

‘I Wanna Rock:’

A Critique of Gender Essentialism in Metal Music Scholarship

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ABSTRACT

As Metal Music Studies (MMS) emerges as a field it is important that members of the field who research gender remain critical of the ways in which we do so. Protecting the autonomy of women participants in both MMS studies and in overall metal culture should be of utmost importance. This research aims to show that both general sexism within metal culture and the use of kind essentialist language serve to damage the autonomy of the women involved. As a result, unification essentialism (uniessentialism) should be the working assumption of MMS in order to avoid damaging the autonomy of women. Protecting autonomy requires more than just acknowledging any problems that exist, but rather I argue, through the use of Carol Hay's work, that there is in fact a moral obligation to confront such harms. This obligation rests on all members of the metal community, of all genders, because it is the only way to move forward and dismantle the systems of patriarchal oppression which exist. MMS research itself is not exempt from these criticisms, as the use of kind essentialist language "others" women fans and does not properly capture their experience, making their experiences less valid. By using the works of Charlotte Witt and Rosemary Lucy Hill, I show that uniessentialism is a more productive form of gender essentialism, because it acknowledges the gendered listening experiences of metal fans and values those experiences as equal; *all* gendered experiences matter and no one gendered experience should be considered the norm. Uniessentialism protects the autonomy of women fans and participants in studies, and therefore should be the working assumption of MMS.

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INTRODUCTION

I am, to use the term generated by Andy R. Brown, an “egg-head-banger.”¹ What Brown meant the term to describe is a “metal-head” or “head-banger” who is also an academic (or, egg-head). I have been a metal-head for a long time, and for most of that time did not realize that there was a way to reconcile my love for metal with my love for philosophy. That was at least the case until I took a class in my undergraduate on the philosophy of rock music. The class covered a variety of topics, mostly concerning aesthetics, but also covered social topics such as race and gender. Those discussions woke me from my dogmatic slumber, as it were, and I began to think about the gender inequality which exists in rock music and, because metal is an exaggerated and extreme form of rock, my own community of head-bangers. While the scholarship itself was useful in leading me to realize all the discrimination and sexism which existed (the sexism and discrimination still exist), I began to notice some other troublesome trends. What I noticed, but have only now materialized into words, is that much of the scholarship described rock music in gendered terms; strong coding of rock music as masculine and all things associated with masculinity then became the reasoning for the sexism which manifested in the scene. The language being used was ultimately gender essentialist, and failed to capture the whole story. If rock or metal are truly arenas for hypermasculinity, then why are there so many women involved? Many of the sources we read in class were influential for other scholars, and now that metal music studies (MMS) has emerged as a field, some of the same pieces have made a comeback and the essentialism and legacy of their work remains in the work of scholars in MMS.

¹ A. R. Brown, “Egg-Head-Banger? Critical Reflections on a ‘career’ in Metal Studies” (Modern Heavy Metal Conference: Markets, Practices and Cultures, Aalto University, Helsinki, Finland, 2016), <http://www.modernheavymetal.net/2016/03/mhmc2016-keynote-thursday-june-30th.html>.

What this experience taught me, though, is the ultimate motivation for my project: to be critical of the media you love. I love metal, even though some bands have lyrics which depict violence against women and other topics which, as a feminist, do not align with my values. Because of my feminist values, it is important for me to remain critical of the music that means a lot to me. However, being critical of the media you love can also extend to metal music studies. MMS is a recent field, and a lot of great interdisciplinary research has been produced (along with some great conferences at which to present that research at) on topics ranging from ethnographies, aesthetics, music production, and social issues such as gender and race. In all of this there is plenty of inward-looking criticism of metal, as it is fair to assert that all the scholars involved are in some ways also fans of metal. However, what is missing is inward-looking criticism of the discipline itself. Like any field, MMS has its founding members, or seminal texts, which everyone relies on at some point. In MMS this is still very much the case, and with the added fun of those people still being very much alive. However, there appears to be very little work done which provides a sort of “self-criticism” of the field. The founding members are still very much revered, and not very often seriously critically evaluated. This is not to say there is no critical evaluation at all, but that there should be more. It is possible to respect these works without reiterating and repeating their mistakes. Self-criticism is important for the field to grow.

The primary objective of this project is to provide a framework for better understanding the position of women in metal through the criticism of the gender essentialism at play in the current literature on metal music. Women face sexism and inequality in popular culture, and that is no different in rock music, and by extension metal. This is a popular subject of study amongst feminist and popular culture/metal scholars, which has led to a wide body of literature. However, the problem with some of this literature is that it diminishes the autonomy of the women involved through the use of an outdated form of gender essentialism. It does so by assuming that the traits exemplified in metal are traits which would not be appealing to women, and therefore their actual pleasure in the music is not taken into account. This is not to say that essentialism cannot be a useful concept, but that a different conception of it is needed if it is going to be productive in understanding women’s relationship with metal and other popular culture which is seen as sexist. The benefit of such an approach is that it moves feminist theory forward in understanding the right women and others have to take pleasure in the media they choose, so

long as they understand that they have an obligation to be critical of it. This approach respects the autonomy of the participants in popular culture, specifically metal music.

Within metal music studies, scholars focus on why women enjoy the music and/or actively participate as band members or fans. Because rock music itself, and by obvious extension metal, are usually coded as masculine the question becomes why something so hyper-masculine might appeal to a female audience.² Other research has focused on why there is a lack of participation from women within rock/metal, and when there is participation why it is usually as vocalists or other “feminine” roles rather than the more masculine act of playing electric guitar, for instance.³ An issue with much of this research, however, is that it relies on assumptions about masculinity/femininity. It is easy to fall into this trap because the claims made are not *prima facie* disagreeable, but I would like to suggest that it is important to try and remove ourselves from these kinds of essentialist viewpoints as much as possible in order to actually make progress in dealing with the gendered issues at play.

In the first chapter of my thesis, I argue that we must be critical of the media we love, and that there is a moral obligation to confront sexism in the heavy metal community. The sexism which women face in the metal scene extends to both fans and musicians. This sexism manifests in a variety of forms; from epistemological gatekeeping (testing the knowledge of group members to ensure that they belong or can gain access to that group), to cat calling, inappropriate comments about dress, heckling female musicians on stage, and in some extreme cases, sexual assault. In the first section of this chapter I argue that it is important to be critical of the media we love, and outline the argument for a moral obligation to confront sexism. Popular culture has the ability to influence society because it has a great reach and scope. It is important to engage with the popular culture we consume so as to gain a better understanding of how much social impact popular culture does have. The obligation to confront this sexism stems from an argument made by Carol Hay on the obligation to confront sexual harassment. Sexual harassment has the harm of damaging the autonomy of women. Therefore, it is important that this behaviour be confronted, because not doing so perpetuates the damage; the obligation is important to

² Sonia Vasan, *Women’s Participation in Death Metal Subculture* (PhD Diss., University of Houston, 2010)

³ Mavis Bayton, “Women and the Electric Guitar,” in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender* ed. Sheila Whitley (New York: Routledge, 1997), 37-49.

protecting the autonomy of women. I take up this argument; however, I extend it more broadly to all forms of sexism, because other aspects of sexism still damage the autonomy of women. In the second section of the chapter, I outline and discuss the sexism which women face in metal communities, as well as how that sexism damages the autonomy of both women fans and musicians. The purpose of this is to further contextualize the need for such an obligation by demonstrating how the autonomy of women is damaged.

In the second chapter, I turn my focus to the scholarship in MMS and on rock music. As I discussed briefly above, it is important for MMS as a field to be more critical of the works being produced in the field, especially in the discussion of gender. In the first section of the chapter I address gender essentialism. Specifically, I address kind essentialism as it relates to gender. Kind essentialism is the most commonly understood form of gender essentialism, as it discusses what is essential to a kind (or group). In the case of gender, kind essentialism discusses what is essential to each gender. Kind essentialism is a harmful position because in discussing what is essential to a gender, it often makes assumptions about what is natural to a gender, and these types of assumptions have been used to alienate and oppress women. In the remaining two sections I discuss the work of two different rock/metal scholars: Mavis Bayton and Deena Weinstein. The purpose of addressing these two articles, and Weinstein in particular, is to show that despite their contributions to the field, they engage in kind essentialism and it is important that those positions be addressed and criticized. Because of their use of essentialist language, MMS scholarship can contribute further to damaging the autonomy of women fans.

In the third and final chapter, I argue that gender essentialism need not be harmful, and argue for a notion of essentialism conceptualized by Charlotte Witt called unification essentialism, or uniessentialism, and that if there is to be essentialism used at all, uniessentialism should be the working assumption of MMS to avoid damaging women's autonomy. In the first section of the chapter I outline uniessentialism, which is a form of essentialism which focuses on individuals, rather than groups. On this model, gender is what unifies an individual. Individuals occupy various social positions, such as student or metal-head, and gender is what unifies those positions. Gender is central to an individual's being as that individual. In the second section of this chapter I address an article written by contemporary MMS scholar Rosemary Lucy Hill. Hill argues that the presumed inherent masculinity of metal can, and should, be challenged because

assuming the masculinity of metal serves to make women the “other” and does not help us develop a proper understanding of how women take pleasure in metal and hard rock. Her article is a useful example of how research on gender in metal can be done while protecting the autonomy of the participants being discussed. Rosemary Lucy Hill’s work is valuable because she changes the question on which most of the research on gender is based, and this is important because the traditional questions being asked are based in kind essentialism. She does not argue that gender is unimportant but in fact the opposite, focusing on how women take pleasure in heavy metal and hard rock music, and ultimately their gendered experience is valuable in challenging the assumed masculinity of heavy metal. Another asset to her argument is ultimately that Hill’s research comes from a different starting point than previous research in that she is not asking why women enjoy masculine music, but rather why women enjoy heavy metal and hard rock; this question is not based in a kind essentialism, and that is beneficial because it values women’s experiences. In the final section of the chapter I argue that uniessentialism can protect autonomy in the discussion of gender in metal. I maintain that uniessentialism avoids some of the standard criticisms of kind essentialism as it does not make sweeping assumptions about women, or what is essential to women, but rather shows that gender is an important piece in the life of people. I also argue that uniessentialism can help us to understand how women fans take pleasure in metal because every person who experiences being a metal-head does so in a gendered way, and it is important to be able to discuss these gendered experiences without falling into the trap of kind essentialism. Protecting the autonomy of women, and every other marginalized fan, should be of priority. This means that there is an obligation to confront the sexism women face in the community, and that uniessentialism should be the working assumption of MMS, because as metal scholars and metal-heads, we need to do better.

Chapter 1: On Not Being a Douchebag: The Obligation to Confront Sexism in Metal

Popular culture is often a reflection of society at large, and since sexism and gender inequality exist in society at large, it is not unexpected for sexism and gender inequality to appear in the media which we consume. In this chapter I will provide a sketch of the problems of sexism and gender inequality in rock music. While I will discuss rock music in general terms, I will be discussing metal music in more specificity. This is because, while metal has many of the problems rock faces, it is also more extreme, which highlights the issues of inequality and sexism more severely. In the first section of the chapter, I will outline the motivation for this project, which comes from Anita Sarkeesian's notion that, as consumers of popular culture, we must be critical of the media that we love. It is important to understand and be critical of how these works can reinforce harmful social norms. Casting a critical eye towards our media allows the opportunity for our media to challenge the harmful aspects of the status quo, instead of reinforcing them.

To make this argument I will borrow from Carol Hay who asserts that women who have been sexually harassed have a moral obligation to confront their harassers. The reason for this obligation is that both women and men owe it to themselves, and to each other to dismantle the

oppressive norms of the patriarchy that are reinforced by this harassment, and to mitigate the harm committed by this behaviour. This argument will help to highlight the ways in which women are harmed by the sexism that exists in metal culture, specifically with respect to diminished autonomy. The harm of diminished autonomy underpins the moral obligation to confront this sexism, in line with Hay's obligation to confront sexual harassment.

In the second section of the chapter, I aim to provide a detailed examination of the problems facing women in this field, both as fans and musicians themselves, with the intent to show how the marginalization of women as both fans and musicians harms women by diminishing their autonomy. Some of these problems include policing of dress, challenging the intelligence and legitimacy of women using terms like "true fan," as well as more explicit sexist behaviour including threats and sexual harassment. In doing so, I will provide figures which show the disparity in male/female participation in certain forms of metal, consider the gendered socialization at play when it comes to playing instruments, and discuss the sexism in the scene which exists in a range of severity and exists both in the attitudes presented by people as well as in artistic and lyrical content.

1.1: Being Critical of the media we love and moral obligations to confront sexual harassment

Feminist writer and video game fan Anita Sarkeesian addresses sexism in video games as being linked to overarching sexism and oppressive behaviour in society.⁴ Sarkeesian initially pointed out the problematic depictions of women in a variety of video games in a YouTube video entitled "Tropes vs. Women." The video is meant to show that women are portrayed in limited roles in video games, often as damsels in distress or as prostitutes to be murdered. Her criticisms have reached a large audience, and have caused a backlash towards the writer such as threats to incite a mass shooting at a speaking engagement she was supposed to attend.⁵ Sarkeesian does

⁴ "We Must Be Critical of the Art We Love," Time, accessed November 17, 2016, <http://time.com/4030632/anita-sarkeesian-sexist-media/>

⁵ "Anita Sarkeesian on GamerGate: 'We Have a Problem and We're Going to Fix this,'" The Rolling Stone, accessed April 25, 2017, <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/anita-sarkeesian-gamergate-interview-20141017>

not claim that we should all stop playing these games, or even stop liking them, but claims that it is at least important to be aware of the fact that these depictions are problematic (and also unnecessary).⁶ These tropes are unnecessary because many games with them still have redeeming qualities, as the gaming experience would be more valuable without the sexist tropes.⁷ While Sarkeesian does not provide an argument for *why* we might have an obligation to do so, she does at least posit that we *should* care and that does not mean we need to stop liking the problematic media. Her criticisms of video games are often of games that she plays frequently and says are her favourites, but the games are nevertheless problematic.

Sarkeesian's mantra is to be critical of the media that we love, but saying this is not forwarding any argument in favour of obligation. With that said, there is an argument to be made. The harms caused by sexist behaviour are serious, and as a result it should be the case that those who are in a position to confront that behaviour, actually do confront that behaviour. This applies as much to general society as it does to video games as it does to heavy metal, which is the focus of this project. I clarify that this obligation to be critical and to confront these problems does not mean one has to stop consuming the media. If it is problematic in that it reduces individuals to not fully autonomous beings based on their social identity, then this might be the best way to approach the issue, but the focus here is on a smaller scale, by which I mean local and personal interactions. The hope is that these small changes eventually snowball outwards into larger changes. Small changes can make communities, such as the metal community, more hospitable for the diversity of people who make it up, in that those individuals are not actively having their autonomy diminished.

To make this argument, I will be leaning on Carol Hay and her paper entitled "Whether to Ignore them and Spin: Moral Obligations to Resist Sexual Harassment."⁸ The conclusion of Hay's argument is that there is a moral obligation among those who are the victims of sexual harassment to confront their harassers. The basic idea for this is that not confronting the situation only continues to perpetuate it and the patriarchy which contributes to these harms remaining

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "Anita Sarkeesian on GamerGate: 'We Have a Problem and We're Going to Fix this,'" The Rolling Stone, accessed April 25, 2017, <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/anita-sarkeesian-gamergate-interview-20141017>

⁸ Carol Hay, "Whether to Ignore Them and Spin: Moral Obligations of Resist Sexual Harassment," *Hypatia* 20, no. 4 (2000)

intact. The overarching obligation can be broken down into two different obligations, both fulfilled by confronting the harasser. The first is that women have an obligation to themselves to do so because this protects their autonomy. The second is that women have an obligation to other women to confront harassers because the harm caused by sexual harassment is distinctive in how it affects its victims; the harm both draws on and reinforces the oppressive norms of the patriarchy. While Hay does not lay out this condition, it should be added that it is important to prevent a particular person from harassing others; if that person has harmed you, there ought to be an obligation to prevent them from doing the same to others. Ultimately, there is an obligation because sexual harassment causes a harm,⁹ the most fundamental harm being that of damaged autonomy. Autonomy in this sense is the goal that should people be free to make their own choices and promote their self-interest. While sexism and sexual harassment have a varied number of harms (psychological, physical etc.), the main harm caused is the diminishment of the ability for women to be treated as equal agents who are free to make their own choices and promote their self-interest.

