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Women in Hypermasculine Environments: An Analysis of Gender Dynamics in the Heavy Metal Subculture

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WOMEN IN HYPERMASCULINE ENVIRONMENTS: AN ANALYSIS OF GENDER
DYNAMICS IN THE HEAVY METAL SUBCULTURE

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes gender dynamics in the heavy metal subculture by means of interviews with fans of this musical genre. Based on research that shows that (male) homosocial environments, denoting non-romantic social bonds among people of the same (male) sex, lead to hegemonic masculinity and the possibility of violence against women, this study focused on the heavy metal subculture from the point of view of its members' experiences related to gender. The theoretical framework of this thesis is based on feminist theories of gender difference and its relevance for the sociology of gender. Specifically, I rely on theories of othering, doing gender, and objectification to explore gender issues in the contemporary heavy metal subculture. In order to uncover the experiences of members of this subculture, I conducted semi-structured interviews of a total of twenty men and women who identified as fans of heavy metal. The findings show that the participants in this study describe the subculture as male dominated, where female fans especially earn respect through the aggressive act of moshing. Females sometimes also use defensive othering to discuss female fans that flash. The participants generally describe the subculture as changing positively for women.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Feminist scholars have produced scholarly work since the late 1800s and the beginning of the Women's Rights Movement. Historically, the Women's Rights Movement can be broken down into three waves, with each wave focusing on a key issue. The first wave was centered on women's suffrage. Once women had the right to vote there was a time of celebration and little work was done within the movement to advance additional women's rights. However, in the late 1940s and 1950s there was a surge in interest in women's placement in society, specifically, how women were treated socially and culturally. One of the key pieces of literature that led to the second wave of feminism was Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. This groundbreaking piece of work focuses on women as "the Other" in society. This othering leads to their subjectivity and their lack of power (De Beauvoir 1952). While De Beauvoir's book is clearly more of a philosophical nature rather than a sociological treatise, it has heavily influenced feminist scholarship and feminist theory in sociology and beyond. Specifically, it helped shape sociological theories of gender difference and the concepts of sexual objectification and "doing gender."

It is this theoretical framework of gender that guides my research in this thesis. After briefly explaining De Beauvoir's concept of othering and the impact it had on the work of feminist scholar Judith Butler, I will use empirical evidence from previous research to show that women in male-dominated groups willingly "do" their gender and

in the process can be sexually objectified and/or treated as the Other. At the same time, some women may avoid this othering by not “doing” their gender and exhibiting masculine behaviors, thus making it harder for their male counterparts to treat them as the Other. Following a review of literature on heavy metal, I will study how women are treated in the contemporary heavy metal subculture. Specifically, I will examine heavy metal fans’ perceptions of how female fans are considered a part of the group and how they are subsequently treated on the basis of these perceptions. It is important to uncover the inside perspectives of the heavy metal subculture itself in order to understand the environment that creates relevant gender dynamics.

CHAPTER 2:

TOPIC OF INQUIRY

Historically, men and women have been confined to separate, respectively public and private, social spheres. Women were traditionally in charge of running the household, while men went out and worked. Today, that situation has changed drastically. Although women may not yet have entered the public sphere as often as men do, it is clear that great strides have been made in recent decades towards fuller gender equality. At the same time, there has also been a rise in the number of stay-at-home dads. Although this percentage is still very low, the number of fathers staying home to care for children has risen over the last few decades (Kramer and McColloch 2010).

As a result, fewer places exist today where a true male homosocial environment and (hyper)masculine environment can flourish. Homosocial environments denote communities where members of same-sex groups interact in a non-romantic way. Male homosocial environments are known for their hegemonic masculinity that promotes sexism and heterosexism (Lipman-Blumen 1976). They create a hierarchy where men dominate women and where gender differences are used as justifications for gender inequalities (Lipman-Blumen 1976). It is important to point out that a homosocial environment can include members of the opposite sex, as the minority, which is how gender inequalities can occur. This environment of misogyny can lead to circumstances

where sexual harassment, sexual assault, or violence against women can occur as a result of aggression, sexism, and hypermasculine qualities.

A recent example of the consequences of male homosociality that received much attention in the news media was the NFL's handling of some high-profile domestic violence cases. An argument can be made that the reason the NFL did not handle this issue properly is because it occurred in a homosocial environment that justified male dominance and violence against women. Another recent sexual assault that was discussed in the media happened at a nu metal concert with the band Staind. In June of 2014 lead singer Aaron Lewis stopped a show in Kansas City in the middle of a song to berate fans who, he claimed, were molesting a girl who was trying to crowd surf.

The heavy metal subculture can be conceived as a homosocial environment because it is comprised mostly of (white) males, who typically exhibit high levels of aggression, rage, and anti-authority attitudes. The music subculture is known for a violent style of dancing called "moshing," where members push and bump into each other with much physical force. The subculture is often also seen as deviant by outsiders, which adds to its appearance of being hypermasculine and misogynistic. It appears to be hypermasculine because the majority of fans and band members are male, and two of the most popular behaviors known to outsiders are moshing (which appears as extremely aggressive) and flashing (which has obvious sexual implications), which could give the subculture the appearance of a place where women are sexually objectified and disrespected. If it is true that male-dominated groups are more likely to produce sexual assaults or violence against women, they should be studied in order to learn what fosters these behaviors and ideally prevent sexual assault and violence against women. It could

also be that men who have these misogynistic qualities are drawn to the heavy metal subculture. A study of sexual assaults on college campuses, by comparison, found that both gender neutral and gendered processes might help predict sexual assault. One factor was the ‘party’ environment, which involved drinking (Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney 2006: 487). This parallels to the environment at concert venues, where drinking and loud music are prevalent.

To study relevant gender aspects of the heavy metal subculture, I have conducted a study of women and men in heavy metal who identify as fans and have been to metal shows in order to get their views on what is occurring in regards to gender dynamics and how the homosocial environment perpetuates observed dynamics. It is important to uncover what fans of the genre themselves say is occurring rather than only have an outsider’s perspective of what might be occurring. Two main concert behaviors to be explored in terms of fan’s perceptions in some detail are moshing (masculine but not exclusive to males) and “flashing” (whereby women lift their shirts to reveal their breasts, thus making it exclusively for females).

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretically, this study relies on feminist perspectives of gender differences, drawn from sociology and related disciplines. Specifically, I build on Simone de Beauvoir's concept of woman as the Other and Judith Butler's related concept of gender performativity. I then employ more modern sociological concepts of gender related to sexual objectification and doing gender, which are influenced by de Beauvoir's and Butler's perspectives.

Woman as 'the Other'

Historically, theories of gender difference focused on the biological differences in males and females. Many believed that men were the superior sex because of their larger physical size and the notion that they are physically stronger than women. These views were justified by religious ideas that held that women should be submissive to men. French feminist philosopher Simone De Beauvoir (1952) was one of the first scholars to argue that biological differences in men and women are not the cause of female subordination. She also argued that women do not have a set destiny created by their biological sex (1952: 33).

Another popular theory of women's subjugation to men discussed by De Beauvoir was developed by Friedrich Engels in his famous work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Engels 1884). Engels' theory postulates that humans

learned to domesticate animals, which led to the creation of private property. Once men had private property they needed heirs to leave their belongings to after their death. Therefore, the institution of monogamy was developed in order to ensure that men knew who their heirs were. Monogamy gave men power over women because they had control over private property. De Beauvoir argues against this theory by stating that it undermines how important women's role of reproduction is in maintaining society. She also maintains that if there were not already a human consciousness that created the category of the Other, it would not matter if men were the ones who domesticated animals and invented the bronze tool (1952: 58). This consciousness of dominating the Other already existed.

This leads to another crucial point made by De Beauvoir, and that is that women also possess a consciousness that an Other exists. They recognize themselves as the Other and typically accept it as their role without fighting back. The only times when women try to fight this notion, they do so with masculine perspectives (1952: 129). In other words, if women want to be taken seriously and not viewed as the Other, they must portray masculine qualities and characteristics. Women can be divided into groups based on how they perceive themselves in relation to men. The "feminine" woman tries to "catch" men by being sexually desirable and in the process she turns herself into an object. The "modern" woman tries to prove herself as an equal by accepting masculine values (1952: 718). In order for the woman to be an object in the men's eyes her body must "present the inert and passive qualities of an object" and while the standard of what is beautiful varies by societies, this is the one thing that will remain constant (1952: 157). So, as the woman is objectified, she becomes the Other (1952: 51).

Gender Performativity

American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler's work on gender, sex, and sexuality is heavily influenced by De Beauvoir's ideas. Butler (1990) sees De Beauvoir's work as useful but also lends critiques to more fully capture the dynamics between gender, sex, and sexuality. For the purposes of this study, I will specifically focus on Butler's work on gender performativity.

Gender performativity refers to a performance of gender in which men and women engage throughout their lives (Butler 1990). Biological sex is merely the starting point for gender performance. Transgendered individuals are a clear example of how biological sex is not a concrete determinant of gender. Therefore, it is through cultural cues and training that gender becomes a learned performance. A crucial aspect to Butler is that these performances take place in a "heteronormative matrix" that leads to clear boundaries for what is masculine and what is feminine. In order for these gender performances to have such fixed implications, they must be repeated constantly (Butler 1990: 136). Under these conditions, gender norms are created and are able to remain so heavily embedded in culture (Brady and Schirato 2011: 46). By following these gender norms and viewing them as natural, our culture can idealize heterosexuality as being biological normal (Butler 1990: 135, 2004: 87). Butler's idea is similar to de Beauvoir's idea that women are the Other to men. Any other form of sexuality becomes the Other to heterosexuality, a process leading to the creation of boundaries (Butler 1993: 9). These boundaries are crucial to research on gender differences and the effects they have on society's gender hierarchy and subsequent power structures.

In a more recent book, *Undoing Gender*, Butler looks at the body itself and discusses “cues” that distinguish between what is a female body and what is a male body (Butler 2004). She raises the question of whether gender is something that can be determined simply by biological sex, or if it is a matter of adhering to cultural cues for what a male or female body *should* look like. She uses the example of intersex people to show that it is a combination of both cultural and biological factors, but that, socially, there is always a clear binary structure. A person must be either male or female to be “read” by society. Butler argued, “bodily indicators are the cultural means by which the sexed body is read” (2004: 87). This process informs, by example, why doctors almost always recommend that intersex babies have surgery to make them either male or female. Once the baby has a biological indicator then the cultural indicators can follow, creating the clear binary (masculine/feminine) categories of gender. The physical (male/female) markers of gender then lead to the gender performativity. People will go their entire lives “doing” these gender performances.

