runaways on the bus mall. We're down on the bus mall" (Meloy, 2004, track 9) or "I will buy you that big house way up in the West Hills" (Alexakis, 1997, track 5). The reference to the mall is known in Portland as the central area where buses and transportation meet downtown. The reference to the West Hills explain hills to the west, inhabited by large houses, maybe distant or desired from the center of the city. These hills are actually a unique part of Portland allowing for views of the city, and providing a physical backdrop when looking towards them from the east. Overall, a strong connection is made between what images of Portland are portrayed through these lyrical themes and what can actually be understood of Portland as a place.

What the first subcategory has shown is that through lyrics, place is represented through descriptions and mentions of physical landscapes both natural and man made.

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Furthermore, what has been described of place in this fashion mirrors the physical layout of Portland and some stereotypical descriptions of Portland and the neighborhoods and inhabitants within them. References to natural landscapes, described rivers, mountains or the sea as connected to the physical landscape of Portland, while direct references to streets, places or events provided further descriptions of the city. Related to these concepts, the appearance of references to climate were also frequent in the data and helped further place imagery as facilitated by the data set. References to the climate surrounding Portland subsequently added a portrayal of the weather that surrounds Portland throughout the year expanding on the understanding of Portland as a place.

**Climate.** Finally, another expression of place was seen within references to climate. Through lyrics about rain, grey skies and the absence of sun, lyrics help describe place. Again here, results showed many mere mentions of these themes, while other more useful findings made explicit connections to Portland and surrounding areas. This topic plays an especially important role in explaining Portland as a place based on the stereotypical understanding of Portland's climate as grey and rainy. Within the climate theme, lyrics tended to fall into subcategories that focused on rain, sun and the summer season. Mirroring the climate of Portland, the data showed that lyrics reflected references to being in the rain, seeking sunlight, and anticipating the short summer period where rain was not as prominent in the city. Again, these references help make the connection between how place is displayed within lyrics of Portland artists and the actual reality of climate in Portland.

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Some direct examples of Portland and rain references are seen in lyrics like "I stand out breaking in the Portland rain. I see the end there in your eyes as I watch you drive away," (Alexakis, Montoya, & Cuthbert, 2006, track 8) or "Well, every town is all the same

When you've left your heart in the Portland rain" (Ward, 2005, track 9). Both of these lyrics directly reference the city of Portland when describing rain. Another example, written by long-time Portlander, Colin Meloy was found in "living down in this rain swept town, sea salt tears, swimming round as the ocean comes down" (Meloy, 2004, track 6) or "the infernal rattling of rain still remains" (Meloy, 2003, track 5). Though not directly referencing Portland, these portray a place consumed by the constant sound of rain and reinforce the experience of a town being swept with rain described as experience of the artist. Finally, in the song "City of Roses," the lyrics "rainy days that might seem bleak, our rain is the paint that makes the land lush and the folks unique" (Spalding, 2011, track 11) help describe the significance of the rain to the city of Portland. The connection between where the artist lives and descriptions of rain help to explain these lyrics as descriptions of Portland and as mentioned above, this is much like what is known about weather in Portland.

Expressing longing for an absent sun, Everclear's "Nervous and Weird" (Alexakis, Montoya, & Cuthbert, 1993, track 6) specifically references Oregon in "I wish I could go out into the Oregon sun, to be alive in the day, I'd smile at everyone," portraying a certain happiness that coincides with sunshine, specifically in Oregon. Similarly, "If I can't go to heaven let me go to LA. Or the far West Texas desert or an



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Oregon summer day" (Bechtolt, 2011, track 10) expresses the summer in Oregon as akin to heaven, though listed with other places. This celebratory idea of the sun appears in lyrics alongside positive adjectives like "looking at the brilliant sun" (Smith, 1998, track 13) and "mornings go best with the sunrise" (Gourley, 2009, track 11) offering further potential connections to expressions of climate that may represent artists' descriptions of Portland.

Similarly, place was also expressed within the climate category via references to an absence of sun and light, and longing or seeking out of the sun. Though these references showed fewer explicit connections to Portland, there are commonalities between the following lyrics and ones directly connected to Portland. Absence of sun was expressed in lyrics like "my god the sun where have you been" (Harris & Foster, 2003, track 4) and "the abstract city sun up to now is done" (Malkmus, 2008, track 4). These aid in visualizations of a physical area with an absence of sunlight. Results also showed a longing for sunshine depicted in lyrics like "I just want to be where the sun shines down" (Alexakis, Eklund, & Montoya, 2002, track 10), "I just wanna feel some sunshine" (Alexakis, Eklund, & Montoya, 1995, track 4) or "I've been waiting, anticipating, the sun comes up. The skies won't sink my soul" (Malkmus, 1991, track 14). These lyrics address this same experience of longing for an absent sun explaining a place lacking sun. As rain is in reality a common occurrence in Portland, absence of sunlight directly coincides with Portland as a place.

Similar to lyrics depicting this lack of sunlight, rain and longing for sun, references to the summer were also frequent. This further depicted place via climate by

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making distinctions of seasons tied to physical place. When referencing summer, lyrics were tied to expressions of enjoyment, warmth and rejuvenation such as “alive and happy in the summertime” (Alexakis, 2000, track 12) or “when summer came up we sang along, we stayed up talking all night long” (Bechtolt & Evans, 2009, track 6). Through these lyrics, listeners may understand descriptions of summer being an enjoyed and warmer time than the rest of the year. The time period of summer climate matching that of Portland’s was apparent in lyrics like “summer arrives with a length of lights, summer blows away” (Meloy, 2006, track 8) and “we lay in the grass all summer just to watch the autumn come around” (Alexakis, Montoya, & Cuthbert, 1993, track 4). Finally, transitioning into expressions of seasons other than summer, lyrics also expressed a longing for summer, much like those of longing for sun, as in “still it’s summer somewhere” (Brownstein, 2011, track 4) or “and hillsides are covered in snow, the summertime sister sends letters to me” (Earley, 2011, track 6). These again depict a place where summer is a distant occurrence, creating another image of grey skies within place.

Overall, lyrics highlighting rain and grey skies shape an idea about a place that experiences this weather. Constant references to longing for the sun as it is absent depict the frequency of these grey skies as a regular part of a geographical area. References to four distinct seasons allow for imagery of certain weather patterns like snow which occurs during winter seasons, or sunshine during summer. All together these two sections focused on place paint a complete picture of a city which directly matches the regular goings on of Portland as a place. From physical landscapes to the descriptions of the surrounding sky and climate of a city, music lyrics here clearly reiterate physical aspects

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of Portland as a place, and facilitate a number of cues to listeners allowing a well-rounded image of what Portland as a physical place is like.

### **Local Identity**

The second research question addressed how lyrics of Portland popular indie-rock artists describe the local identity of Portland. This question focuses on instances that reference identity experienced by those who live in Portland, or how this identity is communicated to outsiders and thus helping others identify with the city. Though different, these two aspects coincide with both how Portland is experienced, and how through popular lyrics this experience is portrayed to outside listeners. Themes uncovered within the data set represented the local identity of Portland primarily through references to certain lifestyles. These themes were displayed through various referents to such concepts as under-employed workers and alternative or liberal practices and attitudes. Though less explicit than many of the themes discussed earlier, these references in lyrics directly match popular stereotypes and understandings of Portland as typically found in other mass portrayals of Portland through media or other dominating sources. Much like how place is represented, lyrics both reinforce these stereotypical identities of Portland and work as another mass tool to describe them to listeners.

