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The Catharsis of Heavy Metal



Introduction

When people refer to Heavy Metal music, it is usually met with many different kinds of reactions. There are those who define it as vulgar, noisy, meaningless, dangerous and satanic. And there are those who would say that it is fun, uplifting, powerful and meaningful. There are growing communities of people that religiously listen, support and connect to Heavy Metal. What I am arguing, is that although there are many who criticize and demonize Heavy Metal, it is actually an incredibly emotionally cathartic outlet for people to release stress and anger.

What is Heavy Metal? Heavy Metal is a musical genre “Characterised by a highly distorted guitar sound, pounding rhythms, and lyrics more screamed than sung.”(Arnett, Jeffery, 1991, Pg 76). The nature of Heavy Metal is considered to be so aggressive that it doesn't appear on any mainstream radio stations. Heavy Metal has had a hard time being accepted by many music listeners. (Arnett, Jeffery, 1991, Pg 76).

Where did Heavy Metal music come from? The inception of Heavy Metal has widely been disputed. There are opposing views and perspectives on the origin of Heavy Metal. Many discuss the different bands and songs that may have created the genre. Robert L Gross in the article "Heavy Metal Music: A New Subculture in American Society", gives a detailed summary of the different perspectives on the origin of Heavy Metal. I will describe these perspectives and explain why I subscribe to one rather than the others.

Many people believe that the band “Blue Cheer” created Heavy Metal with their rendition of “Summertime Blues,” Originally performed by Eddie Cochran. (Gross, Robert L, 1990, Pg 120). The band created a version of the song that contained musical aspects of what Heavy Metal music would be known for. This perspective suggests that Heavy Metal was created in 1958, whereas others believe it began years later. I will delve deeper into these aspects in my analysis.

A popular perspective of Heavy Metal's origin is that the band Steppenwolf created Heavy Metal with their song "Born to Be Wild" in 1967. Some historians prefer to credit the band Steppenwolf because "Born to Be Wild" had instrumental elements that reflect modern day Heavy Metal and were allegedly the first to coin the term "Heavy Metal" as it appears in the second verse. (Gross, Robert L, 1990, Pg 120). There is a lot of nuance between what instrumentally could be considered Heavy Metal, as it shares certain characteristics to Hard Rock. This is something I touch on in my analysis as well.

Another perspective, arguably the most popular, is that Heavy Metal was created by the band Black Sabbath in 1969 with the release of their first record. Monte Conner of Road Racer Records said that all music before Black Sabbath was a warm up and that it was not true Heavy Metal (Gross, Robert L, 1990, Pg 120). This perspective essentially discredits the notion that any band before Black Sabbath could be considered Heavy Metal.

Led Zeppelin has also been widely regarded as the pioneers of Heavy Metal as well. Robert Christgau in 1971 reviewed the newest Led Zeppelin album and he declared it to be the true origin of Heavy Metal (Gross, Robert L, 1990, Pg 120). Leading one to believe that Christgau considered Led Zeppelin to be the archetype of Heavy Metal music at that time period.

All of these perspectives on the origin of Heavy Metal have merit and have solid points, however, when it comes to the origin of Heavy Metal I would cite Black Sabbath as the original source. Black Sabbath were the ones who truly pioneered a sound that embodied Heavy Metal. The Blue Cheer's rendition in 1968 had a few elements that would later be a part of the Heavy Metal sound (Ex. aggressive drumming, distorted guitars), but did not have enough to really be considered anything more than hard rock. The perspective that the band Steppenwolf created the

first Heavy Metal song with “Born To Be Wild” isn't as accurate either. Much like “The Blue Cheers,” SteppenWolf was more of a hard rock act.

Both Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin started at the same time. That is why many people might compare them and suggest that one or the other was the true archetype of Heavy Metal, however, Led Zeppelin had more in common with Rock and Blues than what Metal has been known for much like SteppenWolf and Blue Cheer.

The reason this distinction is important is because hard rock can share certain aspects of Metal music, but it does not embody the exact same sound and feeling that Metal produces. Metal music and hard rock both share punchy distorted guitars and strong drums however the style of vocals is a very important distinction, as well as the lyricism. Hard rock, lyrically revolves around more rock tropes (ex. Drugs, Partying, Anger, Sadness) where as Metal has darker themes such as suicide, abuse, rage and may be more politically charged at times than Rock. As for the vocals, though hard rock vocals can be powerful and loud, much like Metal music, they do not use all the same techniques that Metal vocalists employ. Metal vocalists tend to rely on more guttural screaming techniques that distort the voice far more than singing. However, They may have been the first to coin the term Heavy Metal with “Born To Be Wild.” Black Sabbath’s music contained dark gothic themes that later iterations of Metal would contain. These themes were visual and lyrical.

Heavy Metal music has become an ever growing culture that is still thriving in the modern day. Many might be surprised as Metal music is not very mainstream, it exists within its own pocket of society away from those who may not understand it. Despite its lack of mainstream success, Metal music is still present in award ceremonies, magazines, and other forms of media.

Magazines such as *Kerrang*, *Heavy Metal Magazine*, *Alternative Press* and *Revolver* are helping keep Heavy Metal alive today, within their own media platforms. Despite a lack of mainstream success, surprisingly, the Grammys do have an award for “Best Metal Performance.” This is significant because the Grammys is seen as a huge social and mainstream award ceremony, where only the top artists get to perform and win awards. The Grammys creating an award for Heavy Metal has played a huge part in its validation to the mainstream. This Category was created in 1989 for the 31st annual grammy awards and was given to Metallica for their performance of “One.” (“Metallica.” *GRAMMY.com*, 28 Nov. 2020).