Objectification

Both Butler and de Beauvoir use the concept of objectification in their respective works. Recent social-science research on gender has taken this concept into more detailed descriptions. Specifically, there is work focused on self-objectification, which is where both men and women view themselves as an object and sexual objectification, which is heavily centered on the female body as an object of desire towards males. The objectification of women has been historically rooted in myths surrounding biology and culture. This section will focus on these processes of objectification.

As stated above, historical narratives show that women were viewed as subordinate to men for many reasons. Historically, we can see how the body specifically became objectified and was justified as an object through biological and cultural cues. For example, Sir Robert Filmer used the *Bible* to justify why women should be submissive to men, and John Locke identified differences in the physical bodies of men and women to explain gender differences (Nicholson 1994: 84). Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, the rise of materialist metaphysics led to a culture that focused on the idea of matter and material. Bodies became materialized and viewed as separate entities from each other, which led to a further divide between the sexes (Nicholson 1994: 85). Eventually it became possible to distinguish between different types of objectification.

Self-objectification is the process of viewing one's body the way in which a third person would (generally the media or the opposite sex) (Roberts and Gettman 2004, Newheiser, LaFrance and Dividio: 2010: 657). Such objectification of the self can lead to psychological problems and negative emotions (Lorber and Martin 2007: 230). This problem has dominantly been a women's issue, but recently the negative effects of self-objectification have been seen in males as well (Newheiser et al. 2010: 658). Most works view the process of self-objectification and the process of objectifying others as two separate processes. However, a theory called the "circle of objectification" proposes that objectification is a cycle that encompasses self-objectification, objectification of others, and comparison to others (Lindner, Tantleff-Dunn, and Jentsch 2012). This is a more detailed and clear picture of the process of objectification. All three of these factors should be considered when trying to assess objectification as a social phenomenon.

Another form of objectification, perhaps the most commonly studied in the social sciences, is sexual objectification. Sexual objectification occurs when a body is viewed as an object of pleasure by another person. This can have many social repercussions. Feminists have argued that this type of objectification leads to sexual assault. When a woman is viewed as an object, it is easier for the attacker to justify what he or she is doing because he or she has made a boundary between himself or herself (a human with needs) and the object (can satisfy needs).

As a specific form of othering, sexual objectification can have legal implications. The modern legal system is supposed to enforce justice for all, but when a complex societal issue arises it can cause discrimination in the law and lead to unequal treatment. In other words, “there is a modern dilemma of law in the relationship between values and norms, which under discriminatory legal conditions, appears as conflict” (Deflem 2008: 199). For example, sexual objectification has an impact on victim blaming in sexual assault cases. If a woman dresses “too sexy” and she is assaulted, it is possible, both socially and legally, that she will be blamed for what happened to her. She was so enticing and desirable, the argument may go, that the offender could not resist – ultimately objectifying her into an object of erotic desire (Rival, Slater, and Miller 1998).

A recent study of gender differences found that men thought women showed more sexual interest in them (through specific cues such as physical touching while talking) than the women reported they actually did (Henningsen, Miller, and Valde 2006: 827). This finding is another example of how victim blaming can occur. If the female was thought to come on to the attacker, it could be thought to be proof that she wanted sex, even when in reality she did not.

Sexual objectification permeates many facets of society. The media is one of the main institutions that socializes members of society to adopt aspects of sexual objectification. A strong example of this is known as the so-called male gaze. The male gaze is apparent in the media, most frequently cinema, to show a woman sexualized in the way a male would view her. Women become a sexual spectacle, specifically an *image* that corresponds to a sexualized fantasy. This male gazing is done with specific camera angles and having women characters behave in a stereotypical sexualized way. This image leads to objectification as both men and women see these images and start to internalize them as normal, reinforcing a patriarchal power structure (Mulvey 1981).

Doing Gender

The idea of “doing gender” was introduced as a sociological concept in a 1987 paper by Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987) in the journal *Gender and Society*. Since then, it has become among the most popular and widely used concepts in the sociology of gender (Wickes and Emmison 2007: 311). It has been used in many different disciplines over the last few decades, although it still remains most relevant in the sociology of gender and feminism.

West and Zimmerman consider doing gender a “routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment... it involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities” (West and Zimmerman 1987: 126). Doing gender is not just a performance for men and women. It is something that cannot be turned on and off in certain situations. According to West and Zimmerman it is something that individuals constantly adhere to in all environments. This notion contradicts Erving Goffman’s concept of “gender display,” because gender categorization

cannot be avoided (West and Zimmerman 1987: 130). Essentially, individuals have a natural tendency to categorize things. Gender is no exception. People create binary categories of gender (masculine and feminine) and every interaction in daily life is an “if-can” test of gender (West and Zimmerman 1987: 133). This is how the sex category an individual belongs constructs gender, not just as a matter of doing what is gender-appropriate, but also implying that there will be sanctions when someone does something gender-inappropriate.

Because of the popularity of the concept of “doing gender,” a critical survey has been conducted concerning its use and abuse in sociology (Wickes and Emmison 2007). The authors of this study found that many sociologists use the concept only “ceremoniously,” by referencing it but not actually testing the underlying theory. They also argue that the method of interviewing is insufficient for testing purposes, and that the only way to test the theory is through observation. This method would confirm that females perform feminine behaviors while males perform masculine behaviors (Wickes and Emmison 2007: 321). However, I argue, it is still useful to acknowledge the process of doing gender in a study of gendered behavior, regardless of the limitations of a specific method, because the process of doing gender is an important piece in the broader gender puzzle. While a qualitative study using open-ended interviewing as its main methodology may not be able to test the theoretical assumption of doing gender itself, it can lend insights that are useful to describe and *understand* the process of doing gender and other factors that are crucial to gendered behaviors.

CHAPTER 4: LITERATURE REVIEW

Applying the concept of doing gender to the proposed analysis of the heavy metal subculture, a literature review of relevant areas of inquiry reveals three domains where research has focused on the place and role of women in male-dominated and/or hypermasculine collectivities: sports, the workplace, and (sub)cultural groups. Among these various settings, I show, cultural groups (specifically deviant subcultures) are most interesting for the present study. Cultural research on gender, in fact, includes studies on the heavy metal subculture.

Sports

Many scholarly studies have been conducted on women in the world of sports. These studies rely on a wide variety of theories and methods. For the purposes of this study, I will focus on research that explores gender dynamics and adds to the literature related to othering, doing gender, and the marginalization of women in hypermasculine or male-dominated sports. Specifically, I look at othering in the homosocial environment, gender marking, and objectification.

Male sports teams are arguably a male homosocial environment that could lead to hegemonic masculinity (Messner, Duncan, and Jensen 1993, Anderson 2008, Thorpe 2010). Specifically, this means that the group promotes attitudes of misogyny through a hierarchy based on homophobia, authority, physical strength, aggression, and other

masculine ideals (Messner, Duncan, and Jensen 1993, Theberge 1993, Sisjord and Kristiansen 2009, Ezzell 2009, and Anderson 2008). These groups also tend to be very homogenous in regards to other characteristics such race, age, and socioeconomic status.

For example, a study on snowboarding found that hierarchies are most likely to be based on skill level when the group is very homogeneous (Thorpe 2010: 185). Older snowboarders are less likely to hold sexist or homophobic views than younger snowboarders. The older snowboarders admit to having multiple masculinities, which vary in masculine/feminine characteristics. The author of the study presumes that this variety in masculinities is caused by the new roles which the older snowboarders might be playing, for example, the roles of husband and father. Research also found that as more women enter the sport of snowboarding, the more accepting the atmosphere becomes for women, an effect caused just by the mere presence of females (Thorpe 2010: 197; Anderson 2008: 272).

With respect to othering, studies have generally found that women are marginalized in the world of sports (Messner, Duncan, and Jensen 1993, Anderson 2008, Theberge 1993, and Ezzell 2009). Women are othered in sports by the idea that their physical body differences lower their status distinctively below that of men. The idea is that women are physically incapable of achieving what males can in just about every sport. These boundaries created by othering can become so severe that it is possible that it can lead to condoning violence against women (Anderson 2008). The best way to stop the othering would be to show that women can participate in sports at the same level that men can. For example, cheerleading squads that have both sexes do not have the same

boundaries that same-sex sports have (Anderson 2008: 272). This idea would promote that gender integration is the best way to stop the marginalization of women.

Women athletes are aware of othering in sports, for instance by gender marking of sports women in the media. Gender marking occurs when language is used to other women. Women's sporting events are oftentimes marked by literally using a marker that symbolizes it as a women's sport (Messner, Duncan, and Jensen 1993; Theberge 1993). For example, in the United States there exists a "Women's Final Four," "NCAA Women's National Championship Game," and the commonly used phrase "women's basketball" (Messner, Duncan, and Jensen 1993: 125). This explicit gendering does not happen with men's basketball games and other male sports because men are the dominant group in essentially all sports.

These factors impact how women athletes view themselves, particularly in juxtaposition to male athletes. What can specifically happen in relation to body image is self-objectification (Ezzell 2009 and Sisjord and Kristiansen 2009). There is a specific dynamic occurring for these women. They want to have a body that appeals to societal expectations of femininity, but at the same time they want to be taken seriously by other (male) athletes who might judge them for their smaller stature. This process turns into a cycle of negative images that leads to self-objectification because the body becomes a project (Ezzell 2009: 118). Defensive othering can occur when females create a boundary between themselves and other females, while recognizing the boundary that already exists between themselves and males. This defensive othering leads to a hierarchy where women do not try to compete with the males because they already consider themselves of

lower status. However, they recognize that their ‘masculine’ qualities and athleticism make them better than other women leading to a “heterosexy-fit” (Ezzell 2009: 116).

A study of female rugby players showed this phenomenon (Ezzell 2009). The study found that females do not try to compete with the male rugby players and admit they cannot go up against the males on the rugby field. They can play the same sport only against other females. The female rugby players also want to be viewed as attractive, and the specific team studied was proud that they were called the “Barbie dolls” in their division. They acknowledge that their bodies are smaller and that they are more attractive than the females on the other teams, but that they are also so athletic that they are still able to beat the other teams, thereby ironically reinforcing heterosexism and gender inequality (Ezzell 2009).

