

How do Music Festivals act as an Identity-establishing and Collective Consciousness-raising Event for Attendees?

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Table of Contents:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Theoretical Perspectives

Chapter 3: Music Festivals: Definition, Background Context and Function

3.1 The Summer of Love

3.2 Glastonbury Festival

3.3 Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Chapter 5: Bibliography

Chapter 1: Introduction

The universal language of music helps humans to define who one is or is to become. A space that helps people confirm or search for this meaning is at music festivals. Where every individual is on a quest to find themselves, longing for human connection forms, quickly establishing an identity and collective consciousness (Eyerman and Jamison 1998, 10). Thus, the research question of this paper is: *How do music festivals act as an identity-establishing and collective consciousness-raising event for attendees?* By asking such a question, this paper will explore and trace how music festivals have provided music lovers with an environment to connect with like-minded people, perhaps in times of uncertainty. This research holds societal relevance because through studying how music festivals are an identity-establishing and collective consciousness event, it becomes manifest that they are spaces that help to foster a basic human need, that of belonging, for attendees. Academic relevance also exists, for music festivals often symbolise the socio-political climate in the place and country they are held. Purely by attending music festivals, individuals take part in a form of political participation. Therefore, researchers should care about the functioning of music festivals and the correlation between attendance and political mobilisation.

This paper will be conducted in the form of a literature review to analyse the relationship that music festivals have with establishing a collective identity and consciousness. The paper will begin by situating this research in a combination of two theories, which have been tailored to best suit the paper and support the hypothesis. The theoretical background rests in the work of Emile Durkheim, with support from Erving Goffman, as well as Roy Eyerman and Andrew Jamison. Durkheim's (1995) *ritual theory* centres around how religion plays a vital role in providing an environment where social relationships can flourish. Intentional interaction between humans, known as rituals, provides the foundation of all social life, which Goffman (2017) explores. These rituals are emotional and responsible for generating a group identity and culture. Eyerman and Jamison's (1998) *collective identity theory* focuses on music's ability to construct a collective consciousness that is part of the bigger picture of a social movement. The collective consciousness that is established results in a stronger urge to participate in political activity. The following section will define what a music festival is, give a background context and then explore how such an event can contribute to identity establishment, especially in times of social and political unrest. What follows is an application of the two chosen theories to selected music festivals during the 20th and

21st centuries. This paper will focus on four case studies: The Monterey Pop Festival, the Woodstock Music and Arts Festival, Glastonbury Festival and the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival. These festivals have left some kind of legacy on the music industry and directly participated in the social and political world. This paper also hopes to explore the differences between these festivals and, if they survived more than one year, how they have adapted to the changing world around them, specifically whether profit has become the main driver for keeping these music festivals alive.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Perspectives

Music possesses a unique ability to develop a collective consciousness among its listeners. Moreover, it is a starting point for cultural transformation. Therefore, a strong link between music and social movement exists, for music is an element of culture and culture is a catalyst for igniting political participation (Moore and Roberts 2009, 274). Music festivals are important to explore how a collective identity forms to comprehend the relationship between music and collective consciousness. Durkheim's (1995) ritual theory emphasises focused interactions between humans. In his book *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1915), Durkheim argues that religion acts as a major support system in the social lives of individuals. Religion provides a way of life where those who follow are bound by a single set of beliefs, thus establishing a collective consciousness. The interactions between individuals of the same religion result in forming a "unified system" (Durkheim 1995, 150). What is required to establish a collective consciousness is where ritual theory finds its name. The close relationship between collective identity and culture develops through different channels, including narratives, symbols, rituals, and clothing (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 285). These modes of expression bind members of a collective identity together and define culture. The different channels ignite an emotional response, which Durkheim (1995, 228; Summers-Effler 2006, 137) refers to as 'collective effervescence'. Collective effervescence acknowledges the presence of a group identity and that something external unites them together; in Durkheim's work, this religion demonstrated this. Durkheim's theory centring on the ritual of religion can also be applied to broader society. Sociologist Erving Goffman (2017, 2) applies Durkheim's theory to explore the "countless patterns and natural sequences of behaviour" that take place when two individuals come into contact with each other, claiming that they too possess a ritual-like nature. Goffman (2017) argues that emotions, morals, and ideas of the self do not

develop simply through the individual but through the ritual of social interaction. Like the rituals of religion, everyday interactions between individuals act as a sacred event that connects humans.