Hay's focus is on sexual harassment, which stems from sexual objectification, where sexual objectification is when a woman is treated as sexually attractive in a context where her sexuality is, or ought to be, irrelevant, or when she is not treated as a moral equal. A woman can be sexually objectified without her knowing it. Hay expands by taking sexual harassment to be the outward behaviour that arises from sexual objectification. She contends that if the behaviour occurs because a woman has been sexually objectified, then she has been sexually harassed regardless of how it is perceived.¹⁰

According to Hay, the harm a woman experiences is not necessarily because of her as an individual, but she can be harassed because she is a member of an oppressed group to whose members the harasser does not accord the proper amount of moral respect.¹¹ When a woman has been sexually harassed, or objectified in general, she has not been treated as a moral equal. It follows then, that someone who has been sexually harassed has not been accorded the respect of an autonomous agent. Sexual harassment is not merely evidence of a lack of respect for women's

⁹ Ibid., 104

¹⁰ Ibid., 96

¹¹ Ibid., 97

autonomy, but it actively works to undermine women's autonomy.¹² It does this by contributing to, entrenching, and legitimizing sexist attitudes of patriarchal oppression; sexual harassment is more than just a manifestation of those attitudes. If, for example, a male and female hold the same position in a workplace, and the male employee were to sexually harass the female employee, he would not be treating her as his moral equal, even though she holds equal status and responsibility. This serves to undermine her autonomy, because if nothing was done about the harassment, it would reinforce that behaviour. It would then not only affect that employee, but all other female employees in the workplace. These attitudes reinforce patriarchal oppression because oppression limits the autonomy of those who are oppressed; they constrain, limit, and undermine women's autonomy. Hay asserts that "it's hard to see autonomy's core ideal of self-government as anything other than a laudable moral aim for women, particularly given that one of the greatest harms of sexist oppression is its restriction of the quality and quantity of choices that are open to women."¹³

Sexual harassment leads to autonomy being undermined, which means there is a serious harm. This means we have an obligation. We tend to only want to grant obligation to people whom we consider at least partly autonomous. If women are in fact at least partly autonomous, then they can have some sort of an obligation to confront their harassers. If sexist oppression does in fact completely prevent the possibility of autonomous action for women, then the question of what moral obligations women have will not arise. With that said, figuring out exactly how much autonomy women do have and to what extent they have an obligation is challenging. It's clear that the patriarchy limits a woman's options, and because women internalize their oppression, women end up with preferences which can end up obstructing their interests.¹⁴

It would, however, be unfair to claim that women are incapable of any meaningful degree of autonomy under patriarchy. Despite their oppression, women usually still have some morally significant amount of control over their lives. There are a variety of factors which influence this, but it is fair to say that most women in First World nations have enough autonomy to be considered substantially autonomous, and because of this they can be expected to live up to

¹² Ibid., 97

¹³ Ibid., 98

¹⁴ Ibid., 98

certain levels of moral responsibility. Arguing that patriarchy strips women of all autonomy would undermine the actual power that most Western women do have.¹⁵

Women have at least some autonomy, and so there ought to be an obligation to protect that autonomy. When applying this to any actual scenario, though, considerations of risk must be taken into account when determining the degree of moral responsibility an agent has in a situation. While autonomy is undermined by the harassment, personal safety remains important. Other normative considerations to make are that women who are sexually harassed do suffer real psychological and emotional harms, and that confronting every single case may not be feasible. It is even fair to say that this obligation falling on women is unfair, but Hay asserts that even unfair obligations are still obligations; obligations are often unfair and inconvenient. These normative concerns are important and will come into play in situations where sexual harassment must be confronted, but the obligation nevertheless exists.¹⁶

Another consideration to make is who has an obligation. Hay's focus is on women's obligation because, as unfair as it may seem, it is important for women to confront their harassers. Women's obligation to confront their harassers is twofold. Women's obligation to confront harassers is not to confront a general moral harm, but is a moral obligation to confront and resist behaviour which undermines their ability to be morally obligated at all, or in other words, their autonomy. In this instance, then, the obligation a woman has is to herself. The other component is that the harm of sexual harassment is distinctive because it draws on and reinforces social norms of the patriarchy. When one woman is harmed, there is at least some harm done to all women. It is especially the case if nothing is done to address the behaviour, because the behaviour is then reinforced. This then means her obligation is not just to herself, but also to all women who suffer together under patriarchy.¹⁷ This obligation is different from the obligation that men have.

Hay posits that there is a valid concern that resting the obligation solely on women risks shifting the burden from the harasser to the victim of harassment. Men specifically benefit from the patriarchy, even when not contributing actively to it. The obligation is to fight injustice, and

¹⁵ Ibid., 100

¹⁶ Ibid., 104

¹⁷ Ibid., 105

by not resisting the patriarchy and related sexist behaviour, the obligation is not met. Men have power under patriarchy, which positions them better than others to dismantle it. Society has an obligation to divest itself of unjust institutions, and so women are not the only ones who have the obligation to resist patriarchy.¹⁸ Men, arguably, are not the victims of patriarchy and so their obligation to fight patriarchy is not to themselves. Instead, the obligation to confront other men who sexually harass women is an obligation to women as a group, to end the injustice of patriarchal oppression.¹⁹ So, while women have an obligation to themselves, they share an obligation with men to women as a group. So, on this model, both men and women have an obligation to fight the patriarchy, which includes confronting harassers. Ignoring that harassment only enforces the idea that harassers can get away with it, and therefore perpetuate the behaviour.

The obligation men have is an important component to Hay's argument. Women can protect their own autonomy and the autonomy of other women, but their position is necessarily weaker within a patriarchal structure. The obligation to confront harassment is part of the overall obligation to dismantle the patriarchy. In terms of the metal subculture, that means dismantling the culture of sexism and misogyny both in fan bases, among musicians, and in the lyrical content of the music itself. Sexual harassment is just one of many potential harms and barriers that women face in metal culture, and popular culture as a whole. It is these problems that Sarkeesian addresses in her various articles and internet channels. It is important to be critical of the media we love, and in fact we have an obligation to do so, because doing so allows fans who suffer from patriarchal oppression to maintain their autonomy as fans first and foremost. Female fans owe it to themselves and their fellow female fans to confront sexist oppression, and the majority male fans owe it to their fellow fans to confront each other and minimize oppressive activities within the scene.

Hay's argument is important to this project, as she first provides an important outline of sexual harassment, but in doing so more importantly develops an account of the kind of harm that is caused by sexual harassment, and why it warrants an obligation. The notion of sexism damaging autonomy, and conversely the importance of protecting autonomy, are central to this project. Hay's argument provides a framework for how to better understand the sexism which

¹⁸ Ibid., 104

¹⁹ Ibid., 106

exists in the heavy metal subculture, and the harms which take place as a result. In the next section, the nuances of metal culture and the negative activities which take place will be tackled. The focus of this section is on how women are harmed, or rather, how activities within metal damage the autonomy of its women fans.

1.2: Heavy metal's gender problem

Women are involved in metal. On some level, they always have been, with bands like Girlschool being involved since the late 1970s. However, despite always being a part of the scene either as fans or as musicians, women are and have largely been outnumbered by their male counterparts. Rock music is traditionally a male space, both in the performance of the music and fandom. Women do participate, but in such small numbers that their appearance at shows or in bands makes them the subject of scrutiny by both fans and academics. The notion of women being underrepresented in metal is not terribly surprising. However, it is problematic because it disenfranchises women and minorities, and discourages them from seeking equal participation; it is difficult to seek equal participation when you do not see your position as being equal. Equal in this sense being both in numbers, and in the ways individuals are treated.

While it is difficult to gauge overall due to the diversity of metal fandom (fan bases spread across the globe, diversity in the music, etc.), dozens of surveys have been conducted within a variety of contexts: local scenes, a selection of scenes, and large festivals.²⁰ In one survey conducted by Sarah Chaker which took place at two German festivals and included 550 black and death metal fans, the proportion of males to females was overwhelming. In the black metal category, male fans outnumbered women 83.4% to 16.6% and in death metal, males outnumbered women 86.2% to 13.8%.²¹ The survey consisted of several standardized questions, and while many of the answers were consistent between both genders in terms of aesthetic questions such as why they found metal appealing, when asked the question of how many fans were active as musicians themselves, the women were greatly outnumbered. Only 12.2% of

²⁰ Sarah Chaker, "What is 'male' about black and death metal music? An empirical approach," in *Heavy Metal, Gender and Sexuality: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Florian Heesch and Niall Scott (London: Routledge, 2016), 155.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 155

women were involved actively as musicians in comparison to the 49% of men (in the black metal category of the survey). A similar picture existed in the death metal section of the survey as well, with only 8.6% of women participating in a band.²² German festivals are historically the largest gatherings of metal fans and the venue of choice for metal performances, meaning these statistics are likely an accurate representation of the scene. These statistics provide an example of the representation of women in extreme metal scenes. While women are underrepresented in general, women musicians make up an even smaller portion of an already small group. This indicates that there are significant barriers to women participating which do not appear to be there for their male counterparts, and it is important that metal music studies (MMS) determine what those barriers are, and ways to diminish the impact of those barriers. Not only are women underrepresented, those who do exist within the scene often experience mistreatment in a variety of forms. The underrepresentation of women in the scene leaves those women who are involved vulnerable to the sexist behaviour which is prevalent, and this sexism has the harm of diminishing the autonomy of the female fans. The patriarchy is alive and well in metal culture, and it continues to harm women fans who exist within the scene, and as a result there needs to be a push towards improving conditions for women fans.

Women's participation is limited in all aspects; from few women being in bands, to practices important to fandom such as record collecting being typically a male activity. If rock is male dominated, then collecting records and spending time in record stores provide the materials and spaces for the rituals of same-sex interaction, in this case male to male.²³ In ways, the records one owns and the knowledge one possesses about the bands becomes like sports statistics; being able to perform that knowledge shows one's adherence to the culture around music, and expresses one's fandom.

Having knowledge about bands is important to fitting into the metal scene: if one knows all the dirty details of a band and has extensive knowledge about the music, they are more likely to be taken seriously as being a "true fan." One assumption about why record collecting appears to be a male activity, which Will Straw points to in his article on record collecting, is that women are not socialized to have collections like records, but instead are pushed towards different

²² Ibid., 156

²³ Will Straw, "Sizing Up Record Collections," in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender* ed. Sheila Whitley (New York: Routledge, 1997)

hobbies. Another reason posited by Straw is a matter of economics; due to the wage gap and the encouragement of women to stay in the home, or spend money on other things associated with femininity, men have more disposable income and therefore have more money to spend on things like records. Regardless the reason, if women are unable to or are discouraged from accessing and attaining the knowledge record collecting or like activities provides, they are less likely to be taken seriously within the scene.²⁴ Much of metal identity is wrapped up in knowing and caring deeply about the ins and outs of the music because such knowledge is the perceived antithesis to mainstream music culture where the fans do not appear to engage as deeply with the music; songs are popular for a time and then they disappear off the radar and few artists manage to stay relevant. This type of mentality leads to practices of ‘knowledge testing’ in fan settings.

Knowledge testing is simply a matter of one person asking questions about bands and other aspects of culture to judge another fan’s credibility.²⁵ Another way to think of this could be as “epistemological gatekeeping.” This sort of gatekeeping can be done subtly in conversation, but the intentions of that person are often less than subtle. Knowledge testing is not necessarily problematic, but it becomes problematic when the standards for a quality answer are higher when the person being questioned is a woman, because that means that the woman is not considered an equal. Women’s answers often need to have more detail about a given subject, and the details of the trivia must be more obscure than their male counterparts. Women have always had a precarious position as fans; many male fans assume that women are not genuinely interested in the music itself, but instead in the musicians. Women are either assumed to be groupies looking to pick up the artists, or there with their boyfriends.²⁶ This highlights a double standard in how the intentions of male and female fans are viewed. This makes the latter the subject of increased pressure to prove their credibility as fans, often through their ability to participate in “shop talk” (knowledge exchange about music), which is the main avenue for gatekeeping to take place.²⁷ Other ways to prove this credibility for women is through unofficial dress codes, such as band shirts and jeans, or through participating in other behaviours such as moshing or stage diving. The attitude towards women is not often aggressive, but there is more skepticism around women

²⁴ Ibid.,

²⁵ Sonia Vasan, “Women’s Participation in Death Metal Subculture” (PhD, University of Houston, 2010).

²⁶ Sonia Vasan, Women’s Participation in Death Metal Subculture (PhD Diss., University of Houston, 2010)

²⁷ Ibid

who do not appear to cohere to a “one of the guys” type of attitude. Membership in metal culture is a matter of acceptance in that one must earn the right to participate, and that can be done through knowledge testing, dress, or moshing.²⁸

Biased knowledge testing is an oppressive behaviour, and while it is not as outwardly sexist or aggressive as harassment, it still serves to undermine female participants because the intention is to discredit the woman. It also creates pressure on women, as failing to “prove” oneself often means not being accepted into the social group as an equal, but rather places women even lower in social structures than they might have been before. Sexist behaviour works to undermine the autonomy of women, and this instance is no different. Not conforming to social codes leaves women in a more vulnerable position, and therefore the choice to participate in such “shop talk” becomes less of a choice. The pressure of this proving ground type atmosphere is damaging to women because who they are as individuals is less important to the scene than their ability to give “correct” answers in gatekeeping situations. It undermines women’s autonomy as there really is no choice but to provide the right answers in these situations and act as the dominant group wants women to act. Only after a woman has successfully been “let in” is she part of the community. However, membership in this community is not equal.

Women who participate in bands themselves tend to face even more scrutiny than female fans. Acting in typically feminine ways is neither encouraged nor accepted. Criticism of dress is usually vocalized more locally to friend groups, or can be more public; jeering and cat calling are not altogether uncommon. While there is plenty of judgement passed against female fans, female musicians face even more objectification and public judgement and ridicule.²⁹ Based on Hay’s definition of sexual harassment, according to which any behaviour that stems from a woman being sexually objectified is sexual harassment, an argument could be made that female musicians are often sexually harassed in some form or another. It is not uncommon to hear female musicians heckled on stage, or to overhear conversations about whether a male fan would have sex with said female musician.³⁰ This behaviour is not deemed to be particularly problematic, and therefore it is perpetuated, reinforcing that women are not good enough, should not be on stage, or that any credit which is due is not due to women but rather to her male

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Vasan, “Women’s Participation in Death Metal Subculture.”

³⁰ Ibid.

counterparts. It is this perpetual questioning of credentials, without questioning the behaviour, which damages the autonomy of those women who are involved. It does this by both turning the women performing into objects, and by turning other women fans against each other; if women are not supporting women musicians, then the obligation to confront sexist behaviour is being ignored.

Women participate in metal bands in small numbers, and when they do it is usually as a vocalist. Similar to the traditional role of women in most rock, women who are in metal are predominantly there as vocalists.³¹ Women who play instruments are uncommon, and when they do play instruments in bands they are typically instruments such as the keyboards, which are traditionally coded as feminine. Female guitarists, bass players and drummers are quite rare; specific numbers are difficult to track, but some numbers suggest there are fewer than 10%. Feminist critics of rock (and metal) have suggested that the small number of female instrumentalists is a result of gendered socialization, especially when they are growing up. Women are less encouraged to pick up a guitar, and are instead more strongly encouraged to learn another instrument seen more befitting of them. Mavis Bayton has argued that technical skill is more encouraged among men, and thus the electric guitar is more likely to be taken up by men while women tend to be excluded from that training.³² Metal requires highly technical abilities on guitar, and so, following this logic, it makes sense that fewer women are instrumentalists. When in a band, however, women are faced with many of the same double standards regarding dress and mannerisms that exist in society at large. If women act too much like men on stage, they are not attractive, but if they choose to dress in a provocative manner or embrace a feminine side, they are pandering for support rather than being legitimately talented.

Most women who do perform in metal are likely to be in genres of metal known as power metal. Power metal is known for its operatic style of vocals, and musically is tuned higher than other genres. While power metal is a very technical area of metal, it is generally viewed in the metal scene as more feminine than other genres and taken far less seriously by the average metal fan because of its perceived femininity. Power metal has a large and dedicated fan base, but the appeal does not cross over to fans of more extreme genres as easily. This leads to more

³¹ Deena Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and its Culture* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2000), 68.