Studies on women in sports have also found that females have to specially prove themselves as athletes, coaches, and announcers (Theberge 1993, Ezzell 2009, Thorpe 2010, and Sisjord and Kristiansen 2009). They have to demonstrate a physical strength (Sisjord and Kristiansen 2009), a knowledge of the game (Theberge 1993), and physical ability of the sport (Thorpe 2010 and Ezzell 2009). If they are not able to do this, the othering they experience is higher. Women athletes often find that the best way to fit in and prove themselves is to display masculine qualities and devalue feminine qualities (Theberge 1993: 303-305).

In sum, research shows that women in sports display a token status that leads to a clear and distinct othering (by both males and females). This process of othering is exacerbated through a male homosocial environment that promotes hegemonic masculinity. Gender marking and self-objectification further the marginalization of

women on both a macro-scale (through the media) and a micro-scale (among the female athletes themselves). The only way that othering can be countered is when female athletes are able to prove themselves as equals such as through gender-integrating sports.

The Workplace

Among the research conducted on women employed in work environments that are generally male-dominated, some studies focus on power positions, such as political office or leadership positions in companies. These studies lend insight into the gender hierarchies that exist in relation to power, raising the issue of gender salience in the workplace when women are outnumbered. Research has also focused on jobs that are traditionally defined as masculine for the physicality and mentality required, such as fire fighters and police officers. Of special interest is the military.

It is not surprising that physical gender differences become an issue for jobs that are known to require physical strength at the core of the work or jobs that are known to have violent undertones. Women working stereotypically masculine jobs can induce feelings of doubt by their co-workers (Craig and Jacobs 1985, Koenig 1978). For example, women police officers experience scrutiny due to the stereotype that women are gentler than men, which has implications for the female officer's co-workers and for the public in general. There is a concern that women are not as capable with a gun as men (Koenig 1978). Male police officers reported thinking that there was little chance that the female officers could be equal to them in skill levels related to the job and that their skills were so bad that it could actually lead to more work for the male officers (Koenig 1978: 270, 271). Overall there is also a concern that women are not capable of handling dangerous situations.

Similar findings were reported for female fire fighters, whom research found thought to be unable to carry their own weight and that slowing down the male fire fighters (Craig and Jacobs 1985). However, after working with the women fire fighters and experiencing their abilities, these views were found to decrease (Craig and Jacobs 1985: 67). The women gave themselves higher scores on capability than did their male counterparts. The males were concerned that the women would receive special treatment on the job, while the women thought they did not and should not receive any special treatment (Craig and Jacobs 1985: 70). This finding shows that there is a clear distinction between how women view themselves and how the males view them.

A recent study on women and men dealing with conflict in the workplace (for a variety of jobs) found that women are viewed as more passive and constructive and men are more active and destructive, thus adhering to traditional ideas about how men and women behave on the job (Davis, Capobianco, and Kraus 2010). When more women enter a male-dominated job, gender becomes less salient and can lead to more equal pay (Huffman 2013). It has been argued that this idea could also be applied to government positions. If more women were elected to office, gender would become less salient and women constituents would feel more engaged and have more trust in the government (Lawless 2004).

Gender marking also affects how women are treated in the workforce. This marking could imply something as simple as language, similar to the sports research that showed marking female sports with gendered names for the female athletic events (Messner, Duncan, and Jensen 1993 and Katila and Meriläinen 1999). Gender marking on the job can be anything that points out differences among men and women. For

example, women who are in sales positions experience a disadvantage when they take male clients to a golf course, which is a common business practice. Some golf courses do not allow women at all, and the ones that do often have different tee markers that distinguish where men and women should tee off from (giving women a clear distance advantage), drawing attention to their gender differences during a business transaction (Morgan and Martin 2006: 121). Another place to go for business discussions is strip clubs (discussed specifically in this study, there was no discussion of how common this environment is for business transactions), a practice women have described as problematic as it places them in an awkward position and feeling like they had more in common with the strippers than with the male clients (Morgan and Martin 2006: 119). Women continue to go though this, because if they do not, they might miss out on making a sale. Women workers also choose to frequently ignore sexual harassment because they know it could cost them a sale (Morgan and Martin 2006: 114).

Women are arguably made most aware of their gender differences in the military more than any other field, because of its high level of masculine values and hierarchal focus on force and power. Studies show that women in military settings experience doing gender in the most traditional ways (Beckett 2000 and Hauser 2011). One study found that women found it “empowering” to be in the military and follow traditional gender roles (Hauser 2011). Women in the Israeli military found that they received special treatment by being in a hypermasculine and male-dominated environment. They found that they were more likely to receive special favors or gifts, get sexual attention that they perceived as fun, and they enjoyed recreating a family environment away from home for their male counterparts (Hauser 2011: 637-643). The women soldiers trivialize what

could be viewed as sexual harassment because they say if they call out the men for it they will be viewed as sex objects and it might create a stronger gender divide. Ultimately, this conformity to traditional gender roles is conceived to be beneficial for the individual women themselves but leads to a reinforcement of traditional gender roles in society at large (Hauser 2011).

In conclusion, research on gender differences in the workplace shows that women in male-dominated occupations are often marginalized, have to specially prove themselves, and are not always taken seriously by their male co-workers. This leads to othering because the women have these collective experiences on the basis of their gender. These findings again show that doing gender is part of almost all interactions that individuals participate in daily, even at their jobs. When women are employed in jobs that are male-dominated or hypermasculine, they experience an even higher level of doing gender because they are consciously made aware of their gender through gender markers. This phenomenon can have very real ramifications in relation to sexual harassment in the workplace. It is possible that women in these professions are less likely to report harassment because they feel that it might make the othering they experience even worse (Hauser 2011). One way to combat this experience is by having more women in jobs that have been traditionally filled by males.

(Sub)Cultural Groups

Besides the world of sports and the workplace, women can also be members of groups that are based on certain values and beliefs, and other groups that are part of lifestyles, which are considered as alternative or even treated as criminal in some cases. I have chosen to refer to these collectivities as (sub)cultural groups because of their unique

nature of being related more to lifestyle choices. Women who join male-dominated cultural groups that are known for their hypermasculinity are often labeled as deviants. Both mainstream society and the males in a specific cultural group contribute to this phenomenon. These women are made very aware of their gender in settings where they are in the minority. This phenomenon has an impact on women's behavior and many times they develop coping strategies that help them be accepted into the group and be able to have a functioning role in the group. The two dominant routes of "fitting in" or being accepted are adhering to traditional gender roles (Fleetwood 2014, Wolkomir 2012, and Miller 1998) or trying to be like "one of the guys" by performing masculinity the same way the males in the group do (Miller 1998, Lumsden 2010, and Pilgeram 2007). Defensive othering towards other women in the group frequently occurs as well as a known hierarchy among the group members based on sex and gender (Wolkomir 2012, Lumsden 2010, Pilgeram 2007, Miller 1998, and Fleetwood 2014).

One way for women to fit into a male-dominated group known for its hypermasculine culture is to perform masculinity the same way the men in the group do, for instance by adopting a specific style of dress and language (Lumsden 2010 and Pilgeram 2007). This type of behavior helps show the men in the group that women have rejected feminine qualities in order to take on masculine qualities that will allow them to do an activity related to the group. For example, women farm operators perform masculine roles to be taken seriously in the agriculture world. They recognize that doing this will make them lose all femininity (occasionally making them unsuitable "wife material"), but they think that it is worth it to be respected in the agricultural world (Pilgeram 2007: 585). It is not really possible to be feminine and masculine

simultaneously, because it would mean undoing gender and would lead to sanctions (Pilgeram 2007: 587).

Female racecar drivers have similar experiences. If these women want to be taken seriously as drivers, they have to prove themselves by challenging males to races, dressing like the guys, using foul language like the guys, and so forth (Lumsden 2010). An important part of this culture is to make sure that the racecars are distinguishable from mainstream cars, which is done by technical modifications to the cars. Women drivers try to keep some aspects of femininity by making their cars “girly” with specific gendered additions such as pink accents, teddy bears in plain sight, and keeping their cars extra tidy. Even when the women try to balance this masculine/feminine identity, they frequently fail. When they do many things to appear feminine, it is easier for them to be sexually objectified by male drivers and have lower status in the group (Lumsden 2010).

When women do try to adhere to traditional gender roles and stay feminine, it is often in cultural situations where they have something monetary to gain from doing so (Fleetwood 2014 and Wolkomir 2012). Women players of Texas Hold Em poker found that the best competitive strategy they could employ was to adhere to a gender stereotype such as being dumb, submissive, or sexualized (Wolkomir 2012: 414). They feel that if they tried to act masculine, they would be sanctioned by the males and considered a “bitch.” Poker is a game that does not require skills that are traditionally masculine or feminine. It would stand to reason that both males and females would be able to compete in a gender-neutral environment. Yet, that is not the case. Men dominate the poker culture and have imposed a masculine framework on the game (Wolkomir 2012: 411). They describe their card-playing strategies in terms of masculine aggression. And women

think that if they want to win, they have to adhere to the stereotypes the men hold about them. This response by women “reproduces their marginalized status” (414) although they think it will help them win. When women try to play like the men and be aggressive, the men find them less desirable as opponents.

Another example of women adhering to traditional gender roles for monetary gains is found among women crack dealers. A case study found that these women choose the job because they think it is easy to do while staying at home with their children (Fleetwood 2014: 99). The women openly recognize that they cannot deal drugs the same way men do (with violence and threats), for which reason they choose to use a feminine strategy of friendly professionalism (Fleetwood 2014: 101). They keep their work life separate from their home life and uphold a feminine, traditional, motherly status. This separation is held to be beneficial in their work life, which leads to benefits in their home life. In both cases, the women only adhere to the traditional gender roles because it benefits them financially.

Some cultural groups allow for women to join by acting either masculine or feminine. An example of this finding is provided in a study that focused on women in gangs and how they are initiated into the group (Miller 1998). Miller looked at how females were treated in the gang and what roles are they were allowed to take on once they became members. Her study included semi-structured in-depth interviews with 20 girls who were in mixed-gender gangs and another 26 girls who did not have any gang involvement (Miller 1998: 411).