Kerrang and *Alternative Press* have also created their own award ceremonies that are inclusive to Heavy Metal performances. *Kerrang* started theirs in 1993 and *Alternative* started theirs in 2014. Although these ceremonies aren't as popular as the Grammys, it still helps to push the culture forward and validate it as an art form. These award ceremonies include modern Metal bands such as Bullet For My Valentine, Bring Me the Horizon, Architects, Parkway Drive and Behemoth. However, without the impact of the Metal community and it's fans, these award shows wouldn't be as successful.

The term “Metalhead” will appear multiple times in my study. But what does this term mean? MetalHead is the term that has been coined by fans of Heavy Metal, it is a term used to define someone who is a fan of Heavy Metal. This term was coined in the late 80's. Many Metalheads wear all black clothing, tattoos, piercings, denim jackets, and have long hair. (“Fighting the Stereotypes”, *DiggIt Magazine*, Nov. 2018).

There are many examples of public figures that have ridiculed Heavy Metal.

“Heavy Metal (is) pimply, prole, Putrid, Unchic, unsophisticated, anti-intellectual... terrible, horrible, and stupid music, barely music at all . . . (Heavy Metal) music (is) made by

slack-jawed, alpaca-haired, bulbous-in seamed imbeciles in jackboots and leather” (Weinstein, 2009, Pg 1).

This quote comes from Robert Duncan, a critic of Rock Music. This quote really represents the disgust for Metal music and the disrespect that the genre gets. This also shows how Metalheads are subject to criticism based on their appearance, which is a direct insult to the culture. I would argue, despite Duncan’s claims of musical unintelligence, Metal musicians in the modern day have been hailed as some of the greatest and most revered musicians of all time.

Musicians like Ozzy Osborn (Black Sabbath) and Eddie Vanhalen (Vanhalen) have received worldwide success and admiration for their musicianship in Heavy Metal. They have impacted fans across the world and have reached mainstream success, unlike many other Heavy Metal artists. I measure success by the record sales, streams and following.

Ozzy Osborn, singer of Black sabbath and solo artist, has sold millions of records around the world. His solo album “Blizzard of Ozz”(1980) garnered 7,370,000 global album sales alone (“Ozzy Osbourne albums,” Chartmasters, 2020).

After the death of Eddie Van Halen his band Van Halen received a huge increase in album sales and streams. This huge resurgence of Vanhalen sales returned them to the charts once again. This shows the impact that Eddie had on Metalheads and how his music was so impactful that it was able to reach mainstream heights (“‘Van Halen,’ ‘1984’ Return to the Charts,” Rolling Stone, 2020).

There have been many accounts of religious figures taking part in the ridicule of Heavy Metal. Religion has played a big part in demonizing the genre. Baptist Minister Jeff R. Steele has hosted a plethora of lectures, he has used these lectures to preach his distaste for rock and Metal music. Steele has said that Heavy Metal is Sick, repulsive, horrible and dangerous. (Weinstein,

2009, Pg 1). This is the kind of rhetoric that has been instrumental in the stigmatization of Heavy Metal.

Politicians have also been known for their public ridicule of Heavy Metal. Much like Religious figures, they use their public influence to make Heavy Metal Taboo. Senator Albert Gore has publicly questioned whether there is a growing trend in violence and sado-masochism due to Heavy Metal music (Weinstein, 2009, Pg 3). This is an example of how many have tried to frame Heavy Metal as the cause of violence.

Throughout my project I will be diving into the literature that investigates the link between Heavy Metal and mental health, as well as what Metal music has done for its listeners. This will help support my thesis that Heavy Metal music can be therapeutic. I will be understanding how Metal makes listeners feel. I will also be doing my own research by analyzing interviews with Metal-heads and Non-Metalheads. This will help me understand the view and effect of Metal from the inside and outside.

Literature Review

Subsection I : Mental Health/Suicidality and Heavy Metal

Metal has become a genre that has been labeled as a threat to the mental health of the youth among other things. I will be using research to show how those who are already suffering from mental health issues are attracted to the genre of Heavy Metal. I will be aiming to prove that it is not caused by the genre, it is however a coping mechanism.

The link between Heavy Metal listeners and their risk for increased suicidality has been studied. I will be discussing why this link exists as well as what it means. I will also be discussing mental health as it relates to Heavy Metal more broadly. There are many articles and studies that have been created to test this link and understand it. I will be supporting my

argument that Heavy Metal is emotionally cathartic by pulling from the data of these articles. I will be arguing that although it may seem that Heavy Metal music could be the cause of this link in suicidality, that the music is actually present in this link due to its ability to help with these feelings. These young listeners are actually connecting meaningfully with this music and are using it to cope with their feelings of suicide.

The article that I will be dissecting is called "*Heavy Metal Music and Adolescent Suicidality...*" by Karen R Scheel, & J. S. Westefeld. This article aims to understand the link between liking Heavy Metal and adolescent susceptibility to suicide. They interviewed and surveyed 121 high school students about their relationship to Heavy Metal as well as their psychological well being and thoughts of suicide. Many were either listeners of Heavy Metal or non-listeners.

According to their results, adolescents who noted that they enjoyed Heavy Metal had "less strong reasons for living" and were more suicidal. They concluded that listeners of Heavy Metal may have increased risk of suicidal vulnerability. Based on the RFL (Reasons for Living Inventory) scores, they were able to scientifically identify and quantify scores that would determine suicidality in these surveys and interviews. These tests were able to make a valid connection between listeners of Heavy Metal and suicidality. These listeners were also tested for their objection to suicide. Many of the listeners scored lower which correlates to higher risk of suicide. (Connell & Meyer, 1991)"(Scheel, Karen & Westefeld, J. 1999, Pg 265).

