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More than Music: The Lived Experiences of Communities  
Developed Through Music Festivals

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

Madeline Rahme

June 2020

Advisor: Alejandro Cerón

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## **Abstract**

Music festivals offer individuals an escape from their daily routines to experience a temporary sense of freedom and develop a community. Since the 1950's, the music festival industry has become more common in American culture from inaugural festivals such as Newport Folk Festival and Woodstock to the festivals today such as Bonnaroo, Coachella, and Lollapalooza. Using Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival as a single case study, I seek to explore the lived experiences of the community developed on the festival site that has identified themselves as Bonnarooivians. I used a collection of ethnographic research methods such as participant observation, interviews, and an online survey to gather data for this research. I aim to investigate the development of a community at Bonnaroo and how the experiences and values that are produced at there have the ability to transcend the boundaries of the weekend and shape the lifestyles of the individuals involved. The experience of Bonnarooivians is marked by the inclusion and development of a sense of community and the opportunity and desire to escape their daily lives. The lived experiences of the Bonnarooivians are evaluated through the storytelling of significant memories and understanding what the festival means to them.

## **Acknowledgements**

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I would also like to thank my sister, Marie, for gifting me my first Bonnaroo ticket in 2013. This experience not only brought us closer and created a yearly tradition for us, it influenced my life path in ways I never could have imagined. I would also like to thank the rest of my family and my friends for their continued support with my education and encouraging me to follow my passions.

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Happy 'Roo, I hope to see you on The Farm

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

*Bonnaroo, as I understand it, is a state of being*

- Jim Dickinson

*Bonnaroo: what, which, this, that, the other*

Music festivals around the world have created opportunities for people to step outside of their daily realities. These temporary spaces can encourage community, transformation, and alter perceptions of how life should be. Whether these festivals are momentary escapes, a place to connect or reconnect with people, or merely just a place to watch live music for the weekend, there must be something happening when thousands of people gather and live together for a weekend. This thesis looks at Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival as a case study for understanding the lived experiences of music festival attendees. Over the years, the festival has created a community known as the Bonnarooivians. The Bonnarooivians have developed core values, culture, and transcendent experiences. By examining this event using an ethnographic approach, this research aims to investigate the lived experiences of the community, the varying effects the festival has on individuals, how the experience transcends the boundaries of the weekend, and the significance that individuals are ascribing to their experiences. I argue that the experience of Bonnarooivians is marked by the inclusion and development of a



strong sense of community and an opportunity to escape everyday life. The memories attached to the festival, big and small, are seen in the stories told through the Bonnarooians and the contribution to personal identity and belonging.

Social scientists study festivals to investigate the human desire for public celebration, community, and ritual (Getz 2010). Through the years, crowds of people gather for weekends of immersive musical experiences that produce an isolated community for the duration of the festivals. According to Billboard magazine in 2015, approximately 32 million people attend at least one American music festival per year (Lynch 2015). This number grows every year along with the development of new music festivals, making these events a significant part of contemporary American history and culture.

Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival is just one example of the hundreds of festivals that occur each year in the United States and is regarded as one of the largest of its kind, next to Coachella (Arnold 2018, 36). Founded in 2002, Bonnaroo is hosted in the semi-rural town of Manchester, Tennessee and has attracted tens of thousands of people from all over the world to attend the four-day immersive music festival experience. The festival averages around 73,000 attendees each year, transforming Manchester from the 112<sup>th</sup> most populated city in Tennessee to the 7<sup>th</sup> in the state throughout the designated weekend (Lynch 2018). Therefore, music festivals not only contribute to the music industry but pose as a major contribution to the tourism industry and the local economy as well. Manchester is located approximately 65 miles south of Nashville, a popular tourist destination. In 2012, Bonnaroo contributed \$51 million to the Tennessee state economy and \$36 million locally in Manchester (Rau 2014). This money came directly

from festivalgoers' expenses through hotel costs and food expenses, gas and travel, and the support of local businesses.

For many, Bonnaroo is an annual tradition budgeted into bank accounts and time off in order to attend. It provides a break from the mundane, an escape from daily life, and a space for creativity and self-discovery. After attending my first Bonnaroo in 2013 at 17 years old, I remember returning home and describing the festival as the happiest alternate universe. It was at this festival that the way I experienced live music changed, that I discovered my favorite band, and that I made it a point to go to at least one music festival every summer since. Over the years, I left asking myself these questions: what does this experience mean for the attendees? How does the way we conduct ourselves at Bonnaroo reflect the lifestyle we live for the other 361 days of the year? Does attending Bonnaroo affect the way people view themselves and their identity?

Since there is limited anthropological research conducted on music festivals, I will be using a qualitative approach to obtain a more comprehensive reflection and narrative of the music festival experience. Additionally, this research could also provide community feedback to Bonnaroo and other music festivals that may be helpful for the maintenance or enhancement of the experience.

## **Overview**

This thesis aims to understand the lived experiences of Bonnarooivians through an ethnographic depiction of the festival through the community's narratives. The following chapter includes a historical background on the evolution of music festivals in the United States and the technological and cultural shifts that lead to the popularity of modern music festivals today. Additionally, I present an overview of relevant research connected

to the psychological benefits of music festivals as well as the motivations and findings of other critical research that looks at music festivals. In Chapter 3, I discuss the methodology I used to execute this research including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, an online survey and a thematic analysis. The ethnographic findings in this thesis point to the last three chapters to consider the ways in which community is developed and transcendental at Bonnaroo, the event as a form of escapism, and to present the lived experiences and memories of the Bonnarooivians.

Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the community of Bonnarooivians as linked to the positivity that is experienced at the festival and the use of the Bonnarooivian Code, the connections and relationships made at the festival, and the continuation of the community outside of the event. The Bonnarooivian Code is used as guidelines to build community standards and etiquette. Although not all Bonnarooivians will follow The Code, it encourages a set of norms for how they conduct themselves at the event and may influence some to carry these lessons with them outside of the festival. Bonnaroo is a camping festival that allows attendees to live on-site for the duration of the weekend. Camping at Bonnaroo is another factor that influences the formation of the community because of the relationships it promotes between neighbors, the trust it builds among attendees, and the immersive experience it creates. The community transcends the weekend by the use of online communities on social media, and applying the lessons learned at the festival into daily life.

The concept of escapism is explored in Chapter 5 through the understanding of the way the temporary physical and psychological entrance into a new space affects the attendees. The festival reportedly created a space for Bonnarooivian's to leave behind

their responsibilities and worries in “the real world.” This separation of worlds altered Bonnarooivians perceptions of self through moments of self-discovery and the ability to be either their true selves or whoever they wanted to be for the duration of the weekend. Some Bonnarooivians referred to the festival as a self-ascribed home. While the term home is usually related to a place where one lives, the Bonnarooivians are using it as a term to describe a place they have found the feeling of home connected to the community and sense of belonging they feel there. Chapter 6 explores the lived experiences of the event as told by the Bonnarooivians. The lived experiences are told through the retelling of specific memories at the festival, the emotional releases one feels while attending, or the transcendent and transformative experiences that have changed the lives of individuals beyond the weekend. It has been found that Bonnaroo, and the community developed there, has become part of the identity of some attendees.

## Chapter 2: Background

*What is it, the next Woodstock?*

-Bill Nershi, the String Cheese Incident

*Bonnaroo: what, which, this, that, the other*

### Historical Context of Music Festivals in the United States

While music festivals are part of a global industry, American music festivals have been drawing in thousands of attendees for decades since the first Newport Jazz Festival in 1954 (Keepnews 2012). The festival originally took place in Newport, RI, but as the festival gained popularity over the years, it was unable to host its growing audience and was forced to relocate to New York in 1972. In 1959, the jazz festival founder, George Wein, expanded his business and started the Newport Folk Festival (Keepnews 2012). The Newport Folk Festival created a rift in music history and changed how we listen to music and crowds behaved. In 1965, Bob Dylan used an electric guitar to play three songs that were considered rock n' roll. The folk fans in the crowd erupted, booing angrily at Dylan for playing rock music at a folk festival and changing his sound. *Rolling Stone Magazine* deemed Dylan's "going electric" as "the most notorious live moment in rock" (Arnold 2018, 25). Although the events that took place that day are often disputed and are more significant in music and technological history than they were at the time,

the act of Dylan “going electric” at a folk festival emulated the cultural construction of how music festivals and their crowds would be in the future.

The dawn of music festivals began to transform American popular culture and created a space for self-expression, rebellion, and monumental moments for music history. The time between 1964 and 1972 fostered the American counterculture movement. This movement was composed of individuals who rejected many societal and cultural norms of the time and of the generation who raised them. The counterculture youth stood for sexual liberation, civil rights, and were anti-war (Cottrell 2015). People of the movement were primarily white, middle-class youth who identified as hippies or flower children. The members of this subculture were the main target market for the outdoor music festivals throughout those years as it provided them a removed space to share time with like-minded individuals and escape from the realities of the political climate. At the height of the counterculture era was the Woodstock Music and Arts Fair in August 1969 in Bethel, New York (Arnold 2015, 43). Woodstock was advertised as “An Aquarian Exposition: 3 Days of Peace and Music,” which referred to “the change in human consciousness which transcended mankind and was exemplified by many characteristics of the hippie movement” (“An Aquarian Exposition at Woodstock 1969”, n.d.). The festival attracted nearly one million attendees, while they initially expected 50,000. The high attendance throughout the three days made it the largest music festival of the time. Due to the unexpected quantity of attendees and the inability to account for everybody, the large crowd broke through the fences, abandoned their cars in the street, and, as a result, Woodstock became a free event (Arnold 2015, 49-50). Woodstock became a reflection of the generation and a momentary escape from war and inequality.

“Visually, musically, and symbolically, Woodstock is now considered a culminating site of protest and social change, a utopian idyll where an entire generation was able to express its solidarity against the power elite” (Arnold 2015, 50).

Start to finish, Woodstock was filmed and composed into a documentary, *Woodstock*, that constructed a visual documentation of the counterculture movement and helped maintain the festival’s relevance and cultural significance throughout the years. Smaller festivals in the United States, such as the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967, were occurring, but Woodstock’s documentary and influenced outdoor music festivals across the globe, such as Glastonbury Music Festival in England, and Sziget in Hungary. The US Festival in 1982 was described by the founder as “the Woodstock of the West” (Arnold 2018, 61) which illustrates how regardless of the festivals occurring during and prior to Woodstock, it created a blueprint to be followed in the development of festivals in the future.

Although less famous festivals such as the Aquarius Festival in 1973 and the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival in 1976 were occurring, the frequency and impact of music festivals plateaued after Woodstock. However, The US Festival in 1982, founded by Steve Wozinak, the co-founder of Apple, began to revolutionize the way people were viewing computer technology, specifically Apple, in relation to music. Wozinak broadcasted the festival over FM radio and cable television stations to be seen and heard in the US and Russia. Additionally, forums were held at the festivals to describe the importance and possibilities of computers for musicians and music lovers (Arnold 2018, 61).

By the late 1990s and into the 2000s, computer technology paired with the popularity of MP3s and music piracy, or the illegal downloading of music files from the internet, altered the dynamic of the music industry and how people were acquiring their music (Witt 2015, 2-3). The development of file-sharing software, such as Napster and BitTorrent, allowed users to illegally download entire artist discographies for free (Witt 2015, 115). As a result, there was a decline in sales of vinyl records, cassette tapes, and CDs, as people were able to obtain the music at a faster, larger, and cheaper rate. The reemergence of music festivals was one of the music industry's response to the decline in recorded music sales. "All of a sudden that same generation that's discovering music peer-to-peer online wants to be somewhere in a field with that peer enjoying the live music experience" (Hanks et al. 2018). The internet and the community developed through peer-to-peer file sharing and online communities had, and still has, a direct impact on the popularity of the modern music festival industry.

The reemergence of American music festivals as we see them today, began 1991 with the creation of Lollapalooza in Chicago, IL followed by Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in Indio, CA in 1999 (Arnold 2018). Since then, dozens of American music festivals have developed across the country, catering to different demographics, music tastes, and accommodation preferences. A common theme in the line-ups of modern music festivals is variety in genres. During the weekend, the festivalgoer can see music from a collection of different genres such as rock, rap, electronic dance music (EDM), and even classic rock artists who performed at the iconic festivals listed above.



## **The Birth of Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival**

Highly influenced by the historic festivals of the '60s and '70s, European festivals, and the technological shift in the 2000s, Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival was established in 2002 by AC Entertainment and Superfly Productions. In addition to festivals like Lollapalooza and Coachella, Bonnaroo was a response to the music piracy issue. Bonnaroo's co-founder, Jonathan Mayers, reported, "it was us, Coachella, and Austin City Limits—this new wave of large-scale music festivals that coincided with Napster coming out, the release of the iPod, and people and artists engaging with the internet to connect" (Fumo 2015). The name 'Bonnaroo' came from Creole slang meaning 'best on the street' influenced by New Orleans musician, Dr. John, who had an album entitled *Distinctively Bonnaroo* (George-Warren and Clinch 2012).