Miller found that the girls choose to join the gangs for protection from other gangs (Miller 1998: 412). Specifically, being in a male-dominated group makes the

female members feel safe from men who are not in the gang. Ironically, however, being in the gang, subjected the females to violence and, in some cases, sexual assault. Also, in order to be accepted into the gang, the females had to be initiated into the group. The most common route for initiation is known as being “beat in,” which is also the initiation for males in the group (Miller 1998: 413). This shows that the potential member is “tough” enough to be in the group. Another option is to be accepted into the group because of a connection to a male in the group who is high up in the gang hierarchy (Miller 1998: 415). This route is only accessible to the females who are sisters or girlfriends of gang members. This form of gang membership leads to a special type of protection in the gang because it means that other members of the gang cannot be violent or sexual towards them, which would be seen as disrespectful towards a powerful male member of the gang. A final route into the gang that is open explicitly to females is being “sexed in” (Miller 1998: 418). This means that girls have sex with (multiple) members of the gang. Using this route means that the females are available for sex anytime a member of the gang wants it. Both the males and females in the gang feel these specific females are the lowest members in the gang.

The study by Miller found that the form of initiation that female gang members choose directly affects their roles in the group and specific gang-related acts they are allowed to commit. There are certain violent acts that females are never allowed to participate in simply because they are females (Miller 1998: 417). There are generally clear gender boundaries in the gang. Females are subjected to specific forms of punishment. For example, one girl told a story about a brutal gang-rape on a rival female

gang member (Miller 1998: 420). Sexual assaults on females as a form of punishment or violence are exclusive to women members because of their biological sex.

The risk for victimization is much higher for females in mixed-gender gangs. Such a group is unique because gangs have more formal means of initiation than other cultural groups. Not only is there a hierarchy between the sexes in these groups, but also a hierarchy within the men and women groups as well. Women use the strategy of defensive othering in these cultural groups as well (Wolkomir 2012, Lumsden 2010, and Pilgeram 2007). Women who exhibit masculine qualities are quick to other themselves from the feminine women. The more masculine women view the more feminine women as overly sexualized and very different from themselves. This differentiation creates a hierarchy where men always come before women, but masculine women were treated better than feminine women.

These findings show that women who can perform masculinity in hypermasculine cultural groups are more likely to be accepted and less likely to be sexually objectified, although they do lose out on having any femininity because of the implied clear dichotomy. However, there are exceptions, such as the women in the Texas Hold Em poker group who found that playing the 'dumb girl' stereotype was to their advantage. Women who are more feminine in these groups are not really striving to be accepted in the group, but are perceived to be there because of their connection to the men in the group. Women who choose to employ femininity *and* be in the group do so because it is to their own advantage (usually in a financial sense). Due to this clear distinction between masculine women and feminine women, defensive othering occurs so that the masculine women can show they are part of the group they are trying to belong to.

However, it is also important to point out that not all studies find that hierarchies based on gender exist in certain subcultures. For example, a study that examined female methamphetamine users, dealers, and producers found that gender did not impact the hierarchy that existed. In this case, the power hierarchy existed based on the ability to do tasks, where the women who were just users were at the bottom and the producers were at the top (Jenkot 2008).

Heavy Metal Subculture

Most sociological work on heavy metal approaches it from the viewpoint of a deviant subculture. This is not surprising given the musical form's sometimes infamous countercultural personae. Moral panics related to heavy metal have even been described because of the music's perceived promotion of suicide and Satanism (Haenfler 2005: 63). Most literature on heavy metal does not focus on gender apart from noting the lack of female fans in the subculture.

Ross Haenfler (2010) does a nice job of summarizing the dominant themes in the literature. He states that previous research has shown that the heavy metal subculture draws people in, specifically adolescents, by being accepting of those who feel alienated by mainstream society (Haenfler 2010: 59). The subculture is known as masculine due to their sometimes aggressive behavior and the lack of female fans. Aggression is commonly associated with the act of "moshing" in a "mosh pit" at live concerts. To an outsider, moshing appears to be extremely violent and similar to a fist fight. Among the insiders, however, moshing has a set of rules and etiquette to ensure that no one is injured. An important rule for moshing, for instance, is that if a mosher falls down, other participants immediately need to stop and help the person up (Palmer 2005: 155). Deena

Weinstein, one of the leading experts in the sociological study of heavy metal music and culture, compares moshing to bumper cars because it is meant to be fun (2000:229).

Metal was also found to be one of the most disliked genres of music in the 1993 General Social Survey (Bryson 1996).

While women are generally underrepresented in heavy metal, some successful metal bands have female members who “defy the stereotype of women as groupies, asserting their power in a male-dominated subculture” (Haenfler 2005: 61). However, there is some concern expressed over what the overall genre has to say about women and how it influences males to react towards women. It is argued, for example, that heavy metal is a “discourse shaped by patriarchy” (Walser 1993: 109). One study found that when males are exposed to heavy metal music (with both secular and Christian lyrical themes), they are more likely to hold conventional gender stereotypes and display negative attitudes toward women (St. Lawrence and Joyner 1991: 59). The study also found that males who identified as very religious were more likely to be accepting of sexist ideologies and thoughts that condone rape. An unexpected finding in this study was that classical music created more self-reported arousal in males than did heavy metal music, which could imply that the music itself is not the cause of arousal, which instead is related to qualities of the various listening publics. Also, women were found to tend to like “lite” (commercially oriented) metal music more than males, while males tended to like “classical/traditional” or “speed/thrash” more than women (Weinstein 2000: 299).

Specifically related to gender, a study based on ethnographic research specifically looked at female metal fans in Australia and found that a strongly gendered power dynamic can be seen through multiple facets at concert venues (Krenskey and McKay

2000: 262). The researchers of this study coded both male and female metal fans based on style of dress and used these codes to reveal gendered behaviors. For example, so-called “Glam Chicks” were always dressed in an oversexualized way and almost always on the arm of a male metal fan (Krenske and McKay 2000: 271). Females were found to be attracted to the heavy metal scene because they felt an alienation to mainstream society. Also, a gender hierarchy was observed among the males and females, whereby females never had power over a male unless they had a direct connection to a male who was high up in the hierarchy (Krensky and McKay 2000: 279). In this case, power was viewed as the amount of space in the concert venue that women were able to participate in without repercussion, although the definition of power was not as clear as it could have been. As a limitation, this study relied on analysis of only one club and was conducted by a female interviewer who only interviewed females and did not gain access to research the male perspective.

A study that conducted interviews of female fans of “alternative hard rock” found that there were blurred lines between male and heterosexual dominance (Schippers 2000: 761). Fans’ ideas about gender and sexuality as revealed through interviews conflicted sometimes with what the researcher found during participant observation. The study showed that both male and female fans wanted to reject the idea of a “groupie” (Schippers 2000: 750). It was also commonly accepted for women to be sexual towards each, even when they were not lesbians, a form of behavior that was not acceptable for males to do with other males. The study shows a hard rock subculture that seems to be more fluid in terms of gender boundaries than the heavy metal subculture, even though the genres are closely related. It is possible that the fans of heavy metal will be changing

to take on fluid gender dynamics when the amount of female fans in the culture grows. The alternative hard rock subculture, indeed, is not as male-dominated as the heavy metal subculture, explaining why it has more fluidity in gender roles.

Implications for the Present Study

Clear parallels can be noted among the findings of the studies examined in the literature review on sports, workplace, (sub)cultural groups, and the heavy metal subculture. Specifically, I argue, strong similarities are to be expected between the dynamics and structure of mixed-gender gangs (Miller 1998) and the heavy metal subculture. Both groups are male-dominated and known for aggressive behavior. They are both characterized by distinct styles of clothing, negative attitudes towards mainstream society, and a creation of distinct “us” and “them” categories. Of course, gangs are distinctly violent and have a formal initiation process, which makes them distinct from the heavy metal subculture.

First, the heavy metal subculture is male-dominated and known for the aggressive behavior among its members. As the Miller (1998) study shows, these characteristics could lead to a distinct hierarchy where the males will always be placed higher than the females based solely on gender. Such a gender-based hierarchy can lead to a victimization of females on multiple levels, including violent behavior and sexual assault. Heavy metal concerts are known for being loud, dark, and very crowded. Mosh pits involve a level of physical aggression. It can be argued that this is typically a male setting where females could easily be victimized, especially when females are outnumbered. An example of such problematic behavior is the Woodstock ‘99 festival, where multiple rapes were reported after nu-metal band Limp Bizkit had taken the stage. Such violent

aggression is reminiscent of the gang-rape described by Miller (1998). While such extreme incidents may be isolated events, they are examples of how a male homosocial environment, in combination with other factors, can be a catalyst for sexual assault.

Second, both mixed-gender gangs and the heavy metal subculture are characterized by an “us-versus-them” ideology. In gangs, it is clear that the rival gang is the primary enemy. The sharp boundary between rivaling gangs requires special initiation into a gang in order to prove loyalty and keep the gang boundary clear. In the heavy metal subculture, the boundary with the outside world is not as sharp and distinct, but there is a boundary nonetheless between metalheads (as fans of heavy metal are commonly known) and mainstream society. Fans of heavy metal typically claim to be different from the rest of society and explicitly wish to be known as metalheads. The metal identity is made by style of dress, choice of music, and an overall attitude. When groups have clear boundaries between who is “in” and who is “out,” there are requirements to prove oneself in the group. When that group is also male-dominated, the task of belonging could become even more difficult for females, because they might have to “prove” themselves even more than the males do, strictly on the basis of their gender.

CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

To address issues of gender in heavy metal, I conducted 20 interviews with 10 female and 10 male self-identified metal fans. The participants ranged from 18 to 49 years of age. Two of the participants identified as Asian, while one identified as Hispanic/White, and the remaining participants identified as White. The number of concerts attended for each participant ranged from one to over 400. Five of the interviews were face-to-face, one was conducted over the phone without permission to record, and fourteen were conducted online through emails or Facebook chats. Ideally, the interviews would all have been face-to-face, but it turned out to be unexpectedly time-consuming to find respondents and subsequently to agree on a time and methods for the interviews. I completed the IRB required for this study, as well as the CITI Training needed to work with human subjects.

The five participants who were interviewed face-to-face were found with the help of the heavy metal music DJ of the University of South Carolina radio station. This DJ also books weekly metal shows at local bars and is very engaged in the local music scene. He asked if fans were interested in participating in the study on his Facebook page and by word of mouth, which produced five participants who contacted me through Facebook, email, or phone. Because this method did not produce more respondents, I also gave out

slips to undergraduates in selected classes in my University's Sociology Department to ask them what genre of music they like best in order to identify fans of heavy metal. After handing out around 175 of these slips and not finding a single student who identified as a metal fan, I dropped this plan and decided to try and find participants at metal concerts.

