"Taking It Back, Making It Strong!": The Boundary Establishment And Maintenance Practices Of A Montréal Anti-Racist Skinhead Gang
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INTRODUCTION

For nearly two decades, the skinhead subculture has been nearly universally associated with the most vile manifestations of racism and violence imaginable. As evidenced by popular culture[1], racism is a fundamental component of the mainstream definition of skinhead. It may come as a surprise, then, to discover that not only did the skinhead subculture emerge from uniquely multicultural and multiracial origins and not only are the overwhelming majority of skinheads non-racists, but that a very significant proportion of participants in the skinhead subculture actively identify themselves as *anti-racist.*

One such grouping of anti-racist skinheads was the Montréal chapter of Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice (SHARP). Montréal's first SHARP chapter began in 1991 and folded approximately two years later. In 1996, Montréal racist skinheads began a protracted campaign of ambushes and armed assaults on non- and anti-racist skinheads, culminating in a series of "bar raids" in the summer of 1998 that sent over thirty people to emergency rooms. In response to this threat, SHARP Montréal reformed in late July 1998 (SHARP Montréal, 1999) and consisted of a fairly stable group of around two dozen young men and women.

As members of an anti-racist skinhead gang[2] SHARP members establish their identities as such in both mainstream and subcultural social settings, and, in doing so,

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[1] Any number of television programs (*Law & Order)*, movies (*American History X, Crimson River, Romper Stomper*) and even video games (Sony Playstation 2's *Soldier Of Fortune* and *State Of Emergency*) depict skinheads as being synonomous with racists.
[2] Whether or not SHARP Montréal constitute a "gang" is subject to an important definitional debate, given the consequences that can arise when one's group comes to be labelled as such. Using Christensen's gang

enact dual facets of their identities – as skinheads and as anti-racist skinheads. They establish and maintain both in two crucial areas. On a level of subcultural interaction, their identity boundaries are established through a dramaturgical process involving the skinhead *bricolage* and set interactional scripts. Through the employment of violence, and particularly collective forms of violence, the boundaries of identity for the group are clearly demarcated. Within both the skinhead subculture and the punk subculture it is embedded within, SHARP members adopt a policing role in which they attempt to label and punish racists as deviants, utilizing both ritualized interactional processes and ritualized forms of violence to accomplish this goal.

This study concerns how members of SHARP Montréal deploy their interactions in the broader social world and, more importantly, within the smaller subcultural social space they occupy, in order to define who they are and who they are not.

A Brief History Of The Skinhead Subculture

Any serious investigation of the skinhead subculture reveals that while there is general agreement between academics and most skinhead factions that the skinhead subculture emerged as a hybrid of British hard mod and Jamaican rude boy subcultures, there is strong disagreement between racist and non-racist skinhead factions. Racist skinheads have contended that the subculture originated among youth involved with British fascist parties in the 1930's (Burdi, 1994: 14) but do so against a wave of compelling empirical evidence from both academic and non-academic sources (Hebdige,

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identification criteria (1994: 13), SHARP Montréal lacks the territorial claims that comprise being a gang, but could arguably still fall under the label "gang" due to their similar appearance and manner, their high degree of in-group interaction, and the criminal acts many members have been involved in. However, Hamm (1993: 61-62) cautions against defining skinheads as gang members, because they "do not conform to the classic definition of a street gang" insofar as their use of violence separates them from those of most gangs. Hebdige (1979: 180-181) notes that the issue is not clear-cut: gangs can and do exist within youth subcultures, and the two terms "are virtually synonymous in the popular mythology."

1979; Marshall, 1991) that the skinhead subculture emerged in the mid-to-late 1960's in Britain largely as a result of growing associations between working-class white British youth and Jamaican immigrant youth. With little or no evidence to support their own claims, the racist skinhead theory of the subculture emerging from racist white youth in Britain or elsewhere can be disregarded with a high degree of confidence. What remains is a very surprising history of a subculture now widely regarded as synonymous with racism: the skinhead subculture emerged due to two cultural shifts in English working-class life - an influx of working-class Jamaican immigrants in the 1960's and a split in the prevalent mod youth subculture along class lines.

The need for labour in the post-WWII British service, transportation and health industries, coupled with immigration restrictions imposed by the United States, funneled an influx of Jamaican immigrants to Britain. The population of Jamaican immigrants living and working in Britain more than doubled between 1958 and 1962 (Keough, 1999), with most settling in working-class communities in urban centres. Their spatial proximity to their white, English counterparts led to the development of "some kind of rapport" between the two groups (Hebdige, 1979: 52). Ethnic differences were perhaps compensated for by their similar class positions in a country noted for its rigid and well-defined class structure.

Jamaican youth brought with them a youth subculture from the shanty towns of Kingston - that of the rude boys. "Flashy, urban, rough and tough, they were glamorized in a string of reggae and rock-steady hits" (Hebdige, 1979: 145) and could be recognized by their closely-cropped hair, short sta-prest trousers, and pork pie hats – elements that would soon be implemented in the skinhead bricolage.

With Jamaican and English working-class people living and working alongside each other, the rude boys began to interact with the dominant indigenous youth subculture in Britain at the time – that of the mods. Mods favoured American soul for dancing, sharpened metal combs for fighting, Italian motor scooters for transportation, amphetamines for stimulation and meticulous suits (protected by army surplus parkas) for clothing. The right style of haircut, the latest cut of suit or dress, the newest imported soul record – all became objects whose possession garnered the mod status as a "face" or "high number" within the subculture.

At about this time, the mod subculture was beginning to fragment along class lines. The *bricolage* upon which status within the subculture depended began to be beyond the economic reach of poorer mods. This obstacle to status was overcome with the emergence of the "hard mod" style. Hard mods marked themselves off from their more affulent peers with shaved hair, tight jeans, braces (suspenders), and work boots. This hyper-proletarianized style served as a distinct marker, separating them from both their mod predecessors and their middle-class hippie contemporaries. (Hebdige, 1979: 55; Hamm, 1993: 24). It served as "a conscious attempt by working-class youth to dramatize and resolve their marginal status in a class-based society," (Baron, 1997: 127) as well as their marginal status within the mod subculture.

Class similarities brought the hard mods in close contact with the rude boys, and overlaid elements of each subculture on the other. Socializing with West Indian rudeboys at dancehalls, the hard mods began "copying *their* (the rude boys') mannerisms, adopting *their* curses, dancing to *their* music." (Hebdige, 1979: 55-56). The resulting hybrid

subculture – combining elements of rude boy and hard mod style – begat the skinhead subculture.

This new, multi-cultural, working-class subculture flourished only briefly, peaking perhaps in the summer of 1969, before falling into a period of dormancy from 1972 until the late 1970's. As the subculture began to decline, some disturbing indications of racism began to emerge. South Asian immigrants became targets for violence by skinheads (Brake, 1985: 76; Marshall, 1991: 36), and anti-immigrant politician Enoch Powell became a popular political figure for some skinheads of this period. London newspapers quickly picked up on these two emerging trends, and began what Brake describes as "over-reportage" of skinhead links to racism and racist violence (1974: 193).

It was at this point that the first academic work on the skinhead subculture began appearing, nearly all from the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). Scholars such as Brake (1974), John Clarke (1973; 1974), Tony Jefferson (1973), Julian Tanner (1978) and Dick Hebdige (1971; 1979) characterized the skinheads as group of working-class youth seeking a collective solution to the problem of status inconsistency through participation in the subculture. Others took exception to the lack of analysis of the racist actions of skinheads, criticizing the Birmingham school's work as romanticizing skinheads by ignoring any disturbing and negative aspects (Woods, 1977; Baron, 1997: 126-128). It is somewhat ironic that both media and academic attention to the skinhead subculture finally emerged just as it began its rapid descent into dormancy; moreover, this fact casts a shadow of doubt on the conclusions reached both by the papers and the professors.

The skinhead subculture would remain dormant from 1972 until the late 1970's. Lacking cultural space in North America conducive to "youthful working-class expression of discontent and open, ugly antagonism to the middle class" (Moore, 1993: 30), the first wave of the skinhead subculture made no impact on the shores of North America whatsoever. To become a viable subcultural style for North American youth it would require precisely this kind of cultural space, one that came to be articulated by the creation of punk rock. "Because it tolerated or even demanded displays of hostility to perceived middle and upper class standards, because it was often violent, and because generally it seemed at least in theory or observable stance to identify itself with lower or working class fashions and mannerisms," (Moore, 1993: 52) punk rock was the ideal means to creating cultural space conducive to a revival of the skinhead subculture in England and its introduction to North America at roughly the same time. In fact, punk also paved the way for the revival and North American transplantation of the mod subculture (evidenced in the popularity of music groups like The Jam and in the creation of North American mod groups like Toronto's The Mods [Manley, 1993: 58]) and an interest in ska music (spearheaded by Jerry Dammers' Two Tone music label).

This new generation of skinheads even created their own version of punk rock music. "Oi!", as it came to be known, shared with punk the volume, distortion, anger and utter disregard for musicianship. However, it distinguished itself from punk rock in its incorporation of pub-style sing-alongs, strict adherence to a particular musical style and structure, and its lyrical content. The Montréal skinhead band The Discords recorded what may have been the first North American Oi! release in 1982 (Ibid.: 29). To this day in North America, punk rock and skinhead youth subcultures are closely related.

But this symbiotic relationship between punk and skinhead has not always been a happy one. For reasons that remain largely open to speculation[3], the skinhead revival in England became distorted when large numbers of skinheads became involved in the neo-Nazi National Front political party and other overtly racist activities. The tabloid press quickly picked up and dramatized these elements, rapidly transmitting the new subcultural style of explicitly racist skinheads around the country and, eventually, around the world. When skinheads began appearing at the fringes of the North American punk subculture in the early 1980's, there was initially much confusion over what they represented. Were North American skinheads racist like their English contemporaries, or would they tend towards anti-racism, like the rapidly politicizing North American punk subculture of the early 1980's?

The original North American skinheads split off in both directions. A report by an American visiting the 1984 Berlin "Chaos Days" punk festival in the pages of international punk fanzine *MAXIMUMROCKNROLL* noted that "skins in Europe are different from skins in the U.S. All skins in Europe are Nazis." (Eiden, 1984: 10). At the same time, this issue notes several instances of skinheads physically assaulting punks at concerts (Thatcher, 1984: 32), and one commentator blames a racist skinhead gang for virtually shutting down the punk rock music scene in New York City. (Dictor, 1984: 49). Other evidence points to racist skinheads forming gangs like Chicago's Romantic Violence by 1984 (Hamm, 1993: 5). So, while it is apparent that anti-racist skinheads were involved in the burgeoning North American skinhead subculture as early on as racist

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[3] Hamm (1993: 32-33), for example, postulates that this was the doing of Ian Stuart, a National Front activist and lead singer of punk band Skrewdriver, who released the first "white power" album with their 1984 sophomore release *Hail The New Dawn*. However, evidence of racist skinheads in England and the United States exists well before this album was released.

skinheads, it is also apparent that racist skinheads were likely the first to organize themselves into "crews" or gangs, and to begin physically attacking the punk rock subculture they operated within. This phenomenon spread beyond New York City and Chicago. In 1986, skinheads in Florida were arrested after clubbing a group of youths leaving a punk rock concert. (Suall and Lowe, 1988: 142). In October 1987, skinheads in Portland, armed with bats, pipes, knives and axes, were stopped by police en route to do battle with the clientele of a punk bar. (Ibid.). In Edmonton, weekly confrontations and violence between punks and racist skinheads began taking place as early as 1990 (Edmonton Anti-Fascist League, 1997).

