

# **Towards a New Conceptual Framework for Attendee Engagement in Small Popular Music Venues**

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## **Preface**

**ABSTRACT:** This research seeks to develop a conceptual framework for understanding the psychological and social processes of engagement for attendees of small, popular music venues. An extensive review of literature is undertaken, exploring attendee engagement and peak and flow experience, social capital, place attachment, music scenes, and spatial studies. Framed within the construct of a research capstone, two University of Oregon courses also guided this project: AAA 510 Collaborative Futures, and MUE 547 Psychology of Music. The conceptual framework resulting from this inquiry suggests that it is the transient nature of the live concert experience, as well as potential for flow and peak experience facilitated by live music's time and space-shifting properties, that crystallizes personal feelings and social interactions into a liminal space within the venue. Further, music venue attendee place attachment is wrought from repetitive positive personal and social experiences within the venue. Recommendations for further study include field research exploring place attachment in music venues, social influences on musically induced peak experience, and social bridging within music venues.

**KEYWORDS:** music venues, attendee engagement, flow, peak experience, social capital, scenes, place attachment

Research Questions:

The research questions that inspire and guide this inquiry are as follows.

**1) How do a live concert attendee's individual and social experiences converge to create meaningful engagement within a small, popular music venue?**

**2) How is space socially produced within a small, popular music venue?**

Sub-questions:

- Can a live music venue attendee form place attachment to a music venue?
- Can peak experience play a role in place attachment?
- Can participatory programming play a role in place attachment?
- How do music "scenes" form around music venues?

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## **Section 1: Introduction to the Study**

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this capstone is to create a conceptual framework for psychological and social processes of attendee engagement in small, popular music venues. Systematically reviewing the myriad factors that promote powerful live music experiences for attendees on both the individual and social levels, I propose a new way of understanding engagement within these venues. Through this framework, music venue administrators will be afforded a window into the way in which attendees make meaning out of their live music experiences. Combining perspectives from the fields of psychology, musicology, sociology, the psychology of music, and spatial studies, this framework provides one way to understand, and ultimately encourage, music venue attendee loyalty.

### **Problem Statement**

Performing arts centers in the United States typically contract with local performing arts groups (referred to as “resident” companies) in order to provide season-long programming to their constituents. In this model, the performing arts centers usually offer season ticket subscriptions, which results in audience member consistency, and therefore, loyalty. In contrast, popular music venues typically operate without seasons. Fans come to discrete concerts irregularly and unpredictably, usually out of a desire to see a particular band or musician perform live. Little academic research has explored the experience of concert attendees in popular music venues. These venues are also absent from discussions of performing arts audience development, although such venues are important sites for community building, identity formation, and

transcendent affective experience. Furthermore, performing arts center managers routinely consider the experience of audience members, whereas popular music venue booking staff is primarily focused on booking shows that will sell well. Although the business models between most music venues and performing arts centers differ substantially, it is possible for music venues to become more attendee-centric in their approach to programming.

Academics in the field of marketing have attempted to understand the impact of space and other environmental stimuli on the attendees' experience within performing arts venues (Mencarelli, 2008; Mencarelli & Puhl, 2006; Radbourne, Johanson, Glow & White, 2009), and some popular music studies scholars have sought to understand the social elements that converge to create "scenes" within and around popular music venues (Cohen, 1999; Peterson & Bennett, 2004; Gallan, 2012; Bennett, 1997). Additionally, much research has investigated the psychological effects of listening to music (Wrigley & Emmerson, 2013; Lowis, 1998; Lamont, 2012; Lamont, 2009; Egermann, Sutherland, Grewe, Nagel, Kopiez, & Altenmüller, 2011; Miller & Strongman, 2002; Paul, 2009). However, the effects of psychological phenomena such as peak experience and flow on attendee engagement within music venues have not been studied. This research takes steps towards filling this gap in scholarship while indirectly addressing inconsistency in popular music venue attendance. The present inquiry consists of an extensive literature review guided by coursework in two capstone classes at the University of Oregon, building on existing scholarship from the fields of psychology, musicology, sociology, the psychology of music, and spatial studies. Preliminary strategies that promote attendee engagement within and place attachment to small, popular music venues are identified, and music venue administrators are provided with tools to help create audience loyalty by fostering participant engagement.

### **Researcher's Role**

My personal bias towards this topic includes a belief that powerful musical experiences can be personally and socially transformative. Additionally, I am of the opinion that popular music venues do themselves a disservice by not consciously working to cultivate deep relationships with their attendees, as performing arts centers often do. As a hopeful future administrator of a community-minded music venue, this research is in part motivated by my desire to develop tools for cultivation of audience loyalty.

This inquiry is also grounded in my personal experience with going to live music concerts for twenty years, mainly in small, popular music venues. My own experience with concerts tends towards music of the independent rock, pop, hip-hop, and experimental genres. Frequently, these solo musicians and bands have been on the rosters of smaller record labels. As such, they have toured the small rock club circuit. These clubs have typically housed full bars, and have been standing room only or with limited seating. This investigation is spurred by my own powerful experiences in these venues, arising from a desire to encourage managers to capitalize on the potential community- and spirituality-building aspects of their spaces.

### **Research Design and Conceptual Framework**

This research was guided by construct of place attachment, a concept from the field of environmental psychology. Place attachment is an outgrowth of attachment theory, a psychological theory that deals with the ways in which humans develop relationships with one another. In 1974, Yi-Fu Tuan was among the first to examine the ways in which people attach meaning to place (Manzo & Perkins, 2006), arguing that an individual's sense of place is both an innate reaction to their surroundings and is created by the culture in which they live (Hayden,



1995). Altman and Low (1992) coined the term place attachment several decades later, describing it as “an affective bond between people and place” (Manzo & Perkins, 2006, p. 337). Place attachment to music venues can be analyzed through two basic perspectives: the group experience (studies of the social aspects of music such as musical subcultures and scenes, participatory musical performance, rhythmic entrainment, and ritual); and the personal experience (studies of phenomena such as peak experience, flow, and strong emotions). Further theoretical grounding can be explored by applying spatial relations theory (Lefebvre, 1991), a useful tool to aid in the understanding of building place attachment to a musical venue.

In attempting to answer the question, **How do a live concert attendee’s individual and social experiences converge to create meaningful engagement within a small, popular music venue?**, an extensive literature review has been conducted, with two capstone courses providing additional perspectives. Following the structure of grounded theory, the reasoning presented is inductive. That is, theory emerged from collected data in the form of moments of insight, sprung from connections made between major concept areas. A conceptual framework of processes of engagement for music venue attendees resulted from this theory generation, and recommendations for future application in the field stem from this framework accordingly.

Because this study does not involve field data, I have not studied a specific group of individuals at single or multiple points in time. Instead, the study seeks to illuminate the many factors that contribute to attendee engagement within a music venue, ultimately arriving at broader implications for music venue administrators. The intended audience of this study includes such administrators currently working in the field, as well as scholars of the psychology and sociology of music and arts administration.

The strategy of inquiry employed for this study is triangulation of data. The multiple sources of data are as follows: 1) a review of literature relating to social and psychological aspects of live concert attendance, spatial studies, and place attachment; 2) coursework and literature sourced from the University of Oregon class MUE 547 Psychology of Music; and 3) coursework and literature sourced from the University of Oregon class AAA 510 Collaborative Futures.

Coursework in MUE 547 Psychology of Music allowed me to place the experience of live music within the frameworks of perception and cognitive neuroscience. While I mainly focus on the experience of live music as a social one in this investigation, multiple behavioral and neuroscientific factors do contribute to the perception and cognition of melody, rhythm, and structure. Within this perspective, such factors are thought to be universal or innate to all individuals. Such an understanding was foundational in allowing me to properly situate and interrogate those aspects of live music listening that *are* variable, such as sense of belonging within a music venue, scene membership, and during-concert connection with the performer(s).

Through coursework in AAA 510 Collaborative Futures, I came to understand the concept of space in a new way. An interdisciplinary effort co-taught by five department heads at the University of Oregon (Architecture, History of Art and Architecture, Art, Landscape Architecture, and Public Planning, Policy, and Management), the class was built around the theme of “democratic space.” Adopting a wide-angle perspective of space, I was able to think about music venues as more than physical locations where individuals gather to watch live performances. The theme I returned to throughout the class was the idea of a dichotomous yet fluid relationship between private/internal/personal and public/external/social. Though I initially undertook my research with the idea that the two spheres could be conceptually separated, I

came to realize that this stark dualism is inaccurate in describing what people experience within music venues, or within any social space.

In the tradition of several specific scholars, I offer a novel way to understand music venue attendance through synthesis of this material. Manzo and Perkins (2006) “drew connections between environmental and community psychology literature on place attachment and meaning with the theory, research, and practice of community participation and planning,” and used this inquiry across disciplines to “develop a framework for understanding the psychological dimensions of people’s interactions with community” (p. 335). Similarly, Shelemay’s (2011) work “sets forth points of possible intersection with scholarship in the social sciences and sciences and raises questions that could lead to broader conversations on a subject quite central to music scholarship that tends to be relegated to the background” (pp. 350-351). It is in a similar vein that this study is undertaken, which bridges multiple areas of literature to offer a new approach to thinking about engagement in music venues.

### **Methodological Paradigm**

Operating from a post-positivist perspective, the methodological paradigm from which this research springs is phenomenological. Although I have not conducted field research in a true phenomenological fashion, the paradigm’s emphasis on lived experience resonates with the aims of the present inquiry. Creswell (2014) states, “Phenomenological research is a design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants” (p. 14). A major component of this psychologically oriented research seeks to illuminate the highly subjective and personal experience of a music venue attendee. Particularly, the literature surrounding peak experience

and strong emotions related to music relies heavily on the self-report of participants' experiences. Further underscoring this predilection towards understanding the lived experience of music venue attendees, the heart of participatory performance design, one area of study for this research, is discovering what sparks wonder, curiosity, and learning in a participant. Finally, this inquiry seeks to understand the live music audience member's experience, nearly to the point of exclusion of the music venue administrator's perspective. O'Leary (2010) refers to this type of research lens as the "recipient perspective" rather than the "provider perspective" (p. 139).

This research is also undertaken within the construct of grounded theory. O'Leary (2010) characterizes grounded theory as "flexible, iterative, and emergent" (p. 101). The conceptual framework was inductively built by continuously revisiting the interrelations between the main concept areas. As new ideas emerged, I refined the structure of this framework, rather than seeking only the data that supported my original research questions.

### **Definitions and Delimitations**

This inquiry was undertaken with a particular type of venue in mind: small (capacity under 2000), United States popular music venues. "Popular music" is defined as musical genres having wide appeal, such as electronic, hip-hop, rap, rock, indie rock, and r and b. Likewise, the audience members to whom this study repeatedly refers are those that frequent establishments of this nature. The literature chosen for review was selected based on its theoretical implications for this specific inquiry, rather than literature delimited to particular groups of people, music genres, or types of musical establishments.

In seeking to determine the factors that converge to create attendee engagement within a small, popular music venue, I have investigated literature from multiple disciplines. I consider

this literature to represent the most salient areas of theory as related to the success of a small, popular music venue. By “success,” I mean a venue where attendees feel at home, and optimally, have meaningful, emotional experiences engendered by the live musical performance. I have chosen not to look at economic or music industry-related factors that influence the more general aspects of music venue longevity such as financial concerns, while acknowledging that such factors are very important. In addition, while musical preference is a notable aspect of attendee enjoyment (Wheeler, 1985; Miller & Strongman, 2002), I have largely omitted such discussion in this area. Instead, I have sought to look at other psychological and social processes of attendee engagement within a venue, and some of the spatial characteristics of venues that contribute to these processes.

