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# Extreme Conditions Demand Extreme Responses: The Treatment of Women in Black Metal, Death Metal, Doom Metal, and Grindcore

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Extreme Conditions Demand Extreme Responses: The Treatment of Women in Black  
Metal, Death Metal, Doom Metal, and Grindcore

by

Sarah Kitteringham

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
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## **Abstract**

This is a communicative research project that focuses on the treatment of women in extreme metal bands that stem from scenes in Canada. This research addresses the following question: using constructs derived from the Communication Theory of Identity, what are the contributions to studies in extreme metal that can be made by qualitative research on women's experiences of negotiating gender and identity as performers and fans in extreme metal scenes? It also chronicles the history and sounds of extreme metal, and outlines the extreme metal scene in Canada. The methods of inquiry include autoethnography, participant observation, and qualitative interviews. It found that among other challenges, women in extreme metal bands struggle with negative and reactionary responses from both males and females in the metal scene, and how they are represented in the media. Despite these issues, participants in this study identified the increasing number of women in extreme metal bands, and stated that discourse around gender was changing for the better.

## Note

The title of this thesis directly references the album *Extreme Conditions Demand Extreme Responses* by American band Brutal Truth (1992). Several other chapter headings and subheadings within this thesis are taken from song titles by metal bands and extreme metal bands. Chapter 1, which begins on page 1, is dubbed “Children of the Damned”, which is a song by British band Iron Maiden, featured on *Number of the Beast* (1982). In Chapter 5, on page 122, the subheading “I hate people telling me what do... FUCK YOU!” are lyrics taken from track 12 of Swedish band Nasum’s *Helvete* (2002). Lastly, the concluding chapter is dubbed “Which Way the Wind Blows”, which is an album and song by British band Satanic Rites (1985). All songs/albums are included in the References list.

## Acknowledgments

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*For Mia, Glen, Lisa, and Eric Kitteringham. I love you all.*

## Epigraph

“The Missing Link”

An integral sense  
Comes with belonging to a scene  
Supposedly absent of barriers  
(When sexism is one of many)

Earnest words  
Calling for unity of the sexes  
When she's still the chick, or stupid bitch  
(Ridiculed for showing an interest)

Hidden indifference  
Strikes an emotional reaction  
When you see an animal being abused

Yet un-noticed when a woman  
Is abused in the same way

The links of oppression  
Stem from the same degradation  
But to one, our eyes remain closed.

Actively abusing the rights of one  
Whilst fighting for those of another

The 'scene' may hold a different name  
But the role-plays just the same  
Equal rights are fine  
As long as she's in her place

Out rightly denouncing fascism  
Whilst oblivious to it taking place  
Is condemnation of standards  
All an act of save face

Unity a stark ambition  
When our abuse surpasses recognition

- Napalm Death, 1992



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## CHAPTER 1: “Children of the Damned”

When I was 13, two friends came to my house and asked to play a CD on my hand-me-down stereo. The galloping drums, soaring vocals, and dual guitar leads burrowed their way into my skull, and I excitedly demanded to know what band was performing. “Iron Maiden,” was the response. My lifelong love affair with heavy metal began. For three years, I listened to nothing but the British band, making a monthly trip to the music shop to buy the next album in their discography, thrilled about the possibility of finishing the collage of Eddie – the band’s ghoulish mascot – that had been emblazoned millimeter by millimeter on the album spines.

As I entered high school, I met many girls who were as excited about music as I was. Every weekend, my four best friends and I would attend local all-ages metal shows, making sure we had our time in the front row, center stage. We’d mosh – “ a style of dance in which participants... violently hurl their bodies at one another in a dance area called a 'pit'” (Tsitsos, 1999, p. 397) and headbang; a response to the music that means forcefully thrusting your neck and hair up and down (Weinstein, 1991, p. 130) and stage dive, which involves jumping “from the stage to the audience” (Kahn-Harris, 2007, p. 44). Every morning as we drove to school in a minivan, we screamed along to our poorly made mix tapes, a necessity given that the CD player was broken. In unison we’d bellow lyrics, such as those by Swedish band Amon Amarth, “FOR THE STABWOUNDS IN OUR BACKS” (2002, track 2) at maximum volume in oddly garbled voices. As those three years went by, our obsession with aggression grew deeper. I was a over analytical dork who found something to fixate on, and ended up writing a column dubbed

“Unknown Bands You Should Know” for the school paper throughout Grade 11 and Grade 12, praising bands like American metal act Pig Destroyer. Each time I found a new band, an exponential number of new bands would follow in their wake. My girlfriends were equally enthusiastic, introducing me to new bands and accompanying me to all the shows. We dubbed ourselves the “403 Scum Crew” and jokingly boasted the slogan “we don’t throw down, we throw up.” The name was a mocking reference to the hardcore punk scene, coupled with our province’s area code. In Calgary, the city from which we hailed, many people who listened to hardcore punk identified as straight edge – meaning one doesn’t use intoxicants – yet venue after venue was closing down due to constant fights and blatant cocaine use. The slogan mocked the hardcore scene’s penchant for a style of dancing dubbed “throwing down” which involved an acrobatic display of punching and kicking the air. The five of us would attend these shows, buying CDs and t-shirts and arguing over which band was best, while trying our best to avoid the periphery politics.

After completing high school, I went to work at a music store, and spent my paychecks on expensive back catalogues of CDs as I found band after band: I became obsessed with heavier and heavier sounds, starting with acts like Sweden’s At the Gates, American bands Mastodon and the Dillinger Escape Plan, and Norwegian act Burzum. Eventually, I gave up on CDs and began feverishly buying vinyl. As my music collection grew, so did my interest in journalism, so I began waxing poetic on all things metal for the Calgary-based arts and entertainment magazine *BeatRoute*. Two years passed as I saved money for a big trip: eight months backpacking through Europe, hitting all the music festivals I could afford. Roadburn Festival, Fields of Rock, Primavera Sound, and

Tuska Open Air were all smorgasbords of music. The highlight was Hellfest, a huge heavy metal festival that ran for three days and featured 74 bands in a field in rural Clisson, France.

Over the course of that rain-drenched weekend, I saw some of the biggest and most influential underground bands in the history of metal – Immortal, Napalm Death, Mayhem, Converge, Emperor, Kreator, Atheist, Cannibal Corpse, Cynic, Brujeria, Earth Crisis – spanning numerous subgenres. One highlight was an outdoor set featuring American band Neurosis. As the clouds opened up and soaked the earth, the sextet raged on their instruments. Noah Landis, the member responsible for the accompanying visual backdrop, had wolves projected on the curtain behind the soaked stage. Less than 50 of us stayed in the mosh pit, drenched in mud and screaming our throats out. At one point, vocalist and guitarist Steve Von Till unleashed a roar, snapped his neck back and then forward, accidentally ramming his forehead into the microphone. He completed the set with blood dripping down his face as shards of lightning illuminated the sky.

These types of experiences shaped my life while I worked on my undergraduate degree. I remained a staff member at *BeatRoute*, and picked up several more writing jobs along the way for *UNRESTRAINED!*, *Absolute Underground*, and other online metal news sources. When the time came for the program-required internship, I was determined to write for a metal magazine. After writing a lengthy feature on the future of metal magazines for a digital journalism class, for which I interviewed the editors of metal publications like *Revolver Magazine*, *Brave Words and Bloody Knuckles*, and *Decibel Magazine*, I was given an internship with the latter. I worked three jobs for eight months to afford the unpaid work experience. Every other weekend I would travel to New York

or Baltimore to soak in legendary metal acts like the American bands Bastard Noise and Pentagram. Philadelphia's shows were also fantastic: nothing can replace watching nihilistic American band Eyehategod in the basement of a church while sweat dripped from my nose to the beer soaked floor. The music that surrounded and enveloped my everyday life encouraged me to pick up my own instrument, and eventually I bought a cheap drum set and learned to bang away furiously – and sloppily – on my “Frankenstein” kit.

After completing my undergraduate degree, I did what many students who don't know what to do next do: apply to graduate school. I knew I wanted to study something in metal, as I had been feverishly reading books on metal history. Something had been nagging at me for years, however: the documentation of women's presence in metal. Brief mentions were thrown out here and there in the books on metal history (Christie, 2003; Konow, 2002) and in online articles, but it was not given much importance, and the attention given to women in metal lacked intellectual engagement. Why had no one delved further into the hugely important role that bands such as Girlschool, Bolt Thrower, Satanic Rites (Britain), Mythic, Nuclear Death, Chastain (United States), Lee Aaron, Messiah Force (Canada), Warlock (Germany) and numerous others had played in the formation of metal and its conceptions of gender? What I'd seen in mainstream American music magazines felt far worse. *Revolver Magazine's* “Hottest Chicks in Metal” features ran rampant, and as I scanned the glossy, airbrushed images I wondered what instrument the women in the features actually played. I recalled seeing women like Angela Gossow, who fronted Swedish band Arch Enemy, on stage when I was just 14. Her guttural screams and powerful body language seemed the polar opposite of the overtly sexualized

representations I saw in the aforementioned feature. The final nail in the coffin was the last “Hottest Chicks in Metal” feature I ever saw in July of 2007, featuring extreme metal vocalist Julie Christmas, who sings for American bands Made Out of Babies and Battle of Mice. I was surprised to see her take part in the feature as I was slightly in awe of her simultaneously disturbing and coquettish approach to singing and lyric writing, but pleased she had declined to remove any of her clothing for the accompanying photographs. In response to questions about her “beauty regimen” she responded “tons of beer, way too much whiskey, and the occasional fistfight to work it all off” (Author not listed, 2007, p. 64). The response was funny, but it also made me realize that a lot of work has yet to be done to understand how heavy metal conceptualizes gender. I realized that supporting a magazine like *Revolver* which focused on appearance, instead of on musical ability and the experience of being in a band, was something I could no longer legitimate.

It was disheartening, given the positive state of Calgary metal. My local mentors were both female and male, and ran the gamut from drummers, fans, guitarists, promoters, bookers, agents, photographers, writers, bassists, and vocalists. There was a gaping disconnect between my experience as a fan, editor, journalist, photographer, and drummer, and what the media and literature portrayed.

After being accepted into the University of Calgary to pursue a Master’s Degree in Communications Studies, I read the growing pantheon of scholarly literature that focuses on heavy metal. It was equally frustrating and largely negative, suggesting women are introduced to metal by “partners or groups of friends” (Kahn-Harris, 2007, p. 74), are treated with contempt and derision if they enact their metal fandom in specific

ways, and are numerically few (Kahn-Harris, 2007; Vasan, 2011; Walser, 1993; Weinstein, 1991). I was enraged. I had grown up introducing my boyfriends to metal, dragging my friends along to metal shows, sewing patches on my clothes and drawing band names on my pants and backpacks. All the people who consistently attended metal shows with me were women. On top of that, the number of women in the metal scene who were fans, musicians, promoters, writers, photographers, and more was increasing by the year. One of the people who taught me to play drums was a woman in a successful extreme metal band. Lastly, it seemed as if articles were being published with increasing frequency on bands that featured women as guitarists, drummers, vocalists, bassists, keyboardists, and more. So what the hell was going on?

I knew my question had no straight answers. If one were to look to the media coverage of metal, one would see that numerous journalists have been chronicling the rise of women in metal over the past decade (Kelly, 2011, 2013), and even actively fighting the current representation of women, like *Decibel Magazine* did in the August 2012 issue dubbed “Queens of Noise: Women in Metal” which featured “among 70+ different women” (Mudrian, 2012, p. 6) from bands like Monarch! (France), Helms Alee, Kylesea, Cretin (United States), Witchsorrow (England), Haemorrhage (Spain), and Doro (Germany), alongside a feature on women in the metal industry. Contradictorily, it has been suggested that gender is irrelevant in the genre (Berlatsky, 2010), that women are often treated horribly and their contributions devalued (Winegarner, 2011), and that women aren’t real metal fans (Sergeant D, 2011). When one talks gender with both female and male metal fans, the same contradictions rear up. Some metal musicians and fans are angered that the subject has been brought up and is a non-issue, others are

adamant in their dislike for female performers and female metal fans, and many more think that metal suffers from extreme misogyny. Some of these contradictions were articulated by Berlatsky (2010):

There is no more masculine genre than extreme metal. Death, drone, black, or doom, it's overwhelmingly about aggression and anger, with monstrous vocals growled out by men for men in a manly male ecstasy of hate and testosterone. At first listen, the latest album from San Francisco black-metal stalwarts Ludicra doesn't seem to buck the trend.... I would never ever have guessed that the evil, gravel-voiced singer was a woman. In fact, two of Ludicra's five members are women: Laurie Sue Shanaman, the vicious lead singer, and Christy Cather, who plays guitar and sings backup. One female band member in extreme metal is unusual; two and you start to think they did it on purpose. Still, it's not completely unprecedented. And the extreme-metal bands that include women tend to have important features in common: First, they sound just like bands that don't include women. And second, they present themselves just like bands that don't include women (para. #1 – 3).

It's extremely problematic to suggest that a genre makes gender irrelevant because it does not address the femininity of female participants, as articulated in the last two sentences of the quote. However, it is also indicative of how gender policing works within metal scenes (Kahn-Harris, 2007; Purcell, 2003; Vasan, 2011; Walser, 1993; Weinstein, 1991). Kelly (2011) acknowledges that it's equally problematic on the other end of the spectrum, where metal magazines are eager to demonstrate the rising numbers of women through splashy features that focus on their attractiveness. This representation raises questions about the place of women who are not considered conventionally attractive within metal scenes, and diminishes attractive women's contributions as well. "By placing them all in one 'Hottest Whatever' category unfairly steals some of their heavy-metal thunder by implying that the only reason that they are there is because they are that attractive—that they are there as eye candy and stage dressing, instead of as talented road warriors in their own right," (para. 10) writes Kelly. Later, she continues:



The sheer volume of "women in metal" articles proves that despite the undeniable importance of their contributions and ever-increasing presence within the scene, female metallers are still seen as something of a novelty, often a gimmick used to market the genre to the mainstream. Women have been laying down riffs and living for metal since the very beginning, but they have never been as visible as they are now (para. 11).

If one looks to gender relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is easy to see that some individuals believe in equality and many others do not. If one were to gauge the reaction to marginalized populations in any context via the Internet, they would see a hotbed not just of misogyny, but racism, homophobia, trans phobia, misandry, and misanthropy. This equally applies to the presence of women in metal, as blog posts like Sergeant D's (2011) "Public Service Announcement: Girls Do Not Like Metal" demonstrate. Interestingly, this article spawned hundreds of comments online and an oppositional article series, despite its declaration: "Please note that there are some girls who actually like metal... they don't make a big deal out of it because they're usually introverted and awkward just like guys who are into metal" (para. 5). Admissions such as this one are symptomatic of how gender works within the context of metal, a phenomenon that was also hinted at by Berlatsky (2010). If one demonstrates a "deep commitment" (Kahn-Harris, 2007, p. 77) to metal, they will be treated and appreciated as metal fans. However, given the contradictory and problematic representation of gender within heavy metal, it's difficult to declare that metal is at a place where women are treated well. Perhaps, when Berlatsky (2010) declared that extreme metal made gender irrelevant, he was expressing the notion that the power and aggression embedded in heavy metal need not be internalized as masculine traits. Instead, these are human traits.

The aforementioned opinions regarding gender within the context of extreme metal are a microcosm of gender relations as a whole. If one were to peruse information

on the gender gap in North America, such as gender disparity in the male-dominated fields of math and science, it would indicate that the numbers of women are increasing, despite the outright hostility sometimes enacted towards women involved in the fields (Pollack, 2013, para. 10). The gap in pay – some statistics cite women making 77 cents to every dollar a man makes (Fitzpatrick, 2010, para. 2) – is another problematic issue given the historical and sociopolitical conditions that result in women and men flocking to particular industries:

Once you control for factors like education and experience, notes Francine Blau — who, along with fellow Cornell economist Lawrence Kahn, published a study on the 1998 wage gap — women's earnings rise to 81% of men's. Factor in occupation, industry and whether they belong to a union, and they jump to 91%. That's partly because women tend to cluster in lower-paying fields. The most-educated swath of women, for example, gravitates toward the teaching and nursing fields. Men with comparable education become business executives, scientists, doctors and lawyers — jobs that pay significantly more (para. 2).

Here, more questions arose for me. Do the people within heavy metal scenes treat women any differently than those in other alternative scenes, or within mainstream society? Do differences in treatment exist that correlate to the political and social messages embedded within the music? Is the rise of females within extreme metal – the most intense and aggressive form of heavy metal – any different than increasing numbers of women in male-dominated industries? These are questions that metal scholars should certainly tackle.

There are no easy answers to these questions, and indeed there are too many to address in this thesis. As a result, my goal with this project is to sum up what it means to be a female extreme metal musician in 2013. Has the treatment of women in the scene improved? How might we explain the increase in the number of female musicians in

extreme metal? Why is the presence of women in extreme metal important in an overall analysis of women in metal, in general? Indeed, the field of metal studies is constantly expanding, and such an investigation fills a huge gap in scholarship. Only one work (Vasan, 2011) thus far utilizes the voice of female extreme metal musicians, and it is brief and requires more analysis. This is why several scholars have identified the lack of female musicians' voices and female metal scene members' representation in heavy metal scholarship. Hickam and Wallach (2011) suggest "the extraordinary influx of women performers into extreme metal, particularly since 2000" is a fact of enormous importance (p. 266), while Kahn-Harris notes "there are certainly more women involved in metal, particularly in the scenes mentioned, than is often appreciated. There certainly needs to be more research on women in metal" (personal communication, November 28, 2011).

As such, this project will be organized as follows: Chapter Two reviews the current theoretical basis for the analysis of gender in metal studies. In addition to explaining the scholarly representation of women in heavy metal and extreme metal scenes, the strengths and weaknesses of approaches to analyzing representation are identified, as are gaps in existing knowledge. The chapter concludes with a justification for the usage of the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), a theory that "posits that individuals internalize social interactions, relationships, and a sense of self into identities through communication" (Hecht & Choi, 1993, p. 139). CTI is proposed as a useful tool for demonstrating that the internalization of discourse regarding women in extreme metal scenes can simultaneously lead to and reinforce problematic language and treatment.

Having established that the current scholarly discussion of women musicians in the extreme metal scene is undeveloped, Chapter Three discusses my methodology for addressing this claim. I outline the importance and need for a historical narrative of the extreme metal scene and music, then explain and justify the usage of autoethnography, participant observation, and qualitative interviews for this project. The chapter concludes with an introduction to those who agreed to take part in the study.

Chapter Four contextualizes the ambiguities characterizing the project's social and cultural context. It consists of an analysis of the musical subgenre of extreme metal, and validates the usage of the word "scene" to explain the activities within extreme metal. I then outline a working definition of extreme metal, where it is performed, who creates it, what makes it "extreme," and the people who make up the extreme metal scene. This is conducted by an analysis through Wallach and Levine's (2012) framework of metal scenes. In the discussion of the people who are part of the extreme metal scene, emphasis is placed on the current discourse with respect to gender in heavy metal, as online and personal interactions regarding race, sexuality, and gender in the heavy metal scene are frequent and heated (Angry Black Metal Elitist, 2011, 2011; Berlatsky, 2010; Ford, 2011; Grey, 2011; Kelly, 2011, 2012, 2013; Sergeant D, 2011). This section then outlines how heavy metal bore extreme metal, discussing the history and attributes of doom metal, black metal, grindcore, and death metal. I end with a description of the extreme metal scene in Canada, with a specific focus on Calgary, through parameters suggested by Wallach and Levine, and reinforced by my participants' observations and personal experience.

Chapter Five holds the bulk of this project, and includes an analysis of original data featuring 15 musicians discussing their experiences with the extreme metal scene, alongside autoethnographic experiences. The responses explore the gendered nature of participants' experiences within the extreme metal scene. The responses to these questions are analyzed through the Communication Theory of Identity, demonstrating the experience my participants have as members of the extreme metal scene. Through this analysis, it will be demonstrated that female participants are impacted by interactions with the media, and with male and female participants. The implications of internalized misogyny are also discussed, and it is demonstrated that this phenomenon runs rampant within extreme metal scenes. By applying the Communication Theory of Identity, it is demonstrated that communication deeply impacts my participant's experiences.

I conclude with Chapter Six, and present a conversation regarding the implications of current research findings, which reinforce Hickham and Wallach's (2011) observation that "metal is not an outlet for the antisocial rage of the angry, white, straight, Anglo male. Instead, heavy metal is music that celebrates freedom through strength to a worldwide audience, and everyone is invited" (p. 268). This section continues by suggesting possible and necessary areas for future research. Overall, it concludes that this study sheds light on how women's experiences in the extreme metal scene are shaped through communicative discourse. As such, one of the main contributions of this study is that it provides the first systematic analysis of first-person accounts of women musicians' experiences within the extreme metal scene, and how those experiences are shaped and changed by communication.

## CHAPTER 2: Gender and Metal Studies

I am a metal fanatic, frustrated by the current scholarly representation of women in metal, and more specifically, extreme metal. In Chapter Four of this thesis, I outline what “extreme metal” is, but now a more important thing must be articulated, which is the research question anchoring this thesis. I was interested in determining the following:

*Using constructs derived from the Communication Theory of Identity, what are the contributions to studies in extreme metal that can be made by qualitative research on women's experiences of negotiating gender and identity as performers and fans in extreme metal scenes?*

This question did not yield a simple answer. However, the answers fill a glaring gap in the burgeoning field of metal studies, as not a single work to date has tackled the experience of female extreme metal musicians, or even female metal musicians. Despite that, numerous sources refer to the marginalization of women in metal music and the metal scene (Barron, 2013; Kahn-Harris, 2007; Krenske and McKay, 2010; Leonard, 2007; Overell, 2010, 2013; Spracklen, 2010; Pattie, 2007; Purcell, 2005; Walser, 1993; Weinstein, 1991; Wong, 2011). Although there has been recent interest in reframing the problematic representation of female fans in metal (Cope, 2010; Hickham and Wallach, 2011; Vasan, 2011), the gap in scholarship about the experience of female musicians remains.

Further exacerbating the fact that female metal musicians are not present in academia is that when the voices of musicians are present, male metal musicians' voices are featured to the near exclusion of females (Berger, 1999; Kahn-Harris, 2007; Purcell,

2003; Weinstein, 1991). While one paper features two quotes from female death metal musicians (Vasan, 2011), it is anecdotal. When one compares metal studies to other music genre studies, the lack of female musicians' voices becomes even more apparent. Currently, there exists research based on the data collected from female musicians in the blues (Jackson, 2005; Murphy, 2011); jazz (Gourse, 1995; Placksin, 1982; Tucker, 2000), rock n' roll Carson, Lewis & Shaw, 2004; Fournet, 2010; Groce & Cooper, 1990; Leonard, 2007; Reddington, 2007), punk (Reddington, 2003), swing (Tucker, 2000) and all female bands (Bayton, 1998), alongside other genres.

From this lens, the reasoning for reviewing this literature is clear, but must be narrowed for scope and clarity. This literature review begins with a brief overview of the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) to situate the reader in the theoretical realm in which the remainder of this project is immersed. I discuss research within the realms of women's studies and gender studies, which provides a framework for research discussing gender and sexuality. I discuss how these theoretical frameworks apply to metal studies, and reflect on the findings regarding metal scenes and gender. Studies concluding that metal is a masculine discourse that marginalizes women will first be reviewed. Those are followed by the recent shift towards research suggesting the number of women is increasing in metal scenes. I will demonstrate why a new approach is needed for an analysis of women in extreme metal scenes utilizing CTI.

Much work conducted in the field of metal studies will not be included in this literature review. This is because metal studies is an extremely a broad field with no "mutually consistent overview" (Brown, 2011, p. 216). Indeed, from 1978 until 2010, "98 (37%) of the 261 articles published in the area of metal studies are psychology-based, as

compared to 66 (25%) in sociology, 50 (19%) in musicology and 47 (18%) in cultural studies” (Brown, 2011, p. 220). Although the fields of psychology and musicology have yielded fascinating data on the metal scene, I will only analyze research from the fields of sociology and cultural studies, as they overlap both methodologically and theoretically with communication studies, the field which this thesis is being conducted in.

Surprisingly, no studies in metal have been strictly communication theory oriented, although the field does overlap with cultural studies. This is indicative of a gap in both metal studies and communication studies output, and demonstrates another reason for this thesis.

Specifically, research that will not be reviewed includes the early research on heavy metal approached from a sociological, psychological and criminological perspective (Arnett, 1991a, 1991b, 1992; Epstein, Pratto, & Skipper, 1990; Friesen, 1987; Miller, Wright, & Dannels, 2000; Peterson & Pfof, 1989; Prinsky & Rosenbaum, 1987, 1991; Verden, Dunleavy, and Powers, 1989) which robustly disproved the suggestion that heavy metal scene members were social deviants. These will not be included because they are not relevant to my research question, and because this thesis is not concerned with the social construction of metal scene members, or metal texts, as differing from or contrary to society. This literature will also not review the history of cultural studies, stemming from the Frankfurt school of Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, and Erich Fromm, and the British cultural studies strain, including the likes of Richard Hoggart, E.P. Thompson, and Raymond Williams (Kellner, p.1, n.d.). as they have been chronicled in numerous fashions elsewhere, and metal studies has already been positioned as following the British cultural studies strain, which



“systematically rejected high/low culture distinctions and took seriously the artifacts of media culture, thus surpassing the elitism of dominant literary approaches to culture” (Kellner, n.d., p. 3). These will not be chronicled because several foundational approaches have been updated – such as the adopting of the term “scene” as a replacement for the problematic “subculture”, a phenomenon which will be discussed in Chapter 4 – and inconsistent generalizations, such as the belief “that subcultures are predominately working class” (Kahn-Harris, 2007, p. 16). Lastly, they lacked female representation, as noted by McRobbie & Garber (1991): “Very little seems to have been written about the role of girls in youth cultural groupings. They are absent from classic subculture ethnographic studies... when girls are acknowledged in the literature, it tends to be in terms of their sexual attractiveness” (p. 12). Lastly, this literature review will not address the musicological and historical aspects of extreme metal (among them, Baulch, 2007; Berger, 1999; Kahn-Harris, 2002, 2004, 2007; Overell, 2010, 2013; Purcell, 2003; Weinstein, 1991; Walser, 1993) and will instead utilize that research for a description of the music history and sounds in Chapter Four. This thesis is instead interested in scholarly work that created or outlined a conceptual framework for understanding gender and sexuality (Butler, 1988; Connell, 1987; Donaldson, 1993; Fiske, 1987, 1990; Goffman, 1970; Kandiyoti, 1987; West and Zimmerman, 1987), followed by work that acknowledges and discusses issues around sexuality and gender within heavy metal (Arnett, 1996; Barron, 2013; Cope, 2010; Hickham and Wallach, 2011; Kahn-Harris, 2007; Krenske and McKay, 2010; Overell, 2013; Purcell, 2003; Vassan, 2011, Weinstein, 1991; Walser, 1993).