With both racist and anti-racist skinheads operating within the North American punk rock subculture, and with the racist skinheads organizing themselves into "crews" and physically assaulting punks and other skinheads, it is not surprising that anti-racist skinheads eventually organized themselves to combat the racist skinheads. The Baldies, North America's first explicitly anti-racist skinhead crew, formed in Minneapolis in 1986 in response to the presence of a neo-Nazi gang called the White Knights. (Author Unknown).

In 1987, the first SHARP chapter was organized in New York City to combat media portrayals of skinheads as violent racists, as well as to rid the New York City punk/hardcore scene of racist skinhead gangs like the National Front skinheads (Young and Craig, 1997: 179). "They produced leaflets explaining the original multi-cultural roots of the (skinhead) culture." (Moreno, 1995). The SHARP model rapidly spread to other cities, and by 1988 there were SHARP chapters in Europe as well.

Racist skinhead violence began to spill out of the social boundaries of the skinhead and punk rock subcultures as people not involved in either subculture found themselves attacked by racist skinhead gangs. In November 1988, a gang of racist skinheads in Portland chanced upon and subsequently attacked three Ethiopian students, beating 27-year-old Mulugeta Seraw to death with a baseball bat. Only when attacks of this nature, when victims outside of either the skinhead or punk subculture became targets for racist violence (and approximately six years after the subculture's arrival in North America), did the police, the media and academics finally began to take interest in North American skinheads.

From 1988 to 1996, a correctionalist approach to the skinhead subculture dominated academic discourse. David Matza (1969: 15-18) defines a correctionalist approach as one that examines the deviant phenomenon in question without a sense of appreciation or empathy, focusing on causation, with the goal of eliminating the phenomenon. Studies of this nature tend to pay little attention to detail, resonate with moralistic overtones, and rely mainly on "newspaper accounts, police reports and reports of social investigators" (18) for their data. While certainly avoiding the romanticizing tendencies of previous research on skinheads, the reliance of the correctionalist approach on research material derived from journalists, human rights groups, and law enforcement agencies (e.g. Suall and Lowe, 1988; Moore, 1993; Christensen, 1994) produced distorted analyses of the skinhead subculture (Baron, 1997: 126; Wood, 1999: 132). The first published work on skinheads came from human rights and anti-racist groups (Centre for Democractic Renewal, 1986; Suall and Lowe, 1988), police officers and agencies (Christensen, 1994), and journalists. These works shared a common disregard for the

origins of the subculture in Britain, preferring to focus on the racist skinheads of North America as their point of departure. By relying almost exclusively on the materials produced by these human rights groups, police agencies and journalists, academics took many of the *a priori* assumptions of those materials for granted. Moore's 1993 "cultural history of American skinheads," for example, stemmed from a journalistic account of the 1987 murder of a homeless Black man by two racist skinheads. Consequently, Moore dismisses anti-racist skinheads as "punks from Chicago" (151), and the multiethnic origins of the subculture as "debatable myths" (156).

The correctionalist approach had another effect: in presuming that skinheads were to be automatically associated with racism and treated less as a youth subculture than as a social problem, academics inadvertently favoured the racist skinhead as the authentic skinhead. By using racist skinheads as their point of departure, they effectively marginalized the non- and anti-racist participants in that subculture. Many of the correctionalist studies of North American skinheads then transmitted a message confirming the authenticity of racist skinheads back through the media, apparently taking up Barak's admonishment that criminologists must "become part of the social construction of public opinion" by guiding the interpretation and presentation of "newsworthy items." (1988: 566; 576).

With racist skinheads thus placed in the position of legitimate heirs to the subcultural throne, academics de-emphasized other kinds of skinheads (Wood: Ibid.). The authoritative weight of such academic treatises, reliant as they are on media and agency reports as data sources, and transmitted through media interactions (as "experts" on skinheads), reified racists' claims to the skinhead subculture, while undermining attempts

within the subculture to contest the authenticity of the those claims. The racist skinhead is privileged as the "real" skinhead by academics, the media, the police and human rights organizations, leaving anti-racist skinheads to be depicted as "bad copies." (Bell et. al., 1994: 37).

Beginning in 1997, more recent academic investigations into the skinhead subculture have managed to avoid the distortions and inaccuracies characterized by their predecessors largely through ethnographic fieldwork (Baron, 1997: Young and Craig, 1997) or through analysis of subcultural artifacts and similar primary sources (Wood, 1999). The resulting "naturalist" examinations of the skinhead subculture have been quite revealing and indicate the route for further research to take. These works have, for example, noted the heterogeneity of the skinhead subculture (Baron, 1997; Young and Craig, 1997); the presence of politically-delinated skinhead factions (Young and Craig, 1997); and the non-racist origins of the subculture as well as the non or anti-racist orientation of a majority of its participants (Wood, 1999).

This study seeks to continue in the vein of the more recent naturalist work done on the skinhead subculture in the hopes of providing greater understanding of a large and influential segment of the subculture - one that has been largely overlooked by the media and academia alike. SHARP Montréal's motto, "Taking It Back, Making It Strong!" emphasizes the importance its members place on reclaiming the skinhead subculture from both the racist skinheads and those academics, journalists and law enforcement officials who have granted racist skinheads legitimacy.   By explaining how this particular group of anti-racist skinheads comes to establish and maintain its own boundaries of identity, this

study aims to contribute to a broader understanding of both the heterogeneity and commonalities to be found within this fascinating youth subculture.

METHODOLOGY

Getting In

My previous association with anti-racist skinheads in other Canadian cities, as well as personal relationships I have formed with current members of SHARP (as my neighbours, former roommates and as people I know from the Montréal punk rock music scene), permitted me to gain access to the group with relative ease. I discussed the possibility of doing some research with three members of SHARP in December 1999. In January 2000, I was invited to a meeting, where I explained to all present what I wanted to do, that their confidentiality would be maintained, and that all that I required was their consent to study them. At the next SHARP meeting, they voted to approve my research plan.

Participant Observation and Intensive Interviewing

I chose to combine the methods of participant observation and intensive interviewing in the hopes of yielding a rich and meaningful set of data from my interactions with the subjects. After devising an interview schedule, I began what was to become a two year regimen of participant observation and intensive interviewing of members. From February 2000 to January 2002, I frequented the same bars as they did, attended the same concerts they went to, and attended meetings of the group. I visited members in their homes and invited members to visit me in my home. I was invited to and attended birthday parties, barbeques and other social events. I also went along with

them on several planned "actions" against racist skinheads. In doing so, I sought to find out about their reasons for becoming skinheads and SHARP skinheads in particular. I was interested in their knowledge of the subculture and their perspectives on themselves and on other kinds of skinheads. I wanted to observe their interactions with non-skinheads and with members of other skinhead factions. I was particularly interested in uncovering what role violence played in these interactions and in their own self-conceptions as SHARP skinheads.

From a sampling pool of about a dozen SHARP members fluent enough in English for me to conduct meaningful interviews with I extracted several initial and follow-up interviews over the course of two years. The initial interviews ran between one and two hours, with subsequent follow-up interviews running at less than an hour. I also interviewed some former members of SHARP, other Montréal skinheads and participants in the Montréal punk scene who frequently interacted with members of SHARP. I combined data obtained from these interviews with my field notes and with secondary sources often provided to me by members of SHARP.

Research Limitations

Montréal is a wonderful city for all sorts of social research, but a largely-unilingual researcher is at a definite disadvantage. My lack of fluency in French limited my choices of SHARP members to interview to about half the group. It also created some difficulty in following and interpreting conversations and actions observed in the field at times. Safety considerations disqualified doing any ethnographic work on racist skinheads in Montréal.[4] Finally, SHARP Montréal or the Montréal skinhead subculture is not

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[4] I am already well-known to local racist skinheads because of my volunteer work with a local anti-racist group. One local racist gang has gone so far as to threaten me, by name, on their website.

necessarily representative of the subculture elsewhere. In fact, given the myriad differences between my conclusions and those of researchers investigating other skinheads in other parts of the continent, it is likely that my findings are specific to the group of anti-racist skinheads portrayed in this study and evidence that the skinhead subculture is heterogeneous and varies considerably from group to group and city to city.

BECOMING A SKINHEAD

Youth Subcultures and Subculturization

Many scholars view youth subcultural participation as an attempt "…to resolve collectively-experienced problems arising from contradictions in the social structure." (Brake, 1980: vii). The Birmingham school posited adolescence as a time of establishing identity and status beyond the ascribed identities and statuses of family, education and occupation; race, class, and gender (Ibid.: 93-94). This time of life can be particularly problematic for lower-class youth, who have lower ascribed status and lack the legitimized access to the means for achieving hegemonic goals and mainstream signifiers of high status. This strain between culture goals and the institutionalized means for achieving them leaves the individual with five options, one of which Merton termed "rebellion," (1957) which we may also term "subculturization" (Brake, 1980: 5). Through subculturization – participation in a subculture – youth reject the hegemonic goals and values of mainstream (read: middle-class) culture and instead adopt a subcultural system of values and goals that is within their means. In doing so, lower-class subcultural participants avoid "'the middle-class measuring rod'" (Ibid.: 43) which threatens their status by demeaning their ascribed identities and statuses (Ibid.: 40) by creating a more

salient subcultural identity which affords them an attractive self-image and higher status (Ibid.: 18). According to this theoretical perspective, youth subcultures thus offer lower-class youth a collective solution to a commonly-experienced problem of status discrepency.

The Birmingham School noted differences between working-class and middle-class youth subcultures in their formation, organization and value systems. Middle-class youth subcultures tended to be geographically-diffuse, more influenced by international cultures, and have value systems that consist of sometimes extreme distortions of middle-class values such as self-growth and individuality (Ibid.: 86; 165). In contrast, working-class subcultures tend to be geographically-based with intensive local peer group interaction, whose participants are involved in leisure activities that contest the control of adult authority (Ibid.). The value systems of working-class youth subcultures tend to align more with those of the parent culture (that is, those of their class, not those middle-class values that represent the hegemonic value system) (Epstein, 1998: 9). Whereas the radicalism of a middle-class youth subculture might be oriented towards moral social reforms, working-class radicalism will be geared to economic or material reforms (Parkin, 1968: 2).

Punk As A Gateway Subculture

Becoming a skinhead necessitates prior knowledge of the subculture. The existence of anti-racist skinheads in North America becomes perplexing when taking into consideration the media orthodoxy, which portrays skinheads as, by definition, racist. In order for one to become an anti-racist skinhead, one first has to be aware that such a

subcultural option exists – something the media, legal and political authorities, and academics have thus far done a poor job of advancing.

I discovered that every member of SHARP Montréal had been involved in the punk subculture prior to becoming a skinhead – something also noted in other ethnographic examinations of North American skinheads (Young and Craig, 1997:184), as well as in interviews I conducted with anti-racist skinheads in other cities in early 2002. For example, Christian, a 21-year-old member of SHARP, "was a punk" for "maybe three years or something like that" and currently plays guitar in a punk band, along with some other members of SHARP. Darice, a 24-year-old female SHARP member, was a punk for several years, while interacting with and even dating skinheads. Edward, a 22-year-old male and the sole member of SHARP Montréal who I interviewed that denied being a punk at any point, nonetheless mentioned playing in a punk band in high school.