### **Limitations**

The purpose for this study is to create a conceptual framework that lays the groundwork for future applied field research. The research strategy is that of a capstone project, and data comes from coursework and existing published research. Because I did not conduct interviews, case studies, or observation in service of this research, it is not possible to extrapolate theory from raw data. With the acknowledgment that field research would possibly be a more effective way to study the experiences of live music concert attendees, I hope that this study will provide one possible tool to be utilized by future phenomenological, case study-based researchers.

### **Benefits**

As stated, the conceptual framework presented here might be applied to case study research or truly phenomenological inquiry by field researchers in the future. With further

corroboration, it is possible that the information generated about increasing participant engagement within music venues will also be used by music venue administrators, ultimately leading to greater attendance numbers for said venues, more flexibility and creativity in booking/programming for venue administrators, and a deeper experience for attendees.

### **Plan of the Present Work**

This analysis is concerned with the unifying of multiple theoretical concepts, in hopes that the resulting conceptual framework will bolster praxis in the field of musical venue management. Section 2 of this study contains a literature review. In Part One: Music, I look at the individual and social factors that contribute to attendee engagement within music venues. I describe some of the psychological and spiritual dimensions of musical listening, emphasizing philosophical considerations of the experience of time and transcendence. Then, I review different ways to conceptualize social group formation and the benefits of convening around live music, focusing on scenes and social capital. In Part Two: Spaces and Places, I further discuss social capital, issues of exclusion within music venues, and relate the idea of spatial entitlement to these issues. I then introduce spatial relations theory and place attachment theory, describing how these can be applied to the study of music venue attendee engagement. In Part Three: Music Places, I first define “music place,” then discuss what occurs within music venues as considerations specific to interpersonal relations, and those specific to a venue’s material characteristics. I also provide programming suggestions. In Section 3: Discussion and Conclusion, I synthesize this material, and set forth a new way to conceptualize attendee engagement. Finally, I close by providing a review of the investigation, and suggest future possible avenues for research in the area of music venue attendee engagement.

## Introduction

Live music can be presentational or participatory, in that it can be played by people informally (as in a family or through community tradition), or performed by professionals for a formally delineated audience (Turino, 2008). In the case of the latter, audience members often experience live music in musical venues, spaces that serve primarily to showcase such performances (Kronenburg, 2012). The conditions of live music in a small, popular music venue are my concern for the duration of this exploration. Multiple factors converge to create a meaningful live music experience for a concert attendee. These can be analyzed along two axes: the private meaning an individual derives from the experience, which can be of consequence to her or his immediate emotional state and sense of spiritual connection; and the sense of collectivity born from gathering with peers to see live music. I contend that the live concert music experience begins as a personal one. Through repetitive contact with a venue and a core of similarly minded participants (who may or may not be the same actual individuals), the experience becomes one of sociality, wherein a sense of (even temporary) community is established. This process can lead to attachment to the venue. This attendee attachment, which from a marketing perspective could be called audience loyalty, does not replace the bottom-line effects of alcohol sales, strategic booking practices, careful ticket pricing, or other practical considerations. However, looking at attendee engagement in this manner does offer an alternative way to conceptualize what keeps individuals coming back to music venues, and hopefully, provides some insight into how music venue administrators can leverage these mechanisms of emotional and social meaning-making to both create a better experience for attendees and ensure future success of the venue.

## **Section 2: Review of Literature**

### **PART ONE: MUSIC**

#### **Music and Spirituality**

Speaking about visual art as a means to “negotiate rapture,” Bhabha (1996) discusses art’s mediatory nature in acting between the “ecstatic and the everyday” (p. 10). I argue that live musical concerts create such a liminal space; that such rapture is negotiated across the country, everyday, in music halls, clubs, and bars. These spaces provide a location for individual moments of transcendence and community building, and set the conditions of a type of spiritual ritual for individuals otherwise resistant to, or uninterested in, organized religious congregation. Indeed, discussion of the arts as having the potential to push both artist and enthusiast to the limit of her or himself or to the perimeter of her or his faith surfaces in literature describing transcendent experience through the arts (Bhabha, 1996; Wuthnow, 2003; Earl, 2001; Bernard, 2009). Ethnomusicologists discuss the use of music in ritualized trance (Jankowsky, 2007; Sager, 2012; Blacking, Byron, & Nettl, 1995), studying the ways in which participants utilize music socially to communicate with a higher power. Miller and Strongman (2002) have investigated the use of music in Pentecostal church worship service, finding that religious experiences are facilitated by the strong positive emotions connected with the music in such services.

Art can generally be understood as a conduit to the divine or the sacred. For example, through a series of surveys he conducted in the United States, Wuthnow (2003) found that over half of respondents agreed with the statement, “Art can help people to deepen their spirituality” (p. 69). Finding that the arts contribute to or reinforce peoples’ interest in spirituality, Wuthnow came to the conclusion that the arts are spiritually democratizing, allowing individuals to



experience their personal version of spiritual connection outside the scope of organized religion. Wuthnow limited his inquiry mainly to Christianity and looked at its correlation with the enjoyment of classical art forms, including music, and therefore his results are not necessarily generalizable to popular music. Sylvan (as cited in Lynch, 2006), takes a different approach to investigating art and spiritual practice, and states that popular music serves religious functions such as providing community, a deeper sense of meaning, and the “experience of the numinous” (p. 482). As traditional religion declines, popular music becomes an increasingly essential component to religious identity construction, and also supports such qualities as respect for cultural pluralism, open-mindedness, and a feeling of being personally authentic (Lynch, 2006).

### **Transcendence, Flow and Alternate Experience of Time**

Live music attendance can cultivate pivotal moments of wonder that impact individuals for years to come. Intense musical experiences can improve social relationships, deepen personal values, provide ongoing inspiration for the individual, and positively impact her or his understanding of the meaning of life (Shäfer, Smukalla, & Oelker, 2013). These moments of wonder are produced by cognitive and affective states, which can be seen as falling around certain lines of analysis. The lines of analysis presented here are transcendence/peak experience, and flow/temporal changes. Before beginning this discussion, it is helpful to define “transcendence.” The highly influential humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow described transcendence as “ends rather than as means” (as cited in Bernard, 2009, p. 5), and as a loss of self-consciousness or self-awareness coupled with the sense that one is connected to something greater than her or himself (Bernard, 2009).

Palmer (2006; 2010), a music educator, investigates the relationship between practicing music and transcendence. He states that music can act to stimulate the emotions and allow listeners to experience freedom whereby the individual is able to “[fathom] the depths of the ineffable” (2006, p. 148). Explaining further that music serves to “bridge the outer and inner worlds,” (2010, p. 161), it is evident that live music can act as a threshold or create liminal space. Yet another way to frame this phenomenon is by understanding music as constantly renewing potential. Anderson (2002) draws parallels between the practice of listening to recorded music and the philosophical idea of the immanence of utopia set forth by the composer Ernst Bloch. Anderson rests his thesis on the principle that music is grounded in anticipation—in the “not-yet” (2002, p. 217)—and that individuals can capture routine moments of utopia through music listening. Similar is Turino’s (2008) discussion of the Possible and the Actual. While the Actual is habit-based and reflects everyday life dealings (things we have already done and experienced), the Possible is the seductive and optimistic potential of what we might do and experience. Music helps us to unite these realms, allowing the Possible to seem within our reach.

If recorded music offers a constantly moving target of hope, live music only amplifies its effects. In a live music situation, the listener is often already familiar with the work being performed. Yet, live performance offers a chance for the musicians to depart—whether subtly or drastically—from the recorded version of a particular composition. The expectancy that live music engenders goes even further towards offering the Possible, or momentary utopia (Lamont, 2009). Utopia itself suggests a break from traditional notions of time and place—a temporal or spatial disruption from the everyday ‘real.’ Other scholars have suggested that time takes on a different quality in the performance or experiencing of art forms. This is especially true of music, as music is governed by the measurement of meter and manipulated through tempo.

One astute musing on the intersection of space and music comes from the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, who explains that architecture has been called “frozen music,” and remarks that space can mirror the rhythms of human feeling (1977, p. 118). Considered in terms of venues built specifically for live musical performance, this characterization is all the more compelling. Tuan also says that music can be disorienting for a person, reconfiguring their awareness of time and space. This is especially true of dancing to music, which allows for a certain liberation from time-space delimited objectives: “Music and dance free people from the demands of purposeful goal-directed life, allowing them to live briefly in...unoriented space” (*ibid*, p. 129). There may be biological reasons for this. Cognitive neuroscience dictates that because of interconnections between the brain’s auditory cortex and motor cortexes and their shared activity in the temporal lobe, music and dance have the unique ability to change one’s perception of time (Tan, Pfordresher, & Harré, 2010).

Denora (2003) confirms that of all the arts, music’s characteristic of unfolding over time *socially*, as live public performance makes possible, is unique, and this is in part what causes music to incite such emotion in people. Panzarella (1980), an early researcher in the study of music and peak experience, touches on the warping of time that can occur with music playing or listening, as well as Sager (2012). Sager describes the musicologist John Blacking’s assertions about “virtual time” (p. 32), explaining that perception of time changes when one is in a transcendent state. She also summarizes the benefits of musical entrainment, whereby individuals synchronize to an external musical rhythm:

Musical entrainment...has a special status in human experience because music often serves as an alternate time frame in which social relationships can be negotiated and

reorganized in extraordinary ways, potentially leading to beneficial social effects as well as engendering transcendent experiences in individuals. (Sager, 2012, pp. 33-34)

Flow provides another way to parse music's entrancing property. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) pioneered the theory of flow of optimal experience, which asserts that an individual attains a flow state when she or he feels in command of her or his own actions, and is able to use an appropriate skill level to meet a self-directed challenge. As the individual engages in the challenging activity, a resulting feeling of satisfaction can lead to exhilaration. Flow activities "have their own pace, their own sequences of events marking transitions from one state to another without regard to equal intervals of duration" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 67). Listening to music, whether live or recorded, can be a flow activity because it helps listeners focus their attention on the present moment (Diaz, 2013). Csikszentmihalyi delineates between experiencing a live concert versus recorded music listening; while both can create the necessary conditions for a flow state, only live concert attendance allows for a collective experience, which offers the unique conditions to experience ritual-like participation.

### **Peak Experience**

If transcendence is the sensation of connection and a certain "self-forgetfulness," (Maslow as cited in Bernard, 2009, p. 5), peak experiences are those specific ecstatic moments experienced by an individual. Maslow is credited with bringing into popularity the idea of peak experience, which is the highest point one can reach in the psychologist's theory of self-actualization. Music, dancing, and sex, Maslow reported, are the simplest ways to obtain peak experience (1968). Accordingly, psychology of music research has been conducted under the auspices of this concept (see Bernard, 2009; Lowis, 1998; Sloboda, 1991). Maslow (1976) lists a

number of outcomes or sensations one experiences when moved to the state of peak experience.

To name the few that are relevant to this discussion and that also share traits with

Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow, indicators of peak experience include an individual's deep perception of unity of all things; an uncanny ability to concentrate; the transcendence of ego; and disorientation in time and space. These experiences are what make music so compelling.

