

BARKER, JOSEPH M., M.A. Tales from the Pit: Moshing in the Metal Scene. (2019)
Directed by Dr. Sarah Daynes. 61 pp.

What would become known as *Moshing* began in the early 1980s in the punk scene. It's a violent and aggressive form of dancing that can involve flailing, pushing, kicking, and hitting other dancers. Moshing has made headlines in the news when fans have died in these aggressive concerts. However, this aggressive dance also harbors social bonding, a code of ethics, and comradery that give life to concerts.

As moshing spreads to more genres such as rap and electronic dance music, it becomes increasingly important to understand its role and function in live performance. This paper uses neo-tribal theory to analyze site observations and in-depth interviews with moshers to understand how moshers turn the space in a venue into a place for creating meaning and belonging.

TALES FROM THE PIT: MOSHING IN THE METAL SCENE

by

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A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Greensboro
2019

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair Dr. Sarah Daynes, and my committee members Cindy Brooks Dollar, David Kauzlarich, and Tad Skotnicki. Without their support and guidance, this wouldn't have been possible.

I would like to also thank my parents, James A. Barker and Gail L. Barker for their love, support, and financial backing. They allowed me opportunities that very few people get. I owe the completion of this thesis and my academic journey to them.

Finally, I would like to thank Felicia Barker for her constant encouragement that kept me on track throughout the entire process.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Something is off. Something isn't right. I have gone to a dozen metal concerts at this point, but none like this. This concert seems like home and it seems like the person I know. But it isn't. A packed room with most wearing leather or denim jackets that are covered in band patches. That's almost right. Metal fans typically have the black band shirts. I've at least seen the jackets with patches before, this is just a lot of them. I don't recognize the band names, so they must be local bands then. That must be what it is.

Who starts a pit by falling backward through a crowd? That's not what I'm used to, but I guess it got people moving. I was a mosher, I am a mosher, but I didn't mosh like these people. Who are these people? They stare at the ground and have full body spasms in time to the music. This all looks like moshing but doesn't look like the moshing I know. They don't seem aware, or caring, of the people around them. Did that guy just do a somersault through the pit? That's pretty cool, but I've never seen it before. This music doesn't sound right. It's like punk with the growls of metal. That doesn't seem right. They're running at each other and tackling crowd members. I wouldn't do that, who would do that? These people do that. The way these people bump into each other and throw each other around... Could they be drunk? They don't seem drunk, but the movements are so relaxed in only a way I know as drunk. Something isn't connecting. I'm not connecting. What is this? Is that guy skating around on towels to clean beer off the

floor? How is the mosh pit this open? It was crowded just a second ago. Aren't pits usually crowded when this many people come to a show? Pits are normally an oval in front of the stage, but this is a horseshoe. Why is this a horseshoe? No one is protecting moshers from getting hurt on the front of the stage. Should we try and make a wall at the front? Should we try and protect them or is this the way they want it?

This band just sounds like a punk band, what is this? The vocalist won't face the audience. He has his hoodie pulled tight over his head so he can't see us. He's standing to the side of the mic like it's a person he's uncomfortable talking to. The only time he has spoken between songs was to command the venue to turn out the lights. What? I know the vocals are growled, but was that German? Is he doing growls in German? The vocalist just threw the mic stand at the crowd. WHY? The guitarist is standing on a fan, a person, as if he was a speaker. The fan doesn't seem to like this but isn't stopping it. They don't acknowledge the crowd unless they are disrespecting them. How did I get here?

I'm out of my element. They're stomping around with their moshing. They're using the stage to jump and tackle fans. They're punching people along the edge of the pit. What is this? The band logos are in metal fonts that I don't recognize. My death metal shirt sticks out here. I stick out here. I don't look like them. I don't talk like them. I don't mosh like them. I'm out of my element.

The bands attending that night were advertised on the venue's website as "crushing Texas crossover / German blackened metal / metal." To me this meant that this was absolutely a metal show. But when I got to this concert it continuously surprised me and kept me in an unsure state of mind. I felt uneasy and out of place for the whole

concert. It was only about midway through the concert when I realized that this was most likely a show that had hardcore bands or had at least attracted the hardcore crowd.

Hardcore is frequently grouped in with metal because it has minor differences in the music as a whole. However, the fans and the way they mosh are very different from many metal practices. I had been going to metal shows for about four years at this point and I was still surprised by these moshing styles. This story is just one example of how different moshing can be between two similarly sounding genres.

Moshing

Metal concerts consist of many staples such as deafening volumes, fans dressed in predominantly black t-shirts, and people throwing the horns up (a fist with the index and pinky finger extended.) Moshing and mosh pits are another such staple of the metal concert. Moshing is the act of fans ramming their bodies into each other or swinging their bodies around in disregard. The mosh pit is the space where the moshing occurs and is typically located in front of the stage. While moshing isn't limited to metal and isn't something all, or even most, attendees will engage in, it has become a good barometer of how a metal concert is going. Moshing and mosh pits can be seen as a measure of how much the crowd is enjoying the performance. Through moshing, the joy of the concert is reciprocated back to the band with displays of aggression and excitement.

The mosh pit is not just an indication of how the performance is going. It also reflects the way in which the fans are interacting. Sustained moshing takes trust and some small measure of safety within chaos. Without trust, it can become strained -- for instance, when one mosher takes the aggression too far, or doesn't grasp the tacit rules, or

when different forms of moshing collide. Part of my research will focus on this latter idea: the collision of different moshing styles. I will look at how fans from different subgenres are interacting and how they, and their different moshing styles, impact the interactions in a mosh pit.

There are many minute divisions of moshing between different music circles, but the main ones experienced in the concerts for this research were metal and hardcore moshing; or more specifically what is called pushing moshing and hardcore dancing. Hardcore dancing involves flailing of limbs while generally avoiding physical contact. Moshing on the other hand involves predominantly physical contact with pushing and shoving. Because of their differences, these moshing styles were in harmony at times, and at odd during others. Even when the moshing styles worked together, or when there was only one style present, there was still risk involved.

Both moshing styles can be dangerous in their own way. Hardcore moshers run the risk of their full velocity swings making contact with one another. Contact is purposefully avoided when hardcore dancing, but when contact from swings happens, fans can get seriously injured. Metal moshers on the other hand want the contact but push and shove instead of swinging their limbs. Push moshers face risks of getting the wind knocked out of them, pushed too hard, or trampled if they fall. The most dangerous situations are when these two styles of dance collide. When some people are hardcore dancing and others are push moshing, one group is focusing on dramatic motions without contact while the other is focusing on movement with contact. The push moshers want to get shoved around but not elbowed, kicked, or chopped. In contrast the hardcore dancers

want to flail their bodies around without worrying about hitting one another. This can lead to unintentional injuries and it also might make both groups feel like their space has been invaded. The hardcore dancers are getting pushed around and can't do the full extent of their moshing style without injuring others. The push moshers are getting hit hard from full swings from the hardcore dancers and they can't get as involved as they'd like to, without running the risk of serious injury.

Such a combination of dancing styles often leads to conflict. Push moshing and hardcore dancing appear to be two very similar dances; however, these two groups struggle to create a place that both can occupy. It could be argued that the mosh pit is a space without inherent meaning that can, in time, succeed or fail to become a social "place" of enjoyment, by integrating the interactions between moshers from different, or the same, subgenres. According to Xue, Gao, and Kerstetter (2018) a neo-tribe can transform a space into a "social place" through their activity, i.e. moshing for this study, which then generates meanings for the neo-tribe and attachment to that place. In Xue, Gao and Kerstetter (2018) they look at the tailgating neo-tribe and how they transform the space of a parking lot into a place for their neo-tribe to gather where they created belonging, sociality, nostalgia, and support. When the neo-tribe makes the space welcoming, safe, and encouraging to fans, it has been transformed into a place for them to create their own meanings. A space holds no meaning or functions for a group, but a place creates meaning and belonging.

Such struggle between different ways of moshing (and, with them, sets of rules and ways of being and acting) renders "place-making" necessary for the crowd to enjoy

safe moshing. I will use neo-tribal theory to view how moshers make a social place out of the space they are given during a concert. Originally conceptualized by Michel Maffesoli in the 1990s, the notion of neo-tribe refers to a recent, fluid mode of socialization that centrally involves temporary membership, tribal dynamics, and a specific use of space/place (Hardy et al 2018: 6). I propose, in this research project, to try and understand moshing practices in the light of the idea of neo-tribe. While it might sound obvious that musical genres -- such as metal or hardcore -- could be understood as the locus for neo-tribes, could it also be the case for moshers, across musical styles? One of the ideas I will focus on is the use and occupation of space that moshers engage in at concerts. I will tentatively argue that the way in which they invest the space while moshing -- going from “nothing” to a “mosh pit” -- can be understood as transforming a neutral space into a meaningful place, which in turn could potentially allow us to think of moshers as a neo-tribe.

According to Relph (1976) a space is transformed into a multidimensional social place when meanings are attached. For the purposes of this study, the meanings are the neo-tribal meanings and attachments that the moshers form with the mosh pit. A venue’s floor may be the space, but the mosh pit is the place because of the moshing neo-tribe’s activity creating meaning attached to the space. This place is used as a tribal meeting spot for creating meaning and belonging. It is vital to the continuation of the neo-tribe. I will look at how the metal community succeeds and fails within this place making. Chapter two will focus on the methods used for data collection and selection. Chapter three will provide a brief history of moshing, a description of the anatomy of a mosh pit, and a

discussion of what it is like to be a mosher. In chapter four I will focus on explaining neo-tribal theory and using it to analyze the data collected. Finally, chapter five will conclude on the usefulness of neo-tribal theory for understanding moshing.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

For the purposes of this study I attended metal concerts and interviewed metalheads. I chose metal as the focus of my study because mosh pits are a staple at metal concerts, and various forms of moshing coexist there, even though moshing was born in the punk scene. The other music scene considered for this project was hardcore. Hardcore appears to have the most violent mosh pits, however, metal is in many ways a more inclusive, and definitely a broader and more popular, scene: it incorporates aspects of hardcore mosh pits, and both hardcore dancing and slamdancing can be found occurring within the metal scene. Metal appears to have the most diverse selection of aspects from mosh pits while also having a high number of participants, for these reasons, I chose to observe metal concerts.