Although their conclusion links Heavy Metal as a "red flag" for suicidality, the article explains that the true culprit is more likely found in personal and familial characteristics than in the music. (Scheel, Karen & Westefeld, J. 1999, Pg 253). They found that for a large majority, listening to music of all types had a positive effect on their mood. They also found that female

listeners may be more likely to have feelings of suicidality than men, this may be due to a lack of willingness to admit feelings of suicide from men.

The article “*Contextualizing the mental health of Metal youth...*” by Paula Rowe & Bernard Guerin, aims to understand the link between Heavy Metal and mental health issues. There is a lot of misinformation and lack of evidence that is centered around mental health and Heavy Metal; they intend to rectify this misinformation by directly talking to members of the Heavy Metal community.

The researchers spoke with 28 young Australians who strongly identified themselves with Heavy Metal. The pool of interviewees were aged 18–24 years and had 5 females and 23 males. They were chosen from a variety of socio-economic areas, their reasoning was that although Metal used to be considered music for the poor white population, modern Metal has expanded its audience across race, economic status, religion...etc. Their male to female ratio included more men than women to include the proper representation of gender in Heavy Metal.

This article found that it was their Metal identities that protected them from mental health problems. This study found four core themes through the responses they received. What was found was that they were all victims of being bullied or marginalized, they enjoyed how Metal music and lyrics made them feel when they were angry or ostracized, they felt that the Metal community was protective, and they believed that their Metal identities kept bullies away while helping them make friends. It was evident through these interviews, that the Metalhead identities they adopted have helped them to cope through stress. These identities have also helped build and sustain communities. These two factors are evidence that Metal music has the capacity to help alleviate any potential mental health issues. (Rowe, Paula & Guerin, Bernard. (2018), Pg 1).

Subsection II : Heavy Metal as an Identity

In this subsection I will be diving into the concept of Heavy Metal as an Identity. Many fans of Heavy Metal adopt the genre and its culture as a part of their lifestyle. A reason for this is partly due to feelings of social ostracization. There is an abundance of data that shows correlations between Heavy Metal identities and its inherent ability to be used as a means of preserving mental well being and connecting listeners to a supportive community. I will be highlighting evidence that disproves the negative stereotypes associated with identifying with Heavy Metal. This is a significant detail in my claim that Heavy Metal music can be a cathartic outlet. These identities help define and connect Metalheads to communities that share similar interests and experiences.

I will be analyzing the article "*Becoming Metal: narrative reflections...*" by Paula Rowe. This article pulls from different sources of narrative research. It aims to expand and clarify the research that has been done on Heavy Metal identities. It goes into detail on how Heavy Metal identities are used as a mechanism to combat bullying. This article states that these social identities formed through subcultures, are complex and that Metalheads use these collective identities as an avenue for "reclaiming power and disrupting dominant social norms in the school environment." Focusing on the youth of Heavy Metal, the author mentions past research on Heavy Metal identities to show how it has been expanded upon and highlights its significance.

An important study that is mentioned and expanded upon is the research done by A.D Furlong, Woodman, and J. Wyn. in. "*Changing Times, Changing Perspectives....*" The aim of their study was to understand how Heavy Metal music affects young identities.

The key questions that the study brought forth were as follows. What facets of Metal music/Metal culture do young people find interesting? Why do they adopt these identities? From

forming these identities, what do young people hope to gain? What happens to young Metalheads when they leave school and how does their identity affect their choices later in life?

The research found that these identities were formed based on three themes. Two of these themes were the importance of listening to Metal as well as how important it was for them to be connected to the Metal community. There were aspects of the Metal community that were far more nuanced than expected. The Metal community has developed its connection to its audience specifically through narrative lyrics and developing imagined community bonds through Metal related practices.

The third theme that they identified from this study was how they used Metal music and its cultures as a means for social protection. They use the aesthetic and stereotypes of being scary to repel those who may wish them harm. (Rowe, 2017, 719).

Subsection III : Heavy Metal's Cultural Impact

In this subsection I will be examining the literature that involves the culture of Heavy Metal. I will see if the behaviors of Metalheads are attributed to the culture at large. I will be analyzing articles that get through to the heart of the discussion on the culture of Heavy Metal. Heavy Metal has been classified as many things, I believe that its classification as controversial has a lot to do with its attractiveness to adolescence. What is it about the culture of Heavy Metal that shapes the experience of the listener and how is Metal controversial?

The next article that I have included in my research is “Heavy Metal as controversy and counterculture” by T Hjelm, Kahn-Harris, K., & M Levine. This article attempts to explain that controversy and counterculture are at the heart of what Heavy Metal is about. This article explains what this means for the genre and how it has operated over the years.

They speak about how Controversy is a direct threat to the widely held values and interests of others. The article identifies four elements of controversy. One element is that people create controversy rather than ideas. Second is that controversies contain a definitive public element, what does this mean? It means that there is discourse in society that relates to Heavy Metal, people are discussing and or complaining about it. The third aspect of controversy is that it is symbolic and discursive. Examples of how Heavy Metal is Symbolic-discourse include, images of parents burning Heavy Metal records out of distaste circulated in the 1980s and how Iran cracked down on their Heavy Metal communities by confiscating Metal merchandise and making Metalheads cut their hair, as it was seen as satanic.

The last aspect is that controversies are subjective in their perception. Controversy is the byproduct of the claims that are made. Heavy Metal has been perceived as satanic, inappropriate, and a threat to society. Many times controversy is bred from specific moments that affect the larger hegemonic culture. An example of which was in 1985, Tipper Gore investigated Heavy Metal music alongside the congressional committee to target Heavy Metal as a threat to society. Tipper Gore was the spokeswoman of the parent's music resource center. This event had a lot of coverage and was a prominent piece in the controversy of Heavy Metal music. (Hjelm, T., Kahn-Harris, K., & Levine, M. (2012) Pg 8).