There is much overlap between the interaction sites of punk and skinhead subcultures in North America. The downtown parks, food courts, bars and concert venues preferred by punks are frequented also by skinheads, and vice-versa. In this way, youth involved in the punk subculture engage in face-to-face interactions with the kinds of skinheads not portrayed in the mass media – non- and anti-racist skinheads. Darice recalls that her first encounter with a skinhead:

> …was, I guess I was in the 9th grade, so I guess I was about 14, and I was a punk and I was really fucked up on drugs!…I went downtown and I was supposed to meet a friend at Devonian Gardens (a public park within a downtown shopping mall, a popular hang-out spot for youth in Calgary) and I was so screwed up I couldn't figure out where I was or where Devonian Gardens was. And so I started crying on the mall (a downtown pedestrian mall, also a favourite hang-out spot) and this skinhead came up to me and I remember his patch. It said: Rude Boys, on his jacket. And he was sort of making fun of me, because I'm sure I looked ridiculous.

Punk acts as a sort of gateway subculture, providing punk subcultural participants with opportunities to interact directly with skinheads. This interaction creates skinhead as a viable subcultural option for punks, allowing them to entertain the notion of becoming a skinhead, after having immersed themselves to varying degrees in the punk subculture.

External "push" factors also appear to figure significantly in the decision of many to make the transition from punk to skinhead, particularly for working-class youth. For working-class youth involved in punk, the subculture's distinctly middle-class emphasis on self-expression and maximizing the shock value of appearance by lampooning middle-class conventions eventually collide with more pressing material concerns. Christian explains his transition from punk to skinhead as having to do with "…needing to get a job so I had to shave my mohawk off." Darice recounted that being a punk with a mohawk and having to find work in the service industry meant having to first buy a wig to conceal her outlandish hairstyle – a problem that was far less of an issue after she got her first "Chelsea."[5] Clearly, working-class youth involved in the punk subculture encountered barriers to employment due to the sartorial style of punk. One solution is found in the transition to skinhead, a subculture whose boundary can be softened or turned off with some minor change in appearance. Edward explains:

> Well, for sure sometimes you have to be careful about the way you're dressed, if you're going to go get a job, people don't really know about it. People are going to think something bad about you. After a while, once they get to know you, you can explain what you're really about, and they'll go, "Wow! That's really fucking cool!" But, if you go see the same guy for a job and he doesn't know you, and you come with your turn-ups, suspenders and all that, I don't think he's going to call you for a job. Sometimes you have to be somebody else to go do your stuff.

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[5] The feminine version of the skinhead crop, featuring bangs and wisps of longer hair near both ears and in the back.

Montréal SHARP members indicated that the transition to skinhead was met with less hostility by their families than the initial transition to punk. Skinheads have a cleaner, neater, and more conventionally-presentable appearance than punks and the skinhead value system more closely mirrors that of working-class parent culture. Christian recounts that his parents' reacted to his becoming a skinhead with much less hostility than when he came home with a mohawk haircut as a punk. Darice recalls that her mother, who "absolutely detested the fact that I would want to, as she would put it, 'make myself ugly'" by adopting the punk sartorial style, was more accepting of the skinhead style Darice gradually shifted into.   Edward notes that "When you're a punk it's like, you beg for money, and you squeegee and you squat and you don't care. I think maybe skinhead is more like, I wouldn't say mature, but just more like, maybe, you know, work and everything…You have to be involved in society, I think. You don't need to have the biggest job, but at least get a job. Do something for society, don't get your cheque from the government."

For working-class youth involved in the punk subculture, skinhead becomes a viable subcultural option that permits them continued participation within the punk subculture while simultaneously setting them apart within that subculture. More importantly, it solves material concerns that may arise and may also reduce familial tensions over their subcultural participation by more clearly reflecting the class-based values of their parent culture.

HOMOLOGY AND BRICOLAGE

Henry Giroux notes that the body has traditionally "…been one of the principal terrains for multiple forms of resistance" for youth, whose own bodies are the sites through which their own identities are displayed "through oppositional subcultural styles…central to developing a sense of agency, self-definition and well-placed refusals." (1998: 28). This emphasis on the expressive potential of the body arises from the relative level of vulnerability, marginalization and powerlessness youth experience (Ferrell, 1993: 194). Youth are generally "restricted from speaking in those spheres where public conversation shapes social policy" (Giroux, 1998: 24) and "are unable to vote, are denied basic civil liberties, and…have few opportunities to make their voices heard." (Ibid.: 34). Reinforcing this subordinate position is the lack of an organized base from which youth could otherwise voice positions and negotiate with the adult world (Brake, 1980: 136). Personal appearance is one of the first and one of the only terrains in which youth are permitted a degree of autonomy; this magnifies the significance of appearance for youth, whose only option of expressing their resistance to their marginalized and powerless status is through their own appearance. Subcultural resistance therefore often takes the form of ritualized and stylized expressions of personal appearance, musical preferences, styles of dance, and so forth – none of which threatens the hegemonic order in a substantial way (Epstein, 1998: 11). But for youth involved in subcultures, these ritualized, "magical" solutions to marginalized statuses and identities are the only mediums available, and the only ones over which they can exercise a measure of control. Material expression is therefore a crucial level on which youth subcultures operate (Ibid.).

During an interview with 23-year-old SHARP member Ovide, he described the skinhead style of dress as "showing by your dress and everything that you don't agree with what's going on right now."

How does, showing by your dress and everything that you dont' agree with what's going on right now, how do you show that?

It's like, uh, the fact that's it's different from...

Sets yourself apart from what everyone else is wearing?

Yeah, exactly.

I understand that you mean by dressing differently, you set yourself apart from everybody else, but how does that show to everyone else that you're against what's going on? And what parts of what's going on are you against?

The thing is, uh, it'd be kind of ironic to say that I'm setting myself apart from the people for which I stand for, but it's more of, I don't accept the way it's working right now.

It's not the people you're separating yourself from, it's the system.

Yeah. It's totally symbolic.

Homology is "the study of the relationship between the cultural elements of a subculture and the fit between objects, the meanings granted to those objects and behaviour." (Ibid.). Bricolage, as defined by Claude Levi-Strauss, designates "the symbolic reordering of objects and their meanings," as used to "establish a unique identity and subcultural style and to set the subculture apart from the parent culture." (Ibid.: 13). This is analogous to Erving Goffman's notion of the "personal front…the other items of expressive equipment, the items that we most intimately identify with the performer himself and that we naturally expect will follow the performer wherever he goes." (1956: 24).

Subcultural bricolage largely serves to create boundaries of identity and belonging. Clothing, posture, speech patterns and slang; argot, musical preferences and other things are appropriated from "an existing market of artifacts" and used "in a form of collage which recreates group identity and promotes mutual recognition for members," (Brake, 1980: 15) as well as recognition of those not involved in the subculture in question. For Edward, the first step in becoming a skinhead involved adopting the most obvious aspects of skinhead bricolage: "I shaved my hair and got some boots, got some jeans, started reading about it. And after a while, it came by itself." Ovide noted that skinheads favour tight-fitting jeans, "which is totally different than whatever is going on right now!" - meaning that every other youth subculture going at the time of the interview favoured baggier, looser-fitting jeans and clothing.

Full knowledge of and strict adherance to a subculture's bricolage is a key prerequisite to subcultural acceptance. For skinheads, this includes knowing not only what brand of boots to wear, but what styles and colours and how to lace them in the manner associated with skinheads; not only what brand of jeans are acceptable, but how high to roll up the pantlegs. Such minutiae constitute the insider secrets of subcultural bricolage that "give objective intellectual content to subjectively felt social distance." (Goffman, 1956: 142). Adhering to the rigorous and orthodox standards of the skinhead bricolage then becomes a way of indicating one's knowledge of and experience in the subculture, thus separating oneself from the "freshcuts."[6]

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[6] "Freshcut" is a derogatory term used to describe someone relatively new to the skinhead subculture.

Skinhead Bricolage, Skinhead Homology

Goffman notes that "perhaps the most important piece of sign-equipment associated with social class consists of status symbols through which material wealth is expressed." (1956: 36). The skinheads of SHARP Montréal actively reject this traditional material expression of status, instead selecting "sign-equipment" that affirms their status as members of the working-class. The "hyper-masculinity" of the skinhead style (Hebdige, 1971: 55) serves as a demarcation of class boundaries, in that non-working-class youth are less likely to "subscribe to the cult of masculinity" in such a direct fashion (Brake, 1980: 150).

One form this takes with skinheads is making territorial claims to a low-income or "bad" neighbourhood and its accompanying image; or, for middle-class youth, to conceal their lack of such a connection. The Discords' "N.D.G.," perhaps the first skinhead Oi! song recorded in North America, and title track to The Streettroopers seven-inch single "The Streets of Montréal," are two examples of Montréal skinheads making such claims.

Personal appearance is another form through which skinheads articulate class affiliation (whether actual or not) and subcultural belonging. The skinheads of Montréal SHARP wear black, cherry red or oxblood Dr. Marten boots almost exclusively. Though Dr. Martens are available in a wide array of styles and colours, the ones chosen by skinheads will generally not exceed 14-holes in height, nor will they feature flags, flames, flowers or other special features. Steel-capped toes are a popular option, supporting one's claim to working-class membership as well as being an indicator of one's willingness to fight and being useful in a fight. Dr. Marten shoes are also acceptable in some circumstances, but again only the more conservative styles. Boots are always highly-

polished, contrasting with the unpolished Dr. Martens favoured by punks. Similar to the findings of Young and Craig (1997: 186-187), the colour of laces in a skinhead's boots no longer automatically implied association with a given skinhead faction. However, lacing up the boots in the military, horizontal fashion (as opposed to the more conventional criss-cross style) was *de rigeur* for all skinheads encountered during my fieldwork. On occasion, Montréal SHARPs would exchange their Dr. Martens for a pair of black Adidas low-tops – particularly if they were playing soccer or just staying home.

Pants were almost always black or blue jeans – usually Levi's or a cheaper brand, always tight-fitting. The jeans would either be purchased two inches too short, or the pantlegs would be rolled up into 1/2"-wide cuffs, to reveal the Dr. Marten boots. Sometimes bleach would purposely be splashed on blue jeans in a random pattern. Camouflage military fatigue pants were also an acceptable option. Skinhead women would also sometimes wear short skirts with fishnet stockings – a style they share with many women in the punk subculture.

Shirts tended to be t-shirts, sweatshirts and hooded sweatshirts with Oi!, punk, or hardcore band logos. T-shirts would always be tucked into the jeans – unlike the perpetually-untucked t-shirts of most other youth subcultures, including punks. Most Montréal SHARP members owned and would wear tennis shirts by Fred Perry, checkered button-down shirts by Ben Sherman, and sweatshirts by Lonsdale of London, but would typically only wear these items when going out to the bar or to a concert. Several Montréal SHARP members also wore soccer (football) jerseys from European teams – it was acceptable to not tuck these jerseys into the jeans.

