

Pilgrims on Tour: Collective Effervescence in Concerts

A Thesis Presented to the Department of Sociology
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors

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April 12th, 2010

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Acknowledgements

The following acknowledgements are in order: I would like to thank Professor Silvia Pedraza for teaching me about all the ways one can approach sociological research and for helping guide me through this process from start to finish. Professors Alford Young Jr. and Bruce Conforth for serving as my second readers. All of the study volunteers in the Omaha (NE) and Ann Arbor (MI) communities. My family, friends, fellow cohort members, Amy Nesbitt, Whitney Bergum, My Dear Disco, and the 10KLF Family. Live Music Alliance (LMA), The Michigan Electronic Dance Music Association (MEDMA), The University of Michigan Arts Chorale, and The East Quad Music Co-Op (EQMC). The Ark, The Blind Pig, The Ann Arbor District Library, The Ann Arbor Summer Festival and of course, The University of Michigan Department of Sociology and Honors Program.

Special thanks to Bryan Klausmeyer for helping me format the web-version of the thesis (<https://sites.google.com/site/pilgrimsontour/home>).

Finally, a very special thank you is reserved for my Honors Mentor, Professor Terry McGinn, for pushing me intellectually and providing with assistance from day one.

“What a long strange trip it’s been.” – “Truckin’” (Grateful Dead)

Abstract

In his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), Emile Durkheim introduced the notion of “collective effervescence” into sociological discourse, claiming its presence in religious assemblies helped revitalize the spiritual beliefs of the group and foster feelings of social solidarity amongst its members. This paper presents findings from 25 in-depth interviews with frequent concert-goers from the Omaha (NE) and Ann Arbor (MI) communities and field notes taken at six music festivals during the summer of 2009 structured around investigating the role of collective effervescence in concerts. After analyzing concert-goers’ feelings of spirituality and community at concerts, a distinct pattern was found in the group of concert-goers who had experienced collective effervescence in concerts versus those who had not. These concert-goers, whom I call *Pilgrims*, were willing to spend more money on tickets, travel longer distances to see a concert and were far more likely to experience high feelings of spirituality and community at concerts than concert-goers who had not experienced collective effervescence at concerts. These findings are consistent with Durkheim’s theory about the effects of collective effervescence on religious bodies, and further findings and implications for theory and research are discussed.

COLLECTIVE EFFERVESCENCE

From an early age, music has played a very important role in my life. Starting at age 11, I sang in numerous school and church choirs, participated in competitive show choirs, and dabbled experimentally with various instruments in improvisational jam sessions with friends. It was not until the summer of 2007, however, that I realized music had been more of a fun activity than anything else for me, a pleasing pastime and nothing more. All of that changed on a warm July evening in northern Minnesota. There, something overwhelming and entirely unexpected happened, an event which changed me forever.

This pivotal experience took place during the *String Cheese Incident's* second set at the 10,000 Lakes Music Festival on July 20th, 2007. I had just returned to the concert bowl with a friend from our campsite when the band started to transition into a cover¹ of *Talking Head's* "This Must Be the Place (Naïve Melody)." Musically, I thought that it was good cover, but it was far from spectacular. What made this song so memorable came from somewhere else. Once the main melody line blared out over the speakers the crowd responded by filling the night sky with shrieks, yells, and howls of euphoria. From my previous experience at *String Cheese* shows, I knew this type of behavior was basically the norm, but several seconds before the first chorus broke the crowd erupted into a deafening frenzy that was unusual even for their concerts. As the song progressed, my friend and I moved through a sea of hula-hoopers, costumed freaks², and people

¹ A performance of a previously recorded or released song by another musical artist.

² In *String Cheese* idioculture, the term "freak" is not commonly used in a derogatory manner. It is most often used by frequent attendees as a way to mark people who go to *Cheese* shows from those who don't. Example: "I was just down in the pit dancing with the other freaks."

adorned with glow sticks who were clapping their hands and yelling while dancing in rhythm to the music as it coasted through an instrumental jam section. It was when the vocal part returned that I started to feel *it* act on me.

As the last verse commenced, I started to feel as though I was possessed by an outside power, and my whole body swelled with an alien energy. With this possession came a feeling of empowerment and a sense of peace and calm--everything was finally alright. I saw 8,000 smiling faces dancing all around me and everyone, it seemed, was experiencing the same phenomenon as I. When the musical climax finally arrived, a geyser of euphoria erupted inside of me, with every cell in my body feeling like it was exploding in ecstasy. People all around me raised their hands to the sky in agreement and yelled to the heavens. As the song ended and immediately transitioned into a high-intensity jam³, a pair of hands grabbed my hips and I discovered that I was suddenly the steam engine of a wild four-person train swerving down invisible tracks between dancing bodies. Nobody collided with anyone else, everyone smiled. After receiving 20 “high-fives” from strangers, I stopped and stood still in front of the main stage. Never before had I felt such strong affinity with the music, it almost seemed like it was coming from my very thoughts. I have desperately desired such unison again: the experience of *kairos*⁴.

³ An improvisational section commonly found at the end of a structured song. Jam segments can last for highly variable periods of time and can be used to transition between songs without having to stop the music.

⁴ Translation from Greek: The supreme moment. I decided to use this word to describe my experience based on its use in the following passage from *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968) by Tom Wolfe: “Every vision, every insight of the...original...circle always came out of the *new experience*...the *kairos*...and how to tell it! How to get it across to the multitudes who have never had this experience themselves? *You couldn't put it into words*. You had to create conditions in which they would feel an approximation of *that feeling*, the sublime *kairos*. You had to put them into ecstasy...Buddhist monks immersing themselves in cosmic love through fasting and contemplation, Hindus zonked out in Bhakti,

When I woke up in the morning I realized I was no longer in the empowering state of mind from the night before, and I asked myself, “What on earth came over me?” Initially, I was frightened because the only societal examples I could draw on to make sense of my experience were controlling images labeling me as insane, someone who had fallen off the deep end; an unstable person with no credibility. When I returned home to Omaha, Nebraska, I was hesitant to share what had happened with even my closest friends. I thought that they would have no understanding of what I had seen and experienced: a chance encounter with what I could only desperately call the divine, the transcendent. Had I found God? Even now I don’t feel foolish for asking that at the time: how else could I describe what had happened to me? Partially terrified and overjoyed at my experience, it was at this point in time that I began my journey to make sense of this phenomenon.

My first breakthrough happened when I read the work of Emile Durkheim and was introduced to his notion of “collective effervescence” in religious assemblies. According to Durkheim, the generation of collective effervescence, or a powerful group emotion, happens in religious assemblies because of the shared activities and values of those in attendance. Once generated, the presence of collective effervescence in these social atmospheres alters the energies and motivations of participating individuals, raising their consciousness to a higher level. To each participant, the physical experience of collective effervescence is so overwhelming that it is perceived as force existing

which is fervent love in the possession of God, ecstasies flooding themselves with Krishna through sexual orgies or plunging into the dinners of the Bacchanalia, Christians off in Edge City through Gnostic onanism or the Heart of Jesus” (230-231).

Another word which adequately describes the special nature of this moment is *hierophany* (as defined by Mircea Eliade [1959]). A hierophany is the moment in which a sacred reality shows itself to us in profane (non-sacred) objects and contexts. “In each case we are confronted by the same mysterious act—the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our natural ‘profane’ world” (“Sacred and Profane,” 10).

outside of themselves. Thus, the experience of collective effervescence, albeit a social force created by humans, is often interpreted to be the force of a non-human power (Elementary Forms of Religious Life: 226-228; 230)⁵. Furthermore, Durkheim claims the experience of collective effervescence serves the social functions of revitalizing the spiritual beliefs of the group and fostering feelings of social solidarity amongst its members (419-422). This notion of “collective effervescence” and its effect on individuals resonated with me, and I realized it could serve as the stable sociological framework through which to investigate my *kairos* experience.

In the summer of 2009, after being selected to write an honors thesis in sociology specifically exploring the social nature of my *kairos* experience, I began field research for the honors thesis project by attending the following six music festivals: Movement: The Detroit Electronic Music Festival (Detroit, Michigan), Wakarusa Music Festival (Ozark, AR) and Festivus for the Restivus (Cabot, VT) in the company of the Ann Arbor-based band *My Dear Disco*; the Ann Arbor Summer Festival (Ann Arbor, MI), the 10,000 Lakes Music Festival (Detroit Lakes, MN) and the River City Roots Festival (Missoula, MT), which I attended on my own.

In the specific cases of Wakarusa, Festivus for the Restivus and the 10,000 Lakes Music Festival, attendees had the opportunity to camp on the festival grounds during the event, and it was at these camping festivals that I witnessed a distinct and repeating set of phenomena that might be described as temporary, organic society building.

⁵ Originally published in 1912 in French, this version was translated by Karen E. Fields and published in 1995.