From December 2017 to March 2018 I attended metal concerts, engaged in participatory observation, talked to moshers, and recruited people for phone interviews about their experiences in mosh pits. The phone calls were recorded and transcribed into a text format. I read through the transcripts and wrote down key items I noticed. I wrote down all of these key items and they totaled somewhere in the hundreds. These items were collapsed into nine separate main themes. The interview transcripts were then re-coded with these new themes. Analysis is based off these collapsed themes.

Participant Observation and Interviews

The easiest and most meaningful way to engage in participatory observation was to attend the concerts as a fan and participate. People appeared to be more willing to talk to me when I engaged in the mosh pits than when I did not. I attempted to stay out of the mosh pits and recruit people in between bands changing over, but they wouldn't speak to me because I was unfamiliar to them. By engaging in the mosh pits I gained a rapport with these people that allowed for easier communication. I spoke to people who moshed with me during these concerts. For instance, by engaging with in a wild game of spinning chicken in the pit with Jacob Harrington, I had an easier time speaking to him throughout the show and then eventually asking for an interview after the show. Because he recognized me and had been talking with me throughout the show, he wasn't apprehensive when I asked him to interview after the show. Several moshers agreed to the interview and we exchanged information. All interviewees corresponded through text messages with me to set up interviews at later dates.

Many people spoke to me about this research, and I got contact information from about twenty or so people. However, ultimately seven people agreed to the interviews and followed through with them. Six of those seven interviews were from people that attended these concerts as fans and one of those interviews was from a person who attended as a member of the touring band Go Ask Alice.

There was a total of ten concerts attended during this research where interviewees were recruited. The venues where the concerts were held and the bands that played are listed below:

The Milestone Club, Charlotte: December 29th, 2017

- Kairos
- Rites to Sedition
- Warpath

The Maywood, Raleigh: December 30th, 2017

- Datura
- Green Fiend
- Noctomb
- Gates of Endor

The Drunk Horse Pub, Fayetteville: January 12th, 2018

- Valleys
- Killing the Catalyst
- RVNT
- Discoveries

The Milestone Club, Charlotte: January 21st, 2018

- Misery Love Company
- Go/Ask/Alice
- I Am Heir
- Blackwater Drowning
- The Worshiper

The Milestone Club, Charlotte: January 27th, 2018

- Avalon Steel
- Children of the Reptile
- Nightmare
- Mortal Man
- Neverfall

The Fillmore, Charlotte: January 31st, 2018

- Anthrax
- Killswitch Engage
- Havok

The Maywood, Raleigh: February 4th, 2018

- Mammoth Grinder
- Occvlt
- Skemata
- Noctomb

The Drunk Horse Pub, Fayetteville: February 16th, 2018

- I Set My Friends on Fire

- Kissing Candice

- Awaken I Am

The Blind Tiger, Greensboro: February 17th, 2018

- Intervals
- Jason Richardson
- Nick Johnston
- Night Verses

The Maywood, Raleigh: February 22nd, 2018

- Suppressive Fire
- Black Mass
- Led to the Grave
- Old Codger

The locations studied were selected by these criteria: (1) the location of the venue had to be in North Carolina (both for convenience and because North Carolina has a very active metal scene) and (2) the concert was mainly music that would be classified as belonging to the metal genre: a band's music had to be regarded as metal by either the band, the promoting venue, or online music stores. This was done by researching the band to see how the venues were advertising them by genre, how the fans were discussing them online by genre, and how their music was listed in online music applications like Google's Play Music, iTunes, and Spotify.

The fans selected for interviewing (1) attended one of the concerts observed and (2) I had to witness them moshing at that concert. I made contact with the interviewees either during band changeovers or after the concert had ended. It was explained at that time that I would be conducting phone interviews if they wished to participate. Those people that were interested exchanged information with me. I made contact with potential interviewees after the night of the particular concert where I met them.

In order to be interviewed, bands had to (1) play music that would be classified in the metal music genre, and they had to (2) perform in a live concert that was being studied in this research. For the sake of involvement in the scene, the bands had to also (3) have toured for at least two years while playing in the metal scene. This two-year distinction existed for a number of reasons. In a band's first year of touring they might still be finding how they want to perform. If their involvement with the pit is an integral part of their performance, I wanted to see them do that in a tried and tested way. I didn't want to be interviewing bands that were still finding their footing in their performance style, but after two years of touring I assumed that bands had found their preferences. To clarify, this did not mean that they had to be on the road for a total of two years, but instead meant that they had to have gone on tours in at least two separate years. I recruited one band member, Jacob Harrington, who engaged in the mosh pit before and during his performance that night. I spoke with him shortly after the concert ended and contacted him over the phone.

This paper brings together the voices of everyone I met during this research, the experiences of people I interviewed, the concerts and people I witnessed, and my own experiences as a metalhead in this music scene.

Research Time Frame

The research for this project took about six months to complete. The site observations, participant observations, and recruitment for interviews started in December 2017 and finished in February 2018. The phone interviewing time frame

overlapped with this, starting in January 2018 and finishing in March 2018.

Transcribing and coding the phone interviews lasted until May.

Recording Observations

During the performances I took field notes on who I talked to, what people were doing, and the experiences I had in, or around, these mosh pits. I periodically walked around the venue to get pictures of the pit, the people there, or the venue itself. I took these pictures from whatever locations made the most sense; whether that was in the pit, from a higher up viewing area, or from another location.

The interviews were recorded on a password-protected smartphone. The audio recordings were captured using the Google Voice application during phone calls. The shortest interview was thirty-one minutes long and the longest was eighty-one minutes long. The recordings were transcribed into Google Documents after all of the interviews had been completed. All recordings and transcriptions are password protected and accessible only by me.

Coding of Data

I allowed for the coding categories to emerge from the data collected in the interviews. The interviews were first transcribed line by line with very detailed observations of the conversation. This brought up several hundred items in the initial wave of coding. These very detailed items were then compiled and collapsed into eight general categories, with a final ninth category to catch important miscellaneous phrases. The categories used are detailed below.

Metal vs. hardcore vs. other. This category includes any mention of moshing in other genres or mediums. This includes other music genres, however it also included non-musical comparisons. For example, Devon mentioned dance circles at conventions in comparison to mosh pits. There were 57 occurrences in this category with 19 and a quarter pages of quotes.

Feelings about the pit. This included how people felt about any activity relating to a mosh pit. This included emotional or physical feelings regarding any mosh pit activity. It also included feelings in anticipation of a mosh pit. There were 77 occurrences in this category with 23 and three-quarter pages of quotes.

Pit anatomy. The roles of moshers, people in the wall, and the general crowd. The band was also included if it directly related to roles or pit structure. Along with this was the physical layout of a mosh pit, including in fluctuations mentioned in size, shape, or activity in the pit. There were 39 occurrences in this category with 10 and a half pages of quotes.

Etiquette and rules. This included any mention of tacit or explicit guidelines that participants follow during mosh pits and any stories that directly related to one or more of these rules. There were 38 occurrences in this category with 12 and a quarter pages of quotes.

Hostility and friendliness. This included aggressive versus kind behavior exhibited in moshing. It included general trends that had been witnessed along with stories. There were 57 occurrences in this category with 18 pages of quotes.

Safety, risk, and injury. Included in this category are the concrete and abstract ways in which moshers stay safe, the known risks involved, and injuries from moshing. The injuries could be ones that they witnessed or sustained but they had to be moshing related and be concrete stories rather than imagined. There were 70 occurrences in this category with 21 and a half pages of quotes.

Band-audience relationship. This focused on how a band interacts with the mosh pit and crowd. This category included stories of this happening, as well as abstract discussions of how an ideal or typical concert would have a band and audience interact. This also included if the participant stated that the band didn't have much effect on a crowd. There were 11 occurrences in this category with 3 pages of quotes.

Tales from the pit. This included any of the stories told by the moshers about their experiences in mosh pits. These were not generalized stories, that have a theoretical crowd or show. These were stories from a specific time and place for the interviewee. There were 75 occurrences of separate stories in this category with 19 and a quarter pages of quotes.

Other important themes. A final category that caught phrases that were important but didn't exactly fit any of the other categories already made. There were 34 occurrences in this category with 5 and three-quarter pages of quotes.

The interviews were re-coded using these nine categories. Quotes were extracted from the interviews and sorted into the categories. Quotes could exist in more than one category if it seemed appropriate. These newly coded quotes from

interviews were compiled into a single mass document for analysis. The included occurrences and page lengths contain little or no quotes from myself unless my responses were key to understanding the context of the quote.

Interview Questions

The interviews followed a semi-structured format. I used eight general questions that I asked in all the interviews. Those eight general questions were:

1. How long have you been into metal?
2. How long have you been going to concerts?
3. How long have you been moshing?
4. What was the first mosh pit you participated in like?
5. How is that different from now?
6. What is moshing like?
7. Why do you mosh?
8. Are there good or bad moshers?

I also asked follow-up questions based on what the respondents were saying. Other general topics covered in the interviews were gender, rules in a mosh pit, how bad moshers were dealt with, and how mosh pits have changed or not changed over the years. These other general topics didn't have fixed questions for them, and instead they flowed based on what opinions the interviewer had about mosh pits.