However, while it is possible to create the conditions that will optimally engender a peak experience, it is not possible to actually produce a peak experience at will (Bernard, 2009). Peak experiences are elusive, and such is the particular specialness of the phenomenon.

Physiological and psychological research which explores the impact of music on an individual dates back to Carl Seashore, who studied music's potential to cause relaxed or tense states in individuals in the 1940s (as cited in Schäfer & Sedlmeier, 2011). Some dimensions of the potent musical experience (not all of which would fall under the heading "peak experience," as this label requires that it be assessed by the individual as positive) include chills, tears, feelings of ecstasy, and other "strong experiences related to music" (Panksepp, 1995; Sloboda, 1991; Goldstein, 1980; Panzarella, 1980; Gabrielsson & Lindström Wik, 2003). Lowis (1998) emphasizes that previous associations with a musical piece contributes to the listener's potential to have a peak experience; this could come into play at a live music concert, where the expectations of the listener, who presumably is already acquainted with the band or musician playing, affect her or his experience. At the least, familiarity with music seems to increase the listener's enjoyment of it (Miller & Strongman, 2002; Wheeler, 1985). Additionally, those who have had peak experiences previously are more likely to have them again compared with an individual who has not experienced the phenomenon (Lowis, 1998). In terms of the characteristics of music that impact experience, energetic versus gentle music has been more

strongly correlated with peak experience (Lowis, 1998), and music that violates listener expectations with new harmonies or sudden changes in dynamic or texture is more likely to lead to strong musical experiences (Egermann, Grewe, Kopiez, & Altenmüller, 2009).

A high level of previous musical experience generally also has a positive correlation with peak experience, perhaps because those with musical training cognitively process music in a more involved way than those that are less “musically sophisticated” (Lowis, 1998, p. 209). This corresponds with Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) idea that flow is easier to obtain when one is challenged to a degree appropriate to their skill level; those with more musical knowledge or training will be able to take on the greater challenge of more complex music, and thus, experience a correspondingly greater level of engagement, which can lead to peak experience. However, others such as Paul (2009) find that intense subjective experience does not differ between musicians and non-musicians. While there is some disagreement about the effect of prior knowledge or training on peak experience in *classical music* listening, presence of formal musical training in *popular music* concert attendees has not been studied. Indeed, such research would present issues in defining what constitutes “musical sophistication” or “formal” training within the popular music sphere, where social and genre-specific standards for both musical knowledge (related to music theory and music criticism) and training (related to playing an instrument) differ from the classical music sphere.

### **Individual Sensation and Social Discourse**

Thus far I have examined music listening as a potential conduit for spiritual experiences, transcendence, peak experience, and flow, largely looking at these concepts from the perspective of the individual music listener. These experiences are internal and private, with meaning

encoded particular to each individual music listener. I have described some of the factors contributing to, and characteristics of, these powerful personal experiences. I now turn my attention to the social aspects of live music listening. How does gathering with a group of people at a live music concert impact the experience of the individual? What does an individual stand to gain from participating habitually in gatherings at live music concerts, and how are these gatherings situated within the broader culture or experiences of the individual?

Very few studies have sought to understand the impact of the social context on strong musical experiences. In a psychological experiment, Egermann, Sutherland, Grewe, Nagel, Kopiez, & Altenmüller (2011) found that participants experienced more excitement (as measured by chills) listening to music alone versus in a group setting. This finding contradicted the researchers' hypothesis that social facilitation, wherein the presence of others leads to arousal, would increase physiological effects in individuals in a social setting. However, the authors noted that the artificial setup of the study did not allow for social feedback; that is, participants were not aware of how others were feeling while listening to music. In a music concert setting, it is much more likely that attendees would experience social feedback, in the form of cheering, clapping, and dancing. In contrast, Lamont (2009) gathered data about strong experiences of music among university students, and found that these experiences occurred most often when individuals attended live concerts and music festivals. Music was largely of popular genres, and was observed while others were present. The unpredictable nature and heightened intensity of the live music atmosphere allowed the flourishing of these experiences for many study participants. Event expectancy was at play, as well; listeners often primed themselves for the experience beforehand by listening to the artists' music.

Returning to Sager's (2012) investigation of the work of musicologist John Blacking, she explains, "Blacking theorized that transcendent experience not only occurs at the fulcrum between individual sensation and social discourse, but that transcendence is also the catalyst enabling individuals to experience deeply felt connection to the other—whether human or supernatural" (p. 31). Others (Hesmondhalgh, 2013; Turino, 2008) have also alluded to music's situation at this meeting place of the personal and the social, the private and the public. This point of intersection bears further scrutiny. I will now investigate how an individual's potent personal experience shapes their connection to other audience members, and ultimately, how this social connection creates attachment to a music venue.

In his book *Music As Social Life: The Politics of Participation*, Turino (2008) sheds light on this intersection, though he does not address live music venues specifically. To review, Turino delineates between what he calls participatory and presentational performance. Participatory performance involves music making as a process and a social activity, while presentational performance positions music as a product to be consumed. This is a useful way to differentiate between types of musical involvement. Turino (2008) states, "...*participatory performance* is a special type of artistic practice in which there are no artist-audience distinctions...*Presentational performance*...refers to situations where one group of people, the artists, prepare and provide music for another group, the audience, who do not participate in making the music or dancing" (author's emphasis, p. 26). Turino suggests that if the primary objective of a performing band or musician is to get everyone dancing, this performance can cross over from presentational into participatory. But since the essential structure of a musical concert usually involves a hierarchy that puts musicians above audience members, it may never offer the same kind of community that traditional participatory music practice is able to achieve.



Thus, while dancing is often a feature within popular music venues, the performance type I am chiefly concerned with here is presentational performance. The extent to which equalization of power between performer and audience occurs is dependent upon many factors, including musical genre and type of venue. This theme of performer-audience power balance is one that I will return to later in this inquiry.

### **Scenes**

Recalling the idea of transcendence, music has an integrative function, uniting parts of oneself, uniting individuals with one another, and potentially, uniting an individual with her or his conception of God; this creates psychic wholeness (Bateson as cited in Turino, 2008; Blacking et al., 1995). This wholeness is elusive under normal, everyday circumstances. Group identity contributes to this sense of unity amongst participants at a live music concert. Live music provides a unique opportunity for the formation of identity groups, as the shared habit of attending concerts can become a binding force between people: “Music and dance are key to identity formation because they are often public presentations of the deepest feelings and qualities that make a group unique” (Turino, 2008, p. 2). Whether temporary or long lasting, these groups are subsets from the larger culture. Convening with one’s peers under the auspices of a potentially numinous experience creates a feeling of specialness and exclusivity. This is so not necessarily because attendees intentionally exclude particular individuals based on criteria such as social group standing (although this does occur; more on this later), but due to a shared understanding of the concert as the “place to be” (*ibid*, p. 187). A shared feeling of time being somehow suspended, and the reverie born of multiple people experiencing their momentary connections to the Possible through peak experience, creates a feeling of liminality within the

space. As such, concerts become ideal settings for repetitive, ritualized behavior. This ritualized behavior can result in groupings around a place or style of music.

Popular music scholars have long studied the way that groups form around particular musical genres and/or geographical areas. Turino (2008) refers to these musically based pods of group identity as cultural cohorts (although he is most concerned with participatory action within these pods). Similar groupings have been labeled variously as subcultures, scenes, and neo-tribes (Slobin, 1993; Shank, 1994; Peterson & Bennett, 2004; Bennett, 1999; Thornton, 1996; Hesmondhalgh, 2005). Definitions of such groups can differ according to musical genre, type of venue where the gathering takes place, and participant criteria such as age. It is useful to examine some of the terms used here.

Andy Bennett, popular music studies scholar, has written extensively about music scenes. In *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual* (Peterson & Bennett, 2004), a local scene is defined as "...a focused social activity that takes place in a delimited space and over a specific span of time in which clusters of producers, musicians, and fans realize their common musical taste, collectively distinguishing themselves from others by using music and cultural signs often appropriated from other places, but recombined and developed in ways that come to represent the local scene" (p. 8). Shank (1994) describes a scene as a self-perpetuating closed circuit, in which "spectators become fans, fans become musicians, musicians are always already fans..." (p. 131). The term subculture has also gained significant traction as an alternative to "scene" (Thornton, 1996; Slobin, 1993). However, it has been suggested that "subculture" too pointedly presumes that participants are squaring off against a larger mainstream force, and that specific subcultural standards somehow govern the activity of all those within the group with little regard for individual expression (Peterson & Bennett, 2004). For the sake of consistency, I will use the

term scene for the remainder of this inquiry. What concerns this inquiry is that which connects audience members to a particular music venue; what are some of the contributing factors to scene formation? To begin to answer this question, I will look at the work of music scene scholars.

Bennett (1997) and Gallan (2012) both studied “pub rock” (local bar rock ‘n’ roll) and the ways in which scenes develop around the music in England and Australia, respectively. Through individual fieldwork, both found that the observed sense of community in tight-knit local pub rock scenes depended upon the exclusion of outsiders. For audience members, familiarity with other concertgoers and the performing bands took precedence over all else, creating the glue that bonded audience members to one another, resulting in a scene. Gallan (2012) particularly found that the booking agent played the role of the gatekeeper in his case study site, a small tavern featuring local music exclusively. Genre varied, with localness being more important than style presented. A sense of territorialism abounded in the club, as its “cultural intermediaries” (booking agents) would only book local acts (Gallan, 2012). This fostered feelings of ownership among scene members, which reinforced bonds of community and belonging. Gallan notes that this booking practice, along with the facilitation of social network building through drinking practices, allowed the club to flourish. The author concludes that small venues, especially, need “thriving social investment” in order to survive (2012, p. 39).

Cohen (1999) also argues that venues can act as the center of a scene, providing musicians and fans a space in which to demonstrate both their group identity and love of the music. This group identity can also be communicated through other signifiers such as style of dress and linguistic markers. Members of the scene might share socio-political perspectives

(Jackiewicz & Craine, 2009), as well as frequent other of the same establishments, creating a social web that influences their activities outside of the venue or concert setting (Shank, 1994).

### **Social and Subcultural Capital**

Scenes need not be defined as self-contained or be local to a neighborhood, town or region; a scene in the broader sense can develop without a venue as its home base. Thornton (1996) studied “club cultures” as they relate to participants in the dance music scene. She found that the temporary networks that develop within dance clubs and raves “house *ad hoc* communities with fluid boundaries which may come together and dissolve in a single summer or endure for a few years” (p. 3). Thornton is concerned here with the power structures between participants *within* the dance music subculture, as well as *between* participants and the mainstream media, looking at how those inside the scene created identity based on their perceived authenticity, hipness, and “underground” status. Cultural hierarchies within the scene as well as demarcations between scene insiders and outsiders helped gel participants, whether for a season or half a decade. The currency with which participants dealt is what Thornton refers to as subcultural capital.

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of social structure describes multiple forms of capital that confer power or status among members of society; cultural capital is of most concern here. Cultural capital, “a socially rare and status-laden resource,” has been investigated in relation to performing arts center patronage (Caldwell & Woodside, 2003, p. 34). Cultural capital has generally been understood as desirable, as those who have it enjoy social privileges. However, through her research, Thornton (1996) found cultural capital to be an unrealistic and unrepresentative form of currency among dance club-goers. Instead, she proposes

subcultural capital, which scene members accrue and trade in a fashion similar to cultural capital. Subcultural capital does not assume that participants are socioeconomically upper class or are marked by other indicators of privilege, such as whiteness. I would suggest that the concept of subcultural capital is transferable outside of the dance music scene, and that attendees of popular music venues can also deal in this form of currency. In small venues, especially, where booked music is less likely to have attracted a large following, attendees may feel that concert attendance is one way to affirm their uniqueness while celebrating an alternative to mainstream culture. Still, the question must be asked: who is an “outsider” and who is an “insider” in the cultural hierarchies of a music scene? The next part of the present inquiry will investigate this question.