## **Gender and Sexuality: A Theoretical Framework**

The Communication Theory of Identity “posits that individuals internalize social interactions, relationships, and a sense of self into identities through communication” (Hecht & Choi, 1993, p. 139). This theory refers to how the frames (also known as loci) within CTI – including the “personal, enacted, relational, and communal” (Hecht & Choi, 1993, p. 140) frames – construct one’s identity, although that identity is in conflict because the frames overlap and contradict one another. For clarity, the personal frame within CTI focuses on one’s self-perception or personal sense of contentment. The enactment frame is concerned with how a person expresses identity through the messages and signals they provide. The relational frame is interested in how a person’s identity is forged through relationships with others, and how that identity exists in relation to other individual’s identities. Lastly, the communal frame is concerned with how a community creates, disseminates, and sustains an identity (Hecht et al, 2002, p. 853).

Although several other approaches to understanding gender have been created that stem from gender studies, women’s studies, and men’s studies, the Communication Theory of Identity is a useful framework for discussing gender in relation to extreme metal. Therefore, to justify its usage, several of these fundamental frameworks will be identified. It will then be demonstrated how they have been applied to previous metal studies. This chapter will end with a justification of the usage of CTI.

In Goffman’s (1970) article “The Arrangement between the sexes”, he discusses how “sex is at the base of a fundamental code in accordance with which social interactions and social structures are built up, a code which also establishes the conceptions individuals have concerning their fundamental human nature” (p. 301). He

writes extensively about gender identity, and how “norms of masculinity and femininity... bear on objective (albeit mainly socially acquired) differences between the sex classes” (p. 303). He refers to how we have constructed rules of gendered interaction based on false notion of biological hierarchy, which results in specific activities being attributed to males and specific activities being attributed to females. He dubs this phenomenon “genderism” and demonstrates how this occurs in an institutional and individual level, ultimately disadvantaging women in both circumstances.

West and Zimmerman (1987) expanded on this by discussing how gendered identities and relations are a result of practice. “Sex... was what was ascribed by biology: anatomy, hormones, and physiology. Gender... was an achieved status: that which is constructed through psychological, culture, and social means” (p. 125). Gender is reinforced and legitimated by a social interaction, and because our society is patriarchal and values men, the authors argue women are disadvantaged in how they ‘do’ gender. Kandiyoti (1987) identified distinctions within the realm of male supremacy and patriarchy, stating the system presents women with “distinct rules of the game” which can be countered through varying strategies of active and passive resistance (p. 274).

Media theorist Fiske (1987, 1990) discussed the cultural construction of masculinity and how it is problematic because capitalist and patriarchal societies give men few means to exercise masculinity. In his analysis of television shows such as the *A-Team*, *The Incredible Hulk*, *The Dukes of Hazzard*, *Night Rider*, and *Superman*, he determined that many qualities are culturally demanded of men in their enactment of gender, including “individualism, power, and control” (p. 164). However, this becomes problematic as:

Society frequently denies males the means to develop these qualities by placing them in institutions (such as work), which deny them the opportunity either to express their individuality or to exert any power or control. This is particularly true of men in lower socioeconomic groups and may underlie the aggressiveness of much working-class “style” and the sexism of much working-class and lower-middle-class subculture. Because men’s idea of masculinity can rarely be realized at work they have developed a masculine style for their leisure and social activities that consists of excessive signs of masculinity in an exaggerated and compensatory display (Fiske, 1987, p. 164).

From these many frameworks, the label “hegemonic masculinity” sprang. Based on notions of cultural hegemony developed by Antonio Gramsci, Donaldson (1993) notes that understanding of this phenomenon is based within a feminist framework, and a fundamental element within this is that “women exist as potential sexual objects for men while men are negated as sexual objects for men. Women provide heterosexual men with sexual validation, and men compete with each other for this. This does not necessarily involve men being particularly nasty to individual women” (p. 644-645).

Numerous theorists have discussed hegemonic masculinities and what that means. Connell’s work in this field is particularly influential for the field of metal studies, as noted by the feminist theory frameworks within metal studies identified by Vasan (2011) and Krenske and McKay (2000). Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as a “culturally idealized form of masculine character’, which stresses ‘the connecting of masculinity to toughness and competitiveness’, the ‘subordination of women’, and ‘the marginalization of gay men’” (as cited in Krenske and McKay, 2000, p. 288). In his definitive (1987) work *Gender and Power*, Connell discusses how the social construction of hegemonic masculinity, which does not “correspond at all closely to the actual personalities of the majority of men” (p. 184), is supported by men because it is “what sustains their power” (p. 185), while those within “other patterns and groups are subordinated rather than

eliminated” (p. 184). Masculinity has been culturally constructed; so too has femininity, albeit all forms of femininity are “constructed in the context of the overall subordination of women to men” (p. 186-187). One such form is ‘emphasized femininity’. At a mass level, compliance with emphasized femininity is organized “around themes of sexual receptivity in relation to younger women and motherhood in relation to older women” (p. 187). Both men and women reinforce emphasized femininity.

This form of “doing gender” was referred to by Butler (1988). She wrote, “gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through *a stylized repetition of acts*” (p. 519). In that, “gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo” (p. 520).

These frameworks are useful for understanding how people socially construct and act out gender (both self- and outwardly assigned). Certainly, notions of hegemonic masculinity/ emphasized masculinity and emphasized femininity are applicable to the position of both men and women in extreme metal scenes. Multiple metal scholars state that female metal fans do gender on men’s terms by conforming to masculine or ultra feminine modes of dress and participation (Kahn-Harris, 2007; Krenske & McKay, 2000; Vasan, 2011; Walser, 1993; Weinstein, 1991, 2000), while almost every metal study conducted thus far refers to the highly masculinist nature of metal scenes. Indeed these frameworks are salient in their addressing of gender issues, though they become more problematic when attempting to understand *why* individuals in marginalized positions take part within scenes in which they are disadvantaged. These frameworks do not address how discourse on gender impacts the construction of identity and how that

identity is enacted based on internalized messages, or how women can challenge and disrupt existing expectations surrounding gender. Lastly, they are problematic from a methodological perspective, as will soon be demonstrated. Therefore, a more nuanced perspective that addresses these individualized enactments is necessary. As suggested by Wallach and Levine (2011), “Abundant empirical research has shown that for millions of people around the world, metal is not an outlet for the antisocial rage of the angry, white, straight, Anglo male. Instead, heavy metal is music that celebrates freedom through strength to a worldwide audience, and everyone is invited” (p. 268). The complexities herein are nuanced and complicated, and need be addressed.

Due to this inconsistency in the research, I will first demonstrate how the above frameworks have been applied to metal studies’ conceptions of gender, demonstrate what is known about gendered treatment and what is left to be learned, and will complete this chapter with a legitimation for the Communication Theory of Identity.

### **Metal Studies and Gender**

Weinstein (1991) penned the first full-length academic work on heavy metal. It provided a framework for metal studies to come, utilizing cultural sociology to understand how “heavy metal is made, used, and transmitted by social groups” (p. 4) through a bricolage approach that analyses the “collection of cultural elements” (p. 5). Weinstein investigated the “creation, appreciation, and mediation of cultural forms” through the words and actions of the “artists, audiences, and mediators” (p. 4), in an attempt to answer her research question: why has heavy metal been at the receiving end of “such extravagant rhetoric.... Does a form of music warrant being placed along with a dread disease (AIDS) and drug abuse? Are the critics of heavy metal really talking about

music? If not, what is it that they are talking about?” (p. 3).

Her research methods included participant observation, qualitative unstructured interviews with musicians, scene members, and the media, and an analysis of previous scholarly literature and media coverage. This multiple methods approach set the standard for metal studies to come (Arnett, 1996; Bayer, 2009; Berger, 1999; Cope, 2010; Kahn-Harris, 2007; Purcell, 2003; Vassan, 2011, etc.), and provided much of the foundational basis for the methodology utilized within this research. Utilizing the structure outlined by the British cultural studies strain, she defined the community as a “subculture”, a term that has since been outdated and replaced with “scene” (Cohen, 1991, 1997; Kruse, 1993; Olson, 1998; Shank, 1994; Straw, 1991). Her approach in addressing the “male oriented” (p. 103) trappings of youth culture provide an interesting historical context to how women are treated within metal scenes given metal fans conservative values and dismal of feminism.

Heavy metal fans are deadly earnest about the value of male identity. Masculinity is understood in the metal subculture to be the binary opposite of femininity. Much like the religious fundamentalism that denounces heavy metal subculture holds that gender differences are rooted in the order of things: it is even perilous to question, let alone play with or breach, the boundaries... *Music based masculine subcultures came into their own at approximately the same time as the late-twentieth-century women's movement was reaching its peak. One should not dismiss the idea that these subcultures have a defensive nature...* Women are part of the problem for males, not only because they are objects of lust but because they symbolize repressive authority in the person of the mother and the teacher (p. 104, emphasis added).

Weinstein (1991) provides much other evidence to support her statement that metal is “male-oriented” (p. 103) and “masculinist” (p. 104), and her findings reflect Connell’s and Butler’s work on emphasized femininity, hegemonic masculinity, and the performance of gender. She demonstrates that the genre’s musicians and scene members

are predominately male, that the physical response to the music is reflective of the “masculinity of the culture” (p. 132), and that the style of dress favored by scene members is masculine. “Women who want to be come members of the metal subculture must do so on male terms” (p. 134), she adds.

Weinstein (1991) clarifies, “Females who do not flaunt their femininity, that is, who dress in jeans and black T-shirts, and who even more importantly display a love of the music, are often welcomed and treated as equals at such events as concerts” (p. 105). Their counterparts who dress provocatively are not, and are “either denounced as sluts waiting to have sex with the band or are ogled as obnoxiously as they might be by chauvinistic construction workers” (p. 105). Weinstein accounts for this juxtaposition by stating:

The metal subculture tends to be tolerant of those outside of its core demographic base who follow its codes of dress, appearance, and behavior, and who show devotion to the music. Neither sexist, ageist, nor racist on principle, the metal subculture is exclusivist, insistent upon upholding the codes of its core membership (p. 112).

This view demands further exploration, and is limited in its scope. “Tolerant” is a vague term, and in relation to sexism, ageism, and racism, could use further defining. When inflammatory commentary, such as ““female “headbangers” of the 1980s look the part of the male fantasy of the “whore-bitch”, the cliché constantly presented in metal videos” (p. 117), and “women are aliens in the heavy metal subculture because of their otherness” (p. 135) is provided, it would have been beneficial to provide more scene member commentary and evidence to provide insight into this claim, as it directly contradicts the apparent inclusivity based on musical appreciation that metal communities favor. Oddly, despite this commentary, the voices of female scene members – let alone



gay or minority scene members – are largely absent from the narrative. This “typically dismissive treatment of girls” (McRobbie and Garber, 1993, p. 13) within subcultures is symptomatic of early metal studies, and can also be seen in work such as Arnett’s (1996). He inflammatorily dubs the clothing worn by some women at metal shows as “neoprostitute style” (p. 9) It begs the question of whether researchers are taking girls or women seriously within the subcultural context, particularly in situations where they are “being assessed and labeled according to their sexual attributes” (McRobbie and Garber, 1993, p. 13), a phenomenon observed in studies about subcultures.

Despite questions that remain in this work regarding female participation in metal scenes – which is further intensified by the over two decades that have passed since this book’s release – Weinstein’s work is foundational and extremely thorough. She provides a robust analysis of heavy metal culture, providing historical information on the importance of the media in the transmission of metal music and the importance of the live performance in the metal subculture.

Walser’s (1993) book was equally seminal, stemming from sociology, cultural studies, and musicology, utilizing “methods of cultural analysis, ethnography, and cultural criticism” in his studies, and “analyzing the musical activities that produce texts and styles and make them socially significant” (p. xiii). Although valuable and insightful, the work effectively ignores the music of extreme metal, and instead focuses on “the most popular examples of heavy metal” (p. xiii), revealing a gap in knowledge – although a conscious one – particularly because at its release in 1993, when extreme metal had become a complex worldwide phenomenon. Despite that, his chapter on gender in heavy

metal is revealing and insightful, offering a perspective that even in 2013 demands revisiting:

Heavy metal depictions of gender identities and relationships must offer credible positions for women. In small part this is accomplished by female metal musicians, who search for a style that will articulate their contradictory position as women and performers. But women are more often offered heavy metal empowerment through adaptations and the ideology of romance, the ambiguous implications of androgyny, and their increasing ability to identify with constructions of power that had previously been identified as inherently male (Walser, 1993, p. xvi).

This chapter analyzes popular video and lyrical representations within heavy metal, arguing that metal texts are not “simply patriarchal... [but] a conflicted mixture of confirmation and contradiction of dominant myths about gender” (p. 120). Analyzed through the theoretical perspective developed by Fiske (1987), regarding masculinity’s insecure status because “society denies most males adequate means of exercising the power upon which their masculinity apparently depends” (as cited in Walser, 1993, p. 109), his analysis is thought provoking in that it confirms metal’s complex gender and sexuality dynamics. He chronicles the overwhelmingly masculinist imagery and themes within metal and states that “women are presented as essentially mysterious and dangerous; they harm simply by being, for their attractiveness threatens to disrupt both male self-control and the collective strength of male bonding” (p. 118). He later acknowledges the position that female fans are offered within heavy metal, which harkens to McRobbie and Garber’s (1991) comment earlier in this chapter: “when girls are acknowledged in the literature, it tends to be in terms of their sexual attractiveness” (p. 12).

Female fans, who now make up half of the audience for heavy metal (though only a very small fraction of metal musicians are women), are invited to identify with the powerful position that is thus constructed for them. It is a

familiar one, since women are encouraged by a variety of cultural means to think of appearance as their natural route to empowerment (Walser, 1993, p. 119).

Arnett's (1996) empirical work on heavy metal is focused on adolescent alienation, and involved interviewing 70 male metal scene members and 38 female metal scene members (p. ix). He utilizes that information alongside "national studies and national statistics" (p.x) to illustrate "disturbing trends among American adolescents – the alienation, the cynicism, the recklessness – are illustrated with particular vividness in the lives of the metalheads" (p. x-xi). Arnett is clear on his position about metal, which lends to negative representation of metal scene members: "I was amazed that anyone could find it appealing... attending many heavy metal concerts and listening to dozens of tapes has failed to convert me" (p. xi).

Like Walser (1993), Arnett's work features a chapter on the experience of female metal scene members. He directly quotes the "girls" (an odd reference because they range in age from 13-25) he interviewed myriad gender issues within heavy metal, and was the first author to demonstrate that women face "exploitation and denigration simply for being female" (p. 143) from both males and females. Indeed, internalized misogyny, the "passive acceptance of traditional gender roles and unawareness or denial of cultural, institutional, and individual sexism" (Szymanski, Gupta, Carr & Stewart, 2009, p. 102), deeply impacts women in the metal scene, to the extent that they echo dominant sexist discourses. This calls into question how the metal scene enacts Connell's (1987) concept of emphasized femininity.

Shanelle put it most strongly: "the bimbos [at concerts] are disgusting. Girls who go dressed like that to heavy metal concerts, wear their short little skirts up to here when they know there's gonna be some guy behind her putting his hand up her skirt, you're asking for trouble. I mean, you can dress up nice,

but get a clue I would never dress like that. [*Why do they do it?*] Attention. Serious attention. Honestly, I think a lot of girls that I've known who dress like that, and in my opinion are a bunch of sleazebags, they were not raised properly, or their parents wouldn't walk them out of the house like that. Some of the guys are really cute, so I can see why they would want to attract them, and it works. They're the ones who are going home with someone, and I'm not" (Arnett, 1996, p. 142-143).

Arnett's discussion of this systemic social issue has been briefly discussed in other works (Kahn-Harris, 2007) and demands further exploration, not simply due to its pervasiveness in heavy metal scenes, but its pervasiveness in Western culture, overall. As Arnett's (1996) participant Nina articulated, "the portrayal of women in metal songs was simply a reflection of reality. "I think the world is anti-women. There is so much in everyday life that I come across. I think it is a male-dominated world and I think it will always be that way"" (p. 148). Although this assessment is limited and is represented by only one participant's verbalization, it demonstrates a view that should be further tested, particularly when combined with the usage of the term "poser" within metal scenes, which is used as an insult by certain scene members against others who they believe have a "superficial commitment to the music" (Wallach and Levine, 2012, p. 125). Are women who refer to other women in such a way commenting on a superficial commitment, critical of overt or covert displays of sexuality, or internalizing misogyny? This remains to be seen in Chapter Five.

Natalie Purcell's *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture* (2003) marks a shift in metal scholarship towards the thorough analysis of subgenres of heavy metal, and more specifically, extreme metal. Conducted from a sociological perspective, she deconstructs the many clichés leveled against death metal audiences by investigating the "demographic trends, attitudes, philosophical beliefs, ethical systems,

and behavioral patterns within the scene” (p. 1) while utilizing the other methodological template used by studies before her (Arnett, 1996; Walser, 1993; Weinstein, 1991). In her work on gender, she relays existing demographic data to demonstrate women are not the anomaly previous studies have suggested (Arnett, 1996). Her study pegs the audience demographics at 65.7 per cent male and 34.3 per cent female (p.100). She continues, “one who has attended shows for years might observe the entry of more and more females into the scene. As it grows increasingly acceptable and common for females to take on the same activities as males, perhaps the gender gap will continue to close” (p. 100). According to her research, “women have similar motivations as males for becoming fans” (Purcell, 2003, p. 105); that motivation is liking the music. Despite her different approach to women’s involvement in the metal scene, only two of the 20 interview subjects who are quoted extensively in the book are female.

In her chapter on audience demographics, Purcell deconstructs what Bayles (1994) asserts is the “the masculine nature of metal” (p. 102) that espouses what she calls “perverse modernism.... A radically adversarial stance towards society, morality, and art itself” (Bayles, 2001, p. 40). Bayles statement that metal’s “lyrics are misogynistic or expressive of violence against women” (p. 102) is too simplistic, counters Purcell (2003).

[It is] claim[ed] that many of the lyrics are misogynistic or expressive of violence against women. In truth, although there are references to violence against women, it seems that there are references to violence against *everyone*. Bayles believes that metal appeals to a masculine obsession with “hardness” and describes mosh pits as “all-male workouts” (255). Males definitely do outnumber females in mosh pits, but it is simply not accurate to describe mosh pits as “all-male.” Frequent show attendees observe many females in mosh pits. Of course, most pits are very physical, and naturally larger persons would feel safer in pits. Most males are larger than females, and therefore they would feel more secure in most pits and are more likely to enter them. Still, females are represented in mosh pits and their behavior in those pits is not different from the behavior of males (p. 102).

Many of these statements inspire questions, due to the changing nature of the metal scene. The latest research tells us that metal is masculinist, the scene is predominately male, it is reactionary against feminism, and that imagery of and references to women are problematic (Arnett, 1996; McRobbie, 1991; Walser, 1993; Weinstein, 1991). However, women are metal scene members, they create metal music that perpetuates specific imagery and ideologies, and they work within metal to support their music of choice. This reveals a gap in scholarship noted in the gender framework section of this chapter: narratives on women's involvement in the metal scene, a discussion of how gender norms and expectations are continuously changing, and the product of social interaction. In the last two works outlined in this section, I demonstrate that the field is changing to accommodate these questions, though gaps in knowledge remain, and a new theoretical approach from the field of communication studies will enable scholars to understand how gender is enacted in extreme metal scenes.

Keith Kahn-Harris' (2007) work also stems from sociology, thoroughly exploring extreme metal in a holistic fashion with an emphasis on "space, place and time" (p. 13). This work "provides a perspective that recognizes the interconnection between different elements of social phenomena and that avoids the fragmentation of the subject area that studies of metal have suffered from" (p. 11). He provides insightful history on extreme metal, and comments that there is "no unanimity as to terminology in such writing" (p.9) when it comes to extreme metal and its many subgenres, which will be explored in-depth in Chapter Four.

*Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* thoroughly investigates Kahn-Harris' findings regarding gender and minority communities within extreme metal

through the theories of Pierre Bourdieu (1991). Kahn Harris (2007) utilizes Bourdieu's theories on capital, arguing, "possession of particular sorts of capital within particular sorts of fields endows agents with prestige and 'symbolic power'" (p. 69). He further his position by arguing about the habitus of metal – "the sense of how to behave and what to expect in life" (p.70) – lends to the marginalization of women, as they are not part of the dominant group. This aligns with notions of hegemonic masculinity, as the theory refers to the subordination of non-dominant groups alongside dominant groups. In his book he states that women are treated similarly in extreme metal to how women are treated in heavy metal.

Any observer at an extreme metal show anywhere in the world would immediately notice the numerical dominance of men within the scene. Female fans are most numerous for more melodic extreme metal subgenres such as power and gothic metal. Yet many women are active in the scene and some have reached prominent positions. Women run labels, fanzines, and other scenic institutions. However, when they do become involved in the scene, women generally occupy ancillary, if important, roles. Many women work as press officers for record labels (a situation intriguing similar to that in the music industry as a whole (Negus, 1992)). In music making, very few all-female bands exist. Female musicians tend to be vocalists, or more rarely keyboard players or bass guitarists and tend to be more numerous in bands playing melodic forms of extreme metal (Kahn-Harris, 2007, p. 71).

This commentary has real life application to metal scenes, but geography, experience, and gender affect the findings. Equally, it would have been beneficial to prove this with commentary from female press officers, musicians, and fans. Another observation that would benefit from commentary by female scene members is that, "While the scene's infrastructure is theoretically ideally constructed to enable female participation, many women do not enter the scene alone" (p. 74).

Kahn-Harris (2007) continues:

The marginality of female members is reinforced when women see few prominent female scene members and musicians, and have few role models to emulate. At gigs they see other women with their partners or female friends, often dressed glamorously, but they see few autonomous women who are not defined by their sexuality. Women who enter the scene are often subtly marginalized by scenic interaction. On any occasions I have met male scene members with their female partners, but their partners were not introduced and remained silent. In the heavy metal scene, women were often treated merely as glamorous appendages of male scene members. The same is often true in the extreme metal scene, where women – if they are visible at all in the scene – tend to be visible as hyper-feminine or not at all... The presence of female scene members in such roles is problematic as women are rarely present within the scene in roles not defined by their femininity (p.74).

This explanation is problematic because it suggests that women cannot view other women who dress a certain way as role models. Baumgardner and Richards (2004) state “when women are sounding boards for one another... they will gain the confidence and centrality to eventually change what society values” (p. 65). If researchers assume what empowers women without discussing this with the women they refer to, they reinforce the marginalized status of women. This reveals another gap in knowledge.

The last piece of literature to be reviewed in this section is Vasan’s (2011) journal article on women’s participation in death metal, which she dubs “arguably the most male-centered of any type of popular music” (p. 333) through a sociological lens. She argues the participation of women in the death metal scene should be viewed using a framework of social exchange. Vasan’s position is that “women seek out death metal because it empowers them both as individuals and as women, and frees them from many of the restrictions of mainstream society,” p. (334). According to Vasan, the price they must pay for this freedom is “submitting to the masculinist codes of the subculture” (p. 334).

Vasan’s work found that female scene members “sincerely value the music and culture, and find both meaningful on a personal level” (p. 342) yet are forced to deal with



diminished respect due to their gender, their style of dress, and the accompanying issues surrounding authenticity. The responses she was given by female scene members are distressing, to say the least. They focus on people not taking female vocalists and instrumentalists seriously (p. 342), gender stereotypes (p. 343), the unwanted necessity of exchanging any semblance of sexuality for respect (p. 345), how adopting patriarchal attitudes is necessary to occupy higher spaces in the metal scene hierarchy (p. 345), and other issues. It's a very strong introduction to the many issues that women face in the death metal scene, although due to the focus on death metal, it is difficult to generalize the results to all extreme metal scenes, a differentiation that will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Four.

As demonstrated by the literature, and perhaps due to the “notoriety of metal’s more mainstream manifestations...for a long time, the diversity of metal and its post-1990s development were marginalized or ignored” (Kahn-Harris, 2007, p. 9). Indeed, the two decades of metal studies are marked by its defensive and broad nature, but at the expense of discussing the intricate and ever-developing issues around musical differentiation and the diaspora of metal scenes. In the 2000s, those issues began being addressed, including the notions that women have been active participants in the metal scene since the genre’s inception, marking a change in focus. A few articles have thusly attempted to recontextualize or reframe gender in the metal scene, citing historical precedent and the underlying lyrical themes embedded in the music, and taking a new theoretical approach as opposed to those outlined in the beginning of this chapter. Those will be chronicled now, before legitimating the usage of a new theory.

## **Metal Studies Turns a Page: Gender Revisited**

In a dramatic shift, *Black Sabbath and the Rise of Heavy Metal Music* author Cope (2010) dubs heavy metal “anti-patriarchal... not concerned with the themes of gender anxiety that inform much of rock music’s misogynistic frame” (p. 137). He bases this claim on his musicological analysis of the genre of heavy metal. Borrowing from Fabbri’s (1981) conceptions of music genre that “collocate the compositional, performative (including communicative), social and aesthetic codes into a synthesized whole” (p. 1), he analyzed the music and lyrics of Black Sabbath, arguing that the band forms the essence of heavy metal, and therefore due to their influence the remainder of metal is anti-patriarchal as well.

My research of [sic] occult philosophies and the music of Black Sabbath therefore, has led me to conclude that the lyrics and philosophical world of Black Sabbath appear to contradict some of the more common theories concerning heavy metal’s non sonic or aesthetic values such as Walser’s concept of heavy metal as a ‘social conflation of power and patriarchy’ (1993: 1). My reasoning for this is based on the theory that (1) Satanism is anti-Christian (and therefore anti-patriarchal by default) and non-conformist, and (2) much of Wiccan and pagan philosophical is overtly matriarchal. Therefore, by buying into these philosophies Black Sabbath centre themselves on a world that largely supports female empowerment (p. 83).

While this argument might have credence if it were far more nuanced and applied to the continuing lineage of Black Sabbath on the subgenre of doom metal, it is naïve at best. However, his statements inspire more research. For example, “my own research highlights the way in which metal has opened up a space for women in heavy metal, reflected by the significant growth in female performers at the forefront of heavy metal in 2007” (p. 142). This is anecdotal as numerical evidence is not provided to support the claim, but it does provide more credence to the notion that female performers are increasing. It also is suggestive of a needed narrative on the historical influence and

impact of women on heavy metal and extreme metal scenes, beyond the evidence that Cope provides. He refers to his experience of gigs that demonstrated female/male solidarity, citing performances by female fronted bands like Nightwish (Finland), Lacuna Coil (Italy), and Octavia (Norway, now known as Octavia Sperati), the utilization of female musicians by metal act Cradle of Filth (Britain), and the inclusion of Coal Chamber (United States) bassist Nadja Puelen on the *Roadrunner United* compilation album in 2005 as evidence that metal is pro-women and anti-patriarchal. He briefly mentions Jo Bench, the bassist for influential death metal band Bolt Thrower (Britain), as evidence of “heavy metal’s acceptance of female musicians for 20 years” (p. 144), and cites how Lemmy Kilmister of British act Motörhead set precedent during metal’s “second formative stage” (p. 144) by supporting the women in Girlschool (Britain). He then chronicles the increased media awareness and coverage of women in metal bands, and notes:

The performative and compositional contribution of women to heavy metal and the solidarity shown to women in heavy metal has gone on behind the scenes for most of heavy metal’s history; it has, however, been somewhat underplayed and underdeveloped until now, when women are beginning to make significant contributions to frontline metal bands (Cope, 2010, p. 144).