Jackets were usually black, navy blue or olive drab American flight jackets (also called bomber jackets), though occasionally one would see a skinhead with a maroon flight jacket, this appeared to be the acceptable colour deviation. The flight jackets would be adorned with 1" pins decorated with band logos or political slogans. Sometimes a skinhead would stitch a bar towel advertising his or her favourite brand of import beer to the back of the flight jacket; another popular option was to have slogans such as "S.H.A.R.P.", "Skinhead Montréal", "Streettroopers" or the like embroidered in Olde English-style lettering on the back. SHARP Montréal also produced its own special members' patch – the flag of the city of Montréal with the 2-colour SHARP "trojan" logo embossed on it. This patch was displayed on the shoulders or chest of flight jackets. Jean jackets, black or blue only, were another option, especially popular in the summer. Jean jackets would be adorned in a manner similar to flight jackets. "Harrington" jackets were also a possibility for warm seasons, but were not very popular with most Montréal SHARP members.   Another winter option would be black wool "crombie" jackets, which would not be adorned with more than a few pins.   Soccer scarves, again advertising European teams, and worn cravat-style, provided additional warmth and occasionally improvised masks during protests or encounters with police or news photographers.

"Skinhead" is a bit of a misnomer, in that skinheads do not shave their hair right down to the scalp, preferring instead to leave anywhere from 1/8" to 1/2" of fuzz on top. Skinhead women adopted a modified look, known as a "chelsea", which consists of similarly-cropped hair contrasts with longer bangs, 6" lengths of hair in front of each ear, and hair identical in length to the bangs at the base of the skull. When they were able to grow them, male SHARP members would wear sideburns (cropped to the same length as

the rest of their hair), but no other facial hair was acceptable. A wide variety of tattoos were also continuously being applied to the bodies of Montréal SHARP members.

The overall physical appearance of Montréal SHARP members is designed to convey two messages: one, directed to the general public, of membership in the hyper-masculine, hyper-proletarian, skinhead subculture; and another, directed to other members of the skinhead subculture, of membership in the SHARP skinhead faction. For both audiences, Montréal SHARP members anticipate that the message they transmit via the skinhead bricolage may be interpreted as a challenge. Non-skinheads or members of rival skinhead factions may see the presentation of Montréal SHARP members as an invitation to fight. As Brake notes, members of the skinhead subculture must "…be hard enough to live up to the image" the subculture portrays and be willing and able to demonstrate "that they deserve the uniform" to anyone who challenges their sartorial assertion (1980: 149).

BECOMING A SHARP: SKINHEAD FACTIONS, FACTIONAL BOUNDARIES AND INTER-FACTIONAL INTERACTION

Factional splits within the skinhead subculture tend to occur along political lines. "Skinheads generally organize themselves into groups or 'crews,' often distinguished on the basis of their political orientation." (Young and Craig, 1997: 182). This is perhaps an unusual basis for factional distinctions in a youth subculture, but the explanation for it reveals much pertaining to the politicization of the skinhead subculture. The original skinheads, clearly class-conscious if not otherwise overtly political in orientation, held a cynical worldview in which "they saw the world as run by an elite composed of the

wealthy and the bosses ('guvnors'), who exploited the working man." (Brake, 1974: 196).

The subculture itself may have functioned as an accommodative response to the inequities

inherent in the English class structure (Tanner, 1978: 350). Skinhead created a cultural

space in which working-class youths were able to question the legitimacy of the

distribution of wealth and power, stopping short of coming up with alternatives or

solutions.

Early skinhead style was "of a symbolic nature, finding expression in a leisure

style, through use of dress and activities, rather than confrontations at the work place or

involvement in community politics." (Tanner, 1978: 360). However, as the limitations of

symbolic, stylistic solutions to the problems of status skinheads sought to revolve grew

apparent, skinhead politicized. This polarized politicization and subsequent confrontation

has been restricted to interaction sites within the subculture and between factions of the

subculture.

The politicization of the skinhead subculture was crucial to the survival of

the subculture. Purely symbolic solutions had to evolve into more something more

concrete for the subculture to survive into its third decade. It was inevitable that

skinheads would eventually seek out or create the political alternatives or

solutions that their subcultural forebears stopped short of, even at the cost of

factionalizing the subculture. Skinhead was compelled to eventually develop a

political conscience by the oppositional role it placed itself in. In North America,

this politicization of the subculture forms the basis of factional boundaries within

the subculture. For the faction of Montréal skinheads belonging to SHARP, this

political conscience is centred around class consciousness and in opposition to

racism.

The heterogeneity of the Montréal skinhead subculture is readily apparent to

members of both the skinhead and punk subculture and members of either subculture will

be able to tell you the factional allegiances of any given skinhead in the city. A status

hierarchy of factions also functions in the Montréal skinhead subculture. Montréal

SHARP members had definite opinions about which position each faction held in this

status hierarchy, based on the respective size and "quality" of the "crew"; the length of

time faction members had identified as skinheads; "special" knowledge of the subcultural

history, beliefs and values; the display of the various elements of the skinhead sartorial

style; and especially on political ideology. Naturally, all members saw SHARP as

occupying the top position of this status hierarchy. "If I thought there was a better crew of

skinheads around, ones that I could count on, you know, I'd go join them instead!"

remarked Edward.

Although SHARP was clearly regarded as one faction in this hierarchy, its

members did not necessarily wish for it to be considered a faction. Ovide lamented the

possibility of SHARP being regarded as a separate skinhead faction: "I hope not. I don't

want it to be. And the fact is, I want traditional skinheads to see their place in it." Nat,

the oldest member of SHARP, felt the same as Ovide, and often wore a Harrington jacket

with the words "Traditional Skinhead" embroidered on the back. Other SHARP members strongly identified their factional allegiance with SHARP. Christian explained to me that Sol was "not a redskin, but he says, 'I'm a SHARP.' Before anything. He'll never say, 'I'm a traditional skinhead,'" even if that more accurately describes him.

Redskins and Anarchist Skins

Montréal is one of a small number of North American cities with a skinhead subculture that includes a number of skinheads who hold highly-defined extreme left political ideologies - the redskins and anarchist skinheads. One non-SHARP redskin I encountered even claimed to be a Stalinist, which perhaps explained his unpopularity with other leftist skinheads. Several members of SHARP identified themselves as redskins or anarchist skins. Christian explains that redskins are "skinheads, but they're communists and everything. They're like other skins, too, except they're more into politics. Class war, anti-racism, and everything. There's anarchist skinheads too. I don't know, there's nothing really different with being an anarchist skin. Maybe just the political belief. Anarchist is not the same as communist. That's about it."

Despite being in a group with several redskins and anarchist skins, Edward saw their political ideologies as being more congruent with a transitional period he associates with being young and involved in the punk subculture than with the skinhead subculture. "I never talked to them about what they were standing for," he told me, "but when I heard the name, 'Red and Anarchist Skinheads,' for me it doesn't make sense. I've, like a lot of people when they're young and they're punk, they're like 'oh, Anarchy!' They don't know what they want and all that. And when you become a skinhead, you know what you stand

for. You're working, you choose to follow a line. I mean, you take the line you want but, anarchy skinheads? It's like, whoa!"

Independent Skinheads

Many skinheads do not align themselves with any particular faction, and are typically referred to as "independent skins" within the subculture. In Montréal, this includes a number of former SHARP members, most of whom left the group amicably, some of whom did not. At one Oi! concert I attended, I noticed many independent skinheads, including several former SHARP members, sharing the space directly in front of the stage with a large number of SHARP members, without any noticeable tension or animosity between the groups. This point is significant. At punk and Oi! concerts, the front of the stage constitutes a space known as "the pit" where audience members frequently "mosh" or "slam", dancing by crashing into each other. The pit is often a contested space where tensions between subcultural members are acted upon physically. Fights at concerts typically begin in the pit. It seemed noteworthy that SHARP members and former SHARP members were able to share this space without any apparent hostility towards each other. Likewise for SHARP members and other skinheads present, although one could argue that the superior numbers of SHARP present on this particular occasion would make any dissenting skinhead foolish to voice or act on their dissent. On the other hand, it could also have reflected a high position held by SHARP within the skinhead status hierarchy.

Traditional Skinheads

In 1991, George Marshall published The Spirit of '69: A Skinhead Bible, his own non-academic history of the skinhead subculture. One of his main arguments was that the

politicization of the subculture was an unwanted mutation of the original skinheads, who he maintains were "non-political" despite being class-conscious. This stuck a chord with many North American skinheads, and the "traditional" or "trad" skinheads rapidly grew to be one of the dominant subcultural factions. Young and Craig's description of their Oi! skinheads bears many similarities to trad skinheads – their "oxymoronic" mutation of typical skinhead symbols and attire when contrasted with their proclaimed lack of political affiliations; their emphasis on musical tastes and clothing, summing them up as "essentially fashion skinheads." (1997: 179).

Darice describes traditional skinheads in this exchange:

And what are trads?

Well, they sort of cling more to the traditional root of skinhead, so they listen to a lot of the early rocksteady[7] and the early reggae, and, the only thing is that recently trad has taken on this presumption I guess, that they're non-political.

Uh-huh. And what do they mean by that?

Non-political in that they won't take a stance on either side. And, to me that means, non-political, you know, that you don't hold a political party. But to them it means that they won't take a stand for Nazis, they won't take a stand for anti-racists. They'll just sort of walk the line between both and be friends with both.

I guess that even though the traditional skinheads, though I don't relate to them much I still think that they'll go out on the street and they'll take a beating for one reason or another. It might not be to fight Nazis, but it might be to fight Nazis.

Christian noted that, despite their professed non-political stance, most of the traditional skinheads in Montréal were passively anti-racist – unwilling to associate with racist skinheads, but equally unwilling to actively work against them. Edward concurred with this assessment, noting that the trad skins "stand for nothing, but they won't take their (racist skinheads') side."

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[7]A direct predecessor of reggae.

From the perspective of SHARP members, the traditional skinheads emphasized skinhead fashion more than other factions. Christian was not the only one to comment on how the trad skins were never seen in public wearing anything but Fred Perry polo shirts, Ben Sherman button-down shirts, or Lonsdale sweatshirts – all of which are imported from England by a tiny number of shops specializing in skinhead attire, retailing in Canada at prices of around $80-$100 per garment. This presentation style led Edward to call the traditional skinheads "snobs," contrasting the authenticity of his working-class identity with their wardrobe budgets as justification for this,

> Because that's what they're all about. They're all about the fashion, most of the time they're going to spend their money buying Ben Sherman or Fred Perry. Me, I have a couple of Fred Perrys, but I'm not going to spend my whole paycheque on Ben Shermans or nothing like that. I don't care about going out one night with a regular black t-shirt on. I'm still going to look like a skinhead and I'm not going to be like, them, it's always the nice shirts, the nice cardigans and all that.

> **What do you think about that?**

> Well, I don't know. I told a couple of friends that are not skinheads, they're not into skinheads at all, and I told them that I thought that skinhead was one of the most snobby styles you can get. Because you can be a regular guy and wear some jeans at forty bucks and a t-shirt at ten bucks and you're still going to look ok. But if you want to look like the traditional skinheads, you need to spend ninety bucks on a Ben Sherman shirt and it looks like a contest with them, to see who's going to wear the nicest one.

> A SHARP, it's not like that at all. Because I know that when we have meetings and all that, people are not coming all dressed up really nice. We're all good friends together, so, who cares what anyone is wearing?

> But I look at the trads when they're going out, like when there's a ska night at Bar St-Laurent on Wednesdays, it's a nice style but fuck it costs a lot of money!

