Live Underground Heavy Metal: The Perseverance and Decline of an Art World

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Abstract

Through the lens of underground heavy metal, this thesis explores the importance of live music and the ways in which music worlds transform, decline and remain resilient. In a departure from traditional academic studies of heavy metal, which focus on notions of youth, rebellion, gender and subversive themes, (Weinstein, 1999; Krenske and McKay, 2000; Bennett, 2001), this thesis takes a novel approach in exploring the active nature of this music world. As artists face problems with digital distribution and the related decline of record sales, live music was expected to flourish, as artists seek to compensate for lost recording revenue through live shows. However, this world is not as straightforward as it might appear; arguably it is an industry which is becoming increasingly volatile. As grassroots venues close and touring costs increase for artists, underground live music faces a particularly tough struggle. Therefore, in contributing to the growing body of literature on “Art Worlds”, (Becker, 1982), this thesis develops an understanding of the ways in which venues, promoters and audiences attempt to sustain this music world. Through surveying attendance at live events and interviewing active participants, it is argued that whilst this music world suggests elements of decline it also shows perseverance. Through the development of translocal networks and maintenance of community, these participants pool resources in order to facilitate live events; even in the face of tremendous struggle. In doing so, this thesis makes a unique contribution to academic understandings of underground metal, capturing this music world at a particularly tumultuous time.
Declaration

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The Author

The author completed a BSocSc in Sociology at the University of Manchester in 2012. Subsequently she gained an MSc in Sociological Research at the University of Manchester in 2013. Throughout both, there has been a focus on heavy metal and an underlying interest in live music.

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Chapter One: Tremors in the Underground

1.1. Setting the Scene

This thesis argues that underground heavy metal’s once thriving live scene is in fact struggling to attract a big and committed enough audience to sustain itself. In the face of a number of financial and structural challenges, I explore how this music world attempts to remain resilient in the face of decline, and in doing so I contribute to the growing body of literature on ‘Art Worlds’. Despite sociology’s attempt to study music as an active, fluid concept, studies of heavy metal continue to focus on the fans, the controversial music, and often the mainstream, (Weinstein, 1999; Krenske and McKay, 2000; Bennett, 2001). By contrast, this thesis takes a novel approach to studying heavy metal by adopting Howard Becker’s ‘Art Worlds’ as a theoretical basis. Departing from subcultural studies, this research fills a gap in the literature by attending to the active nature of underground heavy metal and the difficulties in organising, promoting and attending live events at this grassroots scale.

The subject of this thesis originates from a very personal place. Music was a really important part of my upbringing. Although I was brought up in a small village in the south of England, with no music venues, we would organise live music in whatever spaces we had access to; village halls, gym halls, parks and even fields. In addition, if we wanted to see live acts, we had to travel. This, to me, really highlights the active nature of music worlds. Music does not miraculously just come into being, it exists because people actively create and sustain it.

Part of my move to Manchester was for the vibrant music scene. That said, I was surprised that there were not more ‘underground’ events to my taste and therefore decided to organise my own. Undoubtedly the events attracted a ‘community’ which consisted of fans and other active participants; musicians, promoters, venues and sound engineers, for example. In addition to my passion for music, I grew interested in the dynamics between people in this community, particularly between artists and promoters and the ways in which they worked together to organise an event. Similarly I became intrigued by the deep rooted contentions underlying these interactions, largely over struggling finances.
I began to explore these issues academically, firstly focusing upon the ways in which people consume live music and comparing both the commercial and underground spheres (Emms, 2012). Subsequently, I then analysed the relationship between the artist and the promoter (Emms, 2013). Both studies alluded to a struggle within the live sector. I had frequent conversations with other promoters who were losing money and artists who were growing tired of small audiences and this presented a number of questions; how were these events losing money? Why weren’t people attending? Why were other events well attended? As time has passed, the Manchester metal scene is very different from when I first arrived in 2009, venues have since shut down and promoters and bands have moved on. In addition, I have struggled to maintain a promotions company within this city. Whilst underground metal music still exists in some form in Manchester, the changing nature of both the community and the physical musicscape has provided the driving force behind this thesis.

It is necessary first to define the concept of ‘underground’ music as it is employed in the thesis (something I discuss at length in Chapter Two). The meaning of underground music is somewhat contentious, though Todrović and Bakir provide a useful definition. Primarily, they suggest that underground music is largely self-sufficient, or DIY, in nature and that the end result is often unconventional and subversive (Todorović and Bakir, 2005). The self-sufficient nature of underground music is precisely why it is an interesting concept for study; if this art world is struggling, there is no financial support to bolster it. Therefore it is the intention of this thesis to analyse the ways in which underground music worlds, like underground heavy metal, react to change, decline, or remain resilient.

Change is a key feature of the live underground metal scene. Indeed, this thesis captures the complexities of underground music worlds at a particularly tumultuous time. It is no secret that the music industry has always been susceptible to change and these changes are always viewed with trepidation. However, Wikstrom suggests that the biggest of these changes has been the movement into the “Digital Age”, towards a “new music economy”, (Wikstrom, 2009: 4). With the broad availability of free music online, through websites such as Spotify, Last.fm and Sound Cloud to name a few, artists can no longer rely upon record sales in order to make money. Arguably, in this new music economy, live music has become more important than ever before, as the primary way for artists to sustain themselves (Wikstrom, 2009: 137).
The overarching theme of this thesis is about acknowledging the ways in which the music industry reacts to change. However, I do not focus on declining record sales and distribution of music in order to do this. Instead, I argue that alongside this monumental shift, the industry faces another set of difficult challenges within the live sector, and these challenges demand further academic attention and analysis. Whilst bigger arena tours and festivals may appear to boast a sizeable audience and profit, this thesis suggests that small, underground events encounter a very different reality and that the problems they face are multifarious.

Since the start of my research, some of these challenges have been brought into the public domain. In 2014, The Music Venue Trust shone a light on a key problem for underground music; the endemic closure of small, grassroots venues. In turn this has highlighted the importance of underground music as a springboard for the aforementioned big festival and arena acts which are viewed as the solution to the decline in recorded music sales. The underground, grassroots artists are the foundations of the music industry and where these acts start out. Therefore the closure of grassroots venues is of great concern, not only for the underground but the wider industry. London alone lost 35% of its grassroots music venues between 2007 and 2015, “a decline from 136 spaces programming new artists to just 88 remaining today” (The Mayor of London’s Music Venues Taskforce, 2015). This number continues to grow at an alarming rate.

The Music Venue Trust has attempted to bring venues together in order to combat closures. Emphasising the timely nature of this thesis, the issue was even brought to the fore during the 2017 election campaign, as Jeremy Corbyn stressed the importance of live music at this scale, promising to “look into opportunities for independent music venues supporting local artists” (O’Connor, 2017). Many venues that have faced closure are much loved spaces for heavy metal gigs. In addition, it is important to understand that heavy metal is not the only music genre affected by these developments. Issues outlined in this thesis, whilst specifically focusing on heavy metal, are potentially applicable to other music worlds, showing the transferable value of this research.

1.2. Thesis Arguments and Structure

On the basis of quantitative survey research, with 474 responses and 29 qualitative interviews with participants in various roles within the underground live metal world in six areas of the UK, this thesis lends support to the picture of decline that has been brought to
public attention. It will suggest that the main sources of decline are: an ageing audience; changing technology; venue closures; and ever increasing costs. Nevertheless, the thesis also argues that change in a music world initiates new forms of resilience and cooperation on the part of the various elements and actors that make up the underground metal world: audiences connect across cities to create translocal worlds; promotors adapt to new technologies; and venues are working together in the face of the aforementioned issues. Simultaneously fans find new ways to participate, despite growing financial concerns. In order to unfold these key arguments, the thesis is divided into seven main chapters, which are outlined below.

**Chapter Two** provides an overview of the existing literature on both music and heavy metal. The chapter begins by addressing the ways in which heavy metal has been conceptualised in previous academic discourse. In doing this, I establish Howard Becker’s *Art Worlds* (1982), as the theoretical framework for the thesis. Subsequently, this chapter examines the “symptoms of decline” as they might be understood from existing literature in more depth, examining the importance of spaces and venues, technological changes within the music industry and the ways in which audiences change. In doing this, this chapter establishes a gap in the literature, which does little to acknowledge the active nature of music worlds and the struggles that they currently face.

**Chapter Three** addresses the complexities of studying the underground heavy metal music world, the research design behind the study, and the research questions and themes. Sections 3.4. – 3.5. discuss the research methods in depth, starting with the survey, then the interviews, (both face to face and email) and finishing with a short account of the observations that were carried out throughout the project. I provide a detailed account of the research and analysis processes, considering any limitations throughout. In doing this, this chapter hinges particular importance on being reflexive about my role as both a researcher and a promoter, and the positive and negative implications of my long running history with this music world. Finally this chapter details ethical concerns and how participant’s confidentiality was maintained.

**Chapter Four** primarily draws upon the survey data to address my first research question, in mapping out both important spaces and key promotors along the six selected research sites. Throughout, the chapter uses the interview data in order to understand why these spaces are important to participants, establishing a set of venue specific conventions
necessary for the running of a successful underground metal event. This chapter engages with the current media discourse surrounding venues, establishing what is happening to these venues and how this impacts upon underground metal. The chapter argues that venues are not only important as a physical space. Instead, people impose their own meaning on these spaces and this helps develop a sense of community. The sense of ‘soul’ attributed to these venues is what makes them important; these spaces cannot simply be replaced, which makes their closure detrimental to the survival of the music world.

Having established the important network of spaces and promoters within each city, **Chapter Five** turns attention to the promoter’s role. This chapter addresses my second research question, in applying Becker’s Art Worlds theory to develop a better understanding of the important process of reliance and co-operation between the artist and promoter (or support personnel as Becker suggests). Beginning with a breakdown of the promoter’s role and motivations for adopting this role, this chapter establishes two key drivers behind promotion; *the self and the community*. In unpicking the complexities of organising events of this scale, this chapter engages with debates surrounding the impact of technology and the changing nature of the promotion business as costs begin to skyrocket. However, it is not only the transformation of promotion practices that has had an impact on the vibrancy of this world; the interviews suggest that there is in fact a declining audience.

**Chapter Six** then turns focus to the role of the audience in maintaining this music world. This chapter considers how rising costs have had an impact on ticket prices and therefore audience attendance. In doing so, it is established that audiences are not the youth subculture that much heavy metal literature suggests. Rather, the underground metal audience was more representative of young adults upwards, who have life commitments, jobs and families to negotiate their metal identity around. The result is an audience that is continuously torn between which events they can dedicate time and money to. The chapter therefore finds a growing interest in festivals and all-day events, which fulfil participant’s financial needs and facilitate scenic practices.

Finally **Chapter Seven** brings these roles together to highlight how the three separate facets come together to culminate in the transformation of a music world in the face of decline. The chapter presents the overall contribution and implications of the thesis.
Chapter Two: Music as Collective Action and Symptoms of Decline

2.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the existing literature on live music and the complexities involved in its organisation, promotion and consumption, giving particular attention to Howard Becker’s (1982) work on ‘Art Worlds’, which I use to frame much of what follows in subsequent chapters. The chapter begins by discussing heavy metal and the traditional approaches to studying this genre. In doing so, I discuss nuanced approaches to studying social spaces of music, (Crossley and Bottero, 2014), before establishing Art Worlds as the theoretical basis of this research.

Following this is a breakdown of the symptoms of decline highlighted in literature surrounding music, divided into three subsections: Section 2.4 highlights the importance of spaces and “musicscapes” for both live music and in the formation of communities; Section 2.5 focuses on promoters and literature on changes in technology and the impact this has had on live music; 2.6 turns the focus to the audience and the ways in which people detach from music worlds and active music practices, specifically looking at ageing and preference for festivals over small events.

In the course of the chapter I argue that there has been relatively little work analysing the difficulties faced by small, underground music worlds struggling to survive within an ever changing music industry. This is the gap which my own work seeks to fill and which is discussed in subsequent chapters, with a specific focus upon heavy metal.

2.2. Origins of Heavy Metal

Though the specific research questions of this thesis are relatively untouched in existing literature, heavy metal itself has been the subject of previous academic study. As a genre that has been dividing people since its inception in the late 1960s and early 1970s, heavy metal has attained a growing academic interest (Kahn-Harris, 2007; Weinstein, 1991; Walser, 1993; Bennett, 2001). Stylistically, the genre has roots in blues, psychedelic and classic rock ‘n’ roll, and is often considered somewhat diverse and complex, (Kahn-Harris, 2007). Commentators suggest that bands such as Black Sabbath, Deep Purple and Led
Zeppelin were really the pioneers of heavy metal (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 2), encouraging a heavy, down-tuned guitar sound which arguably transformed and developed over time. More extreme disseminations of metal began to emerge towards the 1980s, moving away from the “sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll” themes and blues tones of the 1970s, becoming more distorted and arguably more controversial (ibid.). With a more extreme sound, heavy metal has become further removed from popular culture, with little to no radio play and often contentious reviews: e.g. “as its detractors have always claimed, heavy metal rock is nothing more than a bunch of noise; it is not music, it’s distortion – and that is precisely why its adherents find it appealing” (Lester Bangs cited in Weinstein, 1991: 2). Bennett explains that the attraction of heavy metal for its fans is not purely sonic, but relates also to the subject matter addressed in lyrics, which fans feel a sense of affiliation with:

“It is possible to see how frequently explored themes of extreme metal songs, such as destruction, decay and disease, disillusion, corruption through power, confusion and isolation … resonate in varying degrees with the experienced problem, and resulting outlook, of growing numbers of young people in contemporary society” (Bennett, 2001: 52)

This connection with youth and rebellion has led to a tendency to conceptualise metal fans as part of a “subculture”. Subcultural theory emerged from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham in the 1970s, with a number of influential studies focusing on punks, mods and skinheads, to name a few (Cohen, 1972, Hebdige, 1979). As working class communities became less visible following the Second World War, theorists proposed that the formation of subcultures was the result of feelings of alienation, inequality and disempowerment (Willis, 1981; Bennett & Hodkinson, 2012: 1; Bennett, 2001: 18).

Identifying with particular, alternative musical styles such as rock ‘n’ roll and punk played a large part in the establishment of these communities (Crossley and Bottero, 2015:5). Within these social groups, participants adopted a set of stylistic and behavioural conventions synonymous with a ‘subculture’, the notion of ‘style’ being of particular importance (Hebdige, 1979). In adopting alternative fashion and symbols, participants are seen to position themselves directly in opposition to mainstream culture or the norm such that - “subcultural styles communicate a refusal to belong” (Crossley, 2016: 23). It is perhaps unsurprising then, that this approach has routinely been applied to the study of
heavy metal, where fans are frequently defined as disillusioned, troubled youths, often male and often working class (Weinstein, 2000: 101).

Theorists have suggested that heavy metal provides this group with a form of empowerment, which has involved “embracing symbols, attitudes, and terms that many traditionally regard to be powers of evil” (Harrell, 1994: 101). Weinstein suggests that this often involves dressing in a ‘heavy metal uniform’, with band t-shirts, long hair, piercings and tattoos adding that this ‘look’ “is also related to the attitudes of the metal subculture” (Weinstein, 2000: 132) and represents a rejection of mainstream culture. The portrayal of particular symbols and themes within heavy metal music has been the subject of much academic discourse, focusing on moral panics around religion, violence and sexism (Bennett, 2001: 53). These moral panics have been amplified as the genre has developed. As Kahn Harris explains, since the 1990s heavy metal has in fact become even more diverse, with the rise of more extreme forms of metal music and further subdivisions. Often these subdivisions are viewed as perhaps more taboo than before, with increasingly “offensive lyrical content” (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 26):

“Today’s heavy metal music is categorically different from previous forms of popular music. It contains the element of hatred, a meanness of spirit. Its principal themes are extreme violence, extreme rebellion, substance abuse, sexual promiscuity, and perversion and Satanism” (Stuessy, cited in Weinstein 1991: 2)

Subgenres in contemporary heavy metal can range from Christian and folk metal1 to ‘gore grind’2, ‘blackened death metal’ and even ‘national socialist black metal’3. As a result, there is a continual focus on anxieties over metal music and its fans within academic literature, leading to somewhat deterministic assumptions that listeners are passively influenced and led by the contentious lyrical and visual content, with no active agency of their own (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 26).

1 Folk metal often revolves around themes of nature and myth, and combines traditional heavy metal with folk music, often incorporating instruments such as “mandolins, banjos, flutes, whistles, bodhrans, hurdy gurdy”, (Metal Music Archives, 2017).

2 “Gore Grind” is a subgenre of death metal, often surrounding themes of gore, disease and decay. Stylistically it is fast paced with roots in hard-core and crust punk (Purcell, 2003)

3 Black metal originates from Norway, stylistically incorporating high pitched, screeching vocals with fast paced tempos. Often the music is produced in a simple, raw fashion. Nationalist black metal is ideologically grounded with right-wing, nationalist themes. In extreme cases, NSBM promote neo-nazi beliefs lyrically and visually, (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 41).
Subcultural theory has been widely critiqued, largely because it does not account for change and focuses rigidly on assumed notions of class, youth and style (Kahn-Harris 2007). As Kahn-Harris explains, the genre has become more diverse which would suggest a more fragmented audience. Rather, subcultural theory assumes a homogenous group and thus neglects those who do not define themselves in terms of traditional metal symbols and styles but identify with heavy metal in other ways (ibid.). This fixed assumption of the ‘metalhead’ identity does not account for fluidity and change, and thus, as Hodkinson acknowledges, “there is also a sense, in contemporary writing on the subject, that significant changes in popular culture since the 1960s and 1970s have rendered the theory increasingly irrelevant” (Hodkinson, 2002: 12). As this study focuses on the ways in which these communities decline and evolve, it is therefore important to apply a theoretical framework which views music, and its audiences, as both historically and culturally variable.

The ways in which we discuss what have been dubbed more neutrally as the ‘social spaces of music’ have been the subject of much debate (Crossley & Bottero 2014). This is because music has more recently been conceptualised through various means and the movement away from the term ‘subculture’ has enabled us to think about music in new and perhaps more appropriate ways, as captured by the terminology of fields, worlds, scenes and networks (ibid.).

With regards to heavy metal, it has become increasingly common to apply the concept of ‘scenes’ (Riches, 2011; Riches and Lashua; 2014; Kahn-Harris, 2007). The term scene is frequently used in both public discourse and in academia, where it is taken to encompass groups of people, “producers, musicians, and fans” with shared musical tastes (Bennett & Peterson, 2004: 1). As Silvia Tarassi explains, the term ‘scene’ encompasses groups which are alternative from the wider music industry, often applying a DIY approach (Tarassi, S. 2011). Departing from assumptions of homogeneity that subcultural theory was criticised for, scenes enable us to consider identities as fluid and diverse (Bennett & Peterson, 2004: 3).

Previously neglected in subcultural theory, there is also an emphasis here on the concept of ‘practices’, engaging with the active nature of music production, promotion and participation. As Bennett explains, “work in the scenes perspective focuses on situations where performers, support facilities, and fans come together to collectively create music for their own enjoyment,” (ibid: 3). Of particular significance for this research, Peterson and
Bennett discuss a, “three-tier model of ‘scenes’ consisting of local, trans-local, and virtual scenes” (ibid.). A local scene focuses on music practices within one set geographical location often forming around particular sounds, artists or labels. The development of the Seattle Grunge scene in early 1990s really epitomizes the way a scene emerges and develops. Expanding on this, the notion of a ‘translocal’ scene embraces the way in which these local scenes can become interconnected:

“Often the most self-conscious local music scenes that focus on a particular kind of music are in regular contact with similar local scenes in distant places. They interact with each other through the exchange of recordings, bands, fans and fanzines. These we call translocal scenes because, while they are local, they are also connected with groups of kindred spirits many miles away.” (Bennett, 2004: 8)

This is also a reflection of advancing technology and increasing travel networks which then facilitate broader, more open connections between participants at a national and, at times, a global level. This is in many ways enhanced by the development of ‘virtual scenes’, whereby these groups of likeminded individuals can interact with one another online through chatrooms or online forums (ibid: 10). Through these mediums participants can exchange music and communicate. I return to a more detailed discussion of technology later in the chapter, but for now it is important to consider that,

“The refocussing of music scenes in this way offers new insights into the variety of practices through which individuals retain a commitment to music. Such commitment is no longer regarded as necessarily involving regular face-to-face contact, or the display of spectacular visual attire. Indeed, individuals separated by vast distances, who may never physically meet, can form music scenes purely through the medium of the internet”, (Bennet, 2006: 223)

Music scenes are, therefore, constantly changing and adapting amidst broader social and technological advances. Bennett and Peterson (2004) also acknowledge that the ways in which people come to affiliate with music scenes has changed, moving away from subculture’s focus on style and moving towards participation and ‘practice’.

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4 The Seattle Grunge Scene really took off following the inception of label - Sub Pop and the signing of artists such as Nirvana and Alice in Chains.
The notion of ‘scene’ points attention towards the question of who participates and who belongs, and crucially, as Kahn-Harris points out, who is excluded (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 21). With its focus on decline and transformation, this thesis is particularly interested in understanding what leads to feelings of exclusion from the heavy metal scene, and ultimately to a lack of participation and attendance in live metal events. Research investigating these issues in the concert environment highlights gendered processes of exclusion (Krenske & McKay, 2000).

Krenske and McKay (2000) studied a heavy metal venue in Brisbane, and the ways in which men and women interact in this environment. They found that women were, “drawn to the heavy metal scene to escape one oppressive context”, (ibid: 302), referring to the conditions of everyday life. However, in doing this they “merely inserted themselves into another” (ibid. 302) oppressive context. They found that the environment excluded women in the sense that “it was men who took up most of the space, intimidated women, and valorised bravado and pain in stage diving,” (ibid.). Rather than escaping oppression, the women had to adopt masculine values in order to be accepted in this environment. This correlates with other research focusing on gender in heavy metal (Walser, 1990; Weinsten, 1991).

However, some scholars have suggested that underground metal offers an alternative space. Gabby Riches for example tells a different story, whereby “women take pleasure in occupying and participating in predominantly masculine leisure domains” (Riches, 2011: 319). She suggests that,

“As metal heads enter underground metal venues, they are stripped of their socio-economic status, everyday positions and routine expectations; instead, they take on their subcultural roles and identities. By fully immersing themselves in the live concert experience, metal fans find themselves in a transitional phase, rejecting society that they belong to while being reincorporated into an alternative society,” (ibid: 324)

This enables women to “shrug off the stereotype of sex object” (ibid: 328). The gendered order of the space is ambivalent however, since in order for women to feel welcome in this environment, they are often unable to exhibit normative femininity (see also Krenske and McKay, 2000). Whilst this is a valuable contribution to the literature on heavy metal and begins to tell us more about participation and exclusion within a live setting, this thesis
attempts to move beyond the saturated literature on masculinity and exclusion of women in heavy metal, (Hill, 2016; Krenske and McKay, 2000; Riches, 2011: Walser 1993; Vason, 2011; Arnett 1996). Considering the changing nature of music scenes, (Bennett, 2006), this research suggests that there are further nuances to both exclusion and belonging, largely driven by what it means to be ‘actively involved’ in music practices. Therefore chapter five delves deeper into the ways in which promoters form attachment to this community through their active contribution. Similarly Chapter Six describes how audience members reconceptualise the meaning of ‘active’ to mean actively attending and participating in a live setting, regardless of gender.

Whilst the concept of a ‘scene’ addresses some of the key criticisms of subculture and begins to paint a more detailed picture of the practices and communities of music, it has also been subject to criticism. Though scenes begin to account for local collectives and notions of inclusivity and exclusivity, the concept is somewhat confused (Harris, 2000; Hesmondhalgh, 2005). As Hesmondhalgh explains, the numerous attempts to conceptualise scenes alongside the term’s use outside academia, amongst musical participants, leaves the real definition of scenes unclear (Hesmondhalgh, 2005: 29). In addition, this research focuses on the very specifics of musical practices and the different roles which are necessary in the creation, promotion and maintenance of music and collective identities. Therefore, whilst acknowledging the usefulness of particular aspects of ‘scene’, this research understands underground heavy metal as an ‘Art World’, (Becker, 1982) or more specifically a ‘music world’. I will now define and clarify the concept of an ‘Art World’.

### 2.3. Art Worlds

Peter Martin (1995, 2013), an early advocate of the world approach, calls for music scholars to move away from the notion of music being a fixed social reaction, as in the notion of subcultures discussed previously. He suggests that whilst it is important to consider that music is created and received in its social environment and must therefore be understood in its societal context, music is a process which is “enacted” and negotiated by the individual and is therefore variable (ibid.).

“Social life does not come about through the operations of invisible structures or macro sociological forces that play on individuals and produce responses in them... institutional patterns and our ‘normal’ sense of orderly activity are created,
For Martin, the reception of music is an important and complex process, which must not be limited to the transmission of a ‘message’ but must be emphasised as an active process of constant negotiation and interaction (ibid: 40). With this, Martin echoes the work of Blumer (1969), in suggesting that music processes, like “cultural object[s] are constituted in the constant process of collaborative interaction” (Martin, 2006: 23.). This collaborative interaction becomes so ingrained into the music world that it becomes assumed or taken for granted but these processes and interactions are imperative for the maintenance of an “unproblematic world” (ibid.). Martin goes on to suggest that in order for sociologists to gain a valuable understanding of this process, one must then assess:

“the many and varied ways in which such cultural objects are constituted and defined, the uses that are made of them, and the consequences of these activities, for it through this sort of investigation that we may arrive at an understanding of the social organisation of the musical ‘worlds’ ... in which all production, performance and reception take place” (ibid: 20)

‘Art Worlds’, or ‘Music Worlds’, therefore, provide a valuable lens through which to do this. Unlike subcultural studies, Becker notes that art worlds, whether film, photography or music, are grounded by “people whose collective actions constitute the organisation or system [of art]” (Becker, 1974: 767). Art is not created in isolation; rather it is the result of interactions between people fulfilling different roles. Though the artist and creator is at the centre, all people and their roles are mutually necessary in order to maintain an art world, (Becker, 1982). He asserts that these networks of co-operation are valuable for sociological study because this constitutes a valuable form of social action. In this sense, art worlds are defined by co-operative activity,

“All artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number of people. Through their co-operation, the art work we eventually see or hear comes to be and continues to be. The work always shows signs of co-operation” (ibid: 1)

As he illustrates with reference to a symphony orchestra, these practices are deep rooted. In order for the orchestra to come together and play a concert a number of things must
happen. Primarily their instruments must have been crafted, the music must have been written and composed and the musicians must have learned to play the specific notation, (ibid: 2). In addition, the concert must have been arranged, a performance space must have been booked, publicity materials distributed and tickets must have been sold. Lastly, “an audience capable of listening to and in some way understanding and responding to the performance must have been recruited,” (Ibid.). Studying this world therefore means gaining a greater understanding of the complexities of these co-operative practices and the different elements of music production, promotion and consumption, (ibid.). These roles are all essential in the creation and preservation of an art world.

Furthermore, Dubber contests that music should be viewed as, “an activity people do – and often it’s something that people do together,” (Dubber 2013: 11), in other words, as a form of collective action. Through his concept of ‘musicking’, Christopher Small also expresses the importance of understanding music as the result of interaction, rather than as an abstraction far removed from the process of creation, (Small, 1998: 2). This highlights the importance of studying music as a fluid activity. It is my argument then, that the result of this co-operation within music worlds is often displayed within the live setting, as seen with Becker’s symphony orchestra (Becker, 1982). This makes live music a particularly valuable arena for exploration. Importantly, (as with all aspects of art worlds), in order for these live events to take place; Becker asserts that there is a specific division of labour between the artist and the ‘support personnel’, (ibid: 7). Artists still rely upon others, “all the arts we know, like the human activities we know, involve the cooperation of others,” (ibid: 7). As aforementioned, whilst it is accepted that artists are of course central to the collective activity of live music within such worlds, they are not the focus of this study. As explained in the introduction, my previous research explored the musician and creation of this music in some depth (Emms, 2013). In addition, there already exists a wealth of academic research focusing on bands, musicians and creation of music inclusive of both heavy metal and other genres, (Walser, 1993; Weinstein, 1991, Finnegan, 1989).

Rather, attention is turned here to the support personnel, those who fulfil a supporting role in facilitating music events and producing and supplying the resources required by the musician (Becker, 1982). Again, with reference to the orchestra, the support personnel are those who create the instruments and organise the concert, (ibid: 2). The support personnel and the artist are brought together via shared expectations and “conventions” (ibid: 30). Becker explains that this is key within any art world, as “conventions make
possible the easy and efficient coordination of activity among artists and support personnel” (ibid.). These are shared assumptions of behaviour and practice which make the interaction cohesive and “make possible some of the most basic and important forms of cooperation characteristic of an art world” (ibid: 46).

With this division of labour one can also begin to understand the meaningfulness of the concept of ‘authenticity’. The debate around what constitutes authentic and inauthentic art is certainly not new, and arguably much scholarly focus is drawn from Theodor Adorno’s suggestion that music produced for mass audiences becomes inherently “formulaic” and inauthentic, (Adorno, 1968). Becker also considers the significance of authenticity and asserts that different genres of music are afforded with ‘authenticity’ in different ways, (Becker, 1982: 11), and the division of labour plays a key role in this. He proposes that this is an important process and different worlds “devote considerable time to trying to decide what is and isn’t art, what is and isn’t their kind of art and who is and isn’t an artist” (ibid: 36). In particular, he compares classical, jazz and rock music. Authentic classical music is composed and performed by separate but mutually reliant individuals. By comparison, the creation of jazz and rock is far more individual and simultaneously, the “composition is much less important than performance”, (ibid: 10). In order for the music to be considered authentic, “fully competent performers compose their own music,” (ibid.). In addition, ‘originality’ is prioritised and those who do not compose their own music in these worlds are given the, “derogatory label “copy groups” (ibid.). Whilst he does not refer to heavy metal here, this is an important consideration. Keith Kahn-Harris (2007) devotes more time to this genre more specifically.

One of the primary ways through which participants demonstrate “authenticity” within Heavy Metal is arguably through the accumulation of “subcultural capital” (Kahn-Harris, 2007). This is a term coined by Sarah Thornton, utilising Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Thornton, 1996: 11). She takes Cultural Capital, which refers to the “knowledge that is accumulated through upbringing and education which confers social status,” (Thornton, 1996: 10) and suggests that “subcultural capital is embodied in the form of being ‘in the know’”, (ibid.). Thornton explores club culture and proposes that subcultural capital is acquired in understanding particular slang or dancing in a particular way, (ibid.). Keith Kahn Harris applies this to the study of heavy metal in suggesting that there are two key forms of subcultural capital; ‘mundane’ and ‘transgressive’ (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 121). Mundane subcultural capital is acquired by demonstrating not only knowledge
of heavy metal but also a commitment and dedication to the forms of collective activity that constitute the music world, (ibid: 122). By comparison, transgressive subcultural capital is “claimed through radical individualism” (ibid: 127). This means demonstrating an active detachment to scenic practices and the community as a whole. He explains that transgressive subcultural capital is particularly prolific within Norwegian Black Metal bands, which tend to push the boundaries and express a need to “be different, to challenge and transgress accepted norms within and outside the scene” (ibid: 128.).

It is of particular significance to consider how authenticity and subcultural capital is attained and displayed within active practices. Underground music worlds present a particularly complex space, where there is “a stronger focus on the text, the creativity and the art, rather than the commerce”, (Wikstrom, 2013: 214). Like DIY and indie music, the underground exists in opposition to the commercial or mainstream, (ibid.). Though, as Bennett notes, whilst these worlds may exist in opposition, they are bound by a mutual reliance. “The industry needs scenes to foster new forms of musical expression”, (Bennett, 2004: 3), often in these experimental, DIY forms, while simultaneously, “scenes take advantage of technology, from the CD to the internet, created by the music industry” (ibid.).

The underground therefore encapsulates a social arena whereby participants work together to produce, promote and sustain music, with no funding or commercial backing. As a result, whilst this environment is bound by the mutual creation and love for art, this music world is grounded by rules concerning authenticity and creativity. Drawing on Kahn-Harris’ notion of mundane subcultural capital, underground metal music must be created and promoted for the right reasons, in the right ways, to produce ‘authentic’ art and support the community, (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 122). When these rules are not met, the cooperative links of an art world become severed, largely when notions of profit become involved.

As Kahn-Harris explains, in order for DIY or underground practices to remain authentic, if profit is generated, it must be returned directly back into the music world; into artist recordings, distribution or promotion (ibid: 125). Whilst profit is not the aim for underground music worlds, this study considers what happens when these practices no longer make enough money in order to be maintained, let alone profited from. There has been little to document this struggle for financial stability and the challenges that this music world faces. That said, though Becker neglects heavy metal specifically, his notion of
art worlds does address change and decline, dynamics that have often been overlooked within social studies of music.

“Art worlds change continuously – sometimes gradually, sometimes quite dramatically. New worlds come into existence, old ones disappear. No art world can protect itself fully or for long against all the impulses for change, whether they arise from external sources or internal tensions” (Becker, 1982: 300)

Becker’s “Art Worlds” (1982) therefore provides a useful framework through which to examine the perseverance and decline of underground metal.