## **PART TWO: SPACES AND PLACES**

### **Bridging, Bonding, and Exclusionary Practices in Music Venues**

When discussing music venues, it is important to understand the social dynamics that occur within their walls. To do so, social capital theory should be probed. Popular music venue attendees can accrue and trade social capital. Putnam (2000) is most well known for the contemporary usage of the term “social capital,” although the concept was principle to the aforementioned capital theory of Pierre Bourdieu. Putnam defines social capital as “connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (2000, p. 19). Putnam distinguishes between two types of social capital—bridging, which brings people from different groups closer together, and bonding, which strengthens connections between people within the same group (*ibid*, p. 22). It is often difficult to facilitate bridging social capital, but it is essential to a healthy community in that it potentially “turns

dispute and contention into constructive forms of networks that benefit from and contribute to our diverse society and pluralist democracy” (Garcia, 2012, p. 18). While bonding is easier to achieve, it runs the risk of creating exclusionary practices against outsiders, as within the “pub rock” scene described by Bennett (1997) and Gallan (2012).

Thornton’s (1996) attention to the role that socio-structural variables play within her theory of subcultural capital has been called into question. Jensen (2006) maintains that the theory should more seriously consider the influence that participants’ race, class, ethnicity, and gender have on their ability to participate in the subculture. Similarly, while Putnam argues that participation in leisure activities such as arts and cultural events can build bridging capital by acting a vehicle for “convening diverse groups and fellow citizens” and “transcending social barriers,” (2000, p. 411), Grazian (2009) objects to such a claim on the grounds that urban nightlife scenes, in particular, are more efficient at creating bonding capital and often exclude out-groups. He states: “In spite of the rhetoric of spirited transcendence and nonconformity commonly associated with nightlife settings such as rave parties, dance, rock, and blues clubs, such seemingly countercultural havens generally replicate the same structures of race, ethnic, and class inequality and exclusion found in the larger society” (p. 912). Yet potential exists for cultural organizations to be particularly useful in building bridging social capital, as such spaces, such as museums, allow for both debate and education on issues related to structures of social difference and inequality (Garcia, 2012). Music venues do not typically hold the role of arena for political debate, although this is dependent upon the political ideology of the performer(s) and audience members at a given concert. However, I would suggest that live music venues offer productive ground for connecting across differences due to the occurrence of affective and spiritual phenomena previously discussed. With this connection can come the reconciliation of

personal differences, even if temporary. Programming for bridging social capital will be discussed later in this inquiry.

Hanna, Dale, and Ling (2009) studied quality of place and came to the conclusion that spatial organization can affect social capital. Since the formation of social networks is critical for the building of social capital, the lack of public spaces in which to do so can prohibit its generation. However, the authors also found that “a wealth of strong bonding capital acts against diversity” (*ibid*, p. 35), and suggest that city planners should “structure places to facilitate the bridging of networks and enhancement of access to social and economic opportunity” (p. 42).

Genre of music plays a role in the creation of bridging and/or bonding social capital between participants in small, popular music venues. Thus far, I have examined the ways in which participants form bonds—and perhaps, scenes—at raves and dance clubs and in small “pub rock” venues. Looking at concerts from the perspective of political engagement, Dowdy (2007) studied crowd-performer interactions at “conscious” hip hop shows in small music venues. He came to the conclusion that these interactions create a community space that encourages collective agency among attendees. Echoing Turino’s (2008) perspective on the merits of participatory over presentational performance, Dowdy found that it was the minimization of distance between performer and audience, such as through invitations for attendees to participate in call-and-response, which cemented social bonds. While Dowdy does not specifically refer to this relationship building as social bonding, he treats the term collective agency in much the same way. Framing it as force for political action and the vehicle through which the space (the music venue) becomes democratically activated, Dowdy says, “The audience’s collective identity, then, is created intersubjectively among themselves and between the artists and themselves...the live hip hop show at a small club can be seen as a crucial element

of localized participatory democracy” (p. 87). This is complicated by the fact that the audiences of the shows Dowdy discusses are overwhelmingly white, despite the fact that most of the performers he refers to are African-American. Still, Shank (1994) also frames music scenes as potentially liberating to those involved, calling a scene “an interrogation of dominant structures of identification, and potential cultural transformation” (p. 122).

Clearly, there is some disagreement among scholars regarding the extent to which nightlife can be truly inclusive and/or act as grounds for socially or politically transformative activity. Furthermore, much of the sociology of music scholarship available focuses on predominantly white scenes. Before a music venue attendee can begin to connect with the music, performers, and other attendees, she or he must feel like she or he belongs. In music venues as in most public spaces, people tend to congregate with individuals similar to themselves, and a racial divide is evident among musical genres and scenes. More scholarship should be undertaken with this orientation toward inquiry.

One such scholar to examine scene particular to African-American attendees is Hunter (2010), who looked at social capital within predominantly black nightclubs. The author found through case study research that black nightclubs present an opportunity for club-goers to build social capital by providing “individuals with a unique space to establish ties that provide social leverage and social support; ties that bridge these individuals with people who are not from their neighborhoods or social location” (p. 181). Although Hunter does not claim that bridging occurs across racial lines, he does conclude that connections are made across social class and sexual orientation, providing evidence for Putnam’s theory of social bridging.

There is more sociological research regarding how groups interact with one another, gain access to, and express power relations within, nightclubs (as opposed to music venues)—much



more than I have touched upon here. However, music venues do provide a different set of conditions as compared with nightclubs. For example, overt pickup scenes are less common within music venues. This is because the performing bands and musicians within a music venue act as mediating entity between the venue and the audience members (Turino, 2008), such that concertgoers' attention is not so potently concentrated upon one another. After all, the primary reason to attend a concert as opposed to a bar or club is to listen to live music, rather than engage in the drinking and social connection-making (whether sexually motivated or not) that is likely to be the objective for attendees of bars and nightclubs.

In this way, music concerts offer a unique opportunity for attendees to have a personal, even sacred, experience with the music and performers while still connecting to the larger group. Yet, it seems that more locally oriented clubs (such as the "pub rock" examples provided) are less likely to engender transcendent experiences. Local-only presenting clubs, as expressed by Gallan (2012), are often willing to value the local provenance of bands over the technical skill, originality, or other aesthetic factors apparent in the music. In addition, local, venue-based scenes develop around repeated interaction between the same concertgoers, and this is less likely to occur when a club presents a variety of genres. Thus, it seems that while repeated interaction between attendees at a particular venue is likely to encourage bonding, if not bridging, social capital, and perhaps lead to scene formation, the conditions that make this possible may reduce the possibility for peak experience. If administrators wish to attract a scene around their particular venue, it appears that the booking agent must know the needs of the community well, and cater to (or be invested in helping to create) its taste. Further, a relatively narrow selection of musical styles should be presented. In contrast, I speculate that booking a wider variety of

genres means that bonding and scene formation are less likely, but bridging and individual transcendent experiences are more likely.

### **Spatial Entitlement**

Musical dialog in the form of shared cultural consumption and production can also provide an opportunity for oppressed peoples to build alliances with one another, create new visions of equitable social relations, achieve visibility in the face of racial exclusion, and redress “the injuries enacted by systemic spatial isolation and racism” (Johnson, 2013, p. 168). Johnson (2013) argues that in the past seventy-five years in Los Angeles, the musical participation and popular culture movement-making of blacks and Chicanos enabled the co-creation of shared, collective space and through it, an essential gateway to social membership. Terming this experience of space “spatial entitlement,” Johnson describes black and Chicano punk subcultures of the 1980s:

Through labor activism, environmental justice efforts, and musical economies of exchange, activists and musicians conveyed the right to make the space one resides in (whether symbolic or physical) more than merely habitable, but meaningful in the present and viable for the future. In doing so, they generated new spaces of creativity and social meaning representing mutual empowerment and understanding. (2013, p. 154)

While speaking from a historical perspective specific to blacks and Chicanos in one particular locale, Johnson’s concept of spatial entitlement is useful in understanding how people of color and other marginalized individuals might use creative spaces to claim power and share ideas. Johnson explains that through individuals’ sense of spatial entitlement, dance halls, nightclubs, and youth centers in Los Angeles were “transformed into laboratories for the creation

of new identities and identification” (2013, p. xii). Citing music and popular culture as particularly powerful social sites for transformative ideologies, the author further underscores the radical possibilities therein for reconfiguring social relations. Insofar as the theory of spatial entitlement can be applied to music venues, Johnson’s thesis lends credence to the idea that music venues can be sites for social bridging; venues need not serve to separate “insider” from “outsider.” I will now continue this discussion of social interaction within music venues from a more abstract perspective.

### **The Production of Space**

In such the same way popular music scholar Sara Cohen has investigated place as it relates to music (1995), I wish to discuss music venues as “both concept and material reality” (p. 444). The spatial theory of Henri Lefebvre will be the starting point for this discussion. Lefebvre (1991) saw space as a product of human practice, believing that space was never immune from the influence of sociality: “Space is permeated with social relations; it is not only supported by social relations but it is also producing and produced by social relations” (as cited in Hayden, 1995, p. 41). Lefebvre argued that space could be studied using three frames (although these are not mutually exclusive; in fact, all spaces are composed of all three aspects at once): physical or material space, that which is *perceived*, called “spatial practice;” mental space, which is *conceived* and comprised of ideas or concepts about space, called “representations of space;” and social space, concerned with how one experiences space, that which is *lived*, called “representational space.” Lefebvre sought to understand the interactions between these three conceptualizations of space. He believed that space can never be an empty structure waiting to be filled with activity, but that it takes on the meaning of those who imagine what it is or could be,

and also through social interactions within the actual space. Hayden (1995) succinctly summarized the crux of Lefebvre's theory this way: "People's attachments to places are material, social, and imaginative" (p. 43). This idea can be transferred to music venues, where an individual experiences the physical characteristics of the place, takes part in the social interactions therein, and has an idea of the venue in between visits, perhaps imagining their future visits.

If people experience a place on these three levels, what is of interest to me here in the interplay between the levels. Burgin (1996) refers to Lefebvre's "attempt to account for the simultaneous imbrication of the physical and the psychological," and agrees that "...mental space and social realities are *in reality* inseparable" (author's emphasis; p. 28). In investigating audience experience within music venues, a similar theme arises. As I have shown, while an attendee often has a powerful personal experience with the music, the setting for this private union is a public one. But how is the attendee's experience with the music impacted by other audience members, and to what extent does the attendee need to experience mental aloneness with the performer(s) to make the connection that enables momentary transcendence? Burgin (1996) notes that the theory of the unconscious can help us to understand this interplay between the public and the private, which, in philosopher Gilbert Ryles' words is "*the between perception and consciousness*" (author's emphasis; as cited in Burgin, 1996, p. 30). Going back to the idea of liminality, issues of access and inclusion notwithstanding, small music venues can provide the material, social, and imaginative conditions to realize this in-between state.