In their article on female’s contributions to heavy metal scholarship and authorship, Hickham and Wallach (2011) focus their empirical analysis on metal texts, effectively demonstrating as Cope (2010) did that women have long been involved in metal. They provide a “perusal of evidence more than a systematic analysis” (p. 264), citing a list of role models including “Doro Pesch [Warlock], Sean Yseult [White Zombie], Angela Gossow [Arch Enemy], Anza (Head Phones President), and the four women who comprise the self-proclaimed “witch doom metal” band shEver” (p. 261) as

evidence of female musicians. As the article continues, the list of important female contributors mounts, and suggests a further need for work featuring the voices of female musicians:

This is not to say that gender is insignificant now that the metal scene has changed so dramatically. No one denies the whiteness and the maleness of the beloved British standard-bearers of the genre – Black Sabbath, Judas Priest, Iron Maiden. But to then argue that all metal musicians (and metalheads) are therefore white males is both fallacious and actively harmful to non-white (see Quinones 2010) and/or women metal performers and fans, especially when academics appear to be making arguments to that effect. Metal musicians exclusively male? Tell that to Angela Gossow, Doro Pesch, Sabina Classen, the members of Gallhammer, the all-female teenage death metalers in Brazil’s Valhalla, or the all-female black/death metalers The Pigskins from Turkey (a name that has less to do with American football than with provoking pious Muslims), who endure sexist harassment and vandalism to practice their art.... As for the compulsory maleness of the audience, someone should try telling that to the crazed mobs of teenage girls who surround the members of Iron Maiden at their every tour stop in Japan (see *Iron Maiden* [2009]; see also *Metal* [2005] and *Global Metal* [2008] for vivid portraits of other women musicians, fans, and scholars) (Hickham and Wallach, 2011, p. 262).

Utilizing the knowledge provided by these authors, and the many non-fiction narratives on metal history (Aldis and Sherry, 2006; Christie, 2004; Ekeroth, 2006; Konow, 2002; Moynihan and Söderlind, 1998; Mudrian, 2004; Tucker, 2006; Wagner, 2010) will certainly provide more information on women’s involvement in metal, although so far we have yet to see an author, with the exception of two quotes from Vasan (2010) tackle the question from a communication studies perspective, or from the relayed experience of women musicians, particularly in the understudied genre of extreme metal. Given that the number of women in extreme metal bands is increasing (Cope, 2010; Hickham and Wallach, 2011; Vasan, 2010), this is the logical place to start.

### **Women Making Extreme Metal: Why is a New Representation Needed?**

Hickam and Wallach (2011) suggest “the extraordinary influx of women

performers into extreme metal, particularly since 2000” is a point of enormous importance (p. 266), while Kahn-Harris notes “there are certainly more women involved in metal, particularly in the scenes mentioned, than is often appreciated. There certainly needs to be more research on women in metal” (personal communication, November 28, 2011). The literature demonstrates that since metal’s inception in 1969 with Black Sabbath, metal has come under a plethora of censorship attacks. Scholarship responded by being largely defensive in its first two decades, but has now largely differentiated to demonstrate the changing relationship metal has to gender, along with demonstrating musical differentiation. It’s about time that metal studies produced work referring to gender. After all, women, just as men, utilize metal to gain “a sense of belonging, status, normative guidelines and, crucially, [to reject] dominant values” (Hodkinson, 2007, p.2).

Metal’s aggressive stance, while meant to intimidate, is not really intended to be about fighting, but fighting back. Around the world, it is music that resonates for the embattled and the disempowered, not the already-powerful. In other words, metal is about the need to assert subject-hood and defend oneself from attack and coercion. “Strength”, then, might be a better term than “power” as it is less gendered, less associated with masculinity, and has less of a connotation of patriarchy. While it is true that some hostile outsiders find the music offensive – and that, admittedly, is part of the fun – the music’s primary aim is defensive, to shield from assault, to provide the strength to endure and prevail (Hickham & Wallach, 2011, p. 266).

As indicated, metal studies is in a period of shift. Although many early metal scholars conceptualized gender through the frameworks provided at the beginning of this chapter (Butler, 1990; 2004; Connell, 1982, 1983, 1987, 1990, 1995, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2005; Donaldson, 1993; Fiske, 1987, 1989; Goffman, 1977; Kandiyoti, 1987; Krenske and McKay, 2001; Vasani, 2010; West and Zimmerman, 1987), it’s clear that the increasing numerical presence of women in extreme metal scenes requires more analysis, as indicated by the change in approach taken by Vasani (2011) who utilized social

exchange theory, Cope (2010) who used a musicological analysis, and Hickham and Wallach (2011) who used an empirical analysis. Although these approaches all contribute to the changing representation of gender in metal studies, none of these approaches have yet used the methodology of speaking to female extreme metal musicians firsthand for data. It is from here that we arrive at the Communication Theory of Identity, a theory that stresses a mixed methods approach. As demonstrated within my opening chapter, the media coverage of women in metal and extreme metal bands deeply impacted me as a fan and has become increasingly concerning as a musician. Thus far, the gender/women's studies/men's studies theories presented have partially accounted for the representation of women in metal, but they do not refer to how women interpret, negotiate, and possibly enact or reject these representations. Another issue to consider is methodology, as metal fans' resistance to feminism, and theoretically by extension feminist theory, was demonstrated within the literature. Therefore, a communicative approach to women's involvement in extreme metal scenes is necessary to understand how that representation affects individuals, devoid of existing feminist theory and the associated connotations. Equally, it's important to address *why* individuals within marginalized positions take part within scenes in which they are disadvantaged, or how discourse on gender impacts the construction of their identity and how they enact said identity.

Communication Theory of Identity “posits that individuals internalize social interactions, relationships, and a sense of self into identities through communication” (Hecht & Choi, 1993, p. 139). This theory suggests “identity is inherently a communicative process and must be understood as a transaction in which messages are exchanged” (Hecht, 1993, p. 78). This theory then focuses on how the frames (also known

as loci) within CTI – including the “personal, enacted, relational, and communal” (Hecht & Choi, 1993, p. 140) frames – construct one’s identity. For clarity, the personal frame within CTI focuses on one’s self-perception or personal sense of contentment. The enactment frame is concerned with how a person expresses identity through the messages and signals they provide. The relational frame is interested in how a person’s identity is forged through relationships with others, and how that identity exists in relation to other individual’s identities. Lastly, the communal frame is concerned with how a community creates, disseminates, and sustains an identity (Hecht et al, 2002, p. 853).

Although this theory is quite young, it refers to several important segments of my research that were outlined in my introductory chapter. As Jung and Hecht (2004) describe, “an individual’s identity is created through the internalization and negotiation of ascribed identities by others. The co-created identity is avowed in communication and adjusted by other ascriptions” (p. 266). Their description of how to examine one’s gender identity – which they considered part of one’s personal identity – was crucial in the choice of this theory for this research, because they recognize how the construction of gender identity is affected by the expectations of others.

One cannot examine a person’s gender identity (personal identity) without considering how society defines gender roles (communal identity) or how others view a man and a woman (relational identity). CTI refers to this as the interpenetration of frames (Jung and Hecht, 2004, p. 267).

This comment can be an allegory for interpreting gender in the metal scene. If we look to how metal scholars have defined gender roles within the metal scene, we learn that the community has expectations of women and men and how those participants enact gender. Equally, the metal scene has been constructed as being resistant to feminism. As such, this theory allows for the personal response, reaction, and interpretation of said

expectations, which is crucial for understanding the role of women in extreme metal, devoid of a theory that could potentially alienate participants. In Chapter Three, I outline my methodology for rectifying the gap in scholarship regarding women's involvement in the metal scene, which will be used in conjunction with this theory.



### **CHAPTER 3: Methods of Inquiry- Autoethnography, Participant Observation, Interviews**

How can communicative research within the extreme metal scene narrow the gap within metal studies about the experience of women in extreme metal bands? Given that heavy metal has long been noted for its marginalization of women (Barron, 2013; Kahn-Harris, 2007; Krenske and McKay, 2000; Leonard, 2007; Overell, 2010, 2013; Purcell, 2003; Vasan, 2011; Walser, 1993; Weinstein, 1991; Wong, 2011), this question is worthy of thorough exploration.

Aligning with the historical usage of participant observation and qualitative interviews in metal studies (Arnett, 1996; Baulch, 2007; Dee, 2009; Friesen, 1987; Gaines, 1990; Harrell, 1994; Kahn-Harris, 2007; Overell, 2010, 2013; Vasan, 2011; Walser, 1993; Weinstein, 1991), this project will also use autoethnography, including a critical reflection on the history of metal and its extreme subgenres, as absorbed and reiterated by a participant of the scene. This mixed methods approach “is informed by the postmodernist idea that there should be multiple standards for understanding the social world...and therefore diversity and contradictions should be incorporated within research accounts” (Spicer, 2004, p. 298). According to Denzin (1989),

The researcher using different methods should not expect findings generated by different methods to fall into a coherent picture... they will not and cannot, for each method yields a different slice of reality. What is critical is that different pictures be allowed to emerge... The goal of multiple triangulation is a full grounded interpretive research approach. Objective reality will never be captured. In-depth understanding, not validity, is sought in any interpretive study (as cited in Spicer, 2004, p. 298).

This method will allow for in-depth understanding of the experience of the participants and of a deeply involved metal scene member, and allows for differing viewpoints and experiences to be articulated in the findings, yielding important data.

### **Mixed Methods: Analytic Autoethnography**

The inspiration for this research was drawn from experience within the extreme metal scene, and my engagement with scene members and media coverage of the scene I had been involved with for over a decade. I am using my “own experiences and responses to events as sources of evidence about social processes” (Seale, 2004, p. 108). As Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) describe, autoethnography is “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience” (para. #1).

I utilize Anderson’s (2006) approach to autoethnography, dubbed analytic autoethnography. This method aims to avoid the potential pitfalls of autoethnography, and entails “(1) complete member researcher (CMR) status, (2) analytic reflexivity, (3) narrative visibility of the researcher’s self, (4) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and (5) commitment to theoretical analysis” (p. 378). My lengthy involvement in heavy metal, not only as a fan but as an active member of the extreme metal scene, including my involvement in *BeatRoute Magazine* as an editor, writer, and photographer, as a journalist for British metal magazine *Iron Fist*, my experience as a roadie for an all female extreme metal band, and my place as a drummer in a band that sits on the margins of extreme metal, was valuable for validating this research, because I am an “opportunistic” complete member researcher whose “group membership precedes the decision to conduct research on the group” (Anderson, 2006, p. 379).

Deeply influenced by Leblanc's (1999) *Pretty in Punk: Girls' Gender Resistance in a Boys' Subculture* and Mavis Bayton's *Frock Rock: Women Performing Popular Music* (1998), I dove into autoethnography. While Leblanc (1999) did her work after a lifelong participation in the punk scene and talked to women in the subculture about their experiences and how they resisted hegemonic discourses surrounding their gender and sexuality, musician Bayton (1998) talked to women about their music making practices, the responses and support they receive from friends, families, the industry, and music fans, without injecting much of her own experience. My goal was to combine knowledgeable and obsessive fandom with music making practices to achieve a robust understanding of the experience of women in extreme metal that addressed the media and academic discourse surrounding it.

In practice, this meant continuing with my normal activities: i.e., attending metal and extreme metal shows featuring international, national, and local bands almost weekly, writing for multiple metal magazines, sharing bands with friends, collecting and selling extreme metal vinyl, tapes, shirts, and patches, and practicing covers and original songs with my bandmate for our doom metal project Smolder. Given my myriad roles in the extreme metal scene, the musical world I was researching was fully available, although this project demanded a more nuanced understanding of that world and my place within it. It was also done from a somewhat selfish perspective: I wanted to know what I should mentally prepare myself for when my band starts playing shows in the near future. This required reflexivity: deeply questioning my own experiences and encounters, initiating conversation with everyone I could, engaging in online debates on metal and gender, reading all the articles, and verbally responding to comments aimed at me during

metal shows that reinforced traditional gender roles. Essentially, it required channeling my frustration for this topic into something constructive. This was a challenge, as noted by Leonard (2007), as I was concerned about peculiarizing or dramatizing or glamorizing the work of the women in the extreme metal scene. These women, like I, had strong feelings about being extreme metal regardless of their gender, and I had no wish to “differentiate female musicians from ‘regular’ male rock performers and thus ghettoize their work” (p. 2). In contrast, Bayton’s (1998) goal was to place “women centre stage, for a change, displacing the male-as-norm” (p.x). This is certainly not my intent. Indeed, perpetuating the Internet colloquialism of “Special Snowflake”, i.e., “a person who thinks they are unique, different and therefore more special than everyone else” (Urbandictionary.com, n.d.) was something I was deeply concerned about. *Listening to, collecting, and creating extreme metal does not make me special*. It does not make the 18 women who I interviewed for this thesis, and the many, many more who offered and gave their help to me special either. It is simply indicative of extreme metal’s appeal. We are not a “woman in the extreme metal scene,” we are members of the extreme metal scene who happen to be women. For this same reason, I do not refer to my romantic relationships, nor did I ask my participants about their romantic or sexual relationships to men or women. This is because in classic subcultural work, women are often referred to “in terms of their sexual attractiveness” (McRobbie & Garber, 1991, p. 12), and their participation is diminished on this basis. How sexuality is enacted is not the focus of this work, music making and gendered treatment surrounding music making are.

For the remainder of this thesis, in particular the findings chapter, all the questions asked of my participants will also be commented on from the perspective of an

engaged observer of the metal scene who has witnessed interactions between female musicians and metal scene members, and encountered these interactions myself. While other autoethnographic studies utilize the voice of participants with the theorists experience briefly relegated to introductory paragraphs (Bayton, 1996; Leblanc, 1999), mine will be injected throughout. This is to provide later metal studies academics with first person experiential stories from the extreme metal scene, and to juxtapose the experience of a metal scene member with metal scene musicians.

### **Mixed Methods: Autoethnography via Critical Reflection**

As Leonard (2007) articulated, “different genres carry with them distinct histories, performance practices and discourses that affect how gender is constructed and experienced” (p. 3). Since extreme metal and its subgenres of grindcore, black metal, death metal, and doom metal (Allet, 2013; Kahn-Harris, 2007) have extensive histories and differentiate from other forms of heavy metal and have scarce analysis on them, a thorough examination was necessary. This analysis takes place in Chapter Four, and involved reading the numerous nonfiction accounts (Aldis and Sherry, 2006; Christie, 2004; Ekeroth, 2006; Konow, 2002; Moynihan and Söderlind, 1998; Mudrian, 2004; Tucker, 2006; Wagner, 2010), and analyzing the scholarly depiction of extreme metal (Baulch, 2007; Berger, 1999; Dee, 2009; Harrell, 1994; Kahn-Harris, 2007; Overell, 2010, 2013; Phillipov, 2004, 2006; Purcell, 2003; Walser, 1993), alongside watching the many documentaries available (Aites and Ewell, Aites and Ewell, 2010; McFayden and Dunn, McFayden and Dunn, 2005, 2007, 2011; Srebalus, 2008). It also required numerous cross referencing for a band’s country of origin and gender of participants on metal database Encyclopedia Metallum: The Metal Archives ([www.metal-archives.com/](http://www.metal-archives.com/)).

Given that this research refers to the current extreme metal scene in Canada, and how its producers conceptualize gender and feel they are treated due to their gendered identities, it was important to understand the historical development of the scene. It was equally important to demonstrate the sonic differences. My own experience also provided much data on the extreme metal scene in Canada.

### **Mixed Methods: Participant Observation**

Participant observation was another foundational section of this research. This method is a “formal version of the everyday activity of watching what others do and at times joining in... [and] extends this ordinary activity by meticulously recording what is seen and heard for a later, more formal analysis” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 26). This work was conducted from the insider perspective, because as Leonard (2007) noted, her “background, together with my age and sex, enabled me during the fieldwork to be more readily accepted by respondents, with whom I shared music tastes and an understanding of cultural codes” (p. 16). My prior involvement in the metal community ensured valuable access to the field. My attendance at numerous extreme metal performances at several Calgary venues – including Vern’s Pub, Dickens Pub, MacEwan Hall, The D, Lord Nelson’s Bar & Grill, and the Palomino, which regularly host metal and extreme metal performances – and informal discussions with numerous scene members has informed this research.

As a metal fan, my experience with its music and engagement with other fans and adherents altered my research for the better, as it enabled a deeper understanding of the phenomenon I study. As methods go, Participant Observation has been utilized on nearly every work on heavy metal that utilizes the voices of metal fans (Baulch, 2003, 2007;

Berger, 1999; Friesen, 1987; Gaines, 1991; Harrell, 1994; Kahn-Harris, 2007; Overell, 2010, 2013; Vassan, 2011; Walser, 1993, Weinstein, 1991). Ethnographers are interested in discovering and contextualizing “a whole web of cultural structures, knowledge and meanings which are knotted and superimposed on to another and which constitute a densely layered cultural script” (Walsh, 2004, p. 227). How better to do so than through the lived experience of those immersed in the culture?

Like all other methodologies, Participant Observation comes with methodological issues. As Walsh (2004) suggests, when one takes on the role of participant as observer,

The people being studied are aware that theirs is a field relationship, which minimizes the problems of pretence. It involves an emphasis on participation and social interaction over observing in order to produce a relationship of rapport and trust. The problem is that it carries the danger of reactivity and going native through identification with the subjects of the study, unless the intimacy created in social interaction is restrained by attempts to maintain the role of the stranger on the part of the observer (p. 230).

Clearly, this has created ethical issues for others who have conducted metal studies in the past. Kahn-Harris, Walser, Weinstein, Gaines, Purcell and many others are clear when outlining their research, stating they are fans of the music. However, it is interesting to consider whether they are part of the metal scene, a distinction that Weinstein (1991) is clear to make. She states that those who dress in a specific style, are of a specific age, and undertake specific activities are part of the “subculture”. In that sense, I am clearly a “metalhead”. This allows me to see the inconsistencies in research that has utilized participant observation, but it will also reveal my biases. Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander (1990) refer to issues arising when “researchers do not ground observations in the experiences of the participants, [because] they run the risk of imposing a fictional ‘reality’ onto the field” (as cited in Krenske & McKay, 2011, p.

295). Herein lies a problem – it was sometimes difficult to accept and understand the lived experience and commentary of metal scene members, particularly those who had an overwhelmingly negative view of women’s participation in the extreme metal scene, or had the perspective that they “weren’t like other girls” (Anonymous, 2013, personal communication) within the extreme metal scene. However, this also gave me a more robust understanding of the challenges women may face in their involvement, and also enabled a deeper understanding of the metal scene itself. It also helped me contextualize certain scenic responses to my research. Like Leblanc (1999), who encountered resistance and threats of violence for her work in the punk scene, I received resistance and threats from both strangers and acquaintances alike for my work. A few male members of the metal scene have made a point to harass me, belittle me, make extremely offensive remarks, and ensure I knew they believed I was a “poser”, “bitch”, or “cunt” (Anonymous, 2013, personal communication). On more than one occasion, men I knew from the metal scene and with whom I believed I had good rapport made a point to make misogynistic, sexist comments, be excessively aggressive in the mosh pit by grabbing my crotch and breasts, and belittle my knowledge in metal debates by stating “Just because you’ve got nice tits doesn’t mean I have to listen to you!” (Anonymous, 2013, personal communication). Female extreme metal scene members tended to be more verbally aggressive, although these comments were rarely directed specifically towards me, and instead were parlayed through friends or overhead when they didn’t realize I was close by. Their comments never materialized in violence. This treatment was infrequent, and those who seemed dismissive or simply did not care about the project tended to avoid discussing it with me. Overall however, I received support and interest from the majority



of metal scene members. One band mate of a participant said “it was about time someone talked about how women are portrayed in metal, she’s put up with shit from promoters and people at shows for years” (Anonymous, 2013, personal communication), while another metal scene member, after discussing the topic in-depth, told me “I thought it was a little silly. I thought, ‘yeah, there is women in metal. Who cares?’ But seeing things from your perspective has won me over and opened my eyes” (Anonymous, 2013, personal communication). Both male and female scene members expressed interest and support, and overall, aggression and violence were infrequent occurrences.

Interestingly enough, given that I was experiencing this violence and aggression for the first time in the metal scene, these experiences also impacted my findings, enabling me to more fairly represent the extreme metal scene. When originally reading from many scholars the ways in which women are marginalized in the heavy metal scene, I was irate. I hadn’t received that treatment in my decade within the scene. Now that I have, I am able to look at my own experiences and the experiences of my participants in a more robust and thoughtful light. Still, it appears the majority of researchers disregard the enormous strides women have made in heavy metal, from the number of fans, to those who document the scene, to women in bands. Thus far, scholars have failed to contextualize important facts such as: “analogous to the female presence at most metal shows, being in a statistical minority does not entail women authors’ exclusion or lack of influence in the metal world...” or that female musicians “contributions to the evolution of the music have been, and continue to be, well received” (Hickam & Wallach, 2011, p. 255; p. 257). Indeed, this research proves this conclusion: “that all metal musicians (and metalheads) are... white males... is both fallacious and actively harmful to non-white...

and/or women metal performers and fans, *especially* [as] academics appear to be making arguments to that effect” (Hickham & Wallach, 2011, p. 262).

### **Mixed Methods: Qualitative Interviews**

As Attfield (2011) indicates, “writers have used their own experiences as musicians and fans to reflect on and analyze the music and scenes which arguably provides the reader with an ‘authentic’ and immediate insight” (p. 2). My own experience within the metal scene has impacted this research, but at the onset of my interviews it also revealed my biases. As Bryman and Teevan (2005) note, the “ethnographer is always a mouthpiece for such voices and may be imposing a particular ‘spin’ on them” (p. 177). Following my first interview, I altered my questions somewhat and had to actively avoid talking about specific issues to avoid leading women into saying what I wanted to hear. Although it would have been wonderful for every woman to suggest they had received egalitarian treatment within the extreme metal scene, this was not the case.

For the segment of interviewing, in-depth qualitative semi-structured interviewing with a responsive line of questioning was utilized. I spoke to 18 Canadian female musicians about the conceptions, understandings and observations regarding treatment of gender in death, black metal, grindcore and doom, because as Leonard (2007) stated, “the voices of musicians have frequently been absent from studies of the music industry” (p. 7). Although gender and its relation to other genres has been explored through this method, including jazz (Gourse, 1995; Placksin, 1982; Tucker, 2000), rock n’ roll (Carson, Lewis & Shaw, 2004; Fournet, 2010; Groce & Cooper, 1990; Leonard, 2007), punk (Reddington, 2003) and all-female bands (Bayton, 1998), metal studies is literally devoid of this research.

For the interviews, responsive, semi-structured interviewing was utilized. This method “emphasizes flexibility of design and expects the interviewer to change questions in response to what... she is learning... and put them together in a reasoned way that re-creates a culture... in a way that participants would recognize as real” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p.7). Inspired by several works that utilize the voice of female music producers and scene members (Bayton, 1998; Leblanc, 1998; Leonard, 2007), this proved to be the best way to give an accurate depiction of the experience of women musicians in the extreme metal scene. To balance the contributions, I worked to include close to equal numbers of vocalists, drummers, and guitarists – both guitar and bass guitar – and also included a non-traditional (for metal) instrumentalist, as each instrument has gendered connotations (Leonard, 2007, p. 2). Although it has been posited that “a rock group comprising female instrumentalists and vocalists challenges certain associations between rock and masculinity, a male band with a female does not” (Leonard, 2007, p. 2), this declaration can not be equally applied to extreme metal music. Often, female vocalists sing in the same powerful, guttural, grunting, and/or howling vocal style that males do, and frequently it is difficult to ascertain the gender of the vocalist when listening to recordings. To test this theory, I asked those who were vocalists about their treatment and if in a band situation they were treated differently, better, or worse than women who played instruments. The findings to this are discussed in Chapter 5.

Interviewing has been used in almost every single study on heavy metal, as it “values people’s knowledge, values and experiences as meaningful and worthy of exploration” (Byrne, 2004, p. 182). Walser (1993) concurs it is meaningful to understand “what real listeners hear and how they think about their activities” (p. xiii). I spoke only

to female musicians because they knew intimately how women experience extreme metal, and their perspective has not yet been consulted for data. Given that I wanted to provide a microcosmic glance at the worldwide phenomenon of extreme metal, the Canadian metal scene was an appropriate place to look for participants. To give the findings validity, the parameters for inclusion were that the participant identified as a musician who played extreme metal, had been part of a band that identified as extreme metal for a minimum of one year, and played live in that band on more than one occasion. Preference was given to musicians who had toured in other provinces and countries, released music, and had more than one year of experience as a performing musician. Based on these parameters, three participant's interviews had to be omitted from the findings, although their quotes are used in the description of the extreme metal scene, and for comparison and contrast when appropriate.

Between December and March of 2013, I conducted 18 interviews and attended numerous live performances. To engage participants, I began my search for interviewees by sending emails and messages through social media networks. Gender of many participants I was not familiar with was ascertained through looking at band profile images on social media sites such as Facebook ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)), and cross referencing on the metal database Encyclopedia Metallum: The Metal Archives ([www.metal-archives.com/](http://www.metal-archives.com/)). Several interviews also came via the snowball effect. I diversified my sample in terms of length of time as a musician, location, type of extreme metal played, instrument played, age, and ethnic origin. Age and ethnic origin were two particularly important features: unfortunately, it was required that everyone involved was a minimum of 18-years-old, as performances within the live metal scene predominately

take place within locations that require one be of legal age to enter. Although metal scene members are noted as predominately of white ethnic origin (Kahn-Harris, 2007; Walser, 1993; Weinstein, 1991), I made a point of interviewing a handful of participants of color, as metal's international diaspora has been demonstrated (Avelar, 2011; Baulch, 2007; Bell, 2011; Bendrups, 2011; Dawes, 2012; Greene, 2011; Kahn-Harris, 2007, 2011; Kawano and Hosokawa, 2011; Muršič, 2011; Wong, 2011) and is reflected within the metal scene.