CHAPTER III

DESCRIPTIVE

History of Moshing

At its inception, moshing as a term described a specific dance within punk. However, it is now an umbrella term that now includes many similar dance styles. Moshing originated in the punk scene in the early 1980's. Many of the original dance terms such as slamdancing, pogoing, circle pits, two-stepping, windmilling and thrashing now fall under the conflated umbrella term of moshing. While these terms describe specific actions in the pit, the term moshing is a broad term used to refer to the aggressive dancing that goes on at the front of a performance area in a concert, often right in front of the stage. Because of this wide definition, moshing encompasses these more specific terms.

In the early eighties, the American hardcore band Bad Brains used to describe the activity in the pit as mashing it up and used the term mash frequently in their lyrics. The vocalist had a thick Jamaican accent, so when he would say mashing, it sounded to their audiences like moshing. And so the term came to describe the rough dancing that took place at their concerts in the pit area of the venues they performed in (Ambrose 2001; Riches 2011).

Tsitsos (1999) investigated how different moshing styles in punk could be attributed to different subgenres of punk music and in particular to distinctions between

their fans. Rebellion is at the heart of the punk scene, and Tsitsos argues that it takes three different forms, which correspond to three different types of fans: political punks, apolitical punks, and straight edge punks. He observed that each group moshed differently from the others as a reflection of their respective ideologies. Political punks favored communal rebellion and in their moshing they did more group activities like circle pits. The apolitical punks however rebelled for the sake of rebelling in an individualistic action so their mosh pits were a realization of their society without rules or leaders. Finally, the straight edge punks also favored individual action but did so to enforce their rules upon others. Their mosh pits were the most violent and aggressive ones that had no communal activities (Tsitsos 1999).

At the time Tsitsos was writing, in the 1990s, the term “slamdancing” referred to circle pits, frantic movement, arm swinging, and less theatrical, less dangerous movements which included picking up fallen dancers. “Moshing,” on the other hand, was used to refer to more theatrical and dangerous moves, such as tackling, exaggerated body movements, and jumping karate kicks (Tsitsos 1999). The violence of this was noted in his work, “the development of moshing in New York City in the 1980s even saw the partial breakdown of the convention of picking up fallen dancers, as pit violence increased. New York City straight edge shows became legendary for their brutality” (Tsitsos 1999:410). This idea of picking up fallen dancers is the most fundamental tacit rule of moshing/slamdancing/hardcore dancing. Without the guarantee of being picked up, the dancer is at great risk of being trampled. Tsitsos is contrasting slamdancing here as the safer route for dancing with moshing being the more extreme and violent option.

Another distinction that Tsitsos makes later is group versus individual action. “Compared with slamming, the fundamental body movements of moshing [...] place even greater emphasis on individual territoriality over (comm)unity” (Tsitsos 1999:410). He made the distinction here that the slamming of the political punks was communal, promoting unity, while the moshing of the straight edge punks was individualistic action to assert dominance over others. Over time, the actions and ideologies associated with the terms slamming and moshing have shifted.

Today, the term moshing is an umbrella term for the rough dancing in done in front of the stage. One of the more specific terms that will be used in this study is push moshing. This refers to physical contact, pushing and shoving, circle pits, group activities and less theatrics compared to hardcore dancing. Hardcore dancing on the other hand means frantic movements, more theatrics (i.e. more exaggerated and excessively dramatic), spin kicks, swinging arms, flailing, tackling, individualistic actions and less physical contact compared to push moshing. Looking at the previous paragraph, you can see that these terms associated with hardcore dancing today, are also used there to reference moshing as it was defined in Tsitsos writing. Many of the terms and actions initially associated with moshing during Tsitsos’ 1999 research are now associated with hardcore dancing. At the time of Tsitsos publication on slamdancing and moshing, it was moshing that was the more violent and individualistic dance. Now, 20 years later, hardcore dancing is the new violent and individualistic dance.

The way that Tsitsos portrays moshing in his 1999 article is echoed by metal fans now when they talk about hardcore dancing. During this research, hardcore dancing was

described by participants as having less regard for others but focusing more on the flailing and theatrics which is in line with what moshing was said to have in Tsitsos' research. In the interviews I conducted, moshing was mostly used to describe the physical contact and less of the theatrics attributed to hardcore now or moshing at the time of Tsitsos 1999 research. Moshing has adopted the less theatrical and safer sides of slamdancing, while hardcore dancing has taken up the new reigns for aggressive dancing.

The future of moshing is unclear, but it is beginning to show up in other genres such as rap, EDM, country, pop, etc. Nearly all participants interviewed spoke about other genres that they saw moshing in. It has proven to be a form of dance that has the strength to endure over time and spread. Many styles of dance have not had the same staying power that moshing has had since the 1980's.

Anatomy of the Pit

The term "pit" comes from the theater/auditorium term "orchestra pit" which describes the area in front of a stage that is used for the orchestra when one is required and used for seating when an orchestra is not needed. If you've been to a classical music concert with seats near the front row, there's a strong chance your tickets described the seating as orchestra pit. Below is the UNC Greensboro's auditorium seating chart (UNC Greensboro 2019).

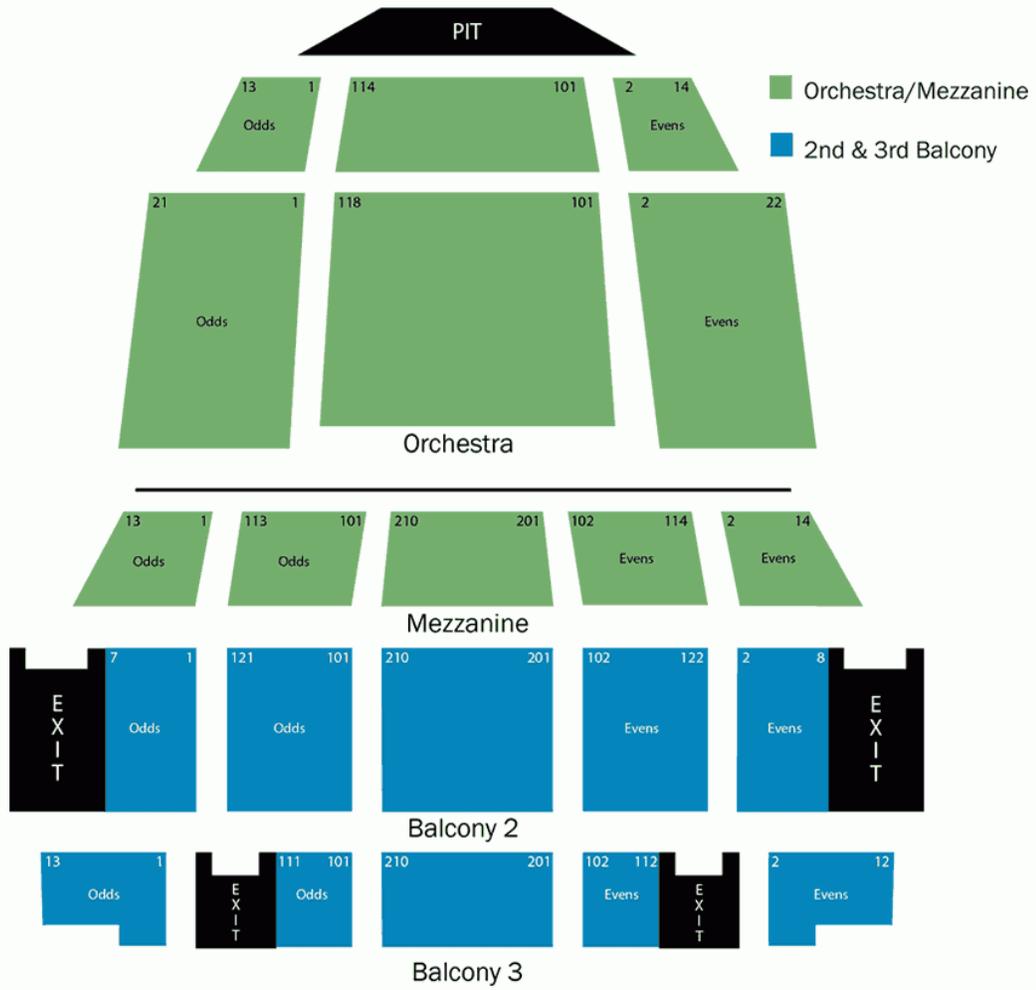


Figure 1. UNC Greensboro Auditorium Seating Chart

This auditorium’s pit can raise and lower for the needs of the performance. When raised, it extends the stage area to give more room for a performance. When the pit is at the lower lobby height it can be used for extra seating. When the pit is below the lower lobby height it can be used as a performance area for an orchestra, usually during an opera. This dynamic pit area in the auditorium is more simply the closest area to the stage. Moshing

in a venue generally takes place in the closest area to the stage, which is where the term “pit” in “mosh pit” comes from.

In push moshing what would be considered a “good” mosh pit is made up of a mostly circular shape with a wall of people defining its borders, but the “circle” can take any shape. The border or wall is densely packed with people that engage in several actions that we could call “tasks” or even “duties.” Indeed, these individuals are spectators, but they watch the moshers for entertainment as well as for safety. When a person in the pit goes down, it’s all hands-on deck to get that person back on their feet. The people making up the wall, at the margins of the circle, play a major role in this. Their job is to step in and block other moshers from trampling the fallen person that others, moshers, may miss in the heat of the action. Because the people in the wall aren’t bouncing around the pit, their stationary position gives them the best chance of seeing and realizing when someone has fallen or been hurt. The second job of these people in the wall is to protect the rest of the crowd from the moshing. Not everyone in the crowd wants to be a part of the mosh pit and it’s the job of these people to play defense for the rest of the crowd. When a moshers is careening out of control, the people in the wall can catch them and throw them back into the thick of the pit. The third job of the wall is to keep the action going. They push moshers along as they run or bounce around. A good shove here and there keeps the moshers moving and keeps the pit alive. A pit with a small amount of moshers in it can be kept alive by an active wall that continually pushes those moshers around. And so, this wall of people plays a vital role in the mosh pit. While some moshers may stay in the pit for the entire concert, most will take an occasional

breather from the action and take a turn in the wall. This keeps them close to the action while they recover.