The notion of scene is not redundant, however. Art Worlds and Scenes do overlap in some respects. As Bottero and Crossley suggest, whilst the different “concepts such as scenes, fields, worlds and networks are often framed as competing” (Bottero & Crossley, 2016: 15), it is in fact plausible to suggest that whilst theorists have come to understand ‘social spaces of music’ in different ways, they do exhibit similarities, focusing on a range of similar themes (ibid.). Therefore, it is beneficial to acknowledge the usefulness of both scenes and worlds, where appropriate. This is an approach adopted by Prior in his study of musicians in Reykjavik, one of his aims being, “to show how one might deploy different concepts at strategic points in order to draw out different scales, characteristics and emphases without necessarily reducing one to the other” (Prior, 2014: 83).

As this thesis focuses on six different cities and often the ways in which these are interconnected, it is useful to retain some elements of ‘scene’, particularly incorporating the notion of both ‘translocal’ and ‘virtual’ scenes (Bennett & Peterson, 2004). Simultaneously this approach also facilitates a deeper understanding of concepts of community, belonging and authenticity which are prominent throughout this thesis. Whilst this is important, the overarching theme of this research pertains to the co-operative practices of organising, promoting and attending live events. Therefore, whilst the project engages with both scenes and art worlds, art worlds provides the theoretical backdrop of this thesis. As highlighted throughout this chapter, unlike subculture and scene, the term specifically focuses on the idea that music is the result of collective action, involving a number of different, active roles. As a result, the project has been able to explore the active processes involved in creating and sustaining a music world. Additionally, rather than concentrating purely on the musician or the controversial music, the project extends focus to a range of different supporting roles which are frequently neglected in studies of music.
Furthermore, another key theme that both scenes and art worlds address is change. In order to understand the impact of change within this art world, the thesis focuses on three key areas: space, support personnel/promotion, and audiences. Therefore, this chapter now proceeds to explore the existing literature for each, beginning with ‘space’ as, “every artwork has to be some place.” (Becker, 2004: 17)

2.4 Spaces, Cities and Venues

The sociology of music often connects with urban geography, as Allan Watson explains,

“Urban geography, both material and imagined, is a crucial mediating factor in the production and consumption of music. The city provides the concrete places which offer spaces for musical creativity... Cities also sustain networks that foster and support musical creativity” (Watson: 2009: 1)

With this there has been a wealth of research studying “musicscapes”, a term taken to reflect the connection, “between music and the urban landscape” (Riches & Lashua, 2014: 2). From Ruth Finnegan’s work on the amateur musicians in Milton Keynes, (Finnegan, 1989), to Sara Cohen’s exploration of rock music in Liverpool (Cohen, 2007), there are a range of attempts to understand the ways in which place impacts upon music making. Irrespective of genre, music is created, received and shared within particular spaces and social contexts, which can be “considered hotspots of creativity where new musical ideas are shared and movements arise”, (McAndrew & Everett, 2014: 56). This is imperative for the development and maintenance of a music world or scene.

These hotspots can refer to a range of different spaces, inclusive of general ‘hang outs’ for communities such as record stores, shops or bars and pubs (Crossley, 2016: 38). Primarily though, as Andy Bennett points out, one of the most important is the live music venue. “The live music venue has long been regarded as a space of critical importance in relation to the musical experience” (Bennett, 2016: 48), in creating and attaching meanings to both music and the social interaction that comes with it. Thus this research, whilst assessing the struggles and changes of underground live metal also assesses the health of live music venues. Whilst this has not always been acknowledged in popular music studies, as subcultures were never situated within a particular place, Becker begins to account for the importance of places and spaces within Art Worlds, (Becker, 2004), further reiterating the usefulness of the concept for this study.
Becker discusses the importance of venue spaces within the Jazz world in particular, noting that “jazz has always been very dependent on the availability of places to perform it in” (Becker, 2004: 17). Referring specifically to the Kansas City musicscape, he described how the type and style of venues had a profound impact on the ways in which jazz was performed and created. For example jazz flourished when played in clubs, as an accompaniment to dancing and drinking:

“Jam sessions allowed experimentation with new forms and ideas, and the chance to improvise at length, to play far beyond the time allowed by a disc or dance set. There was no audience or the audience no longer cared what they were listening to,” (ibid.).

However, he describes how this went into decline and by the time he arrived in Kansas City, “that thriving jazz scene was comparatively dead,” (ibid.). He explains that jazz music moved out of the club environment, becoming “art music”:

“Jazz was becoming an art music, no longer an accompaniment for dancing and drinking, but rather a music people listened to attentively in a quiet setting, supported entirely by the synergistic sale of recordings and tickets – the concert hall, where people came to hear the groups they had learned to appreciate from recordings”, (ibid: 19)

Therefore with the establishment of what were widely becoming known as concert halls or ‘venues’, ‘venues’ being spaces actually built to accommodate live music, there comes the implication that the music has to be profitable. Once audience members began paying for entry, they held certain expectations about the music, as opposed to the music played in bars which was considered background noise (ibid.). This is a profound shift in the way in which people perceive and consume live music. Artists could no longer create music solely for their own enjoyment. Rather they were creating music for other people, to be measured against ticket prices.

The way Becker talks about this change is interesting, where profit isn’t involved; the jazz is creative and innovative. However, with the introduction of ticket sales, the music had to mirror the records and meet audience expectations. This poses big questions for underground metal, where authenticity is key and notions of profit are considered contentious. Whilst here Becker is talking exclusively about Jazz, this begins to tell us more
about the ways in which space can shape both artist and audience expectations and experiences. Participants attach meanings to their experience dependent on the type of venue they are attending.

Venues come in a variety of shapes and sizes, ranging from the 10,000 capacity concert halls to the 100 capacity pubs and clubs. There has been some research describing the importance of range and versatility in order for cities and towns to retain a healthy music scene:

“Practising musicians make their way from the smallest rooms to the largest open spaces, and this variety of venues is crucial not only to their own career development but to the cultural lives of audiences across the country.” (Behr, Brennan & Cloonen, 2014: 1)

Particularly important for this study are those small capacity, underground venues. Arguably these venues provide a platform through which artists are able to progress and grow. As Ben Gallen notes in his Australia based study, these (often) local spaces don’t have to be “purpose built or retrofitted as a music venue” (Gallen, 2012: 35). He focuses in depth on the Oxford Tavern in Wollongong:

“... it was associated with local meanings of what it meant to play and support local music, a place to drink, socialise, dance, mosh, sing and belong. It was a place for both up-and-coming bands and established acts to perform.” (ibid: 35)

This illustrates just how important small venues, as social spaces, can be in the formation of both identity and the maintenance of a wider scene or world. Arguably this facilitates a form of belonging, which makes these spaces vital if a music world is to remain resilient. Not only is this vital for the bands and the support personnel but also the fans themselves. As Bennett explains through his study of memory and live music, “interviewees have in many cases drawn reference to unofficial, informal music venues as highly important markers of their memories of and attachment to local contemporary music” (Bennett, 2016: 48).

This is important for the formation of a local scene, which is not only about music but also community. Gabby Riches and Brett Lashua (2014) reinforce this through their study on the Leeds extreme metal scene. They describe the importance of venues in facilitating metal practices, “such as moshing, head banging and listening to extreme metal music without
high levels of surveillance or outside control” (Riches & Lashua, 2014: 11). This tells us more about the types of venues which are crucial to the maintenance of this music world. However, whilst they talk of a thriving live scene, they simultaneously touch on a key symptom of decline within this music world, explaining that as the Leeds city centre faces serious transformation, the extreme metal scene has experienced upheaval:

“There are changes have shaped and decentralised the scene’s boundaries, territories, and cohesiveness. Just like the city, the metal scene is always in a flux, it’s neither here nor there because it’s understood and lived in spaces of the ‘now”, (ibid: 14).

Through urban gentrification and constant reinvention, the metal venues of Leeds, which were once in the city centre, have been “pushed to the marginal, residential areas in favour of more commercialised, mainstream leisure pursuits,” (ibid: 4). Riches and Lashua employed a mixed methods approach, following venue closure through the use of cartography, mapping out the venues of the city and simultaneously spoke with participants about their experiences. They described a situation whereby participants would travel to nearby cities for live music that no longer came to Leeds and simultaneously showed a sense of resilience in spite of these changes:

“However, despite the continual disappearance of better venues, and emergence of less suitable ones, Leeds metal fans have maintained its scene by finding new spaces to perform and practice their music” (ibid: 13).

Primarily, in attempting to maintain the Leeds extreme metal scene, Riches and Lashua describe how many extreme metal events have moved into the pubs of Leeds. However, this is not without its problems: “although there are technically more venues available for metal bands to perform now than in the recent past, the venue capacities are substantially smaller than previously established venues”, (ibid: 12). Whereas previously members of the metal community may have felt a sense of affiliation with particular spaces, there also comes a kind of fragmentation and a temporal nature to the scene. This has a considerable impact on the sense of belonging and community within this city, (ibid: 11).

As highlighted by Bennett, people build relationships and memories with particular spaces so the loss of these spaces has an impact on the community. In addition, Riches and Lashua explain that this has also affected the gig listings in Leeds, as it becomes less viable for bigger international touring bands to play these smaller venues, to a smaller crowd (ibid).
“Mapping” in this sense is a useful tool for exploring these issues. The method enables one to visibly see the ways in which the metal scene in Leeds is reacting to the changing city, particularly, “as these spaces of the ‘now’ are fleeting, maps also help to capture, if only for a moment, a local music scene” (ibid: 14). This is a method also used by Sara Cohen in her study of the Liverpool music industry, though she tends to reflect more upon the ways in which urban change has an impact on the styles of music produced in the city rather than live music (Cohen, 2012).

Examining how the local scenes adapt to these changes is paramount for this thesis, as heavy metal venues are forced to close or relocate outside of the city centre. This problem is predominantly with small venues and in that respect is a problem not limited to the underground metal scene. Whilst I approach this issue through the lens of the underground metal scene, it is, therefore, applicable to the music industry as a whole. As a Guardian report observed in 2012, “the frequency with which smaller venues are closing is scary” (McVeigh & Bloodworth, 2012). This trend deserves more attention when it comes to understanding the dynamics of music worlds. Whilst Riches and Lashua’s (2014) study is a valuable start, it is limited to Leeds alone, and considering the fast paced nature with which music worlds are changing, it is also now somewhat dated. Riches’ fieldwork was conducted between February 2012 and August 2013. As this study focuses on 2015, two years later, the city will have undoubtedly changed. With this in mind, this thesis assesses venues across six different cities, and the ways in which the underground heavy metal world is responding to gentrification and urban development.

Concerns around the decline of live music worlds and the closure of venues have also been widely debated within the public domain. The Music Venue Trust, for example, was launched in 2014 as a reaction to intense levels of venue closure nationwide:

“It's something happening across the country, and the natural response is always to worry about the impact on live music: fewer small venues = fewer small gigs = fewer places for small bands to play.” (NME, 2014)

The Music Venue Trust (MVT) “is a registered charity that seeks to preserve, secure and improve the UK’s network of small to medium scale, mostly independently run, music venues”, (Davvyd & Whitrick, 2014). There are increasing numbers of venues closing across the country, ranging from the small pubs which Riches and Lashua (2014) described as saving the scene in Leeds, to the bigger venues which house the more expensive, more
mainstream touring artists. The MVT conducted research in order to investigate this intense level of closure and found that gentrification and urban change was a real driving force. Their findings describe a situation whereby venues,

“are highly susceptible to the vagaries of local and national policy and its application, in particular with regard to noise, and also lack the financial resources to adapt to rising property prices. These factors together make their day-to-day existence precarious”, (Music Venue Trust, 2015)

They also explain that with the influx of inner city flats and housing, venues are facing an epidemic of closures over noise complaints and the introduction of noise restrictions. The media has been inundated with stories over closure and contention around noise. For example, The Boiler Room in Guildford came under threat in 2014, as neighbours lodged a noise complaint demanding that the venue be closed by the council immediately. As a local hub for youth culture and live music, there was a strong public reaction, leading to a petition which was backed by Paul Weller and Ed Sheeran, (Renshaw, 2014). Three months later the case was taken to court and the venue saved on the condition that it follows particular noise regulations. However this is just one case, and in the worst case scenario, the noise limiters are not enough to appease the local residents and venues are either forced to close or stop playing live music.

This was the case for the 200 club in Newport, which was closed in May 2013 following noise complaints from the local residents, (South Wales Argus, 2013). Recognised as a growing concern, a petition was released online in an effort to waiver noise complaints made by those who knowingly rent or buy a property near a venue (Turner, 2014). On December 2nd, 32,816 people had signed the petition which had very quickly become viral. The petition was led by artist, Frank Turner who now generally plays much larger events, as a mainstream artist. In light of these anxieties, he has recently returned to his roots to play shows at the likes of Night and Day, Manchester (a venue once threatened by closure), reiterating the importance of these smaller sized venues for emerging artists. As he states in the petition,

“As a musician, these venues are important to me. They are where I grew up, where I learned about rock’n’roll music, where I saw all my favourite bands. The venues where I played my first shows and some of my most recent, the home of the music scene that has given me my career, my passion and my life. But right
now, we are genuinely facing a meltdown and the British live music circuit is crumbling around us.” (ibid.)

Turner suggests that the UK employ the “Agent of change” principle, which has already been successfully adopted in Australia

“Under the Agent of Change principle if a music venue is in place before the residential building, the residential building would be responsible for paying for soundproofing. Likewise, if a new music venue opens in a residential area, the venue are responsible for the cost.” (ibid.)

Three years later, the issue is still up for debate and plays a vital role in building an understanding of the potential decline of live underground metal music. In Becker’s terms, if the resources for maintaining an art world, (venues), are no longer available, it is impossible for an art world to survive, let alone succeed (Becker, 1982).

Asides from journalistic literature and the work from the Music Venue Trust, the impact of gentrification and urban change on live music in the UK is relatively untouched within sociological research. As highlighted by Holt,

“Although gentrification involves some of the biggest changes in the urban condition since the 1960s, the long-term implications for popular music have received relatively little scholarly attention” (Holt, 2014: 21).

Therefore this thesis fills an important gap, by focusing on the impact of changes to venues for underground metal specifically. The research that follows explores these issues in more depth, in order to understand why spaces are closing, and the impact this has on local metal scenes. In addition, the study also focuses upon another vital element in the cooperative links of a music world: the promoters who rent these spaces for live events.

2.5 Promotion, Technology and the Impact of the Virtual

A key element of any music world is the support personnel who facilitate the organisation and promotion of live events. However, there is little in the way of sociological literature to explore the role of the promoter and their motivations. This is vital, I suggest, if we are to understand the struggles and resiliency of underground music. Brannan and Webster explain that defining the role of the promoter is difficult, “the term is used in a myriad of contexts and can describe a huge range of different functions” (Brannan & Webster, 2011: 31)
4), and therefore this role must be considered “flexible” (ibid.). Broadly speaking, Negus explains that the promoter is responsible for a broad range of tasks, including the renting of venue spaces, stage management, renting equipment and ultimately promoting and selling tickets for a live event, (Negus, 1992: 130). Brannan and Webster have taken this definition further to devise a three-tier model through which we can define different types of music promoter across all genres (Brannan and Webster, 2011: 5):

- **The Independent Model**
  
  - Independent (‘Indie’) promoters book the venue, pay for the events themselves and recoup the ticket sales after the event, sometimes as a source of income.
  
  - Indie promoters are considered to be the risk takers within this environment. They are responsible for the ticket sales and there is no financial support. They must pay for everything themselves, from the venue hire to physical resources such as posters, sound engineers, door staff etc. In order for them to succeed in this role, the event costs must be recovered through ticket sales and preferably a profit must be made, (ibid.).

- **The artist-affiliated Model**
  
  - This branch of promoter is an artist themselves or connected with the artist. Not unlike the independents, the artist-affiliated model will also hire out the venue and the ticket sales will most likely go directly to the artists (ibid.).

- **The Venue Model**
  
  - In this instance the venue is provided to promoters as “an empty shell”, (ibid.) or has an in house promoter who will organise the venue’s events and takings will also come from the bar.

This is a valuable attempt to understand how promoters operate, their motivations and the meaning they attach to their role and acts as a useful framework for this research where it focuses upon promoters (see Chapter Five), although not all promoters will fit into these specific categories and this must be considered flexible, as Brannan and Webster assert (ibid: 5). Despite the lack of specific research on promoters and their experiences of the
underground metal world, there are advances within the music industry that will no doubt have an impact on their work. As the music industry as a whole is constantly changing and adapting, promoters face new challenges, which have been predominantly explored in existing literature through discussions surrounding technology.

2.5.1. Record Sales and Technology

As noted in Chapter One, technology has undoubtedly had a huge impact upon the foundations of this industry, both live and recorded. As aforementioned, Wikstrom asserts that the music industry has entered into the ‘digital age’, (Wikstrom, 2009: 8). In McLuhan’s terms, the digital age is characterised by the growing importance of the internet, (McLuhan 1962 cited in Dubber, 2013: 27). With this he believes that the digital age has had a profound influence upon the ways in which music is “composed, performed, produced, distributed, promoted and consumed,” (ibid: 3). Wikstrom explains that one of the most important transitions is the decline of physical record sales:

“During recent years, the relationship between live music and recorded music has reversed. Rather than expecting live music to stimulate sales of recorded music, in the new music economy, recorded music is often used to stimulate ticket sales”

(ibid: 137)

Therefore, anxieties over digital distribution have undoubtedly had an impact on live music and as Holt describes, “the market value [of live music] has gone up” (Holt, 2010: 246). Dubber reinforces the significance of these issues, highlighting that approximately, “80% of recorded music purchases are still in CD form [but] the amount of recorded music purchasing is declining rapidly – and the price of those CDs is also dramatically lower than it used to be” (Dubber, 2013). Echoing Holt and Wikstrom, the value of recorded music has changed and the current musical economy reflects that “the main source of income for artists is generally concerts rather than recordings” (Connolly and Krueger, 2005 cited in Holt, 2015).

However, it is interesting to consider heavy metal more specifically, particularly the underground. This was brought to the fore throughout my previous research, (Emms, 2013), which explored the impact of technological changes for artists. As Kahn-Harris suggests, whilst the internet has had an impact, with a decline in CD sales and the wide availability of music online, this music world still demonstrates a “collectors ethos”, whereby participants
still invest in physical merchandise (Kahn-Harris, 2006: 91). In addition, he suggests a return to vinyl, particularly within more extreme disseminations of heavy metal where collecting records is viewed as more authentic (ibid.). Kahn-Harris proposes that whilst there is a degree of contention surrounding the distribution of music online as “it is hard to resist the temptation of free music”, (ibid: 92), the heavy metal audience may simply download an album as a sampler prior to purchase. Simultaneously he explains that because this music world is not driven by profit, these concerns are not as prominent as within the mainstream, (ibid.).

Whilst this might be the case, due to the problems that have arisen from digital distribution and the related decline of record sales, the live scene was expected to flourish as artists seek to compensate for lost recording revenue through live shows, (Holt, 2015; Wikstrom, 2009). There is some evidence of this happening. For example, it is becoming increasingly common for bands to re-release well known records in order to promote profitable tours and related live events: “there has been an unprecedented economic growth in superstar touring” (Brown and Knox, 2016: 2), with the revival of the Rolling Stones, Fleetwood Mac and Metallica for example. Generally these tours, priced over £50 a ticket, will sell out in a matter of minutes. Furthermore, there is evidence of economic growth within the live sector as a whole (Wikstrom, 2009). As a recent study from the UK music group revealed, live music contributed £1bn to the UK economy in 2016, which has increased by 14% since 2015, (UK Music, 2017).

However, whilst this may suggest growth, such trends are not found in relation to all musical forms. The above figures are mainly taken from big arena tours and festivals rather than the underground music worlds, which have no funding or financial backing. It is important to consider that as petrol costs increase, artist touring costs rise. Simultaneously this means that promoters must pay more for bands and punters must pay more for tickets.

“The performer’s push for higher guarantees is understandable in the light of the falling revenues from recorded music. By increasing the guarantees and as a consequence the ticket prices, it is possible at least to some extent to compensate for the reduced income from recorded music” (Wikstrom, 2009: 137)

Whilst here, Wikstrom is not referring directly to either the underground nor metal world specifically, this is a widespread concern which is applicable to metal. This thesis considers the possibility that rather than higher ticket prices substituting artist’s income, they
actually act as a deterrent for fans. If this is the case, and fewer people are attending these events, this has huge implications for underground live music. Similarly, if there is a return to vinyl and physical recordings, which are in fact considered by many to be ‘expensive’ to purchase, many may in fact have to make a choice between live music and physical music as not all can afford both. If ticket prices are too expensive to attract a big enough audience, this potentially facilitates the decline of live music within this world.

Alternatively, despite the anxieties over technological advances, the internet has also provided promoters and musicians with a useful promotional platform. Wikstrom suggests that it has, “inspired the development of new institutions and resources,” (ibid: 93). Whilst websites such as Sound Cloud and Spotify may cause concern for record sales, they enable artists to promote their music for free. This is also beneficial for audiences, who now have greater access to a varied range of artists. Peterson argues that this has facilitated a form of “cultural omnivorousness”, (Peterson, 1996), where people can indulge in different styles and try new things. Arguably this should be beneficial for the promotion of live music, particularly within the underground. Akin to Kahn-Harris’ discussion of audiences using online music as a “taster” prior to buying, audiences can do the same before attending a live event, (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 92). Though this is an area which is relatively untouched, Becker talks about the walls between artists crumbling in contemporary society as a result of increased communication (Becker, 1982: 329). He suggests that this means increased contact and potential collaborations between participants, broadening co-operative networks within a music world, (ibid.), reflective of both translocal and virtual worlds as described by Bennett and Peterson, 2004). Deena Weinstein reinforces this with regards to heavy metal more specifically, in stating that,

“The metal underground has been flourishing since the mid-1990s – in large measure through the internet...The internet also allows indie labels to promote their new releases at little cost... In some sense, the internet helps to form a virtual community of fans” (Weinstein, 2000: 285)

In addition, she suggests that through the internet, promoters have a new way to reach out to a broad and eclectic fanbase, which was not previously accessible (ibid.). Therefore, theoretically the internet should make the promotion process easier, with less reliance on physical promotion methods. However, Weinstein and Kahn-Harris’s work is now slightly dated, as technology continues to evolve with the introduction of different social media
tools such as Facebook. Therefore this thesis explores the impact of advancing technology on promoters and whether this fosters resilience or decline within this music world.

2.6. Audiences, Ageing and Decline

“Art worlds, then, are born, grow, change, and die.” (Becker, 1982: 350)

This review of the literature has discussed the risks posed to spaces, and complications for promoters. However, a third and final factor to consider is the audience. Whilst Becker focuses heavily on the roles of the artist and support personnel, he also acknowledges that the audience fulfils an important role in the maintenance of art worlds, as art only exists as long as there is someone to receive it, “artworks die because someone executes them… or of neglect because no one cares enough to save them.” (ibid: 218). Therefore exploring the audience and what motivates people to participate in live music is an important element of this research. There is some existing research exploring audience motivation (Brown and Knox, 2016; Elliott and Barron, 2015). Predominantly this work illustrates that the main driver for attendance is that, “participants want to be there, to be a part of something unique and special” (Brown and Knox, 2016: 1). As has already been established, this helps to facilitate feelings of belonging for participants. However, there is little to document what happens when people stop attending events. Tammy Anderson notes in her 2009 research on rave culture:

“Most research has documented a scene’s origins or its ‘evolution into mainstream culture’. Fewer studies have systematically addressed what leads to a scene’s alteration and decline”. (Anderson, 2009: 307)

Structural and spatial changes are merely one issue and it is important to acknowledge the vital role that the audience play in facilitating decline. Anderson forms an interesting argument for the decline of the rave culture in Philadelphia. She focuses upon the “social, political and economic forces that altered the highly popular rave scene from its peak in the mid to late 1990s to its altered and diminished state presently” (ibid: 308). Like underground heavy metal, she notes that in order for the rave scene to flourish, it was expected to maintain a grassroots, DIY ethos which provided people with alternative lifestyles and a sense of belonging within a community who shared these ideals. The raves were anti-establishment and functioned as a response to political changes that were occurring during this time period. Anderson talks of how it’s not just culture industry forces
such as production which alter a scene and it’s movements but “social, cultural and political factors”, (ibid.) do also. Interestingly Anderson also “noted a generational schism that reduced enthusiasm for and participation in the past rave and current EDM scenes”, (Ibid: 309). She found that,

“Specifically those born between 1965 and 1980, who originated and participated in early raves, had dramatically scaled back their attendance at raves and their connections to the EDM scene, while potential new and younger recruits, that is those born between 1977 and 2003 did not gravitate towards them in sufficient numbers to keep the scene vibrant”, (ibid: 315)

She suggests that a large part of this was that, with age, participants had more commitments and life ties. Not only this but their rejection of the status quo had somewhat weakened, there was little need to connect to the aforementioned ‘alternative’ lifestyle.

She notes that another important aspect of this generational schism is the movement away from the grassroots events as physical spaces, “as the generation X respondents aged into corporate society, they developed tastes for its operational style and comforts and a dislike for raves,” (ibid: 317). People had started seeking a more secure, comfortable atmosphere with better sound systems as opposed to the grotty, illicit warehouse shows, which had characterised much of the rave scene prior to the 1990s.

This concept is largely influenced by the work of Andy Bennett (2006). Though he does not speak of a scene in ‘decline’ as such, he acknowledges that music worlds are fluid and susceptible to change, in this instance assessing how older punk fans still maintain their attachment to the music and the punk scene. Similarly to heavy metal, Bennett asserts that much existing research within this field falls in line with subcultural studies and presents punk as essentially “youth music” (Bennett, 2006: 220). He suggests that there is little to document punk’s demographic movement and ageing within music worlds, most in fact focuses on health (Bennett, 2013: 183).

Bennett however describes the complications for ageing punks, as they are constantly faced with a negotiation between the self as a punk and the self as a professional. As Joanna R. Davis argues, this leads to a complex dichotomy between the young, angry, DIY notion of a punk and the grown up, suburban, professional punk (Davis, J. R. 2006). Like Anderson, Bennett acknowledges that “family and work commitments”, (Bennett, 2006: 223), will no doubt have a huge impact upon event attendance and scene participation.
However, though the older punks in his study struggled to attend regular smaller events, festivals were “important events in their collective calendar” (ibid: 230). And whilst, like the rave scene, punk has long adhered to the anti-establishment, DIY ethos, Bennett notes that the participants in his study acknowledged the more ‘corporate’ nature of the festivals, understanding that those involved had to fund the events and return a profit. They were not resistant to the adjustment from the small DIY punk shows to ticket only events. Many of Bennett’s participants were just glad to see that the scene was being ‘preserved’, (ibid: 230). They saw the festivals as an important way to maintain and reproduce the scene that they had long been a part of.

Similarly to punk, heavy metal is frequently considered ‘youth’ music in much of the sociological discourse. Deena Weinstein does touch on the notion of the ageing metal head. However, she asserts that older metal fans resist most common metal practices. She goes so far as to suggest that older participants rarely play old albums and certainly do not listen to anything new. In addition their attachment to live music has weakened, with fewer older fans attending concerts (Weinstein, 2000: 111)

This is, however, a rather simplistic assumption. Much of my experience within the metal world, and my previous research, (Emms, 2013), suggests that this is not always the case. The demographic of those who took part in a previous study was diverse, and many of the active members were middle aged (ibid.). Like Bennett’s (2006) work on punk, it is plausible to suggest that these members of the metal community merely consume live music differently, perhaps attending fewer events, but opting for larger one off events, where they are able to negotiate their new more internalized identity whilst simultaneously maintaining their connection to the scene. There is little research to document this within heavy metal.

With over thirteen heavy metal festivals in the UK alone, with the likes of Download Festival pulling around 120,000 people across the weekend each year, (Wikifestivals, 2012), we can certainly see a rise in the popularity of events of this scale. This may indeed be reflective of the generational changes discussed by both Anderson and Bennett, if participants are getting older; perhaps they are more drawn to these kinds of events, Bennett, 2006; Anderson, 2009). This makes the underground festival space incredibly important for this research. Festivals are an important ground for the social interaction which is so valuable within music worlds, “as they constitute occasions for being together a
world’s often geographically dispersed participants (artists and audiences) in a celebration of their preferred musical styles”, (Crossley and Emms, 2016). Therefore festivals help to connect translocal networks within music worlds, as Hodkinson notes with regards to Whitby Goth Fest, (Hodkinson, 2002).

This growth of the festival market does prompt concerns though. Even if this movement suggests that one aspect of the industry is in fact booming, it begs the question as to what becomes of those smaller, less well-attended events. With regards to rave culture, Anderson points out that the rave scene not only lost its older participants but struggled to draw in new, younger fans:

“new and younger recruits, that is, Generation Y (born between 1977-2003), did not gravitate to [raves] in sufficient numbers to keep the scene vibrant. Since any scene or cultural entity requires a critical mass of people, especially youth cohorts (DiMaggio and Mukhtar, 2004), in order to thrive and transmit culture (Boyd, 2005), this generational disinvestment helped facilitate raves' decline”, (Anderson, 2009: 315)

Although a study based in Philadelphia on rave culture rather than metal, Anderson’s description of this scene’s ultimate decline provides an interesting question for the future of heavy metal if the local worlds are in fact struggling to maintain a healthy audience. Unfortunately, this kind of change may not be a positive sign, as Becker notes,

“Art worlds decline when some groups that knew and used the conventions which inform their characteristic works lose that knowledge, or when new personnel cannot be recruited to maintain the world’s activities.” (Becker, 1982: 349)

Audiences are expected to maintain a certain level of dedication for an art world to continue to flourish, which is why this thesis explores participant’s commitment to live underground metal music.

2.7. Conclusion

This chapter provides a breakdown of the existing literature within this field and the nuanced approaches to studying music within social sciences. Rather than seeing participants as a homogenous mass, much social research now considers music to be the result of conscious interactions between individuals. This movement from the passive to
the active provides an appropriate lens through which to approach the following research, centring on the active organisation and participation that constitutes a “music world”. The emphasis on co-operative activity and the ways in which people come together to create, promote and maintain art, presented in Becker’s “Art Worlds”, (Becker, 1982), therefore provides the theoretical underpinning of this thesis.

In addition, this chapter presents the growing academic interest in Heavy Metal and its social implications, much of which draws from subcultural studies, reflecting a rebellious and deviant youth. In unpicking this research, it becomes evident that whilst simultaneously talking about metal as a music world, it is also important to consider the relevance of “scenes”, local, translocal and virtual, (Bennett & Peterson, 2004). This is particularly interesting for this study, given that it is based on six different localities. It is vital to understand how these different music worlds are interconnected, and acknowledging the concept of scenes in addition to art worlds facilitates this form of analysis.

Despite the wealth of research on heavy metal and the associated culture, (Weinstein, 2000; Kahn-Harris, 2007; Riches & Lashua, 2014; Walser, 1991), there is a gap. There is little to explore the active organisation of live music events within the underground heavy metal music world, and the motivations behind attending and participating in these events. With this in mind, this research sets out to explore three different elements of live music and organisation; venues, promoters/support personnel and the audience. Each section seeks to develop a greater understanding of the ways in which these roles contribute to the broader music world. In addition, the literature presents a need to explore the underlying difficulties and complexities of this social action.

Not only have I argued that this focus is necessary on an academic level, but I have also shown that there is an increasing public discourse surrounding the importance and instability of underground music, particularly with reference to grassroots venues and venue closures. This poses particular concerns for underground music worlds such as metal, which rely on these small spaces. Whilst there is some research suggesting that the live music industry is booming, this is not necessarily the case for small live events, which face a number of challenges detailed in this chapter. Simultaneously there are some studies on the ways in which audiences change, particularly with a focus on ‘ageing’ fanbases (Bennett, 2006), though not specifically investigating heavy metal. This provides an interesting
question with regards to the audience of these events, including reasons for attendance and the demographic of attendees.

Overall, this chapter has provided a rationale for a project on the underground metal world, which is grounded by themes of decline and change, themes which have been previously neglected in studies of heavy metal. The chapters that follow draw on the experiences of people involved in the different areas of underground event organisation, as well as the audience, in order to build a comprehensive view of the underground metal music world, and the struggles that it faces to survive.
Chapter Three: Methods and Mixing in Music Worlds

3.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the ways in which this research has been approached both theoretically and methodologically, to capture the complex web of interactivity that contributes to the creation and maintenance of an Art World, (Becker, 1982). Chapter two presented a requirement to research and understand this world as both culturally and historically variable. Therefore, this chapter begins by addressing how best to approach underground heavy metal, before pinpointing the key research themes and questions and the appropriate ways to explore them. Sections 3.2 - 3.6 provide a detailed account of the fieldwork, including the sampling, practicalities, ethical considerations and analysis. The aim here is not only to provide a rationale for the methodological approach to this project but also to be reflexive about the research practices and the impact this has on the data collected. As outlined in the introduction, my role as a promoter and my involvement in this music world must be considered throughout.

3.2. Research Design

As outlined in Chapter Two, there is a growing academic interest in both heavy metal and music (Kahn-Harris, 2007). However, there is little attempt to engage with the more active nature of this music world, particularly with regards to live events and promotion. In applying Howard Becker’s “Art Worlds”, (Becker, 1982), this project acknowledges that live events are the product of interactions between different individuals, fulfilling different active roles. Therefore it is important that this world is studied as such. Previous attempts to study heavy metal have paid little attention to these roles and practices. As Kahn-Harris asserts, studying “musical production, consumption and aesthetics” (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 11), is a complex process. In order to develop an understanding of the participants and activities that constitute a metal music world, he suggests that it is essential to apply a ‘holistic’ approach,

“Holism provides a perspective that recognizes the interconnection between different elements of social phenomena and that avoids the fragmentation of the subject area that studies of metal have suffered from... It does not seem unreasonable to argue that, holistically speaking, extreme metal needs to be
considered as the locus for a huge range of interconnected practices, texts, institutions and social phenomena” (ibid.)

