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‘Caught in a Mosh’: Moshpit Culture, Extreme Metal Music and the Reconceptualization of Leisure

by

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Abstract

This study explores the ways in which moshing and extreme metal music reflects and informs the social worlds of metal fans. The research project incorporates narrative ethnography which offers the opportunity to explore how underground subcultural practices contribute to our understandings of how violence, pain, and pleasure can be thought with compassion and possibility in leisure. Key concepts such as liminality (Turner, 1979), Dionysian aesthetics (Hawley, 2010; Maffesoli, 1993; Bataille, 1986/1989), and Cagean philosophy (Cage, 1957; Brooks, 2002; Kostelanetz, 1996; Patterson, 2002) are used to examine the nuances and subtleties of moshing culture, practices and behaviours in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Four main themes emerged: the physicality and reality of participating in a moshpit, pit etiquette and movements of trust, negotiation of space within the moshpit, and the significance of moshing for local metal fans. The study accentuated how tensions, pleasures, and resistant practices are necessary in creating meaningful leisure experiences.

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Introduction

Moshing is an essential feature of any extreme metal concert and is a well-known underground leisure practice among metal fans. There has been an increasing amount of literature that has documented the history, characteristics, variations, and gender practices that define moshpit culture as an ever-expanding phenomenon within heavy metal culture (Ambrose, 2001; Berger, 1999; Gruzelier, 2007; Lau, 2005; Palmer, 2005; Simon, 1997; Tsitsos, 1999). Conversely, the social and political significance of moshing as a leisure practice has been disregarded due to its chaotic, risky, and violent nature; thus, restricting its possibility of being included in contemporary leisure discussions and scholarship. I intend to deconstruct common sense understandings of moshpits and extreme metal culture by offering alternative perspectives for understanding rebellion and physical aggression through the current research study. My research identifies moshing as a social trajectory that metal fans use to explore, express and confront their discontent with the rapid changes occurring in society. The moshpit affords struggle, chaos, inequality and existential anxieties an aesthetic expression and I hope to demonstrate the therapeutic and social importance of moshing and moshpit culture.

This examination of moshpit culture and extreme metal music contributes and expands on current leisure concepts and theoretical frameworks. Additionally, my research is offered to challenge and provide a critique of how leisure scholars have traditionally understood pain, suffering and pleasure in regards to leisure practices. I have conducted an interdisciplinary analysis of moshing practices within the Edmonton metal scene which moves the discussion beyond moshing as merely a reflection of musical appreciation to moshing as a site of collective struggle. The two research questions framing the study are: In what ways does extreme metal and moshing reflect and inform our social world? Through the use of moshpit stories and narratives offered by

metal fans, how do underground metal musical communities and subversive physical practices contribute to our understandings of how violence, pain, pleasure and suffering can be held with compassion and possibility in leisure? Moshing is a subcultural leisure practice that requires corporeal negotiation, consists of multidimensional experiences of pain and pleasure, and encompasses social commentary, moshing allows its fans a regulated space to engage in and play with darker aspects of reality. Key concepts such as liminality (Turner, 1979), Dionysian aesthetics (Hawley, 2010; Maffesoli, 1993; Bataille, 1986/1989), and Cagean philosophy (Cage, 1957; Brooks, 2002; Kostelanetz, 1996; Patterson, 2002) broaden current understandings of leisure so extreme metal music and its transgressive bodily practices can be included in the existing leisure literature. The exploration of moshing and extreme metal music within a leisure framework highlights the tensions, pleasures, and resistant practices that are necessary in creating meaningful leisure experiences.

Symbolically, the moshpit acknowledges the essential conflicts of life and as one enters the pit one embraces all the pain, hurt, joy, pleasure, and suffering that delineates existence. The prominence of the moshpit in heavy metal culture is represented by the number of songs that are dedicated to this universal, liminal practice such as Anthrax's "Caught in a Mosh", "Into the Pit" by Testament, FKU's "Metal Moshing Mad," Violator's "Addicted to Mosh," and "The Night of the Ultimate Mosh" by Birdflesh. Additionally moshing is also taken up in heavy metal lyrics metaphorically, to describe and exemplify life struggles. Anthrax's song "Caught in a Mosh," the inspiration for my research title, represents the ways in which the moshpit can be read and understood as social commentary. Anthrax, a seminal thrash band from New York amplified the popularity of the moshpit in their videos that aired on MTV. Anthrax's song glorifies the moshpit as a metaphor for life struggles (Christe, 2004):

Why don't you listen to me when I try to talk to you?
Stop thinking of yourself, for just a second fool
Shut up, shut up, I don't wanna hear your mouth
Your mother made a monster, now get the hell out of my house

Can't stand it for another day
I ain't gonna live my life this way
Cold sweat, my fists are clenching
Stomp, stomp, stomp the idiot convention

Which one of these words don't you understand?
I'm Caught in a Mosh!

Being ‘caught in a mosh’ means dealing with and confronting everyday irritants and frustrations such as ignorant and superficial individuals. Specifically, this song illustrates the difficulties heavy metal fans face when justifying their ideologies and values to others who do not take them seriously. The song alludes to the ‘collisions' we encounter in our everyday routines and the ways in which these collisions can be aggressive, chaotic, and even habitual. Therefore the moshpit provides struggle, chaos, frustration, danger, inequality and existential anxieties an aesthetic and physical expression.

Chapter One: Research Methodology and Methods

Research Methodology

Drawing upon John Cage's philosophical understandings of contemporary music and noise, my central framework allows me to integrate a novel perspective in leisure research while illustrating the multiple intersections between popular culture, cultural studies, and leisure studies. Cage, an American composer, was known for pushing the boundaries of music in terms of what was acceptable. Cage's denial of the boundary between the environment and music production resulted in compositions that reflected the displaced, fragmented, chaotic nature of the twentieth-century aural landscape (Key, 2002). Accordingly, extreme metal music can be understood as deconstructing those same boundaries by reflecting, through its lyrical content and thrashing sound, the disordered world that surrounds us; consequently, the fragmented nature of our society is then played out by fans when they immerse themselves in the moshpit. Cage viewed avant-garde music as integral to contemporary urbanite conditions, music production and performance were methods used to cope with the shocks of modern everyday life (Joseph, 2002). Yet despite Cage's embrace of modernity, music was to play a "therapeutic or compensatory role, providing a hint or 'image' of a utopian moment of reconciliation in the face of the apparent chaos of modern life" (Joseph, 2002, p. 147*).*

On the other hand, 'noise' was also socially significant in Cage's later compositions. Russolo (1967), a noise theorist who influenced Cage's musical understanding of noise, reflected that every manifestation of life is accompanied by noise. Noise is thus "familiar to our ear and has the power of immediately recalling life itself. Noise, arriving confused and irregular from the irregular confusion of life, is never revealed to us entirely and always holds innumerable surprises" (as cited in Joseph, 2002, p. 141). This claim is echoed in And & Hardiker's (1995) description of

polynoise: “Noise leads to no conclusions yet is an equation of solutions” (p. 64). The idea that noise only offers an equation of solutions resonates with extreme metal music, where the lyrics force fans to confront existing social disparities without prescribing concrete solutions. Reinforcing Russolo's position, Cage acknowledged, "Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating" (Joseph, 2002, p. 141). Cage and Russolo’s pronunciations of the value of music and noise reinforce the idea of taking extreme metal music and its physical practices seriously within leisure scholarship. When leisure practitioners ignore rebellious musical subcultures and apply evaluative judgements to them it depletes their sense of curiosity and consideration. Cage’s sense of earnestness towards understanding aural disruption applies to the ways in which leisure scholars need to broaden the dialogue. Exploring the multidimensional realities of experiencing the moshpit expands and questions the notion of what counts and should be counted as leisure.

During his lecture entitled "Experimental Music,” Cage (1957) described music as a "purposeless play" which is an "affirmation of life - not an attempt to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we're living” (p. 5). Influenced by Indian and Zen philosophies, Cage suggested that a mind interested in alternative perspectives and understandings would be interested precisely in rhythms and patterns at the extremes. Encountering the extremes transforms how we think, view the world, and act (Kostelanetz, 1996; Cage, 1957). Transgressive, violent and deviant leisures have yet to be observed with compassion, curiosity, and acceptance in leisure scholarship. Reducing leisure to activity, time, choice, or a particular disciplinary perspective limits our discussions, and obscures the relevance of leisure in many people's lives (Fox, 2010). It is essential that we become curious and attentive to the multi-layered, ambiguous, and problematic nature of discourses used to

describe, theorize, control and legitimize leisures. In theory, Cage was opposed to critical evaluative judgments, explaining, "They are destructive to our proper business, which is curiosity and awareness" (Kostelanetz, 1996, p. 20). Similar to the dichotomies involved in the moshpit, Cage's notion of anarchy requires that every individual remain poised between autonomy and connectedness, refusing obstruction of self or others but not refusing interpenetration. The anarchic citizen strives to be "as careful as possible not to form any ideas about what each person should or should not do," but at the same time "to appreciate, as much as possible, everything each person does do even down to the slightest actions" (Nicholls, 2002, p. 219). For all of our commitment to inclusiveness, we have few frameworks to understand the leisure rhythms and temporal spatial requirements of peoples on the margins or in underground subcultural contexts.

Why Ethnography: Situating Myself in the Field

Using an ethnographic approach illuminates how moshing acts as a social trajectory while revealing the importance of risk, pleasure, pain and rebellion play in underground leisure experiences. Ethnography is a set of practices through which scholars attempt to observe, participate and understand the cultural beliefs and practices of social groups by engaging with them in a significant way (Grazian, 2004). To do ethnography is to attempt to engage with the lives of people as they are lived out in all their complexity, and inevitably involves complicated questions about how to relate to those who are the subjects of research (Kahn-Harris, 2007). The Edmonton metal scene and its symbolic practices can be seen as controversial, paradoxical and at times contradictory. In accordance with this, Eastland (2003) suggested that the "strength in ethnography is to be found in the working-out of the contradictions and dilemmas, so often addressed as problematic, which ethnographers face" (p. 121). Eastland discussed these quandaries as often having to do with the emotional, intuitive, and liminal nature of the ethnographic process.

According to Maton (1993), many advocates of ethnography strongly believe that reality is multifaceted, socially constructed, and that "phenomena are inextricably embedded in a cultural context and are best understood by researchers close to or immersed in what is being studied" (p. 750). As more scholars demonstrate an interest in examining dynamic music subcultures and its participants, there has been an increasing amount of documentation of the advantages and complexities of being an 'insider' to their own ethnographic research. Having an insider status not only eliminates detrimental stereotypes and evaluative judgements that are prevalent in the human sciences but has the potential for self-transformation (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Hodkinson, 2002; Maton, 1993; Snell & Hodgetts, 2007).

My involvement in the Edmonton metal scene extends over six years and heavy metal music has been an integral part of my life for over two decades. My first introduction to the scene was when I was accompanied by my boyfriend. At the time I was nineteen years old. I have headbanged at hundreds of metal gigs, both locally and internationally, and have participated in numerous moshpits over the years. Many consider me a familiar face in the local metal scene due to my attendance at shows and from my engagements in other metal-related occupations. My multiple roles consists of being a fan, hosting an extreme metal radio show, writing metal reviews and interviews for the University of Alberta paper (The Gateway), occupying a presidential position for the Heavy Metal on Campus student group, and being an academic who examines and explores various aspects of extreme metal culture. These positions have allowed me the opportunity to interact and network with a variety of metal fans and musicians.

In Eastland's (1993) discussion on the dialectical nature of ethnography, she asserted that greater participation in the group being studied can lead to improved access of cultural information and greater understandings of experience within the culture. My metal appearance, social patterns,

subcultural knowledge, and regular attendance at local and mainstream metal concerts position me as an insider within the metal scene (Hodkinson, 2002). The legitimacy of my participation and position as a metal fan will greatly enhance the process of meeting people, recruiting research participants, arranging interviews, taking photographs, and gathering information far easier than if I was acknowledged as an outsider. My previous and existing involvement as an insider and researcher will afford me the expertise in putting interviewees at ease because my participation, moshpit experiences and motivations will be more comparable to other metal fans than would have been the case if I was an outsider (Hodkinson, 2002; Riches & Fox, 2008).

According to Luders (2004), the ethnography of one's own culture has become a vehicle for social self-observation. Many ethnographic scholars have posited that the aim of ethnography is to reach a deeper and more critical understanding of the self through understanding others (Eastland, 1993). The shape of the ethnography takes place within the experience of the ethnographer, and ironically, it is just that which we have tried to screen out of many of our traditional methods of inquiry (Eastland, 1993, p. 125). By investigating the viewpoints of Edmonton metal fans, the nature and forms of their knowledge, their interactions, subcultural practices and discourses I aim to improve our understanding of the nuances and complexities that make metal music attractive to young people, thus, bolstering my appreciation for extreme metal music and its practices. According to Bresler (2006), "an authentic, meaningful engagement with a story involves getting inside it and letting it get inside you, internalizing as well as analyzing it" (p. 28). Narrative ethnographers cannot and should not bracket themselves out of the research but rather need to employ methods to inquire into participants' experiences, their own experiences as well as the co-constructed experiences developed though the relational ethnographic process. Ethnographers are

part of the metaphoric procession; they too live on the landscape and are complicit in the world they study (Clandinin, 2006).

Hodkinson (2002) articulated that the complexity and instability of identities and subcultural groupings makes the idea that a researcher can successfully inhabit the position of an 'insider' a little dangerous. This sense of apprehension is echoed in Maton's (1993) detailed examination of subjective bias in ethnographic research. He highlighted the inevitability of an ethnographer's evaluative opinions, biases and feelings about a subculture given the in-depth contact over time. This potential for predisposition is even more problematic when the researcher is already part of the subculture being studied; therefore, he recommended that methodological checks be implemented so there is greater confidence in the validity of the conclusions being made. Turner's (1979) discussion of liminality as a "state or process which is betwixt-and-between the normal, day-to-day cultural and social states" appropriately illustrates the similarities between my position as an insider and participating in a moshpit (p. 94). Often a researcher that engages in fieldwork as a participant or participant-observer occupies various liminal states where they are part of the culture, but also separated from the culture as a researcher. Turner conceptualized liminality as a period of transition where normal limits to thought, self-understanding, and behaviour are loosened, challenged, and poised. This liminal state of being betwixt and between can be emotional and uncomfortable as the researcher uses self-reflexivity to interpret field observations and interviews. Throughout my research I will be fluctuating between remaining on the peripheries of the moshpit as an ethnographer so I can take notes, document feelings and observations while sensuously exploring the dynamics of the moshpit by immersing myself in it.