### **Place Attachment and Place Identity in Music Venues**

A “space” becomes a “place” as an individual endows it with value through personally meaningful experiences had at that site. It is not so much a place that is special as are the social relationships experienced there (Milligan, 1998; Altman & Low, 1992). Another way of conceiving the ways in which music venue attendees assign meaning to live concerts is through the idea of place attachment, a concept from the field of environmental psychology.

Environmental psychology uses social science methods and theoretical approaches to understand how people interact in everyday physical environments (Nasar, 2011). Place attachment can be defined as a cognitive or emotional link between an individual and a place; place attachments can be made by individuals or groups. Low (1992) describes place attachment thusly: “Place attachment is the symbolic relationship formed by people giving culturally shared emotional/affective meaning to a particular space” (p. 165). Place attachment can be looked at spatially, temporally, and socially (Morris, 2012); these three attributes of an individual’s experience converge to form their attachment to that place. Although no research has been published pertaining to music venues and place attachment, I contend that place attachment to music venues is possible and that it occurs frequently.

While place attachment occurs in conjunction with venue-based scenes, individuals can develop place attachment irrespective of scenes. Further, the “third places” (places for social gathering) to which individuals become attached present unique opportunities to build social capital (Waxman, 2006). Place attachment can contribute to a sense of community for attached individuals, allowing them to experience feelings of membership and belongingness to a group. Attachment is often built upon shared interests and history between community members (Manzo & Perkins, 2006); further, a place to which an individual is attached becomes a sort of

storehouse for memories of meaningful experiences, and an individual's identity can form around such experiences (Altman & Low, 1992). While a local, venue-based music scene and the group identity that occurs within it has a specific musical genre or style at the center, place attachment dictates no such limitation in attendance. For this reason, although place attachment and scenes are related, I believe place attachment to be a better theory around which to consider music venue attendee engagement.

For attendees of a music venue, identity can become entwined with the place; more accurately, identity becomes entwined with the social interactions and personally meaningful experiences that are had in that place time and time again. An individual can become attached to a venue from this meeting of the personal and the social, augmented by the shifting of temporal perception and other liminal properties of the concert experience. Depending on the intensity of an attendee's attachment, her or his conception of self can include the music venue; this can be conceived of as place identity. Place identity concerns how the self develops in relation to a place, and is dialectical, continually reflecting an individual's lived experience within an environment (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). An individual's place identity can include a music venue if she or he feels welcome in that venue. Again, the attendee's race, class, gender, and other social-structural factors intersect with the venue's perceived degree of inclusiveness, influencing the attendee's sense of belonging (Manzo & Perkins, 2006).

Using the framework of symbolic interaction within psychology, Milligan (1998) created one model for understanding how place attachment is socially constructed. She found that the less an acceptable substitute of a place will do as a stand-in, the stronger that individual's attachment to the place. Brenneman (1985) also described placehood as a person's sense of intimacy within a place, and the unique particulars that set one place apart from another. This

sense of intimacy and uniqueness allows for the possibility of mental appropriation, for feeling that a place is *my* place. Milligan (1998) states that a place becomes critically important in its uniqueness to an individual mainly through repeated interactions at that particular site; as meaningful experiences accumulate, place attachment becomes stronger. As the author puts it, “Attachment is based on the relationship between events in space and the passage of time” (p. 28; see also Morris, 2010). Of crucial importance is that there is an “interactional past” and an “interactional potential.” Here, interactional past refers to memories of past experiences within a place; likewise, interactional potential has to do with the individual’s expectations that similar things might be experienced in the future in that place. For this reason, continuity of experience is very important. From this, it can be stated that music venue attendee place attachment can be engendered through repeated positive experiences in that venue, both social and personal.

Both Waxman (2006) and Milligan (1998) studied place attachment in coffee shops. While there are significant differences between coffee shops and music venues, it is useful to briefly review some qualities of place that contributed to users’ place attachment. Among the salient features that Waxman (2006) identified in coffee shop regulars were feelings of ownership, ability to territorialize, and opportunity to socialize. Among Milligan’s (1998) findings were importance placed on smallness of coffee shop, emotional warmth, acceptance, exclusivity, and high degree of sociability with others. Even in coffee shops, it seems, patrons want to feel as though they are insiders.

Lawrence (1992) investigated ritual-spatial relations, parsing how the specific qualities of ritual (chiefly ephemerality and specialness) inform interactions with place, and how place attachment occurs through ritual. He discusses spatial features as ritual symbols. Regarding the material aspects of space, Lawrence states that they:

unify the sensory with the ideological poles of meaning, and achieve efficacy in the liminal state. Liminality is a critical transition in which the most potent symbols in their most powerful arrangement are brought together to create an intense ritual state in which participants collectively experience a heightened sensation of communion. (1992, p. 213)

This state is known as “communitas”. Lawrence continues, “Spatial elements contribute to the transcendent qualities of the ritual process and become charged themselves because their relations with other ritual symbols are activated during the rites” (p. 213). I contend that a ritual state is achieved, perhaps to a lesser degree than is presented here, within music venues. The music venue becomes the key spatial element that Lawrence speaks of. Through this and venue-specific symbols (drinking and dancing, performers as icons), in addition to the heightened emotions brought on by personal connection with the music, liminality, or communitas, is achieved. Through repeated interactions with the site (interactional past), and expectation of future similar experiences (interactional potential), the venue becomes an almost mythical mental framework (Hayden’s “imaginative” space), and serves as a gateway to another world. Indeed, as Hufford (1992) argues, places can be a threshold to an alternate realm. Music venues are uniquely situated in this regard; let me now discuss the more practical realities of these places.

### **PART THREE: MUSIC PLACES**

#### **The Production of Music Places**

Most scholarship regarding music and place has sought to understand the relationship between geographical space and music, while almost none has elucidated the role that music venues play in supporting and shaping social culture. Yet, music venues are essential in



supporting local musical activity, and can therefore be instrumental in creating scenes (Johansson & Bell, 2009; Connell & Gibson, 2003). As such, in the sense that cities can come to be known for their music scenes (such as Austin, TX), “a single venue can nurture an entire movement that changes the character of a city and its image around the world” (Kronenburg, 2012, p. 5). Just what is a music place? Howard Becker defines a place in relation to music as “a physical place: a building (or part of one), or an enclosed place in the open air. But it is also a physical place that has been socially defined: by its expected uses, by shared expectations about what kinds of people will be there to take part in those activities, and by the financial arrangements that underlie all of this” (as cited in Peterson & Bennett, 2004, p. 20). This definition will be the jumping-off point for the remainder of this inquiry.

Despite increased opportunities to engage with live music performances online via Youtube, podcasts, and live-streamed festivals, the commercial music industry has not experienced a decline in concert attendance (Earl, 2001; Johansson & Bell, 2009), and concerts remain the essential way for fans to connect with musical artists in the indie music scene (Johansson & Bell, 2009). The 2012 edition of the National Endowment for the Arts’ periodic Survey of Public Participation in the Arts was the first to collect data about live music attendance of *any* kind, rather than only classical, jazz, or Latin, Spanish, or salsa music. The survey finds that 31.6% of all adults in the U.S. attended a concert in 2012, while by comparison, only 8.8% of all adults attended a classical music concert (National Endowment for the Arts, 2013). Subsequent years’ surveys will illuminate trends in overall live music concert attendance; for now, it appears that people are still attending small, popular music venues in healthy numbers.

Connell and Gibson (2003) find that “music and space are actively and dialectically related” (p. 192). Similarly, Cohen (1995), in building a theory of music and the “sensuous

production of space,” finds that music “reflects but also influences the social relations, practices, and material environments through which it is made” (p. 442). I will now discuss the social uses and expectations of physical places where live music is heard.

### **The Live Concert Experience and Audience Loyalty**

Music concert attendees expect much from a performance—to be with friends or to make new ones, to enjoy a good performance, and perhaps, to fulfill a spiritual or emotional need (Radbourne et al., 2009). While music psychology scholars have studied the dimensions of musical preference (see Wheeler, 1985; Miller & Strongman, 2002), it is outside of the scope of the present discussion, which assumes that a live concert attendee knows that she or he likes the music that she or he has paid to see. With this in mind, music venue administrators should more strongly consider all the ways in which they can strive to meet concert attendees’ needs beyond the musical-aesthetic—those that are social, emotional, and spatial.

From a marketing standpoint, promoters and venue managers would find it financially beneficial to better understand what aspects of the live music experience are most relevant to the attendee (Pitts, 2010). While this perspective is common to nonprofit performing arts centers that must serve a mission oriented towards public needs before all other concerns, it is not necessarily at the forefront of most commercial music venue owners’ minds. The reasons for this are complex. Many popular music venues rely upon the sale of alcohol to obtain acceptable profit margins from an evening’s concert (Kronenburg, 2012; Burrows, 2009; Stewart, 2010), and this priority sometimes crowds out other considerations related to optimization of service delivery. Additionally, bands are often booked based on popularity and their ability to draw a crowd; an exception to this would be the aforementioned local-act-only neighborhood venues. Within

commercial music venues that book regional, national, or international acts, there is relatively little effort made to establish continuity between audiences from one show to the next. Although a venue usually books within a particular broad subset of musical style (independent music, for example), the range of acts can include diverse genres (such as independent hip hop, rock, and bluegrass). As acts are expected to draw their own discrete crowd, there may be no apparent benefit to building a loyal audience base. Still, not all acts have equally significant draws. A way to mitigate this uncertainty in attendance is by aiming to increase the power of the audience experience for attendees. Why solely rely on the draw of a particular touring band or cumulative alcohol sales to maintain financial equilibrium? Encouraging repeat attendance within a given venue's constituency will naturally improve its financial bottom line, and as will be discussed, a fuller hall for any single show is one factor likely to increase the perceived quality of a performance for an audience member. As I have argued, place attachment to a music venue is generated among attendees through repeat attendance. The factors that contribute to a positive experience, which could ultimately result in repeat attendance, will now be discussed.

Pitts and Burland (2012) state, "Live listening is...both an individual and a social act, with unpredictable risks and pleasures attached to both elements, and varying between listeners, venues, and occasions" (p.18). In addition to those personal experiences as described earlier, there are a number of considerations to acknowledge when investigating the attendee's social experience of a live music event. While each of these do not assume that the attendee is necessarily at a live concert *primarily* to socialize, each consideration is put forth with the understanding that there are aspects to just being part of the audience that shapes her or his experience. In other words, while an attendee's personal experience of the music is a very important predictor of her or his enjoyment of the event, the interpersonal and venue-specific

aspects are what set the conditions for this personal experience to occur. To analyze these considerations efficiently, I have divided them as follows: performer-audience connection; attendee sense of belonging; revelry; authenticity in experience; music venue intimacy; and music venue escape value. I then offer ideas for programming for social bridging.

Before relating these considerations, it should be noted that audience experience at a popular music venue has been researched very little. The literature summarized in this section represents research undertaken at a variety of performances, including classical (Dobson, 2010; Radbourne et al., 2009); jazz (Pitts & Burland 2010; Pitts & Burland 2013; Radbourne et al., 2009); musical theater (Pitts, 2004); and even theatrical performances (Radbourne et al., 2009). Three of the papers referenced describe audiences at what could be considered popular music concerts (Earl, 2001; Jackiewicz & Craine, 2009; Dowdy, 2007).