Therefore, the notion of Holism works in conjunction with Art Worlds, in asserting the importance of understanding each individual facet of this music world and the ways in which they come together (Becker, 1982).

Furthermore, Chapter Two has presented another key issue within previous studies of music, particularly regarding subcultural studies. Music worlds are not static; rather they are fluid and constantly subject to change, as illustrated through discussions surrounding urban regeneration and technology. Thus, in order to understand more about the inner workings of a music world and these changes, sociologists must aim to capture a music world within a particular time-space nexus (Crossley, 2016). Therefore, in order to understand the ways in which this music industry is changing, and the impact upon underground metal, it was important to ensure that the research design reflected the active and collaborative nature of this music world. With this in mind, I decided upon three key research questions (outlined below), which referred to different themes of change and decline. Similarly, they reflect the interrelated, holistic (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 11), nature of this music industry, exploring three aspects of live music; the spaces where events are held, the promoters who organise these events and the audience who maintain these events.

3.2.1. Research Themes, Questions and Methods

The project addresses the following key questions:

1) What role do spaces play in the formation and maintenance of this music world and what happens when these spaces come under threat?

2) How does this art world come together to create and promote live events and what difficulties do they face?

3) Does this music world still boast a big and committed enough audience to sustain itself?

These questions touch on a variety of themes which presented a methodological problem. This is primarily because, upon narrowing down the research aims, it is clear there are two key issues. The first is in relation to attendance of live events; who attends, what do they attend and how often? The second is more to do with perceptions and experiences; how are these events organised, how are they struggling and why do people attend certain
things over others? In order to address this problem and explore these key themes, it was therefore appropriate to adopt a mixed methods approach. The grounding literature on music, explored in Chapter Two, reflects a wealth of research applying qualitative interviews and observations, (Kahn-Harris, 2007, Bennett, 2013, Thornton, 1996). These studies have developed a rich understanding of music worlds, exploring the experiences and perceptions of participants within these worlds. Similarly, a number of studies have used surveys to explore participation and attendance of music events (O’Shea, 2014; Crossley and Emms, 2016). Whilst traditionally qualitative and quantitative methods have been positioned in opposition, it is now common and effective to combine the two through methodological triangulation (Creswell et al, 2011). In addition to being able to explore different themes, both qualitative and quantitative methods have their own weaknesses and by bridging these methods, it is possible to address some of these weaknesses. Therefore, with this in mind, I conducted a quantitative survey alongside 29 qualitative interviews and actively observed events within the underground metal music world. This combination not only addresses the key research themes but also enabled me to acquire a holistic overview of this music world. However, before entering the field, it was first important to establish the ‘when’ and ‘where’ of this research.

3.3. Preliminary Focus Group and Situating the Research

In order to focus the research, prior to conducting the official interviews and survey I conducted an informal, preliminary focus group interview with three proposed interview participants, found through convenience sampling, (Simon, Stuart and George). I had worked with them all previously and they were aware of my research. As Michael Bloor explains, often focus groups are used in this way, in order to build a “contextual basis” for research,

“focus groups may be used in the early days of the study for exploratory purposes, to inform the development of the later stages of the study. This exploration will typically be wide-ranging (because the focus group, like the wind, bloweth where it listeth) but may concentrate on certain priority topics, on generating contextual data (illustrative stories and cautionary tales), or on everyday group language (vernacular terms, indexical expressions and indigenous coding categories)”, (Bloor, 2002: 9)
This is a particularly useful process prior to conducting both surveys and interviews, predominantly as a way of defining particular practices and unpicking particular concepts (Barbour, 2007: 16). The focus group was conducted in a quiet pub, chosen by the participants. I decided to record the discussion on a Dictaphone. Whilst it was not an official interview for the project, it proved a useful addition to the interview data as the participants brought up insightful and relevant issues. As Barbour notes, frequently people neglect to analyse preliminary focus group data, which can be “a missed opportunity in terms of providing data that might prove useful”, (Barbour, 2007: 16.). From a practical point of view, focus groups can be difficult, with all three participants competing to speak. As the participants were all passionate about the issues at hand, it was important to remain in control of the discourse and try to ensure they were all given adequate time to talk and were not talking over one another. This proved successful, as the discourse flowed. I kept my input to a minimum and merely provided them with themes to discuss, such as ‘venues’, ‘touring’, and how ‘attendance’. Whilst fruitful in establishing interesting themes to pursue, the main aim of the focus group was to decide upon a specific “time-space nexus”, (Crossley, 2015: 11), to research.

In order to gain a proper understanding of this music world, it would have been preferable to study the UK more broadly, over a longer period of time. However, as this study was limited to three years and I have limited resources, this was not feasible. With this in mind, the focus group explained to me that London, Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Bristol and Birmingham were all key locations along a UK tour route and thus would be valuable for study. I also researched each location independently, to ensure that they were relevant to the study, pinpointing particularly interesting characteristics of each location:

**London**

- Not only the capital of the UK, but London is a global hub of the UK music industry, (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 111).
- Home to valued and metal-specific venues such as “The Black Heart”, “The Underworld” and “The Dev” with a vibrant scene in Camden Town, (Simon, 23, Musician).
- London plays host to a number of underground heavy metal festivals such as Desertfest, Incineration Festival and Doom Over London.
• The focus groups described a wealth of sell-out shows and competition within the city.

Leeds

• Suggested as home to a number of well-known underground bands (Stuart, 22, Musician), with a thriving scene.
• There has been some academic interest in the Leeds metal scene previously, suggesting a thriving live scene (Riches & Lashua, 2014).
• Leeds hosts a range of underground metal festivals inclusive of Damnation Festival and Ritual Festival.

Manchester

• As a Manchester resident and a member of the Manchester ‘metal scene’, I have a good insider knowledge and access to a wide range of participants.
• Similarly to Leeds, the focus group suggested a thriving live scene with numerous active promoters, events and festivals on an almost weekly basis (George, 22, musician).
• The focus group indicated concerns around venue closure.

Liverpool

• The focus group suggested that Liverpool was usually on a touring route, primarily due to its close proximity to both Leeds and Manchester.
• Similarly to Leeds, they proposed a loss of venues in addition to poor attendance.

Birmingham

• Birmingham has long been considered the ‘home of heavy metal’, (homeofmetal.com), as outlined in Chapter Two, Birmingham bands such as Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin are often thought to be the pioneers of heavy metal.
• Similarly to Liverpool, Leeds and Manchester, the focus group described a struggling live scene in Birmingham.

Bristol
Of slightly newer importance, the focus group talked in great depth about the growth of the Bristol underground metal scene particularly with the emergence of Temples festival in 2014. These six cities are therefore all important to underground metal and simultaneously evidence potential symptoms of decline and change, making them all significant and relevant to this study.

In addition, the aim of the focus group was not only to establish ‘the where’ of study but also ‘the when’. The group explained that February through to April was a busy touring time for artists, particularly as there are lots of underground festivals taking place around April and May. With heightening costs, they explained that artists aimed to tour around festivals so that they could play more events without having to book additional time off. As explained throughout the thesis, artists within the underground do not make a living from playing gigs and many, in fact, hold full or part time jobs, (See Chapter Five). This meant that they had limited time to tour with, thus touring around this time makes sense financially. The preliminary focus group also enabled me to uncover some initial themes to pursue further within the interviews. They described a situation where all involved were, to a degree, struggling financially. In addition, they told me that event attendance was very mixed, and sometimes very poor, further reinforcing the research concerns and questions that were then taken forwards for consideration within both the survey and the interviews.

3.4. Setting and Surveying the Scene

Following the advice given throughout the preliminary focus group, I designed a quantitative survey as a way to uncover more about attendance patterns at underground metal events. The aim of the survey was to find out which events on the ‘underground metal calendar’ participants had attended between February and April 2015, across the six research sites. The audience survey has been crucial not only in planning for the interviews but also in answering all three research questions. First and foremost, the survey paints an initial picture of participation and attendance at live underground events across the six research sites. Secondly it pinpoints the commonly used spaces and active promoters. Lastly, the survey also begins to tell us more about audience groupings including age, gender, income and active involvement of participants. This has proved fundamental throughout each of the empirical chapters.
Prior to creating the survey, it was first important to operationalise the term “underground live events”, again referring to the focus group, background literature and online resources. As established in Chapter Two, ‘the underground’ is inclusive of music with little to no financial backing. Usually the music itself exists in opposition to the mainstream, (Wikstrom, 2013), particularly where metal is concerned. Underground metal styles are usually inclusive of a wide range of perhaps extreme, radical or unusual sounds, often very different from the more palatable mainstream metal which is arguably closer to pop music. Keith Kahn Harris goes so far as to suggest that extreme music of this kind “often teeters on the edge of formless noise” (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 5). Where events are concerned, the focus group suggested that underground events varied in size with some hosted in venues as small as 50 capacity to others in venues as big as 500 capacity. That said, one cannot define an underground event simply by the size of the venue as sometimes, whilst underground artists, they may still play larger events in sizeable spaces. For example two events used within the survey were in fact held in cathedrals. However both artists still identify as ‘underground’. It was, therefore, important to approach this definition with a degree of caution and flexibility. When unsure, I was also able to refer back to the focus group as all participants were willing to answer any questions after the interview. Many of these events were found online, particularly through social media sites and the website “metalgigs.co.uk”.

![Figure 1 – Events by Type](image-url)
With a definition established, 148 events were then selected, including a range of small tours (113), one-off shows (29), and festivals/All Day events (6) which fitted within the aforementioned definition of ‘underground metal’, (see figure 1). I also sought to find as many events in each location as possible. Though, as illustrated in figure 2, featured below, there was a much higher concentration of events in London and Manchester. The reasons for this will be explored in more depth throughout the thesis. Once events had been selected, I collected data for each; including the price, venue, promoter, sub-genre and location. The survey sought to be inclusive, which meant including as many sub-genres and styles as possible. The event descriptions identified 18 different genres in total. The majority of events were held in small or mid-level venues. As events were selected through data mining the internet, it is entirely possible that events were missed or not recorded online; such is the nature of ‘underground’ music worlds. Unfortunately this is unavoidable. However, the qualitative work conducted alongside the survey and the availability of resources online meant that an extensive selection of events were included. In addition, with regards to the survey aesthetics, if participants had been faced with a list of more than 148 events to trawl through, this may have been overwhelming and potentially affected the response rate. This emphasises the importance of survey design and making the survey accessible and easy to navigate.

![Distribution of Events by Location](image)

**Figure 2 – Distribution of Events by Location**

In order to achieve this, I created the survey through SurveyMonkey.com. I ensured that there was one question per page, so that the survey was not over-facing for participants and that each question was easy to understand. This is vital with surveys, as I was obviously
not present to answer questions. Prior to any of the questions, it was first important to include a page describing the project and explaining that all responses would be completely anonymous. In light of this information, participants were then asked to tick a box illustrating that they consented to take part in the survey. I also ensured that the description of the project, whilst informative, was brief, so as not to lead their responses in any particular way. Following on from this, participants were asked a series of questions regarding their demographic; age, income, gender and whether or not they had an “active” role within this music world. Following this, if they selected ‘yes’, they were then provided with a list of key roles to choose from. The list was inclusive of promoters, artists, musicians, writers, tour managers, booking agents, venue managers and labels. There was also a comment box provided for those who did not fit any of the roles listed. This was a useful exercise, as a number of participants wrote “fan and attendee” in the comment box, which adds an interesting nuance to the notion of ‘active’ within this music world. However, the wording of the question, in hindsight, presents a problem as the difference between “artist” and “musician” may perhaps have been unclear. The term artist was intended to refer to those who design artwork for posters and bands which is an important and common role within this world. However, one participant has since highlighted that people may have misinterpreted this to mean a musician, as the two words are often taken to mean the same thing. That said, as “musician” was provided as a different option, this should have added clarification between the two roles and participants responded to both options, suggesting that this was clear.

Subsequently, participants were asked to select which of the six research sites they lived in or frequently visited. The question was worded as such, in order to gain an understanding of participant’s dedication to live music and whether they travelled to other localities for live music. Whilst a useful exercise, in hindsight I would have perhaps done this differently. As participants often selected more than one of the six locations, it meant that I was unable to ascertain specifically where respondents lived which does limit the study in some respects, as I am unable to compare attendance by lived-location. The remaining three questions listed the 148 events found online and participants were then asked to select which events they had attended. As already noted, the list was long and I was concerned that participants would be overwhelmed and therefore may become disengaged or even exit the survey. With this in mind I divided the events into three sections, across three separate pages. I grouped one-off events, touring events and festivals/all-dayers.
Once the questionnaire format had been devised, I submitted a pilot to four participants, including musicians and my supervisors. They were then asked to provide feedback on the clarity of the questions, the layout and any ambiguities that arose. This was a useful exercise, as participants explained that the survey was clear and easy to navigate. Upon checking the data they had provided, it was also clear that the survey was functional from an analytical point of view. Once any issues had been ironed out, the survey was emailed to relevant contacts and placed onto relevant social media pages, including Facebook pages such as “UK underground metal”, “Manchester Metal Collective” and other local scene pages. I also used music forums, such as “Doom Forever Doomed” and “Bloodstock Festival Forum”. Participants were also encouraged to ‘repost’ the survey and forward it onto other participants. This demonstrates the usefulness of the internet in recruiting for surveys, as there were 474 ‘useful’ responses from participants who had consented to the research and answered the necessary questions. That said, this presents a further limitation. As the survey was only distributed online; this potentially excludes participants who do not use social media or forums. In addition, some participants who did take part did not tick the initial consent box and others stopped answering questions mid-way through the survey. These responses were not used when analysing the final results.

Despite these limitations, I decided on a cut off point for the survey and after four months began to organise and analyse the data. The survey fulfils two key roles within the project. Firstly it has provided information and data regarding the types of events held over the six research sites and secondly it provides data about the audience and their attendance. The survey responses were coded and put into an excel document, enabling me to draw comparisons between both events and attendees. It also enabled me to explore the attendance patterns in more depth, analysing what types of events were more popular for the respondents. Of course there are issues in that the survey is clearly not representative of the whole UK underground metal scene. However, this is not the aim; rather my intent was to capture a glimpse of the participation that takes place within a set period of time. Whilst insightful, the survey also does not tell us why participants attended particular things. In order to address this, the survey was accompanied by a more ethnographic approach including interviews and observations.
3.5. The Impact of ‘the Insider’, Interviews and Observations

An ethnographic approach is an appropriate way through which to explore music worlds, as “ethnography attempts to engage with the lives of members as they are lived out in all their complexity”, (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 23). Whilst the survey tells us more about participation and attendance within this music world, an ethnographic approach enables us to dig deeper and learn more about the participants and their interpretations. This has been a valuable method for understanding music and culture, primarily through interviews and participant observation, as applied to this study, (Hodkinson, 2002; Thornton, 1996, Kahn-Harris, 2007, Weinstein, 2000). As I conducted interviews and participated in this music world, it was important to consider the implications of researching the metal music world in this way, and the impact of my role as a promoter.

Keith Kahn-Harris suggests that during his study, his role as a researcher within this music world was complicated, particularly by the fact that he was a writer for a “well-respected scenic institution”, Terrorizer Magazine. He explains that in adopting this role he held a position of power over other scenic members, as he was attributed with a certain level of subcultural capital, (ibid: 25). Whilst beneficial in some senses, as an insider with increased access to a wide number of participants, this presents obstacles. The problem Kahn-Harris presents here was certainly evident throughout this research. As mentioned in the introduction, I am an underground metal promoter. This was beneficial, not only in gaining access to the inner workings of this music world and its participants but also in attributing me with a greater sense of “cultural competence required to spend time within such spaces and to communicate effectively with others”, (Hodkinson, 2002: 90). However, it is also key to acknowledge that researchers with an, “Insider perspective” “may find it difficult to separate their personal experiences from those of research participants, (Kanuha 2000), confront questions about potential bias in their research (Serrant-Green 2002), and face issues of confidentiality when interviewing members of their community about sensitive subjects (Serrant-Green 2002, citing Kaufman 1994).” (Kerstetter, 2012)

Therefore it was important to approach the observations and interviews with a level of detachment in order to remain as unbiased as possible. Furthermore it was important to

5 Terrorizer Magazine is a print and online magazine devoted to heavy metal with reviews, news and interviews

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remain entirely transparent about the nature of the research. Interview participants were made aware of my position as a researcher through an information sheet, which will be described in more depth in section 3.6. This was really important, as Kahn-Harris explains, whilst conducting his research sometimes participants were unclear about his intentions, particularly whilst he simultaneously worked as a journalist within the scene. Thus sometimes they assumed they were being interviewed for Terrorizer rather than for his academic research, (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 25). Therefore throughout the interviews it was important to position myself very clearly as an academic researcher and not solely as a promoter. It should not be understated that at times it was very difficult to detach from this music world on a personal level, which is necessary in order to produce an unbiased account. Particularly as the study discusses promotional techniques, it was very important to put my experiences and opinions to one side. In order to make this process easier, I actively reduced my contribution as a promoter and did not organise any events throughout the fieldwork period.

3.5.1. Sampling

Prior to conducting the interviews, it was important to select relevant participants. The interview sample was acquired through convenience and snowball sampling. I reached out to participants through social media and email. Some had previously worked with my promotions company or were affiliated in some way, which meant that gaining access was not a problem. Once I started conducting the interviews, I was often put in touch with other potentially relevant participants. More often than not, people responded quickly and enthusiastically. However, there were problems, particularly with some promoters and sound engineers. One, for example, was keen to take part in the research but simultaneously was touring with a band for three months and simply did not have time. Three promoters I approached were also in the middle of organising a festival so again did not have the time for an interview. The time frame of the research is worth considering. I purposefully decided to conduct the research during a busy touring time and whilst this was beneficial for the survey and event observation, it was difficult to pin down promoters who were organising events and artists who were touring. Despite this, I managed to interview participants fulfilling a wide array of different roles and it was equally a good time to be interviewing fans. This was really important for the research, which aimed to develop an understanding of all the roles which come together to create, promote and maintain an art world. In fact it was common for participants to adopt multiple roles, so
some were musicians and promoters and others promoters and venue managers etc. which provided a really holistic view.

Table 1. Participant Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;Name&quot;</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Interview Method</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adrian</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Fan</td>
<td>Face to Face</td>
<td>Manchester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Promoter</td>
<td>Skype</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Face to Face</td>
<td>Liverpool</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Venue Owner</td>
<td>Face to Face</td>
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<tr>
<td>Callum</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Promoter Musician</td>
<td>Face to Face</td>
<td>Manchester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Promoter</td>
<td>Face to Face</td>
<td>Manchester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Musician</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dillon</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Musician</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Sheffield</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edward</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Tour Manager Musician</td>
<td>Face to Face</td>
<td>Manchester</td>
</tr>
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<td>Face to Face</td>
<td>Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilary</td>
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<td>F</td>
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<td>London</td>
</tr>
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<td>Skype</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Skype</td>
<td>Birmingham</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>Promoter</td>
<td>Face to Face</td>
<td>Manchester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Fan</td>
<td>Face to Face</td>
<td>Manchester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Promotions</td>
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<tr>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Promoter</td>
<td>Skype</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Role</td>
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<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>Email</td>
<td>Liverpool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Promoter Venue manager</td>
<td>Face to Face</td>
<td>Manchester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miles</td>
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<td>M</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
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<td>Fan</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Promoter Musician</td>
<td>Face to Face</td>
<td>Leeds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

That said, due to the nature of convenience sampling, the interview sample was somewhat uneven, particularly in terms of gender and location, as demonstrated in table 1. It is perhaps unsurprising that the sample is predominantly male, with merely seven women. Given the inherently masculine nature of this environment described within the literature review, this was to be expected, (ibid.). In terms of situating the research participants geographically, whilst there were interviewees from each research site, there were a far more from both Birmingham and Manchester, with ten participants residing in each. Three were from Leeds and two from Bristol, Liverpool and London. Given my affiliation with the Manchester metal scene, it is no surprise that it was easier to gain access to these participants. However, given the somewhat translocal nature of the music world, it has not been detrimental to gaining an understanding of each research site. As ascertained from the survey results, it is not uncommon for participants within this music world to travel to other cities for live music, with 18% of the survey attending live events in two or more of the research sites. This will be discussed in more depth throughout the course of the research; however it was evident within the interviews that participants were able to describe the health of the live underground metal scene in localities other than their own immediate surroundings. Artists, who were interviewed often toured around the country and through the six research sites, so were considered to be ‘in the know’. In addition, the increasingly virtual nature of this music world also meant people were aware of other cities.
and other events. With this in mind, the geographically dispersed nature of participants was not problematic.

3.5.2. Interviewing the Active

Once willing respondents were identified, I set up the individual interviews. Participants were given agency to decide where and when we were to meet. Though, in lines with ethical considerations considered in section 3.6., I ensured that this was always within an open, public space. Many opted for quiet pubs or cafes, though some had wanted to conduct the interview at live events. I did this for one interview and the process was highly challenging. The atmosphere was loud and often the participant got distracted by the surroundings. In light of this, any remaining interviews were deliberately conducted away from live music, but still within an environment where the participant felt at ease. Whilst these were usually quiet spaces, there were still practical considerations and it is impossible to eradicate all additional noise in a public space, (traffic or other conversations for example). All interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone which carries implications of its own, as some participants appeared very “aware” of the recording device and took a while to settle into comfortable conversation.

Though the interviews were largely unstructured and more conversational in style, I used the preliminary focus group to devise a set list of themes I wanted to explore. An unstructured guide for promoters is shown in Appendix 2. I began with introductory questions pertaining to their involvement in ‘the scene’. Often this, very naturally, led to discussions surrounding the above key research interests and resulted in lengthy and insightful dialogue, as participants felt more at ease and willing to discuss the issues at hand. Whilst this was a valuable approach it was important to maintain control of the discourse to an extent, so as not to go off topic. Many participants were incredibly passionate about the subject matter which occasionally meant steering them back to particular issues. Simultaneously it was important not to lead the conversation too much, as I did not want to influence their responses. This was often worthwhile, as many participants highlighted issues I had not previously considered. Most interviews lasted between one and three hours which facilitated the development of a rapport between myself and the participants. Interestingly, this frequently led to participants changing their tack, as many began the discussion quite defensively, describing the scene in a very positive light and then became more analytical as the conversation proceeded. Whilst the topic is
not necessarily sensitive, I handled particular issues delicately. Notions of profit, and financial struggles for example were somewhat of a pain-point for some participants and it was important to tread carefully. This meant paying careful attention to the participant’s tone of voice and demeanour, as this can sometimes suggest that the topic is too sensitive to pursue any further, (Kvale, 2007: 137). This emphasises the importance of ‘listening’ throughout the interview process. As John Talmage explains, “considerable attention is given to asking the “right” questions and following it up with the “right” probe, there is little discussion of how listening mediates the question-answer exchange” (Talmage, 2012).

Listening however is vital, or as Talmage suggests, a form of “active listening”, which enables the researcher to navigate through the interview appropriately. This was really important for handling more sensitive topics. When participants appeared uneasy I took the conversation in another direction, or reassured them that they could say as much or as little as they wished. That said participants were often quite willing to discuss these issues in some depth.

It is important here to be reflexive about my impact as the researcher. As participants were aware of my promotional role, they appeared at ease to discuss these delicate topics, primarily as they were aware that I had experience with these problems myself. Frequently participants alluded to joint knowledge and made comments such as, “you know how it is”. Discussing my own experiences with the participants was a really fruitful exercise. Douglas calls this ‘the creative interview’, being open about my role facilitated a form of mutual disclosure, (Douglas, J. D. 1985 cited in Holstein, A. & Gubrium, F. 2004 p.147). Of course, with this in mind it was important to remain professional and still allow the participant to lead the conversation.

Whilst beneficial in some respects, it is important to acknowledge that the active nature of my involvement in the scene may have potentially led people to talk about issues in a particular way, if they wanted to present themselves in a particular way. This was certainly the case for some, particularly at the beginning of an interview, whereby they seemed keen to portray their promotions venture as very successful. As mentioned, sometimes this changed as the interview progressed. However, some participants maintained relatively defensive. That is not to say that those who discussed a successful and profitable venture are unreliable, rather some participants were reluctant to discuss any problems or concerns and perhaps saw the study as an attack on their community rather than an
exploration of it. Therefore, whilst analysing the data it was important to be mindful of the reliability.

Once the interviews were conducted, I transcribed them all personally which enabled me to analyse the discourse thematically and conversationally, acknowledging the participant’s tone of voice and the content of the conversation. This also “helps to correct the natural limitations of our memories and of the intuitive flosses that we might place on what people say in interviews,” (Heritage, 1984 cited in Bryman, 2008: 451). The transcripts were uploaded to Nvivo, a qualitative software tool, where I grouped recurring themes into ‘node categories’. These categories included different cities, promotion techniques, venues, and attendance, which enabled comparison. Given the lengthy nature of some of the interviews, this made the analysis process a little easier. Whilst the duration of the interviews led to the acquisition of rich data, it also meant that the transcription process was also incredibly time consuming. Nevertheless, this was not a problem for all the interviews as not all participants were able to take part in a face-to-face interview; rather some requested to talk over email or skype.

3.5.3. Email and Skype

Given that the research focuses on six different cities across the UK, some participants requested to converse via Skype which allowed for greater flexibility (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014: 609). My approach to the Skype interview was similar to those which were face to face, discussing the same set of themes in the same, semi-structured way. Though this was a useful alternative there were limitations. In some cases it was more difficult to develop a rapport, as there is a feeling of disconnect with the participant. This was reflected in the length of the interviews as they didn’t last longer than an hour. In addition, on a couple of occasions participants were not on Skype at the agreed time and interviews had to be rescheduled or cancelled. This is a common problem with interviews of this ilk, where participants sometimes appear more likely to, “drop out of the interview last minute or without notice,” (ibid: 613). Some participants explained that they would struggle to find the time for a Skype interview, and therefore email provided a useful solution. For the email interviews I created a much more detailed list of questions which were then emailed to the participants, along with the information sheet and consent form. It was important, given that I was not present whilst they answered, that the questions be self-explanatory and clear. I also tried to send a few questions at a time, so participants were not
overwhelmed, as often this can lead to a loss of focus (Meho, 2006: 1292). The initial questions were fairly general and informed by both the focus group and initial interview data. Once participants sent their initial responses back, I then replied with more questions, probing for more details (ibid. 1290). This is beneficial for two key reasons, firstly participants tended to feel more at ease, particularly if we had not met before. As Meho describes participants in this situation perhaps feel more empowered and in control of the situation. Not only this, but,

“Many people perceive online communication as anonymous because there is no in-person contact and thus, little accountability. This anonymity may explain why some people are more willing to participate in e-mail interview studies” (ibid)

Therefore this helps counter any ethical concerns the participants might have. Secondly, this also afforded the participants with more time to respond, which was particularly important for those who were working. For example, one of the email respondents, who was a musician, was actually on tour at the time, so was able to answer the questions “on the road”. Simultaneously I was then given more time to consider the follow up questions. Despite the benefits of this process, there are concerns.

“The lack of direct probing in e-mail interviews may result in missing some important pieces of data, especially given that not all participants respond to follow-up questions, even if they were told to expect them.” (ibid.)

Unfortunately this did happen with one participant. Arguably this is because,

“Higher informant commitment or motivation is needed, since participants are required to exert more effort to complete an online interview. In addition, the more motivated the respondent, the more detailed and thorough the informant’s responses will probably be” (Curasi, 2001: 369).

Whilst this can be problematic, the remaining email interview participants responded with detailed accounts of their experiences which were just as rewarding as the face-to-face accounts. From a practical point of view, the email interviews were also less time consuming as the discourse was already typed up. The email interviews were then added to the face to face interview transcripts on NVIVO and analysed in the same way, pulling out recurring themes.
3.5.4. Observations

Whilst conducting the interviews, I also felt it was important to frequently attend and observe live events, in order to develop a greater understanding of the atmosphere. As Hodkinson explains, with reference to his ethnographic research on Goths, participating in a particular scene is,

“crucial to gaining a thorough picture, rather than being overly reliant upon the accounts of interviewees, (Foster 1996: 59). Subcultural groupings such as the Goth scene tend to be characterized by their own dominant discourses, values and assumptions, whose accuracy should not be taken for granted (Thornton 1995: 98)” (Hodkinson, 2002: 5)

This is certainly applicable to underground metal, wherein participants are so actively involved. Therefore it was really important to engage in this environment myself. Given that live events are open, public spaces and I am already a participant within this music world, I had no problems gaining access. I attended ten events as an official researcher. The events, like the survey, ranged in size and some were held in spaces of 50 capacity whilst others were closer to 500. Whilst observing these events, I adopted the “participant as observer” role, (Gold, 1958), whereby I was actively involved in the environment but was also open about the fact that I was conducting research. It is worth mentioning that the observations played a fairly minimal role within the study, but functioned to bolster the interview data and my own interpretations of this music world. Whilst in this setting, I took notes on my phone. This was an appropriate method as a notepad may have looked somewhat out of place at a live music event and may have had an impact upon people’s behaviour. That said, Thornton explains that the observer presence still has an impact that is worth considering.

“I was working in a cultural space in which everyone else was there at their leisure. Not only did I have intents and purposes that were alien to the rest of the crowd, but also for the most part I tried to maintain an analytical frame of mind that is truly anathema to the ‘lose yourself’ and ‘let the rhythm take control’ ethos of clubs and raves” (Thornton, 1996: 2)

This was certainly applicable to my role within this environment, and it is important to be reflexive about this. Nevertheless, whilst the observations were not a key element of the
research, being present within the research sites in this way enabled me to develop a better understanding of the ways in which participants used spaces. This really functioned to reinforce the detailed accounts that I was given throughout the interviews. When I returned home from these spaces, I wrote up more detailed notes whilst they were fresh in my memory. These observations would then be used to support the themes drawn out of the interview data.

3.6. Ethics, Consent and Confidentiality

The research presented no major ethical concerns as participants were not considered vulnerable or dangerous. However, as with any social research, there were important factors to consider. Therefore, prior to entering the field, the project underwent ethical evaluation. A detailed description of the project aims including the research design and ethical considerations were submitted to the University of Manchester ethics committee alongside a risk assessment and a copy of the participant information sheet and consent forms (see Appendix 1.). I pinpointed potential hazards, for example travel and interviewing unknown respondents, and the measures that would be taken in order to minimize these risks. For example, I carried my university ID at all times and interviews were held in open, public spaces. I also ensured that someone reliable knew my location whilst conducting these interviews. In addition, the risk assessment acknowledged, not only risks posed to myself as the researcher, but also risks to participants, such as confidentiality and anonymity. In order to counter this risk, I devised an information sheet to be distributed to interview participants. The information sheet, (see Appendix 1), described the interview process and the potential outcomes of the research; the benefits and the possibility of publication. More importantly, the form explained that any quotes or references to the interview data used within the thesis would remain anonymous and be used under a pseudonym, to protect the participant’s identity and maintain confidentiality. Given the nature of the research, this also meant using pseudonyms for any other participants or bands they might mention. The form also explained that participants were able to withdraw from the study up to three months after the interview had been conducted, if they no longer felt comfortable with their response. Whilst this was not a problem, two participants who were approached for interview no longer wished to take part once they had seen the ethics form. They described concerns around the research being published. As very active participants within this music world, they were anxious
about how they may be portrayed or that, whilst anonymous, their identity would be obvious to other scene participants.

The survey design posed less risk as it was, by nature, anonymous and there were very few open questions which might allude to the identity of the participant. Whilst this may be the case, it was still important to consider issues of anonymity and confidentiality. Therefore, as explained within section 3.4., the survey incorporated an initial page for consent, explaining the aims of the research and ensuring that they were aware that their responses would be completely anonymous. Participants would then be asked to tick a box to confirm that they were aware of this and were still willing to take part. Any participants who did not tick this box were then excluded from the research.

3.7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter provides an overview of the applied research methods behind this study. Having assessed the existing literature, it was most appropriate to apply a mixed methods approach, which enabled me to explore different themes and interpretations in relation to live music event organisation and attendance. In order to do this, the research that follows is underpinned by Howard Becker’s “Art Worlds”, (1982) and Kahn-Harris’s notion of “holism”, (Kahn-Harris, 2007). This means assessing all facets of this music world, which are all necessary for the creation, promotion and maintenance of an art world. Whilst each element of the research had fruitful results, it is important to be reflexive about the methods and the results throughout the project. As illustrated throughout this chapter, each method carries limitations and furthermore, my own impact as a researcher and promoter carries huge implications to the ways in which both the data was acquired and also analysed. With this in mind, the chapters that follow bring together the results from the survey, interviews and observations to describe attendance patterns and a fight for resources, in terms of spaces and finances.
Chapter Four: A Trip around the Toilet Circuit

4.1. Introduction

This chapter argues that an analysis of the places of live metal music is essential to understanding the changes within this scene and the reasons for decline. The concept of ‘place’ is crucial for the creation and maintenance of any music world, as presented in the review of the literature, “every artwork has to exist within a place” (Becker, 2006). Coinciding with the emergence of the Music Venue Trust, this is of particular relevance with venues shutting down across the UK.