Given the extremely problematic representation of women in the metal and extreme metal scenes, many potential candidates refused to speak with me. Several were concerned about being presented in the *Revolver Magazine* "hottest girl in metal" fashion that was discussed in Chapter 1; others posited that "gender doesn't matter, and this topic has been beaten to death" (Anonymous, 2013, personal communication). In fact, one of my participant's band mates posted the following on a social media site: "Holy shit, ----- just told me she has been asked for the 57th time to do one of those cheesedick women in metal articles. Do people genuinely buy into that and think its a relevant issue. Are people surprised by men and women creating art together in 2013? Do the people who write these articles have extremely low self esteem and need to be validated by creating idiotic non-issues?" (Spelling and grammar left as was posted). Multiple potential candidates ignored my requests for an interview. A few participants resolutely refused to take part because they did not want to be portrayed as victims or be valorized as being special for being a female extreme metal musician; I had to clarify my approach and intent multiple times so that participants were comfortable in taking part.

A handful of interviews were conducted face-to-face, but given that I wanted to incorporate musicians from across Canada, many were done over the phone or via Skype. The in-person interviews took place at metal bars, cafés, and in one participant's living room. These interviews generally began with discussion about our lives and my project, our mutual music interests, and other such things. Eventually I segued into my questions. The participants were encouraged to ask questions themselves, share their experiences in any fashion they choose, and voice their discontent for the subject as they saw fit. As a woman and a deeply involved scene member myself, I could empathize with my participants and many had complex and mixed feelings about my project.

Interviews lasted between 30 and 120 minutes and covered topics from an introduction to heavy metal, to participant's engagement in the extreme metal scene, to how they defined their fandom, to if they felt they had received gendered treatment and beyond. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The questions included are listed in Appendix 2.

Participants names are public and cited because it lends validity to the experience of women in extreme metal bands in Canada. The bands involved had a professional interest in not concealing their identity, and may potentially benefit from the press gained from this experience. The alternative option of being identified by a pseudonym and the subgenre of extreme metal they identified as playing was also given. Three participants chose this option, and I have left their pseudonyms as they were written on their forms, with existing capitalization. Along with these 15 participants, three more were interviewed who did not fulfill all the parameters for inclusion (the participant identified as a musician who played extreme metal, had been part of a band that identified as

extreme metal for a minimum of one year, and played live in that band on more than one occasion). They are regardless listed here because they provided valuable information about the metal scene and the music. Participants include:

**Stefani MacKichan:** drummer for Calgary/Chicago based death/doom band Mares of Thrace. The band is signed to Sonic Unyon, a record label based in Hamilton, Ontario. The band has so far released two full-length albums. The latest was 2012's *The Pilgrimage*. The band has conducted several tours in Canada and the United States.

**Georgia Meadows:** vocalist for Calgary based doom band Chieftain. The band has been performing across Western Canada for over a year.

**Freya Giles:** drummer for Vancouver based sludge/grind band Cathar, and she is also a member of experimental music project Nunun. Cathar released their EP *Waste in Shape and Form* in May 2013, and has toured throughout Western Canada. They recently broke up, Giles now drums for Vancouver doom/grind band Disworship.

**Cara Ashbey:** drummer for Edmonton based grindcore band PreSchool Shooting. The band has performed throughout Alberta since 2009.

**Eliane Gazzard:** former bassist for Calgary based death/grind band AKAKOR. The band self released their *Human Sacrifice* EP in 2010, and played infrequently across Western Canada throughout their tenure. They broke up in mid 2013.

**Bina Nancy Whiskey:** Bina choose a pseudonym, but asked to have her bands named. Bina performs in Mendoza and Cambodia, doom bands.

**Alxs Ness:** vocalist for Vancouver based death metal band Abriosis. The band has self-released two EPs and a full length, including 2012's *Vessel* EP. They have toured across Western Canada.

**Claire Carreras:** vocalist for Vancouver based death/thrash band Life Against Death, and vocalist and guitarist for punk band Joyce Collingwood. Life Against Death has released four full lengths, including 2013's *Life Against Death*. They have toured across Western Canada.

**Mya Mayhem:** former vocalist for Winnipeg based grindcore band Violent Restitution, and Vancouver based death/thrash band Life Against Death.

**Thérèse Lanz:** guitarist and vocalist for Calgary/Chicago based death/doom band Mares of Thrace. The band is signed to Sonic Unyon, a record label based in Hamilton, Ontario. The band has so far released two full-length albums. The latest was 2012's *The Pilgrimage*. The band has conducted several tours in Canada and the United States.

**FERAL FERMENTER:** a grindcore musician.

**Samantha Landa:** drummer for Vancouver death metal band Dead Asylum. The band self released their debut full length *General Carnage* in 2013. They have toured across Western Canada.

**Mel Mongeon:** vocalist for grindcore act Fuck the Facts. They've so far released nine full-length albums and over a dozen splits, EPs, and live recordings, including 2013's EP *Amer*. They are currently signed to Relapse Records, a label based in Philadelphia. Her band has toured across North America and Europe.

**Trish Kolstad:** former live drummer for the black metal bands Nattefrost, Skitliv, Warsystem, and Himsides; plays all instruments in black metal punk solo project Dödsängel. She has performed live for a variety of projects within Western Canada and Norway.

**NOTHING:** a black metal musician.



**Alia O'Brien:** vocalist and flutist for doom band Blood Ceremony. The band is signed to Rise Above Records, a label based in the United Kingdom. They have so far released two full lengths. The latest was 2013's *The Eldritch Dark*. Her band has toured across North America and Europe.

**Lindsay Arnold:** former bassist for Calgary based progressive epic metal band Orphan Hammer, former bassist for punk/metal act Seven Deadly Grins, and current bassist for folk metal band Loremaster.

**Jenny Gibson:** guitarist for Canmore based black metal band Loremaster. They released their full length *Call of the Forest* in 2012.

After each interview was completed, the recording was transcribed. After all 18 interviews were conducted; responses were separated by question, and then analyzed for recurrent themes, including similarities and differences. Five questions were then selected for importance and relevance to answering my research question. The responses to those five questions were then analyzed through the Communication Theory of Identity. Special attention was paid to the four frames within CTI, known as loci, including the personal, enacted, relational, and communal loci, which are said to make up how one communicates their identity. CTI identifies overlaps and discrepancies between these four loci as “identity gaps” because they are “discrepancies between or among the four frames of identity” (Hecht & Jung, 2004, p. 268). How this analysis was conducted will be discussed in further depth in Chapter Five. However, before the responses of the participants are parlayed and discussed, the reader will be informed of the music, the history, and the extreme metal scene in Canada.

## CHAPTER 4: The Scene, The Music, the History

*The difference between extreme metal and most other forms of popular music are so pronounced that those who are not fans may not see its considerable differences. Extreme metal music frequently teeters on the edge of formless noise. Whereas heavy metal was at least intelligible to its detractors as 'music', extreme metal may not appear as music at all and its attendant practices may appear terrifying and bizarre. On the edge of music, on the edge of the music industry, extreme metal thrives (Kahn-Harris, 2007, p. 5).*

Very few people would agree on what precisely extreme metal is musically and what the extreme metal scene entails. Certainly, it is a scene that focuses primarily on the appreciation of extreme music. As Kahn- Harris (2007) notes, extreme metal is a “global music scene that contains local scenes within it. It also contains other scenes based on the production and consumption of particular forms of extreme metal genres” (p. 22). More specifically, it encompasses “everything from tight-knit local musical communities to isolated and occasional fans, all contributing to and feeding from a larger space(s) of musical practice” (p. 22).

With that broad definition in mind, being a part of the extreme metal “scene” – a term that will be explained in-depth shortly – entails enjoyment and/or consumption of the music and *may* include certain modes of dressing, attending performances, selling and buying particular music, being in a band, writing for or reading specific fanzines, websites, and magazines, photographing bands, and travelling for festivals. Not all people who make or listen to extreme metal would say they are an active part of the scene. However, several activities and sounds do describe the phenomenon, and extreme metal has an undeniably rich musical lineage and history. In this chapter, I will explain what the extreme metal “scene” means, what the music coming from it sounds like, and provide a

description of the people who make up the extreme metal scene. I will then provide a brief history of the music and how heavy metal fragmented, subdivided, and differentiated to include the subgenres within extreme metal, and will end with a description of the extreme metal scene in Canada.

### **What is “scene”? Why not “subculture”?**

The term “scene” has been adopted in reference to cultural practices surrounding music in the past two decades as a replacement for “subculture”, a problematic term which indicated *subservience* to dominant culture and social hierarchies. “As the prefix implies, *subcultures* are significant and distinctive negotiations located within wider cultures” (O’Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery & Fiske, 1994, p. 307). Although previous subcultural studies often focused on political connotations of subcultural practices and positioned post-war youth and working class persons within a subversive context, recent subcultures theorists maintain persons within subcultures are decidedly apolitical and non-oppositional, and shifted to conceptualize everyday practice within these cultures and the meaning attached to said practices. Eventually, it was declared that the term only lent to an “otherness produced by media, state, and academic constructions of subculture” (Kahn-Harris, 2007, p. 17). Throughout the ‘90s, theorists constructed the word scene as an alternative and it used frequently within metal studies (Baulch, 2003; Greene 2011; Muršič , 2011; Overell, 2010, 2013; Tsistos, 1999; Vasan, 2011; Wallach & Levine, 2013), with the occasional exception (Nilsson, 2009). The term is intentionally ambiguous because theorists have used it to “refer to local, national and global entities in both everyday parlance and in scholarly discourse” (Wallach & Levine, 2012, p. 118). Further broadening the term is the declaration “that *all* musical and music-related activity

takes place within a scene or scenes” (Kahn- Harris, 2007 p. 21). In their excellent article on metal scene formation, Wallach and Levine (2012) contend that the metal scene fulfills a minimum of two out of four purposes.

1. They act as conduits to the global circulation of metal sounds and styles.
2. They provide gathering places for the collective consumption of metal artifacts and the display of metal-related fashion and expertise.
3. They provide sites for local performance and artifactual production. At this point some interaction with the larger economic order of society becomes unavoidable, and scenic institutions become vital.
4. They promote local artists to the larger network of scenes. These promotional aims are not usually oriented towards commercial interests and are rarely focused on one single, exceptional band (p. 119).

In addition to these parameters, the authors make six generalizations about metal scenes, as the metal scene is “characterized by cultural dynamics rarely encountered in other music cultures” (Wallach & Levine, 2012, p. 119). These include: “All metal scenes begin with sites for the collective consumption of extralocal artifacts” (p. 120), “Metal scenes are dependent on institutions for their survival” (p. 121); “Metal scenes are populated by musical ‘amateurs’” (p. 123); “Metal scenes often make a show of patrolling their boundaries, but differ from other scenes in the intensity and function of this patrolling” (p. 124); “In order for a scene to have coherence through time, there must be a ‘generation gap’: there must be an older generation aging out of and younger members entering the scene” (p. 126); and lastly, “All metal scenes are defined not just by their relationship to the global metal scene but by their relationship to other neighbouring scenes and to overlapping scenes dedicated to other genres” (p. 128). These generalizations will be applied to the extreme metal scene in Calgary later in this chapter.

### **What is extreme metal?**

Extreme metal is music. This music is dubbed “extreme” in comparison to “heavy

metal” because the music can be slower or faster, and comparatively more intense sonically and visually than its more commercially acceptable parent, with shrieked/growled/screamed/ howled vocals that are often indecipherable. It can be differentiated based on sonic, visual, lyrical, and thematic qualities, thus making it impossible to describe in an all-encompassing fashion. As Kahn- Harris suggests (2007), “the term extreme is widely used in the scene as a term of approbation and a vague way of delineating death metal, black metal, grindcore and other metal genres as special” (p. 29). Allett (2013) calls it “stylistically diverse, but united in the artists’ pursuits of extremity, intensity and dissonance in music” (p. 167). Author Joel McIvor (2009) explains the term originated in the ‘90s, when “the metal scene had fragmented into so many different genres that the catch-all phrase ‘extreme metal’ had been coined... it’s a vague term with different connotations for everyone” (p. 60). Stefani MacKichan, drummer for Mares of Thrace added, “musical proficiency is really important... And creativity, and something that goes against the grain” (2013, personal communication). What makes each subgenre extreme will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter.

Extreme metal is created in basements, jam rooms, and living rooms all over the world by men, women, and transgendered individuals of every race, religion/irreligion, and sexual orientation, although it has long been positioned as being created and consumed primarily by men (Arnett, 1996; Kahn-Harris, 2007; Weinstein, 1991, 2009; Walser, 1993; Wallach and Levine, 2012). It is performed at house parties, in squats, in bars, concert halls, churches, stadiums, and outside. Extreme metal is sold at record stores, at shows and festivals, online, and at commercial chains, and feverishly hunted through trading, distribution, and mail order programs. It has numerous publications and

Internet news sources to disseminate the information about it. Many of the fans within the extreme metal subculture are musicians themselves, or disseminate the music according to their own talents, whether that be through writing, photography, sharing bands via social media or tape trading, booking shows, touring with bands, or many other activities.

Extreme metal is a genre that is performed live frequently, generally at an intensely loud volume. Often, the live performance is accompanied by certain modes of dress or stage props, and if the band has the budget, lights may accompany it. Visual projections, smoke, and costumes that range from simple black cloaks to foam monster outfits are also sometimes utilized. Specific subgenres of extreme metal have their own standards for performance that are not consistent. For example, some black metal bands perform wearing black and white face paint dubbed corpse paint, and utilize props such as inverted crosses, animal bones, and blood. Other black metal bands may completely reject this theatricality and perform in day-to-day wear, with no props or adornments; others still may perform with their backs turned to the audience, while lit candles burn on every available inch of the stage. As for touring networks, local to international acts work incessantly to create relationships with friends, promoters, bands, and fans in other cities. If the band is likeable or has formed the right relationships with people, they may form intensive touring networks that span provinces, states, countries, and continents. If a band is signed to a record label, they may receive money for tour support and have shows booked for them through the use of booking agents and promoters.

Despite the worldwide fan base of extreme metal, it is not a commercially viable enterprise. Bands revered in the underground with several decade long careers often still work day jobs unless they are extremely fortunate; in this, extreme metal perpetuates an

underground, nearly unknown aesthetic, and often revels in its own obscurity. Indeed, it is “extreme music for extreme people”.

Due to the vagueness of the term “extreme” – a dictionary definition simply describes the word as “reaching a high or the highest degree” (Oxford University Press, 2013) – it is necessary to define it in the context of this research. The only consensus reached is that the term is discursively constructed and negotiated, and that each fan has a specific and individual interpretation of the term and what bands belong under the extreme metal umbrella. For purposes of this thesis, only band members who self-identified their music as “extreme” were included. Given my own experience within the metal scene, I searched for bands I correlate to the extreme metal subgenres of black metal, death metal, doom metal, and grindcore, as the majority of metal fans would identify bands within these subgenres as extreme, while many other bands within the subgenres are decidedly not extreme. Who is and who is not extreme is often arbitrary and based on personal tastes. Later in this chapter, when the sounds and history of each subgenre are articulated, I will discuss why specific bands under each subgenre are considered extreme while others are not, and will also discuss how bands utilize, manipulate, or reject standard qualities within their genre to further their positions within the extreme metal scene.

### **The People Who Make Up the Extreme Metal Scene**

The global proliferation of metal, and more specifically extreme metal, has been dubbed a “diaspora” (Hickham & Wallach, 2011, p. 211). Akin to the dictionary definition of “the movement of a population from its original homeland”, metal and extreme metal have proliferated from its origins in the United Kingdom and the United

States to every corner of the world. Overell (2010) discussed Melbourne, Australia's "grindcore death-metal scene" (p. 79), while Baulch (2003) explored the death/thrash metal scene in Bali, Indonesia; Kahn Harris (2007) focused largely on extreme metal – including the subgenres of death metal, doom metal, black metal, and grindcore (p. 4-5) – in Israel, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Levine (2008) wrote the book on heavy and extreme metal proliferating throughout the Middle East, while the recent documentary *Death Metal Angola*, which continues to be premiered throughout 2013 in areas as diverse as South America, Asia, Europe, and the United States, captured the budding death metal scene in Angola, Africa (Castelo and Xido, 2012). Undoubtedly, it is a worldwide phenomenon, enjoyed and created by people from literally every walk of life.

It is difficult to characterize the people who are part of the extreme metal scene. Though early sociological, criminological and psychological studies largely disproved the metal stereotype of fans who are suicidal, reckless, angry, or violent (Arnett, 1991, 1991, 1992; Epstein, Pratto & Skipper, 1990; Friesen, 1987; Prinsky & Rosenbaum, 1987, 1991; Verden, Dunleavy, and Powers, 1989) historical and present day media coverage has painted an extremely negative portrait of metal fans, and largely ignored the distinction between metal and extreme metal unless the crimes perpetrated seem reflective of the music the perpetrators create. Though much of the scholarly "work persuasively demonstrates that lyrics or music do not 'cause' violence in any straightforward way, and that metal is rarely as extreme as its critics suggest" (Phillipov, 2012, p. 151), when news hits of extreme metal musicians or fans committing crimes (such as the recent charge of "suspicion of preparing a major terrorist act" (Schofield, 2013, para. 1) leveled against extreme metal musician and notorious multiple felon Varg



Vikernes, which was dropped), the affiliation with metal is always prominently displayed.

“It's a fire the international media has been happy to flame, quick to draw links between various acts of savagery and heavy metal even if, as in the case of the Columbine shootings and Marilyn Manson, evidence points to the contrary” (Donkin, 2008, para # 2).

In my own experience extreme metal fans are passionate, intelligent, and intense. Numerous articles, studies and blog posts have pointed to the redeeming qualities of the genre, particularly the psychological support that fans receive from it (Fleming, 2007; Hayes, 2013; Kahn-Harris, 2007; Kelly, 2013; Statts, 2013). Indeed, I first discovered metal shortly after my mother suffered a traumatic brain injury and was left in a coma for several months; I was angry for some time about the experience and Iron Maiden proved to be the soundtrack to that experience. Shortly after the pain of adolescence and puberty made things worse, my tastes became heavier and it was easier to cope in a healthy way. Rather than act out violently, I had this music to be aggressive for me. As an adult, that anger has subsided, and instead I am filled with intense euphoria when listening to certain bands; anxiety, depressive melancholy, empowerment and many other varied emotions while listening to others. Metal and extreme metal are amazing coping mechanisms. Freya Fawn, drummer for sludge/grind act Cathar, concurs.

I feel like it's really misrepresented, but it's the only thing that I really resonate with. I've noticed a lot of the metal heads that come from – and I am sure this is a generalization – but they come from a despondent place and are looking for a community that understands that just because we are aggressive we are not dangerous or mean. And finding that community of people who understand and don't freak out when you're aggressive is really cool. And I think that's what really brings us together is that community. Not scared of each other's darkness and doominess and aggression (Fawn/ Cathar, 2013,

personal communication).

Extreme metal fans cannot be summed up by this explanation anymore than any other group. As bassist and interview participant Eliane Gazzard of AKAKOR put it, the scene is “a lot of fun... I’ve only experienced open-minded individuals and you get your odd meathead... but that’s everywhere. People just want to enjoy music” (2013, personal communication).

Yes and no. It’s contradictory, because although the scene is populated by fun, engaging, educated, and open-minded individuals, the extreme metal scene often suffers acutely from problems like sexism, racism, misanthropy, and homophobia (Allett, 2013; Baulch, 2007; Barron, 2013; Berger, 1999; Dee, 2009; Fellezs, 2013; Friesen, 1987; Gaines, 1991; Harrell, 1994; Kahn-Harris, 2007; Olson, 2013; Overell, 2010, 2013; Pattie, 2007; Purcell, 2003; Vassan, 2011; Walser, 1993; Weinstein, 1991). Sexuality, gender, and appearance are monitored by the community and often seem reinforced and strengthened through the violent and misanthropic subject matter and imagery, as well as through “casual sexism, homophobia and racism” (Kahn Harris, 2007, p. 25). Scene members have become increasingly vocal against these abuses in the past decade, and many heavy and extreme metal writers are chronicling, questioning, and fighting back against these behaviors. For example, longtime metal fan Laina Daiwes (2012) released her novel *What Are You Doing Here: A Black Woman’s Life and Liberation in Heavy Metal* last year, and lectures at metal conferences and festivals about the extremely racist encounters she’s endured alongside the empowering and fantastic gains metal has afforded her. Journalist Craig Hayes recently unveiled a lengthy exposé titled “A Very Dirty Lens: How Can We Listen to Offensive Metal?” via *PopMatters* in September of

2013, questioning for and against the legitimacy of enjoying metal that is politically and ideologically suspect. Metal journalist Kim Kelly, alongside her frequent articles on a myriad of extreme metal bands, has written extensively on gender issues and the changing attitudes surrounding gender in heavy and extreme metal.

Speaking from a conceptual or theoretical standpoint, it's easy to point at the lyrics and imagery as the fueled by or feeding such ideologies; in some cases the creators of music, for example bands that affiliate as NSBM –National Socialist Black Metal – do perpetuate hate ideologies. However, the vast majority of the music and members within the extreme metal scene play with “the imagery of violence, but their actions within the scene mostly revolve around... more ordinary activities” (Phillipov, 2012, p. 152). For example, a subgenre of grindcore dubbed pornogrind uses extremely violent, highly sexualized and perverse lyrics and violent, misogynistic imagery of women (one description of the genre reads “the basic and unmistakable equation remains the same: porno & grind = pornogrind” (Stewart-Panko, 2009, p. 54). Bands like XXX Maniak (United States) release albums such as 2004's EP *Harvesting the Cunt Nectar*. Its cover features a man in a torture chamber with a shovel hovering over a bloody dead woman with a knife in her eye. It's undeniably vile; however, it's also comical, self referential, and self-effacing, and the genre features several bands with female members that use the remarkably similar imagery and lyrics, such as Psicovomitosis Sadinecrootitis (Mexico) and Hatefuck (United States). Seeing as how these exceptions are present, the best way to illuminate gender relations in the scene will be to give context first into the history of the music, as gender relations are intimately intertwined with the activities and actions of that occur within the extreme music scene. It's equally important to demonstrate that extreme

metal's aesthetic and lyrical qualities are emulated and perpetuated by certain bands, and rejected and transformed by other bands, within extreme metal subgenres. However, it's difficult to give much context to the practice without giving some insight into heavy metal. Here, I will briefly discuss the formation of the heavy metal scene, and how it grew and differentiated to include the extreme metal scene.

### **Laying the Foundations: How Heavy Metal Bore Extreme Metal**

Genre progenitors Black Sabbath emerged from the post-war factory town of Birmingham in 1969 at the tail end of the hippie era; their town was economically disadvantaged, life was hard. “They were prophets bred from the downside of English society, the unemployed – people regarded as morally suspect and of negligible social worth” (Christie, 2003, p. 1). Their music was downtrodden, massive and undoubtedly blues influenced with mournful vocals; guitarist Tony Iommi had lobbed off his finger tips in a factory accident, and by necessity began tuning lower to reduce the tension on his hand fashioned finger covers so he could continue playing his instrument. The effect of this first album was monumental, and set off a trigger effect that is essential in the creation of the metal scene: they acted as “*conduits* to the global circulation of metal sounds and styles” (author emphasis, Wallach & Levine, 2012, p. 116). Given that metal scenes are simultaneously global, national, and local, this first metal recording was crucial to inspire “some of the consumers of disseminated metal recordings... to develop performative competence to replicate collaboratively the sounds on the recordings in cover bands and even compose new songs within the genre conventions” (Wallach & Levine, 2012, p. 120). After the band released their massively influential self-titled debut, 1970's *Paranoid*, and 1971's *Master of Reality*, the genre truly gained momentum.

Similarly innovative, though sonically unique acts like Alice Cooper, Blue Cheer, Hawkwind, King Crimson, Led Zeppelin, Motörhead, Rush, Deep Purple, Judas Priest, KISS, and the Stooges, who hailed from countries around the world, came shortly before and after that, and combined with Black Sabbath's down tuned, sludgy sound and misanthropic approach, the doors to metal were blown wide open. Across the United Kingdom – a country with a long and proud popular music lineage, who already had “material and institutional resources for scene building” (Wallach & Levine, 2012, p. 121), thus fulfilling the second generalization about metal scenes – bands began experimenting with dueling guitarists, operatic vocals, integrating punk instrumentation, and/or pounding, whip fast drums; Iron Maiden, Saxon, Girlschool, Witchfinder General and Diamond Head led the charge, popularized as the New Wave of British Heavy Metal, thanks to its usage by rock journalist Geoff Barton in the late 70s' (as cited in Ward, 2008). Many bands remain hugely popular today, while numerous others remained in the underground, retaining their status as the “musical amateurs... [and] the lifesblood” of the metal scene (Wallach & Levine, 2012, p. 123- 124), including acts like Angel Witch, Satan, Badger, Triarchy, Demon Pact, Gaskin, JOKER, Virtue, Crucifixion, and hundreds more. Extreme metal's tentacles took root; England's Venom presented “a speeded-up and striped-down version of the genre” (Kahn Harris, 2007, p. 2) with the hugely influential 1981 debut *Welcome to Hell* that is now legendary for its ultra Satanic lyrical and visual themes. Like many extreme metal bands that followed in their wake, Venom's music was reactionary against the technicality of the current metal scene from a sonic, visual, and idealistic perspective; they aimed to make a “band that was heavier and more over the top than anything anyone had ever seen before, more Satanic than Black

Sabbath, louder than Motörhead, with a pyrotechnic show to rival Kiss, and with even more leather and studs than Judas Priest” (Venom Legions, n.d., para. 2). This musical growth stems from the metal scene making “a show of patrolling their boundaries” (Wallach & Levine, 2012, p. 124), whilst proudly differentiating from the norm, thus fulfilling the fourth generalization about metal scenes. The creation of and support of metal was now a diaspora: it exploded in the northern hemisphere in the early ‘80s with powerful metal acts like Canadian titans Anvil and Exciter. European bands like Mercyful Fate (Denmark) and Warlock (Germany), and infamous American bands Manowar, Metallica, Anthrax, and Exodus – the latter three were eventually dubbed thrash metal – emerged as more musicians played with the genre troupes and created their own along the way. These bands were simply heavier: “two times the speed, two times the spikes” (Christie, 2003, p. 95). Most metal genres were created from a similar response.

### **The History, Sound, and Attributes of Extreme Metal**

In terms of drum style, and vocal style, extreme metal definitely takes the traditional elements and uses them in a way that is just intense... And evokes a much more visceral, emotional response than something that is tuneful or melodic or the song structures are formulaic in a way. I think, in a way extreme metal, it definitely aims to evoke an emotional response, rather than just be music (NOTHING/ black metal musician, 2013, personal communication).

As demonstrated early on in this chapter, extreme metal is a vague term with different connotations for each music listener. For purposes of this thesis, it includes bands within the subgenres of black metal, death metal, doom metal, and grindcore (following the genre allocation suggested by Kahn-Harris (2007) and Allett (2013)) that self identify as extreme. Rather than simply choosing bands within those subgenres, I conducted 18 interviews with bands I believed were extreme, and used 15 of those

interviews who also identified as extreme. The reasons why I did this are most evident when analyzing the subgenre of doom metal.