## **Interpersonal Considerations of the Live Music Experience**

### *Performer-Audience Connection*

The degree to which there is a connection between the performer(s) and the audience will impact the experience of attendees. The live music experience differs from the recorded music listening experience chiefly in that, at a concert, the performer(s) serve as a mediating factor between the music and the audience (Jackiewicz & Craine, 2009; Pawley & Müllensiefen, 2012). Regarding live music, Connell and Gibson (2003) state, “it is the context in which communication between musicians and audiences is perceived to be the most direct...” (p. 29). Arguably, at a classical concert (be it chamber ensemble or orchestra), musicians are less likely to incite the same level of fanatic ardor that occurs with the more commercially visible performers of the independent and popular music genres. Even with performers that have

achieved less notoriety on a scale of fame that tops out at the superstar level of, for example, Beyoncé, small venues still routinely bring bands and solo performers that have a fan base of some kind, if considered niche within the larger music industry. The notion of hero worship is worth mentioning here. Earl (2001) speaks about hero worship as one of seven possible reasons an individual would choose to attend a live music concert despite potential risks such as the cost of transportation and childcare, poor sound, difficulty in being able to see the stage, and dislike of supporting acts. If an attendee has built up a personal history with an act through time spent with the performer's recordings, the individual can finally come face to face with her or his "hero" by seeing that performer live, who is often ascribed a "sacred" status (Earl, 2001, p. 350). By virtue of attending the concert, the individual becomes a part of the performance, and with her or his physical presence, can communicate support for that artist.

Indeed, one aspect of an attendee getting swept away in a live performance is the extent to which the performer personifies the music, for "at smaller gigs, in particular, they should appear to be the inspired source of the sound. The audience expects to appreciate aura" (Thornton, 1996, p. 81). The artist as one who channels divine inspiration is a well-known trope in all artistic disciplines, but perhaps because of the popularity and commercially widespread nature of music, fans seem to expect this creative "aura" most from musical performers onstage. At the same time, though, there is ample evidence that a *reduction* in the physical and figurative distance between performer(s) and audience members increases the potency of the experience for attendees. Contributors to reduced distance include spatial characteristics of the venue, which will be described in some detail later; however, it is apparent that being in close proximity to the performer as would be more likely in a small venue is a predictor of increased enjoyment at a concert (Radbourne et al., 2009; Dowdy, 2007).

One tactic to reduce figurative performer-attendee distance is for the performer to engage with the audience. Performers should at least acknowledge and thank the audience (Dobson, 2010; Radbourne et al., 2009), and all the better if they exhibit certain personality traits consistently enough to demonstrate a stage persona. A performer's ability to communicate their own commitment to performing in the moment, evidenced by their apparent absorption in what they are doing, also impacts an attendee's level of enjoyment of the concert (Pitts & Burland, 2010). Many performers can, and do, go beyond mere recognition of the audience. For example, Dobson (2010) found that new classical music attendees were more likely to enjoy a classical concert that contained embedded information, as through performers verbally introducing musical choices. While this provision of information was designed to make first-time attendees more comfortable with what they deemed as foreign (and perhaps intimidating) musical concert territory, it is useful in illuminating the concept of reducing the distance between performer and audience. The correlate of this at a popular music concert would be the performer engaging in between-song storytelling.

In general, audience members need to feel as though they know what is expected of them, regardless of genre of music played (Radbourne et al., 2009). As mentioned earlier, Dowdy (2007) noted that at hip hop concerts with politically involved musicians, the presence of a direct relationship between performer and audience was extremely important in cultivating the "collective agency" that so enlivened and motivated the crowd. Some of the aspects that exemplified this direct relationship, such as relatively inexpensive concert tickets and the tendency of the performers to mingle with the audience before and after concerts, were those that could be seen as equalizing the power between both parties; in other words, the opposite of hero worship. However, I would suggest that a certain level of hero worship could still be at play

under such circumstances. Though some performers make overt efforts not to put themselves on a level somehow above the audience, the nature of the performer-audience paradigm makes it difficult for a performer to completely scale this differential. It could even be beneficial for performers to maintain a certain level of mystique onstage (Thornton, 1996). At the extreme end, audience perception of performer “aura” can lead to idolization, which can produce such intense emotions and physiological reactions that cause fainting or hyperventilation in fans (Tan et al., 2010). While this is less likely to happen in a smaller venue, where the stars are not as big and attendees must sometimes abide by social unwritten rules to maintain their “cool,” the “aura” of the performer(s) enhances the otherworldly nature of the experience, laying down one possible condition for peak experience.

Live music concerts can be participatory to the extent that the performer(s) invite the audience to be part of the performance. At hip hop shows especially, but also at concerts of other genres, performers can initiate call and response (Dowdy, 2007), or assign audience members other performative contributions such as handclaps or letting audience members sing into the microphone during the chorus of a particularly well-known song. Even the acts of cheering and dancing are means through which audience members co-create the live music experience. Indeed, audience members actively construct meaning during a live performance (Connell & Gibson, 2003), though the extent to which they influence the performer(s)’ set is entirely in the hands of those onstage.

### *Attendee Sense of Belonging*

As has been shown, the social aspects of music listening are powerful—enough so that sometimes scenes are built upon the habitual gathering of individuals to see live music within a

locale. But exactly what occurs to create a feeling of connection between attendees? As previously mentioned, Earl (2001) looked at the factors that make a live concert compelling when an attendee would otherwise stay home and listen to the artist's album, terming one of these factors the "social dimension" of the live music experience (pp. 351-353). Contributing to this dimension is that live concerts can be social meeting places, and attendance can confer social status. Within an independent music concert, this latter aspect is similar to what Thornton (1996) terms subcultural capital. Gathering with like-minded folk creates a sense of belonging, as concerts "provide opportunities to discover whether one is alone in one's social group in liking a particular type of music" (Earl, 2001, p. 352). Beyond serving as a space to test one's conception of oneself, and to possibly help form one's identity, concerts create a space in which attendees can experience the feeling of being part of a collective. In Dobson's (2010) study, an individual was most likely to rate her or his experience of a classical music concert as enjoyable if she or he felt included; this was made possible by the aforementioned use of "embedded" information.

Music festivals are somewhat unique in their ability to generate a sense of belonging or of being part of the collective. For example, a small, regular festival may produce a tightly knit community that is especially homogenous (Pitts, 2004); as mentioned, such a similar effect is achieved in local pub rock scenes. In these situations especially, "music listening can be a shared experience that reinforces identity and belonging" (Pitts, 2004, p. 158). Through repeated interactions with the same individuals, bonds are formed. However, the reality is that at most small music venues that book regional or national acts, the same crowd does not show up time after time. In these situations, social benefits are more about being in a tightly packed crowd and feeding off of the energy of others, or socializing with friends that attendees have brought with them. In the case of the latter, powerful, shared musical experiences can serve to strengthen



existing relationships between friends (Pitts & Burland, 2010). The sense of being in an audience is indeed an important motivating factor for going out, and this sense cannot be achieved with a half-empty venue (Pitts & Burland, 2012). Additionally, dancing and singing along to songs at a live concert can have a synchronizing effect on attendees (Turino, 2008; Pawley & Müllensiefen, 2012) as evidenced through the phenomenon of entrainment (Tan et al., 2010; Sager, 2012). In sharing in the same kinesthetic activities, audience members feel closer to one another, and with this feeling of connection or *communitas* can come a still greater, ephemeral sense of relatedness to humanity and the cosmos.

### *Revelry*

Central to this feeling of exhilaration and of being even temporarily bonded to fellow concertgoers is the sense of revelry that is experienced at a concert. Crowd psychology offers one useful way to understand this revelry. Crowd or mob psychology looks at how members of a crowd, such as the audience at a concert, are susceptible to losing their rational decision-making faculty, sometimes acting contrary to their personal ideals (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2013; Earl, 2001). A recent theory of crowd psychology emphasizes the individual's idolization of the person who is the center of attention (Tan et al., 2010), recalling the previous discussion of hero worship. And yet, besides the power that a charismatic performer holds over a captive audience and the crude psychological mechanics of the "herd mentality," the simple influence of alcohol cannot be ignored. Research on "singing along" at pubs and nightclubs has revealed that more intense revelry is seen on weekend days and later in the evening, as more alcohol is imbibed and inhibitions fall away (Pawley & Müllensiefen, 2012).

Although largely dependent on genre and the scene-particular unspoken rules of conduct at a live concert, dancing also figures into the degree of revelry in which an attendee partakes. In illustrating this point, part of Thornton's (1996) argument about the potency of "club cultures" and attendee experiences therein is that music is embodied. She describes this process of embodiment as twofold: first, people relate to their environment through their physical relationship to it (recalling Lefebvre's concept of the "lived" or "representational" space). Second, music often: provokes a kinesthetic response through dancing; includes the bodily perception of sound waves; and is expressed through the physical movements of performing musicians. Music venues allow attendees to experience an intensified sense of their own physicality, influencing how they perceive the sound and interact with other attendees. In addition, the dark interior, flashing lights, sometimes hot temperatures, and often overwhelmingly loud volume of music within a venue all serve to disorient and, in a way, level the social playing field between attendees (Dowdy, 2007; Thornton, 1996). In this alternate world, the rules of time, space, and sometimes, social mores temporarily do not apply. When an attendee feels as though she or he can express her or himself freely while experiencing the music in a direct and immediate manner, there is an opportunity for her or him to feel a powerful sense of authenticity.

#### *Authenticity in Experience: Performer and Attendees*

Authenticity is a slightly less tangible or obvious aspect of an attendee's live music experience, yet must be examined. Kronenberg (2012) states that, even in this time of readily available music via the Internet, popular music is unequivocally tied to a specific time and place; when it comes to live music, "nothing can replace the actual experience, *the authentic*

*experience*, of having been at that event” (p. 4; author’s emphasis). Attending a concert and being able to relate this experience to others after the fact translates to authenticity, such that attendees have bragging rights. More broadly, though, the notion of authenticity underpins much of the scholarship related to popular music. Musicians are expected to be authentic in their delivery of a performance (whether recorded or live); otherwise, they risk being labeled as phony and will have a difficult time finding legitimization within their respective genre. Connell and Gibson (2003) summarize Grossberg, explaining that authenticity has three dimensions: “aesthetics (the skill and creativity of the artists); the construction of a rhythmic and sexual body (often linked to dance and black music); and the ability to articulate private but common desires, feelings, and experiences, through a common language that constructs or expresses the notion of a community” (p. 29). As this idea relates to live music, the performer must express authenticity in order to create an environment where audience members can also feel like their authentic selves.

I would like to suggest that, in fact, concerts offer a rare environment in which attendees can feel and express personal authenticity. In a sensually disorienting environment where even traditional conceptions of time might be considered a discourse, where alcohol is being consumed and intense emotions are being felt all around, attendees may experience a certain vulnerability understood as personal authenticity. Authenticity is also one of four components that Radbourne et al. (2009) have identified as essential to a positive performing arts attendee experience. The authors suggest that while an audience member’s perception of whether or not a performer is expressing authenticity will necessarily be unique to each audience member, an attendee can both experience authenticity individually and collectively; in the case of the latter, this ties back into the concept of *communitas*.