**Lifestyles.** The first theme to appear within the data which portrayed lifestyles most frequently appeared in lyrics that directly reflected being under-employed. Next, references to drugs and alcohol were found frequently, potentially describing Portland's stereotyped liberal views on marijuana, and strong beer and microwbrewing culture. Also depicted was a clashing between members of the working-class with more upper-class

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groups or figures of authority. Grouped under the themes of this under-employed identity, expressions of more alternative lifestyles were also present. These themes ranged from understanding of part-time jobs, for example, combined with artistic practices like art or music as supplemental to working. This coincided with themes that represented a struggle to make ends meet. Outside of an alternative working style, lyrics also covered such instances that relate directly to some stereotypes of Portland such as having tattoos, being vegan, or playing in bands. Again, these themes appear to reflect the lifestyle that is stereotypical of Portland, especially when related to Portland's indie-rock music scene. These themes will be explained in more detail in the following sections.

***Under-employment.*** The most apparent theme that emerged regarding representations of local identity was the description of under-employed lifestyles. When the artist referred to the self, or members of their own social groups in lyrics, they were commonly referred to as citizens who struggled to pay bills, and typically struggled to earn income. References to part-time jobs coincided with negative language around the ideas of working. Lyrics like “my part-time job ain’t exactly thrilling” (Ward, 1999, track 7) and “we go off to our beds after struggling for our bread” (Coomes, 1999, track 2) present a picture of citizens who work hard at jobs not particularly enjoyable and are still not able to make ends meet. These descriptions are not directly specific to Portland, but viewing lyrics as narrations of the artists' personal lives as residents of Portland help make this connection. In addition, when comparing these lyrics to lifestyles in Portland, a connection is apparent between what artists are describing of personal lifestyles and how

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lifestyles within Portland's indie-rock music scene are commonly portrayed in other popular media depictions.

Next, results show that lyrics help explain lifestyle as a place where working a job is typically unpleasant, or a burden. The idea of this as a burden appears with language that reflects being poor commonly within lyrics like “without a penny or a plan, now I’m a failure” (Harris & Seim, 2012, track 3) or “No, we didn’t have too much money just enough to make the dead ends meet” (Malkmus, 2005, track 7). This idea is furthered by lyrics that also describe a local identity specifically around struggling to live. This struggle is apparent particularly through mentions of not being able to pay rent and/or subsequently living in less than desired housing. Lyrics like “I went and sold my soul so I could pay my rent. I waited by the mail, but the check was never sent. So I called the Devil up, but I just got his machine. I left an angry message, said I gotta have the green” (Malkmus, 1999, track 7) and

After the glow, the scene, The stage, the set. Talk becomes slow but there's one thing I'll never forget. Hey, you gotta pay your dues. Before you pay the rent.

Over the turnstile turn out in the traffic. There's ways of living, it's the way I'm living” (Malkmus, 1994, track 9)

describe this struggle but also reflect that a more important goal is at play beforehand (i.e. pursuit of what appears to be a description of performing as a musician). In these lyrics this lifestyle is described as being the artist's lifestyle, potentially explaining a common lifestyle of local indie-rock musicians, rather than Portland residents as a whole. Lines such as “our lust for life had gone away with the rent we hated” (Mercer, 2003, track 3)

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and “we got rooms to live in but no room to give in” (Malkmus, 1999, track 7) describe from the artists' point of view through the use of we and our, unhappiness with living quarters revolving around rent.

These examples can be compared to other popular portrayals of how Portlanders commonly live. Some common stereotypes of Portland portray renting rooms in large houses with roommates as a more common practice for under-employed locals, than owning a home. This again describes an alternative from living norms both in and outside of Portland, furthering stereotypical descriptions of lifestyles of Portlanders and the indie-rock music scene. With these lyrics juxtaposed with some of the further themes, an under-employed lifestyle portrayed by artists is shaped, but understood as more of a chosen path that aids in the pursuit of alternative lifestyles (possibly narrowed to being a musician). This idea was supported even further by frequent descriptions of drug and alcohol consumption within lyrics.

*Drugs and alcohol.* Despite depictions of struggle, references to drugs and alcohol were commonly presented. Within this drug and alcohol category there were both action oriented themes most frequently referencing drinking and smoking, followed by similarly frequent mentions of being drunk or high. These themes help describe a strong drug-friendly and alcohol consuming lifestyle. Though these lyrics do not specifically reference Portland, they again match up with some common stereotypes of the city as shaped by popular media, but also match some realistic factors of Portland in terms of known political and cultural lifestyles of Portlanders to be discussed below. Again, these lyrics don't directly mesh with the previously discussed category describing under-

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employment and struggle, but rather describes a lifestyle where it is more common to spend money on things like drugs or alcohol before bills.

Coincidentally, these findings do in many ways mirror stereotypes of Portland. Some examples of this are Portland's stereotypical portrayal of having liberal views on marijuana, and its strong culture of microwbrewing and alcohol distilling. These understandings relate to specific cultures within Portland, but are also lifestyles commonly portrayed of Portland by popular media. However, the city has very loose medical marijuana laws and has since been in the process of trying to pass a marijuana legalization bill. Portland's bill, and the proximity to Washington where marijuana was legalized may lead to further stereotypical understandings of Portland as a marijuana friendly place, and may be seen as representations of small, but powerful groups of people (such as local, popular indie-rock artists). The failure of the bill to pass in Oregon may also contradict the artists' description of this lifestyle with a majority view of marijuana legalization within the city. This is now more than ever a very specific way that locals and outsiders alike can identify with Portland as a city based on the efforts to legalize marijuana in Oregon, matched with the marijuana-friendly portrayal of Portland in popular media. Additionally, Portland is home to one of the strongest local beer brewing cultures in the country, and microbrews are far more common in Portland than they are around the nation where domestic beers are more common.

With these understandings of common drug and alcohol stereotypes in Portland, results showed that smoking marijuana is expressed more often as common and accepted through lyrics like “Hoping and smoking. That's what I keep hoping. That broken and

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smoking. That's what I keep coping" (Taylor, 2002, track 4), "The past is healing and you can focus or you can smoke it. I wanna forget. And I don't wanna forget" (Harris & Foster, 2003, track 10). Results also saw references of being high, which appeared in an even more common and accepted light. The lyrics "keep me dry and warm, keep me high and normal. Cause I'm riding in your strut and lying in your gutter drunken and confused. Ready for abuse" (Harris & Foster, 2004 track 7) again directly expresses an identification with marijuana and alcohol consumption as a normal practice. "Because I'd have to be high to track the sunset down" (Smith, 1998, track 7) expresses a thematic connection with themes of being dry, warm and in sunlight which earlier were also represented as positive things that were longed for. Again, rather than direct expressions of a Portland identity, these themes work more as explicating the personal lifestyles of the artists. However, there is a small amount of overlap that can be seen across earlier discussed lyrics making specific connections with Portland, and popular understandings of Portland's drug and alcohol culture.

References to consuming alcohol or being intoxicated were also described as common and accepted. Lyrics like "never let your drunken heads rest on obscene old man beds" (Harris & Seim, 2012, track 6), "you seduce with your bottle neck and vapid proofs through drunken breath" (Harris & Seim, 2012, track 9), "Drunken tears once again, my friend. Go ahead, I don't mind your drunken tears" (Coomes, 2003, track 5) express drunken actions, but do not portray them in a negative light, but rather quite positive. These results are similar to the above in that while they don't explicitly explain the lifestyles of Portlanders as a whole, they reflect other popular representations of the city,



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while matching earlier descriptions of specific Portland lifestyles (as in lyrics describing Old Town for example).