Division of physical space into distinguished, identifiable communities:

Many people hung their state flags or *Grateful Dead* flags, mandalas, animal cut-outs, and inflatable objects from either surrounding trees or their cars. Particular to the 10,000 Lakes Music Festival [hereafter referred to as 10KLF] were make-shift mailboxes and street signs at various campsites, where people could leave mail for the residents of specific temporary communities. A common feature at all three festivals was hanging boards at campsites for passer-bys to leave messages on, often randomly or anonymously. Often camping parties or communities would set up tarps over their campground to provide shade and designate a common area for the group to meet and interact. Lastly, mixed up in the fields of elaborately decorated vehicles at each festival were cars and vans specifically customized to allow people to comfortably cook or sleep inside of them.

Establishment of environment-specific behavioral norms:

Relationships often began in the campsites where lots of intermingling between neighbors could occur. People were generally welcome to randomly walk into other people's campsites and ask questions such as, "Hi there, where you're from?" or "I'm looking for X, can you help me?" On the whole, most people were very willing to have conversations with strangers and often offered food and drinks such as water, juice, beer, mixed drinks, and moonshine to them--At 10KLF, my camping party and I were treated to an endless supply of free snacks from our neighbor who was a marketing executive at Wrigley Foods. These relationships had the potential to play out throughout the entire festival, with groups meeting inside the concert grounds sharing various items

with each other (e.g., food, drinks, drugs, glow-sticks and other decorative items) or sharing resources within the campsites (e.g., flashlights, matches, stoves, tools, blankets).

Within the concert grounds, these relaxed social relations and norms were observable in almost all social situations. At morning hula-hoop and yoga sessions people interacted freely and shared tips about technique and tricks with each other. People waiting in line for vendors, restrooms, or just sitting in the same area felt free to ask each other about their hair and clothing styles without having previously engaged in a conversation.

When acts were performing, a separate set of behaviors would arise. At all three festivals select attendees brought spray bottles full of water and would spray strangers if they asked for it during afternoon performances in the sun. At nighttime performances "glow-stick wars" would often ignite, with people bringing large quantities of glow-sticks into the concert area and throwing them into the air for others to then re-throw, turning the night sky into a collective, dynamic neon canvas.

At the conclusion of these festivals, particularly at Wakarusa, some people walked around holding signs or walked into campsites to ask for rides to various locations.

A “culture of exception”:

In my conversations with attendees, many people described camping music festivals as an “adult Disney Land,” an out-of-the-ordinary event where people pay for the ability to do any combination of the following: experience their favorite bands all day, take exotic drugs they cannot find under normal circumstances, party from dusk

until dawn, and express themselves to strangers without inhibitions. This last behavior could be seen at all turns, as a significant percentage of people wore costumes (I ran into Jesus during *Widespread Panic*'s performance at 10KLF), decorated themselves partially or in-full with body paint, and even wore Arkansas flags as capes. In general, people described the social environment at music festivals as being so unique that they found it impossible to describe to people who had never been to one.

Intensive amateur efforts to archive the moment:

Completely voluntarily in most cases, many people spent serious time and effort in cataloging the audio and visual events of the festivals. "Tapers" recorded shows (when approved by the performers) by rigging large microphone stacks by soundboards and then shared their recordings over torrent-sharing websites in the days following the festivals. Videos were often made with camcorders and cell phones and then distributed over video sharing websites, such as YouTube. An array of photographers would ask for peoples' e-mail addresses after taking photos of them so that they could share the images with the subjects.

All of these sociological behaviors and events occurred at the three major camping music festivals where I collected field notes, but the one phenomenon that I witnessed at all six festivals was Durkheim's "collective effervescence": powerful group emotions resulting from the music being played, which lessened peoples' social inhibitions and bred a spectrum of high-energy activity and expression. I observed it in the wild crowds dancing to *Widespread Panic*, *My Dear Disco*, and *The Macpodz* at 10KLF; in the masses bobbing to *Sound Tribe Sector 9* at Wakarusa; in the widespread

prevalence of street dancing in the Ann Arbor and Missoula city festivals; and I observed it when Dave Pransky of *Toubab Krewe* said, “Can you feel it? How are you feeling? Let’s keep this going!” to an intimate crowd in Cabot, exactly when the feeling hit me and the rest of the audience.

Research Question

The ubiquitous presence of “collective effervescence” in these concert settings made it clear to me that I wanted to focus my further research around the following question: How do individuals experience and interpret collective effervescence in concert atmospheres? and, Can experiencing collective effervescence in a concert setting facilitate the generation of individualistic, non-affiliated notions of spirituality and feelings of community for concert-goers? Having experienced the powerful effects of an effervescent moment myself and, hearing second-hand about the high levels of spirituality and feelings of community in *Grateful Dead* fans, I felt that this was an intriguing and realistic research question to investigate.

RELEVANT RESEARCH AND THEORY

To begin pursuing my research question, I consulted the following bodies of literature to review previous relevant research and theory by social scientists: observations on how group emotions effect the behavior of individuals in a crowd setting, works on religion that address the use of emotion in building community, and works on highly dedicated band fan-bases who resemble communities. To strengthen my research design and overall methodology, I also consulted works on how to accurately conduct ethnographic observation when the researcher is already a member of the group being studied. After analyzing these works I found that there was an adequate prior body of research to begin investigating the role, if any, of “collective effervescence” in concert atmospheres.

The term collective effervescence was introduced into sociological discourse by Emile Durkheim in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912). Analyzing the societal functions of totemism in “primitive” societies such as the Australian Aborigines and various Native American tribes, Durkheim developed a causal explanation of religion centered on collective effervescence after witnessing an Aborigine *corrobbori*.⁶ Used to mark the rejoining of Aborigine groups after periods of nomadic separation, Durkheim observed the following in the ceremony’s social environment:

“When they are once come together, a sort of electricity is formed by their collecting which quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation. Every sentiment expressed finds a place without resistance in all the minds, which are very open to outside impressions; each re-echoes the others, and is re-echoed by the others. The initial impulse thus proceeds, growing as it goes, as an avalanche grows in its advance. And as such active passions so free from all control could not fail to burst out, on every side one sees nothing but violent gestures, cries, veritable howls,

⁶ The ethnographic term for an Aborigine religious ceremony.

and deafening noises of every sort, which aid in intensifying still more the state of mind which they manifest” ([Swain], 247)⁷.

According to Durkheim, this contagious, compounding group emotion is the causal foundation of totemism and all religion because participants who experience these sensations cannot find a normal explanation for their altered state of consciousness. Thus, they attribute their experience of raised awareness to a higher, outside power. In Durkheim’s words: “Religion is still the product of a certain delusion. By what other name can one call the state in which men find themselves when, as a result of collective effervescence, they believe they have been swept into a world entirely different than the one before their eyes?” ([Fields]: 227-228)⁸

In a more universal context, beyond the social world of the Aborigines and their *corrobories*, Durkheim says the following to describe the experience of collective effervescence: “Vital energies become hyper-excited, the passions more intense, the sensations more powerful; there are indeed some that are produced only at this moment. Man does not recognize himself; he feels somehow transformed and in consequence transforms his surroundings,” ([Fields]: 424). Durkheim’s observation on the transformative power of collective effervescence parallels the work of one of his contemporaries, Gustave Le Bon, who described the attitudes and behavior of crowds in his *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1895). Concerned with how crowds can make participating actors feel and act in a completely different way than they would in isolation, Le Bon stressed that in a crowd the sentiments and ideas of each individual will

⁷ Originally published in 1912 in French, this version was translated by Joseph Ward Swain and published in 1961.

⁸ Originally published in 1912 in French, this version was translated by Karen E. Fields and published in 1995.

focus in a unified direction, and that as a consequence of this, all of their conscious personalities disappear into a new formation (19-21).

Both Durkheim and Le Bon seem to be arguing that crowds (and the collective effervescence they generate) have a transformative power which acts upon the participants, causing them to lose their normal conceptions of themselves. This effect resembles the defining characteristic of Victor Turner's description of "liminality," which is the second of Arnold van Gennep's (1909) three stages of religious ritual (Rites of Passage, 10-11). In his description of Gennep's model, Turner states that participants in ritual rites go through three stages in all religious ceremonies: separation, liminality (or transition), and reincorporation ("Liminality and Communitas, 1967: 48). The first stage, separation, occurs when the subjects are removed from their normal environment and social conditions. During the second stage of liminality, subjects are exposed to a set of cultural conditions that are neither reflective of the past (the familiar) or of the future, which causes them to lose their former sense of self. At this point of marginality, Turner states, "Among themselves, neophytes tend to develop intense feelings of comradeship and egalitarianism. Secular distinctions of rank and status are homogenized or disappear" (48). Turner labels this resulting emotional phenomenon "communitas." According to Turner, the feeling of communitas is experienced as an open and infinitely extendable sense of society that emerges only when the previous social structure and its constraints are missing. When a group of ritualized subjects experiences communitas after their phase of liminality, they become revitalized in their relationships, build new understandings, and reintegrate themselves into the structure of society in a new form. Turner's model of the three stages of religious ritual is a very useful tool for

understanding and analyzing non-traditional religious behavior. It has been used by two scholars, Robin Sylvan (2002) and Scott Hutson (2000), in their separate works on studying the spiritual experiences of *Grateful Dead* fans and ravers⁹.

