

**THE EXPLORATION OF TRANSFORMATIONAL EXPERIENCES AT
FESTIVALS**

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Abstract

Electronic and transformational festivals (ETF) are growing in number and size. This study seeks to understand how these festivals are conducive to transformational experiences and the lived experience of festivalgoers. This is a phenomenological, exploratory study. The data was collected during 10 open-ended interviews from 11 volunteer participants from the Southern Alberta/East Kootenay area. Themes were generated using thematic analysis. A total of 15 themes and subthemes were developed. These themes were grouped according to the following: the physical and emotional environment created, how this environment creates moments of profound bliss, and the overall transformational journey. ETFs create an environment that allows festivalgoers to let down emotional guards and open themselves to new perspectives. Although participants described moments of profound bliss and shifts in consciousness, there was an overall consensus that these events act as stepping-stones in a life-long journey of learning and spiritual growth.

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List of Abbreviations

ETF – Electronic and Transformational Festivals
DJ – Disc Jockey

Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview

Everyone is going there for different reasons but when everyone is there together there is a shared intention of just raising awareness. Being unique and open-minded. Just really coming together. And maybe that's the common purpose, the common purpose is to come together and just witness what happens. And when you're coming together for such a pure purpose it becomes this conscious event.
(Tim)

Focus of the Study

Electronic and transformational festivals are growing in size and attendance, across both North America and Europe, and have impacted hundreds of thousands of people from around the world (Leung, Chan, & Transformational Festivals Series Team, 2014). In North America these festivals range in both duration and size. Smaller festival or newly established festivals may host around 350 participants over a long weekend; larger scale festivals, such as the famous Burning Man festival, may last several days. In 2014, Burning Man hosted nearly 66,000 participants in the Black Rock Desert of Nevada (Masha, Andrew, & Michael, 2015). In British Columbia alone, the 2015 festival season will be holding many well-established electronic and transformational festivals such as Bass Coast Project, Motion Notion Festival, Shambhala Music Festival, Luminosity Gathering, and many more. These events draw tens of thousands of festivalgoers every

year. With new festivals being created each year and attendances swelling into the thousands, it sparks the question of what are the intentions of such communities and why do they draw such avid participation?

Transformational festivals are events created to provide a space for individuals to learn about environmentally-conscious living practices, to promote the development and growth of communities centered around conscious living practices, and create an environment supportive of spiritual and personal development (Leung et al., 2014). Electronic festivals feature synthesized music played by DJs (disc jockeys) are most often held in remote locations, are associated with psychedelic drug use, and are known for their communities of tolerance in which counter-cultural values flourish (Weir, 2000).

These events are growing in both number and popularity yet very few studies have approached the topic of electronic and transformational events. Currently, there is a clear void in academic literature pertaining to this sub-culture. A review of the literature shows that raves have been the central focus in the media and academic research due to their association with drug culture. However, there are a few studies on rave culture and spirituality; most research on raves have focused on drug use and lacks information on participant perspectives and the personal meaning of their experiences (Hunt, Evans, & Kares, 2007). Documentaries and social media are the most prominent sources of information that are available. My own personal experiences at transformational festivals have also shown me how these are impactful events that create an accepting and open social environment, and provide extraordinary opportunities to improve physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness.

Previous scientific inquiries into rave culture have explored drug and alcohol use, the social structure of these events, and the personal impact of the events on ravers; therefore, I review literature on raves due to their similarity to electronic dance events. Other studies referenced have inquired into festivals, of all genres, as spaces for learning (Karlsen, 2007). Other forms of knowledge that were foundation for this study included documentaries such as *The Bloom Series* which explores electronic and transformational festivals around the world; the first episode explores the fundamental, recurring themes of what about transformational festivals allows for positive personal transformations (Leung et al., 2014).

The intention of this research project is to explore electronic and transformational festivals by understanding the importance and meaning given to them from those who have been personally touched by them as well as the physical, social, and emotional environment that fosters these experiences. This study relied on a group of participants who were willing to share their experiences from electronic and transformational festivals that they would describe as meaningful, spiritual, or influential. In-depth interviews with participants, observations, and personal experiences were the main sources of data. The subsequent analysis and results were founded in phenomenological hermeneutics.

Terms and Definitions

When entering this field of study there is an immediate issue in identifying and describing this festival genre. There are no formal definitions for transformational or electronic festivals in the academic literature, nor is there a clear consensus by those who

attend these festivals. The terms electronic or transformational are often applied to festivals interchangeably. Festivals may be described as electronic, transformational, or both, by festival organizational groups, and this may be classified differently from those attending the events. This is likely because they are so closely related to one another; transformational festivals have developed in parallel to electronic dance music and rave culture (Partridge, 2006). As explored in the literature review, historically raves were the first sub-culture to emerge, and were closely followed by the start of the British Free Festival (Blackman, 2007; Partridge, 2006). Electronic festivals are often referred to as such because of the type of music played, but similar styles are also found at events that are deemed transformational; however, transformational festivals are known for a sense of community that emphasizes personal reflection and growth. This concept of transformational festivals is reflected in the following passage from the Midsummer's Dream Festival:

What is a transformational festival? It is a counter culture festival that focuses on self- growth and personal realization through live music and artistic expression while featuring workshops on environmental sustainability and healthy living. The goal of the festival is to inspire participants to take their experiences home and apply them to enhance their everyday lives. (Midsummer's Dream Media Team, 2014)

For the purposes of this study, I use the term electronic and transformational festivals (ETFs) which I define as festivals using the following criteria: events held in outdoor locations removed from population centers; feature, but are not limited to, synthesized music played by DJs; has an association to counter-cultural activities; and a

sense of community or common purpose. Examples of counter-cultural activities include, but are not limited to, alternate styles of dress and physical projection of self, use of illicit drugs, and alternative expressions of sexuality. Individuals who attend festivals are referred to as festivalgoers, as this is the commonly used term at ETFs.

This study encounters aspects of self exploration and spirituality; therefore, for the purposes of this study spirituality is defined as “a way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate” (Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, & Saunders, 1998, p. 10). This definition is forwarded by Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, and Saunders (1998) in their study *Towards a Humanistic-Phenomenological Spirituality: Definition, Description, and Measurement*. Elkins et al. (1998) study is founded in the literary works of authors such as Abraham Maslow, John Dewey, William James, Carl Jung; the goal of the study was to create a humanistic definition of spirituality that was not restricted to a specific religion or tradition.

The current study views spirituality as an individual’s realization of self or self-awareness and seeks to understand how this may relate to a broader sense of community or culture. An individual’s self-awareness may include changes in their relation to mental, physical, or metaphysical state. This idea of self would also allow for the individual to develop a meaning to their life that goes beyond day-to-day existence (Joe-Laidler & Hunt, 2013). An individual’s religion may influence their perspective of their own spirituality; however, spirituality does not equate to religion for the purpose of this study. This perspective is in agreement with the researchers and authors of the reference

material used to inform this study, including Ken Wilber (Wilber, 1996, 1999) and Christina Grof (C. Grof, 1993).

Personal Impact

My interest in the subject as a researcher stems from my own experiences at transformational festivals; these experiences have altered my perception of the world, and exposed me to an alternative way of thinking, ultimately leading me to new life paths.

Before attending festivals, I could already sense that my personal interests and aspirations were changing. I had grown up idolizing scientific inquiry and research pursuits. A significant part of my childhood was spent watching children's shows that emphasized the importance of biology, ecology, chemistry and physics. Watching television shows such as *Bill Nye the Science Guy*, *Discovery Channel*, *Kratts' Creatures*, and *Magic School Bus* was a part of daily life. Growing up, I had respect for the environment and wildlife instilled in me; my family spent the majority of our vacation travels camping and playing outdoors. I was enrolled in summer camps with nature conservatory programs, and was a member of the local Girl Guides troop. The importance of getting an education was clearly communicated to me in my upbringing, and I was eager to pursue the sciences as part of a university education. I believed that a career in the sciences was not only a respectable pursuit, but would also be morally, mentally, and economically fulfilling. I began an undergraduate degree in Biochemistry as I thought the discipline embodied the best of all scientific pursuits, and although I was still impassioned with the sciences, I began to realize I was still craving something more grounded in human connection and personal values.

I first became involved in the festival community while attending festivals during the completion of my undergraduate degree. I attended not only as a festivalgoer but also as a volunteer working in hospitality, sanctuary, and First-Aid. Over the past four years I have attended festivals that were designated as electronic and/or transformational by the festivalgoers or by the organizers of the festivals. Examples of festivals I've attended include Oregon Country Fair, Inshala, Loki, Rainbow Festival, FozzyFest, and South Country Fair. Through my attendance and volunteer work at festivals I became integrated into local spiritual communities, participated in local projects and activities that focused on mindfulness, and created connections with festival entertainers and organizers.

Electronic music festivals have exposed me to a vast array of new concepts and perspectives at the time, and I found the amount of knowledge and opportunities that were presented to me to be overwhelming. It was the first time I felt open to exploring my spirituality; I was surrounded by a supportive community and environment that created the time and space in which I could reflect on my own beliefs and values, as well as explore new ones. I felt free to express myself through avenues that I would have otherwise been too self-conscious to consider, such as dance, art, costume, nudity, and in-depth conversation. My experiences ranged from finding the importance of self-love, to being comfortable with my body around others, to simply having the freedom to play. Through festivals I created new social networks, developed personal practices of mindfulness, and learned new life skills. Each time I returned from a festival I had gained new perspectives, inspiration, and sense of self. These festivals have exposed me to alternative ideas of environmentally sustainable existence, living consciously, and community centered lifestyles. These concepts of self-awareness, community

consciousness and the ideals of eco-conscious living practices are integral aspects of my life and a driving force for me to explore this area of research. As elegantly described by Ludwig Binswanger (1963), “[o]ne learns to know only what one loves, and the deeper and fuller the knowledge is to be, the more powerful and vivid must be the love” (p. 83). Transformational festivals, to me, are not just a weekend escape to dance and play, but are the birthplace for revolutionary human experiences. The skills and concepts I have learned from the festivals now are integral tools for dealing with my personal life challenge; the most profound example of this being my daily battle with my anxiety. I now had the ability to not only cope with stressors and breakdowns but also love myself throughout the process.

During my own experiences at festivals I saw myself and many others go through vibrant and beautiful experiences; I saw moments of deep healing and release, honest connection and open communication with strangers, and personal reflections resulting in changing life paths. My conversations with friends outside of the festival grounds revealed many similar stories. These events have been inspirational not only to me but also for many of my close friends. The documentaries and articles I’ve encountered also lead me to believe that festivals have fundamentally impacted thousands of people across the world (Leung et al., 2014).

I began to wonder if others have had similar experiences. What is it about these festivals that people find so meaningful? What aspects of festivals create this profound impact for people? At the same time, I was finishing my undergraduate degree and looking to change the direction of my own education. Would I be able to combine systematic research with the exploration of self? Can I explain the importance of festivals

to those who have not attended one? Is it possible to describe the impact of this experience through an academic lens?

I challenged myself to create a graduate thesis project that not only embodied exploratory academic research but also the meaning of human experiences in an area that I found inspiring. Not only has this study has been a learning experience for myself academically, but also spiritually. Through this project I have gained new perspectives of what my role as a researcher can be, and what I find meaningful as an individual. Throughout this research project I explored the connections between the professional and the personal, the academic and the existential.

Status of the Literature

The studies found on electronic and transformational festivals focused on single festivals and were preoccupied with predetermined themes. As previously stated, the literature for electronic dance culture is dominated by studies on raves. The majority of studies involving raves or non-electronic music festivals in North America are predominantly quantitative in nature and focus on licit and illicit drug use; few of these studies have explored the meaning of the experiences given by festivalgoers or ravers.

This study uses the literature available on the history of festival culture, rave culture, normalization of drug use, and the social and spiritual implication of drug use as a contextual basis for the study. The following chapter will go further in-depth into the cultural evolution of raves and ETF from free festivals. The history of human psychotropic drug use and drug use in popular culture is also expanded upon. The risk

and meaning of drug use at raves will be highlighted in the literature review. I review the physical and social context in which raves occur, popular recreational drugs used at these events, and how users perceive the physical risk and social impact of using these drugs. The social impact of drug use in mass gathering is then covered from an organizational level from both a harm reduction perspective and public policy. The review concludes with a summary of the transpersonal literature used to address the existential nature of the current study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction to Festivals

Festivals have been a part of human civilization for thousands of years; they are a part of community celebration, a space for self-expression and learning, and a part of human social and cultural development (Karlsen, 2007). Festivals have been established in many different cultures, and have many different themes that may highlight specific seasons, performing arts, craftsmanship, cuisine, or historical events. Festivals in Scandinavian countries and Europe have been increasing in number, with large cities to small towns hosting their own festivals (Karlsen, 2007). Festivals are unique to both the time and space in which they are held and evolve with the communities and times they are associated with. A newly evolved subgenre of festivals is the transformational festival. Transformational festivals are events known for providing a space for individuals to promote the development and growth of communities centered on consciousness living practices, a place for communication and learning, and the creation of an environment supportive of spiritual and personal development (Leung & Chan, 2013). These events have become known as places of openness, sharing, consciousness, and love.

Internationally there is a growing political and societal concern towards transformational festivals as these are associated with a culture immersed in illicit drugs. The number of events and size of raves and ETF are increasing around the world, and many events host over 30,000 participants (Hunt, Moloney, & Evans, 2009; Wilson &

Bryant, 2010) and some over 180,000 participants at large scale ETFs such as Tomorrowland (Red Bull, 2013).

For the purpose of this study, I will define raves as smaller scale events hosted at private homes, private buildings, clubs, bars or public venues. As previously stated, I define ETF as events held in outdoor locations removed from population centers, feature synthesized music, have an association to counter-cultural activities, and have a sense of community or common purpose. I refer to people who attend raves as “ravers” and those who attend festivals as “festivalgoers”. Raves and ETFs are both part of electronic dance music culture and have aspects of a conscious partying culture. Raves have many similar aspects to ETFs, as both electronic and transformational festivals evolved from raves. Historically only rave culture has been explored and well defined; therefore, I use the research on raves as a knowledge base for this literature review. This review features drug use and the physical, mental, and social impacts of drug use; the use of mind altering substances is a common aspect of electronic dance culture and a main theme in the current study, as seen in chapter 4.

The Evolution of Festival Culture

The concept of creating a culture that is founded on compassion, community, spirituality, and eco-consciousness is not original to modern day transformational festivals; such ideals can be traced back to the 1950s and 1960s as part of the counterculture of free festivals. The first large scale free festivals were held in Britain; they were events that celebrated and facilitated alternative approaches to spirituality,

social interaction, economics, and basic lifestyle. Partridge (2006) reviews free festivals as part of the archaeology of rave spirituality and the socialization of festivals. One of the most notable free festivals of this era is the Windsor Free Festival, which was first held at Stonehenge in 1974 and is still the longest lasting free countercultural festival. These festivals are created to represent a “model utopia” in which festival participants contribute skills, entertainment, or goods freely and trade is promoted over money-based economy. As eloquently described by Stone (1996) free festivals “are just that: freedom. You can do what you like, it doesn’t matter how bizarre, as long as it doesn’t impinge upon other people. No moralism. No prohibitions. Only the limits of common humanity, aware of our responsibility to each other and the earth we all share” (p. 185).

Over time, these festivals took on different themes and purposes, such as anti-nuclear, anti-democratic, and anti-consumer demonstrations. They also differed in which spiritual philosophies or dogma predominated the specific festival’s culture. These alternative spirituality festivals were open to all religious philosophies but have historically been more oriented to Pagan, Buddhist, and Hindu mythology; evidence of this is demonstrated in the literature, music, and art displayed and produced at the festivals.

The ETFs explored in this study over time have evolved from these original free festivals. Partridge (2006) describes in the following passage how current ETF and rave culture have been influenced by free festival culture:

Needless to say, this articulation of a psychedelic continuity between premodern ‘tribalism’, indigenous spiritualities, festival counterculture, and rave connected well with emergent dance culture. Pagan, countercultural, and eco-spiritual ideas

within contemporary rave culture are clearly continuous with an older subculture (p. 50).

Partridge continues by emphasizing how these festivals have changed overtime, but the aspects of community, music, dance, and spirituality are still at the core of these festivals. These festivals continue to emphasize the co-creations of an ideal living space in which each individual contributes (Leung et al., 2014).

Raves and festival culture are constantly evolving into new sub-genres of music and festivals. A relatively unexplored genre of youth culture is transformational festivals and the conscious partying movement, which embody the ideas of community, eco-friendliness, spirituality, and self-development. *The Bloom: A Journey Through Transformational Festivals* identifies inspiration, connection, and healing as the fundamental aspects of transformational festivals (Leung et al., 2014). These events provide resources and opportunities for personal and spiritual development that allows for “youth to imagine their own and other groups, assert their distinctive character and affirm they are not anonymous members of an unidentified mass” (Thorton, 1996, p. 10).

Raves

Raves, rave culture, and the use of “club drugs” first grew in popularity in the 1980s in Great Britain, later emerged in youth culture in Canada in the late 1980s, and has been increasing in popularity ever since (Gross, Barrett, Shestowsky, & Pihl, 2002; Weir, 2000). Raves are characterized as all-night dance parties that feature heavily synthesized music and large number of youth in attendance (Glover, 2003; Weir, 2000). Weir (2000)

describes raves by specifying four or their major components: the music, the venue, the people, and the drugs.

Music at raves usually feature non-commercial music produced by computers, which contains little or no vocals (Weir, 2000). Originally, raves featured mainly acid house and techno music but have evolved to include tribal, jungle, drum & bass and ambient genres of music (Glover, 2003; Weir, 2000). More recent sub-genres of music include dubstep, happy hard core, and trance, with new genres continually developing. Music tends to be repetitive, fast-pace, have high levels of bass, and be “remorselessly loud” (Weir, 2000, p. 1844). The music is designed specifically to entice the participants to dance, to create an environment that perpetuates trance-like state in ravers, and/or enable participant to lose their self and become immersed in the collective crowd (Hutson, 2000). It is the DJs intention to take their audience into an altered mind space; they establish mood, presence, or energy on the dance floor without bringing attention to themselves as an individual (Glover, 2003). As described by Melechi, the music creates a sense of community, a “place where nobody is, but everybody belongs” (1993, p. 37).

The venue and publicity of an electronic dance event depends on the geographical location. Many counties have policies that limit the locations of raves or ban them completely (Krul & Girbes, 2009; Parker, Williams, & Aldridge, 2002; Weir, 2000). Raves were originally held in remote or private locations such as farmers’ fields, private homes, and “secret” locations (Glover, 2003; Weir, 2000). The location of the rave is often not announced until hours before the event, presumably to avoid police surveillance (Weir, 2000). It is more common now to have raves in public leisure centers and other

legal venues such as bars, dance halls, concert theatres, and public recreation facilities. This is seen as a safer option as these spaces are more likely to adhere to safety protocol for fire-code, access to drinking water, and sanitation (Glover, 2003).