As discussed earlier, Portland is a city that is commonly stereotyped as practicing these alternative lifestyles. Speer (2009) has explained Portland as a city nationally recognized as progressive and bohemian. Locals are also commonly portrayed in popular media as being extremely liberal in their lifestyle. Portlanders, especially within the indie-rock scene, are commonly identified as young people, or people aiming to portray youth, who tend to participate in activities that deviate from popular culture. Typically, qualities that are common among the stereotype of Portland and its indie-rock culture are tattoos, piercings, liberal practices, concerns for the environment, and working part time jobs while spending the rest of personal time participating in non-paying activities like art or music. These ideas also tend to coincide with the appearance of a more relaxed lifestyle.

These ideas, activities, and references appeared often within lyrics citing activities like working at record stores or listening to records. This is found in lyrics like “the judge is on vinyl, decisions are final, and nobody gets a reprieve” (Smith, 2002, track 6) “took her records and clothes” (Smith, 1994, track 7) and “The song is always the same. Got lonesome fuel for fire. Got forty-fives to play at night. Got books to spend with every weekend. The story's always the same”(Ward, 2005, track 5). References here to vinyl show an alternative consumption of music. Where most of the nation purchases or illegally downloads digital music, these lyrics describe vinyls and record stores as valuable. This understanding is also a commonly portrayed stereotype of music

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consumption in Portland but yet these references fail to explain Portland as a whole.

Next, references to riding bicycles or using public transit were found in lyrics like “my bicycle rode so smooth under the clouds” (Neilson, 2011, track 2) and “We kicked around from stairway to station. We made a sensation with the gadabout crowd. So take up your makeup and pocket your pills away. We're kings among runaways. On the bus mall, we're down on the bus mall” (Meloy, 2004, track 9). These lyrics showcase the artists' lifestyles where riding bikes or taking public transportation is portrayed as common, again reflecting popular stereotypes of Portland and the indie-rock scene. These lyrics also mirror the environmentally friendly ideals also stereotypically associated with Portland in popular media. Across the nation and by many popular sources, Portland has been identified as one of the most environmentally friendly cities to live, and these lyrics reinforce this specific identification of the city.

Next, being vegan, found in lyrics like “but if you love vegan food, come over to my work, I'll have them cook something that you'll really love” (Taylor, 1998, track 10) for example highlights even further an environmentally, liberally conscious alternative lifestyle. Where around the nation being vegan is considered a less than common lifestyle, Portland is popularly identified as a place where vegans abound. Finally, references to physical appearance also mirrored appearances of the popularized depiction of Portlanders. “I'm gonna get a new tattoo, black and stretching around my arm” (Alexakis, Montoya, & Cuthbert, 1995, track 8) or “I found you, a tattooed tramp” (Meloy, 2004, track 2) depict people with and pursuing tattoos. When Portland is identified around the nation, the idea of tattooed locals is extremely common. Where

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most cities around the nation look down upon tattoos, (in working environments, formal environments, etc) Portland is alternatively portrayed as celebrating this practice.

Finally, and not surprisingly, references to being a part of the music scene appear numerous times. This most prominently presents the notion that local identity themes found within these lyrics may be more closely related to lifestyles of musicians rather than the whole of Portland. These themes reinforce the lifestyle where pursuing a craft, such as music, is more valuable than working a nine-to-five job. Given that the artists reviewed within this data set are a part of a music scene, appearance of these seems obvious but nonetheless paints a small picture of the lifestyles of those within a music scene, in this case, potentially specific of Portland's. "Music scene is crazy, bands start up each and everyday" (Malkmus, 1994, track 4) showcases a common practice of many and frequent participation in the music scene by locals and this may be reflecting the music scene of Portland. Related moreso to the struggles discussed above, as well as the sort of struggling-artist themed lyrics like "I have left my home just to whine in the microphone" (Mercer, 2003, track 8) express a sacrifice of comforts of home to break into music. Both of these examples reinforce music scenes as common and important to a lifestyle. Not surprisingly, this notion directly matches up with Portland being identified by locals and outsiders as having one of the strongest music scenes in the country.

**Attitudes.** The final theme uncovered for representations of local identity within the lyrics of Portland artists was seen through references to specific attitudes. This theme was tightly connected with above references to lifestyles and practices but focused more on collective beliefs. Relating to the above discussion of lifestyle, liberal beliefs and

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ideals were described within the data, again matching the type of attitudes and ideals that stereotypically identify those of Portland. These concepts were portrayed most prominently as a clash between the working-class (also present in themes discussed above), more middle and upper-class citizens, or figures of authority.

*Clashing with the upper-class.* This theme of a clash with the upper-class was expressed through both neutral language showing a clear separation between the two classes, and even more frequently combined with negative descriptions of upper-class. To explain the actual prominence of the working-class and upper-class in Portland, a distinct match in lyrical themes is apparent. Portland by demographics is an extremely liberal, under-employed city where upper-class citizens are in the minority. This identity of Portland has been frequently portrayed to the nation in popular media. A specific example of this understanding of Portland attitudes was recently expressed to the nation during Occupy Wallstreet, where Portland showcased one of the strongest Occupy groups outside of New York. A more solid example can be seen through the liberal political orientation of Portland, so much so that the particularly conservative state of Oregon consistently votes Democrat because of liberal Portland voters.

To begin, lyrics first described upper-class citizens through lyrics like "The mogul's daughter in hog-tie, the mogul figures the wrong guy, all right" (Meloy, 2006, track 5) describing individuals "in suits of charcoal gray" (Malkmus, 2008, track 8). Aspects like privilege were used to portray upper-class lifestyle through lyrics related to living situations such as "So your ex's got a mansion, where you kick it on the hill" (Taylor, 1998, track 6) and "You've got some big plans for your nice house" (Hodges,

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2008, track 9) Descriptive language like "and they'll take you for a ride, set you softly in their white plastic world and your stuck inside" (Coomes, 2010, track 6) and "watch out for the platinum-mastered man, it's all a scam" (Weikel, 2001, track 5) present the notion that these groups are fake or insincere. Lyrics like "A Land Rover drove right by with Satan at the wheel" (Coomes, 1999, track 7) or "If Satan didn't want my soul I'd sell it to the man" (Coomes, 1999, track 7) depict the upper-class as evil. Lyrics also describe these classes of people as possessing expensive belongings in lyrics such as "you've got a diamond ring it's just another hollow thing" (Coomes, 2001, track 4) or the "land rover," mentioned above, for example. These lyrics portray a working-class that understands an upper-class made up of privileged, fake or evil individuals. When looking at how this reflects Portland, these ideas mirror the clash between working and upper-class groups in the city.

These descriptions of clashing with the upper-class is further depicted through the use of negative language as discussed above and notions of geographical and political rifts again expressing a negative identification with these groups as is realistic in Portland. Numerous lyrics referenced upper-class groups residing in the suburbs as in "I think they moved out to the suburbs, and now they're blonde, bland, middle-class Republican wives" (Alexakis, Eklund, & Montoya, 2002, track 4). This also reaffirms an opposition in conservative political beliefs like those less-identified with Portland. Similarly addressing "evil specters from my own suburban upbringing" (Coomes, 1998, side 2) while making reference to moving away from this lifestyle subject it to an "evil" ideal that is not welcomed. Additionally, in Portland, suburbs fall west of the city

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approaching the towns of Beaverton and Hillsboro, outside of Portland. This adds to both the idea that these classes of people are described as not a part of the Portland indie-rock music scene's local identity.