The founders of Bonnaroo got their start in the industry working with jam bands in New Orleans and inspired by major influences such as Phish. In the late 1990s, the iconic jam band Phish was hosting an annual music festival named Big Cypress on a farm in Limestone, Maine averaging approximately 85,000 attendees in 1999. "Big Cypress was the pinnacle of an era of Phish's creativity, community, and cosmic alignment" (Getz 2019). The mixture of Big Cypress, the Bonnaroo co-founder's close involvement to jam bands, and the large music festivals popping up around the country planted the seeds for the first Bonnaroo in 2002. Co-founder, Rick Farman, reflected on the inspiration for the creation of Bonnaroo saying, "as fans of the band [Phish], we saw what they did – how they treated their fans, incorporated art installations, and how they fostered community at these events – which served as a model for what we were looking to do" (George-Warren and Clinch 2012).

These ideals carried on throughout the years of Bonnaroo and aided the success and community that is present there and has set them apart in the industry. In 2002, 70,000 jam band fans traveled to Tennessee to attend the inaugural Bonnaroo and see iconic artists in the genre such as Widespread Panic, Trey Anastasio (of Phish), and The String Cheese Incident. Bonnaroo welcomed Phish back to the festival in 2019 as a headliner to play three sets throughout the weekend. In 2019, Anastasio reflected on his experiences at Bonnaroo since the beginning saying, “Bonnaroo, to me, I feel like I’m part of the family there. And I like that feeling. We kind of just keep coming back” (Paulson 2019).

Since 2002, Bonnaroo has evolved but it has remained a 4-day event held annually in Manchester, TN on 700-acres of farmland called Great Stage Park on the second weekend in June. As the years went on, the festival created a mosaic lineup of artists of various genres, from jam bands, to pop, to EDM, and rap. This collection of music created a more diverse crowd of individuals to embrace the music they love and explore music they have never heard. Bonnaroo is a camping festival that hosts thousands of attendees and 150+ artists across five stages. This festival is unique in relation to others because it offers 24-hour entertainment opportunities such as sunrise sets, a silent disco, and plazas in the campground that offer music and art activities throughout the night. The collection of experiences Bonnaroo offers throughout the weekend separates the festival from others of its kind and enhances the lived experiences of the attendees.

### **Loyalty in a Saturated Market**

As the popularity of music festivals, in the United States and globally, has increased in the last decade, market saturation has become a relevant issue in the

industry. While some music festivals such as Bonnaroo, Lollapalooza, and Coachella helped pioneer the contemporary industry, as the years have gone by, hundreds of music festivals have been created across the country. According to the 2018 Music 360 Report, 52% of the U.S. population participates in a live music event yearly. Further, 23% of the U.S. population attended a music festival in 2018 (Rys 2018). Market saturation occurs when there is a high supply of a good, in this case music festivals, that does not meet the consumer demand (Kokemuller n.d.). Festivalgoers across the country have a large number of options when picking which festivals to attend. Motivations for attending can vary from travel proximity, price points, lineups, brand loyalty, and other emotionally charged factors. Additionally, another factor caused by market saturation is the repetitive nature of lineups. Together, if a festivalgoer can attend a festival in their home city with a similar lineup to other festivals across the country, what would stop them from doing so? This question is important in understanding the loyalty individuals have to festivals and the communities fostered there.

### **Relevant Research**

While there is limited research on Bonnaroo specifically, research surrounding modern music festivals has been gaining recognition in the last decade. As discussed throughout the previous section, music festivals have been evolving for years. Gina Arnold's book (2018), describes the rise of music festivals in the United States from the Newport Festivals to modern music festivals like Coachella and Bonnaroo. Arnold situates the festivals in historical contexts to expand the significance of them as both an evaluation of the event, and the culture of the generation of the time, by evaluating the effects of war and technological developments. She found that crowds at festivals

become a symbol of idealized freedom due to the discourse used to speak about music festivals and the “middle of nowhere” style locations they are hosted in (Arnold 2018, 166).

The relevant research was found through an interdisciplinary approach including works from anthropology, psychology, musicology, and event tourism journals. Previous research primarily evaluates the key motivations for attending music festivals, the experiences of individuals who attend, and consider music festivals an aspect of event tourism. Some have found that music festival attendees are motivated primarily by the music (Vinnicombe and Sou 2017), while others have found it to be linked to socialization and event novelty (Faulkner, Fredline, Larson, and Tomljenovic 1999). While studying a heavy metal festival, Elliot and Barron, found the leading motivations for their population was the experience, escape, and socialization (2015, 37). Although there are copious amounts of research across disciplines focusing on the benefits of listening to music and cultural festivals around the world, there is limited research investigating the complex benefits of music festivals. Frequent music listening has been linked to several psychological benefits such as the formation of identity, mood-enhancement, and a form of self-expression (Sloboda and O’Neill 2001). By transforming music listening from an individual level to a community level through music festivals, the positive benefits are heightened and contribute to a sense of belonging for festival and concert attendees (Duffy 2005)

Noah Little, Birgitta Burger, and Stephen Croucher (2018) explore the lived experiences of festival attendees using the popular electronic dance music festival, Electric Daisy Carnival, as a case study. They place their research in conversation with

research surrounding motivation for attending music festivals, the short and long-term benefits individuals gain from attending music festivals, and the psychology of music festivals. Specifically, they explain the motivations for attending include: socialization, togetherness, escape and relaxation, and cultural exploration (Little et al. 2018, 79). They cite numerous studies all concluding overlapping motivation factors. Based on empirical investigations, the short and long-term benefits individuals gain from their experience at festivals include: strengthened social relations, improved life satisfaction, developing a more open-minded outlook, and personal growth (Little, Burger, and Croucher 2018, 79). These personal benefits contribute to a positive psychological impact.

Some music festivals have been classified as “transformational festivals” by Jeet-Kei Leung in a 2010 TEDxtalk (Leung, 2010) followed by a documentary web-series (Leung and Chan 2014). Leung found that these transformational festivals are based on the participant’s need to contribute to community. In his TEDxtalk, he explains how music has the power to create new cultures, and subcultures, with shared values, codes, and worldviews based on the thirst for freedom and expression. He describes festivals as “safe containers” that he believes alerts individuals’ psyches that this is a safe space to release and process all emotions that have been bottled up and unexpressed, thus creating a cathartic experience. The psychological benefits and aspects of music festivals extend far beyond the confines of the weekend the event takes place on and is expressed through transforming and affecting the psychological well-being of attendees throughout the year.

Festivals can also be seen as religious or spiritual experiences for attendees. Lee Gilmore (2010) provides a comprehensive ethnographic account of Burning Man and the development of a community in relation to ritual and pilgrimage. Although Burning Man

does not classify itself as a music festival, this event and research exemplifies the concept of a temporary community and illustrates the spiritual and emotional impacts it has on its attendees. The creation of Burning Man was inspired by several factors but one important idea the event was based on was Hakim Bey's theory of a Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ). Bey does not define TAZ, these spaces are tangible locations that promote the expression of free culture, it is short-lived, and a place to preserve creativity (Bey 1991). While the theory of TAZ is reflected in the "ontological anarchism inherent in the Burning Man spirit" (Gilmore 2010, 22), elements of TAZ can be applied to wider music festival models around the world.

Music festivals have been theorized to have created a "festivalscape," or an emerging temporary landscape that blends cultural and political patterns and values:

Festivalscapes are a set of cultural, material and social flows, at both local and global levels, both concrete and imagined, both deliberate and unintended, which emerge and are established during a specific festival. In this sense, festivals can be seen and analyzed as terrains where different cultural, aesthetic and political patterns and values temporarily converge and clash, constantly creating, stabilizing and redefining the setting of festival interaction, and in so doing stressing the problems raised by the multiple articulations of global cultural flows, local life and spatiality (Chalcraft and Magudda 2011, 174).

Festivalscapes are created and unique to every space. Chalcraft and Magudda's claim is reflective of those of Bey's and his TAZ. When crowds of individuals enter an autonomous space, such as a festival, they each bring their own cultural capital and positionality to create a blend of culture and values separate from the world outside of this space.

## **Anthropological Theories about Community**

Anthropologists have long studied community, collectivity, and identity as some of the foundational concepts of the discipline. Defining the term community, within and outside of anthropology, is complex and multifaceted as seen through countless attempts and variations. Outside of anthropology, the term community has been seen in fields such as urban studies, sociology, social and political organization, and various other disciplines. Research in urban studies has outlined the use of the term community in three ways: community as a place or neighborhood, community as a set of shared values and practices, and community as shared interests (Latham, McCormack, Mcnamara, McNeil 2009). These characterizations of community align with those of anthropology. Within anthropological research, the term community has been broken down into three broad approaches based in terms of common interests, common locality, and common social system or structure (Rapport 2009). Although there is no concrete definition of the term, the conclusive elements of mutual interests, location, and values can be seen across disciplines.

For Warner (1941), community is tied to a group of people adhering to a common social structure, or “a set of relations which link individuals in a society” (Bernard 2009). Others believe community is tied solely to the location of dwelling and employment (Minar and Greer 1969). However, Frankenberg (1966) explains the interconnectedness of these three points by suggesting common interests in attainable things allow community members to relate to each other, living with a small group of people with these common interests in mind helps foster relationships within the community, and attachment to a space can elevate attachment to the community. The conflicting

understandings and definitions of community occur because of the different contexts the term is being used in and the temporal and evolutionary experiences of both the definition and the community members (Stein 1964).

Individuals can belong to many communities in different contexts and extents (Wilson and Peterson 2002, 455). The term community “evokes a group of people who have something in common and who are actively engaged with one another in a benign fashion” (Gold 2005, 2). Others have described community as “a sense of belonging together” as linked to an understanding of shared identity and solidarity (Brow 1990, 1; Weber 1978, 40). To go further with the idea of a sense of belonging, “communalization” is “defined as any pattern of action that promotes a sense of belonging together” as seen through acts such as rituals, national communities, and religion and strengthened by a common origin (Brow 1990, 1-3).

Benedict Anderson (1991) defines a nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 1991, 6). Anderson also claims imagined communities are linked to an idea of deep comradeship.

Victor Turner’s theory of *communitas* and Arnold Van Gennep’s *rites de passage* model. The rites de passage model, is composed of three key points in human experience. 1. Disengagement in which the individual is symbolically removed from society and his own identity, or separation. 2. The liminal stage in which the individual is secluded from society, or limen. 3. The reunion, or post-liminal stage, where the individual is



reintegrated into society with his new status, or reaggregation (Turner 1969: 196). Victor Tuner expands on Van Gennep's phases of rites de passage through his theories surrounding the ideas of *communitas* and liminality. *Communitas* refers to the strong feeling of acceptance and community among equals, "communitas emerges where social structure is not" (Turner 1969: 127). Liminality refers to the temporary separation from the ordinary day-to-day life (Turner 1974). *Communitas* is very closely linked to the *rites de passage* model. *Communitas* is a Latin noun that refers to "an unstructured community in which people are equal, it is an intense community spirit, the feeling of social equality, solidarity, and togetherness" (Kumar 2018, 681). Turner's distinction between "communitas" and "community" is rooted in distinguishing the expression of a social relationship from "an area of common living" (Turner 1969, 360).

### **Online Communities**

With the development of social media and online forums, online communities have developed throughout the years. Online communities can range from esoteric interests to a broad collection of more general topics with varying purposes, population sizes, and engagement frequencies. Communication within these communities has been studied and labeled as computer-mediated communication (CMC) and the usage of this form of communication and the Internet has been evaluated in the effects it has had on the users (Hine 2015). The literature surrounding the validity of communities based online is torn between real and imagined or even so far as replacing face-to-face communities (Rhinegold 1993). However, the idea that communities can only exist through face-to-face interaction has been challenged as mentioned by Anderson's theory in *Imagined Communities*.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Fieldsite**

I first attended Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival in 2013 with my sister and cousin just days after my high school graduation. At seventeen years old, before declaring my undergraduate major in Anthropology, I noticed something at Bonnaroo that I have never seen or felt before. There was a culture, community, and an aura energetically vibrating through the air. Throughout the following summers, my sister and I made it tradition to continue to attend at least one music festival each year. Since then, we have attended nearly ten music festivals together. Other urban music festivals I have attended include Governors Ball, Lollapalooza, Riot Fest, Warped Tour, Pitchfork, Boston Calling, and over 150 individual concerts. I chose to focus on one music festival to have a realistic scope for this project. Choosing Bonnaroo as a fieldsite was a personal choice based on past experiences and a careful comparison to other festivals I have already attended. Due to my research interests in community development at music festivals, I evaluated and reflected on the personal experiences I had accumulated throughout the years. Additionally, I looked at the different festival models including camping vs urban, genre-specific vs diverse, and the different festivals company values. Bonnaroo stood out as my final choice because of the community standards present, the application of the Bonnaroo Code, the online presence of the community, and the

campground setting. I also chose to conduct research at a festival I have attended before, so I would be familiar with the layout to make the most of my limited time in the field.

