

# The straight-edge and the scene



Straight-Edge and the Scene For some youth it's all about the scene. What is the scene? The scene is a general reference to the music venues in which these youth participate. The straight-edge subculture is one that many may not be familiar with. Why is this? Probably because the straight-edge lifestyle is one of the few countercultures in which the youth that is involved tries to steer clear of drugs and overindulgence. It is closely related to the hardcore/punk music scene.

The straight-edge lifestyle refers to people who are involved with the hardcore/punk lifestyle but they refrain from drinking alcohol, using drugs, smoking cigarettes, and promiscuous sex. This subculture was created as a social movement against authority, drug abuse, and any type of overindulgence associated with punk rock (Kirchner, 2009). Background: the 1970's to the Present Individuals who are straight edge take a pledge to live a drug, promiscuous, alcohol, and cruelty free lifestyle. Sometimes, this even extends into vegetarianism and veganism and Hare Krishna, a belief based on Hindu scripture (Kirchner, 2009).

The basic philosophy of the straight-edge lifestyle centers around self control and regaining as much of one's personal control over their lives as possible, by getting rid of the negative influences (Kirchner, 2009). Straight-edger's, a common nickname, usually are involved with the environment, animal rights and pride their counterculture on keeping their focus on higher learning and a positive outlook (Wood, 2006). The straight-edge subculture emerged in the late 1970's (Wood, 2006). The term straight-edge was coined by musician Ian MacKaye in a song called "Straight Edge" which he wrote for his band, Minor Threat.

Their music was fast and powerful with angry and thoughtful lyrics, which is how straight-edge seemed to be viewed as at first. With further understanding, it was found that the straight-edge lifestyle was the opposite. In the 1970's only a slew of prominent artists rejected drugs and alcohol and influenced the straight-edge ideology (Wood, 2006). After the term straight-edge was thrown out into the music community, many people picked up on it and many other bands for decades to come centered their music and lifestyle on the straight-edge, drug free lifestyle.

Minor Threat was the first band to use the term straight edge and adopt the letter X as a representation of being straight-edge and living the lifestyle. The X symbol was believed to originate from the use of the letter on people who were underage (under 21) to symbolize that they were too young to drink at the shows and became the symbol for straight-edge by being used on album covers, as body art, and other paraphernalia (Kirchner, 2009). In the 1980's the influence of music on the straight-edge seemed to be at an all-time high.

Many bands seemed to be using the straight-edge lifestyle as a stepping stone and inspiration for their songs. During the mid-1980's many of the vegetarianism and veganism ideas stemmed out and gripped straight-edge community members (Cogan, 2008). This propelled a trend towards animal rights and vegetarianism that would reach its peak in the 1990's. Straight-edger's want to be directly involved with both the music community in which they support, by either playing in a band or writing a webzine or article for the music and their regular community by helping with any aspect of it.

Straight-edger's use this subculture to move away from the stigma of destruction that hardcore and punk music seems to have veiled over the industry. Militant straight-edger's were first identified in the early 1990's. These individuals were characterized by less tolerance for those who were not straight-edge, more outspokenness, and more willingness to resort to violence in order to promote clean living and fight against homosexuality and abortion (Woods, 2006).

This willingness to resort to violence led to some parts of the United States paying close attention to the straight-edge subculture and the subculture being treated as a gang by law officials. However, " a study done in 2006 suggests that a small minority of individuals who identify with the straight-edge subculture are violent. " (Woods, 2006: 38). In the 2000's the straight-edge movement has become less violent and more about promoting a positive lifestyle. Straight-edge has moved out into different genres of music instead of staying specific to the punk/metal scene.

The decline of aggressive behavior has been linked to the lack of a well known band leading the straight-edge movement (Irwin, 1999). The amount of tolerance from people who are straight-edge to non-straight edge participants has grown as well (Irwin, 1999). Deviant Theories Applied: Straight-Edge and Theories First, we have to ask why the straight-edge subculture is deviant. The straight-edge culture embraces moral inclination in a positive way. This subculture does not fit the " norms" of society. By abstaining from substances, sex, and other negative things, it makes this subculture stick out.