Finally, these rifts are also commonly expressed between those portrayed within lyrics against figures of authority. Specifically, police are commonly referenced within the data. Much like the discussion above, Portland has in the past been identified as a city with citizen-police clashes, especially depicted during the Occupy movement. Through these lyrics, this clash was both expressed and reinforced as an identity of Portland. Negative adjectives like "pigs," a common slur for police are seen more than once in lyrics like "pigs they tend to wiggle when they walk" (Malkmus, 1996, track 1) and "run from the pigs, the fuzz, the cops" (Malkmus, 1993, track 9). The lyric "I love you like a small town cop, I want to smash your face in with a rock" (Bechtolt & Evans, 2010, track 4) expresses a strong and violent dislike of the local police force. When thinking about Portland lifestyle and attitudes as a whole, this clash with authority helps express the identity of Portland as alternative, valuing independence, liberal practices and attitudes, and disapproving of authority figures who threaten those notions. Themes uncovered within data support this as a local identity of Portland.

***Liberal practices.*** Finally, in addition to some of the above mentions, such as referencing Republicans as others, direct references to liberal practices and lifestyles also appeared noticeably though less frequent than other themes. Direct references like "In these conservative times, you're making conservative art, and it's boring, boring, boring" (Bechtolt & Evans, 2009, track 4) portray a disconnect from conservative practices as

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addressed previously. Specific references to be included within this theme are also

apparent within the frequency of mentions of drugs as a common and accepted practice as discussed earlier. Less frequent, but addressed issues such as gay and women's rights are showcased through lyrics like "William wants Leroy, but Leroy is straight. He couldn't commit to the mental jujitsu of switch hittin' from ladies to men" (Malkmus, 2003, track 9) portray commonality of gay relationships. These lyrics particularly represent the common gay-friendly identity of Portland and an even more thriving LBGT community within the city. These lyrics, like other attitude related themes mentioned above relate directly to the actual progressive ideals within the city of Portland that are commonly understood around the nation (Speer, 2009).

Overall, these references to the local identity as portrayed within indie-rock lyrics showcase common stereotypes of the lifestyles and communities of Portland, and its indie-rock music scene as fostered by popular media. Through these portrayals, Portland is depicted as being dominated by liberal practices, ability to make a living off of part-time jobs and a major focus on artistic lifestyles found in art and music communities for example, though it may truly only represent the indie-rock music scene. Lyrics reviewed and themes uncovered directly reflect these popularized identities of Portland, while also reflecting what may be descriptions of lifestyles of only Portland's popular indie-rock musicians. When receiving these lyrics, listeners conceptualize the attitudes and lifestyles that reinforce these stereotypical identities as portrayed by these popular artists. Though there are connections between themes found within lyrics, and some actual aspects of Portland, results show that lyrics rather than depict Portland identity as a whole, may only

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reflect specific segments of such, while also reflecting many commonly portrayed stereotypes of the city.

In conclusion, the results from this data set help shape an argument that music lyrics from popular Portland indie-rock artists aid in the stereotypical portrayal of Portland as a place and the local identity within it. Place is described through references to landscapes and climate. Lyrics help shape a mental mapping of the city and its surrounding areas which directly match Portland's actual geography. Lyrical themes related to climate portray a grey, wet area also mirroring that of the city itself. Themes found within these lyrics help define Portland as physical space. Local identity of Portland was also described in lyrics most commonly through themes of lifestyles and attitudes. Most commonly depicted via liberal and alternative lifestyles, Portland identity was described through such instances as acceptance and common usage of drugs and alcohol, lower socioeconomic status, clashing with upper-class groups, and a liberal community with alternative ideals from other cities across the nation. When connecting these uncovered themes to Portland, it is clear that music lyrics do mirror the stereotypical understandings of place and identity of Portland and describe these stereotypes to mass audiences.



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### **Chapter 5: Discussion**

The premise of this research was to determine how Portland popular lyrics represent place and local identity of Portland, and what these findings describe of the city. Themes found among the data related to many prior studies within the fields of popular music, place and local identity. Unlike previous research, the researcher explored indie-rock music lyrics as tied to a specific location to determine what was being communicated as place and local identity of a specific city within this music scene. The results offered a new way to understand how these concepts appear in localized lyrics and what this says for portrayals of a city through artists who live there. Most predominantly, results showed that the demographic of the music scene played an important role in the narrow portrayals of place and local identity that were uncovered, and that many real-life understandings of the city were left neglected. These results may help bring to light certain aspects of power within cities that help shape their national understandings. The following section will discuss in detail the findings of the study and what the results mean within research, as well as how they may affect future theory and research.

To begin, themes uncovered throughout the study showed the concepts of place and local identity as interchangeable and fluid and offered much overlap between the two research questions. Results indicated that indie-rock lyrics, rather than constructing meanings about Portland specifically, more so offered descriptions of physical aspects of place and lifestyles that mirrored certain segmented stereotypes of the city. These narrow portrayals of Portland may best be explained by the common aspects of lifestyles within

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the Portland indie-rock music scene and the power that popular musicians have to shape and reinforce one view of place. To summarize, the uncovered themes offered descriptions of place, most often, physical aspects of place through natural landscapes or a number of direct references to specific locations or events. Also related to place and local identity, a number of themes reflecting lifestyles were uncovered. These lyrics offered descriptions that may help shape mental mappings of place through expressions of natural environments, rainy, grey climate and understandings of lifestyles and attitudes. With minimal direct references to Portland appearing within the data, a number of assumptions were made regarding the connections between place and local identity themes and their actual connection to the city of Portland. There was also an underlying premise that lyrics within this study were constructed by a specific demographic of Portlanders involved in Portland's indie-rock music scene thus aiding in an understanding of the segmented descriptions that were found.

Among these descriptions, what was most interesting about the uncovered themes, especially themes reflecting lifestyle, is that when compared to Portland as a whole, only one demographic of Portland was found to be described overall. These results show that there may be a connection between descriptors of Portland in lyrics and aspects of Portland's popular indie-rock music scene, thus narrowing the way Portland is described to national or global audiences via these music lyrics. The below discussion will delve deeper into the results to make better sense of what is known about Portland, and how themes found within lyrics describe some understandings of the city, while leaving others out. It will touch on the power dynamics at play between popular artists, Portland's indie-

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rock scene and the descriptions of Portland within the data. This will help shape the argument that the Portland indie-rock scene shapes personal lifestyles as descriptions of Portland to national and global audiences. Finally, the connection found between lyrics, place and local identity of Portland in the data will also be compared to prior research, with an explanation of how the results may help expand on that research.

### **Summary of Findings**

**RQ1.** The first research question aimed to uncover how music lyrics of popular Portland indie-rock artists represented Portland, Oregon as a place. Within the literature, place is depicted as both a physical and social construct. Based on this definition, themes of place were represented in results from both RQ1 and RQ2. To first address the more physical aspects of place, two major themes were uncovered: landscapes and climate. Physical landscapes were described within lyrics as both natural and man-made layouts of the city and surrounding physical areas. As discussed in the results section, lyrics referenced natural aspects of place such as rivers, mountains and the sea. Climate was depicted through references of weather and seasons. With only few lyrics directly referencing Portland within these themes, very loose connections are assumed between references to landscapes and the city of Portland. As discussed in the results section the majority of lyrics merely mentioned natural landscapes like rivers, mountains, and the sea. When compared to natural landscapes surrounding Portland, many similarities were found, but were only backed by the classification of artists as current residents of the city. While results showed numerous descriptions of place within the lyrics, only minimal amounts of lyrics offered direct references to Portland.

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When reviewing the more salient place oriented themes directly connected to Portland, physical landscapes were one of the most commonly referenced. Based on landscapes of Portland explained in the results section, an argument can be made that the landscapes of Portland are common descriptions of place, though only touching on the physical aspects. Direct references to such aspects as city streets and nearby locations help to create mental maps of place, thus providing a means for listeners to shape understanding of place through music lyrics. References to natural landscapes that are also common landscapes around Portland also help facilitate this idea but to a lesser extent. These results may explain the significance of these aspects of place as part of how locals conceptualize about where they physically live. However, within this study, locals are represented by the artists who may not reflect Portland as a whole but yet provide more of a description of the landscapes of Portland as perceived by Portland's indie-rock music scene.