Narrative is a pervasive part of everyday life and social existence: many metal fans understand metal as not just an activity but a lifestyle that bleeds into their everyday practices. The

heavy metal lifestyle is narrated as fun, self-identifying, a release of pent up frustrations and anxiety, meeting like-minded people, establishing emotional connections with others by sharing similar values and ideologies, wanting to be different from the mainstream, and feeling like an outsider. However, participation in the moshpit creates a particular narrative that predisposes how metal fans conceive their stories within everyday life. Because heavy metal is more physical, loud, aggressive, masculine, resistant, and offers a critique of certain power relations, the moshpit takes up these kinds of narratives. The adoption of narrative is conducive to exploring musical cultures and its practices because it has "considerable promise as a way of recovering the complexity, multiplicity, and polyphony of musical meanings, and music's deep implication in the construction and maintenance of identities, both personal and collective" (Bowman, 2006, p. 14). Narrative can also be understood as an act of coming to understand the world empathetically, exploring and conveying polysemic meanings with respect (Bresler, 2006).

As a critical insider, I was able to situate my research with empathy and compassion because of my experiences being a metal fan, an experienced mosher, and previous experience as a researcher. Additionally, the duality of my position will allows me to recognize the potential trepidations of moshpit practices and extreme metal culture. The use of narrative is a way of "keeping alive questions, conversations, and controversy, by stirring up the sedimentary deposits of official discourses," as well as extreme metal and moshpit cultural discourses (Linde, 2003, p. 14). Stories are incomplete, open structures that give room for future possibilities. They are open to re-interpretation, re-investigation, and new perspectives. Self-conscious and self-critical methods are essential for providing some measure of transparency, checking intentions and interests, keeping the interstices visible, and provide an opening for alternative narratives and critiques (Fox & Klaiber, 2006). The use of narrative is complimentary for examining how moshpits inform and

reflect our social world because narrative research supports the construction of social critiques (Bloom, 2002). The individual is understood as a social being whose experiences are mediated by and in turn mediate the social world in which they live. Narratives can "illuminate how, in an individual life, different ideologies and power relations in society are maintained, reproduced, or subverted" (Bloom, 2002, p. 311). Studies of narratives also help us understand social action at both the personal and collective level. The task of the researcher, therefore, is to be dually cognisant of the individual and the societal-cultural milieus in which the individual experiences and interprets their life.

In Bowman's (2006) discussion of why narrative matters in music education he stressed that narrative "exposes and explores music as it is lived by everyday people in everyday situations-stories that may be resistant, even disruptive, to the accounts circulating through positions of academic power and authority" (p. 9). In addition to this, the use of narrative will allow me to make audible voices and stories that have been marginalized and silenced in leisure research. Narrative is a method that is dedicated to voicing those stories that are resistant, oppositional, and outside the mainstream. Through the process of analyzing the ways in which metal fans interact and engage in subcultural leisure practices at local metal shows, these stories will show the myriad ways in which "communication functions to organize experiences and shape meanings by applying theories to lives *and* by drawing applications from those lives to enrich theoretical understandings" (Goodall, 2004, p. 188). Being involved in multiple in-depth research projects will provide a rich resource of cultural insights, skills, knowledge, and sensitivities that will prove to be foundational for my future work at the doctoral level (Maton, 1993).

The Edmonton Metal Scene: Sites of Research

The Edmonton metal scene has transformed and has taken many forms over the past fifteen years judging by many of the participants' remarks. As I sat down with Scott[1] and Josh, the two eldest moshpit participants, their moshpit accounts occurred in venues and spaces that are no longer active in Edmonton such as The Rev, The Fox and Hounds, and Stars. The frequent changeability of available venues for metal bands affects the ways in which the moshpit is enabled and restricted. Scott lamented that the amount of intense moshpits and crowd participation at shows was greater ten years ago, especially in clubs such as the Fox and Hounds and Stars. Jeremy, who shared similar views with Stefan despite being ten years younger than him, suggested that before the advances of communication technology, more people appeared at local shows and exemplified greater dedication. Despite the changes in metal venues in Edmonton, one venue that remains the quintessential underground metal venue in Edmonton is The Mead Hall. It is located in an industrial area in the West end of Edmonton, creating a space where patrons have more freedom in playing loud music and participating in subcultural performances such as moshing and headbanging. It is a central place where metal fans from the Edmonton metal scene come to congregate on the weekends to watch local bands and underground international bands perform. Features of the Mead Hall resemble Bennett's (2001) description of extreme metal as characterized by small-scale local scenes which offer more opportunities for creative engagement. The use of "small venues and the proximity of the stage to the dance floor reduces the division between performer and audience and gives rise to expressions of community and solidarity" (Bennett, 2001, p. 47). Moshpit practices at the Mead Hall are dependent on the people and the type of metal music being performed. The majority of people that attend the Mead Hall are well known to each other and are knowledgeable

[1] All participants in this study are referred to by their pseudonym

in scene practices, making the moshpit a safer and more communal experience for both men and women. However, due to the size of the venue and the amount of people, the moshpit can be very sparse which makes it more dangerous and physically difficult for men and women to participate.

Even though the Mead Hall plays a significant role in the Edmonton metal scene, there are larger venues that are situated in central locations which cater to mainstream metal bands, audiences, and subcultural leisure practices. Venues such as the DV8, Starlite Room and The Pawn Shop frequently have metal performances that appeal to a diverse crowd of metal fans. In relation to Turino's (2008) discourse on the politics of performance and participatory music, these larger venues are more inclusive because they offer a range of possibilities and experiences: "The inclusion of people with a wide range of abilities within the same performance is important for inspiring participation" (p. 31). Typically within these spaces, the moshpit is tighter, has more longevity, involves more people and replicates predictable rhythms and patterns due to the metal music being performed. Berger's (1999) analysis of death metal music emphasized the reciprocal nature of moshing and band performance: "Hooky, aggressive, medium-up tempo sections are the ones that typically induce moshing, and in designing forms, bands seek to deploy the moshy parts at just the right point in the song to stir the audience into a frenzy of moshing" (p. 64). To keep everyone engaged, the moshpit must have an ever expanding ceiling of challenges or a range of activities that can provide continuing trials, while at the same time, there must be space for unskilled moshers to begin or who want to go in and out of participating (Turino, 2008). While conducting my research I considered that the friendly moshpit dynamic might be disrupted due to the location of the metal venues. The majority of them are located on Whyte Avenue and Jasper Avenue, which make them vulnerable to inexperienced outsiders. There have been occasions that outsiders become perpetrators of violence because they assume that extreme metal is all about

violence and wish to take part in it (Purcell, 2003). By conducting my ethnographic study at underground and mainstream metal venues in Edmonton, I took note of the the cross-cultural flows of moshpit practices and gender performances, which accentuated the heterogeneity of the Edmonton metal scene that is commonly misconstrued by outsiders as homogenous.

In Irwin's (1977) illustrative discussion on urban scene and leisure activities, he declared that there are newer expressive leisure *social worlds* which are "more complex and much more important than mere forms of entertainment;" these worlds are entities called "scenes" (p. 298). These scenes are located in public places such as The Mead Hall and other musical venues in Edmonton. Their central activity has been embroidered with a set of special meanings, rules, symbols, and subcultural bodily practices that have emerged from the interaction of participants. According to Irwin (1977), people go to the scene locations to "engage in the activities *and* to be among others *and* to meet new people *and* to share the meanings of the scene with friends and strangers" (p. 301). Within the realm of popular music studies, the term 'scene' has been commonly used to describe loosely knit groups based around particular music genres (Irwin, 1965/1977; Kahn-Harris, 2000/2007; Hodkinson; 2002). In his famous study of surfers, Irwin (1965) described a scene as a shared perspective; a social world in itself. It is an action system that serves as a guide for social interaction and a shared context for subcultural meaning. Moreover, Irwin described scenes as sites through which sociality could be recovered and put to use (Gelder, 2007). Kahn-Harris (2000) reveals the nuances and implications of the term scene when applied to extreme metal music. Scenes include everything from "tight-knit local music communities to isolated musicians and occasional fans", since all contribute to and feed off a larger space(s) of musical practice. Scenes are fluid and shift toward and away from one another, and that individuals continually negotiate pathways within and between them" (as cited in Hodkinson, 2002, p. 22).

Scenes imply ‘lifestyle sensibilities’ where patterns of social life are reproduced and subverted. Edmonton’s metal scene correlates to Will Straw's (1991) conceptualization of a music scene as: “that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross- fertilization” (p. 373).

Heavy Metal Methods: Engaging in Moshpit Stories

My interviews and data collection took place between the months of April to July, 2011. Six men and one woman, who identified as being heavily involved in the Edmonton metal scene and moshpit practices, were chosen based on their appearance at shows, visible participation in the pit, chance meetings and willingness to participate. Implemented by a snowball approach, the interviews were conducted at local concerts, and local restaurants, and at various public meeting areas. Open ended ethnographic interview questions were implemented with accompanied field notes and journal reflections. In-depth interviews are intended to probe for “meaning, to explore nuances, to capture the gray areas that might be missed in either/or questions that merely suggest the surface of an issue” (Angrosino, 2007, p. 43). Due to my extensive involvement in the Edmonton metal scene and the nature of my research, I have built and will form more meaningful relationships with metal fans in Edmonton. For many scholars this is problematic but for Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (1995) these ongoing relationships are important. Connections between the researcher and participants do not disrupt or alter ongoing patterns of social interaction, but reveal the complex ways in which people form social ties in the first place. My relationship with the majority of research participants expanded over several years but for a few of them this was our first introduction. First-hand relations with those studied may provide “clues to understanding the more subtle, implicit underlying assumptions that are often not readily accessible through

observation or interview methods alone" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 3). Through participant observation, open-ended interviews, biographical narratives from participants, and personal journals, I was able to capture the complexities, nuances, and fluidity of participating in moshpits.

Ethos of fieldwork holds that in order to fully understand and appreciate action from the perspective of participants, one must get close to and participate in a wide cross-section of their everyday activities over an extended period of time. During the four month fieldwork period, I attended countless metal concerts that comprised of localized crowds and mainstream attendees and documented behaviours, moshpit practices, personal reactions, and casual discussions with metal fans. Through a process of discourse analysis, I examined each interview narrative to understand the ways in which metal fans used gestures, language, rhetoric, and strategies to interact with and engage in moshing practices. Each interview transcription was coded for several themes (physicality, etiquette, negotiations/conflicts, and importance of moshing) and then coded again for multiple participant interpretations within that overarching theme. For example, the universality of moshpit etiquette emerged throughout all of the interviews yet some of the participants had different perspectives on the preservation of the etiquette. My research was enhanced by follow up in-depth interviews which allowed both myself and the participant to re-engage in previous moshpit narratives and dialogues which then were compared to the existing moshpit literature. How do metal fans perceive pain in their journeys for pleasure? What is the role of pain, suffering and negotiation in the world of extreme metal? How do metal fans respond to fear, injuries and risk when entering into a moshpit? And in what ways does moshing reflect the participants' social world? Through the ritualistic release of participating in the moshpit, fans escape the nothingness of everyday life, and turn to something more authentic, more distinctive and personalized. They enter

a world of liminality that is always oscillating from structure to anti-structure, disorder to order, and from pain to pleasure.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Leisure scholars have struggled with the word "leisure" given its connotations, denotations, historical, and cultural context, and lack of a clear characterization adequate for historical and cross-cultural application. The term *leisures* is used to represent multiple ways to categorize, represent, and perform leisure as a foundation for polythetic comparison across differences (Fox & Klaiber, 2006, p. 413). Fox's (2010) notion of leisures parallels the elements that comprise extreme metal culture. Leisures are "fragile, fluid, open, indeterminate spatio-temporal dynamics where we can play with imaginaries, expectations, the what-is of life, and the range of human identities and desires (both positive and negative) and potentially create what has yet or needs to become. This fragile dynamic is vulnerable to oppression, hegemonic forces, violence, and appropriation" (p. 13). According to Fox (2010), by attending to a specific interpretation of leisure, leisure scholars and practitioners have concealed the rich, multivariate, fluid, paradoxical, and contested nature of leisures and the different values interwoven within leisure by various cultures, classes, disciplines, and perspectives. Rojek (2010) elaborates on the paradoxical nature of leisure by relating Turner's (1982) duality of freedom with normative conceptions of leisure as a free choice. Turner argues that there is a duality of freedom in leisure forms and practices that make some leisure practices inherently political since they carry experimental qualities. Leisure is the *freedom to enter* and produce new symbolic worlds and it is also the *freedom to* transcend social structures and play with ideas, and social relationships (Turner, 1982). Similar to conventional institutions, leisure has a long history of controlling and regulating certain behaviours while being defined by the concept of freedom. Therefore leisure is inherently paradoxical; in being a "normative institution which is

intrinsically organized around freedom it permits individuals and groups to enter into and generate relationships that resist, challenge and transcend normative structure" (Rojek, 2010, p. 60). Fox (2010) contends that it is crucial that we become curious and attentive to the multi-layered, ambiguous, and problematic nature of the words and discourses used to describe, theorize, regulate, and predict leisures. Predominantly the existing leisure research leans heavily on solutions about how others can become healthy and develop in a socially acceptable manner rather than engaging in the creativity and problem-solving strategies of young people (Fox, 2010).

Popular music is a primary, if not *the* primary, leisure resource in late modern society (Bennett, 2001). Yet, extreme metal music, its participants and practices have been absent from the existing body of leisure research because on average, our scholarship misinterprets, negatively judges, and excludes leisure forms, like heavy metal, because they are seen as controversial, obscure, risky, and even dangerous. Furthermore, our predisposition to view leisure through the lens of class, political economy, and moral judgements often leads to harm, misunderstanding and exclusion rather than curiosity (Fox, 2010). Convoluted and narrow conceptions of leisure have led scholars to disregard extreme metal music and moshing practices as significant forms of leisure. The examination of moshpit practices provided herein challenges typical leisure discourses, enhances our understanding of the ways in which metal fans assume and plays with multiple roles and responsibilities within the maelstrom of the moshpit, and grasps the role the moshpit plays in the everyday lives of metal fans in Edmonton. The current research provides a space for sustaining 'deviant', strange, marginal, rebellious leisures. Any time leisure conceptions privilege leisure connected to citizenship, socially sanctioned behaviour, education, and freedom, they are haunted by the untold history of deviant leisure, class struggles, and alternative and resistant forms of leisure (Fox & Klaiber, 2006).

