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Spirit in the Speakers:
Collective Spirituality in Electronic Music Subcultures

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of Honors

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of religion and spiritual practice should not go unnoticed in understanding a society and its various behaviors (McCullough and Willoughby, 2009). Social meaning and motivation can be derived from religious doctrines and expectations that arise within collective belief systems. It is this collective behavior that often drives groups to exist with cohesion and solidarity (Durkheim, 1912). As Western society becomes more and more individualistic (Bellah et al. 1985), for example, social thought follows this pattern, thereby resulting in more individualized expressions of spiritual experience. In addition to the individualized experiences, oppositional consciousness (Mansbridge, 2001), or the collective culture of marginalized, "deviant" groups of people, can bring individuals' experiences together to create a spiritual culture that creates shared spiritual experiences, not wholly unlike those which can be found in formal religious rituals. Individuals gather and model behavior upon that of surrounding others that builds through a collective contagion enabling groups of people to experience intense emotion and perceptions through prolonged collective experience (Durkheim, 1912; Le Bon, 2009). Of the tools humans use to induce such collective experiences, music is one of the oldest (Eyerman 2002; Sarabia and Shriver 2004; Futrell, Simi, and Gottschalk 2006). Electronic music communities house one of the most strikingly spiritual music-based subcultures in 21st century North America. Electronic music communities use music to enhance shared experiences, thereby creating a unique emotional and spiritual subculture (Sylvan, 2002).

Through participant observation and in-depth interviewing, this research examines the collective behaviors and interactions within American electronic music

2

communities in order to identify how musical experience serves as spiritual experience for many participants. This research serves as insider knowledge with attention to potential biases, to further develop sociological understandings of spirituality and collective behavior (Bennett, 2002).

COLLECTIVE SPIRITUAL BEHAVIOR IN MUSICAL CONTEXT

Spiritual concepts and symbols pervade human culture, touching the social body constantly in ways both explicit and unnoticed (Aupers and Houtman, 2006). Be it the prayer before a family meal, the cross on the side of the road, or the Buddha statue that greets patrons on entrance to a Chinese restaurant, spirituality continuously appears throughout social institutions. While many such elements of spirituality may be simple to recognize, others camouflage beneath the guise of everyday life. Some types of music, for example, specifically aim to induce spiritual experience.

At concerts, people focus attention at a specific point. Here, the music guides the worship-like, often emotional experience that enables listeners to reach altered states of consciousness. Collins' interaction ritual theory applies to much of this response.As individuals interact with others successfully, they create an emotional response that builds into a passionate, group solidifying state, "linking past situations with the present into a chain" (2004: 18). Collins describes a successful interaction ritual as having four essential ingredients (group assembly, barrier to outsiders, mutual focus of attention, and shared mood), all of which combined have four group empowering results (group solidarity, emotional energy in individuals, sacred objects, and moral standards). A

graphic representation of Collins' model of a successful interaction can be found in Appendix II.

As crowds of concert spectators assemble, all focused on the music and mood within the crowd, the individuals mimic one another with common body movements through dance and rely on musical leaders to carry them on collective experiences (Wedenoja, 1990). In an organized church setting, pastors lead congregations through similar incidences, using rituals and symbols (often involving music) to drive emotional and spiritual experiences. Some subgenres of electronic music, particularly psychedelic trance music (also known as an abbreviated psytrance), aim specifically at working crowds into altered states, using sound and collective experience to move the mind toward spiritually-focused thought patterns, imbibing participants in perceived states of elevated consciousness. As noted by St. John (2006: 3), some forms of electronic music can be considered "expressive of a religiosity that is at variance to or complicates institutional religion (i.e. Christianity)…[and] are often concerned with the subculture or popular culture of religion and the (re)appearance of the sacred." This use of spiritual focus and collective behavior creates an element of religiosity unique to the musical genre, warranting consideration and examination as a potential religious subculture.

Electronic dance music grew in popularity in the 1980's in the United States and by the 1990's, the music developed into "rave" culture, or a subculture that revolved around late-night dance parties and fast paced, beat-driven music (Neill, 2002). Many so-called ravers, or those who regularly participate in rave culture, described their musical experiences as "therapeutic…a form of healing comparable both to shamanic, ecstatic healing documented in ethnographies of small-scale non-western societies, and to

spiritual experiences in modern western subcultures" (Hutson, 2000: 36). Hutson reports

several ravers' musical experience using words such as "church," "sacred,"

"congregation," "heaven," "soul," and "eternity". Even many of the establishments in

which raves took place hold meaningful stake in religion. Hutson describes numerous

locations where raves took place, including a Nashville venue called the Church, known

to house electronic music events known as "Friday Night Mass." A Great Britain rave

was held within a church where the performing disc jockeys used the altar as a stage. One

individual Hutson interviewed compared his experience with a conventional church goer,

describing his experience as follows:

> [On Sunday morning after the rave] I see people headed off to church dressed in their Sunday best
>
> and I just have to smile because I know that last night on the dance floor I felt closer to God than
>
> their church with all its doctrines and double standards will ever bring them (38, 2000).

The comparison between rave experience and the experience of conventional religion

demonstrates ravers' perceived need for religious experience with more depth and

freedom, with a stronger connection to the natural world and less restriction by

mainstream cultural norms (see Hutson, 1999: 53-77).

    While participants within electronic music culture may find it easy to compare

musical experience with that of mainstream church goers, the appearance many raves

take on would not allow the common observer to easily discern that such a depth of

spiritual experience exists. The rave culture takes on a circus-like exterior, with

participants in "costumes, skillful acrobatic displays and fire-twirling, kaleidoscope

lightshows and elaborately constructed soundscapes and art spaces" (St. John, 2006: 6).

In addition to flashy dress and performance, the music events blend concepts of

primitivism, with focus on tribalism and natural living as well as futurism, employing

space-aged themes. As Hutson (2000) describes, the combination of futurism and primitivism reflects the pattern of removal from the mainstream that ravers endeavor to achieve, and it displays the desire to consider more unorthodox lifestyles. This distaste for modern living, coupled with rave doctrines like "Peace, Love, Unity, Respect" (PLUR), create an atmosphere of collectivity in which ravers attempt to live without social hierarchy and respect for every person, where harmony, cohesion, and equality provide a stark contrast to the modern, rationalized world.