In Weir's study on rave culture in Canada, it is estimated that most ravers are between the ages of 15 and 25 (2000) with studies from other countries supporting that the majority of attendees are teenagers and young adults (Glover, 2003; Hunt et al., 2009; Hunt, Moloney, & Fazio, 2011). Ravers are predominately Caucasian but there is a wide range of ethnicity in those who attend these events. Depending on the geographic location, attendants at raves have been roughly equivalent in gender distribution. Ravers' dress has been noted to be of particular importance as it is a form of self-expression by the participants and acts to create a sense of "oneness" among ravers and festivalgoers (Lim, Hellard, Hocking, Spelman, & Aitken, 2010; Weir, 2000). Traditionally the style of dress at display at raves was "*androgynous and modest*" (Glover, 2003, p. 312) as to avoid being pretentious and to create a sense of acceptance that is not based on attractiveness or sexual orientation (Weir, 2000). As stated by McCaughen, Carlson, Falck, and Siegal (2005) a "constant evolution is taking place within this subculture, on both individual and group levels" (p. 1511) and so too is the culture and style of dress. It is now more commonly observed at raves for ravers to display a colourful and more elaborate style of dress, which includes "bell bottoms, 'fun fur', feathers, top hats, and clothes made from vinyl and other plastics" (Glover, 2003, p. 312). As noted by Glover (2003), a particular style of dress can be isolated to different groups of ravers or festivalgoers. These events vary from one another in music and communal social sense; as a result, there is a wide variation in dress between events as is indicative to the

particular group. For example, McCaughen et al. (2005) groups ravers in the Midwestern United States based on visual markers and on “their prevailing philosophies and typical drug-use practices” (pp. 1504-1505).

Common Drugs of Raves and ETF and Their Physiological Impact

Attending ETFs or raves doesn't require a raver or festivalgoer to use licit or illicit drugs; however, drugs are considered an integral cultural aspect of these events. Raves are associated with the use of recreational drugs also known as “club drugs”. These recreational drugs include marijuana, LSD, methamphetamines, and opiates (Gahlinger, 2004). Although the predominant drug or group of drugs being commonly used depends on the specific rave or festival, generally the literature defines club drugs as 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA, also known as ecstasy), gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB), flunitrazepam (also call Rohypnol), and ketamine (Duff, Michelow, Chow, & Ivsins, 2009; Gahlinger, 2004; Gross et al., 2002; Parrott, 2004). A wide variety of street names are often used to refer to these drugs, which vary from region to region (McCaughan et al., 2005). Club drugs are used because they are “believed to enhance social interaction” (Gahlinger, 2004, p. 2619). Alcohol is not usually provided at raves or ETFs. Alcohol carries a negative association within the rave and ETF culture as it is considered to provoke violence and aggression in users (Glover, 2003; Weir, 2000).

MDMA is the most common and widely used club drug at raves and festivals, and is usually sold as small tablets, powders, or liquids (Gahlinger, 2004; Parrott, 2004). It was originally developed as an appetite suppressant and then later prescribed by

physiologist to “break through physiological defenses as an ‘empathy agent’” (Gahlinger, 2004, p. 2620, Henricksen, 2000). MDMA is a central nervous system (CNS) stimulant; the use of MDMA is marked by the increased release of serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine. MDMA also disrupts the metabolism of these neurotransmitters by inhibiting the function of monoamine oxidase. At first, MDMA users may describe sensations of agitation, reduced hunger and thirst, and a warped sense of time. These initial sensations are followed by a sense of euphoria, intimacy, profound insight, and well-being (Gahlinger, 2004). MDMA enhances the raver’s perception of touch and physical reaction (Henricksen, 2000). Because MDMA impairs thermoregulation by the hypothalamus, the most significant danger to users is hyperthermia and associated “serotonin syndrome” resulting in elevated core temperature of the body, rigidity, acute renal failure, hepatic failure, and respiratory distress. (Gahlinger, 2004; Parrott, 2004). MDMA also causes an increase of antidiuretic hormones. The increase of this hormone level combined with the heat exerted from dancing, elevated room temperatures from large crowds, and hyperthermia can lead to dehydration (if appropriate water sources are not available) or excessive water intake and severe hyponatremia. Many adverse effects of taking MDMA may be the result of adulterants in the drugs, as drugs are often laced or contain no active ingredient (Glover, 2003).

GHB is the derivative of a γ -amniobutric acid that naturally occurs in the central nervous system where it is understood to mediate body temperature, sleep cycles, cerebral glucose metabolism, and memory (Gahlinger, 2004). GHB gives users a sense of euphoria. With increasing doses, GHB can produce effects ranging from dizziness to amnesia. GHB use can result in hypothermia and bradycardia. Overdose can result in

“Cheyne-Stokes respiration, seizures, coma, and death” (Gahlinger, 2004, p. 2621). Like Rohypnol, GHB has associated concerns as a “date rape” drug.

Flunitazepam, known as Rohypnol, is a benzodiazepine and was used for sedation, treatment of insomnia, and to induce anaesthesia (Gahlinger, 2004). Rohypnol is used to reduce muscular tension, inhibition, and anxiety. In higher doses, Rohypnol can result in anterograde amnesia, loss of consciousness, and loss of muscular control (Gahlinger, 2004).

Like Rohypnol, Ketamine was originally synthesized for use as a dissociative anaesthetic and functions as a neural inhibitor preventing the uptake of dopamine, serotonin, norepinephrine, and glutamate. Ketamine can produce “bizarre ideations and hallucinations” (Gahlinger, 2004, p. 2622) as well as sensation of floating. Negative effects include amnesia, confusion, hypertension, respiratory depression, tachycardia, and ‘flashbacks’ days to weeks later.

Overall, little is known about the drug-use and consumption patterns of Canadian youth who attend raves and festivals. A study by Gross et al. (2002) showed that ravers in Montreal primarily consumed alcohol and cannabis, with MDMA as the third most commonly used drug. This study, however, was concerned with overall lifetime usage and not substances specifically taken at raves and festivals.

History of Human Use of Psychotropic Drugs

Humans have been using psychotropic and mood altering substances for hundreds of years; some evidence suggests these substances have been used since prehistory

(Saniotis, 2010). Archaeological evidence of substance use includes the Australian aboriginal people's use of *Duboisia hopwoodii* as a stimulant, the use of *Sophora secundiflora* by Pleistocene and Paleolithic people 10,000 years ago, and substances used by Mesolithic and Paleolithic mushroom cults (Saniotis, 2010). There is evidence showing that hallucinogens were used by ancient civilizations across the world and substance use can be traced back as far as the fifth millennia B.C.E. Examples of hallucinogens used by ancient people include the Assyrian use of *Atropa belladonna*, *Papaver somniferum*, and *Mandragora officinarum*; the use of *Hyoscyamus niger*, pomegranate, poppy, and henbane by ancient Egyptians; and the use of *T.Corymbosa* by the Aztecs. *T.Corymbosa* shares similar properties to d-lysergic acid diethylamide also known as LSD (Saniotis, 2010).

The need for psychotropic and mood altering substances by humans can be viewed through two different evolutionary perspectives: biological or cultural evolution. Approaching the topic from a biological evolutionary perspective highlights a number of different explanations for human use of psychotropic drugs. It is suggested that it was unlikely that addiction was a problem for humans in prehistory. Natural drugs were a limited resource and therefore had only a minimal effect on the mesolimbic dopamine system. An evolutionary approach to human use of psychotropic drugs suggests that substance-seeking behaviour in humans was an “adaptive benefit due to exploiting plants during prehistory” (Saniotis, 2010, p. 480) and that substance use was a result of attempts by humans to gain knowledge about the natural world. Another theory is that humans may have used psychotics as food sources. Bolivian coca leaf, for example, contains more

than the daily recommended amount of vitamins A, B, and E and the plant khat, used by the Yemenic, contains vitamin C, niacin, iron, riboflavin, and carotene (Saniotis, 2010).

The cultural and anthropological perspective on human use of psychotropic drugs “emphasize social mechanisms and seeks to explain human behaviours and the symbolic meaning that individuals employ” (Saniotis, 2010, p. 481). According to Winkelman (2004; 2010), psychotropic substances are often used to evoke spiritual experiences and induce powerful emotions, which he calls “psychointegrators”. Psychointegrators have been largely used as part of shamanic practices in many traditional societies. These substances have an inhibitory effect on both the visual cortex (raphe cell region) and the temporal lobe region of the brain. These substances cause some sympathetic arousal but predominantly stimulation of the parasympathetic system (Winkelman, 2010). This induces what is known as altered state of consciousness, which is fundamental to shamanic healing practices and other religious practices. Shamanic and Tsonga rituals both use dances, chanting, singing and drumming to enhance the hallucinogenic effects of the psychotropic substance used. The altered state of consciousness produced by these psychotropic compounds are used to “generate independent discovery and creativity” (Saniotis, 2010, p. 481) as well as for personal transformation, healing, and reflexivity

History of Popular Culture and Recreational Drug Use

Historically, trends in youth culture have been closely tied to different genres of music and are associated with a predominant drug of choice. Shane Blackman (2007) summarizes youth culture and recreational drug use into the following four phases: beat

culture and heroin; mod culture and amphetamines; hippie culture and LSD; and dance culture and ecstasy. For the purpose of this study I will focus on the last two phases. The late 1960s and 1970s is seen as the hippie era, which was characterized by its clothing style, music, philosophy of living, and recreational drug use predominated by the use of ‘mind-expanding drugs’ such as LSD, cannabis, and ecstasy. In this era, festivals first emerged as a space to promote “idealistic, romanticised notions of love, spirituality, and relationship to the land” (Partridge, 2006, p. 41). Politics concerning recreational drug use was a highlight of this era with the revolution of ideas lead by Timothy Leary, exemplified in his book *The Politics of Ecstasy* (Blackman, 2007). The ideas of recreational drug use spread first through elite-culture and educational institutions, then through pop culture, and eventually alternative magazines. In the early 1980s this culture became more integrated with the movement against nuclear weapons and became known as ‘the Peace Convoy’ (Partridge, 2006). Political backlash against the hippie culture included political propaganda and Richard Nixon’s famous war on drugs (Fields, 2010). At that time drug use was no longer considered a just a criminal problem, but an “international political problem that threatened to destabilize Western society through communism and terrorism” (Blackman, 2007, p. 49).

The following phase of youth culture and recreational drug consumption, as defined by Blackman (2007), is contemporary rave. During the start of the 1980s, the new subculture of rave emerged in Great Britain and later in Canada around 1991 (Blackman, 2007; Gross et al., 2002; Weir, 2000). Acid house music was one of the first predominate music genres and was heavily associated with ecstasy use. Acid house eventually evolved

into dance culture and rave culture (similar to the electronic dance music seen today). Participants at these raves were defined as the “chemical generation” (Blackman, 2007). These events were initially held illegally at warehouses, private land, and even airplane hangars. Eventually, raves moved into nightclubs and public leisure spaces (Blackman, 2007; Glover, 2003; Weir, 2000).

More recently, raves have developed social/cultural movement within the culture. This movement is known collectively as the conscious partying movement, as defined by Beck & Lynch (2009). Larger scale electronic dance events that are oriented around ideas of community, eco-friendliness, and spirituality are known as transformation festivals (Leung et al., 2014). These festivals and dance events are centered on creating energy, a sense of oneness, inspiring political and social change, as well as creating a space for spiritual and personal development (Beck & Lynch, 2009; Joe-Laidler & Hunt, 2013; Leung et al., 2014)

The Cultural and Social Impact on Drug Use Behaviour at Raves and ETFs

It can be observed that there is a split in perspectives for those who create policy associated with drugs and those who continue to use illicit drugs despite the apparent health risks and legal consequences. Although there are numerous studies on the pharmacology and health risks of these drugs as well as an increase in the number of surveys directed towards youth drug use at raves, there is a void of information in the scientific literature regarding the “meaning that young people give to their own drug use” (G. P. Hunt et al., 2007, p. 75). Most of the literature reflects the idea that youth are

uneducated, ill-informed, and are unknowledgeable about the risks and hazards of drug use, and that their drug use is a result of youth failing to incorporate themselves into mainstream society. Most literature, directly or indirectly, condemns drug-use and doesn't "consider the possibility that using drugs may be viewed to people as normal, positive and pleasurable" (G. P. Hunt et al., 2007, p. 75). Hunt et al. (2007) points to the fact that most research on drugs in youth culture does not address the notion of pleasure as the main intent for use, even if it could be reasoned that the anticipation of the high and the exhilarating experience of being on the drug is the whole purpose of taking the drug. Hunt et al. (2007) describes how drug-use is a personal balance of the negative side effects of the drug with the perceived benefits. For the purpose of this study I would like to review how ravers have reported their perceptions of risk, the import role of community in drug use, and the intent of drug use to promote spirituality or self-development.

Perception of Risk

In a study by Hunt et al. (2007), they conducted in depth interviews with 300 participants from the electronic music dance scene in San Francisco Bay area. A number of themes were identified in this study concerning how participants assessed risk. Although participants had various levels of knowledge on the substances they used, most participants had expressed that they had "spent time, before or after using, learning about drugs through online sources, books, classes or experienced friends" (Hunt et al, 2007, p. 82). Participants in the study not only accounted for the potential physiological effects, but also were aware of the social and environmental context of their drug use and how it

could contribute to a “bad trip”. Participants considered the physiological effects of the drugs, what the consequences of the drug would be on how they conducted themselves, both in social and physical environments, and how addictive a substance was perceived to be. Respondents in the study expressed how many of the negative side effects were perceived as a normal and accepted component of consuming drugs (Hunt et al., 2007). Some drugs were considered more risky than others; drugs such as cannabis and mushrooms were considered natural and therefore posed less of a risk to participants than other substances, such as methamphetamines (Hunt et al., 2007). Hunt et al. (2007) focused on the idea that the participants view of risk as relative and not absolute. The following passage elaborates on the pattern of ideas surfaced by Hunt et al. (2007):

What is important to note here is that risk was not often viewed as absolute terms but was instead seen as relative. Not all drugs were seen to pose the same risk, or even the same degree of risk. But just as the risk of using different drugs was relative, some respondents also argued that the potential harm of any one substance had to be evaluated against other everyday dangers. These day-to-day dangers were sometimes perceived as more harmful, and so the risk of using drugs did not necessarily pose any great concern. As a result, the pleasure gained from drugs, despite their risk, was seen as worth while (p. 85).

Hunt et al. (2007) describes how respondents actively sought out strategies and resources to increase the benefits of consuming a drug while minimizing the potential harm of that drug. Personal regulatory behaviours included drinking sufficient amounts of water, taking rest periods from dancing, taking supplements and vitamins, taking lower or moderate dosages of the drug, or using the drug less frequently. Overall, it could be

viewed that drug-users in the rave scene are constantly evaluating and re-evaluating the balance between risk of drug use and pleasure.

The Social and Community Aspect of Drug Use.

When managing risk, drug-users interviewed by Hunt et al. (2007) brought forward the fact that the social setting in which the drugs are being consumed is essential to how they manage risk and pleasure. Hunt et al. (2007) describes the pattern of social meaning of drugs as both “socially embedded and socially determined” (p. 87) as consumption was considered to be part of a social experience by participants. An individual considers a drug to be risky based not only on personal knowledge and experience, but also in how they perceive the social acceptance of the specific drug. In the study by Hunt et al. (2007) respondents described which location or context was preferable for the consumption of a particular drug. Participant answers varied between individuals and according to the particular drug being described. It was often brought up that the social group aided in whether or not participants would have a ‘bad trip’. Having friends that a raver could trust was considered critical by participants in the study. Friends not only enhanced the pleasurable experienced but also increased their sense of safety by watching out for each other and “by sticking together” (Bunton, Crawshaw, & Green, 2004, p. 170). The buddy system was described as being particularly important for women as a measure to prevent being taken advantage of.

The Use of Drugs for Self-Development and Spirituality.

Youth dance club cultures, including raves and festivals, have become known as places for personal and spiritual development (Joe-Laidler & Hunt, 2013). As described by Beck & Lynch (2009), “dance music cultures intersect with the discourse and practices of alternative spirituality” as a “continuation of psychedelic culture or an emergent form of religious transnationalism” (p. 340).

Historically, drugs have been used to facilitate spiritual or religious experiences such as “religious rituals and practices with native cultures like the Aztec, Toltec, and Navajo, revering altered states of consciousness for its euphoric, mystical, and transcendent effects” (Joe-Laidler & Hunt, 2013, p. 1101). The hippie era used psychedelic drugs to pursue spiritual awakening, exploration of consciousness, and alteration of perceived time and space (Joe-Laidler & Hunt, 2013). More recently, individuals have used MDMA, LSD, and newly emerging experimental drugs to facilitate spiritual and transcendental experiences.

Joe-Laidler & Hunt (2013) describe modern day youths’, or generation Y (born 1982-2000), drug use as preoccupied with spirituality in the pursuit of finding one’s identity. Beck & Lynch (2009) describe this group of ravers and festivalgoers as the ‘conscious partying movement’. Larger electronic dance events that incorporate the ideas of consciousness and oneness are collectively known as transformational festivals (Leung et al., 2014). Those who associate themselves with this movement perceive festival and rave experiences as a means for spiritual and cultural transformation (Beck & Lynch, 2009). Rosenbaum (1999) found that those who used ecstasy in a recreation setting used them with the intent for manifesting a spiritual experience, engaging in self-development,

and creating an overall life-changing experience. These drugs are used by ravers and festivalgoers to create a sense of “personal growth, acceptance, communality, oneness, energy and intimacy” (Joe-Laidler & Hunt, 2013, p. 1102).

The Normalization of Drug Use

The theory of normalization was originally applied to the use of illicit drugs by Howard Parker, Aldridge & Measham (1999) in attempts to make sense of drug consumption patterns in British youth (Blackman, 2007). Normalization is the concept of “stigmatized or deviant individuals or groups becoming included in as many features of conventional everyday ‘normal’ life as possible” (Parker et al., 2002, p.942). Parker et al. (2002) use normalization as a tool to “measure the changes in social behaviour and cultural perspective, in this case focusing on both illicit drug use and drug users” (Parker et al., 2002, p. 943).

There are five dimensions explained by Parker et al. (2002) to measure the degree of normalization within a culture. The first dimension is access and availability, which is essential in the progression of normalization. One way to measure access and availability is national seizure rates of illicit drugs. A fall in street prices of drugs is also associated with an increased rate of use. If access to drugs is near the point of consumption then drug-users are likely to avoid aggressive or violent drug dealers. In raves, most participants acquire their drugs “through social networks and friends-of-friends chains connected to small dealers” (Parker et al., 2002, p. 944). Parker et al. (2002) claims that

this type of transaction allows for the drug-user to avoid risk of interacting with drug dealers.

The likelihood that an individual will try drugs is another measure of drug normalization that uses long-term indicators such as on-going secondary school surveys, longitudinal studies of youth, college surveys, and household surveys. As study by Hammond, Ahmed, Yang, Brukhalter, and Leatherdale (2011) on illicit substance use on Canadian youth between 2002 and 2008 concluded that exposure and experimentation to illicit substances was a relatively common experience as a considerable number (13%) of Grade 7 to 9 reporting trying drugs other than alcohol, tobacco and Cannabis. Hammond et al. (2011) suggest that drug programs using an abstinence approach may not necessarily be realistic.