### **Theoretical Approach**

The theoretical approach for this research is a blend of ethnography and phenomenology. While the use of phenomenology has been debated within anthropology throughout the past century, it has been used to inspire ethnographic works from ethnographers such as Clifford Geertz (1973), James Clifford (1986), and Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon (1995) (Katz and Csordas 2003, 277). Phenomenological approaches in anthropology have reframed the way ethnographers view experiences, what it means to be human, and viewing “life as lived” (Desjarlais and Throop 2011, 88). The adaptation of some principles found in phenomenology inspired anthropologists to begin looking at the anthropology of experience. In anthropology, phenomenology as a philosophical way of thought and methodology is often implicitly used but found paired with other methods (Katz and Csordas 2003, 277). This influence of philosophy paired with a strong use of ethnographic methods allows ethnographers to get a more “empirically grounded understanding of human existence in its many formations” (Desjarlais and Throop 20011, 92).

Ethnography is an immersive method that explores the daily lives of humans and their practices, phenomenology explores the lived experiences of a particular phenomenon (Maggs-Rapport 2000). Utilizing aspects of phenomenology as a theoretical framework for this research allows me to understand the lived experiences of the community as defined by its members. Lived experience refers to “the meanings of life as lived” (Lavery 2003). To understand the Bonnarooivians’ lived experiences, I used a

phenomenologically inspired ethnographic approach to allow flexibility in the research and understand the meanings of life as lived in the terms the community uses. I am viewing Bonnaroo as a cultural phenomenon and using ethnographic field research methods to understand the community that is experiencing this.

### **Data Collection and Participants**

My research on Bonnaroo relies heavily on autoethnographic and ethnographic methodologies including onsite participant observation and semi-structured group and individual interviews as my main form of data collection. The chosen research methods were lightly inspired by Lee Gilmore's methods (2010) in the field which allowed me to put the voices of the research participants first while still allowing my voice to be present. A brief explanation of my research methods follows.

Due to my past of attending Bonnaroo as a participant, I consider myself a member of the community present at the festival. Since I identify as a member of the community, my participant observation techniques fell under complete participation as I was familiar with my site and was already a part of the community before my research (Spradley 61, 1980). Being a complete participant poses some limitations in my observational abilities and ability to remain objective in fieldnotes. My past experiences at Bonnaroo and other music festivals informed this research from its inception, specifically in choosing this topic, the formation of my research and interview questions, and throughout my analysis. Some limitations I faced in the field were my own emotional and sentimental attachments to aspects of the festival, a complex familiarity with the physical site that influenced my observational notes, and internal biases about new changes, the community, and the culture. To combat some of these limitations and biases,

I had two fieldnote journals: one for observational notes and one that acted more like a journal for reflection and personal commentary. Additionally, I utilized my semi-structured interviews in order to gain outside, unbiased, opinions that both agreed with and varied from my own experiences and assumptions. I also made sure to interview first-time attendees as well as veteran Bonnarooers in order to level out any bias individuals returning may have as well. The personal reflections in my fieldnotes also acted as probing inspiration in my interviews to understand how others were feeling about certain changes which allowed me to see another perspective rather than just my own opinion. This research accounts for all perspectives, not just those that align with my desired outcomes or preconceived notions.

Throughout the four days of the festival, I fully immersed myself in everything the festival had to offer. I had long days of leaving my campsite at 10:30 AM and not returning until 5:00 AM to write final reflections before going to sleep. I was determined to see, hear, and feel as much as I could in the short time I had there. I had to balance hours spent conducting interviews with hours participating with the community in musical and art events. To find this balance, I spent the days interviewing individuals in the campground and exploring the various plazas, then entering Centeroo before sunset to participate and observe the events and nature of the festival.

Throughout the weekend, I conducted a total of 12 semi-structured interviews. Within the 12 interviews, 11 of them were in group settings and one was done individually. The groups I interviewed ranged from two to six active voices. All interviews were recorded using a Zoom H1n recording device upon receiving approval of informed consent. One of the interviews was recruited online through a Facebook

connection. The rest of the interviews conducted were recruited on-site. My recruitment process included me approaching various campsites throughout the campground asking if they had a moment to be interviewed for my research. While most of these interactions were not prompted by a previous interaction, approximately three interviews began because of friendly interaction previously. The willingness to engage in conversation with me is an indicator of the culture and community at Bonnaroo. For the full interview guide and informed consent speech please see Appendix A.

Upon returning home from the festival, I transcribed my interviews and fieldnotes. Once my transcriptions were complete, I began an initial coding of the transcripts using thematic analysis to pull out emerging themes that were found across the conversations. While this is not a comprehensive list of all themes that emerged from my initial coding, the codes mentioned in Figure 1 were the key codes I found that influenced the creation of my survey.

Initial Interview Codes	
Neighbors	Helpful, friendly, willingness to share, positively impacting experience
Community	One of the biggest draws to the festival, a strong sense of positivity, hope for humanity, random acts of kindness, strangers becoming friends, feeling of home
Self-Expression	Ability to be whoever you want to be, perspective of self-expression within vs outside of Bonnaroo, connected to the acceptance of the community, comfort one feels in the festival space
Line-up	May not be the main reason people are attending, some really care while others buy tickets before the line-up is announced
Significant Experiences	Tied to specific concert experiences, drug use, community, emotional responses

*Figure 1* – Table of key initial codes

After creating and evaluating the initial list of codes, I then crafted a 10-question survey based on the emerging themes to gain a wider data set and support or reject the data gathered from my interviews and observations. The survey was posted on the public Facebook page, ‘Bonnaroo: A Loophole to Reality!’, that resulted in 67 responses over the course of 12 days. The survey questions had a mixture of open-ended and prompted responses. Upon closing access to the survey, I began my second coding process on all responses and found the data to mirror those of the initial interview coding. For further information on my survey questions, please see Appendix B.

## **Thematic Narrative and Data Analysis**

The analysis of this research was completed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis technique for analysis of qualitative data “used for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke 2012, 6). Thematic analysis is used throughout various disciplines in order to sort through data to find recurring and emergent themes. To begin my thematic analysis, I first became immersed in my data by reading through it several times and highlighting certain quotes that aligned with my research goals or felt repetitive. This is how I decided which themes were important to expand on in my survey questions. Once I received all of my survey responses, I repeated this step for all of my data once more. I then began “generating initial codes” (2012, 18). While generating my initial codes, and sorting relevant quotes within them using Nvivo12, I arrived at over twenty codes from my fieldnotes and interviews and an additional thirty codes from my survey. I then began to pile sort these initial codes to find my themes. Moving into the third phase, “searching for themes” (2012, 19), my themes were born out of my initial coding and pile sorting. At this phase, the themes were still not finalized but I had a clear understanding that themes surrounding the concepts community, escapism, and significant memories through narrative were key emergent themes. In the next phase, “reviewing themes” (2012, 20), I was able to begin identifying and constructing these themes and deciding what subthemes were emerging within the dataset. I utilized the pile sorting technique to group outlying or smaller data within the larger themes. I then solidified a thematic map of my data with relevant quotes and subthemes for each section. And lastly, I was able to conduct the final analysis and write



up of my data as seen in this thesis. While writing, I began to notice the overlap in my ethnographic themes and embraced the fluidity and interconnectedness of my data. In this phase, I embraced the ability to let my themes flow in and out of each other and utilized thick description as well as my direct quotes to create this ethnographic piece.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In compliance with my Institutional Review Board (IRB) submission and approval, all informants were above the age of 18, given the option of informed consent to participate in the study and, if so, to be audio recorded, and all names remain anonymous using pseudonyms with no identifiable information. Placing myself in this research was a constant internal battle. My choice to include myself was done in a reflexive and introspective manner as a process of self-reference. While the data found throughout this research is primarily collected from the individuals who participated in my research, I was an active voice in the interviews and found that sharing my experiences over the years aided the quality of this research. Since I am closely connected to this research, I conducted all data coding with an open mind and placed my opinions and research ideas to the side and accepted the themes that were presented regardless of if they aligned with my personal beliefs or not.

## Chapter 4: Community

*Whether it's the artists or the promoters or the people who are dishing out food or water, Bonnaroo is a big community thing, and fans can sense that. They can feel it's a positive thing. The bands want to be part of something that's good, that's fun, that's exciting. I could tell from the beginning that it was something big when we saw all those folks coming out for the first time. It was truly a unique and special moment.*

-Sunny Ortiz, Widespread Panic

*Bonnaroo: what, which, this, that, the other*

Throughout the years, Bonnaroo has formed a unique cultural ethos and microcosm with core values that warp the norms of society outside of the festival. According to my survey results, 82% of people responded that the community is their motivation for attending the festival and over 98% of respondents claimed they felt part of the community at Bonnaroo to varying degrees.

Since I first attended Bonnaroo in 2013, I felt a sense of belonging in the community at there. The community manifested itself, to me, in the ease I felt to talk and dance with strangers around me, the unity of the crowds I found myself in, and the way people were always there to lend a helping hand. As the years went by, I continued to attend Bonnaroo and other festivals – like Firefly and Lollapalooza – and noticed some

similarities and differences. While in every festival I attended I saw similar forms of self-expression, large crowds of people, and met new and friendly people, the sense of community I felt at Bonnaroo was more intense. Looking back, it seems clear to me that the sense of community had to do with Bonnaroo's, long-standing traditions that build community, the feeling of complete freedom within the grounds, and a sense of positivity that the festival cultivates. The community at Bonnaroo is more than just a crowd at a concert, everybody was willing to start conversations, share festival essentials such as water and sunscreen, and always reminded me to pay it forward. The crowds at Bonnaroo act as a collective unit, rather than just focused on the individual. My experience at Firefly and other festivals did not give me the same sense of community, I think due to heightened occurrences of theft, self-centered attendees, and stricter regulations concerning security and time.

Similar feelings and observations have been reported throughout my conversations in the field and within my survey responses. One survey respondent reflected on their view of the community at Bonnaroo by saying, "Bonnaroo is more like a family than a community, in my opinion. I've never met a stranger at 'Roo. Everyone is just so damn happy to be there and so willing to help anyone out when in need. The world could learn a lot from the people at Bonnaroo." Participants in my interviews and surveys have described their experience of community at Bonnaroo in relation to (1) the environment of positivity, (2) the overall sense of community (3) how the community transcends the weekend.

## **Positivity**

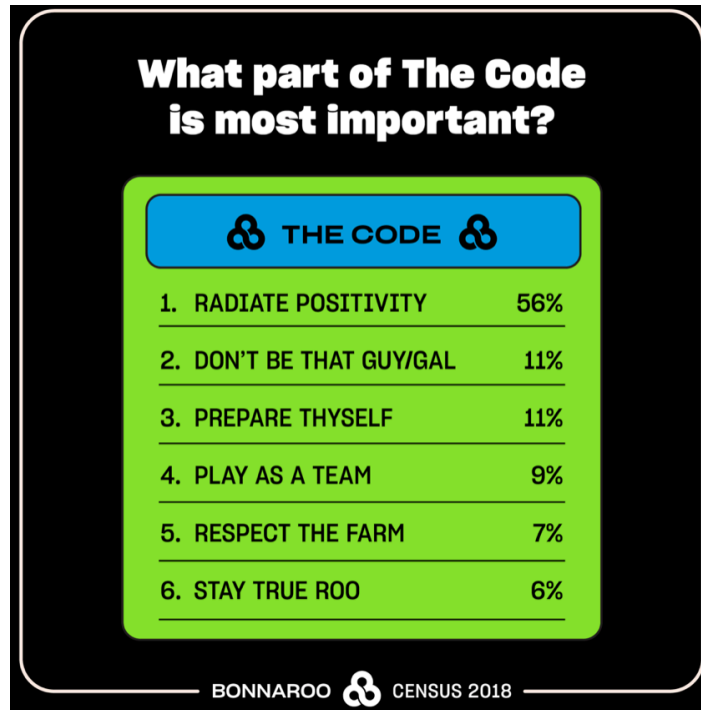
“The positivity I experienced at Bonnaroo that weekend absolutely changed my life,” said one survey respondent while reflecting on what Bonnaroo meant to them.

According to my data, the positivity experienced and performed at the festival was one of the crucial crutches to the experience, development of community, and aspects of The Bonnaroo Code.

The Bonnaroo Code is a list of values that serve as a preparation and attitude guide to new and returning Bonnarooers. The Code includes: 1) Prepare Thyself, 2) Play as a Team, 3) Radiate Positivity, 4) Respect the Farm, 5) Don't be that Guy/Gal, 6) Stay True Roo, see Appendix C for an expanded version. These six ideas were born out of years of community engagement and the development of norms at the festival and were later put in place by the organizers of Bonnaroo to help reinforce the community standards. The points on The Bonnaroo Code encourage Bonnarooers to treat the farm and the community with mutual respect, prepare themselves for the event, and take with them what they have experienced into their daily lives. While not every person will follow The Code, it is one of the many aspects unique to Bonnaroo that contributes to a sense of community. The application of The Code on an individual level and peer-to-peer education and reinforcement of these point acts as a catalyst to the community that is generated by a set of community standards. While The Code is written on the website, the company claims that “No one wrote it. It just always was and now is. It [...] evolved within the Bonnaroo community over the years, out of the real-life experiences [...]” (“Bonnaroo Music & Arts Festival” n.d.) From the outside, The Code may look like a marketing gimmick created by the company in order to establish and reinforce a brand.