In *Music and Social Movements* (1998), Eyerman and Jamison preface music as forming a collective identity that mobilises political participation. Situated in the notion that music has the capacity to produce meaning, belief, and purpose, Eyerman and Jamison (1998) argue that music forms a collective identity that then operates in broader society. Music is often used as a medium to express the social and political climate of any given state. When this form of communication is heard, music makes its way into the individual psyche of its listeners, where the interpretations help to bring those who find a common meaning together. A collective identity theory provides a comprehensive understanding of how music can form a collective consciousness that encourages societal reflection and improvement (Eyerman and Jamison 1998, 10). Music, therefore, plays a crucial role in shaping the foundations that social life rests upon, acting as the perfect breeding ground for social movements to be born. The movements that come from music prompt constant cultural progression and, in turn, ignite more political mobilisation. Eyerman and Jamison look at music's ability to establish a collective identity that then mobilises political participation. This paper looks beyond movements to look at music festivals, perhaps viewing festivals as political participation in their own right.

The underpinning notions of the theories of Durkheim and Eyerman and Jamison provide a stable framework through which to analyse music festivals. Music festivals express deeper meanings through the role of ritual, offering an emotional and physical experience for attendees. An application of Durkheim's *ritual theory* can help to explore how music festivals act as a ceremony and ritualised practice that brings like-minded people together and establish a collective identity (Eyerman and Jamison 1998, 15). In the context of music festivals, a Durkheimian lens helps to explain how face-to-face interaction fosters a ritual of social interaction that extends beyond the self and moves into a realm of collective consciousness. Eyerman and Jamison highlight the intersection of music and culture, where music can shape the very foundations that social life rests upon. Where political mobilisation is perhaps the endgame for Eyerman and Jamison, this paper recognises music festivals as political participation in their own right; this is because music festivals change with the times, acting as a mirror of reality or, perhaps, an alternate reality (Frith

2002, 276). Those who attend music festivals, therefore, become part of a defining time in societal history. Based on this theoretical framework, it seems a relationship between music festivals and the forming of a collective identity exists. Therefore, this paper's hypothesis reads: *by attending music festivals, one is more likely to develop a collective identity*. This paper defines a collective identity as a shared community or practice formed by several individuals that produce an emotional and moral connection (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 285). By analysing literature on a range of music festivals throughout history, this paper takes an interest in whether, over time, the forming of collective identities at music festivals has decreased to perhaps be driven by other motives. This paper will use a mixture of theoretical scholarship and non-theoretical work to analyse the selected case studies. The Summer of Love created a lasting legacy; thus, there is a vast amount of work on this particular era. For the two latter festivals, which are still in operation today, academic research and literature are not as available, and media articles are used to provide insight.

Chapter 3: Music Festivals: Definition, Background Context and Function

Music festivals make way for other experiences to occur and are shared with others more often than not. In an environment where music is the universal language, festivals give rise to a collective identity. There are several ways to define a festival. However, this paper understands a festival as “an organised series of concerts, films, plays, or other themed events, typically held annually or every few years in the same place” (Oxford English Dictionary 2021). There is the cultural history behind festivals that help it to be a universally recognised event. Rooted in this definition, music festivals evolve and mirror society to become a time capsule of each held time. Another unique aspect of music festivals is that music becomes the main channel of communication. The common meaning is subsequently found among individuals, who form a collective identity that operates in a ritualistic nature, an idea supported by the works of Durkheim and Goffman (Sharpe 2008, 219). The study of music has thus transcended its own scholarship to look at how it impacts other areas of life, namely, the social sphere in which music festivals operate.

Much like the rituals within religion, and the symbols and spaces attached to it, music festivals have literal and metaphorical barriers from the ‘outside world’ where attendees can experience the forming of a collective consciousness through modes of expression (Berkers and Michael 2017,

99; Lawendowski and Besta 2020, 209; Polletta and Jasper 2001, 285). Expansive grass fields, feelings of peace and love, or musicians themselves are some characteristics associated with music festivals. Those who are present partake in these symbols and the ritual of attending, resulting in the establishing of a collective consciousness and sense of tradition. A ritual is created within the space of music festivals every year, which helps establish a sense of tradition. The tradition of attending music festivals did not just occur, however. As Eyerman and Jamison (1998, 38) state, traditions “must be based on actual experiences - there must be a basis for a tradition”. Therefore, music festivals are a symptom of the society in which they are born.