### **Doom Metal**

Doom enjoys the longest history of any subgenre of heavy metal. It is the glacial paced antithesis of metal's long-standing obsession with technicality, precision, and speed, a genre that unpretentiously celebrates its regressive tendencies. Christie (2004) claims it is so "entrenched in primitivism that it barely recognized any metal milestones beyond the first Black Sabbath album" (p. 345). While that is no longer the case, since it began, the music was intended to be emotionally compelling, and it changed little throughout its first three decades, aside from having its mournful cries emulated and integrated into other genres. Its origin story tends to claim Black Sabbath as the progenitor, although several other bands and albums are occasionally touted by the comparatively few accounts of the genre that presently exist. Particularly influential are Coven's 1969 debut *Witchcraft Destroys Mind and Reaps Souls* (England), Blue Cheer's 1968 full length *Vincebus Eruptum* (England), and the overlooked Lucifer's Friend (Germany). It proliferated courtesy of bands like Pentagram (England), Witchfinder General (England), Pagan Altar (England), Saint Vitus (U.S.A.), and more.

From the get go, doom metal has been infused with religious, occult, and drug abuse lyrical and visual themes. Tracks tend to be lengthy, running from around six minutes to one hour, three minutes, and 31 seconds, as does the opening track from Tee Pee Records release of Sleep's *Dopesmoker* (2003). The tempo is slow. This genre is most akin to rock n' roll, with many blues style progressions and tempos. The ride cymbal is utilized frequently, as are clean vocals and sorrowful sounds. There are

multiple subgenre variations of doom metal, and as metal has evolved, genres have cross-pollinated and integrated elements of one another. Herein lies the reason why many people do not consider doom to be extreme: classic and so called “stoner” strains of the genre tend to borrow elements of ‘70s psychedelic acts, classic rock, and classic metal that are decidedly not extreme. Others are resolutely extreme. These genres include death/doom, drone, and funeral doom. Funeral doom is played at extremely slow speed with very heavy guitars, as well as guttural, growled vocals. Bands like Ahab (Germany), Mournful Congregation (Australia) and Evoken (United States) perform it. Death/doom is also largely considered extreme, as the bands within it utilizes troupes with death metal, contrasted against trudging sections and howling vocals, such as diSEMBOWELMENT (Australia), Asphyx (Netherlands), Coffins (Japan), and Autopsy (United States). Drone is almost formless, and is generally played extremely slow with long-duration tones that border on noise, such as the music made by Earth and Sunn O))) (United States). The thread that ties all the sonically diverse subgenres is an emphasis on emotionality. As Georgia Meadows, vocalist for self-proclaimed “adventure sludge” band Chieftain puts it, “I can describe the emotion it gives me: it’s slow and it’s sad. What sounds? Sonically? It sounds very beautiful and sad but very heavy too. Yeah.... It just gets into you and sort of becomes a meditative thing” (2013, personal communication). As Alia O’Brien, flutist and vocalist for doom act Blood Ceremony describes, the genre incorporates a vast variety of sounds. Bands such as hers are generally dubbed classic doom, and share similar attributes with the genre progenitors, hence the distinction between doom that could be considered extreme, versus doom that is decidedly not extreme.



I really consider us to be a rock band. We have obviously metal influences.... I would be really iffy, I believe we operate in the world of metal, just because everyone within that world appreciates the forefathers and mothers of heavy music, we aren't an extreme band... I'm not an authority, but when I think of extreme metal or extreme music, I think of music that serves a real social or political purpose. It's a music or movement that has a very powerful, visceral affect on a community at any given moment in time. So, it's maybe intended to be confrontational, confronting, whether that be confronting past musical norms or past musical idioms.... In my experience, there is an element that breaks away from the mainstream. We sort of fall in line with a tradition of pop music, I would say there is a subversive element to extreme music (2013, personal communication).

Bands within the doom subgenre utilize many differing facets to make up their performance and imagery. Many classic doom bands play with few to no visual aids, although band members infrequently wear '70s inspired regalia, including fringe t-shirts, bell-bottoms, and leather vests. In contrast, those who many extreme metal fans would dub extreme, will frequently play obscured by darkness and fog. Vintage amplifiers are highly prized within several of doom's subgenres for their sonic and aesthetic qualities. Bands within each specific subgenre may exploit these qualities listed; however, when asked about why, they are likely to suggest as O'Brien (2013) did the process occurs through "osmosis" (personal communication).

Doom metal is somewhat exceptional when it comes to the treatment and number of women. The past several years have seen a huge rise in female vocalists and instrumentalists in bands under the umbrella of doom, and historically bands within the genre have long featured female members. Whether that can be attributed to the absence of misogynistic themes, or to the genre's affiliation with the self-empowering nature of occultism, is worthy of further exploration. Genre progenitors Coven were led by vocalist Jinx Dawson, later seminal acts like Electric Wizard (England) eventually included guitarist Liz Buckingham; Noothgrush (United States) boasts drummer Chiyo Nukaga.

The hugely influential death/doom acts Mythic and Derkéta (United States) were composed almost entirely of women. Historically and currently, doom bands like SubRosa, Vastum, Salome, shEver, the Melvins, Chained Lace, Kylea, Bloody Panda, Made out of Babies, A Storm of Light, Helms Alee, Wounded Kings, 13, Sourvein, Castle, Alunah, Undersmile, Black Math Horsemen, Hammers of Misfortune, Royal Thunder, Invasion, Thorr's Hammer, Jex Thoth, Saros, Acid King, Dark Castle, Witch Mountain, Christian Mistress, Jucifer (United States), Mist (Slovenia), Ava Inferi (Portugal), Diathra (Belarus), Cauchemar (Canada), Boris (Japan), Triptykon (Netherlands), Octavia Sperati, Tristania (Norway) The Lamp of Thoth (England), The Devil's Blood (Netherlands), and countless more feature female members.

### **Black Metal**

Black metal is the most notorious of metal subgenres, and due to the events that took place in its history and the fashion in which said events were covered (Aites and Ewell, Aites and Ewell, 2010; McFayden and Dunn, McFayden and Dunn, 2005; Moynihan and Söderlind, 1998), the accompanying history has largely overtaken the music itself. Its genealogy and history have been hugely sensationalized, disseminated, and subsequently internalized in a myriad of guises, and the genre is now inarguably under the extreme metal umbrella for a variety of reasons.

Though black metal was dubbed after Venom's second album *Black Metal* (1982), the bands that followed in their wake adapted, created and disseminated music that was far more primeval, gritty and wanton than Venom ever was. "The speed was grueling, and raw, primitive emotion burned from the heart" (Christie, 2004, p. 109). Hellhammer (Switzerland), Vulcano (Brazil), Sarcófago (Brazil), Sodom (Germany),

Mercyful Fate (Denmark), Tormentor (Hungary) and Master's Hammer (Czech Republic), and Bathory (Sweden) led the charge with music that was chaotic, evil, and very poorly recorded. As the early '80s passed and death metal increased in popularity, black metal's second wave came into prominence. "The distillation of death metal in a simpler, more concentrated style, black metal abandoned lurching chaos for a million-miles-an-hour assault on the senses" (Christie, 2004, p. 27). Centered in Scandinavia during the late '80s and early '90s, this wave of extreme metal, created and performed by bands like Beherit (Finland), Darkthrone, Emperor, Mayhem, Immortal and Enslaved (Norway) was extremely reactive. This was the period during which "violent aesthetics in metal music became explicitly and deliberately articulated to real acts of violence" (Phillipov, 2013, p. 153). Key members in the Norwegian scene committed murders, church burnings, bomb threats, and more (Christie, 2004; Moynihan and Söderlind, 1998). Due to the extremity of violence and worldwide media coverage of the events, the entire black metal scene is correlated to Nazism and racism. This has been perpetuated by such figureheads as Varg Vikernes (an early member of the influential Mayhem, and creator of one man project Burzum, who continues making music to this day) who discussed his racist, Nationalist, Odinist, and constantly morphing ideals via his blog after being convicted and imprisoned for murdering Mayhem's guitarist Øystein Aarseth in 1993. In backlash against these associations, many bands are extremely careful to condemn and disassociate from the genre's history and the Norwegian scene. Simultaneously, many other black metal bands perpetuate and exploit hate ideologies.

Musically, black metal often utilizes low production value that sounds raw and chaotic, tremolo picking – a technique that involves alternating picking upwards then

downwards – and incredibly fast drumming techniques. Vocals are generally delivered in an unearthly shriek. Lyrical themes include Pagan history, Satanism, an appreciation of natural surroundings, and misanthropy. The imagery is often stark black and white with naturalistic themes.

Since the genre's heyday in the early '90s, the sounds within the black metal spectrum have differentiated hugely. Due to the differentiation of the music, and the response that the creators have to the associations within black metal, the black metal scene suffers acutely from elitism and contempt, both from within the scene and from people outside of it. Of all metal scenes, the black metal scene is the most strident in its boundary patrolling. There is extremely "intolerant attitudes towards what is perceived as a superficial commitment to the music" (Wallach & Levine, 2012, p. 125). For example, when American act Liturgy released a manifesto on their music, dubbing it "transcendental black metal" (Hunt-Hendrix, 2010, p. 54), the response was obscene. Currin (2011) interviewed guitarist and vocalist Hunt-Hendrix about the responses he has received, and he said, "It's like, "These guys are fags. These guys deserved to get fucked in the ass—to death." It's this violent, gay, rape stuff. It's all over the place, and it freaks me out... Somehow, some threshold was crossed. It's less dismissive, and more, like, really, really angry" (para. 9).

Now in its second decade of cross-pollination, the musicians who perform black metal are very specific about their allegiances. This materializes in their live performances, which bands they perform with, the media they choose to speak with, and in other ways. For live shows, you can semi accurately guess a band's genealogy and current allegiances, depending on if they play in corpse paint, a black and white face

paint popularized by the '90s bands, or with Satanic symbolism, or with decaying animals as props, or without visual aids. As for subgenre allocation, musicians are equally definitive. Many hybrid genres exist within black metal, including black/death, war metal, symphonic black metal, post black metal, and several more, each with associated connotations and sounds. For example, the black metal subgenre of war metal is made by bands such as Blasphemy, Revenge, Axis of Advance, Ouroboros, Rites of Thy Degringolade (Canada) and others.

In the most basic terms, war metal is a blasphemous, violent black/death metal hybrid so extremely fast, raw, and chaotic that it often borders upon grind.... war metal's aesthetic is almost as crucial as the music. Visions of apocalypse and conflict, gas masks and bullet belts, nuclear Baphomets and goats laden with bandoliers – war metal's schtick revolves around the blasphemous, the irradiated, the anti-life and war-hungry (Kelly, 2012, para. 4-6).

The sub/sub genre distinctions within black metal materialize in many ways, particularly how band members define themselves. Trish Kolstad, the former drummer for Nattefrost, Skitliv, Warsystem, and Himsides, and sole member of Dödsängel describes her “solo project... it's black metal mixed with hardcore d-beat punk, and the other bands I was in are more like black metal” (2013, personal communication).

Of all subgenres of extreme metal, black metal has the most interesting gender relations, in that within the more extreme underground bands, gender is seemingly irrelevant, and musical ability and commitment to black metal is prized above all. Historically many women have been present, including in Demonic Christ, who were a key figure in the first wave of American black metal. Greek band Astarte is comprised entirely of women, while bassist Sarah Weiner was in the hugely influential Weakling (United States) and vocalist and bassist Vvonne Wilczynska fronts Darkened Nocturn

Slaughtercult (Germany). Although there are examples, they do not boast a high presence. Whether this is attributable to the issues of elitism and contempt within the scene is worthy of further exploration. In the past 15 years, the numbers of women have increased, and bands like Darkestrah (Kyrgyzstan), Gallhammer (Japan), Hell Militia (France), Ludicra, Hahimiron, Teratism (United States), Bestial Holocaust (Bolivia), Melencolia Estatica (Italy), Demonic Christ (United States), Sortilegia, Antediluvian, Sylvus (Canada), Sigh (Japan), and Peste Noire (France) had or currently include female members.

### **Grindcore**

Grindcore's history is closely related to that of punk rock. Created by "truly disgruntled English Youth" (Mudrian, 2004, p. 25), punk's second wave arrived in the form of "anarchist bands such as Crass, the Exploited, and Discharge" (Mudrian, 2004, p. 25). According to the numerous historical accounts of the genre, the aforementioned bands and the sounds created by New York act Swans ended up deeply impacting the teenage boys that eventually formed Birmingham based act Napalm Death. Their one-time drummer Mick Harris is sometimes credited with the naming the genre (Mudrian, 2004, p. 35). Their 1987 debut *Scum* is now legendary in metal circles, and when combined with releases like Sore Throat's *Unhindered by Talent* (1989), Doom's *BBC Peel Sessions* (1989) and the influential proto-grind/crust album *The Only Good Punk.... Is a Dead One* by British act Electro Hippies, it forms the basis of grindcore. According to Christie (2004), the genre "was a dense spattering of black metal, hardcore, and thrash metal accelerated nearly to the point of atom-splitting self-destruction" (p. 186). Mudrian (2004) provides a more simplistic explanation, dubbing grindcore a "barbaric amalgam of

hardcore punk and heavy metal” (pg. 32). It often features screeched vocals infused with sociopolitical lyrical themes often targeting the “machinations of late-capitalist culture” (Overell, 2010, p.82) alongside often 220 beats-per-minute drums. The imagery is often stark black and white, often employing Xeroxed images of social injustices. Emerging at a similar time as death metal, it was “developed in the mid to late 1980s as bands such as Siege, Repulsion” (Kahn-Harris, 2007, p. 3) and the aforementioned Napalm Death put their own variances on the genre.

Today, bands under this subgenre include acts whose sounds vary wildly and include subgenres or hybrid genres such as deathgrind, goregrind, noise, powerviolence, pornogrind, and others. Many of these descriptors have been given due to lyrical content, and many bands could be placed under several of those genres. For example, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, pornogrind bands like Creamface (Finland), XXX Maniak (United States), Cock and Ball Torture (Germany) and others came about as bands took grindcore, subtracted “the politics, social consciousness and personal exploration normally associated with the genre, [and added] detailed [and embellished] description from the fantastically lurid corners of both pornography’s landscape and one’s ribald imagination” (Stewart-Panko, 2009, para.1). Other acts like England’s Carcass were dubbed goregrind or deathgrind, as they used lyrics that featured graphic descriptions of human body disposal pulled directly from a medical textbook, as they did on 1991’s *Necroticism – Descanting the Insalubrious*. The origins of these two terms are unclear, but according to Exhumed guitarist and vocalist Matthew Harvey, who played this style of grindcore himself, “Gore-Grind music is characterized by its preoccupation with pitch-shifted or extremely low vocals, use of gore and forensic pathology as its

exclusive subject matter, and often very fast tempos” (Purcell, 2003, p. 23).

To be very clear on the musical genealogy, the genre of grindcore is musically and thematically tied to death metal, so closely that Mudrian’s historical narrative (2004) tied the two together. As such, other important acts like Brutal Truth (United States), Terrorizer (United States), Impetigo (United States), and more are often placed under the umbrella of either genre. In contrast, other bands such as Nasum (Sweden), Rotten Sound (Finland), Pig Destroyer (United States), All Pigs Must Die (United States), Cripple Bastards (Italy), and Disrupt (United States) are generally dubbed grindcore. The main quality that combines all these bands is an appreciation for short/loud/fast music, and an emphasis on intensity and extremity in a live setting. Thanks to the sonic qualities and emphasis on anger and violence, grindcore is resolutely considered extreme metal. In a live setting, this materializes in intense performances, which are rarely done with visual aids.

Although grindcore doesn’t police its boundaries nearly as stridently as black metal, there are certainly standards that bands utilize to further their positions within the grindcore scene, depending on their ideological affiliations. For example, Canadian band Fuck the Facts espouses the sociopolitical leanings of early grind and the Do It Yourself ethos of punk rock (Mongeon, 2013, personal communication). The band frequently self releases EPs and recordings, tours despite losing money on the endeavor (Rosenberg, 2013, para. 2), and self identifies as “a bit of noise and experimental. So lately if you put half and half with metal and grindcore with a bit of spice, experimental and noise a little bit on top of it, is what I would describe it. First a metal band, but there is a lot of grindcore influences” (Mongeon, 2013, personal communication).



Grindcore is unique in its gendered treatment. Given that it has long been affiliated with sociopolitical ideologies, it is theoretically set up for female participation.

For example,

A serious criticism of sexism can be found in the deeply sarcastic lyrics of Napalm Death songs like “It’s a Man’s World”: “God gave me strength, women suck my length.... It’s a man world, so you’d better act like one. Cunt, born some more, to be big and strong like daddy, drill them to perpetuate the ultimate form of stupidity.” Napalm Death also criticizes sexism within the mainstream metal scene and the underground punk genre. According to the song “Cock-Rock Alienation”, “capitalism, racism, sexism [are] the foundations of cock-rocking idealism. “The Missing Link” mourns hypocrisy and misogyny: “Earnest words, calling for the unity of the sexes, when she’s still the chick, or stupid bitch, ridiculed for showing an interest (Purcell, 2003, p. 47).

Perhaps due to the lyrical focus and connection with punk rock in grindcore, the genre has long featured women in its ranks, albeit in smaller numbers than doom. The musical growth, genre differentiation, and subsequent fascination with gore and misogyny could be the reason why, although that is worthy of exploration, as is the fact that many bands write lyrics critical of misogyny and sexism. As for the bands, women have long been present in such acts as Disrupt, Despise You, Bastard Noise, Stresscase, Curmudgeon, Cloud Rat, Idiots Parade, Hatred Surge, Agoraphobic Nosebleed, Hemorrhage, Landmine Marathon, Cretin, Transient (United States), Melt Banana, Flagitious Idiosyncrasy in the Dilapidation, Mind of Asian (Japan), Fermento (Spain), Rape Revenge, Exit Strategy (Canada), Warsore (Australia), and many more.

### **Death Metal**

Of all the subgenres of extreme metal, death metal’s history has been covered the most extensively, which is why it has been mentioned so frequently throughout this chapter. Its origin stories directly impact and intertwine with those of black metal,

grindcore and doom metal, confirming the sixth generalization about metal scenes by Wallach and Levine (2012). “All metal scenes are defined not just by their relationship to the global metal scene but by their relationship to other neighboring scenes and to overlapping scenes dedicated to other genres” (p. 128). Thanks to this overlap, death metal is music with incredible variety, and the culturally situated history of the genre is complex, as the seeds of the genre were “planted throughout the world. The phenomenon was a pure product of the tape trading underground” (Christie, 2004, p. 241).

Death metal was built from the foundations of thrash metal, grindcore and early extreme metal, borrowing heavily from Venom and thrash titans Slayer (United States), along with albums by Possessed, Morbid Angel, Cryptic Slaughter, and Death (United States). Of all the metal genres, death metal’s scenes are easiest to identify as they’ve been coded into metal history. Early on, thanks to tape trading and key bands appearing in the regions, large scenes grew in Tampa, Florida, and Gothenburg, Sweden, as well as in other locales.

In 1983, Tampa became the birthplace of death metal when the group Mantas (which later changed its name to Death) released its first demo cassette. This primitive recording was circulated throughout the underground metal cassette tape trading circuit, and in turn spawned a number of bands from the Tampa area, most importantly Morbid Angel, Obituary, and Deicide. By the early 1990s, death metal had gained international popularity and new scenes began to emerge. Most prominent among these were Stockholm and (especially) Gothenburg, Sweden where bands such as Entombed, Dismember, At The Gates, and In Flames combined the aggressiveness of the "Tampa sound" with the melodic European metal of Iron Maiden, Judas Priest, and others. This particular style of death metal, which has been labeled the "Gothenburg sound," typically focuses less on themes of horror and gore and instead addresses societal and philosophical issues including media manipulation, political corruption, and hopelessness (Dunn, 2004, p. 107).

Since its inception, death metal has usually been played “fast, low, powerful, intense, and played very loudly” (Purcell, 2003, p. 9). The vocals are mostly

indecipherable and growling, and the tempo changes frequently. Drums, as they are in black metal and grindcore, are usually played extremely fast and often employ blast beats, a technique that involves alternating or simultaneous snare drum and bass drum hits at an incredibly high beats per minute rate, often between 180 and 220. Another strain of death metal that is often dubbed death/doom, utilizes many of these troupes within death metal but the instrumentation is played at a significantly slower speed. The lyrical themes often focus on violence of all varieties, morality, mortality, religion and mysticism. Imagery is largely gory and menacing.

Of all the subgenres in extreme metal, death metal is arguably the most musically varied. The boundaries are scarcely patrolled, and elements of death metal are mixed with literally every subgenre of metal. The sub/sub genres under its umbrella include brutal death metal, melodic death metal, progressive death metal, slam death metal, symphonic death metal, technical death metal, death grind, death n' roll, deathcore, and death/doom as well as variations of blackened death metal. Several of these distinctions have already been articulated within this chapter, to further illuminate the lack of boundaries and importance of overlap in metal scenes worldwide. To the untrained ear, the distinctions are nearly impossible to hear, while to the connoisseur they are distinct. For example, Alex Ness, the vocalist for death metal band Abriosis describes the delineations in her own band.

We call ourselves progressive death metal because we are using different time signatures and dissonant chords and things that kind of sound off, so it's not necessarily, so we strive to always keep a pulse in there, and keep it accessible for people if they are willing to be patient with the music and find a pulse that registers in our songs. It's not necessarily the easiest music to get into right away, sometimes it does take some time to work through it and feel what's going on, there is quite a bit going on in each song. Maybe that's where the progressive tag comes in. People have called us technical death

metal, but we find we have a lot of melodic aspects too, we don't feel that encompasses our entire sound (2013, personal communication).

Death metal is interesting in its gender relations. Female musicians throughout most of its history have populated it. Hugely influential acts like Bolt Thrower (England), Nuclear Death (United States), Mythic and Dekerta (United States), November Grief (Canada) boast bassists, guitarist, vocalists, and drummers who are female. When compared to the four genres of extreme metal, death metal has a comparative number of females as grindcore, particularly in bands that play the hybrid genres, such as those in death/doom and death/grind, while brutal death is nearly devoid of female musicians. The reasons why are worthy of exploration, and may be attributable to the lyrical content, violent and misogynistic imagery, or other reasons. Regardless, bands such as The Agonist (Canada), Matriarch (Puerto Rico), Arch Enemy (Germany), God Dethroned (Netherlands), Demonic Christ, Torrid Flesh, Abnormality, At Odds with God, Holocaustum, Spiritual Decay, Warface, Vastum (United States), Merlin (Russia), Adoiror (England), Cerebral Bore (Scotland) and numerous more had or have female members.

### **The Extreme Metal Scene in Canada**

Now that extreme metal has been outlined, it is possible to correlate it to and outline the Canadian extreme metal scene. The scene is extremely strong, and enjoys local scenes in every major city, and many of the smaller towns as well. Given that I have only thoroughly experienced the Calgary metal scene, I can only speak to that, but the Calgary metal scene fulfills all the four crucial functions necessary of a metal scene, and all six generalizations as well. However, before we go into depth, it's important to discuss the overall scene in Canada.

The music and scene are enjoyed by tens of thousands of fans nation wide, and bands enjoy strong touring networks that stretch from Victoria to Halifax. Although geographic proximity makes it more difficult and extremely expensive for touring bands – sometimes an eight-hour drive is necessary for every show, as compared to some American markets that necessitate a drive of two hours – many cities have been identified as metal hotspots. For example, my hometown of Calgary boasts multiple local festivals, including Noctis Metal Festival, Calgary Metalfest, and the Fuck Off Life Festival. It has produced literally hundreds of bands, and the most popular subgenre is death metal, though in recent years the music has differentiated wildly. In contrast, Vancouver is known regionally for sludge/doom metal and grindcore. Although their populations are smaller, cities such as Kamloops, Thunder Bay, Victoria, Winnipeg, and others have metal scenes as well. Given the location, population size, and the accompanying extreme metal scene, how musicians and fans are treated by outsiders and insiders alike varies wildly. As many have experienced, small towns generally have different social mentalities than large urban centers.

Small town B.C. is scary, it's weird and rednecky. Not good... I've definitely noticed the smaller the town, the redneckier, and the less accepting [it is], you know what I mean? It's just exposure and un-education and mostly cable, I don't understand what's going on cultural wise. But in the cities, you're most of the time treated good (Freya Fawn/drummer, Cathar, 2013, personal communication).

As for extreme metal fans, many run the gamut described earlier. Many who attend shows frequently tend to practice such things as collecting items, moshing and/or headbanging, and drinking. The audience is predominately male, although the numbers of fans who are female is increasing. Undoubtedly, the largest racial majority is white, although other minorities do take part, and their numbers appear to be increasing as well.

This is related both to the population diaspora, and culturally ingrained notions of what is acceptable for consumption along racial lines (Daiwes, 2012).

Dress in the extreme metal scene in Canada, as it in other extreme metal scenes, is generally subdued, and many participants wear metal t-shirts, hand-sewn vests, hand altered tops, and jeans. Sometimes, female participants will alter their t-shirts so they are low cut, and a few wear bondage or PVC wear, depending on their personal tastes. Clothing is frequently an issue – though mostly an unspoken one – between scene members, as male and female participants make judgments based on bands touted, on body parts which are covered or uncovered, and other such arbitrary decisions. As Samantha Landa, drummer for Dead Asylum observes:

I think a lot of women in the scene are very similar to the guys, will wear oversized band t-shirts, and they don't really care about, well, they'll wear makeup, but they don't really care about going all out, or looking pretty, they just want to go out and rock out and whatever. They know they're going to get sweaty anyway, so they don't make themselves up. Girls in the scene can be pretty judgmental of other girls in the scene, especially if they don't know them. I've been guilty of that, which is awful because you know people are doing it to you. I'll be in a group of girls, we have a pretty solid group of girls that all know each other and friends in the Vancouver metal scene, and we'll all be standing around and talking and there will be some chick that is there, and she is, I don't know, dressed maybe more preppy or pretty, and looks somewhat out of place, or is there with a friend and we're like 'oh who is that, where did she come from' and someone will be like 'who does she think she is? She is so out of place.' And that's a thing I fear too when I'm in a scene that's not mine. If I want to wear whatever I want in my scene with all the people I know, it wouldn't be a problem. But, when you're out of your element, you're in a new area, people can be very judgmental. I feel comfortable in this scene because I'm in it, and I have a lot of friends, but to somebody who is on the outside, I think it would seem very cliquy and very judgmental (2013, personal communication).