In order to understand what this means for underground heavy metal more specifically, this chapter maps out the distribution and availability of appropriate spaces across the six research sites. In doing this, the chapter describes the importance of these spaces, not only in facilitating live music but also in providing communities with a hub for socialising and engaging in metal practices. The loss of these spaces is therefore a key factor in the transformation and decline of this music world. In addition, whilst pinpointing key venues, the chapter also begins to locate the key promoters within each city and their connections to these spaces, before exploring this role in more depth in chapter five.

Beginning with London and Bristol, then moving up through Birmingham and finishing with Liverpool, Manchester and Leeds, the chapter weaves through what, “is affectionately known as the "toilet circuit", the network of small music venues across Britain from which the next stadium-filler might emerge” (Sherwin, A. 2014), highlighting the broader importance of these venues not only for underground music worlds but the music industry as a whole. The intent of this chapter is to explore the vibrancy of each research site and simultaneously highlight not only the instability of ‘musicscapes’ but also the ways in which they remain resilient.

4.2. London

“Part of the distinctiveness of the British [metal] scene lies in the paradoxical importance of London. London’s cosmopolitanism and huge population make it a hub in the global extreme metal scene. There are concerts most nights of the week in some venue or other and a number of important scenic institutions are based in the city.” (Kahn-Harris, K. 2007: 109)

Not only is London the UK’s capital but it holds a rich musical history. Home to Abbey Road Studios and music legends Pink Floyd, Motorhead and Iron Maiden, the city has long been connected with music and culture. Therefore it is undoubtedly a key location along the tour route for most artists.
and underground metal artists are no exception. Somewhat unsurprisingly, throughout the survey period London had the highest concentration of both venues and events, with 49 events spanning across 21 different venues, as illustrated in Figure 3. One of the events was held using venues simultaneously.

![London Events by Venue](image)

**Figure 3 – London Events by Venue**

![London Events by Borough](image)

**Figure 4 – London Events by Borough**
Given the size of London, it proves more insightful to divide these events by borough, as shown in Figure 4. The majority of events (75%) were held in Camden Town, which has always been “internationally renowned as a vibrant site of live music” (Behr, et al. 2014: 6).

Reflective of this, Keith Kahn-Harris suggests that Camden has given the metal community a sense of visibility in such a big city,

“The size of London has always meant that extreme metellers have always been a near invisible minority in most places except in the centre and areas such as Camden where they congregate for concerts” (Kahn-Harris 2007: 109)

With this in mind, Camden has often been considered a hotspot for alternative culture and lifestyles, with a large alternative market and several renowned rock and metal bars and pubs. The metal fans, promoters and musicians explained that they felt “at home” in Camden.

“I used to go there as a kid, it was like a right of passage really – buying silly studded clothes and shoes from the market. Then as I was old enough to go out on the town, it was THE place to go. Everyone went out there, clubs, pubs and so many gigs” (Karen, 33, Fan)
Considering the live music venues featured in the survey more specifically, Camden also appears to have a lot to offer. As can be seen by figure 5 above, Camden’s venues are within close proximity, particularly The Underworld, the Black Heart and the Electric Ballroom. Journalist and fan, Dave, told me that having the venues closely situated in Camden town helped to encourage a thriving live scene in the area,

“I guess another thing you often contend with in London is sold out shows. So, say you’d have a sold out show at the Underworld that a lot of people wanted to go to, they’d spill out into the surrounding venues as well. So it wouldn’t be uncommon for there to be a show at say – the underworld or the electric ballroom, for people to kind of piggy back that and put on a free show at the Unicorn” (Dave, 30, Journalist)

This, to some extent, creates a valuable network of venues across Camden. Venue managers at spaces such as the Underworld and the Unicorn are obviously mindful of the other events going on in the area and the impact this will have on their venue and takings. Looking at the survey, it becomes clear that three venues are particularly important within this network of spaces; The Black heart, The Underworld, and The Unicorn.

The Black Heart, which played host to 30% of the events included in the survey, is both a bar and venue, at 150 capacity. The venue opens until 3am at weekends and hosts live music in the venue space upstairs with DJs downstairs. This enables them to maximise profits with longer opening hours and entertainment prior to a live music event. A review in ‘Timeout’ describes the venue,

“A rock ‘n’ roll watering hole off the beaten Camden track, The Black Heart falls somewhere between an American biker bar and a classic British rock pub. It’s a dim space decorated with Día de Muertos skulls and a big neon crucifix ... For the thirsty there’s a good range of local beers from the Camden Town Brewery and East London Brewing Company, including Camden Hells Lager. Wine, spirits and cocktails are also in supply. Follow the noise upstairs most evenings, and you'll find a dedicated, 150-capacity venue with a separate bar and a top-of-the-range PA system, which lets the rock, punk and metal bands who play here go all the way to 11.” (Timeout, 2013)

Everything, from the décor to the beer selection is important. When observing a live music event at the venue, the atmosphere and the attendees both reaffirmed how the venue’s aesthetics contributed to their sense of belonging.

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6 A popular website reviewing entertainment, art and culture in a variety of cities worldwide
“There’s ace beer, an amazing juke box and the venue upstairs is pretty grimy and sweaty. It’s bang on really” (Karen, 33, Fan)

As seen from the above review in Timeout and the comments from Karen, the venue is specifically tailored towards an alternative crowd and fulfils a set of stylistic and technical conventions appropriate for a heavy metal venue. This may go some way towards explaining why The Black Heart is considered a “place to be”, (Crossley, 2015: 42), for underground metal participants. There appears to be a resistance to cleaner, more corporate environments, which correlates with Krenske and McKay’s description of heavy metal venues, “The general ambience was similar to the music that was constantly playing: heavy”, (Krenske and McKay, 2000: 292), and whilst the venue is technically up-to-date it is still considered “grimy” and “sweaty”, as per Karen’s comments.

Participants did not appear to feel uncomfortable in this space, particularly throughout the observed gig\(^7\) where there was a lot of movement, ‘head-banging’ and ‘moshing’. As Gabby Riches defines, “moshing is a form of dynamic movement and intense and aggressive physical expression; it consists of people slamming into each other repeatedly in front of the stage at extreme metal concerts”, (Riches & Lashua, 2014: 89). Kahn Harris explains that this kind of movement may be uncontrolled and peculiar to ‘outsiders’, (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 440), however it also enables participants to display their connection to both the scene and the music. Though debateable, Kahn-Harris suggests that “it is tempting to understand moshing as a kind of expression of communal solidarity,” (ibid.). Through watching the movement in this space, it becomes clear that spaces like the Black Heat facilitate these scenic practices and thus belonging.

This kind of specific, alternative venue space was relatively uncommon across the other venues, particularly in other cities. However, 289ft away from The Black Heart sits The Underworld, which is a slightly larger, mid-level underground music space at 500 capacity. Beneath the pub, The Worlds End, The Underworld describes itself as “the heart of the alternative music scene in England”, hosting both club nights and live music. Though a larger space than The Black Heart, when observing an event at the venue\(^8\), it still has an ‘intimate’ feel to it. It was also very clear that most of the attendees were familiar with one another and the space itself, as most were making conversation and nodding to one another. People spoke less fondly of the beer selection and pricing, particularly in comparison to The Black Heart. One participant in particular mentioned that she had to pay £3 for a bottle of water and another told me,

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\(^7\) The gig was held on April 28th, with a line-up of “Slabdragger, Bad Meat and Wychhound”

\(^8\) Desertfest
“I was just having a look at the beers and what they’d got, it was five pound twenty for a pint of fosters – not even like, good beer. Should be like twelve pence or something” (Tim, 40, Promoter and Musician)

As will be assessed in more detail in chapter 6, whilst discussing the fans, alcohol evidently plays an important role within this music world and therefore is an important part of a venue’s success or, in fact, decline. As Tim adds to the above statement, when the prices at the venue are high,

“as soon as they said that I was like, I’m going to the shop and in between about four of the bands I was seeing... like – just went to the shop and bought a bottle of wine for a fiver instead. There was a few others just sat out on the street as well – because it was the middle of summer it was really nice. So in the twenty minute changeovers we were just smashing bottles of wine and then back in – it’s cheaper than a pint of fosters. Obviously you want to see all the bands but everyone – well, not everyone as not everyone drinks but it’s kind of part of it, the social thing and you know, getting a bit wobbly by the end and it’s that kind of thing.” (Tim, 40, Promoter and Musician)

This has a detrimental impact upon the venue and their takings. Despite this, however, the venue held 19% of the events included in the survey, and the ticket price was on average £14 per ticket, with a selection of both national and international artists playing. Like The Black Heart, the venue was also open until the early hours, particularly at the weekend, closing at 3am. Again, this enables the venue to again maximise profits from club nights as well as live music.

The third most popular venue, also situated in Camden Town, was The Unicorn. The Unicorn, whilst hosting fewer events than the Black Heart and The Underworld, was considered to be an important space for underground metal. As Dave explained,

“That really was the hub. So, the Unicorn ... every show they put on was free. They were given a large weekly advance by green king brewery to put on bands and bring people in. Drinks prices were always pretty low...It was the sort of place where, even if there wasn’t a band playing, you could go down and just knew there would be certain people there that you could associate with and hang out with.” (Dave, 30, Journalist)

This reflects Andy Bennett’s work on music venues and memory. Scene members displayed an important sense of belonging through nostalgia and emotional connection to spaces, particularly The Unicorn. Through this, scene members such as Dave afford their own meanings to such spaces and the music. As spaces like The Unicorn foster co-operation between scene members, this plays a
vital role in the creation of a music world, providing a central meeting place of likeminded people. Similarly, whilst the community rely upon the venue, the venue relies on the community in order to remain resilient.

Looking at The Unicorn, again, cost becomes an important element of the venue’s popularity, with low drinks prices and free entry events, which was also displayed in the survey as all the events were non-ticketed. As Dave explains, the venue provides a “hub” for the community where people can expect to see other scene members (Gallen, 2015). This in itself facilitates a form of belonging, perhaps because the venue is inexpensive; it opens itself up to those from different economic backgrounds as opposed to other venues with higher ticket and drinks prices. Like The Black Heart, the venue is also a small space at 150 capacity. Primarily it is a venue and pub space, though does not host club nights like The Black Heart and Underworld, and closes at latest, at midnight.

Potentially due to the high costs of licensing, the Unicorn is primarily a pub. Venue managers explained that licensing became costly if they were to stay open past a certain time, (Bill, 44, venue owner). With this in mind, participants explained to me that often they would walk from the Unicorn to other venues in Camden to continue their night. This further illustrates how venues in Camden operate as a network, with attendees moving between and utilising the different spaces. All of the Camden venues are also within close proximity to the Camden Town tube stop, which is again another important practical consideration for attendees, particularly with the introduction of a 24 hour tube service in 2016, (UK Music, 2016). Also reflective of Dave’s comments, and work highlighted in the literature review, the venues close proximity and variation in size enables different shows, of different calibres, to run simultaneously, encouraging a healthy live music scene in Camden (Behr, Brennan & Cloonen, 2014: 1).

A festival included in the survey epitomizes the usefulness of Camden’s network of spaces. Desertfest, which was the most popular event included in the study, occurs in April on a yearly basis and is currently celebrating its sixth anniversary. The festival itself is held over three days, across four different venues within the Camden borough. In 2015 it was in fact held across six, including The Jazz Café and The Purple Turtle. Unfortunately, after seventeen years of hosting rock and metal events The Purple Turtle was in fact shut down in June 2015. Three of the London events in the survey were held at the Purple Turtle, illustrating just how current the issues highlighted in this thesis are. Undoubtedly, this will have an impact on the underground metal community of Camden. The reasons for closure seem ambiguous, though there have been discussions around increasing rent and licensing problems.
“Purple Turtle bosses had been keen to renew the lease for another 20 years, but say they were only offered a 15 year lease with a three year break clause, which could result in them being asked to leave with “a moment’s notice.” With the amount of money they planned to invest in the building, they explained that three years would not be enough to pay off the costs.” (Polianskaya, 2015)

This brings forth a key issue for the spaces of London, venue closure, which requires further consideration.

4.2.1. Venue Closure in London

Whilst there appears to be a strong underground identity present in Camden Town, the survey and interview data revealed that live events were not entirely restricted to the Camden borough. I was told that this was a relatively new transition which reflects an interesting shift for the London metal world. As venues like the Purple Turtle close, participants explained that they were seeing a shift from a close-knit community of venues a stone’s throw apart, to a music world which is perhaps becoming more fragmented.

“I was talking to the guy from Sex Swing- Tim, that guy, and he was saying that the center of London is kind of gone, it’s fallen off the face of the earth as far as local music venues. It’s all in suburbia now – Brixton and places like that if you wanna play a gig, gentrification and stuff like that.” (Micheal, 29, Promoter and Venue Manager)

This can be seen in figures 3 and 4, which illustrate the distribution of venues used across London, over the survey period. Whilst there is still a dense cluster situated in Camden town and the majority of events are hosted in the Camden borough, (75%), the map also shows a further 12 venues used across London within three other boroughs; Islington, Hackney and Hammersmith and Fulham. Whilst Hackney and Hammersmith only hosted three events collectively, 19% of events across this time period were held within the Islington borough.

The sprawling distribution of metal events across London may be indicative of a number of things, but I was told that one of the main reasons was due to venue closure. The interviews began to tell a story of participants attempting to quickly ‘mobilise resources’ in order to find new venues and spaces (Dave, 30, Journalist). Not only have three London venues included in the survey closed since it was sent out but according to a recent report from The Mayor of London’s Music Venues taskforce, “between 2007 and 2015, London lost 35% of its grassroots music venues, a decline from 136 spaces programming new artists to just 88 remaining today” (Greater London Authority, 2015). The report
notes that several Camden venues have been shut down due to “escalating rents” (ibid.) and “Venues like the Flowerpot in Camden have been demolished and turned into flats”, (ibid.). This really begins to emphasise the impact of urban change and gentrification on this world, particularly as The Flowerpot had been highlighted as a “decent” venue in the interviews (Dave, 30, Journalist).

Therefore, whilst people spoke of sold out shows and a hub of activity in Camden Town, the broader city appears to be facing a very different struggle. This level of closure is a concern for both the future of live music within this world and also to the sense of community and belonging itself. As the events move further away from Camden and the well-known, underground venues, it will be interesting to see if those hosted elsewhere still boast a healthy audience. As demonstrated in Gabby Riches and Brett Lashua’s work on the Leeds metal scene, these kinds of changes pose important questions for a community, if fans are forced to relocate from what they are used to or travel further afield for events (Riches & Lashua, 2014). As described by Dave previously, having some kind of a hub enables people to just “turn up” on the off chance of something happening or seeing familiar faces, it provides a centralised meeting place. Venues further afield from this ‘hub’ may not present this kind of openness to fans, particularly within such a big city. In turn this can cause problems for promoters, who then have to work harder to get people to actively travel for specific events rather than relying upon a regular crowd.

4.2.2. London’s Promoters

As this research views music as a “network of co-operative links”, (Becker 1982: 2), rather than a set of individual elements, it is important to understand the connection between the promoters and the venues in each city as the two are inextricably linked. Venues require promoters, albeit in-house or independent and promoters require a venue space in order to organise an event. By understanding the relationship between the two facets, we can begin to understand more about the vibrancy of underground metal in each city.

With this in mind, interestingly 66% of events in London were held by independent promoters. Independent promoters hire out venues and pay for the events themselves; they will utilise the network of venues available in London. Whereas in house promoters, who are hired by a particular venue to put on events, similar to the aforementioned promotion in The Unicorn, will work solely for one venue. This also suggests less of a personal economic risk for those involved, as mentioned previously by Dave, some of these venues are given some form of funding from breweries or such like to encourage a crowd. Independent promoters who hire out the venues however are given no such funding, which can be a substantial financial burden, as noted by promoter Tim,
“I don’t have investors, I don’t have sponsors, I don’t even have people who will lend me the equipment, I don’t have people working for me – it’s just me.” (Tim, 40, Promoter and Musician)

Throughout the three-month survey window, London had 18 different active promoters, the busiest of which would appear to be Old Empire. Old Empire, an independent outfit, played host to 13 events (25%) across the three months, suggesting that they are key players within this music world. Old Empire used four different venues, ranging in capacity, from 150 to 1,100. The events they held were varied, featuring a mix of touring and one off shows with ticket prices ranging between £7 and £22.50. This would suggest that they a key point of contact for touring artists of varying scales within the underground; local, national and international.

Not only would they appear to be a key contact for musicians, but also for other promoters. The survey showed that there were seven co-promotion events hosted in London, all of which were co-hosted alongside Old Empire. They have also launched a booking agency, illustrating their level of involvement and connection to this music world, its members and venues. This is significant because, not only does it demonstrate the co-operative links between other promoters, it also displays the importance of adopting these active roles within this world, often multiple roles. In addition, the fact that Old Empire run a booking and promotions agency as a business, in order to make a living, suggests that there is a market for this music in London. However, they also put on larger events which may be the driving force behind their income. The need for co-promotion events suggests that smaller promoters, working alongside Old Empire, are in fact struggling. This is explored in more depth in Chapter Five, which highlights the struggles within promotion practices.

Further reiterating this potential struggle, aside from central promoters Old Empire, the other promoters featured in the survey hosted, at most, three events across the three months. Most of these events were held at the smaller venues. The only exception was promoter, Desertscene, who curated Desertfest thus working with some large scale venues alongside the smaller ones. However, Desertfest is not just hosted by one promoter, but in fact involves a number of small London underground promoters who assist with creating the line up and running the festival across the different venues, thus exemplifying the ways in which networks of spaces and people, “foster and support musical creativity”, (Allan, 2009:1). Again, this further illustrates a real sense of community and connection of the support personnel working together, (Becker, 1982). The festival team is not only made up of promoters but also a dedicated team of journalists, sales staff and door staff. Some are paid and others volunteer for a ticket to the festival. Speaking with one of the festival organisers,
it became clear that the intentions of the festival were to foster community and fill a gap in the underground metal calendar. Desertfest writer, Dave, told me about the inception of the festival,

“The festival’s run, almost entirely not for profit. So it’s not really run as a money making venture although it is run as a promotions venture. So Desertscene, is the company that runs desertfest and there was a big desire to put that promotions agency on the map and gain contacts and gain trust, gain confidence in people and ultimately be able to put on more shows. I think when Desertfest started, there was a desire for it to be national – so like, a national agency dealing with stoner, sludge, psych, um, kind of underground music. But quite quickly, that became... I mean, the guys who run it are based in London, based in Camden, quite quickly I don’t think they felt that much affiliation with the people that they’re working with in the other cities they tried to use. Quite quickly, it became pretty London-centric.” (Dave, 30, Journalist)

The use of the word ‘trust’ here is interesting, and illustrates the importance of building a relationship and connection not only with the musicians and promoters they work with, but also with the fans. Though significantly for this research, it is clear that the agency were unable to build those co-operative ties with other cities outside of London. The notion of active, translocal communities is developed further in chapters five and six, with reference to both promoters and fan. This is particularly interesting as London differs from other cities such as Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool, which have managed to develop these inter-city ties. In addition, these ties actually prove vital in maintaining an underground metal world in the North West, as they exhibit very different kinds of struggles to London.

This section has explained why London is a unique city. The underground metal world is vibrant, with festivals and sold out shows however there are struggles for relevant spaces. This means that promoters and fans are forced to move away from the metal hub of Camden, into other London boroughs and venues in a bid to maintain this music world. This begins to highlight how active participants persevere in the face of decline. Comparatively the remaining five research sites are very different from the UK’s capital, as they exhibit a struggle for attendance as well as space. This was particularly prominent in Bristol.

4.3. Bristol

Though Bristol has a huge musical history with Drum & Bass and club culture, it was highlighted as a point of interest for this study. Participants told me that since the inception of Temples Festival, a vibrant underground metal scene had emerged,
“Bristol as a city had often been overlooked by big tours however a DIY community has really thrived here with underground-centric events such as festivals like rad not sad fest, the failed temples festival and Dead Punk festival.” (Edward, 30, Tour Manager)

Despite these more enthusiastic representations of Bristol, the interview and survey data painted a more pessimistic picture with merely 13 events, held across 7 venues recorded across the three month survey window. Whilst, on the surface, the figures are not dramatically different from Leeds, Liverpool and Birmingham, Bristol appears to face a unique set of problems. As highlighted with reference to London, in order for a music city to function and remain resilient, it is important that there is a network of both venues and promoters, facilitating the organisation of different events.

This would appear to be a key issue for Bristol, as unlike London, it is also difficult to pinpoint a set ‘hub’ of interactivity, with only one venue used more than once throughout the survey period. The Exchange, a 250 capacity venue was used twice. Unlike some of the alternative venues discussed in London, The Exchange takes pride in the fact that they “offer an adventurous and diverse program”, (Exchange Bristol, 2017), hosting a wide range of different events, including live music and club nights of different genres and styles. Unlike the popular venues in London, interviewees did not talk about The Exchange as one of the ‘places to be’. However, 30ft away, sits the Stag and Hounds, which although it only featured in the survey once, was referenced in the interviews as a key venue for Bristol underground metal. Whilst participants told me that, “key small venues such as the Stag and Hounds, Fleece and the Gryphon have allowed a scene to thrive in recent years” (Edward, 30, Tour Manager), in May 2017 the Stag and Hounds was closed down. The owner explained that,

“Through a series of events and circumstances – some out of our control – we have looked at the books and it’s not viable for us to carry on to see the contract out. Our final weekend will be Friday, May 26, to Sunday, May 28. The whole economics of the pub business is in turmoil.” (Pipe, 2017)

Whilst there is little information available at this point, the comments suggest that the business was not taking enough money in order to sustain itself. This undoubtedly has implications for Bristol, particularly as the remaining five venues used within the survey period are geographically much further apart and, aside from The Gryphon and The Exchange, are much larger in capacity, The Academy (2,500 cap) and Colston Hall (600) for example. In addition, as venues like The Exchange are primarily club spaces or more commercial, they fail to fulfil the stylistic and spatial conventions necessary for an underground metal gig and its participants to feel at home, something that I have shown to be a strength of a Camden scene.
This leaves The Gryphon, the smallest of spaces at 40 capacity. Whilst the venue fits the underground metal conventions well, describing itself as a “Real Ale & Heavy Metal haven”, the venue has recently taken to the internet in a desperate bid to raise £30,000 in order to save the business. The owner explains that not only is the venue in drastic need of refurbishment but also requires capital in order to stabilise the business, “Over the year the Gryphon more than breaks even but with no capital behind it there are a few stressful moments balancing suppliers, staff and tax” (Ashby, 2013). The venue remains open but this again suggests a struggling underground world in Bristol.

It is also difficult to identify the key players in Bristol, with 46% hosted by in-house promoters and the remaining six events all hosted by different individuals. This suggests greater risk promoting in Bristol, with few promoters organising events on a regular basis and more promoters working for venues rather than renting them. Alternatively it suggests that there is less of a market for underground metal in this city. However, whilst Bristol may be difficult to gauge with reference to the survey alone, the interviews begin to tell a more interesting story about the turbulent live scene.

“I used to live near Bath/Bristol, and the scene there was pretty bad at the time, there were no gigs at all...Bristol’s always been good for electronic stuff and has produced loads of great music too, but when I was living near there it seemed pretty dead. It’s amazing for metal now though, and I think Temples fest and all the gigs Harry put on beforehand played a large part in changing that – I moved back down south straight after uni and was bummed out that I couldn’t go to as many gigs, then suddenly he started booking Eyehategod, Church Of Misery, Ramesses etc . and everything started to pick up, so yeah, respect to Harry ha!” (James, 29, Promoter and Musician)

Harry, as mentioned by James, not only hosted an event across the survey period but also organised Temples Festival. Whilst a festival can encourage vibrancy within a city, it is also potentially problematic and may go some way toward explaining the lack of events within the survey period. Temples was held in May 2015, one month after the survey, and the festival boasts an impressive list of exclusive appearances from artists. It is possible that this may have restricted the number of bands visiting both Bristol and the rest of UK during this time. When interviewed, musician, Simon, notes that this is common within the underground and also potentially detrimental to both wider and local music worlds. If artists are restricted from playing small venues and other cities to play a one-off appearance at a festival in a big venue, promoters, venues and artists lose out. With reference to Desertfest, journalist Dave suggests this wave of ‘exclusivity’ is in fact a reaction to the influx of festivals not only in the UK but also in Europe,
“I guess as it started out, there was a bit of a desire to do a London version of Roadburn, so Roadburn festival in the Netherlands. In particular, that was one of the reasons why the festival was put the weekend before, the first year, the weekend before roadburn so that it meant that a lot of the bands touring Europe – the organisers could look to sign up for desertfest. That didn’t actually go down too well with the organisers of Roadburn who thought their festival was pretty unique and they wanted a lot of bands to play exclusively for them. They felt quite threatened by a number of other festivals that popped up around Europe so – freak valley, even things like hellfest. Temples festival in Bristol is a new big one. For the people who run these festivals, it’s threatening the market and for the people who go to these festivals, it’s great because they get loads of choice but I think that the next wave of activity will be festivals booking bands exclusively. That will be the way that festivals bring people in and get tickets sold.” (Dave, 30, Journalist)

Whilst this may encourage a larger turn out for the festival in question, it limits the number of underground artists playing across the UK on a regular basis and, as highlighted by Dave, is in fact detrimental to other festivals. On the flip side, at the Modern Heavy Metal Conference 2016, an organiser of Party San Festival in Germany explained why exclusives are a necessity for touring artists, as those who play too much locally or even regionally are unappealing for festival bookings. He felt that it meant the artist and their fans ‘burned out’, reducing enthusiasm for the artist and ultimately affecting attendance. On the same panel of speakers, a band manager supported these claims, detailing that they often instruct bands to limit where they play and how often because a festival provides a primary source of income as well as access to a broader fan base. Thus, it is beneficial for an artist to aim for a festival rather than an array of small one-off events.

Whilst this may have been discussed with reference to German festivals, it is possible to see how this applies to British ones also. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to suggest that whilst playing a festival of this nature may be beneficial to the band’s future and the wider music world, it is potentially damaging to the broader music world. This also hints at a music world which is less cohesive than Becker’s theory of Art Worlds suggests. There is an element of competition here which is not reflective of a co-operative music world. The growth in the festival market means that promoters are constantly fighting for the attention of fans, who cannot always attend every event on the metal calendar. This is brought to the fore in Chapter Six, with reference to the audience more specifically. Furthermore, the 2016 edition of Temples was actually cancelled merely four days prior to the festival taking place. Whilst the organiser had obviously been a key name across the Bristol scene, he admitted that beneath the hype which had built over three years of what appeared to be a
successful festival; Temples had left him in excess of £70,000 worth of debt, (Lach, 2016), as again this market is not as successful or indeed profitable as it may first appear.

However, whilst festival exclusives may deter artists from playing small, one-off shows in Bristol, the festival has arguably put Bristol on the map. Therefore, the dissolution of Temples has wider implications for the Bristol underground metal scene. As James explained, prior to both Harry and the festival, “it seemed pretty dead”, thus as Harry ceases to promote there are potentially implications for the future of underground metal in Bristol. As noted by Becker, (Becker, 1982), resources and support personnel are interchangeable and the expectation would be for another promoter to fill the gap, “resource pools grow up in response to a real or imagined demand for those resources”, (ibid: 70),

“one of the most important things an art world provides its artistic members is a supply of interchangeable human parts. When you can count on replacing people with others just a good, you can carry on artistic work in a routine way. That is why the cooperative networks and conventions that make up an art world create opportunities as well as constraints” (ibid.)

This was demonstrated in the wake of Temple’s festival, the day the festival was cancelled this music world pooled resources in order to organise a replacement event for the artists and punters who were supposed to be in attendance. The event was organised in less than 24 hours by a network of promoters, musicians and fans across the UK. Therefore, whilst Bristol may not be as vibrant as I was led to believe in initial interviews, the city has experienced a great deal of turbulence throughout the research period and poses interesting questions for the organisation of underground music worlds. Not only this but reaction to the cancellation of Temples illustrates how a pool of support personnel can function to foster networks of co-operation and resilience within this music world, not only on a local level but also translocally.

Interestingly, this is the kind of co-operation that London struggled with. Therefore, whilst Bristol may be less vibrant than London, this story places emphasis on the importance of co-operative networks in overcoming scarce resources and pooling together to find alternative ways to provide for the scene. This also touches on a key focus of this thesis, the impact of festivals. Temples Festival illustrates how these events can put a music city on the map and encourage the growth of a scene. Simultaneously it also displays how festivals of this nature can be damaging for both local scenes and the broader music world, discouraging smaller, regular one-off events. This touches on the focus of Chapter Six, illustrating how these larger events may be popular but in fact exhibit financial struggles of their own, occasionally leading to decline. This brings forth the next city on the touring route,
Birmingham, which exhibits similar problems to both Birmingham and Bristol, with scarce resources and audiences.

4.4. “The Home of Metal”: Birmingham

“There appears to be a strong consensus amongst academics and established journalists that heavy metal and hard rock emerged during the late 1960s/early 1970s in the industrial midlands of England.” (Cope A: 2010)

Figure 6 – Map of Venues in Birmingham (Google Maps, 2017)

Considering Birmingham’s musical history, it is impossible to ignore this city as a part of the UK touring circuit. Home to celebrated metal bands such as Napalm Death, Black Sabbath and Judas Priest, it is perhaps unsurprising that, “Birmingham is fortunate to have the tag ‘Home of Metal’ among the underground metal scene”, (Mark, 20, Promoter). In this sense, unlike Bristol, the city itself carries a sense of identity, similar to the alternative hub of Camden Town. Despite a valuable history of heavy metal, there were merely ten underground metal events recorded between February and April 2015. The events were spread across five different venues, four of which were held at Scruffy Murphys, a pub and venue. As can be seen from figure 6, the venue is directly in the middle of Birmingham city centre and within close proximity to both train stations. Similarly to The Black Heart in London, the venue is a well-known “alternative” establishment.
However, whilst aesthetically ‘alternative’, the interviews suggested that Scruffy Murphy’s was far from the hub of the underground scene in Birmingham. Though 33% of the total interview participants were from Birmingham, only three referred to Scruffy Murphy’s and described fairly negative experiences. From a practical point of view, one musician found the space difficult to play in, “the room was quite small, the sound wasn’t fantastic” (Jim, 24, Musician). A fan also explained that the alternative aesthetics were off-putting,

“It’s almost trying too hard to be “alternative”... It’s a bit childish. I just want a decent space, with a decent atmosphere. It doesn’t have to be skulls and iron maiden on the jukebox. Most people there seem to be idiots” (Karen, 33, Fan)

Further exemplified by another fan,

“Scruffy’s have a space but you get some right wankers in there - last year there was a massive gang of Nazis who kicked off and it was terrifying. What makes a good venue for me is good sound, good vibe, no hassle and somewhere to sit down” (Helen, 36, Fan)

This potentially reflects the juxtaposition between the underground and commercial metal worlds. Throughout the interview discourse, there was a sense of participants wanting to detach from the more commercial, metal conventions. It is considered inauthentic to partake in these more mainstream practices, which may explain why the underground participants actively try to position themselves in opposition to these kinds of spaces. As highlighted in Chapter Two, Kahn-Harris discusses this in some depth, labelling this active detachment and critique of traditional scenic practices and symbols as ‘transgressive subcultural capital’ (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 127). With regards to fans, this concept is developed in more depth in Chapter Six, analysing the ways in which fans accrue subcultural capital through attending live events.

This concept is also important for venues though, particularly within the underground. Whilst venues such as the Black Heart in London may exhibit some of these traditional metal features, it is perhaps considered more discrete and promotes an inherently underground ethos. As the venue is quite new and the manager is in fact an underground promoter, who plays and promotes underground artists within the venue, it is considered more authentic. The venue is putting money directly back into the scene and the bands (Wikstrom, 2009; Kahn-Harris 2007). This may explain the sense of attachment and belonging exhibited by participants who seemed to display a greater sense of affiliation with The Black Heart. Though Scruffy Murphy’s hosts live underground events, it has a long standing history with more traditional heavy metal, and displays this aesthetically.
Whilst Scruffy Murphys may be a contentious venue, the participants nodded to a few other venues which featured less frequently in the survey; The Flapper and The Asylum for example. The Asylum in particular appeared to fulfil the set conventions necessary for a successful underground metal event,

“IMO the best venue in Birmingham is Asylum/Asylum 2 and its features are everything that makes a good venue for me. You can go outside for a smoke/hang out with your mates, but if you want to just stay in and watch the bands, the venues are ideal for this and the sound is excellent. Very relaxed, friendly atmosphere,” (Susan, 42, Fan)

“It’s pretty good there actually. It’s interesting, so it’s actually a recording studio. Um, it’s then got a venue upstairs and a larger venue outside. So uh, it’s actually a pretty good sound quality and the bar is, it’s almost, it’s not a bring your own but it’s got a feel of you know ‘cans in the fridge’ rather than a bar. And certainly I can’t imagine they make very much money there but what money they do make is from the recording studio.” (Dave, 30, Journalist)

Interestingly it’s a 600 capacity space, which is larger than most small underground venues. However it appears to fulfil certain social conventions. As will be explored in more detail in Chapter Six, underground metal is not just about the music and the quality of the sound but also about the social experience itself, and venues can hinder or support this experience by providing certain features. When asked “what makes a good venue”, 20% of interview participants discussed the importance of having a reasonable outside space,

“You can take your drinks outside so it is good for smoking and socialising” (Helen, 36, Fan)

“Here is still a big social aspect however and time at the gig will be spent inside whilst bands are on then outside in the smoking area during the breaks” (Louise, 30, Fan)

Whilst The Asylum may provide a useful underground space and a set of conventions suitable for fans, it is still a 600 capacity venue which is considered to be too sizedly for most underground artists. This appears to be a key problem in Birmingham, whereby apart from Scruffy Murphy’s, there is a lack of small venue spaces alongside a number of much larger venues.