Many participants in electronic music culture note that the spiritual emotions they experience at concerts are a direct effect of musical stimulation. In rave culture, the disc jockies take on the role of "technoshamans" using music to elevate the emotions of crowds, taking participants "on an overnight journey, a psychic voyage" (Hutson, 1999: 53-77). After the musical healing experience, ravers report feeling better about themselves, losing emotions of fear and worry, and experience sensations of calmness and heightened awareness (Hutson, 2000). According to Collins' definition, these feelings of personal completeness are the emotional residue of successful interaction rituals and lead to greater group solidarity (2004: 108).

While such music experiences may assist participants in reaching ecstatic states, other factors could contribute to feelings of altered consciousness. Prolonged periods of exercise (such as dance) can cause bodily exhaustion, and in severe cases it can cause a person to lose control of his or her breath and become dizzy or even hyperventilate (Hutson, 2000). This intense stimulation, paired with intensive collective ritual, creates an environment in which emotional energy increases, allowing for feelings of group solidarity to rise when individuals are surrounded by likeminded participants (see Heider

and Warner, 2010). Collins' concept of interaction ritual examines group experience as "mechanism of mutually focused emotion and attention producing a momentarily shared reality, which thereby generates solidarity and symbols of group membership" (Collins, 2004: 7). With a focus on unity and respect of others, ravers gravitate toward shared experience, bolstering the effects that interactive rituals offer by elevating the meaning of collective thought and behavior through preexisting themes of harmony and oneness.

When Hutson (2000) asked what benefit ravers received from attending electronic music events, most responded with more than a simple recreation-based answer. Respondents described their experiences as highly spiritual, consciousness-expanding, reality altering events, sometimes even life changing and monumental. This heightened experience, however, does not easily transcend the confines of the concert itself. Ravers do not engage in spiritual practice as effortlessly in the confines of their homes as they might at a loud, crowded concert.

Hutson compares the electronic dance music culture of ravers to that of Evangelicals. He notes that three important characteristics of Evangleical conversions can be observed within his collection of participant testimonials. These include the "raw, personal emotions of a spiritual nature, unstructured by the norms of the church…out-of-body experience, sometimes involving hallucinations that bring the convert close to God…and healing and mental hygiene experienced after conversion" (2000: 40). These comparisons demonstrate the highly emotive manner in which ravers might respond to dance music and collective, ritualistic body movements. Both conversions in conventional religion and music-based spiritual experience can be experienced with great, lasting intensity that might lead participators to feel reality has changed. Electronic

dance music generates a stimulating, shared environment that unites members in solidarity, exhibiting enough strictness and enough freedom to keep participants interested and engaged. The importance ravers place on consciousness expansion through music demands more of musicians than a good time. Musicians within this subculture have expectations of spiritual guidance to uphold, and participants look to such spiritual-facilitators to lead them throughout their journeys.

METHODS

Between 2007 and 2012, I conducted participant-observation in the electronic music community. This research led me to notice many peculiarities within electronic music communities—things both wholly unique and things that can be closely compared to other groups—and inspired me to use my collected observations and formal sociological exploration to better understand the subculture.

During the years of my highest level of participation (2007-2010), I noticed a great deal of spiritual ritual. These rituals took the form of casual conversations, healing sessions, responses to symbology, and collective response to music. This strong spiritual-focus at electronic music events and the similarities between the beliefs held by participants, specifically at psychedelic trance events, sparked my interests and shifted my research to focus specifically on spiritual activity and beliefs within electronic music communities. By seeking to more fully understand and characterize the subculture and the collective behaviors therein, the group's religious and spiritual activities could be more accurately depicted.

In addition to the observations I collected and recorded during my years as a participant, I also conducted formal and informal interviews with participants. For the interviews, I used convenience and snowball sampling to find respondents and conducted private individual interviews both at events and with individuals over the telephone. Nine interviews were conducted in person, and seven were conducted over the telephone.

All sixteen respondents were white. Seven were male and nine were female, all between the ages of 22 and 39. These demographics are typical for the electronic music community as a whole (Thornton, 1996). Ten respondents have been a part of the electronic music community for seven or more years, while four had been a participant for four to six years, and two had been a participant for three years or less. Seven respondents attended events weekly, four attended events multiple times per month, one attended monthly, three attended multiple events per year. One (Respondent J) reported attendance "as often as possible."

The respondents were questioned about their beliefs in God(s), images of God(s), spiritual practices, musical and spiritual experiences, and opinions on electronic music, as well as the community that surrounds that music. A list of these questions and responses can be found in Appendix I.

The observational aspect of research was developed at multiple events, each of which varied in size and length, from 20 to 5000 participants and from four hours to four days. At most of these events I was a bystander, and I did not participate actively in any manner other than observation. This separation allowed my research to be as unbiased as possible, even though I have also participated in many similar events. The combination of

this observation and the formal interviews gave me a foundation to uncover this subculture's use of musical experience as spiritual experience.

RESULTS

Concept of Spirituality

Spiritual or Not?

Of the sixteen respondents interviewed, eleven defined themselves as spiritual, one defined himself as religious, and the remaining four defined themselves as neither religious nor spiritual. The majority's "spiritual" response suggests that many respondents believe in some form of metaphysical reality that guides their behaviors, whether such behaviors are ritualistic, performed to the benefit of a deity, or to satisfy some need within the respondent's own being. All four of the respondents who defined themselves as neither spiritual nor religious still identified spiritual practices in which they engage (see Appendix I).

Images of God

Many respondents identified with an image of God not unlike themselves. In fact, five of the respondents reported that they decidedly believe humans *are* God. Respondent D describes his personal understanding of God as "our own Self, with a capital S… our own consciousness is the eternal flame, and when we connect with ourselves on a deeper level we find that our self is all we have." Similarly, Respondent J believes in "a connection between all beings…the merging of all thought and intention. Sort of like, everyone simultaneously creates their own god, which is themselves." Respondents D

and J feel as though each individual human possesses qualities of God within his or her own mind, and no other deity or higher power exists outside of the individual. As Respondent P says, "everything we see and know and interface with is actually inside our brain."

Others who identified humans as God saw the relationship slightly differently. Instead of humans acting as an individual God, God exists to them as what occurs when humans act passionately, as described in the statement "human beings are the higher power when they put their heart and soul into something" (Respondent H). Another respondent (Q) stated that humans become God when acting collectively, when they "exist together as part of the one great living, breathing, creating, destroying, infinitely balancing everything that is."