“Heavy Metal and Hip-Hop Style Preferences...” by H. W Selfhout, Maarten., et al. Performs a longitudinal study to observe the long term behavioral influence of Heavy Metal and hip-hop. They call this behavior “externalizing problems.” The researchers gave a questionnaire to 931 adolescents (11-18) in two waves over 2 years. A preference for hip-hop was a predictor of externalizing problems in boys and girls. What they found was that externalizing problems were connected to exclusively boys who preferred Heavy Metal. However externalizing issues

found in adolescence did not influence whether they preferred Heavy Metal or Hip-hop later on in time, if they had not previously preferred the genres.

They include reasonings for why musical preference can be a predictor for behavior. They talk about how youth culture is connected to the music that they listen to and even derives the names of the groups they form. For example “rockers,” “punks,” “Metal kids,” and “ravers.” They believe through their research that musical youth culture provides them with their shared values, beliefs and social identities. (Selfhout, Maarten H. W., Heavy Metal and Hip-Hop Style Preferences... et al., (2008) Pg 436).

My Take on The literature

This article (“*Heavy Metal Music and Adolescent Suicidality...*”) does a good job of investigating and highlighting the link between mental illness and listening to Heavy Metal. This article was able to meaningfully and carefully test this link without religious or political bias. It aligns with my point that Heavy Metal is not the cause of these suicidal thoughts, rather it is the coping mechanism that they chose to vent their feelings through. This is a perfect scientific example of why the genre of Heavy Metal is connected to many people with mental health issues and further disproves that the music is exasperating these issues, despite its link.

In my research I will be highlighting more of the reasoning and provide context behind this link. My research will differ because I will be dissecting the contents of the music in order to understand its ability to create catharsis. I will be diving deep into how the culture of Heavy Metal, lyrical content and performance add to the overall emotional catharsis and why it draws in such mentally vulnerable fans. I will use my interviews to draw a connection between community and emotional openness to Heavy Metal music.

This article (“*Contextualizing the mental health of Metal youth...*”) highlights how the Metal community has created a positive culture strung together by commonalities in listeners. As this article and the last have laid out, many of these listeners endure mental health issues, this has been empirically supported. Many listeners are able to connect with other Metalheads through the culture of Heavy Metal. It is the underlying catharsis that the music provides that bonds these listeners. As the article states many listeners deal with mental health issues and bullying. These factors are a diathesis that might lead them to this kind of music, where they build a community around the music. This article helps to support my claims that Heavy Metal has been able to be used as a coping mechanism of sorts.

The Article “*Becoming Metal: narrative reflections...*” by Paula Rowe touches on a very important aspect of Heavy Metal and its culture. A little known part of the identity that is Heavy Metal is that it is purposefully warding off those who don't understand. Heavy Metal is a community of those who are not conventionally accepted by society. To combat bullies and outsiders they don their dark and tough aesthetic.

Another aspect of Heavy Metal culture that was identified by their interviews was how the community in general helps the members' well-being. The feeling they get from being connected to the Heavy Metal community is a prominent part of their life as Metalheads. Another aspect that I will be diving deeper into, is the connection that Metalheads create with the lyrics and imagined community bonds through Metal related practices. In a later section I will be analyzing Metal lyrics to understand their impact. These aspects are an important window into the reasons young people are attracted to the Metal community.

“Heavy Metal as controversy and counterculture” by T Hjelm., K Kahn-Harris., & M Levine adds important details of the community. The way that Heavy Metal has been reacted to

in the media has a lot to do with its perception. By breaking down the aspects of controversy and connecting it to Heavy Metal, we can see that it may be a factor that grabs peoples attention.

We can think about, in other words, what is the point of Heavy Metal? What might be the desired response? This article helped add to the conceptualization of what Heavy Metal means to people. Controversy could be the manifestation of the rebellious nature of the music. Metalheads might be relating to controversy, not for attention but as a statement of rejecting society and its norms.

“Heavy Metal and Hip-Hop Style Preferences...” by Selfhout, H. W Maarten., et al. discovered some very valuable information through their questionnaires. They were definitely able to link a preference for both Heavy Metal and Hip-hop with those who have externalizing problems. I like that a second genre was involved, as many articles solely focused on Heavy Metal. However I wish that their longitudinal study was over more than just a 2 year span. I think that their likeness to change behavior, especially as adolescence would be later on in life, maybe even 5 years later. I believe they would have gotten better data and could have found more if they had followed in later on in time.

Methods

I will be analyzing research in order to provide evidence to the fact that Heavy Metal music is emotionally cathartic to many listeners. I will be asking specific questions that will help me develop an understanding of how people view the Metal community. How does Metal music make people feel? How can it be therapeutic? Are the stereotypes placed upon the community true? What are the similarities among those who listen to Heavy Metal? I will be interviewing individuals who are avid listeners, that consider themselves fans of Heavy Metal aka Metalheads. I will also be interviewing people who don't listen to Metal to have a control group to see the

reasons why some people don't listen to Metal. I aim to understand the inside and outside view of Heavy Metal communities. What are similarities to the people who don't? I will interview approximately 5-7 people per group, which is a total of 10-14 interviews. The demographic that I will target is around 18-24 years of age.

I will be reaching out to local Heavy Metal communities, online forums, pages as well as within my own community and utilize Snowball Sampling. Snowball Sampling is when people are recruited for a study when it may be particularly hard to find participants.