In chapter three of her *Traces of the Spirit: The Religious Dimensions of Popular Music* (2002), Robin Sylvan examines the frequently reported spiritual experiences of fans of the *Grateful Dead* (known commonly as “Deadheads”) at concerts. Using Turner’s model as an analytical tool, Sylvan reports the majority of descriptions of spiritual experiences at *Grateful Dead* shows involved the experience of losing one’s ego and of gaining a sense of oneness and community with other fans in the audience (92). These descriptions, Sylvan argues, are in line with the characteristics of Genep’s stages of religious ritual (as described by Turner), where entering the concert area served as the symbolic act of separation from the outside world; the loss of ego and sense of oneness are liminality (and its subsequent feeling of *communitas*); and the formation of the Deadhead community based on shared religious experiences represented reintegration in a new form (109-110). Additionally, Sylvan saw Genep’s model at work in the very musical structure of the *Grateful Dead*’s performances: where the end of the first song represented separation and the end of structure; the improvisational jam represented liminality and a lack of structure; and the beginning of a new song out of the jam section represented reintegration and a return to structure (104). Sylvan concludes that for Deadheads, the *Grateful Dead* concert experience was a symbolic ritual for recharging their spiritual reservoirs.

⁹ A person who frequently attends “raves”--a sub-cultural gathering oriented around dancing to electronic and techno music in established nightclubs and open industrial spaces in large groups for all hours of the night.

In his study of spiritual healing at raves, Scott Hutson (2000) also found Genep's model to be an effective tool for analyzing the spiritual experiences of ravers. Hutson reports that one of the most important elements rave participants needed to have spiritual experiences was the social non-differentiation that occurs between participants at events because it helps them construct a sense of unity with everyone in attendance (2000: 42). Hutson argued that these experiences and attitudes resembled Turner's concept of *communitas* and that the experience of unity had the effect of providing spiritual meaning to the ravers.

While Genep's model of religious ritual is a very helpful tool, two other scholarly works have focused on the spiritual experiences and ritualistic behavior present at *Grateful Dead* shows without using his model. In his essay, "The Deadhead Community: Popular Religion in Contemporary American Culture," (2000) Shan Sutton examined the *Grateful Dead* as a popular religion. Sutton states that the Deadhead community often served as a popular religion for fans because it drew in thousands of people who desired to share in communal states of mystical union via the music of the band. Many fans within the community developed ritualistic behaviors (e.g., meditative techniques, taking psychoactive drugs) and attitudes towards concerts, which they believed would assist them in achieving states of extraordinary experience (108-127). The other work, Jennifer Hartley's "We Were Given This Dance: Music and Meaning in the Early Unlimited Devotion Family," (2000) is an ethnographic study of a specific subgroup of *Grateful Dead* fans which developed its own religious interpretation of the band's music and followed the group devotionally for years. The Unlimited Devotion Family created a well-defined belief-system and complementary idioculture through

which they often reported achieving a spiritual union with God (in the Christian sense) via the performances of the *Grateful Dead*. All of the group members, 30 or so at its peak, lived and traveled exclusively together and communicated with the larger community as a single entity that has been recognized in various accounts by fans, band members and other Deadhead scholars (128-154).

METHODOLOGY

My research methodology consisted of conducting 25 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with regular concert attendees in the communities of Omaha, Nebraska (7) and Ann Arbor, Michigan (18) as well as taking field notes at six music festivals (five short-term, one long-term) during the summer of 2009. The interviews were conducted between the months of August and December, 2009. The following section will detail how the interviews were administered; the changes that were made in the interview script as the data collection period progressed; how field notes were taken at summer music festivals; and a critique of the overall research design. Before the research design can be presented, however, attention must be paid to my personal relationship with the environments and situations being studied and to my role as a social researcher.

The Critical Insider

As discussed in the introduction, I was motivated to undertake this research project because of personal experiences at concerts. I am an active member of the subject population I studied--a “native” in the eyes of classic ethnography. However, as many

contemporary sociologists have argued (Jules-Rosette 1978, Lidz 1991, Bourdieu 2000 and Anderson 2002), this does not automatically invalidate my observations. In fact, it may make them more valid. Both Lidz and Anderson discuss the roles of the “participating-observer” and the “observing-participant” (Lidz, 1991: 81-83; Anderson, 2002: 1535) in their research, arguing that the former is reflective of a researcher who is in the early stages of establishing a relationship with the studied group while the latter is reflective of a researcher who has become close with the subjects and can effectively empathize with their social and cultural perspectives. Yet, my position as a social researcher is not fully covered by these definitions because I was already a member of the group under study before the research began. Borrowing a term from Paul Hodkinson, who studied his own Goth subculture, my position is best described as a *critical insider* (Hodkinson, 2002: 4-6), a member of the studied group who must constantly maintain a distanced mental perspective “so as to observe, compare, contrast and question as well as to experience” (6). In order to practice the required distanced mental perspective of a critical insider, I had to frequently challenge my most basic assumptions about concert atmospheres. This entailed such practices as observing the behaviors of others for an extended period of time while taking field notes to gain multiple confirmations that my initial interpretation was correct and asking subjects during interviews to clarify and provide definitions to terms I was familiar with.

The Interview Script

The interview script for this study was constructed with the intention of gathering as much information about a subject’s concert attitudes, preferences, behaviors, and

experiences as possible (see Appendix A). Featuring a blend of quantitative and qualitative questions, this design allowed me to collect tangible information about how much time, energy, and money a subject put into seeing concerts while simultaneously collecting subjective accounts and feelings about concert experiences and their impacts on the subjects' lives. In my original interview script design, I specifically asked subjects about their personal alcohol and drug use because I wanted to gain the most thorough understanding of whether or not these substances were related to a subject's feelings of spirituality while at concerts. These questions, #12 and #13 respectfully, had to be revised during the IRB approval process. The IRB reviewer cited a concern that, despite the confidentiality of the study, asking subjects about their alcohol and drug use had the potential to create incriminating evidence and cause psychological harm to the subjects. Thus, the questions were revised to ask the subjects about their perceptions of other concert-goers' alcohol and drug use. Finally, the script contained two qualitative questions, #10 and #17 respectfully, that would allow me to directly test my research hypothesis: Did frequent concert-goers experience collective effervescence in concert atmospheres? If so, did their experience of collective effervescence help them in building individualistic, non-affiliated notions of spirituality and feelings of community?

In-Depth Interviews: Omaha Community

All of the Omaha interviews took place during the month of August and all of the Ann Arbor interviews took place between the months of September (2009) and January (2010). The interview process varied for the two subject communities. For the Omaha interviews, I reached out to old friends and acquaintances via phone calls, e-mail, and

Facebook messaging to gauge interest in participating and to request interviews. Once participation was confirmed, I asked the subject for general times in their schedule when they would like to be interviewed and for preferred meeting locations. Most of the interviews occurred in outdoor locations such as parks and arboretums, and no changes were made to the interview script during this period. On average, the interviews lasted 45 minutes and all responses were recorded with participant consent on an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder. When the interviews were completed, I gave each participant a contact information card for them to share with persons they felt might be interested in participating in the study. This effort was responsible for two interviews with referral subjects.

There were two weaknesses in my research design for this segment of the data collection. In five of the seven interviews, I already knew the participant. This pre-existing familiarity may have prevented me from seeing any flaws in the structure and presentation of the interview questions because the subjects already trusted me and were likely to not be bothered by any awkwardly worded or placed questions. Also, in some cases I had briefly talked about my hypothesis questions during earlier, informal conversations, and this may have biased participants' responses. Still, the depth and content of data obtained from the Omaha interviews was consistent with the depth and content of data obtained from the more rigorously conducted Ann Arbor interviews.

In-Depth Interviews: Ann Arbor Community

For the Ann Arbor interviews a different set of protocols was used for subject recruitment, interview scheduling, conducting the interviews, and asking for referrals.

Several changes were also made in the interview script in response to recurring themes and problems that had occurred in past interviews. These changes are described below under “Revisions to Interview Script and Presentation.”

Recruitment

Study information fliers with tear-off contact information tabs were placed around the University of Michigan Central Campus area in music-related business establishments (i.e., record, guitar, and alternative-lifestyle stores), the Ann Arbor District Library, as well as two local music venues: The Ark and The Blind Pig. When I received funding approval from the University of Michigan Department of Sociology for buying \$5 gift-cards to local coffee establishments to give to subjects when they completed their interviews, I added a line to the recruitment fliers stressing that a small gift of appreciation would be provided for their participation. My recruitment efforts also consisted of sending out e-mails containing information about the research study to several University of Michigan student groups, such as the Michigan Electronic Dance Music Association (MEDMA) and the East Quad Music Co-Op (EQMC), as well as reaching out to my professional contacts in the local Ann Arbor music scene via phone and e-mail.