³² Mavis Bayton, "Women and the Electric Guitar," in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender* ed. Sheila Whitley (New York: Routledge, 1997), 37-49.

assumptions about both female fans and female musicians: the assumption in relation to female metal fans is that they do not like *real* metal, which then leads to the assumption that female vocalists in power metal bands are not true metal artists. While they may be considered talented vocalists, their classification as metal vocalists is questioned. This reinforces women's outsider status within the metal community, as well as reinforcing double standards surrounding talent. When women do perform in more widely accepted genres of metal, such as thrash metal or death metal, they face the issue outlined above of having to navigate a very fine line when it comes to being taken seriously. Women at times threaten the idealized vision of these genres many male fans have; being on stage and performing is a subversive act, as it challenges many male fans ideas about the true form of the genre.

An instance of women threatening an idealized vision of an extreme genre is female black metal musician Myrkur. Black metal is a type of metal which is aesthetically harsh; fast drums and guitars, screeching vocals and lyrical themes dealing with the satanic and the occult. Black metal, like most extreme metal genres, is traditionally very male dominated. Myrkur's brand of black metal has often been described as "hipster" black metal by her critics because of her use of atmospheric elements in her music, as well as some of her imagery and her own stage presence. These atmospheric components are usually created using keyboards or other electronic sampling. While some male bands have begun to do this, the backlash has been more extreme towards Myrkur. The musical elements themselves might not be considered feminine, but coupled with her gender and feminine presentation on stage, it is likely that there is an equivalence being made to those sounds being feminine. A male band using these elements may be disregarded as "hipster" black metal, but few have received criticism or threats to their safety. Myrkur's authenticity as a metal-head have also been questioned at length, due to her previously having been a model. The criticisms of Myrkur's music might be valid in terms of questioning her authenticity as a black metal musician, but the criticisms manifest in ways which most male musicians have not faced. Myrkur has faced both threats of general violence and sexual violence, mostly through the internet, and with people paying money to go to her shows with the intention

of heckling her.³³ The internet has played an important role in both highlighting and exacerbating the sexism being expressed towards female musicians (and fans).

Magazines and blogs play an important role in metal fan culture, as in other popular music cultures. Female musicians are rarely featured, and when they are it is generally in a demeaning role. A popular metal magazine, *Revolver*, has a yearly article on “metal’s hottest women,” in which the article lists various female musicians in the metal world according to their appearance. Metal press, like most things in metal culture, is clearly viewed as made by men and for men.³⁴ Since males are the largest demographic, it makes economic sense for a magazine to cater to the largest likely readership.³⁵ However, these articles continue to push women further to the fringes of metal culture by giving them only yearly spots in press, and rather than being based on musicianship, their place is based solely on appearance. The immediate impact of this type of journalism for many males who read these articles is that women are to be appreciated for ephemeral qualities such as appearance, rather than as serious musicians. As most publications have moved to the internet, comment sections make prevailing attitudes far more obvious. The internet, especially in the age of social media, can be a vicious place as it allows anyone with an opinion to say what they want. As a result, aggressive harassment of female musicians, fans, or anyone remotely sympathetic to concerns about sexism, can take place with few repercussions for the harassers. Most comment sections are moderated, but censoring internet trolls only serves to reinforce them and their likeminded counterparts.

At the same time, the internet has provided opportunities for more media responsibility towards treating women as people, rather than as centrefolds. The role of metal journalism is no longer limited to large publications like *Revolver* or *Metal Hammer*. Metal blogs/press such as *Metal Injection*, *MetalSucks*, *Noisey*,³⁶ or *Decibel*³⁷ have also become popular, and their content

³³ “One Woman Black Metal Band MYRKUR is Tired of Getting Death Threats from Men,” *Metal Injection*, accessed 2017-01-24, <http://www.metalinjection.net/hateorade/one-woman-black-metal-band-myrkur-is-tired-of-getting-death-threats-from-men>

³⁴ Andy Brown, “‘Girls like metal, too!’ Female Reader’s Engagement with the masculinist culture of the tabloid metal magazine,” in *Heavy Metal, Gender and Sexuality: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Florian Heesch and Niall Scott (London: Routledge, 2016), 164

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 164

³⁶ “It’s Time to Stop Making Excuses for Extreme Metal’s Violent Misogynist Fantasies,” *Noisey*, accessed 2017-01-24, https://noisey.vice.com/en_ca/article/death-metal-misogyny

is often more thoughtful on topics like race and gender in metal. They feature fewer articles based on female musicians' appearance, and more content on female musicians as musicians. In doing so, some have even begun to realize that "female fronted" is not a genre, and that attempts to highlight female musicians may in fact be problematic, though well intentioned.³⁸ Neill Jameson in his article "Low Culture: Neill Jameson on Maybe Not Treating Women Like Sperm Receptacles," cites a popular meme stating, "female fronted is not a genre," to illustrate that highlighting a band as "female fronted" becomes more of a marketing tool, and still shifts the attention to the fact that a *woman* is in the band. While the article does not explicitly discuss autonomy, what it alludes to is the fact that labelling something as "female fronted" takes away some of the autonomy of female musicians. This is because placing gender back into the mix might change how the band is heard. Depending on the genre, it is not immediately obvious that there is a female vocalist, and having that highlighted can cause her to be taken less seriously. It is important to have role models for women in the genre, but fans of a band are fans for their sound first and foremost. Placing female musicians in discussion solely by their gender diminishes their accomplishments as musicians, and is more likely to place the accomplishments on the male musicians who may be (and likely are) backing her. She then becomes an object and how useful she is for marketing the band, rather than her credibility as a musician, or as an autonomous being.

Recently, there have also been more articles in popular blogs about the sexism and harassment faced by women in the scene. The topics they address range from the harassment and mistreatment of women (from minor harassment to sexual assault) at music festivals³⁹, the content of the lyrics in metal songs⁴⁰, to attempts to reinforce that women are in fact people and

³⁷ "Low Culture: Neill Jameson on Maybe Not Treating Women Like Sperm Receptacles," Decibel Magazine, accessed 2017-01-24, <http://decibelmagazine.com/blog/2015/8/27/low-culture-neill-jameson-on-maybe-not-treating-women-like-sperm-receptacles>

³⁸ "Why I Stopped Talking about Women in Metal," Decibel Magazine, accessed 2017-01-24, <http://decibelmagazine.com/blog/2016/10/19/why-i-stopped-talking-about-women-in-metal>

³⁹ "One Woman Sexually Assaulted at Bloodstock Open Air," MetalSucks, accessed 2017-03-06, <http://www.metalsucks.net/2016/08/19/one-woman-sexually-assaulted-bloodstock-open-air/>

⁴⁰ "It's Time to Stop Making Excuses for Extreme Metal's Violent Misogynist Fantasies," Noisey, accessed 2017-01-24, https://noisey.vice.com/en_ca/article/death-metal-misogyny

deserve to be treated as such in all settings.⁴¹ Some of these articles address the gendered violence directed at musicians like Myrkur, suggesting that it is fine to not like a person's music but it is not fine to send her threats of rape and death via Facebook.⁴² It is possible that these blogs and magazines are merely writing these articles to get more readers, but the fact that they are then engaging in the comment sections to confront people who are purposely being inflammatory is promising. Sexism and harassment is not likely to be completely eliminated in metal, but slowly the metal press is beginning to influence the conversation. Very few productive conversations happen in comment sections on the internet, but the fact that a press that has traditionally focused on women as sexual objects is now turning to providing content for women and addressing some of its own habits of itself as a medium for conveying information, and what impact such habits have had on the culture, is encouraging. This demonstrates the potential for change as more people feel obliged to ensure respect towards all participants in the metal scene, and as a result begin to dismantle the patriarchal structures that exist. This happens through the efforts of vocal female journalists and fans, but also through male journalists and fans who understand the power of their position within the scene.

One genre of metal which stands out as being most frequently tied with sexism is that of death metal (and its sibling brutal death metal). Death metal as a scene differs from others as its culture is more restricted in terms of acceptable behaviour, attitude and attire.⁴³ Death metal displays the most apparently hypermasculine and outwardly misogynistic traits and there are fewer female musicians/fans than other scenes.⁴⁴ The lyrical content of death metal has always been controversial; this is because the lyrical content of death metal focuses on themes of death and violence. Often the lyrics are hyperbolically violent and the graphics which accompany the albums and adorn merchandise are comparable to various shots in slasher horror movies. Death metal's aesthetic is one of gore and brutality, which means the highest compliment a band or

⁴¹ "Low Culture: Neill Jameson on Maybe Not Treating Women Like Sperm Receptacles," Decibel Magazine, accessed 2017-01-24, <http://decibelmagazine.com/blog/2015/8/27/low-culture-neill-jameson-on-maybe-not-treating-women-like-sperm-receptacles>

⁴² "One Woman Black Metal Band MYRKUR is Tired of Getting Death Threats from Men," Metal Injection, accessed 2017-01-24, <http://www.metalinjection.net/hateorade/one-woman-black-metal-band-myrkur-is-tired-of-getting-death-threats-from-men>

⁴³ Sonia Vasan, *Women's Participation in Death Metal Subculture* (PhD Diss., University of Houston, 2010)

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

song can receive is being described as “brutal.” While the subjects of this violence are sometimes supernatural creatures such as zombies or other monsters, the most typical subjects are women.

Many of the originators of death metal (bands such as Cannibal Corpse in the 1980s) wrote songs about the violent evisceration of women, with the express purpose to shock people. This made them the easy target of censors across the world. Their cover art depicted violent scenes, typically of zombies or other fictional entities, and thus the cover art was also heavily censored. The shock value of Cannibal Corpse seems to persist, despite their 28-year run as a band, with their albums having been banned in Germany, and the band being prohibited from playing shows in countries like Russia. The subject matter that Cannibal Corpse tackled became the formula for death metal as a genre, and bands who came after them took a similar line of shock and gore. As more people repeat this process, the shock value wanes. While it may have been shocking in the early days to sing/write songs about graphic violence against women, the reality is that so many bands use this lyrical content that it is not shocking anymore to devotees of the music. Nor is it seen as problematic to many, including by many women within the scene itself.

The complacency towards constant talk of violence against women is concerning; violence, especially gendered violence, is real for many people, and desensitization toward this violence comes as a potential warning sign that violence against women in overall society has been normalized. The talk itself is harmful to anyone who may have actually experienced gendered violence, but it also raises concerns about whether the normalization of such violence in fact leads to more violence. This subject has also been brought up recently in popular metal press, with a female writer for *Noisey* confronting the problem of violence against women as represented in death metal lyrics.⁴⁵ As a fan of death metal, she came to realize that the themes in death metal lyrics are in fact problematic. In her piece, she made an appeal for fans of the music and bands themselves to have an honest conversation on the subject. The problem she was pointing to became more apparent in the comments section of the post on the magazine’s website and on social media where the article was posted and subsequently shared. The author of this article was not intending to end death metal as people knew it, as she is a fan herself, but rather

⁴⁵ “It’s Time to Stop Making Excuses for Extreme Metal’s Violent Misogynist Fantasies,” *Noisey*, accessed 2017-01-24, https://noisey.vice.com/en_ca/article/death-metal-misogyny

wanted to bring to attention the lack of respect women face in the scene and the fact that the lyrics continued to normalize violence against women.⁴⁶

The resulting comment section highlighted the problems she was pointing to; namely that having a meaningful discussion appeared to be impossible. The comments also highlighted the strain of conservatism that appears (ironically) within metal scenes. Commenters accused the author of being a “feminist” and “social justice warrior” who wanted to take away their music. When there is discussion of a controversial or problematic topic in metal, many fans expect that there will be censorship. Metal has long been the target of censors, which makes fans of the genre sensitive to the idea that someone is trying to push censorship on them once again. Pushes to censor metal were at their height in the 1980s with the creation of the Parents Music Resource Centre (PMRC) and the subsequent Senate hearings which were held. The basic purpose of the PMRC was to make it easier for parents to screen the content of an album for violent or sexual content, and therefore prevent their children from listening to something “harmful.”⁴⁷ The organization led by Tipper Gore (at the time, wife of Senator Al Gore) created a list of fifteen songs which became known as the “Filthy Fifteen.” Nine of the songs on that list were metal songs from bands like Twisted Sister, Judas Priest, Black Sabbath, WASP, Mercyful Fate, and Venom.⁴⁸ Judas Priest, WASP, and AC/DC’s violations were due to presumed sexual content, Twisted Sister and Mötley Crüe’s were for presumed violent content, Def Leppard and Black Sabbath for discussions of the use of drugs and alcohol, and Mercyful Fate and Venom for discussions of the occult.⁴⁹

The PMRC’s success at censorship is negligible. However, all attempted and successful censorship did have a lasting impression on the psyche of metal fans. Metal has not traditionally been good at accepting criticism about anything that it does, and so the reactions to criticism are strong. Reactions to the PMRC within the metal community were strong, and often gendered. The PMRC was comprised primarily of women, and spearheaded by Tipper Gore. Dee Snider and all of the musician participants reacted to Tipper Gore, and the other members of the PMRC,

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Claude Chastagner, “The Parents’ Music Resource Center: From Information to Censorship,” *Popular Music 8* (Cambridge: 1999), 179-192

⁴⁸ “Artists tagged as PMRC Filthy Fifteen,” Last.fm, accessed December 3, 2014, <http://www.last.fm/tag/pmrc%20filthy%20fifteen/artists>

⁴⁹ Ibid.

in gendered manners. Dee Snider in particular is important because his reaction to the committee became a rallying cry for metal heads at the time, and Dee has remained an icon in the metal world. Dee Snider reinforced the attitude that you could still be sexist towards women who present a challenge to you, and his rise to metal icon status arguably continues to reinforce that behaviour. Snider's reactions to Tipper Gore, and the appearance of "feminists" wanting to censor metal strengthened the misogyny within heavy metal, ensuring that women's place in metal is a precarious one.

Some participant studies still show signs of fans continuing to resist criticisms of metal. Sonia Vasan's PhD dissertation on women in death metal included interviews with women who occupied various social levels within the metal scene, as well as a few men.⁵⁰ Vasan's goal was to attempt to find out why women actively engaged in a misogynistic scene. Many of the women she asked focused on what was appealing about the music, and what steps helped them achieve integration and social acceptance by the dominant group (men). The answers provided by the women were standard and anticipated; women who act more like men tend to be accepted more by the men. While almost all of them admitted to experiencing something like epistemological gatekeeping, as described above, many of them dismissed it as merely part of the process and something which was necessary to discern between what they referred to as "true fans" and "band whores."⁵¹ The questions elicited common responses to why they liked the music (mostly relating to feeling empowered, and that it was strong), and they also parroted many things heard from male fans. Many of the women appeared to have internalized the sexism which exists in the scene: that women who were there just to support their partners, or who were perceived as being interested/were interested in being there solely to pick up men were not accepted. This manifested in judgements in the way other women dressed; any more than subtle manifestations of femininity were generally unacceptable. The uniform for women considered "true fans" was typically a band shirt and denim pants, with very little attention drawn to their appearance or the fact they are female.