Hardcore dancing follows everything above with some minor differences. Because hardcore moshers are doing flailing and spinning moves which create space, their mosh pits are less densely packed with moshers. Hardcore dancers will avoid hitting one another, leaving room for each other to mosh without injury. The threat of being hit is present, and some moshers may even tempt it at points, but in general the spacing leads to a less dense pit. The hardcore dancing style also leads to disruption of the walls of the pit. There will still be a wall, but people in the wall are more likely to move out of the way of an incoming moshers that is hardcore dancing. There is a larger threat of danger to be hit by a spinning kick or punch, than it is to be hit by a moshers' full body who is pushing. The walls still have the function of keeping the moshers in and defending the rest of the crowd, but they are more likely to avoid hits from moshers than in a push moshing pit. The threat of greater injury also leads to a less densely packed wall. Less people are willing to stand in the way of danger, so the pit walls tend to be more broken up in hardcore dancing than the tighter packed walls in push moshing.

A mosh pit can be started, or made more active, in various ways. Mosh pits are often started by one or more people shoving each other in the area close to the stage. In most venues the area that is usually designated as the pit is easy to spot, because it's directly in front of the stage. So, when mosh pits start, usually moshers are aiming to begin their pushing or flailing in this spot. During research I saw one moshers crash through the crowd, running and shoving his way from the bar, roughly 30-40 feet away

from the pit area. When he finally arrived at the pit area, he had gained the attention of many people and roughly eight people had chased after him to start the mosh pit. From these starting points, the crowd around the pit area opened up to create the structure of the mosh pit. Moshers will use several methods in order to bring more people into the pit with them. Shoving is a typical method to achieve this, as well as running along the walls of the pit. A more interesting tactic observed during research was two moshers linking arms and then spinning in a mad whirl around the edge of the pit. Their tightly gripped arms and centripetal force kept them from falling over as they bashed their way across the pit. They could knock over the largest of moshers and disrupt the wall.

Some of the activities in the pit can be understood as organized group activities rather than what seems to be chaos. Usually these group activities are directed by the band, but they can be started by crowd members as well. A circle pit is one such activity. This is usually initiated by the vocalist of a band calling for one or just by simply pointing up and moving their hand in a circular motion. This cues the moshers to run in a circle along the wall of the pit. The pit widens as more people join in the running, pushing and shoving. Another group activity that takes more planning is the wall of death. These are almost entirely started by the band on stage. The crowd is split down the middle of the venue. The audience pushes to either side and leaves a large area in the middle empty. On the cue from the band, both sides of the room run full speed at each other and collide, pushing and shoving in the middle. The wall of death breaks up the standard anatomy of the pit the most. However, the normal anatomy of the mosh pit usually forms back around the epicenter of a wall of death collision.

Being a Mosher

Participants experience moshing in many ways, but most experiences focus on the camaraderie and stress relief. Most moshers will remember jumping into their first pit vividly. James describes it eloquently:

JAMES: It was crazy. At first I was like “I'm not going to get in there” I was like “someone hitting me and pushing me around? I'm going to get mad before it's all over with, I'm not doing that” you know what I'm saying? Once you start doing it, it's not what everybody says it is. It is... Moshing is more of a therapeutic thing; you know what I mean? I've seen research that shows that people that go to the shows and get moshing, and mosh pits, are happier when they leave. They are a lot less stressed out. Like guys I work with, they're like “I wouldn't do it because I can't stand nobody hitting me” which I can understand, you know I get it. I get it, but no one's really hitting you... but just pushing around, running into each other, that's part of it. Like when you're done, you're always dabbing at the other guys. Like you look out for other people, you know you're having fun, you're letting loose... It's a bonding thing. It's not like people hitting each other and running into each other, it's good people enjoying a good time, you know what I mean? Everybody when they're done are a lot happier.

James described how other who don't mosh, and himself before he moshed, would think of the activity. He described how apprehensive people can be before they've tried moshing. He contrasts this with the joy that he gets out of “letting loose” in the pit. For James and many others, the camaraderie that he describes is a large part of the experience that outsiders might not understand. There's a social aspect to moshing in a group along with the physical stress relief involved. This perspective is shared among many moshers, who emphasize the positive effects of moshing, especially in terms of stress relief, for instance as Adam does:

ADAM: I don't know about everybody else, but I know for me and Mark that you met last night, it's kind of a stress relief and, uh, I think that's probably the case

for most people. [...] It's that and the - and the little bit of adrenaline rush you get with it, that's about it... Stress relief really is the big thing.

Though other moshers focused on a few other reasons and benefits for moshing, many of them like Adam and James point out the stress relief. This point of view was the most common among the moshers interviewed.

The second most mentioned topic was the dangers of injury in a mosh pit and the safety of it as well. In my interview with Joshua here below, I asked him about the risk involved with moshing. Before covering the risk fully, he emphasized the safety and friendliness.

JOSHUA: I mean, I know there's risk involved, I'm not going to lie, but when it comes to push pits, you're all kind of just smiling, shoving each other around a little bit, it's not like too hostile. Although every once in a while, you'll get a few bad apples in there trying to tackle people. But yeah, it's just a fun way to kind of let off some steam and honestly like, it kind of went from a little bit of that to actually... I don't know, it's kind of a social thing, you know? Because it's kind of like if you ever go to a concert and don't know anyone, it could be a little awkward. Just hit that pit and you'll probably end up talking to somebody, but you never know what some scenes are like.

Besides solely emphasizing the danger and safety of the pit, Joshua also wanted to emphasize the friends he has made through being a mosher. Whenever he moved to a new city and didn't know anyone in the local scene, he was able to join one of the mosh pits at a concert and make friends. Many of the participants spoke about the friends made while moshing but also spoke about these being casual acquaintances. Many of them didn't speak to these mosh pit friends anymore but had very fond memories of the times that they shared. This idea of short but intense bonds with fellow moshers is discussed

further below in chapter four's section titled Fleeting and ephemeral nature, see page 32. Joshua also mentions here a "few bad apples" that will tackle people. Tackling is most directly associated with crowd killing and more broadly placed within hardcore dancing. Tackling and crowd killing are covered further in chapter four in the section titled Wrecking the Place, see page 49. Throughout our interview, Joshua put more emphasis on the benefits and joys of moshing, rather than the risk. He was not alone in stressing this.

To many of these moshers, the mosh pit wasn't a dangerous place, but rather akin to a playground. Chris spoke highly of the fun that people can have in the pit. The pit, while having inherent risks, was a place to let go and have fun.

CHRIS: But I'm happy that, you know, people are getting to have fun where they're just letting their aggression out. But at the same time, I also see people that just love to have fun bumping into each other. Like "hey, tag you're it" you know? It's kind of like playing tag. But just with moshing. So... (Chris laughs) Hell yeah.

To many moshers like Chris, this was a place for them to have fun. This was a time of play rather than a battle with others. As pointed out in the above section on the anatomy of the pit, when moshers take a breather on the wall, those that continue moshing will try to encourage those on break to join back in. I witnessed many people in the pit pushing someone taking their break to see if they would take the bait to get back in. The more action in the pit, the better experience it is for all of the moshers. So, this game of "tag" is a common practice to bait people in the pit to join in the fun. Moshers will also tag people in the wall of the pit to encourage them to get into the action. Pushing lightly, or

tagging, people in the wall who haven't moshed yet generally happens in the beginning or middle of the concert in order to start the pit activity.

Another activity for bringing people in and having a fun game was when two people would lock arms and spin wildly in a circle. This whirlwind of two moshers would collide with the walls of the pit, disrupting it. The force of their own spinning was the only thing that would keep them up. While this may sound threatening, it functioned as a group tag. As the wall was disrupted by the vortex, people previously in the wall would chase after the spinning moshers to push them around. This encouraged the moshing and spinning within the pit, generally increasing pit activity. The mosh pit isn't always fun and games though.

Minor injury is an expected risk during any mosh pit. When injuries occur, they tend to be worn as a badge of honor. Moshers expect to get hurt on occasion and are not deterred by injuries. When I was speaking with Sticky, he recalled his first pit and how he felt about getting hurt.

STICKYY: Well in the first pit, man, it was the worst man. I got busted lip, my fucking face was swollen, but it was lit because like, it's just like an adrenaline rush. like when you get into a pit it's just like everything is just like going so fucking fast. I got some battle scars that night.

This was the first mosh pit for Sticky, and even with the injuries he sustained, he ended up enjoying the activities enough to continue doing it. He was proud of the injuries that he sustained during his first time and was happy to speak with me about them. The injuries were something to be proud of and the adrenaline rush is what kept him coming back.

One of my participants, Jacob, spoke about the synergy between the band and the crowd. He was part of one of the performing bands the night I met him, and he felt that the pit was an integral part of the performance.

JACOB: Mostly I would say, uh, due to just excitement, I would say. If I'm, you know, at a show for a band I enjoy or for a friend of mine's band that I'm excited to see play, it's mostly just hype and excitement in the moment. It's just - it's an outlet of, "I like that I'm here and that I'm doing this. So hey, here's all these other people that feel the same way I do let's get a little rowdy! Let's-let's move around a little bit, let's put some - let's outlet some energy into the room which will feed the band on stage, so they'll feed us more energy," and it's a cycle. It's kind of how I think of pits starting up at shows is it's... it's an energy outlet that's gonna keep the room alive while the performance is going on.