However, based on my personal experiences at the festival and the data I have collected, aspects of The Code are often referenced and implemented at the festival by the attendees.

One of the core tenets of The Code is “Radiate Positivity.” The Bonnaroo website describes Radiate Positivity in reference to spreading positivity and carrying on Bonnaroo traditions; “happiness is the goal, proactive positivity is a proven way to get there” (“Bonnaroo Music & Arts Festival” n.d.). While this point is just one of several of The Code (see Figure 2), it is often the most commonly referenced by Bonnarooians and has inadvertently become an unofficial mission statement for the festival. Radiate Positivity is referenced throughout the festival on art, official merchandise, and is said with a smile or a high-five between fellow Bonnarooians. In my interview with Ben, he reflected on how Radiate Positivity has expanded and become a slogan at the festival, “I feel like the Radiate Positivity slogan really kicked off in the last five years or so and continues on. I even hear it being said at other festivals, painted on walls, and used on social media.” As seen in Figure 2, the community has voted Radiate Positivity as the most important aspects of The Code according to the 2018 Census Report measuring which aspect of The Code is more important to them.



*Figure 2 - 2018 Bonnaroo Census Report*

Radiate Positivity was voted by the majority in the census over the rest of the points in The Code. It is possible that Radiate Positivity was voted this way due to it becoming an unofficial slogan, as previously mentioned, and the higher level of application of this point in the lives of the Bonnarooivians. However, although The Code was written by the organizers of the festival, the community appropriates it and ascribes meaning to it at the festival and in everyday life. The collective energy and attitude of the community have created and reinforced the meaning of Radiate Positivity. By embracing The Code at the festival, the community adheres to an expected social etiquette reflected in their behavior and sense of community.

The Code is unique to Bonnaroo, while other events such as Burning Man have a code, they are not very common in the industry. In my interview with Caroline, she described the use of The Code in relation to the company and the community, “ I think

Bonnaroo having an established code and it being enforced, not only by Bonnaroo, but by the people who attend here is something that makes it work. People want to carry that on, people always want that positivity here [...] you just maintain The Code.” The collaborative effort from Bonnaroo and the Bonnarooivians to use The Code helps it live on. The community set the standard and Bonnaroo, as a company, observed and encouraged it. Caroline continues to say, “as long as everybody has the positivity and attitude, it will remain this way.” As Bonnaroo evolves and generations change, the application of The Code and positive lifestyle is one way to carry on the community present at the festival. By enforcing and practicing The Code, it helps guide the way Bonnarooivians conduct themselves and by maintaining this as the norm, it is contagious to adhere to and hard to deviate from.

Random acts of kindness are one common way Bonnarooivians radiate positivity on The Farm. Random acts of kindness, big and small, spread positivity and can touch the lives of other Bonnarooivians and enhance their experience. One random act of kindness that stuck out to me at the festival was in 2016 while I was sitting in the back of a Lionel Richie set. There was this older man, by himself, sitting a few feet in front of me. This group of people came by and sat in front of him and asked him if he could take a Polaroid picture of them. After he took the photo and handed the camera back to the group, the person who owned the polaroid turned it around and took a photo of this man and gave it to him, said thank you and left. I kept watching this man after they left and he kept staring at the photo, watching it as it developed. I watched a smile spread across his face as he saw this image of himself become clearer. He probably didn't have many pictures of himself there since he was alone. Small moments like this do not take a lot of effort

but they touch the lives of individuals. Random acts of kindness enhance the experience of Bonnaroo and spreads positivity.

People I interviewed kept bringing up the random acts of kindness they witnessed. In my interview with Sabrina, she reported that a woman was standing by the shower lines giving \$10 to people who did not know it was cash only. In a different interview, Jackson reflected on a moment where a group was offering fresh cut watermelon to people as they passed by their campsite. It has also become a tradition to make large amounts of trinkets to pass out at the festival such as customized poker chips, bracelets, stickers, business cards with kind messages, and key chains, to name a few items I have personally received or found at the festival. These random acts of kindness and gifts are commonplace at Bonnaroo and act as an example for spreading and radiating positivity. In Jackson's reflection, he elaborated to say, "when you see people just doing those random acts of kindness, it not only makes other people happy, but it makes them happy to just be doing that for others and they're getting their enjoyment from seeing other people enjoy these simple things [...] the way everybody is so positive kind of gives you hope for humanity, like everybody is willing to help each other." These moments are part of what generates the magic of Bonnaroo and helps set the tone of how individuals interact with one another and the community ethos.

Although Radiate Positivity influences the attitudes of Bonnarooivians, other points in The Code encourage efforts beyond the music festival and provide knowledge that can be adapted into their daily lives. For example, "Respect the Farm," represents sustainability and global consciousness. This encourages Bonnarooivians to leave their campsite free from trash when they exit the festival and make more environmentally



minded decisions. Within Centeroo there is an area called Planet Roo where there are panel discussions about environmental issues, a Learning Garden where individuals can learn how to grow their own food and how to compost, group yoga, and \$1 from every ticket sold is donated toward the BonnaROOTS sustainability efforts. Here, it is seen again how Bonnaroo as a company and as a community coexist in values and how it is reinforced through actions and The Code. Respect the Farm can also be reinterpreted to respect the environment and integrate the lessons learned in Planet Roo all year.

Similarly, the other points within The Code represent ways to behave within the community and can also be adapted to the lives of Bonnarooivians outside of the festival. The points “Play as a Team” and “Don’t be that Guy/Gal” fall in line with the values of Radiate Positivity. Playing as a team means to watch out for yourself and your friends but also extending a helping hand and a watchful eye to the strangers around you. Don’t be that Guy represents following The Code; do not be the person who is spreading negativity or disrespecting The Farm.

The Code mirrors the community’s values and standards for behavior. Each point in The Code is equally important but the highlight of Radiate Positivity in this section is a direct reflection of my data as seen through random acts of kindness, traditions, and the contribution it makes to the sense of community. While each point in The Code may not be fully honored, the Bonnarooivians do their best to educate each other of the standards, apply it to their lives within and outside of the festival, and respect it. It is the responsibility of returning Bonnarooivians to teach newcomers The Code and encourage the application of it.

## **Experience of Community**

Due to the growth of the music festival industry over the past decade, a variety of different types of festivals emerged in various settings. At the broadest level, one of the main differences found in the festival industry is the difference between camping and non-camping festivals. Camping festivals allow festivalgoers to pitch a tent and live on the festival grounds for the duration of the event. While camping festivals offer the option to leave and stay in a hotel if one chooses, it is encouraged and more common to participate in camping. Non-camping festivals often take place in urban environments, and festivalgoers have no choice but to leave the grounds when the music ends. While the logistical differences are clear, the experiential differences are important to unpack. Since Bonnaroo is a camping festival, entertainment is provided 24 hours a day throughout the weekend including artists who play music until the sun rises, plazas that host group meditations, dance parties, and drag shows, and food vendors that stay open throughout the night. Additionally, camping next to people on all sides of you allows you to meet fellow festivalgoers and generates a sense of community that a non-camping festival cannot match. These features of Bonnaroo are a result of camping, however; they do not exist at every camping festival. For example, although Firefly is a camping festival, they do not offer the same level of intricacy in campground entertainment and the music usually stops around 2:00 AM at the latest.

While Bonnaroo is not unique for having camping as an option, it is a factor of the festival dynamic that encourages community. Throughout my interviews, individuals brought up the differences they felt between the community at Bonnaroo and other festivals they have attended. The community was described to be different from non-

camping festivals because “at Bonnaroo, the community gets built within.” Caroline discussed her experiences at Grandoozy, a festival in Denver, CO that was also created by Superfly, in comparison to Bonnaroo.

We went to Grandoozy last September in Denver. It was really cool, it was our first urban festival. It was weird that you go in, leave for the night. I didn’t like how we were stuck there for the day though. City festivals definitely draw more of a younger crowd. I personally enjoy the more adult setting of the camping and the late night experiences at Bonnaroo. At Grandoozy we saw Florence and the Machine and right after her set ended it was like, “oh man we have to go back into reality.” I just like to be able to be here, live here, be comfortable for four days and knowing you have a place to, like, come back to and put your head down and eat something and chill with your friends and neighbors. (Caroline, interview excerpt 2019)

For Caroline, the urban environment of Grandoozy and being forced to leave the festival grounds after the music ended interrupted the immersive experience of the festival and created a detachment that camping festivals like Bonnaroo do not. She enjoys the luxury of being able to camp on-site and meet her neighbors and not go back “into reality.” The ability to be completely immersed at the music festival provides festivalgoers more opportunity to connect with the community, especially in the campground.

In my interview with Sabrina, she described her experiences both camping and non-camping festivals explained that she felt “people here [at Bonnaroo] care about everybody else’s experience as much as their own and people at Lollapalooza only cared

about themselves and their friends.” Lollapalooza is an urban festival that takes place in Chicago, IL every August. Her reflection on the energy she felt at Lollapalooza differs from what she feels at Bonnaroo because she believes Bonnaroo is more community-minded, while the people at Lollapalooza are more concerned with the individual level. This comment is reflective of the point in The Code, “Play as a Team.” At Lollapalooza, Sabrina felt that people were not concerned about the community around them but the application of “Play as a Team” at Bonnaroo promotes a more community-minded atmosphere.

In my survey, I asked individuals to reflect on their experiences at other music festivals without limiting them to camping or non-camping. The responses to this question coincide with Sabrina’s sentiment describing the differences between Bonnaroo and Lollapalooza. For example, one individual responded to the survey saying, “I have been to several other festivals. Every other festival, I noticed the community was more about themselves, vs Bonnaroo is about loving one another.” This quote holds striking similarities to the response from Sabrina. Another person responded, “Bonnaroo is like moving into a new community for a few days. You set up your home with all of your favorite festival amenities and you spend time meeting your neighbors and making new friends. It’s a truly immersive experience. I have yet to feel a high, positive level of engagement with other festivalgoers at any other festival.” This quote coincides with the themes Caroline brought up and the impact of being able to live on-site for the duration of the event. Another individual responded, “the city festivals are entirely too difficult to navigate. It’s extremely hard to get back and forth from the hotel when you’re with thousands of others. Camping is what really sets Roo apart.” The individuals who

participated in my interviews and survey felt Bonnaroo is more community-minded than other festivals and the camping option sets Bonnaroo apart from other festivals, especially city-based festivals.

In my experience, even at other camping-based festivals, I have never felt the level of trust and community in the campground elsewhere. At other camping festivals I have attended, I have had things stolen from my campsite, witnessed the destruction of property, and have had inconsiderate neighbors. While this may be occurring at Bonnaroo, I have not heard of, or experienced this there. In one of my interviews, the group discussed their trust within the community and campground.

**Caroline:** With theft and all things it's really comes down to "Don't Be That Guy", don't be stupid. We have things that are valuable/pawnable with us but I've never had the experience at Bonnaroo where anything has been stolen from me. I leave my cooler out, people could easily walk up and take our beer or water out of our cooler. If somebody really needs a water that bad that they need to steal it, please go for it. But I feel like there is this unspoken rule of Bonnaroo where our tents are our homes, in other environments there could be people rifling through our stuff but its just a nice environment where I feel like I can leave my stuff out and have faith in the community.

**Brandon:** I've heard of people who were being closer to Centeroo might be more of a target for theft. But I really believe it's like the .1% of people, not adhering to the code, who are just shady in general. I definitely don't think it's a common thing here.

**Caroline:** Yeah and like, I obviously wouldn't do this, but I believe that I could probably leave my wallet full of cash out here and it would be totally fine.

The trust in the community for this group has been built throughout years of attendance, positive experiences, and their belief in community adhering to The Code. Their reference to The Code and Don't Be That Guy that can be understood as an individual who does not adhere to the code and negatively impacts other people's time at the festival, in this example through the action of theft. Brandon continues to say that the few individuals who would steal are not adhering to The Code. For these Bonnarooers, trust in the community and campground is linked to The Code and community standards at the festival.

Bonnaroo offers several different camping options in order to ensure the development of community regardless of the situation. Some examples of camping options include: SoloRoo, an area for individuals who attend the festival alone, SheRoo, an area specifically for people who identify as women, and Groop Camping, an area that allows groups of minimum 24 people to be able to camp in one campsite together. These areas create little neighborhoods within the campground and encourage people who have reservations about attending the festival that there is a place for them there. I conducted a group interview in the SoloRoo campground. The layout of SoloRoo mainly consisted of one person tents with one large tent with chairs off to the side that acted as a common space. I entered the large tent, sat in a chair and immediately was greeted and began talking with SoloRooers. My time spent in SoloRoo exuded friendliness and development of community. The individuals who I spoke to were some of the most open and willing people I talked with during my interviews. They all had different reasons for attending

alone, some due to the proximity of travel, some as a personal growth adventure, and others because the group they intended to go with could not make it anymore. The individuals I interviewed in SoloRoo spoke about their experience within this campsite as a positive experience. One person said, “you meet so many amazing people in the campground because we’re all sharing the same experience. Even in Centeroo, once someone finds out you’re here solo, you won’t be solo anymore.” Bonnaroo having a campground specific to individuals who come alone provides a space for individuals to easily make friends and enjoy the festival without being held back.