According to Rojek (2000), a prominent leisure theorist, any approach to leisure which fails to take into account the fun, excitement and pleasure to be gained from deviant behaviour is unrealistic. Leisure enables young people to objectify the rules and behaviours of everyday life and subject them to critical appraisal. The need to incorporate and take seriously notions of deviancy in leisure theory is echoed in Williams' (2004) examination of deviancy and the beauty of non-normativity. Deviant identities and practices are expressions of creative existence, which are expressions that are characterized as transgressive and that serve to "affirm one's creative, expressive potential in the face of conditions serving to negate or hinder one's capacity for expression" (p. 241). Various forms of deviance communicate how individuals understand, experience, think, and feel about the world and their place in it. Many young people engage in socio-political undertakings during their leisure activities; therefore, deviance acts as a vehicle for young people to express sentiments of social malaise and political discontent because they lack power, or any sort of access to political institutions (Williams, 2004). In its subcultural form, deviance is typically expressed by way of clothing, hairstyle, music, dancing practices, and body art. Heavy metal music, its symbolic practices and occupation of subcultural spaces are examples of such social resistance. Heavy metal fans publicly display metal symbols, participate in moshpits, retreat to underground musical spaces, and embellish a style of dress to offend mainstream sensibilities and establish their identity (Snell & Hodgetts, 2007).

According to Turner (1969), one of the serious features of leisure is that it "constitutes the time and space in which cultural values can be objectified and subject to reflexive investigation" (as cited in Rojek, 2000, p. 147). By allowing and encouraging the individual to stand outside the ordinary flow of mainstream values, axioms and conventions, leisure in liminal settings is potentially culturally transformative (Rojek, 2000; Turner, 1992). Moreover, the political and social

significance of leisure is heightened in these liminal spaces because it provides people opportunities to challenge orthodox and official social values. Turner's extensive work on liminality and symbolism is important for leisure research because it shows that 'deviant, 'abnormal' leisure values and practices are expressed habitually as part of the ordinary relations of everyday life (Rojek, 2000; Turner, 1969/1992). Rojek (2000) highlighted the need for controlled risks in our leisure practices. By bending the rules of everyday life we express our unique identities and reveal the fragile, arbitrary character of the constraints that bind us. This behaviour is "intrinsically exciting because it opposes the dominant tendencies in society which operate to maintain and reinforce self-control" (p. 158). Extreme metal and its liminal subcultural practices offer young people a forum to address social inequalities without providing concrete solutions. Even though extreme metal overtly embodies elements of serious leisure (Rojek, 2010; Stebbins, 1982), its incorporation into leisure dialogues has not come to fruition.

Extreme Metal Music: A Site of Collective Struggle

Extreme metal music and its subcultural practices can also be understood as social commentaries by reflecting aspects of our social world through grotesque lyrics and violent physical gesticulations; yet, this notion has been obscured due to the prevailing stereotypes that have plagued the musical subgenre and its fans. Characteristics of extreme metal music can be described as "crashing guitars, pounding percussion, ear splitting volume and screaming vocals" (Gross, 2000, p. 119). Extreme metal is a subgenre extension of the overarching heavy metal umbrella and genres such as death, black, thrash, doom, and grindcore metal structure this obscure, transgressive and less attention-thriving form of heavy metal music (Kahn-Harris, 2007). These forms of metal, according to Kahn-Harris (2007), represent the "most diverse, the most artistically vibrant, the most dynamic and also the most problematic aspects of metal culture" (p. 2). In contrast

to heavy metal's mainstream commercial reach, extreme metal is disseminated through small-scale 'underground' institutions, such as online blogs, zines, small metal venues, and underground record stores that extend across the globe. Unfortunately, extreme metal's vulnerability to the prevailing stereotypes that have plagued the larger musical genre of heavy metal have lead music scholars and researchers to perceive extreme metal and its culture as juvenile, sexist, and unfit for academic inquiry. According to Rafalovich & Schneider (2003), the bulk of academic literature that does focus on metal music is "inundated with inquiries regarding the extent to which metal music harms the listener, the greater culture, or both" (p. 3). Additionally, extreme metal has been criticized as promoting juvenile delinquency, sexual promiscuity, misogyny, Satanism, drug abuse, and suicidal tendencies (Krenske & McKay, 2000; Arnett, 1992; Weinstein, 1991; Moynihan & Søderlind, 1998). Rafalovich & Schneider (2003) claimed that these oversimplified accounts of extreme metal music "stigmatize the genre and those who listen to it" (p. 4). What is worth noting is that these accusations prevent scholars from acknowledging the seriousness and social criticism inherent in metal lyrics and the potential that metal has to achieve social and political change.

Another obstacle that debilitated extreme metal's potential to be taken seriously by leisure academics has been the media's preoccupation with moral panics in which representatives from various government administrations and religious groups attempted to censor, control, and regulate the circulation of heavy metal music in North America. Criticism of heavy metal music in the 1990s focused on the "influence on youthful values, attitudes and behaviours through the music's (perceived) sexuality and sexism, nihilism and violence, obscenity, black magic and anti-Christian nature" (Shuker, 2008, p. 225). Moral panics that sought to control and regulate various forms of popular music, particularly metal and rap, are significant because they reveal the ways in which music becomes invested with ideological significance (Shuker, 2008). Conservative groups like the

Parent's Music Resource Center (PMRC) and fundamentalist Christian groups have historically targeted youth subcultures, most notably punk and rock music, as a threat to traditional 'family' values. Adding insult to injury, heavy metal music came under intense scrutiny after the Columbine shooting in April 1999. When it was revealed that the two shooters were Marilyn Manson fans the heavy metal subculture was accused of promoting thoughts of suicide and subliminally encouraging violent behaviour (Shuker, 2008). Consequently, music affiliations were used to scapegoat, cover up and ignore larger underlying social issues. Although heavy metal music has been removed from the moral panic spotlight, many underground metal bands still have conflicts obtaining appropriate venues to play in which speaks to a more localized bias in North America compared to countries within Europe. Furthermore, moral panics neglect the fact that the lyrical and aesthetic content of metal music are integral aspects of identity and reflect the power struggles young people have with contemporary culture and society (Rafalovich & Schneider, 2003). Controversy over particular musical styles, ideologies, performers and fans continues to surface sporadically within extreme metal circles; yet, this is a clear reminder of the force of music as symbolic politics, operating within larger social contexts and arenas (Kahn-Harris, 2007; Shuker, 2008). Extreme metal is a site of struggle that seeks to disrupt, challenge, and confront cultural hegemonies such as normative gender behaviours, physical interactions with others, political administrations, religious influences, and styles of dress. Heavy metal's controversial nature and inherent philosophical position is echoed in Dunn's ground-breaking documentary *Metal: A Headbangers Journey* (2005): "Metal confronts what we rather ignore, it celebrates what we often deny, it indulges in what we fear the most; metal is a culture of outsiders."

The most apparent aspect of extreme metal lyrics is their engagement with contemporary social problems, particularly those confronting youth (Bennett, 2001). This has led critics to label

heavy metal as deviant, controversial, and dangerous to youth. According to Epstein et al. (1990), the importance attached to a particular genre depends "primarily on the extent to which it functions within their lives as a method of granting definition to experiences" (as cited in Bennett, 2001, p. 52). In this respect, it is possible to see how frequently explored themes of extreme metal songs, such as destruction, death and disease, disillusionment, corruption through power, isolation and alienation resonate in varying degrees with the experienced problems, and resulting outlook, of growing numbers of young people in contemporary society. It is through its violent and grotesque lyrical themes that extreme metal music explores darker aspects of human life such as death, war, tragedy, greed, anxieties, psychological chaos, nihilism, and overall discontent with the overarching social structures that aim to control and manipulate its populace (Rafalovich & Schneider, 2003; Halnon, 2006; Kahn-Harris, 2007).

In Weinstein's (1991) exploration of the sociology of heavy metal music, she asserted that references to chaos are another distinctive attribute of heavy metal. The discourse of chaos in heavy metal lyrics which is then physically played out within the moshpit includes interests in "disorder, conflict, opposition, and contradiction. It incorporates images of the grotesque, mayhem, and disaster. This constellation of themes can be understood as the inversion of the constellation revolving around Eros in countercultural music, which emphasized images of unity" (p. 39). Chaos, disorder and disruption are present in heavy metal and become real life scenarios within moshpit practices and experiences. In an Aristotelian sense, extreme metal is considered art in that it represents certain essential truths about the human condition both positive and negative. The audience, witnessing these representations on stage or in the pit, is edified, deepened, and paradoxically consoled by sharing the experience of acknowledging human suffering, limitation, vanity, and mortality in a collective manner (Arnett, 1996). The development of popular music

portraying angst and nihilism parallels similar developments in painting, sculpture, orchestral music, and other arts in the twentieth century. Ozzy Osbourne is cultural kin to Andy Warhol and John Cage. In the twentieth century, "art is not something that elevates and edifies but a mirror of the disorder and soullessness of modern life, a gesture of despair" (Arnett, 1996, p. 57).

Heavy metal's strong subcultural identification is produced through a shared philosophy, asking the listener to "trust the human capacity for self-reflection and discover a higher self" by exploring darker states of the human mind and the modern world (Rafalovich & Schneider, 2003, p. 9). Concomitantly, heavy metal lyrics function to solidify subcultural power by creating a kind of community through which marginalized voices are strengthened by the promise of taking on the world (Nilsson, 2009). Heavy metal's social critique encourages its fans to remain committed to social activism by forcing them to be critical of their often unquestioned surroundings. One of the most common themes within extreme metal is the theme of protest. According to Arnett (1996), this diverse theme includes songs "attacking corruption in institutions of politics, religion, or the legal system, songs deploring the destruction of the environment, and songs declaring a general defiance against forces that might try to restrict or repress individuals" (p. 51).

Metal is a philosophical response, whether conscious or subconscious, to terrifying questions about human nature and the human condition (Purcell, 2003; Halnon, 2006). In this way, the fantasy of the metal realm is a response to and a reflection of reality. A similar point is made by Berger (1999), who in conducting interviews with death metal fans and musicians, noted the importance of "people coming together to listen to heavy metal music and using it to face the difficulties in their lives" (p. 275). Extreme metal is considered, by its fans, to be more honest and serious about the complications facing the world- environmental, economic, political, social, and educational problems have replaced a sense of progress and hope for a future world that is better

than the current state of affairs. There is a strong resistance against commercial understandings of our social world (Bennett, 2001; Weinstein, 1994). Purcell (2003), the first woman scholar to examine the politics inherent in death metal music, argued that extreme metal bands with socio-political lyrics often describe reality and use their lyrics to offer critical social commentary. In truth, for many listeners, these lyrics serve merely as "a release for aggression and anger at the social order. Inherent in even the most violent imagery, one may find messages that are both critical of the status quo and prescriptive" (p. 47).

The theme of embracing freedom and thinking for oneself became a prominent concept in many metal lyrics. It seems that where there is legitimate critique of the social order, there is also some vague prescription for change or at least the plea for a new order. The themes of individuality and freedom often emerge in lyrics with socio-political overtones (Purcell, 2003). Lyrics can offer criticism against the status quo and the status of the status quo changes when re-enacted in the moshpit. Consequently there is an emergence of liminality, whereby metal fans create a new social order because they are dissatisfied with the current social order. According to Nehring (1997), a scholar who explored the political importance of angry music, the most successful radical politics are currently found in the angriest forms of popular music. With political institutions closed to all but the wealthy, caustic music has been the most noticeable public voice of protest by keeping visions of humane social change alive in the mass media. Music has the potential to "reawaken efforts in other areas, by offering instruction in the possibility of dissent at a time when it seems futile with respect to conventional politics" (p. xiii). Yet metal and its political potential has not been taken up seriously in leisure discussions because the disruptive power of emotion is as much political as philosophical; there is an overwhelming concern over subordinate groups getting out of control (Nehring, 1997). Metal's anger is a "vent for life anger" and the frustrations that accrue in

daily life. People listen to metal to draw that anger out and acquire the energy to overcome impediments and restraints. People use metal to explore the darker elements of their experiences and metal then can be understood as a resource for overcoming obstacles, a tool for dealing and negotiating with sensitive and difficult issues that are not explored in other forms of popular music.

According to Hawley (2010), unlike any other subgenre, extreme metal challenges its fans and demands something from them. Extreme metal's vitality is manifested in its aggressive, rebellious, and liminal corporeal practices that are enacted by the fans. Extreme metal offers the potential for permitting transgressive and liminal practices. Transgression implies "a sense of testing and crossing boundaries and limits" (Kahn-Harris, 2007, p. 29). Within the extreme metal scene, there is a constant desire to transgress boundaries while simulteanously guarding them. In correlation to this notion, Turner (1979) explores how, through highlighting the mendaciousness of boundaries, 'liminal,' transgressive practices allow individuals to escape power and authority, if only for a moment. The concept of transgression, analogous to liminality, captures the central elements of extreme metal practices that are "excessive, testing and breaking boundaries, invoking the joys and terrors of formless oblivion within the collective, while simultaneously bolstering feelings of individual control and potency" (Kahn-Harris, 2007, p. 30). One of the most visible examples of this, apart from sonic and discursive transgression within the extreme metal scene, is the way in which metal fans are united through participation in a rejuvenating bodily transgressive practice- moshing. Walser (1993), an ethnomusicologist who studied the dynamics of heavy metal music, emphasized the rebellious, escapist and alternative nature of heavy metal music. Walser's outlook can be applied to moshing, which connects fragmented subgenres across relational worlds of liminality and rebellion, "what seems like rejection, alienation, or nihilism is usually better seen as an attempt to create an alternative identity that is grounded in a vision or the actual experience of

an alternative community" (p. xvii). These alternative communities that are created in urban milieus are founded on the notion that violent expressions, such as moshing, initiate feelings of freedom, group camaraderie, and a sense of belonging (Simon, 1997; Palmer, 2005; Halnon, 2004).