According to Keith Kahn Harris and Vasan, subcultural codes prevent women (or others) from directly addressing the issue of misogyny. Any criticism of misogyny, such as the Noisey

⁵⁰ Sonia Vasan, *Women's Participation in Death Metal Subculture* (PhD Diss., University of Houston, 2010)

⁵¹ Ibid.

article on misogynistic lyrics in death metal, is met with resistance. Ways of dealing with questions about the misogyny in the music include downplaying it by saying it is not offensive, joking about it, and ignoring it. When approached about the low numbers of women attending death metal shows, some participants in Vasan's study suggested that women are outnumbered at concerts of every genre, unless it is one marketed towards women specifically.⁵² Vasan provides instances of comment threads on message boards, some of them on official band websites, where there is open discussion of rape, and tearing down people (mostly women) who had claimed their music was offensive, to illustrate the hostility towards criticism. While there were women in the message board group, their presence was mostly disregarded and they did not have any kind of power to mitigate the misogyny in the message board.⁵³ Not all the women interviewed felt the misogyny in the music was acceptable; they chose to not make much of it aside from attempting to make personal choices which lessened their participation in it.⁵⁴

Vasan noted that among the female fans, there did not seem to be much group cohesion and there appeared to be very little to no feminist undertones in the scene at all. On a larger scale, not limited to the scene which she studied, the lack of feminist identification has also appeared to be the case. As one interviewee noted, this lack of feminist awareness stands in opposition to what happened in the punk scene during the early 1990s with the beginning of the Riot Grrl movement.⁵⁵ Riot Grrl was formed by feminists, led by Kathleen Hanna of Bikini Kill, as a reaction to the male dominance of the punk world. Hanna and others wanted to participate in punk but found barriers to their participation. Riot Grrl bands instead created a "walled off" space in the scene; this space was intended to be inclusive to women, minorities, and anyone else who felt that they were not safe or did not belong in the mainstream punk scene. They encouraged more women and minorities to be involved in the music as well. Riot Grrl bands, remaining consistent with most political punk bands, were also activists. They were active in promoting inclusion, rallied for organizations like Planned Parenthood, and brought awareness to

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

issues such as sexual assault on campuses (as many of these bands started on college campuses and continued to play there).⁵⁶

Instead, metal appears to have very little feminist organization or any real cohesion among female fans. It is worth noting that the participant interviews in Vasan's work suggest that there is more competition and potential conflict between female fans than there is between female fans and non-female fans. Instead of building each other up and actively trying to attract more female fans, the female fans judge other women more harshly and lament about the fact that new women at shows add a softness to the scene. In one interview, a female participant made attempts to separate "female metal heads" from feminists in a discussion about a group of feminists who protested a band (named Anal Cunt). The participant acknowledged that she does not like the band and would not book them, and part of that was because she did not want a group of "feminist lesbians" to try and start a riot. In juxtaposition to this, her claim is that a female metal head would react to actual action on the misogynistic lyrics in a tough kind of way, shrugging it off and maybe even punching the person who tried.⁵⁷ There is a current of promoting strong women among female fans, even to the extent of chastising women who show weakness. However, feminism for many is linked with attempts to censor metal, and therefore identifying as feminist for women in the scene is often problematic for them.

Thus, mentions of feminism in metal are usually met with hostility. Feminists are viewed as people who are not allies to the scene, and as actively hostile towards it. They are often described as "weak," "oversensitive," and other characteristics which are not desirable to fans of metal. There are also metal fans who ascribe more lewd descriptors and show a more intense dislike of feminism. References to feminists as "feminazi's" or "feminist lesbians" are not uncommon. At least one participant in her study, though, identifying herself as a feminist (and an anarchist), discussed the difficulties she faced when grappling with the misogyny in the lyrical content of many death metal bands. While she did not think those lyrics would translate to action on the part of any of the members of the bands or fans, and did not support censorship, the lyrics are nevertheless something she views as a problem. She did not forward any kind of suggestions

⁵⁶ Christa D'Angelica, "Beyond Bikini Kill: A History of Riot Grrrl, From Grrrls to Ladies" (Master of Arts diss., Sarah Lawrence College, 2009).

⁵⁷ Sonia Vasan, *Women's Participation in Death Metal Subculture* (PhD Diss., University of Houston, 2010)

for how to deal with the problem, but mentioned that it is something she is personally struggling with.⁵⁸ So, while there are some women who identify as feminist within the scene (myself included), feminism is generally met with indifference at best or hostility at worst.

This lack of feminist participation, or willingness to identify as feminist, is harmful to all fans of metal and to the overall cause. It is lofty to suggest that every person should be a feminist (though they should), but the hostility towards feminism within the metal scene prevents many from identifying with feminism. The harm that is done here is that autonomy is more difficult to protect when the problem of autonomy being damaged by sexism is not being acknowledged. Being hostile towards feminism, or being afraid of backlash for identifying as one, makes women (who have the most obligation) more hesitant to resist the behaviour which is harming their and other women's autonomy. If feminism is viewed as the evil it is perceived as by men, this also means that most of the members of a scene are also less likely to step forward and act on their duty to dismantle the patriarchy and protect women's autonomy. It is difficult to fight something that is not seen as a problem.

Overall Vasan's participant interviews provided some insight into internalized misogyny, how females interact with each other in metal, and metal's tenuous relationship with feminism. The women interviewed supported the notion of women being actively involved in the scene as fans and musicians, and dispelled some sexist notions of why women do not participate that they had heard (such as "women can't growl" or "women are too emotional").⁵⁹ Some indicated that the misogyny was problematic for them, and that it was a struggle which they dealt with (albeit quietly), but they ultimately did not see it as affecting their participation. Simultaneously, the dress of other women and their motivation for participation appeared to be of prime importance to the women interviewed, as they saw themselves as real fans and part of the scene; whether a woman is taken seriously by both male and female fans hinges on whether one conforms to more masculine dress or whether they appear to be "groupies." The women shared a few hostile words about women who were viewed as groupies in the interviews, but the attitude was one of at least indifference, and at most, ridicule. Despite there being some instances of feminist identification, there was little action being taken to promote feminism, and even fewer reactions were elicited

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

when discussion of sexism was brought up in the interviews. Many either appeared to show some sort of indifference toward sexism or ignored it, or those who saw it as a problem were not sure how to act.⁶⁰

The complicated reactions to this topic are common when it comes to media and popular culture in general; the inclination is to not consume or support media which is offensive to one's beliefs, because supporting it is perpetuating it. The problem with this kind of attitude, though, is that first it assumes that a person can stop liking something in the first place, and in the second place, creates guilt in those who do still like something despite it being against their beliefs and values, or directly harming their autonomy. The Rolling Stones created some feminist guilt amongst feminist rock scholars and fans; songs like "Under My Thumb" (which is about sexual assault) or their famous billboard advertising the album *Black and Blue* which depicted a woman tied up, and covered in bruises with the caption, "I'm Black and Blue for the Rolling Stones – and I love it" made it difficult for feminist fans of their music to *be* fans of their music without some sense of underlying guilt. Theodore Gracyk addressed this in his book *'I Wanna Be Me: Rock Music and the Politics of Identity* saying that it is difficult to be a fan of rock music without liking the Rolling Stones, but reconciling that with not supporting domestic abuse, for instance, can be tough.⁶¹ While Gracyk did not provide a fully worked-out solution, his view is consistent with and further adds weight to the claim that we must be critical of the media we love.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Theodore Gracyk, *I Wanna Be Me: Rock Music and the Politics of Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 174-176

Chapter 2: Metal Scholarship's Gender Essentialism Problem

With the problem now laid out in broad strokes, including the obligation to confront sexual harassment, this chapter will address the work of academic scholars who address sexism more broadly, with the goal of demonstrating that important scholarship on rock and metal has failed women fans by othering them and diminishing their autonomy. Popular music studies is a recent area of academic research, especially work directly related to metal music itself. However, there is a large oeuvre of gender research in relation to rock, and metal. The aim of this chapter is to present the works of key scholars in the formation of metal/rock scholarship and evaluate their respective works, focusing on the ways their work fails women fans by continuing traditions of oppressive gendering, or diminishing the importance of the study of gender altogether. In the previous chapter, it was established that sexism harms women by damaging their autonomy and that there is an obligation to confront that sexism. In this chapter, I will show that the gender essentialism which is present in metal scholarship also contributes to damaging the autonomy of women. In the first section I will give a brief taxonomy of gender essentialism. In doing so I will focus on kind essentialism, which is the most commonly used form of essentialism, and how kind essentialism is harmful and damages women's autonomy. Each subsequent section of this chapter will outline the argument of a scholar whose works provide interesting insights but are nevertheless problematic because they are based in kind essentialist views of gender.

First, however, I will provide the framework within which much of this scholarship exists. Understanding the theoretical context within which these scholars are based is important to evaluating the work of the scholars themselves. This is important because previously much of the research was based in a negative view of metal; it was not critical in order to properly understand the music itself or the culture around the music, but rather it was critical of rock and metal music as being problematic in and of themselves. Instead, rock music (in this case metal) is important to both Weinstein and Bayton. There are plenty of scholarly works that criticize rock and metal from the outside without much intimate understanding of the music itself, but this is not the case for these scholars. Even for scholars who are fans of the music, though, rock and metal are and have always been considered a male domain; this fact is *prima facie* obvious when looking through any magazine and/or the internet when looking at pictures of rock bands. The most famous rock bands in history, the Rolling Stones for instance, are all male. This maleness persists in both the production and consumption of the music, with most bands being made up of men and most fans also being men. As described in the previous chapter, most domains associated with fandom (such as record collecting or magazines and other press) are also dominated by men.

Moreover, rock music differs aesthetically from other forms of music because of its sound. Rock music is dominated by the use of the electric guitar and power cords, meaning that the music is played loud and has a raw power to it. The more extreme rock gets, the more this becomes the case. The electric guitar's importance is often seen by many as the ultimate symbol of masculinity, and therefore music dominated by the electric guitar is coded as masculine, and attitudes within rock are masculinist. These masculinist attitudes are reflected in the lyrical content of the music itself, with many pointing to the Rolling Stones as an example. Songs like "Under My Thumb," "Brown Sugar," and "Stupid Girls" are cited as the most explicit examples of misogyny in rock music, and the Rolling Stones' stage presence and general attitude as explicitly masculinist.

Metal, while technically rock music, is often an extreme version of whatever is happening in rock. If rock is masculine, then metal is hyper masculine. If rock is powerful and aggressive, then metal is more powerful and more aggressive. The electric guitar maintains its importance to the music, and is arguably even more central to metal than to generic rock. While

acoustic instruments might make a brief appearance in a prelude to a song, there are no acoustic metal songs. It is part of metal identity to focus on the extreme; anything not considered “hard” enough is often rebuked as inauthentic or “not metal enough.” Gender is also tied up in metal identity, as metal scholar Keith Kahn-Harris addresses metal identity in his article “‘Coming out:’ Realizing the Possibilities of Metal.”⁶² In this article, Harris addresses how homosexuality is treated in heavy metal, and in doing so discusses one of the most famous cases of an openly gay performer in Rob Halford of Judas Priest. Harris sees it as beneficial to unpack the case of Halford and his widespread acceptance in the scene by using what he refers to as the identity triad of metal. The identity triad is the idea that metal’s identity is white, heterosexual and male. Harris argues that Halford’s acceptance upon coming out is a result of the fact that, while Halford violates one of the three pieces of the triad (heterosexuality), he still ticks two of the three boxes. For most popular culture scholars, the boxes of “white” and “male” are the two most important.⁶³

The identity triad is a convenient way to summarize metal identity, because statistically it holds true. Rock and metal have been primarily the domain of young, white males. Class is also added into the mix, as it is generally seen that it is the domain of working class young males. While the working class is represented both in fan bases and in the case of some musicians, it could be argued that the working class is not the dominant demographic. Age is probably the most important factor, rather than class, as metal fans are often a diverse group of classes. Most metal fandom peaks in teenage to young adult years because the content speaks to this age group the most. The aggressive aspects of the music certainly speak to teenage angst. Like all group identities, metal fandom is an amalgamation of numerous intersections of class, race, and gender. This is the point that Harris ultimately gets at with his conception of the identity triad in his article, but it also helps to explain the context in which the discussion of metal takes place for many scholars. The notions of metal as white, male, and heterosexual are engrained deeply in the understanding of what metal is; it is the most traditionally accepted view of what metal identity is. Challenges to this view are mounted, but the traditional view of metal as white, heterosexual,

⁶² Keith Kahn Harris, “‘Coming out:’ Realizing the Possibilities of Metal,” in *Heavy Metal, Gender and Sexuality: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Florian Heesch and Niall Scott (London: Routledge, 2016), 27.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

and male is the context for much of the scholarship. White, male, heterosexuality is considered to be “essential” to metal identity, and therefore the following scholarship is based in essentialism.

2.1: What Is Gender Essentialism?

In her book *Feminist Metaphysics*, Charlotte Witt dedicates a chapter to figuring out what exactly gender essentialism is.⁶⁴ The purpose of said chapter is to sketch a taxonomy of essentialisms to clarify what is at stake in an argument between gender essentialists and anti-essentialists. Gender essentialism is often subject to attack in feminist criticisms. The other purpose of her chapter is to distinguish between types of essentialism, with a special focus on the types of essentialism that are harmful. This is important, because some forms of gender essentialism may not in fact be problematic, or subject to the same feminist criticisms of essentialism.⁶⁵ While not all forms of gender essentialism are necessarily harmful, some are, and in this section of this chapter I will, following Witt’s lead, demonstrate how gender essentialism can be harmful, and why the existing literature on gender in metal, which I will explore in the following sections harms women by using gender essentialist language.

Witt first distinguishes between two kinds of essentialisms: individual and kind.⁶⁶ Kind essentialism determines what is essential to a group, or kind: in the case of gender, the kind being referred to is a person’s gender.⁶⁷ Individual essentialism deals with what is essential to individuals. Kind essentialism is the essentialism which is most commonly criticized by feminists, and it is often seen as the most harmful. In other words, the essence in this type is a property that members must possess which determines kind membership. This type of essentialism is often the type described when a definition of gender essentialism is provided in anti-essentialist literature. The common definition is that gender essentialism refers to the attribution of a fixed essence to a gender. In this definition, which is kind essentialism, gender is

⁶⁴ Charlotte Witt, “What Is Gender Essentialism?,” in *Feminist Metaphysics*, ed. Charlotte Witt (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2011), 11–25, doi:10.1007/978-90-481-3783-1_2.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Charlotte Witt, “What Is Gender Essentialism?,” in *Feminist Metaphysics*, ed. Charlotte Witt (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2011), 11–25, doi:10.1007/978-90-481-3783-1_2.

the “kind” which is being referred to.⁶⁸ Gender essentialism about women presumes that there is a universal and fixed essence to women, and is usually identified with characteristics which are viewed as being feminine in their nature. Distinguishing kind essentialism from other essentialisms is important to Witt’s project, because she is not an anti-essentialist, but is not in favour of kind essentialism.⁶⁹ When essentialism is criticized there is often little distinction in the type of essentialism being criticized, and as Witt points out, that can be misleading. It is important to be specific when criticizing essentialism, and it is specifically kind essentialism about gender needs to be criticized.

Kind essentialism is the usual target of anti-essentialist critiques, because kind essentialism is usually understood as harmful, and that essentialism is false. There are two main arguments against kind essentialism: first what Witt refers to as the core argument, and second what she refers to as the exclusion argument. The core argument against kind essentialism is that those who advocate for gender essentialism (in the case of kind essentialism) mistake what is social for what is natural.⁷⁰ Women and men form social kinds, not natural kinds, so those groups cannot be defined by a naturally shared property. Essentialists in the case of kind essentialism also mistake what is variable for what is fixed, meaning that there is little fluidity in their understanding of what makes up the masculine or the feminine. The core argument holds that the features which characterize women and men vary over time and across cultures, which means there are no features which are common to all women or men. Proponents of kind essentialism are often understood as making an appeal to biologism; biological descriptions are one way of specifying the essence of women, and an anti-essentialist reading of this equation is to read it “as a rejection of patriarchal conceptions of gender, which have tended to be naturalistic.”⁷¹ There is good reason to be suspicious of this naturalist position, as appeals to women’s nature or biology have been, and are, used to justify social and political injustice. It is common for women to be excluded from a job because they are deemed to be weak by nature, or that menstruating might somehow interfere with their ability to do that job. Being wary of appeals to biology is consistent

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Charlotte Witt, “Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Theory,” *Philosophical Topics* 23, no. 2 (1995): 321–344.

with that of theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir who have insisted that women are made and not born.⁷²

The exclusion argument is similar to the core argument, stating that even if women form a kind, women are a diverse group and therefore kind essentialism will necessarily exclude and marginalize some women by defining kind membership using properties that they do not have.⁷³ In describing this argument, Witt draws heavily on Elizabeth Spelman and her book *Inessential Woman*. Spelman's main argument is that feminist theory has reproduced the exclusionary practices of male thinking in the Western philosophical tradition. She says:

I try to show that the notion of a generic "woman" functions in feminist thought much the way the notion of the generic "man" has functioned in Western philosophy: it obscures the heterogeneity of women and cuts off examination of the significance of such heterogeneity for feminist theory and political activity.⁷⁴

Spelman argues that the essentialism which has found its way into feminist theory not only excludes many groups of women from consideration in its theorizing, but it creates a kind of double-privilege in that it excludes many women from both the object of inquiry and the role of inquirer, while at the same time placing other women at centre stage. However, Spelman does not suggest that feminism abandon gender studies altogether, and her argument is more meant to caution against facile essentialism as there have been plenty of political and intellectual abuses of the essentialism. Her argument is meant to encourage feminist theorists to listen to women who inhabit different cultures, and for attention to be paid to the political, both with regard to the objects of feminist inquiry and to the subjects who are inquirers.