3.1 The Summer of Love

The Summer of Love in San Francisco, and the 1960s in general, is arguably the most significant period for music festivals, for they came to be the lived experience of the growing counterculture. Music’s ability to establish a collective consciousness is manifest when analysing this decade, highlighting a unique relationship with socio-political awareness (Bennett 2001, 24-25). Many look at the 1960s as being the decade that turned music festivals into a ritualistic tradition. During a time when the socio-political climate in America was heightened and divided, music festivals in the 1960s represented the raising of a new consciousness and a radical shift in American culture that became defined by the Civil Rights Movement, anti-war movements and a growing student and youth culture (Kramer 2017, 222; Eyerman and Jamison 1998, 2 & 106). This transformation of society and consciousness was partly driven by music, particularly during the Summer of Love. One of the most well-known music festivals that symbolised the Summer of Love was the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967 (Hill 2006, 28). A festival for the generation of the youth, Monterey established itself as a converging of music, culture, diversity and a new way of seeing the world. Featuring artists such as Simon and Garfunkel, the Mamas and the Papas, Janis Joplin and Otis Redding, Monterey had music representative of all sorts of genres, therefore backgrounds, symbolising a new American culture (28). As a form of escapism, Monterey allowed individuals to interact with others who possessed similar morals and values during a time defined by division and hate.

During the Summer of Love, Woodstock Music and Arts Festival was another prominent music festival that embodied a changing America. Held in 1969, just two years after Monterey, Woodstock amplified the Summer of Love's vision of peace and love to more than 400,000 attendees (Kitts 2009, 717; Partin 2021, 327) and has left a lasting legacy that many other festivals have tried to imitate. Performances from artists such as Joni Mitchell, Jimi Hendrix and Joan Baez all used music to convey a message that touched on current socio-political issues of race and war (Ramos, n.d.). Music symbolised Woodstock's idealistic values, personified into a collective consciousness that longed to pull America out of a troubled socio-political state (Gatten 2016, 6). The work of Durkheim and Goffman would suggest that the gatherings at Monterey Pop Festival and Woodstock helped like-minded people to interact with each other, leading to the development of a collective consciousness. Music festivals during the Summer of Love became a space where the awakening of a collective consciousness nurtured souls who were set on discovering whether love, peace and nonviolence might one day result in social and political transformation (The *Oracle*, n.d.; Kramer 2017, 225). The Summer of Love, however, did not succeed in a complete transformation of American society (231). However, it was responsible for raising a new collective consciousness and reevaluating what it meant to be a modern American. For that, the Summer of Love is remembered as a cultural playground where the new counterculture gave hope that unity, peace and love could prevail and inspire other movements and music festivals to carry the same message.

3.3 Glastonbury Festival

Founded in 1970, Glastonbury Fayre (the name given when it was first held) is now hailed as the British version of Woodstock and one of the most important internationally recognised music festivals (Anderton 2020, 202; Partridge 2006, 44). What is unique about Glastonbury, in the context of this research paper, is that it is the longest-running music festival out of the selected three, making it ripe for analysis of British popular culture over the years. Glastonbury has long fostered the notion of community and diversity. It functions in the hope to “encourage and stimulate youth culture from around the world in all its forms, including pop music, dance music, jazz, folk, fringe theatre, drama, mime, circus, cinema, poetry, and all the creative forms of art and design, including painting, sculpture, and textile art” (Glastonbury Festival, n.d.). Upon its establishment, 1970's Great Britain inspired the idea of the ‘New Age Traveller’ (Partridge 2006,

43). New Age Travellers were a group of hippies that quickly became associated with values of peace and love, much like the individuals who were part of the American counterculture (43). They formed a community based around anti-nuclear protest, helping them establish a transformed society of nonviolence and spirituality (Eyerman and Jamison 1998, 10). New Age Travellers embodied counterculture values that inspired like-minded people to gather collectively, similar to Monterey and Woodstock. Glastonbury offered a safe haven for these alternate members of society and changed the very meaning of the festival forever (Reibling 2021, 19:43). A strong value of community became attached to the ethos of Glastonbury thereafter.

Another unique aspect of the Glastonbury Festival is that the music festival site sits upon a line that connects several prehistoric and ancient sites from Celtic Mythology (Anderton 2020, 209; Bowman 2007, 19). The spirituality of Glastonbury continues to add to the festival's atmosphere, allowing attendees to connect and search for a transcendent level of meaning collectively. Such a connection with spirituality shares a similarity to Durkheim's (1995) analysis of religion. Through a spiritual connection, Glastonbury provides a space for attendees to interact with others through the ritual of the festival and symbols. One of the most prominent symbols of Glastonbury is the Pyramid Stage, which holds significant meaning because the peak pulls energy from the "Glastonbury Abbey/Stonehenge ley lines" (Flinn and Frew 2014, 426). In the case of Glastonbury, spirituality seems to play a much more significant role in the establishing of a collective consciousness compared to the earlier festivals of Monterey and Woodstock. Today, the atmosphere of the Glastonbury Festival continues to be a primary motive for people attending over an interest in the music (Gelder and Robinson 2009, 189). It acts as a space where people can live outside their day-to-day lives and, as a collective, experience a utopian-like culture that Glastonbury has become so well known for.