## **Venue Considerations of the Live Music Experience**

### *Music Venue and Sense of Intimacy*

Up to this point, I have said relatively little about the physical characteristics of a music venue that are optimal for attendee engagement, place attachment, and/or scene formation. While it is outside the scope of this inquiry to delve deeply into architecture, certain aspects of venue design and the behavior these physical features influence can be examined when looking at attendee engagement. Central to the powerful live music experience is the feeling of being immersed—in the crowd, in the musical sound waves, and, for lack of a better term, in the energy that the combination of crowd and sound generates. Music venues, as conduits for this special energy, can enhance or distract from the feeling of being immersed. As Cohen elegantly states, “...as sound, music fills and structures the space within and around us, inside and outside. Hence, much like our concept of space, music can appear to envelop us” (1995, p. 444). It happens that it is easier to achieve a feeling of immersion, or of being enveloped, in a smaller space.

To begin, reduction of distance between performer(s) and audience members, which as discussed is key to enjoyment of a live concert, is easier to negotiate in a small venue. This reduction of distance correlates with an attendee feeling personally connected with the performer(s), heightening the sense of shared emotion. Such close confines also allow the performer(s) to interact more directly, and perhaps more authentically, with audience members. To use an extreme example of the opposite, arena rock concerts usually find the performer(s) prepared with stage banter, which include prompts for audience participation (asking the audience to cheer or hold up their cell phones, for example). However, I argue that it is unlikely that such overtures will feel authentic or personally meaningful to an audience member. In

contrast, in a small venue where attendees can be close to the stage, an attendee might even engage in conversation with the performer(s), or a particular fan might grab the set list at the concert's conclusion. In addition to an increased sense of intimacy (Dowdy, 2007), a smaller venue provides the practical advantage of allowing a better view of the stage. As can be expected, good sight lines are important with regards to an audience member's enjoyment of a concert (Pitts & Burland, 2010).

In addition to such "close architectural confines" made possible in a small venue, another factor contributing to an attendee's sense of immersion are the often high decibel sound levels that seem to drown out the outside world (Dowdy, 2007, p. 83). Although volume level will depend on genre and the preferences of the venue's sound engineer and the performing musicians, a smaller space bounds amplified sound more closely. Acoustic intimacy, listener envelopment, and warmth are three desired characteristics of architectural acoustics. Acoustic intimacy has to do with a listener's perception of closeness of sound, listener envelopment refers to the perception of being surrounded by reverberant sound, and warmth is interpreted through the presence of bass tones (Tan et al., 2010). Interestingly, these are the aural correlates of some of the aspects already covered in this inquiry: an attendee's sense of closeness to the performer(s), of being enfolded or enveloped in the venue's atmosphere, and of emotional warmth in the form of social conviviality.

The idea of auditory spatial awareness provides another useful way to conceptualize a music venue attendee's conception of the musical space. Blesser and Salter (2007) define auditory spatial awareness as the way in which an individual detects sound within a space, in addition to the individual's resulting emotional and behavioral experience within that space. Recalling Lefebvre's definition of representational space, auditory spatial awareness is "the

*internal* experience of an *external* environment” (authors’ emphasis; Blesser & Salter, 2007, p. 131). By sharing an acoustical space through common experience of the music, music venues can reinforce social cohesion (Blesser & Salter, 2007; Mencarelli & Pulh, 2006). Thus, in many ways, the venue shapes an attendee’s experience of the musical concert. By providing extraordinary or exaggerated conditions in which auditory spatial awareness occurs, music venues can be the key facilitator between an individual’s subjective, private experience and the public experience, and again, exist as sites of liminality.

### *Music Venue and Escape Value*

Mencarelli (2008) developed an instrument for measuring different types of value audience members seek from a performing arts venue. Though these venues were largely performing arts centers, the instrument is useful to consider some measures of value in a venue that I have not already discussed here. These are: aesthetic, performer interaction, audience interaction, accompanier interaction (friend accompanying attendee to the concert), affective, functional, social distance, and escape values. I have examined some of these extensively, such as the social interaction aspects of music venues. Before concluding this discussion of the physical and experiential aspects of a music venue, though, I would like to talk a bit more about escape value.

Thornton (1996) notes that many dance clubs “have long winding corridors punctuated by a series of thresholds which separate inside from outside, private from public, the dictates of dance abandon from the routine rules of school, work, and parental home” (p. 21). While such a labyrinthine construction might not be a practical way to design a music venue, there could be a way to achieve a similar feeling of escape within such a venue by using features of décor.

However, in exploiting the escapist value of a venue in this manner, the venue may become correspondingly socially opaque or inaccessible, trading in a sense of warmth and camaraderie for one of other-worldliness. While it is possible to develop both a scene around, and place attachment to, a venue that matches the model Thornton describes, if one considers escapism central to the live music experience, how can the experience truly be a social one? Is it possible for such a venue's performances to have positive and long-lasting social-capital building effects on attendees, if escapism hinges on the conscious abandonment of one's daytime role? While live music concerts afford a sort of temporary freedom for attendees for all the reasons examined, without efforts made to mitigate both exclusivity and an extreme emphasis on the subjective, personal experience, they will not stand as a reliable tool for social bridging.

### *Programming for Social Bridging*

As I have shown, bonding through a live concert experience is not uncommon. Whether attendees become closer to those with whom they arrived, interact with new folks through dancing, form a scene based in a venue, or simply feel in tune with other audience members through the transcendent aesthetic experience that live music can engender, individuals use music venues to feel connected to others. Even if this is secondary to the main reason for attending (presumably, to see the performer(s)), connection to others is a motivating factor and a sure benefit of going to a concert. Such social bonding and connection building seems to have less roadblocks within a small music venue, as well. Social bridging, however, is more difficult to facilitate.

To review, bridging occurs when people make connections with one another across differences. Such alliance building contributes to healthy social reciprocity by requiring "that we

transcend our social and political and professional identities to connect with people unlike ourselves” (Putnam, 2000, p. 411). What drives an attendee’s musical genre preference, in part, is the desire to define and publicly showcase an identity while participating in the expression of affinity with others who like the same thing. This is not likely to change, nor would I suggest it should. However, it is possible to convene different groups of people—those unlikely to commune socially due to difference in race or ethnicity, socioeconomic status, orientation, or age—by bringing multiple music genres together in one concert. Many museums have experimented with “culture clashing” to aid in bridging, whereby programmers combine multiple distinct subject or patron interest areas through an event to intentionally bring together diverse audiences (Garcia, 2012, p. 28). While music venues working in an outside promoter booking model would not easily be able to achieve cross-genre booking, and keeping in mind that management of some bands require approval of opening acts prior to signing on for a show, such a feat would be possible in some circumstances and could be more easily implemented in small, independent venues.

Putnam (2000) argues for participatory arts activities as a means to build social capital; his sentiment echoes that of musicologist Turino (2008), who suggests that participatory music-making brings participants closer together through flow and entrainment. It is difficult to imagine that such participatory music making could occur in tandem with the overt performer admiration that saturates many a music concert. While, again, this type of activity would not be appropriate or scalable for every venue, it is worth discussing in a preliminary fashion here.

Simon (2010) defines a participatory cultural institution as one where individuals can create or contribute to some aspect of meaningful content while sharing and connecting with others over that content. The James Irvine Foundation further defines participation along the



“Audience Involvement Spectrum,” measuring it according to a participant’s level of creative control (Brown, Novack-Leonard, & Gilbride, 2011, p. 15). While the Audience Involvement Spectrum was designed with museums, theaters, and community arts organizations in mind, aspects of it could be applied to music venues. On the lower end of the Audience Involvement Spectrum lies crowd sourcing, wherein the audience helps choose or curate content. This is seen at concerts all the time; attendees request that certain songs be played, and as has been shown, this increases the performer-audience connection, and thus improves the experience for the attendee. The second level is co-creation. In this instance, the audience actually contributes to the performance. In music concert terms, this could be as simple as supplying handclaps during a song, or chiming in during performer-initiated call-and-response. Note that at a concert, both of these activities are dependent upon the openness of the performer(s) to audience interaction. The final and most participatory level of the Audience Involvement Spectrum is audience-as-artist. In this scenario, the act of creation becomes focused on process, rather than artistic product. In Turino’s and Putnam’s conceptualization of participation, this level would be tantamount to citizens singing in a choir, engaging in social dancing, or playing in a jam session. It is most difficult to imagine this level of participatory performance occurring within a traditional music venue. Yet, such use of interactive or “communicative” performance design increases agency for all participants involved (Miles, 2009). Describing communicative action as “a form of social interaction, pursued verbally or nonverbally, oriented towards achieving understanding and consensus” (*ibid*, p. 32), Miles suggests that through communicative performance an audience can become a community.

If a music venue were to design participatory music experiences, issues of responsibility in programming would necessarily arise. For example, venue administrators could design

participatory experiences that would occur in tandem with a performance (for example, providing attendees with an opportunity to sing and play in a pre-show acoustic jam session, or providing a between-band art activity). However, in order for the performance itself to be truly participatory, the performers would need to help execute participatory activity during their set. Examples of participatory musical performances that require during-show audience interaction do exist; in the best cases, audience members can track the effect that their contributions have on the musical performance in real time (Freeman, 2010; Taylor, Boulanger, & Olivier, 2008; Hödl, Kayali, & Fitzpatrick, 2012). However, many of these musical composer-designed examples rely on interactive technology that is beyond both the financial and logistical means of small music venues, as well as possibly outside the scope of the artistic interests of both performer(s) and audience.

Though, not all participatory musical experiences must be tethered to technology. One performance I personally helped facilitate was designed by the composer Lanier Sammons. Entitled “Triplum,” in this performance, professional instrumentalists were placed in each of three galleries in the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History. They were given “open scores,” scores written by Sammons that contained minimal required notation and much room for performer interpretation. Two of the three galleries had small, hand-made scales adjacent to the seated performers that allowed for audience member interaction; one scale was labeled “fast/slow,” and the other was labeled “loud/soft.” In each gallery, audience members were encouraged to drop provided tokens onto either side of the scale, which the performer would then respond to musically. Thus, the audience member was able to immediately hear the result of her or his manipulation of either tempo or dynamics. In the third gallery, the setup was a bit more complex. Pre-made cards with prompts such as “Draw the voice of someone you love” and

“What’s your sound?” were available for audience members to fill out and put on a modified music stand in front of the performer. The performer then played her or his interpretation of these cards. Based on my personal observation, some audience members stayed for over an hour, creating multiple cards to see how the performer interpreted the responses. The other aspect of this performance was that there were speakers in each gallery set up with audio delay, so in every room, one could hear the sound from the other rooms from a few minutes prior. Although this added another dimension to the overall musical composition, it was not integral to the participatory nature of the performance.

Existing on the “co-creation” end of the “Audience Involvement Spectrum,” in “Triplum,” audience members in each gallery were able to see the impact their contributions had on the composition, which is crucial to the design of a good participatory art project. A project like this was successful (defined in this case as enjoyable for the audience members) for this very reason. Whether a performance like this be possible within a popular music venue depends largely on the willingness of a band or solo musician to design and implement a project of this nature, which differs substantially from the typical set of rehearsed songs. Unless bands and solo musicians consistently see an increased demand for participatory concert design (which, given the current emphasis on participatory design in other cultural settings, may well be inevitable), it is not reasonable to ask that they build opportunities for participatory engagement into their sets beyond that which they already do. So, music venue administrators should consider what they can do to scale participation for attendees, either through commissioning specific artists to design participatory performances similar to “Triplum,” or through before- or between-set programming add-ons. If nothing else, they should consider booking cross-genre to encourage social bridging. Such attention to enhancing participation opens up a venue to a broader audience, enriches the

experience for those who already attend, and encourages attendee place attachment, which translates to audience loyalty.