The second theme, climate, worked in a similar fashion in helping to shape an understanding of Portland through physical notions of place. Much like the mental maps that may be facilitated through lyrics, and understanding of the climate of Portland is depicted through references to rainy weather, grey skies and a longing for sunshine and the summer season. When looking back on lyrics discussed in the results section, the frequency of these instances and varying degrees of usage within lyrics (i.e. experience of rain, longing for sun, happiness felt in warm weather) help describe climate as an expression of place. When directly tied to Portland in lyrics, these references then communicate the stereotypical Portland climate to listeners.

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Even when not directly connected to Portland, lyrics related to climate discussed in the results section described a climate very similar to the rainy, grey climate of Portland. Presumably the reason for this occurrence is that, much like physical landscapes, climate may play an important role in the lived experience of those within Portland and how people view Portland on a global level. As the experience of this rainy, grey climate is assumed to be constantly embedded in the lives of locals, it makes sense that similar themes would appear in lyrics of the local artists. This shapes the explanation that through lyrics of Portland popular indie-rock artists, a climate very similar to that of Portland is communicated to listeners. Again, these claims are more accurate within lyrics directly connected to Portland, but a connection is still apparent between many lyrics and climate of Portland. Finally, when understanding this portrayal of place, these results might also explain how artists from other cities across the globe write about their relative experiences of climate as part of where they reside.

**RQ2.** The second research question explores how the local identity of Portland is represented within lyrics. Though the main themes classified as local identity were lifestyle based, these themes also fit into definitions of place causing much overlap amongst the two concepts. Rather than physical aspects discussed above, themes classified under local identity addressed more of an abstract understanding of individual and group cultures also important in understanding place. Specifically, findings from this data set showed that lyrics expressed themes of a very segmented and specific lifestyle likely shaped by the common demographic of the indie-rock music scene. Again, without many direct references, only a weak argument can be made for many of these findings.

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However, when taking into account that these concepts were written into lyrics by artists currently local to Portland, and directly matched certain specific stereotypes and understandings of the city, a connection can potentially be drawn between lyrics and some aspects of Portland life. Specifically, the role of the Portland indie-rock scene becomes most apparent within these results. The major themes expressed through lyrics representing lifestyle showed working-class lifestyles, drugs and alcohol, non-conventional practices, clashing of upper and lower-classes and liberal beliefs. Rather than assuming this is how Portland is entirely experienced by locals, it is important to recognize these results as experiences and from the points of view of the artists.

Within these categories, lyrics expressed representations of under-employment, drug and alcohol consumption and unconventional life practices. The way in which these themes were communicated through lyrics described some common segmented understandings of lifestyles commonly identified with Portland. More specifically these themes mirrored the type of understandings of Portland that are typically otherwise depicted in popular media. As detailed in the results section, lyrics expressed the commonality of working low-wage jobs, spending much leisure time, and straying away from typical societal norms in ways such as eating, consumerism and environmental standards, for example.

These results may explain that these stereotypical lifestyles of Portland influence how culture is depicted in lyrics of the popular local artists they were written by. It also may lead to the argument that the popular indie-rock music scene in Portland is responsible for helping shape these stereotypes of Portland across mass audiences. As

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descriptions of these lifestyles may allude to the lived experience of the artists, their appearance within the data should be looked at as representations of lifestyles common within Portland's music scene as opposed to Portland as a whole. Assuming these lyrics stem from lived experience of artists, these understandings may then be embedded throughout lyrics and explain lifestyles of where the artists live, the communities they interact with, and the experiences they have thus shaping and reinforcing the aforementioned stereotypes of Portland life through the experiences common within this particular demographic.

The second local identity theme depicted attitudes within the above discussed lifestyles. These themes also seemed to describe very specific types of attitudes, again similar to those popularly portrayed of Portland. Further reflecting on the under-employed lifestyle, lyrics related to attitude also expressed a clashing with groups of others, specifically middle and upper-class citizens or authority figures. As exemplified in the results section these lyrics may only be representative of the Portland indie-rock music scene but responsible for depicting and reinforcing these stereotypes of Portland's citizens, again painting an incomplete picture of Portland as a whole. However, as Portland is known for being an extremely liberal city, lyrics can be argued to be a tool through which to experience this political and moral spectrum as identity of the city, though only mirroring the dominant political aspects of the city. A conclusion can be made that these lifestyles are experienced by local artists within the music scene, and may be unique to this scene, influencing the way these artists write and the significance of including these concepts within lyrics. Once written and globally communicated,

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liberal and alternative attitudes are described to mass audiences and when directly

connected to Portland portray the city in this singular way through the eyes of the artists.

To conclude, the results of the two research questions were embedded throughout the data as common when using constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2006) but need to be discussed more holistically in order to better understand the implications of uncovered lyrical themes. First, the argument that these lyrics describe the city of Portland may be explained by the population specifically including artists who live in Portland within the indie-rock music scene. With this, a connection may be seen between what is described of place and local identity via lyrics and the demographics within which artists have a physical and cultural connection to. However, this argument is best exemplified through lyrics making direct references to the city, with a weaker argument supported by lyrics without specific references, which were more common.

Next, the results uncovered that the lyrical themes of physical landscapes, climate, and lifestyles helped to describe understandings of place and culture based upon the writings of popular Portland locals. More specifically, the common demographic of these musicians was dominated by the Portland indie-rock music scene. Through these artists, landscape references described place (specifically as physical) as naturally rich, with a rainy grey climate, while local identity themes helped to describe an under-employed, alternative and liberally identified community of people. Direct references to Portland helped shape a connection between these themes in lyrics and descriptors of place and local identity of Portland. As these were uncommon, a direct connection cannot be made



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between many themes, though themes without direct references were closely related to those that included them.

What this says overall, is that lyrics first and foremost express different notions of place and local identity, but are not always explicitly connected to Portland. This concludes first that without an understanding of the artists' residence in the city or prior knowledge of Portland, the connection between themes and Portland may not be immediately understood by audiences. Additionally, themes found represented only a small set of locals' descriptions of Portland, exemplifying the results as descriptions made by members of Portland's indie-rock music scene. The researcher also concludes that the place-based lyrics found within this study explain the experience of place through the eyes of a very particular demographic of locals and does not completely explain Portland nor represent the descriptions of all locals.

With that, it is important to note that through this narrow lens, lyrics within this study help to shape stereotypes of Portland across mass audiences that do not completely portray place and local identities of the city. These stereotypes are similarly both reinforced and mirrored within other popular media outlets around the world. Through both categories of place and local identity a number of themes that were expressed that related to some of the more popularized stereotypes of Portland. This again shapes an argument that these lyrics are more reflective and reinforcing of stereotypes rather than shaping overall understandings of Portland as described by its full community. Finally, looking at the uncovered themes as specific of one demographic of Portland, especially when considering the similarities to popular stereotypes of the city, the idea of power

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dynamics within Portland may offer a better explanation of this study's findings and how the music scene plays a major role in construction of popular understandings.

### **Power dynamics**

Before addressing the theoretical implications of this study, one of the most telling findings within the data must be discussed. This finding saw the overall reflection of a singular demographic within the uncovered themes, the Portland indie-rock scene. When reflecting on place and local identity literature, social, economic, and political powers are cited to play major roles in the formation of place and culture (Cooper, 1991; Harvey, 2001; Putnam, 2001; Scott, 2000). When taking into account literature about music scenes and the study's definition of the term popular, one can hypothesize that the lyrics within the study are messages constructed by and potentially reflecting only this group in power, thus leaving out descriptions and recognition of marginalized groups.