I would make the following changes if this project were repeated. Direct recruitment would need to take place on both the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor campuses (North and Central) in the form of recruitment fliers. During my recruiting efforts, I did not successfully reach out to the U of M Music School student or faculty population and I feel that this was a missed opportunity. I should also have contacted

University of Michigan faculty teaching courses related to music (i.e. American Culture or Musicology) to see if they would be interested in participating in the study or at least discussing their experiences, observations and ideas in an informal interview during regularly scheduled office hours. Any valuable information gleaned from these informal interviews could then be counted as field observations and included in the overall project.

Scheduling and Conducting Interviews

Once I had determined meeting times with Ann Arbor participants, I presented them with the following choices for meeting locations: The University of Michigan Union (by Amer's Café), the Ann Arbor District Library (343 S. Fifth Avenue), or Carillon Chocolates (330 S. Main St.). While the majority of the interviews were conducted at the University of Michigan Union, there was one instance in which an interview was conducted at a participant's residence and one instance in which an interview was conducted over speaker phone. For all of the interviews conducted at the University of Michigan Union, after meeting participants outside of Amer's Café we walked around the hallways bordering the courtyard and found an open couch to conduct the interview. For the most part, these hallways were very quiet and provided a calm, private interview environment with minimal disruptions or interference. I had the participant sit on the end of the couch with a wooden table, which is where I placed the voice recorder. I sat at the other end of the couch and positioned my body such that I was at a 45-degree angle to the subject and my head was facing them without looking directly at them. I found that this aided most interviews because it communicated to the participant that they did not need to make eye contact with me during their responses if

they were not comfortable doing so, while simultaneously communicating that I was engaged in the conversation. On average, the interviews lasted approximately 50 minutes and all responses were recorded with participant consent on an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder.

When the interview was completed, I first thanked the subject for their participation and then allowed them to ask me questions about my personal motivations for conducting this research project and the overall goal of the research. This typically cemented good rapport with the subject, which was helpful in getting referrals for future interviews. I then presented the subject with a log on which I had them write down the current date, their initials, and a “stamp” (a spontaneous symbol or picture of their choosing) with the knowledge that in doing so they would receive a \$5 gift-card to a local coffee establishment as a form of appreciation for taking time out of their schedules to participate. On almost all occasions, subjects told me they greatly appreciated the gift and that they really enjoyed the entire interview process. I also asked participants if they would like to accept a contact information card so that, if they thought of someone who might be interested in participating in the study, they could provide my contact information to them. I received five referrals from these efforts.

Revisions to Interview Script and Presentation

I made major revisions to the interview script and overall presentation during the Ann Arbor interview process. At the beginning of each interview, the first question I asked participants was, “Why do you attend live music?” This was a straight-to-the-point starting question that immediately engaged the participant and provided me with

information that I could bring up later to encourage in-depth answers to certain questions. After several interviews, I began to notice that participants commonly responded to this question that they had been actively engaged with music from an early age, so I started to ask follow-up questions to determine a) at what age their engagement started and b) in what form did it manifest itself (e.g., singing in a choir, playing an instrument, or frequently listening to a practicing family member). Asking these follow-up questions allowed me to determine the amount of experience and exposure the participant had to music, which added depth to their accounts about why music was important to them.

The next set of major changes that occurred in the interview script revolved around the way in which I asked the first of my two major hypothesis questions. Question 10 on the interview script originally asked, “Have you ever experienced “spiritual”/other-worldly feelings at a show?” and called for the participant to answer a list of sub-questions concerning the contextual details of the event, e.g. “How big was the venue?” “How did the crowd interact with the music?” “Describe your subjective experience of this moment.” “What, if anything, do you attribute this experience to?” “Do you feel this experience has had a significant impact on your life?”

After just a few interviews I noticed the wording of this question caused hesitation and confusion in participants, probably because of the symbolic weight of the word “spiritual,” and that many needed to have me clarify what I meant by this question. I always responded by asking the participant if they had ever experienced euphoric or very intense emotional moments at shows, moments that stood out from most day-to-day experiences. This rewording of the question worked in every case and the majority of the participants, when asked about it after disclosing all of the contextual details surrounding

the event, responded that they felt these moments to be spiritual moments. These early interview experiences helped me realize I needed to change how the question was asked to avoid causing confusion and hesitation during future interviews. Once it was revised, the question asked participants if they had ever experienced euphoric or other-worldly feelings at shows and then to describe the details surrounding the experience if they had. In all of the interviews following this revision, participants reported moments of euphoria at concerts and then described the context of these experiences in response to my structured follow-up questions. At the very end of this revised question sequence, the participants were asked, “Would you associate the word “spiritual” with this experience?” The repositioning of this question allowed participants to reflect on their concert experience in-depth before answering such a symbolically-loaded question.

I retained question 10’s overall position in the interview script because it allowed participants to warm-up and become familiar with me as an interviewer before being asked very personal questions. Other minor changes to question 10 occurred in the required sequence of follow-up questions for participants who had experienced euphoric/other-worldly feelings at concerts. Participants were additionally asked, “What effect did the crowd have on your experience of the concert?” and the question asking, “Do you feel this experience has had a significant impact on your life?” was modified to allow participants to distinguish between short-term and long-term impacts, if any. These improvements strengthened my research design by allowing me to ask about the role of the group in a participant’s emotional experience and about the duration of the experience’s impact on their life.

The last set of major changes in the interview script revolved around the way in which I asked my second major hypothesis question. The major questions and sub-questions in slots 16 and 17 on the script are designed to gauge the social importance of concerts for participants, e.g. “Do any of your friends attend live music with you?” “How important is attending live music events for maintaining your social network?” “Do you identify with your community?” “Do certain activities foster feelings of involvement with your community?”

After several interviews, I realized these questions were confusing to participants and would have to be more specific in their aim in order to determine the real social significance of concerts for participants, if any. With the questions in slot 16, instead of asking how important attending live music was for maintaining one’s social network, I asked participants how important live music was for participating in one’s social network. This revision clarified to participants that the question was intended to ask about how often they saw and interacted with people they knew at concerts, and not if their friendships were solely founded and maintained by going to concerts. With the questions in slot 17, participants were asked to define community instead of whether, in general, they identified with their community or not. Participants were also asked specifically if attending concerts helped them identify with their community. These changes enhanced my research design by allowing me to determine if attending shows helps frequent concert-goers create bonds to specific individuals or the community-at-large.

There was one especially noteworthy strength of the interview script, and that was restating the first question (“Why do you attend live music?”) at the end of the interview.

Doing this caused major revisions by most participants in both the Omaha and Ann Arbor communities, and it allowed each participant to reflect on the questions they had been asked over the course of the interview to provide a more thorough explanation of their rationales for attending concerts.

Field Notes

The second part of my research design consisted of taking field notes at five short-term and one long-term music festival during the summer of 2009. For the purposes of this paper, a short-term music festival is defined as a music event which lasts for more than a 24-hour period but no longer than 5 consecutive days, and has a for-profit motive. A long-term music festival is defined as a music event which lasts for more than 5 consecutive days and is non-profit oriented. The festivals I attended were: Movement: The Detroit Electronic Music Festival (May 23rd-25th, Detroit, Michigan), Wakarusa Music Festival (June 4th-7th, Mulberry Mountain, Arkansas), the Ann Arbor Summer Festival (June 12th-July 5th, Ann Arbor, Michigan), Festivus for the Restivus (July 17th-19th, Cabot, Vermont), 10,000 Lakes Music Festival (July 22rd-25th, Detroit Lakes, Minnesota) and The River City Roots Festival (August, 29th-30th, Missoula, Montana). At these festivals I carried a small notepad with me, either in my backpack or in a pocket. Whenever I overheard something of interest or saw an interesting interaction between people, I made a note of it in the notebook, including the date, location and context of the interaction, if one could be reasonably determined. Whenever I found myself in a lull between events or under adequate lighting during nighttime performances, I went back to my marked notes and elaborated on them in greater detail. Throughout all of my

experiences in the field, I never found myself in a situation where a person disclosed personal information about themselves solely to me. There were always at least two other people present, making the situation a public and not a private setting, so I never had to reveal to an attendee that I was a social researcher taking field notes on why people attend music festivals. On the whole, I found that the notepad did not bother people attending the music festivals because notepads were widespread at most of the events, with people taking notes on the performances or making a list of performed tracks. After returning from each festival experience, I made an electronic copy of my field notes, elaborated on new connections and patterns I had realized, and summarized my overall experience.

In conclusion, while there were weaknesses in the in-depth interview component, I feel that my overall research design was effective at gathering data from participants about their reasons for attending concerts and the impact of the “collective effervescence” they experienced in concert atmospheres on their lives.

FINDINGS/ANALYSIS

The data presented and analyzed in this section was derived from the 25 interview transcripts with frequent concert goers (defined as those who attend at least 5 concerts in a six month period) in the Omaha and Ann Arbor communities. Although this group is not large enough for true statistical analysis, I created the following data representation in order to help find patterns in the participants' responses.