Four other respondents reported that they understood God not as a person, but as abstract energy, "a power or force" (Respondent N), using words such as "etheric" (Respondent K), "light," and "intangible" (Respondent R). Respondent O explicitly defined her concept of God as "energy," and she described that energy as "the constant that comes from the void."

In the electronic music community, particularly at psychedelic trance festivals, I noticed a great deal of what I would term as *energy transfer*. In Collins's theory, energy can be transferred from person to person in the form of emotional energy to promote group solidarity. Emotional energy is created during interaction rituals, and it can be marked in individuals as "feelings of confidence, elation, strength, enthusiasm, and initiative in taking action" (Collins, 2004: 49). As individuals interact with one another, the emotions initially felt in response to live music are amplified. With the amplification

of positive feelings, the individuals are continually drawn to experience such emotionally charged events, and they continue to act as participants. With the continued participation, the emotional energy continues to build, causing an even greater desire to be a part of the group. This strengthening of emotional ties promotes group solidarity.

Another form of energy transfer occurs as what participants may perceive as a literal transfer of energy for healing purposes. It is not uncommon at electronic music festivals to find multiple healing artists, often claiming to be able to manipulate energy, by way of a specific modality such as reiki or pranic healing, in order to facilitate healing and promote wellbeing to the energy's receivers. Often claiming to be "lightworkers" these healers feel that they have a connection to a higher source of abstract energy, a God source, which enables them to catalyze that energy and use it purposefully. This phenomenon uses elements of each of the previously discussed images of God that respondents reported. The belief in one's own human self to possess the power to heal others suggests that the individual contains higher powers, God-like healing powers, which can be summoned at will. Also, the use of energy or light proposes that an abstract energy in the universe contains healing, manipulable powers that are usually only attributed to supernatural forces. Because of these qualities within their work, such healing practitioners exemplify the idea that God is both human and abstract energy.

Two respondents felt that connectedness, "everything being connected to a degree which we haven't even begun to comprehend," described God (Respondent A). Two others thought of God as "a feeling…something you have to experience" as a temporary emotional state (Respondent S) "that feeling in your heart" (Respondent T).

Two respondents defined God as a benevolent entity, "something that can keep us sane here on Earth. Something that is good" (Respondent G). Of the sixteen interviewees, only one felt unsure of God, and Respondent M defined himself as "an atheist," however each of these respondents still felt they were "spiritual" and identified manners in which they choose to practice their spirituality.

Spiritual Practice

Spiritual practices among respondents, while wide in range, held many similarities. Three-fourths of the respondents identified prayer and meditation as a part of their personal spiritual practice. Two of these twelve specifically spoke of using audio tones to deepen their meditative states. Respondent M describes his meditations using binaural beats. When meditating to binaural beats:

> You have to wear headphones, and it goes between certain frequencies and they're supposed to make certain chakras, like the one I listened to the other day was like a throat chakra, its supposed to like, help heal your throat or something like that. These frequencies are I guess associated with a certain vibration that would hit the throat, and you put headphones on and it just kind of pans left and right, and also there's a visual. You can even have your eyes closed and you'll still see it. I meditated to it, and it was like very similar to a psychedelic experience or something like that. There were small amounts of visuals that were created from it.

Not wholly unlike the binaural beats, six of the sixteen respondents identified music in general as an important aspect of personal spiritual practices. Respondent D

specifically identifies his experiences with psytrance events as profoundly spiritual, describing them as "a bonding experience with God, goddess…light, energy, sacred geometry, ancestors, whatever you want to call that thing... this culture and these gatherings are the peak of human experience and what keeps the evolution of consciousness progressing and transforming." Dance and connection with other people were two aspects many respondents did not feel could be wholly separate from music. During festivals, musical experience is largely created by the factors surrounding the music, rather than only by the music itself. As Collins describes, the co-presence of likeminded individuals—all focused on the same things with a similar mood—creates efficacious interaction rituals. The assembly of a group, combined with a common focal point and a meshing of shared emotional energy, allows for feelings of group cohesion, group moral righteousness, and the intensifying of the emotional energy created during interactions and sustained thereafter. As individuals come to an electronic music event, they naturally create a co-presence with other individuals. The participants focus on the music and use it to build upon internal emotions that they affirm with other participants. The act of dance at electronic music events serves as an opportunity to both express one's own emotive response to music as well as observe the emotive response of others present. By dancing with others, one's own emotional response and behavior can be compared to others and changed to either affirm or deny the behavior of other individuals. Eventually, participants fall into rhythmic synchronization with one another during dance as well as in interaction with one another.

At most events, participants engage in two or three types of dancing, including a light swaying dance pattern and a more elaborate fluid style of movement. Others use

props such as hula hoops and poi (a Hawaiian dance apparatus), but few deviate from the few "mainstream" styles of movement. By choosing to dance in a manner similar to other participants, group members affirm that the music helps them to achieve the same state of togetherness with the sound, further allowing for feelings of connectedness and opportunities for building emotional energy. As participants grow accustomed to the normal interactions within the group, they begin to act by anticipating the actions of others, rather than act in reaction to those actions. Eliot Chapple (1981) called this "rhythmic entrainment."

Additionally, when other participants affirm and deny the emotions of individuals other than themselves, Durkheim's (1912) concept of collective effervescence comes into play. As the participants continue to affirm one another's emotions and moods, they begin to experience widespread, shared emotions among many participants at once. The continuous interactions between members of the group eventually produce norms that are unique to that group's participation. It is the collective action and the shared emotions that create collective effervescence, which continues to intensify and promote group cohesion until a symbology is created to solidify the temporary interactions into more permanent emotional objects. These emotional objects can be used to invoke a sense of group membership even when the group is not present, as will be explored in the coming sections.

Many respondents identified yoga and exercise as a personal spiritual practice. Respondent N stated that she creates "a homeostasis of mind, body, and soul through exerting [her] body physically." She reported feeling spiritual and less restricted by her human form after exercise. Respondent Q stated that exercise helps to "align [her] to gain

insights [she is] ready to receive" that will enable spiritual growth. Respondent A noted that her yoga practice's focus on breath helps her to "get out of [her] body and…feel more spiritual."