To begin, the major description of lifestyles and attitudes as found in the results section describes such practices as under-employed individuals focused on leisurely lifestyles, part-time jobs, and focuses on art or music, for example. When reflecting on research regarding music scenes (Bennett, 1997; Bennett & Peterson, 2004) and subcultures (Hebdige, 1979), the lifestyles found within music scenes, in this case of Portland indie-rock artists may fittingly be grouped into a specific demographic and culture. While this demographic is tied to the city of Portland based on the residence of artists, the small amount of direct references to the city itself may be better explained as reflections of a general indie-rock culture rather than specifically tied to Portland. This is best explained by the predominantly young, white demographic that makes up Portland's

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popular music scene, or even common demographics of the national indie-rock genre.

Though one of Portland's dominating demographics (Whites make up 73% of Portland's population), this group neglects underrepresented demographics such as Portland's Hispanic, Asian, or African American populations which make up almost 23% of Portland's population (State & County). When taking into account the segmentation of the indie-rock music scene from other cultures and even other music scenes within Portland, the lens through which Portland is portrayed within this study is even more narrow.

While the data does not entirely support themes as directly reflecting Portland, a connection between the results of this study and the popularized stereotype of Portland's indie-rock, or even "hipster" (Deresiewicz, 2011) culture can be seen within the data. This again reinforces the idea that members of the indie-rock music scene describe a much segmented version of the city likely from their own lived experiences. These cultures as described are commonly portrayed in media as liberal lifestyles participating in such things as veganism, bicycling instead of driving, tattoos, drug and alcohol consumption, all which were found in the data. This again may explain the existence of a strong power dynamic at play in Portland's indie-rock scene, production of Portland popular music, and other popularized depictions of Portland such as the popular television show *Portlandia* or earlier cited media articles (Clark, 2007; Rose, Grube & Davenport, 2009; Speer, 2009). What can be concluded from these ideas is that rather than reflecting the city of Portland as a whole, or addressing the many different cultural segments of it, Portland popular lyrics rather focus on what is typically a singular

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stereotype and understanding of the city primarily matching the Portland indie-rock

demographic. Below, the results of this study, and understandings of the power dynamics at play will be discussed in terms of how they relate to and can help expand upon further research in popular music, place and local identity.

### **Theoretical Implications**

**Popular Music.** The results of this study offer a number of implications to the field popular music studies, specifically the role popular music as a global medium has in communicating place and local identity, how popular music may differ from more localized music, but also how the role of the music scene still exemplifies a very specific cultural group within music. Prior to this study, research on popular music, place and identity has been restricted to a broad scale. Prior studies have looked at the way popular music communicates a geographically broad set of popular music products (as in not restricted to products from a distinct local source) reflect specific places (Hayes, 2009) or how music is broadly tied to geography (Carney, 1998; Knocke, 2006; Shobe & Banis, 2010). The results of this study offer an understanding of how locally tied popular music communicates a specific city as a place, and the local identity within it to mass audiences. Specifically, it uses lyrics to showcase these factors, an even less common finding within popular music literature. Prior to this, studies have looked at various themes that could be uncovered within popular music lyrics (Addy & Austin, 2000; Kubrin, 2005) but have yet to directly address place and local identity as written by locals.

The benefit of this more specific research is that it helps shape an understanding of representations of place from an artist who experiences place rather than an outsider's

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perspective. This was seen through some of the direct references to Portland within these lyrics and understanding these artists as experiencing life in Portland. Looking at popular artists who have expanded to global audiences furthers this concept in that these representations break the boundaries of the local communities of which they were written about. Based on this, results of this study showcase who is shaping global messages about place and local identity, and how these concepts are described. In this case it was seen that descriptors can only be viewed as the experience of artists who communicated them (indie-rock artists), and this may lead to both the creation and reinforcement of popular stereotypes.

Recognizing the existence of stereotypes and how they are shaped is important within research because previous research has shown connections between popular music and specific geographic locations (Romig, 2009; Shobe & Banis, 2010) whether through sound, genre or lyrics. As a form of mass communication, popular music is similar to other such sources that have previously been catalysts in shaping these two concepts such as televised news, radio broadcasts and more which depict locally connected messages to audiences. In comparison to this previous research, popular music is unique in this study in that it holds these local qualities but unlike local news or radio is expanded out to mass global audiences.

Particularly within this study it is shown that lyrics play an important role in the direct communication of ideas in alignment with Pettijohn and Sacco (2009) and Romig (2009). Their research explains the significant role of music lyrics in communicating with audiences about place and local identity. The results of this study proved similar results

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based upon the number of common themes that were revealed. Additionally, results of this study align with some previous results from Hayes (2009) that uncovered connections with certain popular songs and specific geographical locations. Hayes (2009) explains that artists represent and make connections with place that are meaningful to them. Based on the results of this study, it is posited that the themes of place and local identity that were found describe what is experienced of Portland by the artists. Therefore, the idea that lyrics are written from a personal standpoint helps showcase the notion that through popular music lyrics, it is possible to make connections with place, but lyrics may not always describe place entirely or accurately. Rather, popular music lyrics may best be explained as depicting common lifestyles that align with lived experiences of music artists, possibly more aligned with understandings of local music scenes.

To understand what this says about popular music's effect on audiences it is important to note the narrow portrayal of place and lifestyles as uncovered within this study. The influence that popular music has on audiences has been analyzed within literature (Bennett, 1997; Frith, 1992) and within this study is further proven to help reinforce certain understandings of place and culture. Most related to local identity as addressed in this study, popular music has been previously researched as having major influence on the way culture is both communicated through and shaped by popular music (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944; Bennett, 1997; Frith, 1992; Krims, 2003). Understanding the role of popular music as influential to audiences, the results of this study and the way

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Portland is described by a small demographic but portrayed to global audiences

showcases a problem in expressions of place-based culture in music.

Analyzing the very specific portrayal of Portland in this data set may explain that popular music lyrics are tools shaped by those in power, and thus neglect marginalized groups within place. This is exemplified through the notion that Portland popular artists represent both a narrow music genre and similarly small segment of the overall culture of Portland. Based on the sample size chosen via CMJ music charts, it is clear that Portland's popular music scene is dominated by the indie-rock genre, thus similarly causing the genre to dominate the music scene within Portland. Viewing these lyrics as both narrow descriptors of place, and notions of common stereotypes of place shapes an argument that popular music neglects to inform global audiences of cultures outside of the music scene's demographic. This also may explain that popular music lyrics may be tied to other stereotypes of place (in other forms of media, for example) in that they both reflect and reinforce these stereotypes to mass audiences, while leaving holistic understandings out. Results also explained that music scenes, especially involving popular artists, maintain exclusive and segmented demographics within cities allowing them the power to communicate descriptions of place and lifestyles to audiences which other groups do not have access to. In conclusion, though this study shows that place and local identity can be expressed in popular music lyrics and that direct references to cities can be found, it is important to understand that popular lyrics may not properly explain the reality of place but rather offer descriptions of place through a narrow and restricted lens and furthermore not incorporate lifestyles outside of the artists' demographic.

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**Place.** Theories of place have been discussed in a number of ways throughout this research. Results of this study further theories of place in two major ways. First, results explain that place plays an important role within lyrics of popular music, but is not always expressed as directly connected to residence of the artist. Second, results offer a better understanding of how place is communicated through mass media, in this case, popular music lyrics. Both of these understandings of place within popular music help to further the importance of place when discussing how geographic regions are understood and communicated about not just in the field of popular music, but communication and media as a whole. Specifically, the results of this study show that place is depicted via descriptions of physical landscapes in combination with descriptions of local identity through themes of lifestyles. These themes exemplify some different ways to assess place reference within music lyrics and potentially other mass mediated messages.