Over the course of the research period, I attended three metal concerts, in Lexington, KY, Charlotte, NC, and Spartanburg, SC. I approached multiple people at all three shows, but no one would agree to do an interview. At a Slipknot show I wore so-called "sugar skull" make up (as I had done at previous Slipknot shows) and found that this seemed to irritate many of the female fans I was approaching and asking to interview. One female specifically (out of four females I approached) told me to "go on with my girly shit." At the next metal show I attended, featuring the band Mushroomhead, I dressed less feminine and more traditional metal (black jeans, black combat boots, black metal shirt) and approached more fans. But at this show, the fans I approached seemed to think I was trying to scam them and refused to talk to me. One male gave me his email address for an online interview, but later said he was too busy to participate.

Finally, I decided to contact friends who are metal fans and asked them to help me find participants. This method produced additional respondents, whereby I made sure to only interview people I had never met, spoken with, or been otherwise in contact with. Using these various methods and on the basis of snowball sampling with the first round of participants, I was eventually able to conduct twenty interviews, ten with male fans and ten with female fans.

Five of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, one was a phone interview that was not recorded, and fourteen were online interviews through email or Facebook chat. The face-to-face interviews were conducted in a public location (Starbucks). These interviews lasted around 30 minutes and were semi-structured or in-depth. I relied on a list of questions to make sure I uncovered the necessary information, while at the same time allowing for leads from the respondents themselves so that the interviews could go in a different, unexpected direction (Bernard 2013: 182). The online interviews were conducted by sending the participants the questions from the interview guide, and subsequently following up with their responses for clarity when needed.

I collected the data through semi-structured interviews, rather than on the basis of a survey, because of the specific type of information I was seeking to uncover. In order to *understand the experiences* of the participants, I needed to get to know *their* subjective interpretations concerning the gender dynamics of metal and relevant concert behaviors. In-depth interviewing provides the best means to adequately understand the behaviors, states of mind, and interpretations of events that the participants experience (Fleetwood 2014, Pilgeram 2007, Lumsden 2010, Wolkomir 2012, and Morgan and Martin 2006). In view of the choices I had to make to conduct some interviews by means of email or Facebook chat, certain limitations were imposed on the depth that could be reached.

I recognize that female respondents' experiences in this specific type of environment could lead to discussions that are of a personal nature. However, due to my own status as a female researcher who also possesses prior knowledge (as a participant) of the heavy metal culture, I was able to conduct the interviews using an appropriate type of language and repertoire with the participants that feminist research sometimes requires

(DeVault 1990). It was also useful that I have a certain knowledge of the metal subculture, because I think otherwise participants might be suspicious about why their subculture was being studied. Especially when a participant needed reassurance, I revealed my own participation in the subculture to give me credibility that should lead to more honest and valid answers during the interview (Singleton and Straits 2010: 380).

My subjectivity as a researcher in this study brought both strengths and weaknesses to this study, which must be discussed in qualitative research (Glesne 2011:151). As a feminist and metal fan myself, my position impacted the direction of the study. A limitation to this approach is that I cannot obtain generalizable results and that I may have brought my own experiences as a metal fan to the study. Yet, I deliberately sought to keep my own experiences separate from this study. I also made sure to not judge participants for making statements that I felt were sexist. Nonetheless, it is possible that male participants were not as honest with me about what they truly thought about females in the metal community, because in most cases they asked me if I was a fan. They might have been concerned about giving responses that they thought would offend me. In this respect, the online interviews by email and Facebook chat may have been an advantage, because these methods took away the face-to-face pressure about how respondents could have perceived my own presumed reaction to statements about females in the subculture, although some research shows that different forms of interviewing have no impact on the results (Laumann et al 1994).

A main strength to my study is that by being a fan of heavy metal myself I could make the participants feel more comfortable while talking to me. I observed that there was a very distinct change in the participants' demeanor (for the face-to-face and phone

interviews) after they asked me if I was a fan of the genre. I never volunteered the information to them, but many asked me if I was a fan upfront, and I felt that was because they were considered that they were under analysis for the negative stereotypes associated with the subculture. Once respondents knew I was not an ‘outsider,’ they were more friendly and less formal with me. Some of the male participants wanted to know specific information such as shows I’ve been to and bands I like. In some cases, I felt I had to prove myself as a fan.

Research Questions

In line with the theoretical framework I specified about the role of gender in homosocial groups, the research questions I explored through the interviews pertain to both the overall characteristics of the heavy metal subculture and, in particular, the place of females therein. Specifically, my research questions are:

1. What does it mean to the respondent to be a fan of heavy metal music?
2. What are the self-reported reasons for joining the heavy metal subculture?
3. Do respondents feel women are discriminated against and, if so, do the respondents attribute it to the female’s minority status in the group? Do female respondents describe experiences of being othered or objectified?
4. Are respondents’ opinions on gender dynamics in the heavy metal subculture different for male and female fans?
5. What are respondents’ attitudes about the possible effects of the practices of flashing and moshing on the status of female fans in the heavy metal subculture? Do respondent’s attitudes relate to descriptions of females doing their gender and/or undoing their gender?

There were a total of sixteen specific interview questions that aim to answer these research questions (see Appendix 1). These questions were created on the basis of the “Checklist of Major Points” created by Bradburn, Sudman, and Wansink (2004: 118). The questions were designed to be very broad at first, to see if the participants mentioned gender when asked general questions about the heavy metal subculture. The general questions were content-wise based on the themes found in the literature on the heavy metal subculture. These questions explored the meaning of being of metal fan and were designed to elicit descriptive general responses from the participants. The subsequent portion of the interview questions was targeted specifically at gender relations in the subculture. These questions were more specific and examined whether the participants brought up flashing or moshing during the gender questions. A final part of the interviews, as addressed by the final two interview questions, was specifically meant to uncover fans’ thoughts on flashing and moshing.

I initially considered asking the female participants a different set of questions than the males to see what their specific perceptions were like, but I decided that it would be more useful to ask both males and females the same questions. Primarily, this strategy makes it easier to compare the findings for male and female respondents.

I want to emphasize that the interview questions were conceived as part of an *interview guide* (not a survey) to ensure that specific topics are covered in a generally specified order (Bernard 2013: 182). These questions guided the conversation I had with the participants during the face-to-face and phone interviews. This style of interviewing flowed more like an informal conversation than a formally pre-structured questionnaire. This approach has the advantage to produce a more *in-depth* discussion that provide more

fruitful information on the subjective experiences of the participants, which is the primary aim of this study.

The first few interview questions were meant to put the participants at ease, and the participants seem more comfortable with me after telling me about their favorite bands, which helped me build more rapport with my participants. So while these questions did not necessarily provide useful data, they did help the participants feel more relaxed and lead to a more honest and valid interview.

Data Analysis

After the interviews were completed, I conducted an analysis of the findings on the basis of thematic coding (Babbie 2010: 400). I performed a total of five rounds of coding. In round one, themes were pulled out for each question. In round two, I focused on the female participants' responses and pulled out relevant themes. In round three, I focused on male participants' responses. In round four, I compared the male and female themes, which lead to 10 overarching themes for the entire study. In round five, I condensed those 10 themes logically down to 8 themes, which were grouped into 4 categories.

I also explored any deviating statements made in the interviews, which were indeed present. Even though these statements were not reflective of any dominant opinion, they were useful to understand certain areas in the heavy metal subculture on which there are more nuanced opinions. These deviating statements also indicate areas that might be useful to help formulate ideas for future research.

CHAPTER 6:

FINDINGS

I will present the findings of this study by providing an in-depth exposition of the themes that emerged from the five rounds of coding the data. Eight themes are discussed under four headings, first focusing on themes that are more general (to the entire heavy metal subculture) and subsequently centering on more specific themes that are related to gender, with separate attention for the acts of moshing and flashing. It is to be noted that these themes were derived from the participants' discussions of their own *experiences* in the heavy metal subculture and how they attach *meaning* to these experiences.

In order to maintain anonymity, the participants will be distinguished with an 'M' for male and an 'F' for female, followed by a number that is chosen merely on the basis of the order in which they were interviewed. So, for example, F4 means the fourth female participant interviewed. When quotes contain typos or misspelled words, they are based on participants' verbatim answers provided in writing. I left these responses exactly as the participants typed them in order to keep the data as pure as possible and to make sure I did not impose any additional meanings.

The Heavy Metal Identity

This section will explore the broadest themes found in the data. They are broad in the sense that the participants apply them to the entire heavy metal subculture, regardless of gender. Two specific themes emerged from these data: (1) being a metalhead is a

passion; and (2) there is a clear distinction between the *insiders*' perspectives and the *outsiders*' perspectives of the subculture.

Theme 1: Heavy metal as a passion. Participants overwhelmingly used the word 'passion' to refer to their membership in the heavy metal community. Using such a strongly emotional term demonstrates that being a metalhead is clearly an important part of respondents' overall identity. It was especially striking that the word was used in response to a wide variety of questions, both by male and female participants alike.

When asked to describe the heavy metal fan base in general terms or what it means to be a 'real' metal fan, many participants spoke of this passion. For example, Participant F6 described metal fans as "mostly males, blue collar workers, who are passionate about their music." Participant F10 in her response to the same question said, "you have to truly listen to the music and understand the passion that comes with the music and understand the meaning of songs." Later in her interview Participant F10 also said a fan is accepted into the group, "if you can prove your [sic] not just listening to be cool, show your passion is real." Participant M1 took a pause before answering this question, and then the first word he said was "passion" before going on to describe his personal interest in the music. The most striking part of his response was the clear and conscious decision to say the word 'passion' after taking the time to think about the question. Similarly, Participant M6 stated, "I think you have a passion for the genera [sic] of music is the true meaning of a Metal Fan." When asked what the characteristics of a metal fan are, Participant M4 kept his response short and simple by saying, "passion for the music; not much more than that. No need for ear gauges."

The significance of ‘passion’ was also brought up in response to questions that specifically targeted if gender impacted one’s acceptance into the group. For instance, Participant F10 said that gender did not affect her acceptance, stating “no, your [sic] accepted based on passion.” The same respondent also said that a woman who moshes “shows her true passion, she’s brave definitely.” So while the term ‘passion’ was used mostly in response to questions that regarded the heavy metal subculture as a whole, in this instance it also came up in regards to female acceptance.