Patterns Among Concert Goers who Had and Had Not Experienced Collective Effervescence.

	Low Effervescence	High Effervescence
Age	30.2	25.7
Drug Use At Shows	50%	33%
High Community	66.70%	89%
Low Community	33.30%	11%
High Spirituality	16.70%	72.20%
Low Spirituality	83%	28%
Shows Attended Per Month	4	4.42
Hypothetical Maximum Ticket Price	\$157.50	\$210.63
Maximum Miles Traveled for a Show	581.3	712.1
# of Times Traveling 50+ Miles for a Show	1.6	9.4
	N=6	N=18

Definitions

Participant age, shows attended per month, maximum distance traveled for a show, and the number of times per year traveling more than 50 miles for a show (listed as “leave their area of residence” in the interview script) were obtained through direct questioning in the interview, questions 1, 3, 5, and 6 respectfully (see Interview Script, Appendix A). Respondents were considered to use drugs in concert atmospheres only if they volunteered information clearly indicating their own drug use; for the purposes of this study, any of the following were classified as drugs: marijuana, LSD, psilocybin

mushrooms, ecstasy, MDMA, opiates, painkillers or heroin. Alcohol and tobacco were not classified as drugs.

Concert-goers' feelings of spirituality and community were determined by their direct responses to spirituality and community oriented questions in the interview script, questions 10 and 17 respectfully, and any elaborations they made about either topic outside of direct questioning. Responses evaluated as being indicative of "high spirituality" were separated from responses evaluated as being indicative of "low spirituality" on the basis of whether or not participants agreed with the question, "Would you associate the word 'spiritual' with this experience?" At the conclusion of the interview process, there were 10 low spirituality participants and 15 high spirituality participants. Here are quotations that typify low spirituality:

[Question]: Would you associate the word "spiritual" with this experience?

[Answer]: No, but I have known people who [would], yes, especially at old Dead shows, but not me personally.
--Charlie, Ann Arbor

[Question]: Would you associate the word "spiritual" with this experience?

[Answer]: That's a tough question, I would say no, I mean, it is and it isn't, so that's why I have a hard time answering that one, so I guess no would be my answer. The reason why it's a no is that it's a human accomplishment, nature on the other hand can be considered spiritual because it's an accomplishment made by my God, a divine, while a DJ spinning records is an accomplishment by man.
-- Kathryn, Ann Arbor

Here are quotations that typify high spirituality:

"I was at a music festival last year called Wakarusa and I saw an act called Leftover Salmon. It was something where I had been walking around, got drunk and walked into the show. Halfway into the show, it was such a

moving performance, and I was getting this energy flowing from the whole crowd, it was so jovial but at the same time it actually brought me to tears at that point because there was so much energy flowing. It was an experience where I could feel myself moving with it in a way that I was not entirely in control, my emotions were being moved by the music I was seeing and by the people I was around and it really did have a feeling of spiritual awakening/spiritual experience.”

-- Paul, Omaha.

“I definitely think I would associate many of the music events I’ve been to as highly spiritual, I guess not in an aspect in the way I used to think of spirituality, of Christianity and everything. They’re definitely events that have had profound and strong impacts in my life, they stick out as being these huge monumental occasions, for what ever reasons they brought me to a state of bliss, you could say in a way, that nothing else really does. Like, specifically festivals, I guess, and the aspect of being there and specific concerts at those festivals have brought me to those places.”

-- Larry, Omaha

“O it’s like awesome, yeah I lose the sense of myself, the sense of I, the sense of myself and it’s a collectivized greater consciousness type of experience. The whole audience tends to move more as a mass, it almost seems, I guess some people would describe it as mob mentality, but in a very awesome way. And not self-conscious and just like dancing with strangers and doing crazy thing and...not worrying. Yeah, it’s just like a really safe place, it’s really...you feel a communion with everyone around you including the artist on stage. It’s really beautiful and awesome, and spiritual.”

-- Angela, Omaha

[Question]: Would you describe these moments, these crazy out-of-body experiences as “spiritual?”

[Answer]: Yes, absolutely. Of anything, reflecting on each of these shows that have moved me in such a way is more of a spiritual touchstone for me than anything else. Absolutely.

--Britney, Ann Arbor

Concerning community: responses evaluated as “high community” were separated from responses evaluated as “low community” on the basis of whether or not participants indicated concerts helped them bond with strangers in new ways or become more

empathetic towards strangers. At the conclusion of the interview process, there were 4 low community participants and 21 high community participants. Here is a quotation that typifies low community:

[Question]: Do concerts help you identify with your community?

[Answer]: I think it makes it a false sense of community, when you're at a concert you feel like your community expands, everybody is your friend except security. Even somebody who isn't that social can strike up a conversation with you. But this closes when I go home, and then I'll only talk with people that I know and care about.
--Will, Ann Arbor

Here are quotations that typify high community:

[Question]: Does going to shows help you identify with your community?

[Answer]: Of course it does, it's part of the community because the people who live in and interact in the community are part of the shows and you see them in a different aspect, a different part of life as opposed to seeing them at the bus stop or the grocery store or in church.
– Quinton, Ann Arbor

“It's something that people are literally going to enjoy for the most part, and it's definitely a sense of connectedness for people you don't see on the regular. You're there for the same reason, chances are you got a little bit in common. If you're doing the same thing, then you're already participating in the same community together.”
-- Greg, Omaha

“There's also the aspect of just the whole collective energy that's there at one point in time, when you're there viewing this musical performance with hundreds, maybe even thousands of other people at the same time, it's kind of like bringing everyone together on the same page at the same time, it's like we're all part of this, we're all viewing this musical experience together, so it's kind of like a bonding aspect I'd say in a way there too.” – Larry, Omaha

[Question]: Does attending live music help you identify with the community in which you live?

[Answer]: Absolutely, it's very telling of the personality of the area, the complexion of the culture around here. Yeah, every show is a pretty good snap shot of the community and the surrounding areas. Instead of normal life, when everyone is having a million different experiences, when you're at a show, you're watching the same thing, you're hearing the same thing, you're in the same place, and not only are you sharing it but you discuss and reflect on the same thing afterwards. Just going to a show with someone and sharing music with them in that way is on a completely different plane and much more profound and fulfilling versus even having people over and putting on records. It's a completely different world going to a show, it's so personal, interactive and intimate, and there's no substitute for that.

—Britney, Ann Arbor.

“Yeah, there's definitely, you know, for a few days, you feel good. You have more of a positive attitude and that sort of carries over. I think a lot of it too is...just being in the crowd you can feel how music brings people together, so you sort of have that being connected feeling for a while afterwards.”

--Sarah, Ann Arbor

“When you're expressing yourself you find that you have a shared thought or feeling that you can commune or come together with people on those feelings and then they take on a life of their own, they're not just yourself, they're everybody's.”

– Doug, Ann Arbor, describing feeling community while performing music.

The final variable in this table is “collective effervescence,” with concert-goers who reported either never having effervescent experiences or having experiences that may or may not have involved collective effervescence being grouped into the “low effervescence” column and concert-goers who reported having experiences involving collective effervescence with certainty being grouped in the “high effervescence” column. Whether or not a concert-goer experienced effervescence was determined by examining participants' responses to question 10 on the interview script (“Have you ever experienced euphoric or “other-worldly” feelings at shows?”) and comparing other

information divulged in the interview, such as crowd behavior, with my field notes on effervescent moments at summer music festivals. References of being “transported” by either the music or atmosphere, experiencing an unexpected intense emotional moment, or experiencing external “energy” were common reflections of those who had effervescent experiences. Here are quotations that typify effervescent experiences:

“The whole time I was on cloud nine. Everyone knew the lyrics to his songs so you could feel the hype and energy in the crowd. A few people were fainting... there’s a connection that people make with these artists, and they get so excited and worked up and the energy from the excitement...it’s like something happens within our body to make us react a certain way, it’s like our senses are all on alert. It’s like you come home from work and there’s a man standing in your living room with a gun pointed at you--it’s immediate, your whole entire body, you feel me? It’s the intensity you feel when you’re about to get laid by somebody that you’ve been after for a long time and you’ve just been wanting them and then the moment presents itself where you’re going to get intimate with them, you know how the intensity inside you--your heart is going like a million miles an hour---it’s that same intensity and I felt that. I can still feel it and it was three or four years ago. I even had that going in me when I was at that concert with Michael and Janet Jackson.”

--Quinton, Ann Arbor, describing an Eminem, Missy Eliot, and 50 Cent concert at Ford Field [Detroit]

“That was BIG, I remember being... almost like hot, heated up or something from my heart. My face felt the warmth of people. It was Hawaii and it was warm outside, but it was different, it was a high energy in my body, almost like I feel when I have too much caffeine or something.”