The next indicator of normalization is recent and regular drug use. A study of youth in England suggests a rise in drug use for individuals from age 15 into the early 20s; in the Youth Lifestyles Survey, it was found that 22 percent of youth between the ages of 14-25 have used drugs in the past year (Parker et al., 2002). These rates greatly increase when the surveys focused on the drug-using population, such as nightclubs and raves. In Canada, studies have found drug usage rates are higher in rural and high-risk areas (Kuo, Shamsian, Tzemis, & Buxton, 2014). In studies by Measham, Aldridge, & Parker (2000) it was found that ravers had close to a 100 percent lifetime rate of cannabis use; the rates for LSD and ecstasy lifetime use rates ranged from 60 to 90 percent. However, Parker et al. (2002) states that it would be illogical to generalize these results as they're limited to only a handful of studies and surveys; as indicated in a study by Kuo et

al. (2012), the understanding of high-risk drug use is mainly based on large scale cohort surveys conducted in major cities.

Another fundamental measure of normalization is the social accommodation and sensible recreational drug use. This measure accounts for the degree to which drug use and drug-users are socially accepted and integrated into the community by those who abstain from drugs or are former users. It is difficult to measure this due to the lack of information from the perspective of youth attending raves and festivals including their “knowledge, decision making process and attitudes to ‘sensible’ recreational drug use” (Parker et al., 2002, p. 948). Parker et al. (1998) have hypothesized that early in life young teenagers usually have a strict view of abstinence towards drugs, which over time mellows with life experience. A survey of Canadian recreational drug use found that illicit drug such as ecstasy, mushrooms, LSD and ketamine were perceived as acceptable when used while partying (Duff et al., 2009).

Cultural accommodation measures to what degree drugs have been accommodated for and accepted as a reality of an individual’s life while maintaining a functional lifestyle within their society. This can be seen by the integration of drug use as inspiration in media such as comedy, television and film. Parker et al. (2002) states that this accommodation can also be seen in government and official policy as they are “moving towards the decriminalization of cannabis use and sidestepping the ecstasy phenomenon, whilst concentrating on heroin and cocaine as drugs which ‘do the most harm’, we see the same hierarchy of dangerousness first articulated by drug wise youth now being reflected in official thinking and even parental attitudes” (p. 949).

Shildrick (2002) argues against the idea of normalization as it can't explain the entire intricacy of drug use and youth culture, and may overgeneralize the extent to which drug culture is accepted in society. Sznitman (2008) expands on the idea of normalization in the concept that youth incorporate drug use into their lives in two manners: assimilation and transformational. Pennay and More (2010) define assimilative behaviour as means that youth incorporate their drug use in their life in such a way that it does not disrupt how they function in society. This includes creating strategies so that their drug use does not inhibit their performance in work or school. Transformational normalization is when "drug users actively attempt to resist or redefine what is considered to be 'normal' with respect to illicit drug use and drug users" (Pennay & Moore, 2010, p. 559).

Community Harm Prevention Strategies

Because of the health concerns and associated risks of drug use, the rave community has developed a number of harm reduction strategies and programs (Henricksen, 2000). Many rave communities have developed "self-police" systems that monitor individual and group behaviours as well as addressing the negative stereotypes about the rave community. Raves are designed to provide a safe environment for both non-drug and drug users by using an internal ethics code called PLUR (Peace, Love, Unity and Respect; Henricksen, 2000; Weir, 2000). Well known harm-reduction strategies include those proposed by DanceSafe. DanceSafe is an organization that strives to be nonjudgmental source of resources and information about both the positive and negative effects of commonly used party drugs (Dundes, 2003). DanceSafe not only gives

out information on the effects of drug use but also information on safe sex practices and protection against hearing loss from loud music. A Canadian based project, similar to DanceSafe, is the Toronto Rave Information Project (TRIP), which is “taking harm reduction to raves and underground parties throughout the world” (Henricksen, 2000, p. 1). There are numerous newly emerging harm prevention organizations that emphasize educating the rave community as the best way to promote safety and reduce irresponsible decision. These harm prevention organizations work with rave and festival production teams in order to set up booths that are staffed by volunteers. Harm prevention organizations are not only a source of information but may also provide items such as condoms, earplugs, water, and other comfort items. These booths act as a focal point at raves for those participants who experiences negative effects of the drugs they have taken. Volunteers are trained to recognize negative symptoms of club drugs, how to take appropriate action, and are often trained in first-aid.

Some raves have volunteers who observe the crowd, monitoring the “vibe” to ensure that participants have the information and resources they need. Volunteers may also be trained in peer counselling to help participants dealing with the potential negative emotional and psychological effects of MDMA and other club drugs (Henricksen, 2000).

More recently, national research bodies have begun to partner with festival organizers and harm prevention communities in order to address health and safety at mass gatherings such as music festivals. As discussed in the following section, the Canadian Centre for Drug Abuse collaborated with various national and local groups in order to address growing concerns on drug and alcohol use at festivals.

Public Perception of Drugs and Drug Policy

There have been a number of drug related deaths at raves in Canada. In particular, there were three deaths occurring after ecstasy use at a Toronto rave in 1999 that sparked public and government concern (Glover, 2003). As described by Glover (2003), society's fears are largely “spurred on by concerned citizens whose impressions of raves are largely developed through their exposure to sensationalized media reports about fatal overdoses that have occurred at raves across the continent” (p. 309). In the summer of 2014, the death of five Canadian youth at festivals along with a number of associated hospitalizations reignited the issue of drug and alcohol use at mass gatherings. In response to these tragic events and growing public concern the Canadian Center on Drug Abuse partnered with both experts and stakeholders in festival organization, health promotion, emergency care, and law enforcement in order to discuss harm prevention strategies (Young et al., 2015). This report was initiated due to an “absence of national or provincial guidelines for preventing or responding to drug- and alcohol- related harms at music festivals” (Young et al., 2015, p. 2).

There are a number of studies on the demographics of rave participants, the types of drugs present at raves, the pharmacology, and health concerns of these drugs, but very few studies exist on drug consumption patterns in the rave scene in Canada (Gross et al., 2002). Most literature portrays youth rave culture and drug consumption at raves as inherently deviant and makes the assumption that ravers and festivalgoers are “ill-informed and fail to fully understand the harmful consequences of drug use” (Hunt, Evans, & Kares, 2007, p. 75), or that their ability to assess risk is inhibited due to a lack of

socialization. There is an increasing interest in the purpose, intentions, and expectation of participants attending raves as well as the cultural and community importance of raves and festivals. Experts in the field have expressed that research should focus on the importance of rave culture in the lives of participants, as part of experiences in balancing pleasure and risk, the development of self and spirituality, and in the development of a sense of community (Beck & Lynch, 2009; Hunt et al., 2009; Hunt et al., 2007; Joe-Laidler & Hunt, 2013). One perception of increasing normalization by Parker, Williams & Aldridge (2002) suggests that drug use in youth culture is no longer perceived as deviant but “an integral part of young people’s recreational leisure pursuit, defined by the opportunity of choice” (Blackman, 2007, p. 55).

Public policy regarding rave culture and drug use in North American culture is often criticized for having a single-sided moral viewpoint. The literature asserts that there should be a balance in public policy that incorporates prevention of harm without limiting an individual’s rights and freedom (Glover, 2003; Pennay & Moore, 2010). Glover (2003) attests that “social reaction to rave culture has been driven largely by a moral panic” (p.318); ravers have been portrayed as a “threat to social values and interests” (p. 318) and are considered proponents of deviant behaviour. Negative media portrayal and a lack of understanding in society have created policy that is pre-programed against the raving community (Henricksen, 2000). Glover (2003) proposes three alternative approaches to government policy in response to the growing rave community: tolerance, prohibition, and harm-reduction.

Tolerance is defined as a lack of formal response by the government to rave culture. The idea is that the biggest threat to rave culture is to be assimilated by

mainstream society. Glover (2003) states that “rave culture defines itself in opposition to mainstream culture, and by extension, to things mass-produced, and massed consumed” (p. 319). Raves have already begun to be commercialized with the music, clothing, and events becoming marketed on a corporate level. Glover (2003) indicated that tolerance is unlikely to be adopted because it is politically dangerous, as it does not address the potential harms and perceived deviant behaviours.

Glover (2003) then presents prohibition in contrasts to tolerance. Prohibition, as is currently in place in Canada, bans the sale and use of ecstasy, but is unable to ban rave events themselves because of the inability to make the attendance to the raves unlawful. Prohibition includes “enacting new legislation to ban the sale and use of ecstasy, devising exemplary sentences for those who break such laws, and increasing police action” (Critchler, 2000; Glover, 2003). There are a number of critiques against the prohibition approach. The lofty fines and steep penalties penalize non-violent drug offenders and do not address rehabilitation needs. As seen in the U.S, the war on drugs has created an overburdened criminal justice system as the U.S has the leading incarceration rate in the world with 55.1% of the prison population comprised of non-violent drug offenders in 2002 (Glover, 2003). Further fines and surveillance may also drive ravers and festivalgoers further underground. Unregulated rave venues often have associated health and safety concerns as they do not address safety standards such as building codes, sanitary conditions, access to drinking water, and emergency plans (Glover, 2003; Henricksen, 2000; Weir, 2000).

Harm reduction is the final alternative policy approach presented by Glover (2003). Glover (2003) states that harm reduction “begins with the recognition that drug

use at raves is going to continue, irrespective of efforts to encourage abstinence and regardless of the threat of punitive consequences” (p. 321). The harm reduction strategy continues to promote abstinence but also provides education and information and the resources required to “do the least possible harm to themselves and those around them” (Glover, 2003, p. 322). This strategy values the perspectives and beliefs of ravers and festivalgoers by acknowledging their ability to “reason and learn from their own experiences” (Glover, 2003, p. 322). The harm reduction strategy recognizes that total abstinence is not a sensible alternative for all ravers and festivalgoers, and that the use of mind-altering drugs does not necessarily predict drug abuse or addiction. This strategy would create policy to regulate rave and festival venues so that they meet health and safety regulations, provide security services, provide access to drinking water, and set age restrictions. Harm reduction strategies would emphasize the use of awareness and education campaigns on the health risks of raves and festivals. These campaigns would be organized, designed, and delivered with the assistance of those members of the rave and festival community to incorporate the perspective of the participants. Harm reduction strategies may include ecstasy-testing kits or drug analysis programs to test for the purity of the drugs. There are those opposed to drug testing, such as those provided by DanceSafe, as it is believed it could encourage drug use by removing the fear of adverse effects and indirectly encouraging the use of illicit drugs (Dundes, 2003). However, Dundes (2003) claims that more research needs to be done to conclude that drug-testing programs increase drug consumption rates. In the Netherlands, house parties and raves are required to have an effective medical system that is defined by the National association of Emergency Medical care in the document *Mass Gathering Medical Care* (Krul & Girbes,

2009). The number and types of resources required at festivals is derived by the medical usage rate (MUR), which act as “a guideline for the required need for care” (Krul & Girbes, 2009, p. 133). In a study by Krul and Girbes (2009) that was taken over a nine-year period with over approximately 3-million people attending registered raves and house parties there were only 15 reported cases of severe health problems and one death. No other country besides the Netherlands has legal raves that are organized on this scale. The evidence supports that the number of severe health problems related to drugs at legal raves is very low in the Netherlands (Krul & Girbes, 2009).

Transpersonal Theory

This study has been developed using transpersonal theory as an underlying framework. Transpersonal theory provides a philosophical standpoint to help understand the data collected; in other words, to guide the research process to a deeper understanding of the transformational experience of festivalgoers. Transpersonal Theory is described by Walsh and Vaughan (1993) as “experiences in which the sense of identity of self extends beyond (trans) the individual or personal to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche or cosmos” (p. 203). Similarly, Lajoie and Shapiro (1992) define transpersonal psychology as a study that “is concerned with the study of humanity’s highest potential, and with the recognition, understanding, and realization of unitive, spiritual, and transcendent states of consciousness” (p. 91). Transpersonal theory emphasizes the importance of spirituality in understanding human nature and that transpersonal experiences lead to transpersonal knowledge (Ferrer, 2002).

Transpersonal theory was first developed in the 1960s by physiologists and psychiatrists who believed that research into human experience, such as spirituality, should not be reduced to the study of neurology and other empirical methods, but instead be focused on human interests and human needs (Grof, 2008). Central to the development of the transpersonal movement were the works of Abraham Maslow, Anthony Sutich, Stanislav Grof, and many others (Ferrer, 2002; Walsh, 1993).

Transpersonal theory does not have a single, unifying paradigm, and varies widely on how transpersonal phenomena and spirituality are described and defined. In this study, transformational theory is based on the work of Jorge Ferrer (2002) in his book *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory*. Ferrer emphasizes the participatory nature of spiritual knowing and defines transpersonal theory in the following passage:

Transpersonal theory, however, is not merely another academic discipline. The transpersonal vision is a way of thinking and living self, other, and world that can be diversely manifested not only in transpersonal states, but also in relationships, community, society, ethics, education, politics, philosophy, religion, cosmology, and almost any other area of human thinking, feeling, and action (p. 7).

Transpersonal theory will be used as a guideline to help in understanding the data; however, the first priority of the study will be to describe the lived experiences of the participants in a way that is meaningful. As emphasized by Maslow (1968), research into the existential emphasis should be placed on experiential knowledge.

Psychodynamic and Transpersonal Experiences.

As previously mentioned, the works of S. Grof (1975, 2008) were among the founding compositions of transpersonal psychology; S. Grof's work continue to be at the forefront of this field. His work originated in the experimental use of LSD and other psychedelics for the purposes of psychiatric research and treatment; this included addressing both mental health disorders as well as seeking a greater understanding of the human consciousness (S. Grof, 1975). Initially LSD was viewed by psychologists and medical professionals as a means to induce a "model psychosis" in order to study complex mental disorders, such as schizophrenia, as the drug had a short duration and the effects were seen as reversible (S. Grof, 1975). LSD research also peaked researchers' interest in the creative process of the human psyche as well as the psychology of religion. Volunteer LSD subjects reported "unusual aesthetic experiences and insights into nature of the creative process" (S. Grof, 1975, p. 3) as well as profound experiences of mystical or religious nature. S. Grof (1975, 1980) reported the effect of LSD on humans, which included the physiological effects, the observable physical symptoms, perceptual and emotional changes, the effect on sexuality, the impacts on intellect and memory, the influence on experiences of art, as well as religious or mystical experiences.

During LSD sessions, participants were confronted with complicated psychodynamic experiences; these experiences could include vivid memories from different time points in an individual's life and may include memories of childhood, infancy, or even birth trauma (S. Grof, 1975). He defined this group of phenomenon as the COEX system, which are a constellation of memories consisting of condensed experiences. S. Grof (1975) also observed how patients' experiences could be influenced

by their environment. Patients' experiences would include over reaction to stimuli or associating environmental stimuli (emotional or physical) to their current experience.

Grof (1975) gives the following as example of this phenomenon:

Thus, patients are particularly sensitive to what they consider uninterested, cold, and "professional" treatment when they are under the influence of memory constellations that involve emotional deprivation, rejection, or neglect by their parents or other relevant figures in their childhood. When they are working through problems of rivalry with their siblings, patients attempts to monopolize their therapist and want to be the only or at least the favourite patient (p. 91).

A major theme from S. Grof's (1975, 1980, 2008) work are birth and death experience. During these death-rebirth experiences, individuals are often faced with the fragility of life and the inescapability of death. These encounters with death often resulted with "spiritual and religious experiences that appear to be an intrinsic part of human personality and are independent of the individual's cultural and religious background and programming" (S. Grof, 1975, p. 95). One result of S. Grof's research was the use of LSD psychotherapy as a means of cancer patients and the terminally ill to cope with death and dying (Gasser, Kirchner, & Passie, 2015).

S. Grof (1975) observed that transpersonal experiences in LSD sessions rarely occurred in early sessions and were more likely to surface after an individual had worked through psychodynamic or death-rebirth experiences. S. Grof (1975) defines these experiences in the following:

The common denominator of these rich and ramified group of phenomena is the feeling of the individual that his consciousness expanded beyond the usual ego

boundaries and limitations of time and space. In the “normal” or usual states of consciousness, an individual experiences himself existing within the boundaries of his physical body, which separates him distinctly from the world. This is usually referred to as one’s body image... The basic characteristic of transpersonal experiences is that one or several of these limitations appears to be transcended. In some instances, the subject experiences loosening of his usual ego boundaries, and his consciousness and self-awareness seem to expand and to include and encompass other individuals and elements of the external world (pp. 154-155).

S. Grof (1975) continues to explain how these experiences go beyond the realm of empirical research. Examples of transpersonal experiences, as defined by S. Grof, include experiences of being in the womb, reliving memories of ancestors, phylogenetic memories, and experiences of a collective consciousness.

Another researcher foremost in the field of transpersonal psychology, as recognized by Grof (2008), is Ken Wilber. Wilber’s works spans the extent of the human psyche; his includes that of behaviourists and developmental psychologists, such as Loevinger, Kohlberg, and Piaget, as well as predominant philosophical literature on human consciousness from both eastern and Western origin (Nixon, 2011). The following section summarizes Wilber’s developmental model of the human consciousness in relation to this study.

Integral Psychology.

To understand transformational experiences and their influence on participant's overall wellness, it is necessary to acknowledge the process of the development of human consciousness. The collective works of Wilber serve as a guideline in understanding how the human consciousness grows and evolves, as well as how this journey relates to physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual changes in the individual. In Wilber's (1999) *Integral Psychology*, as well as in many of his other works, he eloquently outlines and organizes everything from matter to life, life to mind. Wilber describes integral psychology as "the endeavor to honor and embrace every aspect of human consciousness (p. 434)". His organization and networking of different paradigms of thought are used to explore human consciousness and how it develops. He describes this as "orienting generalizations" as it incorporates numerous different perspectives and fields of knowledge to create the best possible framework for understanding consciousness. His work encompasses numerous fields, "from physics to biology to psychology, sociology, theology and religion (p. 15)" (Wilber, 1996).

Wilber describes the development of consciousness by the organization and movement through holons. A holon is a "whole part of other wholes" in which consciousness evolves and moves between these different states. The collective grouping of these holons is called a holarchy. Wilber describes these holons as structures, levels, or waves; they are not linear in nature, but a path of individual development that is fluid in

nature. During an individual's development they move through the holarchy as described in the following passage by Wilber (2006):

Within limits, the self can temporarily roam all over the spectrum of consciousness- it can regress, or move down the holarchy of being and knowing; it can spiral, reconsolidate, and return. Moreover because the self at every stage of its development has fluid access to the great natural states of consciousness (psychic, subtle, causal, and nondual), it can have temporary peak experiences of any or all of those transpersonal realms, thus leaping forward into greater realities (p. 467).

In order to map out the vast spectrum of information covered by his work, Wilber created a four-quadrant model of knowledge. This four-quadrant model separates knowledge based on singular vs. plural perspectives as well as interior vs. exterior perspectives (Nixon, 2011). The upper left quadrant (the interior-singular) will be used to guide the understanding of inner psychological development. This quadrant is further divided into the ten stages of Wilber's spectrum of development. These ten stages are then further grouped according to prepersonal, personal, or transpersonal levels of psychological development as seen in Figure 1. This study will focus predominantly on the stages under transpersonal levels of development.