Theme 2: The distinction between insiders’ and outsiders’ perspectives.

Respondents often state that there is a clear distinction between the insiders’ perspectives and the outsiders’ perspectives of the heavy metal subculture. This theme was also prevalent for both male and female participants. Essentially, the participants in this study recognized that there exists a stereotype of what a metal fan is to broader society, which many of the respondents agree to exist. However, they also argue that there are metal fans who do not fit that stereotype and that the subculture actually includes a lot of diversity. However, the comments that were made on diversity generally pertained more to *diversity among males*, not diversity in regards to race, gender, or sexual orientation.

Many participants comment on the outsider’s stereotype of metal fans, and some comment that this stereotype does exist but is not reflective of what all metal fans are actually like. For example, Participant M8 said, “LOL I understand there is a definite stereotype of the long haired guy with his leather jacket, sub-primate IQ, and 400 tattoos, but honestly I think the only universal characteristic of metal fans is the love of the heavily distorted guitar. I think we’d all like to think that heavy metal fans MUST have some inner sense of rebellion, but the truth is you’ll find your share of guys and gals who

would proudly identify themselves as conservative Republicans at any rock concert in any genre of music. Hell, my in laws are the biggest Republicans that I've ever met and they gave me a Metallica beanie for Christmas last year.” This sentiment was reiterated by Participant M10 who said, “I think metal fans are generally intelligent, thoughtful people. I don't think one could stereotype metal fans as far as their outward appearance goes as many fans of metal look no different than any other segment of society. That said, there certainly seems to be a uniform for attending shows that consists of jeans, t shirt, and piercings.” Although some respondents do acknowledge a unified stereotype exists, they disagree with its validity. Participant F9, for instance, argued, “Honestly there is no set 'type' of a fan. I've known very respectable people in the community to love metal, as well as the stereotype.”

Participants frequently spoke about what 'outsiders' think, even though they were not asked about this at all, which shows this differentiation is of considerable importance to the fans in identifying and presenting their metal subculture. For example, Participant F5 (who did a phone interview, and declined the interview being recorded) essentially said, “the group is intimidating to outsiders, who do not understand the music; they pre-judge us as people who don't work, don't have real jobs.” Participant F8 gave a similar response, saying “I think they are misunderstood. Society thinks of the metal fan base as hoodlums, trashy, etc.” Participant F1 said outsiders adopt a stereotype of metalheads that is “not a good stereotype...not in college...on drugs....drinking...have gauges, dreads, black hair, piercings....all black clothing.” Participant F2 gave her response to what are the characteristics in a clear dichotomy for 'outsiders' and 'insiders' where the 'outsiders' view the metal subculture as “long hair, black clothing, dirty, wearing denim vests,

patches and male” and ‘internally’ there “are all sorts of demographics, males, females, some look like they don’t belong at all.”

Finally, there were many statements about the diversity in metal, but usually the examples given were in regards to diverse characteristics among male fans. The most common example was the male fan that shows up to the show in a suit and tie. For example, Participant F4 said, “There really aren’t any (characteristics of a real metal fan) to be honest. It’s not about what you wear or how you look to be a Metal fan. I’ve seen people who dress in nothing but suits and ties and love Slayer. On the flipside, I’ve seen kids who run around in band shirts they don’t even listen to because they think it’s ‘cool.’ Maybe I’m just too damn old, but I refuse to typecast anyone unjustly.” Participant F7 said, “It all depends of the person. Generally metal fans can be easily recognized by their look. But the look is not everything. You could be facing someone wearing a suit without even knowing that he absolutely loves metal. I would say that we share the same love that kind of music, to me being a metal fan since so many years is also a synonym of friendship.”

Both of these themes show that the metal fans in this study view the subculture as a passionate group that distinguishes itself from mainstream society, or ‘outsiders.’ It is worth noting that most of these quotes were, not surprisingly, pulled from the first few questions about the subculture in general. But as the sequence of the questions was purposefully designed to see if gender was discussed in these broader questions, it is striking that I found that, in responding to these general questions, most respondents used pronouns and physical descriptions of fans that were male. Only later in the interview,

when I asked about gender specifically, some of these same participants would proclaim that the metal subculture was equal with respect to gender.

Women in Metal

There were two themes that emerged, in interviews with both males and females, with respect to the status of female metal fans: (1) there is a special need to *prove oneself* as a female/minority and (2) female metalheads need *physical markers* or *symbols* to emphasize that they are fans of the genre.

Theme 3: There is a special need to prove oneself as a female/minority. This theme was one of the most prevalent findings of this study. Over half of the female participants in the interviews felt that they needed to do some form of ‘proving’ themselves in order to be accepted into the group. For example, Participant F1 said, “you have to know what you’re talking about, know the bands.” This requirement on the part of female metalheads implies having a broad knowledge of the musical genre. Another participant supporting this theme was Participant F5 who argued, “you gotta know the bands.” Participant F10 similarly said, “prove your [sic] not just listening to be cool.” The most detailed response on this subject came from Participant F4 who stated, “Not to mention the whole crap that gets thrown at girls during gigs. I’m tall enough that I will push back if some guy is trying to be a jerk. Yes, some girls are there to make gaga eyes at the band members but a lot of them are there for the music. Too bad closed-minded guys don’t see it that way. You have to somehow prove your worth and all that crap. It’s so not like that in other countries. For some reason the US seems to think they’re better than everyone else and you get that kind of mentality.” There was a rather strong consensus among females on this issue.

On the other hand, almost every male respondent in this study said that just going to metal shows was enough to be accepted into the group. One male respondent said that style of dress at the show was important: “I wore my football jersey and nice jeans because it was on a school night and we had had football practice that day. As excited as I was [sic] to be going to my first metal show, I couldn’t help but feel that something was amiss. Finally I realized that I was the only person in attendance that wasn’t wearing a black t-shirt and ripped jeans.” This statement is from Participant M8’s first metal show in the 1980s. He never actually said in his interview that you had to prove yourself as a metal fan, only that this experience was an issue he personally had experienced. The only minority male in the study, Participant M3 who is Korean, explicitly told me that I should be studying all minorities in the metal subculture, not just the females. He also spoke of having to prove oneself to be accepted into the group. He said, “Let’s see, for me its acknowledging a lot of the classics like um you have to acknowledge the importance of bands like Anthrax, Iron Maiden, Motorhead, or Black Sabbath uh and I guess like the old school bands like death metal like Slayer, Metallica, so then there’s that acceptance as long as you acknowledge that those bands are important that is acceptance but at the same time things that would get you isolated would be, I hear a lot from the elitist point of view or old school guys. A love for something too different like newer bands that may or may not be as good or at least said by the old schoolers or elitists but at the same time I do hold elitist sentiments myself a lot of the common hate or accusations are towards the core bands a lot.”

These findings demonstrate that minority members of the metal subculture (including racial minorities) feel that you have to especially prove yourself to be

accepted, while white males in the study think you just need to go to shows. On this theme, there was a clear distinction between the views of the minorities of the group and the majority.

Theme 4: Female metalheads need physical markers or symbols to emphasize that they are fans of the genre. While this theme was not discovered among the majority of female interviews, it was more common for the females to discuss having to buy merchandise to establish identity than it was for the males. For example, Participant F3 said, “heavy metal...seeps into multiple facets of their life, whether that includes moshing at concerts, collecting rare vinyl of obscure metal bands or just listening to hours of metal in their free time.” Other females argued for the significance of buying merchandise clothing that has been worn, specifically shirts. For example, Participant F2 said that buying merchandise like shirts was important. Participant F10 brought it up multiple times in her interview with statements like, “support them by buying there [sic] CDs and apparel [sic],” and she later said, “Don’t wear the shirt if you don’t know the band.”

This theme has relevance from a gender perspective because no males discussed buying things as part of their experience in the subculture. Based on the broader statements made in the interviews with females, this theme can be argued to imply that female metal fans feel a need for physical markers to show they are fans of the genre as another way of ‘proving’ themselves.

Moshing and Flashing

Moshing and flashing were the two specific acts that were explored in the interviews in regards to gender. There were two questions that explicitly asked the

participants how moshing and flashing affect a woman's status in the group. There were two themes that emerged from the findings on these topics: (1) there is *defensive othering* in flashing and (2) moshing girls receive *more respect*.

Theme 5: There is defensive othering in flashing. Female participants in this study generally view the act of flashing as a negative form of behavior. For example, Participant F2 said that flashing gives a woman "groupie status," while Participant F3 said, "I honestly don't have much experience with this, but from the few times I have seen this happen, I can say they're viewed by some as 'wild and crazy,' and by others as 'tramps.' Depending on who you ask, she might not be taken as seriously as a metal fan, and it might be assumed that she's looking to hook up with someone rather than to enjoy the music." This quote illustrates that the assumed 'groupie' status of flashers implies that these females attend concerts more for the possibility of a sexual hook up rather than to enjoy the music, ultimately making them less of a fan. This theme also relates to the general consensus among participants that the act of flashing is not as common as it used to be, an issue I will further discuss below.

Some female participants comment that flashing implies a need for attention. For example, Participant F6 said, "It may show she's not as into the music as others, or she just wants attention." Participant F9 likewise stated, "I guess because I'm a woman I just think it's senseless, and view it as someone trying to get some attention. Usually it's just accepted as 'it's going to happen' at any concert." As an example of defensive othering, this participant clarified that "because [she is] a woman," it is a "senseless" thing to do. This respondent recognized that for males, the view might be different.

Participant F8 said, “I personally think it’s trashy but it’s part of the culture. I haven’t seen it as much in metal than I have at 80s hair band concerts (Motley Cure, Poison, etc).” The questions on flashing and moshing were overwhelmingly the only time when females took the time to distinguish that these were their personal views, using a lot of ‘I’ statements rather than responding to how the larger subculture would view it (as they did in other questions). Another example of this finding came from Participant F7 who said, “I never encountered a woman in my group who did such a thing during a concert.” Defensive othering is present because the female participants took the time during the interviews to distinguish themselves from those women who engage in an act that they view negatively. Participant F7 also distinguished ‘her group’ of women from women who flash, which made it clear she did not associate with women who flashed.