⁷² Simone de Beauvoir et al., *The Second Sex* (New York: AVintage Books/Random House, 2011).

⁷³ Witt, "Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Theory."

⁷⁴ Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion of Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), ix.

Witt is not wholeheartedly convinced by either the exclusion or core arguments against essentialism as it pertains to her theory, as she is not an anti-essentialist. However, she does concede that they offer important criticisms against kind essentialism specifically. Witt does not advocate for kind essentialism, and recognizes that it poses a harm to the subjects of essentialist research. Appeals to what is natural or inherent allow for abuses to occur, especially in the discussion of women. For instance, it is argued by some that women naturally have less aptitude in science and engineering, and that is why women are underrepresented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Similar appeals to what is natural have occurred in the scholarship surrounding heavy metal as it is the case in other fields. When kind essentialist language is used, it is usually in reference to the inherent masculinity of heavy metal and rock music. The music is often coded the way it is because it is a loud and aggressive style of music, and as was highlighted in the previous chapter, a male dominated one. The role of women in rock and metal has been discussed at length in scholarship, and despite the intentions of such literature often being good, its starting point is often grounded in essentialism. The research question with which most scholars begin is usually about how women can appreciate or like masculine and misogynistic music, or be involved in it as musicians. What makes this essentialist is the coding of metal as masculine in itself. Metal is assumed to be masculine because of the traits which are associated with it, such as aggressiveness (and even loudness), and the understanding of those traits as masculine is essentialist. ‘Masculine’ sounds are only masculine because they have been understood as such, not because they are inherently ‘masculine.’ The following sections are an illustration of scholarship on rock and metal which is harmful to women because of its kind essentialist starting point.

2.2: Mavis Bayton

Mavis Bayton is a sociologist who focuses on women performing rock music, and deals with women as instrumentalists, or rather, the distinct lack of female instrumentalists. In her article “Women and the Electric Guitar”⁷⁵, Bayton examines nearly a decade of research into the subject, most of which consists of participant interviews with women in the UK. The key

⁷⁵ Mavis Bayton, “Women and the Electric Guitar,” in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender* ed. Sheila Whitley (New York: Routledge, 1997), 37-49.

question Bayton sets out to address in her article is why so few women embark on the career of electric guitarist. She provides useful insights into why this might be the case, however I disagree with some of her insights into the instrument itself, as she believes it is phallic in nature, as well as the underlying assumptions that metal is inherently masculine, which appear in the article. Despite the fact there are women performers, the female role in popular music has largely been as fan or consumer, rather than producer. Male idols are marketed at women as men they should want to date, rather than appreciate or emulate. Bayton argues that the introduction of the electric guitar left women excluded from the music world, and despite more and more women getting involved, they are still largely outnumbered. Her estimate for women instrumentalists in her area (Oxford, UK) is 2.4% of the total population.⁷⁶

Bayton argues that there are no innate reasons to explain the absence of women in the electric guitar world, as guitarists are made and not born. The focus on the electric guitar more than instrumentalism in general is important to her argument because the electric guitar is an instrument that is crucial to the rock aesthetic and sound, but like any skill, it is developed through access to the tools to learn. The lack of innate reasons for why women do not play electric guitar in larger number suggests that the reasons are social.⁷⁷ Bayton posits gendered socialization as possibly the best explanation of why so few women play the electric guitar. Women are raised to be ‘feminine’ and avoid ‘masculine’ activities. They learn what is feminine or masculine through family, school, books, magazines and other popular culture. With these assumptions about gender, certain instruments are then coded as ‘feminine,’ and when women are encouraged to play instruments, it is the piano or other instruments. In opposition to this, the electric guitar is coded as a ‘masculine’ instrument.⁷⁸

Bayton argues that even the first steps of learning the electric guitar force women to break with norms of traditional femininity, in that it is difficult to have long manicured nails and play the guitar.⁷⁹ This is the crux of the point for Bayton: it is difficult to remain ‘feminine’ and play the electric guitar in a band. Traditional conceptions of femininity assume that women do not sweat, their hair stays in place, and they do not strike masculine poses.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Other ways women are traditionally socialized to be feminine also include facing social pressure to get boyfriends, rather than encouragement to pick up an instrument. Male fans idolize their guitar heroes, and women are taught to want to fall in love with them. While men buy guitars, women buy posters. My previous chapter discussed in more length other barriers which women face in becoming part of the metal world, such as epistemological gatekeeping, and even threats of violence, and Bayton also cites these barriers as further keeping women from playing. Difficulty accessing equipment (including financial access), the time to learn, finding transportation for equipment, or having the space to play are all material barriers which may limit women who want to play electric guitar.⁸⁰ Moreover, men themselves also pose a barrier, as women are rarely accepted in male social groups. Music scenes are often social, and not being readily accepted acts as a way of discouraging certain groups from entering the scene. Bayton argues that this could be chalked up to socialization to some extent: both women and men feel an emphasis to hang out in like gendered groups, and social pressure prevents them from wanting to be part of another gender's social groups. When one tries to make the cross over, there is hostility and exclusion.⁸¹ Per Bayton, a major preoccupation of young men is establishing their masculinity, and their masculinity is preserved by the exclusion of women from their groups. Because electric guitars are traditionally a male instrument, women who endeavour to play are often met with at best negative attitudes, and at worst hostility. Bayton argues that if the electric guitar was a traditionally female domain, men would avoid it as they avoid other traditionally feminine activities like embroidery.⁸²

Bayton's main argument for the electric guitar's importance to masculinity is that the electric guitar is simply *seen* as male.⁸³ Bayton states that "the major reason [why women do not choose the electric guitar] is that the electric, unlike the acoustic guitar, is seen as 'male.' The skills involved in playing the instrument are perceived as 'male' skills, inappropriate for women."⁸⁴ Rock is associated with technology (new recording methods, electric instruments

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Mavis Bayton, "Women and the Electric Guitar," in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whitely (New York: Routledge, 1997).

⁸⁴ Mavis Bayton, "Women and the Electric Guitar," in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whitely (New York: Routledge, 1997), 43.

etc.), and a level of technological competence is involved in masculinity.⁸⁵ Men often use technical language as a power strategy to exclude women, much like the knowledge testing explained in the first chapter. The skills involved in playing the electric guitar (primarily technical skills) are often seen as male skills, and that further pushes the electric guitar into the realm of male dominance. Because these skills, and the instrument itself, appear male, women who do play a rock instrument are breaking gender roles. However, in doing so, women are also faced with the barriers described above, as well as low expectations for their performance. Women are not expected to be highly competent, and so their competency is judged on a different scale than their male counterparts, and they are less likely to be taken seriously overall. Bayton describes a woman with an electric guitar as being like a fish with a bike; it is not a tool the subject is expected to use and therefore their ability to perform the action with said tool is judged based on that notion.⁸⁶ To coincide with this point, Bayton posits that for men a good performance on the electric guitar is equal to being a good performance of their masculinity, and that this is true the heavier the rock.

Bayton's premises for her argument that the electric guitar is phallic are that the electric guitar is an extension of the male body, and heavy metal guitarists especially hold their guitars like a penis. The "power stance" which metal guitarists take is an exclusively masculine idiom. The shape of the guitar is phallic, but it is not only the shape but volume which connotes phallic power.⁸⁷ The louder the guitars, the more powerful they are. Powerful sounds are important to metal, and power is associated with the masculine. According to Deena Weinstein, whom Bayton quotes and I will discuss in a later section, power is the essential inherent and delineated meaning of heavy metal, and is culturally coded as masculine.⁸⁸ As guitars are easier to play the higher up the body they are held, the only reason, according to Bayton, that guitarists hold their guitars low to their bodies and close to their genitals is the encoded phallogocentric message; the higher up a guitarist holds their guitar, the less masculine it is.

The electric guitar is problematic in its present form for Bayton for two reasons. First, as outlined previously, it is masculine, phallic, and therefore a representation of phallic power.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Second, she argues that the shape of the guitar poses a problem for the female body.⁸⁹ She argues that technical objects are political in their design, which means that the electric guitar was made by men for men. This means that they necessarily function to exclude women, and for Bayton this is done so both by how the guitar is acceptably held (slung low below the waist), and that the shape of the guitar makes it physically uncomfortable for women. She posits that if mainly women played the guitar, it would perhaps be shaped differently to no longer be as phallic, and would make accommodations for the female body (primarily, the fact that women have breasts).⁹⁰ It would also then be acceptable to play the guitar above the waist, rather than having to emulate male guitarists and their power stance. While some women do set out on a career path as electric guitarists, they still face all the challenges of sexism, such as hostile male musicians, prejudiced promoters, obstructive technicians, sexist language and marketing, etc. More and more women are participating, and making their way successfully, but men are still the standard by which females are measured insofar as their musicianship is concerned.⁹¹

Bayton's article raises some interesting points, especially in relation to gendered socialization. This is well noted in research being put forward on the harmful impact of gendering toys.⁹² It is plausible that fewer women are interested in learning the electric guitar simply because it was never shown to them as a real possibility. This is not always nefarious on the part of guitar instructors or parents, but it is certainly plausible based on the small number of women playing the electric guitar, or any loud and aggressive sounding instrument. Bayton correctly points out that demands placed on women, make it difficult to succeed. There are more expectations of women, which means it is more difficult for women to commit to a career wholeheartedly (though this is not the case for everyone).

Bayton is correct in contending that women are underrepresented and that in many ways women have been kept out of the guitar playing realm by men. Much like gendering music, gendering instruments is social; instruments themselves do not inherently have genders, people ascribe genders to them. This is an important distinction to be made, because as Rita Steblin

⁸⁹ Ibid

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² See: Elizabeth Valerie Sweet, "Boy Builders and Pink Princesses: Gender, Toys, and Inequality over the Twentieth Century" (Ph.D., University of California, Davis, 2013)

argues, gender association with instruments serves to harm women as instruments are used as tools to enforce “womanly” behaviour, and can help to ensure male domination of art.⁹³ In part, I think that Bayton’s article does describe the male domination of art, as well as the oppressive behaviour women must face when endeavouring to play the electric guitar. Bayton does assert that the situation would be different if the electric guitar was considered a traditionally feminine domain, because it is true that playing the electric guitar in a rock band is not congruent with traditional notions of femininity. However, Bayton’s argument on this subject is hindered by the fact that, at times, she is also gendering instruments.

In her argument for the electric guitar serving to isolate women, Bayton also argues that the guitar is a phallic instrument. She provides little justification for why the instrument might be phallic; the only inference one can make from her argument is that it is phallic because it is mostly used by men and it is held in a “power stance,” which means the guitar is held low on the body. This criticism is interesting for a couple of reasons. First, it is interesting because Bayton mirrors a point brought up in Steblin’s article on gendering instruments. Women were discouraged from playing instruments like the violoncello because it was held between a woman’s legs.⁹⁴ Bayton seems to be critical of the apparent masculinity of the guitar because men play it in a sexual stance. Second, Bayton’s criticism of the stance itself damages her overall argument. The electric guitar is an unwieldy instrument as it is heavy and bulky. Bayton argues that the electric guitar is potentially damaging to women’s health and that it is uncomfortable to play; holding the guitar low on the body puts extra weight on the shoulders and neck, and holding it in its most comfortable position can cause discomfort as it puts pressure on women’s breasts.⁹⁵ This is true, but it is no truer for women than it is for men. Male musicians have long had documented neck, back, shoulder and other issues because of performing and playing the electric guitar: there is no denying that it can be an uncomfortable instrument to play.⁹⁶

⁹³ Rita Steblin, “The Gender Stereotyping of Musical Instruments in the Western Tradition,” *Canadian University Music Review* 16, no. 1 (1995): 129–37.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Bayton, “Women and the Electric Guitar.”

⁹⁶ Sabine D. Klein, Claudine Bayard, and Ursula Wolf, “The Alexander Technique and Musicians: A Systematic Review of Controlled Trials,” *BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine* 14 (October 24, 2014): 414, doi:10.1186/1472-6882-14-414.

This is not meant to diminish the importance of what Bayton is saying; however, it is important to note how this serves to reveal some problematic assumptions. It does this by relying on the very stereotype that is used against women: that women are weak and not meant to play that instrument (or do a specific task). While it is no doubt a barrier, and a potentially off-putting result of the guitar, it is a red herring in the overall discussion of why women are left out of the rock arena in regard to the electric guitar. Bayton herself states that there are no inherent physical reasons for why women are not as prolific on the electric guitar, and that guitarists are made and not born; therefore, it is disappointing that part of her argument for why women are not prolific on the electric guitar relies on physical reasons. It is a red herring in the overall argument because by focusing on the physical reasons, and reinforcing a stereotype, she is failing to focus on more crucial reasons. One such crucial reason for women being left out is one she only mentions briefly: women are most often excluded from sharing, participating, gaining, or circulating musical skills and knowledge.

Bayton provides useful insights into the gendered reasons behind the limited representation of women in the guitar world; but the starting point of her article is where the main flaw lies. Her investigation is based on the idea that rock and metal, and therefore the electric guitar, are inherently masculine; this is based in kind essentialist thinking about what is natural to masculinity and as a result serves to other women further. Wanting to show the difficulties women face when trying to play guitar professionally is admirable, as it is important to discuss the underrepresentation of women in areas like being professional instrumentalists, but basing the discussion in the context of the inherent masculinity of the genre of music and the instrument they are playing continues to keep women on the fringe of the conversation. If the electric guitar is essentially masculine, then it will continue to make women abnormal when it comes to playing the instrument as it can then never be anything but a tool of masculinity.

2.3: Deena Weinstein

Deena Weinstein, a sociologist at DePaul University, is a founding mother of metal-studies (the interdisciplinary field in academia focusing on all aspects of heavy metal). Her book *Heavy Metal: The Music and its Culture* was one of the first academic books published on metal,

surveying a variety of topics, including gender. The gender analysis in this work is scattered; only a small part of larger discussions rather than a focus. Weinstein's book is cited by numerous scholars in rock and metal studies. This is largely the case because much of Weinstein's focus on gender concerns metal as a hypermasculine space.⁹⁷ Her assertions regarding metal and its perceived masculinity are cited by most scholars when discussing gender/sexuality and rock music, including Mavis Bayton, discussed above.

Weinstein's importance to the field, then, justifies some discussion of her work on gender specifically, which came in a recent publication. In her article, 'Playing with gender in the key of metal,' which is the first chapter in a 2016 book *Heavy Metal, Gender, and Sexuality: Interdisciplinary Approaches*⁹⁸, Weinstein conducts a general survey of gender in metal, and how it has been approached thus far in metal studies. Unfortunately, her article is outdated primarily because of how she discusses the way musicians are part of a web of social relations: Weinstein fails to mention contemporary ways in which musicians communicate, such as the internet, and how those methods impact the discussion about gender.⁹⁹ Social media, unlike previous forms of social relations in music, allows bands to communicate directly with their fans which can lead to collective action via textuality (as is common in feminist spaces). Textuality is the quality or use of language characteristic of written works, as opposed to spoken works. Philosophical texts, for instance, are interpreted with careful attention to their textuality. Social media interactions are happening more frequently, with bands directly responding to their fans' concerns regarding how they are treated at shows. In one case, a female fan was sexually assaulted at a show, and the band reached out to the fan through social media to offer support. Social media has provided some bands an opportunity to deal directly with fans on issues of gender, and allows those bands to represent a shift from perceived hypermasculine male metal musician to feminist-aware. Not discussing social media's importance is a missed opportunity for Weinstein, as it provides

⁹⁷ Deena Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*, Rev. ed., 1st Da Capo Press ed (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000).

⁹⁸ Deena Weinstein, "Playing with Gender in the Key of Metal," in *Heavy Metal, Gender and Sexuality: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Florian Heesch and Niall Scott, Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2016).