Out of the ten developmental stages, the transpersonal level includes the psychic, subtle, causal, and nondual stages of development. These psycho-spiritual levels represent the combined perspectives of Eastern and Western contemplative development that focus on the separate sense of self (Nixon, 2011). The psychic level, which is the first existential stage of development and the seventh overall, is the first point of development

that goes beyond the individual self to incorporate a more universal perspective of being. The next transpersonal stage of development is the subtle stage. This stage acknowledges and incorporates sensory phenomenon and experiences of insight that are understood as being results of a higher consciousness or personal deity-form (Nixon, 2011). Next is the causal stage, which is oriented around the realization of a “cosmic consciousness”. This is often defined by the experience of a vast void, abyss, or sense of formlessness (Grof, 1993). Development in this stage is frequently concentrated on how the individual learns to incorporate this awareness into his/her everyday life. The final stage, the nondual, is characterized by an individual fully integrating and existing as both form and formless, as part of a universal oneness. This final stage is characterized by a sense of unconditional love, full surrendering of the ego, and embracement of a nondual way of living. An individual at this stage is able to integrate all levels of existence and is no longer attached to their separate self.

Therefore, using Wilber’s work as guideline, this study will seek to understand how these transformational experiences are related to the development of the individual’s state of consciousness. The lower-left quadrant (interior-plural) of Wilber’s model of knowledge may also be utilized to explore any data relating to cultural influence on an individual’s development.

Figure 1. Outline of Wilber’s Transpersonal Model of Development

Prepersonal	Personal	Transpersonal
1. Sensoriphysical	4. Rule/role mind	7. Psychic
2. Phantasmic-emotional	5. Formal reflexive	8. Subtle
3. Rep-mind	6. Vision-logic	9. Causal
		10. Nondual

Summary of the Relation of the Study to Previous Work

Festivals are unique to the time and place they occur and are continuously evolving. The newly emerging subculture of ETFs can be traced back to raves and free festival culture. These events that incorporate drug use yet highlight and promote self-awareness as well as personal mental and spiritual development level are identified collectively as the conscious partying movement. As described by Beck and Lynch (2009), these events are not solely about pleasure seeking but can “be thought of as an informal movement, in the sense that its participants demonstrate a broad sense of collective identity and basic shared political agenda based on ecological, social justice, and loosely anti-capitalist concerns” (p. 341). Youth culture at raves and festivals is not simply oriented around music and drug use but also involves multiple variables including mental, spiritual, and social factors. Ravers and festivalgoers must reconcile the risks of raves/festivals and drug use with the pleasures and benefits they receive from the community at these transformational events. To fully understand the cultural phenomena of the conscious partying movement and transformational festivals, research needs to be conducted emphasizing the participant knowledge, experiences, and perspective with

focus on the ideas of community, participation, spirituality, and why these events are important to the individual. Research into electronic dance culture allows for greater public awareness, provides a foundation for informed public policy that incorporates the festival and rave communities' perspectives, and acts as a source of knowledge for innovative harm reduction strategies. Although there is newly emerging literature in the field of raves and ETFs, there is still a demand for studies that are founded in the perspective of the individual and the meaning of their experiences (Hunt et al., 2011; Hunt et al., 2007). The current study seeks to create a greater understanding of the context of ETFs, the meaning and impact these experiences can have on individuals, and set the foundation of knowledge for future inquiry.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Philosophical Framework

Overview.

In order to facilitate the understanding of festivalgoers' experiences at transformational festivals, I have chosen to use phenomenology to describe the lived experiences of participants. This study is founded in the phenomenological and existential hermeneutics established by Martin Heidegger. Phenomenological research is founded in the meaning of lived experiences as perceived, identified, and interpreted by the researcher (Creswell, 2014). Also utilized are Max Van Manen's guidelines for philosophy and methodological outlines for the human scientific study of phenomena. This study uses transpersonal theory as a guide in understanding the spiritual aspect of the phenomena of interest during the data analysis process. I have chosen Jorge Ferrer's participatory vision of human spirituality in regards to philosophy of transpersonal theory; this view complements van Manen's view of phenomenology and approaches the research question in a holistic manner. Phenomenology and transpersonal theory both allow for the creation of the research questions and analysis processes as they both recognize that an individual's experience is not isolated to an internal event but involves the interactions as part of relationships, community, environment, and other contextual factors; I believe this allows me to fully encompass the numerous elements of transformational festivals that contribute to the creation of an environment conducive to transformational experiences. As this study is integrated into the realms of human consciousness and development, the collective works of Ken Wilber (1996, 1999) are

used as guidelines in understanding the development of the human psyche and how this relates to transformational experience.

Ontology and Epistemology.

In regards to the ontological aspects of this study, existence is a communally built concept of individual perspectives (Flick, von Kardoff, & Steinke, 2004) and “all knowledge is human knowledge and apprehended through our phenomenal experience” (Osborne, 1990, p.80). This concept is also supported in Van Manen’s view of phenomenology. Van Manen (1990) states that, using phenomenology, we seek to understand phenomena through our worldly experiences and the worldly experiences of others “since to know the world is profoundly to be in the world in a certain way” (van Manen, 1990, p. 5). The concept of communally built truths is also supported by transformational theory as defined by Ferrer. Ferrer emphasizes that transformational events should be viewed as participatory experiences that are not isolated to an internal individual event but rather “a mutually codetermined transformation” (Ferrer, 2002, p. 118) that is the result of an individual consciously interacting with the environment in a specific context.

It is through conversation and communication with others that it is believed we are able to come to an understanding of our world (Ferrer, 2002). As part of Ferrer’s participatory vision of transpersonal theory, transpersonal phenomena are thought of as multi-local participatory events. Transpersonal experiences are seen as events because the experiences are neither objective nor subjective, but are instead the result of “the coming

together of certain conditions” (Ferrer, 2002, p. 118) which includes an individual’s state of mind and the environment in which they find themselves. This is important to the stance of the research project as I seek to gain understanding on how transformational festivals *create an* environment that is conducive to people experiencing transformational phenomena. Transpersonal phenomena are considered multi-local as they “can occur not only in an individual, but also in a relationship, a community, a collective identity, or a place” (Ferrer, 2002, p. 119). Although the study is focused on the meaning participants give their experiences at festivals, using the perspective of transpersonal phenomena as multi-local events allows me to draw on how festival social interactions, environment, and communities contribute to transformational experiences. Rothberg (1993) emphasizes that transpersonal psychology should not be limited to an individual’s subjective experiences but should also explore “socially engaged spirituality” which he defines as “simultaneously inquiry into and to transform self and society, self and world” (p. 122). Rothberg claims that spirituality is not limited to the experience of the individual; instead, investigation into transpersonal phenomena should be focused on “individuals in the social, political, and ecological problems of our time” (Ferrer, 2002, p. 24). Wilber (1996) also argues that transpersonal studies should not only focus on the self-body, but also how spirituality influences communities, relationships, cultures, and human interaction with the environment. Phenomenological research also acknowledges that “understanding itself cannot be objectively grasped or employed as a faculty of the mind like a method or procedure for securing the truth, for understanding is our fundamental mode of being-in-the-world” (Porter & Robinson, 2011, p. 60).

Phenomenological and Existential Hermeneutics.

This study seeks to understand the transformational or life-altering experiences of festivalgoers. This study found only a handful of peer reviewed articles that were grounded in ETF or spirituality in rave culture and none that focused on lived experience (Beck & Lynch, 2009; Hunt, Evans, & Kares, 2007; Hutson, 2000; Joe-Laidler & Hunt, 2013; Masha et al., 2015; Weir, 2000); therefore, phenomenology was chosen as the best method to explore this area. As indicated by Husserl, one of the first major contributors to the field of phenomenology, phenomenology allows researchers to build a foundational understanding of a phenomenon of interest that can then be used as a framework for future scientific inquiry (Porter & Robinson, 2011). This study is founded in Martin Heidegger's approach into the inquiry of phenomena. Heidegger's phenomenology seeks to investigate the meaning of being, interpret it, and acknowledges the prejudices and presumptions of those seeking to understand a phenomenon (Porter & Robinson, 2011).

Phenomenological research is a well-established, qualitative research method; however, phenomenology varies widely in its theoretic underpinnings and academic application. This study utilizes the philosophical and practical guidelines of phenomenology as described by Max van Manen (1990); his method gives an approach to understanding how individuals orient themselves to a lived experience. This study is based on creating a deeper understanding of transformational phenomena through lifeworld experiences. Lifeworld is "the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it" and aims to understand "the nature or meaning of everyday experiences" (p. 9).

Like transpersonal theory, phenomenology seeks to study human phenomena and the meaning of human experiences that lies outside the realm of empirical research. Phenomenology is based on description and discovery rather than measurement and control (Osborne, 1994). Phenomenology seeks to fill in the gap that is left by the limitations of empirical research; as stated by Aikin (2006), “empirical research has purported blind spots, where some crucial features of human life may escape detection and reflection” (p. 323).

van Manen (1990) describes phenomenology as “a philosophy of the personal, the individual, which we pursue against the background of an understanding of the evasive character of the logos of other, the whole, the communal, or the social.” (p. 7); he also emphasizes how the understanding of the individual experience cannot be studied separate from the context in which it was based. The notion of human phenomena being tied to context is also supported by Osborne (1990, 1994). Osborne (1990) states that when studying human experience using phenomenological methods “[w]e cannot consider the environment independent of the ways which people construe their environments nor can we consider persons’ experiences of their environment without considering the ways in which those environments have influenced persons’ experiences of them” (p. 80).

Transpersonal theory and phenomenology go hand in hand, for this research topic, as they are both focused on human experience and meaning within a specific context. With regard to Ferrer’s view of participatory knowing, van Manen’s view of phenomenology is particularly well suited for this study as it also accounts for the physical, relational, communal, and political context of a phenomenon.

Although the aim of phenomenology is in “making explicit and seeking universal meaning” (van Manen, 1990, p. 19), phenomenology does not require a study to result in the development of a theory or encompassing explanation of human nature, but instead seeks to allow deeper insight and connection to the world. This study seeks to create a deeper understanding of the experience of festivalgoers as preliminary research into transformational festivals.

Research Design

Data Collection.

This study is situated in the Southern Alberta and East Kootenay area; this area is central to the transformational community I intend to interact with and which I consider a part of my social, cultural, and spiritual life. I attended a number of festivals in this area during the summer of 2014 in order to make connections with the festival community, recruit potential participants, and take field notes.

Participants were recruited using posters placed at the University of Lethbridge, local stores in the Lethbridge area, online media outlets (such as festival Facebook pages), and at the festivals I attended. The recruitment poster can be seen in Appendix A. Individuals who were interested in participating in the study were screened over the phone using the questions seen in Appendix B. Participants were chosen based on their history of attending transformational festivals, having had an experience they considered meaningful of spiritual, as well as being highly motivated to share their experiences. The participants were not selected based on age, gender, ethnicity, or other demographic

information. There was no demographic information collected as part of this study as it was determined unnecessary for the two reasons. Firstly, this study sought to develop themes beyond predetermined groupings and pre-existing theories as part of phenomenological research; therefore, this information was not seen to be of value for the analysis. Secondly, this information was not included as a means to exclude data that could be potentially used to determine the identities of the participants; this was done in order to provide an additional measure of maintaining participant anonymity.

Participants recruited were also required to be over the age of 18. The sampling was not intended to be representative; this study only seeks to explore the deeper meaning of human experience through the experiences of individuals and is not intended to provide evidence for universal concepts or theories. As described by Osborne, “traditional notions of random sampling, reliability, validity, replicability etc. are not necessarily appropriate in the qualitative context” (1994, p. 2).

There were a total of 12 participants recruited for this research project; this was presumed adequate to illuminate the phenomena based on previous phenomenological studies in health sciences as well as based on the presence of repeated themes in preliminary data analysis (Rich & Graham, 2013). A total of 11 interviews were collected and analyzed. The interviews were audio recorded and were based on the question guide seen in Appendix C; however, the questions were not strictly followed in order or wording and were brought up in a manner that was suitable for the conversation. Two participants, a married couple, indicated they wanted to do the interview together. One interview was discarded due to the inaudible quality of the recording. Interviews were conducted in

Lethbridge or at the festival grounds at locations where the participant felt comfortable. The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes.

van Manen states that “to be aware of the structure of one’s own experience of a phenomenon may provide the researcher with clues for orienting oneself to the phenomenon and thus to all other stages of phenomenological research” (van Manen, 1990, p. 57). To embody this, I also recorded my own observations, thoughts, and experiences at the festivals I attended, as well as before and after conducting interviews. I used these experiences and material to become more deeply immersed in the event and to better understand my own thoughts and perspectives. van Manen (1990) describes this as “close observation” which attempts to enter the lifeworld of others by participating in it. I made observations about aspects that I perceive are relative to transformational experiences as part of an immersion into the phenomena of interest.

I attended three festivals in Southern Alberta and East Kootenay area in order to make observations and further my own experiences as part of being an immersed researcher, as explored later in this chapter. This allowed for the ability to “recognize what parts of the ‘text’ of daily living are significant for one’s study while it is happening” or identify “narrative with a point, and it is this point that needs honing” (van Manen, 1990, p. 69). I also used my previous personal experiences at transformational festivals to supplement informational gaps in the analysis. Another major source of supplementary information for this study are documentaries on transformational festivals.

Data Analysis.

The recorded interviews were transcribed and cleaned using ExpressScribe© and Microsoft Word© software. As recommended by Osborne (1990), the formal data analysis began by reviewing all the transcripts in order to become immersed in the data. I then analyzed the transcripts manually using thematic data analysis technique.

Thematic analysis is the foundation method used in qualitative data analysis and can be utilized in accordance to numerous different epistemologies and theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2008). Thematic analysis is flexible as it allows for the researcher to break the text into manageable units of content, to explore an area of research without employing a theoretical framework or previous philosophy, and allows for the identification of themes across the data set while still maintaining the meaning and value of the original context (Braun & Clarke, 2008; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Thematic analysis is similar to content analysis as it allows for determination of the elemental characteristics of the data; however, thematic analysis can also go beyond this to bring those elements together to create higher level concepts in relation to the social and contextual aspects of the study (Marks & Yardley, 2004). Thematic analysis is used to come to an understanding of a text by breaking it down into meaningful units, structures, or themes (van Manen, 1990).

van Manen (1990) defines thematic analysis as “the process of recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work” (p. 78). In phenomenology, this process is not “rule-bound” but a creative and insightful process that involves the researcher to be immersed in the research. Phenomenological themes are thought of as “structures of experience” and are the lived

experience we are trying to capture (van Manen, 1990). Themes are the unit of focus in which we are trying to capture the phenomena of interest. However, a theme is only a simplification of an actual experience and will never fully encompass the lived reality; this study seeks to make sense of the phenomena as best as possible through language. As suggested by Osborne (1994), the data was first analyzed on an individual level for all participants in the study. Next, the data was analyzed across all participants to draw out shared themes. These shared themes were then reapplied to the individual interviews to ensure they still resonated within the original data. The final thematic structure is intended to reflect the essence of the phenomenon of interest.

Ethical Considerations.

This proposal for this research project was reviewed and approved by the University of Lethbridge Human Subject Research Committee to ensure that ethical principles and standards respecting the personal welfare and rights of subjects have been recognized and accommodated as mandated by University of Lethbridge Policy. This committee follows the *Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* as determined by the Tri-Council.

The participants reviewed and signed a consent form before participating in the interviews; there were no predicted negative effects from participating. The participants were informed that they were free to leave the study at any point in time without penalty. Participants were provided with contact information if they had any further inquiry or wished to acquire more information. Personal information, consent sheets, and transcripts

were kept in a secure location. Information collected that could be used for identification was limited or removed from transcripts. Pseudonyms were used in the current study to identify participants. The participants were informed that the study provided only partial confidentiality as there was a risk of seizure of information.

A Mindfulness Approach to the Research Process

The importance of reflection during the research process is elegantly stated in the following passage by Van Manen (1990):

Indeed if there is one word that most aptly characterizes phenomenology itself, then this word is “thoughtfulness.” In the words of the great phenomenologists, thoughtfulness is described as a minding, a heeding, a caring attunement—a heedful, mindful wondering about the project of life, of living, of what it means to live a life (p. 12).

van Manen further describes phenomenological research as inter-subjective and therefore needing “the Other” to validate what the research has described. Osborne also emphasizes that phenomenology aims to interpret and communicate an experience in a way that is meaningful to both the researcher and the participant (Osborne, 1994). Osborne (1990) states that phenomenological research has “an atmosphere of respectful concern for participants, a shared interest in illuminating the phenomenon, and good rapport” (p. 82). The participants of the study were fully informed of the intentions and nature of the study and efforts were made to ensure the interviewing process feels safe and comfortable. For example, although interviews were intended to be individual, a couples’ interview was

permitted for Nancy and Floorgasm to allow Nancy to feel safe in talking about the deep hurts and the healing process during her ETF experience. As suggested by Osborne (1990), this study indicates interviewees for the study as a “participant” to emphasize the collaborative, voluntary, and cooperative nature of the research project.

An Immersed Researcher

In the literature for qualitative research, phenomenology, and transpersonal theory, the authors express the difficulty and problematic situation created when researchers attempt to study human experience using qualitative methods while adhering to empirical standards of validity and reliability (Ferrer, 2002; Osborne, 1990, 1994; Sandelowski, 2000; van Manen, 1990). However, in accordance with van Manen (1990) and Ferrer (2002), inquisition into human nature and spiritual phenomena is inappropriate to use empirical measures. Van Manen (1990) emphasizes that a researcher in phenomenology is not oriented around being either “object” or “subject” in the traditional sense, but rather sensitive and dedicated to producing vibrant language and dialogue.

van Manen (1990) also emphasizes the researcher’s engagement in the topic and the importance of personal fascination in the subject. Transformation festivals and the development of spiritual wellness through transformational events are not only a fascination of mine, but have also become part of a lifestyle and have contributed immensely to my own personal philosophies. I intend to create a career around creating environments and communities that support self-awareness and healing. As previously

stated, I also attended festivals during the research process as part of a continual immersion into the culture, community, and overall ETF experience.

Self-reflection, Member-checking, and Resonance

As noted previously, to use empirical standards for rigor and validity in phenomenological research is illogical and inappropriate (Osborne, 1990; van Manen, 1990). In the natural sciences, reliability generally refers to how consistent and replicable a study is and the truthfulness of measurements (Osborne, 1990). Reliability in phenomenological research is “based upon the observation that human perception is perspectival and contextual” and that there is “no absolute interpretation of the data” (Osborne, 1990, p. 87). The quality of a phenomenological study is evaluated in how clear the methodology and procedures are defined, and by how persuasive and well articulated the interpreted results are.

Osborne (1990) outlines four ways in which a phenomenological study can be assessed for validity. Firstly, validity can be assessed by rigorous self-reflection and clarity of personal orientation to the study; secondly by ensuring that the data collected corresponds with the research question and is congruent with the participant’s perspective of their accounts; thirdly by “presenting coherent and convincing arguments”(Osborne, 1990, p. 88); and lastly by how well the description of the phenomena resonates with others outside of the study.