--Trish, Omaha

“I was surprised I was having such an intense experience, but it was very much like an experience of being outside of myself, like the rest of the world was like closing off, not mattering. It was very much feeling the energy of being there and everyone else’s energy, it was a very positive sort of feeling of connection. This sounds stupid, but I distinctly remember being there and feeling that good and being like, ‘yeah, everything is going to be okay’. That kind of feeling, that if this is something you can hold on to in other areas of your life, just like remembering that feeling.” --Sarah, Ann Arbor

“It was just...I was through the roof, I can’t explain it to you, it was better than any high you can imagine because in New Orleans I feel like I have this powerful ability to make things happen and, I don’t feel like I don’t have this ability in other places, but in New Orleans I just feel so plugged into it, I feed off it and it energizes me.”

– Jennifer, Ann Arbor

Last of all, one interviewee’s data was not included in this table because it was difficult to classify for effervescence. In his interview he indicated that he frequently felt strong “other-worldly” feelings in group settings at concerts, acknowledging that these feelings fell outside of his normal consciousness. At the same time, he described these feelings specifically as being very meditative and internally focused, whereas Durkheim describes collective effervescence as a frenzied state ([Fields]: 424; [Swain], 247). Given the duality of his account, I can neither confirm nor deny that he has experienced collective effervescence in a concert atmosphere.

Findings--“Pilgrims Among the Faithful”

Since all of the participants in this study were already frequent concert-goers before being interviewed, it is fair to label the population of this study *The Faithful*: persons who regularly gather at concerts with defined intentions and rationales. What the data in this table suggests is there are definitive differences between the groups of *The Faithful* who have and have not experienced high feelings of collective effervescence at concerts.

The Faithful who have not experienced effervescence nevertheless put a lot of time and effort into attending concerts. On average, they attend 4 shows per month,

would be willing to pay \$157.50 for a ticket, and would be willing to travel 581.3 miles to see a show. Exactly one-half of them acknowledge using drugs in concert settings. They are likely to have low feelings of spirituality at concerts, but they do possess a very strong feeling of community at concerts.

When *The Faithful* do experience collective effervescence at a show, they undergo significant changes in their behavior and attitudes towards concerts. These individuals show significantly more investment in the amount of time and money they dedicate to going to shows than other *Faithful*. Although they attend the same number of shows, those who have had collective effervescent experiences are willing to spend approximately 33% more money on tickets, are almost six times more likely to travel farther than fifty miles to see a show, and, on average, have traveled much farther to see a single show. Despite the fact that *The Faithful* already possess strong feelings of community at concerts, these individuals are even more likely to experience feelings of community at concerts and are significantly more likely to experience feelings of high spirituality. Additionally, and perhaps surprisingly, these individuals as a group have a lower rate of drug use at shows. For these reasons, I call this group *The Pilgrims*¹⁰: people who seem to be questing for certain experiences. This person states as his reason for attending live music events:

¹⁰ As Paul Basu argues in “Route Metaphors of ‘Roots-Tourism’: The Scottish Highland Diaspora,” (2004) long distance roots-tourism and pilgrimage have many characteristics in common. Travelers journey from their normal destination to one that is believed to embody or hold ideals of importance; travelers collect souvenirs or relics believed to contain pieces of the sacred substance to bring back with them; and travelers “leave behind the ‘ordinary’ world of their diasporic homes and enter a ‘liminal’ zone where they often report supernatural occurrences and altered states of mind” (167-168). While ethnic identity and diasporic feelings are usually not the reason for traveling long distances to see concerts, I would argue the symbolic importance destinations in the minds of the concert-goers, the collecting of souvenirs and relics (e.g., concert tickets, shirts, and other merchandise) and the liminal status of concert atmospheres qualify many concert-goers’ travels as secular pilgrimages.

“Yeah, that’s what I want, that’s what I’m there for. It’s definitely other-worldly, it’s something that is rare...it’s funny because it’s a little treasure that doesn’t happen, you know it happens once out of...I mean the times where I’m actually at a show where I’m really transported and I feel like I’m not even a human, my body, my survival, my basic instincts, they don’t feel relevant to me, and those moments of transcendence like happen maybe once to five times a year, it’s like a rare thing, but when it happens, it’s enough that you will try 100,000 more times ‘til it happens again.”
–Doug, Ann Arbor

Based on this summary table and the raw data collected during interviews, the following four generalizations can be made about *The Pilgrims*:

1) Pilgrims Are More Spiritual

Pilgrims more often find concert experiences to be a source of spiritual rejuvenation in their lives:

“Community is definitely one of the largest driving forces on it and being able to have a positive influence on what’s going on, but I also go for my own spiritual growth. I mean this is kind of like my church I guess, in some aspects, this is where I go to feel the most alive a lot of times.”
--Steve, Omaha

[Question]: Would you associate the word “spiritual” with the intense emotional feeling of that moment?

[Answer]: Yeah, absolutely. I felt like I was having, that moment and then there were a couple others [sic] that week with music that made me feel like I was having a born-again Christian experience for somebody with a Jewish last name who is not a Christian. But from what I’ve seen people describe as, “o my God, I was born again,” that’s what I felt like was happening to me except that it had nothing to do with Jesus.

[Question]: Would renewal be a good word? Or rejuvenated?

[Answer]: Definitely, definitely...re-something, because I feel like it’s been there, it was something that I had as a kid. The word recognize, if you break it down to re- cognize-, cognize is “to be come aware,” so to re-become-aware, to become aware again of something you already were aware of, is when you recognize something...and I felt like I was back, I felt “2.0.” So in that moment I felt fearless, I felt powerful, respectful of

others and, I don't know...it's this weird thing where like empowerment is for everybody. So when I say I felt powerful...I did, I felt fucking powerful as shit, you know, but it was like I was this fireball for good, as opposed to evil.
-- Luke, Ann Arbor

2) Pilgrims Tend to be More Community-Oriented

Through their experiences *The Pilgrims* tend to become less egoistic and either a) feel they need to be more active participants in their community or b) actually become more active participants in their community.

“There is a sense of community and responsibility too, I remember being at Deer Creek [Indiana] and some knuckle-head smashed a big whiskey bottle in the area where people were walking and I started picking up some of the glass and all of a sudden I had 10 other people helping me pick up the glass because you didn't want some spinner¹¹ or someone to cut up their foot”.
–Brett, Ann Arbor

“I definitely feel involved with the Omaha music community. I try to actively promote local bands as much as I can, have other people to come out to those shows. I'm not currently in a band, but I have been before, so being a part of that definitely adds to helping. So bringing people out, bring people together.”

[Question]: Does being involved in the music community help you identify with the Omaha community at-large?

[Answer]: I think so because I think the music community is becoming bigger and bigger every day and people are starting to see how they can help out the greater community as opposed to just the small aspect there. Yeah, more so every day I think I start to become more involved in the community as a whole because I'm starting to see things as a whole rather than an ego-centric, centralized view. I wouldn't say that I was a few

¹¹ A spinner is member of the Unlimited Devotion Family, a particular sub-group of Grateful Dead fans which developed its own religious interpretation of the band's music and followed the group devotionally for years. They were known for dancing throughout the entire show by spinning in times with the music, which is where the name originates. [See Hartley, 2000]

years ago in the Omaha community, but it has started to become more so, I'd say.

--Larry, Omaha

“The word ‘family’ is really, can be implied to certain bands, and I think that’s why I spent the better part of two years of my life trying to see String Cheese as much as I could because those people took care of me so well. The phrase I’ve heard a thousand times is, “The String Cheese kid will take his shirt off his back and give it to all the Sound Tribe kids who will sell it for twenty bucks,” which I think is a fair analogy...I went to SCI for the music, but I went more for the community for sure because those are like the best people in my life, who will really go out of their way to help you out, whatever you need. And so I like to bring that back from these trips and try to introduce it into my own community, whether it’s as simple as waving to people when I walk down campus or when I’m driving. It extends into all areas of my life.”

--Steve, Omaha

3) Pilgrims Tend to Have Expanded Boundaries/Conceptions of Community

Through their experiences and interactions with other *Faithful* at concerts, *The Pilgrims* tend to have more flexible definitions of where they can find community and expanded notions of how they interact with others.

[Question]: How do you feel the audience played into your experience of music?

[Answer]: Well it was like having friends all over the country, you’d know where people were based at but then you’d see people in Red Rocks [Colorado] or something and they were from New Jersey and say, “hey, what are you doing here?” and that was part of the fun, is seeing old friends down the road. Matter of fact, Tuesday I got a call from a guy who used to play guitar in a Dead cover band that started in Detroit and is still going in Southeast Michigan and he’s the 15-year vice-president of recruiting for Dow Chemical. So he was out east and we ran into each other out at a Furtherfest show a few years back and we hadn’t seen each other for a long time, so it was the family, the extended family.”