It is hard to imagine another youth subculture where possession of the proper (and most expensive) clothing coveted by subculture members can actually backfire, calling into question their subcultural authenticity due to a contradiction with class identity. This may be a unique feature of the skinhead subculture.

SHARP members were critical of the traditional skinheads for other reasons as well. Ovide felt that the traditional skinhead faction lacked substance and lampooned their forced attempts at introducing distinctly English elements of the subculture to North America:

> They're more into ska stuff, usually. Well, there's not much else, when you look at the '69 skins[8]! (laughter) Just being working and class and ska. And soccer does not apply here, so all the local bands that sing about soccer are just a bunch of losers...(laughter) It doesn't make any sense! It's an adaptation to our culture, people who try to bring the soccer thing here. It'd make more sense to have hockey hooligans than having soccer hooligans.

Darice also criticized the puritanical zeal with which the traditional skinheads seek to reverse the evolution of the skinhead subculture to its' "pure form": "The simple fact is we're not in 1969 and subcultures evolve like anything else. The people who want to keep the 'spirit of '69' alive, with one kind of skinhead who, you know, will go out and fight Teddy Boys[9], I mean, give me a break!"

The major point of contention that SHARP members seemed to have with traditional skinheads revolved around the traditional skinheads absolute refusal to voice any opinions on "political" issues. For Ovide, this position contradicts the working-class identity cherished by the subculture.

> Totally! Because they're like, "working class, working class." Well, fight for it. Don't vote Tory. (laughter) I think that's what traditional skinhead should be all about. And it makes sense. I don't see people saying, "I'm not in SHARP, I'm a trad." I mean, what the hell? Traditional skinheads could totally be in SHARP, it totally fits with their traditional skinhead values. Totally! Working class, it ain't just white. Nazis are a total enemy of the working class. It makes so much sense to me. For me, being a traditional skinhead is just one more good reason to fight racism.

Darice saw the traditional skinheads' "no politics" position as selfishness – "they don't want to risk themselves, they don't want to suffer any consequences." She further

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[8] 1969 was considered the peak year of the original wave of skinheads, whom the trads attempt to emulate.
[9] a British youth culture from the late 1950's, that enjoyed a very brief revival in England in the 1970's.

speculated that while some traditional skinheads may secretly agree with SHARP's explicit and active stance against racism within the subculture, they are unwilling to voice this for fear of violating factional norms against taking such a position, and subsequently losing status within the traditional skinhead milieu. Somewhat ominously, she predicts problems for the trad skins because of this:

> I think that there is starting to be, and there's going to be even more of a backlash against that.

> **Against trads?**

> Yeah, I think so. And of course I'm biased, but I look at them condescendingly, that's for sure, because, like I said, we're fighting for scene where Uyen[10] doesn't have to be concerned if we walk into BSL[11] and she can be assured that there's no fucking bonehead[12] there. And I don't think that the trads really give a shit. And I don't think that furthers the greater good. So I look at them condescendingly because I think that it's shallow and it's very selfish.

> I do think that there's going to be a backlash. I think there's starting to be one.

Tension exists between some of the traditional skinheads and the SHARP members of Montréal. Many SHARP members brought up the issue of traditional skinheads saying bad things about SHARP to other members of the subculture, but never directly to a member of SHARP. Darice felt that any existing animosity was,

> …mostly on their part. For us, it's starting to be, because you can only hear so much shit that's been said behind your back and read print-outs of internet sites and what's been said on IRC[13] about how SHARPs do this and SHARPs are so bad and whatever, and then you'll go to the bar and they'll be just sweet as pie. But maybe, again, they're concerned for their physical well-being, I don't know.

Edward mentioned that the traditional skinheads complained that SHARP was creating divisions within the skinhead subculture, but that he thought it was "them that's splitting

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[10]Darice's best friend, who is Vietnamese, and was attacked, along with Darice, by neo-Nazis in a bar 18 months before.
[11]a St-Laurent bar and favourite hangout for SHARP.
[12]a slang term for neo-Nazi skinheads
[13] Internet chat room.

the scene by saying that, because they're all 'oh, we don't like SHARP.' We did nothing wrong against them. And they're like that, right away." By way of illustration, he mentioned a particular traditional skinhead that had harshly criticized SHARP on the internet, and told me of his plans to "kick him out" of the scene: "If he's at the bar this weekend, I'm coming in, I'm not going to go say hello to anybody. I'm going to go straight to him. Right away. Bing, bang, bouff, bye. I'm tired of him."

Edward speculated that the traditional skinheads' complaints regarding SHARP largely stemmed from factional jealousy, based on SHARP's large membership, longevity, and solid relations with the punk subculture in which Montréal's skinhead subculture in Montréal is embedded. "When they saw that SHARP was still here after a year, they were like, 'Wow, they're getting stronger! And us, we're still the people in the corner of the bar, drinking our beer.' And they saw that we have our punk crew and they don't have a punk crew. They have them, and that's all." Edward credited SHARP's good standing with the punk subculture to the group's explicit position against racism:

> Well, the thing is, punks, they like to see people standing up against racism. I mean, a bunch of the punks, they have the swastika crossed out on the jackets and stuff. For them, it's cool. But the trads, I mean, they don't see that from the trads, so they won't be like "whooo" about them. But they see that SHARPs are standing up for something, they're like, "Wow, that's cool!

Fencewalkers and Racist Skinheads

Of major concern to members of SHARP is the presence of "fencewalkers" in the Montréal skinhead subculture. Whereas traditional skinheads will not explicitly state their anti-racism, fencewalkers go one step further, befriending both racist and anti-racist skinheads. Often, they bounce back and forth from one camp to another, claiming to be racist skinheads one time and anti-racist skinheads the next. Members of SHARP feel that this creates a threatening situation for anti-racist skinheads, because of the information

passed on by fencewalkers to racist skinheads, such as photos of SHARP members, or a SHARP member's home address (which did appear to have occurred in a few instances). One of the Philadelphia skinheads I talked to also took this view of fencewalkers, noting that the larger number of them present in the Philadelphia skinhead scene was a main reason why "it's not so good" there.

For SHARP, racist skinheads occupy the lowest position of the skinhead status hierarchy. Not a single member of SHARP that I spoke with even considered them to be real skinheads, nor would any SHARP refer to racist skinheads as skinheads, preferring to use terms like "boneheads," "Nazis," or "white powers." Darice was adamant that "they've never, ever had a place in my subculture, except as enemies. So, I don't call them skinheads and I don't think of them as skinheads – I think of them as Nazis." For Christian, "boneheads" "are destroying the skinhead name. And their ideology is not acceptable. So that's why we like to fight them." Ovide, calling them a "perversion of our movement," ventured that the association between skinheads and extreme racism occurred because extreme right parties exploited the paramilitary look of skinhead in making appeals to disenfranchised working-class youth. The vacuum of appeals to this population segment by any other political parties became filled with a manufactured racist skinhead subculture, promoting the "hard look" of skinhead. "So, the people who just didn't know what skinhead was all about, and kind of stupid too, kind of were like, 'Wow! This is great!' and kind of got recruited in easily. And once you just add a few bands in there, away you go!"

Symbolic Interaction and Skinhead Factions

One problem Montréal SHARP members encounter occurs when members of the general public mis-read their bricolage and assume that they are neo-Nazis. Most Montréal SHARP members were able to recount incidents in which this occurred. For example, a weekend trip to Boston by several members of the group was marred when they found themselves harassed by residents in a predominantly Black neighbourhood they were walking through, who referred to them as "Nazis," threw stones and threatened to shoot them. Those members of the group that experienced this situation agreed that they were scared and uncertain if stopping to explain who they were would have been a wise or safe choice at the time because of the number of residents involved and because of their unfamiliarity with their immediate surroundings.

This type of situation can also occur with members of the punk subculture. During the evening of a planned action against racist skinheads, several members of the group of punks that joined SHARP seemed extremely confused to be in the presence of anti-racist skinheads. One of the punk women, armed with a video camera, repeatedly began videotaping SHARP members while excitedly calling them Nazis, which the SHARP members tried to first ignore (with some embarrassment!). After several minutes of this, two members of Montréal SHARP finally pulled her aside to explain that they were there to fight Nazis. Later that night, a punk suddenly decided that a SHARP walking alongside him was in fact a Nazi, and began hitting him in the head and calling for his friends to assist. Lily was particularly upset with what transpired that evening, repeating afterwards how "…fucked-up it was. The fucking crusties kept yelling 'Kill the Skinheads! No

more Skinheads!   And what was with them calling us Nazis? Fuck! It was like for them, any skinhead was a Nazi."

Unlike other youth subcultures, the animosity between some skinhead factions can combine with their propensity for violence. Anti-racist skinheads have been murdered by neo-Nazis in Pennsylvania, Nevada, California and other states, whereas the reverse has been true in Nevada and Oregon. I witnessed several clashes and violent confrontations between Montréal SHARP members and neo-Nazis during my time in the field. How quickly a chance encounter can erode into violence was underscored by the nonchalance of Christian's response to my question about encountering a skinhead not known to him: "Well, mostly, everytime I see a skinhead that I don't know, I make sure I go up to him and ask him who he is and stuff like that. And if he's a bonehead, I just confront him. And if he wants to fight, I don't mind. Just like that."

Because of this potential for violence, it is of crucial importance for skinheads to be able to identify the factional allegiances of other skinheads and to signify their own - a process in which skinheads who encounter each other use whatever information they can glean to define the situation the encounter places them in, letting them know whether or not to expect (or introduce) violence (Goffman, 1956: 1). This relates to the "fundamental dialectic" of all social interaction, according to Goffman (1956: 249) – the desire to know "the facts of the situation" when "one individual enters the presence of others." (Ibid.). Like all social interaction, SHARP members rely on "cues, tests, hints, expressive gestures, status symbols, etc. – as predictive devices." (Ibid.). This often takes the form of "a feeling-out process…whereby one individual admits his views or statuses to another a little at a time." (Ibid.: 192)

However, discerning the factional allegiance of an unfamiliar skinhead can sometimes be as difficult for the members of Montréal SHARP as for people outside of the skinhead subculture. In the Montréal skinhead subculture, overtly racist or anti-racist patches sewn onto flight jackets often serve as factional signifiers, as do the t-shirts and pins advertising racist or anti-racist or other types of music groups. However, some skinheads choose to conceal their factional allegiances by not displaying any signifiers relating to a specific faction. In SHARP's collective experience, this often appears to be the case with racist skinheads. Christian mentioned that a racist skinhead who attended the same school did not openly display racist signifiers at the school, since "he would be killed" if other schoolmates were made aware of his racist leanings.

This practice of concealment means that the appearance and even behaviour of neo-Nazis can so closely resemble that of members of other skinhead factions that they become difficult to tell apart, even for skinhead subcultural participants. Because of the negative attention SHARP members and other anti-racist skinheads direct towards racist skinheads, racist skinheads attempt to adapt by employing various strategies to conceal their factional allegiance. This is similar to the circular relationship Kai Erikson describes between the attention a community pays to deviance and the subsequent deviance and adaptations created by this attention (1966: 20-21). Because of this, several members stated that they would explicitly ask about an unknown skinhead's factional affiliations, were they to encounter another skinhead they did not know who was not displaying signifiers like patches. I asked Darice what she would do if she was in such a situation:

What would you do if you ran into a skinhead that you didn't know, and he wasn't wearing any patches?