Each group will receive the same questions. I will be asking questions that will help me judge their involvement in the community or lack thereof. My questions will allow my interviewees to reveal what they have witnessed through their own experiences. I will be attempting to understand whether music (Metal or otherwise) has the ability to alleviate negative emotions and why. The questions I will ask to my interviewees are as follows:

How would you describe your involvement in the Metal community? (eg. Do you attend shows, listen to Metal music, create Metal music?) Would you consider yourself a Metal-Head? Have you ever met someone in the Metal community? If so how would you describe them or others that you have met in the community? What are your current feelings towards the Metal community? How much time do you spend listening to music per week? How much of that time is spent listening to Metal music? How does listening to Metal music make you feel? (Angry, calm, agitated, inspired) Has music ever alleviated any negative feelings for you?

I will be using interviews because it will be the most effective way for me to understand how people feel about the music they listen to and how it affects them. I will be paying attention to each and every story that I obtain. I believe that by asking specific questions that deal with music and emotional connection, I will be able to understand why Metal is cathartic, and how it

compares to the catharsis of other genres. What is it about Metal that is especially or just as cathartic?

There are however limitations to interviewing. Those who are interviewed won't be representative of the entire Metal community so I will have to search for the most quality participants. I will also have to make sure my personal bias does not affect the participant or they might answer questions differently. Some people may also be intimidated by talking to someone in person or while seeing someone else, so they might not open up as much as possible.

This will also be an analysis on the Metal community, how the community creates ties with each other, how the community promotes emotional well being and understanding. Although there can be limitations to interviewing, it is a method used a lot in related studies and has proven to be very effective for this subject matter. I will uncover the mysteries of what makes Heavy Metal music so beneficial to those who enjoy it. I will understand first hand how the Metal community has thrived through massive emotional catharsis.

Interview Analysis:

Background

_____ Those who participated in these interviews were either from Long Island or Connecticut. In my interview I was able to include 4 women, one of which was a Metalhead. The other 6 were male, 4 of which were Metalheads. The age range that was captured was ideal, between the ages of 18-24. As for ethnicity, my interviews included 5 Caucasian's, 2 Italian/Caucasian's, 1 Asian/Caucasian, 1 Hispanic/Caucasian and 1 Hispanic. The way that these interviews were conducted were either in person or video conference.

A broad look at how the community is viewed

Through my interviews I was able to get a feel for what those inside and outside the Metal community felt and have experienced. My interviews seem to reflect that my interviewees have had positive experiences with Metalheads. They have described them as Down to earth, chill, caring, relatable and sympathetic. I asked multiple Metalheads and Non-Metalheads “What are your current feelings towards the Metal community.”

Gorilla, a self-identified Metalhead, said that He feels like everybody labels it as an aggressive form of music and it is. But people don't realize that it's therapeutic. He believes that the unique and harsh vocals express emotions that you don't hear in other songs. From Gorilla's perspective, Metal music is aggressive in nature but expresses emotions uniquely in a way that other genres don't. He also believes it has the ability to be therapeutic. He is fully aware of the social stigma that plagues the community and feels that it is unjustified.

Another self-identified Metalhead, Bunny, feels that Metal Music is misrepresented because people don't get it. Bunny feels that People have a narrow view of the culture and genre as a whole. They explain that Metalheads are normal people, who may just dress differently than the average person. Bunny believes that society has pigeon holed the Metal community and has not realized what more it has to offer than mindless aggression.

PopCorn, another self identified Metalhead, says that they think that Metal Music is really fun. They noted it as a positive influence and they described Metalheads as very cool and down to earth people that are very relatable and sympathetic. He noticed a trend of mental illness in the community. The mental illness that exists within listers has been supported by “*Heavy Metal Music and Adolescent Suicidality: An Empirical Investigation.*” by Karen R Scheel, & J. S. Westefeld. I extrapolate on this in my literary analysis.

But what do those on the outside of the community feel about it? Do people outside of the Metal community share similar beliefs? What can we gather from their point of view?

Non-Metalhead, Tea Cup said that Metal Music is very comforting for people who enjoy it at times of stress. They think that it can be viewed in a negative way but there's really no fact that would make Heavy Metal have a negative influence on people who listen to it. Those who like Metal music who don't fit the typical stereotype or mold often have to hide the fact that they like it. They feel like people shouldn't have to hide the fact that they like Metal music and that It shouldn't be a guilty pleasure.

From this we can see that it might be possible that there are people outside the community that have an understanding that Metal music is more than just aggression. Tea Cup is aware of the stereotypes and degradation that is put upon the Metal community while not being involved in it. She has witnessed people hiding their involvement in the Metal community out of fear of rejection. Other Non-Metalheads that I interviewed had less to say about the community, but seemed supportive of it nonetheless. Non-Metalhead's Mercedes and Flower say that they like the Metal community and would say that it's a positive community.

Although it may be based on a small sample. It seems that there are those outside the community that understand the Metal community and its positive impact. This could be due to their interactions with Metalheads and or some sort of social shift in narrative for the community over time.

What we can conclude:

_____ In this section of my interviews I was able to get a feel for what people, broadly, understand or feel about the Metal community. It seems as though those inside and outside the community are aware of its positive impact and understand that the negative stereotypes are not

accurate depictions of what the music is about. Those inside the community feel that the Metal community is not treated as it should by society. It seems as though people can understand what the music can do for people without experiencing it for themselves. It's possible that those who don't understand the music are more likely to shun it and stigmatize it.

The Social Stereotype

I wanted to question Metalheads and Non-Metalheads to see how prevalent social stereotypes of the Metal community are. Do members of the community really dress the same? Do they act the same? I asked my interviewees “Have you ever met someone in the Metal community? If so how would you describe them or others that you have met in the community (Eg. What was their attitude/personality like? How did they dress?)”