Furthermore, what is taking place on the dance floor is also taken up in the lyrical content of extreme metal music. Thrash bands such as FKU, a Swedish thrash metal band that formed in the late 1980s, promote and acknowledge the importance of moshing in extreme metal culture. Their song "Metal Moshing Mad" illustrates the synergetic dynamic between metal music and moshing:

In the name of metal, In the name of mosh
The hordes of evil gather for a bash
Joining all together to explode as one
The moshing pit is where we all run
We love the horror metal we love the sound of mosh
We love the crunching riffs that defines thrash
The amps on full power the drums begin to pound
The night of metal madness has arrived
You wanna mosh? Than mosh!
You wanna thrash? Go ahead and thrash!
Metal, Metal, Metal! Metal moshing mad

The song endorses unity and rebellion while also shedding light on the genre that incites moshpits, thrash metal. The majority of the participants in my research claimed that thrash metal was the most conducive for moshing because of its continuous driving 4/4 time signatures and rhythmic drumming. In addition, the moshpit is considered a focal point for many bands because that is the space where appreciation and excitement is physically manifested and expressed. That is where the energy is palpable and vibrant. Many metal bands acknowledge the pit by jumping in, placing the microphone in front of the chaotic space so fans can sing in unison, and/ or smile to indicate the reciprocated liveliness emanating from the crowd.

The Importance of Dance

According to Spencer (1985), in his book *Society and the Dance*, dances have been variously understood as a form of escape, catharsis, social protest, and as the display and maintenance of boundaries encapsulating group identity. Dancing is the principal way in which musical pleasures become realized in physical movement and in bodily grounded aesthetics (Thomas, 1995). Lefebvre's (1991) 'rhythmanalysis' project where he examined the relationship between everyday life and rhythms and how they are performed socially resembles Hanna's (1979) conceptualization of dance. Rhythm consists of "time, movement, becoming and also includes a measure which implies memory" (p. 194). The human body, according to Lefebvre, is the locus and base of interaction between the biological, the physiological and the social, and each of these dimensions has its own specificity, and thus its space-time: its rhythm. In view of that, Hanna (1979) emphasized that dance exists in time and space and is affected by the physical environment. Additionally, danced movement is patterned reinforcement of the habitual movement patterns of each culture and reflects the patterns that occur in everyday life. Hanna reflected on the significance of dance in contemporary society by identifying that dance has a multitude of meanings and purposes. The meanings in dance are found internally, in the "stylistic and structural manipulation of the elements of space, rhythm, and dynamics" (p. 24). Dance is a compound and cultural behaviour that can be understood as physical, cultural, social, political and communicative. By analyzing the cultural and political characteristics of dance offered by Hanna (1979), I am able to demonstrate how moshing can be seen as a subcultural form of dance and holds social significance.

Dance is cultural in the manner that people's attitudes, values, and beliefs partially determine the conceptualization of dance as well as its physical production, style, and performance. Moreover, dance has a political dynamic in that it becomes a forum for articulating political

attitudes and values that may function to criticize existing institutions, policies, and current social orders (Hanna, 1979). The meanings that are translated through dance go beyond the dance itself; the affective function of dance is to provide an immediate and sensuous experience that can potentially transcend personal perspectives. Fernandez (1974) and Frith (1978) claimed that dance may be "rituals of rebellion, or cathartic outlets for deviance, a way of representing a segment of the psyche or world to understand or cope with it" (as cited in Hanna, 1979, p. 27). Correspondingly, dance can be conceptualized as what Turner describes as a liminal performance (Turner, 1979) because it can suspend all rules through its complexity, conflict, ambiguity, instability, and polymorphism. Hanna's (1979) sophisticated discussion on the multifaceted nature of dance becomes pertinent when applied to the understanding of moshpits as symbolic, sub-cultural expressions of shared norms, values and ideologies. Additionally, dance is not only an important leisure activity for young people; it is also bound up with the processes of gender roles and identification, particularly in relation to women (Frith, 1978; McRobbie, 1984).

In her informative ethnographic study on dance clubs and women's pleasures, Gotfrit (1991) revealed the politics and paradoxical pleasures that women experience when they go out dancing. Within the realm of popular music, Chambers (1986) exclaimed that "dancing is the fundamental connection between the pleasures of sound and their social realization in the libidinal movements of bodies, styles and sensual forms" (p. 135). Particularly in the existing heavy metal, feminist and cultural studies literatures the aspect of pleasure for women engaged in masculine practices such as moshing is disconcertingly absent. Failing to incorporate pleasure into musical and leisure discourses obfuscates the ways in which we can explain why women engage in contradictory activities within forms of popular culture, appearing to consent to dominant and patriarchal practices and expectations (Gotfrit, 1991). According to McRobbie (1984), dance is a

site for women to experience pleasure, sensuality, self-expression, identity, control and is also the site of resistance. As women enter into metal venues to participate in subcultural leisure practices, they are engaging in resistant gender practices because they are refusing to engage in traditional courting patterns and adhering to normative notions of femininity by participating in a deviant form of dance (Riches & Fox, 2008; McRobbie, 1984). By virtue of being seen in public (particularly at night), taking up space, and enjoying the sensual pleasures of dancing women are contesting the dominant notions of femininity. Women can explicitly disrupt and challenge the status quo by snubbing the social conventions and requirements like coupled heterosexuality and politely restrained dancing, and this resistance is evident when women enter the frenzied vortex of the moshpit.

'Mash It Up': The History of the Moshpit

Moshing is an expressive performance bound up in identity and group solidarity that has been a redeeming and distinctive feature in extreme metal culture. Moshing, a ritualized and furious form of dancing which combines real physicality with remarkable displays of emotion, has been a fundamental characteristic of heavy metal culture since its inception in the early 1970s (Ambrose, 2001). The moshpit is considered a vital part of the concert experience, providing an opportunity for metal fans to formulate new identities, rebel against normative social conventions, release unexpressed frustrations with mundanity while fostering a strong sense of community. The moshpit refers to the constructed space in front of the stage for crowd surfing, stage diving, pushing, body slamming and headbanging. It is the physical expression that compliments and reflects the energy present in the live extreme metal music experience. Moshing can be described as "good clean violent fun" and what must be understood about moshing is the tension between bedlam and order (Berger, 1999). The majority of metal fans share their passion for metal music through dance as a

way of "reaffirming a sense of belonging, shared experience and support" (Snell & Hodgetts, 2007, p. 434). Moshing offers a forum for boundary maintenance by communicating shared ideologies of estrangement, frustration, and alienation while seeking temporary resolutions to these internal conflicts through physicality. This resolution resides inside the pit where metalheads experience a climax in the exhilaration of freedom that can be potentially experienced by all moshers (Halnon, 2006). According to Sibley (1995), boundaries between "the self and other can be formed through cultural representations of difference in taste and style" (as cited in Snell & Hodgetts, 2007, p. 437). Moshing is a physical and subcultural stylization that represents a response to and rejection of mainstream sensibilities due to its aggressive, chaotic, and forceful nature; therefore, it creates a symbolic boundary between the underground and mainstream. However, the moshpit can be seen as an internal boundary that limits certain types of moshing and restricts the participation of moshers that are smaller in stature and unskilled. Within the extreme metal scene, the ability of metal fans to access another type of communicative power is essential to the moshing experience and to the betterment of society: "a power that undergirds how we internalize our social roles and hierarchies, externalize our emotions, and, on a very fundamental level, envision our society deeply" (Simon, 1997, p. 171). Although extreme metal creates boundaries, its own roles and hierarchies are not unproblematic in itself.

Derived from the mid-Seventies punk practices of stage diving and slamdancing, moshpits are a regular feature at any metal show and are regarded as being a vital aspect of any great live metal experience (Ambrose, 2001). The term "mosh," and its practices, came to fruition during the early eighties in the American hardcore scene in Washington, D.C. Vocalist of the band Bad Brains, regarded as the band that put moshing on the map, used the term 'mash' in lyrics and stage show repartee to both incite and describe the aggressive and often violent dancing of the scene. To

"mash it up" was a frenzied physical response to the aggressive music. Due to the vocalist's thick Jamaican-accented pronunciation of the word, fans mistakenly heard 'mosh' instead. This quickly became a popular term that suddenly appeared in numerous metal magazines and permeated all spectrums of heavy metal music (Ambrose, 2001).

There are various forms of moshing practices and when a moshpit contains multiple styles it becomes fraught with conflict which then requires moshpitters to implement strategic movements and techniques. The earliest form of moshing, which originated in the American hardcore and punk scenes, is slam dancing or "hardcore dancing." It is considered an individual form of dance where people frenziedly swing their arms and legs in a circular motion to the rhythm of the music, creating a windmill movement. To many metal fans this is the most aggressive and violent form of moshing due to the making of the spatial occupation and physical movements of the body. Other aspects of moshing that were central to early hardcore and punk practices and were later taken up in metal circles are crowd surfing and stage diving. Stage diving is the courageous act of jumping off the stage into the crowd, anticipating that audience members will successfully catch the jumper, while crowd surfing requires that people lift a person up onto the heads of the crowd around them. The crowd surfer is slowly passed along on top of the crowd, towards the stage, until they reach the barricade and security sets them down on the ground. Crowd surfing provides metal fans an excellent view of the stage while feeling as though they are floating above the crowd. The circle pit, another form of moshing which is the most visually distinguishable and aesthetically pleasing to see live, became popular just as thrash metal music emerged in the early to mid-1980s. Originally, the circle pit referred to the confines of an open, circular space in the middle of the floor where metal fans would run diagonally at each other. Whereas, current circle pit activity consists of metal fans

running in one direction in a circular motion, with little physical contact and less movement in the middle of the open space.

The traditional or 'typical' heavy metal moshpit consists of sporadic, chaotic, and unpredictable pushes and shoves within a concentrated area. The majority of moshers use their forearms and shoulders to move in and around the volatile center of the pit. The "wall of death" is the most recent addition to the moshpit repertoire, requiring cooperation from the fans and large crowd participation. For many moshers in this research project, the "wall of death" was seen as the antithesis to chaos, requiring too much structure and arrangement for something so inherently chaotic and spontaneous. The "wall of death" typically occurs at nu-metal or metalcore shows and is constructed when bands split up the audience into two opposing groups facing each other. The band usually counts down and then signals to the crowd, indicating that each side run at each other at a furious rapidity until the floor erupts into a massive chaotic vortex. This moshing strategy is most successful in large settings such as festivals and outdoor concerts.

Lamentably, the positive and therapeutic nature of moshing has been obscured by an overabundance of negative media attention that has emphasized the dangerous nature of moshing, even its fatal consequences. There have been several reports indicating that women have experienced sexual abuse in moshpits while other men and women have died at mainstream metal concerts such as Limp Bizkit and Smashing Pumpkins (Ambrose, 2001). These incidents are rare and usually occur not because of the mainstream appeal and size of the audience but because there are more people who are uninitiated with moshpit culture, practice and etiquette. Whereas extreme underground metal concerts have smaller numbers of people and for those who are unfamiliar with moshpit practices they tend to learn rather quickly either through observation or from fellow moshers. According to Palmer (2005) "the proper social environment where there is sufficient pre-

existing trust and the rules of etiquette are followed, moshing nurtures friendship and camaraderie with an acceptable level of risk" (p. 163). Additionally, when etiquette is maintained and the moshing ritual is properly performed, the metal moshpit is a microcosm of metal itself. It is frightening to outsiders, seemingly full of anger and chaos, but extreme metal and its practices are actually sociable and co-operative. (Palmer, 2005). By participating in aggressive, chaotic, and rebellious forms of dance, moshers affirm not only their own expressive potential but others as well. Metal fans become a cohesive unit in the moshpit because they are non-verbally communicating sentiments of frustration, pleasure, admiration, and pain (Simon, 1997; Palmer, 2005).

Women's Involvement in Extreme Metal and Moshing Practices

In Gruzelier's (2007) analysis of the valorizations of masculine solidarity and the evolution of moshpit culture, he accounts for the ways in which metal fans have "tailored their physical gestures and spaces at live shows as a means of consolidating a series of cultural codes that pertain to the way a band perceives audience acceptance" (p. 59). Members of the extreme metal community share values, norms, and behaviours that highly esteem notions of masculinity. The moshpit is a space that encourages male homosocial interaction; there is a strong association between masculinity and moshing when one examines the male bias of the gender demographic and the aggressive gestures found in the pit. According to Gruzelier (2007), moshing environments are "a clear indication that for homosocial bonds to strengthen, a particular element must be objectified to unite masculine powers" (p. 67). The homosocial structure of the moshpit is affected by the inclusion of female participants. By adding females to the moshpit demographic, the males may become cautious of the intensity of their moshing as a means of avoiding inflicting serious injury on a female (Gruzelier, 2007; Riches & Fox, 2008).

Many women occupy and participate in predominantly masculine leisure domains. Numerous scholars (Walser, 1993; Arnett, 1996; Purcell, 2003; Kahn-Harris, 2007; Mudrian, 2004; Ryan, 2008) have explored the presence of women in extreme metal music and opine that women have been and still are a strong force in heavy metal scenes all over the world. With the amplified growth and popularity of heavy metal music, more female musicians and fans are entering into scenes and providing positive examples for younger generations of young female fans (Purcell, 2003; Kahn-Harris, 2007; Ryan, 2008). According to Ryan (2008) even though few women in metal have achieved the name recognition of their male peers, those have "ascended in the genre have at least provided a frame of reference showing that women can and do participate in the scene as more than just girlfriends and groupies" (p. 58). As more women become involved in the metal scene their presence will slowly change the genre of extreme metal music. Women are challenging and destabilizing the gender norm in both extreme metal culture and society by participating in moshpits and other aggressive physical practices which echo their refusal to adhere to normative female roles. This is echoed in Gruzelier's (2007) statement, "the participation of active female moshers at metal shows represents one schism in the history of heavy metal that has allowed women, as fans of the music, to shrug off the stereotype of 'sex object'" (p. 67). Purcell (2003) hypothesized that as women's presence in the metal scene grows increasingly acceptable, and as it becomes common for them to take on the same activities as males, perhaps the gender gap in heavy metal culture will continue to close.

According to Hutton (2006), whose scholarly work examined gender performance in alternative club spaces, "women take part in cultures and spaces that render them *visible* in public and which also label them quite clearly as participants in these cultures and spaces" (p. 8). Space is gendered, and gender, sex and sexuality are spatially practiced. In Krenske & McKay's (2000)

study of Melbourne's metal scene, they examined the restrictions that women have to negotiate when participating in a masculine musical scene. At metal shows, women enlarge their social space by engaging in the moshpit; however, there are restrictions placed on women who enter these spaces. Due to the extreme physicality and violent nature of the moshpit, many women find it difficult to participate in the moshpit. Status is achieved by demonstrating bravado and inflicting pain on one's body, which are actions coded as masculine within our culture, and also because of their smaller stature. Men generally move freely through the pit with little or no constraint (Krenske & McKay, 2000). Consequently, women's movements within the pit are usually fearful and hesitant, with women almost always confined to the periphery of the pit and tending to react to the vigorously moving bodies of men rather than slamming into others. Krenske & McKay (2000) argued that many women were anxious about the physical pain and being able to hold one's own in the pit. Women who moshed and stage-dived 'successfully' were incorporated into and taken seriously within the male-defined ethos of the subculture. Being involved in typically male expressions has the potential to free women from normatively restrictive corporeal and spatial experiences. Extreme metal and its liminal practices offer women opportunities to resist, challenge and subvert traditional understandings of femininity, and find pleasure doing so.