In the survey I distributed, I asked individuals to reflect on how their neighbors have impacted their experience at Bonnaroo. While a handful of people responded that their neighbors had little to no impact on their experience and they did not interact, many reported that their neighbors positively impacted their experience, sharing resources, and forming lifelong friendships. One individual said, “in 2013, the guys camping next to me had never been before and weren’t prepared. I introduced myself and shared my canopy and some snacks. I found out they were from Chicago, my favorite place to vacation, and since meeting them I have stayed with them in Chicago several times and returned to Bonnaroo camping with them every year since!” For this respondent, his act of kindness and sharing created a friendship that has continued for years inside and outside of the festival. This story was similar to my experience at the festival in 2019. I was camping next to three boys from Canada who have never been to a music festival before and were extremely unprepared. After getting to know them, we shared some of our resources, let them use our grill, and combined our campsites to provide them with shade and extra space. They showed gratitude for our help and told me if it was not for us, they probably

would have had a bad experience and never came back but now will come back and will be more prepared. This moment stood out to me because it shows how important neighbors can be in contributing to the overall experience and how spreading positivity and kindness does build trust within the campground.

Another individual explained how their neighbors influenced their sense of community at Bonnaroo, “we combined our camp with one of our neighbors and ended up hanging out at camp with us the whole weekend. I had literally just introduced myself on the first day and we instantly became friends and I still keep in touch with them off The Farm. They were another reason Roo felt like home and a community.” The combining of campsites with strangers at the festival is common and helps these relationships and experiences transcend the festival.

Similarly, one interview I conducted was with a Bonnaroo veteran who has been 8 times named AB. He was an avid festival goer, frequenting various other festivals such as Electric Forest and Electric Daisy Carnival (EDC). The group he was camping with was composed of a variety of people with different experiences. He was accompanied by his girlfriend who was attending Bonnaroo for the first time, an individual who he met at Bonnaroo 3 years ago (HF), and a few mutual friends who did not interact much. AB told me stories of his time at Bonnaroo and how Bonnaroo stands out amongst the other festivals he has attended, specifically in regards to the campgrounds. He spoke about the community and how giving everybody has been to him. AB and HF camped next to each other 3 years ago at Bonnaroo as strangers and decided to camp together and attend other festivals together since then. These transcendent relationships and the openness to connecting and sharing with neighbors is also a factor that builds trust in the



campground. These reflections depict how the aspect of camping helps the community grow stronger and the opportunities for connections that are harder to achieve at urban festivals.

Based on this research, Bonnaroo, and the community developed there, has set itself apart in the saturated festival industry. One aspect of the community at Bonnaroo is inherently tied to the campground experience and the differences between Bonnaroo and other festivals such as The Code, the bond between neighbors, and various camping accommodations. According to the research participants, the festival sets itself apart because of the openness of the community, the ability to live on-site for the weekend, and the earned trust among attendees.

### **Transcendental Community**

Although the community is only physically together for one weekend each year, some of the ways the community lives on are by incorporating The Code and life experiences into the daily lives outside of the festival, keeping in touch with friends they met on The Farm, and connecting with people through social media groups. Adapting these experiences and lessons into everyday life is written into The Code in the last point, “Stay True Roo.” According to the Bonnaroo website, Stay True Roo is interpreted as “Bonnaroo lasts only a few too short days. The rest of your life is forever. Apply what you do on The Farm to improving you and the world beyond Roo” (“Bonnaroo Music & Arts Festival” n.d.). While leaving the festival in 2019, a local radio station was broadcasting Bonnaroo specific content and the host said, “Fight hate with love. Take everything you’ve learned on The Farm with you into the real world; community, love, and togetherness.” Although Bonnaroo lasts just one weekend a year, the community

lives on through shared experiences, application of The Code, and a collective identity off The Farm.

Applying what happens on The Farm to the world beyond Bonnaroo occurs when individuals use their positive experiences to inform decisions the rest of the year. Returning to the frequency of random acts of kindness at Bonnaroo, Jackson explains that, “random acts of kindness do not need to stay at Bonnaroo, that can go to other places and I feel like that’s the issue. We’re sitting here talking about how amazing it was that people did these things when we can literally do that all the time. Because of my experiences here I pay it forward into the real world and just knowing there are people like us out there that are willing to spread that out there is hopeful.” Experiencing random acts of kindness and adapting this type of generosity into daily life is one way the Bonnaroo experience transcends the weekend. Throughout my interviews, several individuals elaborated on what parts of Bonnaroo should transcend the weekend and how it lives on. In my interview with Ben, an older man who has been attending since 2006, reflects that, “Bonnaroo encourages community in a way that I feel we have lost.” His group discussed how the concept of interacting with neighbors should live on in daily life, “I don’t even know my neighbors in the real world yet here people come over and introduce themselves and treat each other like they want to be part of a community.” He believes that adopting the friendliness of Bonnaroo may generate a stronger sense of community in “the real world.”

In my survey, I asked “do you believe the Bonnaroo community is still present, even when we are not on The Farm?” While some people believe the community only exists during the weekend, “I think not. It’s kind of part of the magic of the festival that

it's temporary. People's daily lives are much different on the farm and the community that thrives there would have a much harder time existing in reality" the majority of responses believed the community transcends the weekend in many ways such as feeling a connection when seeing somebody with Bonnaroo merch on and the online community. Additionally, this glance into the community that exists at Bonnaroo also provides some with hope for humanity "in reality." Throughout my interviews and survey responses, the common theme individuals had while reflecting on this question was relating their experiences at the festival with those in daily life. One person said, "so many people in this place that are willing to be a good person, you don't see that outside of this every day. Just knowing there are people like us out there that are willing to spread that out there is hopeful." Staying true to 'Roo and taking the experiences and lessons learned with you when you exit the festival is an integral way that the community's identity lives on outside of the festival.

Another way the community transcends the festival is through meeting people who have also attended Bonnaroo. One survey respondent answered, "Yes! When you meet another Bonnaroo-vian, or even another person with the spirit you see on The Farm, you just want to share your experiences and connect on a deeper level. Outside of Roo we still radiate positivity and try to meet others who do the same." Similarly, another person said, "Bonnaroo may only be 4 days, but the True Bonnaroo-vians radiate positivity 365 days a year." The application of The Code can be seen in these responses as an example of how the community and lessons learned to transcend the weekend. Additionally, reflecting on random acts of kindness, Caroline explains how this is a way to continue the "spirit of Bonnaroo" off the farm:

Random acts of kindness do not need to stay at Bonnaroo, that can go to other places and I feel like that's the issue. We're sitting here talking about how amazing it was that people did these things when we can literally do that all the time. Because of my experiences here I pay it forward into the real world (Caroline, interview excerpt 2019).

Social media, specifically Facebook groups, subreddits, and Instagram accounts, allow the temporary community to live on throughout the year. There are three dominant Facebook groups: "Bonnaroo, A Loophole to Reality!", "inforoo™", and "Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival 2020." These Facebook groups range from 10,000-21,000 members and have an active posting engagement. Experiences in the Facebook groups were also mentioned in the survey responses. For example, this individual says, "Yes, because the Roo community still keeps in touch through social media and spreads positivity through posts. I have also met friends through these posts, so Roo is still connecting people off of The Farm." Facebook, and social media in general, can be a negative place but the Bonnarooivians in the groups remain positive, overall. The use of social media has acted as a community network of sharing helpful tips, excitement, and even hosting meet-ups at the festival to connect with other group members.

Bonnarooivians have cultivated a sense of community throughout the years that has evolved and carried on since the inauguration of the event. The community lives on through shared traditions and community standards supported by The Code. Bonnaroo offers participants a chance to feel part of a larger community through the various opportunities for interpersonal connection throughout the festival. Although Bonnaroo

only exists for one weekend a year, the community transcends the weekend by applying the experiences at Bonnaroo into their daily lives and staying connected through online spaces like Facebook. Bonnaroo creates a spoken and unspoken bond between individuals, even when they meet outside of the festival through the materialized iconography of Bonnaroo merchandise spotted on strangers in daily life. The souvenirs worn and collected have united strangers to notice and share a common interest based on the shared experience. The experience at Bonnaroo and connection to the community has become a part of some individual's identity and way of living. For some, Bonnaroo is a glimpse into an improved way of living and condoning oneself for the rest of the year. This experience provides individuals with hope for humanity and an altered sense of how communities and life should feel.

## Chapter 5: Escapism

*For people who work a normal nine-to-five job, Bonnaroo is a chance to come lead an alternate life. You come out with your tent, and you stay somewhere else for four days, and run around in the mud and the rain, and eat and drink, and just have a good time and meet a lot of new people. People are always looking for an escape from reality and their normal lives, and that's one reason why so many people love Bonnaroo, because you can come and be a different person, forget about who you are and what you'd normally do.*

- Jim James, My Morning Jacket

*Bonnaroo: what, which, this, that, the other*

Escapism is commonly understood as a temporary leave or relief from the routines of daily life through a physical or psychological change (Stenseng, Rise and Kraft 2010, 19.) Music festivals often provide a combination of physical and psychological escape for attendees. Some forms of escapism that festivals create are the entrance into a new physical space, an immersive community experience, disconnecting from technology and social media, and the hedonistic experiences of dance, drug use, and entertainment. While Escapism is sometimes associated with a negative, intentionally dissociative act and, as humanistic geographer Yi-Fu Tuan explains, that may it “suggest

an inability to face facts - the real world” (1998, 5), other forms of escapism may have the opposite connotation and emotional effects. The term “the real world” is a common phrase used by Bonnarooers to describe life outside of the music festival. In “the real world” routines of daily life are present such as work, school, bills, and emotionally charged problems. One survey respondent mentioned they were attending Bonnaroo because, “real life isn't the easiest to deal with for me. I've been blessed with great people in my life, but there are a lot of personal, relational, and situational challenges that are there every single day. This is the only complete detachment I get from all of it for a few beautiful days on The Farm each year. It means everything to me!” Bonnaroo produces a temporary space where the routines of daily life are not present and allows Bonnarooers to momentarily escape “the real world.” This temporary escape is sometimes described as a “recharge” and detachment for some Bonnarooers that allow them to experience a break from their “real lives” and focus on the present moment away from *reality*.

Bonnarooers temporarily escape from their daily lives of social constructs, work, and responsibilities to enter an autonomous zone found constructed through Bonnaroo. The experience at Bonnaroo somewhat mirrors Victor Turner's rites of passage model. The removal from daily life, or “the real world,” and entrance into Bonnaroo represents the separation aspect. Following this separation is the experiences individuals have while present at Bonnaroo. This space is representative of liminality; when the individual is removed from society and experiencing it in a different form. Finally, in the aggregation stage the Bonnarooer returns to the daily life they left behind while carrying the changed perspective and transformative experiences with them. Although

Bonnaroo may not be transformative for everybody, individuals are made up of past experiences that subconsciously influence the way they behave and orient themselves every day. For the individuals who have had transformative experiences, Turner's model holds true. We see this throughout the previous chapters manifested in the development of a collective identity through community and the transcendental effects the experience holds.

During my first year attending Bonnaroo, I was sitting towards the back of the field watching the band, Local Natives, on the What Stage during the early afternoon. All around me were people dressed in vibrant colors and dancing with props like ribbons and hula hoops. The sun was shining down and it was a beautifully clear day. As I watched them dance to the music, I began to notice something about the crowd. It was filled with colorful people who looked like they were just dancing for themselves, dressing how they wanted to dress, and enjoying this singular moment in time. It was a visual I could not capture through video, even though I tried. It was a feeling within the crowd. Since this experience, I have been searching for "Local Native moments" at festivals. These "Local Native moments" occur throughout Bonnaroo, and other music festivals; they are glimpses of freedom and unapologetic self-expression.

Bonnaroo provides people a place to temporarily escape their lives and enter a space to freely express themselves in a way they may not be able to otherwise. As previously discussed, the strong community at Bonnaroo creates a positive and accepting environment. For example, throughout my interviews and survey results, the community reported a sense of acceptance that they do always not feel in their life and community outside of the festival.



In 2019, Bonnaroo hosted its first Pride parade, as June is national pride month.



*Image 1- Bonnaroo 2019 Pride. Image captured through Facebook.*

This screen capture was taken from the Facebook group: “Bonnaroo: A Loophole to Reality!.” this young girl was able to experience her first Gay Pride Parade at Bonnaroo in 2019 at 13 years old. She has attended the festival since she was four years old and feels confident at a young age to be openly gay with the support of her family and the Bonnaroo community.

However, this is not the first time Bonnaroo has created an atmosphere for LGBTQ+ people to feel accepted. In my interview with Jackson, he recounts a time his

open sexuality at Bonnaroo helped another Bonnarooian feel comfortable to be themselves.