Four respondents mentioned nature as an important aspect of spiritual practice. Respondent G states that being in nature allows him to "be [alone] and with [his] spirit at the same time." Many psytrance and electronic music festivals and events are held outdoors, involving camping in the open air, and give participants an experience that allows them to feel close to nature. Participants are without electric hookups in many cases, and often lack running water for several days. Such a need for self and community reliance creates closer bonds between participants, facilitating the companionship and communal qualities that many electronic music communities exhibit. Respondent D described one of his spiritual practices as "shamanic," stating, "the synergetic relationship between our biology and the dynamics of the universe and consciousness itself is a very important relationship." This respondent believed that by recognizing oneself as a part of worldly biology, or nature, the relationship between people and the spiritual realm is more easily experienced.

Three respondents identified psychedelic drugs as an aspect of spiritual practice. In relation to his shamanic practices, Respondent D describes a type of spiritual connection that "can only be fully experienced through peak mystical experience…Humans throughout the ages have found that psychedelics are one of the most important and straight forward tools when investigating the process and experience of existence." Other respondents identified "natural substances" (Respondent J) and a

"respect [for] the 4:20 spiritual activities" (Respondent P) to be an important part of their practice.

Oppositely, some participants responded negatively to psychedelics, noting with frustration that "a lot of people don't even show up for the music, they're just there for the drug culture" (Respondent M), and "when you turn around and see someone almost [overdosing on drugs], it kind of ruins the moment" (Respondent B).

Music as Spiritual Experience

Music and Connection to God

All of the respondents interviewed reported feeling that music brings them closer to understanding God. Even Respondent M, the atheist, responded positively, accounting "feeling I guess weightless or nothingness when I'm really in the music, I'm completely engulfed and surrounded by whatever the song might be at the time." Some respondents describe music as a gateway to higher power, or "an intermediating force between the world of everyday life and the realm of spirits and dreams, like a holy spirit or something. The deeper you go into music, the higher you can climb into realms of sonic bliss" (Respondent P). Others say music contains "serious power [for] healing" (Respondent Q) and that it can create a "mental euphoria" (Respondent B). Respondent D describes the manner in which music acts as

"a direct catalyst to [the] higher self…Music affects every part of our physical and spiritual self, through emotions, and through vibration of our molecular structure. Our universe is based on frequencies and harmonics. Music is the universal language…I feel that music is one of

the best tools when connecting with our higher self."

Through the use of music to connect with God, or to the higher self as a God form, respondents think of music as the mediating force between themselves and "the spirit world." At an electronic event, music will often continue for an entire weekend, without stopping at any hour of the day or night. Many psytrance musicians play sets that last eight or more hours to captivate the crowds in a prolonged spiritual experience, guided by music and intensified by extreme durations. While crowds are free to come and go from stage areas, this music can often be heard from anywhere within the event grounds, so all participants hear this music for the entire length of an event. The entire event, whether a few hours or several days, attempts to bring participants closer to their understanding of God.

Thirteen respondents identified electronic music as the genre that best enables them to achieve closeness with a higher power, five specifically stated psytrance, and four stated that all music brings them close to God. Eleven respondents reported feeling that music has been one of the strongest spiritual motivators in their lives. Respondent J describes music as "a constant source of motivation…grounding…a source of communion." Respondent A states that "the opportunities for [her] spirituality to develop and grow, in people who have an innate connection to it is limitless," and through this she has developed a "deeper appreciation for a divine presence…not being defined by a prescribed religion. It's impossible not to believe in a higher power." Respondent D noted that psytrance music events enable people to "break [their] shell[s] and open up to the ever present life that we all share…shattering the illusional prison we put ourselves

in" when we conform to mainstream society's expectations. Only three respondents did not feel that music helped them to develop spiritually.

In reference to electronic music, half of the respondents said that the reason they felt spiritual when experiencing an electronic music event likely stems from the fact that they perceive that the electronic music community as having a stronger spiritual focus than other music-based subcultures. As Respondent M describes, "electronic music is the only other type of music that encourages you to think about your existence and uses symbols from all religions to tune its listeners into a divine god or frequency…" and the style of music "typically draws similarly-minded, spiritual beings" (Respondent B). Many participants of psytrance festivals and gatherings attend with the sole purpose of ascending into religious experience, one in which they identify as something higher than mundane reality. This focus is present from opening to closing in many psytrance events.

Experience in Music and Community as Spiritual Ritual

At one particular psytrance festival, Genesis Music Festival, held in Asheville, North Carolina, the event opened with a ritual similar to the practices of pagan earth worshipping. A cleansing and energizing meditation began the ritual. There were roughly fifteen participants at the meditation, which was held inside of a covered geodesic dome, constructed specifically as a space for sacred activities like meditation and healing arts. During the meditation, participants focused on the visualization of expelling negative, unhealthy energies from their physical and energetic bodies, after which participants directed attention to absorbing clean, healthy energy from the surrounding universe to fill their entire body and chakras. This cleansing and energizing practice was performed to

better connect the participants to the earth, each other, and their higher, more spiritual selves. Once the meditation was complete, the participants exited the geodesic dome and surrounded an elaborately built fire pit to continue the opening ritual. The wood in the fire pit was purposefully stacked to imitate the shape of the Merkabah.

Physically, the Merkabah is composed of two four-sided pyramids, one upright and one upside down that exist inside of one another to form what looks somewhat like a three-dimensional Star of David. Energetically, the Merkabah is said to be a vessel composed of light that, through specific meditation and focus, can transport the mind and body into different dimensions. The significance of this Merkabah-shaped fire pit acting as the primary burning altar for the opening ceremony of Genesis Music Festival indicates the intention set by the ritual participants for the music and the community to allow participants to "ascend into other dimensions" during their time at the festival, giving participants an opportunity to engulf themselves in a music-based spiritual experience.

Before burning the Merkabah-shaped firewood, the ritual participants gathered around the fire pit, with five individuals in the center of the circle, four facing in a particular direction—one East, one West, one North, one South—acting as a particular corresponding element—fire, water, earth, and air—and one other individual acting as the element of the spirit. These individuals each spoke a poetic sentence or two, asking the respective spirit guides of the individuals' assigned direction and element to bless the festival with healing, connection, guidance, and protection. Once this spoken ritual was complete, the spirit element individual called on "the spirit" for light and protection and lit the Merkabah shaped firewood. The participants let out a howl once the flames caught,

hugged one another, and a DJ immediately took the stage for the commencing of 48 straight hours of music.