Instead of trying to obtain objectivity, phenomenological researchers “recognize the unavoidable presence of the researcher in the formulation of the question, the

determination of what are the data, the collection of the data, and their interpretation” (Osborne, 1990, p. 81). To address my personal orientation towards the study topic, I’ve reviewed my history in the culture and influences in my ideology. I’ve also worked towards clarifying my personal impact in the study through meticulous self-reflection and identification of such throughout the research process; as previously mentioned, part of this process was keeping a field journal to record my thoughts, emotions, and experiences at the ETFs I attended as part of this study. This journal is used to inspect how my intentions, predispositions, and personal biases may influence the overall research process.

To ensure that the data corresponds to the research questions, the theme development process was monitored and mentored by my supervisor. To ensure that the participant’s perspective is honoured, rather than overshadowed by my own, I have reviewed the themes developed and their quotes used in the analysis for each participant on an individual level through e-mail communication. The presentation of coherent and convincing arguments will be demonstrated in the following two chapters: analysis and conclusion.

Chapter 4: Thematic Analysis

Introduction

As discussed in the methodology section of this paper, the interview transcripts were reviewed numerous times to construct and refine the underlying core themes. The essence of themes resonated throughout the research project, participant interviews, and my own personal experiences at festivals. These themes were created with an intention of bringing light to ETF experiences. I have separated these themes into the following three groups: (1) how ETFs create an environment that is supportive of personal growth and transformation; (2) how the social and emotional environment manifests in moments of profound bliss and self-exploration, and (3) personal enlightenment and transformation.

How ETFs Create an Environment That is Supportive of Personal Growth and Transformation

Going to a festival is more than just leaving your creature comforts of home or life in the city; it is entering into a “dream world”, a utopic escape from the grind of everyday normality. Whether or not participants have previously been exposed to this environment they enter the festival grounds and are swept into an overwhelming atmosphere. The intense beauty of the natural landscape, the escape from social pressures, and the abundance of new opportunities are overwhelming. As described in the following section,

ETFs become safe and sacred spaces for the festivalgoers. The following section of the analysis focuses on the emotional and social foundation of ETF.

The Freedom of Being Removed From The City.

As previously mentioned, a defining aspect of ETFs is that they are held in remote, outdoor locations. The analysis of the interviews with the participants clearly shows why the location is such an important and distinguishing feature of festivals. Although raves and ETFs have similar history and culture, participants describe ETFs as being a highly unique experience. How participants were able to experience music or the festivities was altered by the physical location of the event. In Tim's experience as a DJ in the electronic dance music industry "being out in nature versus listening to music in a club" makes a drastic difference in atmosphere. A participant's ability to remove themselves physically and emotionally from the city is one of the major themes of this study.

Why does location have such a great impact on ETFs? One reason described by participants is the influence of being in a natural space. For Anna, there is the opportunity to connect with the life force in the forest. Anna described how she was able to connect with individuals as well as her natural environment. At one point during her ETF experience, Anna described being able to visualize the connections between all living things.

I felt like I actually felt a connection to the forest. I could feel the connection between everything being alive... the way that everything looked and everything felt. When I took a breath in the trees took their breath in... Just like everyone was

glowing. Whether it was night or daytime I felt like everyone was glowing, whether I was sober or not. I remember holding my friends hand just feeling her pulse in her hand and I felt as if “This is my pulse too, we are the same.” And don’t know what happened but I remember at one point being “We’re all the same.” It was really emotional for me. I was in tears because I was so surrounded by such love and beauty. It was really moving.

Although there are many electronic dance events held within urban environments, in this study participants routinely praise the unique character of ETF that are held in natural environments. As described by Jordan in the following passage, tranquility and space for individual reflectance can be found in these outdoor settings:

... it’s just so easy to contemplate life when you’re in a forest with animals and bugs around you. Something you couldn’t really do when you’re just in a stone building.

Another participant, John, also noted how the natural setting allowed for easy transition between the public and private:

... you have the freedom to wander off into the mountains or wander off into the trees in general. To be alone with your own thoughts... It’s actually just a few steps between being part of 5000 people raving on the dance floor and being alone with your thoughts.

There is a sense that these festivals are remote yet accessible to most people. As put by the participant Nietzsche, these events are “close enough to legitimate camping” to draw those who are passionate about the outdoors as well as accommodate those with less experience “roughing it”. Participants explained in their interviews how being removed

from the city and the comforts of daily living creates a sense of reliance on others. Nancy illustrated in her interview how if someone is in need of anything from a toothbrush to BBQ there are a plenty of people willing to give their support. Nancy described, in the following, how this also creates a sense of respect:

You know your neighbour, you know everyone around you and so I think that kind of self-checks you. Don't be a douche bag because guess what, I'm going to see you again!

In many ways the location of ETFs is both unique to the festival itself as well as distinct from a city event. Enrique described in the following how foreign a festivalgoer would be if placed in an urban environment:

If you took two people from Shambhala and put them in the middle of downtown Calgary suddenly they're weird people. It's a different kind of environment. But get these people in Shambhala and they're at home, and they're comfortable, and they're surrounded by friends. That in its self, people being accepted, is so inspiring.

The location of the festivals also creates an environment that is temporarily isolated from societal pressures. Most ETFs are isolated physically from major population centers as well as being socially removed; this intentional removal from social norms is pursued more in depth in later themes. This isolation reduces the threat of legal implications stemming from drug use, nudity, and other actions deemed socially deviant. Participants are not worried about the stressors that come from being at home, at work, or public spaces such as bars. For Jordan, it was the removal of not only any legal threat but also any negativity coming from his family, which he explains in the following:

Just being in such a loving environment, knowing that I would be taken care of no matter what; without my family there to yell at me, or the police officers to take me away.

Kevin also approached the topic of the stress imposed from legal implications; in his following statement he brings attention to how choosing to participate in illicit drug use or counter-cultural activities drives an individual into social isolation:

I think coming from a regular community where you have to seclude yourself or isolate if you want those kinds of experiences or else there is potential for criminal involvement...I would say, definitely have to say, Shambhala has provided me a really safe venue to be able to explore that part of myself in an anonymous way.

The idea of being separated from law enforcement is echoed by a number of participants; John states that ETF are “as close as you can get to a realistically safe environment to do any sort of psychoactive substance; as in you don’t have to worry about cops or anything”.

The sense of safety and acceptance is a fundamental aspect of ETFs, as routinely indicated by participants. The intentional creation of a positive emotional environment and the accepting social space created at ETFs will be explored in the following theme.

The Overwhelming Experience of Mass Positivity.

Even before entering the festival grounds there is a change in the emotional environment. Participants describe how even in the line up to enter a festival they already

feel as if they have entered a completely different social realm. Jordan describes this experience in the following passage:

Just the way people talk to you and the way people are acting, it's completely different and it took me by surprise. I remember driving into the festival. The people in this car beside us were like 'tune into Shambhala radio!'. Just yelling stuff to us. Everyone was talking to us. It felt so weird because you go out of there and everyone is just trying to be better than everybody else. Once you go there, [Shambhala], everyone is trying to be your friend, it's completely different. When you've never experienced that before it's totally something else.

Participants described this change in emotional and mental state as if it were a physical force. Anna described this sensation as being flooded with positivity that was welling up from the ground beneath; it was as if she had been "hugged by energy". It is this overwhelming positive experience that is so unique to ETFs. As described by Femka, in what other situation could you be with thousands of total strangers and be able to say "I have fifteen thousand friends?" Femka continued this idea in her interview, as seen in the following quote:

But if you go to Shambhala and you were to be like 'Hey you! Want to be my friend?' they would be like 'yup!' You don't get it! You can think you get it but when you're actually in it it's totally different.

ETF are immensely bright and optimistic settings. At ETF, the general census is that everyone is actively putting forth his or her truest self. As eloquently described by Enrique, everyone may gather at the festival for different purposes, but there is a shared

core intention. The impact that this mass positivity had on Enrique is well summarized in the following transcript excerpt:

So many thousands of people doing the same thing and everyone is there for many different purposes but at the same time there seems like there is a common intention too. Sure some people might be there to do drugs, some people might be there to like have a spiritual experience, and some people might be there to have sex, whatever. Everyone is going there for different reasons but when everyone is there together there is this shared intention of like just raising awareness. Like being unique and bringing out that open-mindedness. I don't know, just really like coming together. And maybe that's the common purpose. The common purpose is being at Shambhala is to come together and to just witness what happens. And when you're coming together for such a pure purpose it becomes this conscious event. You know? It's not advertised as a spiritual event or somewhere you go to meditate or whatever but when everyone's together doing that maybe that's how it is... I remember coming back from that festival and being full of light; suddenly having experienced what love actually means on a grand scale. Not like personal 'I love you' but a scale of everyone just being in love with the festival.

The positive energy is foundational to creating an open and accepting environment for self-exploration. The following theme outlines how the social environment created at ETF impacts participants.

Emotional Freedom Stemming from the Absence of Judgment.

There is both a conscious and unconscious group initiative at ETF to remove negative mental attitudes towards the self and others. This active removal of judgement creates an emotional space that gives festivalgoers the freedom to self-explore, connect with others, and find new forms of personal expression. This idea is illustrated by the following passage from the interview with Kevin:

That kind of space, it's free to be myself and everybody either supports that or encourages it. Encourages in the sense of interacting with you... We're all humans, we're all looking for experience, looking to take risks in life and can we do it in safe ways and support each other in those opportunities.

What inhibits someone from wearing a comfy pair of old sweatpants to work on a cold, dreary day? What keeps a stranger from approaching another they have yet to introduce themselves to even when their curiosity craves it? What keeps an individual glued to their seat even though their feet call them to the dance floor? If I were to answer these questions myself the words that come to mind are “what would someone think of me?”

An idea that profoundly resonated throughout the interviews was the lack of judgment at ETF. During their interview, participants referred to the comfort or openness that the removal of judgment brought them. For John, this concept of consciously removing judgment directed towards himself was the core transformational aspect of his ETF journey. As seen in the following passage, John explained how the confidence and freedom found in this open environment was not a violent lashing out at others but rather an acceptance of their limits of control:

They were going to express themselves however they were. It wasn't a 'Fuck you, I don't care what you think of me'. It's people are going to think what they are, I can't help it, I'm going to do what I want. I can only govern myself. I guess that kind of attitude is what I took away coming out of that festival.

The participants clearly express that it is not an absolute absence of judgment, but rather accepting that others have their own thoughts and feelings, while being conscious of what is manifested through their own perceptions of self and others. As I review the data I imagine a social space where there is the potential to be liberated from the deepest sense of self-consciousness and where everyone is actively trying to remove his or her own personal inhibitions. A person's mental prediction of the thoughts and judgments of others acts as a sort of 'emotional ball-and-chain' that restricts the individual to a 'normal', restrained, socially defined sense of self. EMF demonstrates what can be created when those chains are actively diminished or removed. The act of removal of judgment by individuals and the EMF community creates a sense of emotional security that is infectious and results in the propagation of self-confidence throughout the festival. The openness created by this communal sense of shedding self-impositions and casting aside prejudices becomes a catalyst for the creation of new forms of individual expression and meaningful connection with others. As seen in the following passage, Femka describes how openness sets the emotional tones at ETFs:

It's too bad people can't do this all the time, but I feel like people leave their 'reality self' at the door and come in really open... hearts open, minds open... I could have walked to the beach and laid down. I could have lain down on any

blanket, just blankets everywhere. They were no one's; they were anyone's. You could just go and lay and could lay with anybody. You could touch anyone.

In her interview, Femka described how euphoric and yet strangely natural it is to be able to open up to others through in-depth conversation, through eye contact, and in the freedom of physical contact. She also goes on to say how ETFs not only provide the right environment for people to be able to interact with such openness but also the space and support “to practice it so they can actually do it”. Participants describe how they've taken these experiences and integrated them into their own life practices, as explored in the last themes in this analysis as part of the overall journey.

Again, this open atmosphere is supported by the separation of the festival physically and socially from ‘the city’. Nietzsche further explores this concept in the following passage:

I think that open-mindedness, that tolerance, that general loving atmosphere, the willingness to help, you don't find that; if I go drinking at a bar I'm more likely to have a guy chuck a fist at my face than give me a hug... There is an understanding of the wanting to self explore to whatever variation or limit there is that you don't have by going for a walk in the coulee or going to the bar with your buddy.

As previously mentioned, this removal of judgment allows for the formation of deep connections and sense of acceptance. This sense of acceptance is explored in the following theme.

A Profound Sense of Belonging.

ETFs are notorious for the creation of intense and deep connection with others. The caring and loving nature of these newly formed relationships is referred to at ETFs as finding your ‘festival family’. I have personally experienced feelings of complete safety, acceptance, and connection with fellow festivalgoers I had only just met. As reflected by Femka, “[i]t’s creating a family community with people you don’t know.” For Enrique, the sense of belonging and the ease in finding that connection with others felt incomprehensible to him. In the following quote, Tim connects how the emotional environment at ETF allows for relationships between individuals to form almost effortlessly:

And it just kind of dawned on me that the people that I meet, are the festival family, seem to be the right type of people. The right type of positive energy... There is a certain level of connectedness amongst people. Everyone is your friend. Even if you don’t know someone it’s like you’ve known them forever.

Another distinguishing characteristic of this sense of belongingness at ETF was the sense that the individual is loved for their quirkiness, their abnormality, and their imperfections. As stated by Anna, “[p]eople don’t like you in spite for your weirdness, it’s like they love you because of your weirdness”. Jordan also reiterates this enigmatic sense of inclusion in the following: “I thought everyone was a bunch of freaks but I myself was a freak so I felt right at home.”

Every participant in this study expressed feeling the unconditional acceptance and love at ETFs. Femka claims that this is because when people come to ETF “they get in and they put away judgment or their kind of biases”. When judgment is removed, it takes

with it the pretences that exclude and reject others. Participants are able to connect with others in a way normal social constructs usually inhibit.

Drugs as a Consciously Used Tool for Transformation.

Another theme that is consistently found throughout every interview is the intentional use of mind-altering substances. Although these events are associated with drug use, there were no questions directed towards personal drug use in the interview guide yet all of the participants shared experiences at ETFs that involved illicit drugs without being promoted to do so. Many of the participants expressed that drug use was an integral part of their festival in many ways; for some it was the initial draw to the festival, while for others it was the environment that ETFs provided in which they were able to explore their own tolerances for risk versus pleasure. However, all participants expressed using drugs with an intended purpose. The selection of the drug used, the personal preparation for drug use, and the creation of an environment that is supportive of their mind-altering experience was premeditated and controlled. Participants sought to ensure the physical, mental, and/or spiritual aspect of their altered-state journey was as positive as they could realistically create. Participants were conscious that the drugs used had both advantages and disadvantages; as described by Tim, “they’re a tool but they also limit”.

For some participants festivals were an exploration of drug use and drug culture. As explored previously, the physical location of these events removes participant from the social and legal threat of drug use. Participants were able to obtain first hand

experience of what the possible consequences of drug use were without societal bias, as explained by Femka in the following passage:

When I went I was expecting- because all you hear is like drugs are bad, people are going to die, and all this crazy stuff is going to happen to you. Then you get here and it's so welcoming and a totally different feeling than what you expected.

For Nietzsche, drugs were a tool to create a mental space for contemplation and making conscious life decisions. For John and Tim, drug use was a means to curb anxiety and social restraint. Tim, who suffered from social anxiety, would face the daunting social pressure of performing as a DJ. Tim uses drugs as means to break through his anxiety and gain the ability to relax in during social interactions.

Overall, drugs can be seen as a tool for exploration of self and spirituality. Kevin describes how he and his friends communally set the intention of going to an ETF to work on aspects of their inner self that they currently had turmoil with, to explore their own spiritual form and capacity, and to examine what their intentions are for the future. As explained by Kevin, "I've always struggled with spirituality in a lot of that sense. Where I found a lot of meaning has been my own exploration into drug culture." Jordan initially became interested in drug use as a means to explore his mind and conscious space. During one ETF experience, Jordan's journey with mind altering drugs resulted in a complete disintegration of his previous concept of self, as described in the following passage:

...they broke me down while I was there...I felt like they tested my soul... it broke down my thought process and who I think I am... real emotions started

coming up that I never could accept were even there...Everything I thought I knew before this event changed.

He describes his sense of self was as though he had been completely erased.

Leaving the ETF, Jordan describes feeling like a blank canvas, cleared of past structures of ego and now open to new potential. During Enrique's ETF journey, while in an altered state of consciousness, he was confronted with his inner desire for spiritual fulfillment and was able to see how his current life priorities were not aligned with this goal.

Although drug use was mentioned by all participants as being an important part of their ETF experience at some point, many participants described either the complete removal or easement of drug use. Light described how exploring the importance of drug use on a personal level is a part of many festivalgoers ETF journey. She describe how many festivalgoers initially perceive drug use as an essential part of the experience and then in time are able to share feelings of elation or the bliss of being in the moment with or without drugs. Nancy and Floorgasm describe how drugs aren't necessary at festivals, as compared to raves, as there are so many other things to do such as workshops, hula hooping session, fire spinning, and yoga classes.

Overall, participants use drugs in an informed manner, either through personal experience, help through friends or the community, or their own research. The use of drugs by the participants is conscious and intentional, although the end goals and personal journeys may vary. Drug use at the festivals is a highlighted aspect of the culture and community due to ETF isolation from societal norms and the negative public perception of drugs. Overall, there was a sense that drugs were a very useful tool for changing an

individual perception, becoming more open to experiences, or exploring the mind and spirit; however, drugs were not essential to personal transformation.

Music and ‘Vibe’ as a Means to Draw People of Similar Intention.

The influence of music at a festival has always been rather elusive to me in my own festival experience. I knew how the music could make me feel; on the dance floor the rhythm and the motion would overwhelm me with energy, elation, or a sense of groundedness. Although the music could often sway my emotions, so could my friends, the environment, and many other aspects. I’ve attended a variety of different festivals with artists playing a diverse range of music. Different types of music could evoke the same energy and emotion; however, the people I met at different stages had a distinct character. It was through the study that I began to understand what my own experiences were indicating. In this theme, participants describe being individually influenced by the music yet the overall experience being more than just what the DJ is playing. Rather, the participants describe music as being a uniting force for the emotional or spiritual mindset. Floorgasm states that “[i]f you like the same kind of music you’re going to meet the same kind of people over and over again at the same types of events.” Tim describes how different kinds of music create different social and emotional spaces between and within different festivals in the following passage:

Different people vibe to different kinds of music. There are different musics at different festivals. You’ll find different groups of people around different stages which have different music. It really does influence the vibe people are having.