In 2013, we met one of our good friends that we still are friends with to this day. He ran up to us and asked if we were “actually a gay couple” and we were like, “yeah” and he was like, “oh man, I wish my boyfriend was here to see this.” He bolts off and comes back with his boyfriend. We hang out and went to Tom Petty with them and they were shy in their relationship and not comfortable being out and being around us and by the end of the weekend they were more comfortable holding hands and being around each other and stuff and just being able to share that experience and knowing that we were able to like give somebody that confidence to be themselves, that alone is an experience I could never get over and I got that because I was at Bonnaroo (Jackson interview excerpt 2019).

Jackson and his partner helped another gay couple at Bonnaroo feel welcomed and free to be who they are. Although this is Jackson’s description of another couple’s lived experience, Jackson and his fiancé have stayed in touch with this couple and reported that they are out and proud now. While these examples may not be directly due to Bonnaroo, the acceptance felt at the festival may be the push these individuals needed to feel safe and proud. The experience for this couple was elevated by the acceptance the festival holds for people to be their “real” selves. Since then, Bonnaroo hosting the Pride parade has even further encouraged these experiences for Bonnarooians.

Although Bonnarooians are breaking from some social norms of the “real world,” they are also creating norms within the festival grounds. The boom of the music

festival industry within the last decade developed an emergence of festival clothing brands and trends. From the tie-dye shirts and flower crowns to “freeing the nipple,” festival attire has become a major sector of the culture developed at music festivals. Popular clothing stores such as Forever 21, Urban Outfitters, and even Target have begun branding summer clothing lines around festival fashion. Additionally, large online companies such as Dolls Kill and iheartraves, and small Etsy shops curating custom designs, have dedicated entire clothing lines to festival fashion.

“The style of dress known commonly as ‘festival fashion,’ features styles that would look right at home at Woodstock such as floral crowns, floppy hats, fringe, lace, peasant blouses, halter tops, crochet and macramé, flowing maxi dresses, kaftans, slip dresses, tie-dye, denim cutoffs, ethnic prints and accessories” (Divita 2016, 1). Inspired by the 1960s hippie counterculture era fashion, music festival fashion has become a sort of uniform for festival goers with numerous distinctive style markers that evolve each year. Festival fashion and the use of costumes have become accepted and expected as a way of dressing at the events. Unfortunately, some festival fashion has stirred up controversies in the culture due to heavy occurrences of cultural appropriation by wearing things such as Native American headdresses, “warpaint,” and Indian bindis without cultural context, permission, or awareness. Festivals across the world, such as Outside Lands, Osheaga, and Bass Coast Festival, have begun banning festivalgoers from wearing headdresses to promote respect for Native culture and heritage since 2014 (Freda 2014).

However, festival fashion extends farther, and less offensively, than this part of it. Festival fashion is one example of how attendees at music festivals across the world can express themselves in ways they would not be able to in daily life outside of the event. A

brief google search of “music festival fashion” will give you dozens of photos of tan, thin, women in “boho-chic” outfits with fringe, glitter, and floral prints. While this image is somewhat true of a portion of the crowd at Bonnaroo, the fashion observed at Bonnaroo is much wider than this. Photographer, David Bruce, has created an ongoing photo project entitled “I am Bonnaroo” to capture Bonnarooivians at the festival, as seen in the photos below.



*Image 2 - Examples of festival fashion. Photo credit: David Bruce “I Am Bonnaroo” project*

As captured in Bruce’s photos; glitter, vibrant colors, sequin, and even nudity are all common festival fashion at Bonnaroo. While festival fashion is not unique to Bonnaroo,

it is encouraged, accepted, and commonplace. Additionally, as seen in these photos, festival fashion can range from costumes to more simple and colorful pieces.

Festival fashion is unique to everybody and a form of self-expression however one feels comfortable. One survey respondent stated, “Bonnaroo is a place where you can be your true self without judgment.” One example of this acceptance can be seen through festival attire. Another survey respondent reflected, “I was relaxing in the grass Friday night in 2018 by The Other Stage, listening to music, when a 15 foot inflatable unicorn and a crew of people in unicorn onesies created over the horizon, danced through the crowd, and then went in their way to the next location. I remember feeling that was such a magical moment and how cool it was that it didn't feel out of place or absurd in any way.” Imagine if these outfits and moments occurred outside of the music festival setting. They would not be described as not feeling “out of place” or “absurd,” they would most likely be paired with judgment and confusion. This ability to be carefree and embrace the freedom and individuality is part of the “Local Native moment” and the Bonnaroo culture that fosters self-expression and acceptance.

Similar to the unicorn sighting, a group interview described and analyzed the idea of freedom and self-expression through fashion and costume based on a moment they had in a crowd in 2019. They watched an older man dressed up as a mermaid and feel welcome to wear whatever he wanted that day and was celebrated for it:

**Jackson:** In the real world we've been brought up to see everybody as competition.

That's not how it is here. Everyone is just here and it's the one chance you have that nobody knows you and you get to show the world who you really are. To enjoy the music, have a good time, enjoy the atmosphere. There isn't that

competition. There isn't that need to feel like somebody is better or worse – everybody is equal.

**Madeline:** I definitely understand that. Here you're not a neuroscientist, I'm not a student, we're all just here and nobody knows what anybody's business is. We get to show like, "this is who I really am outside of what I do."

**Jackson:** Exactly, it's like the one chance you have! Nobody knows you, there is no pre-set version of you. You get to show the world who you are.

**Caroline:** And if you want to be somebody different for the weekend you can be! There was this dude in a mermaid outfit at The Other Stage and he was this magnificent man!

**Dave:** Yeah guaranteed he works at like H&R Block or some shit.

**Caroline:** Yeah older dude with his girlfriend or wife and he had on this glorious crown, a beautiful purple bob wig with some stunning highlights. And I really feel like he doesn't get that chance a lot or has never gotten that chance before. I told him "I don't even care what's going on this show because you are everything to me right now" and he was just loving it and working it and in a way that I'm like yeah, he does probably work at H&R Block or something and can finally be free.

**Jackson:** Just watching him having his moment and enjoying it. Getting to see other people having their moment is so cool.

**Dave:** Somebody came up to him and asked to take a photo and you could just tell like he was so happy right after the person left and probably didn't think anybody was going to do that.

In addition to self-acceptance and being your “real self,” Bonnaroo creates a place where you can be whoever, and whatever, you want to be. Acceptance at Bonnaroo extends through the culture that exists and has evolved throughout the years. “What one escapes to is culture - not culture that has become daily life, not culture as a dense and inchoate environment and way of coping, but culture that exhibits lucidity, a quality often comes out of a process of simplification” (Taun 1998, 23). The culture at the festival is unlike the culture embedded in the daily lives of the Bonnarooivians. The simplification is the separation of the two worlds into one without the harsh constructs. In the words of a survey respondent, “we tend to file into our roles and identify with them, but I saw with the help of Roo that people are people. We have infinite possibilities to change and grow and become whatever it is we want to be.” By escaping the constraints of gender, dress, and sexuality, and getting rid of the professional expectations placed on individuals in the “real world,” Bonnarooivians can express themselves however they want to. Jackson explains how he does not feel there is competition among the community at Bonnaroo how he experiences it in the real world. The competition in daily life is based on the social system put in place and the competition to obtain good jobs and higher education. Competition at music festivals is not seen in these constraints but competition may arise in other forms such as festival fashion, seniority in the festival scene, and attitudes surrounding the musicians performing. However, the data gathered combats this potential competition at Bonnaroo through the display and accounts of acceptance and willingness to offer a helping hand.

While there may be some Bonnarooivians that leave the festival and remain their free and freaky selves, it is more common that people have school, work, or

responsibilities outside of the festival that hinders them from acting and dressing the way they can at the festival. One individual I interviewed, Matt, described their daily life as, “on a daily basis, I’m a conservative person, I wear a suit and tie to work every day. Here, I can be myself. This is a really good break; I feel like I am discovering myself a lot more and discovering parts of myself that I never really knew before.” When I interviewed Matt, he was wearing a bright pink floral shirt and talked about how he turned his phone off for the weekend because he kept receiving updates and emails from work. This ability to escape and disconnect from the responsibilities of “the real world” allows Bonnarooers to immerse themselves in the experience of the festival and aids self-discovery.

In my survey, I asked individuals “what does Bonnaroo mean to you?” and one of the most common responses described Bonnaroo as “home.” For example, one respondent said, “Bonnaroo is a release for me. It recharges my battery. It's home.” In this context, the idea of home is self-proclaimed and imagined for the Bonnarooers as opposed to a place they live in. It is a place filled with comfort and safety. To expand on the *rites de passage* model, Bonnaroo is situated as the liminal stage. This is the stage where they are being transformed and recharged to reintegrate into their “real lives” outside of the festival. The lessons and experiences they learn at this festival are transformational and transcendent.

When one thinks about “home” it is mostly associated with somewhere they live. It is connected to a tangible place where the individual has developed memories, community, and spent time with people close to them. While traditionally, home is one of dwelling, it can also become a metaphorical or temporary space for some. The ways in



which a non-dwelling space can feel like home include, “community-related and friend-related responses” as distinctive aspects of how people identify these spaces as home (Cuba and Hummon 2009, 117). Friend-related responses include interactions with strangers, meeting new people, and connecting with neighbors to eventually develop friendships. Community-related responses are linked to the sense of community one feels in a space and the attraction to a lifestyle present there. Applying these ideas to Bonnaroo, the community is developed at Bonnaroo throughout the campground and connection between neighbors, the temporary yet transcendent aspects of the community, and through a binding culture consisting of traditions, shared experiences, and lifestyle. The connection between the sense of community and the feeling of at-homeness at Bonnaroo, for some Bonnarooivians, is inherently tied. Describing Bonnaroo as “home” is somewhat common for Bonnarooivians. Additionally, while describing Bonnaroo as home there is a reference to the community members, they are sharing the space and experience with. However, the reference to community is often on a broader and more indirect scale referring to the strangers around them as seen in these survey responses: “Bonnaroo is not something that you can find the right words to describe! It’s magical and you get to high-five friends you’ll never even know the name of! It’s my soul home” and “Bonnaroo felt like home with a family I’ve never met but loved.”

This account of feeling communion with strangers coincides directly with Anderson’s theory of imagined community (1991). Although the Bonnarooivians may not know each other by name, the sense of kinship, love, and unity described in these quotes can be attributed to this theory. Additionally, here we can see *communitas* forming and rejecting the common structures of community as defined within and outside of

anthropology. The Bonnarooers have described their participation in the festival community as more of an unstructured feeling and community spirit, it is not tied to any social structures and stretches beyond the four days at the festival.

Bonnaroo provides an escape for some Bonnarooers from “the real world.” Bonnaroo has created a space for acceptance and self-expression through festival fashion, community norms, and lack of judgment. It has proven to be a space to temporarily release the worries and constraints of the real world to enter a space that has the power to transform and recharge. Bonnarooers have gone farther than describing life outside of the festival as “the real world” to describing life inside the festival as “home.” Bonnaroo, and music festivals more generally, has become an anchor for some individuals; their one vacation a year, their chance to detach from daily life and enter a space outside of their routines. Entering a self-ascribed home away from home, specifically as a form of escapism or not, has created an imagined home since Bonnaroo is a temporary space. Music festivals generate a space for acceptance and self-expression that allows individuals to identify these spaces as a safe space and home.

## Chapter 6: The Lived Experience

*People come and hang out in the middle of nowhere to smell each other's funk and listen to great, eclectic music from all corners of the industry. To get this many people together in one place, and be peaceful, that's the power of this weekend.*

-Dave Matthews, Dave Matthews Band

*Bonnaroo: what, which, this, that, the other*

Bonnaroo has become a significant place and event for many individuals who return to The Farm year after year. Throughout the weekend, Bonnarooivians collect a colorful array of memories that touch them for different reasons. Big and small memories form from the individual level to a collective one. This chapter explores individuals' responses to the questions, "can you tell me about a significant memory you have from Bonnaroo?" and "what does Bonnaroo mean to you?" The answers to these questions allow unfiltered personal narratives to be heard and give a firsthand account of the lived experience of the Bonnarooivians. The narrated memories in this chapter explore the significance of the festival on an individual level, these memories are reflections of the self in this space and contribute to a sense of belonging, self-discovery, and identity.

Many stories that were told throughout my interviews were primarily tied to the music, the community, a psychedelic drug experience, or some combination of the three that encouraged a form of introspective growth. The introspective growth can be seen as

a form of catharsis, a reflection of the stages of *communitas*, and a glimpse into the effects of escapism. Jackson, for example, reflected on a moment at Paul McCartney in 2013 as a moment that changed the way he heard music, this story combines the elements of music, community, and a psychedelic drug experience that encapsulates one of his most cherished memories of Bonnaroo:

Paul McCartney in 2013, on acid. The way I heard music changed for me from that moment. Hearing “Let It Be” on acid, of course that would be moving regardless, but at that heightened experience with so many people around you experiencing that same moment it changes things for you and you see things differently. I felt so at home. I felt like I could just be me and nobody was judging. There was just such a positive energy in this place. There’s a strong hope you get from Bonnaroo, these people are all here for the same reason and this brought all these people together to celebrate something we are all so touched by. What these artists have put out for us to be here and it doesn’t matter if you’re here to do it for a heightened experience, or just the music, Bonnaroo has something for everyone. This is a one of a kind experience (Jackson, interview excerpt 2019).