It is worth noting that the only females in this study who did not portray the act of flashing in a negative way also used laughter in their relevant responses. My phone interview with Participant F5 had a friendly, but serious tone, until this question. She then began laughing and then took a pause and then said, “I guess she’s having a good time...” and then she trailed off and began laughing again. Participant F10 said that women who flash were, “more confident, badass Lol crazy.” This was one of only two times “lol” was used during this online interview. The only female participants in this study that did not speak of flashing in a negative way still found the thought of it humorous. This finding could arguably show that flashing is something that might be made fun of by other females.

The male participants of this study gave very mixed answers on the question of flashing. Some gave neutral responses, which did not really delineate whether it was a

positive or negative act. The older male participant, by example, said, “The guys love it! It certainly bring her A LOT OF ATTENTION!!! LOL.” Two other male participants viewed flashing in a more negative way. For example, Participant M4 said, “I can only speak for myself, but I wouldn’t say I gain respect for them when they do.” Participant M5 likewise stated, “Honestly, I have always found myself to be very embarrassed for the women who do that. Some may do it to get the attention of band members, but I have been able to do that just with screaming along, throwing the horns, etc. I never got the concept of a woman pulling up her shirt to get a bunch of sweaty guys to freak out. I would never outwardly shame them...it’s just something I never really got.” Making these statements, both male participants use “I” statements like the female participants who also viewed the act negatively. There thus appears to be a consensus among these participants to distance themselves from women who flash. On the other hand, the participant who seemed to view flashing as a positive act said ‘the guys’ rather than using an ‘I’ statement. The more neutral statements could have been given due to my status as a female researcher.

There was only one participant in the study who brought up sexual assault, which was one of the broader issues that influenced this study. Participant M2 said, “It doesn’t end well (flashing)...can be seen as an invitation to get frisky. You hear about it leading to sexual assault.” He went on to give a detailed example that happened at an Exodus concert where a female crowd surfer took her shirt off and was groped the whole time while she was surfing. Her boyfriend saw it and was upset and tried to approach some of the guys that had groped her, and ultimately the girl and boyfriend were kicked out of the

show rather than the men accused of groping. This story illustrates how victim blaming can occur in sexual assaults.

Theme 6: Moshing girls receive more respect. This theme was dominant in both male and female participants' interviews. The physical size of the female mosher was mentioned as well, whereby for females it was an issue of defensive othering and for males it was a safety concern. Performing the more typical masculine act of moshing seemed to add to the amount of respect a female received from these participants. For example, Participant F5 said, "she earns respect from the guys for sure." Participant F6 commented that, "I don't think it affects her status. It may actually show that she can 'hang' with the guys." In both of these statements, we see a direct comment on how female moshing connects with 'the guys'. Participant M8 reiterated this after being prompted by me in a follow up question to do so. He was quick to respond to the question about flashing, but when asked about moshing his response was, "not really sure?" When I followed up and asked to give his personal thoughts when he saw a woman mosh, he responded: "In my opinion if the woman is moshes it means she is definitely hardcore and a fan of the band. It also shows she can keep her own and hang with the guys. I would think she would be more accepted more into the heavy metal subculture group." These comments show the advantage in moshing of being able to 'hang with the guys'.

There were two quotes that stood out as examples of defensive othering with respect to the data on moshing. Participant F1 said about female moshers, "they are looked up to...its about taking turn [sic]." She went on to tell a story about a time where she thought of female moshing as negative because it involved a "fat chick" who, she thought, might cause people to get hurt. She made no comparable mention about the size

of male moshers. Participant F3 said, “When a woman moshes at a concert, and she does it properly, her status is positively affected. She’s usually accepted as a ‘real metal fan’. Sometimes, there are women who don’t understand the proper way to mosh in different scenarios. I’ve seen women try too hard to fit in and try to mosh but just get hurt and embarrass themselves. I’ve also seen women initiate mosh pits and go in harder than some of the men. If she shows she knows what she’s doing, thus displaying masculine qualities, she is further accepted into the group.” This quote is very descriptive and literally comments on how masculine qualities raise females’ status in the heavy metal subculture, supporting the notion of defensive othering because special value is placed on females who display masculine characteristics.

Male participants occasionally also mentioned the size of female moshers. Participant M2 said that, “a smaller girl might get protection.” Participant M7 said, “At a mosh pit everybody should be aware of what they’re doing, no matter the gender. And when a girl is moshing against a guy, then the guy needs to be aware of her physical status.” In this statement, the participants contradicts himself by saying that ‘everyone should be aware of what they’re doing’, but then later saying ‘guys’ specifically need to be aware of the girl’s ‘physical status.’ As such, the size of the female is brought up in the discussion of moshing, but not the male’s.

In terms of moshing having a distinctly masculine quality, the terms of “true” and “ballsy” moshers stood out in some of the male participants’ interviews. Participant M4 said, “That is a ballsy move, but good for her. I am sure it is accepted amongst the true moshers.” The phrase ‘true moshers’ almost creates a dichotomy whereby the female moshers is compared to the ‘true’ (male) moshers. Participant M3 said, “she is cool...if

she had the balls to do it.” The use of the words ‘balls’ and ‘ballsy’ also promote the act of moshing as a masculine behavior, which can earn female moshers more respect. One participant summed up this overall theme nicely by stating that a female moshing “makes her more fun to bring to a show. It also gives her a better reputation. Newer people in the group find them more ‘hardcore’ than others.”

Differences and Changes

The final two themes that emerged from the data are that: (1) there are *differences* across subgenres within the metal subculture; and (2) the metal subculture is *changing* in a positive way for women. Both male and female participants describe these developments as positive.

Theme 7: There are differences across subgenres in the heavy metal subculture.

This theme emerged most frequently in the questions about the general description of the fan base. Many participants found this question hard to answer because they said that it ‘depended on the subgenre of metal.’ While respondents recognized the unified outsiders’ stereotype of a metalhead, they were quick to add that insiders’ are aware of the differences and disagreements among metalheads across various subgenres. For example, Participant M7 said, “I’ve seen all kinds of metal fans, as well as I’ve seen all kinds of people in each subcultural group. All metal fans have different ways of expressing their personality.” Some participants discussed how some metal subgenres are more ‘elitist’ than others. For example, Participant M9 argued that a fan being accepted depends on the subgenre they are trying to belong to: “Depends on the group. Most would need to listen to the same genre of metal. Especially when you get into the more extreme genres. It also helps to be friends with someone in the group or know someone in the group.”

Female participants expressed similar thoughts, such as Participant F3 who said, “Interactions between metal fans at shows often varies by the sub-genre. Heavier types like thrash, death, and grindcore often include mosh pits in the middle of the floor. Other genres like progressive, slower types of black metal and classic heavy metal usually don’t, so fans usually stand still or headbang with others when appropriate.” Female participants also discussed how flashing mostly took place only in the older and more commercially oriented “hair band” or glam genre of metal. Participant F1 said that flashing, “only happened at more rock concerts....the pretty tame metal.” Participant F4 said, “People actually still do that [flashing] at metal gigs? I don’t know what Metal gigs you go to, but they don’t happen at mine. I haven’t seen someone flash since Poison in the 80s and 90s.” Similarly, Participant F8 said, “I personally think it’s trashy but it’s part of the culture. I haven’t seen it as much in metal than I have at 80s hair band concerts (Motley Cure, Poison, etc).” Thus, based on statements made by participants in this study, flashing is more common for metal bands that peaked in popularity in the 80s/90s and may thus be declining in the contemporary subculture.

Theme 8: The metal subculture is changing in a positive way for women. While some participants spoke about how the metal subculture is more challenging for female members, the majority of respondents stated that the situation is changing for the better. For example, Participant F2 said hypermasculinity in metal is “starting to go away...before yeah it definitely was like 80s thrash was male dominated....today there are more female lead singers.” Participant F3 similarly stated that the “heavy metal fan culture is most definitely male-dominated, as it has been for years. That being said, it’s come a very long way. More women are taking charge in the genre. There are more

female musicians in metal, or so it seems. There are females who are allowing their femininity to shine through as designers making sexy metal-inspired clothing. There are female metal fans who are not exactly masculine, but just enjoy the music. There are female metal journalists, photographers and concert promoters as well. I'm a singer in a heavy metal band myself. That being said, we have quite a ways to go... Unfortunately, heavy metal's aggression, loudness and energy are all masculine-related attributes so heavy metal itself is a very hypermasculine scene in sound and in look. That doesn't mean women are shunned out, but it does mean there is a huge double standard in some areas of heavy metal." Such quotes also show that a lot of meaning is assigned to the presence of female lead singers in some of the newer metal bands, and how this integration is considered a sign of positive change.

Other respondents reiterated this sentiment, such as Participant M5 who agreed that heavy metal is very masculine, but also added: "The older I get, the more evidence I see of female metal fans, which I think is awesome. The scene does still feel male dominated, just to a lesser extent than say, 20 years ago." The oldest metal fan I interviewed, this respondent went on to say it is no longer more difficult for a woman to be accepted as fan a metal fan because: "If that ever was the case, I think that is a thing of the past now. I think it is fantastic to see women, especially women of all ages, at shows." Similarly, Participant M9 said, "When I first became a fan it was way harder for a woman to be accepted. I've seen that shift over the years...Everything about females has changed since I first became a fan. They used to be the 'holders' of things at shows. The watchers of drinks. Now everything has changed. It's weird now if I go to a show and not see a female in the pit."

Participant M7 also agreed, stating “Yes. It’s mostly male dominated and very masculine, but things have been changing these past years with more and more female-fronted bands becoming successful. And that’s great because we need more diversity. We need more diversity in our music. And we need more diversity in our cultural views. As a gay man, I’ve not always felt really welcome in the community. That’s a shame, isn’t it? It doesn’t have anything to do with the music and the music is what unites us.” This quote is especially striking because it raises the relevance of sexual orientation, which was not explicitly considered as part of this study. This participant, as well as the racial minority participants, made clear that the issue of minority representation in metal not only revolves around gender.

The comments from female fans that thought gender did impact their acceptance into the metal community were fewer in number, but very telling. Perhaps the most striking statement in this respect came from Participant F3 who stated, “My gender does affect my acceptance into the group of heavy metal fans... females are often doubted as being ‘real metal fans,’ because we’ve so often been seen as the eye candy. Even female musicians in the genre who are/were successful took the role as eye candy. Lita Ford and Vixen, for example, are far more known than Chastain and Detente. In the modern day, bands like Epica and In This Moment are far more popular than Mortals, Certin and Mortillery. Outside of the musician role, we’ve often been seen as groupies or girlfriends of musicians, along for status or sex. We’ve been video girls and album art, so sometimes newcomers are not taken as seriously if they’re female. Our intentions are doubted until we ‘prove’ ourselves worthy... I’m occasionally asked where my boyfriend is, supposedly under the assumption that I wouldn’t be at a heavy metal show out of my own

interest. In fact, many of us have to show a masculine side to be more accepted by some. This isn't to say all heavy metal fans are misogynists... I rarely have this problem anymore, and most people will listen to my music and see me for who I am and not my gender. But the reality is that there will always be that guy who says, 'Cool band, the singer/bassist/guitarist/drummer has nice tits!'"