Nietzsche backs up this statement in that the general sense of many festival participants is that the DJ playing at that moment does not usually have a great importance, rather that the vibe created is what is important. He states that a common phrase used at festivals is “I follow vibes not DJs”. Femka described her experience related to music during an experience at a stage with her friend; she and her close friend are usually perfectly in sync with each other emotionally and energetically. On this occasion, Femka felt disconnected from the music that she would usually find herself enjoying; she was unmoved and was experiencing an overall negative vibe. She looked over to see her friend in a state of absolute elation in complete contrast to her own state. There seems to be a disconnection between personal taste for the music and the experience festivalgoers are having. This phenomena is described by Nietzsche in the following quote from his interview:

So it's not so much about the music but I find in that environment with the right kind of people, and the right type of happy vibe, and obviously the right type of substance, all of the sudden you catch yourself where you stop and you're like 'Man this is garbage!' but here I am enjoying myself.

Some participants, however, expressed how the music isn't an essential part of their experience but rather a medium for dance. Participants describe moments of absolute bliss where they are consumed in the present during dance. Jordan states that it was “... probably the most uplifting time of my life...I was in touch with my body and mind.” He describes himself as dancing for hours without food or rest and yet feeling rejuvenated after. Participants who have conveyed how important dance is during these events have also verbalized how dance is their ability to outwardly express their

thankfulness. As stated by Light, “music to me is like my heart-beat. I need to dance. That’s my expression... it’s the closest I can get to saying ‘thank you’ to life and the universe.”

It appears that the music and physical space at the festival stages carries different energies in which people are drawn to that which they resonate with the most; the vibe created in that moment in time is more important than their personal taste in music or even personal relationships with others. ETF stages also have an environment conducive to dance, which is another example of the physical manifestation of emotional and social freedom, which will be explored in the next group of subthemes.

How the Social and Emotional Environment Manifests in Moments of Profound Bliss and Self-exploration

As previously reviewed, the participants expressed feeling safe due to both the removal of the social threats as well as the conscious removal of judgment against self and others. This creates a foundation of openness, acceptance, and the freedom to explore. The following themes focus on the meaningful experiences participants describe that are manifested because of the physical, social, and emotional environments at ETFs.

Detachment from Time and Living in the Present.

A particularly potent theme in this study, as it is the mostly clearly indicated and universal, is the unimportance of time at festivals. We are increasingly becoming a

society that is dependent, if not addicted, to electronics and social media. The break away from societal norms and conscious intention of unhindered connection at ETFs has created a culture that values time very differently. As explained by Femka, the festivalgoers place emphasis on abandoning cell phones, watches, and other electronics as part of being able to have a genuine experience at a festival. As explained by the Femka in the following, the intention is to bring back focus to the self and not technology:

I think it's pretty cool because we are always with our cell phones... we have constant access to what time it is, what everyone else is doing. Here, it doesn't matter.

This is also reiterated by Light who suggests this is due to a lack of interruptions from social media and technology:

We're not interrupted by technology... I got to reflect and be without a phone and observe my patterns.

The removal of importance of time as a means of maintaining a schedule allows for a certain fluidity that is absent in most people's day-to-day life. As explained by John in the following statement, living without adhering to a schedule or timeline seems alien coming from a normal student or working lifestyle:

You're going from the hour-by-hour kind of blocked lifestyle of what you're used to either in a job or school... you're adjusting to life without that... Now I don't have anywhere to be. I can actually just go anywhere right now for whatever motivation I have. When was the last time I could do that legitimately?

At ETF, festivalgoers are able to slow down and manage the basics; as stated by Jordan,

“all I have to worry about is eat when I’m hungry, sleep when I’m tired, and that’s all that matters.” As described by a number of participants, the space created by being freed from daily tasks and responsibilities allows them to become fully immersed in the present. As described in the following, for Kevin, the connection back to the self was illuminated in finding his breath:

The future isn’t my focus, I’m just right here in every single breath that I’m taking, wherever I’m on the grounds. So time just kind of becomes a lapse. All of a sudden the sun rises and you’re like ‘holy shit!’

Without the distraction of social media or the stress of following a schedule participants are able to live freely in the moment, follow their desires on a whim, and connect on a deeper level with each other. John’s explanation, in the following passage, emphasizes the utter bliss in this moment:

This conscious moment of ‘I have no idea how much time has passed’ or ‘what I was thinking about’ ... I’m not dwelling on the past. I’m not entirely sure I’m dwelling on anything. I’m not thinking about the future. I’m not entirely thinking about anything... Have I been thinking about anything? No! I feel amazing right now! This is perfect!

Space and Time for Deep Reflection.

As previously covered, due to the detachment from electronic devices and scheduling, the removal of social restraints, and the freedom to explore there is a space created in which participants have the resources and support to reflect on their life and

their current state of self. Nietzsche describes in the following the unique mental space created at ETF:

It provides the right environment to maybe have a thought about yourself instead of thinking about your next Facebook status or your most recent selfie, or is that chick interested in me.

Light described Burning Man as “a place that [she] can go to reconnect with what’s a deeper level of what is important to me.” Participants rediscover what it is that they find most important in life and how to prioritize this in the future. For John, he discovered he wasn’t actually socially awkward, that in fact he greatly enjoyed interacting with people at ETFs. John describes being worried about how others would perceive his life choices and career goals; he felt that others would judge his desired lifestyle as somehow unworthy or incomplete. John was able to reflect back on his life and discover the true source of his social aversion was his own perception of how he thought others judged him and that he would no longer let this hinder his own desires; this is reviewed in the following quote:

[ETF] actually reinforced all the reasons that I felt not really comfortable being here doing the whole academic thing anymore because I met a lot of people who really embodying more the direction I want to take in my own life...I guess I got over the idea that if I live my whole life and I’m doing relatively inglorious jobs and whatever. Again, one of those realizations. You’re carrying your own judgmental baggage here.... Why should you care if other people see it lacking in glamour, lacking in sophistication? ... The transformational aspect as it related to that specific festival, for me, was realizing I’m not actually socially awkward at

all. That was misplacing the problem. I really started to re-evaluate, practically speaking, what am I doing? Where do I want to be in a year? How can I get here and what can I do?

For Nietzsche, his reflection at ETFs brought him to the realization that family was of primary importance to him. During his festival experiences, Nietzsche entered a space in which he felt connected back to his family's homeland and was able to clearly reflect on his relation with his family. Despite having a difference in ideals with his family, Nietzsche was able to see past any disputes in lifestyle choices and embrace the unconditional love that his family offered him.

The experience of participants entering a space of deep reflection not only takes place on an individual level but also on a collective level. As described by Kevin, "We all approach it as a very transformational experience and an opportunity to look deeply into ourselves and kind of challenge and support each other in our growth." Kevin also explains how he and his partner use ETFs as a place to reconnect with each other, address problems they've had the previous year, and take the time to foster what intentions they will carry into the next year.

The removal of personal stressors and daily distractions allows for deep connection with others, emotional healing, as well as the exploration self; these concepts are explored in the following two themes.

Letting Down Personal Guards and Opening Up to Profound Connections.

The barriers that you have to put up just to survive the daily life in the city. I think we don't realize how much that does to us mentally, putting up these barriers.

As stated by Nancy above, the participants described an immense emotional release upon the realization that they no longer had to wear the masks and armour of the everyday. There is an emotional and spiritual barrier we create in order to feel secured and significant. The weight and constriction of this self-imposed, mental construct is only realized after its removal. The removal of these emotional barriers provides the opportunity to connect with others in a new way and at a new level that was unavailable before. It may start as the ability to make eye contact with others, to smile, or to give a stranger a hug. As stated by Anna, “[i]f you are walking people aren't afraid to look at your eyes and smile.” As previously mentioned, there is an openness created when emotional barriers are brought down. Femka describes how this atmosphere of openness allows for deeper connection:

Just in relation to other people you could just go and talk to anyone the way you and I could just sit here and have a conversation. I was so comfortable... In most people's lives they don't have the opportunity to walk up to anyone they see and be like 'hey!'. You could give them a hug and they would hug you back. You felt comfortable with people. You were comfortable with a stranger to have an intimate moment with you... It was so good and it was purely because I didn't stop myself from being like 'Hey you! Let's talk!'

This deep connection also stems from the idea of the ‘Festival Family’ and unconditional acceptance and love. In my personal experience, I have never been able to so easily and spontaneously create a connection with complete strangers as I have at ETFs. As someone who has always struggled with anxiety, I’m able to greet people fearlessly at ETFs; I can sense how my body language and speech is more honest and less manicured than in daily life. At ETFs I was able to interact with people without second-guessing their intentions or questioning their motives. Tim portrays this concept of open and deep connection in the following passage:

I just met him but we were connected. It was like everything was meant to be with this friend. Our experiences we shared were phenomenal. When we were there it was like now we are friends forever. It was just a bonding experience... Our level of connectedness was just open because the experience of festivals... we cut through that bullshit, the filters, the guards we have in our normal day. You just get right to the heart.

Either the inability to use electronics or the conscious removal social media devices is yet another common barrier inhibiting honest human connect that is removed at ETFs. As exemplified by Nancy’s statement that “[h]ere, you meet people on a face-to-face level... have a connection that is real as opposed to filtered by some device”. It is my sense that most festivalgoers are aware of the negative influences that electronics and social media have on their ability to connect with others.

ETFs act as classrooms for festivalgoers to learn how to connect with others on a deeper level and remove some of the unnecessary societal pressures we place on ourselves. For John, this was the removal of his self-imposed belief that he was socially

awkward, while for Nietzsche it was being comfortable in his ideals and lifestyles in his professional life. ETFs create an environment in which you feel safe to talk with others about your inner most demons and most private personal problems. As described by Kevin, “[y]ou can talk about things that maybe you wouldn’t ever chose to openly talk about with people and yet feel that support and appreciation from, in my case, people who are loving and supportive in my life.” Festivalgoers are able to take these lessons, and skills and begin to incorporate them as part of daily practice or natural paths of thought. The following theme then explores how the lowering of guards and defensive lines of thought can lead to moments of emotional and spiritual healing.

Letting Go of Emotional Afflictions.

As stated previously, there is a toll on our physical, mental, and spiritual health in carrying around the emotional and spiritual burden as a result of living a self-restricting lifestyle or in fear of social admonishment. For Nancy, ETFs acted as “an emotional release”; she was able to finally let go of her pain because she felt she was in a place that no one would judge her for it. Nancy volunteered for this study in order to share her meaningful experiences at an ETF that was oriented around the theme of healing. Nancy had been dealing with the traumatic loss of a dear friend and how she was able to start to deal with her friend’s suicide at a special ETF event. In the following passage Nancy explains how a particularly meaningful festival provided the space for her to grieve and let go:

I mean I forgot why I went there in the first place, what the place is for. It's for you to do some healing, it's for you to shed all of the protection you wear every day of the month... We just talked and talked and talked. And going back to that place, just being able to say goodbye, there is a healing that comes from that and you can't, as much as you want to, you can't avoid it.

The escape from everyday pressures, the removal of self-judgment and impositions, and the creation of connections with others allows for a deep healing that is reflected in the participants' mental and even physical state during and directly after ETF. As stated by John, "[it] recharged the batteries...it was a hugely positive experience which kept me going forward and clearly I'm still here". For Anna it was like she "hit a reset button on stress". As this study continues into the opening of the participants' innermost sense of self, the following theme examines how at ETF participants are able to explore identity as an individual and as a group.

Diving Deeper into the Self.

As previously reviewed, the physical and emotional environment at ETF allows for the participants to feel safe, loved, and uninhibited by daily stressors. The space and time created at the events gives festivalgoers the opportunity to reflect inward; for some, this may be the first time they've had the opportunity to do so. In the following passage from John, he reiterates how although people are drawn to festivals for a number of different personal interests, there is a natural tendency at ETF for people to flow into a mindset conducive to the exploration of both self and group identity:

People were very much exploring their own. I wasn't the only one exploring my expression, exploring my own projection I suppose. It seemed like that was what everyone was doing. It as much about experimentation within each person's character as how they were expressing that outwardly. I think it's a great time of creativity for people. People really explore who they are and how they interact with the world. People are there to party, people are there to do drugs, people have all their priorities. Whether they're there to socialize with friends, to see people they haven't seen for years or people they haven't met before. You are going to meet new people, see some awesome music, all that. You have got all those material, more conventional, or more easily expressed priorities... People are really exploring what their own ideas, their own identity; each individually and as this group that we all collectively work on... They're so liberated. It's very intentional throwing off social conventions. Throwing off self-impositions one is forced to play with in conventional setting. People physically, emotionally embody that. The things they say, the clothes they wear, the way they act.

With an immense sense of positivity, support, and communal safety, ETFs create “an accepted space to dive deeper into yourself”, as stated by Kevin. Although ETFs are cast in a negative light by the media and the public, these events are also known for the acceptance of socially deemed deviant behaviour. As described by Anna, through the exploration of the socially taboo, changes arise as participants discover “things that society tells us are deviant and wrong aren't wrong.” Predominate subthemes for this section includes the exploration of nudity, appearance, and gender roles.

Nudity.

Being able to be topless and braless and completely comfortable with you body and not having people tell you to put clothes on. Not having people tell you you're asking to be raped or something you even hear in Calgary, right?

As hinted by Anna in the above quote, it is no secret that society has a fascination with appearance and the presentation of personal image. The outward, material projection of self is a highly controlled image whether someone is in public, at work, or in social settings. The atmosphere created at ETFs by consciously removing judgment based on appearances as well as the freedom of expression provides the opportunity for festivalgoers to abandon social restraints on nudity. Jordan, during his first ETF experience, identifies how burdened he felt by his clothing and the freedom he felt after removing himself from it:

I had to ditch my clothes right away pretty much, because I felt I was carrying around too much ego. Too much of who I thought I was were invested in this clothing... I tried to wear as little clothing as I could to feel comfortable...I felt reserved. Although taking your shirt off isn't a big deal but back then, for me, I just felt reserved. For me it was a symbol of letting go, letting loose, and just having fun, and just going with the flow.

For Jordan, the act of physically removing his clothing was as if he was shedding the social restraints he was mentally bound to. Participants mention how the partial or full removal of their clothing allowed them to feel as if they were returning to a more natural

state. As part of Kevin's experience, he explains how nudity helped him connect with the natural environment:

There was just a point where I needed to take off my clothes and take off my shoes and just be part of the earth. Just ground my feet in the water and just be present to the rhythm of the earth.

Nudity is a visually distinct example of how participants are able to cast off social norms; however, a subtler example is explored in the following theme where the male participants describe how the social environment at ETF affected them.

The 'Jock Complex'.

The following theme took me by surprise and yet was a notion that I had gleaned from my festival experience that had never been verbalized. This theme consisted of participants breaking free of gender norms and the 'male machismo'. All of the males that contributed to this study describe their struggle to conform or adapt to society's concept of the ideal male role model. Nietzsche describes how ETFs allowed him to come to an understanding of how he wanted to present himself and his own sense of self worth:

Having grown up in a jock world, rugby, hockey, where it is very machismo shot for shot, that never really agreed with me and who I am... Whereas festivals allowed me to realize that I'm not on my own. You can find other like-minded individuals... It's the exact opposite of the bar scene and that spoke to me.

Dancing for the sake of dancing not just rubbing your crotch on a girl. [They]

allowed me to not be saddened by the fact of who I was and felt like, as I was stepping away more and more from what society is expecting a male to be.

Kevin shared his journey in which he is gradually able to relax the strict control he had over his outward appearance; he described how over his numerous attendances at a particular ETF he was eventually able to become more expressive and exploratory with his appearance. His experience at ETFs provided him with the opportunity to learn how he wanted to represent himself in society and continue to be an active role model for youth in his community. Kevin's new perspective on appearance stemming from his experience at ETF is well summarized in the following excerpt from his interview:

All of the messaging that I've had over my time of what does it mean to be a certain kind of male in our society. It's like fuck that, I don't want to be that kind of male. I want to try something different. I want to be and I want to show people that it's okay to be who you are and that can be flamboyant and that can be expressive. That can be emotional, that can be whatever it ends up being... even though I hold a different image as it is, it's very controlled. I hold an image I can stand my ground on.

Both Kevin and Nietzsche described their struggle to excel as professionals by maintaining appearances in the workplace when it contradicted their own ideals and sense of self. Nietzsche explains, in the following, how he was able to come to terms with how he projected himself at work:

Usually I've always had this conflict at work; what I look like but who I am. I found festivals allowed me to realize it's not so much an A or B. You don't have

to present yourself a certain way depending on who you're with. Just be yourself and if they don't like it screw 'em."

Even from the perspective of the opposite sex, the freedom from societal roles had a profound influence, as explained by Anna in her following statement: "Guys were walking around wearing fluorescent tutus and not being judged. Just like complete weirdos, for lack of a better term. That acceptance was just really important for me to feel." The visual expression of self and identity is explored in the following theme, which highlights the sense of mass freedom, self-expression, and creativity that creates a surreal experience for participants.

The Creative, Crazy, and Beautiful.

The exposure to new concepts, perceptions, and knowledge at ETFs is truly a staggering experience. There is a sense of shock and marvel. As described by Kevin, "To have all these people sharing and yet it's an intensely personal thing. It can be a very private experience and simultaneously a social experience." There is a surreal aspect to ETF; I cannot think of any other experience that comes close comparable. The purity of self-expression presents itself as mass creativity, as described by participants in the following quotes:

Just absolute, pure, 100% who they were or whoever they wanted to be in that moment and it was awesome. (Floorgasm)

Completely like I was on some alien planet. (Enrique)

It felt like a circus but totally vibing with this loving frequency that you felt as soon as you go there because it's so overwhelming. It completely took me to a whole new world, it felt like I was dreaming the whole time... (Jordan)

...I was in a fairy tale. (Anna)

This unrestrained expression of inner beauty is manifested outwardly as individual loveliness. Participants repeatedly expressed being initially puzzled at the sheer beauty of their fellow festivalgoers but coming to realize that this was no coincidence, as explained in the following:

I remember seeing so many people, there are so many incredibly beautiful people and then you realize everyone is actually always that beautiful, but at Shambhala all these chains that would bind you to the real world are suddenly cut and everyone is just expressing more who they really are and so people's natural beauty are shining through. There are less constraints that we have to dress a certain way so people dress up in costume and are free to express themselves. You have a lot more people expressing their natural beauty and that itself is really inspiring to see people frolicking around.

Femka explains how this beauty is visible in many forms; in how everyone is smiling and waving, the fact that people are excited to greet each other, and in how people are wearing whatever they want to wear; "everyone is beautiful because they feel beautiful".

Having the space and support to be comfortable with oneself and the group energy of unhindered creativity allows the festivalgoers inner self to be more accurately reflected outwardly. As previously mentioned, there is group consciousness or core energy that propagates throughout the festivals. The creativity is contagious and encourages people to open their minds and spirit to their potential and that of humanities.

The creativity is huge! I find it allows me to be myself more, to be more eccentric, to be more creative, to be more open...People's imagination and creativity was beyond what I could have imagined which opened up mine.

As touched on by Light in the quote above, the pure expression of their fellow festivalgoers was a source of immense inspiration for many participants. In the following theme, this study explores how ETF act as a source of encouragement, motivation, and hope.

Hope For Humanity.

Even after that first initial experience with who I was on a deep level that's enough to motivate the rest of your life in pursuing that deepening, that connection with true essence... Going to festivals is more of a celebration of the fact that humans exist and just this beautiful exciting process of the enfoldment and evolution of our society.