Female metal fans embrace the chaotic and challenging world of underground metal scenes as a space where they can negotiate understandings of gender, exhibit flexible and often contradictory forms of sexuality, and participate in masculine performances without being labeled negatively (Riches & Fox, 2008). Women who headbang and participate in moshpits contravene conventional forms of femininity, but in the heavy metal subculture this type of behaviour for women is rewarded. The moshpit is a site that both supports and complicates performances of gendered maneuvering for women. In many situations within the extreme metal scene, male-female

diversity and interaction is encouraged and celebrated on many levels including sharing music, moshing, drinking, and attending shows. Women embrace the liminal space of a metal show because it offers them an opportunity to resist and reject normative notions of femininity (Riches & Fox, 2008). However, it seems that if women want to feel respected and equal in the extreme metal scene they have to ascribe to the masculine codes of the genre (Riches & Fox, 2008, Gruzelier, 2007; Ambrose, 2001; Krenske & McKay, 2000); women who exhibit notions of normative femininity could be seen as usurpers, resisting the masculinist code and diluting the validity of the genre and what it represents.

Moshing, Liminality and the Dionysian Orgy

To many outsiders the moshpit may appear to be a whirlwind of chaos and extreme violence, where riots of bodies are violently bashing into one another without any reason or principle. However, a different view is potentially afforded as one observes and participates in moshpits. By incorporating the methodology of participant observation, I was able to construct explanatory frameworks which offered nuanced understandings of moshpit culture by establishing considerable rapport with my research participants (Angrosino, 2008). There is a highly structured sense of community and structure within the pit. The physical appearance of the moshpit can be observed as a community within a community, with a "hard core of participants forming the main nucleus and lighter or less stable elements towards its outer edges" (Armitage, 2008, p. 234). According to Berger moshing is the tension between violence and order, the violence is "accompanied by the subtle awareness that this is a moshpit and not a riot" (1999, p. 72). Berger (1999) emphasizes that moshers are careful to take care of other moshers - those who do not control themselves and cause too much trouble may be forcibly ejected from the moshpit. It is evident that many moshers enforce Pit Etiquette which is a common set of norms shared by those who take the

pit seriously. The fundamental rule of this etiquette insists that people look out for one another and react instantly when they see something that could potentially be injurious. Although the presence of violence and the dark dangers is what drives metalheads in there, it also gives them a comforting sense of belonging (Ambrose, 2001). Essentially, the moshpit is a reflection of the crowd's appreciation of and affection for, a band. Despite the lack of overt signs of attention by the moshers towards the musicians, metal bands read an active moshpit as a sign that their music is appreciated, reflecting the energy of the band's performance (Weinstein, 1991). In Tsitsos's (1999) examination of American straight-edge punk scenes, he articulated that moshing mirrors not only social realities but "ideologies of rebellion which exist in the scene by emphasizing individual and communal motion in ways which reflect a desire among dancers for the elimination of all rules" (p. 400). The suspension of orthodox norms, rules and behaviours in the moshpit are reflected in Turner's (1979) notion of liminality.

Turner (1979) identifies liminality as a period of transition where normal limits to thought, self-understanding, and behaviour are loosened, challenged, and poised. Underground metal concerts offer fans a time to "vent, release, resist, hector, parody and rebel. Turner (1979) defined liminality as a "state or process which is betwixt-and-between the normal, day-to-day cultural and social states and processes of getting and spending, preserving law and order, and registering structural status" (p. 94). It is a highly transgressive, playful retreat from, and inversion and debasement of, the totality of officialdom" (Halnon, 2006, p. 36). In liminality, profane social relations may be discontinued, former rights and obligations are suspended, and the social order may seem to have been turned upside down. In other words, in liminality people "play" with the elements of the familiar and unfamiliar. Liminality is also associated with anti-structure, a term employed by Turner (1979), which is a ritually organized time-out from the rules and regulations of

everyday life. In relation to the metal concert experience, there is a performance of public liminality which has often been regarded as "dangerous" by authorities and mainstream music representatives which have pushed extreme metal music and its liminal practices to the margins. Extreme metal is a liminal experience, a way for people to break from society, engage and play with darker aspects of reality without providing resolutions to social struggles (Turner, 1979).

This ritualized 'metal dance' embodies and transgresses various dichotomies such as structure/anti-structure, pain/pleasure, destructive/creative, disorder/order, control/chaos, and individuality/collectivity. Maffesoli's (1993) ground-breaking discussion on the sociology of the orgy helps us understand how the moshpit transgresses dichotomies. The most notable elements which make moshpits attractive for metal fans are pain and pleasure, elements that define and represent Dionysian aesthetic of hedonism, violence and ecstasy. Likewise, these elements are also found in the Dionysian orgy, "it [the orgy] expresses an entire range of feelings and passions. The term orgy refers to both anger and resistance, effervescence and sweetness, to agitation and to exceeding oneself" (p. 11). Throughout his discussion, Maffesoli demonstrates his "acute awareness of what makes us social beings, of the peculiarities which order our communal behaviour, however bizarre, incomprehensible, or even repulsive" (p. xx).

The concept he applies to the Dionysian orgy also applies to the moshpit and extreme metal because of their shared emphasis on a bodily experience and the physical interactions we experience with others. Within extreme metal culture, the body plays a central role in exhibiting subcultural identity and in the engagement of physical resistant practices such as moshing and headbanging. The moshpit is a space where bodies are touching in an intimate fashion and personal space is invaded. Similarly, the experiences of being within a moshpit correlate to the idea of Eros

which is the fascination with the metaphoric reality of the orgasm. After emerging out of a pit there are strong feelings of euphoria, almost orgasmic in nature, and just like an orgasm this euphoria is reached by experiencing some degree of pain and discomfort. In his exploration of eroticism, taboos, and sensuality, Bataille (1986) explained that "eroticism always entails a breaking down of established patterns, the patterns, I repeat, of the regulated social order basic to our discontinuous mode of existence as defined and separate individuals "(p. 18). Bataille's conception of eroticism and the breaking down of established patterns resonates with Turner's (1979) notion of liminality. Furthermore, the assertion that pleasure within the moshpit cannot be reached without experiencing painful sensations is echoed in Bataille's explanation of erotic passions: "passion fulfilled itself provokes such violent agitation that the happiness involved, before being a happiness to be enjoyed, is so great as to be more like its opposite, suffering. A tranquil feeling of secure happiness can only mean the calm which follows the long storm of suffering" (p. 19). These articulations reinforce the idea that the passion for heavy metal music manifests itself in sometimes violent and aggressive ways which leads to ecstasy, therapeutic release and invigoration.

Maffesoli's (1996) further observations on human histories, on tribal communities and on what he perceives as the decline of individualism reflect Lefebvre & Regulier's (1985) concept of rhythmanalysis: everyday life contains certain rhythms in time and space. However, it is worth noting the datedness of Maffesoli's claim. It is difficult to have confidence in the claim that "individualism" has declined given its rise and prevalence in North America, particularly its influence and gendered nature in heavy metal culture. Rafalovich (2006) argues that heavy metal music is a modern expression of masculine individualism because heavy metal lyrics tend to be saturated with invocations of ultimate triumph and despair. Heavy metal lyrics can be understood as "ideological representations of manhood, demonstrating individualism through extreme domination

or, conversely, extreme suffering. As is reflected in heavy metal songs, suffering and domination exist in a dialectical relationship, where the former often gives rise to the latter" (p. 20). Yet Maffesoli's discussion can be extrapolated to further understand the rhythmic meanings inherent in moshing culture: "a manner of living collectively the temporal rhythm in which darkness and light, death and life, tension and relaxation, inexorably follow one another" (p. 6). While miming disorder and chaos through confusion of bodies, the Dionysian mystery periodically stresses the pre-eminence of the collective over the individual along with its rational correlate, which is the social. Lefebvre's concept of the rhythm analysis project can expand on the symbolic significance of the moshpit by focusing on the ways in which everyday life intersects with bodily rhythms within homogenous time. Metal fans come together temporarily and it is a kind of rhythm itself as they go in and out of the moshpit. Metal is like a pulse in that it can get larger, can be repeated over and over again until it is taken up, or until it pervades people's lives more. According to Lefebvre & Regulier (1985), for there to be rhythm there has to be repetition of movement. This offers a unique perspective on the moshpit because as metalheads become more skilled and knowledgeable about moshing they are cognizant of their own internal and external rhythms such as how to move through a moshpit, how to negotiate their movements and rhythms with other moshers, and how to mosh to various heavy metal tempos. Lefebvre and Regulier's discussion also touches upon the aspect of moshing reflecting and informing our social world. Moshing reflects everyday rhythms such as spontaneity, chaos, excitement and frustration but is also informed by the rhythms of extreme metal music and the bodies of moshers. In this sense, the moshpit can be understood as polyrhythmic, made up of various rhythms that are dependent on and vulnerable to certain spaces, people, and music. Lefebvre and Regulier (1985) state "the human body is the locus and seat of interaction between the biological, the physiological (nature), and the social, and each of these

areas, each of these dimensions, has its own specificity, and thus its space-time: its rhythm" (p. 196). Therefore the moshpit is a site of constant interaction with rhythms within a similar time and space.

Maffesoli's (1993) dialogue about the dynamics of the Dionysian carnival also connects with Kristeva's (1982) depiction of abjection. The abject is that which is "formless, disgusting, terrifying, and threatening" (Kahn-Harris, 2007, p. 29). It disturbs identity, system, and order; it does not respect borders, positions, or rules. Abjection is comprised of the in-between, the ambiguous, and the composite. The notion of the abject enriches our understanding of the inner workings of the moshpit. Metal fans are drawn to the moshpit because there is a sense of perpetual danger and risk. But abjection, like the moshipit, is itself is a "composite of judgement and affect, of condemnation and yearning, of signs and drives" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 10). Similar to the themes expressed in extreme metal lyrics, abjection is about suffering, horror, death, sarcasm, and fear. Abjection and the sense of suffering was an important aspect of ancient Greek culture (including theatre). A capacity for suffering, indeed the "ability to draw strength from suffering and to use it as a means of bolstering an affirmative orientation to life," is characteristic of a life form inundated by the Dionysiac and reflects the depths to which the tragic sensibility penetrated ancient Greek culture (Hawley, 2010, p. 5). In accordance with notions of the abject and Dionysian carnival, Hawley (2010) declared that heavy metal is an example of Dionysian music, stating that its "harshness of sound, the violence of its aesthetic, and the purity of the rage that so often inspires its performance [which] has undoubtedly repelled at least as many listeners as it has attracted" (p. 29). Heavy metal gives form to the chaos, pain and suffering that delineate existence not by denying these or trying to eliminate them but by giving these artistic expression. Extreme metal also demands something from its audiences and the demand is neither easy nor always pleasurable. The

demands of extreme metal are both physical and conceptual. Extreme metal demands its audiences to confront negative elements of existence, to exercise caution when it comes to institutional control, to react physically and subversively to the music, and to embrace corporeal pleasures (drinking, moshing, headbanging, knowledge) that are otherwise controlled in other spheres of society. Therein lies its therapeutic value; extreme metal music puts us face-to-face with elements of ourselves and society that we would otherwise obscure. Metal might also reinforce negative elements and support notions of violence. For some metal fans the physicality of metal may play a more prominent role so it may not be as necessary to conceptualize the negative elements of existence as to physically understand them.

The investigation of extreme metal music and its subcultural leisure practice aims to challenge and redefine our normative leisure discourses and conceptualizations. Analogously, through the analysis of social practices that occur at metal shows, I am reconceptualising violence so it can be considered with compassion, and so that we may explore its possibilities within the framework of leisure research. Contrary to popular belief that metal lyrics promote violent behaviours and attitudes, Rafalovich & Schneider (2003) argued that the violent themes speak more to issues of emotional catharsis and social critique. Descriptions of physical violence symbolize the beauty and horror of rapid change; hence, in conveying the "human capacity for violence, metal bands symbolize one's ability to effect immediate and visible alterations in the course of events in the social world" (p. 13). Metal shows are very physical, and the outbreak of a moshpit resembles the act of fighting; yet, there is no hostility involved. If she/he falls to the ground, anyone standing nearby is expected to immediately help lift them up onto their feet. At a metal show, no one enters the infamous moshpit unless one chooses to. If violence is defined as physicality, then such shows are violent. However, if violence is defined as the hostile attempt to injure another person, then,

extreme metal shows as observed in practice, are overwhelmingly nonviolent (Purcell, 2003). Extreme physical contact is used to break down perceived restrictions to the expression of human capacities of pleasure which then reinforces the chief role that moshpits play in extreme metal culture. In the pit, "touch is electric, and bodies are no longer restraints. What could better express the paradox of simultaneously being supremely alive and yet separated from the self as a part of something shared" (Purcell, 2003, p. 193). Furthermore, the aspect of trust separates moshing from actual violence, it is about community, friendship and solidarity, not violence or hostile aggression (Palmer, 2005).

Heavy Metal Spaces

There has been little documentation on the significance of heavy metal spaces and the role they play in identity construction, gender resistance, and political activism. There has also been little attention to how these spaces allow individuals to engage in resistant practices that provide meaning to their everyday lives. My research diverges from dominant western epistemologies regarding space, which presuppose that symbolic meanings are attached to spaces which create places. According to Heidegger, space is "something that has been made room for, something that has been freed, namely, within a boundary" (p. 356). While places, on the other hand, are classified as "locales that allow a site that provides a space. Subsequently, the spaces in which we frequent are provided for by the places (Heidegger, 1927/1993). Space is itself actively produced by the people that frequent those spaces. Space is not just discovered by humans and occupied, but in the process it is transformed (Elden, 2004). Social space is a social product. But Lefebvre argues that space is the ultimate locus and medium of struggle, and is therefore a crucial political issue: "There is politics of space because space is political" (Elden, 2004, p. 183). Within the extreme metal scene, locally and globally, people negotiate metal spaces by engaging in gender and class politics.

Urban space is not just the place of conflict, but an object of struggle itself. In addition to this, extreme metal in general is a cultural site of struggle. Therefore work needs to be done, particularly within heavy metal literature, on understanding space and how it is socially constructed and used.