The Spiritual Separation of Electronic Music

As noted, half of respondents felt that electronic music stands out as more spiritual than other genres of music. Many of these respondents mentioned the strong connection to others as the source of electronic music's spiritual base. Respondent A states that electronic music participants show more "anti-violence and [are] more accepting and tolerant than participants at a metal or rock show," and there is "no spirituality" in the majority of other music genres. One respondent described a physical connection with others during events that he finds nowhere else: "For me it's easier to connect with folks on the dance floor. When you've shared a space with others on the dance floor for eight plus hours, well, there are no words for it" (Respondent J). This extended time period of live musical experience rarely happens during a concert setting outside of psytrance events. Because the extended performance time is an uncommon practice in musical performance, it is unlikely that concertgoers of other musical styles will experience this form of spiritual experience through extreme prolongation of electronic music and dance. Similarly, Respondent D described his experiences with music and dance as "gathering the tribe to dance around the fire all night, it's what our ancestors have done since the beginning of time. It's the sacred, sacred communion…Dancing is active meditation."

Only one respondent specifically identified psychedelic drugs as a spiritually defining factor in the electronic music community, noting "that hallucinogens play a huge

role in the psytrance community" and this fact "is a direct reflection of the group-mind and spiritual outlook" (Respondent D). In many cases, spiritual experience rests in the usage of mind-altering substances, particularly psychedelics such as marijuana, LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide), DMT (dimethyltryptamine), MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxy-N-methylamphetamine), or psilocybin mushrooms. While lesser-known research chemicals are also fairly prevalent in the community's drug circles, it is these five that are most actively sought and used at electronic music events, and many actively profess that such substances help engage users in spiritual experience. In some cases, drug use can alter community and individual bonds, either strengthening or weakening the collective emotion felt by drug users (Kavanaugh and Anderson, 2008).

Spiritual Experiences Through Music

Five respondents recalled specific experiences in which they felt a spiritual connection through music after the consumption of mind-altering substances. Respondents recalled experiences in which their drug-enhanced musical experiences gave them sensations such as "goose bumps" and a "calming feeling" (Respondent G), and the drugs made them "feel closer to music, more spiritual" (Respondent H).

Respondent N described a specific, drug-enhanced episode in which she had "a vision of energy waves."

> Every note the band played the sound wave moved forward and passed over the crowd. Then I noticed that there was around the crowd and each person there was a bubble of light that was glowing like some kind of electric mist. Then I had this overwhelming sense of peace, of calm, and that everything in my life was just

exactly as it should be, that everything I had experienced was a culmination of

events that happened so I could be exactly where I was at that moment in time.

This was when I first realized the connectivity of all things through vibration and

that music is a spiritual tool through audio vibrations.

Such an experience might have been less spiritual, or perceived entirely differently or not

at all, without the enhancement of perception-changing chemicals. Respondent E

described a similar occurrence.

It was a long time ago at one of my first shows…and I had eaten some LSD. I

guess it could have been the [LSD], but it was so spiritual. I felt like I could see

everyone's light. The light all around them that was their individual life sources."

Each of the respondents (N and E) noted a visual light as an important part of the drug-

enhanced spiritual experience.

Not all participants consume or even appreciate the fact that drugs are largely

used at events, however. Only four respondents specifically identified drug use as a

positive aspect of spiritual experience. Two respondents thought drug use was a negative,

distracting practice that did not help them to achieve spiritual connection through music.

Respondent B describes events in which "there are a lot of ignorant people that go around

and do a lot of drugs," and that "ruins the experience" for her.

A majority of respondents identified having a memorable, non-drug related

spiritual experience at a music event. These experiences were described as "life-

changing" (Respondent A) and as having "endless potentials" (Respondent D).

Respondent J described the first time he heard psytrance to be "like someone had

smashed a window between me and myself, and for the first time I was meeting myself"

while completely sober. Respondent P described his spiritual experience with music to be a daily occurrence in which music keeps his "chi" centered.

In reference to setting, most respondents recognized live concert-style events as eliciting more spiritually connected experiences than other settings. Respondent D said, "Having other beings around you adds to the energy and intensity of the experience." This response suggests that the communally intensifying effect of larger groups is less likely to occur while at home alone or with a smaller group of people, and Collins's interaction ritual theory supports Respondent D's assumptions. With group assembly, there is greater opportunity for meaningful, successful interactions that enable emotional energy to compound and create a more intense ritual. Successful, emotionally charged rituals create an emotional contagion, allowing the emotions of the group to spread from person to person. As the group emotion becomes homogenous, the group's solidarity increases, leading to even more emotional energy (Collins, 2004: 108).

Five respondents stated that music, either live or recorded, could stimulate spiritual experience, one stating, "the magic happens when it happens" (Respondent O). Only one respondent identified her home as the setting where she most often felt spiritually connected through music. These at-home spiritual experiences could be an individual response to music, or they could be the result of the long-term effects of successful interaction rituals. When an interaction ritual occurs over and over, individuals assign certain emotions to symbols of that ritual. Once those symbols are assigned to the ritual, individuals may draw emotional energy from the symbol that is similar to the energy they receive during the ritual itself. In this way, the symbols can drive the

experience for an individual even during moments when they have no partners with whom to build emotional energy (Collins, 2004: 81).

Nearly all of the respondents (81%) noted that they felt that other individuals have similar spiritual experiences with music as themselves. Respondent H notes that "whether or not [people] realize it, we are all tapping in collectively in these shared experiences." Respondent N mentioned worldwide subcultural participation, that there are many individuals "who gather together to celebrate the oneness of all things in the universe with electronic music and dance," and such gatherings exhibit qualities that are "a lot more tribal and even a little ritualistic sometimes" bringing people from different backgrounds to collectively practice in an intentionally spiritual musical experience. One respondent noted that he did not "feel that [people] share similar spiritual connections…however…when [people] are all dancing to the same beat, on the same beat…connection goes beyond all beyonds…that is more spiritual than anything" (Respondent D).