Multiple participants echoed this sentiment, and it certainly lends credence to the importance of legitimacy and authenticity within extreme metal. Personally, my experience with treatment due to my dress mirrors Landa's observation. As a participant

who wears a metal vest covered in patches, jeans, and an unaltered metal t-shirt, and as a known member of the media, I very rarely am treated as an outsider. In contrast, I have been asked or had people make comments towards me in other scenes and by newcomers to the Calgary scene. Such statements include “where is your boyfriend?” “Are you at the wrong show?” “Do you actually like metal?” “I can’t believe you know about metal” (Anonymous, 2013, personal communication) or other such things, but largely, I am respected and treated like a fan and participant. Like Landa, I have also observed negative behavior between female scene members, and as a result I go out of my way to talk to other female participants, particularly those who I have yet to know. This mentality, which is practiced by several of my participants, directly contradicts what has been previously accepted about female interactions in the extreme metal scene. Kahn-Harris (2007) states, “the marginality of female members is reinforced when women see few prominent female scene members and musicians, and have few role models to emulate” (p. 74). Especially in the past several years, women are actively engaging with other women in an attempt to improve the camaraderie and treatment. This camaraderie is particularly strong between female musicians, although the same is occurring between those who are fans exclusively.

There is a big camaraderie with women and with men too, with just metal heads in general, I find. Like, why are you stoked when you see a female in an extreme metal band? Because oh, she’s like me, it’s kind of like a commonality. Because there [are] more and more women, but there is still not tons. It’s cool to find that commonality with someone who is interested in what you’re interested in (Alex Ness/vocalist, Abriosis, 2013, personal communication).

There are definitely more ladies doing it, like I said. There are more ladies doing it, and beyond there being more ladies doing it, the ladies who are doing it are so much more into it now. And, I’m not sure if this has changed or if this is my own personal experience because I know playing in bands

skews your view of what's going on, but so many more women are not just attending shows but getting up on stage and playing instruments (Stefani MacKichan/drummer, Mares of Thrace, 2013, personal communication).

The response of female metal scene members to other female metal scene members will be discussed in much further depth in Chapter Five, as treatment is frequently problematic and other elements of the extreme metal scene need be outlined.

Extreme metal is created in and consumed all over the country. Multiple labels, large and small, exist solely for the dissemination of bands from Canada and all other areas of the globe, creating institutions that “act as conduits to the global circulation of metal sounds and styles” (Wallach & Levine, 2012, p. 119). Band members and fans operate these labels, including such imprints as Calgary's Fuel Injected Records, Winnipeg's Mercy of Slumber Records and War on Music Records, Toronto's Vault of Dried Bones Records, New Hamburg's Profound Lore Records, Victoria's Black Raven Records, Verdun's Galy Records, Edmonton's Serpent Head Reprisal and Funeral Rain Records, and countless more. Many bands pay to press and subsequently disseminate their own releases, though some have been signed to larger labels from Canada and other countries. For example, participant Alia O'Brien's band (Blood Ceremony) is signed to United Kingdom label Rise Above Records. Participant MacKichan's band Mares of Thrace is signed to Hamilton's Sonic Unyon.

The venues at which extreme metal is performed in Canada are varied. Bars, house parties, squats, community halls, and concert venues host extreme metal shows, and these locations “provide gathering places for the collective consumption of metal artifacts and the display of metal-related fashion and expertise” (Wallach & Levine, 2012, p. 119). These sites are also utilized for “local performance and artifactual



production” (Wallach & Levine, 2012, p. 119). In Calgary, the main extreme metal venues include Dickens Pub, Vern’s Bar and Lord Nelson’s Pub & Grill. Both Dickens Pub and Lord Nelson’s Pub & Grill host other genres of music, while Vern’s Bar is primarily for heavy music, including heavy metal and punk rock. These bars all serve as a location for extreme metal fans to hang out, drink, and eat. Occasionally, people will sell or trade extreme metal artifacts, including tapes, t-shirts, patches, LPs, CDs, and other miscellaneous items. Metal shows are also hosted at large venues such as Flames Central, The Republik, and the Scotiabank Saddledome, though extreme metal bands are rarely hosted in such large venues, as the music generally does not boast a large enough fan base for such venues, except in exceptional circumstances.

Extreme metal scenes in Canada have many avenues to “promote local artists to the larger network of scenes” (Wallach & Levine, 2012, p. 119). For example, bands can release their recordings through multiple channels. Facebook pages are ubiquitous, as are Bandcamp – a website that allows you to upload as much or as little of your discography as your desire – profiles. Albums may be released through digital download, CD, tape, vinyl, 7-inch vinyl, 12-inch vinyl, and for varying costs. Depending on if the album is self released, or released through a label such as those mentioned above, distribution varies. Many bands will simply sell their album online and at live performances, while label releases tend to have better distribution. Smaller labels, however, often out of necessity conduct trades with other small distributors. This makes their product more varied resulting in more sales, and allows their bands greater distribution.

Show bookers and promoters, as well as fans within the scene promote local extreme metal artists by organizing shows where they may perform and sell their music

and memorabilia. In Calgary and other cities, a band may book gigs themselves, or go through a promoter. Promoters in Calgary often book bands for no fee, although some do charge bands to play through “pay to play” schemes. Due to the frustrating and difficult reality of promoting shows, and promoters who have allegedly used unscrupulous tactics, many bands within Calgary have rejected using promoters. Instead, they book shows themselves and invite bands who are friends or who share sonic similarities.

Given that Calgary has over 100 active metal bands performing original songs at a variety of locations that are sold through multiple avenues, it clearly and obviously fulfills several of the generalizations about metal scenes outlined by Wallach and Levine (2012). Firstly, it started with the consumption of extralocal artifacts, as there was a conduit which inspired “some of the consumers of disseminated metal recordings choose to develop performative competence to replicate collaboratively the sounds on the recordings in cover bands and even compose new songs within the genre conventions of metal” (p. 120). The Calgary extreme metal scene is most certainly “dependent on institutions for their survival” (p. 121) as this is the economic support for the bands that currently exist. One of the reasons why the Calgary extreme metal scene is so strong is because there are a huge number of institutions helping it. There are record stores like Meloydia, Sloth Records, and the Inner Sleeve to sell local extreme metal bands, distros at shows to disseminate recordings, practice spaces like Slaughterhouse Studios, college radio stations like CJSW 90.9 at the University of Calgary that boasts not one but FOUR metal shows, youth friendly centers like Tubby Dog restaurant, Broken City, Laundromats, and Undermountain venue, magazines like *BeatRoute Magazine*, *Absolute Underground* and *FFWD* that write about extreme metal bands, and multiple venues that

were previously listed. It goes without saying that the Calgary extreme metal scene is “populated by musical ‘amateurs... a critical mass of musicians willing to remain for long periods in a liminal state, never really crossing over into the realm of the professional musician due to the amount of actual earnings obtained from playing in a band” (p. 123). Fifthly, the claim “Metal scenes often make a show of patrolling their boundaries, but differ from other scenes in the intensity and function of this patrolling” (p. 124), certainly applies to the extreme metal scene in Calgary. This materializes in scenic interactions and snide comments over people who have been dubbed “posers”. These are people with “a superficial commitment to the music... infiltrating’ the scene” (p. 125). In my decade in the extreme metal scene in Calgary, these comments are most pervasive at black metal performances, where violence is not uncommon. For example, when Norwegian black metal legends Mayhem performed at Dickens Pub in November 2011, many members of the *Blood and Honour* Aryan pride group were present. Two of them verbally threatened to “kick the shit” out of me, as I had threatened them years previous after they made racist remarks towards a girlfriend of mine. Although they ultimately did not act upon the threat, several fights broke out at the performance, and at the end of the band’s set the floor was littered in broken glass.

The fifth generalization about metal bands does apply to Calgary, but not strictly. “In order for a scene to have coherence through time, there must be a ‘generation gap’: there must be an older generation aging out of and younger members entering the scene” (Wallach & Levine, 2012, p. 126). While the majority of musicians and participants on stage, in the crowd, and working for the scene are younger than 30, the extreme metal scene in Calgary, like other metal scenes, has “the advantage of being a subculture that

does not cast out its elders” (p. 126). Indeed, there are numerous people who have been in the metal scene for a lengthy period of time who are above 30, and most of them are prized and respected by other scene members as valued contributors who play in strong grindcore and death metal bands, book amazing festivals, own bars, run practice spaces, and run other important institutions that comprise the scene.

In their last generalization, Wallach and Levine (2012) state “all metal scenes are defined not just by their relationship to the global metal scene but by their relationship to other neighbouring scenes and to overlapping scenes dedicated to other genres” (p. 128). This is certainly true of Calgary’s extreme metal scene, which often aligns, compares, and contrasts itself to the Edmonton extreme metal scene. The cities have long been in friendly competition with one another, and the extreme metal scenes are no different. This friendly relationship materializes in Edmonton bands frequently performing in Calgary, and vice versa. In fact, a “Primitive Black Metal” tribute show that occurred in November 2013 played in both Calgary and Edmonton. In contrast, extreme metal fans often complain when larger tours go through only Edmonton or only Calgary. In general however, the scenes are often complimentary and support one another extensively.

### **Concluding Remarks**

As demonstrated by the application of the framework developed by Wallach and Levine (2012), the international, national, and local metal scenes all feed from and off of each other. Truly, metal is a global phenomenon, and accordingly metal scenes can be found in nearly every city in Canada. As indicated, the people who make, appreciate, and are part of the metal scene and, by extension, the extreme metal scene, are a diverse group who enjoy a myriad of activities and levels of involvement within metal. The

music itself is incredibly rich and varied, encompassing a wide spectrum of sonic and visual options.

Although there are problems that exist within the metal scene regarding homophobia, sexism, racism, and misanthropy (Allett, 2013; Baulch, 2007; Barron, 2013; Berger, 1999; Dee, 2009; Fellezs, 2013; Friesen, 1987; Gaines, 1991; Harrell, 1994; Kahn-Harris, 2007; Olson, 2013; Overell, 2010, 2013; Pattie, 2007; Purcell, 2003; Vassan, 2011; Walser, 1993; Weinstein, 1991), the metal scene is not far removed from everyday society and works from within to address these issues (Dawes, 2012; Hayes, 2013; Kelly, 2011, 2012, 2013). In the next chapter, my participants and I will discuss how issues around gender are being addressed and enacted within the metal scene, and through the Communication Theory of Identity, it will be demonstrated that this discourse is problematic, though is changing to accommodate increasing numbers of women on stage and in the audience.

## CHAPTER 5: Negotiating Gender in a Complex Scene

In April and May of 2012, I was invited to go on tour with Mares of Thrace, a two-piece death/doom band from Calgary, Alberta who was primed to release their second album *The Pilgrimage*. Drummer Stefani MacKichan and guitarist/vocalist Thérèse Lanz and I had become friends based on a love for abrasive music, Richard Dawkins, Mexican food, and feminism, so we got in the van and the duo played shows while I was the muscles and merch person. These were two women who I had looked up to for years, and I've modeled many of my critical mannerisms after them, so I was thrilled for the opportunity. We drove from Calgary to Vancouver and down to Portland, then back home for a sold out CD release party and then all the way across Canada to Quebec City. At many shows, while I practiced paradiddles with drummer Stefani, we discussed the enjoyable – and often extremely challenging – reality of being a woman in the extreme metal scene. The jazz trained musician has been performing live for over ten years in a variety of bands, and ended up being my first interviewee for this project. Her reflections resonated throughout my interviews.

You never, ever talk about how 'pretty' men are going on stage. And unfortunately, I've never read an article that didn't mention we were women that didn't mention how pretty we are. And that's a big kick in the face, and doesn't help women get into it. That just tells women that in order to do this, I need to be pretty. And that's NOT true. Pretty is stupid. But on that note, I used to have a professor that would say 'change never ever came from outside a system, you need to be within a system in order to make progress.' And on that sense, I'd like to think that if being a woman gets us recognition, it gets our bands further ahead, and exposes us to more women, then we can make a difference. But you can't do it from beyond the system (Stefani Mackichan/ drummer, Mares of Thrace, 2013, personal communication).

In essence, the increased visibility and numbers of women on stage can be attributed to women being empowered by seeing other women performing live. It also demonstrates how media coverage tends to reinforce “othering” based on language and expectations of women. Aside from those two overarching themes, several others became obvious when analyzing my research, and the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) intimately illuminated each. In this chapter I focus on five questions, and how participants negotiate, respond and act in extreme metal scenes due to personal negotiations of identity. I contrast personal experience with their experience and how “individuals internalize social interactions, relationships, and a sense of self into identities through communication” (Hecht & Choi, 1993, p. 139). Special attention is paid to how CTI's notion of frames (also known as loci), identified as the “personal, enacted, relational, and communal” frames (Hecht & Choi, 1993, p. 140) – overlap, contradict each other, lead to, and reinforce problematic language regarding women within extreme metal. For clarity, the personal frame within CTI focuses on one’s self-perception or personal sense of contentment. The enactment frame is concerned with how a person expresses identity through the messages and signals they provide. The relational frame reflects how a person’s identity is forged through relationships with others, and how that identity exists in relation to surrounding individuals’ identities. Lastly, the communal frame is concerned with how a community creates, disseminates, and sustains an identity (Hecht et al, 2002, p. 853).

This chapter focuses on gaps between those loci of identity, as the participants expressed on numerous occasions a disconnect between their personal interpretation and enjoyment of extreme metal and the community standards and expectations surrounding

their enjoyment and engagement with extreme metal. Far from being simplistically summed up, participants identified problematic and extremely pleasurable relationships with the community, each other, other women and men, and were careful not to demonize or implicate. The personal-relational gap was particularly salient. As indicated by Drummond and Orbe (2009), “a personal–relational identity gap exists when one sees him- or herself one way but perceives that others see him or her differently” (p. 81). My participants certainly indicated this struggle in their experience with extreme metal, but spoke of the music lovingly. As such, the responses received in these interviews will simultaneously demonstrate how, despite much negativity aimed at female participants in extreme metal, their numbers are increasing and the community’s ways of referring to itself are changing, though it remains problematic. The five questions asked of participants will be presented in the order they were asked, and were selected due to their relevance of answering the research question regarding the experience of women in extreme metal.

**When the Personal turns Relational:**

**Q # 1: Can you tell me if you feel your initial involvement with metal was impacted by your gender?**

No. Not at all... you like some sort of music, you end up liking a band. Back in the day when you started listening to metal, it started with old Metallica when I was a teenager, but it started that way for everybody. I don’t call that really in the metal past, it just happened, but let’s say the first heavy bands were Carcass and Cradle of Filth that I listened to. And I just started listening to them, and back in the day, that was about in ‘97, you wouldn’t see the band on the Internet, your friend would have a CD and you’d listen to it, you know? If they had a sexist image or anything, I wouldn’t have known. I never felt, ‘hey I’m a girl’ and I don’t know! Music just happened at that point. I love going to shows. When I was a kid, especially my two last years of high school, all I wanted to do was go to every single show, all of them. I needed to be at all of them, so it was just a natural thing to love music and if it was heavy, awesome. You know? At no point did I ever stop and think ‘oh, is there a difference because I am a girl?’ (Melanie Mongeon/ vocalist, Fuck the



Facts, 2013, personal communication).

My interviews began when I asked my participants about their introduction to heavy metal as fans, and were followed by a question about their introduction as musicians. These responses will not be chronicled, as they focused primarily on fandom and musicianship, as opposed to the gendered aspects of these practices. After opening up and discussing band and music interests, participants were more comfortable to talk about the issue at hand, which was whether they felt their involvement with heavy metal was impacted by their gender and communal concepts of gender. I was interested in determining if they felt their relationship with the genre was gendered from the onset, and the discussion surrounding this question allowed me to ask follow up questions about when and if they felt their relationship to metal changed at any point due to gendered communication with other scene members. Similar to several participants, the first few years I enjoyed metal were free of moments that appeared to be impacted by my gender. I eventually became aware through specific interactions.

In high school, I hung out with a group of people who were into metal and hardcore. As is usual during that phase of life, particular cliques formed, and my own group of friends consisted of several girls and myself who attended a variety of shows. Another group of music fans, males that we only knew from recognizing each other at metal and punk rock shows, became quite combative towards my girlfriends, and would attack them on the Internet and threaten them at shows whenever I was absent. One day a friend told me such a person approached her, telling her she was not allowed to wear a band t-shirt she had purchased because she “didn’t actually like them.” He had finished the conversation by threatening to beat her up. Later that week, another member of the

group approached me at school and asked where I had purchased my t-shirt because he “really fucking wanted it.” At the time, my girlfriends couldn’t understand why the males in the community responded so negatively to them and left me unscathed. Looking back, I think perhaps I was treated with respect due to my music column in the school paper, or because my appearance was quite menacing – black hair, dreadlocks, metal studs, facial piercings, all black clothing, combat boots. In my mind, it was likely that my attractive girlfriends intimidated the young and insecure metal fans. It was here I first became aware of the “dress code” of metal, discussed in Chapter Two. Although my girlfriend did not dress in a hyper sexualized fashion, they did not dress in overtly metal clothes, and generally wore metal t-shirts with jeans or skirts. This response from the males could be interpreted as a reaction to my girlfriends being feminine in ways the males couldn’t accept or manage, given their participation in the heavy metal scene. In contrast, my dress may have been considered more masculine, although I personally reject this labeling. Although my dress at metal shows is always jeans, a t-shirt, a metal vest, and combat boots, I label my clothes utilitarian and comfortable.

I still question whether these situations were gendered. The simplistic explanation *could* be that metal fans respond to other metal fans when there is a perceived lack of authenticity. As discussed in Chapter Four, Wallach and Levine (2012) chronicle how people who are considered inauthentic by other metal fans are labeled “posers” (p. 125). That being said, this response has a gendered aspect, as “in many scenes, men are taken-for-granted performers and consumers of music, while women struggle for legitimacy both onstage and off” (Hutcherson & Haenfler, 2010, p. 102). They continue, saying extreme metal “music can be a source of gendered resistance in which participants

contest gendered meanings, reify the dominant gender order or both” (p. 102). In this case, my friends *could* be the ones contesting gendered dress expectations, while the males *could* be reifying scene expectations for female participation and appearance.

My participants had more definitive answers regarding their experiences, which were extremely varied. Only five of my participants responded with a resolute “Yes” when asked if their gender impacted their enjoyment of metal early on. Comparatively, seven of my participants gave a resolute “No,” while the remaining three gave no definitive answer. Interestingly, although all of them identified problematic treatment in their interviews based on their gender – due to being treated poorly because of their gender or because they were exhausted by the topic of gender being continuously raised – they were hesitant to paint broad strokes, and their responses indicated an awareness of others’ reactions (or the relational frame), as well as a negotiated response (personal frame). Given their experience in the extreme metal scene, many participants had internalized expectations for feminine participation and involvement, and were actively rejecting those expectations, and contesting gendered meanings. For example, drummer Cara Ashbey responded with:

Yes. Because I was always considered a groupie, and I hated it. Because I’d go to shows, I didn’t play in a metal band years ago, but I do play in a grind band now, but when I didn’t play in a band years ago, I would often work merch and people at the shows, or people I went to shows with, would often consider like ‘oh, are you hanging out with the band? Are you somebody’s girlfriend?’ And it was always a negative connotation, and I’d always say ‘I enjoy this music and I actually want to be a part of this community, not arm candy’ (Cara Ashbey/drummer, PreSchool Shooting, 2013, personal communication).

This response is indicative of how the frames of identity can create “dialectical oppositionalities” (Hecht et al, 2002, p. 853). Community identities – such as those found

within extreme metal – help shape individual identities, and vice versa. These interpretations become problematic when an ascribed identity does not match the personally selected identity. Cara’s response indicates a discrepancy between her personal frame versus her relational and communal frame. Again, this discrepancy occurs when “when one sees him or herself one way but perceives that others see him or her differently” (Drummond & Orbe, 2009, p.82). This is symptomatic of how many interview participants felt about their gender in relation to their participation in extreme metal. CTI identifies these as “identity gaps” because they are “discrepancies between or among the four frames of identity” (Hecht & Jung, 2004, p. 268). Obviously, Cara found the ascribed identity problematic, as it does not conform to her personally selected identity of “music fan”. Another such response came from Eliane Gazzard, bassist for death metal act AKAKOR. Throughout our interview, she indicated many times her discomfort with the subject because she felt she had suffered no disadvantages within extreme metal on the basis of her gender, though she did indicate contempt for the hyper-focus on the subject by metal media, metal fans, and scholars. Her response to the first question was as follows:

No, only in the mosh pit. And I’m small, and I can get destroyed pretty easy, at certain shows. That would be the only time. Physically, I couldn’t handle a metal show. But as far as a woman... I just love talking about music, so if you’re about music, and other people are about music, then it’s a pretty open ended experience (Eliane Gazzard/ bassist, AKAKOR, 2013, personal communication).

Although Eliane’s experience differs from Cara’s, both women indicated that community engagement helped shape their relationships to extreme metal. In Gazzard’s case, her personal and communal frames coincided. Though, some, including Hutcherson & Haenfler (2010) would argue that moshing is an issue packed with potentially

gendered connotations (p. 113) affecting both males and females. This is because activities within metal scenes “often evolve around typical masculine concerns as toughness, power and delinquency” (Tanssgaard, 2012, p. 14), and moshing is a strenuous activity where toughness and power can be clearly demonstrated. Yet another response to this is acknowledging many smaller participants, and just many participants in general, choose not to mosh because they do not want to get hurt or simply do not enjoy the activity, as noted by Purcell (2003, p. 102).

Another issue that needs to be unpacked from these responses is something I’ve encountered numerous times within the metal scene. That is, many female scene members are dismissive and sometimes even combative when the discussion of gender discrimination is raised. Given the antagonistic nature of metal and how scene members often enact outright hostility towards feminism, this response can be interpreted in a variety of ways. There is an threat of being excluded, attacked, and further marginalized in the scene for calling attention to sexism, racism, and homophobia, as I’ve experienced from people who dislike the topic of my thesis, as chronicled in Chapter Three. Also, many female scene members appreciate their status as an “honorary boy”, a label that is infrequently utilized when women “venture into the gender transgression zone by demonstrating masculine behaviors... [they can] join the boys’ group, but only by giving up their femininity” (Ryle, 2012, p. 150). I’ve been dubbed this on numerous occasions, and it makes me frustrated because it perpetuates the notion that women or girls are incapable of obtaining respect. In other scenarios, I’ve seen women in the metal scene perpetuate this exact same labeling system. For example, at a party attended by nearly exclusively metal scene members, a group of several women and myself were sitting on a

couch playing video games while some of the men stood watching us. One woman remarked, “man, this isn’t normal. All the dudes are standing around and we’re playing video games! We’re not like other girls!” (Anonymous, 2013, personal communication).

My experiences, coupled with the experiences of the participants, are indicative of many female scene members’ encounters. Most of my participants were introduced to metal through a friend or family member, and became aware of the gendered discourse later on, or attempt to avoid gendered discourse through communally ascribed notions of “correctly” enjoying metal, which tend to be masculine in nature. It was drummer Stefani Mackichan of Mares of Thrace who astutely summed up when gendered discourse became overtly noticeable:

I think your gender influences every single aspect of your life, regardless of music. I find that being a drummer, being a girl, has influenced my life hugely because I have a giant chip on my shoulder. But it’s hard to specify [if that comes from] being [in] the metal community or in the punk rock community. I always found it when I was younger to be really accepting. I don’t know if I found it accepting because I was always playing on stage and going to shows and a lot of my genuinely good friends were going to shows. I never, ever felt... I never felt until I started playing in bands that were getting more recognition and more press that I realized that sexism really existed in metal. I think it felt pretty egalitarian when I was a kid (Stefani Mackichan/drummer, Mares of Thrace, 2013, personal communication).

After determining how the participants were introduced to metal, what types of metal practices they enjoy, and segueing into the question about whether they felt their involvement with metal was impacted by their gender, I switched directions and began asking about their beginnings as a musician. This was followed by questions about their involvement in bands, how many months or years they had of experience performing live, how they would describe their music, if they felt their band belonged in the category of extreme metal, and eventually what they had observed during their tenure as a

performing musician about audience and musician interaction. The responses to this will be chronicled next.

**When the Communal becomes Personal:**

**Q#2: What have been your experiences with metal fans before, during, and after your performances?**

There is mixed reactions. Like you know, always some people like the music and some people don't. I think with female musicians, some people will react differently just because it's a female, either more positively or more negatively. Some people are sexist... and some people think it's extra cool to see a female drummer, they aren't used to it (Trish Kolstad/drummer, Nattefrost, Skitliv, Warsystem, Himsides, Dödsängel, 2013, personal communication).

To understand how my participants' engagement and interactions changed from when they were a consumer of metal music to a producer of extreme metal, I asked several questions about how they were treated at performances. This question was preceded and followed by several others for clarification, including if they felt the crowd treated them as equal to their male band mates (if they had such members in their band), if they felt fans judged their abilities as being affected by their gender, and so forth. I was especially curious about the perception of gender in extreme metal, and whether the stereotypes and myths surrounding women had an impact on their interpretations of their experiences. As CTI posits, identity is "shared" by a group. "Just as members in certain groups recognize or share a particular language, beliefs, norms, and culture, they also share common images of "selfhood" or identity that transcend individual group members and are reflected in cultural products and myths" (Hecht & Choi, 1993, p.140). I was curious if their experience mirrored the suggestions made by existing scholarly literature, and how the participants personally responded to, absorbed, and potentially rejected gendered interactions with fans and musicians.

Several commonalities were evident in the responses to this question. The participants referred to male fans commenting on their attractiveness as frequently they did their musical capabilities, while several noted that female fans were frequently inspired by the performances, or on the opposite end, hostile to their performances. Few participants gave responses to this question that did not harken to gender roles, while most had a difficult time negotiating the fact that crowds would rarely treat them as “musicians” versus placing them in an othered category as a “female musician”. Clearly, the communal identity of the extreme metal scene has yet to uniformly adopt the notion that women, like men, are simply musicians, regardless of gender. There are several ways to interpret this. One participant wasn’t particularly bothered by the fact that people found her vocals uncharacteristic for women. For example, vocalist Georgia Meadows of doom band Chieftain had this to say:

There was a boy I was kind of dating maybe almost, and I invited him [to a show] and he said, ‘I didn’t know something like that could come out of such a pretty girl.’ I said ‘I don’t know if I’m flattered or not. You called me pretty, that’s flattering.’ And... yeah. That was fun. A lot of women have had friends saying ‘that was really empowering to them’ and that’s inspiring and awesome (Georgia Meadows/vocalist, Chieftain, 2013, personal communication).

In contrast, Mya Mayhem, the former vocalist for Life Against Death and Violent Restitution, outlined how people within the crowd tend to aggrandize female musicians roles, or trivialize their participation by assuming they are incompetent.

As women in hardcore, there is a lot of misogyny all the time. You get that at a show, but then after you play there is a lot less of it. *People are... either afraid of you, or they are a lot more into giving you respect, or they want to be your friend.* I’ve definitely seen a lot of venues when you roll in as women in a band, umm, people just don’t really believe you’re going to do anything good. You got the sound person who is being an asshole, and people wondering why there is a woman on stage, and it’s not till after you play that people are like ‘oh, you can actually do this.’ There is really not, there hasn’t



been a lot of faith unfortunately, but that's a lot different in the underground DIY scene. I've seen, going into it at house shows, there is tons of support. People have probably looked up your band and listened to it in advance and are really excited to see you (Mya Mayhem/vocalist, Violent Restitution & Life Against Death, 2013, personal communication).