Metal venues can be understood as spaces of representation, which are directly lived spaces, the space of everyday experience (Merrifield, 2006). According to Lefebvre, spaces of representation can be "linked to underground and clandestine sides of life and don't obey rules of consistency or cohesiveness" (Merrifield, 2006, p. 110). The act of moshing within underground metal venues represents a resistance to mainstream conceptions of consistency and cohesiveness. A sense of cohesiveness within heavy metal venues consists of physically aggressive and spontaneous practices such as moshing. Although on the surface the moshpit can be seen as a unified movement and a cohesive space, in actuality, the moshpit is comprised of various moshing styles, different kinds of metal fans, and interactions of insiders and outsiders of extreme metal culture. These heavy metal spaces are felt more than thought, and this is evident in metal venues where there is a preoccupation on bodily activity such as headbanging, moshing, exhibiting various metal attires, and drinking. Furthermore, spaces of representation involve and are defined by spatial practices. Spatial practices "structure lived reality, include routes and networks, patterns and interactions that connect places and people, images with reality, work with leisure" (Merrifield, 2006, p. 110). Heavy metal venues are spaces in which heavy metal fans congregate, interact, and engage in similar rhythms like moshing to metal music. There are certain patterns and skills that are used by metal fans to move through and within the moshpit and these patterns can be disrupted when female moshers enter the pit. Lefebvre's conception of spaces of representation and spatial practices can also be applied to the concept of dwelling.

Tim Ingold (2000), a prominent anthropologist who was influenced by Heidegger, maintained that a dwelling perspective emphasizes different understandings about the similarities and differences between the ways in which human beings create environments for themselves. The dwelling perspective concerns the interrelation of people and their surroundings, their 'life-world,' which gives rise to places, which they build, and open spaces for certain activities. According to Heidegger, humans derive meaning from their world by dwelling in and engaging with the environment and other human beings. Music clearly plays an active role in creating and shaping spaces that otherwise would not have 'happened' or existed (Stokes, 2001). Without the role of heavy metal music, The Mead Hall, Edmonton's exclusive heavy metal venue, would not have been established as a heavy metal venue. In accordance with Ingold's (2000) dwelling perspective, music-making has the ability to shape spaces and spaces can shape music. In various ways, "sounds are used to create spaces and suggest and stimulate patterns of human behaviour in particular locations" (Connell & Gibson, 2003, p. 192). Furthermore, music can also be used in certain contexts to create "a sense of space, to reaffirm various social identities" (p.193). Music can shape the spaces we inhabit and sounds can influence behaviour in spaces. Altman (1993) proposes that social relationships vital to musical communities are often embedded in specific, physical environments. He claims that "people and environments are 'mutually defining' in that they shape and give meaning to each other" (as cited in Snell & Hodgetts, 2007, p. 431). Music is also a major component of one's identity; but this sense of identity, especially in heavy metal music, develops through social interactions among people during their life activities. It is through dwelling that people can come to understand their surroundings and find meaning within places which open up and allow for shared experiences within certain musical spaces.

Heavy metal provides the anthem of a working class subculture that came into existence as a response to the cultural marginalization of the working class in the late 1970's. According to Weinstein (1991), "heavy metal music came to express the utopian desires, the lifestyle, and the discontents of a structurally defined segment of youth. There could have been no heavy metal music if there had been no incipient subculture already to guide and embrace it" (p. 101-102). Feelings of estrangement are palpable in the subculture of heavy metal because its members feel oppressed and marginalized by underlying social conditions such as organized religion, poverty, consumerism, mass unemployment, racism, sexism, and conformity. The significance of youth subcultures is articulated by Cashmore (1984): "youth subcultures are ways in which young people come to terms with the social order as they understand it, and they frequently express a dissatisfaction with the world as it stands" (as cited in Muggleton, 2000, p. 149). Subcultures that sustain an 'underground' status, such as the extreme metal subculture, tend to have more political and social freedom because they operate in backspaces outside mainstream media and social surveillance. Musicians and fans within the extreme metal subculture are offered freedoms that are usually prohibited in other facets of society such as parodying politicians, speaking out against social institutions, and rejecting notions of conformity (Halnon, 2006; Nilsson, 2009).

To be part of the working class, according to Skeggs (1997), is to be "born into structures of inequality which provide differential amounts of capital and thus circumscribe movements through social space" (p. 161). Heavy metal is symbolically (through style of dress) and musically resistant and oppositional to bourgeoisie values; therefore, fans' access to musical spaces is restricted and kept on the margins. Fraser (1997) maintained that is it vital for subordinate groups to "have access to 'venues' where they can undertake communicative processes that are not under the supervision of dominant groups" (p. 81). Heavy metal venues, which are usually located outside of the

downtown core of the city, are backspaces that allow metal fans and musicians to construct a strong sense of community through articulating private but common desires in a shared public language, adorn sub-cultural symbols, and engage in illegal and contradictory performances. Backspaces, according to Goffman (1963), provide "a liminal license for people to transgress norms, participate in playful deviance, and present their secret self in urban settings" (p. 27). Three main characteristics of backspaces that are relevant to the workings of the extreme metal subculture are: 1) ordinary levels of surveillance are reduced; 2) individuals feel free to openly engage in a range of tabooed activities with some degree of security; 3) and people involved believe that the stigma associated with their performances of deviance is of relatively little concern to everyone present (Redmon, 2003).

In his discussion on deviance and non-normativity, Williams (2004) articulated that through the exploration of liminoid moments of spontaneity, anti-structure, and individual expression, deviant interactions and events "exemplify an ethic of play standing over and against antithetical normative valuations" (p. 243). Williams' depiction of liminoid moments parallel Turner's (1969) concept of liminality because both provide a license for temporary transgressions from normativity by which norms and social conventions are suspended and re-structured. Social norms regarding appropriate physical contact and conduct are challenged and re-defined as metal fans create their own rules of etiquette within the moshpit. Additionally, liminoid moments can be thought of as forms of "playful deviance," such as moshing, which typically occur in backspaces (Redmon, 2003). Underground metal venues are backspaces that offer a space for both men and women to engage in 'taboo' activities such as moshing, headbanging, witnessing controversial stage performances, and allowing musicians' freedom to speak out against political and social inequalities. Engaging in expressive cultural practices, such as extreme metal music, within

backspaces are primary ways in which "people articulate the collective identities that are fundamental to forming and sustaining social groups, which are in turn, basic to survival" (Turino, 2008, p. 2).

The Mead Hall, is a social place known and understood across sets of people; it is created and reproduced through interpersonal interaction, formalized in social behaviour, and ultimately persists in collective memory. According to Stokowski (2002), people actively *create* meaningful places through conversation and interaction with others. The social and cultural values of place become sustained in the language, culture, and history collectively experienced, imagined, and remembered across groups and communities of people. The power of place is derived in its ability to connect people in society, encourage development of personal and social identities, and reinforce socio-cultural meanings. This coincides with Cohen's (1985) writing on the symbolic construction of community. Cohen observed that people "construct community symbolically, making it a resource and a repository of meaning, and a referent of their identity" (p. 118). The creation, reproduction and repetition of symbolic social practices construct meaningful places. There has been little attention dedicated towards the role that suburban and urban places play in leisure practices; furthermore, there has been insufficient documentation in leisure scholarship about the importance of musical places. Relph (1976), a renowned phenomenologist who studied the essential human experience of place, clarified that the "meanings of places may be rooted in the physical setting and objects and activities, but they are not a property of them - rather they are a property of human intentions and experiences" (p. 47). My research on moshing practices within heavy metal venues in Edmonton accords with Smale's (2006) assertion that there needs to be shift towards reflections on resistance to and transgression of cultural norms associated with places.

Alternative nightlife spaces, like metal venues, are often found in 'fringe locations' such as industrial areas or locations on the edge of the city. Spaces located on the fringes are understood as liminal ones because they are characterized as chaotic, unstable, fluid, as "unbounded space between which brings together a collection of unusual things, and contains unsettling juxtapositions and alternative modes of social orderings" (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003, p. 206). Marginality allows for a reversal of normal social roles and a transgression of normative behaviour becomes possible. Such marginal places provide openings for more affective, neo-tribal forms of identification and lifestyle (Shields, 1991). It is important that metal venues are located on the margins because they are a vital part of the self-regulation of the alternative scene, as it ensures that attendance is based on desire and dedication rather than chance. Most people accept and reinforce this spatial logic and choose to stick to their 'own' territory, often for reasons of self-preservation. According to Walser (1993), the construction of boundaries can be read as a form of "social marginalization when metal fans are positioned within public discourse as weirdoes or outsiders and are stigmatized and excluded" (as cited in Snell & Hodgetts, 2007, p. 431). Hetherington (1997) emphasized that marginal sub-cultural groups, such as the extreme metal scene, are united through disillusionment and frustration with mainstream culture, and represent attempts to recreate a sense of belonging, solidarity and authenticity. Thus the margins are often seedbeds for counter-hegemonic or resistant ideologies which involve a commitment to an identity, community, or cause as well as an attachment to a particular place.

Chapter Three: Analysis and Discussion

Bloody Fucking Chaos: The Physicality and Reality of Being in the Moshpit

In a moshpit, bodies are furiously hitting one another in a self-contained space, usually in front of the stage; bodies become hypnotized by the aggressive and fast metal rhythms, personal

space is annexed, and bodies are vulnerable to injury. There is an intense physicality and aggressiveness of being within a moshpit that was acknowledged by all of the participants. As I sat with Kody, a young mosher who has attended hundreds of metal concerts since the age of 14 and who plays in a local melodic death metal band, he summed up the total experience of being in a moshpit: "Absolutely bloody fucking chaos (laughs), and it has to have bloody in there because you look left there's going to be a dude with a split lip, you look right and the other guy is bleeding from some orifice." Scott, a local metal musician and long-time mosher, cautions people about the reality of entering the pit and that it takes physical strength and endurance, "Sometimes it fucking hurts but it was still fun. If you can't take it, if you're afraid of getting pushed the wrong way and something might be sore the next day then don't go in there, they are not for everybody." Josh and Stefan, metalheads who have had many years of experience within the metal scene, suggested that particular subgenres of extreme metal provoke the most physically aggressive moshpits because of the physique of moshers present within the pit and the aggression expressed in the music. Josh explained,

> It sort of is the ultimate expression of physical brutality in the moshpit. Every moshpit of almost every type has a physical element, but I find in this moshpit in particular, and death metal moshpits are what I am referring to, it is the highest edge of it. Participants are most likely to get hurt and they are also at their highest level of aggression. In my experience, when I got to a death metal show I find that the moshpits are predominantly full of larger people as well as their behaviour in the moshpit seems less conducive to everyone joining in. Anyone could join in, anyone is free to join in and those of smaller or average, or below average join in but perhaps for shorter intervals because it is more taxing.

It was interesting the ways in which the participants conceptualized and described their familiarities with levels of pain and pleasure, many of them agreed that both physical elements have to be tangible for a positive moshpit experience. Jeremy, who was originally from Athabasca, a small town north the Edmonton, reflected upon the difficulties of growing up in a rural area and

identifying as a metalhead. He explained the ways in which these feelings of pain and estrangement manifested in the moshpit and how they could be reconciled:

> You have long hair, you look different so right then you are already experiencing some pain. You're fighting against the mainstream just to enjoy something that not very many other people appreciate. Then you go to these shows and you deal with this pain, it's kind of a like a rites, the passage.

According to Bryan, a mosher who has been a dedicated metal fan since the age of 14, there is a distinct pleasure in the pain of the moshpit: "It can be a very painful experience but it's also absolutely invigorating when you walk out [of a show] and you're buzzed on adrenaline, you're thrilled, you're happy, and yah you might be bruised, you might even be bleeding but there's nothing more invigorating." This depiction highlights the complexity of experiencing this sense of invigoration because not only is the pain invigorating but the invigoration is derived from the demanding physicality of moshing.

Bryan expands on the element of pain of the moshpit experience by describing how that pain can be a great reminder of the pleasure: "Whenever you get a slight moshpit injury it helps for the next week or two whenever you feel that little wince of pain, it brings a smile to your face because it reminds you of the fun you had." Moreover, the profound amount of pleasure masks the amount of pain experienced in the pit, which is echoed in Josh's account of his moshpit experiences, "You're so excited that the adrenaline is pumping and when the adrenaline is pumping you can definitely take a bit more punishment in general in terms of receiving blows and bruises and falling down. The pain is definitely masked, it feels secondary." Kody further illustrates how he conceptualizes his pain threshold within the moshpit by equating the moshpit to everyday sexual experiences:

> It's [the moshpit] is like rough sex. You're getting bit, scratched, pinched, and slapped. It's exhilarating, it's euphoric, it gives you that tingle sensation. But if it

> gets too rough, personally, then it's no fun anymore. It's the same sort of thing in the moshpit. You feel people slam into you, you slam people, you get a punch to the face that sucks, it hurts. But then you get up and you're like 'I just got punched in the face, I want more!'

The depictions offered by Bryan, Josh, and Kody are modern expressions that reflect Maffesoli's (1993) description of the Dionysian orgy and Bataille's (1986) conceptualization of erotic passions. It is evident that the moshpit transgresses the dichotomies of pain and pleasure by almost blurring their physical distinctions. Feelings of euphoria and a heightened sense of awareness contribute to the pleasurable elements of the moshpit which emerged from painful experiences brought about by other moshers. By breaking down established norms and patterns of everyday living, moshers achieve a sense of tranquility which is only achieved through physical practices of suffering and pain.

The role and reality of violence in the moshpit emerged throughout all of the interviews, with the majority of moshers claiming that the pit was a site of controlled violence. However, as we sat and teased out the differences between normative conceptions of violence and how that is played out differently in the moshpit, the only distinguishing factor separating everyday understandings of violence from metal understanding was intention. Jeremy explained the difference between how outsiders, individuals who are not familiar with extreme metal music and its practices, would perceive violence and how the moshpit expresses that differently: "A lot of people think violence is intended, I'm acting violent upon this group, this person, whatever, it's intentional. In the case of the pit it's completely random acts of violence and it's not really targeted at a particular guy." Stefan shared similar views with Jeremy in regards to the level of violent actions within the chaotic vortex of the pit: "There's the crazy violence where you're out to hurt people intentionally and then there's the unintentional violence- that is a great question because there is a major difference but how do you describe that. It's a consensual violence maybe." The way that the moshers articulated

their understandings between everyday understandings of violence from metal understandings reflect Purcell's (2003) consideration of violence within extreme metal culture: if violence is defined by the hostile attempt [intent] to injure another , then, extreme metal shows and moshpits are overwhelmingly nonviolent. Furthermore, Bryan also acknowledged the complexities and nuances of understanding the role of violence in the moshpit. He compared these violent expressions to the conflicts we experience in everyday life:

> It [the moshpit] is definitely violent but it's a sort of willing type of violence, there are no victims really. Everyone is there of their own volition. It's harsh, it's rough but it's all an act of free will. It is violence, there are bruises and there's often blood but it's not like what most people think of when they think of violence. They think there is always a victim and a perpetrator. But I mean all of life is a constant set of just minor conflicts and that is what these sorts of collisions in the moshpit represent.