If, in society, something about a group or person sticks out, they become deviant, which is departing from anything that is socially accepted or “usual” (Clinard, Meier, 2011). In the early 1990’s violence that was related to the straight-edge movement was high. Some militant actors used violence against random people and other straight-edge members who were drinking, smoking, or doing drugs in order to try and spread their substance free message. This violence was brought on because of their direct relation with the straight-edge culture.

Functionalism can be used to describe this time period for the straight-edge activists. Functionalism describes how different social occurrences uphold and disturb social stability. It also claims that society needs crime to be functional and for various other reasons such as attaining group unity, innovation, and setting and preserving moral limitations. The straight-edge subculture has many moral limitations. They have a strict set of requirements that they have to follow in order to be considered straight-edge.

The violence that took place by the straight-edge subculture was due to the fact that many who committed the violence, to random people or other straight-edge members, was for the preservation of their morals. Any type of substance abuse, promiscuity, and meat eating is an implicit sin for members of the straight-edge community. The disregard of these rules by both participants and non-participants in the straight-edge subculture alike were reason for some members in this group to become violent (Woods, 2006).

Militant straight-edger's used violence to try and force a straight-edge lifestyle onto others because they viewed, and for those who still use violence today, still view their lifestyle as the most morally right. The straight-edge lifestyle also indirectly calls for unity by forcing its members to follow the straight-edge lifestyle's specific guidelines, such as not drinking. When members conflict with this or associate themselves with people who drink, smoke, or indulge in anything morally incorrect violence usually followed.

In this subculture the deviance mainly applies to the push against abusing drugs, alcohol, and overindulging in any way. Why do individuals in the straight-edge community take this approach? The social learning theory may be able to explain this. The social learning theory asks how people become deviant and whether it is learned (Clinard, Meier, 2011). With this particular subculture it can be said that the majority of the straight-edge lifestyle is learned from music and peers. Many individuals who are involved in the straight-edge lifestyle found out about this lifestyle from the music scene or their friends.

Others, driven to take part in the music scene, joined and others who wanted to be a part of a positive influence on their society because of music joined the straight-edge subculture (Woods, 2006). Many members of the straight-edge community became a part of it because it represented a break away from the increasing sexuality of rock music and the sexual revolution. The sexual revolution offered youth freedom and an alternative to the dating script and the straight-edge counterculture did the same (Kirchner, 2009).

The straight-edge understanding embodied freedom as well. The freedoms between the two are quite different as one gave the freedom to indulge in one's inclinations while the latter gives the freedom to make an intentional habit out of their choices to refrain from overindulgence. In society, sexual behavior is socially learned. What is acceptable and unacceptable sexually is made clear through social informative (Clinard, Meier, 2011). The straight-edge subculture tries to take sexuality back into a time where hooking-up was not the social norm.

Being sexually promiscuous is frowned upon in society as well as in the straight-edge subculture. In society heterosexual deviance is an ongoing topic. The straight-edge society wants to be known for exactly the opposite of this. In society, sexual deviance is generally negative. Sometimes, women are objectified and men are a number of different things, which is why the straight-edge community rejects these ideas in order to show society that they have exerted control over their life by abstaining and "saving" their bodies (Woods, 2006). In the straight-edge society, the double standard holds true as well because a lot of the time men who proclaim to be straight-edge may be being promiscuous at the time but can still claim the straight-edge lifestyle. A woman doing the same would no longer be looked at as straight-edge (Woods, 2006). Conclusion The straight-edge counterculture is one most interesting, yet unheard of subcultures. The reason why this subculture is so fascinating is because of the values it represents. Although this group is vague and there are fewer members than before, the preservation of values is one of the many reasons to continue and study this fascinating unconventional group.

Overindulgence is something that is common in this day and age. Drug addictions, sexual promiscuity, alcohol abuse, and other substance abuse are not shocking to hear about. These are daily occurrences that the straight-edge culture is trying to remove from their lives. From the 1970's until now this culture has been constantly changing and rearranging itself to match the attitudes and music of the time. The straight-edge counterculture has been excellent in integrating modern ideas in with more traditional values, all while supporting the music scene.

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