Symbology

Symbols are important mechanisms that enable individuals to harness the energy of interactions for later use, outside of the ritual setting. When asked whether or not they recognized any specific, recurring symbols within the electronic music community, all of respondents identified at least one symbol. One of the most noted symbols in the community resulted as a form of "sacred geometry." Just over half of the respondents spoke of ancient, geometric symbols outright. When asked to describe sacred geometry, Respondent D provided this definition:

Sacred Geometry itself is a manifestation of the universal frequencies and patterns that naturally exist. When one enters the trance deep enough, one can become engulfed in Sacred Geometry and even dissolve into endless fractals. So yes, symbology goes very deep in the trance community, Sacred Geometry is an unspoken language used to communicate throughout the stars.

Multiple respondents noted the repeated appearance of the ancient civilizations such as Egyptian and Mayan ideologies. By casually listening to the account of many electronic music participants outside of the interview setting, I ascertained that the Mayan prophecy for the year of 2012 was held with high significance, and many individuals professed the belief that on December 21st, 2012, a separation of worldly dimensions would occur in which some humans would ascend energetically into a higher dimension, and other humans who are less spiritually developed would remain in the current dimension to continue to experience worldly hardships such as financial ruin and environmental degradation until their ultimate deaths.

A few respondents identified other religious symbols, such as Buddhist, Hindu, and Jewish symbols, as prevalent in the electronic music community. Blatantly Christian symbols, however, were largely absent. The lack of Christian symbology in this "deviant" community is likely the result of resistance to mainstream cultural values. Because Christianity is the dominant religion the United States, especially in the Southeastern United States where this research was conducted, the absence of Christian texts and ideas is a result of the defiance of conventional value systems. Three respondents noted that alien life and space concepts appeared a great deal in the context

of electronic music. Others mentioned generalized symbols, such as peace and love, were prevalent.

Two respondents note that much of the symbology can be seen in the art forms surrounding the music community, and recently one has noticed "an upsurge of live, visionary art with live music and Sacred Geometry" (Respondent P) and that there is "so much detail in the art, like the life flower, a lot of geometrical designs…that's on everything" (Respondent B). A couple of respondents said the community is "too diverse" for specific symbols, while one folk anthropologist said the community itself acted as an overarching symbol.

Perceptions of Community

Connection to the Music Community

Two respondents identified as employees of the music industry. Respondent A described her involvement as occurring on "a daily basis. It's my family, the biggest part of my life. As promoter of EDM, I'm a lover of it first. I'm always looking for ways to further develop our scene and bring something to the table." Respondent H noted that through her "work in the music community" she had an opportunity to meet many interesting people "and the friends [she] made because of a connection through music are some of the greatest, realest people in the world."

Two others defined themselves as artists. Respondent O specifically identified himself as "a technoshaman of sorts…a carrier wave, a bodhisattva for others to experience this magic [psytrance]." Half of the respondents identified themselves as a part of the psytrance "family" or said electronic music was a fundamental part of their

life and social circle, that they had "become so engulfed in it" that it had "become [the] ticket to community and friendship" (Respondent M).

A Unique Community

When asked what separates the community of people associated with electronic music, many respondents noted the friendships fostered as an immediate separation. Respondent D described the unique community of psytrance listeners by saying:

> The pystrance community differs in that you're automatically looked upon as equal, part of a large family. I've never experienced so much love and openness, and I feel more connected to my psytrance family than I do most of my other connections. For me, its about as sacred as it gets, the knowing and feeling that you get when you're around hundreds of other people that know and understand you from a deeper level. There's an automatic comfort and a feeling of being at home.

Family is a very important concept to many participants within the electronic community. The familial connection that many perceive between themselves and other participants is fostered through repeated meetings at events. During these festivals and individual shows, participants recognize the same faces, have meaningful conversations, and share in profound experiences that encourage connection, constantly building emotional energy through interaction ritual chains. As the interaction ritual chains become longer and

longer, the energy between participants becomes so strong that they come to feel connected to the group with such strength that the group is like a chosen family, much stronger than other, less emotional communities participants may be a part of outside.

Style of dress is an important identifier of group membership at electronic music events. By dressing in a manner that is uniform with other participants, those who have been previously involved with the group can be visually separated from those who are new to the group, or those who are outsiders. Seasoned participants dress in earth tones, with layered, natural fabrics, and many wear pendants made of various crystals, minerals, and hemp that have been homemade or crafted by other members of the group. Dreadlocks and other ornate hairstyles are not uncommon for participants of both genders and all races. Both men and women can be found with feathers, beads, and fabric in their hair and worn as jewelry. Some of the male participants who do not opt for earth toned, natural fabrics wear a more street-friendly style, including oversized track jackets with bright, abstract prints, hand painted flat-billed hats, and skateboarding shoes. Although this street style is different than most, it is common enough within the communities that it does not cause the wearers to appear separate from the group.

Some respondents identified the ideologies held by community members as a crucial separating factor. Regionally, "the East Coast community" as opposed to the West Coast community "seems a lot less into being concerned with style and appearance" (Respondent J). Regional differences aside, electronic music exhibits positive, fun-loving values, and "EDM fans rage, dance, and have a blast. Rock, Country, and Metal fans for the most part drink heavily, mosh, fight and are more destructive and aggressive people" (Respondent A). Electronic music communities are also "motivated by spreading love

and coming from a place of compassion and understanding" (Respondent Q), and many participants are "trying to be one" (Respondent C), or to exist together peacefully behind ideas of unity.

Community Values

Family appeared as an important metaphor of community for many respondents. The electronic music community is a family that "helps each other out, carpools to festivals, fosters the arts since so many people are inspired by the music and the scene" (Respondent A). The "positive" ideology of so many of the community's members was also frequently mentioned as another key aspect of the community's value system. Values most often mentioned were, in descending order:

- o Love
- o Acceptance
- o Respect
- o Compassion
- o Peace
- o Responsibility
- o Positivity
- o Kindness
- o Gratitude

Many electronic music gatherings are named for the specific values the community wishes to embody. The aforementioned Genesis Music Festival was so named to encourage attendees to "open a portal of Healing, Love, and Divine Creativity activating a symbiotic relationship with Earth" (Genesis Festival's Facebook Page). Another EDM event, held in Johnson City, Tennessee, was named Awareness to promote spiritual endeavors, community responsibility, and respect for organizations within activist

communities and art circles. The naming of events based on value importance demonstrates the significance that ideology has in the subculture.