Bryan's description of symbolic significance of the moshpit parallels Christe's (2004) and Anthrax's (1987) assertion that the moshpit is a metaphor for everyday life. The moshpit is a social trajectory which means that the collisions that occur within the moshpit are physical manifestations and expressions of everyday conflicts, anxieties and frustrations. By being 'Caught in a Mosh' and colliding with one another in the chaotic vortex of the pit, moshers are able to release sentiments of frustration that come from society's dismissal of metal music and moshpit culture. Metalheads are constantly justifying their subcultural commitment to metal by physically exerting themselves in the world by way of dress, behaviour, and ideologies. Thus, the pit becomes a space of collective struggle where these composite emotions can be played out and cathartically released.

For the majority of moshers that I interviewed, therapeutic release was one of the greatest pleasures they experienced within the pit. Stefan, a metalhead who has been moshing for over 15 years stated,

> I love it [moshing]. It is so serene for me. The violence, the inadvertent violence, the music just brings me to a place where I am calm. The most pleasurable aspect of the pit is the release. I can pull out and express my inner self… I get to let out

> everything. I get to confront my inner aggressions and it becomes a collective experience because a lot of people feel that way.

The therapeutic effect of the moshpit is echoed in Jeremy's assertion, "Sometimes that controlled violence is needed in this mundane life that we live in. I feel that lots of people are taking all of their anger levels and bringing it back down to zero and you feel very calm the next day." Stefan expands on this notion by exploring the feelings and sensations he experiences after participating in a moshpit, "That feeling right before you jump out of a plane, but you can imagine anxiety. And pure rage but levelled off rage, it is not uncontrolled rage. I do not know how, it is something about it that brings something out in me. But it is so stress relieving and euphoric." Stefan's depiction of catharsis paralleled other participants' statements that supported the notion that moshpits do not perpetuate or lead to escalations of violence; it does just the opposite. However this opens up questions around how this would be researched and verified. The cathartic value of moshing opens up a more in-depth discussion around violence, physicality, pain, pleasure and metal that necessitates further research. Stefan's account also points to how men think this is how it works even as the system actually reinforces "violence" and "physicality" in the moshpit. If we closely examine Stefan's description of the therapeutic effect of the moshpit his language reinforces a certain kind masculinity. A masculinity that is has been socially constructed around controlling anger through physicality which leads to certain behaviours. This is also reinforced in Scott's description of the types of energies he can release within the pit and the feelings he experiences afterwards:

> If you're kind of down or pissed off, those types of energies can be released in the pit. It can also be really exciting energies too. Here's an example, let's say it is an aggressive emotion or energy that you are trying to express and get out, that can sometimes save you from doing it later. I feel a lot better coming out of a show. I feel way better coming out than I did going in. Let's say I've had a really shitty day at work, then I'm just going to be bitter towards the world but after I do something

> like that [moshing] you feel tired and you feel kind of lethargic. You feel kind of relieved in a sense, you've been satisfied.

The majority of the participants described that they felt calm, collected and their heads were cleared after being involved in a moshpit. Bryan, among other research participants, indicated that the moshpit is a reflection of inner emotions, "the expression of that pent up and repressed mental energy. This is a relatively safe and I think a positive way of expressing that whereas if you kept repressing it, it may express itself in a socially negative way." Bryan expands on this by addressing the cathartic nature of the pit because one is purging deleterious emotions within a supportive, collective setting, "it [the moshpit] is transcendental, providing a freedom from yourself and from societal expectations. Moshing is a cathartic in nature because it makes you feel larger than yourself by being part of a collective." Bryan's assertion provides an example of Turner's (1979) idea of liminality, a period of transition where social norms and expectations are temporarily suspended. Additionally, the moshpit allows metal fans to play with elements of the unfamiliar and familiar. Bryan perceived that within the liminal space of the moshpit thoughts to self-understanding were loosened and re-defined.

Help Your Fellow Mosher: Pit Etiquette and Movements of Trust

Even though the moshpit can be a chaotic and physically violent space, the majority of moshers remain safe while maintaining that needed degree of danger by adhering and preserving the Pit Etiquette. These are the unwritten, almost unspoken rules that keep the moshpit ritualized as co-operative play and prevent the aggressive dancing from crossing the line into fighting (Palmer, 2005). Some of the rules that outline pit etiquette refer to specific behaviours and are explicit. For example if someone falls down, stop moshing and immediately help that person up, remove any spiked bands or jewellery that may injury others before entering the pit and kicking and punching is generally regarded as a breach of Pit Etiquette, shoving or pushing with the forearms or elbows is

preferred. The last rule of Pit Etiquette is important when women enter into the moshpit, no groping or sexual assault is allowed and most metal fans are quick to eject individuals out of the pit that violate any facets of the etiquette. Additionally, Ambrose (2001) in his book *Moshpit: The Violent World of Moshpit Culture* asserted, "the very presence of these dark dangers is what drives metalheads into the pit and, conversely, gives them a comforting sense of belonging. In this sometimes hostile landscape, they have to look out for one another. There is more community and trust in the pit than is usually acknowledged by outsiders" (p. 36).

The importance of upholding the pit etiquette emerged throughout all of the interviews. Yet many of the moshers, particularly Allison, Jeremy, and Stefan, highlighted their disappointment in the new generation of moshers that clearly did not understand the unwritten expectations and rules of the pit. Because of this perceived rift among moshers, many metal fans are apprehensive about entering the pit because there is a lack of safety and security. Allison accounted for the changes in moshpit behaviour:

> I guess my biggest problem is that it does not seem that anyone wants to pick you up. I don't want to sound like an old person like 'oh back in the old days' but I remember every time I fell there would be a few sets of hands picking me up and I would do the same thing. And now it has just turned a lot more violent. I never worried about getting punched in the head when I was at Opeth, it just did not happen. Now it seems more about kicking and punching than it is about pushing people in the moshpit.

Allison's explanation refers to not only the loss of etiquette but to the changes in moshing styles and forms. Jeremy expands on Allison's assertions by describing his experiences at more recent metal gigs, "I find moshpits now, the culture, people do not know it anymore. I was at the Nevermore show in November where I didn't see any of the code or the supposed code being followed and it actually made for a bad show because the crowd was awful, they didn't understand."

For many moshers, their first moshpit experience is daunting but as they take that leap into the pit they quickly learn that most metal fans are looking out for each other. Likewise, if someone in the pit is clearly rupturing the etiquette and getting out of hand then they are ejected from the pit. Jeremy emphasized the collective effort it takes to maintain the safety of the pit, "What holds up the etiquette are guys who are willing to take down those people who are not upholding the etiquette. If not then they perpetuate the violence and then it becomes uncontrolled and gets too chaotic. You have to draw the line somewhere." According to Palmer (2005) "the proper social environment where there is sufficient pre-existing trust and the rules of etiquette are followed, moshing nurtures friendship and camaraderie with an acceptable level of risk" (p. 163). Additionally, when the etiquette is maintained and the moshing ritual is properly performed, the moshpit is the microcosm of metal itself. It is frightening to outsiders, seemingly full of anger and chaos, but heavy metal and its practices are actually sociable and co-operative. Josh attended to aspects of trust, camaraderie and concern when it comes to crowd surfing at metal shows:

> That is kind of the lost art of moshpitting, you know, it is equally if not more reckless and dangerous in terms of its behavioural style but at the same time it has the very similar attributes of companionship, camaraderie, concern and care for the people around you. I mean you tap a random person on the shoulder and you say 'I want to go up' and two random strangers come down and boost you up, and all the random strangers that you are floating across, they have an unspoken duty, they feel an unspoken duty towards you, to ensure that you stay up or if you fall you are helped up immediately.

The pit's movement is self-contained and regulated by not only the moshers in the centre but also by the people surrounding the moshpit. Moshers depend on people on the perimeter to push them back into the centre of the pit to maintain momentum, and the peripheries offer a place where moshers can catch their breath so they can enter once again. Scott discussed the role people play on the peripheries and how they contribute to upholding pit etiquette:

> People keep an eye out for you. Especially too, most of the falling happens on the outside of the moshpit that I've noticed because when you're on the inside you're getting hit too much to fall over. The outside of the actual pit is lined with people that are keeping an eye out. And they keep the momentum going and you get saved the most from those guys. If I'm worn out I like to be on the edges.

However, there is still that element of disorder within this regulated space. Bryan compared the moshpit to a running stream or a waterfall:

> It is kind of chaotic and it goes wherever the hell it wants to and a river over time will erode away the path that it is inevitably going to take. I think the moshpits do the same thing but not over time. If you see a moshpit breakout it sort of carves out its own little space. The moshpit is carving its way out. The crazier the moshpit gets, the bigger it gets, the more space it has to carve out for itself.

Fighting for a Space: Negotiating Diverse Moshing Styles, Outsiders and Female Moshers

The moshpit, although common at most metal shows worldwide, is not a universal experience. Factors such as gender, age, styles of moshing, and knowledge of the scene are aspects that contribute to understanding the complexity of the moshpit. The dynamics of the moshpit transform and are at times disrupted when women enter the pit and male metal fans have to negotiate their presence. These types of negotiations are based on women's stature and physicality; however, the participants did not mention the smaller statures of men within the pit and there was no account for the diversity of female physiques. These absences within the narratives reveal the subtleties of how gender, specifically masculinity, is constructed and reproduced within heavy metal. This dismissal echoes Weinstein's (2000) description of the heavy metal subculture in which the shared values, norms and behaviours are highly masculine. For example, Kody felt as though women who participate in the pit should acknowledge their physical limits before entering the chaotic vortex:

> My personal opinion, if she's there she better be ready for what's coming. I'm not going to go out of my way to slam into her, but I'm going to treat her just like the next guy. A lot of women end up getting hurt, or killing the vibe of the pit because

> everyone is giving them that extra space or side stepping them. She has every right to be there, but know your limits.

There is a discourse that emerges that reproduces the notion that the moshpit is a masculine space. Kody's illustration about women's involvement in the moshpit coincides with Gruzelier's (2007) analysis of heavy metal culture: "in many ways, this suggests that men are willing to allow female subscription to heavy metal but only on conditions set out by the masculinist codes of the genre" (p. 69). So if women want to be seen and treated as metal equivalents then they have to engage in masculine scripts that are comprised of physicality and aggression. Kody's account highlights the ways in which the presence of female moshers disrupts the homosocial interactions between males by 'killing the vibe' of the pit (Gruzelier, 2007). Here is yet another example of how the moshpit is a contradictory and highly complex space. Men want to be welcoming of female participants but they have to engage in the ongoing process of negotiating their masculinity within this masculine space.

Allison, a female mosher, understands the complexity that is involved when women want to fully participate in the moshpit and empathizes with men, who restrict their physical expressions when women are in the pit,

> If I heard a guy was hitting a woman I would not be friends with him. So I can see why you don't really want to push a girl over. I always like being one of the guys so I don't want to feel that I'm not invited but I can understand why they would be hesitant in the pit. But I always tell my guy friends, well I accept the consequences and I'm never violent about it so I hope I receive the same treatment.

Additionally, Allison also acknowledges the blurry relationship between identifying as 'one of the boys' and actually being treated as such, "Being one of the guys means being treated like an equal and it's kind of a double-edged sword in that I do not want to be treated like an equal it if is going to be super violent because I just do not want to get that hurt. I don't want to break bones." Here Allison constructs a narrative that testifies to the gendered nature of the moshpit by reflecting the

tensions that arise when women try to conceive of their participation in the moshpit. Allison preferred less physically aggressive moshpits, which reproduces normative conceptions of femininity being 'softer,' and more 'gentle.' Her statement illustrates the struggle that metal fans have, particularly women, when conceptualizing femininity within a masculine space.

Scott's experiences of moshing with females added a positive dynamic to the moshpit, "I've been in pits with a lot of women and it does change the dynamic a bit. I've noticed that over the last few years there have been more and more women involved and I think that is great because you know that's one less greasy guy to rub up against." Stefan reminisced about his 'old school' moshing experiences by recounting the amount of women participating in local death metal moshpits and emphasized the fact that women play an important role in the pit:

> Actually kudus to the females in the death metal scene because they're usually the ones who help get the pit started. They're grabbing their boyfriends and pushing them around. I'm seeing less and less of that. I've seen women in there quite a bit, at local shows. They are the ones at the stage thrashing the hardest and that's for sure. They are really an important component.

Male moshers are welcoming to the idea of having women in the moshpit yet their statements are contradictory due to the fact the aspect of male bonding or the rhythm of the moshpit is disrupted by female participants. Bryan claimed that he was pleasantly surprised when he received a solid hit from a woman because it adds a different dynamic and challenge to the usually male experience. He asserted that metalheads are typically active in constructing a sense of equality within the moshpit. Yet the pit remains a paradoxical space that is defined by tension, conflict, and intercession.

Moshers who consider themselves insiders within the Edmonton metal scene also have to negotiate and work together to keep the pit safe from outsiders, those individuals who seem to think that the pit is a place to fight and prove their dominance instead of treating it as a space of appreciation and play. Outsiders tend to size up people in the pit and single out individuals in the

crowd when the moshpit should be about spontaneous, chaotic and disorderly movements. Therefore people who respect and take moshing seriously work together to reinforce the etiquette so outsiders do not jeopardize the total moshpit experience. Many of the moshers that I interviewed that were large and tall in size stated that their size was indicative of their role in the moshpit. Jeremy explained that because he was a large guy he is typically delegated the role of the enforcer and supervisor in the pit:

> It's harder to be the big guy because you have certain expectations. You have lots of little guys come up to you, which I don't have a problem with, and they have the 'I need help' look in their eyes. So sometimes you have to drag someone out of the pit because there's a chance that no one will be able to. The easy thing about being the big guy is exerting myself. If I don't like the way things are going [in the pit] then I can control the scenario. You become the enforcer because people look to you and know that you can take control. Sometimes it's not difficult but sometimes you're asked of a lot. It's a role that you kind of accept after a while. There is a sense of empowerment.