Participant F4 had a similar response, saying her "only gripe... is the whole attitude against female fans. Some guys seem to think that female fans are only there to stare at the band members. And while that may be true for some fans, it doesn't make all of us like that... I grew past that obsession back in high school. Now it's the music that gets my attention. Though having to prove that every time gets very tedious after a while. ...You have to find some angle to prove to the male fans your so-called worth. Personally I couldn't give a fuck what others think of me. That's their problem, not mine."

Participant F5 also gave a complimenting quote, "girls are supposed to do girly stuff...they don't think we can be hardcore."

Some male participants also acknowledged that it might be harder to be a female fan. For example, Participant M10 said, "I would have to say yes (it is harder for females). For a man to be accepted he would probably only need to show up in a black t-shirt and rudimentary knowledge of the band's music. For a woman to be accepted she would probably be called upon to have a much more extensive knowledge of the band and the genre before being accepted as a true fan." Similarly, Participant M3 gave a detailed response about how women have it harder because they "receive fire from both sides" because "society thinks it worse for females to be metal fans" and "metal would do it too, but not as bad as society."

CHAPTER 7:

DISCUSSION

Focusing on the findings of this research in terms of how the uncovered themes connect to the theoretical framework outlined in this thesis, a number of issues emerge. With respect to the themes specifically involving a gender dynamic, the third theme that women and other minorities (the gay male participant and the Korean male participant) felt that they needed to prove themselves reveals an issue that connects back to the theory of women as the other or, more precisely in this case, 'minorities' as the other. The fifth and sixth themes found that women who mosh receive more respect and that some of the female participants in this study gave responses that showed they wanted to be distanced from women who flash. This finding indicates the value of the theory of defensive othering. Finally, the fourth theme, which found that women need physical labels to mark themselves as fans, and the eighth theme, which found that participants in this study think the subculture is changing positively for women, are likewise connected to the theory of objectification.

In the section on woman as 'the Other', I discussed the work of De Beauvoir, and how women become the Other to men. Women recognize themselves as the Other to men and generally accept this hierarchy. The only times women try to fight this notion, they do so with masculine claims (De Beauvoir 1952: 129). In other words, if women want to be taken seriously and not viewed as the Other, they must portray masculine qualities and

characteristics. This notion is displayed very clearly in the descriptions and experiences given by the female participants in this study. The majority of all participants, both males and females, stated that the heavy metal subculture was hypermasculine and male-dominated. This finding demonstrates that most participants in this study share the mindset of women as the Other. Female participants discussed how they felt they needed to prove themselves through things such as knowledge of the genre, going to shows, and wearing specific metal clothing. They also agreed that women who mosh can gain more respect, in which sense women who display masculine qualities are considered to be less othered than women who do not portray masculine qualities.

The themes that supported the theory of defensive othering connect to the notion that women in hypermasculine environments create their own sub-hierarchy where females who display masculine qualities are placed above females who display feminine qualities. This idea was revealed in themes 5 and 6 on flashing and moshing. Women who mosh, according to the study participants, are considered to receive more respect and to be positively viewed as ‘one of the guys.’ There were comments from female participants that demonstrate their disapproval with women who flash. There was also a sense revealed that they wanted to distance themselves from the women who flash. The data from this study thus suggest that there is a general hierarchy in the heavy metal subculture where males are placed above females, while females additionally have a sub-hierarchy whereby women who mosh are at the top, women who do not mosh or flash are in the middle, and women who flash are at the bottom. Participants were also in a general agreement that the metal subculture is changing positively for women, as more women

enter the subculture and less women flash or do other behaviors that make them appear to have ulterior motives for being at metal shows.

The dynamics of gender in heavy metal inevitably exist under the broader culture of values related to gender. Thus, while gender performativity was not explicitly found in the data of this study, it is still an important concept to consider to the extent that the gender expectations for men and women that exist outside of the subculture are brought into the subculture through its members. Being a fan of a masculine genre of music and participating in a hypermasculine subculture could impact how the female participants are seen in society at large which provides the broader context that the homosocial environment exists in, a crucial insight to providing a more holistic view of subcultures.

While the participants' responses did not include descriptions or experiences that directly linked to objectification, the research findings can be analyzed under the broader context of the metal subculture, which might show that objectification is present in the subculture. The one place where objectification was seen in the participants' interviews related to theme four, or the finding that females in this study discussed having physical markers on their bodies to show they are fans more than the male participants in this study. This could be connected with the theory of self-objectification that states that objectified members of society or a subgroup thereof might turn their own bodies into a project to reach a specific goal (in this case fitting into the metal subculture) and objectify their own bodies in the process. While this finding was not prevalent in most of the interviews, it was present in some of the interviews with females, but not with males.

A finding that is central in the context of this thesis is theme 8, concerning the changes in the heavy metal subculture with respect to the status of women. This notion

was most commonly supported by the participants by saying something about how there are more women in the fan base today and, even more importantly, that there are more women in contemporary metal bands. Therefore, the perception to the participants in this study is that women are not being (mis)treated in the same sexualized way as they used to be, specifically in the 80s when hair metal was most popular. This idea of positive changes also was reflected in the discussions on how flashing is no longer as common as it once was, in which sense the data reflect that women are not being sexually objectified as much as they used to be.

However, considering the responses given for *why* the subculture is changing (because metal bands have more female members), sexual objectification could still be an issue. Taking a closer look at the successful metal bands of today that are fronted by women, these female metal musicians often discuss being sexually objectified. For instance, frontwoman Maria Brink of the band In This Moment, which was brought up by a participant in this study, was in a recent media interview asked if she had to prove herself more than a man would. She responded, “I don’t think so”, but also went on to say, “I’ve had 500 people scream, ‘Show me your tits!’ at Ozzfest at the same time. I used to let that have power over me and I used to think that I had to be really tough and scream at the crowd and be like a boy, to be taken seriously. It was all bullshit!” (Blabbermouth 2014). Such objectification of female performers in metal is also seen from the fact that the best-selling metal magazine *Revolver* has a yearly issue called “25 Hottest Chicks in Hard Rock.” Such evidence at least affirms that sexual objectification in heavy metal remains a concern.

CHAPTER 8:

CONCLUSION

A study of gender dynamics in the relatively homosocial environment of the heavy metal subculture, this work was framed on the basis of gender difference theories, specifically centered on salient gender phenomena such as doing gender, othering, and objectification. Relying on in-depth interviewing, I sought to understand the subjective experiences of members of the subculture and uncover the meanings they attach to behavior that takes place in the heavy metal community that relates intimately to gender dynamics, specifically moshing and flashing.

I hope that this study can contribute usefully to the existing scholarly work on the heavy metal subculture and broader research efforts concerning gender differences. Specifically, this study provides more information on how females are accepted (or not) and treated or mistreated in a male-dominated environment. My study also provides insights on both the female and the male perspective in the heavy metal subculture, which Krenske and McKay (2000) argue to be important.

In conclusion, this thesis found that defensive othering, self-objectification, and woman as the 'other' exist in the experiences of the participants of this study. At the same time, more women have been joining this subculture in more recent years, and the participants argued that they think the environment is becoming more positive for female fans.

In terms of the five research questions laid out at the beginning of the thesis, the participants in this study argued that being a metal fan was about having passion and loving the music. The reasons for joining the subculture varied, but the overarching consensus is that metal fans love their favorite music and its lifestyle, and that many of them felt they were different from mainstream society. Female fans gave mixed responses on the question if they felt discriminated against by other metalheads because of their gender. Some respondents describe experiences where they felt they were othered and had to prove themselves. Objectification was not explicitly discussed by participants, but objectification is arguably experienced by female band members in the industry.

There was no strong distinction between the responses of male and female participants. There were mixed responses from males and females about how flashing can affect a woman's status in the group. An overwhelming consensus was found that moshing earns more respect for female fans from the male fans. It can be argued that female fans that engage in moshing un-do their gender and that it helped them find acceptance. Yet, there was barely any discussion from participants about people doing their gender, instead centering their attention on expected etiquette at concerts.

Among the research limitations, the findings of this study may not be generalizable to the entire heavy metal subculture. Also, I was unable to do all of the interviews face-to-face, which might have given more and better qualitative data to work with. A follow-up study of thoroughly conducted in-depth interviews, ideally with more than 20 participants, is needed to increase the validity and significance of my findings. Moreover, it would have been useful to include questions that specifically asked about

behaviors that males more typically engage in at metal shows, so that I would have been able to draw stronger comparisons between the experiences of males and females.

Among the strengths of this study, having a researcher with inside knowledge of the subculture made the interview participants feel more comfortable, which increased the validity of the responses. Moreover, this study provided more information about what personal experiences are like for women in a specific homosocial environment. My research has also revealed questions useful for future research, especially concerning the existence of sexual objectification among female members of heavy metal bands and the need for further exploration about sexual assaults that occur in concert settings. Such important issues of gender and gender violence, also, are worth exploring across different genres of music and other cultural settings.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

- Age:
- Race:
- Sex:
- How long have you been a metal fan?
- What made you become a fan of this particular genre?
- What are some of your favorite bands?
- How many (metal) concerts have you been too?
- What does it mean to you to be a real metal fan?
- What are, according to you, the main characteristics of a metal fan?
- How does a fan become accepted into the group in your opinion?
- How would you describe the metal fan base as a group overall?
- How would you describe interactions between metal fans at shows?
- How would you describe the interactions in a mosh pit?
- Would you consider the heavy metal fan culture as a whole to be male-dominated or overly masculine?
- Do you think your gender (as a man/woman) has affected your acceptance into the group? How?
- When a woman flashes at a concert, how do you think that affects her status?
- When a woman moshes at a concert, how do you think that affect her status?
- Do you think it is generally harder (or not) for a woman to be accepted as a metal fan than for a man?
- Is there any other information you would like to share with me?