Flower, a Non-Metalhead, says that Most people they meet who would consider themselves Metal-heads are great people. She has seen Metalheads that all look different, there is no specific aesthetic. In her experience, she hasn't observed the physical stereotype of Metalheads to be true either. She's not the only interviewee that didn't observe the stereotypes. Some of them had more nuanced experiences.

Non-Metalhead, Marker spoke about his experience with those that he has met in the Metal community. He said that Metalheads were Pretty chill in contrast to their onstage personality. He has encountered about three to four individuals who identify as Metalheads. And they typically wore Darker pallet clothing, black denim, long hair and tattoos.

A distinction in his experience is that Metalheads on stage seem to be more aggressive but off stage they are very easy going people. Unlike Flower, Marker has observed commonalities in how those in the Metal community dress. This aligns with the aesthetic stereotype of Metalheads.

Eyeball, Non-Metalhead, says he has met quite a few Metalheads. He says that usually they wear leather jackets with spikes and skinny jeans. He also notes that they have a tough personality but are very fun people. In Eyeball's experience, he has observed similarities in wardrobe that reflect the stereotype. He has observed that much like the stereotype suggests, Metalheads tend to be tougher, However, not necessarily aggressive. Much like what Popcorn suggested, Metalheads tend to be very fun.

What happens when we look within the community? Do Metalheads observe the stereotypes to be true? When asked the same question, Metalhead Snake said she had met multiple Metalheads. She met the band cradle of filth And said that they dress very edgy and gothic, with face paint, corpse paint and big boots. The other bands that she met were in tee shirts and jeans and that they were all very nice and down to earth people.

Snake has noticed the aesthetic stereotype in Metal musicians that she has met and also shares the sentiment that other Metalheads are very nice and down to earth. She points out the more gothic style that many Metalheads wear. However, She notes that not all Metalheads dress the same.

Metalhead Gorilla says he wasn't always a Metalhead. He said that he used to like rap a lot more. He noticed the Metal community was really cool and people care for each other. He spoke about his experience at a Metal concert where he lost his phone. Someone had turned it in for him and he said that if he was at a different kind of show than someone may not have returned it. Unlike the stereotype that suggests that Metalheads are aggressive and antisocial, Gorilla believes that those within the community tend to be explicitly kind and thoughtful. He believes that the community promotes looking out for each other.

Bunny has noticed that Metalheads wear all black and that they are down to earth. They have mostly seen men in the community. He said that one guy looked like a frat guy who was an all state wrestler and the other guy was a guitar player with long hair. Bunny has noticed Metalheads who align with the stereotype but notes that it isn't always consistent. In his experience, many people who listen to Metal look like average people. Bunny points out that he has mostly encountered Metalheads that are male. He also shares the sentiment that the majority of my interviewees have, that Metalheads are very calm people.

What we can conclude:

From the questions I asked in this section I was able to see if the stereotypes that have been placed on the Metal community are in fact true. Many of the stereotypes suggest that Metalheads are aggressive and unpleasant people. The stereotypes also suggest that they dress the same (denim, dark clothing, band shirts, long hair, tattoos, piercings.) Through my interviews I was able to gather that Metalheads are actually quite diverse in their appearance, while there are those who do represent the stereotype, some may appear as average people. Although, they may not dress as a stereotypical Metalhead to hide the fact that they listen to the music, in fear of scorn. As for the behavioral stereotype, it seems to be far from the truth. Based on my interviews, it seems that many Non-Metalheads find those in the community to be very nice and down to earth people, this helps credibility because they are unbiased and have no reason to defend the community. Those within the community suggest that Metalheads tend to be very good people who care for one another and that the community actually promotes this behavior.

The Emotional Value of Heavy Metal.

An important facet of my interviews is the emotional value of Heavy Metal. I wanted to understand how music and specifically Heavy Metal has made people feel. This is connected to

my thesis, I want to show how Heavy Metal is able to be therapeutic and emotionally cathartic to the listener. Just like the last two sections I asked the same questions to Non-Metalheads and Metalheads to understand how people feel inside and outside the community. I asked “How does listening to Metal music make you feel? (Angry, calm, agitated, inspired)” (**I will refer to this as question one**) and “Has music ever alleviated any negative feelings for you?” (**I will refer to this as question two.**)

To question one, Metalhead Bunny says that it chills him out and It pumps him up at the gym, but If he starts to listen for too long he might get angry. This suggests that there is a nuance to how Metal music may make people feel, even for Metalheads. Although Metal music may be enjoyable to him, listening for too long may anger him. He mentions a productive aspect to Metal music is that it helps him at the gym. In response to question two he says that Metal Music, mainly, alleviates negative feelings for him. This suggests that, in Bunny's case, Metal music has the ability to make him feel better emotionally.

In response to question one, Metalhead BottleCap says that Metal Music helps them get rid of aggression. It makes them happy and they even like sleeping while listening to it. In BottleCap's experience, Metal music alleviates feelings of anger for him, he also attests that it makes him feel happier in general. In response to question two he said that Metal specifically alleviates negative feelings. According to BottleCap, Metal music is the main genre that allows him to purge negative emotions much like Bunny.

Snake responds to question one by saying that it depends on her mood and that she can listen to it whenever. When she is mad it's very satisfying to listen to Metal. Snake admitting that Metal helps with her anger, seems to be a consistent trend. In response to question two she said that It feels like people understand what you are going through and you don't have to get through

it by yourself. Her response mentions how the lyricism in Metal music is an attribute that is involved in the catharsis. This may be the same for other Metalheads.

Given these responses from Metalheads, we can see how Metal makes them feel. How do those outside the community feel when they listen to Metal music? Does it make them uncomfortable? Is emotional catharsis limited to just Metal music?