Given that I've noticed the same phenomenon in how both men and women respond to female musicians, I was curious if there were differences in how male and female fans speak to female musicians. I've had a multitude of positive and negative experiences within heavy metal and extreme metal subcultures, but I have always noticed a marked difference in extreme metal regarding how female fans speak to each other. I've attended extreme metal shows for over a decade now, and generally spend the shows doing everything from violently moshing, to headbanging and snapping photos front row, center, to talking with friends while enjoying a beer. The majority of the time, I am talked to and treated with respect and kindness. The other treatment I have received has not necessarily been negative; it has been people – mostly males – who are surprised by my passion and knowledge. I have been infrequently asked questions by male attendees like, “where is your boyfriend” or “are you really into this music?” (Anonymous, 2013, personal communication). However, the more frustrating experience is seeing or being victim to hostility that some women display towards other women at extreme metal performances, seemingly without provocation. For example, In 2012, when I was attending Calgary's Noctis metal festival, I went to the washroom, and after I exited the stall I could hear three attendees discussing how many women were attending the show. In a chorus, they proceeded to call the attendees' “sluts” and “groupies”, and then bet they would not be back for the next year's festival. It was extremely disappointing, and is a phenomenon literally all my female extreme metal fan friends have discussed when I

told them what my thesis would focus on. With that in mind, I wondered about my participants' experience with female fans, if they felt they were regarded positively or negatively. After hearing their responses, *it appears one of the biggest challenges women face in being part of extreme metal comes from other women.*

The strongest response I received regarding misogyny perpetuated by women in extreme metal came from grindcore musician FERAL FERMENTOR. When asked what her experiences with metal fans before, during, and after shows with, she said this:

For heavy metal, I find it's extremely misogynist and it's extremely objectifying of women in every way possible. Even if women are involved and go to shows, the men and the women still use misogynist imagery and still objectify themselves and other women. There is a lot of female competition because there is not a lot of space for women, and so, as far as the metal scene, to me, it's just kind of a hard place to be. I find it extremely negative and there are a lot of power structures, like hierarchical structures, within the males and the females. Like there is certain groups of people who are more important than others based on what bands they are in and musicianship and who they've got on their jacket. With the women, it's more like there is always the alpha female who rolls within the male circles, but almost as an objectified figure, where the other women are stuck in a position of like, fighting for that spot, and it creates a lot of issues within the females of that scene (FERAL FERMENTOR/grindcore, 2013, personal communication).

If this phenomenon of females creating problems for other females seems contradictory, it's because it is. Even among the musicians interviewed, many indicated they would like to be treated more positively, and stated they were supportive of other women within extreme metal. Simultaneously, many indicated discomfort and disdain for certain types of women, which illuminated the notion of the communal frame and how it is difficult to escape judgment. Early on, it was evident that responses from this question parallel the gaps in personal and enacted identity. "In other words, an individual's expressed identities in communication can be different from his or her self-views... The

enacted identity... [differs] from the self-image” (Hecht & Jung, 2004, p. 269). It was in later questions this contradiction came about, as my participants began referring to specific women within the extreme metal community in a negative light. As Hecht et al (2002) state, “A community possesses its own identities and shared visions of personhood for themselves and other groups. When these images are assumed to be characteristics of individual group members and are applied to them in fixed or rigid ways, they are stereotypes” (p. 853). Though many people are working to dismantle rigid gender roles, it remains problematic. There is evidence of internalized gender oppression and internalized misogyny within the extreme metal scene, as indicated by nearly all the responses I received to this question. While many responses acknowledged that this happens, many responses echoed sexist discourses. In relation to the first response, participants were particularly vocal about their distaste for the opinion that a woman would automatically be a lesser musician. Thérèse Lanz, vocalist and guitarist for death/doom act Mares of Thrace, put it eloquently:

There is an expectation the average, uncritical, status quo person has about what a woman is capable of. And what a woman should be doing, and what a woman’s role in the world is. And, I mean, even you or me makes certain assumptions when we see certain people go on stage, it’s just human nature, I’d like to think we are slowly making positive change. A really interesting one I got, when I was in KEN mode, a girl who I guess was a fan of theirs in Quebec City, came up to Shane afterwards and was like ‘when I saw you had a girl, I was expecting her to suck, but she didn’t suck she was really good.’ And I was like ‘wow, even other women expect me to suck, YAY. Thanks for the vote of solidarity dude’ (Thérèse Lanz/vocalist and guitarist, Mares of Thrace, 2013, personal communication).

This partially addresses the reason behind the phenomenon. With comparatively few female participants and performers, expectations remain extremely skewed. However, responses from both genders change markedly when skill is demonstrated.

I play with two enormously big guys, hairy and you know, we get up there and they say stuff like ‘you don’t sound like you guys look’ and ‘I didn’t expect that’ or ‘holy shit, you’re really loud and heavy.’ I get up there and I play as hard and heavy as I can. I can not hit any heavier. And you can see that, and there is sticks flying, and sweat, and pieces of cymbal, skins, and blood, I always smash my fingers. So, before they are like ‘oh, what’s this going to be like?’ Then during they are like ‘HOLY SHIT’ and after they are like ‘OH MY GOD’ (Bina Nancy Whiskey, Mendoza, Cambodia, 2013, personal communication).

The change in response when skill is demonstrated is similar to how women within metal scenes are accepted when they conform to masculine modes of dress and participation, and is an overarching assumption about women that is slowly changing and improving as more women demonstrate their skills, talent, and efficiency within metal scenes. For those acutely aware of gendered treatment, it’s slightly more complex. For example, I remember attending extreme metal shows when I was younger and being always excited by women on stage. Then, I disproportionately celebrated women on stage and in the crowd in a vain attempt to level the playing field. In the past decade, I’ve actively shifted to only appreciating women’s musical abilities if I actually like the music. That attitude has been extended to women in the metal scene. For example, when I see or meet new women at extreme metal shows now, I am careful to address them in the same fashion as I do males to avoid that negative and biased view of female inability or difference being perpetuated. Evidently, a similar clash of responses is enacted towards female extreme metal musicians. Freya Fawn, drummer for sludge/grind band Cathar, had this to say about the variety of responses received from both male and female extreme metal fans:

I’ve had a lot of people come up to me, and the first thing they say, they don’t realize what they are saying, ‘that was pretty rad for a girl’ and the second thing is ‘that was hot. You’re hot.’... A lot of people come up to me and say ‘you’re a good drummer’ and treat me like I’m the drummer from Cathar, I’m

not Freya, whatever they think in their head. A lot of people come up to me and are pretty inspired. They ask me things like ‘did you take drum lessons, where did you learn to do that, what are you guys doing, or how do I get a hold of you guys’ or they want to buy merch and stuff like that (Freya Fawn/drummer, Cathar, 2013, personal communication).

Freya Fawn’s experience certainly correlates with the notion that once authenticity has been proved, female musicians are treated as authentic metal fans and producers. Again, however, you can see within her response the notion that authenticity is questioned immediately due to her gender, which illuminates complex power relations within the metal scene. That being said, all my participants had both positive and negative experiences, and were hesitant to judge all experiences as gendered. Though few would agree with Cope’s (2010) assertion that metal is “anti-patriarchal” (p. 137), many did suggest the power it gives them needs no gendered connotations. Alxs Ness, the vocalist for death metal act Abriosis, articulated this strongly.

I have had a few instances where there was some aggression, basically someone in the audience who was being overtly aggressive and it was directed at me, and I’ve never been sure, I wondered if maybe that was because they were feeling threatened because there was a female in a power stance, or a female acting aggressive in a powerful position on stage, or if that guy is just being an asshole. It’s kind of hard to tell. Umm, but that has happened a couple times. But it’s something that, it’s never really; it doesn’t stop me from performing. When they are performing, a lot of bands will experience a heckler, once or twice in their career, it’s something that happens. I’ve never really thought of it specifically, feeling self-conscious about being a female performing. Because when I’m performing, I don’t really, in death metal especially, it’s such a powerful music it’s hard to feel self-conscious. You’re sort of channeling that power and that aggression, and it’s almost genderless (Alxs Ness/vocalist, Abriosis, 2013, personal communication).

After discussing how fans and audience members treated participants, we began talking about how band mates treated them, if they believed women were common as

performers, and how other female musicians tended to respond to them. Finally, I asked if they had noticed the rise of female musicians that scholars have chronicled.

**Frames Interact and Overlap:**

**Q3: Have you observed any changes in the number of female musicians in bands you've played on the same bill with in the past several years?**

It's nice to see that there is more... at any given show, there is like a little community of us. All the girls know each other, because it's so exciting when you meet somebody else who is doing the same thing you are... I can definitely say there is a bunch of us, whereas before maybe five, six years ago, there really wasn't a whole lot of us. So I think it's getting better, it's becoming more common knowledge that women can and do do that kind of music (Claire Carreras/guitarist and vocalist, Joyce Collingwood & Life Against Death, 2013, personal communication).

Although many participants experienced complicated and often negative interactions based on gender, the number of women who perform and consume extreme metal and heavy metal as a whole is increasing (Cope, 2010; Hickham & Wallach, 2012; Kelly, 2011). It is difficult to ascertain specifically why this increase has occurred, and more difficult to deliver clear statistics that demonstrate the increase. Anecdotally, in my decade as an extreme metal fan, I have observed that the number of females who enjoy the music, create the music, and help the scene through show promotions, photography, writing, and other roles has increased. However, my observations do not equal a confirmation. Therefore, to see if I could get a more accurate gauge, I asked my participants about it. Ten out of 15 of my respondents gave a resolute yes when asked if the number of women performing in extreme metal had increased in the past decade, while the remaining five said they did not know if the number of female performers had increased, or if only the visibility of said performers had increased, or they believed the numbers remained the same. As with all responses, there was no consensus. However, each response given indicated that the loci of identity are deeply integrated.

“With the separation and/or integration, that is, interpenetration, the four frames of identity show various aspects of identity in various situations” (Hecht & Jung, 1993, p. 267). Responses demonstrated strong integration of the respondents’ frames of identity (metal fan and musician) and were indicative of their personalities. Obviously, these are strong musicians who are not totally compliant with hegemonic gender roles, and their responses demonstrate a form of resistance that is aligned with their personalities and overall conceptions of how women are treated within extreme metal scenes. For example, guitarist and vocalist Thérèse Lanz had this to say:

Most definitely in the past decade. I think role models are really important, particularly in regard to the notion that role models set up ideas in your head of what you can do... Gender is a very polarizing, it’s a innate part of who we are, it’s how we are socialized to be, and if you have someone you can look up to who is the same gender as you, most people like that and really need that. So there is a snowball effect where one woman finds a bunch of other women, and there is a chain of inheritance that goes down from there (Thérèse Lanz/vocalist and guitarist, Mares of Thrace, personal communication, 2013).

Several frames can be applied to her response. Lanz’s admission that gender is “very polarizing” indicates awareness of others feelings around gender, confirming Hecht and Jung’s (1993) statement that “the negative stereotypes attached to ethnic or gender identities... are communal identities” (Hecht & Jung, 1993, p. 142). The relational frame may also be applied to her response, as “an individual constitutes his or her identities in terms of other people through interaction with others” (Hecht & Jung, 1993, p. 141). She indicates this through her commentary on the “chain of inheritance” regarding women being inspired by other women. Lastly, the enactment layer is indicated, as “when people communicate in a persuasive or articulate fashion, they may be enacting an identity” (Hecht and Jung, 1993, p. 140). Throughout our interview, Lanz was incredibly

articulate, made educated assessments, and provided frequent commentary interlaced with historical examples, current events, and theory. Thus, one could argue her identity was “expressed as part of a message” (Hecht, 1993, p. 79).

More skeptical participants – meaning those who struggled with the subject matter because they felt they were not disadvantaged on the basis of their gender – indicated several frames within their articulations as well. Interestingly, vocalist Mel Mongeon of Fuck the Facts brought up the question of whether or not the number of women within the extreme metal scene had increased, or if their visibility had simply increased. This phenomenon was touched on briefly in Chapter One.

Maybe there [are] more female musicians than ten years ago, but maybe it’s because there is a doubling of female fans, so that makes sense. Maybe there is not as many, everything is now more accessible, MP3 followed by MySpace followed by Facebook. Prior to that, I didn’t know that much about a band from Vancouver with a female singer, now it’s way easier to know everything about everybody so we are more, I don’t know, what’s the word, we see more overall, so we see more females. *But, is that because there is more, or is that because we see more?* That’s over my head (Mel Mongeon/vocalist, Fuck the Facts, 2013, personal communication).

From the data collected, it appears both are true: there are more women performing metal, and their visibility has increased, thanks to the capabilities of the World Wide Web, and increased media exposure (Kelly, 2011, para. 11). Again, this claim of increased media exposure is hard to prove empirically, however, with the increased activity of groups such as *The Representation Project*, which “is a movement that uses film and media content to expose injustices created by gender stereotypes and to shift people’s consciousness towards change” (n.d., para. 1) we see cultural shifts in the media representation of women are occurring. The *Decibel Magazine* issue “Queens of Noise: Women in Metal” from August 2012 that was mentioned in Chapter 1 lends



credence to this argument.

Eliane Gazzard of AKAKOR demonstrated her distaste for the subject with her response, stating that women have always been part of extreme metal. This is certainly true, as one can look to early acts like Bolt Thrower, Nuclear Death, Paradise Lost, My Dying Bride, Mythic, Dekerta and numerous more for confirmation. She had this to say:

They are not going to be as common. But ever since I've been going to shows, there has always been ladies, powerful women doing the same thing as guys, so for me, there's never been a barrier for me becoming a musician. There was never anything stopping me because I've always seen women involved in grindcore, in metal, in punk, and it was always there (Eliane Gazzard/bassist, AKAKOR, 2013, personal communication).

This response is indicative of some of the criticism I have received for my project. Before presenting my research at the Noctis Metal Festival in Calgary, Alberta in September 2013, a heated debate ensued on the social media site, Facebook, regarding the authenticity of my project. Some stated it was “stupid” and “pointless” because gender is irrelevant in extreme metal, and that women have always been involved in the metal scene (Anonymous, 2013, personal communication). Indeed they have been, and it was encouraging to see that a handful of participants feel that gender has never been detrimental to their involvement in the extreme metal scene. However, given that the large majority of my participants did not have an equally positive experience, it was important for this project to represent the spectrum of experiences, from both positive and negative perspectives. Therefore, this particular section represented the three types of responses received, and will end on a positive note from black metal musician NOTHING, who said despite the negativity, things are changing for the better.

More recently definitely there have been far more females. Especially in the underground, which I never really thought would be the case because the underground seems to be very particular about who and what they accept, but

yeah, it's been really good actually. [It's] very authentic and genuine, and people... either they are making a good effort, or they don't care that you are a girl, they care that you're a good musician, which is exactly what I want them to care about (NOTHING/ black metal, 2013, personal communication).

After this question, I asked several questions about the different types of spaces where participant's bands performed, if those different spaces changed their relationship with the audience, and if treatment changed depending on the city they performed in. Then, I segued into the question that evidently infuriated everyone, no matter what their opinions on gender and extreme metal scenes were.

**When the Personal clashes with the Relational and Enacted Loci:**

**Q4: What are your opinions on the media coverage of women in metal? Does the media coverage of women in metal change according to the medium?**

It's kind of like sports. Like the best female soccer player, or the best female basketball player... It feels sometimes like a different league. It feels sometimes like a boys club, and it's hard sometimes to break that barrier, and have people say 'you're one of the best drummers I've seen' instead of 'one of the best female drummers.' You need to get out of the female league that they put you in that's supposedly not as good as the boys, and [say] 'hey look at what I'm doing now, I'm at the same level as all of you,' but it feels a little bit isolating. And that's the thing... That's why I pose for calendars.... It's that whole 'I'll do whatever it takes' mentality. Using your novelty factor as an advantage. I've definitely done that, and my band welcomes that. They know things like, hey, we can get into this magazine, or hey, we can get into this show, or people will notice us more because we've got this additional bonus, you're also a female, and it's still quite unique. But it is a little bit unsettling when you think 'well I shouldn't have to do that.' So I don't think we are at the point where we are totally integrated. I think that it's still a novelty; we are still in a different category (Samantha Landa/drummer, Dead Asylum, 2013, personal communication).

What were my participants' opinions on the media coverage of women in extreme metal? I was not sure what they would say. However, I do know my own approach to interviewing women is nuanced, given how irritated I am about many articles on bands that have women in their ranks. As I mentioned in Chapter One, I stopped buying specific metal magazines quite intentionally due to the gendered coverage. As an extreme metal

fan, I now gravitate towards *Iron Fist* and *Zero Tolerance* magazines, alongside the *Chips and Beer* fanzine; all three refer to women the same way they do men. Evidently the other type of coverage irritated my participants as well: 14 out of 15 identified metal media coverage as a hindrance. The remaining participant simply said she did not read any of it so isn't in a position to comment on media coverage.

One issue raised was the media's fixation on gender, and how that was particularly pervasive for vocalists, which calls attention to an interesting phenomenon. Certainly, female vocal chords may have different cadences, ranges, inflections, and capabilities than male, and sometimes the label "female fronted" is used to indicate a different style of vocals and to set the band apart, although its usage is problematic as it implies an otherness that further differentiates women in metal bands. Most frequently, the label is applied to bands that often use operatic or clean singing vocal styles which utilize sounds that only female voice boxes can conjure, such as Nightwish, Sirenia (Finland), Lacuna Coil (Italy), Epica, Within Temptation, After Forever, The Gathering (Netherlands), Halestorm, In This Moment (United States), Beautiful Sin (Belgium), Leaves' Eyes (Germany), Kobra and the Lotus (Canada), and numerous more. However, the term "female fronted" becomes more complex when referring to extreme metal bands. This is because the singing style often makes it impossible to tell what the gender of the vocalist is, and at that point mostly serves to ghettoize vocalists rather than differentiate them on the basis of their vocal abilities. Vocalist Alxs Ness of Abriosis discussed this.

There [are] still sometimes people that say, and sometimes I say this to myself, 'female fronted' band, as opposed to 'band', so that would indicate that it is still something that is new to people, or something that is different I guess for some people... It still seems like it's more difficult or less accepted

that women are performing in extreme metal bands (Alxs Ness/vocalist, Abriosis, 2013, personal communication).

A much more pervasive and upsetting issue raised by participants was the specific feature that I found so problematic: that is, *Revolver Magazine's* "Hottest Women in Hard Rock and Heavy Metal" photo feature.

When I first started listening to metal, I did used to read this magazine... and it was pretty cool because they had an article on Burzum once, and I was like 'I like Burzum, this is cool!' And then they had this issue where it was the whole hot chicks in metal, and that was pretty much when I stopped liking them. I was sort of fascinated by it, I was like 'what's happening here?' I don't usually know what my emotional response is, it's usually pretty delayed, I'm usually not 'that sucks!' I'm usually, 'that's okay I guess.' But the more I thought about it, and the more I think about it now, the more it really sucked.... I thought it was really lame because it was all these girls, no matter what they did, they were reduced to being portrayed in a really sexualized [manner], just physical, and half of them didn't talk about their instruments in the editorial. I didn't know what they played. What if I wanted to know what those girls played in those bands? I don't know... Suddenly you're just a push up bra and a corset (NOTHING/ black metal, 2013, personal communication).

This is indicative of a serious divide in the participants of this study. Several said they would absolutely never take part in such a feature, while many had a mentality of doing whatever it took to get their band recognition. The former indicates no gap in identity, while the latter is indicative of a personal-relational and personal-enacted gap. As explained by Drummond and Orbe (2009), "a personal-relational identity gap exists when one sees [themselves] one way but perceives that others see [them] differently, and a personal-enacted identity gap occurs when one presents a particular face when talking to others that does not match how that individual actually sees [themselves]" (p. 82). As for a personal-enacted identity gap, Samantha Landa's quote at the beginning of this question segment demonstrated this. This gap occurs when "an individual's personal identity also can differ from his or her enacted identity. In other words, an individual's

expressed identities in communication can be different from his or her self-views” (Jung & Hecht, 2004, p. 269). Although the drummer does not see herself as being a novelty, she uses what other people see as her “novelty factor” to gain support for her band. She believed that she should not be in a different category than other drummers; however, she was willing to exploit that different category. Interestingly, one participant who actually took part in this highly publicized feature now expresses disappointment for doing so, as she explained it resulted in no tangible benefits for the project she was part of at the time (which was noise metal project KEN mode).

It ranges from awesome to totally bullshit. It is still a very deep regret of mine that I am one of *Revolver's* ‘Hottest Chicks in Metal’. If I could take it back, I totally would. Then there is stuff like *Decibel's* ‘Women in Metal’, which I thought was amazing and really well done and really well written and they picked some amazing bands and they shot an amazing cover. I mean, lots of reviewers are really conscious of that, so they make a point not to mention gender ever when they are interviewing me. So there is no one answer. Sometimes it rules and sometimes the stuff is totally terrible (Thérèse Lanz/ vocalist and guitarist, Mares of Thrace, 2013, personal communication).

Another issue this representation raises, as indicated in Chapter One, is about the place of women who are not considered conventionally attractive within metal scenes. It equally diminishes attractive women’s contributions. “By placing them all in one ‘Hottest Whatever’ category unfairly steals some of their heavy-metal thunder by implying that the only reason that they are there is because they are that attractive—that they are there as eye candy and stage dressing, instead of as talented road warriors in their own right” (Kelly, 2011, para. 10). This observation correlates with a comment by participant

FERAL FERMENTOR:

I find a lot of times when the media wants to put a woman in extreme metal in the spotlight, it’s done in a way that is almost like ‘oh my god, she can actually do it, that’s crazy!’ It’s very specified on gender, and it’s very condescending, and I just hate it... I feel like the media just plays those same

gender buttons and it's just the same thing. A lot of the time, the interviewer will be, not that I want to create different classes of women, but they will kind of take this blonde bombshell who is there for her body, not her interests within metal. Often the person isn't really aware of what's going on, she is an interview that was picked because she is pretty and stuff like that, and yeah, also same thing with the Women in Metal. A lot of the time, the media will pick women that are socially more beautiful or whatever. It's all imagery, and it's all gender, it has nothing to do with inclusion, it's just another form of excluding women by alienating them to their gender (FERAL FERMENTOR/grindcore, 2013, personal communication).

This notion of a hierarchy in the media based on appearance is certainly not new, and is mirrored within metal media. The relationship each musician who took part in this study had with the metal media yielded the most complex negotiations of power, and you can see that struggle within the quotes provided. Though many of the participants involved in this thesis were not interested in getting coverage due to their gender, many acknowledged it was important for women to be recognized so that healthy representation of women in the media was normalized. Several participants stated they did not want to be acknowledged for their appearance, yet several more stated they would use it to get their band recognition if it was necessary. The frames of identity clashed most obviously when discussing the metal media. Correspondingly, this is one of the issues that divide the extreme metal scene along rigid lines. As this quote from guitarist and vocalist Claire Carreras demonstrates, it is very difficult to avoid your sexuality becoming the focal point of articles, even when you do not partake in photo shoots and features where appearance is the focal point.

HA! Oh my gosh. I remember our very first review for Joyce Collingwood. The headline read "Joyce Collingwood. She's hot." Brutal, right? And the thing is, that guy is one of our friends, he knows us. And that's the kind of funny, but not so funny thing about it. People feel like they have to comment on the aesthetics of a band when they are female, or the way that a front singer looks before they even start talking about the musical aspects of it. I don't know why. People don't do that with dudes, man. Somebody goes 'oh

the lead singer from August Burns Red, oh wow, he's got a nice face, eh? And then in the last paragraph say something about his vocal style.' For chicks, it's funny how that goes. I don't know if that's the way society is in general, it's probably not just with music that we see that, but it's weird. It's weird that they feel they have to comment on that. I don't mind it I guess, if you want to say I'm fucking sexy or something, cool, but you know, that's not what we are here to talk about, we are here to talk about the music. And I really wish there was more focus on that. We've had reviews where they say good things about the music, and then they feel the need to parlay into this like 'oh yeah, if Jose and the Pussycats girls were punks, this is what Joyce Collingwood would look like.' It's like 'who the fuck cares about that man? First of all, that's not a real band, that's a weirdo cartoon show band'" (Claire Carreras/guitarist and vocalist, Joyce Collingwood & Life Against Death, 2013, personal communication).

As indicated by such projects as the documentary *Miss Representation*, which explores how mainstream media is partially responsible for the lack of women in prominent positions because it distributes disparaging and inadequate representations of women (Costanzo & Newsom, 2011) the hegemonic "media" has long represented women in an unsavory and lopsided fashion. In 2009, the UNESCO report *Getting the Balance Right: Gender Equality in Journalism*, found it would take "another 75 years to achieve gender equality in the media... if we continue at the current rate of progress" (p. IV). Entire areas of study are devoted to gender stereotypes and female representation on television (Butsch, 1992; Elasmr, 1999; Glascock, 2003; Lauzen et al, 2008; McNeil, 1975), while more exist on representation in film, magazines, and all other forms of media. In that vein, it is challenging to assess whether the metal media differs all that much from mainstream media outlets in their representation of women. Just like in mainstream media, there are specific ways women are represented, and participants can choose whether or not they want to take part in that representation. For example, many extreme metal bands who are intentionally obscure and underground tend to receive non-gendered coverage in publications like *Iron Fist*, *Beer and Chips*, and *Outburn Magazine*,

as well as numerous online sources, likely due to a combination of them refusing requests that are gendered and the writers for those magazines being aware of such representations. In contrast, many women do agree to be part of coverage that is gendered for a variety of reasons. As Hecht (1993) indicated, this comes from a dialectical perspective, because there “are polarities and contradictions in all social life. Thus social life does not merely exist at a point on a continuum” (p.76). These gaps in sexualized versus non-sexualized identity become particularly salient when “individuals feel conflict because of identity gaps, those places where their self-concepts and avowed identities conflict with others’ perception and understanding creating dissonance and a need to negotiate the competing and conflicting identities” (Faulkner & Hecht, 2010, p. 832). Clearly, many of the responses in this section indicate that negotiation, as the need to juggle the desire to gain coverage for your band, versus being represented in a sexualized fashion, is a difficult and personal decision that many participants have made. This question in particular demonstrated the polarities and contradictions that women encounter when scrutinizing or being covered by extreme metal media. Although acknowledgement of this does not change or forgive certain parts of metal media for hyper-sexualizing female instrumentalists and vocalists, it does not indicate that metal media is far different from mainstream media. That’s an important distinction to make, as metal is often criticized for its depiction of women, although arguably the overall representation of women in all media is problematic, and feeds into that cycle and practice. As participant Eliane Gazzard of death grind band AKAKOR put it, the media is something you can either accept in its current form or reject.

Any sort of media coverage, I take with a grain of salt, is that the right term? I take with a grain of salt because in the end, your own experience with your



own life are your reality, so for me, any media coverage could never justify or explain to me what's actually happening in the world. You know? (Eliane Gazzard/ bassist, AKAKOR, 2013, personal communication).