⁹⁹ Amanda DiGioia and Lyndsay Helfrich, "I'm sorry, but it's true, you're bringin' on the heartache': the antiquated methodology of Deena Weinstein," forthcoming 2017.

support to her thesis that “culture does not occur in a social vacuum,” and further expands on the theme of her paper which is how metal artists “play with gender” in heavy metal.¹⁰⁰

However, it is further on in the article where her discussions of gender become most problematic, especially as she begins to tackle women’s place in the metal scene. Through much of the first portion of the article, Weinstein focuses predominantly on metal as a hypermasculine space, surveying the thrash and death metal scenes of the 1980s (it serves more as a historical lesson than much else), but later in the article she begins to discuss women in the power metal scene. Power metal, as noted above, is a genre of metal which is tuned higher, often features clean singing, and is widely considered to be more effeminate. Many have female vocalists. Finnish band, Nightwish, has achieved a large degree of commercial success over their twenty-year career, and is arguably one of the most commercially successful metal bands currently.

Weinstein’s analysis of women in power metal suggests that these women represent the opposite of what she described in her previous book as the ‘bitch goddess.’ The ‘bitch goddess’ is a term used to describe the women depicted in metal videos, usually in miniskirts and stilettos.¹⁰¹ The women in power metal are distinctively feminine in a more classical sense, and often look like opera singers (some, such as Nightwish’s first singer Tarja Turunen, are classically trained opera vocalists), and according to Weinstein are “icons for the female gaze.”¹⁰² Front women in bands are often role models and draws for female fans, which gives the front women a lot of influence over their fan base, and Weinstein does aptly describe women fans being excited by seeing women performers on stage, to use her words “owning it,” but she fails to provide much further analysis.

Weinstein also fails to capture in this representation of front women that women “owning it” is not something that comes easily. Because of the heavy policing of how women act and dress in metal, “owning it” is hardly an easy task. Weinstein asserts, “with the explosion of women on the metal scene, anything goes for women’s self-representation, from the angelic to the demonically aggressive.”¹⁰³ This claim that “anything goes” can be, and is often, refuted by other scholars through participant interviews. I will not spend too much time here on the myriad

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Weinstein, *Heavy Metal*.

¹⁰² Weinstein, “Playing with Gender in the Key of Metal.”

¹⁰³ Ibid.

ways women are not in a position of “anything goes,” as that was the purpose of the discussion in the previous chapter, but a participant in Sonia Vasan’s PhD research sums up the problem nicely:

“By dressing up like one of the guys, I was treated like one of the guys.” She expressed disdain for the suggestive attire of “band whores”: “If you dress like a slut, you’re gonna get treated like a slut.”¹⁰⁴

Instead of an anything goes attitude, women experience both misogyny and policing from external forces (male fans), but also deal with internalized misogyny. Weinstein’s approach is damaging because she claims that there is no longer a problem for women in metal. There are countless testimonies in media and scholarship that the environment is not one where “anything goes.”¹⁰⁵

She continues to argue that there is no longer an issue, arguing that:

“postfeminism shows a strong cultural indication that, at least for many younger women in the West, gender is no longer as salient an issue as it had been through much of the twentieth century. . . . As post feminism replaces feminism in women’s gender culture, some pressure is taken off men, who are in the process of adjusting to the new balance of power, rather than feeling constrained to fight it.”¹⁰⁶

The assertion that gender is no longer a salient issue is ultimately false; while there certainly has

¹⁰⁴ Sonia Vasan, “Women’s Participation in Death Metal Subculture” (PhD, University of Houston, 2010).

¹⁰⁵ Amanda DiGioia and Lyndsay Helfrich, “I’m sorry, but it’s true, you’re bringin’ on the heartache’: the antiquated methodology of Deena Weinstein,” forthcoming 2017.

¹⁰⁶ Weinstein, “Playing with Gender in the Key of Metal.”

been progress in gender equality, it is still clearly a salient issue, as backed up by myriad works, including those outlined in the sections above.¹⁰⁷

Weinstein also states that social and cultural pressure to accept women is taken off of men who are “in the process of adjusting to the balance of power.”¹⁰⁸ This assertion is troubling. While I have argued above that women have an obligation to confront sexism, men still share that obligation. Men have power within the patriarchy; even when they are not actively benefitting from it, they still benefit from it, and it is their obligation to use that power to the advantage of others. The claim that the pressure be taken off men both relieves men of that obligation, which is problematic, but also carries the sentiment that men are not important in changing sexist culture at all. This sentiment actively harms women because it continues to other them by further placing them as outsiders, while men are still assumed to be the “normal” in metal.¹⁰⁹ Not only are women abnormal, all the pressure is then placed on them to find their way to some level of acceptance, which, unless men also change, is not really acceptance but merely tolerance. Weinstein appears to perpetuate the construction of metal as hypermasculine by asserting that men have no obligation, and that is also harmful. The ideal of hypermasculinity is harmful to men as it also creates unattainable standards. Taking the pressure off men means that the onus is taken off men to treat women with common decency, and that is unacceptable.¹¹⁰

Furthermore, Weinstein appears to be making the argument that because there are more women in metal, research into the subject is no longer as necessary as it once might have been.¹¹¹ It’s a curious argument given that it appears at the end of the first chapter of a book dedicated entirely to the study of gender and sexuality in metal, so it appears to negate all the research it precedes. Secondly, this statement represents an outdated view of feminism. While this article may be recent, her feminism appears to not represent many of the shifts that movement has made. To entertain the idea of post feminism means there is a failure to acknowledge the privilege which necessarily exists in post feminism. It is often the case that post-feminist arguments serve to reinforce Western, middle class, heterosexual whiteness as the cultural

¹⁰⁷ Amanda DiGioia and Lyndsay Helfrich, “I’m sorry, but it’s true, you’re bringin’ on the heartache’: the antiquated methodology of Deena Weinstein,” forthcoming 2017.

¹⁰⁸ Weinstein, “Playing with Gender in the Key of Metal.”

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

norm.¹¹² Even with that aside, the argument for post-feminism in this instance reads as such: there is increased visibility of women in metal, they are shown a level of respect, therefore sexism must not really be a problem anymore. While there *is* increased visibility of women in metal, and *some* are shown a shred of respect, sexism persists, and asserting otherwise discounts the experiences of women who dealt with sexism from the beginning, and those who are still dealing with it now. It diminishes sexism to merely being able to participate at the most basic level, when there are other factors involved. Just because it is possible to participate at the most basic level and have some sort of visibility does not mean that other barriers do not exist, such as gatekeeping, policing women's bodies and more serious instances of sexual harassment and even sexual assault.

To analogize, this argument is like the argument that because the United States has had a Black president, the United States is now a post-racial society. This also negates the idea that racism is something deeper.¹¹³ While it is true that Barack Obama managed to reach the highest office in the land, it does not mean that prejudiced people or institutions have automatically died. Increased visibility of people of colour in positions of power does just that: increases visibility. The same goes for women in metal. More women participating in bands or as fans increases the visibility of their existence in the scene, but it does not make them anymore an equal of their male counterparts. Successful female musicians such as Angela Gossow (Arch Enemy) have done great work in making it possible for more women to follow in that path, but the sexism that remains despite their success has also shown why further discussion of sexism is important.¹¹⁴ When bands have a token female member, it reinforces the idea that women are not respected as autonomous beings, but are tolerated as being there provided they conform to male acceptability.

It is disheartening to see a recent publication like this one perpetuate much of the same gender essentialism which is pervasive in many of the earlier publications dealing with gender and rock music/metal. While Weinstein is arguing that masculinity and traditional gender roles are bending in metal, the assumption from which she is beginning is still that of metal as

¹¹² Jess Butler, "For White Girls Only?: Postfeminism and the Politics of Inclusion," *Feminist Formations* 25, no. 1 (2013): 35–58, doi:10.1353/ff.2013.0009.

¹¹³ Amanda DiGioia and Lyndsay Helfrich, "I'm sorry, but it's true, you're bringin' on the heartache': the antiquated methodology of Deena Weinstein," forthcoming 2017.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

inherently masculine music, as art forms are not essentially gendered. She claims that certain forms of metal represent a broken-masculinity, while others (such as extreme metal) are still playgrounds for the hypermasculine.¹¹⁵ When male musicians appropriate feminine looks, it is merely displaying a different form of masculinity, rather than promoting femininity in metal. The examples of female musicians are on stage “owning it,” are only doing so in the traditionally allowed ways: as vocalists, and in a genre of metal which is widely considered to be effeminate and less authentic. Weinstein talks about women’s involvement in metal as if it is something that is new, which suggests that she still views metal as an inherently masculine space where women do not naturally fit in. Rather than challenging the masculine coding of metal, Weinstein merely states that female musicians might be playing with masculinity and possibly challenging masculinity, but the starting assumption is still that metal is inherently masculine. Gender essentialism in this form is harmful as it damages the autonomy of those women performing, or in the crowd, because if metal is inherently masculine, then their place is always going to be limited. It is difficult to claim there has been progress in gender issues when the scholarship on those issues appears to have made little progress itself. Weinstein’s article missed opportunities to unpack gender in some insightful ways. Instead, much of the material Weinstein drew upon was dated, and the discussion of gender was proclaimed to be less necessary than before. At best, this is disappointing, and worst it is harmful.

¹¹⁵ Weinstein, “Playing with Gender in the Key of Metal,” 22.

Chapter 3: Uniessentialism, Rosemary Lucy Hill & Implications for Metal Music Studies

In the first chapter, I showed how sexist behaviour in the metal scene affects the autonomy of its women fans. In the second chapter, I addressed how scholarship surrounding rock music/metal sells female fans short by damaging their autonomy by using gender essentialist language. In this chapter, I will further the conversation about gender essentialism to show that, while kind essentialism is harmful, there is an alternative to anti-essentialism. Charlotte Witt presents an alternate conception of gender essentialism, and I intend to show that her alternative to kind essentialism and anti-essentialism should be the working assumption of critical metal studies to avoid damaging women's autonomy. In section one I will outline Witt's theory of unification essentialism, with the purpose of showing how it differs from and avoids many of the problems that kind essentialism faces. Her theory is useful because it highlights the importance of gender, and gendered experience, without making claims about what is natural to a gender. In the second section, I will provide an overview of Rosemary Lucy Hill's article titled "Masculine Pleasure? Women's Encounters with Hard Rock and Metal Music" in *Global Metal Music and Culture: Current Directions in Metal Studies* which focuses on female pleasure, masculinity, and heavy metal. Her article provides some important criticisms of metal scholarship and the essentialism which is prevalent within it, arguing that the pleasure women take in metal music challenges notions of the inherent masculinity of heavy metal, which is an assumption that is damaging to women fans. She believes that women fans are sold short by much of the scholarship because they are placed on the fringes of a scene which they have been part of since the beginning using essentialist

language regarding masculinity and heavy metal. Hill's research into women's pleasure in hard rock and metal shows a valuable way of looking at the subject of women's involvement in metal, because she begins from the question "why do women take pleasure in hard rock and metal?" rather than "why do women take pleasure in masculine music?" In the third section, I will show that Rosemary Lucy Hill's criticisms of metal scholarship are consistent with uniessentialism, as Hill's focus is on the pleasure which women take in metal music, and that gendered experience is important to understanding that pleasure and women's overall experiences. Hill is not asking why women like metal (as understood as masculine music), but rather is asking why women like metal music and how their enjoyment and experiences challenge the idea of metal as masculine music. This distinction is important because Hill is not beginning with kind essentialist assumptions about heavy metal, but rather a uniessentialist approach. Uniessentialism should be, at the very least, the working assumption of metal music studies so as to further the research of gender in metal without making harmful essentialist claims, and therefore protect the autonomy of women fans.

Section 3.1: Uniessentialism Explained

In her article titled "Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Theory,"¹¹⁶ Witt provides an in-depth explanation and analysis of the arguments against gender essentialism in feminist theory to disentangle several strands of thinking so that we could more clearly see what the issues are. While she does have some reservations about maintaining essentialism, she believes that feminists need to reconsider the adequacy of the basis on which the genders are thought to differ essentially.¹¹⁷ She posits that feminist philosophers need to switch their focus from determining the truth of essentialism to the tasks that are central to feminist theory. As Witt concludes, it is important to be aware of the ways in which gender essentialism has been used historically as a grounding for the inequality and oppression of women. She believes that we should use this fact to inspire us to direct our critical attention towards the connection between what we essentially are and what we should be, rather than using it to inspire us towards anti-essentialism.¹¹⁸ Witt's

¹¹⁶ Witt, "Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Theory."

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

aim is both to articulate that humans are uniessentially gendered, while acknowledging the contingency of our social institutions, structures, and norms. Uniessentialism or Unification Essentialism, is Witt's theory of gender essentialism, where gender plays a unifying role in uniting the social positions which individuals hold, meaning that gender plays a central role in the experiences of individuals.

Witt emphasizes the importance of differentiating between types of essentialism, as she is not anti-essentialist. Witt is not convinced that anti-essentialism is necessary, and believes that a form of individual essentialism, called unification essentialism, is viable. Her view is classified under what she refers to as individual essentialism. Individual essentialism focuses on a property or characteristic that makes an individual the individual that it is. In this sense, the essence is a property that an individual has essentially; it tells us what the individual is fundamentally.¹¹⁹ The question that individual essentialism is trying to answer is that of what makes an individual the individual that they are. Individual essentialism is conceptually different than kind essentialism, which means that Witt does not need to defend kind essentialism to forward her own view.¹²⁰ Witt, like many feminist philosophers, is wary of kind essentialism, as it has a history of being used to oppress women. It is helpful to her view to not need to defend kind essentialism as the point is to show that where kind essentialism fails, her theory of unification essentialism (uniessentialism) need not. There are two interpretations of individual essentialism covered by Witt: identity essentialism and her own account, unification essentialism. Individual essentialism is tasked with figuring out what is essential to each individual, as opposed to kind essentialism which is tasked with pointing out what is essential to a group, or kind. Identity essentialism, like uniessentialism, is a form of individual essentialism, meaning they both focus on the individual rather than a group.

First, identity essentialism deals with the question of what makes an individual the individual that it is, and is concerned with the identity of that individual.¹²¹ In other words, what makes me as an individual different from another individual person? On this view, the origins of that individual are relevant for determining identity. What makes this desk an individual desk is the material that it was made from. If it had been made from a different piece of wood, then it

¹¹⁹ Witt, "What Is Gender Essentialism?"

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

would not be the same desk. Identity essentialism begins with an existing individual and asks about which of that individual's properties are necessary for it to be that very individual.¹²² The properties an object *must* have if it exists at all are the properties that, if the object did not have them, would not be that very object. Witt associates this with Saul Kripke, who classifies necessary properties under three categories: properties of origin (a material object must come from the very hunk of matter it did come from), sortal properties (being a desk is necessary property of a desk), and properties of a substance (a material object must be made from the kind of matter it is in fact made from).^{123 124}

Kripke, as well as Anthony Appiah,¹²⁵ also use individual essentialism to investigate gender. In doing so, they make a distinction between our metaphysical/biological self and our social selves.¹²⁶ When saying that human beings necessarily come from the very same sperm and egg that we come from, Kripke is discussing our metaphysical/biological selves. If an individual comes from genetic material with XX chromosomes, then given the necessity of origin, that individual would not be them unless they were genetically female.¹²⁷ This can be contrasted with the social roles of being male and female; it is possible for a biological female to live as a man, and vice versa. Appiah develops the notion of the ethical self along these lines as a way to distinguish between metaphysical/biological and social selves. The ethical self is an individual with projects and a self-conception; when asked the question "but would it still be me?" the answer reflects our self-conception as social agents rather than an external metaphysical/biological self. For Appiah the question of gender essentialism is a question about an individual's ethical or pragmatic self-conception. While Kripke and Appiah's individual essentialism is one that Witt does not necessarily object to, it is conceptually different from her view as it addresses a different question. Where Appiah sees the question of gender essentialism as being fundamentally about an individual's self-conception, Witt believes that our self-conceptions are formed in relation to the social positions that we occupy, such as student or metal-head, and her focus is on the way those social positions are unified and organized.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Saul A. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, USA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).

¹²⁵ Anthony Appiah, "'But Would That Still Be Me?' Notes on Gender, 'Race,' Ethnicity, as Sources of 'Identity,'" *The Journal of Philosophy* 87, no. 10 (1990): 493–99.