Well, I guess I'd ask him where he was from. You know, I'd start friendly and say, "oh, I haven't seen you around, where are you from." Then I'd say, you know, "what are your politics?"

Straight up like that?

Yeah, or, you know, if you're a little more wary, you could say like, "did you see the Streettroopers show?" And if they said, "oh I hate the fucking Streettroopers!" then it'd be like, pretty obvious that they're probably on a different side than you are.

For skinheads then, musical tastes are one signifier with factional connotations that can result in immediate confrontations with members of other skinhead factions.

Occasionally, SHARP members have been able to use homological ambiguity to their advantage. In one instance, three SHARP members went to a death metal concert to look for neo-Nazis. The SHARP members carefully selected clothing that would identify them as skinheads but not as anti-racists. They proceeded to approach other people who looked like skinheads and ask them is they were "white power." This resulted in several neo-Nazis enthusiastically exclaiming in the affirmative, likely assuming that their interrogators were like-minded. At the end of the concert, they joined several other SHARP members at the doors to the venue, where they singled out those they had identified as neo-Nazis earlier in the day for physical assault.

"POLICING" THE SCENE

Although the presence of fencewalkers and racist skinheads was opposed by anti-racist skinheads, the lack of organizational structure and information-sharing made it difficult to do much about it prior to the resurrection of SHARP in Montréal,. Ovide recalls that "you'd end up finding out something two months after something that most people knew about someone. So, it's hard to do something about it, confront someone about it." For him, two of the major benefits that came with SHARP was the

improvement in how information on fencewalkers was disseminated among anti-racist skinheads and how the presence of an active SHARP chapter put the fencewalkers on notice that they were no longer welcome within the skinhead subculture. Both benefits allowed SHARP to "police" the skinhead and punk subcultures. Ovide describes SHARP's policing role as follows:

> After SHARP, you know, as soon as we find out that someone's been with Nazis, he's kicked out. There's no way he's tolerated in the scene. Because when we find out, everybody knows. And we decided together that. Some people who are not in SHARP will maybe say, well, you know, complain about it, but we can tell everyone why we did it. And everybody supports it, and it goes over. Totally. And it's accepted.
>
> **How do you go about kicking someone out of the scene?**
>
> Kick his ass! (laughter) Or just get the word out that you're going to do it. That works, usually. Unless he was really hanging out with Nazis, like definitely known for a fact, then he'll get it. But if it's more wishy-washy, he'll get warned.

Ovide's explanation is illustrative of how SHARP expanded their policing role from removing racists from the Montréal skinhead and punk subcultures to removing those who associate with racists as well.

If deviance functions in part to demonstrate the boundaries of behaviour conducive to community membership and involvement, racism and associating with racists are two traits that transgress the boundaries of the skinhead subculture in Montréal. SHARP's ritualized excommunication of, firstly, racists and, secondly, those who socialize with racists, serves both to separate the deviants from the convention-maintaining majority in the subculture and to define the subculture's very boundaries. Moreover, by ritually separating racists and their associates from the skinhead subculture and the punk subculture within which SHARP is itself embedded, SHARP members are attempting to work toward resolving the problem of identification stemming from the similarity of racist and anti-racist factional homologies.

SHARP's policing role soon expanded even further, to include the forced exclusion of people critical of SHARP from Montréal's skinhead subculture. But this expansion of the policing role increases the likelihood that not everyone will agree or accept the targeting of a given individual by SHARP. Not unexpectedly, this expansion has led to an increasing level of animosity and hostility directed towards SHARP from other skinhead factions, who may contest or resent SHARP's self-appointed policing role and their decisions about who are the deviants to be ritually expelled from the skinhead and punk communities. Charles, an anti-racist skinhead not affiliated with SHARP, bitterly recounted how a SHARP member attacked a friend at a party for allegedly "talking shit about SHARP." And Ovide admits that "It's kind of touchy in the scene to start fights. Because you have to do it with a certain diplomacy, and people have to know why you're doing it, and if it's a good reason."

> **Have you guys run into that before, where you've kicked somebody out of the scene and other people, not in SHARP, have kind of protested about it?**
>
> Well, there's this guy right now, I don't know if he's hangs out with Nazis, but he's been totally dissing SHARP left right and centre, for no reason. And, on the internet, of all things. Saying, "SHARP bitch" this and blah blah blah. And having the pretension to think that we'd accept him in SHARP, even though he's a two-watt bulb. The guy is total fencewalker material.
>
> So, we figure it out. And naturally, we never did anything to this guy. And he even wanted to be in SHARP before. He also hangs out with Celeste, who's a total fencewalker. I think he was going out with her or something.
>
> So anyways, the message is out that he can't show up anymore. Anywhere. And some people are like, "oh, he's not that much of a threat," and just try to convince us not to. But, we're right. We have the proof and everybody knows about it, that he's dissing us and all this crap. So, even if they complain, what are they going to do? They know we're right.

In this case, Ovide justified SHARP's actions by explaining that he "probably would've gone over to the Nazis sooner or later anyway. So it's better to get rid of him right now." Linking the expansion of targets for policing to the original targets of policing may work

as a justification within SHARP, but it remained controversial and a point of contention with other skinhead factions who appeared to harbor growing resentment towards SHARP for this. It was therefore unsurprising when Darice revealed growing animosity coming from the trad skinheads. "For us, it's starting to be (mutually hostile), because you can only hear so much shit that's been said behind your back, and read print-outs of what's been said on IRC about how SHARPs do this and SHARPs are so bad and whatever, and then you'll go to the bar and they'll be just sweet as pie. But maybe, again, they're concerned for their physical well-being, I don't know."

Like armed agents of the state who enforce the laws of the land, the policing role adopted by SHARP members is only effective because of the actual or implied violence with which they are able to carry out this role. And like official police, SHARP members attempt to legitimize their use of force by emphasizing and perhaps exaggerating the level of consensus and agreement with their policing actions. A final similarity SHARP shares with the official police is the level of resentment and hostility directed towards them by some members of the community who may disagree with the decision to target a particular individual for expulsion from the community, or who may dispute the legitimacy of their claim to the policing role.

VIOLENCE

Skinheads only began to receive academic attention in North America because of the inordinate amount of criminal violence they were committing. It is no secret that violence plays a central role in the value system of almost all skinheads. Even a cursory examination of Oi! music yields lyrics rife with the glorification of violence. The

skinhead value system promotes and encourages violence under a wide array of acceptable circumstances. (Baron, 1997: 130). This level of acceptance is one of the main differences between how the dominant culture perceives violence and how it is perceived within the skinhead subculture. (Hamm, 1993: 156).

Since violence operates as a key value among racist skinheads, and more generally within the skinhead subculture, it is unsurprising that SHARP members also hold this value. However, they frame this value in a manner similar to other social movements that have employed violence tactically. In a written attempt to explain the group's position on the use of violence to combat racism, Ovide wrote: "SHARP Montréal are advocates of the use of violence in our struggle against organized racism...don't think of anti-racist violence as motivated by hatred, think of it as motivated by love for humanity and the working class. I loved kicking that Nazi in the traffic. Pretty smooth, eh!"

This position may seem shocking to those outside of the skinhead subculture, but is not so surprising. Viable options available to working-class youth to participate meaningfully in the political process are few and far between. When confronted with a problem, like racially-motivated violence, they are liable to view violence as one of the only means available to them to deal effectively with their collective concerns. The fact that engaging in violence is a dramatic , masculine and exciting way to deal with these concerns enhances the place of violence as a subcultural value. (Tanner, 1978: 347).

The number of outlets for political action enjoyed by adults and by the middle-class are unavailable to most members of the skinhead subculture due to the double blockage of youth and class. This same blockage, which supports youth subcultural expression through bricolage and homology, can also support the employment of violence.

Ferrell explains that youth may arrive at criminal behaviour "…out of the politics of youth, out of the relative powerlessness and marginality of the young, and out of the particulars of their resistance to this." (Ferrell, 1993: 194). Giroux notes that "youth represent one of the lowest priorities" for the ruling class (1998: 27), and that youth are "prohibited from speaking as moral and political agents." (1998: 24). Charles Tilly notes that democratic regimes "generally host fewer violent rituals than undemocratic regimes because they shelter fewer privileged political enclaves and offer a wider range of opportunities for non-violent claim making." (forthcoming: 4:9). If working-class youth are not privy to opportunities for non-violent claim making and are not part of the enfranchised political enclaves, violent ritual becomes a viable, even attractive, option.

Mass society theory's prediction of political violence "when people are inadequately embedded in institutionalized political life" (Kornhauser, 1959: 73) seems applicable to the situation of SHARP. Researchers have been quick to condemn the violence of anti-racist skinheads (Moore, 1993: 137; Hamm, 1993: 10), while praising usage of the civil and criminal justice system to deal with racist violence (Moore, 1993: 138). This perfectly illustrates the dilemma of a youth subculture in addressing genuine social problems. Skinheads lack access to civil, legal and even most political means of addressing social problems. No one could expect a group of working-class youth, such as SHARP, to retain lawyers, file lawsuits or lobby politicians as a means to effectively combat racist skinheads. The approaches utilized by other, more mainstream, anti-racist organizations are equally as alienating for them. Darice had harsh criticism for a campus-based anti-racist group she had joined briefly: "trying to fight racism by creating paper-machés, they're going to fight racism? Like, c'mon, give me a break! I think that they're

just considered less, you know, it's fine to be intelligent and have very strong ideas, but when you get on the street that doesn't mean shit!"

Clearly, members of SHARP felt the need to address the very specific problems relating to street-level violence perpetuated by racist skinheads. With no hope of legal recourse and, at best, a deep-rooted mistrust of the police, violence becomes one of the more attractive options available to them. The very fact that SHARP was re-formed primarily as a response to racist skinhead violence is underscored by one member's definition of the group: "SHARP is an organization that fights racism in Montreal, in the Montreal area. It's ready to fight organized racism, and by organized racism we mean the extreme right racism, because it is, and the fact that it's active and physically aggressive, violent."

The members of SHARP Montréal are not strangers to violence. Their familiarity was as evident as the stitches that one member or another seemed to be sporting at any given time. In fact, SHARP members seemed quite preoccupied with violence, recounting and referring to past fistfights with great frequency. This behaviour was consistent with the English skinheads observed by Brake, who found "more myth and fantasy concerning violence than actual behaviour." (1974: 190).

Acceptance of and participation in violence also delineates a boundary that, when activated, serves to separate skinheads from subcultural non-participants and to demarcate the boundaries between skinhead factions and between deviant and nondeviant behaviour within the subcultural milleu. Illustrative of this point is an anecdote told to me by Donal. Shortly after a news documentary featuring SHARP aired, Donal and two other SHARP members were approached by a middle-aged couple. The man immediately asked them if

they were "the good skinheads." I asked Donal what he told the man. "'Of course we are,' I said." I asked Donal what happened then, and Donal pantomimed the couple looking surprised and pleased. "Then," said Donal, "the lady asked us if we were armed!" "What did you tell her?" I asked him. "I told her that we had steel caps in our boots." Both the skinhead sartorial style and the acceptance of violence identified them to members of the general public as skinheads.

Types Of Violence

SHARP members differentiate between politically-motivated violence and more random acts. The acts of violence in which SHARP members participate can be categorized as either random, non-political acts; acts of opportunistic political violence; or planned acts of mass political violence. Moreover, a normative system has been developed by the group, regulating when each type of violence was and was not considered appropriate.