--Brett, Ann Arbor

“I think that the lessons I’ve learned on the whole from these experiences have definitely changed how I look at my life. It changes the way that I

talk to people when I meet them now, I think that it really helped me in getting away from this sense that I had to pre-judge people and try to figure out just by looking at somebody that I could pin-point what they were into and who they were as a person. It just really taught me that there are good things about everybody in the world and that you just have to talk with them about it to figure it out. You're going to find common ground with anyone you're going to talk to. It made me a more open person, a more accepting person. It opened my eyes to a lot of new learning that I don't think I would have found in any other place."

--Paul, Omaha

"It's crazy, you go away from one of those concerts or festivals and it puts you in a whole different mind set of how you should go treat other people and how you get along with other people as well. You're just kind of in a state of bliss for weeks afterwards, and trying to hold on to that is definitely the goal for me. To emulate how people act towards each other at festival experiences, which is an ideal way for everyday life."

--Larry, Omaha

4) Pilgrims Use Fewer Drugs

Due to their experiences of collective effervescence, *The Pilgrims* are less likely than other members of *The Faithful* to use drugs.

[Question]: How does it feel to experience these intense emotional moments as a performer?

[Answer]: When I'm being me on stage, I feel so full alive, I feel so powerful, I feel really respectful, again. I feel humbled, I feel lucky, I feel joyous beyond...I feel high as hell...and I never do when I'm not sober and playing. I never feel high playing music when I'm actually high on drugs. Yet, I haven't felt that yet, sometimes it's fun. In the last year, I've hardly played under the influence of even one beer prior to a performance, I just find that the high is much more intense when I am sober...and I'm kind of an addict of that feeling, so I'd rather get off harder, which means I'm sober, which is funny. It does feel like a drug kind of, to get that rush from performing, but it feels very like...it feels very community, it feels very bringing everybody together and like sharing, it feels like sharing.

--Luke, Ann Arbor

[Question]: Have you ever experienced that sensation at a live music event while not on drugs?

[Answer]: Yes, for sure. I guess in that aspect it wouldn't have to be for that, but I do remember going to a few shows specifically in mind saying that I'm not going to take anything or do anything before hand and just experience it how it is. And I still got really close to the same experience and had an amazing time still, I think a lot of that was feeding off the energy of other people and the experience that they're having too, so when you can tap into that positive energy aspect that everyone else is giving off, it's really easy to feel that way too. It's a great thing, you definitely don't need drugs to enjoy that music and that experience.

--Larry, Omaha

“Definitely happy, euphoric happy, but I think the “otherworldly” experiences would be drug induced from what I've heard from my friends, but definitely the euphoric and happy. So nice, so fun, not all the time, but it's definitely something you want to have happen again and it's definitely a driving force for seeing the band again.”

--Kathryn, Ann Arbor

Summary

The patterns that distinguish *The Pilgrims* from others among *The Faithful* are consistent with Durkheim's theory about the effects of collective effervescence on religious bodies. Just as in religion, where collective effervescence serves as a generative source of social cohesion between group members by making those who experience its physical and mental effects more community oriented, collective effervescence serves the social functions of helping concert-goers attain spiritual rejuvenation; reduce their hedonistic behavior; and focus additional attention on their communities, however they may be defined.

CONCLUSIONS

Implications for Theory

To the untrained eye, contemporary rock concerts and festivals may appear to be nothing more than drug-infested wastelands where hedonism and self-absorption are the norms. However, when one looks beneath the surface of concert atmospheres using the sociological perspective, one can see there is something going on at live music events, something that is having a positive impact on our social world. Beyond having fun and enjoying the cultural and symbolic meanings of music, people who experience “collective effervescence” at concerts become less ego-centered and more community-oriented, feeling a greater desire to actively engage in the shaping of their communities. This reaction by concert-goers to collective effervescence parallels Durkheim’s description of collective effervescence in religious settings, which raises the question: Are concerts fulfilling the same social functions as religion for some concert-goers? This may seem to be an incredible proposition at first glance, but a look at emerging trends in religious practice gives credence to asking this question.

According to the *2008 American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS)*, which analyzed data collected from 54,000 interviews, even with population growth and immigration adding nearly 50 million more adults, almost all religious denominations in America have experienced a decline in membership since the first ARIS data was released in 1990. The ARIS also indicates that the number of Americans who identify as having no religious affiliation has doubled from 8% in 1990, the year the survey began, to 15%: roughly 34 million Americans (Kosmin and Keysar). This number is confirmed by the *2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*, which found that 16% of the adult

population identifies as being unaffiliated with an organized religion, and 79% of persons who identified with this group reported having been raised in a religion during their childhood (“Faith in Flux: Changes in Religious Affiliation in the US,” Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life, 4/27/09). Given this decline in religious attendance and the rise of atheism in the U.S. population, the results of this research study, albeit quite limited, may suggest that certain sections of society are having their need for social cohesion and spiritual rejuvenation met by the collective effervescence they experience in concert atmospheres. Even this might not be the whole story since concert atmospheres are only one of several social arenas that can generate collective effervescence on a frequent basis. Other arenas such as sporting events and large-scale political activities, (e.g., the Million Man March, Barack Obama’s Presidential Inauguration, and the Taxpayer March on Washington [September, 12th 2009]), might also be helping various segments of society fulfill their need for social cohesion and spiritual rejuvenation.

If the hypothetical trend of Americans increasingly finding their need for spiritual rejuvenation and social cohesion through secular sources correlates to the historical trend of Americans leaving religion in greater numbers, then it is most likely to have started in the last third of the 20th century. The years surrounding 1970 were identified by social researchers, most notably Robert Bellah in *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (1975), as a period of large-scale disillusionment with religion in America. Furthermore, this period is defined by many significant parallel cultural developments in politics (e.g., the civil rights, free speech, anti-war, environmental and women’s rights movements), music (e.g., the start of the *Grateful Dead* and the Summer of Love), and even sports (e.g., the beginning of the Super Bowl and other mass televised

sporting events). With such a dynamic, political, social and cultural environment, the years surrounding 1970 serve as a highly-probable marker for the displacement of collective effervescence from predominately religious to other secular contexts in American life.

It should be noted, however, that contrary to the general trends in American religious attitudes some religious groups are growing significantly in attendant population, with 45% of American Christians now identifying as “Born Again or Evangelical,” for example (Kosmin and Keysar, 9). These groups tend to have more congregant agency in their services (i.e. congregants have a bigger role to play in leading the service), which encourages more emotional investment and active participation by congregants. This, in turn, likely means collective effervescence plays a more pivotal role in these groups’ religious services than the religious services of mainline American denominations. Thus, a more refined hypothesis might be that since the 1970’s, collective effervescence in American society has been displaced from mainline religious denominations to non-religious activities and religious sects characterized by a high degree of congregant agency and emotional expression.

Ideas for Further Research

Due to the limited sample size of this research project, any future research will need to survey a much larger sample group so that true statistical analysis can be applied to the raw data to find statistically significant patterns and trends among frequent concert-goers. If I were to perform such research with ample funding, I would repeat my qualitative interview approach with a larger sample group and create a survey to

administer to three specific sets of concert-goers. The first set would be concert-goers at randomly selected small venues (defined as having a capacity between 30 to 500 people) in four different geographic regions across North America. The second set would be concert-goers at randomly selected large venues (capacity: 1000+) in the same geographic regions. The third set would be concert-goers specifically at any of the following bands' concerts: *Phish*, *The Dead* or any of their derivatives, and *Widespread Panic*. These bands have proven followings¹² and many of the attendees would be quite familiar with the subject material in the survey, which would likely give greater validity to the survey results. As a whole, this research design would allow me to investigate the following variables and their roles in generating collective effervescence in concert atmospheres: crowd size, geographic area, and the presence of an established fan-based community.

An alternative quantitative research design would consist of distributing remote radio devices to either a certain percentage of attendees in different sections of the concert venue or a percentage of the total attendee populations. These devices would have a clicker button for participants to press every time they felt they were experiencing any of the following: an unexpected intense emotional moment, an other-worldly feeling, or extreme euphoria. Responses would be recorded on a digital time-plot graph synchronized to the live recording of the concert so that a research team would be able to see any of the following: 1) the personal concert experience of each participant, 2) the number of effervescent moments in specific seating sections and their specific occurrence times, and 3) the number of effervescent moments happening at specific times in the

¹² People who follow the band from town to town during the course of their tours for either extended periods or the entirety of the tour.

entire concert population. Such data could potentially illustrate group emotion and its contagious qualities in a revolutionary way and help shed light on the causes of collective effervescence: Is it the music, the surrounding crowd, or both?

An alternative research focus could be exploring collective effervescence in the social atmospheres of political and sporting events respectively, in addition to concert atmospheres, probing if there is a modern trend of social cohesion occurring more frequently in these various social arenas than in the past. This could be realized using two different approaches. The first would be to use a historical sociology methodology and examine primary and secondary documents from these various social arenas over the last 40 years. The second would be to conduct retrospective interviews with people in different age cohorts, which would allow one to document shifts in religious attitudes or reliance on collective effervescence in non-religious social atmospheres for social cohesion over the last 40 years. If the size of the study were large enough, it would even be possible to determine which effervescence-generating social atmospheres (e.g., concerts, sports, political events), if any, have been more influential in certain periods for helping people fulfill their needs for spiritual fulfillment and social cohesion, and compare these trends with corresponding periods in religion. The findings of such a study might help us better understand the role of collective effervescence in our society today and its implications for our collective future.