¹²⁶ Witt, "What Is Gender Essentialism?"

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Witt's preferred view, called *unification essentialism* or *uniessentialism*, is a form of individual essentialism that borrows from Aristotle. Aristotle held that "the essence is the cause of being of the individual whose essence it is."¹²⁸ Both biological organisms and artifacts (desks, etc.) have material parts which are organized into an individual that is not identical to the sum of its parts. As a result, in both cases we can ask why the material parts constitute an individual, rather than merely a collection of those parts. Where identity essentialism addresses which properties an individual must have to be that very individual, unification essentialism (Witt's approach) addresses why a new, unified individual exists over and above a sum of parts, or materials.¹²⁹ The answer to this question is that the individual (both the biological organism and the artifact) realizes its functional property, or functional essence. Witt gives the analogy of a house: a house is the sum of many parts, and what makes that house a house is that it realizes its functional property of providing shelter. If those parts were arranged in another manner so that the house did not provide shelter, then it does not realize the functional property of a house, and is therefore not a house. A functional essence is an essential property that explains what the individual is for, its purpose, and what organizes the parts of that individual towards its end.¹³⁰ The origin of the functional property differs for artifacts, which have an external origin in the intentions and purposes of humans. The functional property for a house has its origin in the need for shelter by humans. For biological individuals, their purposes are intrinsic to them. To recap: uniessentialism addresses why a unified individual exists over and above the sum of its parts. It does this through realizing its functional property/essence.

Again, uniessentialism is a form of individual essentialism that is different from both kind essentialism and the identity version of individual essentialism. In relation to the former, uniessentialism is answering a different question than kind essentialism: the question of whether artifacts or natural beings are kinds is a different question, as uniessentialism explains why an individual exists as the individual it is, rather than as a heap of parts.¹³¹ Uniessentialism is also different from identity essentialism: the functional essence explains why an individual exists over and above its parts, but does not thereby secure its identity.¹³² Identity essentialism asks

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

what makes an individual an individual, which means that it is asking a different question than uniessentialism. Uniessential properties are functional properties that are realized in and by their material parts. This means that functional properties are relational rather than intrinsic; they operate in relation to the individual, rather than being intrinsic to the individual. Functional properties have a normative dimension because the function specifies what the object *ought* to do.¹³³

To relate this to gender, then, Witt seeks to show that gender is the unifying property of social individuals. Individuals hold various social positions simultaneously in life, such as doctor and mother, but gender unifies those positions. Gender is uniessential to the individual. Witt points out two features that are important to her application of uniessentialism to gender: gender is essential to social individuals, and gender plays a role in unifying the social roles of social individuals. First, Witt describes social individuals as those individuals who occupy social positions, and whose actions are bound by social normativity. Someone with the social position of doctor is bound by the social normativity of that position; a doctor should act in certain ways. Witt further defines social individuals as being social position occupiers who are agents capable of intentional behaviour and of entertaining goals and figuring out how to achieve them, and who act from a standpoint or perspective.¹³⁴ Social norms are not species based, unlike biological norms. Social individuals are more than just biological humans in that they necessarily exist in a web of social relations.¹³⁵

Second, there is the claim that gender provides a unifying role. In the case of an artifact, the functional essence provided by that artifact's creator unifies the material parts into an individual. To use Witt's example of a house, the building materials are unified and organized so as to realize the property of being a shelter for humans. Since we are discussing social individuals, Witt argues that gender is the unifier of the parts, those parts being social positions. Social positions are the positions of individuals in a given society and culture; these can include occupations, professions, roles in family and so on. Social individuals occupy multiple social positions simultaneously, and the question is what feature unifies these positions into a social individual. As Witt puts it, "a bundle of social position occupancies is not an individual, just as a

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

heap of house parts is not an individual house.”¹³⁶ Gender is a universal and fundamental social position that unifies and determines all our other social positions both synchronically and diachronically. While gender does not physically unify them, it unifies them by providing a principle of normative unity. I occupy all the social positions I hold, such as student, or employee, as a woman.¹³⁷

Witt further explains social individuals in a chapter of her book titled “The Argument for Gender Essentialism.”¹³⁸ Since social individuals are social position occupiers, and they occupy multiple positions, the question of their unity arises. Witt’s question asks how “the mother, doctor, and immigrant [are] unified so that there is just one social individual rather than a bundle of social position occupiers.”¹³⁹ The unity in question is not so much the unity of material parts, as in artifacts, but the kind of unity which is appropriate for social individuals. It concerns how the “various social roles an agent is responsive to and evaluable under are unified and integrated with one another so that what results is a normatively unified social individual or agent.”¹⁴⁰ The “parts” which need unifying are social roles and the norms attached to those roles. With nothing to unify those roles and norms, there would be no individual. What guides Witt’s argument for gender essentialism is the idea that the social roles associated with being a man or being a woman are organizing and unifying roles in the lives of social individuals. An individual would not be the same individual if their gender changed but everything else stayed the same; how we occupy positions is influenced by our gender.¹⁴¹

Her central thesis in this chapter is, first, that a social individual’s gender, and particularly the norms attached to that individual’s gender, provides the principle of normative unity for social agents, and second, that gender has normative priority in relation to other social roles in an individual’s social agency.¹⁴² Social roles have normative priority over other social roles in two ways: a social role has normative priority if it is first in importance (if it is the role whose normative requirements tend to trump the normative requirements of other social roles),

¹³⁶ Ibid. 20

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Charlotte Witt, “The Argument for Gender Essentialism,” in *The Metaphysics of Gender* (Oxford University Press, 2011), doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199740413.001.0001.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

or if it prioritizes (defines and organizes) an individual's other social roles.¹⁴³ If the lawyer who is also a parent enters into these social roles as a woman, then the norms she follows in these roles are unified and defined by her gender. Gender is a principle of normative unity for an agent, because the agent's gender norms have normative priority (in both aforementioned ways) in relation to the other social roles that agent occupies. An agent is first defined by their gender, and therefore the norms attached to their gender are of higher priority than the norms attached to other social roles that the agent occupies. If gender is the principle of normative unity for agents, or social individuals, then gender is unessential to social individuals.¹⁴⁴

Our social activity is intricately normative. Witt uses the example of determining what a person ought to wear in a given situation. As a female philosopher, she generally asks what she should wear on the first day of class, whereas her male partner asks what he should talk about on the first day of class. The "should" in their questions show that we are thinking about social norms, primarily what would be appropriate to the situation.¹⁴⁵ The differences in their "shoulds" reflect the gender differences in the social roles that govern them as academic philosophers. Social norms can generate conflict, as someone who is "both a woman and a philosopher might recognize that her gendered appearance norms lie in tension with the philosopher's traditional norms, which do not include concern for attire."¹⁴⁶ This conflict would not exist without the condition of there being a social individual, because in order for these norms to be in conflict there needs to be a social individual who is responsive to those norms. Social individuals can ignore this conflict, but it does not change the fact that social individuals are responsive to that norm. Ignoring it is still responding to it.

Norms are sometimes explicit; a doctor should "do no harm." In many cases, though, the norms and the process through which we "live up" to them are implicit and habitual. Sometimes the norms only emerge when we ignore them, such as using a dinner fork at a formal dinner when a salad fork is more appropriate. Social norms are complex patterns of behaviour and practices that establish what one ought to do in a situation given one's social positions and context. Witt explains that these norms are importantly public and shared, as they are established

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

by communities and not by individuals.¹⁴⁷ Social norms are “what my people do,” meaning one ought to do something based on their social role; a doctor ought to do no harm, for example. Social individuals occupy multiple social positions, and each position brings with it a different set of norms, and yet an individual requires an integrated or unified set of norms that tacitly or explicitly governs their social activity, perhaps even prioritizing some normative requirements over others. As Witt argues, the very concept of an agent requires normative unity because otherwise a single entity would not exist, but would be simply a collection or sum of social position occupiers and an associated pile of norms.¹⁴⁸

Witt contends that there is good reason to think that social individuals are agents for several reasons. First, social position occupiers have responsibilities in relation to the positions they occupy, and we generally assign responsibility to individuals rather than collectives (of social position occupiers). If a set of social position occupiers were just a collection, and had no unity, then there would be no reason for a professor also and simultaneously to be responsive to and evaluable under the parental social role (if that professor is also a parent).¹⁴⁹ Second, the examples of social positions that have been considered here assume the existence of individual agents.¹⁵⁰ The discussion has been about an agent occupying certain positions with the implication that the agent is an individual who might occupy a number of social positions simultaneously. Third, a social individual requires what Witt calls normative integrity, which is a blending together of discrete social roles. For there to be a conflict of social roles, an individual would need to be bound by each of the sets of norms in order for there to be a conflict of social roles.¹⁵¹ If, as Witt claims, gender is the principle of normative unity in societies, then the resolution of this conflict will reflect the gender norms of the individual. Witt’s example in this instance is a doctor who is simultaneously a single mother; the conflict which could arise would be a call in the middle of the night. The doctor may choose to not work on call at night, which would mean her maternal role “trumps” her role as a doctor. In arguing that there must be a principle normative unity for the social individual, Witt is not ruling out the experience of

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

conflicting norms, but rather providing a basic conceptual requirement for the experience of inner conflict.¹⁵²

The idea behind a principle of normative unity is that whatever additional social roles we occupy, we do so in a way that is responsive to what Witt refers to as a *mega social role*. This mega social role is prior to the other social roles, and prioritizes them. Witt relates this to Aristotle's ethics. At the centre of Aristotle's ethics is virtuous activity. A life of virtuous activity does not necessarily lead to happiness, but a life of virtuous activity is a life of human flourishing, which leads to the question of what human flourishing is, and therefore to the consideration of human flourishing as virtuous activity. Virtuous activity is the dominant element in a flourishing human life because it is prior to, and prioritizes, all of the other activities and goods. In this sense, virtuous activity is the principle of normative unity in Aristotle's ethics in that it organizes and unifies a flourishing life. The principle of normative unity in Witt's uniessentialism is gender.¹⁵³

To return to the mega social role briefly, the mega social role has two major conditions. First, the mega social role will exist as long as that person exists, making many other temporary social positions, such as "metal-head" unsuitable to be a mega social role. While some fans remain fans of metal their entire lives, it is certainly more of an exception than a rule. Second, the mega social role should plausibly inflect or define a broad range of other social roles. To borrow Witt's example, being a hunter or collector may be a life-long social role, but neither is a suitable mega social role because each is relatively isolated from other social roles; it is possible to be a collector or hunter without altering their other social roles, and we are not inclined to say that someone who gives up hunting is no longer the same individual.¹⁵⁴ The same could be said for the metal fan who moved away from metal fandom. However, Witt thinks that gender satisfies these conditions; it is almost always a lifelong social position.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Gender fits as a mega social role, however what is not clear is whether or not gender is the only social role, or whether multiple mega social roles can coexist. Another possible mega social role could be race, as it fits the same criteria as gender; it exists as long as a person exists, and actively effects social roles and positions of individuals. Furthermore, race and gender intersect for women of colour which leaves open the question of whether or not these two mega social roles coexist, or if one is more important than

Witt concludes by addressing the contingency of our social institutions, structures, and norms. According to gender uniessentialism, the property that is essential to social individuals is essential only relative to the actual organization of human societies, which is contingent. For gender to be essential, human society must be a society which genders social individuals. Given the current organization of human societies, gender is uniessential to social individuals.¹⁵⁶ The fact that it may not always be the case highlights the contingent nature of our social organizations and the relational nature of uniessentialism; as Witt puts it, “it is only in relation to the organization of a necessary social function (engendering) in human societies that gender is uniessential to social individuals.”¹⁵⁷ Witt dispels the notion that contingent properties cannot be essential, because the kind of properties that can count as essential and the context within which they are essential depends on the type of individual. Witt goes back to the difference between social individuals and artifacts: artifacts can only have essential properties that are relational, and these properties are only essential within a social and historical context, which is contingent. A house has a relational essence, as its functional essence is to provide shelter for humans and animals; that is a relational property. There exists a social world with houses, and in relation to the “house” social world, the function of the house is uniessential to it. Analogously, it is contingent that there is a social world with gendering, but in this case, social individuals are unified by their gender, and are hence uniessentially gendered.¹⁵⁸

Uniessentialism does, I think successfully, show both how individuals are gendered, as well as that our social institutions are contingent. Though gender uniessentialism is contingent on engendering in our social structures, it is the case that in our current social structures, people (and things) are gendered. Witt therefore provides us with a plausible alternate conception of gender essentialism which has the ability to articulate gendered experience while avoiding making harmful claims, as can happen with kind essentialism. The centrality of gender to individuals is important because, as will be shown in the next section, understanding gendered experience in activities like music without relying on kind essentialism is important to protecting the autonomy of those involved.

the other. The purpose of this project is to focus on gender specifically, but there is certainly more to unpack in the discussion of the mega social role, gender, and race.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

3.2 Rosemary Lucy Hill

Now that uniessentialism has been outlined, it is time to return to some more contemporary scholarship in metal music studies (MMS). The purpose of this section is to further underline the harm that kind essentialist language can have, and to show that approaching gender in metal research can be done in a manner which is more productive to understanding gendered experience in metal, which simultaneously has the effect of challenging the notion that metal is inherently masculine. Rosemary Lucy Hill provides a constructive and positive approach to dealing with gender in metal, which I believe should be followed because it does not perpetuate the same kind essentialist readings of metal, and protects the autonomy of women in metal. Her article, “Masculine Pleasure? Women’s Encounters with Hard Rock and Metal Music,”¹⁵⁹ poses a challenge to established scholars’ views of metal’s relationship to gender, specifically the perceived masculine nature of metal. While other scholars approach the topic through the lens of the inherent masculinity of metal, Hill approaches the topic through the lens that metal may be male dominated, but that does not necessarily mean that metal is therefore masculine. Her argument is centered around participant interviews, with the argument being that, when considering the ways in which women fans enjoy the music, it is possible to challenge the preconceived notion that metal is inherently masculine.¹⁶⁰ Hill argues that it is important to consider women’s pleasure, and how they enjoy the music, rather than asking why they might like something which is misogynistic and masculinist. Hill believes that women fans are not given the same benefit of the doubt as their male counterparts when being considered in relation to metal because they are always placed by their gender, which makes them an “other.”¹⁶¹

Hill asserts that the works of Weinstein and Bayton are useful in their own way, but they are all ultimately harmful to women fans in that they perpetuate the perceived masculinity of metal, which is a kind essentialist position. According to Hill it is “important to remember that ‘masculine’ sounds are only ‘masculine’ because they have been read as such: they have no

¹⁵⁹ Rosemary Lucy Hill, “Masculine Pleasure? Women’s Encounters With Hard Rock and Metal Music,” in *Global Metal Music and Culture: Current Directions in Metal Studies*, ed. Andy R. Brown (New York: Routledge, 2016).

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

inherent masculine qualities.”¹⁶² It is difficult to deny that metal or rock are male dominated, but it is important to challenge the perception of metal or rock as being inherently masculine. Hill argues that leaving assumptions about the masculinity of rock and metal unquestioned misses an opportunity to understand how both male and female fans make sense of the music.^{163 164} For Hill, “considering rock and metal as exclusively masculine eclipses women fans’ own interpretations that challenge the notion that the genre is only an arena for hypermasculine posturing, which excludes or demeans women.”¹⁶⁵

Women have been part of the metal scene, both as fans and musicians, since the beginning, so it is curious that metal is only considered a masculine pursuit. Doing so diminishes the accomplishments of the musicians, as well as the autonomy of those musicians and fans, because it ignores their very presence. Hill found in her own interviews that women fans used language that fit neatly within the “extreme” ideology of the genre; these are terms such as ‘fierce,’ and ‘heavy,’ and ‘powerful,’ as well as an emphasis on hard rock and metal’s authenticity against pop’s manufactured nature. These are all manners that are intrinsic to the ways rock and metal are understood as masculine. However, while they use these words, they were not limited by them in the same way that many male fans of extreme metal appeared to be, in that they managed to create other meaningful descriptions of the music. Their alternate descriptions do not fit the standard narrative of metal’s identity as white, male, and heterosexual, and therefore provide a challenge to the perceived masculinity of the music.