Jackson’s story and reflection show how the three elements of music, community, and partaking in psychedelic drug use created a *heightened* experience for him at Bonnaroo. He responded to my question with this story without hesitation, this moment stuck with him and was an almost uncontrollable response to why he continues to attend the festival. While he explains how emotionally moving the experience would have been without the collection of elements, he elaborates on how and why this moment was so special to him because of the blend of music, community, and LSD. This reflection on

drug use mirrors the responses in my survey regarding drug use. My survey question, “was recreational drug use a significant part of your festival experience?” generated a total of 99 responses, 20 individuals responded, “yes,” 23 individuals responded, “yes, I believe it enhanced the music and overall experience,” 33 individuals claimed, “yes, but I still would have had a great time without them,” and 10 individuals responded “no.” This survey question had the option to select all that applied, while it is not possible to see the overlap in answers those who participated in recreational drug use found it to enhance their experience but also found they would have a good time without them, similar to Jackson’s reflection.

We also revisit the feeling of home here; Bonnaroo began to feel like home in that moment for Jackson. It became a place of positivity and acceptance based on a shared experience with strangers. However, it is important to understand that he says, “Bonnaroo has something for everyone” because although the combination of music, community, and drug use has become a common narrative amongst some of the informants’ reports of significant experiences, it is not the universal narrative of the community. Brandon provides us an example of how a moment at Bonnaroo transformed his fear of crowds and changed this aspect of his life:

I’ve always been kind of claustrophobic in groups of people and when I was at Radiohead in 2012, it was like a massive sea of people at the What Stage, and it just went away for some reason. I was completely comfortable in a sea of people and like now I can just weave all the way up to the front of the stage and be surrounded by people and be completely comfortable and like I don’t know, Bonnaroo changed that for me. (Brandon, interview excerpt 2019).

Brandon reports his significant memory to be tied to a moment of personal growth because of the community that attended Radiohead in 2012. He was able to confront and grow from a lifelong struggle of claustrophobia in crowds because of the comfort he felt being at Bonnaroo in a crowd of thousands. This moment was significant to him because he is now able to incorporate this accomplishment of overcoming a fear into his daily life and at other concerts or festivals.

While reflecting on my conversations and survey responses on this topic, I began to reminisce about my most cherished experience at Bonnaroo. At my first Bonnaroo in 2013, I remember watching Tom Petty finish his set on Sunday night, closing out the festival. The whole crowd at the What Stage turned around to leave Centeroo and go back to the campground. I was in this huge crowd of people and Bonnaroo 2013 had just ended when suddenly, the entire crowd just started singing the “na na na na” of “Hey Jude” by The Beatles as we were walking under the arch for the last time that year. People were releasing paper Chinese lanterns into the sky, drifting away above the arch. This moment felt so unified and sentimental and I felt the magic of Bonnaroo in that moment. A few years later, I was watching Portugal. The Man’s set at Firefly Music Festival and they incorporated the “na na na na’s” into their song “Sleep Forever.” I felt myself audibly gasp and tears rolling down my face as I began to sing along. I was in the midst of several personal challenges and in a transitional period of life. In that moment, I felt this insane emotional breakthrough and came to terms that everything was going to be okay. Although I was not even at Bonnaroo for that set, the comfort I felt walking under the arch that night came back to me and it felt like a sign that everything was going to work out. For me, my significant experience is tied to community and music in a way that

differs from the others. My musical reference is not tied to a concert but the community's contagious eruption of song and unity that night.

For Jackson, taking acid enhanced his experience watching Paul McCartney's set within a community of people experiencing the same moment. For Brandon, the music and community helped him overcome a life-long struggle with claustrophobia in crowds. For me, the community singing a song together and having this song reemerge throughout my life has changed the way I hear "Hey Jude" and redefined it as a good omen whenever I hear it. These stories are snippets of personal narratives for us. "Personal narrative simultaneously is born out of experience and gives shape to experience. In this sense, narrative and self are inseparable" (Ochs and Capps 1996, 21). These experiences and memories have changed the way we experience and interpret things in the world, they enhanced our narrative of the Bonnaroo experience, and they are inseparable from ourselves because they have transformed who we are today.

Narratives of significant memories can be shared among strangers without knowing. Thousands of people are experiencing this communal moment in a crowd and two informants, separately, told me the same story about a moment at an Elton John performance in 2014:

It was our first Roo and me and my two friends who I've been to every Roo with since kept seeing this astronaut/Buzz Lightyear balloon throughout the weekend. We took a liking to it and had fun spotting it every day. Fast forward to the last set of the weekend, Elton John, the crowd was singing along to Rocketman and at the end of this beautiful performance we looked up in the sky and saw the Buzz Lightyear balloon floating above the crowd. Someone had been carrying this rocket man around

all weekend just to let him fly during this song. The crowd around us was so moved and it was such a special moment and an amazing way to close out my first Roo (Sabrina, interview excerpt 2019).

While I was going through my survey responses, I noticed a different person mention this exact same moment as being their most significant experience. Two strangers reporting the significance of this moment to them made me wonder how many moments have been shared among strangers at the festival that carried with them throughout the years. Such a simple moment of somebody letting go of a helium balloon, or singing along to a song together, has united strangers without them even knowing it. These moments that are significant to individuals may have been significant to the collective of the community, enhancing the energy and communal feelings and identity attached to the festival.

The memories and narratives the Bonnarooivians shared with me are just one way of understanding the lived experience, another way is through the understanding of the feelings and emotions linked to the festival. Bonnarooivians have described their attachment to the festival as a home away from home, “Bonnaroo is home. It is where I can go to embrace myself and remember that life doesn’t have to be taken so seriously all the time. Bonnaroo is the most open and loving space I have ever experienced, and I feel honored to call myself a Bonnarooivan.” This survey response describes Bonnaroo as home, and they have allowed Bonnaroo to become part of their identity. A home is a safe haven where one should feel comfortable and a sense of familiarity. Whether Bonnaroo being describes as “home” alludes to a form of escapism or an example of the depth of



significance this festival holds to some individuals, it is apparent that Bonnaroo is more than just the farmland the festival resides on, it is a collection of the energy, community, and emotion that is created each June at the festival.

While the community at Bonnaroo is seen as transcendent, it is important to notice how “Stay True Roo” can also be applied on an individual level. In order to have the community transcend past the event, individuals must be able to apply the lessons and experiences to daily life. Recognizing these experiences as transcendent and transformational is another way people find significance in the festival. For example, one survey respondent

I went to see many shows on my own during my first Roo and got to know the people who attended and worked there. Many had been coming for years, like a pilgrimage, to escape the negativity of the world and be around people who felt the same way and loved music. On my own I began to see what they were talking about and experience the effect Bonnaroo has for myself. Bonnaroo is so much more than a music festival. It's where people are positive to one another. I left my first Roo wanting to be a positive version of myself and bring back to my community a little of what I experienced there. I became a vegetarian after my first Roo and feel healthier. I carried the positivity I experienced there back with me to transform my life. It's the only festival with a code you can apply year-round, if you choose (Survey Response 2019).

For this survey respondent, Bonnaroo became an influence that changed their lives even after the festival had ended by adapting The Code and lessons learned into their day to day. This is another example of how Bonnaroo transcends the four-day weekend and

how it can be adapted back into the everyday life of the Bonnaroo'vian. If an individual is willing to let this experience be transcendent and transformative, it will be. Throughout my data, individuals have also alluded to the healing aspects this weekend away gives them. One survey respondent reported, "The worst thing could probably happen to me here but I would always come back, I didn't think coming back here would have as much power on me as it did but I feel. I deal with depression and anxiety, I don't medicate, Bonnaroo has been all the therapy I need for one year." Bonnaroo holds power for individuals as more than just an escape from reality but as a form of catharsis to encourage change and healing in their life outside of the festival. This moment of catharsis was seen in a variety of ways throughout my research data. Individuals spoke about the power Bonnaroo has to help them recharge, have emotional breakthroughs, and regain faith in humanity in a therapeutic way.

Bonnaroo has become a significant part of the lives of many Bonnaroo'vians. Each summer tens of thousands of people take a trip to Manchester, TN to experience all that Bonnaroo has to offer. The lived experiences of the Bonnaroo'vians stretches from a few selected memories to larger feelings and emotional connections to the event. One survey respondent described their main motivation for attending the festival as, "the pilgrimage to the farm has become a sacred tradition" and even reported that they will be getting married at Bonnaroo in 2020. Bonnaroo is more than the music or the memories. It is significant because it is a collection of everything reinforced by the community and the energy Bonnaroo creates. As one survey respondent stated, "Bonnaroo means being free in myself, experiencing music and people, forming deep connections through different

avenues than outside of the festival. It's my happy place, it's High-Five Friday, it's the love and positivity that can, and will, move me to tears.”

## **Chapter 7: Discussion**

Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival was used as a case study to explore and understand the lived experiences of music festival attendees and the community that is developed there in order to gain a glimpse into the significance that music festivals have on the lives of the attendees. This thesis documents the lived experiences of the Bonnarooivians in order to understand the varying effects the festival has on individuals, elements that make the community what it is and how it transcends the boundaries of the festival, and how individuals are ascribing meaning to these experiences. The experience of Bonnarooivians is marked by the inclusion and development of a strong sense of community and an opportunity to psychologically and physically escape everyday life. The meanings ascribed to the festival include the importance of community, the countless unique experiences, and the transformational moments that have carried with them beyond the confines of the weekend.

The community of Bonnarooivians is linked to the positivity that is experienced at the festival and the appropriation of the Bonnarooivian Code, the connections and relationships made at the festival, and the continuation of the community outside of the event. Positivity can be seen as a way of life for some Bonnarooivians, it is spread throughout the festival through art, acts of kindness, and in the unofficial slogan, “Radiate Positivity,” that can be found on merchandise and in the voices of the

community. The Bonnaroo Code is used as guidelines to build the community standards and etiquette. Although not all Bonnarooians will follow The Code, it encourages a set of norms for how they conduct themselves at the event and may influence some to carry these lessons with them outside of the festival. Bonnaroo is a camping festival that allows attendees to live on-site for the duration of the weekend. Camping at Bonnaroo is another factor that influences the formation of the community because of the relationships it promotes between neighbors, the trust it builds among attendees, and the immersive experience it creates. Bonnarooians have elaborated on how they have made lifelong friendships because of the immersive camping experience and acknowledged the openness and helpfulness of their neighbors. Although the community is formed, in part, through this immersive experience, the community transcends the weekend by the development of online communities on social media, meeting fellow Bonnarooians in daily life, and carrying the experiences and feelings of the festival into the everyday.

Escapism was manifested in the temporary physical and psychological entrance into a new space with new norms and a new community. The festival reportedly created a space for Bonnarooians to leave behind their responsibilities and worries in “the real world.” This separation of worlds altered Bonnarooians’ perceptions of self through moments of self-discovery and the ability to be either their true selves or “whomever they wanted to be” for the duration of the weekend. These feelings were encouraged by the accepting nature of the people around them. Some Bonnarooians referred to the festival as a self-ascribed “home.” While the term home is usually related to a place of dwelling,

the Bonnarooivians are using it as a term to describe a place they have found the feeling of home connected to the community and sense of belonging they feel there.

The lived experiences and stories told by the Bonnarooivians allow for a firsthand understanding of why the festival is significant to them, the catharsis one feels after spending the weekend there, or the transcendent and transformative experiences that have carried on far beyond the four days. Bonnaroo, and the community developed there, has become part of the identity of some attendees. These memories have contributed to positive self-growth and a sense of belonging and are inseparable from the individuals.

Although the chapters in this thesis were separated by thematic categories, the key findings would not exist without elements from each other. The themes of community, escapism, home, and reflections of memories can be seen weaving throughout the chapters. They connect and they influence the findings related to each theme. For example, escapism is found through these significant experiences that exist in the memories of Bonnarooivians, the feeling of home that is linked to the sense of community, are reflected in the positive attitudes of the Bonnarooivians, which encourage feelings of acceptance and self-discovery people feel. These elements may be separate on paper, but they are interconnected in the entirety of the experience.

The findings suggest that although music festivals may be temporary, highly populated, events, something larger is happening here. As explained throughout previous research, communities are known to be connected to a sense of belonging (Brow 1990) or developed through commonalities (Gold 2005). While there are specific findings that have been explored to understand the community at Bonnaroo, the community is tied to these larger definitions. The lived experience of the community at Bonnaroo can be seen

as a sense of belonging one feels to their fellow Bonnarooians with the shared experience of the festival creating a commonality. I also believe this promotes the transcendence of the community outside of the event. Examples of these claims can be seen throughout the thesis. For example, individuals reported feeling connected to strangers met in daily life that has attended the event because of the shared experience it implies. Additionally, a sense of belonging can be linked to the descriptions of Bonnaroo as “home” or the community being called “family” while speaking about strangers. The sense of belonging can also be felt throughout the exploration of escapism. Specifically, the individuals who felt welcomed to be themselves or experienced feelings of self-discovery at the event.

