

Places of Metal: Women, Leisure and Identities



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Outline

- What is heavy metal?
- The significance of heavy metal in regards to leisure
 - Women and heavy metal
- Future considerations and further research questions

Metal confronts what we rather ignore
It celebrates what we often deny
It indulges in what we fear the most
Metal is a culture of outsiders

- Metal: A Headbangers Journey (2005)

What is heavy metal?

- Described as “crashing guitars, pounding percussion, ear splitting volume and screaming vocals” (Gloss, 2000)
- The lyrical content focuses on darker states of human existence. Themes such as violence, war, anger, death, and tragedy.
- Heavy metal music is not a monolithic entity, it has numerous subgenres that have their own philosophy, values, and characteristics
- The presence of women is predominantly in black metal, doom metal, and melodic death metal. Women are attracted to these sub-genres for their lyrical content, increased representation of females, and harmonic melodies.

Thrash Metal

- Lyrical content often deals with social issues, anti-authoritarian views, balance between life and death, partying, and critiques of modern society.

Death Metal

- Lyrics explore nihilistic themes and mortality
- It was a reaction to Thrash Metal, it brought darker underlying issues to the forefront.

Black Metal

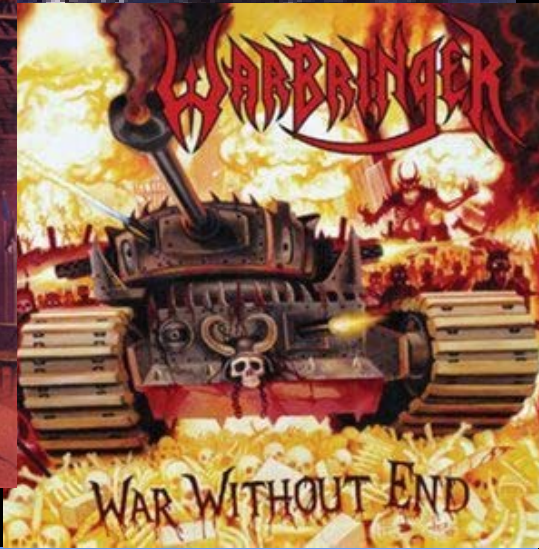
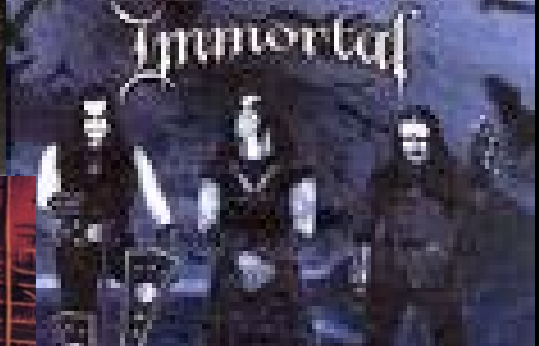
- Lyrical content focuses on nihilism, war, antitheism, paganism, and Satanism
- Has remained very underground due to lyrical content and negative media attention



KREATOR



OMA OF SOULS





Darkthrone



Razor

Heavy Metal: Serious Leisure with an Attitude

- Heavy metal music is a form of leisure because it promotes meaningful companionship, creates a permanent sense of community, embraces difference, and allows individuals the freedom for creativity and understanding (Stebbins, 1982)
- Heavy metal music is valued as a serious leisure activity, offering experiences that contribute to “personal fulfilment, enhancement of self-image, social interaction, empowerment, and self-expression” (Stebbins, 1982)
- Moreover, heavy metal can be classified as serious leisure because of 2 key qualities
 - Development of subcultures
 - Strong identification with the music and culture

Place of Metal: Women, Leisure and Identities

Purpose

To document through narrative the roles and relationships that heavy metal venues play in the formation of women's identities and their lived experiences

Research Questions

How do women come to feel a sense of belonging or at home in a heavy metal venue?

How does female bonding emerge as their presence increases in the metal scene?

Participants and Location

- Women between the ages of 18-28 yrs, frequently involved in the heavy metal scene
- Presently, I have interviewed 17 women
 - Wacken Open Air, Germany: 4
 - Party San Open Air, Germany: 1
 - Berlin, Germany: 1
 - Edmonton, Alberta: 11

Method

- Utilized in-depth, qualitative interviews
- Used audio-recording and note taking
- The data was coded qualitatively for main themes and ideas
- Women were chosen through chance meetings and their willingness to participate

Discussion

4 main themes:

1. Opportunities for Gender Resistance
1. Feelings of Belongingness
1. Emergence of Female Bonding
1. Attraction to Heavy Metal Music

1. Opportunities for Gender Resistance

- Heavy metal can provide a space in which females can fight traditional understandings of gender, an opportunity to respond and challenge capitalist ideals in which gender is viewed so narrowly (Mullaney, 2007; Mullaney & Kolb, 2006).
- Many women claimed that the heavy metal scene provides a space where there is more flexibility with sexuality and identity.
- The majority of the women claimed that within the heavy metal scene they could be aggressive, physical, loud, and powerful; behaviours that are frequently hindered within our society because they are deemed too masculine.
- Some women felt as though the morals, rules, structures, and standards regarding femininity disappeared because the focus was not on gender but on the music

2. Feelings of Belongingness

- One woman from Germany stated that women are attracted to heavy metal because it promotes feminist aspects such as equality, respect, and sense of belonging
- Heavy metal allowed women to feel part of a community where they could be themselves without feeling the pressure to adhere to 'typical female' mannerisms
- Feelings of belongingness within the metal scene were determined on musical knowledge and involvement in the scene (going to shows, searching for new bands)
- Women did not feel intimidated going into heavy metal venues because they were not self conscious about being a sexual object

3. Emergence of Female Bonding

- The majority of the women enjoyed spending time with their male friends and boyfriends
- Some women asserted that because of the increased presence of females in the metal scene they developed meaningful relationships with other like-minded women
- Many claimed that they created such powerful bonds with others in the scene that they felt comfortable going to shows alone knowing that they would meet up with others

4. Attraction to Heavy Metal Music

- Women were attracted to heavy metal because it made them feel confident, important, strong, beautiful, and respected.
- Many claimed that they enjoyed the fact that they did not have to be pre-occupied with their appearance and that they would be accepted for who they *really* are
- The majority of the women loved heavy metal music because they could embrace the fact that they were not 'ordinary' women. They no longer felt like outcasts but part of a large, connected family.

Conclusion

- To many fans, heavy metal is considered more than just a serious leisure activity, it is essential and life affirming: “Metal is my life, my best friend. I can’t help but hold my head up high, no one can take that away from me” (Wacken Open Air, 2008)
- Even though heavy metal music is predominantly masculine and can be perceived as very misogynist, it provides a space where women can challenge gender boundaries and feel a sense of belonging.
- It pushes us to theorize leisure differently, in terms of deviant leisure and underground musical communities.

Future Research and Considerations

- Female bonding between researcher and participants
- Orientate research project within a German context (a global female perspective)