Random, Opportunistic Non-Factional Violence

Some of the violence SHARP members engaged in was of a random, non-political character. Typically, SHARP members would become involved in some sort of argument with non-skinheads and let the argument escalate to the level of physical violence. These particular acts of violence occurred most often on weekend nights in the vicinity of several drinking establishments. More often than not, alcohol was a factor. Incidents of this nature that occurred during my time in the field included Edward's fistfight with another man over a cab, after leaving the bar; a scuffle between Michel and a rockabilly after Michel witnessed the rockabilly kick a female punk in a bar during a concert; an altercation I broke up between a skinhead and a 17-year-old male in a bar over a pool

game; and a fight outside of a concert between Christian and four police officers when Christian took exception to how the police were treating his friend. Christian later told me how "cool" it was that "it took four cops to arrest me because I was kinda drunk and everything." Tilly would categorize this particular form of violence as brawling due to its "rapid mutation from routine non-violent interaction, quick termination and dispersal, operation through conventional understandings and signals, and generation of anger," as well as its low level of coordination, weak scripts, shifting stakes, blurred boundaries, lack of monitors and great uncertainty. These incidents take place in bar districts precisely because such areas cluster these components together. (forthcoming: 7: 5).

Random violent acts not politically-motivated are not uniformly approved of within SHARP. If an act is construed as contradictory to SHARP's goals, it is frowned upon and other members may express their disapproval. One example was a fight provoked by five male SHARP members with members of another youth subculture. The SHARP members had been drinking and, in their own words, were "looking for a fight," receiving a severe beating and a trip to the emergency room for their troubles. Other SHARP members expressed little sympathy for them, Darice commenting that "they were being idiots," and noting to me that the SHARP who had taken the brunt of the beating "told me yesterday that he learnt his lesson."

It would be both easy and misleading to dismiss this type of brawling as merely senseless. The "hard" image projected by the skinhead sartorial style, separating them from non-skinheads, would mean nothing and lack the demarcation uses of a boundary if the wearer cannot demonstrate "that they deserve the uniform." (Brake, 1980: 149). As Goffman explains, "to *be* a given kind of person, then, is not merely to possess the

required attributes, but also to sustain the standards of conduct and appearance that one's social grouping attaches thereto." (1956: 75, emphasis in original).

It is however, important to note the derisive reactions of several SHARP members to incidents of brawling like the one mentioned above, as this illustrates a normative system operating within the group that governs to some extent when violence is and is not appropriate.

Random, Opportunistic Intra-Factional Violence

The type of violence most often engaged in by SHARP members had an opportunistic, politically-motivated character and was directed at members of the racist skinhead faction. Most commonly, this took the form of individual SHARP members "confronting" racist skinheads encountered by chance on the street by provoking an argument or fistfight with them. SHARP's written record[14] of such encounters offers several illustrations of such interactions, all of which follow a pattern similar to this account from Edward:

> Maybe August or September, I was going to work and I had my clean pants on, but I had my Streettroopers t-shirt on, too. I was in one wagon on the metro and he was in the other one. And he had his Canadian flag hat on and I recognized him. And he was looking at me and I was looking at him.
>
> So, we stopped at a metro station. I get out of my wagon and I jump in his wagon. And I went to see him. I asked him, "Do you remember me?" And he was, like, "No." So I said, "Well me, I remember you! You should come with me, we're going to talk a bit outside." And he said, "No, I'm going to be late." and blah, blah, blah. So I said, "Well, where are you going?" And he told me he going to work! But he was dressed like shit, he wasn't going to work. He was dressed really normal and all that.
>
> So at Atwater, I decide to push him out of the metro. And he was holding onto the pole, "No, no, no man, I can't, I don't have time!" So I started hitting him in the train. And then, an old guy started ringing the emergency thing. So, at the next station I jumped out and ran away.

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[14] SHARP keeps written notes from all its meetings, and granted me unlimited access to these meeting notes for my research.

And Ovide had got that guy just a week before! With me. I was with Ovide and Ovide jumped on him and hit him a couple of times and he cut him...

So, Ovide punched him pretty good a week before me. And when I saw him, he had some stitches over his eye and I punched him and they re-opened. **(laughter)** So, it was pretty cool.

This type of violent interaction lies between brawling on the one hand and the violent ritual on the other. While it displays the "rapid mutation from routine non-violent interaction, quick termination and dispersal, operation through conventional understandings and signals, and generation of anger" seen in brawls (Tilly, forthcoming: 7:5), it features the "heavy scripting, competitive public display of standing, fixed and finite stakes, stylized enactment of we-they boundaries, clear delineation of proper participants and targets, as well as sharp distinction between those participants from either monitors or spectators" found in the violent ritual. (Tilly, forthcoming: 4:11).

This brand of opportunistic intra-factional violence also carries with it an addition boundary-defining role not featured with brawling - dividing SHARP members from other anti-racist skinheads who are not willing to participate in physical violence. In fact, membership in SHARP hinged partly on current members' recognition of a candidate's willingness to participate in opportunistic intra-factional violence as a minimum standard of risk-sharing. This feature is found in many youth subcultures, which often "promote a large variety of conditions under which violence is expected or required of its members (Baron, 1997: 130). Violence also enhances group solidarity (Brake, 1974: 191) and strengthens the social ties between members (Fagan, 1989: 645). This role is especially crucial for SHARP, whose structure depends on building and maintaining loyalty and solidarity between strong primary friendships within the group. "Thus, something in the quality of these friendships must sustain and support the skinhead norm of violence,"

(Hamm, 1993: 169), and vice-versa. Darice's explanation of what being a SHARP means

to her is indicative of this:

> What does it mean to me? Well, it means putting my ass on the line maybe more than I would otherwise. Because I feel like I do have a group of people who are counting on me and I count on them. And truly, it's a great feeling when I was sitting on top of Isabelle[15] and smashing her face in! **(laughter)**

Derrick, an anti-racist skinhead who moved to Montréal after belonging to a

SHARP chapter in another city, illustrates this point. Derrick's candidacy for membership

in the Montréal chapter of SHARP was repeatedly turned down over the course of a year

of repeated attempts to join. Derrick's frequent admissions at parties, oi! concerts, and

other skinhead interaction sites that he was "not really very much of a fighter" and that he

was really "more of a pacifist" was a main reason for the rejection of his membership in

the group. Several SHARP members confided that such admissions made them doubt

whether they could "count on" Derrick in situations of intra-factional violence. As Ovide

explains,

> To get into SHARP you had to prove yourself. We're not talking, like, an initiation or anything, you just gotta show that you're totally anti-racist and you're ready to act on it and you're ready to fight for it. Because naturally, when you're going to fight with nazis, you want to know that the guy beside you won't start running!

Some members of SHARP may find, when faced with the violent situations that

the group routinely places themselves in, they no longer wish to be a part of it. When

monitors raise the stakes by punishing violent participants, less-committed members may

use this opportunity to opt out of the group and the risks inherent to it. This can obviously

weaken a group, but it can also strengthen it by weeding out members who would not

prove reliable when members of the group engage in other types of violence with

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[15]a Montreal racist skinhead.

potentially more serious consequences. This turns out to have been the case for several

SHARP members,

> just because they were never, you could always tell that when push came to shove, were they going to be in there? You didn't know. And I think, you know, with things heating up and arrests have been made and, like, with Edward and stuff like that[16], and they kind of got cold feet and said, "hmm, I don't know if I want this."

Two founding members of SHARP Montréal evidently felt this way, their departure from

the group being prequeled by a reluctance to appear at situations where violence was

likely. This reluctance was noted by other SHARP members, who commented on it with

disgust. For instance, when Udo (one of the few SHARP members with both a driver's

license and a vehicle) was told that Ken or Edward were "probably not" coming out to a

situation in which violence between SHARP members and racist skinheads was likely, he

swore, adding, "what bullshit!" Ken and Edward quit the group a few weeks later.

The Violent Ritual: Organized, Collective Intra-Factional Violence

On occasion, SHARP collectively plans and prepares for violent confrontations

with racist skinheads. My timing in the field coincided with the inception, planning and

execution of several such events, normally focusing on arriving *en masse* at a bar, concert,

or similar site known or suspected to be frequented by racist skinheads. Usually,

information pertaining to such a bar or event is presented to the group at a meeting and a

decision is made to go to the bar, attack any racist skinheads present, "and lose the bar for

them." An evening when they are most likely to find their opponents is selected, and

SHARP members agree to meet a few hours beforehand to discuss and plan the

confrontation.

The preparatory meetings follow a set pattern. The person who acquired the

information on the racist skinheads' whereabouts reveals how the information was

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[16]Edward was arrested in November for punching out the window of a car whose driver had been incorrectly identified as a neo-Nazi.

obtained – usually from punks, educated guesses,[17] or from news of a recent incident

involving racist skinheads occurring in the vicinity. Then people discuss potential

problems with confronting racist skinheads at the site under consideration. Discussions

often demonstrated a sophisticated view of this type of organized, intra-factional violent

ritual as something separate from the other forms of violence previously described. All

manner of considerations were discussed, including police response times and in one

instance the potential of sparking a conflict with the biker gang who dealt drugs from the

bar in question. Another discussion, about how SHARP might be portrayed in media

reports of their action, would have been familiar to anyone who has sat in on a meeting of

a more conventional social movement organization. Indeed, SHARP's understanding of

the media seemed congruent with that of, say, Greenpeace – remaining aware of the

important differences between the group's perceptions of violence and those of the

general public (Hamm, 1993: 156), and how the media can shape these perceptions.

Ovide told me that:

> We have a media aspect, we try. Which we're incredibly careful with, which is why we're not on the news all the time. Going out, followed by a camera, beating up people.
>
> **How come?**
>
> Well, first of all, you don't film yourself going out doing something illegal! (laughter) And, it's just, it's not, it's totally doesn't, it would backfire. Totally. Because people don't see the nazi who, the day before, smashed a punk girl in the head with a baseball bat with five of his friends. Or, anyone from a different culture, who they intimidate everyday by walking around with all their gear on.
>
> What the fuck was I saying? OK, they won't necessarily see that; they'll see the fights and the punches. So, we talk about that - yes, we confront them, and if we have to we fight them. But, it's more the message we pass and not necessarily the different actions.
>
> It's not a question of hiding what we do. It's just being good marketing!

After the discussion had led to a plan of action, and after reports back from people sent to

scout the location beforehand, SHARP members (and often, a significant number of

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[17] For example, SHARP members would make a point of waiting outside of death metal concerts for racist skinheads to show up, knowing that racist skinheads were more likely to attend such concerts.

supporters – skinheads and punks who were friends with SHARP members and came along to participate in the confrontation) would pile into several cars and drive to the established rendezvous point. Numbers of participants ranged from a dozen to over fifty, depending on the amount of advance notice and the notoriety of the racist skinheads in question. From there, everyone would typically walk into the targeted site at once; if racist skinheads were present, they would immediately be set upon and driven out of the area. Just as often, no racist skinheads would be present, and bar regulars would be surprised and more than a little scared to find the sudden presence of two or three dozen skinheads, some brandishing clubs, in their local watering hole.