“So obviously you’ve got very big arenas like the NEC or NIA which are, y’know, huge. 8-10,000 people. Then you’ve got the 02 academy system ... I think it’s become more unpopular over the last few years for what you and I would call underground bands because
it’s just not the kind of music that those particular promoters are looking at or booking mainly because it’s just not financially profitable.” (Dave, 30, Journalist)

As aforementioned, the availability of diverse venue spaces is absolutely paramount for any music world to maintain itself, as small underground venues give artists a platform for growth. Not only is this an issue for the artists but also promoters. When organising an event, promoters are forced to choose between a high capacity, high priced venue or a small pub venue which may explain why the majority of these underground events have been held at Scruffy Murphy’s, despite the participants actively disliking the venue. As stated by Dave above, the larger venues are not a financially viable option for underground events of this scale. Simultaneously, they are equally unappealing for fans because of high drinks and ticket prices. Not only this but some fans explained that venues of this size were not welcoming spaces,

“Sadly most international bands end up at the 02 venues, which are overpriced, soulless and frankly unpleasant.” (Susan, 42, Fan)

This is problematic for this music world, as underground artists are faced with a very limited choice between a small pub with a small crowd or much larger, more expensive venue. Echoing Riches and Lashua’s study of the Leeds Heavy Metal world, it becomes less financially viable for touring bands to travel to cities like Birmingham where there is a lack of mid-level spaces and their financial guarantees may not be met, (Riches & Lashua, 2014)

As a reaction to this, Dave explained that more and more events seem to be moving further afield to Wolverhampton, whereby “You have a cluster of venues which are extremely close to each other but all of which have very different sizes and facilities” (Dave, 30, Journalist). Similarly, Birmingham fans also talked about Coventry as an alternative,

“In Coventry the number of shows has increased massively. Up until last year there was hardly anything on, now there are loads of incredible shows coming up. I think Coventry does well with its two venues.” (Sonia, 32, Fan)

Mirroring the movement away from Camden Town, this makes Coventry simultaneously more appealing for touring bands, who are more likely to play a suitable venue with less financial risk. This also shows a certain level of dedication from fans who are willing to travel further, for a better experience. Therefore venues must not only fit this music stylistically but they need to be the right price and the right size.
Whilst artists and fans can travel further afield, this is potentially unsustainable for Birmingham’s promoters. As promoter, Mark, explains, the music world has to react to this,

“Right now it’s very quiet, for a long time it was isolated to a small number of venues which in essence created a band of regulars who you would always see at shows, but the scene is always ‘recycling’…. venues open, venues close. Promoters come and go. People change, and that inevitably brings new fans and people into the scene and others leave.” (Mark, 30, Promoter)

Similarly to Bristol, there appears to be a lack of a constant or main point of contact. Mark’s promotions venture, Sirius Promotions, hosted 40% of the Birmingham events, “I’d say I’m a bit of a facilitator”. Whilst Sirius has been operating for five years, another promoter alluded to a high changeover within this sector of the music world. Reflective of Mark’s previous comments, he explained, “Inconsistent is the best way I would describe it. A lot of people start off well but then people seem to take it for granted and it struggles,” (Alan, Promoter), suggesting that the promoters in Birmingham face a real financial struggle. Even though he has been promoting for a fair length of time, Sirius also explained that “I currently promote solo and have drastically reduced my shows as a result of financial constraints”, so whilst he may have hosted the majority of the Birmingham events taking place at this time, he has obviously been forced to scale back.

Birmingham does not appear to exhibit the same level of persistence as Bristol, where promoters pooled together as a co-operative network. There were no co-promoted events throughout the survey window and interviewees suggested that there should be greater connections within the Birmingham network,

“Promoters should work together more. It’s silly when promoters who book similar kinds of music in the same town don’t communicate and end up having similar gigs clash and both having poor turnouts as a result, when they could have teamed up and just put on one stacked gig with a good turnout” (James, 29, Promoter)

Whilst there is a visible struggle for independent promoters in this city, merely two of the events were hosted by in house promoters. This perhaps suggests that the venues themselves do not see it as financially feasible to inject more money into live music, especially if they bear witness to the independent promoters struggling when renting out the venue.

Looking closer at the events themselves, the price averages at £10 a ticket and there were no free events. This is potentially due to the size of the venues available to promoters and the difficulty with
booking the cheaper, small venues which Birmingham lacks. With a steep venue hire, the promoter is forced to charge more for tickets. Five of the ten events were part of booked tours around the UK with the average ticket price at £13.50 which perhaps reflects the rise in touring costs, petrol and the sense of risk artists are perhaps feeling with playing this location. This will be explored in more depth in Chapter Five, with reference to the promotion techniques and artist costs. Ultimately, not only does Birmingham exhibit a struggle for the space and support personnel but also the artists themselves, who need some kind of reassurance that Birmingham is still in fact the home of heavy metal.

4.5. The Northern Triangle: Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool

“Most bands go through Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds... They’re almost guaranteed on most bands tour routing” (Edward, 30, Tour Manager and Musician)

Approximately 100 miles north of Birmingham lie three key cities on the underground touring route; Liverpool, Manchester and Leeds. One of the key considerations for this area is the incredible closeness between these three locations and the ways in which this simultaneously benefits and damages the underground for local participants. This will be examined beginning with Liverpool.

4.5.1. Liverpool

As touring costs increase for artists, with petrol and accommodation expenses to consider, in order for a tour to be financially viable, artists must attempt to play as much as possible in order to recoup as much of their travel expenses as possible. Therefore, having these three cities within such close proximity enables artists to play multiple events at a reasonably low cost. The lack of distance is not only beneficial to artists however, as another intriguing tie between the three locations is the crossover of promoters. The survey evidenced a degree of intercity-co-promotion where promoters from different cities may work together to organise events in different locations. Therefore these three cities differ greatly from London, Birmingham and Bristol as this level of co-operation appears to be key in the survival or a North West underground metal world. Tim, a Liverpool promoter, explained that he...

“did twin events, I took on tours and I did – on the Thursday night, I’d do a Manchester date and on the Friday night I’d do a Liverpool date.” (Tim, 40, Promoter and Musician)

Tim felt that venues, or lack of venues in Liverpool, was one of the key reasons he branched out to Manchester. This was evident through both the survey and the interviews. Merely eight Liverpool events were recorded throughout the survey duration, held across six different venues. Like
Birmingham, it is difficult to pinpoint a key hub of activity in Liverpool. Only three venues were used more than once in the survey, including The Magnet and The Lomax which have since closed down, as Benjamin notes, this has had a big impact on the metal scene in Liverpool, “we’ve recently lost the Lomax which was our leading metal venue”, (Benjamin, 31, Promoter). According to news articles, the staff and venue management had been found to be dealing class A drugs from the venue, reinforced by Benjamin who said they were involved in “naughty dealings”. The venue itself was 300 capacity, with a cellar bar for smaller events, thus providing two important spaces for the underground. There are questions as to whether the venue will reopen or not, though Tim explained that he and other Liverpool promoters have had to make the most of whatever else they can in the area, including the third most popular venue used throughout the survey, The Pilgrim which is a pub and venue.

As fan, Adrian explains, “the Pilgrim in Liverpool is always a good one, for you know, small sweaty gigs.” (Adrian, 31, Fan). Whilst the intimate nature of the venue may appeal to fans, Benjamin explains that this is not necessarily sustainable for both the artist and support personnel, “In Liverpool, we’ve got several metal venues like Maguire’s and the Pilgrim which are tiny and they’re not really venues” (Benjamin). As already exhibited in the other locations, it is not uncommon for venues to carry a dual purpose, either as a pub, bar or even a recording studio but Maguire’s is in fact a pizza restaurant with a 90 capacity venue in the back, therefore only suitable for very small underground events. This means it may not necessarily fulfil other important conventions, like a good sound system or bar. Promoter, Martin explains that,

“We could do with some more venues in the city. More affordable at least. Maguire’s have a capacity of 90 which makes for great atmosphere but we’re lacking in places around the 150 cap. Dumbulls again, around 100 capacity, great atmosphere”, (Martin, 30, Promoter and Musician)

Whilst these spaces may provide a good atmosphere, it is important for there to be a selection and range of spaces available for the slightly bigger artists, which fit the appropriate conventions. Once more, like Birmingham, it is not feasible for artists to travel to Liverpool to play to a smaller audience, or pay more for a bigger space, if they are not likely to take enough money to fund their costs. As Sonia explains,

“The lack of decent venues is currently a problem for the scene as it does mean that some promoters have to pay through the nose for somewhere that doesn’t serve the fans or suit the band.” (Sonia, 32, Fan)
Representative of this, the survey also presents a concerning story for promoters in Liverpool. Liverpool had two promoters who hosted more than one event during the survey period; Peste Promotions and Facemelting Entertainment. Interestingly, both promoters seem to have resigned since the survey. Benjamin explained,

“we recently had face melting entertainment and he pretty much did solely death metal – he pinched a lot of the bands who normally come to me first, when to him he was getting reputations of a death metal promoter – he also declared he’d gone bankrupt and gone out of the game about three weeks ago, he’s only been in it about a year.” (Benjamin, 31, Promoter)

This will be examined in more depth in Chapter Five, with reference to support personnel. However, ultimately this presents an interesting issue for Liverpool as a scene, with few venues and few promoters. This may go some way toward explaining why promoters such as Andy have begun promoting in other local cities such as Manchester, as reflected by a few interview participants in other cities, “Manchester is the place to be now for this kinda music” (Helen, 36, Fan).

4.5.2. Manchester

![Figure 7 – Map of Venues in Manchester (Google Maps, 2017)](image)
Second to London, there were 33 events recorded in Manchester across the survey period, reflecting Helen’s comments. Whilst this may be indicative of a healthy live scene, upon further inspection it becomes clear that the city is also facing a struggle of its own, particularly with regards to venues. Looking at figure 7, it is evident that the venues are relatively spaced out, as reinforced by sound engineer, Edward, who explains that this can make it increasingly difficult for both Manchester promoters and fans,

“In Manchester everything’s a bit more spread out. So if you’re going to put a show on in one part of Manchester, it would make it really difficult for one half of Manchester. But then occasionally shows in Chorlton, or the venue in Levenshulme, Klondike. Occasionally those seem to do well if it’s an all-day event and gets a bit of hype if it’s a DIY show just because people fancy a day out that’s not in Manchester but it’s quite hard to predict.” (Edward, 30, Tour Manager)

Whilst hosting a larger number of events, Manchester had five key venues, The Academy, Sound Control, The Roadhouse, Kraak Gallery and The Star and Garter which is indicative of another problem. Whilst on the surface this may seem like a reasonable array of spaces, the interviews tell a different story. Since the survey was conducted, both the Roadhouse and Kraak Gallery have been shut down. Kraak Gallery faced a number of difficult problems. The area surrounding the venue had recently been redeveloped and turned into flat blocks, and thus the venue has been forced to introduce noise limiters, when residents complained about the noise. Noise limiters switch off the power if the sound reaches above a certain decibel. Before the venue was closed, participants explained to me that this was problematic, as it reduced the enjoyment of the live experience for them. An artist told me, “It was a waste of time. I play louder in my f*cking bedroom.” And promoters explained how this had affected the turn out as fans were less likely to attend, for a disappointing experience. This was an important loss of space, as the venue was described on its website,

“‘Kraak’ is a Dutch word for ‘squat’. It literally means ‘crack’ as in ‘crack open a place’. We decided the name would complement our ethos of being a relaxed welcoming non-elitist space which encourages free expression and collaboration.” (Kraakgallery, 2017)

Asides from the noise limiter, the venue was in keeping with the DIY venue conventions, and was also an appropriate size for small artists at 120 capacity. Noise complaints are becoming an increasingly common reason for closure, as discussed in the literature review. Often this goes hand in hand with urban regeneration, as councils use the noise as an excuse to close the venue. This had
certainly had an impact on the Manchester scene, as musician and ex promoter, Callum notes “The worst thing at the moment I think is that we’re losing smaller venues and running out of places to put on smaller shows of 50 – 200 capacity,” (Callum, 24, Promoter and Musician). When asked whether he would go back to promoting, “I’ve been tempted to do more but the choice of venues and amount of shows already on has put me off”, (Callum), suggesting that this is really a key issue. Not only have these venues already closed but a number of the remaining venues are under threat of closure, including The Star and Garter. 25% of the interview participants, from a range of different cities, ages and backgrounds, spoke of The Star and Garter which has gained an almost legendary reputation for its underground metal events.

“Personally consider Manchester’s Star and Garter to be the best hidden gem of a metal venue and that’s under threat and that’s going to disappear” (Benjamin, 31, Promoter)

“The Star hasn’t changed – it’s still the Star, still run by the best people ever. It hasn’t changed since 2002 and good for it. The star and garter – they made us.” (Lee, 35, Promoter)

“I think there’s definite concern over it, if and when the star and garter goes – that’s the main underground venue in Manchester. Everyone loves it; it’s a really nice venue, really good sound, really good set up” (Sonia, 32, Fan)

The ways in which participants talk about the venue is again representative of Bennett’s work on venues and memory, spaces such as this become a really important part of participants building a connection to a music world. Therefore if venues such as this are under threat, this poses real problems for scenes such as Manchester. As fan, Louise, told me, venues such as this encourage attendance,

“In fact if a band is playing S & G or another venue I love it actually makes me want to go more, if I’m on the fence about something the venue can definitely sway it.” (Louise, 30, Fan)

With this in mind, as venues which help to encourage a sense of community disappear, alternative spaces may not foster the same sense of belonging. Much like the spaces in London, the Star and Garter faces a struggle as a result of gentrification and redevelopment. As Manchester Piccadilly station looks to expand and build another platform, London Continental Railway intends to buy the Star and Garter. Manager, Bill, told me that if this were to happen,

“It won’t be a music venue. It’ll still be the star and garter but I guarantee it won’t be a music venue. The outside will look alright but it’ll lose its character. It’ll lose its soul.” (Bill, 44, Venue Manager)
This suggests that venues of this sort, once gone, cannot be replaced and used for the same purpose. The Star and Garter had been given the option to close the venue whilst the work was completed surrounding Piccadilly Station, but he explained that they could not physically afford to do that given that London Continental would not cover their loss of earnings and the venue simply does not make enough money to sustain itself, let alone preserve the space for two years. He explained that as an older venue, it cost a lot of money to maintain, “you’re gonna have to spend a load of money, we do it now – just stopping things falling off walls. The plaster was falling off the walls, it was that damp.” Despite the wealth of references to the Star and Garter and the number of events held at the venue, Bill explained that the venue had long been affected by renovation in the city, even before its threatened closure. Not only this, but had been struggling financially for a long time.

“No, it died off because of the northern quarter. We got really busy, really popular – the money we should have just shoved away. If we’d known this was coming.” (Bill, 44, Venue Manager)

“The northern quarter happened. I remember walking around what is now the northern quarter where there’s now, bar, bar, bar, shop, vintage shop, vintage shop, bar, bar, bar, flats above them. I remember when the only place open during the day was the craft centre which I assume is still going and a place where bands used to get cheap printing done. You know flyers and posters. Nowhere else was open. Everywhere else was just fabric shops open at weekends” (Bill)

He explained that the development of the Northern Quarter, alongside the licensing act in 2012 meant that there was an influx of ‘venues’, as “coffee shops, takeaways in theory could all put a gig on.” As highlighted in the literature review, whilst in theory this opens up more spaces for live music, it is potentially problematic for the existing spaces such as The Star and Garter. Bill explained that this had a huge impact on the venue’s revenue,

“One year, probably about 2010, there was three smiths nights in the northern quarter and we didn’t have one single punk gig in just under ten months because they all went over there” (Bill)

He explains that their main line of income is from hosting a Smiths Night, which is world acclaimed and sells out on a monthly basis. Again suggesting the importance of emotional connection for participants, he explains that whilst other Northern Quarter venues attempted to host their own, “Their smiths nights didn’t survive because people were loyal to this place” illustrating the strength of this emotional sense of belonging and community. Not only this, but this also reinforces the
importance of venues promoting other events as well as live music, in order to remain resilient in the current economy. This also further demonstrates how music cities can exhibit greater levels of competition than cooperation, akin to Bristol.

This was reinforced by Michael, a promoter, who spoke of the significance of losing The Roadhouse in Manchester, which is rumoured to become a restaurant. He explained that the venue had never made a profit from live music and was predominantly a club space before a live event space,

“Live music now has taken a back seat to the clubs themselves, to club nights I think. Certainly greater Manchester with such a massive student population and this all goes back to the economic thing as well. Students don’t have much money and it’s much easier to make a – to put on a club night that will get 600 people in rather than a band who may get 50 people in” (Micheal, 29, Promoter and Venue Manager)

Reflective of these comments, Hilary of the Music Venue Trust explained that students were a key problem within cities such as Manchester and London, the draw for them was predominantly club nights as opposed to live music. Therefore, it is unsurprising that most of the remaining venues in Manchester appeared to double up as bars and clubs. Arguably this makes it more financially viable to promote events and potentially cover their costs, if the money is being subsidised through other means. This also mirrors the situation described across other venues in London, Bristol, and Liverpool.

Despite these financial concerns, the survey illustrates that Manchester was the second busiest city for events. There were also a fair range of underground promoters available, largely independents booking the venues themselves. CMH appeared as an over-arching force, hosting eleven Manchester events as well as shows in both Leeds and Liverpool exemplifying the translocal interactivity within this underground music world. CMH’s events were hosted across a wide range of small, mid and large capacity spaces. Robert, who runs CMH, told me that he often has at least one show a day and hosts a range of artists from all walks of life and genres. He alludes to the fact that this is because whilst he is predominantly a metal promoter, the bigger more commercial shows, (not always metal), allow him to make a loss on some of the smaller underground ones. Therefore, it is not just venues having to branch out and make money through other means.

Alongside CMH, there were nine other promoters available in Manchester, hosting at most, one show per month. The city also held the second most popular event within the survey, The Tombstone All Dayer which was a one-day festival, priced at £15. The translocal nature of Liverpool and Manchester may begin to explain why Manchester held the second largest number of events, in
spite of a struggle for spaces. As simultaneously Liverpool struggles, there is a movement toward Manchester and these scenes begin to sustain one another. These two scenes are not alone, as Leeds also provides an interesting nuance to North West Metal world. Though Leeds has an abundance of relevant spaces, there has been changeover. In addition, similarly to Manchester, there is a great deal of competition which can in fact instigate decline.

4.5.3. Leeds

Finally, approximately 45 miles away from Manchester sits Leeds, which also presents an interesting case for study. Similarly to Bristol, Leeds has also built up a reputation within the underground metal world alongside the growth of Damnation Festival, an all-day festival held in November each year. However, whilst the festival may sell out or at least come close, the underground music world is not exempt from the problems presented in the other locations.

Figure 8 – Map of Venues in Leeds (Google Maps, 2017)
As demonstrated in the literature review, Gabby Riches and Brett Lashua have already begun to explore the Leeds underground metal music world. They explain that there has been a “visible shift from a centralised metal scene to a peripheral, and widely dispersed scene”, (Riches & Lashua, 2014), due to constant redevelopment. As a result, they suggest that the Leeds metal scene is being forced out of the centre and with this, “the de-centralisation of the Leeds metal scene has had a lasting impact on feelings of belonging and community”, (ibid. p.11).

This echoes the earlier comments on both the London and Manchester scene and the importance of venues being within close proximity, or the idea of having somewhere “you could go down and just knew there would be certain people there that you could associate with and hang out with.” (Dave, 30, Journalist). As can be seen in figure 8 above, Riches and Lashua’s work was well reflected in the survey. Not only are the venues further towards the outskirts of Leeds and widely distributed but there appears to be a lack of “hub”. The survey found fourteen different events between February and April 2015, all of which were held in different venues, apart from Bad Apples Rock Bar which was used twice.

Though it is hard to distinguish the important spaces from the survey alone, the interviews provide an interesting account. Once more, it would seem that the majority of Leeds venues are multifaceted, acting simultaneously as bars, clubs and recording spaces. An example of this is The Temple of Boom, operating as a set of practice rooms as well as a live music venue with two separate event spaces, at a total capacity of 250. Whilst further out of the city centre, the venue seems a popular choice for metal events,

“It just feels kinda grungy and horrible, like not trying too hard. But the sound’s ace, the bar’s cheap, the people are normally really chilled. There’s an outside area to hang out between bands… All in all, it’s one of the best, the set up just works there” (Karen, 33, Fan)

Again, this venue appears to fulfil the main ‘conventions’ people look for in an underground metal venue and provides an ‘authentic’ underground space for participants, far removed from more formal or commercial settings. Interestingly, unlike Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool, Leeds seems to be lacking bigger spaces rather than the smaller and mid-level spaces, of which there are many. Most of the underground venues included in the survey range from 70 capacity to 400 capacity, providing a wide array of mid-level spaces. In addition, fans described a fairly vibrant live scene in Leeds,
“I don’t know if it’s a case that the grass is greener; when you’re looking at another city, but I’d definitely say that to me, somewhere like Leeds has a much stronger scene. That scene is massive in Leeds; all the gigs are packed out. It was really good.” (Adrian, 31, Fan)

Fan, Adrian, was in fact based in Manchester but explained that he found himself frequently travelling to Leeds for events, “It sometimes feels like I go to more shows in Leeds than Manchester!” (Adrian). With a range of smaller, more “appropriate” venue spaces, the city seems to attract a wealth of underground metal events. Promoter and musician, Tim, explained that this can in fact be problematic for a music world as Leeds has had a real problem with competition and clashes which has had a negative impact upon venues,

“There is a lot going on... a few years ago it got really bad for it, on one night there could be four gigs within a similar style... It got to a point where people were saying I can’t do this because I know, whatever I do, no matter how much I put into it, it’s going to get split by 25% will turn up and the rest are all at other gigs. Loads of people lost money, I did because there were so many other things going on and everyone just said no, gonna stop doing it. Venues started closing because of it.” (Tim, 40, promoter and Musician)

Whilst most of the venues included in the survey remain open, in 2014 Leeds lost the Cockpit, after hosting live music for twenty years. The venue was forced to shut its doors due to “a changing industry.” Similarly to Manchester, the manager suggested that they got little support from the students, who were less likely to go out in the week, due to “Big debts”. The venue also needed work in order to pull it up to current standards. Like The Star and Garter, this is work they simply could not afford. “No-one wants to see an iconic venue like that disappear but we have got to keep up and if you don’t you will be left behind” (Bains, 2014). Keeping a venue up to date in a constantly advancing industry is an expensive process, as illustrated with the Star and Garter in Manchester. Alongside the costs of licensing, staff, stock and rent, managing a venue becomes increasingly difficult. Simultaneously, this only further contributes to the increased rental prices for promoters, which was reflected in the ticket prices of the Leeds events, averaging at £11 a ticket. Again, as stated by Tim, with more and more going on a high ticket price, this means that fans have to choose more carefully what they do and don’t attend, creating further competition for promoters.

4.6. Conclusion

“A place is physical. It involve bricks and mortar or, in the case of a city, a territory. But it has a meaning for those who inhabit and use it. It is a space in which they ‘play’ in every sense of the word, and their play transforms and bestows meaning upon it” (Crossley, 2016: 39)
In mapping out the venues and spaces along the six research sites, this chapter describes the importance of space in establishing a vibrant live music scene and similarly the difficulties in maintaining this. This is really brought to life by the differences between each city and the unique struggles they each face. First and foremost this chapter has painted a picture of the necessary conventions for a heavy metal venue, primarily location, size and price.

The physical spacing of these venues is really important, as exhibited with reference to Camden Town in London. Having a selection of venues a stone’s throw apart creates a valuable network of spaces for the metal community to move between constituting a valuable ‘hub’ of interactivity. In addition, it is paramount that a city have a range of different sized spaces; ranging from those 50 capacity venues to 500+ capacity venues. This facilitates a varied range of artists to play and thus increases the likelihood of events being hosted in a particular city. Leeds for example boasts a wide array of different, small venue spaces which in turn attracts a translocal audience of fans willing to travel to shows within this city. By comparison Birmingham illustrates how a lack of variation can lead to decline within a city. With a lack of appropriate venues, fans are forced to travel to other cities such as Coventry and Wolverhampton for live music, where these venues are available. This is also important for artists who appear increasingly deterred from playing this city, as there are only larger venues available which are more expensive and therefore less financially viable for these small touring artists (Riches & Lashua, 2014).

In addition to the availability of venues, the chapter also explains that these events cannot just be hosted in any small space. The interviewees spoke in depth about necessary aesthetic conventions of a metal venue. Though technical properties such as sound systems and sound quality were mentioned, consistently, socialising was given primary importance. Participants preferred to attend events at venues with certain features such as smoking areas which enable interaction and conversation, specifically away from the music. In addition, they preferred to attend events at venues which facilitated very specific scenic practices, such as “head banging” and “moshing” and often this means being far removed from the corporate clean spaces such as 02 Academies. Rather, they wanted “small, sweaty”, (Adrian, 31, Fan), spaces.

In addition, price was really important. Promoters needed to be able to book cheap spaces in order to keep ticket prices low and fans consistently discussed the importance of cheap bar prices. If the bar is too expensive, fans can be dissuaded from attending the venue. This is assessed in more depth in Chapter Six, focussing more specifically on the audience. But here we can see how these particular features can really enhance the experience for fans and foster a sense of community. When a venue fulfils these conventions, it becomes a popular hotspot for live events of this scale. As discussed with
reference to venues such as The Black Heart in London, or The Star and Garter in Manchester, they become a ‘hub’ for the community, a centre of activity within this social action. Scenes that lack this hub, for example Liverpool or Bristol, appear to exhibit a degree of weakness.

This chapter addresses this weakness in more depth, particularly as cities lose important spaces. As venues are forced to close down, to make way for new flats, transport links and cocktail bars, this music world becomes threatened. As stated by the Music Venue Trust,

“An increasing population means that residential development is taking place cheek-by-jowl with night-time activity. This pressure, coupled with rising property prices and increasing costs for grassroots music venues, is proving too much and venues are closing” (MVT 2016)

This is demonstrated particularly in cities such as Manchester and London, where venues are forced out of the city centre to accommodate urban regeneration of this sort. However, gentrification is not the only factor as venues simultaneously appear to be struggling financially with limited bar takings and a rapidly declining audience. This chapter demonstrates the ways in which venues attempt to survive. Many become multifaceted, operating as bars, simultaneously hosting club nights, or doubling up as recording or practice studios as seen with the Temple of Boom in Leeds. Painting a concerning picture, many state that live music of this scale is not financially viable alone, and there must be another source of income. Particularly common in cities such as Manchester, with a broad student population, venues are more likely to generate a profit from club nights which meet a student’s needs rather than small, underground live events with a more niche audience.

Another important attempt to remain resilient amidst these struggles is festivals. As seen with Desertfest in London and Temples Festival in Bristol, a festival can encourage a vibrant music scene within a city. However this is not without its own problems, as highlighted with Bristol. Not only can the existence of a festival restrict the frequency with which artists play particular locations but they are also not necessarily as financially stable as they might appear. Again this is an issue to be considered whilst analysing both promotion and attendance in the following two chapters.

However, whilst all these cities exhibit differences, they are also all interconnected. This chapter describes how each local scene contributes to the broader music world. With technological advances and an abundance of public transport readily available, participants are not limited to one scene alone. Rather they are a part of the UK metal world as a whole, and this is really emphasised with the translocal connections created between Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester. These three cities are pooling resources in order to combat their own problems. Similarly, with the decline of Temples Festival, we have seen how promoters across the UK came together through online resources in
order to organise a replacement event in under 24 hours. These networks of co-operation need further development and it is in the next chapter that focus is turned to the actual practice of promotion. Arguably, alongside the struggle for spaces exhibited in this chapter, there are also further financial and practical considerations for the active individuals involved.
Chapter Five: “Supporting the Scene”

5.1. Introduction

“The artist thus works in the centre of a network of cooperating people, all of whose work is essential to the final outcome. Wherever he depends on others, a cooperative link exists”,

(Becker, 1982: 25)

In conjunction with the previous chapter, focus is now turned towards the organisation of these events. Chapter Four has already described the importance of having key promoters within each city: these participants are essential within a music world because they make live music happen. Their active agency, as we saw in the previous chapter, can sometimes even help overcome the constraints of venues, especially when they work together as a co-operative network. This was really highlighted in Bristol and through the translocal connections between Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester.

However, this requires further investigation as the promotion role carries its own complications. With little to no financial backing, these participants are not motivated by making money but happy to merely break even. Often, they actually lose money. Rather they are driven by the development of the self and the community. Whilst there is a sense of perseverance amongst these participants, driven by these motivations, this chapter suggests that this role is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain, with changing resources and a breakdown of underground conventions.

These two concepts, conventions and resources, are key in the maintenance of an “unproblematic world”, according to Becker. With this in mind, it is to a discussion of Becker and the importance of the “support personnel” that I firstly turn. Following this is a closer analysis of promotion practices and the ways in which this role has changed, with the increasing prominence of social media and declining use of physical resources such as posters and flyers. Subsequently the chapter discusses financial issues in more depth, and the impact of increasing costs. The chapter concludes by considering the impact of these challenges and the sense of resilience from these participants, who tackle such change by really utilising the co-operative networks around them.

5.2. Support Personnel

As Becker explains, it is important not to underestimate the role of support personnel and their importance within a music world, as the role is still vital to the maintenance of an “unproblematic world”.

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“the people who make up a pool of potential personnel for art projects belong to that pool because they can do some specialised task required”, (Becker, 1982: 77)

The relationship between the artists and support personnel is complex and bound by mutual reliance. The two roles are often brought together through shared assumptions of behaviour and practice which make the interaction cohesive, conventions as Becker defines them. This is key in any art world, as “conventions make possible the easy and efficient coordination of activity among artists and support personnel”, (ibid: 30). Furthermore, Becker asserts that trust is another important facet of this relationship,

“A network of connections consists of a number of people who know you and your work well enough to trust the well-being of some portion of their project to you. The key element of the network is trust... Through interlocking trust and recommendations, workers develop stable networks which furnish them with more or less steady work” (ibid: 87)

If the relationship is not bound by trust or the shared conventions are not met, the co-operation necessary for the maintenance of an art world becomes threatened. As Becker notes “breaking with existing conventions and their manifestations in social structure and material artefacts increases artists’ trouble and decreases the circulation of their work” (ibid.34). As underground metal is essentially a DIY outlet, with little to no financial backing, this makes it all the more vulnerable. With this in mind, it is an interesting lens through which to explore this form of social action and the ways in which these participants make sense of this relationship. Particularly as this thesis proposes that this music world is in fact struggling, it is important to analyse how identity is negotiated around these roles.

5.3. Who Promotes and why?

Looking at both the survey and interview respondents collectively, (504 participants), who were all asked about their connection to this music world, 59 participants, (12%), said they were promoters in some capacity. In line with much metal literature, it is perhaps unsurprising that merely 12% were female. This is perhaps reflective of the fact that metal has long being considered an inherently masculine environment, in some ways exclusive of women. If female fans in other studies found it difficult to gain entry, it may be even more difficult for women to become involved on an active level, (Krenske and McKay, 2000; Riches, 2011). The average age of promoters was 29 years old and the majority were on the lowest income bracket, of £0-£24,999 per annum, with only 25% earning over £24,999. Considering the literature on ageing and participation within music worlds, (Bennett, 2006,
Davis, 2006, Weinstein, 2000, Anderson, 2009), it is perhaps interesting that these active participants are in their late twenties, with only 18% under 25 years old. Typically towards the latter end of a person’s twenties, they are more likely to be carving out a career and starting a family, and are perhaps more likely to begin to distance themselves from active music participation of this kind. Not only this, but as has already been established throughout data discussed in Chapter One, most promoters included in the survey and interviews were independents who were not attempting to make a living from promotion. As a time-consuming process often incurring a sizable cost, this begs the question as to why people promote underground events and what makes it ‘worthwhile’. The data alluded to two key reasons; self and community.

Numerous promoters explained that they felt that there was something was lacking for them personally,

“Paul got fed up with me moaning about certain bands not playing here so we jokingly went well – if they’re not doing it then – why don’t you do it? So I just thought ok but only if you’ll do it with me so that’s how we did it and he went yeah cool so we set up some gigs...That was it. We just got fed up of getting listings and moaning that bands weren’t playing so that’s what we did.” (Alan, Promoter)

Particularly with regards to the underground and perhaps less palatable nature of underground metal, promoters felt that there was room to step in and promote something that was new or different. Often this meant taking a fairly big chance, adding further to the already sizable risk.