Non-Metalhead Tea Cup, in response to question one, says that Metal makes them nervous at times but liberated at other times. This is interesting because those who don't usually listen to Metal music may have much more nuanced feelings while listening. Somehow based on her mood, Metal music is able to make her feel nervous or liberated. This could be due to the fact that Metalheads welcome and embrace the aggression as opposed to those who don't understand it. In response to question two she said that music in general has alleviated negative feelings for her. This points to the fact that for some people, music in general has the ability to be therapeutic, not just Metal.

Non-Metalhead Marker responded to question one by saying that they feel energized when listening to Metal Music. By this response we can see that for some non-Metal listeners, they might get varied feelings from listening to Metal music. Whereas some people may feel nervous others might feel quite indifferent or just thrilled. He responded to question two by saying that music, in general, has not alleviated negative feelings for him. By this we can see that music clearly affects people differently and for some it doesn't make them feel any better or worse emotionally.

When presented with question one, Eyeball said that Most of the time he uses Metal when he is working out or when he's angry, to channel what he is going through. This is interesting because it shows that even Non-Metalheads are able to use Metal music to calm

down. It seems as though you don't have to have a strong interest in Metal music for it to alleviate negative feelings. Eyeball also mentions something that has been mentioned before, that Metal music can be used when working out to help motivation. Eyeball responded to question two by saying, Yes, music helps him emotionally all the time. He uses different songs to help him get through what he's feeling. He said that he isn't good at expressing his feelings through words. Singing it usually helps him get through it so he doesn't have to talk about the way he feels.

For those that aren't good at dealing with their emotions, it seems as though music can help them understand what they are feeling. Something that was touched on before was lyricism, it seems as though lyrics are a big part of what helps people emotionally. Lyrical preference could be a factor in whether or not someone is interested in Metal music. Those attracted to darker themes may be drawn to Metal music.

What we can conclude:

Through my interviews I wanted to understand how music, especially Metal music affects people emotionally. Relating to my thesis, does Metal music affect everyone the same? How does music affect people's emotions and generally? What I gathered is that Metal music, even for those who are not Metalheads, can help people purge themselves of anger and negative emotions. Metalheads attest that it helps them, specifically, when they are angry and that the lyricism is a factor that aids in this catharsis. For those that are not interested in Metal music, music in general is able to relieve them of negative feelings. It could be that those attracted to Metal lyricism and instrumentation may prefer it as their vessel for catharsis.

Body

Through my literary analysis and my interview's I have developed my argument that Heavy Metal is therapeutic for some listeners. I will now connect the research that I have done and the research that I have found to make my position more cohesive.

The Mental Health Benefits of Heavy Metal

As mentioned before, there is a link between those who listen to Metal and those who have a susceptibility to suicidality. Although this link seems troubling and some could point to Heavy Metal as the issue, Heavy Metal music is actually what they are using to cope with their feelings. My argument for this is through not only my interviews but interviews that have been done by other researchers. I believe the best way to answer this question is through the words of those affected by the music.

I cite my interview with self proclaimed Metalhead Gorilla where he talks about how he feels about the hate that Heavy Metal gets. He says that people don't understand how Metal music has the ability to be therapeutic. According to him it expresses emotions that other kinds of music can't produce. Not only is the music healing to him but the community and culture contains people that have positively impacted him.

As someone involved in the community, Gorilla believes that Metal music has the ability to be therapeutic. The way that the music is delivered and its message seem to resonate heavily with listeners like Gorilla. Not only that but the community that surrounds Heavy Metal seems to be a positive influence on the members. He believes that this aspect is misunderstood because of its aggressive aesthetic. This point is so evident that even thoughts outside of the community have been able to understand this.

Non-Metalhead Tea Cup says that they think that Metal music is very comforting for people who enjoy it at times of stress. They think that it can be viewed in a negative way, but that

there's really no fact that would make Metal music have a negative influence on people who listen to it. Through her experience as someone who has met people in the community, she has been able to understand how Metal music is a positive influence on its listeners. She even states that she believes this is irrefutable. This shows that those outside of the community understand just how much the music means for its listeners without actually experiencing it for themselves.

Those who have studied this link have not corroborated that the music is the issue. “The source of the problem may lie more in personal and familial characteristics than in any direct effects of the music”(Scheel, Karen & Westefeld, J. 1999, Pg 253).

This quote is pulled from the article that studied the link between suicidality and Heavy Metal. The researchers pointed out that Heavy Metal does not seem to be the factor affecting suicidal feelings, although it is a red flag for them existing. I would add that the music itself is what is helping them cope with their issues as well as the community. I will be diving into how the community helps the members cope in my next section.

You may be wondering, what factors of Heavy Metal are therapeutic for these listeners? Well through these interviews there seems to be a common thread that the lyricism and the delivery of the music’s message seems to resonate with the listeners.

I cite my interview with Snake where in regards to the lyricism of Metal, she said That it makes her feel that other people understand what she is going through, and that you don't have to get through it by yourself. Through her experience as a listener, the lyrics have had a positive impact on her. This is a similar experience that others have had, possibly due to the fact that mental health is a topic mentioned in Metal lyrics that other genres don’t touch on.

An example of this is from a song named Clip Paper Wings by the band “*The Color Morale*” “Your wings might be broken but it's not too late. You hide your emotions so you can

escape. You can't be afraid to make mistakes. And you can't fake perfection” *The Color Morale. Clip Paper Wings, Dan Korneff. 2016*). The message that this song and many other Metal songs reflect is that recovery is always possible. No matter how broken someone may feel they will always be able to rise above their struggle. This is a message that has resonated with listeners and has promoted emotional well being. It is songs like these that attract those who aren't finding positivity in their own life. They may be struggling with substance abuse or mental illness and are able to find solace in lyrics like these. They feel as though they can be themselves if artists that they look up to are supporting them with their message.