For Jacob, the energy that the moshers gave off in their excitement was what would feed the band during a performance. If the band ramped up, the crowd did. If the crowd ramped up, the band did. During his performance that night, Jacob used the wireless capabilities of his guitar so that he could join the people in the mosh pit. Him and another fellow bandmate jumped into the action while still performing their songs. They spun around with their guitars in the pit and would use their backs to bash into moshers. The moshers were careful not to knock into their instruments. Beyond that, he and his band members moshed with the audience before their set and after they performed. They made it their duty to enjoy the mosh pit and keep the crowd going.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYTICAL

Neo-Tribal Theory

In his book, *The Time of the Tribes*, Michel Maffesoli argues that what he calls “neo-tribes” are “without the rigidity of the forms of organization with which we are familiar” and “refer more to a certain ambience, a state of mind, and is preferably to be expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and form” (Maffesoli 1996:98).

Maffesoli’s idea of tribes has been elaborated and expanded upon since the publication of his book, in particular his insight that identity might be a fluid, flexible “state of mind” or “ambiance.” For instance, sociologist of music Andy Bennett has analyzed neo-tribes as “a series of temporal gatherings characterized by fluid boundaries and floating memberships” (Bennett 1999: 600). In neo-tribes, membership is not constant, and does not define a member’s life. People are free to join and leave.

With colleagues Anne Hardy and Brady Robards, Andy Bennett released *Neo-Tribes: Consumption, Leisure and Tourism* in 2018, a collective volume in 2018 that paints a picture of the current state of neo-tribal theory. For the purposes of this research, I will be using the five characteristics of neo-tribes that Hardy, Bennett, and Robards use in their book, which includes: “fluidity of membership; the fleeting and ephemeral nature of neo-tribes; neo-tribal belonging; tribal dynamics; and the performative characteristics of neo-tribes, including rituals, symbolism, and the use of space and place” (Hardy,

Bennett, Robards 2018:6). I will explore these five ideas and the ways they relate to moshing and the metal community in the below sections.

Fluidity of membership

Being a mosher is not a constant membership. Some people may only mosh for the headliner bands, or only mosh for breakdowns in songs, and some may only mosh when the feeling of the moment takes them. Many moshers only mosh occasionally and some abandon the activity altogether as they age. There is a fluidity here across several increments of time such as, one song, one band, a concert, a year, and lifetime membership. Participation can fluctuate across these different units of time which affects the positive relationship that participation has with membership. Membership and participation depend on the individual members and the environment of their neo-tribe.

Many people I spoke to, who had been in the scene for a couple of decades or more, told me that they used to be heavily into the moshing, but now they just watch it for fun. This seemed to be a consistent story among older men that I spoke to who either stood in the wall of the pit or watched it from further away. These older men stood out amongst the majority of moshers that range from teens to early thirties in age. These men were forty to fifty and they were at least partially fixated on what happened in the pit. They aged out of moshing over time, but never lost their love for it. Though these people may be unable or unwilling to take on the risk of moshing now, they still feel a sense of belonging. Their membership has changed over time. They no longer participate in the moshing, except possibly on the walls of the pit, but they never fully disconnected from the neo-tribe.

While these previous moshers have a form of membership, others have aged out of the neo-tribe entirely. While speaking with people about my research outside of the concert site observations, several people told me that they used to mosh and go to shows but now they don't go anymore because they are "old." The concert space for metal and hardcore is definitely a younger crowd and these fans felt that they aged out of going to the live concerts. These previous fans or moshers have ended their membership with moshing and metal due to aging out. Though this was stated as fact by those that I talked to, any of them could go to a live show and mosh again; thereby reclaiming membership in the neo-tribe.

These older ex-moshers can reclaim a position in moshing, or even the metal community, at any time. This fluidity of membership is being demonstrated in the largest increments of time with decades and lifetime membership, but this also applies to the smaller increments of time. For instance, a moshers may not mosh after they move to an area that does not have live shows or venues that mosh. They have no space for their moshing place. There is no moshing neo-tribe for them to meet up with. Their moshing membership has been shelved, but they can come back to it at any point by finding a concert that will support it. The membership for anyone can come and go depending on their engagement and participation with the neo-tribe.

Fleeting and ephemeral nature

The fleeting and ephemeral nature of neo-tribes can be seen in how the moshers are there for the night and go back to their lives as soon as these concerts come to an end. People that come from different walks of life, converge into this neo-tribe; but when the

night ends, the fans of the show must return to their “everyday” lives which likely have nothing to do with metal music or moshing. Intense bonds are formed for the duration of a few hours a night, and most of these bonds and relationships only last that long.

Discussions with moshers paint the picture of a friendly environment that ends when the band is done. Very few of the bonds endure past that night and turn into relationships outside the venue. Though locals may frequent a venue enough to be aware of other “regulars” and be friendly with them, the chances of relationships outside of these venues is low. Yet socializing with strangers through loose bonds is a common occurrence. In my interview with Josh, he mentioned that he would use mosh pits as a means to make friends in a new town.

JOSH: I don't know it's kind of a social thing. Because it's kind of like if you go to a concert and don't know anyone, it could be a little awkward. Just hit that pit and you'll probably end up talking to somebody, but you never know what some scenes are like. (...) I just didn't really know anyone there and it just seemed like the pit was kind of like the place where people congregated, I guess. If you want to call it that way haha. It just seemed like a good way to get in there and push people around. You know, say “good job in the pit” and make buddies like that afterwards. It's kind of like a good icebreaker, I guess.

Here Josh describes how the mosh pit is a way of socializing. He didn't know anyone in the local metal scene, so he joined the mosh pits in order to get familiar with that crowd. After breaking the ice in the mosh pit, he would feel more comfortable in the venue. In our interview, he further encouraged people new to a venue or area, to try and get into the mosh pits. He advised researching the bands who are playing and watching the pit beforehand for safety. For Josh, getting into the pit was a way in which he could make loose connections with people. And indeed, there is some sort of intimacy, or connection,

among strangers in a mosh pit. Moshers do not always get on a first name basis, but they put their trust in each other. They congratulate one another after a good mosh. They don't know each other's names, and they won't be hanging out after the show, but they are having a good time moshing, and will be friendly if they see each other at another concert or pit. These bonds demonstrate the fleeting nature of the neo-tribe as the tribe and their bonds exist while they are within this place that they make for themselves in the crowd.

Neo-tribal belonging

There's a sense of belonging in the risk taking behavior of moshing. Though chances of injury are generally low, there's always a threat of serious injury. It is well known among moshers that some people have lost their lives due to moshing. David Fricke with Rolling Stone reported in 2000 that nine people had died in a Pearl Jam concert due to injuries they sustained during the event. Even though this was more the fault of crowding issues independent from the audience's behavior, the deaths occurred in the pit. Emily Friedman with ABC News reported in 2008 that at least nine deaths had been documented between 1994-2006 from moshing. Friedman's emergency medical professional, Wertheimer, speculated that many more deaths had possibly occurred but weren't reported. At the time, Crowd Management Strategies estimated that 10,000 people had been injured in mosh pits in the last decade (Friedman 2008). There is a sense of camaraderie within the risk and within watching out for one another. Part of moshing is making sure no one gets injured because that will end the moshing. These people walk a thin line between enjoying the danger while also minimizing the threat of danger. If there's no danger, there's no fun; If the moshing is too dangerous, people will leave it,

and then there won't be a mosh pit at all. Moshing has been banned from certain festivals and venues due to injuries. Bonds form between these people because of the inherent need to trust and protect other people while also "letting loose."

Participants in this research reinforced that other moshers were watchful of injuries. When I probed them about what a good moshers would be considered, all of them stated in some form that a good moshers would look out for others. Below are two excerpts from my interview with Sticky, and a separate interview with Chris, where they spoke about moshers being cautious and considerate in the pit.

JOE: So, in what ways are they caring?

STICKY: Because they are watching out for others, even though they are moshing, and throwing elbows. there's always like, like I said earlier, they're always aware of their surroundings.

CHRIS: Why I specifically mosh... I just like to have fun and at the same time I want to be careful, because I don't want to hurt or hit nobody, and at the same time I don't want to cause drama. And even if I do get hit or hurt, I want some of those guys to be careful, because I don't want to start a fight over, I don't want them... I don't want to be the guy to start a bar fight and just have somebody try and start a fight with me. I want to be reasonable.

In the above selections we can see how Sticky and Chris both want to let loose while also being careful of other moshers. Rather than a blatant disregard for other moshers, Sticky shows that other moshers are being careful of those around them. Chris, on the other hand, talks about his specific reasons for moshing involving caring for others while also having a good time. Even when Chris is injured, he refrains from starting arguments with other participants, and instead chooses to be "reasonable."

While there are moshers that watch out for one another, there are also moshers that disregard this tacit rule. Disregarding the safety of others will cause the moshing neo-tribe to either react to protect its pit or disband for their own safety. In the following quote, Jacob refers to hardcore dancers entering a mosh pit and how that was handled in some of the pits he has seen.

JACOB: I have seen pits open up at shows and seen the one or two guys come in throwing fists and stuff and everyone else just kind of backs out and ends the pit and lets them kind of have the entire space to themselves.

In this quote Jacob talks about how a pit that appears dangerous can end quickly by having most of its participants leave the area. Jacob is specifically referring to hardcore moshing meeting push moshing, but the same applies for fights or people intentionally entering to cause harm. He is also referring to pits opening up, which is the beginning of a mosh pit. This is important because it is easier to disrupt a pit that has few moshers, or has just begun, than a mosh pit that has been ongoing with established players that know how to interact with each other. When the neo-tribe members have some idea of how to mosh with one another, they have a greater comfort in throwing out those that threaten the health of the pit. If there are a lot of moshers all moshing in a similar way, i.e. hardcore dancing, push moshing, etc., it is easier for them to disregard the different moshing styles of others that they find disruptive. Part of neo-tribal belonging in moshing is that the safety of others is paramount. Disregarding the safety of others will have a direct effect on the neo-tribe. This idea will be discussed more in the section titled “Building the Place.”