This type of violence fits into the category of violent ritual, where "at least one relatively well-defined and coordinated group follows a known interaction script entailing the infliction of damage on themselves or others as they compete for priority within a recognized arena…participants activate a certain boundary, maintain it zealously, and direct their violence across it." (Tilly, forthcoming: 4:2). SHARP members participating in organized, collective intra-faction violence clearly follow known scripts, going as far as to discuss the script beforehand in meetings. The scorecards are also known, measured in the amount of physical damage done to either side during the ritual. We-they boundaries become sharply defined and activated through stylized enactment – between both skinhead factions as well as between spectators and participants (Ibid.: 4:14).

This particular type of violent ritual patterns itself on ones found with youth gangs generally; sometimes constituting "quick raids into hostile territory; other times beginning as a "'fair fight'" between individual members of each faction (Ibid.: 4:16). The former case normally described SHARP "bar raids", the latter occurring only when SHARP members would discover only one or two racist skinheads. Ovide's recollection

of fighting a racist skinhead while in the presence of several other SHARP members

offers an example:

> I saw this nazi, which is a big enough guy. I know totally his face, but he wasn't dressed the part, with his girlfriend, which I saw at court.(19) And, so, we went downstairs, I went into the shop while Darice went to get Sol and the other guys.
>
> Then I went back up, 'cuz they were looking for me. So I went back up and waited for them to come back up. And when they came up I said, "oh, hi, how's it going," you know? So he said, "let's go outside." I said, "yeah, sure!" And, then while we're going outside, our friends got there.
>
> I wasn't expecting to fight him myself. I was hoping someone else would do it. Anyways, some people told him, "we're not like you, we won't beat you ten-on-one. It's just one-on-one." So I had to fight him myself! I was the biggest one there. I was the biggest guy and he was maybe an inch taller than me, but a lot bigger. Ugly motherfucker, teeth all over the place.
>
> So, I fought him. I kicked him into the traffic. He almost got hit by a car, it was beautiful!

Like other social control rituals, organized collective intra-factional violence

brings the subcultural community of skinheads and punks together in a ritualized

separation of convention-maintaining members from those who deviate from subcultural

conventions by embracing racist ideologies, therefore serving to define the community's

boundaries in a dramatic manner. The successful performance of violent ritual enhances

SHARP's policing role by verifying to both opponents and spectators that the group's

threats and demands can, and will, be backed up with force (Ibid.: 4:11). This function is

of particular importance in the skinhead subculture, rife as it is with homological

ambiguities that blur and distort factional boundaries. Tilly points out that violent rituals

"give unusually sharp definitions to the identities in play: boundaries between the parties,

stories about those boundaries, relations across those boundaries, and relations within

those boundaries. (Ibid.: 4:2-3). It should be noted that such violent rituals occur with

both racist and anti-racist skinhead factions. Montréal racist skinheads have also engaged

in the very types of violent rituals described above, with SHARP members and other anti-racists involved in the skinhead and punk subcultures as their targets.

Violence, Impression Management and Impression Disruption

It is apparent that skinheads put a great deal of energy into fostering self-conceptions and projecting the image of being what Tilly would term "violence specialists" – members of a subculture who are familiar with violence, have the appearance of being prepared for violence and who actively and eagerly participate in violence when opportunities to do so present themselves. From the hyper-macho "hard" sartorial style of the subculture to the continual affirmations of approved violence in the lyrics of Oi! music to the training in boxing, kickboxing, jiujitsu and other martial arts undertaken by the majority of SHARP members, much time and effort goes into both fostering the self-conception and image of being violence specialists.

Anti-racist skinheads are not alone in this. Indeed, all factions in the skinhead subculture foster this image to varying degrees. Racist skinheads appear particularly concerned with this. Literature and websites published by racist skinheads in the Montréal area are rife with the signifiers of a "warrior culture;" filled with crude drawings of heavily muscled skinheads and Vikings, armed with knives, swords, guns, and clubs. Body-building is a popular pastime for many in the racist extremist movement, and there are indications of widespread steroid use in the movement. Vinland Hammer Skins, a Montréal racist skinhead gang who clashed frequently with SHARP Montréal, describe themselves as being "always radically violent with members having been arrested for many hate-crimes (sic)…One being described as the largest hate crime trial in Canadian History. The charges have included: aggravated assault, assault, armed

robbery, possession of illegal firearms, attempted murder, and even the 'Biggy'…murder itself!" (Vinland Hammer Skins, 1999).

The skinhead image of being violence specialists goes beyond being an affirmation of masculinity. SHARP's policing role, for example, would be curtailed if they did not give the impression of being able to back up threats of violence. For skinheads, violence "functions as a display for persuading the audience; it is often a means of communication, not merely a means of action." (Goffman, 1956: 241). Therefore, intra-factional violence carries significant consequences for the public standing of both the winning and losing faction (Tilly, forthcoming: 4:6).

Violent rituals between skinhead factions function largely as a shaming ceremony, particularly in organized, collective intra-factional violence, where typically "one party begins with far greater force than the other(s)." (Ibid.: 4:2). The goal of SHARP's violent rituals (and, to a somewhat lesser extent, instances of opportunistic intra-factional violence) is to disrupt and discredit the impression fostered by racist skinheads of being violence specialists, in order to elicit shame and embarrassment in them (Goffman, 1956: 65-66), and to discredit their claims to membership and legitimacy in the skinhead subculture. If successful, SHARP may in turn discredit the very self-conception around which racist skinheads build their personalities since it is likely that racist skinheads may deeply involve their ego in their identification with their role as racist skinheads (Ibid.: 243).

This goal is apparent in discussions with SHARP members concerning both opportunistic and organized episodes of intra-factional violence. Ovide, recalling challenging a racist skinhead to a fight on the subway, recounted that "he wouldn't budge from his seat, you know? And I spit on him just about everything. Humiliated him like there was no tomorrow, and just left, 'cuz otherwise we would've done the green line like five times!" Ovide further describes "three types" of racist skinheads: "the hardcore lifers; brainwashed yet vulnerable; and recruits who liked the image and power.

Confronting the third case, experience shows, brings them back to reality before it is too late. No! people won't look down when they see him. No! it is not a game. The recruit will most likely question himself." By employing violent ritual as a shaming ceremony, SHARP members believe they are able to discredit the fostered impression and even the self-conception of at least some racist skinheads, causing them to question their role as racist skinheads. Regardless of their success, such shaming ceremonies reinforce the behavioural boundaries SHARP members seek to establish for the skinhead subculture.

CONCLUSION: FROM SHARP TO RASH

Members of SHARP Montréal face the challenge of establishing boundaries both as skinheads and as anti-racist skinheads, within and without the skinhead subculture. Prior involvement in the punk subculture provides an introduction to the skinhead subculture, which, because it is embedded in the punk subculture, is nearly impossible for any skinhead or potential skinhead to avoid. Working-class youth may feel "pushed" from punk to skinhead subcultures by the greater flexibility of subcultural boundary activation afforded skinheads, which can facilitate resolutions to material concerns not faced by punk subcultural participants from either upper-class or lumpen proletariat backgrounds.

Once involved in the subculture, skinheads utilize the time-honoured youth subcultural tradition of utilizing bricolage to activate a boundary between subcultural participants and non-participants. However, homological similarities between skinhead factions mean that skinheads must rely on more than sartorial signifiers to identify factional allegiances. One solution is a greater elaboration of symbolic interactional processes. Another solution is to establish and more firmly maintain the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour of a given skinhead faction. For SHARP, the

boundary that initially barred racist skinheads from subcultural interaction sites quickly expanded to include associates of racist skinheads. SHARP skinheads maintain this boundary through banishment – placing themselves in a "policing" role in both the Montréal skinhead subculture and the punk subculture it is embedded within.

Skinhead violence serves as more than another boundary - separating subcultural participants from non-participants. For members of SHARP Montréal, it is a necessary element of their policing role, providing the threat element necessary to fulfilling that role. Violence, and especially intra-factional violence, also serves to reinforce the impression and self-image SHARP members seek to project as a viable and legitimate skinhead faction both to other skinhead factions and to the general public. Furthermore, intra-factional violence provides SHARP Montréal with opportunities to discredit and disrupt the image projection of racist skinheads. As such, intra-factional violence serves as a shaming ceremony, which in turn re-asserts and reinforces the behavioural boundaries for the subculture.

The months following my field work seemed to indicate that SHARP Montréal was winning the battle against racist skinheads. Sightings of known racist skinheads in the Montréal area dropped to almost zero, as did news of violent incidents involving them. When several SHARP members encountered a group of known racist skinheads at a West Island bar during this period, the SHARP members were baffled by the transformation of the appearance of the racist skinheads. "You would never have known they were white powers by looking at them – they were just dressed so normal, like anyone at the bar. Nothing that skinheads would wear," claimed Michel. Even more baffling was that, rather

than accepting the challenge to fight the SHARP members, the racist skinheads (or, possibly, former skinheads) declined, claiming to be "past that stuff."

What should have been a period of victorious celebration soon brought about new difficulties for the group as SHARP Montréal found themselves to be victims of their own success. In a very short period of time, nearly half the members of SHARP Montréal had formally or informally dropped out of the group. Without the constant threat of contact with their opponents, the racist skinheads, for whom their identity as *anti*-racist skinheads depended upon, SHARP Montréal fell into a crisis of identity and purpose. Since so many of the boundaries SHARP had established depended on the presence of racist skinheads to oppose, banish, discredit and police, their absence left SHARP without opposition. Lack of opposition led to a crisis of identity as boundaries dependent upon the presence and threat of deviant "others" blurred. Though racism clearly existed beyond the confines of the skinhead subculture, SHARP had set its boundaries through racist skinheads, thereby limiting their own interactions and goals to within the subculture itself.

Lacking distinct boundaries and a viable opposition, remaining members sought to find a new way of establishing the boundaries of identity by finding "some way of measuring what one is *not*." (Erikson, 1966: 64, emphasis in original). The lack of available deviant subjects to serve as reference points for behaviour boundaries meant that the community boundaries and identity required radical redefinition if the community was to survive (Ibid.: 107).

And so, with SHARP essentially defunct, several members formed a new group – Red and Anarchist Skinheads (RASH). RASH continued the anti-racist mandate of SHARP but, lacking any credible racist opposition in the skinhead subculture, expanded

the boundaries of the group by adding a radical leftist element to that identity, which provided the forces of global capitalism as new foes. Some former SHARP members embraced this, themselves adopting a more explicit political identity. RASH's first action was to participate in the massive protest at the 2001 Québec Summit on the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas. A few months later, RASH members became heavily involved with an ad hoc group that had squatted an abandoned building in downtown Montréal to protest the lack of government response to the affordable housing crisis in the city. In the fall of that year, several RASH members were arrested by police outside of Toronto while on their way to join anti-poverty demonstrators who were going to attempt to shut down Bay Street[18] with a huge street blockage.

Other members were notable in their absence from the new group. Derrick, who had been rejected for membership in SHARP, expressed his disinterest in joining RASH as follows: "RASH, they're so political and me, I'm a traditional skinhead," pointing out the various pins on his jacket attesting to his love of first wave ska (or perhaps, pointing out the lack of political slogans on his pins). For Derrick, as for the members of the defunct SHARP chapter, it became important to establish new factional identities and new boundaries for those identities, whether as members of RASH, as traditional skinheads, or as something else.

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[18] Canada's financial center, serving for all intents and purposes as the country's answer to Wall Street.

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