As eloquently summarized by Enrique above, ETF act to rekindle hope for the future. I believe one of the biggest influences that ETFs have on transforming festivalgoers' perceptions and priorities is how inspirational festivals are. Tim's words rang so true to me when he spoke about how ETFs influenced him, saying, "I usually feel like there is hope for humanity... I feel like festivals can be your antidepressant."

A point brought up by Femka, during her interview, was how negative media and general communication is in our society. Participants describe how refreshing it was to interact with others in a positive manner, even if it was simply through basic signage for communicating festival rules. Relating back to the healing theme at ETFs, these events are able to counter depression by acting as a reminder of the beauty, light, and potential that humans are capable of. As described by Anna in the following, one particular festival deeply impacted her hope for the future:

Going to Shambhala really upped my view of the world and of human kind in general... Like it sounds not important but all the hugs I got there just reminded me that in spite of all the wars and really terrible things, like famines, happening that there is goodness in the world. If it only exists for 5 days of the year in a little farm at least it's there and that's really important for me to feel and I can feel that with just hugs.

As described by Light, ETFs are her time to live in a manner that she finds the most ideal, even if it not feasible for a day-to-day living practices. ETFs act as utopias in the fact they are the idyllic style of living for most festivalgoers, but can only exist for short time and space. Still, the events act as models for human interaction, problem solving, and ingenuity. As described by Nietzsche they are "...closer to what we are

supposed to be living like.” Many ETFs have developed organizations devoted to incorporating the ideals and lifestyles into their own communities. ETFs have started to evolve to not just cater to youth and young adults, as previously found at these events, but also families and children. In Femka’s experience she was inspired at the work the festival put into promoting educating and supporting children:

And one of the main messages from that festival that they were talking about was like putting energy into children. It was an all ages festival and there was 10% children there. And like the energy of putting all of our thoughts and all of our energy into our children to create these from birth conscientious people to make like real changes in the world... That gives me faith that like the message that we can put forth really good people is- you’re putting it into practice.

ETF festivals remind participants of the kindness that humanity is capable of. The creativity, cooperation, and positive spirit of the festival act to rejuvenate the participants’ faith in humanity and give hope for the future.

Personal Enlightenment and Transformation

The participants in this study were asked to share experiences that they found meaningful or spiritual; as might be expected, experiences at ETFs had either direct or indirect influences on the participants’ view on their purpose in life. The following section explores themes involves how ETF are a part of festivalgoers’ journey in the betterment of self, meaning in life, and overall happiness.

The Emotional Experience of a Dramatic Shift in Self-Awareness.

The emotional and physical environment, the freedom to explore and play, and the exposure to new concepts and ways of living is all a part of the immensely stimulating experience of ETF. The participants in this study describe being able think differently, feel and confront newly arisen emotions, or connect with themselves on a different emotional or spiritual level.

A particular experience shared by Jordan during his interview emphasizes how dramatic a shift in consciousness may be. Although Jordan also beautifully describes some of the social impacts the festival had on him, to me, the most vivid and impactful images he presented was during his internal journey that was initiated through drug consumption. He stated, “Drugs were there because one, they lured me in, and two, they kind of broke me down while I was there. It was all authentic and it was all beautiful”. His journey is that of dissolution and reconstruction. Jordan describes, in the following, how this new foundation brought him to a heightened awareness of himself and life in general:

There was some times where I felt like I was dissolved. I felt like there wasn't really me anymore. There was just... there was just this essence, this knowing, and then there was this animal, which was my body. And there wasn't really, because my mind was shattered, there was nothing there. Just a sense of knowing almost, and that was it... It broke down my thought process and who I think I am. And, you know, real emotions started coming up that I never could accept were even there. And I had to deal with that, like face-to-face. And being in such a loving environment; knowing that I would be taken care of no matter what.

Without my family there to yell at me or the police officers to take me away. It was just perfect.

Jordan goes on to describe how this process of breaking down and reformation was as if “there was puzzle pieces being put together” above his head. All of the sudden the puzzle pieces fell into place, he felt settled, and he was able to let the festival guide him through the rest of his experiences. Jordan describes his emotional state upon leaving the festival grounds in the following passage:

As I left that festival I just left a dream world, a dream world that just beat me around, destroyed who I thought I was and put the pieces back together, and now I’m leaving as this fresh slate. This painting that still needs to be painted, like brand new, but all I had now was an idea- a new idea of who I was and- just magical.

What struck me about how Femka illustrated her experiences was the unique perspective of it. Part of Femka’s culture is reading tarot cards, a practice passed down to her by her mother. She describes what a transformational experience is like by comparing it to the ‘tower card’ in the following excerpt from her interview:

It’s funny because I feel when I read tarot cards for people, they get the tower, it’s one of those cards that looks really scary but it’s not. It’s one of those- people see it, and because it’s the tower and lightning, it’s over the water and the water is really bad. It’s obviously a storm. The tower is usually on fire or the top is off and people are falling out of it... It’s that moment when what you thought, what you had, is gone but the tower in the picture is still standing and the people who are

falling out of the tower, they're falling into water. Ya it's stormy ass water but they're going to be okay. And the tower might be a little bit shook up but it's still there. It's still standing, it's not totally wrecked. And that to me is the power of the "Aha" moment that's like "Wow! This brought me into this new level of consciousness, this moment really changed my life" but process of it can suck sometimes because sometimes having a life altering moment means leaving behind bad things but also sometimes hard things. To really alter life you have to change yourself and that's scary. People pay thousands and thousands of dollars to go to therapy to be able to look into themselves, to have someone help them look in at themselves. To truly have a life altering moment there is the 'aha' but there is also the 'Whoa! I need to process this'. You need time to think about it.

Femka reminds us that personal transformation is a journey that is not always a clear and mellow road, but rather weather-beaten mountain path. Enrique summarizes how his personal progression towards a greater understanding of his spiritual calling was altered as part of his festival experiences. He comes to the realization that although festivals are rejuvenating, inspiring, and are an accepted space of psychedelic drug use they are not an end point. In the following quote, Enrique gives a brilliant metaphor of his ETF compared to his lifelong spiritual journey:

It's almost as if those festivals, and these psychedelic experience, were like they opened the door. They open the door and gave you a glimpse- or I shouldn't say you- they give me a glimpse of the potential of all humans have for like divine spirituality and to manifest that which is actually important as opposed to that which is just concerned with petty

attachments and materiality. After the drug starts to wear away that door shuts and then you are back down into the real world. And no matter how many times you do ayahuasca, no matter how many times you do acid, that door is always going to shut at the end of the experience and so we can take the lessons we've learned from those experience and begin to build our way up there but you'll never going to keep that door open. You're never going to stay in those realms as long as possible. And I think the spiritual lifestyle practices of meditation and mindfulness and just learning the philosophy and experiencing that- that's the long way up. That's taking the stairs instead of taking the elevator with the opening door you're taking the stairs to that top floor. And it takes a lot more effort and it's harder to get there but once you get there you're there and you're not going to go back down... So I think a lot of those experiences taught me not to be content with that quick elevator experience and have really proven to me the long road is the better road.

Jordan, Femka, and Enrique all describe very different views of their experience but all of them describe that the transformation does not bring you to an end point but rather the next phase of your journey. This idea of ETF as part of a life long journey is explored in the following theme.

How EMFs Act as Stepping-Stones in the Pursuit of Happiness.

I initially approached this study with the prediction that festivalgoers would describe intense peak experiences at festivals, and that within that moment they would be able to describe themselves as transformed or reaching an elevated state of consciousness. Although participants describe moments that may be labeled as peak experiences, the participants consistently described their experiences as a journey in which each festival experiences acted as a time of accelerated emotional or spiritual growth. The following section examines how ETFs influenced each participant's journey.

In Enrique's interview, he reflected on how before his ETF experiences he had negative habits relating to drug and alcohol use, low self-esteem, and was struggling with his parents' divorce, and yet still experienced this time as being happy. It is through his ETF experiences that he came to the realization that his current lifestyle only brought a superficial level of satisfaction. What he was yearning for was deep connection and spiritual fulfillment, as described by Enrique in the following:

... now I realize that I have much more potential inside of me to enjoy life and to like capture blissful moments and just be content... I want to be claiming that same type of contentedness and happiness all the time, not just special moments within music festivals but why not align my entire life to achieve that maximum potential.

Enrique describes how one particular ETF allowed for him to become conscious of his discontent and provided him the resources and opportunities to continue his spiritual journey; as stated by Enrique, "festivals very quickly and transiently get me in touch with the core essence of who I am". Enrique described how his experiences at ETFs

directly lead him to a lifestyle in which he was practicing mindfulness and meditation on a daily basis.

Enrique also describes how now he approaches ETFs differently for when he first entered the community; now each festival provides him with new perspectives and learning experiences rather than an escape from personal problems. This is also confirmed by Nancy who described how ETF experiences are about “opening your mind to different experiences and knowing that it’s all a part of your learning”. For Femka, this opening and growth was experienced as learning to love herself again:

I’m the most grounded I’ve ever been... I had totally re-rooted not only to my physical self but feeling like my best me... It reignited my passion for myself. To look at yourself and be like ‘Hell ya you! Whoo!’

In Light’s experience it wasn’t necessarily learning something new but rather the materialization that what she had already learned and believed in:

I think the idea of manifestation became very real for me. I felt totally inspired, totally inspired, and felt a little reassurance as what to me is a reality that you can’t see in day to day living is actually a reality that I can live with because I’ve experienced it in another place... It just put a bow on everything... You know, it packaged it with a bow because everything I had worked towards or started believing.

Whether these experiences are obtaining new knowledge about themselves, about others, about the world around them, or becoming more grounded in their own ideals, each festival allows participants an accelerated period of growth.

Whether a participant's transformation was based from a single festival experience, such as Anna's story of becoming newly emerged in ETF, or a life long journey, such as Tim's career of being a DJ, each ETF can be seen as a catalyst for individual emotional release, spiritual developments, and a change in social perspective. Even a single ETF event can allow a festivalgoer to discover immense self-confidence. John was able to come away from his first ETF "with a very different perspective" on how he interacts with everyone in his daily life.

These learning experiences can translate directly or indirectly into changes in personal interaction. In Anna's learning experience she was able to find self-understanding and a renewed passion for her own lifestyle; she stated, "I understood a little bit but now I really, without being able to explain it, know that I'm a being of light, and energy, and love. I have 100% confidence of what is inside of me". Anna goes on to describe how her experiences at ETFs also changed how she interacts with people; how she is more conscious of how her approach to a conversation and opinions affect herself and others.

For Tim, ETFs are such an influential part of his life that he finds it "difficult to separate the self from the festival" and they have profoundly influenced how he lives and who he has become. Tim beautifully explains how ETFs are not about a single moment of profound change but a special part of a life long journey:

I've learned a lot from my experiences at festivals. I've learned to be open, to challenge myself to see things in a different perspective, to be inclusive, to really be open-minded and non-judgmental as much as possible... I would say they've had a profound influence on who I am and how I live. It's difficult to separate the

self from the festival... I don't think there was one moment where I transformed in completion. Festivals create stepping-stones and you process something from one and you integrate it into the self and then it's time for the next festival. At the next festival you might face something new or a new challenge and the next one it might be re-solidifying something you learned from before.

Tim emphasized how at ETFs it wasn't necessarily feeling "Oh wow! I'm at the place I want" but rather the start of a journey to better understanding of self and others, where he could "...look back and pinpoint festivals as markers." ETF are places of intense emotional and spiritual development but are still only a part of an individual's overall development. As described by Nietzsche, "it's an ever ongoing process, it's never done." As for Light, she described the ETF experiences as preparing her for the next step and that she doesn't think she'll ever stop learning at these events.

In Kevin's interview he described how he and his friends went to ETFs with the intention of using the space to meditate on the challenges they face in day-to-day life in a supportive and positive environment. He describes this process in the following passage:

Those challenges have helped me. I process through them because it brings them to light. It's like okay now. I can start to, for the rest of the year, process it and move through it and try and understand it on a different level and integrate that into my being.

Kevin then uses ETFs as learning experiences and is able to take the knowledge gained at ETFs, translate it, and incorporate it into an action plan towards improving his community's wellness. These ideas he brings are often controversial but he is able to

present them in a positive manner that can be accepted by the community, as described in the following:

So I think it's really opened my eyes to how to educate society. I've learned to educate myself but how do I now learn to share these experiences to open up other people's eyes that may be more conservative or they want to be in control...

Bringing back those types of information has been a real positive thing for me.

The idea of being able to look differently at challenges presented in life is also echoed by Nancy in the following passage:

What, overall has the experience changed me? I really have an idea of who I am and when I'm working through something I think about that... I take on the challenges, the everyday challenges, a bit differently. You know? You look at them from a bit different perspective.

Tim's words truly resonated with me in how ETF's really do act as "stepping-stones"; they are grounded and safe places to guide you to the next place on your journey. ETFs can give you the knowledge or the inspiration to move you to your next destination or reconnect to your roots when you have become lost or burdened. However, it is clear that ETFs promise no permanent solution, nor a final destination. These events are short and transient, and therefore all participants described have to integrate their experience back into the daily grind. Although ETFs offer a temporary separation from normality, the experience of festivalgoers is not isolated completely from society, nor is it intended to. The individual brings their personal problems while the group brings societal issues into a space where acceptance, love, and creativity may heal or inspire. As described by

Tim in the following, participants take this energy with them from the festival and actively seek to maintain and propagate it everyday:

I become a stronger person for a bit. I take that and I share and I give and people share and they give. I just become a more whole person and then integrate that as I go through life.

ETFs act to rekindle passions and allow participants to bring new energy into their lives as well as the inspiration to share that happiness with others. I believe the transformational aspect of ETFs is that they are not a destination in which participant can only be truly happy in that particular time and space but rather a community of sharing and learning which then empowers festivalgoers with the ability to be blissful in the everyday.

Chapter 5: Findings and Implications

Individual Transformation- Moving Through the Spectrum of Consciousness

If we return to the definition of spirituality, as defined by Elkins et al (1988), I believe this definition speaks volumes to what we explored in the previous chapter. None of the participants spoke of a spirituality based from their relationship with either a chosen religion or their cultural upbringing. The participants' sense of spirituality was truly born through experiencing moments of bliss or stillness in which they were able to recognize their current state of being. Upon internal reflection they were able to start to relate these experiences to their relationships with themselves, others, life, or their natural environment.

I believe there is a clearly transformational aspect, or a shift in consciousness, in the experiences that the participants described; these experiences lead them to see life or themselves from a distinct and different perspective. Although a new way of thinking may not lead to drastic life changes, all of the participants described being able to view situations, problems, or life in general in a more holistic manner. To return to Wilber and his concept of a spectrum of consciousness, I would reason that all the participants described experiences that were relatable to the four transpersonal stages of Wilber's ten-stage model (1986, 1999). A handful of descriptions given by participants are used as specific examples of reference to particular stages of Wilber's transpersonal development model; this is to allow a reader to become more immersed how a shift consciousness may

manifest. However, which developmental line or level of consciousness an individual participant may have achieved is subject to interpretation and classification; therefore, Wilber's models are used as references tools rather than a diagnostic manual. In the following, I review how particular experiences or themes resonate with the description Wilber gives for the four transpersonal stages of development.

As summarized by Nixon (2011), the psychic stage is the first of Wilber's ten developmental stages that enters the existential level. The psychic stage is characterized by a shift in an individual's cognitive centre from being focused on oneself to opening to a more pluralistic perspective (Nixon, 2011). This often manifests in what Wilber (1986) calls nature mysticism, which is a mode of being or sense of interconnectedness with the natural surroundings. Mercer (1913) explains nature mysticism as "the world of external objects must be essentially of the same essence as the perceiving minds" (p. 5). At some point during the interviews, each participant reflected on his or her ETF experience as being connected to the natural flora, fauna, or landscape. Anna's breath was not her own but instead an extension of the forest's inhalation and exhalation; Kevin was grounded into the earth as his 'roots' intermingled and connected with all the life around him. Although examples of nature mysticism appear in the theme Freedom from Being Removed From the City, examples are also scattered with themes of How the Social and Emotional Environment Manifests in Moments of Profound Bliss and Self-Exploration; this is seen in moments when personal reflections turn outward and expand into a connection with the participant's natural surroundings.

The next stage is the subtle stage, which is most readily noted by the identification of a deity figure (Wilber, 1986). As described by Nixon (2011), this may be seen as a

realm of illumination or transcendental insight. Grof (1993) identifies this stage as when an individual's false identity dissolves, the disintegration of the ego, or surrendering of the self. Although none of the participants described experiences with a personal deity figure there is mention of surrendering of the self and absence ego. In the theme The Emotional Experience of a Dramatic Shift in Self-Awareness, participants often described relinquishing their sense of identity or a sense of 'oneness'; an example of this may be gleaned from Jordan's experience of being broken down and being left as a blank canvas. A sense of dissolution of self may also be traced back to the theme Detachment from Time and Living in the Present. The participants did not describe a "white light surrender experience" (Nixon, 2011, p. 421) nor the visualization of a deity figure; however, they did describe experiencing the partial or complete dissolution of their identity or ego.

The following stage of Wilber's transpersonal development model is the Causal. Wilber (1986) identifies this level as having an association with experiences of formlessness. Nixon (2011) expands this definition to a sense of "cosmic consciousness". Nixon (2011) explains how the experience of a vast abyss or nothingness can initially bring forth a sense of fear; this fearfulness may evolve into an experience of immense relief and stillness upon the surrendering their sense of control. Participants in this study described struggling with surrendering their sense of identity, whether this refers to their physical, emotional, or spiritual projection of their inner-self. The bliss and awe experienced when participants relinquished control of their own image is present in many of the sub themes under How the Social and Emotional Environment Manifests in Moments of Profound Bliss and Self-exploration but are mostly concentrated under the theme Diving Deeper into the Self. In the theme Diving Deeper into the Self, participants

described giving up their firm control on not only their image but also their sense of self. The initial fear of formlessness, the relinquishment of control, and the integration of formlessness into daily life are exemplified in the theme The Emotional Experience of a Dramatic Shift in Self-Awareness, which leads into Wilber's final transpersonal stage of non-duality.

The non-dual stage is the 10th and final stage of Wilber's model (Nixon, 2011). This stage is epitomized by the convergence of form and formlessness, a sense of wholeness, enlightenment, and oneness. Many of the participants described moments of intense connectedness with all of the festivalgoers or all of humanity in which there was no longer a disconnect between the self and other. These experiences of oneness often arose in the themes Letting Down Personal Guards and Opening Up to Profound Connections with the Self and Others and Diving Deeper into the Self. A few participants described moments of enlightenment in which they felt their being was intertwined with all people, all living things, and the cosmos, as described in the theme The Emotional Experience of a Dramatic Shift in Self-Awareness. All of the participants' experiences of non-duality are all described as state experience rather than entering a new stage of development; the participants described peak experiences where in that moment the participant may have reached a higher levels of consciousness but the participant had yet to fully incorporate it into their day-to-day living. As described by Tzu (2014), the ascension into the non-dual stage of awareness is a lengthy journey; to fully embody all levels of consciousness as they come into present awareness, to integrate both the form and

formlessness, and to dissolve the sense of self that is separate from other is a difficult process that few can be said to have fully embodied.