Physical landscapes was the first major theme to emerge regarding Portland as place. These findings first fit into one of Tuan's (1974) descriptions of place as related to the value, the seeking out, or personification of environment. This idea focuses on the way that individuals value, perceive of and respond to their physical environments, defined as topophilia, or "the bond between people and place" (Tuan, 1974, p.4). Tuan (1974) argues that humans structure worlds into substances, directions, or colors for example which help humans to create symbolic views of their environment. Though differing from culture to culture, references to such aspects as mountain and sea or east and west, or use of color to make sense of environmental distinctions in Western culture, help individuals symbolically perceive of place.



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All three of the above examples were prominent within the data in both the physical landscapes and climate themes, alluding to the fact that artists make direct symbolic references to physical environments. In results from this study, themes related to Tuan's (1974) understanding of place as best connected to a specific city were seen in such lyrics as exemplified earlier, referencing street names, direct names of neighborhoods, nearby cities, and the general references to nearby natural spaces like rivers, mountains and the sea or coast, all within or surrounding Portland. The frequent use of these terms help shape an argument that the lyrics of popular artists can describe place, while not necessarily as fully defined within research but nevertheless making some connections to relevant physical environments of a specific city.

In addition to this understanding of place related to Tuan (1974), the use of lyrics to shape mental mappings (Cresswell, 2004, Lynch, 1960, Stamm 1985) of place also plays a role. Mental or cognitive mappings of place are one of the major ways that humans are able to shape a sense of place. Cresswell (2004) argues that the use of specific wording such as place reference triggers images and memory of physical place. This concept is not only regulated to individuals who have personally experienced certain physical spaces but can also stem from what is known of place from external sources. With an understanding of Cresswell's (2004) theory here, references to physical landscapes, especially direct references (i.e. "Oldtown," "Nehalem," "Division Street") as discussed in the results may shape mental images of Portland as a place. It should be noted however, that these references may not be understood explicitly by all audience members without some prior knowledge of Portland. Regardless, when references to

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landscapes are communicated within the lyrics of popular artists, listeners may be able to use references within lyrics to shape their own mental mapping of place. This idea coincides with mentions of places outside of Portland, such as the coast, or California, wherein lyrics used directional and navigational references described by Tuan (1974).

Harvey (2001) and Romig (2009) discuss these aspects of place as they relate to geographically separate places. Harvey (2001) discusses differentiation between territories as a way to understand physical space while Romig (2009) discusses themes of escapism found in lyrics as a similar way to make sense of place. As part of the physical landscapes referenced in lyrics were related to locations more distant but still in proximity to Portland, they should also facilitate an understanding of Portland as place. This offers a distinction between Portland and territories outside of it; out to the ocean or down south to California, for example. Lyrics that expressed the physical moving from place to place aid in the mental imagery (Cresswell, 2004) and cognitive mapping (Lynch, 1960) of place. These references again support the idea of cognitive mapping (Lynch, 1960), especially within the idea of paths from one place to another.

Overall, results of this study help to more deeply classify the way that place is written into lyrics by local indie-rock artists even on a more global level and how lyrics shape an understanding of place. Though references that fit many definitions of place were uncovered, only few were explicitly connected to a specific place. These findings add to popular music studies and place theories in that they offer a new way to connect the two theories, and a new way to thematize how the concept of place is communicated through popular music lyrics, commonly through physical references. While these

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understandings of place through music lyrics have been deeply explicated, an understanding of what goes on among community members and how this is personified to listeners is also an important way to understand place and local identity.

### **Local Identity**

The themes of local identity that were uncovered within the data offer descriptions of lifestyles, written as first person narrations or descriptors of others. Notions of lifestyles within lyrics were relatively interchangeable when discussing how the results of this study related to theories of both place and local identity, in that they also represented the social aspects of place (Cresswell, 2004). Results from this study as discussed in the summary of findings depicted a place that was socially significant, and explained the unique identity of the Portland through themes in lyrics embedded in the Portland indie-rock scene. When comparing themes to other stereotypical portrayals of Portland lifestyles, results showed again a much specified notion of local identity which left out a number of marginalized groups also a part of the city. This was seen within themes of lifestyles through expressions of an under-employed society. Similarly, the frequency of references to drugs and alcohol helped to explain a collective identification with and acceptance of these practices. Secondly, when reviewing some of the references categorized within the alternative lifestyles category, these concepts relate directly to the idea of a very specific culture that reflected common practices across the nation, wherein the alternative lifestyles category fell. Finally, lyrical themes also reflected liberal attitudes, which makes up the political majority of Portland, and a disconnect between the

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discussed working-class and middle to upper-class citizens, mirroring political disjoints of Portland and highlighting another of Portland's majority group.

First, the overall findings related to local identity within this study showed support for the theory of collective consciousness (Cerulo, 1997, Hoffman & Eveland, 2010, Stamm, 1985), most specifically describing what is determined to be a collective consciousness among the Portland indie-rock scene, rather than Portland as a whole. Themes across the data set showcased an overarching depiction and representation of cultures with much commonality with popular stereotypes in Portland. These commonalities across the data support claims made by Cerulo (1997) describing collective identity as the we-ness of a group. Looking back on some literature related to music scenes (Bennett, 1997, Bennett & Peterson, 2004), this further supports the notion that a collective consciousness (Cerulo, 1997) exists within the indie-rock scene of Portland (as members from this scene are responsible for writing lyrics within the data set), but may not carry over to the collective consciousness of the city as a whole.

To exemplify some of these themes, the data shows for example, an environmentally conscious collective identity. The frequency of mentions of natural landscapes, in combination with some specific lyrics categorized within the lifestyles (such as environmentally friendly practices like biking and public transportation) theme help portray a culture as one which values the environment, another common stereotype of certain Portlanders. The many references of these examples within lyrics from the data may showcase to audiences that the environment is both a physical and social construction of Portland identity. This directly relates to some previous studies of lyrics

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and place that reference certain (Pesses, 2009, Romig, 2009) qualities of life such as this.

Pesses (2009) and Romig (2009) found lyrics as representative of California through such aspects as purposes of living in Los Angeles, escapism, drug culture, downtrodden life and more through an assessment of lyrics from a single artist, or a set of non-local artists, respectively. Results of this study uncovered similar results but rather from a large set of lyrics about a specific city from a set of local artists. While uncovered themes directly agree with prior local identity theories, results of this study may help to develop a way to more deeply address the connection between popular music and local identity within music lyrics through similar populations and themes.

Next, the frequent mentions of under-employed lifestyles and liberal practices help to explain the dominating political and socioeconomic culture of Portland, and the indie rock scene as another aspect of local identity in lyrics. This again, however, neglects to include both perspectives and representations of minority groups and beliefs situated in Portland. Harvey (2001) explains the ideas of power within a geographical location as being an aspect which shapes the local identification of place, while Earlmann (1998) explains the concept of shared experience. These two assessments of local identity were present within the data between themes communicating working-class lifestyles (showcasing both a shared experience and a spectrum of political and economic hierarchy) and clashing with figures of power such as police or upper-class citizens (portraying power dynamics) within the city of Portland. These findings again help to depict Portland as having a dominating culture, but less frequently address other marginalized groups, or do so in a negative light. With very few other studies looking at

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how these understandings of local identity appear within popular music, this study offers new ways to assess other sets of popular lyrics with the aim to uncover representations of local identity, and also offer an understanding that popular lyrics may be exclusively biased to lifestyles mirroring that of the artist, rather than place as a whole.