The community developed at Bonnaroo fits into anthropology’s three characterizations of community: common interests, common locality, and common social system or structure (Rapport 2009). At the minimum, the community at Bonnaroo was formed around the common interests of live music and festivals. The community exists on the venue grounds, Great Stage Park. Lastly, the common social system or structure at Bonnaroo can be found in the shared community standards, The Bonnarooian Code, and is fueled by positivity. However, I believe the community at Bonnaroo can be viewed more theoretically than a tangible entity, it is something that is felt and experienced even outside of the locality, it is not tied to things such as employment as Minar and Greer (1969) suggest.

The community at Bonnaroo can be seen in Anderson’s theory of imagined community. There are approximately 73,000 attendees each year, some Bonnarooians cannot attend each year, and the community is only physically together for one weekend

out of the year. As Anderson explains, the imagined community is linked to comradeship and although the community may not know every member there is still validity and communion (Anderson 1991). It is impossible to know every member in the community at Bonnaroo and it should not matter if you are physically together or not, the community is a feeling of unity among people fostered through the sense of belonging and identity.

Turner's distinction between community and *communitas* can also be closely linked to the findings in this research. The community at Bonnaroo has broken away from the three categories derived from annual reviews on the subject in anthropology including common interests, common locality, and common social system or structure. While Bonnarooians bond over the common interests of Bonnaroo, music, and music festivals and the community is formed on the festival grounds, the community is more than this as seen throughout my findings. The community transcends outside of the weekend, making it imagined and linked to a sense of belonging and identity.

While I do not classify Bonnaroo as a "transformational festival" (Jeet-Kei Leung 2010), I believe Bonnaroo has transformational capabilities for people attending. Specifically related to Chapters 6 and 7, the experiences at Bonnaroo are proving to be more than attending live music. Through modes of escapism and impactful significant experiences, Bonnarooians are being impacted and changed by the emotions and occurrences that are happening because of Bonnaroo. These experiences are linked to self-discovery, overcoming fears, and pushing the boundaries of societal expectations. Leung (2010) has described the effects of transformational experiences as based on the need for community and the psychological benefits individuals are exposed to throughout these events. While "transformational festivals" are more of a niche classification with



events including, Shambala and Burning Man, Bonnarooians are experiencing similar outcomes. I believe the research should widen to become more inclusive and aware that although not all festivals are classified as “transformational festivals” elements are being found that can expand the research on this phenomenon.

Some limitations of the findings in this thesis are derived from the small population size I collected my data from and the inability to collect data from other music festivals. Additionally, my survey was released approximately 2 months after the event, it is possible that releasing it earlier or later may have changed the number and quality of responses. Next, some individuals interviewed reflected on experiences that happened in their past attendance which creates the possibility of exaggeration, missing details, or misinformation in their account. This research was executed with a timeline in mind to coordinate with the completion of my degree, so the scope of the research needed to be realistic and manageable. I hope to continue to explore this topic by gathering data from other music festivals and additional data from Bonnarooians.

Further research on this topic would benefit from a higher level of comparison between festivals or more case studies that explore the communities and motivations for attendance. Constructing similar research projects at other festival has the potential to further theorize the transformational and emotional effects of the events, explore other developments of community, and potentially find subcultures and subgroups within each event. Methodological variations may be valuable to explore, specifically utilizing on-site surveys and more structured interviews between a larger number of people. Researching festivals in other countries may also serve as a favorable route to understand how festivals are being perceived and experienced around the world.

## **Conclusions**

Music festivals are a prominent experience for hundreds of thousands of individuals around the world. It is crucial to understand and document how these experiences are being interpreted and lived as they are a sector of a current cultural zeitgeist. These festivals are transformative, influential, and are building communities that extend far beyond the temporary spaces they physically exist in. They are widely positive experiences for attendees and fulfilling human needs for community and catharsis. The effects of these events hold lasting changes on attendees, whether it is a resulted change in attitude, self-discovery, or overcoming challenges. This research penetrates the conversations surrounding the elements of different communities and challenges the idea that communities must exist in a physical space.

While not every person will attend a music festival, humans have found a sense of belonging in their own communities and every person has an anchor that allows them to recharge, momentarily escape, and find happiness. Although this research is just one case study, the fundamental elements of the findings throughout this research can be applied to larger fields of research and experiences in life. I urge anthropologists to learn from my research methods, and the methods of those I referenced, if conducting fieldwork at music festivals to improve the ways we can acquire data from these events. I hope, regardless of education or discipline, this research provides first-hand accounts to individuals interested in learning about music festivals and allows them to understand the lived experiences of the Bonnarooivians.

## **Afterword: COVID-19 and The Festival Industry**

As I was working toward the completion of this thesis and preparing for graduation, the Coronavirus spread to the United States in March 2020. Seemingly overnight, reality and normalcy completely changed for millions. There was a cancellation of on-campus classes in schools across the country, a closure of all non-essential businesses, stay-at-home orders in all major cities, and of course, the cancellation and postponement of all music festivals and concerts for the foreseeable future. As of right now, Bonnaroo remains postponed for September 24-27, however; it is highly possible within the upcoming weeks Bonnaroo 2020 will be officially canceled based on the trends of other festivals and major tours.

As mentioned throughout this thesis, music festivals are considered anchors for some people. Their one vacation a year, their one chance to let loose and escape the constraints of daily life. As more festivals begin to cancel their 2020 dates, Bonnarooivians have taken to the Facebook group to voice their concerns, spread positivity in these trying times, and stay hopeful for the September dates but realistic for the possibility of cancellation.

Top name industry concert promoters such as Live Nation and Insomniac, have taken major monetary hits due to the effects of COVID-19 on the industry. Live Nation, who recently purchased Superfly's share of Bonnaroo in 2019, has taken cost-cutting

measures such as hiring freezes, furloughs, and the CEO Michael Rapino declined the rest of his \$3 million-dollar salary (Millman 2020). The company has faced millions of event cancellations and has already refunded 1.6 million tickets for these canceled events and has donated \$10 million to funds supporting individuals in the industry who have lost their jobs (Millman 2020). Additionally, Insomniac Events has furloughed 50% of its employees and has faced similar monetary hits and major event cancellations (Brooks 2020).

While the future is uncertain in so many different facets of our lives right now, the music industry has been active to maintain community for music lovers around the world. Various digital music festivals, such as Digital Mirage, Room Service Festival, and Dreamworld, have been created since the pandemic has started. These festivals are completely free for streaming and consist of dozens of artists recording live sets from their homes to be streamed online for fans. These digital music festivals have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for charities like Sweet Relief Musicians Fund that are providing financial assistance to musicians and music industry workers who are suffering from illness, financial instability, or other issues related to COVID-19. Additionally, drive-in concerts have begun to pop up around the world and social distancing theater layouts have been released as options for moving forward.

Although these online festivals will never compare to the feelings we get while dancing in a crowd of strangers, there is a live chat feature where individuals can interact in real-time with a community of fans and artists who are also watching. Every now and then while I am watching the stream of comments, I read, “happy roo!” and smile knowing there are Bonnarooers out there going through this with me. This time may be

one of the most horrific times I will witness in my lifetime, but I am hopeful knowing the community of music lovers I have found so much solace in is still present online and will meet again on the farm soon.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Complete interview guide and informed consent script

#### Informed Consent:

This interview should take approximately 15-30 minutes and is looking to gain an understanding on your experiences at Bonnaroo. Throughout the course of the interview, you have every right to skip a question, redirect the conversation, or end the interview at any time. By participating in this interview, you are agreeing to allow me to record your voice and use this conversation as data in my MA thesis in Anthropology at the University of Denver. I may use this data in future publications or extensions of this topic. I am the only person who has access to the recording of this interview and there will be no identifiable data linking this interview, or its use in my thesis, back to you.

Do you have any questions before we start?

Will you confirm that you are sober for this interview and above the age of 18?

Do you consent to this interview?

#### Interview Guide:

There will be two separate interview guides depending on the informant's previous experiences (i.e. if this is their first time attending Bonnaroo or a music festival in general vs an individual who has attended in the past years).

##### A: Individual who is attending Bonnaroo for the first time

- Have you been to Bonnaroo before? (no)
  - Why did you choose to come to Bonnaroo this summer?
  - Have you been to other festivals in the past?
    - (If yes) How does Bonnaroo compare to the other festivals you have been to?
- Who did you come to Bonnaroo with?
  - Have you met people since you have been here?
- Can you tell me about a significant memory you have from Bonnaroo?
  - Why did this memory stand out to you?
- What does Bonnaroo mean to you?
- Do you feel like you are part of a community while you're here?
- Would you come back in the future?

##### B: Individual who has attended in the past years

- Have you been to Bonnaroo before? (yes)
  - When was your first Bonnaroo?
  - How many times have you come?
  - Have you been to other festivals in the past?
    - (if yes) How does Bonnaroo compare to other festivals?
- Who did you come to Bonnaroo with?

- Have you met people since you have been here?
  - Do you keep in contact with anybody you have met in the years prior?
- Can you tell me about a significant memory you have from Bonnaroo?
  - Why did this memory stand out to you?
- What does Bonnaroo mean to you?
- Do you feel like you are part of a community while you're here?
- Have you noticed any changes in your years on the farm?
  - This can include observations about people, lineup, traditions, your personal experiences (probe if needed)

## Appendix B: Online Survey

The online survey was created through Qualtrics and posted in the Facebook group, 'Bonnaroo: A Loophole to Reality' on August 26, 2019 with the caption:

Hey everybody! I am working towards my MA in Anthropology at the University of Denver and I am writing my thesis on the community at Bonnaroo. The survey below will take about 10 minutes and the responses will be used as data for my research. The survey is completely anonymous and voluntary - nothing is off limits. Please feel free to message me if you have any questions, your help is greatly appreciated!

### Questions:

- 1) By participating in this survey, you are allowing me to use your answers as data towards the completion of my master's thesis, *More than Music: The Lived Experiences of Communities Developed Through Music Festivals*. All response data will remain anonymous. Please answer honestly and openly.  
Do you agree to these terms?  
Yes  
No
- 2) Please list the year(s) you have attended Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival. (If more than one year, please separate by commas)
- 3) What are your motivations for attending Bonnaroo? (Select all that apply).  
Lineup  
Tradition  
Community  
Proximity/Convenience for travel  
Escape from daily life  
Freedom and self-expression  
Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Have you attended another music festival? In what ways do those experiences differ or compare to Bonnaroo? (If N/A please skip).
- 5) What does Bonnaroo mean to you?
- 6) Please describe a significant or memorable experience you have had while attending Bonnaroo.
- 7) Do you feel like you are part of a community at Bonnaroo?  
Definitely yes  
Probably yes  
Might or might not  
Probably not  
Definitely not
- 8) Do you believe the Bonnaroo community is still present even when we are not on the farm? Why or why not?
- 9) How have your camp neighbors impacted your Bonnaroo experience?

10) Was recreational drug use a significant part of your festival experience? (Select all that apply).

Yes

No

Yes, I believe it enhanced the music and overall experience

Yes, but I still would have had a great time without them

No, I don't like the drugg culture at Bonnaroo

Other

11) Do you plan on attending Bonnaroo again?

Definitely yes

Probably yes

Might or might not

Probably not

Definitely not

Appendix C: The Bonnarooian Code – [as displayed on bonnaroo.com]

1. "Prepare Thyself" – "The power to predict is a special human ability. We embrace it by thinking ahead. Expecting to be outdoors in the Tennessee summer? Think hydration, plenty of sunblock, raingear, hats... Deck yourself out as an all-in-one Swiss Army Knife so you don't have to McGuyver your way through the festival."
2. "Play as a Team" – "Consider the Community and keep an eye on your friends. Extend that friendship to new friends, too -- even Bonnarooians you've never met before. If you see someone who can use a hand, offer it. You will make his or her day, and provide an example that will multiply across The Farm."
3. "Radiate Positivity" – "The Farm is an aggro-free zone. Leave your worries at home. For a few days this summer celebrate the best things in life. Smile, high fives, and random acts of kindness... Happiness is the goal. Proactive positivity is a proven way to get there."
4. "Respect the Farm" – "This place grows happiness. We want to ensure the sweetest sun-kissed crop of smiles every year by properly cleaning up. Recycle what you can, reduce what you can't, and reuse watcha got."
5. "Don't be that Guy/Gal" – "We hate being negative, but we've seen it too many times to leave it unsaid. You've seen it too. That dude is a vibe killer. That gal is a mood wrecker. It's a powerful cautionary tale that can help us all be better Bonnarooians."
6. "Stay True Roo" – "Bonnaroo lasts only a few too short days. The rest of your life is forever. Apply what you do on The Farm to improving you and the world beyond Roo."