CONCLUSION

In sum, the results of the research provide evidence that the world of musical experience is vast and deep, provoking intense emotion in listeners. The significance of live music in a shared environment can be a powerful experience that bonds participants in a manner that other, less emotional circumstances cannot. These bonds that form under heightened emotion allow for new patterns of communication, both verbal and nonverbal, to emerge in communities, creating new norms and values with prolonged interaction.

As a whole, Americans who do not claim to be religious are on the rise (Funk and Smith, 2012; Hout and Fischer, 2002; Baker and Smith, 2009). Many of these nonreligious Americans fall into the so-called "nones" category (Funk and Smith, 2012: 7), in which they claim to be neither spiritual nor religious. However, many who claim to be nonreligious continue to believe in a higher power, but refrain from participating in organized religion and describe spiritual practices in which they engage (Hout and Fischer, 2002). Chaves marks an increase in those who identify as "spiritual but not religious," growing from 11% of 18-39 year olds in 1998 to 18% 2008 (2001: 40). Multiple reasons exist for the growing separation from organized religion. Baker and Smith identify religious socialization (those who have a nonreligious upbringing), political affiliation (liberalism), and demographics (young, white males from the West) to be some of the underlying factors for choosing nonreligion (2009).

The demographics of those interviewed in my research reflected such categories. All respondents were white and under the age of 40 years old. Almost half were male, and while they were not all from the western United States, several were born into families from California or had lived in the West at some point during their lifetimes. While my interview questions did not specifically determine the familial religious socialization or the political affiliations of respondents, my participant observation noted the politically liberal viewpoints of many within the community. For example, participants commonly engaged in conversations that exhibited support for alternative energy, marijuana legalization, and social activism.

With the absence of organized religion, nonreligious believers seek spiritual fulfillment through alternative means, largely relying on media for accessibility to alternative forms of spiritual practice (Lynch, 2006). Popular music remains a prevalent avenue for spiritual exploration, granting listeners both spiritual gratification (Carr, 2006; Hamel, 1979; Yob, 2010) and a unifying group focus that reinforces cohesion (Haenfler, 2004; Hunt 2008 and 2010).

While music and other items of mutual focus solidify group cohesion, failed ideologies cripple that solidity (see Collins, 2004: 50-53). With the passing of December 21st, 2012 (a date once held with high significance for the electronic music community), sans apocalyptic events, further research could be of interest to determine the nature rationalization or collapse within the ideological infrastructure of the community. The End Times conversation topic could potentially be identified as a failed ritual within the electronic community. The failure of "dimensional divergence" on the set date could prove to diminish philosophical solidarity, and thereby the group solidarity, within the

community. Alternatively, the community could find a way to rationalize the events in a way that would permit the continued cohesion of the group (Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter, 1956). Because of the positive ideologies that exist within the electronic music community, the group may easily find a way to rationalize and even appreciate the lack of divergence.

While the electronic music community as a whole is currently growing quickly in popularity (Mason, 2013), the psychedelic trance community is not expanding as fast. The denial of mainstream ideals may contribute to the leisurely pace of growth, as well as the sound of the music, which can sound somewhat alien to the unaccustomed ear. These elements of exclusion likely encourage the cohesion of the psytrance community by discouraging fleeting participants from continued involvement (Stark and Finke, 2001). Small as it may be, the psytrance community is notably unified in ideology and spiritual purpose.

The emergence of patterns and symbology within the study showed the importance that music has within heightened experience. In electronic music communities, music is a force that binds members together and initiates an emotional experience that is often perceived as spiritual. This approach to spiritual experience and solidarity is not limited to electronic music and can be applied to multiple settings. Music allows individuals to form attachments that make a given experience more meaningful, thereby unifying groups and solidifying community values. Further research could be done within other music communities, as well as religious settings that use music as a central focus in worship, to monitor participant behavior, observe collective emotions,

and identify patterns in community structure to fully define the role of music within

populations.

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Appendix I

RESPONDENT	A	B	C	D
Sex:	F	F	F	M
Are you religious, spiritual, both, or neither?	Spiritual	Spiritual	Spiritual	Spiritual
Image(s) of God:	Connectedness, A Presence	Unsure	Entity	Humans are God
Spiritual Practices:	Yoga and Exercise, Listening to Music, Dance	Prayer or Meditation	Prayer or Meditation, Yoga and Exercise, Being in Nature	Listening to Music, Being in Nature, Dance,
Does music bring you closer to God?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Does music help you progress spiritually?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
What separates electronic music as spiritual?	Spiritual Focus	Spiritual Focus	Fad	Spiritual Focus, Connection to Others, Psychedelics
Have you had a specific experience that changed your spiritual relationship to the music?	Yes, Non-Drug Related	Yes, Non-Drug Related	Yes, Non-Drug Related	Yes, Non-Drug Related
Where do you feel a stronger connection?	Live	Home	Live	Live
Do you feel others have a similar experience to yours?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Do you notice any spiritual symbols unique to this electronic music community?	None	Sacred Geometry, Extraterrestrial, Art	Ancient Civilization, Other Religions	Sacred Geometry
How long have you been involved with this music community?	More than 7 years	More than 7 years	More than 7 years	More than 7 years
How often do you participate in music events?	Weekly	Weekly	Multiple Times per Year	Multiple times a month
Describe your connection to the music community:	Industry	Industry	Family	Family
What separates this community from others?	Ideologies	Ideologies, Mass Appeal	Ideologies, Acceptance, Mass Appeal	Friendships, Ideologies
What are some specific values of this community?	Family, Music	Family, Positive Ideologies	Acceptance	Family, Positive Ideologies, Acceptance