“It was actually properly like straight metal stuff and there was no one putting that on so I was like oh I’ll just put it on and see how it goes.” (Tim, 40, Promoter and Musician)

Not only were the promoters attempting to mobilise events which suited their own tastes but also, perhaps in a more altruistic sense, many promoters were more community driven. These participants explained that they promoted events because they were well connected with artists and wanted to ‘help’ and support the community,

“I expected the scene to be buzzing but when I moved here, I’d seen all these ace bands in other places that just weren’t getting a look in. So I guess in part it was for me to see some cool bands but I also wanted to help out my mates who hadn’t had the chance to play up here,” (Karen, 33, Ex-Promoter and fan)

Referring back to Brannan and Webster’s three tier promotion model in the literature review, not only were many promoters ‘artist affiliated’ in this way, but many were simultaneously musicians or
had played in bands previously. “I played in many bands, attended a lot of gigs and just thought one day - I want to do this”, (Hannah, age undisclosed, promoter). Some participants alluded to the fact that this was becoming increasingly more common within the underground circuit,

“It feels like more and more people that are in bands are putting on their own shows these days, when I was first trying to play gigs in Leeds there were a few promoters that ran pretty much everything, it was really hard to get on to shows unless you were friendly with them.” (Miles, 33, Venue Manager, Promoter and Musician)

Echoing this, of the 39 promoters who took part in the survey, 25 (64%) were simultaneously musicians which would suggest that the artist affiliated model is perhaps becoming increasingly common within this music world. There are pros and cons to this recent development, as arguably the connections between artists become stronger however simultaneously the network within the music world becomes more enclosed and exclusive. This is potentially problematic for those who are solely promoters, as when discussing their motivations, it became clear that the role enables people, potentially without musical ability, to become more ingrained within this music world. Adopting such a role affords them with a greater sense of belonging. However, as discussed in my earlier research, (Emms 2013), the contention exhibited between artists and promoters may be a driving force behind this change. As artists struggle for money it may be more financially viable for them to promote their own events without ‘the middle man’. Some artists described a sense of mistrust towards promoters, as their intentions seemed more financially driven,

“There are too many people out there saying they’re promoters when they’re not, they’re just putting on a night. Some say they are and they are but they’re not really in it for the music, I think fair enough you have to think about money. If it’s your job, it’s your job. But also, as an artist, I want the promoters to care about what they’re doing. I want them to care about my music. I’d rather they put me on because they like my music not because I can bring a lot of people.” (Simon, 23, musician)

As Becker explains, this begins to create conflict between the two parties rather than fostering cooperation. Despite these concerns from artists, there was a unanimous feeling from the promoters that whilst not all were exclusively driven by wanting to belong to the community, they certainly felt a connection to it and often this played a large part in their involvement. Their intentions came largely from a love for the music and a dedication to this music world. Contrary to Simon’s concerns, notions of profit appeared to be low on the promoter’s agenda. Rather their
primary reason for promoting was simply pleasure. Not only this but many felt that notions of profit were laughable in underground metal anyway,

“You can get an idea of my passion and how I feel for what I do – I do it because I love it, not because I want to be rich. If I wanted to be rich, I’d do something else – simple as! I could probably get a crack habit and it’d be cheaper” (Benjamin, 31 Promoter)

Not only did promoters feel they were supporting artists but also the fans and wider music world. Only two participants referred to promotion as an actual ‘career’ and they both had to work full time jobs to make up for their, fairly frequent, financial losses. This was well known amongst all participants in the study, even fans. Promoters described a situation whereby events of this scale were becoming less and less feasible as a hobby. Most certainly did not expect to make money but were merely happy to get close to breaking even or making a small loss. People talked about the concept of loss in very different ways and often this represented their reasons for being involved in the first place. In addition, most had spoken about loss with a jovial tone,

“If I break even I’m happy (I made a profit once, which was £20 after putting on Slabdragger. Result!)” (James, 29, Promoter and Musician)

Some promoters were adamant that it was normal to an extent and in fact worth it in the long run.

“I think if I’d have travelled to another city to see that band touring instead, I’d probably spend the same amount of money on trains, hostels, etc, so in most cases I’m happy to spend that money on having the band just play where I live and then partying with them afterwards” (James, 29, Promoter and Musician)

This suggests a dedication to the music and community rather than financial gain. When asking why promoters continued to promote in the face of large losses, most laughed and said that it was like a gambling problem or addiction, “the kind of addiction you get with putting on gigs”, (Lee). Many of those interviewed were very open about the losses they had made, and the numbers wildly oscillated between losing £100’s to losing £1,000s.

“The year before last, 2013, I lost about £2,800 through the course of the year and that’s out of my pocket. When I had The Agonist on, I lost £1000 in one night. Realistically, common sense says you should give up but I’m not going to.” (Benjamin, 31, Promoter)

“Promoters and myself I know have lost thousands paying bands” (Callum, 24, Promoter and Musician)
Manchester promoter, Michael, explained that the benefits of promoting frequently outweighed the negatives, for the experience alone,

“Well, this might sound naïve or just optimistic – So obviously the biggest kind of drawback to all of this is kind of the financial side... Maybe even just to embrace the idea that you just put this show on because you want to see it. Instead of just ‘well I’ve lost a load of money’, that’s the only reason this show is here – because you put it on. Obviously that’s not a great business model. It’s more of a case that you’ve gotta see some kind of positive in it because you know, the positives are amazing. It’s a very, very unique thing to be able to do and when it goes right it’s honestly the most rewarding thing I’ve ever done. So, to not do it because I lost money on x amount of shows or whatever – and I’ve been fortunate enough to kind of make money, break even or whatever again on more shows. So yeah, it’s all about context really. So yeah, one disaster, disaster whatever, doesn’t mean less successful, doesn’t mean you should stop for good. Anything you really want to do that much is hard work and there is toil and there is disappointment with it. But ultimately it’s worthwhile in the end for the ones that do work out for you.” (Michael, 29, Promoter and Venue Manager)

It is plausible to suggest that the fact that promoters were willing to take on these losses because the benefits to the community outweighed the negative financial implications. As Benjamin explained,

“You come to a gig as a community, as the penultimate expression of your faith, you walk away thinking ‘this is why I do this’... I used to enjoy standing outside at the end of the night watching people go home, smiling, quite a lot of staggering, yeah – these people, I’m not saying they wouldn’t be drunk or they wouldn’t be with their friends because of me but they’re here with those smiles on their faces because of me. My mission is to make people happy.” (Benjamin, 31, Promoter)

For them it was about participating in something and belonging to and maintaining a community that they had long been a part of. Being a promoter in this music world also enables people to develop their sense of self, as demonstrated by Benjamin,

So, the big question – why, why keep doing it

“Why not? Because at the end of the day, life’s really boring – if I can go to people I’ve never met, it’s always that case of one-up-man-ship. You go to a house party somewhere, never met anyone there – what questions do you ask, who are you, where do you live, what do
you do? I win. I don’t mean that as a, I’m the one – when I say I do this, people go oh wow and ask questions. People want to know, it’s exciting for people to talk to me about what I do – if it’s exciting for them, it’s ten times more exciting for me. Nothing in life is worth doing unless there’s some sort of story involved.” (Benjamin, 31, Promoter)

Being a promoter is a large part of who Benjamin is; it enables him to have a sense of value within this community. Arguably this can be translated into a form of subcultural capital, which as Kahn-Harris explains is “produced through a commitment to work hard for the scene, as an almost altruistic commitment to the collective”, (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 122). He argues,

“Subcultural capital is accrued in the extreme metal scene by constructing and performing various forms of discourse and identity... To possess subcultural capital, whether by claiming it for oneself or having it endowed by others, is to gain self-esteem and a rewarding experience of the scene”, (ibid: 121).

Arguably, taking on active roles such as promotion enable participants to demonstrate their commitment and connection to both the broader music world and also the other participants within it, fostering a sense of belonging and connection. The openness with which people discuss loss is also representative of this, as Kahn-Harris adds, “long standing scene members who have a reputation for ethical dealing and a commitment to the scene gain subcultural capital in the form of respect and fame”, (ibid. 126). The willingness to promote and in fact lose money adds to their personal reputation, enhancing the relationship between promoters, musicians and audience members. This is particularly important as some artists, such as Simon, voice concerns over trust.

The importance of this role, in establishing a sense of self, and being a part of the community was further demonstrated when talking to participants who had resigned from these active roles. Karen explained to me that she had been left feeling excluded and “out of the loop” since choosing to distance herself from the world of promotion,

“It sounds ridiculous but I feel like I’ve lost something, it’s not my community anymore. I guess I’m just not really a part of it since I stopped. I’m not in a band or anything else so I don’t really add anything” (Karen, 33, Ex Promoter and Fan)

This perhaps reinforces the idea of accumulation and loss of subcultural capital, and belonging and exclusion within this world. Being active is an important element of belonging, and this begins to tell us more about why promoters may choose to fulfil this role despite the financial implications.

Interestingly, despite the discussions around financial loss, as represented by the wide age range,
the promoters included in the study exhibited varying levels of experience. Some were fairly new to this world, (had been promoting for one-two years) and others had been promoting for almost ten years. Exemplifying the fluid nature of music worlds, the promoters of today painted a very different picture to the ‘old hands’. The older promoters described how this scene had actually changed, describing a “well supported scene...you know, we made money”, (Lee, 35, Promoter). With this in mind it is important to explore what has potentially driven this change within promotion practices.

5.3. Promotion Practices and Change: From the Material to the Digital

“Making art works of any kind requires resources” (Becker, 1982: 69)

On a very basic level, the promoter’s role in this world is to book the venue, select and book the artists and ensure that an event is appropriately circulated amongst potential attendees. In order to understand this process in more depth and thus understand the ways in which this has changed, I spoke with the promoters about their methods and the ways in which they mobilise resources. Lee, as already mentioned had been promoting in Manchester since 2002. He explained that he and his fellow promoter were very hands on in method. They would spend weeks distributing flyers and posters around Manchester and the “local area”, “That ring spreads out locally like I said. If you’re doing a big gig, I class locally as North West” (Lee, 35, Promoter). This resonates with the tight network of promoters and events between Liverpool, Leeds and Manchester. Lee described a flourishing live scene and there was no mention of social media or the internet. Tim, from Leeds, reinforced this. He had been promoting since 1999 and explained that material resources were key, (ibid: 71).

“Flyering in different towns so the word spreads around because before it’d just be like, putting it in a few record shops and just hope that some people come and bring some mates but then it’s like oh yeah we can get to Bradford and put some flyers around the shops there and then Bradford bands would get in touch – before the big internet thing of event pages and ticket sites and all this kind of stuff which is good promo anyway. You know, we had to kind of get on the street I guess and do it. ” (Tim, 40, Promoter)

Similarly to Lee, he describes the importance of travelling to other towns locally and attempting to engage with as wide an audience as possible primarily through material resources; flyers and posters. However, in the “digital age”, to borrow McLuhan’s terms, (McLuhan, 1962), newer promoters described a situation where “old school”, (Alan, age undisclosed, promoter), methods such as flyering had been replaced. Most promoters explained that their primary resource was in fact social media and the internet. This is reflective of Wikstrom’s analysis of the contemporary music industry.
“one significant trend which has changed the rules of music promotion is the growing importance of internet-based social network services”, (Wikstrom, 2009: 160). As Hannah explained, “long gone are the days where we would creep around Birmingham city centre with a bucket of paste, a brush and a carrier bag full of Xerox posters”, (Hannah, Promoter).

All promoters interviewed talked of the prominence of social media, yet most were prompted as to whether they still used traditional posters and flyers like Tim and Lee. The newer promoters explained that there were two key issues with physical promotion; time and cost. They described a laborious task, waiting outside different events within their town or city to hand out flyers, often until the early hours. Not only was flyering arduous but the cost of printing flyers was high. Some promoters were also aware that it is in fact illegal to flyer on the streets without a specific flyering license, which, dependent on the city costs £111 minimum, (Manchester City Council, 2017). As a result, Manchester promoter Alan explained that he saw a lot of promoter’s flyering illegally, which was not a risk he was willing to take.

“I have a flyering licence of course. I don’t really want to take the risk of doing it [illegally] because I’m the only registered person in the company. If you get caught it’s nasty, it’s like £2000. The council will hammer you if they catch you” (Alan, Promoter)

A lot of clubs and venues were also very strict and would not allow flyers inside or within the vicinity of the venue if the flyer was promoting another venue. As illustrated in data in Chapter One, promoters use a range of venues and if flyering on the streets is illegal and venues are restrictive, this is problematic and limits their reach through material resources alone. Not only this, but as illustrated with the spatial setting of these venues, as they become more dispersed, this makes flyering more difficult. This may go some way toward explaining the increasing importance of online promotional methods which appears to hold a multitude of benefits.

### 5.3.1. Increased Interaction with the Virtual Community

Some promoters felt that the internet provided them with an alternative, easier and often free channel through which to access a broad virtual community which was previously inaccessible unless you had the time and resources to travel around the country. Michael, a promoter from Manchester, explained,

“I think that’s so much easier now than how it was a few years ago. Whilst the economic side is harder – raising someone’s awareness just by liking something on Facebook with the same interests as you and that mutual kind of empathy with each other – with what I’m
doing and what their interests are. That’s easier than it’s ever been... but it is a great way of gaining an audience that you just wouldn’t reach if you were just putting out posters and flyers. I mean I shamelessly add people on Facebook. You know, I add anybody new or try to add anybody new that I don’t know who’s on the events because again it’s just mutual interests. My interests are their interests and trying to indulge them by, you know, putting these shows on – it just makes sense. Now it’s a necessary evil I believe.” (Michael, 29, Promoter and Venue Manager)

Thus, digital resources have enabled people like Michael to build bridges with a potential audience and to engage with this ever-growing virtual community, (Weinstein, 2000, Bennett & Peterson, 2004). London promoter, Mark, also explained that social media was crucial and that promoters had little choice but to adapt and use these resources,

“It’s essential, I’m not sure if we could do it without now and I don’t think there are any other promoters that could. We can make great connections, achieve huge organic reach and word spreads through audience engagement which is extremely powerful” (Mark, 30 Promoter)

The idea of increased ‘reach’ came up repeatedly in the interview discourse and was invaluable in order for promoters to branch out to as many people as possible. The notion of ‘reach’ has also potentially changed as borders break down through the prominence of social media. ‘Reach’ is no longer defined by how far one is willing to drive to distribute flyers; rather it is defined by how much time and effort one puts in on social media. Both Chris and Michael also mention the importance of increased ‘interaction’ with their potential audience via social media sites. This is a luxury afforded to underground music worlds which are inherently interconnected unlike more mainstream industries.

Interaction between the fans and the promoters is important in order to establish trust, as it is not only the artists who must trust the support personnel but the audience also. As is the nature of ‘the underground’, often the artists at live events are not particularly well known. Therefore if fans are to ‘take a chance’ on attending an underground event, they need to be able to trust that the promoter knows what they are doing and who they are booking. Consequently, this relationship is imperative in driving attendance at these events and arguably the internet provides a platform through which this rapport can evolve.

This also ties into the aforementioned concepts of the self and subcultural capital, which can also “be acquired through a detailed knowledge of the institutions and practices of the scene”, (Kahn-
Harris, 2007: 124). The ways in which a promoter presents themselves and interacts online is important, and can be used as a platform through which to demonstrate their level of knowledge and commitment to this music world, enabling them to develop a “good reputation” as a promoter. As Kahn-Harris explains, “those that have a good reputation are rewarded with considerable subcultural capital and tend to grow and to last. Those that have a reputation for ‘rip offs’ are loudly disparaged”, (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 125).

5.3.2. Influx of ‘Amateurs’

Simultaneously, and on a more practical level, the internet also provides promoters with a platform to actually create an event, quite literally through mediums such as Facebook. Fans explained that Facebook is now the primary way, through which they discover events listings,

“Frustratingly Facebook seems to be the way I find out about most gigs, I say frustratingly as I find it a huge time waster in my life, but without it I would not find out about half the gigs I go to. Of course apps like bands in town and emails from promotion companies/ticket agencies help, but mostly Facebook is the main source of gig information for me. Also world of mouth from friends who are playing or promoting a gig. I used to get most of my gig listings from magazines however (I) rarely buy music magazines anymore, social media seems to have taken over in that respect.” (Louise, 30, Fan)

“I like having a flyer but the easiest is Facebook notifications, getting invites to gigs and things, makes it a lot easier.” (Adrian, 31, Fan)

In turn this means promoters have to change the way they operate, often prioritising Facebook as a promotional tool. Some explained that this had made their job much easier; ‘Becoming a promoter’ has become much easier. “All it takes is creating an event online and bam, you’re sorted”, (Karen, 29, Ex Promoter and Fan). They explained that they created an event page, detailing the event’s location, links to the artist’s music and then invited a “relevant audience”, (Michael). However, whilst this appears to be a positive transition, much of the interview discourse expressed concern over the impact of these new digital resources. Some explained that promoters now tend to neglect more traditional, material resources when they should in fact be used alongside the digital, not in opposition,

“It’s again, more reach – more reach to get a big enough audience possible. Just use it - what you have available to you – and the thing about Facebook is that it’s very instantaneous and throw away rather than a flyer or a poster – it’s solid and it’s material.
Someone, it has more emotional impact for people. So yeah, just use all of it.” (Michael, 29, Promoter and Venue Manager)

Many of the promoters interviewed voiced real anxieties about social media and online methods, which were revealing restrictions of their own. Liverpool promoter, Benjamin, explained that he begun by promoting almost solely online. As time has progressed, he has felt forced back to “the grassroots, traditional methods of flyer and posters simply on the basis of the social media sites are getting wise to it and strangling it”, (Benjamin, 31, Promoter). When digging deeper, it transpired that Facebook in particular was presenting constraints,

“Facebook has a new algorithm that throttles the amount of people that like your page that have access to your posts unless your prepared to pay for them to see it. It’s all very well and good but people didn’t set up a Facebook page to pay ten pounds to sponsor every post so people can see it.” (Benjamin, 31, Promoter)

As social media had proven more cost effective for these promoters, with limited financial support, this poses a real problem. Some had experimented with ‘pay to promote’ methods online, similar to those described by Benjamin. In order to do this, a promoter selects an event, and pays for increased exposure. The more they pay, the more Facebook will push the event through advertising and increased visibility. However, this also exhibited problems. Andy explained to me that he had, “tried it out and basically Facebook keeps rejecting the posters because they have this rule of 20% text, they keep charging me for the posts but rejecting the image so I won’t be doing that anymore,” (Andy). Posters are an important element of promotion not only visually but also primarily to display the full line up of an event, so this causes complications.

Not only have there been problems for promoters but artists also expressed their own concerns about online promotion. Tour manager, Edward, explained

“I think it’s the classic thing which seems to be repeated by a lot of people these days that it very much appears that some promoters focus on Facebook way too much and don’t seem to do very much outside of Facebook”. (Edward, 30, Tour Manager)

Edward toured with a range of artists and felt that promoters who relied purely on the internet were missing a key demographic as not everyone uses social media. He added that often it was clear from the onset if there had been no use of material resources, and usually this went hand in hand with poor attendance. As reflected by an agency worker who had a bout in promotion,
“I feel for some of the independent and amateur promoters it almost makes them lazy/complacent. I’ll be the first to admit I was the same for a while, thinking that social media will sort everything out when it doesn’t. So I think it’s a great addition, however you should never replace it with the core fundamentals.” (Luke, 32, Promoter)

Therefore many suggested that these methods should be used in unison not in opposition. As the internet becomes more prominent, this poses concerns for the health of live music at this level and may go some way towards explaining why promoters were often struggling to break even, if they are not promoting through all of the appropriate channels and thus not reaching as great an audience as possible. Edward felt that often promoters attempt to guess how many people will attend an event, based purely on social media. This can lead to false hope, or perhaps laziness if they promote something online and there are supposedly ‘300 people attending’. Some promoters said it was easy to become withdrawn if they felt the event had already gained enough attention and promised to do well, leading to laziness in other forms of promotion.

“People online say they’re coming, you can take the number, divide it by four, subtract ten and that’s probably closer to the truth! People are all too keen to pretend they’re interested in the live music online; they’re not actually going to attend... Social networking is more about maintaining a face” (Karen, 33, fan)

This is something which is explored in more depth when analysing the views of punters and reasons for attendance or lack of.

As the internet becomes increasingly ingrained into promotion practices, across all music worlds, there is also a key issue of over-saturation. Whilst the ease and low cost of tools such as Facebook can be beneficial, it becomes easier for anyone to ‘give it a go’. As an underground music world, there is some contention as to where we can draw the line as to what constitutes professional and amateur but some interviewed felt there was an influx of amateur promoters who were “in it for the wrong reasons” (Simon). With more promoters appearing, the punters interviewed began to tire of constant ‘event invites’ online which lead to a sense of detachment rather than interest, particularly if these events are not well organised,

“…I think it’s very frustrating getting event invite after event invite on Facebook and generally it gets a bit annoying, it feels like it’s an invasion of your free time whereas if you’re at a show and someone hands you a flyer it feels like someone’s inviting you to a birthday party – that kind of thing.” (Edward, 30, Tour Manager)
Again here, the relationship and the tie between the promoter and the punter and the impact of trust become valuable. Audience members are more likely to pay attention to events from well respected, trusted promoters, exhibiting a greater degree of subcultural capital. Hilary from the Music Venue Trust, reiterates concerns with over-saturation online not only for Metal but for wider music worlds. She went so far as to suggest that the influx of amateur events online, which were often poorly organised were in fact “paralysing” for live music culture: people become over-burdened with options and it’s difficult to navigate through those options and find the events which are worth attending. Often she felt this resulted in poor attendance. Alongside poor attendance, it became apparent the promoters were also struggling with an increase in overall costs.

5.4. Further Financial Constraints

Alongside the cost of actually promoting the event, the costs of hosting these events have also risen dramatically, including artist’ fees. Whilst this music world is not commercial, promoters explained that it was rare that artists would play for free,

“When it comes down to this level of bands then no one really takes the piss because they all get what it is but I understand why bands don’t want to lose out on petrol.” (Tim, 40, Promoter)

This is a mutually agreed convention of promotion practice, promoters want to ensure that the artist’s costs are covered at the very least and appeared more than happy to do so, whatever the cost. However, many, whilst happy to pay, also described a rigorous process of negotiation over artist fees, particularly when there is a third party or booking agent involved. Most explained that they tried to avoid booking agents and deal directly with the artists themselves, “I try not to as much as possible. All the bands – I will at least message them on Facebook or message them if they’re mates or whatever and try to talk to them that way” (Tim, 40, Promoter). However participants explained that it was becoming more and more common to have to sign a contract and negotiate with an agency. Promoter, Michael, described it as a “necessary evil”,

“it makes you see that there is this ridiculous cat and mouse game to be played. You just have to be aware of it you know. Again, it’s a necessary evil. You don’t have to fall over yourself and lose money just for the sake of it” (Michael, 29, Promoter and Venue Manager)

Booking agent, Jake, told me that their main goal was in fact to help the artist and look after their interests. In some instances this was reflected by the promoters and artists, “the agents we have worked with were great, I suspect they do it as a favour, rather than a full living so still manage to
maintain a DIY ethos,” (Gavin, 35, Promoter). Some promoters suggested that agencies in fact offered more clarification than the bands did, making the event easier to organise. Though this is increasingly seen as a necessity, the interaction did not always foster co-operation. Unsurprisingly, the agencies often fought harder for a higher fee. Not only that but some promoters were left feeling detached from the artists and the broader network.

Where agents were involved they expressed that there was a lack of communication between all parties, “too many cooks as such”, (Tim). Often this created confusion and made the event increasingly difficult to organise and ultimately more expensive. The concept seems to work directly in opposition to the nature of the underground, “Agents are seen as middle men really and not really DIY”, (Gavin, 35, Promoter). The idea of a ‘middle man’ takes something away from that process and polarises the gap between the artist and support. It also represents a lack of trust from the artist, which again may go some way toward explaining the breakdown of co-operation here.

That said, the main issue here is profit. Numerous promoters explained that often, on top of the artist fee, they would also be paying a percentage to the booking agent, “I mean they have to make a living too whilst keeping the acts happy”, (Jake, 29, Promoter). Whilst this is understood, as Wikstrom notes, profit often causes contention in music worlds, particularly when it is not returned directly back to the artist or their work, (Wikstrom, P. 2009). And as Kahn-Harris explains, specifically within underground metal, in order to attain subcultural capital, participants must present themselves as committed to the scene and driven by the art, (Kahn-Harris 2007). So it is, once again, important to be able to trust the agents involved, as Lee describes,

“there was a booking agent run by a woman called Marcia and she ran a booking agent called Sabotage based in London years ago and now – she was ace. If anyone was ever to set up a booking agency, that’s how it should be run. She was so honest and she knew people, she liked – she’d try and work it, whatever way ’round” (Lee, 35, Promoter)

These conventions are important for the maintenance of this music world if it is to run cohesively. Promoter, Michael, explained to me that it was important to work with the agent and not against them in order to attempt to maintain a sense of cooperation,

“You kind of empathise with the agent and what they’re trying to achieve. And yeah – it gives you a better understanding of how to deal with them really because the agent knows what you’re trying to achieve- all the time. It’s the same. They want to put on this band, break even – well, say, generally, commonly, make money from it so they know exactly what you want... I have a horrible tolerance for tour managers and things like that because again
they’re not there for you – they’re there for the band so you can’t help but be objective when you’re in a position like that.” (Michael, 29, Promoter and Venue Manager)

Thus it is important that the agency presents itself as beneficial to the artist, in order for this to be “tolerated”, as Michael explains.

Agents are not the only factor in increasing artist fees. Tour manager, Edward, explained that part of the reason that artist fees were going up was purely because artist expenses were also on the rise. He explained that, at the most basic level, if a DIY band is to tour their costs will include between £50-£80 for petrol per day, £70 to hire a van and possibly more if they also require a driver. If the band don’t own their own equipment, (backline, including heavy duty guitar cabinets and drum shells), then this must also be rented which can cost hundreds per day.

Promoter, Lee told me that when he organised events in the 2000’s, artist fees had been lower and perhaps more accessible for underground promoters, “it was easier. I dunno, maybe things are getting dearer. Maybe petrol was cheaper then”, (Lee, 35, Promoter). This was demonstrated when talking about fees, he explained that, “Levels of money, what they were being paid, in the old days – ha, in the old days, those bands you were looking at anything between £500, £750, (Lee, 35, Promoter). Rather now, in order to play similar venues, he explained that they would be looking for thousands rather than hundreds. Evidently artists have numerous financial considerations when touring so the risk not only falls with the promoter organising the event, but the artists as well.

With this increased risk, this perhaps makes the role of a booking agent, who will negotiate a better deal, more valuable in the current economic climate. There is very little assurance that artists will make money or even cover their costs along the tour route, which must also include renting practice rooms and recording albums in order to promote themselves. He explained that often the biggest way for artists to cover their costs whilst touring was to sell merchandise at the events. Often artists created numerous t-shirt designs, back patches for jackets and posters. Some even began selling band-branded candles, incense sticks or smoking paraphernalia. Unsurprisingly, this comes with its own expenses however, as he told me that the artists had to pay for merchandise and often they also needed to pay for someone to sell the merchandise at the events. Even if they were to do it for free, it is still an extra head in the touring party and another person to pay for. When I asked how financially viable touring was for UK underground artists, he painted a concerning picture,

“As a career, no. I don’t think there’s anyone in, I’d say probably out of bands that are on record labels in the UK – I’d say probably the top 5% are full time.” (Edward, 30, Tour Manager)
Therefore not only is touring a costly process but underground artists are certainly not touring in order to make a living. This would then suggest that they have to take time out of work and possibly face a loss of income, depending on their job and the holiday available to them. Edward also explained that a lot of artists are often forced to work flexible or temporary jobs in order to tour regularly. This was also reflected in the survey, where the artists who took part were also on the lowest income bracket.

Therefore, the lack of turnover is not specific to the promoter; this is increasingly difficult for the artists too.

5.4.1. Artist Hospitality

After covering the artist’s fee, providing the artists with accommodation and a hospitality rider is another important expectation for promoters. Many promoters explained that most underground artists were happy to sleep on floors, but some required hotels or private accommodation. Some promoters exhibited a degree of frustration at the expectations artists held,

“I get bands turn up and they’re unhappy because I haven’t given them things – but sorry, but the way I view it – if you turn up to your day job, does your boss pay your bus fair? No. Does your boss buy your lunch? Doesn’t it say, in your contract if you turn up drunk at work, or even having had a pint, you’ll get sacked. I am paying you, I am your employer, to come and perform. You want me to pay petrol money, I’m paying for your hotel, I’m buying you lunch, and I’m buying the booze”, (Benjamin, 31, Promoter)

He went on to explain that often the contents of the rider was close to the promised financial guarantee for the artist, including a wide range of alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, snacks and hot meals or the equivalent cost (usually £10 per head). A few promoters explained that often the riders “take the piss”, and were open to negotiation. Tour manager, Edward told me that often artists needed to “figure out what they’re worth” and most were happy with what they could get. Expectations seem relative to the artist in question, as one promoter simply put it “some bands are cool, some aren’t. Some are needy divas and some are the most helpful folks you could meet,” (Chris, age undisclosed, promoter).

Interestingly, Lee explained that expectations had changed since he was a promoter in 2002. He recalled making cheap, hot food from scratch and they could feed everyone and provide beverages for £20 total, whereas now often the requests total a lot more, “a good rider will cost around £150/£200”, (Hannah, Promoter). One promoter explained that often this was worse for overseas
artists, who “seem to think we’re made of money... or at least their booking agents do.”, (Jim, 24, Musician). Agents explained that it is not uncommon for venues in Europe to provide promoters with funding for live events. There is more money available to host an artist and provide for that artist. Therefore there are certainly heightened expectations for those who are then travelling over to the UK, if that is what they are accustomed to. A few of the artists interviewed also echoed this, explaining that,

“One of the luxuries of touring Europe is playing venues with council funding. As well as top class sound and lighting facilities, bands and their crews can enjoy comfortable backstage facilities, showers, nourishment, secure parking and clean accommodation. Because of dedicated catering facilities it is fairly common for all the touring party, local support bands and venue technical and administration staff to sit together for dinner before the evenings performance, forming a great sense of camaraderie.” (Edward, 30, Promoter)

Brannan and Webster explain that with more and more promoters available, impressing the artists and keeping them happy is a key priority. If a promoter expects to deal with an agency or artist again, sticking to the given hospitality rider or as close to as possible is really important, “quality provisions carry weight with your production”, (Hannah, Age Undisclosed, Promoter). This refers back to Kahn-Harris’s discussion of building a reputation within this music world, treating artists well enables a promoter to stand out over others available, particularly with an influx of ‘amateur’ promoters online. If a promoter is seen to hold a great deal of subcultural capital, they are more likely to be approached by artists and booking agents,

“We for instance, had a lot of offers of shows or tours, based upon our reputation – that has been shared. Once it is known you are trustworthy, do the job, and are good at it – everything is fine then on.” (Hannah, Promoter)

Not only this, but this level of trust also enables promoters to negotiate more on fees and costs, “but I think, when you’re an independent promoter maybe – it’s still who you kind of know isn’t it, who gets a better deal,” (Lee, 35, Promoter). This kind of relationship represents co-operation between the promoter, artist and agent if they can agree on a fee and work together. Arguably, whilst some have suggested that agencies make the organisation of events more difficult, they are still fulfilling an important role as support personnel, and as evidenced by the number of artists using booking agencies, this is obviously a beneficial support to the artist.
5.5. Conclusion

In summary, this chapter begins to tell us more about the interconnected web of activity involved in organising an underground metal event. Promoters included in the study were motivated by a love of the music and establishing their sense of self within the underground metal community. Being ‘active’ in this sense facilitates a greater sense of belonging and commitment to this music world. However this chapter unearths the complexities of this role which is arguably not as co-operative as it might appear. This chapter explains that it is not only venues struggling in the current economic climate; similarly promoters have seen a dramatic rise in costs which is the result of increasing costs for artists. With rising petrol prices, if bands are to tour and cover their expenses, they have to ask the promoter for a greater guarantee in addition to the costs of renting a venue space and providing necessary equipment. Therefore organising events of this scale becomes a costly process. In turn, the promoters are forced to increase ticket prices for fans and this means that the actual process of promotion is very important.

As was suggested in Chapter Two, a key development within this role is the prominence of the internet. Promoters described a situation whereby the internet and social media platforms had become the primary channel for promotion. In talking to promoters both past and present, we can see the way this role has transformed. There has been a movement from the use of physical resources such as posters and flyers to virtual resources, such as Facebook events. On a practical level, this saves time and money. In addition, these platforms provide access to a rapidly expanding virtual world, increasing promotional ‘reach’. This virtual world also brings the promoter and the audience closer together. This is of great importance for an underground music world which is inherently more interconnected than larger events where audiences may never even know the name of a promoter.

In this sense promoters must build a reputation and a trusting relationship with the audience in order to maintain attendance at events, particularly as many underground artists are not well known. A primary way through which promoters are able to gain the confidence and trust of audiences is through the accumulation of subcultural capital. The more knowledgeable and supportive of the wider music world a promoter is the more subcultural capital they accrue. Arguably websites such as Facebook and Twitter enable a promoter to display this wealth of knowledge and commitment to this world in a way which facilitates the accumulation of subcultural capital.