### **Limitations**

A few limitations were experienced within this research that should be accounted for. The first limitation was the minimal genre reach of the population. The majority of bands within the sample represented an indie-rock genre, leaving out genres such as hip-hop, country, or pop which may have widely varying themes or lack thereof. This was likely responsible for the very narrow portrayal of place and local identity within the data. As the overwhelming genre of the Portland music scene and culture are particularly dominated by indie-rock, the population filled this majority accordingly. However, as previous research suggests, common themes among varying genres like hip-hop or country tend to have massively contrasting themes from genres like indie-rock. This issue may have left out some important cultural understandings of minority groups in Portland which though not as wide-spread, remain valuable representations and depictions of the overall city of Portland.

Second, the selected set of popular artists were not all born and raised in Portland, Oregon which may have altered their perceptions of the city, as well as created the argument that they could not be a particularly useful sample to express place and local identity of Portland. To counter this, the researcher attempted at great lengths to assure all artists who were chosen had spent a great deal of time in Portland, particularly during the

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time of writing the majority of lyrics used in this sample. For example, The Shins originally were based in Albuquerque, New Mexico but relocated to Portland in 2001, when their first album was released in June of the same year. Their subsequent albums were written and released during their residence in Portland. In contrast, many artists included in this study were born and raised in Portland or began their music careers in Portland including Esperanza Spalding, The Thermals, Pink Martini, The Helio Sequence and more.

Third, the researchers personal residence in the city of Portland may have played a role in the predisposition of the researcher to perceive and understand otherwise generalizable themes as related specifically to Portland. More specifically, residing in Portland may have made it more obvious to pick up on themes that could be locally oriented but were not, or themes that may have been missed by a neutral eye. The constant comparative method employed within this study, however, offered techniques which helped to reduce biased recording made by the researcher. Through techniques like line-by-line coding and diagramming, the researcher was able to make three reviews of the data set to make sure categories were sensible and organized correctly. Using these techniques of repetitive review should have aided the researcher in pulling away from any assumed meanings of the data and view the set with a more neutral eye.

### **Further Research**

As this study focused on a very specific data set, along with a very specific methodology, much room is left for expansions upon this study. Aiming to further understand the connections of place/local identity and popular music, three areas could

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potentially be carried on to both fine-tune and expand this research. To begin, this study, its methodology and results may be particularly useful as employed in other geographical locations. Especially within cities with more eclectic music scenes and popular, localized genres, testing this study in other locations might help to further test some understandings of place and local identity theories as fostered from results of this study.

Second, being that the data showed only minimal direct references to the city of Portland in connection to themes of place and local identity, it may be useful to also conduct lyrical analyses of locally based artists. It may be informative to see if direct references to Portland would be more frequent, which may give light to whether or not the connection to Portland is lost among artists with mass reach. This type of study may also help to uncover if a focus on lifestyles significant to the music scene are also as if not more prominent. Analyzing local lyrics as opposed to popular may also offer a look at different power dynamics, assuming the most popular artists of the city have more influence over shaping ideas (not just of place and local identity) via lyrics. Similarly, this may open up a window to explore various genres of the Portland music scene, being that the popular music scene was dominated by indie-rock artists, thus giving way to a very specified set of descriptions of place and culture.

Third, this study left out the audience aspect of popular music studies and rather only focused on analysis of the actual mass mediated product being provided *to* audiences. One useful follow-up study might be to conduct audience assessments to better understand how both local and global groups make connections with the city of Portland or other cities, based upon lyrics. This would allow for a better understanding of



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not only the influence of lyrics as a mass mediated message to audiences, but help

determine if themes of place and local identity as written by artists were being understood by audiences in similar fashion.

Finally, another opportunity for further research would be to conduct interviews with artists about lyrics. This would be useful in that it would develop an even deeper and more accurate understanding of how artists perceive of their communications of place and local identity within lyrics. This also offers the opportunity to determine whether or not these concepts retain value among artists when they have broken from their local scenes and expanded into global audiences. Together, the results of this study offer baseline data for how to assess place and local identity in popular music lyrics from sets of localized artists. Though results of this study found interesting and significant connections between lyrics of local artists and understandings of place and local identity, there is much room for expansion.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research shows that the concepts of place and local identity are found to be communicated in popular music lyrics. However, lyrics made less direct references than anticipated which showcased the focus on very specific demographics of the city's majority culture. Popular music, in this case through lyrics can work as a medium through which these concepts can be expressed to mass audiences but may not shape understandings of cities in a proper manner. Within this study it was shown that lyrics portrayed place and local identity through such themes as landscapes and climate as representations of place, and lifestyles and attitudes as representations of local identity.

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By looking at artists from a specific city, in this case Portland, results of this study were comparable to realistic qualities of the indie-rock music scene within the city from which the artists are a major part of. Understanding this connection helps build a deeper argument that through popular music lyrics, local artists are able to thoroughly depict their own personal geographic communities and the identities that reside within them through music lyrics but may neglect depictions of place as a whole and especially neglecting marginalized groups.

Results overall through a small set of direct references depicted the city of Portland as a place through natural and man-made landscapes such as rivers, mountains, streets, neighborhoods and even events. Place was also expressed through lyrics describing a grey and rainy climate. These two theme shape mental mappings of Portland as place which should allow audiences to develop personal understandings of the city. Local identity was depicted through lyrics representing lifestyles and portrayed a working-class, leisurely community that commonly participates in practices alternative from the national norm. These lyrics helped explain such notions as collective identity and community attachment of some groups of locals within the city, thus defining these as identities of Portland to audiences. As discussed, there was a strong connection between depictions of these lifestyles and other popularized stereotypes of the city, again both reflecting and reinforcing these same understandings through the power dynamics of Portland popular artists.

To better support the appearance of these concepts in lyrics, using previous research on general definitions of place and local identity allowed the researcher to

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thoroughly and accurately make sense of how they appeared within lyrics. Because of this, a new understanding of place and local identity themes were developed to be viewed within localized, popular lyrics. In this case, uncovered themes helped define understandings of Portland but truly only related to a very specific majority of Portland demographics and lifestyles. These findings may reflect the lived experiences of what are unique to these Portland artists and then portray these ideas out to mass audiences as descriptions of Portland as a whole, when truly they are not holistic representations. This process has offered results that explain how lyrics of Portland popular artists communicate ideas of place and local identity of their own demographic using the themes of natural landscapes, climate, lifestyles and attitudes. These four themes help expand on prior understandings of place and local identity and may be carried on throughout future research as specific ways to address the two concepts.

Additionally, this research helps expand communication, cultural and popular music theories offering a new way to assess music lyrics as expletive tools to communicate place and local identity to mass, global audiences. However, these results also suggest a cautionary example of certain segmentations and biases that may arise from popular artists, and ties to lifestyles of specific demographics within music-scenes. Like many studies before the results here show a connection between explicit themes in music related to culture and identity, but tied to artists' residences help depict not a city as a whole, but rather a city as commonly experienced by an artist. Through this connection, future research can further explore the ways that similar themes appear, such

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as landscapes, climate, attitudes and lifestyles and how they are expressed in popular  
music lyrics of artists from other cities across the globe.

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### Appendix

Everclear  
The Decemberists  
The Shins  
Elliot Smith  
Pink Martini  
M. Ward  
Esperanza Spalding  
Dandy Warhols  
Blitzen Trapper  
Menomena  
Portugal. The Man  
The Helio Sequence  
Starfucker  
Quasi  
Stephen Malkmus and the Jicks  
Pavement  
The Thermals  
YACHT  
Wildflag  
Unknown Mortal Orchestra