After discussion about the representation of metal media concluded, questions surrounding the expectations within extreme metal were asked, and if the participants saw differences in how men and women enacted fandom within metal. After that, I asked questions about whether or not the participants noticed a difference in gendered treatment based on the subgenre of extreme metal they were part of, and other subgenres. Largely, there were very few differences in treatment. With that, I concluded with the following question, which was inspired by the observation by Hickham and Wallach (2011) that there has been an “extraordinary influx of women performers into extreme metal, particularly since 2000” (p. 266). I wanted to know if my assumption that the more women who were involved in metal, the better women were treated overall, was correct.

**The Shifting Communal Frame:**

**Q5: Overall, do you think there has been any changes in the treatment of gender within your given extreme metal subgenre in the past decade? Do you think the change is indicative of a cultural shift?**

Ahhh yes, I do. I do. Ummm, I also think that access to instruments, and access to people who want to support female musicians, is growing. I don't think that's specific to metal. I think it's still unbelievably hostile. Kudos to women who are not afraid to push through that, or to women who don't even recognize it. I met tons of women now who are just 'oh no, it's not, it's fine', and I always say 'cool, alright, it's cool you perceive it as such.' I think a lot of that is what women are going to realize is we have to go through a process of consciousness raising, be educated on that to realize what's happening (Stefani Mackichan/drummer, Mares of Thrace, 2013, personal communication).

As my interviews winded down, I wanted to see if I had taken the right direction, and attempted to see if I could sum up my research. Of course, this was not possible. Out of 15 participants, only four had been in the metal scene as a musician for over a decade.

Three out of four of them – Bina Nancy Whiskey, Stefani Mackichan, and Thérèse Lanz – agreed that changes have been made in a positive direction, though all of them identified problems. Grindcore vocalist Melanie Mongeon said treatment had remained the same. Participants’ responses were varied on this question, as those who’d been in the scene for over ten years had more holistic responses, while those involved for a shorter time had more specific responses. For example, Bina Nancy Whiskey of Cambodia and Mendoza quipped “Women in extreme metal? Thank god. There [are] definitely some of us out there” (2013, personal communication). In contrast, Mel Mongeon made a good point about how difficult it is to track such any such perceived shift.

I don’t think there is a big issue. There [are] mainly situations. That’s what I find. There is people who totally play along with the gender thing, but it depends on your point of view, and what that is, right? ...Let’s take female singers for example. Some people will decide, ‘I don’t like female singers’ and that’s it. I will not listen to this band because of it, and they might miss on a band they would have really liked because of that preconception. But then you have the opposite, a metal fan, ‘I really love a band with female singers, all of them. And it doesn’t matter. I’ll pretty much like them.’ Then you’ve got the balanced person in the middle who likes stuff because they like it, it doesn’t matter. And I find that’s the ideal spot. People like things or they don’t, there is not one pattern (Mel Mongeon/vocalist, Fuck the Facts, 2013, personal communication).

For those participants who have been involved for a shorter period, the majority of them agreed that their treatment has been problematic but as their abilities have been demonstrated treatment improved dramatically. Many participants also made a point to express that the extreme metal scene is a place where they feel empowered, strong, and they enjoyed many of their experiences within it, and simply wished their role within that scene was better understood and accepted without gendered connotations. Interestingly enough, one participant had even read the scholarly literature on women in extreme

metal, and rejected how women had been depicted due to her own experiences. Alxs Ness, the vocalist for death metal band Abriosis, had this to say:

At one time I was doing my own research, not for anything official but my own interest, and I remember reading a book with a black cover, something about extreme metal? And he was writing about how women find themselves at shows, and they're there with their significant others. But in the Vancouver scene, and I keep saying that because it's my own experience... but I go to shows to meet up with friends, and people go to shows all the time, and altogether, women go by themselves all the time... I don't think that [book] is indicative of what's going on out there (Alxs Ness/vocalist, Abriosis, 2013, personal communication).

Apparently, both women's and men's identities and interactions are adapting to the increasing numbers of women in the scene. The communal frame – meaning “something held by a group” (Hecht, 1993, p. 80) – is updating to accommodate new attitudes and ideas about what a woman can do and does do within the extreme metal scene. The “ascribed relational identities” (Hecht & Jung, 2004, p. 268) that women have seen in media or scholarly depictions do not work for them, and their perceptions regarding expectations placed on them from the metal scene are sometimes rejected, ignored, fought against, or outright lambasted. Sometimes, in a phenomenon I hope takes place with increasing frequency, women in the extreme metal scene do not feel they are treated any differently in the first place. Regardless, the extreme metal scene is not nearly as misogynistic as existing literature suggests. Although this study does acknowledge that women within the scene frequently are victim to and perpetrators of misogyny, it also articulated that such treatment and stigma is decreasing. Overall, it appears that the treatment of women in extreme metal is far more positive than has been indicated in previous scholarly works, and that the way gender is enacted is less rigidly judged than it was even a decade ago.

I really enjoy seeing many women in different roles in different bands. It's really exciting to see it grow so much, and I hope it continues to grow. Because I think that women are starting to let go of that stigma to, like 'you're just a cheap woman trying to start a gimmick band, and get popular because you're a gimmick'. It's like 'no, now you have to compete with these other bands that also have females that are skilled.' So I think the competitive nature of women being in other bands has shrunk a lot, and you know, there is still a lot of male stigma, but just from female to female that's decreasing so it's becoming more a community where women accept other women, and that's where that positivity comes from. That's also where a lot of judgment comes from so I think breaking that down, and knowing that's been decreasing and contributed to more women making music, I think that more women need to, as Tina Fey says, women shouldn't hate other women. You shouldn't be competitive with other women, especially if you work in the same field. It just makes no sense (Cara Ashbey/drummer, PreSchool Shooting, 2013, personal communication).

**“I hate people telling me what to do.... FUCK YOU!”**

Women within extreme metal scenes have a nuanced and negotiated understanding of their gender in relation to their music. Participants articulated a number of points about gender: there are problematic ways of referring to and interpreting female extreme metal performers, the increased numbers of female extreme metal musicians is partially attributed to women having role models of their gender, and that how women and men refer to women within the scene has changed for the better, though problems remain as many participants still notice a hyper focus on gender and fans are still often surprised when women musicians demonstrate capability. It was also articulated that metal media coverage is detrimental to the women involved, and needs to be improved, but changes are slowly being made for the better, personified by such projects as *Decibel Magazine's* “Queens of Noise: Women in Metal” issue. Most clearly, it has been demonstrated that women within the scene continue to negotiate their frames –personal, enacted, relational, and communal – to be involved in the scene, and as such each participant in this had a complex understanding of their musical and gendered identity.

Certainly, there is a resistant discourse to prevalent understandings of gender in extreme metal, and this demonstrates that more research is needed on the experience of female performers in extreme metal, as well as female fans, promoters, writers, photographers, and more. Certainly, it has been demonstrated that treatment and regard of women in extreme metal is far more positive and nuanced than previous research has suggested. While many of the participants who took place in this study had no interest in demonstrating or perpetuating the “special snowflake” complex, all are examples of women musicians within extreme metal scenes that are changing others perceptions of what women are capable of. Freya Fawn, drummer for sludge/grind band Cathar, summed up the changes eloquently, and I’ll leave the last word of this chapter in her capable hands.

The more that guys see women and people see women at shows and represented there, the more 100 per cent people will realize we are just musicians. That’s what I try, and I think I said that in the interview, I’m just a drummer. I want to be just a drummer. Turn your back to the wall, does it sound any different from any other dude there? No. You see me, you know it’s a girl, but really, you listen to drum beats, there is no difference (Freya Fawn/ drummer, Cathar, 2013, personal communication).

## CHAPTER 6: “WHICH WAY THE WIND BLOWS”

*When Liz Buckingham of UK doom legends Electric Wizard steps onstage and unleashes one of her cataclysmic riffs, heads bow in reverence. When Bolt Thrower bassist Jo Bench lays down one of her thunderous basslines, or Thorr’s Hammer vocalist Runhild Gammelsæter grasps the mic and roars, or Chiyo Nukaga of California sludge troupe Noothgrush brings down her sticks in thunderous fury, the fans are there, and they are awed. These women, and so many others, are powerful, inspirational, and utterly unapologetic.... In this world, women aren’t expected to be demure, modest, or quiet - they are encouraged to be innovative, brazen, and ballsy, because this is metal, not brainless Top 40 treacle. The whole point is to harness the sound and the fury and come up with something awesome – a very particular sort of alchemy that, when mastered, yields spectacular results, no matter what’s in your knickers (Kelly, 2013, para # 4- 5).*

The extreme metal scene is complex. While one might assume the metal scene is inclusive – particularly when musical proficiency and appreciation is the most important element of being an active participant – challenges remain not only for women within extreme metal, but also for marginalized populations, and for men. Standards for participation, dress, and performance are created and monitored in each scene, although those standards are changing as the music itself changes.

Among other challenges, female extreme metal musicians struggle with negative and reactionary responses from both males and females, the enactment of internalized misogyny, and how they are represented in metal media. Although her comments were not included in the findings because she did not identify her band as extreme, the following quote from Blood Ceremony’s vocalist and flutist Alia O’Brien is illuminating, and demonstrates the frustration participants in my study felt with gendered labeling.

I do appreciate it when articles are written on us... It’s important for women’s achievements to be recognized and championed, but it’s getting a little tiresome that being a woman involved in music is something still worth commenting or it’s spectacular. It’s almost like, it’s an additional. I play flute, I play keyboards, I sing, and I am a woman. *It’s like my fourth instrument is*

*my body* (Alia O'Brien/vocalist and flutist, Blood Ceremony, 2013, personal communication).

Despite this very frequent challenge, it is not nearly as difficult or exclusive in the extreme metal scene as scholarly literature has suggested. Participants in this study identified the increasing number of women in extreme metal bands, and stated that discourse around gender was changing for the better. The extreme metal scene is not without its problems, but this research demonstrates that the loaded language used when speaking to gender issues could benefit from temperance. Although we risk dramatizing the position of women within the metal scene and extreme metal scene by talking about gender issues, it's important to normalize these experiences and integrate them into the history of heavy metal. As articulated by Fury (2012) in the *Decibel Magazine* "Women in Metal" issue, "who would want to be considered "pretty good for a girl"? Not only is it illogical to measure someone's success in terms of gender; it's also not fair. Does that mean we should turn a blind eye to the struggle for equality? We're inclined to [loudly] say no" (p. 45).

This study was a long time coming as it is the first scholarly work that directly addresses the experience of women in extreme metal bands. It is also one of the first studies within metal that took a communicative approach, which allowed for participants in the extreme metal scene to discuss how interactions with scene members affected their participation in the extreme metal scene. The usage of the Communication Theory of Identity was integral to my analysis, as it facilitated the identification of frames of identity. Through the application of frames to responses, it was demonstrated that women's enacted involvement in the metal scene can contradict with personal beliefs.

Given that this study was limited in scope, this work also illuminates possible areas in which future research might be conducted. This includes research on the increasing numbers and experience of female scene members, and on the contributions of women to sounds, subgenres, and scenes within extreme metal. It would also be extremely beneficial to conduct research on intersections of race, class, and gender within extreme metal, as that area is hugely understudied. Another question this research raises is if and why there are more female performers within specific subgenres of extreme metal versus others. This is briefly touched on in Chapter Four, when bands from each specific subgenre of black metal, death metal, doom metal, and grindcore were discussed, and it would be fascinating to see some researchers delve further into the topic. Lastly, it appears the metal media and its representation of female musicians and fans should be researched in much further depth.

While the current study does not address all the issues within extreme metal scenes or the heavy metal scenes that could use expansion, it is able to contribute the first body of literature on the experiences of female musicians in the extreme metal scene. It also contributes the first scholarly work on the extreme metal scene in Canada. Alongside that, it chronicled this scene, the history of extreme metal as interpreted and articulated by a scene member, and parlayed the types of experiences female scene members and musicians encounter. Explicitly, this project sheds light on how women's experiences in the extreme metal scene are shaped and perpetuated through communicative discourse.

Thank you for reading. Now go listen to some Canadian extreme metal! Support your local scene! Disagree with and celebrate the subgenres and scenes!



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## APPENDIX 1: Ethics Approval



UNIVERSITY OF  
CALGARY

# MEMO

CONJOINT FACULTIES RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD  
c/o Research Services  
Main Floor, Energy Resources Research Building  
3512 - 33 Street N.W., Calgary, Alberta T2L 1Y7  
Telephone: (403) 220-3782  
Fax: (403) 289 0693  
Email: csjahrau@ucalgary.ca  
Thursday, November 08, 2012

**To:** Sarah A. Kitteringham  
Communication & Culture

**From:** Dr. Kathleen Oberle, Chair  
Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB)

**Re: Certification of Institutional Ethics Review:** Extreme Conditions Demand Extreme Responses:  
The Rise of Women in Black Metal, Death Metal, Doom Metal and Grindcore

The above named research protocol has been granted ethical approval by the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board for the University of Calgary.

Enclosed are the original, and one copy, of a signed **Certification of Institutional Ethics Review**. Please make note of the conditions stated on the Certification. A copy has been sent to your supervisor as well as to the Chair of your Department/Faculty Research Ethics Committee. In the event the research is funded, you should notify the sponsor of the research and provide them with a copy for their records. The Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board will retain a copy of the clearance on your file.

Please note, an annual/progress/final report must be filed with the CFREB twelve months from the date on your ethics clearance. A form for this purpose has been created, and may be found on the "Ethics" website, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/research/compliance/ethics/renewal>

In closing let me take this opportunity to wish you the best of luck in your research endeavor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cari Jahraus".

Cari Jahraus  
For:  
Kathleen Oberle, Ph.D., and  
Chair, Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board

Enclosures(2)  
cc: Chair, Department/Faculty Research Ethics Committee  
Supervisor: Brian Rusted



UNIVERSITY OF  
CALGARY

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**CERTIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS REVIEW**

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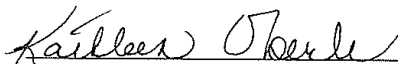
This is to certify that the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board at the University of Calgary has examined the following research proposal and found the proposed research involving human subjects to be in accordance with University of Calgary Guidelines and the Tri-Council Policy Statement on "*Ethical Conduct in Research Using Human Subjects*". This form and accompanying letter constitute the Certification of Institutional Ethics Review.

File no: **7515**  
Applicant(s): **Sarah A. Kitteringham**  
Department: **Communication & Culture**  
Project Title: **Extreme Conditions Demand Extreme Responses: The Rise of Women in Black Metal, Death Metal, Doom Metal and Grindcore**  
Sponsor (if applicable):

**Restrictions:**

**This Certification is subject to the following conditions:**

1. Approval is granted only for the project and purposes described in the application.
2. Any modifications to the authorized protocol must be submitted to the Chair, Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board for approval.
3. A progress report must be submitted 12 months from the date of this Certification, and should provide the expected completion date for the project.
4. Written notification must be sent to the Board when the project is complete or terminated.

  
Kathleen Oberle, Ph.D.,  
Chair  
Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board

NOV 08 2012  
Date:

**Distribution:** (1) Applicant, (2) Supervisor (if applicable), (3) Chair, Department/Faculty Research Ethics Committee, (4) Sponsor, (5) Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (6) Research Services.

## **APPENDIX 2: Recruitment Message**

Sarah Kitteringham  
2500 University Drive Northwest  
Calgary, AB, Canada T2N 1N4

Hello \_\_\_\_\_,

I hope all is well.

My name is Sarah Kitteringham and I am a graduate student at the University of Calgary in Alberta, Canada. I am e-mailing/calling you today because I am doing research on the rise of women in extreme metal – specifically the subgenres of black metal, death metal, doom metal, and grindcore – and I wanted to ask you if you were interested in taking part.

As a long time metal fan, my research aims to chronicle why the number of women performing in extreme metal bands has risen dramatically since 2000. Scholarly research has long noted the marginalization of women in heavy metal; this research will explore why changes have been made in the number of women in the metal community and the overall treatment of women in those subgenres. It will also entail a musicological analysis of the aforementioned subgenres to enhance awareness.

This research will include open-ended phone interviews, or if available in-person interviews with participants in the Canadian metal community during the time period of December 2012- February 2013. These conversations will last approximately 30 – 90 minutes, and may involve a follow up interview for clarification. Sound recordings will be taken if you participate.

The provisions of my research are outlined in the attached documents. I'd greatly appreciate if could you let me know if you are interested in participating. This would entail reading the attached informed consent form and asking for clarification if necessary, and returning it to myself with your signature. If you are not interested in participating, I appreciate your time and respect your decision.

Thanks kindly for your help. I await your response.

Sarah Kitteringham



### **APPENDIX 3: Interview Questionnaire**

**PROJECT TITLE:** *Extreme Conditions Demand Extreme Responses: The Treatment of Women in Black Metal, Death Metal, Doom Metal and Grindcore*

**SEGMENT:** Qualitative in-depth research questions

Ethnographer introduction: Hello, and thanks for chatting with me today. I am interested in learning about your experience with the heavy metal subculture. My impressions and experiences as a metal fan are varied, and I'd like to hear first hand how a musician experiences the subculture. I'm sure your experiences will be far different than my own.

1. Can you tell me about your first experience with heavy metal? When did you become a fan?
2. What types of music do you most enjoy?
3. Do you identify as a metalhead? Why or why not?
4. Do you enjoy any of the practices that are associated with being a metal head? This includes dressing in a particular way, reading heavy metal magazines, collecting shirts/posters/records, attending metal concerts?
5. Can you tell me if you feel your initial involvement with metal was impacted by your gender?
6. Can you tell me about your beginnings as a musician? How long have you been playing for?
7. What are your projects names and what instrument do you play in each of them?
8. When did you begin performing live within the heavy metal community?
9. Can you describe the music you play? What is it inspired and informed by?
10. Do you think your band fits into the category of extreme metal? Why/why not?
11. How would you define extreme metal? Does it belong in a separate category as heavy metal? What musically makes up extreme metal? Lyrically?
12. How long has your band been performing live?
13. During your tenure as a performing musician, what have you observed about metal fans? What have you observed about the activities of metal fans? Have the things you've observed changed over time?
14. What have been your experiences with metal fans before, during, and after your performances?
15. If your band is mixed gender, do you think you are treated as an equal to your bandmates before, during, and after your performances?
16. Do you think your gender has an impact on how people perceive your live performance?
17. In your experience, are women common as performers? If not, why do you think that is?
18. Have you observed any changes in the number of female musicians in bands you've played on the same bill with in the past several years?
19. Overall, has the number of women in all roles in metal changed in the past decade? Has it increased/decreased?

20. As a drummer/guitarist/vocalist/bassist, how do fans tend to regard your abilities as they relate to your gender?
21. Can you tell me about the different spaces where your bands performs? Are there different kinds of places? If so, can you please describe them to me?
22. Do the differences in space impact your performance? Do the differences in space impact your audiences? Do the differences in space impact your relationships with the audience? Please give specific examples of each.
23. Do you think the city you perform in has an impact on how you're treated as a musician? (If yes, ask what cities and for specifics. Which cities are better, which are worse, why?)
24. What are your opinions on the media coverage of women in metal?
25. Does the media coverage of women in metal change according to the medium? (Television, magazine articles, newspaper articles, online coverage) Why do you think that is?
26. Is extreme metal an egalitarian type of music, in terms of gender and sexual orientation equality? (If yes, why, if no, what are examples of such unfair treatment?)
27. Do you think extreme metal has expectations regarding gender, sexuality, and appearance? If yes, why?
28. Do you see what men do, or how they act in metal, as different from what women do? If there are differences are they evident in both performance and audience?
29. As you've experienced (metal type), has your activities within the subculture changed? Has your treatment changed?
30. Do you think that women are treated as a novelty within heavy metal? If so, why do you think that is?
31. Overall, do you think there has been any changes in the treatment of gender within your given extreme metal subgenre in the past decade? Why, why not? Could you please provide specific examples?
32. Anything else you'd like to add?

#### **APPENDIX 4: Consent Form**

**TITLE:** Extreme Conditions Demand Extreme Responses: The Treatment of Women in Black Metal, Death Metal, Doom Metal, and Grindcore

**INVESTIGATOR:** Sarah Kitteringham, 1.403.481.1505. Thesis advisor is Brian Rusted, 1.403.220.7766

**PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:** This research will chronicle why the number of women performing in extreme metal bands (bands directly in or revolving around the subgenres of black metal, death metal, doom metal, and grindcore) has risen dramatically since 2000. Scholarly research has long noted the marginalization of women in heavy metal; this research will explore why changes have been made in the number of women in the metal community and the overall treatment of women in those subgenres.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH:** This letter is an invitation to participate in this study. This research will include open-ended phone interviews, or if available in-person interviews with participants in the Canadian metal community during the time period of December 2012- February 2013. These conversations will last approximately 30 – 90 minutes, and may involve a follow up interview for clarification. Sound recordings will be taken if you participate.

If changes are made to the study or new information becomes available, you will be informed.

**ACCESS TO RESEARCH INFORMATION:** Access to the data collected will only be available to myself, Sarah Kitteringham, the sole researcher in this project. Data – including audiotapes – will be indefinitely archived. Participants will be informed at the completion of the research and write up, and will be sent a copy of the research. If you choose to withdraw from the research at any time, your data will be removed from collection and destroyed. Your data will be used in a master's thesis. There is a potential for future research projects including journal articles and a PhD work that may include your data with your permission.

Do you agree for your samples to be used for future research?

Yes

No

**POTENTIAL HARM, INJURIES, DISCOMFORTS, OR INCONVENIENCE:**

There is no known harm associated with participation in this study. There may, however, be unseen harmful consequences if respondents feel discomfort with subject matter.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS:** Musicians may benefit from public citation, as it will gain them press and exposure.

Societal benefits may include changing perceptions regarding heavy metal and a changing direction regarding scholarship on heavy metal.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Confidentiality will be respected and no information that discloses the identity of the participant will be released or published without consent. We are asking if the participants agree we may publish their names alongside so they may be recognized for their contributions and to lend validity to their experience.

I hereby explicitly grant the researcher to use my name and other identifying factors (band name, number of years as a musician, genre allocation) alongside my quotes.

YES / NO

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have circled “NO” please choose a pseudonym. You will only be identified by the subgenre of music you play and your gender. No other identifying factors will be included.

Pseudonym:

\_\_\_\_\_

**REIMBURSEMENT:** No reimbursement will be given. Researcher will ensure phone calls are charged to herself; if any cost is incurred from long distance conversations participants will be remunerated.

**PARTICIPATION:** Participation in research is voluntary. If you choose to participate in this study you may withdraw at any time and data collected will be destroyed. You will receive a signed copy of the consent form to keep.

**CONTACT:** If you have any questions about this study, please contact:

Sarah Kitteringham, 1.403.481.1505

Collect calls will be accepted.

If you have any concerns about the way you’ve been treated as a participant, please contact Russell Burrows, Senior Ethics Resource Officer, Research Services, University of Calgary at (403) 220-3782; e-mail rburrows@ucalgary.ca.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

**CONSENT:**

By signing this form, I agree that:



## APPENDIX 5: Canadian Black Metal Bands

1. Chapel
2. A.M.S.G.
3. Fornication
4. Antediluvian
5. Monarque
6. Blasphemy
7. Revenge
8. Woods of Ypres
9. Bone Chalice
10. Gloria Diaboli
11. Panzerfaust
12. ISKRA
13. Saggoth
14. Ye Goat-Herd Gods
15. Wilt
16. Wolven Ancestry
17. Desecrate Scripture
18. Adversarial
19. Moradin
20. Dark Forest
21. Axis of Advance
22. Sacramentary Abolishment
23. Brulvahnatu
24. Sylvus
25. Sombres Forêts
26. Sortilegia
27. Nuclearhammer
28. Hellacaust
29. Galdra
30. Allfather
31. Thantifaxath
32. Conqueror
33. Godless North
34. Akitsa
35. Megiddo
36. Obscene Eulogy
37. Pagan Hellfire
38. Coffin Birth
39. Miserere Luminis
40. Gris

## APPENDIX 6: Canadian Death Metal Bands

1. Begrime Exemious
2. AKAKOR
3. Mitochondrion
4. Cryptopsy
5. Gorguts
6. Dead Jesus
7. Dead Asylum
8. Abriosis
9. Death Toll Rising
10. Impalement
11. Archspire
12. Divinity
13. Ex Deo
14. Laika
15. Neuraxis
16. Xul
17. Disciples of Power
18. Thorazine
19. Hammerdrone
20. Vaalt
21. Savage Streets
22. Beyond Creation
23. Martyr
24. Kataklysm
25. Dark Minion
26. Eye of Horus
27. Reverend Kill
28. Slaughter
29. Pericardium
30. Chthe'ilist
31. Galgamex
32. Autaric
33. Dire Omen
34. Cephalectomy
35. Thy Flesh Consumed
36. Martial Barrage
37. Atheretic
38. Paroxsihem
39. Kryosphere
40. Final Darkness

## APPENDIX 7: Canadian Doom Metal Bands

1. Cauchemar
2. Funeral Circle
3. Blood Ceremony
4. Cambodia
5. Haggatha
6. Bison B.C.
7. Nadja
8. Chieftain
9. Goat Horn
10. Mares of Thrace
11. Mendoza
12. Sons of Otis
13. Lavagoat
14. Hoopsnake
15. Witchstone
16. Ominosity
17. Gatekeeper
18. Psychotic Gardening
19. The Whorehouse Massacre
20. Weirding
21. Chronobot
22. Hand of the Horsewitch
23. Cygnus
24. Vitriolage
25. The Great Sabatini
26. Helgrind
27. Dark Breakfast
28. BIPIIGWAN
29. Dopethrone
30. Show of Bedlam
31. Cortisol
32. Ghäst
33. Embrace
34. The Order of the Solar Temple
35. sHEAVY
36. Anion
37. Dark Covenant
38. IRN
39. Zaraza
40. Longing for Dawn



## APPENDIX 8: Canadian Grindcore Bands

1. WAKE
2. Exit Strategy
3. Violent Restitution
4. Mudlark
5. Cathar
6. PreSchool Shooting
7. I Die Screaming
8. Kataplexis
9. Breathe Knives
10. Fuck the Facts
11. Soil Of Ignorance
12. Mesrine
13. Burnt Church
14. Slaughter Slashing
15. Archagathus
16. AHNA
17. Rape Revenge
18. Poser Disposer
19. Six Brew Bantha
20. Massgrave
21. Dysplasia
22. Anakronis
23. Head Hits Concrete
24. G.O.D.
25. Violent Gorge
26. Shooting Spree
27. Bridgeburner
28. Abuse
29. Zuckuss
30. Tard
31. Expression of Pain
32. Maniac Sumo Cunt
33. Endless Blockade
34. Swallowing Shit
35. Myopia
36. Tumult
37. Fistfuck
38. Dahmer
39. Ion Dissonance
40. Putrescence