However, whilst this can function to foster a greater sense of co-operation between promoters and audiences, it can also have a detrimental effect on this industry. Interviewees explained that they
had seen an over-reliance upon online methods of promotion and they felt that many promoters had become ‘lazy’, expecting the internet to do the work for them. As a result, some tour managers and artists felt that events which were solely promoted online exhibited poor attendance figures. In addition, the growth of social media and the influx of events promoted through these channels means that fans are inundated with invites to the point of saturation. As illustrated through chapter four, competition may illustrate a healthy live scene to an extent, but it can also facilitate decline as fans cannot attend everything. With so much to choose from, audiences become divided which can lead to some events being better attended than others.

Whilst this suggests a sense of decline, we can also see the ways in which these participants work together in the face of these issues. In line with Becker’s “Art Worlds”, this chapter demonstrates how promoters can pool resources in order to organise events and attempt to maintain live music within this world. However, an over-arching theme of this chapter is rising costs and whilst co-promotion may be a solution for promoters, rising ticket prices are still a consideration for the audience. Therefore the following chapter addresses the impact such issues have on the fans.
Chapter Six: Community, Audience and Attendance

6.1. Introduction

“Remember that the object of our analysis is not the art work as isolated object or event but the entire process through which it is made and remade whenever someone experiences or appreciates it. That gives a special importance to the audience’s contribution” (Becker, 1982: 214)

The previous two chapters have outlined two key elements of the underground metal music world; the venues and cities where these events are hosted and the active participants who organise them. Both chapters have established challenges and very real concerns for this music world, with a loss of spaces and large financial losses in the face of ever-increasing costs.

However increasing costs are only one facet of these financial losses. The current chapter extends the previous discussion and argues that this may in fact be symptomatic of an increasingly detached audience. Becker asserts that the audience plays a crucial role in the maintenance of an Art World and thus this chapter begins by unpacking his concept of the “serious audience member”. Following this is a breakdown of the survey data, delving into the attendance and the demographic of the participants included in this study. From this breakdown this chapter establishes the importance of particular events in maintaining this music world. In addition, the survey presents an older audience who are torn between increasing personal and financial commitments and their love of live music.

This leads to a discussion around how participants negotiate between their professional and metalhead sense of ‘self’. Despite this negotiation, the chapter describes the intense level of commitment displayed by ‘serious audience members’ within this music world, both in a local and translocal sense. Akin to the promoters, this is driven by a dedication to the community and a love for events which facilitate particular communal practices. The chapter concludes in recognising that whilst these participants may have greater life-ties, this music world is still important to them and their participation has changed rather than declined.

6.2. Art Worlds and the Serious Audience

As Becker explains, in order for any art world to be maintained and reproduced, it requires an audience.

“Someone must respond to the work once it is done, have an emotional or intellectual reaction to it, “see something in it”, and appreciate it. The old conundrum – if a tree falls in
the forest and no one hears it, did it make a sound? – can be solved here by simple definition: we are interested in the event which consists of a work being made and appreciated; for that to happen, the activity of response and appreciation must occur” (Becker, 1982: 4)

Audiences are vital in maintaining the co-operative nature of a music world, particularly those whom he deems to be “serious audience members”. He explains that serious audience members can be defined by their level of dedication and understanding or awareness of art. This is something that can only be achieved by “their more continuous presence in the audience,” (ibid. p.48). Not only does this provide the audience members with a greater sense of knowledge and connection with the artist, Becker suggests that they play an invaluable role in the co-operative process of maintaining an art world. He explains that the serious audience member is a valuable and necessary part of the co-operative action that makes up a music world, (ibid.).

Arguably, the lack of serious or dedicated audience members can therefore facilitate the decline of a music world, “artworks die because someone executes them... or of neglect because no one cares enough to save them” (Ibid. 218). Despite the underground nature of this music world, it still requires financial support. As most bands and promoters evidentially operate on an independent level, this means that most financial support comes through selling merchandise, records and tickets. This is the responsibility of the audience. Serious audience members who continue to participate in live events thus enable artists to keep touring and promoters to keep promoting. So if promoters are losing money this is potentially indicative of poor ticket sales and a declining interest in live music. This chapter seeks to understand why.

**6.2.1. Trends in Events**

It is first important to understand what the survey data tells us about the different events taking place and attendance patterns. As stated in the methodology, the survey included 148 events, spanning across six different cities. There were 108 touring events or one-off shows, 4 all-dayers⁹, and 2 festivals, (see figure 1). Of the 474 survey respondents, only 260, (55%) attended one or more events, leaving 214, (45%) participants who did not attend anything. Therefore it is important to understand what kinds of events were attracting a crowd. There appeared to be two particularly interesting trends within the data.

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⁹ An “All-Dayer” is a colloquial term used by participants to refer to events which are one-day of artists, representative of a mini festival
The first of which is the popularity of all-dayers and festivals. Figure 9 illustrates that, on average, attendance was higher at both festivals and all-dayers. Festivals and all-dayers collectively only account for 5% of the events included in the survey and 37% of the survey sample attended at least one. Furthermore, the three most popular events within the survey were Desertfest (76 attendees), Tombstone All Dayer (54 attendees) and Birthday All-Dayer (49 attendees). Therefore, whilst there were more one-off events hosted, the all-dayers and the festivals seemed to gain the most attention.

![Figure 9 – Average Attendance by Event Type](image)

Not only were specific types of event more popular but specific locations were also seen to be more popular that others. The survey suggests a higher concentration of events hosted in London and Manchester. In addition, the attendance also appeared greater within these locations. Attendance ranged between 1 and 79 in London and between 1 and 54 in Manchester. By comparison, events in the remaining four cities appeared less vibrant. In Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool and Bristol attendance ranged between 1 and 14 attendees. Given the size of London, it is perhaps unsurprising that it would attract a larger number of participants. However, the draw to both London and Manchester is still interesting. This is reflective of a lot of concerns highlighted in Chapters Four and Five. Chapter Four, for example, describes a situation whereby Liverpool and Leeds exhibit a struggle. This may be a key reason for the greater attendance in Manchester, which is in close proximity and hosts a greater range of events, thus attracting fans from surrounding localities.

As stated in the methodology, whilst this is only inclusive of the survey participants and there may be a skew towards London and Manchester residents, this is an important pattern to consider throughout this chapter. However, what was perhaps more significant in the data on participation
was the demographic picture that is built up of who is participating in this scene and how. I will now turn to a discussion concerning the participants of such music events.

6.2.2. Audiences and Ageing

It is perhaps important here to consider that situating the audience is very difficult. As established in Chapter Two, a music world is not a homogenous group: as a world in constant flux, it is impossible to pinpoint a definitive demographic. Rather, the aim here is to capture this music world at a particular point in time and space. This is important, particularly as Keith Kahn Harris explains, “Detailed information on metal audiences is limited” (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 11). Despite this, he and other metal scholars suggest that the stereotypical ‘metal head’ is expected to be male, heterosexual, white and working class, (Weinstein, D. 2000; Kahn-Harris, K.). Weinstein goes so far as to suggest that these attributes are in fact an intrinsic part of existing within this music world.

“As an expression of a distinctive segment of youth, the metal subculture valorizes the demographics of its membership. Masculinity, blue-collar sentiments, youthfulness, and, to a less extent, “whiteness” are values shared and upheld by the metal audience.” (Weinstein, D. p.102)

Whilst much of the existing literature surrounding heavy metal fans focuses more on the mainstream, it provides a useful starting point. With this in mind, it is perhaps unsurprising that of the survey respondents, 74% were male. Furthermore, when assessing attendance, men were more likely to attend events than women. Of the attendees, 77% were male in comparison to the 71% of non-attendees. Despite this, the two participants who attended the most events were both female, attending up to 15 events. Unfortunately it was even harder to recruit female participants for interview, with merely seven women agreeing to take part. It is important to bear in mind that whilst this is interesting, this is not to say that women are definitely less likely to attend live events. This may well be because the survey was placed onto underground metal forums and social media pages, which women may be less likely to use or interact on. However, the lack of women involved in the study does also echo some previous research which suggests that women are somewhat ostracised within this environment, (Krenske and McKay, 2000). That said, the women who were interviewed appeared very dedicated to the metal music world, two of which were promoters and the remaining five described attending events regularly.
The age of participants was also interesting. As highlighted in Chapter Two, much of the previous literature on heavy metal tends to theorise around ‘subcultures’, a term which has always been somewhat synonymous with youth culture. One of the main aims of this thesis is to move away from the term subculture, which arguably focuses a little too heavily on youth and neglects the ways in which older participants negotiate identity within this setting.

With this in mind, it was interesting that the survey results were far from representative of a youth culture. The average age of participants was in fact 31 years old, the youngest participant was 17 and the oldest was 61. When analysing the survey results in segments, (teens, 20s, 30s etc.), there were few differences in attendance asides from a fairly gentle decline in attendance as participants got older, (Figure 10), with a particularly large dip for those in their fifties. On average, participants attended 2 events across the three month period, though the largest segment (those in their twenties), attended three. This is unsurprising, as arguably those in their twenties are more likely to have more disposable income with perhaps fewer ‘life ties’. As seen with previous research, things get more complicated as people begin to factor in “the inevitabilities of adulthood”; partners, children and careers (Davis, 2006). Though it’s difficult to deduce this from the survey data alone, the interview data begins to paint a more detailed picture. Participants described a situation whereby their lives had become a juggling act, tenuously balancing their responsibilities and their passion for music.

“...It sounds dumb but I do try and quota myself. It’s kind of weird but I guess as I’ve got older and obviously your priorities change – I mean I still love music, I still love live events but um – my fiancé isn’t really into music and if I go to an all-dayer, that takes me out of the house,
away from her and away from all the other shit I’ve got on for a day. I changed jobs recently so I have to be in work a lot earlier than I did before so that’s changed how I see gigs midweek. So if I go to something now I have to think about those priorities basically. It’s not all doom and gloom but at the same time, it has made me think harder about what I go to which is unfortunate because I like to help the scene as much as possible but – uhh – I’ll hopefully never stop going to things but you, you kind of have to make that balance with life sometimes and that’s what’s probably catching up with a lot of people, in terms of attendance is dwindling etc.” (Dave, 30, Journalist)

Regardless of their family situation, this was a common situation for participants, particularly for those in full time employment. Some explained that they simply didn’t have the energy to work all day and then go to an event in the evening,

“Especially having a day job too – when you’ve gotta get home, you’ve gotta do shit – you don’t just wanna hang around in a dark club or whatever.” (Michael, 29, Promoter and Venue Manager)

As noted with reference to promoters in Chapter Five, most participants were not making a living from underground metal. Only tour managers and sound engineers appeared to be making a fulltime wage from music and often they worked with many different genres, not just metal. Therefore most of the participants were either in fulltime or part time employment and most followed other career paths including recruitment, research, and retail or admin jobs. Echoing Bennett’s work on ageing punks, the participants evidenced a constant negotiation between the self as a ‘metal-head’ and the self as a professional, (Bennett, 2012). It was very rare that the two were combined. As Joanna R. Davis argues, this leads to a complex dichotomy between the young, angry, DIY notion of a punk and the grown up, suburban, professional punk, (Davis, 2006).

The same certainly applies to metal, with much of the previous literature carrying a connotation of angry, deviant youth. In reality, a large proportion of those who took part in the survey were in fact young adults upwards and many of those interviewed were professionals, working in industries far removed from music. Therefore there is a level of self-negotiation that takes place for these individuals to remain a part of this community which, regardless of age, was still a key reason for attending live music events. Arguably, despite life ties, families and careers, both the survey and interviews exhibited an intense level of commitment and dedication to heavy metal and live music.
6.3. Serious Audience Members

Referring back to Becker’s “serious audience members”, participants spoke with enthusiasm about attending, promoting, playing and ultimately supporting the underground metal music world. Whilst most made a living through other means, 45% were actively involved in some capacity, fulfilling a wide range of roles; promoters, journalists, tour managers, and booking agents for example. In line with Chapter Five, participants exhibited a strong need to prove that they were in some way more ‘actively’ involved than merely an attendee. As promoters illustrated, this is a key way through which to attain subcultural capital within this world, in order to feel like a more established member of the community.

However, many of those who were not actively involved felt that they also fulfilled an important role, and by supporting and attending events, they felt their role was just as valuable. As Becker explains, art cannot exist without an audience there to receive it, (Becker, 1982). Fans seemed well aware of this and were keen to demonstrate their dedication, as most explained that they “try to get to as many gigs as possible”, (Miles, 33, Venue Manager, Promoter and Musician), and others described regular attendance, “I would say on average I attend one gig a week, last year (2016), I went to just over 50 gigs/festivals” (Louise, 30, fan). These fans explained that their primary reason for attendance was not only pleasure but also to “support the scene”, (Adrian, 31, fan), the artists and the promoters. Most were increasingly aware of the financial difficulties exhibited in the previous chapters, and most were very passionate about supporting this music world,

“I can’t say I don’t do it for the community because I don’t know what life is like without – to me, being a metal head is who I am. I was once asked by someone, what my life would be like without metal, I just laughed at the time.” (Benjamin, 31, promoter)

Adrian, a Manchester fan, added to this,

“I consider myself to be a little more understanding of how difficult it is. I don’t think most people really consider that as much, I think most people are like – “ah man, ten pounds a ticket” but they’ve come over from wherever, the promoter knows there won’t be that many people turning up. You know, I don’t mind paying that to try and support the scene, the people and the bands – everyone involved. I think a lot of people aren’t willing to do that.” (Adrian, 31, fan)

Here Adrian positions himself directly against other fans, who he feels to be less committed. In turn this attributes himself with a greater degree of subcultural capital accrued through “self-sacrifice”
and “commitment”, (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 122). Most participants described their scenic participation in this way. One fan explained that attending gigs had become “like a full time job”, (Tim, 40, musician), for him and he spent any free time afforded to him supporting the music world in whatever way he could. He described frequently looking at a calendar to figure out what he could or couldn’t attend,

“It is getting a bit silly – right if I do that then I can get to that one but then I can’t eat when I’m there or I can’t eat at home for like the next three days or something. I kind of have to – I guess it’s looking at which ones have got bands that I’ve not seen – or I’ve not seen for a long time or anything like that. Occasionally there are a few bands that come up that I’m like – right, I want to see every gig they play. Like Conjurer at the minute I think are one of the best bands. I’ve probably seen them like eight or nine times now, going to different cities to see them.” (Tim, 40, Musician)

Not only this, but Tim also explained that he had previously been a promoter and whilst he had to stop promoting, he still tried to help others alongside attending as many events as possible.

“I know how it is and end up doing stuff sometimes on their own so if I can help just flyering or just loading vans on and off – anything. I think a lot of it is everyone’s in it together and the only way any scene’s going to get better is if there’s collective stuff going on.” (Tim, 40, Musician)

Fans also described the importance of buying merchandise, as well as attending the events.

“There are a lot of gigs that are free too, and this can make me a little uncomfortable at times as I know the work involved, and the fact bands rarely make money upsets me. In these situations I will always try to buy some merch to support the bands playing. Paid gigs are still extremely good value, usually around the £5-10 mark for around 3/4 (or more) bands. More like £15-20 for a more established band. Again I still try to buy merch where possible as a lot of bands have to travel and touring leaves them in debt rather profit.” (Susan, 42, Fan)

So even where entry is free, participants still like to feel as though they have contributed something to the maintenance of the music world, by buying records and t-shirts for example. This is important for the artists, as explained in Chapter Five. With a financial struggle, merchandise is now one of the key ways through which artists fund themselves. Through buying this merchandise, participants are also reinforcing their commitment to the artists, not just the broader community and promoters.
This level of dedication was exhibited in the survey, as participants displayed a willingness to travel or even follow a particular artist or tour. Though certainly the minority, there were select individuals who travelled to up to five different cities along a tour route for one particular artist. This exemplifies the ways in which “some art worlds develop beyond the local level”, (Becker p.322). 18% of the survey sample said they regularly attended live events in two cities or more, with three participants travelling to all six frequently. As Becker explains, this goes some way towards creating,

“an extended network of cooperation we might think of as a full art world, everyone using conventions developed in many different local segments but now known and understood nationally or even internationally” (Becker, 1982: 322)

This is facilitated, in part, by the participants, who described a need to ‘support’ the scene beyond their local community and be a part of the wider music world. The internet plays a vital role here. As Chapter Five explains, a greater sense of interaction and participation is built largely through social media sites such as Facebook. This is not only a useful promotional tool but is also a key way through which scene members and fans can interact with other local scenes, (Hodkinson, 2004). As Kahn-Harris deduces, “the speed of discussion in online forums arguably facilitates new forms of sociality”, (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 91), people are able to interact with different people, at different times, in different locations. Arguably this contributes to the formation of a “translocal world”, which is something that has already been demonstrated in Chapter Four. As Louise explains,

“Yes I regularly travel for gigs and festivals. In addition to Manchester, Bolton and Leeds I have also travelled to London, Sheffield, Wakefield and Birmingham in recent months. To be honest, a lot of my friends do the same thing. There are people all over the country into the same music and gigs are not only a chance to hear the music we love but to see good friends and hang out. As massively cheesy as it sounds there is a huge community/family feel to the underground heavy music scene. I look forward to seeing friends as much as I do the bands, so more and more it doesn’t matter where we travel to.” (Louise, 30, Fan)

With increasing communication and transport links, the community network becomes more extensive. Dedication, displayed through attendance and a willingness to travel can be an important factor in participants establishing their sense of self within this music world. Particularly for those who are not ‘actively’ involved, by being explicitly willing to spend time and money to participate at this level, they felt ‘active’ in their own way. Arguably, this level of dedication and commitment can be translated into a form of subcultural capital, which then facilitates a greater sense of belonging within this music world as fans feel they have earned a particular status.
However, whilst this sense of translocalism is positive in that it encourages fans to move between
different cities and attend different things, it is important to consider the impact on the audience
dynamic. Chapter Four describes the importance of having set local hubs, which facilitate this form
of community. This only works with a very mobile audience who travel regularly. With people
moving around more, they are not likely to be as connected to the hubs and spaces in the same way,
arguably lessening the attachment to the community. If people don’t feel ‘at home’ in these spaces,
this can therefore have an impact on the atmosphere of the event. Therefore whilst translocalism
may facilitate greater attendance in some locations, the experience overall is challenged and the
audience is more fragmented.

To add to this, some explained that they travelled, not only for the community, but also because
other cities appeared more vibrant. In correlation with Chapter Four, participants from Birmingham
in particular described travelling to other places for live music, as the city struggled.

“The scene in London is much bigger and much better than in Birmingham. More shows and
bigger crowds.” (Sonia, 32, Fan),

“One thing I will say though is dedication and crowd size/participation seems stronger in
Manchester than elsewhere. I have been to half empty gigs in Birmingham and have local
friends there who have often felt embarrassed by the lack of support for touring
underground bands. This is something I rarely encounter in Manchester.” (Louise, 30, Fan)

This is represented, to an extent, through the greater number of events in both London and
Manchester. It is also interesting how Louise describes different levels of dedication in different
locations, and how a distinct ‘lack of’ support can in fact act as a deterrent for attendance, as the
community is a large part of the pull for these events. If the community is not present, the music
itself is clearly not enough to draw in a crowd. This then begs the question as to what experience
participants are looking for when attending an event. Going back to the key trends in the data, many
explained that festivals and all-dayer s fulfilled a lot of the desired conventions for fans.

6.4. Festivals and All-Dayers

As the survey data suggests, all-dayers and festivals appear to attract bigger crowds. When talking
with participants, there appeared to be two key reasons for this; value for money and atmosphere.
Whilst fans are keen to demonstrate their dedication to the music world through buying tickets and
supporting artists financially with merchandise, it is important to consider that they also have to
consider cost, particularly as 61% of the survey sample was earning £25,000 or less per annum. As
described in Chapter Five, ticket prices for underground events have had to increase, as costs for both promoters and artists escalate. The survey illustrates that the average ticket price of one-off and touring events was £12, and ranged from free events to £38 per ticket. As fans have explained that they “try to get to as many gigs as possible”, most quantifying as regularly as weekly, this becomes less and less feasible. As a result, many of the participants explained that festivals and all-day events provided a solution,

“Personally think the huge upsurge in festivals, all-dayers and things is a symptom of the economy. The fact that no one has any money. Regular gigs are becoming a bad deal. Why pay five pounds for four bands when you can pay ten pounds for eleven bands.” (Benjamin, 31, Promoter)

As living costs and travel costs increase, participants are forced to be more selective. Many explained that this had played a part in the declining attendance of smaller, one-off events, as promoter Hannah explains,

“I find a lot of people nowadays will hold off on shows and just do several festivals a year as they can see everyone all in once go... All-dayers are always fun, I think too many festivals just cause problems with smaller events as people tend to save money for festivals and not go to many smaller gigs” (Hannah, Promoter)

Fan, Adrian, explained that the problem with small underground events is the level of ‘risk’ involved for participants. As described in the previous chapter, trust must be established between the promoter and the fans, as underground artists are not usually well-established acts. Averaging at £12 a ticket, this becomes a difficult risk for those who are earning a lower wage. As Louise explains, this had influenced her to,

“perhaps play it safer than I used to do, opting for gigs I know I will enjoy over taking a gamble on something that could go either way.” (Louise, 30, Fan)

Adrian explained that this had become very visible, with low attendance at smaller one-off events.

“I don’t think as many people are willing to give it a chance these days as they would perhaps, you know, historically” (Adrian, 31, Fan)

Arguably festivals again provide a solution to this problem. Usually inclusive of an array of artists, both well-known and underground, this meets an important convention for attendance. Not only this but promoters explained to me that many one-off events and tours wanted to play in London
over the weekend. Therefore other UK cities tend to host artists during the week, which was not always desirable for those with full-time jobs. Not only do festivals provide value for money and a range of artists but the timeframe is also beneficial for audience members. They are usually organised over a weekend and limited to a day or, at most, three days.

All of these conventions go hand in hand with the previous discussion surrounding the age demographic. As people have less time and money available to them, events of this scale enable them to see more bands, within a set period of time, for a set cost. The most expensive festival included in the survey was £100 for a three day event and included a large number of bands, which many cited as “good value”. In addition, participants explained that festivals were not only preferable financially but they also offer other incentives. In line with Bennett’s work, festivals offer a form of escapism.

“While music festivals occur more rarely than do events do that constitute local scenes, the intensity of a festival compensates for its infrequency. Drawn together from geographically dispersed locations and away from the expectations of everyday life, fans and performers can immerse themselves in the [festival] culture”, (Dowd, Liddle and Nelson 2004. 149 cited in Bennett & Peterson, 2004)

Participants are able to escape everyday life, careers and commitments for a set duration. This environment arguably enables the previous dichotomy between the rebellious youth and the professional to blend into one, facilitating and accommodating scenic practices. Whilst most paint a positive picture surrounding festivals, some participants suggested that, whilst good value for money, festivals had also become less feasible financially,

“The big UK festivals such as Download charge around £200 for a weekend ticket now and charge extra for camping etc. Food and drink prices at festivals are also extortionate. When you compare this to European festivals it seems obscene.” (Louise, 30, Fan)

Fans explained that this had led to the popularity of ‘all-dayers’, which were one day ‘mini festivals’ and were often smaller and cheaper.

“Yeah, more all-dayers than festivals. All dayers have been a fairly popular thing to do in the years that I’ve been involved in music. They’re great for the fans because you know, you pay a relatively small amount of money, and basically sacrifice an entire day to get drunk and see a load of bands.” (Dave, 30, Journalist)
The all-dayers included in the survey were all £15 for one day and inclusive of, at most, 10 artists. All four were hosted on Saturdays. Some participants explained that all-dayers had become more appealing than festivals,

“All dayers are a proper blow out and a chance to watch some bands you wouldn’t normally see and hang out with good friends at the same time and all for a good price. UK festivals by comparison I find very expensive. The price goes up year on year and you could go abroad for two weeks on holiday for the price of a UK festival!” (Louise, 30, Fan)

This means participants didn’t necessarily have to plan around work, if working Monday through to Friday, as it was only a day rather than a whole weekend. In addition, they would not have to think about attending the event again the following day,

“On the whole I find local all dayers brilliant fun, there is usually a strong mix of bands and entry is a reasonable price. I would say I attend one all dayer a month on average over a year. I love them as there is no having to watch bands hungover the next day! All the partying takes place in one day. The atmosphere is friendly and upbeat.” (Louise, 30, Fan)

This brings forth an important question for this chapter, which I will now investigate in more depth. This concerns the more communal conventions that participants look for when attending live events: the atmosphere and communal aspect.

6.5. Behaviour and Community

As already established, the community is a key attraction in attending a live event, and much of the interview discourse suggested that this was given the same, if not more, importance than the artists playing.

“It’s as much about the people who are going to be there – you know, your community is going to be in one place. It’s centralizing one core group of people essentially for a large amount of time.” (Tim, 40, Musician)

And fans felt that All-Dayers met this important convention. Arguably, these kinds of event facilitate a more social hub for the underground metal community and key behaviours that come with it. Dave explained the particular appeal of these events on a social level,

“I mean it sounds bloody obvious, you’ve got a lot of people who’re there for longer so those people have got the ability to bond, the ability to pop in, pop out a little bit more easily. Normally if you go to an all-dayer, you’ve got a band or two you can afford to miss if
you want to catch up with people or eat some food. So it’s a slightly more relaxed way of seeing music if that makes sense. Rather than, having a full day at work, travelling for an hour and a half to get to a gig, quickly eating some food and then bang-bang-bang, you see three bands and then you drive home or you walk home or you get the train home so I think there’s definitely a social aspect to all-dayers”, (Dave, 30, Journalist)

This echoes ideas discussed in Chapter Four, with regards to the importance of having set “social hubs” where members of this music world can come together to interact. Arguably this can be a set social event as well as a physical space. It also became evident that alcohol plays a key role in belonging within this community and participants were more likely to attend events that facilitated heavy drinking, or getting drunk. As already highlighted in Chapter Four, low drinks prices are a key convention for a successful underground venue and the interviews highlighted this further. It is no secret that “heavy metal has always been associated with excessive drinking and the abuse of illicit drugs”, (Kahn-Harris, K. 43), and this theme was very prominent within this research, particularly with regards to the appeal of festivals and all-day events. As some explained,

“It’s a form of escapism I guess, you’re so far removed from reality and it’s like three or four days of just chaos, music, booze, probably too much booze… but because you’re camping and you’re partying non-stop, it’s just different from going out normally, from normal life I guess. You can get away with a hell of a lot more at a festival than you can at a show mid-week because you’re not so contained… It feels more free somehow” (Karen, 33, Fan)

However, with the large overheads of booking an outdoor festival, most participants noted that there had been a real resurgence of indoor festivals within this underground music world which perhaps don’t offer the same freedom that Karen refers to. The all dayers and festivals throughout the survey were all in-doors. One of which was spread between five different venues, a common occurrence with European festivals. Whilst some found this preferable, as it offered a more comfortable space than outdoor festivals, in turn it made the events more costly to attend, as participants had to consider accommodation and food and drink,

“Even underground festivals such as desertfest add up to at least £500 for a couple (unless you live in London), which is a hell of a lot for a weekend. The tickets are around £100 which in itself is good value, however when you factor in that it is being held in one of the most expensive cities in the world, and attendees have to pay for travel, accommodation and food/drink costs it becomes less of an attraction.” (Louise, 30, Fan)
One key issue for attendees was drinks prices, particularly in London. As discussed in Chapter Four, this is problematic for both the venues and the fans,

“With stuff like that, venues really aren’t doing any favours for themselves. One of the all dayers I went to a couple of summers back, in London, it was like six bands playing, like Bolzer and a few others. Death black metal sort of stuff and it was um - £16 quid in I think, plus then I’d got there, walked in because it started at like six o clock and I was just having a look at the beers and what they’d got, it was five pound twenty for a pint of fosters – not even like, good beer. Should be like twelve pence or something so as soon as they said that I was like, I’m going to the shop and in between about four of the bands I was saying like – just went to the shop and bought a bottle of wine for a fiver instead. There was a few others just sat out on the street as well – because it was the middle of summer it was really nice. So in the twenty minute changeovers we were just smashing bottles of wine and then back in – it’s cheaper than a pint of fosters. Obviously you want to see all the bands but everyone – well, not everyone as not everyone drinks but it’s kind of part of it, the social thing and you know, getting a bit wobbly by the end and it’s that kind of thing.” (Tim, 40, Musician)

When observing Desertfest in London, it became apparent very quickly that this was a common phenomenon. As mentioned within Chapter Four, the venues exist within the hub of Camden Town. Throughout the festival the streets between each venue were littered with cans and bottles as well as heavy metal fans sat on the streets, drinking. When talking with the participants, they explained to me that it was somewhat a “tradition” with the beer prices in the venues being so high, many referred to the notion of “street beers” with great familiarity. This poses real concerns for venues who are struggling to make a profit from bar sales. Edward explained that this may benefit the punters but it also causes problems for the promoters,

“Certainly certain shows, as people get a bit drunk, they go for a cigarette, get talking to a mate and take a lot longer getting back to the gig than necessary. I do find that sort of, all dayers people do spend more time chatting, smoking outside than watching bands. It’s a social thing as well as a music thing.” (Edward, 30, Tour Manager)

So again, this begs the question as to what drives attendance. Whilst punters may still pay entry, they are showing a lack of interest in the artist and a greater interest in the social. This may not appear to be problematic if they are still paying for a ticket, but it does not illustrate the same level of support mentioned previously. By watching the bands, people are demonstrating their dedication to both the promoters and the artists.
In addition, a lot of participants explained that bar prices were a key convention for attendance, as Adrian told me,

“...”I think it’s a factor. Yeah, definitely. To most people. I mean, if the bar’s expensive I’ll still go but it would be like ‘ah, really, I’ve got to spend £4 for a pint’. I can understand that putting a lot of people off. But if you go to gigs with a much cheaper bar then people are more likely to spend money at the bar instead of sneaking some whiskey in or drinking before they get there or whatever. I think it helps the pub, if it’s cheaper. If they knocked the beer down by a pound, more people would buy beer at the bar.” (Adrian, 31, Fan)

As Adrian notes here, high bar prices sometimes contribute to a lack of attendance, particularly where bigger venues, all-dayers and festivals are concerned. Fans who were openly heavy drinkers explained that, with limited funds, they were forced to limit the events they attended.

“I understand how it’s a bigger event making it more worth your money but if you drink heavily... Which a lot of people do, then all dayers and festivals become expensive and it’s getting harder to pick and choose which ones to go to. I’d go to all of them if I could!” (Callum, 24, Promoter and Musician)

This further reinforces the importance of the social within this environment. Rather than limit the alcohol he drinks, Callum chooses to restrict the number of gigs he attends. Arguably, alcohol’s role in the heavy metal music world is not new. As Deena Weinstein explains, “ingestion of massive quantities of beer has remained a constant feature of the metal subculture... “Beer drinking and hell raising” is a motto of the metal style.” (Weinstein, 2000: 133). The problem however is as bars, pubs and venues struggle, they have to increase their prices which in turn mean that drinkers (the fans) have to increase their budgets. I spoke with the participants about the notion of ‘budgeting’ for a night out and, reiterating the above; fans explained that this had become more difficult, especially as ticket prices increased,

“The ticket prices are quite off-putting. I went to that gig at the Ritz, Carcass, Obituary and Napalm Death – it was like £30 for a ticket. I was like, thirty quid? And I paid on the door. So much money. Um – yeah, which is of course putting people off especially because I assumed it was going to be £20, took like £40 out, had to pay £30 on the door – left with £10 so could only buy two drinks in there because they were like £4.50.” (Adrian, 31, Fan)
The incorporation of alcohol was not only important on a personal level but also as a means to connect with the wider community. One participant, who did not drink, felt that this in fact left him, to a degree, isolated from the community,

“As far as inclusive goes, I kind of want to say no... It kinda goes back to that scene mentality “are you in a scene?” or “aren’t you in a scene?”. I think you have to be a certain type of person, you know, people want a mirror image of themselves in things like that. That’s ultimately what a scene is really. It’s common ground you know, common interests and all that. For me personally, not drinking, not into the kind of lary side of it, I didn’t really feel that inclusive towards it, not in amongst the bands themselves because that’s what’s overriding really” (Michael, 29, Promoter and Venue Manager)

Suggesting that in order to feel a sense of belonging, participants must buy into this identity and conform to these conventions. This ties in with the concept of ‘exclusion’ within music worlds as Michael explains being explicitly ostracised because he does not drink, despite his love of the music. Michael explained that this attitude and sense of identity was becoming more and more synonymous with the types of music arising out of the underground. He explained that there had been a rise in “party, sludge, stoner bands”, (Michael, 29, Promoter and Venue Manager). 28% of the events included in the survey were of this genre. Other participants also described this recent trend, “that kind of Pantera, Down influence, sleazy rock and roll but kind of doomy big heavy riffs but fairly simple songs. It seems to be a new thing. It seems to be a big new thing around Manchester these days”, (Adrian, 31, Fan). Ultimately alcohol was a key component, when probing around the reason for this trend, the answer was simple,

“Beers, mate. *laughter* it’s more... it’s a pretty easy identity to buy into isn’t it. It’s that kind of music that sounds fucking amazing when you’re pissed. I think it suits a social demographic of people who wanna go out, they’re gonna hear this music that’s really jolly and they can drink beer to. It’s just easy to consume really.” (Michael, 29, Promoter and Venue Manager)

The way Michael suggests that this music is “easy to consume”, suggests a lack of authenticity. There appears to be a dichotomy between a more serious underground and the “party” music described above. This ties in with the attraction of festivals; it’s facilitates a form of escapism. Michael explained that he felt the popularity of this music was arguably symptomatic of living in a time where “there wasn’t much going on”, (Michael, 29, Promoter). Interestingly, with regards to attendance, events of this genre seemed to be notoriously well attended in comparison to other
events. Desertfest, the most popular of events included in the survey with 76 attendees, is a festival dedicated to stoner and sludge metal. Arguably the popularity of the festival is reflective of this growing trend and fans felt that the vibrancy of such events presents a sense of resilience within this music world. As Adrian explains,

“There’s a lot of these kinds of bands playing them which means a lot of people are going to these gigs which can only be a good thing. Whether I don’t like the music or not, it can only make the scene healthier if there’s bigger gigs on. People like it; it’s just something they’ve latched onto. I can understand why people like it but it is kind of good time music, you know?” (Adrian, 31, Fan)

However, whilst this presents resilience and illustrates how events can thrive, this simultaneously reflects my initial hypothesis that people are looking for a new kind of experience from live music. The overarching theme from talking with participants was more about the social and communal experience, rather than the music itself. If festivals and all-day events are a means to support this kind of culture then this may provide a potential explanation for their current popularity. Once again, such resistance to change is not necessarily seen as favourable amongst all members of this music world and notions of ‘authenticity’ come into play, as evidently participants such as Michael consider that this kind of music not to be as authentically underground, or driven by art.