Another song that reflects a positive message that isn't always showcased in the public perception of Metal music, is the song *Bad Listener* by the band “Beartooth.” The opening lines of the song are as follows “You say my vision's not a vision at all. There's no degree in rock n roll. Say it's a waste of time. Say I'll never get a real shot. I'll be bangin' my head 'til my brain rots.” (BearTooth. *Bad Listener*, Caleb Shomo, Nick Raskulinecz, Oshie Bichar, Kamron Bradbury. 2018).

This message resonates with those who feel disenfranchised and put down by others. Many people feel as though they are alone and that they are working against an opposition. -The singer Caleb Shomo shares his experience with being put down and misunderstood. It is themes like these that attract those who are struggling to have faith in themselves. They are able to feel understood through lyrics like these, which promotes emotional catharsis.

Metal as Social Protection

_____ One aspect of the Metal community is how it has been used as social protection. It has been studied that those within the community are able to use their Metal identity to help them cope and shield themselves from bullies. This is mentioned as the 3rd theme identified within the interviews by “*Becoming Metal: narrative reflections...*” by Paula Rowe. One of the

interviewees spoke on their specific experience with this phenomenon. They spoke about how they used Heavy Metal as a way to ward off bullies by attempting to scare others away. The interviewee was a victim of bullying and the only thing they found that was able to work was donning a Heavy Metal persona. Because of the imagery and aesthetic of Heavy Metal it can push those away who do not understand. The interviewee cited that this was the only way he was able to make it through school. (Rowe, 2017, Pg 723).

Society might assume that because this person is dressing the way they do and listening to such violent music, that they might not be opposed to violence. When in reality they use Heavy Metal as a source of social protection so that they do not have to encounter people that would pick on them for looking vulnerable. Although there are behavior issues that are associated with a preference for Heavy Metal, as discovered in “Heavy Metal and Hip-Hop Style Preferences...”, I believe that these actions are connected to issues that they are coping with and not the music, as mentioned before.

What does this have to do with the emotional catharsis of Metal music? I would argue that not just the music but the community as a whole, acts as protection for listeners. All the interviews that I analyzed have reflected that the Metal community is a positive influence and although it may seem very rough and aggressive, those in the community support each other. The music acts as a vessel for coping with negative emotions, especially anger, while the aesthetic of the Metal community keeps people away from them.

It is the controversial nature of the genre that is a big part of its image and attraction. Those in the community that are using the aesthetic of the Heavy Metal area attempting to rebel from society and how it has oppressed them. By connecting the larger picture of Heavy Metal as controversy, as mentioned in T Hjelm., K Kahn-Harris., & M Levine. (2012), to those inside of

the community who are using it, we can see that they are attempting to act out in their own way against society. It is this controversy that is a part of the appeal, the political and emotional implications of the genre is inspiring to these listeners. They feel as though they are being attacked by society, so they align with how Heavy Metal has been treated.

In Paula Rowe *Becoming Metal: narrative reflections on the early formation and embodiment of Heavy Metal identities*, she talks about what draws people into Heavy Metal aside from the preference of music. She talks about how joining the Metal community is relatively easy and is inexpensive. She also touched upon how using Metal as social protection was another factor that allures adolescents into Heavy Metal. They develop strong connections within their community as a way to feel accepted in a community and repel the outsiders that don't understand and mock them.

From this we can see that, obviously if they are in the Metal community they are attracted to the music. But what the community has to offer is inclusivity without social barriers. There is no standard of wealth that needs to be met in order to join nor do they have to meet some level of social popularity. This is what attracts those who feel that there is no place for them. Those who need a safe outlet to purge their negative feelings find the Metal community. The community allows them to be who they are as well as express the feelings they have through music. They build bonds in this community through their shared experiences and love for the music.

Conclusion

Through the process of my interviews and my research on the Heavy Metal Community, I believe that I have been able to consolidate evidence that validates my thesis. The Metal community is a complex and misunderstood social phenomenon. There are many who have pushed against the community without inspecting deeper into what is attracting people to it. Those that I had the pleasure of interviewing, inside and outside of the community, understood

its positive impact. This could come from some sort of social shift, or these individuals could all have had positive experiences to support this claim.

The community itself acts as protection against outsiders and they repel them with their aesthetic and attitude. The Metal community is misunderstood, many of the members in this community are dedicated to preserving its positivity. The music itself, while enjoyable to those in the community, has become a coping mechanism for them. Based on the interviews I analyzed, many Metalheads attest to this as well. In the future I would love to see more research being done with interviews as I believe it to be a very important way to understand the message of Heavy Metal.

I was unable to test on a larger scale but I was able to capture the age range I was looking for. I was also unable to talk to Metal musicians, this would have been a great way to understand the intention behind the music. For example, what is their goal in creating such polarizing music. I also think that it would be beneficial to see more longitudinal studies to see the social outcomes of adolescent listeners. This is something that I see is not present in the literature and believe it is important in understanding all facets of this topic. Understanding the listeners perspective is important but I believe those who create the music may have their fingers on the pulse of the community in a different way.

Understanding cultural and social phenomena like Heavy Metal, can give us an insight into parts of society that we tend to ignore. The deeper meaning and understanding behind Heavy Metal is something that has not been viewed as important. It's important to look inside and outside of the community to develop a clear idea of what is going on. There's a reason that certain people with shared experience and feelings are attracted to this kind of aggressive music. The community is made up of sensitive people who are looking for a way to express their anger,

whether it be directed at society or their own personal struggles. These people deserve to be understood and not written off.

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