Tribal dynamics

Merriam-Webster.com defines dynamics as “2: a pattern or process of change, growth, or activity.” Applying this definition of dynamics to the metal moshing neo-tribe can help us capture several different aspects of how a mosh pit fluctuates. A pattern of change within the mosh pit is the level of activity throughout a song. This activity is patterned by the intensity of the music, the encouragement or leadership of the band, the interactions of moshers, and the density of the crowd attending the concert. If there’s no band playing, there’s usually no mosh pit. If there’s a quiet part of a song going on then the pit may be structurally there, walls of the pit present and moshers in the middle, but have little to no activity going on. The loud roarous points of a song encourage heavy activity. A band that gives pit commands encourages more activity while a band that only plays the songs without pit commands will be leaving the level of activity up to the power of the songs and the fans’ own decisions. If a moshers is getting too violent, or if an inexperienced moshers is making the area unsafe, the mosh pit may dwindle or halt. On other occasions, the participant that causes the offense will be taken out of the mosh pit.

JOE: Have you had to take people out of the pit, that are doing that, before?

JAMES: Yes, I have. Plenty of times.

JOE: How do you usually do that?

JAMES: I usually, you know I see them doing it, and especially if they hit me, I'll kind of run up, I'll either run up and push somebody into them or knock them down, and get them out of the pit. Or I'll just clothesline them or something like that. Either way, if you want to hurt somebody, I'm going to get you out of there. Whether if I have to throw you out, I've grabbed some people by their shirts and threw them out of the pit, and I'll be like you know, “stop doing that,” or you know, I'll wait till they start running around and I'll let them come at me, and I'll

just brace up and clothesline them, and tell them like “stop.” I've done a few different things to stop that. I don't put up with that, and most people don't put up with that either.

James regulates pits activity by taking out problem moshers and beyond this, points out that most people also don't tolerate behaviors that cause problems in the pit. Finally, if there isn't a dense number of fans, it's unlikely that a mosh pit will take place. In open areas with low density it can be hard to form or maintain the walls of a pit. This physical border of people around moshers is vital to the overall amount of activity going on. A tighter border encourages more activity than a looser or non-existent border.

While push moshing will encourage the border formation to give structure to the mosh pit, the hardcore dancing can focus on breaking down or disrupting this wall. During the February fourth site observation at The Maywood, the hardcore dancers disrupted this wall to an extraordinary degree. During the moshing they frequently climbed the stage to jump into the crowd. They also moshed up against the stage, rather than allowing a barrier of people between the pit and the stage. This meant that rather than having the circular or oval shape of a pit within the crowd, there was a horseshoe shape to this pit. In order to avoid being hit, crowd members would not stand between the pit and the stage. There were some crowd members along the sides, but most of the crowd was behind the pit. Even with the crowd being mostly behind them, the moshers would throw themselves into the walls of the pit while throwing the punches and kicks of hardcore dancing. The fans in the wall avoided being hit by pushing the moshers out as quick as possible or avoiding being hit altogether. Because of the threat of being hit from swings or elbows or kicks, the walls of the pit were far sparser than a push pit. Push pit

walls are dense with most people standing shoulder to shoulder in a good pit. This hardcore pit left much space between people in the wall, to the point there wasn't a functioning wall like there is in a push pit. Many of the push moshers that I spoke with didn't think that a good pit could exist without a solid wall of people, while the hardcore dancers did not care if there was a wall or not. Hardcore dancing will disrupt the walls of the pit while the push moshing will encourage the walls of the pit. Hardcore dancing can be more individualistic in its experience while push moshing can be more communal.

Another dynamic to consider is the amount of people participating in the mosh pit. This number fluctuates throughout any performance, but the general trend is that the amount of moshers increases as the performance progresses. One simple reason for this is that concerts are generally set up so the least well known bands go first, and the most well known bands go last. The most well known bands are called headliners. They are well known to the point that their involvement makes headlines in the news and attracts fans to the concerts. The headliners typically go on tours with one or more supporting bands that travel with them for part or all of the tour. The least well known bands are typically local bands to the venue. The local bands perform first but draw very little crowd, compared to the rest of the acts. The crowd and mosh pit take time to build up as the concert goes on. Many fans skip the first few bands during a concert and only show up for the last couple bands or only the headliner. This means that the longer the concert goes on, the denser the crowd and pit get. This directly affects all aspects of the pit because the mosh participation goes up and the crowd which forms the walls of the pit can become denser. In some venues, this can effectively squeeze the area of the pit,

meaning there is less available area for the moshers to mosh in. With a smaller area to work with, moshers are much more likely to collide, no matter what mosh style they use.

The participation in the pit isn't always a consistent growth, however. Sometimes the supporting bands can draw more fans than the headlining band. This happened during the January 27th concert where Avalon Steel was the headliner. The mosh pit grew during the entire concert. The mosh pit activity maxed out during the two supporting bands' performances which were Knightmare and Children of the Reptile. After Children of the Reptile finished their set of songs, the venue began changing over the stage to set up for the headliner. Fans left the venue during the band change to Avalon Steel, leading to a noticeable thinning of the crowd and disappearance of moshers. Even though Avalon Steel was the headlining band and there had been an active mosh pit during the previous performances, the crowd had thinned so much that there was no mosh pit. Instead of a mosh pit or engaged crowd, the fans were standing around with drinks in hand, not seeming enthusiastic or even invested in watching this band's performance.

One further abnormality to the growth of the crowd and fan participation is the popularity of the opener or local bands. These bands in some situations can have the most dedicated fans. The local crowds in some situations may have higher crowd interaction than the following supporting bands. This is rare, but does happen. This occurs because a group of dedicated local fans may come out to every performance of their favorite locals, while the supporting bands from out of town are not well known enough to draw the same crowd in that area. This can lead to high pit activity in the beginning and end of a

concert with a lull during the supporting bands, even with a consistent growth in the attending crowd.

Use of space and place

The performative aspects mentioned above were broken down into three aspects which are ritual, symbolism, and use of space as place. For this research I will focus on the performative aspect of transforming a space into a place. Xue, Gao and Kerstetter (2018) make the argument that tailgating is a neo-tribe. They describe the way in which this neo-tribe takes a space -- the parking lot -- transforms it into a place for the tribe to gather and make meaning. In much the same way, moshers and fans make a place out of space within a crowd. They take what would be considered neutral space, and turn it into their neo-tribe gathering spot, delimited by a wall of individuals, and interactions that are codified and meaningful. If there is moshing going on, there is a place. But when the moshing stops and fans fill in the area, it again becomes just space within the crowd for the other concert activities.

Building the Place

When moshers start a pit by flailing or pushing and shoving, they are creating their place. A crowded area will quickly turn into a relatively circular hole in the crowd. This open space fills with moshers. At some concerts the crowd may choose to leave this circular area open even when the moshing may die down at times. In other cases, the moshing area will remain if there are moshers within it, otherwise the crowd collapses back in on itself. In some crowds I witnessed space being left for the mosh pit, when not

a single moshers had initiated the area. The crowd was aware of the place's meaning. It was going to be a mosh pit, it was just a question of when. The mosh pit may not always be present, but it is always known to have a place reserved. If the space is not reserved and open, then the moshers will make the space for themselves. There might be a certain song or band that gets the crowd going. It can be started by one person or a group, but it normally starts with one person pushing another in push moshing or someone will begin swinging and dancing with hardcore dancing. Once the pushing, shoving, or flailing has opened up the pit, the place is made. This is where like minded individuals come to share in the excitement of their music. The games of "tag" are started to bring more people into the pit. This is where moshers will shove nearby people to see if they will join in the moshing. This shove is kept lighthearted in general but meant to entice people into pushing back. People will also run along the inside of the pit to bring people in or start shoving and running into the walls of the pit. Throughout the concert the mosh pit grows in number, usually climaxing in size and participants with the final band. The growth and stability of this mosh pit depends on trust and safety between moshers as described in the "Tribal Dynamics" section.

When a moshers is joining a pit, or already involved in one, they put some level of trust in the other moshers. They want to get knocked around to have a good time, but they don't want to start a fight. Everyone is watching the pit to see what people do in it. Many people look at the pit for entertainment, but for others they are deciding if they want to get involved in the pit. They're watching the behaviors of the people who enter early and

watch. Now not every decision is made in this positivist rational way that I'm describing, but moshers do care who is in the pit and what they are doing.

As mentioned above, moshers are not just protecting their own safety; many of them are policing the pit for the safety of others. In the below quote, Adam describes how he and his friend will remove problem moshers that are disrupting the mosh with their aggression.

JOE: Yeah, so with a bad attitude, they're just looking to start a fight, or what? And how are they removed?

ADAM: Pretty much, yeah. Uhh, usually somebody the size of me or my buddy Marc takes them out. We'll push them to the outside of the crowd and tell them not to come back.

Adam points out a common practice in the mosh pit. When a moshers is getting out of hand and either hurting people or disrupting the fun, other moshers will take them out of the pit. This habit of policing the pit is like a gardener pruning their plants, removing problematic parts so that the whole plant can thrive. Maintaining the health of the pit is vital to a good experience everyone in the crowd.

The moshing neo-tribe maintains the health of the pit in a variety of ways. One of these other ways is looking out for moshers even if they're not hurt. These moshers share a tacit rule of helping one another out. In my interview, Adam explained that moshers will protect each other in minor activities like tying a shoe.

ADAM: I was going to say it's usually it's minor. Umm and one thing that you'll notice about the pit is that other than the few jerks that are in there, and the drunks that I was telling you about, most everybody is in there with a good attitude, and if somebody goes down, the pit stops and helps that person. So, you probably

witnessed that last night, I mean, like even if somebody is just stopping to tie their shoe, everybody will gather around them and keep the pit back. It's usually a very friendly group of people.