RESPONDENT	G	H	J	K
Sex:	M	F	M	F
Are you religious, spiritual, both, or neither?	Spiritual	Neither	Neither	Spiritual
Image(s) of God:	Entity	Humans are God	Humans are God, Connected-ness	Abstract Energy
Spiritual Practices:	Prayer or Meditation, Yoga and Exercise, Being in Nature, Soul Searching, Art	Connection, Behavior	Prayer or Meditation, Yoga and Exercise, Listening to Music, Dance, Drug Use, Connection	Prayer or Meditation, Yoga and Exercise
Does music bring you closer to God?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Does music help you progress spiritually?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
What separates electronic music as spiritual?	Spiritual Focus	Spiritual Focus	Yes, Drug-Related	No
Have you had a specific experience that changed your spiritual relationship to the music?	Yes, Non-Drug Related	Yes, Non-Drug Related, Yes, Drug-Related	Either Live or Home	Live
Where do you feel a stronger connection?	Live	Live	Yes	Yes
Do you feel others have a similar experience to yours?	Yes	Yes	Personal	Sacred Geometry
Do you notice any spiritual symbols unique to this electronic music community?	Ideological Symbols, Community	Sacred Geometry	More than 7 years	4-6 years
How long have you been involved with this music community?	4-6 years	More than 7 years	As Often as Possible	Multiple times a month
How often do you participate in music events?	Weekly	Multiple times a month	Family	Family
Describe your connection to the music community:	Family	Family	Ideologies, Size	Friendships
What separates this community from others?	Friendships, Acceptance	Friendships	Positive Ideologies	Family, Positive Ideologies
What are some specific values of this community?	Positive Ideologies, Music	Family, Positive Ideologies	Push Bounds of Human Experience	Music

Respondents	M	N	O	P
Sex:	M	F	F	F
Are you religious, spiritual, both, or neither?	Neither	Spiritual	Neither	Spiritual
Image(s) of God:	None	Abstract Energy	Abstract Energy	Humans are God
Spiritual Practices:	Prayer or Meditation, Listening to Music, Being in Nature	Yoga and Exercise	Prayer or Meditation, Yoga and Exercise	Prayer or Meditation, Listening to Music, Drug Use, Behavior, Art
Does music bring you closer to God?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Does music help you progress spiritually?	Yes	Don't Know	Yes	Yes
Have you had a specific experience that changed your spiritual relationship to the music?	Yes, Non-Drug Related	Yes, Drug-Related	Yes, Non-Drug Related	Yes, Drug-Related
Where do you feel a stronger connection?	Live	Either Live or Home	Either Live or Home	Either Live or Home
Do you feel others have a similar experience to yours?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Do you notice any spiritual symbols unique to this electronic music community?	Ancient Civilization, Other Religions, Extraterrestrial	Sacred Geometry, Ancient Civilization, Other Religions	Extraterrestrial	Sacred Geometry
How long have you been involved with this music community?	4-6 years	More than 7 years	More than 7 years	More than 7 years
How often do you participate in music events?	Weekly	Monthly	Weekly	Weekly
Describe your connection to the music community:	Artist	Family	Artist	Fan
What separates this community from others?	Friendships	Acceptance, Mass Appeal	Friendships, Ideologies, Acceptance	Nothing
What are some specific values of this community?	Family, Positive Ideologies	Family	Family, Positive Ideologies, Acceptance	Positive Ideologies

| RESPONDENT	Q	R	S	T
Sex:	M	F	M	M
Are you religious, spiritual, both, or neither?	Spiritual	Spiritual	Religious	Spiritual
Image(s) of God	Humans are God	Abstract Energy	Experiential	Experiential
Spiritual Practices:	Prayer or Meditation, Yoga and Exercise	Prayer or Meditation, Yoga and Exercise	Prayer or Meditation	Prayer or Meditation
Does music bring you closer to God?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Has music made you progress spiritually?	Yes	No	No	Yes
Have you had a specific experience that changed your spiritual relationship to the music?	Yes, Non-Drug Related	Yes, Drug-Related	No	Yes, Non-Drug Related
Where do you feel a stronger connection?	Either Live or Home	Live	Live	Live
Do you feel others have a similar experience to yours?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Do you notice any spiritual symbols unique to this electronic music community?	Sacred Geometry, Art	Sacred Geometry, Ancient Civilization	Ideological Symbols	None
How long have you been involved with this music community?	4-6 years	More than 7 years	Less than 4 years	Less than 4 years
How often do you participate in music events?	Weekly	Multiple times a month	Multiple Times per Year	Multiple Times per Year
Describe your connection to the music community:	Family	Fan	Fan	Fan
What separates this community from others?	Ideologies	Friendships	Friendships	Acceptance
What are some specific values of this community?	Family, Positive Ideologies	Family, Music	Positive Ideologies, Acceptance	Positive Ideologies

Appendix II
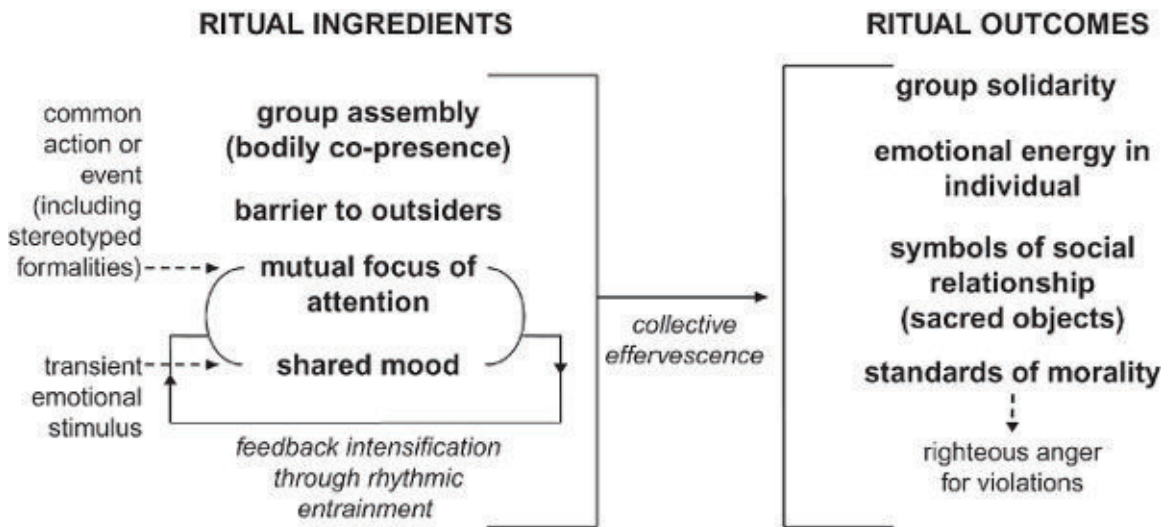
Figure 2.1 Interaction Ritual

Taken from Randall Collins' *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004), page 48