Scott explains that if people are acting inappropriate at a show and within the pit they need to be informed of the ways in which one needs to properly behave in the pit. On the other hand, Kody argues that more intense measures need to be taken in order for outsiders to get the message that they are not welcomed in the pit,

> I've seen assholes get destroyed in the pit because people were sick of it. Assholes are persistent with their behaviour, always swinging their elbows. I have seen five or six guys gang up on one guy, roll him, and then walk over him when he was on the ground and then no one picked him up. No one will even mosh with them. I have seen guys eject outsiders out of the pit by not picking them up, not moshing with them, speaking with them, and also by keeping their distance.

Stefan had similar experiences of upholding the etiquette when individuals were clearly breaching it, "There was one pit where one buddy was just out to hurt people and I've seen him with his spikey wristband and he would be lunging at people, trying to get them in the face and stuff. I would come by quietly, nonchalantly and I would just keep my eye on him and then when I had a moment he got an elbow and I knocked him on his ass and he was out of the moshpit." Yet this is

complicated because on the one hand the moshpit is considered a communal experience, but, on the other hand, simultaneously signifies individuality and allows individuals to express their own idiosyncratic when it comes to moshing styles and expressions.

Moshers are also aware of their body size in relation to others in the pit. Many moshers like Kody and Scott have a strategic way of moshing so they do not seriously injure smaller individuals. Kody explained that he watched how other people moshed. He moshes low to the ground, with wide-stance and deliberate stepping. He says that "you're not just utilizing your legs and calves; you're using your entire torso. Being in that low of a stance, you can recover a lot faster from hard hits because you can quickly deflect and move." Parallel to this, Stefan illustrated his technique as a circle approach, where he enters the moshpit from the periphery and circles the outside of the pit. His friends refer to him as "The Shark": "I crouch down and do a circle along the outside and go through the crowd and then I come in. Then I go around in there [middle of the moshpit] and then shoot back out of the pit." Josh was very cognizant of his moshing techniques and he incorporates various elements into his moshing strategies:

> I like to keep my arms high specifically to guard my throat and face, and with your forearms out they act as shock absorbers, so when you do crash into a perhaps a stationary person or into a person in motion they can kind of fold and collapse and absorb some of the shock. So if you're stationary moshing you want to plant your feet and have a good stable stance but if you're moving around moshing you kind of have to lose yourself. I just lose myself to the song so I do a lot of headbanging. I'm half headbanging and half charging around. It's basically like going crazy: I yell, I whip my head around, I shove, I get shoved, I get knocked down.

Metal fans have to deal with people who display different moshing styles such as slamming (derived from the punk/hardcore subculture), jumping up and down, throwing each other or swinging their feet and fists. "I have seen a lot of people get kicked in the face," claimed Bryan, "and that is harsh. And I mean, that is not the spirit of the moshpit, it shouldn't be physically

damaging, the odd bruise is negligible but when you're getting kicked in the teeth that is a little much" (Bryan). The majority of the research participants acknowledged the moshpit as a space for individual expression which is reflected in the various moshing styles. But some of these differing moshing styles can dampen the mood within the moshpit. Josh articulated his frustration in moshpits where certain styles annoyed him:

> For me I find it annoying when you have these guys who use the moshpit as a feat of strength, it's simply for them to show themselves and show everyone just how strong they are. They size people up, they try to find people that they would think would be a suitable challenge to their physical prowess. And even if you're not necessarily engaged or wanting to be engaged in the moshpit they're still engaging you, trying to chide you in. This could be the guy that's charging at you from behind just to get you angry enough to retaliate or the guy who comes up and grabs you by your shirt and tries to pull you in because he thinks you would be a good opponent.

Orchestrated Chaos: The Significance of the Maelstrom

The moshpit has varying levels of meaning for different people and within different metal contexts. While many metal fans enjoy listening to their favourite metal bands at home on their sound systems, attending and participating in a live metal show physically intensifies the inherent listening experience and allows fans to further express their devotion. According to Jeremy "you can listen to a band as much as you want on CD but until you see them live and you experience the moshpit then you've never truly experienced the band." Josh asserted that he is driven to the moshpit not to solely show appreciation for the band but because of the personal connection to the music: "And when you see it happening live you're not just hearing the song like you normally would on a CD but you're experiencing it, you become part of the experience so that excites you because you love that song, you love that experience that you want to be part of it."

Jeremy illustrated that the moshpit is significant to him and his friends because it is as a way to play out and play with real life scenarios represented in metal music, "its chaos, if it's chaotic

music you want to see that chaos on the floor. You want to see it mimicked. You want to see the music turn into the real world. And that, for some people gives them real pleasure, seeing the music turning into a real life scenario." The ultimate moshpit experience occurs when metal music and the crowd merges symbiotically, this is echoed in Jeremy's statement: "You feel sore, you're sweaty, you feel awful the next day but you're hyped on adrenaline, you're stoked that the band played the songs that you wanted, because you wouldn't mosh otherwise." Jeremy's statement illustrates how the moshpit adds a physical aspect to something that is otherwise just strictly an aural experience. Josh elucidates on the how the moshpit compliments the extreme metal music experience:

> I guess you focus on a feeling that the music gives you and you focus on how you would express that if you could in a large group of people. And that is what the beauty of a moshpit is, it really allows that excitement and rage that I think metal builds inside of its fans, that manifests itself in a physical way which of course is a very reckless way and that's the beauty of the moshpit. There's different ways to completely lose yourself physically and at the same time completely maximize expenditure of energy, of motion, and movement, and the moshpit is just one way.

What has not been discussed in the current moshpit and heavy metal literature but warrants serious attention is the type of metal music that is conducive to moshing practices. What types of rhythms and tempos drive metal fans into the pit? Are there particular metal songs or portions within a song that incite an energetic moshpit? How does instrumentation affect the rhythm of the moshpit? Jeremy elucidated the differences in subgenres and how moshing is either encouraged or minimized based on the style of music,

> If you got serious black metal then moshpits tend to not help because really, what I find, the whole point is that you're supposed to be induced into some kind of trance. But if you are listening to thrash metal or even D-beat (a form of punk music), the moshpit adds to the energy. It's very simple, they [d-beat musicians] want you to jump, pick up on the riffs, the beats, the simple things.

Many of the participants claimed that the subgenre of thrash metal was the most conducive for an emerging pit. Bryan explained how thrash facilitated his entry into the moshpit:

> A lot of old school thrash songs had that kind of breakdown ("Indians" by Anthrax for example) and that was the mosh part of the song. It is hard to describe the riff though. Speed of course is essential and the more jarring the riff, the more discordant the riff; the more you want to throw yourself into that chaotic situation.

Kody, a classically trained musician, explained certain songs that facilitate a successful circle pit,

> Exodus's "Toxic Waltz," it has to have that cadence. The best circle pit song would be anything in ¾ time, so you got that 1, 2, 3 rhythm. You still have that down beat on the fourth so it still keeps you going but it has that rolling rhythm. Even in a 6/8, anything with that three. For me, that's what does it, that is what makes me want to run or have more movement while moshing.

During our third follow-up interview Kody went into more depth about certain parts of a song that can encourage a unified physical expression within the moshpit:

> …the drop in the song. That climax after a crescendo in a song or even after a decrescendo where things slow right down and swells up again. It is a buildup, a crescendo builds from something very small or very soft into something very large or loud or aggressive. Really chuggy riffs, lower notes, big open drums, usually slow driving riffs. Emotionally I follow that climax, that decrescendo. And if it is a song that I really like and I know how it goes, then that anticipation just grows and grows until it finally gets to that part and then you just let loose.

For moshers such as Kody, Scott, Stefan and Bryan, the moshpit is seen as a space where friendships are created, maintained and played out. Kody stated, "You see almost the same people in the pit at every show. You spend so much time with those people, you're spending hours with these guys and in a very intimate way. You're sharing bodily fluids; it's a type of bond. Afterwards we all congratulate each other because it's kind of like yah, *we* just did that." Moshpit participation is further encouragement through the display of high fives, patting each other on the back, and even hugs. Interestingly, the moshpit can be used as a forum for social activism by physically representing and expressing marginalized voices. For one mosher, who was not part of the research study but is seen by many local metal fans as indispensable to the metal community, he moshes on behalf of people who have various types of disabilities and barriers that prevent them from participating in the moshpit. This could be seen as a form of martyrdom in terms of enduring and

experiencing suffering for others. For him, the moshpit is a site of social justice and camaraderie. Moshpitters such as Stefan, Josh, and Kody respect and look up to him because of the respect, experience and encouragement he offers: "He's one of the old school boys, I have a lot of respect for him. He tries to get people moshing" (Stefan).

Conclusion: Exploring the Darker Aspects of Leisure

The research project sought to challenge pre-existing understandings of moshpit culture in order to demonstrate its social importance as a leisure expression. Framing the research within leisure studies demonstrated the meanings and social implications inherent in moshing practices. Through the use of narrative ethnography, the study critiqued how leisure scholarship has traditionally understood pain, suffering, and physical aggression. Currently, there is a lack of analysis and consideration for moshpit culture and extreme metal practices within leisure research within North America. Moshing is a worldwide practice within heavy metal culture and this is problematic in terms of the pervasiveness of music and its significance in leisure. Moshing lends itself to identity formation, repressive expressions, experimentation, and a sense of camaraderie (Ambrose, 2001; Palmer, 2005; Simon, 1997; Tsitsos, 1999). All of these aspects are common in normative leisure practices. Moshing provides a medium for female and male metal fans to explore and play out their everyday anxieties, pleasures, and conflicts within a space that was evidently fraught with conflict, contradiction, and constructions of normative masculinity. Moshing provides a voice for young people to challenge the "falsification of everyday life, a cathartic outlet for everyday aggression, and a medium for experiencing the exhilaration of a wide-awake and focused life" (Halnon, 2006, p. 36). Underground musical venues are conducive to transgressive subcultural practices such as moshing where fans confront and explore the horrors of existence. The participants' exploration of grim emotions has not occurred as some autonomous aesthetic project

but is used to "serve the broader purpose of casting away obstacles, motivating the self, and clearing a path for action" (Berger, 1999, p. 272). Metal fans become addicted to the totality of the moshpit experience, because it allows them regulated freedom to establish, out of the chaos, their own social order and subcultural norms. They create regulations which define the type of dance, accepted behaviour, treatment of fellow moshers, and degree of rebellion. Moshing, headbanging, and releasing pent up everyday frustrations are a vital part of the metal experience. This is echoed by Halnon's (2006) succinct summary of the role and importance moshing and extreme metal music play in the everyday lives of metal fans:

> It is a resistance to superficiality and duplicity, to pressures to conform, and to un-equalizing judgements. It is a demand for community, freedom, and equality and an opportunity to surface, release, and transform everyday frustrations and aggressions into wide-awake consciousness and the exhilaration of being alive (p. 46).

By integrating key ideas from Turner (1979), Maffesoli (1993), and Cage (1957) into the analysis of moshing, the study illustrated that moshing was more than just mere musical appreciation and physical exertion. From the participants' narratives the moshpit was constructed as a liminal space that challenged normal, everyday understandings of self-understanding, behaviour, and norms (Turner, 1979). Within this ritually organized time-out from everyday rules and expectations, metal fans explored and played with darker aspects of reality through physical interaction in the pit. The moshpit also symbolized the Dionysian aesthetic where elements of pain, pleasure, euphoria, and suffering were indistinct. The majority of the metal fans that I interviewed accounted for the fact that both elements of pain and pleasure had to be present in order to achieve a state of euphoria and invigoration. For moshers like Bryan, Stefan, Scott, Jeremy, Josh, and Kody, the physical pain experienced within the moshpit was desirable but there were distinct pain thresholds that if transgressed would disrupt the pleasurable experience. The importance of physical pain reflected the ongoing discourses of hegemonic masculinity, but it also represented how metal

fans manifested and confronted their feelings of alienation and anger through subcultural expressions. By analyzing the moshpit narratives within the study, it became evident that being committed to extreme metal and its transgressive practices involved levels of multiplicity and playfulness. Drawing upon Cage's (1957) philosophical musings of contemporary music and noise, the current study aimed at conjuring up the reader's curiosity about moshpit culture while deconstructing prevalent evaluative judgements that have previously exhausted its validity for consideration by leisure scholars. Encountering the extremes such as moshpit culture and extreme metal music we begin to transform our understandings so we remain attentive to the multi-layered and paradoxical nature of leisure.

Narrative ethnographic approach was appropriate because it added depth and detail to a perceived homogenous music subculture and practice. My two research questions were: in what ways does extreme metal and moshing reflect and inform our social world? How do underground musical communities and subversive physical practices contribute to our understandings of how violence, pain, pleasure, and suffering can be held with compassion and possibility in leisure? Due to size, gender, experience, age, and preferred styles of moshing, the participants' stories contributed to a fuller understanding of the moshpit as a complex and negotiated space, challenging the idea that the moshpit is a uniform practice and that extreme metal is a monolithic subgenre. Participants such as Jeremy and Bryan were attentive to the fact that the moshpit reflected the realities inherent in extreme metal music. The moshpit was seen as a social trajectory that offered existential anxieties, everyday frustrations, and feelings of alienation a physical expression. Whatever was happening on the dance floor was also being taken up in extreme metal lyrics. The majority of the participants associated moshing with normative leisure practices such as football,

hockey, and rugby; therefore, this association speaks to the role that pain, violence, and pleasure play within leisure.

According to Rojek (1989), the ways in which leisure practitioners have attempted to control and regiment leisure promotes and offers various forms of resistance. Moshing will continue to play a vital role in the lives of heavy metal fans even though metal culture in North America, both ideologically and politically, struggles to find venues for expression. Practices of leisure and recreation for personal growth and development are strongly mediated by other schemas. No longer can leisure scholars adequately talk of a sphere of social practice called "leisure" as if it were something discrete and distanced from the articulation and material consequences of other personal and social practices (Willis, 1978). This current study illustrated the ways in which leisure encompasses intersecting, overlapping and interconnecting arenas of research and practice. Tomlinson (1999) suggests that "leisure should be understood as integrally connected to wider relations of culture, status, and power, rather than being seen as some autonomous sphere of social life" (p. 64). Examining moshpit culture and extreme metal music is important because it forces us to re-think the ways in which we can support musical communities on the margins while maintaining their 'underground' status. The moshpit continues to be a site of collective struggle, an ongoing negotiation of masculinity, identity, and possibility.

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