Moshers will protect each other and even members of the crowd that are not involved directly in the pit. Tying a shoe puts a moshers at great risk and in order to protect that person, people will form a wall around that person to keep them from being injured. He acknowledged that while there are problem moshers, the majority are people that have a desire to help each other out.

Adam also discussed the friendly nature of mosh pits, which is not well known to people unfamiliar with metal and moshing. To him and many other moshers, friendliness and safety is what they want and in fact how they would characterize a good mosh pit. When I asked Chris what made a good moshers, he too kept coming back to safety and friendliness.

CHRIS: Yeah, like I think the good moshers are the ones that like to try to keep themselves, you know careful and make sure they're not hurting anybody.

Chris is talking about focusing on everyone having a good time while avoiding causing fights. To Chris, a good moshers is avoiding drama by causing fights and will look out for others getting hurt. A good moshers for Chris, and my other participants, was one that cares about the wellbeing of others and the pit. None of the participants mentioned enjoying or pursuing reckless injury of others. The only time that the participants mentioned intentionally harming others, was when they saw problem moshers getting out of hand or hurting others.

While weeding out problem moshers is one way to support the creation of a place, one of the most important is to make it a fun environment that fans want to enjoy together. One of the ways that moshers encourage each other is with the game of tag, which was previously mentioned in the “Being a Mosher” section of chapter three. When the moshers take a break on the wall, their newfound moshing friends will encourage them to come back to the fun by giving them light pushes and running into the pit. The person that was shoved is being encouraged to push that person back but now must give chase into the pit again. This friendly behavior encourages people to come into the pit and gives permission for them to shove another mosher back. This is a tacit confirmation of consent for the other person to come shove them back. Actions like this make the pit a safe place for pushing and shoving strangers through these acts of encouragement and consent which builds trust among the moshers.

Another act I witnessed for making an enjoyable pit was when people would set up a launching area to get people into crowd surfing. This was usually done by two or three of the moshers on the wall of the pit, who would lean over in a position as if they were about to lift a piece of furniture. They would be set up so that the two or three of them could all lift one person at the same time to get them easily on top of the crowd. The crowd members around this launching area were usually aware of incoming fans and would assist in getting the fans carried across the crowd.

I witnessed this during the January 31st concert. During Killswitch Engage’s set I was jumping up and down with the crowd and I was on the edge of the pit closest to the band. I had noticed that three moshers had set up this launching area earlier, but I hadn’t

noticed that they became mobile with this. What I didn't see was that they were working their way left to right on the front edge of the pit, lifting up anyone they crossed that didn't protest. I was all at once shocked and stunned to be grabbed and lifted by three people. I had no time to realize what was happening until after I was on top of the crowd, shouting in excitement. I had a great time being carried around by the crowd, along with several others floating on top of the crowd's hands. I was eventually dropped off in front of the stage where there were security guards to help people down. When I got back to the pit, I saw that there were two of these launching stations getting people to crowd surfing and a few people protecting them from the chaos of the pit. At this point, the launching stations were now stationary and people from the pit would run into them to get lifted up. I recognized the new launching station and the people defending them as some of the crowd surfers that I had just seen in the air with me. In an act of kindness and cooperation, they were now helping others to crowd surf.

While you can crowd surf from the center of the crowd, it is much harder to initiate. The launching stations that happened during that set made the pit the place to go to start crowd surfing. The mosh pit was being careful of them and encouraging non-moshers to crowd surf as well. The moshers were maintaining the pit as a safe place for fans to engage in crowd surfing who might not have gone near the pit otherwise. In the context of the space to place argument, the pit was now a place where fans of any type could go to create meaningful experiences at that concert. Crowd surfing is an exciting and memorable experience and the moshers made their pit, their place, a safe avenue to experience it.

Beyond the physical safety and encouragement that helps build the mosh pit as a place, there is also a sense of security that comes in an unexpected form. Moshers will return lost items. I witnessed this happen when I met Devon. In our interview, I asked him to recall if he remembered why everyone had their phone lights out in the mosh pit.

DEVON: Like I said, whenever anyone, whenever someone loses an item, if someone finds it, they usually hold it up and like “hey, whose is this?” But umm, in the case of what happened there, someone lost their, whatever it was. I’m not sure what it was, but I did help to look for whatever it was though. Umm, this guy that I was moshing with, I’m pretty sure he was shirtless, I don’t remember what he looks like, umm noticed that somebody had their phone out and they were looking on the floor around them, like around their feet, like “what happened?” So, he sort of got in front of her and put his arms out to make a sort of like semi-circle, you know, widen her visibility, even a little bit. I saw this was going on right after I just got finished moshing and was catching my breath and all that. So, I decided to help too. I was keeping people away from them. Eventually everyone, like, caught on to the shrinking size of the mosh pit and stopped what they were doing, and everyone had their phones out with their lights out, helping her look for whatever it was, or him. I don’t remember who it was exactly, but yeah. I don’t know if they found what they were looking for, but uh, they eventually gave up the search. Might have been a phone. Or something, maybe not a phone, but something personal.

JOE: Cool! Yeah honestly, you told that story perfectly. I wanted to get your gauge of what it was before I told you, because I actually did see that too. Uhh, it was actually a pair of glasses that dude dropped, and he wasn’t able to find them.

DEVON: Oh, that guy! I know exactly who you’re talking about.

JOE: Yeah, yeah. The phone search with the phone lights went on for a while, and then, uhh, at the very end of it, right before everyone gave up finding it, we found one of the arms of the glasses and that’s all we found.

DEVON: The funny thing is, that guy that lost his glasses, is the dude that, like you know, helped me give people back their hats.

Devon noticed that a search was going on for a lost item and decided to assist since he was about to take a break from moshing anyway. He held back the moshers from the

search along with another moshers. This gave the person who lost their glasses room so that they could search the floor. As other moshers and crowd members caught on to what was happening, more of them stopped and assisted with the search using the light from their phones to search the floor. The pit stopped while they searched for this item. Once the single arm of the glasses was found, the person who had lost the item gave up their search and the pit started back up. After Devon realized who had lost the item, he recalled that this had been one of the moshers that had helped him throughout the night with returning hats to moshers. This glasses moshers was helping return lost items before and after he lost his own. He wasn't the only one to be doing it. Though he was taking an active role in the return of items, there were others that also assisted in this way or passively assisted. The ones that passively assisted would stop what they were doing when a search was going on or when someone was attempting to return an item. They would help in the search or return of the item using their phone lights before returning to moshing.

The returning of items provides an added layer of security to the mosh pit. It's very easy to lose an item while you're moshing, but the knowledge that others moshers will try to return anything you drop, provides peace of mind. This is another tacit rule of mosh pits that adds to their significance as a place for the moshing neo-tribe.

Connections are formed with strangers trusting one another. Throughout the concert they develop the levels of trust in each other with these practices of safety and security and they will fight to ensure that this place they've made isn't disrupted. They

guard the values of the place that they have co-created by pruning the bad actors and supporting the good ones.

Wrecking the Place

Not every mosh pit is a good one. There are many ways in which a mosh pit can fail. There may not be enough participants, or those participants may not be enthusiastic enough about moshing, or about the music played. There might be conflict between push moshers and hardcore dancers, an unsafe pit area, and so on. Here I will look at how conflict between push moshers and hardcore dancers can disrupt the construction of a place for the two to co-exist.

Most of the moshers I interviewed had a lot to say about crowd killing. When I asked them to define what it was, I got a variety of answers that centered around similar actions. One person said that it was synonymous with being a buzzkill and anything that hurt the energy in the pit. People who appeared to push mosh more than hardcore dance attributed it to intentionally hurting another moshers with punches, kicks, or tackling.

Stickyy was hardcore dancing when I met him; when I interviewed him, he said:

JOE: Who are the people that do the crowd killing?

STICKYY: Sometimes it can be like negative, like really really big guys, like they've got muscles and everything, they think they're all hard. some of those guys try to crowd kill. And then somebody like keeps messing around with you bro, like they get offensive too. I don't know why. You're trying to stay away from people when you're moshing, like we try and stay as far away as possible. Like we know. Like sometimes it's like someone gets hit, and that's not cool. That sucks. I got crowd killed one time and it was the worst.

Sticky hardcore dances and purposely keeps his distance from other moshers who are likely also hardcore dancing. His story appears to indicate that a push moshers was upset about his moshing and took him out of the pit. This sounds very similar to the way James in the above Neo-Tribal Theory section described taking problem moshers out of the pit. James would wait to get hit by one of the moshers and then use that as a justification to take the offender out of the pit. While a push moshers like James might see a hardcore dancer like Sticky as the problem for hitting people, the reverse is also true. Sticky doesn't like people getting hit and wants to keep his distance for the safety of others. Though both people are moshing, their moshing styles are at odds. A hardcore dancer and a push moshers may each consider the other to be the crowd killer.

Another example is provided by Josh and Jacob. Both mostly push mosh, but they also hardcore dance on occasion. Josh thinks of crowd killing as singling out other moshers to hurt them, while Jacob views it as its own set of dance moves. However, they both consider their idea of crowd killing to be more similar to hardcore dancing rather than moshing.

JOE: For people that don't know, could you tell me what crowd killers are?

JOSH: Basically it's like, well it's not like randomly punching people in the face, but sometimes it can really seem like that and sometimes kind of is. Like they will literally run back and forth in a line sometimes in a hardcore pit and they'll just kind of sometimes look at a random person and try to punch them in the face or kick them. And I know that sounds kind of stupid, but that's kind of what happens. Sometimes I noticed that people don't try and do it like full-on, you know like their punch will just be kind of like a tap, or sometimes they'll put their backs to people and swing backwards at them. But that's generally what a crowd killer is. [Crowd killers] will look at someone random and try and go after them and hit them, to technically define it.