### **Section 3: Discussion and Conclusion**

#### **Towards a New Conceptual Framework for Attendee Engagement in Small Popular Music Venues**

Music concerts offer a unique opportunity for attendees to have a personal, even sacred, experience with the music and performers while still connecting to the larger group. I suggest that attendee engagement within music venues be conceived of as therefore having three contributors: the individual, with her or his expectations, affective state, and other factors germane to her or his interior experience; the other individuals present (including the performer(s)) and the phenomena that result from this intentional and temporary grouping; and the venue itself as a lived or representational space which contributes to the experience of all those present. If the attendee has positive personal experiences with the musical outlay, positive interactions with others, and positively attributes how the space shapes both of these, the individual is likely to return to the venue. Based on habitual attendance, the attendee can develop place attachment to the venue. Now, I will review the factors that contribute to positive private and social experiences, as well as the role that the venue plays in these experiences.

##### *The Individual Experience*

Music venue attendees often feel momentary transcendence of the physical realm at a concert. This is aided by features specific to music, notably, the seeming reconfiguration of time

and strong emotional and physiological reactions to music, including peak experience and flow. Experiences such as these can be pivotal for an individual, and even those of lesser degrees of intensity can be spiritually deepening. These phenomena occur because individuals are able to access a space of the “in-between” with music. Furthermore, the sheer act of participating in a live music performance instills hope, as “...the arts are a realm where the impossible or nonexistent or the ideal is imagined and made possible, and new possibilities leading to new lived realities are brought into existence in perceivable forms” (Turino, 2008, p. 17). This sense of possibility allows a live concert attendee to feel more open to the experiencing of strong emotions, as well as a sense of personal authenticity engendered by such vulnerability.

An individual is more likely to have a peak experience at a concert if she or he has much prior musical training or exposure, and/or has had a peak experience during music listening in the past. Particular musical features also tend to incite strong emotions, but not all attendees react in the same way to a piece of performed music. Still, if an attendee is able to make a personal connection with the music, and the musicians display technical skill, originality, and apparent authenticity, the likelihood for peak experience will increase. While music venue administrators can only nominally affect the extent to which strong emotions, transcendence, or peak experience are privately felt by the attendee, they can take steps to maximize opportunities for an attendee’s positive social and venue-bound interactions.

### *The Social Experience*

When concert attendees contribute to the rhythmical component of live music through playing an instrument, singing, or dancing, entrainment can occur; this deepens the experience of all those involved. The more attendees are actively engaged in the performance through these

activities, the more the event can also be called participatory. A concert at a small popular music venue can be participatory; this is dependent upon style of music, how encouraging the performers are of audience expression, and how comfortable attendees are.

Some individuals derive an identity from the music they listen to; this process is aided by habitual attendance at concerts of a primary, preferred genre. As this trend is conceptualized within popular music studies, other attendees similarly disposed to a particular style or genre will band together to form a scene. Scene formation is also dependent upon the presence of resources both creative and financial/physical. Scene members define themselves by their relationship to this scene, and music venues can act as a hub for this activity of self-definition. A scene's ability to attract and retain attendees is powerful, and must be looked at when considering attendee engagement within music venues.

The relationships that occur between music venue attendees generate bonding social capital, and sometimes, subcultural capital. While considered beneficial for the attendees, both bonding and subcultural capital can be exclusionary to outsiders. Social bridging is significantly harder to engineer, but has the benefit of creating trust and reciprocity between individuals that do not normally interact. Music concerts provide a temporary community space where new relationships can potentially be forged amongst those of similar *or* dissimilar backgrounds, and venues can serve as important sites for spatial entitlement. Because music can bring individuals into contact with the less-experienced aspects of themselves, music concerts are an ideal setting to build both forms of social capital.

*Venue as Liminal Space*

Suspension of time, a sense of the Possible, heightened emotional response, personal authenticity, performer-audience connection, and formation of new and/or strengthening of existing social relationships all meet to create a space of liminality within a music venue. When an individual participates in this ritual-like routine of concert attendance at one venue repeatedly, attendee place attachment results. Further, a music venue is both a material reality and a concept for an attendee. A symbolic interactionist theory of place attachment suggests that an individual must have both a personal history with, and imagined future in, a place in order to form an emotional bond with it. Further, music venues can be termed representational spaces. As attendees habitually act within the space, she or he experiences it as inseparable from the emotional, social, and physical interactions she or he has within it, and ascribes it meaning accordingly. The venue facilitates this exchange between attendee and music, attendee and performer(s), and attendee and other concertgoers. Serving as a space to experience the private publicly, the venue is key in bringing cognitive consonance and a needed, albeit transient, sense of unity to an individual's earthly experience. It is also in this (conceptual *and* physical) space that *communitas* is realized between attendees.

Practically speaking, an attendee should be able to get close to, or at least have good sight lines of, the stage, and performers whom are known to interact with the audience should be presented. Following the principles of psychoacoustics, the sound in a venue should provide a feeling of warmth, intimacy, and envelopment. Opportunities to dance will increase attendee sense of revelry, and a measured sense of escapism should be provided with regards to architecture and design.

The audience at a music concert is made up of individual attendees all experiencing a personal connection to the music, to the performers, *and* to the other audience members through the phenomena discussed; collectivity through strong, shared affective experience results. Through this process, the individual attendee creates personal meaning out of the experience, creates meaning with fellow concertgoers, and all co-create meaning with the performer(s) inside the venue's walls. It is the temporary nature of the live concert experience, as well as potential for flow and peak experience made possible by the seemingly time and space-shifting properties of ritualized music listening, that crystallizes personal feelings and social interactions into a sort of liminal space within the music venue. This is the nexus of the individual and the social, and this is where true attendee engagement lies (see Appendix: Visual Schematic of Conceptual Framework).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This exploration has investigated the psychological and social processes of attendee engagement within small, popular music venues. Through this inquiry, I discovered that an attendee can form place attachment to a music venue as she or he has positive individual and social experiences there, and as she or he builds memories of, and can imagine having future positive experiences within, this place. Repetition of positive experiences is the most powerful predictor of place attachment, and the ritual-like nature of concert attendance does encourage habitual attendance. The opportunity to have good social experiences with like-minded individuals aids in place attachment, and this is also key to local, venue-based scene formation. However, this notion of social bonding is also where the two concepts diverge. While exclusionary practices born from bonding seem to be central to scene formation and it appears



that social bridging is even antithetical to scenes, place attachment is a psychological phenomenon that can accommodate a wider spectrum of social identification in attendees by putting more emphasis on the personal experience of the attendee.

As a lens through which to study cultural venue attendees, place attachment provides more flexibility than scenes for understanding how social and cultural differences affect engagement. Furthermore, a “scene” stipulates that there is also a wealth of production and consumption of a particular style or genre of music. While investigations of particular scenes provide popular music scholars with fruitful case studies, the perspective offered by this type of inquiry is narrow, skewing findings toward genre-specific social conventions. Thus, while place attachment and scene formation share some conceptual ground, place attachment offers a more holistic framework through which to understand engagement. For these reasons, I recommend that field research should be undertaken which uses the construct of place attachment to collect data about attendee engagement within music venues.

While booking mostly local music or music of one genre can lead to a scene, there is a risk of homogenization of the crowd. On the other hand, a venue can strive to build diverse constituency by paying mind to the social and individual needs of *all* potential attendees. An immersive experience, a variety of booked musical acts with established fan bases, and performers known to interact with the audience are key factors to encouraging repeat attendance, and thus, place attachment. While social bridging opportunities are not necessary criteria for place attachment, my position is that it is a venue manager’s responsibility, especially within a nonprofit music venue, to actively pursue programming and marketing strategies that will pull in and retain a diverse audience base. Such strategies include cross-genre booking and participatory programming.

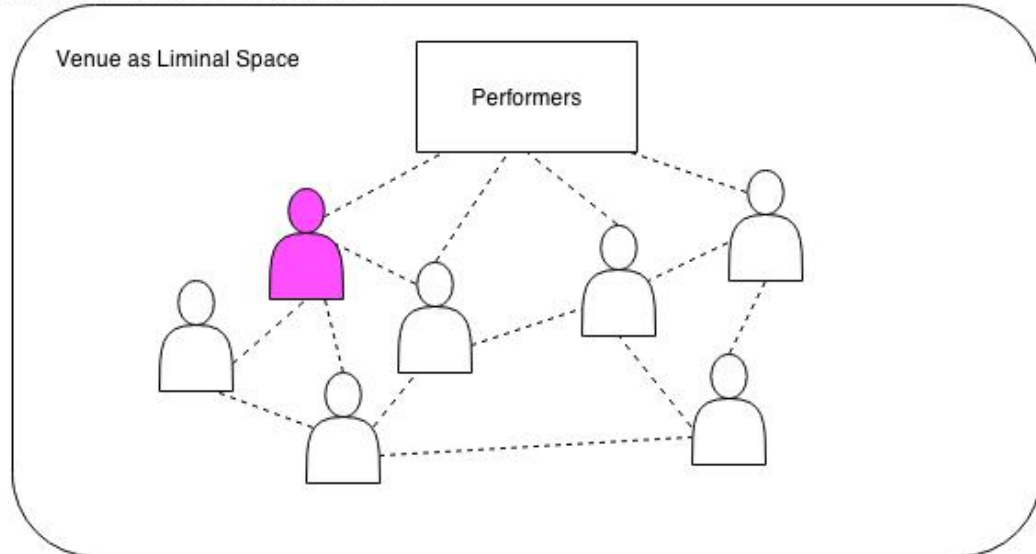
In many ways, the venue shapes an attendee's experience of the music concert. As such, they serve an important role—one that has been neglected in popular music, arts management, and psychology of music literature. Research that explores popular music venues even broadly should be undertaken, as well as research that looks at the social influence on peak experience. Psychology of music research (the most likely home for research on peak experience) has largely ignored the influence of social factors on musical emotion, and peak experience within a group setting is but one way to study this influence. I acknowledge that the study of peak experience offers particular difficulties in data collection, especially in an ecological setting of live concerts (such as reticence of participants to impart their experience to researchers; the elusiveness of such experiences; and the unpredictability of circumstances onsite within music venues), but at the least, further theoretical investigation of this topic should be undertaken, as should other studies of emotion and the social experience of music.

Attendance at popular music concerts in small venues—whether hip hop, rock, indie pop, or electronic dance music—is highly common. While sometimes considered within the field of arts management to be an average or generally unremarkable leisure activity, what transpires at these concerts can actually be quite remarkable. As I have established within this investigation, concerts offer a rare chance for attendees to experience strong emotions and momentary transcendence with others. Music venue administrators should aim to complement and honor these powerful individual and social experiences, consciously addressing the venue's position as the key mediating force between the two realms. They should consider their space as representational or lived, seeking to address all the needs of attendees. They should welcome diverse audiences, and consider booking criteria beyond profitability of a musical group. In doing this, they will stand a better chance of engendering place attachment for music venue

attendees, which will presumably translate into audience loyalty and economic stability in the end.


## Appendix: Visual Schematic of Conceptual Framework


## Co-creation of Meaning → Attendee Engagement



*The audience at a music concert is made up of individual attendees all experiencing an individual connection to the music (creation of personal meaning), social connection with other audience members (collectivity through shared experience), and connection with the performers (co-creation of meaning including a shared sense of liminality).*

KEY:

Individual = 

Other Individuals = 

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