Hill also found that women provided descriptions which were different than those given by male metal fans of the music, which further challenged this masculinity. The women she interviewed described the music they were listening to in terms of its beauty and its ability to take those women on a journey of some kind. Many of Hill’s participants credited musical beauty with the power to expand their minds, enable them to think more creatively, or help them transcend above mundane daily life. One participant named Susan described listening to Led Zeppelin (her favourite band) as being able to “lift you out of the mundane. I mean cleaning or

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Susan Fast, “Rethinking Issues of Gender and Sexuality in Led Zeppelin: A Woman’s View of Pleasure and Power in Hard Rock,” *American Music* 17, no. 3 (1999): 245, doi:10.2307/3052664.

¹⁶⁴ Rosemary Lucy Hill, “Masculine Pleasure? Women’s Encounters With Hard Rock and Metal Music.”

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

ironing can't be anything but mundane, can it? So a well chosen piece of music just lifts you above that."¹⁶⁶ Another participant, Jeanette, described a performance of her favourite band as "visually absolutely stunning. . . [disturbing images] combined with extremely melodic, beautiful music in front of you, so it transports you as well."¹⁶⁷ These descriptions stand in stark contrast to the ways metal is typically described, which emphasize metal as masculine or negative. While the women did often mimic the language and attitudes that fit nicely with the perceived masculinist ideology of metal, these descriptions of the music as providing transcendence, or as beautiful, and other interpretations of music as joyous, all challenge these notions of metal as masculine. While it is difficult to say whether these descriptions are common, the purpose of Rosemary Lucy Hill's research is to show that if similar descriptions are used by women fans, we need to take them seriously as they can help to mount a challenge to metal's perceived masculinity.

Hill also briefly addresses the concern that one cannot be a feminist and still listen to misogynistic music. Hill argues that this concern is problematic because it stands to reinforce the perceived masculinity of the music. She states, "women's fandom cannot be reduced to understandings of women hard rock and metal fans as cowed by the music or as 'betraying' women or feminism."¹⁶⁸ Doing so sends the message that it is not possible to be both a fan of metal and hard rock *and* a feminist. By ascribing to particular qualities a gender, "the male dominance of the genre is maintained via the reification of male associated qualities and the denigration of those linked to femininity."¹⁶⁹ As a result, women are alienated and excluded from the genre, and there is a presumption of an underlying male norm for musicians and 'real fans;' it is important to not be feminine. As Hill further points out, when only these 'masculine' qualities are considered, metal appears to be 'naturally' associated with men. The problem is that these qualities are not exclusively available to men: aggression is not solely a male quality. What Hill is pointing to here is that masculine ways of describing metal, are not the only ones in which it is possible to describe it, and that the 'masculine' traits associated with metal are not

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

necessarily even masculine, as all humans can experience aggression. In this case, her participants were not discussing lyrical content, but musical sound.

Hill's article ultimately contends that a wider consideration of the pleasure women take in the music draws attention to the fact that it is a social process when we ascribe gender to qualities. Traits are not naturally gendered, but are socially given that meaning. The qualities that are associated with masculinity are not essentially masculine, such as power or aggression, just as qualities associated with femininity are not essentially feminine, such as caring or deference. When metal is thought of as masculine, this is the result of socially constructed understandings of gender, and not about the fundamental qualities of music. Examining this is important because it is not just a matter of giving a fuller picture of the pleasure women take in rock and metal music, but is necessary in order to challenge the "orthodoxy of the genre as masculine and therefore the naturalized hierarchy that places men upon the stage and/or positioned in the audience as the 'real fan' whilst women are relegated to the subordinate role of groupie."¹⁷⁰

Hill's research into women's pleasure in hard rock and metal shows a valuable way of looking at the subject of women's involvement in metal, because she begins from the question "why do women take pleasure in hard rock and metal?" rather than "why do women take pleasure in masculine music?" As Hill points out, much of the scholarship that exists places women on the fringes by questioning why women like such masculine music, rather than asking why women like the music for the music's sake, and without the inclination to ascribe only masculine qualities to the music. Hill is correct to point out that the gendering of music is a result of social conditions, rather than any gender characteristics being inherent to the music. The tradition of juxtaposing women's pleasure against masculine music is deeply ingrained in rock and metal scholarship, to the point that it becomes easy to only ask the question of why women would like such masculine or misogynist music. This question seems right, and interesting if one thinks of metal as inherently masculine, because it then seems odd that there are women participating at all; while women are underrepresented, they are still very much present. However, this implies that metal is only really for men. If the results of Hill's participant interviews show anything, it is that metal is not only for men, and is not naturally masculine.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

An additional harm, which Hill touches on, is that women's autonomy as fans is damaged. While Hill does not elaborate much on this subject, it can be inferred that women fans have their autonomy damaged because they are being treated as others in this context. They are not normal, because metal as masculine is the norm. Women fans are often treated as anomalies in a scene in which they have always existed because the music is seen as inherently masculine. As Hill states, "it is necessary [to take women's pleasure into consideration] in order to challenge the orthodoxy of the genre as masculine and therefore the naturalized hierarchy that places men upon the stage. . . as the 'real fan' whilst women are relegated to the subordinate role of *groupie*."¹⁷¹ This downplays a lot of the work women have done in the scene and also ignores the pleasure they take in the music, for the sake of the music. How they actually feel about it, or what it means to them, is less important than their reasons for liking 'masculine' music.

Othering women fans in scholarship is a way of damaging their autonomy in similar ways to how sexism in the scene damages their autonomy: their voices are deemed less important and their belonging is contingent on more than the mere fact that they like the music. The way in which gender is handled in the scholarship damages autonomy because the assumptions being made and applied to the music, and gender, are essentialist. Hill does call some works essentialist, but only briefly touches on it, as the focus of the article is on participant interviews and how they challenge the narrative, rather than the essentialism specifically. Hill alludes to kind essentialism by discussing the ways women are failed in other scholarship, in particular regarding the works of Weinstein, saying that "women fans have been reduced to unhelpful stereotypes."¹⁷² The ways which women are understood by these works can be understood as kind essentialist because kind essentialism can cause stereotyping by fixing traits to a gender. The "stereotypically feminine" woman is often meek mannered and always kind, and usually emotional. What Hill argues is that beginning our research from the standpoint of metal as inherently masculine necessarily leaves women out of the discussion, thereby missing the opportunity to understand how women fans take pleasure in metal, as metal is not the thing that has a gender, but the listener does.

¹⁷¹ Rosemary Lucy Hill, "Masculine Pleasure? Women's Encounters With Hard Rock and Metal Music," in *Global Metal Music and Culture: Current Directions in Metal Studies*, ed. Andy R. Brown (New York: Routledge, 2016).

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

3.3 Uniessentialism and Heavy Metal Research

In this section I intend to show that, while she does not make this claim, Rosemary Lucy Hill's approach in her research into gender is a uniessentialist approach, as it focuses on the gender of the person, and how that gender influences the individual's social roles.

Uniessentialism is compelling because it expresses the idea that my gender is constitutive of my being the social individual I am, because gender is interwoven into my social experience and identity. This view also intersects with my criticism of previous research that gender is being approached in the wrong way. While Weinstein and Bayton, for instance, intend to address gendered issues in metal, they are not necessarily seeking to understand how gender influences fandom or belonging in the metal scene past the point of proving that metal is masculine. In other words, women's autonomy is damaged because their gender is only important because it is in apparent opposition to the perceived ideology of metal. The way this damages the autonomy of women is that it places them on the fringes of the community; it puts a contingency clause on their belonging, and their opinions carry less weight than their male counterparts. Witt is correct in highlighting that it is important to distinguish between kind essentialism, which is most criticized in feminist thought, and other types of essentialism, as essentialism is not necessarily harmful.

Witt points out that gender essentialism has been used, and is still used, with the aim of oppressing women. The ways in which popular music is discussed, often still, is essentialist in its associations of music and instruments with gendered traits. To reiterate some of what has been covered in the previous two chapters, this is harmful because, to quote Rosemary Lucy Hill in the case of metal, it "sells women fans short."¹⁷³ The type of essentialism being used is kind essentialism, which is harmful primarily because it assumes what is natural about a gender. Kind essentialism in relation to women has been used to diminish women, as the feminine is usually associated with weakness. In terms of metal scholarship, that particular claim is not necessarily being used, but kind essentialism is harmful in other ways. Traits which are associated with metal music, such as aggression, are associated with masculinity, which leads to the perception

¹⁷³ Ibid.

that metal is naturally masculine. This is harmful because it “sells women fans short” by discounting their experiences unless they fit neatly within the perceived ideology of metal, which leads to some sort of confusion about why women might like something masculine. Instead, it is more useful to acknowledge that traits such as anger and aggression are in fact human traits, not male traits, and that metal can be described in terms which are not always considered ‘masculine.’ To reiterate Rosemary Lucy Hill’s point, music does not have an inherent gender but we gender it, and in doing so it necessarily excludes and others certain groups.¹⁷⁴

Uniessentialism is also compelling because it *prima facie* coheres with Rosemary Lucy Hill’s assessment of the problem of studying gender in metal culture. To return to Hill’s criticisms, they are coherent with Witt’s concept of uniessentialism because Hill is not saying that women’s experiences in metal are not gendered experiences. In fact, she is arguing the opposite, by asserting that gender is in fact important to the experience of the music that women have. Research into gender in metal often locates women in opposition to men, only understanding the experiences of metal as male experiences. In doing so, the research often fails to understand varied gendered experiences that oppose the narrative of the standard experience. There is very little discussion of how women take pleasure in such music. Understanding pleasure and women’s experience was the aim of Hill’s research, and in that research, she found that gender was in fact very important to how women reacted to and understood the music they were listening to. The women she interviewed took pleasure in the music in different ways than male counterparts, to some extent. The more striking commentary was Hill’s participant who said the music had a transcendental quality for her, helping her be above the monotony of her day to day life. Some of the details of that monotony, which she listed, were tasks such as cleaning, which are associated heavily with female gender roles of domesticity.¹⁷⁵ This highlights the fact that warrior masculinity is not the only experience which exists in metal, and challenges the understanding of metal as inherently masculine.

If gender is indeed a unifying quality of social individuals, then it would make sense that social individuals of different genders would have their own experiences of things like music. Given that being a member of a social scene, such as being a member of the metal scene, would

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

count as a social position, it would mean that I or any other woman occupies the social position of metal-head as a woman. Given the prevalence of sexism in the scene which was discussed in the first chapter, it can be said that the scene does not let one forget that one occupies the social role of metal-head as a woman or a man. That attention is not wanted attention, and is certainly enough to make most women fans not want to occupy that role as a woman, or at least contribute to the common sentiment amongst women fans that they wish they were referred to as just metal fans, rather than as different than their male counterparts. This wish is fair, as the expected social norms which come with occupying the role of metal-head while a female can be oppressive and often impossible.

However, even though many women fans of metal flout traditional social roles in order to participate in metal (arguably this is even a requirement), it is still a response to that role, which means they are still responding to the central role of gender in their lives. From a pragmatic, everyday life standpoint, this does not necessarily change much. Understanding how gender is unessential does not do much to dispel sexism or the harms done by sexism, but it does address the fact that metal music research damages the autonomy of women fans by subscribing to kind essentialist terms. What Hill does is challenge the reading of metal and hard rock as an arena only for hyper masculinity which demeans and excludes women. Doing so misses an important opportunity for scholars to engage with the ways which both men and women enjoy music, and also misses an opportunity to explore how gender is essential to individuals as part of the social position of metal-head. Importantly, if metal is only understood as an arena for hypermasculinity, it then supposes that this is what is “normal” and therefore others women and assumes women who do enjoy such music are not normal. This line of reasoning removes autonomy from those women, and diminishes their ability and right to take pleasure in the music.

Hill is critical of what she sees as essentialist views in metal scholarship, as it makes assumptions about metal music’s perceived masculinity, and how the feminine is then outcast and juxtaposed in a negative way. She suggests that metal is not binary, and that even metal scholars who seek to understand women’s place in metal with the best intentions do not take women metal fans as seriously as their male counterparts. Women participant’s answers to questions are only important insofar as they fit a narrative of metal as an inherently masculinist space, that only allows a certain place for women to exist, and that women should not like metal

because it is masculinist and misogynistic. It is a convenient narrative, and it is easy to go down that road, but if the aim is to understand gender dynamics and women who are in metal, then the aim should be to understand how gender does impact how people experience metal.

Hill is concerned with protecting the agency of women fans by seeking to understand how they experience metal (and hard rock) music. There are clearly women fans involved in the scene, and surely their experience is important in understanding the oft-asked question of why women like misogynistic music. That question aside, their experience is important. It is important because it could provide interesting insights on pleasure and how we understand it in general, how music is interactive, and maybe why it is a special medium. It is important because it could provide insights into how social roles influence daily life, and how that intersects with music and other popular culture. It also shows that there is more than just criticism. Sexism is harmful to women, and it exists in spades in the metal world, but there are plenty of women who prefer to continue enjoying that music and being part of that scene despite sexism and mistreatment. More and more women are entering the metal world as musicians, and the profile of women musicians is ever increasing. This presents plenty of opportunity to understand how gender plays a role, and it can be done without harming the agency and autonomy of those involved.

While anti-essentialism might be a good goal, it is not entirely necessary. Essentialism can be harmful, but as Witt's view shows, it need not be. Witt's uniessential view provides an opportunity to both address the problematic nature of much of the literature and correct how we approach the topic of gender in metal. It is possible to both acknowledge that gender is an important part in the way that people interact with the music, without making gendered assumptions about the music or the people themselves. Uniessentialism also suggests to me that Hill is correct in stating that music is not gendered, it is the people who listen to the music who are, and therefore it is people listening to the music who are gendering it. The characteristics associated with metal, and other music, are human characteristics which are social and not natural, fluid and not fixed. Acknowledging the centrality of gender allows us to consider how male, female, trans and gender fluid/non-binary folks all experience the music, rather than assuming that the male experience (which is the most recorded) is the usual experience, and all others are opposing, or other.

My aim is to reduce the harm done by the literature on gender in rock and metal that exists (as well as the harm done by sexism). I believe that adopting a uniessentialist view helps push us towards that aim: it allows for a better understanding of the relationship that women have with metal by avoiding the othering that takes place in a different essentialist approach, as much of the literature has done. Uniessentialism respects the agency of the participants in popular culture while acknowledging that gender is important and that the continued discussion of gender in relation to popular culture, and in all senses, is still pertinent. Overall, it is a more productive approach and assures the autonomy of women fans is protected.

It is important to protect the autonomy of women fans in metal, which means it is therefore important to examine and address the sexism which exists in metal culture. Addressing that sexism means acknowledging it, but also comes with a moral obligation to confront it. Carol Hay spoke directly of sexual harassment, but her argument is valid when discussing sexism at large as sexism serves to damage the autonomy of women fans in many of the same ways. After all, sexual harassment is only a small part of a big problem. However, if the autonomy of women fans is to be truly protected from all angles, this means that the scholarship which is produced in metal music studies is not exempt from analysis and criticism. Gender essentialism (kind essentialism in this instance) also serves to harm women, and others, because like sexism, it also serves to undermine the autonomy of women. In discussions of gender in metal, the sexism which exists is often the subject of discussion, and for good reason. However, if authors like Bayton and Weinstein centre their discussion of gender around kind essentialist assumptions about metal, then they are further damaging the autonomy of the women who they discuss and interview. While it is important to discuss the sexism which exists, as I also did, it is also important for future scholars to attempt to change the starting point for gender research in metal. This can be done through the use of uniessentialism, as demonstrated by Rosemary Lucy Hill. Hill not only challenges the perceived masculinity of metal music, she seeks to understand the pleasure which women take in hard rock and metal. This approach takes into account the importance of gendered experiences in the lives of metal fans, which reinforces the core of uniessentialism: that gender is the unifying principle of social individuals, and as a result we experience all of our social positions as gendered experiences. This is key, because this approach accounts for the idea that it is not music or instruments which are gendered, but the people who enjoy and play that music. Moreover, this view serves to respect and protect the autonomy of

women fans because it values their experience as equal to their male counterparts, because *all* gendered experiences matter and no one gendered experience should be considered the norm. Therefore, uniessentialism should be the working assumption of metal music studies in order to avoid damaging the autonomy of women.

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