In Josh's above quote he's stating that crowd killers will target individuals. This targeting is sometimes playful, but other times comes off as a hostile attack on a stranger. He directly relates these behaviors in the pit to hardcore pits. Jacob also links hardcore dancing and crowd killing in his quote below, but takes a different perspective on it.

JACOB: So, hardcore dancing is, it's a much, it's - much more than push moshing which is your typical mosh pit you'll find at more punk rock, hard rock shows, even some instances of metalcore shows depending on the band and things like that, but hardcore dancing is more of the dudes *short pause* I'm sure people have seen it on, you know, Facebook and things of that nature where, you know, spin kicks and throwing fists and backflips and all kinds of crazy stuff like that. Crowd killing is very much in the same, uh, same boat as hardcore dancing where you're showing off your guns, you're throwing fists in the air, you're throwing kicks, you're kicking back behind you, you're trying to just go as nuts as you can basically.

Jacob views crowd killing as its own set of dance moves that overlaps with hardcore dancing. He relates them both to letting loose with kicks, punches, and even back flips. Jacob began by making the distinction that push moshing is more typical to see and indicated that it happens in genres such as punk rock, hard rock and metalcore. He is also making a separation with hardcore dancing and crowd killing being separate from push moshing. To both of these moshers, crowd killing is in line with hardcore dancing rather than push moshing. The people I questioned at concerts had varying ideas of what crowd killing was, but they generally shared this idea that crowd killing was similar to hardcore dance moves. I will point out that the concert site observations were mainly push moshing concerts. Since push moshing was the more widely used form of moshing, the hardcore dancing was seen as the disruption in moshing. On the other side, hardcore dancers often view push moshers as crowd killers as well. Sticky described concerts

where the moshing was predominantly hardcore dancing but that push moshers would cause problems by pushing people around when the hardcore dancers didn't want to make any contact.

Chris is a push mosher himself. He thinks of crowd killing as a buzzkill like as above. He looks at crowd killing from both perspectives of hardcore dancing and push moshing. When I asked him to describe what crowd killing was and where it took place, he had the following to say.

CHRIS: Yeah. I've seen guys like they'll, you know, try to be smart asses like, like trying to ruin people's fun. Pretty much crowd killing is like, is another term for buzzkill, old term old terminology from back in the day for crowd killing. Like guys will try and do a push mosh in a hardcore and sometimes I'll see them hardcore dancing in a metal, death metal show. And sometimes it doesn't coexist like that. Like even more recently I've seen some shows that mixed it up a little bit. (...) Saying something "we're going to start our own shit and just let them know this is a metal show, not a fucking hardcore show." or "we're a hardcore show, not a metal show." And sometimes guys will like, you know, kind of be a little reckless, these jerkoffs. Sometimes some guys will take it as a lighthearted joke and sometimes it gets a little agitating. Not agitating, but just annoying. So, it's kind of hard to explain to guys, like "hey, this isn't the kind of crowd for it. So, I mean you can't do that." And it's funny because, like I've never understood some of the hardcore bands. I'm not a fan of hardcore dancing, even though I will admit, because I'm a hypocrite, I have done hardcore dancing. That's only because nobody was doing push moshing. But I've seen, you know, hardcore dancers push each other, just to make some space, to do their little karate kick crap that they're doing, you know? It's just like... and I've seen hardcore dancers going to metal shows and they're doing hardcore dancing, and it's just out of freaking place, even when there's a breakdown, it doesn't make any sense. There's no... They're not a hardcore or a metalcore band, not even a Deathcore band. You know, nowadays were so genre, there's too many genres and people just kind of doing the same thing. You know? It's like come on guys, at least expand. Like you don't have to keep doing hardcore dancing forever. Like just, you can still join in, you can still have fun, but... It is one of those deals when people who do like the crowd killing thing, like it's just bumming people out because you're doing something that it's not particularly into, the particular genre, especially when it comes down to music. Because I mean, hell, what else can you do?

He acknowledges that both sides in moshing can view the other as crowd killing when they are out of place. Chris also shows here that the styles will occasionally try to assert dominance over one another to declare what kind of moshing style will be dominant at a concert. Chris advised that crowd killing is when the crowd is not agreeing on a moshing style and the minority moshing style disrupts the majority, making a bad experience for both styles. This conflict is a buzz kill to the mosh pit and thereby, dampens or even suppresses the crowd's enthusiasm.

This is similar to Tsitsos' (1999) findings discussed in the History of Moshing section. Tsitsos observed that political punks favored communal activities, apolitical punks favored individualistic activities, and straight edge punks favored individual activity as well but would assert their dominance over others in the pit. In what Chris has described, both moshing styles want to achieve a single style where all participants are doing the same dances. Push moshing involves more communal activities, like circle pits and walls of death, in line with the political punks. On the other hand, hardcore dancing favors more individualistic action like the apolitical punks. When there is a conflict between the styles though, they will try to assert dominance over one another until either a single style is reached, the pit works harmoniously with both styles present, or the pit falls apart due to the conflict.

Although there are more than a few ideas on what crowd killing means, it captures the idea of ruining the enjoyment of the pit for a group or individual. Crowd killing disrupts the mosh pit as a place. In the space to place argument, this is disrupting the moshers' ability to create their place as a safe and secure area due to fighting between

the styles. When this moshing style conflict occurs, it can ruin the pit's ability to become a place, unless action is taken. The moshers either must fight to keep their place or accept the discomfort for the duration of the mosh pit or even concert.

During my research one of the concerts I attended went this way. The first of four bands in the lineup was up, but there wasn't much action in the pit. In fact, there was one person in the pit. It's usual for a mosh to build as the concert goes on but this wasn't like that. There was only one person in the pit. He was tall, young, and heavier set. He seemed to be disoriented and possibly drunk. He threw his shirt off during the first song of the first band. He stood in the left side of the open pit and looked at the crowd on the right side, rather than the band. He stomped around and kept an intense stare at no one in particular. He was daring people to come mosh with him. One or two people tried to engage with some pushes and then ran along the walls, but he didn't seem to like this. Anytime he could, he would grapple one of them and see if he could knock them off their feet while locking arms. Grappling is abnormal in both push moshing and hardcore dancing. By the end of the first band the people who were trying to entertain him in order to create a mosh had given up. For the next two bands, the activity remained very similar with some spikes of more activity. The thing was that this person was determined to exert his power over the pit. He was treating it like he was fighting to maintain his position over it. Anyone that entered the pit was a challenger. This pit was heavily avoided by other moshers and he was large enough that people weren't invested in trying to kick him out of the pit. This not only affected the would-be moshers, it also affected the crowd and band. The disappointment seemed evident on many faces. The bands couldn't call out for

circle pits or walls of death because no one was there to support them. There was only this guy defending his territory. There wasn't a conflict of moshing styles present at this concert either, as it appeared those that joined were all push moshers. It was only this one person that ruined the creation of a place for everyone.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This paper has used the aspects of neo-tribal theory to analyze the ways in which moshers are a neo-tribe within the metal and hardcore music scene. This paper compared the 5 separate aspects of neo-tribes described in *Neo-Tribes: Consumption, Leisure and Tourism* (Hardy, Bennett, & Robards 2018:6). The five aspects were “(1) fluidity of membership; the (2) fleeting and ephemeral nature of neo-tribes; (3) neo-tribal belonging; (4) tribal dynamics; and (5) performative characteristics of neo-tribes, including rituals, symbolism, and the use of space and place” (Hardy, Bennett, Robards 2018:6). The first section of chapter four, *Neo-Tribal Theory*, showed moshing through the perspective of neo-tribal theory through the above five aspects. Moshing was established as a neo-tribe in that section in order to further analyze the space to place aspect in this context. The *Building the Place* section focused on how moshers created a place out of the space provided to them. The neo-tribe’s place was created through moshing involving support of good behaviors and punishment of bad behaviors in a constant pruning process. This allowed the pit to be the place of meaning-making for the neo-tribe. Finally, the *Wrecking the Place* section focused on ways in which this sacred place could be stopped, injured, or destroyed entirely through crowd killing and conflict between push moshing and hardcore dancing.

There were five core ideas used for this research, however, the dynamics of transforming a space into a place were the most important to the moshing neo-tribe. The pruning process of support and punishment utilized in the pit kept the pit alive. Without this process, the neo-tribe would not exist. When the pit fails to stabilize, it will fall apart. Due to the fluidity of membership aspect and the fleeting and ephemeral nature aspect of the neo-tribe, these issues would stop the neo-tribe from coalescing. The moshing neo-tribe must fight for their place, otherwise they won't exist. All other aspects of the neo-tribe hinge solely on the neo-tribe's acquisition of space and transformation into place. If they fail to make a pit or keep the activity in it healthy, then everything else that is secondary, will fall. When there is success in place-making, the other functions and aspects of the neo-tribe can thrive.

The activity of moshing is spreading to other genres such as rap, country, and EDM. Because of this spread, understanding the ways in which the fans interact with the practice is vitally important to the success of live performances. Safety should be a top concern along with understanding how successful moshing can fuel lasting group experiences. Further research should be done to understand how the band and mosh pit interact during a concert. By building upon this research and integrating how the bands interact with moshers, we can have a clearer idea of the function of mosh pits. This understanding of function, success, and failure could provide for better planning in live concerts and in audience engagement. Beyond this point, understanding how a space can be turned into a place by strangers gives us a look into the ways in which we connect and defend these connections against disruption.

Not every mosh pit is a good one. While we have explored some of the reasons for a pit to fail, it is also worth noting that mosh pit failure cannot always be predicted. This is partly what makes a successful pit such a dynamic and memorable experience for many moshers. The success stories for moshers aren't just a personal story of triumph, they are the story of a group of people that created an amazing time. The best moshing stories come from the community working together to create their place amongst the crowd.

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