3.4 Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival

An American music festival that looks a lot different from its predecessors of Monterey and Woodstock is the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival. Coachella, the youngest of all the music festivals this paper has analysed, was founded in 1999 in California (Brown and Kennedy 2018). Although Paul Tollet, the founder of Coachella, envisioned his festival to be an

amalgamation of past American music festivals and place them within the frame of the “the sixties-era longing for a new world”, Coachella operates in a relatively stable socio-political climate (Seabrook 2017) compared to the Summer of Love and Great Britain in the 1970s. For this reason, it is not associated with ideologies of the counterculture that define the former festivals. Instead, Coachella has become associated with “consumer participatory culture” (Edgmon 2019, 13). The extensive media coverage from the weekend event portrays Coachella as a California dream, somewhat reminiscent of the 1960s; attendees dress the part of a counterculture hippie and escape to the desert, but engagement with this era stops at that. The famous values of love and peace during the Summer of Love are not engaged, and attendees simply become a by-product of mainstream consumer society (26). It seems that the morals and values that reigned supreme during the Summer of Love have themselves become commodified and reduced to an aesthetic of the flower child.

By not resting on a clear ideology or set of values, the ability to connect with others through ritualistic means becomes complicated. Therefore, the establishment of a collective consciousness is difficult. Where music festivals once functioned similarly to a tradition - time for like-minded people to unite in times of uncertainty - the culture has been lost to “marketers of popular culture, who have developed sophisticated strategies for constructing new kinds of artificial “traditions”, musical and otherwise.” (Eyerman and Jamison 1998, 30). Over time, the ‘tradition’ of music festivals has become commodified and, more than anything, has become a profitable event for organisers. The dominating of the commercial sphere at Coachella has thwarted the festival’s ability to be seen as a catalyst for social and political mobilisation. Where Eyerman and Jamison (1998) argue that music possesses such an ability, VIP passes and high-end club lounges have drowned out the messages communicated through songs that inspire movements. Instead, Coachella has become a form of escapism for those who can afford it.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Through culture, music becomes more than just thought within an individual. In the context of music festivals, it possesses a unique ability to trigger emotional and physical responses within its listeners, who can then share an experience with thousands of other people. The attendees of music

festivals can therefore be a living symbol of what the music stands for. This paper raised whether music festivals act as an identity-establishing and collective consciousness-raising event for attendees. By using the theoretical background of Durkheim and Goffman, and Eyerman and Jamison, a literature review was carried out to analyse how a range of music festivals throughout history have, or have not, contributed to the development of a collective identity and consciousness that may result in political mobilisation, or whether attending music festivals is a political activity in its own right.

Through this exploration, this paper has revealed that the earlier music festivals of the Monterey Pop Festival and Woodstock Music and Arts Festival provided attendees with a space to interact with like-minded people against the backdrop of socio-political turmoil in America. During the Summer of love, at these festivals, the counterculture formed a collective consciousness that enabled attendees to consciously, or subconsciously, take part in the act of political participation that would define the generation. Glastonbury Festival presents an interesting study, for it was established shortly after the Summer of Love but continues to operate today. Despite losing much of its counterculture backbone, the festival has maintained a ritualistic nature through engaging with spirituality. These cases studies, as mentioned above, support the hypothesis that by attending music festivals, one is more likely to develop a collective identity and consciousness.

With the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival, the evidence suggests that it does not establish a collective identity and consciousness. As a result, the case study of Coachella cannot support the hypothesis. Over time, it seems that modern music festivals have become distant from their counterculture roots of finding an escape from mainstream society. Instead, Coachella has traded the counterculture utopia that music festivals once rested upon for opportunities provided by commercial success. Perhaps a desire for getting lost within the music still exists within Coachella, but the reasons have significantly changed since the Summer of Love. Based on the findings of this paper, it would be of value to further explore what has changed in society for this shift to occur as collective identity theory and ritual theory provide valuable avenues to engage with a collective and politics. The world has become an egocentric society where the self is valued over any form of collective identity. Therefore, going to a music festival to interact with others and establishing

a collective consciousness is not as idealised as it once was. This notion would be a point of interest for further academic research.

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