Participants explained that this was, in part, also represented in the increasing numbers of participants who were more likely to attend pubs, bars and clubs rather than live events.

“Well, it annoys me because you’ll get a club night will be playing fairly like – play some kind of slightly underground music maybe and there will be loads of people there but then none of these people – never seen them at any gigs.” (Adrian, 31, Fan)

Adrian explained that this was more common with younger people and particularly with students,

“It’s usually a lot younger crowd go to those {clubs}. Students, geared towards students. Yeah, not that you should judge people on their music taste - that’s ridiculous but most of the people I know who like Slipknot… aren’t really people I want to speak to. Generally, it’s those kinds of people that will go to those nights.” (Adrian, 31, Fan)

And similarly, ex-promoter Karen explained that she had attempted to gain the interest of the student population with little success,
“I used to go down to the university ‘rock society’ to hand out flyers every week and offered them a discount on tickets. Was a complete waste of time, they never bothered to show up and would just make fun of the flyers. They were a very closed off group. Always thought it was weird they never bothered with gigs other than the mainstream shows at the academy or club nights at Satans Hollow” (Karen, 33, Ex-Promoter and Fan)

The head of the rock society reinforced this, when asked about the society for my earlier research he explained that, “they would have called it the pub society but the university wouldn’t fund it. It’s rare to have a music society where no one discusses music”, (Emms, 2011).

When discussing the issue of students with Hilary from the Music Venue Trust, she explained that she felt students were generally just less interested in live music now; they have less money and higher tuition fees to consider which doesn’t correlate well with higher ticket prices. Reflective of Chapter Five, this was further complicated through the increasing reliance on social media. Students are constantly “over faced with options”, (Hilary) and club and gig promoters are all fighting for their attention. She explained this was particularly problematic in the South, especially in London, where living expenses are so great for students on such a low income.

Furthermore she added that when the students were likely to attend an event, it was more so out of loyalty to friends than to support live music. The venue managers I spoke with explained that they assumed club nights, at a cheap price, to be a safer bet in terms of making a profit. Promoter, Michael, explained that this had somewhat of a knock-on effect for venues who were choosing to cater more to the students than to perhaps the ‘serious music audience’, as represented by the dual-purpose venues in Chapter Four.

“Certainly greater Manchester with such a massive student population and this all goes back to the economic thing as well. Students don’t have much money and it’s much easier to make a – to put on a club night that will get 600 people in rather than a band who may get 50 people in.” (Michael, 29, Promoter and Venue Manager)

Correlating with earlier comments surrounding the risk involved in attending underground events, Hilary also felt there was a decline in “have a go culture” and the ethos of exploration whereby people will go out and try new music. This goes some way towards explaining the greater success in club nights and festivals. People know what to expect, with music from well-known artists, and when given a choice between risking their money on something unknown or attending a cheap club-night with drinks discounts, more often than not the club night probably prevails. As Edward told me,
“Certainly whenever I go to metal clubs, especially a venue like satans hollow, it doesn’t really have shows there that often but then the club night starts – suddenly there’s 300 people. I think there’s a lot of people who go to metal clubs because they want to get drunk and talk to girls and aren’t really as interested in going to a small show but might go see slayer, slipknot or metallica.” (Edward, 30, Tour Manager)

This isn’t dissimilar from the discussion around the prevalence of festivals. Club nights provide a similar platform for people to socialise and meet people, the music often takes a backseat. Frequently, when observing Desertfest, participants joked about how few artists they had watched.

The underground, by definition, is made up of lesser known music and therefore thrives on this kind of explorative attitude, which was reinforced by some of the ‘serious audience members’ interviewed,

“I was one of those people, I’d go to every single – didn’t even look at the line ups, I’d just turn up, buy my ticket, get smashed, head bang – you know. And if I didn’t – I mean half the bands I’m into now, I’ve discovered by jus turning up blindly and to me, that’s what metal’s all about. It wasn’t about all this – oh I don’t like this genre, I like this one and I don’t like that one. Or, “who’s on? Oh I dunno if I like them” (Benjamin, 31, Promoter)

This is particularly problematic for this world where there is such a huge reliance upon the fans to ‘take a chance’ on artists they may or may not have heard of. As explained in both Chapters Four and Five, this kind of ‘have a go’ culture only works when the ties of reliance and trust between the promoter and fan are maintained. When this fails, it becomes increasingly difficult for an audience to be maintained or reproduced. As Tammi Anderson explained in her study of rave culture, as a music culture’s fan base begins to lose its older participants and simultaneously struggles to attract a new fan base, this is where a music world may begin to decline. Promoter, Martin, explained that this certainly appeared to be the case for underground heavy metal, as younger participants appeared less drawn in.

“The younger crowd seems less music driven unfortunately. At least on the underground side of things anyway. It seems to be the old school crowd who still keep it alive. While you do get a younger crowd it’s only at select shows” (Martin, 30, Promoter and Musician)

Other fans explained that this was a symptom of modern life, and younger fans were prioritising other things,
“For whatever reason, I honestly don’t think it’s because people can’t afford it. I think people are spending money on too many things these days. So think about like the 70s, or the late 60s, or the 80s or whatever – you’re so much more exposed to stuff that you ‘need’ to have in your life these days. So young people nowadays, “Oh I can’t afford £10 on this gig ticket” but I can afford I don’t know, to pay my sky subscription or buy some fucking pointless stuff I don’t need – a new laptop, this computer game. I mean, I have no interest in any of that kind of stuff. So my spare cash is spent on a fairly limited field of things I want, be it music or some other interest. So I don’t think people are valuing the live experience or music in general as much these days.” (Adrian, 31, Fan)

Therefore this chapter paints a concerning picture. The older fans featured in this research cannot afford the time or money to maintain the small, one-off events on their own and the younger fans don’t appear to be participating.

6.6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the audience present an interesting third and final subsection of this research. Engaging further with the challenges highlighted in Chapters Four and Five, this chapter builds a better understanding of how audience members deal with increased choice and their motivations behind attendance. Both the survey results and the interviews begin to tell us more about what people attend and why. The importance of the ‘social’ and the community have been invaluable in all facets of this research, but particularly in relation to the audience. Participants view attendance at these events as important because it demonstrates a level of dedication, and affords them with a greater sense of prestige and status. In this way, participants felt that they were ‘active’ in their own right, though not as necessarily promoters or musicians. Many travelled to other cities and locations for gigs, some even following artists along a tour. This not only illustrates a dedication to the music but simultaneously the development of a translocal community, as participants note that the draw of other locations was simultaneously to see friends and to socialise.

Whilst some fans felt that live events grouped this music world, others felt that different social situations had become preferable. Some note the increased popularity of club nights and bars, which are potentially more facilitative of a social gathering than a venue with live music. This is also reflected in the discussion surrounding venues in Chapter Four, as venues find that in order to survive they must become multifaceted, hosting club nights or operating as a bar. This suggests that there is more financial return here than in live music.
In addition, rather than attending regular, one-off and touring events, participants were opting for larger, less frequent all day events and festivals. With an average age of 31, these audience members simply did not have the time, energy and money to attend events as frequently as they would have liked. Those within Liverpool, Leeds and Manchester struggled in particular, as tours usually reached them mid-week. Therefore this meant attending an event after work, with the prospect of work the next day. This was problematic, as explained; participants do not attend these events for the music alone.

Rather, for most, the community plays a more valuable role. In order to really throw themselves into this environment and feel a sense of belonging, they had to adopt specific scenic practices and behaviours, inclusive of heavy drinking and socialising. Those with full time jobs struggled to negotiate this lifestyle around their notions of the professional, adult self. However, festivals here offer a solution. Participants were able to pay a set cost for a range of artists, usually playing over a weekend or Saturday. This meant they did not have to think about the implications for work and the atmosphere facilitated a form of escapism which was preferable to the occasional evening event. That said, participants also explained that larger festivals were also becoming increasingly expensive, which has perhaps explained the proliferation in all-day events, which are, in essence, mini-festivals.

This is not to say this is a new phenomenon. As one participant explained during an observation exercise, the importance now lies with a new, young audience taking up the mantle, when I asked him how he thought the scene would progress; he explained that, “perhaps it’s our circles. You know, as we get older we don’t really see the next generation coming in. We wait until the next generation latches on “. This reflects Tammi Anderson’s (2009) discussion surrounding rave culture and the importance of attracting a young audience, as the older participants become more detached. Interestingly Ryan also went on to explain that perhaps the lack of attendance was in fact more to do with trends in music. Perhaps it is not only the nature of ageing participants, but simultaneously the ways in which trends come and go. Obviously tracking trends within such a limited period is difficult, but this further reflects the fluid and ever-changing nature of music worlds. This would be a valuable arena for further study.
Chapter Seven: Conclusion

7.1. Contribution

This thesis has provided an analytical overview of the processes of change, decline, and resilience within the underground metal music world. Whilst heavy metal is of growing academic interest, these particular themes have been largely neglected in previous studies particularly with respect to the underground. Rather, as highlighted in Chapter Two, heavy metal has often been studied as a subculture, placing heavy emphasis on a deviant, youthful fan-base passively consuming the music and its controversial themes, (Bennett, 2001; Kahn-Harris, 2007).

This thesis has demonstrated a clear need to move from the notion of the passive to the active if we are to understand patterns of change and decline within the music industry. Theoretically framing underground heavy metal as a “music world” has facilitated this kind of analysis whilst simultaneously contributing to the growing body of literature on “Art Worlds”, (Becker, 1982; Crossley, 2015; Martin, 2005; Hield and Crossley, 2014), where heavy metal has previously been omitted. In acknowledging that music is not created and received in isolation but is the result of interactivity between individuals, we are able to understand the complex nature of practices, and better understand the struggles that it faces. Undoubtedly this music world and the resilience of live music are constantly shaped by external factors, particularly as the music industry continues to evolve. This thesis captures these changes at a particularly fascinating time, as venues close and costs rise.

Simultaneously, this project captures the reactions to change. In unveiling the motivations behind organising and attending live events, the concept of community remains strong. Venue spaces and events must facilitate this sense of community in order to remain resilient. Therefore this thesis presents a real problem for touring artists: because of the continual focus on the community, the turn out for small one-off underground events is becoming less and less. Combined with fewer places to host these events, this paints a concerning picture. This is significant on a broader scale because underground music and playing live within ‘the toilet circuit’ provides artists with a springboard for growth. These experiences of the underground:

“give artists their first experience of playing live in front of an audience and give fans somewhere to get up close to artists that one day may well be playing stadiums and festival main stages” (Independent Venue Week, 2015)
Importantly therefore these struggles may be echoed elsewhere. Whilst this research focuses on underground heavy metal, the processes, dynamics and interactions might well be similar in other similarly sized live worlds. Therefore, this research can be instructive on an analytical level beyond just the case of metal, making it a significant contribution to the field.

The holistic viewpoint, (encompassing promoters, venues and audiences), taken within this thesis also highlights the importance of not only understanding the role of spaces and promoters in the maintenance of live music, but also the importance of the audience. As emphasised, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between the active, (musicians and promoters), and the audience, as often these roles overlap. In addition, many audience members consider their participation and attendance of these events to be ‘active’ involvement itself. Apart from descriptive studies of live events, (Weinstein, 2000), there has been little to investigate levels of attendance at underground live heavy metal events, particularly with regards to reasons for non-attendance, addressed in chapter six.

What this research has found is that there is a declining attendance at small, one-off touring events. Instead many participants are opting for festivals. This again taps into the movement towards studying music as a fluid, active concept. Whilst these events are important within this music world, attendance cannot be assumed or taken for granted. Instead, this thesis highlights that understanding the audience’s role is just as complex as the promoter’s. Audiences have a number of external factors to consider, influencing what they can and cannot attend, and within this current economic climate, this is becoming increasingly difficult to negotiate. In analysing the three interconnected facets (promoters, spaces and audiences) this thesis has described an increasingly unstable industry, which is struggling to sustain itself. Whilst this may be true, the interviews with active participants have also shown that there is an overwhelming sense of perseverance and resilience in the face of change. These themes will now be explored in more depth.

### 7.2. Decline

The first overarching theme to emerge within this thesis has been decline. In analysing the three interrelated areas of music promotion within this music world, we can see the struggles that it currently faces. First and foremost, in exploring six different cities within this music world, this thesis has highlighted the endemic loss of underground venues. In presenting a number of case studies, Chapter Four presents a growing number of venues which have either closed or are currently under threat of closure.
There are two key reasons for this. One of these reasons is the gentrification and the impact of urban change. London really exemplifies these problems as there is more money to be made in property than live music. This has resulted in many venues being sold to developers or being forced to close in the face of increasingly unfeasible rent. Similarly, the chapter illustrates how other developments can have an impact. The Star and Garter in Manchester, for example, will be forced to close in order to accommodate the expansion of Piccadilly train station. As the Music Venue Trust explains, with a growing population, travel infrastructures must expand. Therefore venues are demolished to make way for train lines and it is increasingly common to regenerate surrounding areas, further affecting venues, (Music Venue Trust, 2014).

The second reason for closure is simply a lack of financial stability for these businesses, with limited bar takings and a rapidly declining audience. In addition, running a live music venue is an expensive venture with licensing and staff fees, stock and equipment to pay for. The loss of these spaces is detrimental not only for live music but for the audiences and the sense of community. Events within this music world cannot just be hosted ‘anywhere’. Participants, both promoters and audience members, look for particular conventions. Though technical properties such as sound systems and sound quality were of significance, the ability to socialise and the community was considered more important. Participants preferred to attend events at venues with certain features such as smoking areas which enable interaction and conversation, specifically away from the music. In addition, they preferred to attend events at venues which facilitated very specific scenic practices, such as “head banging” and “moshing” and often this means a preference for, “small, sweaty”, (Adrian, 31, Fan), spaces.

These particular features really enable participants to fully immerse themselves in this world. More often than not, these are the venues which are being forced to close. The venues fulfilling these set conventions are given a sense of ‘soul’ and they cannot be easily replaced; participants form attachments to both the venue and the interactions and practices it facilitates. Whilst participants attempt to use other spaces available, this has had a big impact. London for example illustrates a movement from the alternative hub of Camden Town to other boroughs such as Islington, Hackney and Hammersmith and Fulham. Whilst the majority are still in Camden, participants explained that the London metal scene was becoming increasingly fragmented. The physical spacing of these venues is really important, having a selection of venues a stone’s throw apart creates a valuable network of spaces for the metal community to move between constituting a valuable ‘hub’ of interactivity.
Chapter Four explained the importance of having a hub of this sort in encouraging a flourishing live scene within a city. In addition, it is paramount that a city has a range of these different spaces; from 50 capacity venues to 500+ capacity venues. This can encourage vibrancy within the city, enabling a range of different artists with different appeal to play. Particularly, this enables the lesser known underground touring bands to play in appropriate spaces, where their financial guarantees are more likely to be met. As explained, if promoters are forced to book larger, more expensive spaces and there is a small turn out, they incur great financial losses. Therefore the availability of this range of spaces is crucial. This thesis also demonstrated how a lack of variation can in fact lead to decline within a city, as illustrated by Birmingham. With a lack of appropriate venues, both artists and fans are forced to travel to other cities, such as Coventry and Wolverhampton for live music, where there are appropriate spaces.

This also touches on another key area of concern: the rising financial costs for promoters. With rising petrol prices, if bands are to tour and cover their expenses, they have to ask the promoter for a greater guarantee. This is in addition to paying for the venue space, renting equipment and often providing food, drink and accommodation for the artists. Therefore organising events of this scale becomes a costly process, particularly as promoters in Chapter Five described increasing expectations from artists. In turn the promoters are forced to increase ticket prices for fans, which then has an impact upon attendance. Both promoters and fans described declining audiences at these live events, particularly the one-off midweek gigs. A key reason for this appears to be age. The average age of those involved in this study was 32, and as illustrated, these participants were finding it increasingly difficult to negotiate their time around music and their own commitments and life ties. This was particularly detrimental amidst the Northern Triangle. With a tendency for tours to play London at the weekend, Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester events were often midweek. For audiences, this is less appealing, particularly if they had work the following day. In addition, as the majority of participants were on the lowest income bracket and as events become more expensive, audiences have been forced to choose carefully what they do and do not attend.

This further reinforces the importance of the relationship between promoters and fans, as audiences are more likely to attend the event of a well-known and trusted promoter. However this is not the only factor; fans explained that the artists playing were merely one motive for attending live events. Reflective of Chapter Four, the community and socialising with others was considered to be, in many ways, of greater importance than the music itself. Fans frequently talked about drinking, drinks prices and the importance of venues facilitating a social environment. Again this highlights the importance of space, moreover particular and appropriate spaces in the maintenance of this music
world and thus their closure is a significant element of decline within underground metal. As one participant highlighted, “In fact if a band is playing Star and Garter or another venue I love, it actually makes me want to go more, if I’m on the fence about something the venue can definitely sway it.” (Louise). Therefore as events are forced to relocate to inappropriate spaces, the attendance may in fact be affected, resulting in declining ticket sales and further financial losses for the promoters and artists. Audiences interviewed were actually well aware of this decline and these problems and interestingly this lead to another particularly poignant theme throughout; the sense of resilience that this music world demonstrates in the face of these issues. This resilience was displayed in a number of ways which shall be outlined here beginning with pooling resources.

7.3. Pooling Resources

This thesis illustrates how these elements of live music come together in a co-operative sense to maintain this art world. The overwhelming loss of spaces outlined above has had a particularly detrimental impact upon live music within this world. Not only are participants routinely looking for new spaces, but venues themselves have demonstrated resistance to these financial struggles. Venue managers explained that a solution is to become multifaceted, in an attempt to substitute their income through other means. Chapter Four pinpoints a number of venues which are simultaneously practice rooms, bars, clubs or even restaurants and cafes. Having this second source of income has enabled many to continue.

In addition, the development of The Music Venue Trust has begun to pool resources in order to get grassroots venues to come together and tackle more external issues such as gentrification and noise complaints. The organisation is pushing to introduce the “agent of change principal” which would mean that residential developments near venues must pay for the venue to be appropriately soundproofed. Similarly, residents who knowingly move near to a venue would not be able to lodge a formal complaint about the noise from that venue. There are also persistent attempts within the media to rescue venues, through online petitions and webpages such as “Indiegogo” and “gofundme”, which allow participants to donate money to those who are struggling, as highlighted with reference to the Gryphon in Bristol, a much loved metal venue. As technology advances, the venue desperately needs updating, and pooling resources in this manner is enabling the venue to raise much needed funds in order to do this.

A key part in this has been the development of a translocal music world, which has been highlighted throughout this research. As small local scenes, such as Bristol, Birmingham, Bristol and Liverpool exhibit particular struggles, the broader translocal connections have really enabled this music world to survive. Bristol, for example, displayed a real struggle as Temples Festival dissipated. As the
festival was cancelled with a week’s notice, both artists and audiences were already travelling for the festival. As a reaction, promoters across the country banded together in order to organise a replacement event in under 24 hours. This really demonstrates how important conventions and resources are in maintaining an art world; the shared knowledge of practice enabled this to happen quickly and efficiently, (Becker, 1982: 348). This is also demonstrated with the rise in cross promotion across different cities, as shown with the interconnected workings of Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester for example. The loss of venues in Liverpool has meant that the city’s promoters have branched out to Manchester to organise events, still ensuring that live music continues to have a place within this music world and that touring artists are still reaching the North West.

A prominent factor in this translocal world is the increasing prominence of a virtual world. Not only has this encouraged an interconnected web of promoters, who talk through online channels, but promoters described a situation whereby the internet and social media platforms have become the primary channel for promotion. Promoters described the changing nature of promotional methods, with a movement from the use of physical resources such as posters and flyers to virtual resources, such as Facebook events. On a practical level, this saves time and money. In addition, these platforms provide access to a virtual world, accessing a greater potential audience. This virtual world also brings the promoter and the audience closer together.

Chapter Five has described how important this is, particularly for underground music worlds which are inherently more interconnected. It is vital for promoters to build a reputation and a trusting relationship with the audience, in order to boost attendance at events. A primary way through which promoters are able to develop this relationship is through the accumulation of subcultural capital; demonstrating their commitment and knowledge to potential audiences. As social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter enable a promoter to engage with this community and display their knowledge and commitment to this world in a way which facilitates the accumulation of subcultural capital. Therefore the development of a virtual world has given promoters a new platform through which to remain resilient in the face of rapidly increasing costs. This virtual world also touches on another key theme throughout this thesis, as the formation of these broad translocal networks is also significant for the fans and in the development of ‘serious audience members’.

7.4. Serious Audience Members

Despite the growing concerns over attendance and an older fanbase with increasing personal and professional commitments, the interview and survey data described a trend toward all-day and festival events. There are two key reasons for this; social and financial. These kinds of events were really seen to encapsulate the sense of community that these participants sought. As they are
considered inherently ‘better value’, with a number of different acts spread across the day, audiences felt that these kinds of events fulfilled both social and financial needs. In addition, these events were more likely to be held over the weekend, alleviating the pressure of mid-week responsibilities such as work. Instead, participants were able to fully immerse themselves into this music world and its practices. Therefore these festivals enable fans to maintain their connection to live music and this music world, albeit in a different way. This was particularly prominent in Manchester, again where many touring artists reach the city midweek, the one off events may be struggling but there appears to be a market for all-dayers and festivals.

Despite the dwindling attendance of small, one-off events, music and the underground metal community are still an important feature of the interviewee’s lives. Much like the discussion in Chapter Five, participants were also keen to demonstrate their commitment and dedication to this music world. Though not actively involved, in roles of promotions, musicians or otherwise, audience members felt that their attendance was ‘active’ in its own right. Many quantified the numbers of gigs they attended and others described a situation whereby they would travel along Chapter Four’s ‘toilet circuit’, following underground bands. We call these, “serious audience members”, and serious audience members facilitate the maintenance of a music world, with some participants travelling to all of the six research sites for live music.

This is reflective of Hodkinson’s study of the Goth scene, which was able to “transcend the boundaries of place”, (Hodkinson, 2004: 132) in order to remain present, with broadening networks of communication and transport. As he explains, the more participants travelled to other locations, the more participants developed translocal friendships and therefore this became a “circular process whereby the motivation for further travel would be increased with each journey”, (ibid: 136). This also goes some way toward explaining the value of festivals which encourage this translocal network, for example Desertfest was considered to be key date on participant’s calendars. In observing the event, it became very clear that this was in fact a yearly meeting for some participants whose primary reason for attending was to see friends. Again, this reflects Hodkinson’s discussion surrounding Whitby Goth weekend, (ibid.). Whilst there is some concern here over a lack of attachment to the actual music, with people drinking on the streets of London rather than in the venues, these participants are still paying for a ticket and therefore supporting the music world.

7.5. Scenic Solidarity

However, the main conclusion to be drawn from this thesis is that this music world has not died. Rather it has retained a sense of solidarity in the face of this decline. Becker states that music worlds die because “no one cares enough to save them”, (ibid. 218). In spite of these changes, these
participants do care. The consistent attachment displayed to the community prevails here. Though promoters who were interviewed describe loss after loss, they persistently explain that the benefits outweigh the negatives. These benefits often connect to the community. As promoter, Benjamin, explained, “I can’t say I don’t do it for the community because I don’t know what life is like without”, (Benjamin, 31, promoter).

Similarly, whilst audiences may not be able to attend as many events, they still participate and contribute to the music world in attending all-day events and festivals. The development of translocal and virtual ties has really encouraged this community to flourish, and festivals are a real draw for this community who exist in a number of different localities. This sense of resilience is what maintains an art world and this is clearly illustrated, as events are still taking place across each of these six locations, even though some are more vibrant than others.

Ultimately, change within music worlds is inevitable. In this sense, this thesis strikes a balance with the record label industry’s struggle to remodel itself after the collapse of the CD market. Despite declining record sales, there are continuous attempts from artists to find new ways of making money and funding themselves. Similarly, this thesis has shown that there are persistent attempts to come through the struggles exhibited in the live sector.

7.6. Conceptual Reflection

This thesis makes a unique contribution to academic understandings of heavy metal, not only substantively but also conceptually. A fundamental aim of the thesis was to step away from assumptions of a passive audience and the stereotypical image of the ‘metalhead’. In understanding underground heavy metal as an “Art World” (Becker, 1982) this research has been able to engage with the collective activity involved in organising, promoting and maintaining events of this scale. This has been an insightful approach, particularly considering the limited research giving focus to both the underground and supporting roles. Too often, sociological studies of music tend to focus upon the musician and the music itself. However, art worlds places emphasis on the broader network involved in the creation and maintenance of art; particularly, the support personnel. Becker asserts that art, more specifically music, does not just miraculously come into being. Rather, music is the result of co-operative activity between different individuals fulfilling different roles, (ibid.). Therefore, exploring a music world in this holistic way is vital if we are to understand more about the complex workings of this industry. With this in mind, the thesis has given focus to the role of promoters, audiences and venues specifically. As participants often adopt multiple different roles within this world, the research has been able to engage with an even broader range of different
perspectives; promoters, musicians, venue managers, tour managers, sound engineers and the fans themselves.

This is of importance given the changing nature of the music industry. As technology advances and financial risk increases, live music is struggling. In adopting this inclusive approach, this research has been able to engage with a number of different themes and concepts, as highlighted throughout this thesis. The study unveils the motivations behind organising and attending these events, which is particularly important given the substantial financial losses and high ticket prices that most of the participants discussed throughout the interviews. In tapping into these issues, the study explores notions of identity, belonging, status and community. Participants do not just attend and organise these events for the music. Within the underground, importance is placed on being actively involved, whether that be through organising or attending events. Those who participate in this way are rewarded with higher status. It is important to be seen as ‘supporting the scene’, particularly as this music world begins to struggle.

As reflected throughout this concluding chapter, the thesis also focuses on notions of resilience, change and decline. This has meant developing an understanding of how participants pool resources in order to sustain themselves. Stepping away from subcultural studies has facilitated this kind of analysis. As highlighted throughout the literature review, there is a need to understand what happens to these communities as things change and how they experience change. This is of primary importance when trying to understand an industry such as this, where technology is constantly advancing and tastes shifting. With this in mind, sociological studies of music should strive to understand these transformations within the industry and simultaneously how music worlds survive in the face of such change. Exploring this at grassroots level, where there is no financial backing and rarely any profit provides particular insight. This thesis stands as an example of a sociological study which has highlighted and furthered understanding of the transformations of the industry.

Whilst art worlds has been the most appropriate lens through which to explore this world, the research does not completely disregard other conceptual understandings of music. As suggested by Prior, it is perhaps more fruitful to incorporate elements of scene alongside music worlds, as both terms provide unique and valuable insight, (Prior, 2014; Bottero & Crossley, 2016). Not only did research participants frequently refer to their community as a ‘scene’, but the term also enables us to think about a number of different and important concepts. Of primary importance has been the notion of ‘translocal scenes’ (Bennett, 2004) and the ways in which communities interact across different localities. Translocal networks and communities have proven a key way through which people keep this music world alive. Participants travel in order to satisfy their different musical
needs but also to interact with other members of the community. With this comes notions of inclusion and exclusion, which have been given further consideration through studies of music scenes, (Kahn-Harris, 2007). It has therefore been beneficial, throughout the research, not to limit one’s understanding of underground heavy metal to one conceptual framework. While the focus has been on practice and collective action, this still surrounds notions of community. This is perhaps somewhat neglected in Becker’s art worlds (Becker, 1982).

Furthermore, this approach also carries broader conceptual implications. This thesis has already emphasised the transferable value of this research and this approach therefore potentially provides a useful framework for understanding music worlds beyond heavy metal. As highlighted previously, there have been a growing number of studies on music worlds; punk, folk and classical to name a few, (Crossley, 2015; Martin, 2005; Hield and Crossley, 2014). This theoretical approach, which gives focus to collective action and change, provides a useful basis for understanding other music worlds also. The problems and solutions outlined throughout the course of this thesis are likely to be exhibited in similar underground music worlds. Engaging with the different, active roles in this way would therefore potentially provide an insightful understanding of such worlds. This research highlights not only the importance placed on ‘active’ roles like promoters, but also the significance of the audience and the ways in which they work together to maintain an art world through attending events and supporting artists. This is touched on in art worlds, but in combining both scene and music worlds in this way, this research understands the role of the audience as active in itself.

7.7. Future Implications

The timely nature of this thesis presents a number of interesting avenues for further research. Throughout the interviews, I was persistently asked if I was going to compare the UK underground scene to other cities across Europe. As outlined by various artists and tour managers, the funding poured into live music is very different in other European cities, particularly in places such as Germany where often small independent venues are given substantial funding for live music. From my own personal experience, artists are also treated very different by promoters in different countries. This would be a particularly interesting comparison to make, especially given Britain’s departure from the EU. A recent report from UK Music indicated that 50% of music industry officials felt that leaving the EU would have a detrimental impact upon the industry, (UK Music, 2017).

This is particularly problematic for UK touring artists, who will require work visas in order to tour across Europe. This is a costly and complicated process which, given the already costly nature of touring, would be hugely problematic. Many of the participants I spoke with explained that it’s incredibly common for underground metal bands to play festivals and small tours in Europe as often
the turnout is better and they actually make more money. Therefore, as touring in this way becomes more unsustainable, this will have a huge impact upon this music world.

This is particularly interesting as the translocal connections mentioned throughout this chapter also extend globally. Participants frequently explained that the festivals across Europe were often far better value than the ones in Britain, thus this will also have an impact on the audiences travelling for these events. Simultaneously the loss of significant venues throughout this research has been a really important transition within this world. As already explained, this has an impact on other music worlds of this scale and therefore would be a valuable point of further study, particularly as this thesis captures a point in time and this issue is so current. It would be interesting to explore this issue through other locations and other music worlds, again not necessarily limited to the UK.


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APPENDIX 1

Participant Information Sheet

The PhD study, taking place across three years, aims to explore the underground world of live metal; the people who play, promote, attend and accommodate these shows and the health of the UK touring circuit. I shall be conducting interviews with key players in the scene, musicians, promoters, labels, venues, and active participants. I want to develop an understanding of the ways in which this world has changed, how issues such as venue closure and increasing touring costs have affected the live scene across the UK and what this means for the future of this specific genre, wherein live music was once so important. I also want to delve deeper into whether or not audience members are looking for something different in live events now, what makes people really want to attend a show.

What happens to the data collected?

If face-to-face, the interview will be recorded and transcribed. This may also be done via email or messenger. I may then quote parts of the interview in the final PhD thesis.

How is confidentiality maintained?

Everything in the interview will remain completely anonymous.

A pseudonym shall be used instead of your name and any others who you may mention, including promotions companies and artists/booking agents etc.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

If at any point throughout the interview, you feel uneasy or no longer wish to take part/need a break, please say so and we will stop the interview.

You will also have three months to withdraw your contribution, following the interview.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?

There is a possibility that the research will be published, if this happens, participants will be notified.

What benefit might this research be to me or other subjects of the research?
I’m providing research about the scene which may well be useful to active participants such as yourself.

**What if something goes wrong?**

If you wish to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the research you should contact the Head of the Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL.

**Contact for further information**

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APPENDIX 2

Structure of Interviews

The Underground Scene

- Where are you based?
- How would you describe your local underground metal scene?
- Tell me a bit about you and your role within that scene?
- How would you say that scene, as a space for live music, has changed?
- How do you feel about the health of the UK underground metal scene at the moment?
- As an attendee, do you go to many events yourself? If so, what encourages you to attend something?

Promotion

- What inspired you to start promoting?
- What kinds of events do you put on (genre/size/one offs/all dayers etc)?
- How do you go about forming a line up for an event?
- When you have a line up, how do you promote that event?
- How do you find the whole process? Any particular experiences stand out for you (good and bad)?
- Do you tend to work with booking agents or go straight to the bands?
- If you’ve worked with agents, how have you found the process?
- How has technology, (tools such as social media), impacted upon promotion do you feel?
- How do you feel about festivals in the UK at the moment?
- How would you describe the financial side of promoting?
- How would you describe the requests you get from bands with regards to rider, guarantees, accommodation etc?
- Do you have much planned for promotion in the future?