Closing Thoughts from a Pilgrim

In the process of undertaking this research project, I have come to make sense of my own *kairos* experience in Minnesota and learn a good deal about myself as a *Pilgrim*

searching for effervescent experiences with live music. Although its emotional saliency has faded and most of the moment-to-moment details of the experience have become blurred, I am forever motivated by my original *kairos* experience to keep exploring the infinite possibilities of music and celebrate the rejuvenating energy it brings to life. I know now that there are others like me, people of different ages and backgrounds who also strive to experience, to be humbled by, and to joyfully participate in the expression of the cultural and social forces that lie within all of us as human beings.

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TABLES AND FIGURES

Fig 1. Patterns Among Concert Goers who Had and Had Not Experienced Collective Effervescence.

	Low Effervescence	High Effervescence
Age	30.2	25.7
Drug Use At Shows	50%	33%
High Community	66.70%	89%
Low Community	33.30%	11%
High Spirituality	16.70%	72.20%
Low Spirituality	83%	28%
Shows Attended Per Month	4	4.42
Hypothetical Maximum Ticket Price	\$157.50	\$210.63
Maximum Miles Traveled for a Show	581.3	712.1
# of Times Traveled 50+ Miles for a Show	1.6	9.4
	N=6	N=18

(See next page for spreadsheet with the raw data from which this table was derived)

Subject #	Age	Concert Per Month	Hypothetical Max. Ticket Price	Max. Miles Traveled	# of Times Traveling over 50 miles per year	Low Spirit	High Spirit	Low Comm	High Comm	Drug use (Y/N)
18 (Did not fit either classification)	48	12	1000	3100	20		x		x	Yes
Low Effervescence										
12	20	1	200	833	2	x		X		Yes
14	51	1	25	50	0	x			x	Yes
15	19	4	40	180	2	x			x	No
21	48	4	100	485	1	x			x	No
23	21	2	500	280	3	x		x		No
4	22	12	80	1660	n/a		x		x	Yes
Average N=6	30.166667	4	157.5	581.33333	1.6	5		1 2	4	50%
High Effervescence										
1	21	3.5	600	1000	15		x		X	Yes
2	21	3	20	450	11		x		X	No
3	21	4	500	1000	n/a		x		X	Yes
5	23	3	200	1660	10		x		X	Yes
6	22	4	600	662	10		x		X	Yes
7	21	6	100	140	3		x		X	No
8	34	2	75	612	5	x			X	No
9	19	4	150	614	3		x		X	No
10	36	2	250	400	4	x			X	Yes
11	24	1	n/a	n/a	n/a		x		X	No
13	23	16	200	365	12		x		X	No
16	35	4	150	1010	8		x	X		No
17	23	16	150	180	30		x		X	No
19	19	3	100	245	2	x			X	No
20	21	2	75	55	n/a		x		X	No
22	23	2	100	2800	n/a		x	X		No
24	22	3	100	200	n/a		x		X	Yes
25	56	1	n/a	n/a	n/a		x		X	No
Average N= 18	25.777778	4.4166667	210.625	712.0625	9.4166667		5	13 2	16	33%

APPENDIX A

Interview Script

“A Durkheimian Revival? Collective Effervescence in Concert Atmospheres.”

Jeffrey May

Senior Honors Thesis – Winter 2010

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- 1) Basic Information:
 - Sex:
 - Ethnicity:
 - Age:
 - Marital Status:
 - Education:
- 2) Why do you attend live music?
- 3) How often (With what frequency) do you attend live music events?
- 4) Do you exclusively attend live music events of specific genres?
 - If so, which genres and why?
- 5) What is the highest amount of money you would hypothetically pay to see a performance?
- 6) What is the maximum distance you have traveled to see a performance?
- 7) How many times have you left your area of residence to see a band or musical performing artist (more than 50 miles)?
 - Have you ever seen a performing artist multiple times before returning to your area of residence?
- 8) Do you make audio recordings (when allowed) of the shows you attend?
- 9) Do you buy or download recordings of the concerts you have attended?
 - Do these recordings have meaning to you?

10) Have you ever experienced euphoric/other-worldly feelings at a show?

- If so, at what show(s) did you experience it and what were the conditions surrounding it?
 - i. How large was the audience?
 1. Describe the movement/behavior of the audience:
 - ii. Describe the set-up of the venue:
 - iii. Was the audience seated or standing?
 - iv. Where people free to move about or confined in sections?
 - v. Did the artist use any auxiliary equipment to enhance their performance (lights, video screens, costumes)?
- In your own words, describe your experience(s):
- What effect did the crowd have on your experience of the concert?
- Would you associate the word “spiritual” with this experience?
- Do you feel this experience has had a short-term, long-term or no impact on your life?

- 11) Have you ever followed a band or a musical performing artist to multiple shows in multiple cities during the same tour?
- 12) Based on your experience at live music events, what percentage of patrons do you think consume alcohol at the events? A rough estimation will be accepted
- Does it vary by genre?
- 13) Have you ever seen or known other patrons to take illegal drugs at live music events?
- If so, please specify which drugs/substances:
 - i. Do you know of any rationales for why some patrons take these specific substances?
- 14) What is your ideal concert setting?
- 15) Do you feel particular genres of music promote certain:
- Dress/Styles?
 - Behaviors:
 - Drug use:
- 16) Do any of your friends attend live music events with you?
- Have you ever met any of your friends through a live music event?
 - How important is attending live music events for participating in your social network?
 - Please describe the makeup of your group of friends who attend shows (without giving names):
 - i. How many people make up the group?
 - ii. How many are women?

- iii. How many are men?
- iv. Is everyone roughly the same age (give or take 3 years)?
 1. If not, please give a rough range of ages:
- v. In what proximity do you live near each other?

17) How do you define community?

- Does attending live music help you identify with your community?

18) This question has already been asked, but I am restating it to see if this interview has had an impact on your response: Why do you attend live music events?

APPENDIX B

What's it like to feel collective effervescence?

The following is a collection of subjective accounts of collective effervescence taken from the interview transcripts that were not featured in the main thesis manuscript.

“We were standing there, and one dude runs up to the fence, climbs up and jumps over the fence. Right after that, there was a group of 30-40 of us and we sort of said “what are we waiting for?”

[Question]: Was there a specific person who said that or a group undercurrent?

[Answer]: It started with one person, but the group under current was there the whole time. There was one guy who yelled, “what are we waiting for?” but I think he was yelling that to his immediate friends, but even as he was yelling other people were yelling. It was like a rolling snowball or something, a snowball effect, it was pretty cool. We jumped over the fence.

[Question]: From your perspective, when you were there, did you feel sort of empowered when you saw other people doing it with you?

[Answer]: YES, there was a very warm feeling that shot up my spine, there was a sense of team work and community, something that we all felt strongly about. You know there were so many of us that security had a very difficult time dealing with it.

--Kevin, Omaha

I think that it was pure and total happiness, I was not thinking about anything else, it was the most in-the-moment experience I've ever had because I feel it's very hard to ever be in the moment and at that crowd I felt like I was in the moment, almost as if there was nothing else around me, it was independent of anything, very fun, very happy, very fun.

--Sue, Ann Arbor

Yeah, definitely. Um, I wouldn't say those have always happened at what I would call a show, but certainly at musical performances or like...I wouldn't call church a show but being in a church environment can produce that as well, when there's a lot of heightened awareness towards seeking a deeper connection with the music or a connection from a God-source or a greater spiritual power. When people show up to receive that it's contagious. It can be contagious, it can be in the air and you can feel it. I don't know if that's because some people perceive that as God or a higher power coming to them...I don't know if calling it “God” is the right word, but when people show up with that intention of feeling a certain way it does create a collective palpable buzz in the air, and I have had the good fortune of playing at a church every Sunday for a year---and then I had a year off and now I'm back again---and it's really palpable at church, people come to that kind of thing so it happens – Luke, Ann Arbor

It also feels very sexual at times, like there are times where I feel like I've been just as intimate with an entire group of people as I have been with a sexual partner, or even more so. And therefore, I feel sometimes like I've had musical sex with people I've played with, which might sound weird to say but I don't mean it that like I fantasize about fucking the people I'm on stage with....I AM fucking the people I'm on stage with in the best way...and my guitar, and the whole crowd, and it's joyous and its rejuvenating in the way that sex can be rejuvenating. I think part of the reason that it's true is that creation, the fire shakra, is sexual energy and creative energy because sexual energy *is* the creative energy, sex creates offspring. So like being a creator of music in front of people feels very sexual to me, groove feels very sexual to me in that it feels very intimate and rejuvenating like sex does feel when it's the real deal. – Luke, Ann Arbor