. As Described by Wilber (1999, 2006), each stage of consciousness is experienced, processed, and incorporated before an individual is fully able to consistently access the next stage. Although the participant's moments of wholeness or oneness may be temporary or part of a peak experiences, many participants described being able to integrate these experiences or states of being into their perception of self or their perception of life; these experiences are described in both the themes *The Emotional Experience of a Dramatic Shift in Awareness* and *How EMFs Act as Stepping-Stones in the Pursuit of Happiness*.

As previously mentioned, although participants' experiences can be associated to the psychic, subtle, causal, or non-dual stages of Wilber's transpersonal development model, an individual's developmental line of consciousness is not linear nor static but may spiral, transcend, and descend (Wilber, 1986, 1999, 2006). The expressions of the participants' transformational journeys at ETF events were reflected in definitions for Wilber's transpersonal developmental stages; however, this does not indicate that an individual's experiences or development is limited to those described in this study. As previously mentioned, ETF are only part of a greater journey of the growth of consciousness and spiritual fulfillment. Returning to the definition of a transpersonal experience as defined by S. Grof (1975), participants clearly described experiences that transcend the limitations of the physical body perception of the self as well as the ego,

time, and space. Overall, there appears to be a progression of consciousness that becomes increasingly aware of the ego, aware of others, and a sense of universal oneness.

The Transformation of the Individual as Part of a Greater Group Dynamic

A theme within Wilber's spectrum of consciousness is the notion that, with increased cognitive development, an individual is less focused on the self and becomes increasingly aware of others from a familial scale to a global scale and there is decreased sense of separation (Wilber, 1999, 2006). Each participant in this study described feeling more connected to the group in some way, whether this is a sense of family, to being connected on an energetic level, or a sense of complete unity. A number of participants directly stated that, although individuals are drawn to the festival for different reasons, and whether they are conscious of it or not, the basis of the festival is the coming together to be part of a group energy or collective consciousness. While the individual is working on specific problems or their own internal challenges, the group is collectively working towards learning, growing, and being more self-aware. This connection and positive energy is extremely pleasurable and is stated by a number of participants as their reason for going back to festivals. I believe there is very few opportunities in Western culture for people to come together as a collective and be given a creative space with no expectations, constricting social structures, or rigid time-lines. This positive and creative energy isn't confined to these festival spaces; as mentioned previously, the participants were eager to practice what they learned at the festival once they returned home. As explored by *The Bloom Series* (Leung et al., 2014), this is not limited to the actions of

individuals as a number of organizations and communities have emerged from ETFs. As an example from within this study, Kevin would bring back his knowledge and experiences from festivals and integrate them into new approaches and perspectives on harm reduction programs directed towards drug use as a part of his involvement in community organizations. To further explore how ETFs impact individuals and communities, I believe future studies into how ETFs influence communities would be beneficial.

The Freedom of Self Expression is still Limited by Morality

In Western culture, daily habits of life are not favourable for deep reflectance or creative thought. It was through escaping the restraints of Western society by attending ETFs it became clear to me the number ways that our day-to-day activities can be repressive and constrictive. The practicality and functionality of having a schedule in everyday life is clear; however, the amount of stress and tension that may be present in having even to plan basic meals isn't apparent until absent. As each mental barrier is stripped, I believe we become closer and closer to a more neutral state and true inner selves. ETFs go even further to remove not only basic daily motions but also our mental and emotional structures.

This does not mean that at ETFs there are no social implications, such as no sense of right and wrong. As previously mentioned, festivalgoers are free to explore as long as it's not causing harm to others. A study by Chen (2012) explores how the coordinators of the Burning Man festival manage and organize such a massive event without removing

the agency of individuals, nor inhibiting the magical nature of the event. Chen explores how stories are used to communicate between volunteers and participants what is desirable and undesirable behaviour. In one story, there is a performance that is aggressive, violent, and brutal in nature. This particular act resulted in the performer thrashing himself on the ground and breaking sound a equipment. This resulted in one of the sound technicians kicking the performer in the back of the head. Although Burning Man is a world renown as a place exploration and the creative nature of the art, that does not free the event from a social sense of morality; As explained by Chen (2012), “[y]ou antagonize some people and they’ll turn the other cheek. Antagonize others and they will respond with violence” (p. 327). Free expression, even at Burning Man, still has its limits; another incident narrated by Chen (2012) had a camp shouting sexual harassments at those passing by. There was a consensus by participants and organizers that this behaviour was not acceptable because although it might be a form of radical self-expression it was also a form of abuse. The idea of freedom of expression within the confines of morality was also reflected by participants’ descriptions of ETF events; in an example from this study, Nancy described an ETF event where organizers asked festivalgoers not to wear headdresses as this was seen as cultural appropriation and offensive to the local native community. Festivalgoers were all exploring and pushing personal boundaries and expression as long as that didn’t result in the harm of others physically, mentally, or spiritually.

“So what about the drugs?”- And Other Areas of Potential Controversy

A frequent response when I talk to people about my work is something to the effect of “So you interview people who were as high as a kite?”. At first I was taken aback by these comments, but upon reflection I realised these comments are not completely unfounded. Through my experiences and the experiences shared by the participants of this study, I do believe the meaningfulness of ETFs is not based in illicit drug use; however, it is an important element of these festivals. As previously mentioned, Blackman (2007) follows how drug culture and music culture have evolved together for decades. I believe drug use is a significant aspect of ETF culture for two reasons.

Firstly, as explored in the analysis section, a theme of this study is the separation of the ETF environment from societal norms and constraints. Many participants described already having the intention of exploring mind-altering substance before ever attending festivals. There is a draw to festivals because there is a social acceptance and a removal from negative legal and occupational implications. There is a sense of safety in drug use at these festivals because of the community support, first-aid, sanctuary resources, and a sense of physical and mental preparation for the experience. As previously explored, drug use is not the only socially prohibited activity that flourishes at festivals. As described by participants, it was more natural to become accustomed to the drug culture than perhaps initially feeling comfortable with costumes or nudity; there is an atmosphere of acceptance and the perception of ‘if it’s not hurting anyone why not?’. Overall, I believe participants come to ETF events with preformed perceptions of illicit drug use; ETF allow individuals to grasp new knowledge on mind-altering drugs and make personal choices on the risk and reward in the absence of normal social and legal pressures.

Secondly, there are the physiological effects of the drugs. As explored in the literature review, participants know the risks of the drugs they are taking and try to minimize any negative side effects as well as enhance both the physical, emotional, and spiritual benefits. Participants described their drug use as a means to decrease social anxiety or enhance the sense of connectedness to others. Relating back to theme Drugs as a Consciously Used Tool for Transformation as well as Letting Down Personal Guards and Opening Up to Profound Connections with the Self and Others, although there is a sense of unity and acceptance at ETF, some participants described using drugs to alleviate their own self-impositions and emotional barriers. Tim explicitly stated that his drug use at festivals was to manage his crippling social anxiety to allow him to perform as a DJ and enjoy the social experiences at ETFs. John explained how he had struggled previously interacting in social setting and how drug use was able to curb some of his social anxiety and personal inhibitions both within and outside of ETF events. Participants also described using mind-altering substances, as individuals or as part of a group, to explore their spirituality and sense of self.

There is growing evidence that drug users at raves and electronic dance events are not unconscious in their consumption of illicit substances but rather are well informed and have a specific intention in their use of mind-altering substances (Hunt et al., 2007; Joe-Laidler & Hunt, 2013). As evaluated in the literature review, many of the popular drugs used at raves and electronic dance events are described as ‘empathogens’; drugs that are commonly found at festivals, such as MDMA, that may induce the sense of euphoria, intimacy, and empathy in users. Also reviewed in the literature is the historical

use of drugs as a part of human spiritual practice. As described by participants, festivalgoers are often introduced or gain knowledge on the drug use as part of ceremony and psychological health practices at ETF. In Grof's (1980) research with LSD and other psychedelic drugs, he explored not only how these hallucinogens could be used therapeutically for emotional disorders but also as a resource to explore deeper into the meaning of the human spirit. More recently there has been a new surge of research in the medicinal application of common ETF drugs such as LSD, mushrooms, MDMA, and other mind-altering substances in treating addiction, post-traumatic stress disorder, eating disorders, anxiety, and other psychological disorders (Goldsmith, 2010). In their study on LSD-assisted psychotherapy, Gasser, Kirchner, and Passie (2015) show how LSD use as part of intensive psychotherapy can not only be safely administered but also provide individuals with life-threatening illness a method to access and confront their emotions to allow them to cope with their fears and anxiety. Research has also continued using hallucinogens as means to explore the human psyche; a phenomenological study by Shanon (2003) explores how the mind-altering experience of ayahuasca can be used to explore aspects of the human consciousness. Metzner (2006) summarizes not only the indigenous use of ayahuasca in ceremony but also the exploration of the inner psyche as part of profound experiences during ayahuasca ceremony in present society.

With the historical human use of mind-altering substances, the open and accepting atmosphere at ETFs, and newly emerging research on the positive impacts of some hallucinogens on physical, emotional, and spiritual health, it is not surprising that a strong drug counter-culture exists at ETFs despite the illicit nature of many of these substances. As frequently stated by participants, ETFs foster harm-reductive environments by both

the resources they provide and the social support. As reviewed in the literature, although Western culture still approaches drug culture from a prohibition standpoint, drug-use in many subcultures is becoming more normalized. There is continually emerging evidence that a harm-reduction strategy is more beneficial for individuals and communities, as given in the following examples: the success and growth of harm reduction programs such as Dance Safe and TRIP, the collaboration with the Canadian Centre on Substance with stake holder in both health services and festival organization, and research into the benefits of medical personnel at electronic dance events trained in treating the physical and mental side effects of drug use (Krul & Girbes, 2009; Weir, 2000; Young et al., 2015).

Festivalgoers who have either the intention to use or to abstain enter an environment that is removed from direct legal implication, public shaming, and negative social impact as well as being provided with knowledge on drugs from experienced users or third-party educational programs. Although the nature of many ETFs makes drug use socially acceptable and therefore more readily accessible, I believe the environment at ETFs allow festivalgoers to make decisions about using illicit drugs based on their personal needs and beliefs rather than social pressures. Festivalgoers are better able to determine their drug use based on what they think the positive and negative effects will have on them as an individual, rather than the fear of legal infractions, job loss, or being rejected by family and friends. As described by participants, this allows festivalgoers to learn, develop, and grow when it comes to personal drugs use practices at ETF. Also pointed out by participants, ETFs are often singled in the media as negative entities because of drug use, yet they fail to address societal addiction problems as a whole.

However, not all ETFs have a shared social perspective on drug use, and many actively encourage that individuals experience their festival without using mind-altering substance as a crutch, but rather use their own power of mind to open themselves to others and their deeper selves. ETFs are also not free of legal liability and participants are often subject to waivers, mandatory car and baggage checks, and police searches before gaining entrance to the festival grounds. However, it is outside the scope of this study to address any issues of addictive behaviour and associated drug use.

Overall I hope this study is able to illuminate the beautiful experiences that the participants of this study have shared without being over shadowed by the controversy and politics that surrounds illicit drug use. It was not the intention of this study to focus on drug-use as major theme, but rather an issue that demands to be acknowledged throughout the research process.

Limitations

As explained in the methodology section, this study is founded in phenomenological principles, and therefore seeks to be an in-depth study into the participants' experiences at festivals. It is my hope that this study has enabled a glimpse into the world of ETFs and their potential for life altering events; however, this study is not generalizable. As seen in appendix A, the study recruited those participants who were motivated to share their spiritual or transformational experiences at ETFs that they believed to be meaningful or spiritual, and therefore is also limited to this perspective.

Future inquiry in ETFs should also include questions on any negative experiences participants may have encountered.

This study also falls short in addressing drugs and addictive behaviour. Although there has been some scientific inquiry into drug use at different genres of festivals, most research still falls short of addressing the sociological and psychological of drug use as part of the electronic dance subculture (Hunt et al., 2007).

Another potential area of additive behaviour and mental health risk is the false sense of enlightenment stemming from an individual experiencing a higher state of consciousness as part of a peak experience; intense experiences of awakening may result in the seeking of out methods to obtain that same sense of enlightenment (Grof, 1993; Nixon, 2011). As explained previously by the participant Enrique, the healthy and sustainable development of consciousness versus seeking peak state experiences is like taking the stairs rather than an elevator. An individual who has spent the time and effort progressing through all the stages of conscious development is less likely to regress to previous, lower states of consciousness while an individual who relies on a crutch, such as the use of hallucinogenic substances, may be able to quickly and easily access to higher states of consciousness but ultimately must return to their original stage of conscious development. These “short cuts” may allow for individuals to experience authentic moments of enlightenment; however, there is may be associated emotional or spiritual distress in not being able to consistently and reliably access this new found state of awareness (Grof, 1993; Nixon, 2011; Wilber, 1999, 2006). In the article *Transforming the Addicted Person’s Counterfeit Quest for Wholeness Through Three Stages of*

Recovery, Nixon (2011) describes how transpersonal psychology and Wilber's spectrum of consciousness development model can be used address addictive behaviors and mental health issues stemming from the "counterfeit quest for wholeness" (p. 408); the implications of this will be explore in the next section of this paper.

Implications- Spirituality in the New Age

Throughout this study participants described how through ETFs they were able to connect with others, find new perspectives, explore their inner selves, and learn what spirituality or soul means to them. Many participants explained that these events had been the first opportunity they've had to develop spiritually, or the first time they have felt awakened to the possibilities of conscious practices. Although the culture has always been rooted in the freedom of the exploration of self, raves and electronic dance culture have become increasingly aligned with conscious practices and spiritual ritual (Beck & Lynch, 2009). ETFs provide a nurturing physical location, abundant social support, and access to new forms of knowledge and resources. Perhaps ETFs are becoming the ashrams of today, safe havens to cast away social pretences and open up the mind and soul to the infinite. As seen in *The Bloom Series* documentaries (Leung et al., 2014), the social culture manifested at ETF events has begun to give rise to new community groups and organizations based on the values emphasized at ETF.

How ETFs will continue to evolve is beyond my speculation; however, I believe this subculture is an important area of research because of the potential of these events to be spaces for deep personal healing, resources for the expansion of consciousness, and a

place to rekindle hope for humanity. ETFs already act as therapeutic events for many participants in this study. As previously addressed, drugs can be used as a tool to create empathy and connect with others, develop new perspectives, and explore the self; however, there is also the risk of physical and spiritual addiction. As seen in the themes The Freedom of Being Removed From The City and The Overwhelming Experience of Mass Positivity, ETF themselves can be used as an escape from reality. This becomes a double-edged sword; ETF create an environment conducive to intense emotional and spiritual development but this also creates the potential for the false sense of enlightenment or seeking behaviour. To tackle the issue of risk of addiction and potential mental health impact I recommended the following: further development of current festival resources as well as research and development into ETF as potential integrated counselling and therapy environments.

To address the first, the ETF community and many event organizers are aware of the potential physiological and psychological impact that both the ETF experience and the use of mind-altering substance can have on festivalgoers; therefore, well established ETFs have developed resources such as First-Aid, drug testing centres, and sanctuary. However, I recommend the further development of these resources, in particular sanctuary. I would challenge ETF organizers to expand sanctuary to more than a place of quiet, comfort and warmth to include 24-hour staffing with individuals who are counsellors or trained to guide individuals going through emotional or spiritual trauma. I would also encourage the further incorporation and development of workshops oriented around personal health and spiritual awareness.

Secondly, I would recommend future research into the potential of ETF as places of assisted healing and development for individuals suffering from depression, anxiety, or other mental health disorders. I envision a system where those who were already seeking counselling or therapy could attend select ETF as part of a group or organized body designed to assist in their emotional and spiritual journey. It would be like a “counselling fieldtrip” where the individual could utilize the ETF’s workshops, resources, positive energy, and non-judgemental atmosphere while having reliable and readily available access to personalized, professional counselling. If I were to set aside legal implications, this support network could also include therapy sessions that utilized hallucinogens to break down emotional barriers, explore the self, and find new perspectives.

Overall, I believe previous research into rave and festival culture has approached drug use and addiction from a narrow and one-sided perspective. The intense and powerful nature of these events impacts the individual on multiple levels; rather than just focusing on how to brace against the potential negative effects of ETF, I would encourage research into how to harvest this potential for change and direct it towards long-lasting, positive, personal development.

Closing Statement

The healing and spiritual nature of many ETFs is an increasingly important aspect for many individuals’ overall wellness. It is my desire that future studies approach festivals in a more holistic manner and not to be blinded by the political and social issues that are inherently a part of these counter-cultural events.

A goal of this study was to enlighten both those unexposed to the culture and avid festivalgoers to the multiplicity of ways that ETFs are unique spaces as well as their ability to foster beautiful experiences. ETFs are truly a place to celebrate humanity in all forms, a place of rejuvenation and healing, and personal growth. As utopic as ETFs may appear, they are not isolated from the bigger picture. Festivalgoers have to learn to be open to the happiness in every moment and not limit themselves to experiences of ecstasy in the exotic. By integrating Wilber's (2006) view of the development of human consciousness I like to visualize ETFs as part of an individual's progression as the following: ETFs are brightly lit lanterns along a winding mountain pass; they act as a welcoming, warm, and safe space for people to gather together and celebrate, but eventually the individual must carry on their own journey in order to reach greater heights of consciousness.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Poster

University of Lethbridge

How Have Festivals Changed You?

We are looking for Volunteers to Share Their Spiritual or Transformational Experiences from Electronic or Transformational Festivals

As Part of a Research Project on
Exploring Transformational Experiences at Music Festivals

Volunteers for this study will be asked to explore and share their life-changing experiences at festivals. Participation in this study would require approximately 3-4 hours of your time (in total) as part of a brief phone screening, an interview, and a follow-up discussion session. In this study, the procedures and methods have been designed to promote confidentiality and minimize risk to the participants.

For more information, or to volunteer for this study
Please Contact

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Artwork by Dela & Soul Purpose

This study has been reviewed by and approved by
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Appendix B: Questions for Screening Phone Call

- 1) Are you 18 years or age or old?
- 2) Have you had an experience that you would describe as meaningful, spiritual, or transformational that occurred during an electronic or transformational festival?
- 3) Briefly summarize this experience? How would you describe this experience?
- 4) Would you like to share and explore this experience during an in-depth interview?
- 5) Would you be willing to review the preliminary results of this interview in a follow up discussion?

Appendix C: Interview Guide for Open-Ended Interview

- 1) Briefly describe what was happening in your life before you attended the festival.
- 2) Which festival did you attend in which you had a spiritual/transformational experience?
- 3) Describe how the environment at this festival felt to you?
- 4) What happened during your spiritual/transformational experience?
- 5) How did you feel in relation to your body? What did your body feel like?
- 6) How did you feel in relation to others?
- 7) Did you have any sense of time? If so, what did you experience?
- 8) How did you feel in relation to your surrounding/environment?
- 9) What did you feel immediately after this experience?
- 10) Overall, how has this experience altered your sense of self or way of living?