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Hypermasculinity in the Heavy Metal Subculture

Whitney Doucette

California State University, Monterey Bay

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HYPERMASCULINITY IN THE HEAVY METAL SUBCULTURE

By: Whitney Doucette

Adviser: Dr. Armando Arias

California State University Monterey Bay

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Abstract

This study analyzes the dynamics of the heavy metal subculture through the lens of gender. Through fieldwork in the heavy metal culture, themes of discrimination against women were made notable. The sociology of gender, both subtle and conspicuous, was used as a theoretical basis for this research. The purpose of this paper is to study relevant aspects of gender in the contemporary heavy metal subculture. I conducted ten interviews with self-described fans of the music genre, as well as thirty participant observations in the environment in which they dwell. Themes of sexualization and ostracization based on gender expression were apparent. I applied the theory of othering by Simone De Beauvoir and “doing gender” theory by Zimmerman and West in order to examine gender issues within this subculture. To uncover the experiences of members in heavy metal community, I analyzed qualitative data that is ethnographic in nature. My findings revealed aggressive othering based on individual gender expression, specifically negative attitudes toward femininity. Although many participants reported negative aspects of the metal scene, they still reported a strong connectedness to the culture as a whole. This paper emphasizes the effects of hypermasculinity on women in the heavy metal subculture.

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Introduction

Gender is omnipresent in the human condition. It plays an imperative role in forming the context of social situations, particularly when analyzing culture. Culture cannot be properly studied independent of gender; therefore, the study of gender and hypermasculinity is necessary when examining heavy metal as a subculture.

To be broad, heavy metal music is a genre of rock music characterized by highly amplified distortion, extended guitar solos, emphatic beats, and overall loudness (Noyer 2003). Fans of this music have created their own subculture. Heavy metal subculture can be categorized as a culture of alienation. They take pride in distinctly separating themselves from greater society. Like with any culture, they have their own specific rituals, dance, and dress, which all stem from the heavy metal music genre. Members of the subculture attend metal concerts, buy metal albums, wear t-shirts with band names, and contribute to metal websites (Weinstein 2000). They often grow their hair long, get tattoos, and wear leather. (Weinstein 200). These members are predominately (white) males, creating a homosocial group characterized by male dominance.

I explored two main research questions through interviews and observations. Specifically, my research questions were: “How does hypermasculinity manifest in heavy metal culture?” and “How does hypermasculinity effect the environment of heavy metal concerts, specifically for women?” My hypothesis was that hypermasculinity in the metal scene results in sexism against women.

Hypermasculinity is the exaggeration of male stereotypical behavior, such as an emphasis on physical strength, aggression, and sexuality (Mosher and Sirkin 1984). This can be seen in the heavy metal culture through violent dancing, also known as moshing, and overt sexual

aggression. Hypermasculinity is largely intolerant of homosexuality, so it should be noted that male sexual aggression in this context is targeted specifically at females. It should also be distinguished that throughout this paper I will be referring to cisgender males and females.

To better understand the way in which hypermasculinity operates in the subculture of metal music, I will incorporate previous scholarly works and grounded social theories to expand on the analysis of my research.

Theory

In the context of this paper, I will be referring to gender using Zimmerman and West's social theory of "doing gender." The purpose of studying doing gender theory "is to advance a new understanding of gender as a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction" (Zimmerman and West 1987). According to Zimmerman and West, gender is behavior. Gender is a socially constructed set of norms ascribed to individuals at birth, based on their biological sex (Zimmerman and West 1987). However, these gender roles are not always abided by. Zimmerman and West argue that every human behavior is either conforming or rejecting your gender role (1987). In heavy metal culture, gender roles are strict. These strict rules are applied to individuals through social accountability. This is known as the accountability structure. "To 'do' gender is not always to live up to normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity; it is to engage in behavior at the risk of social assessment" (Zimmerman and West 1987). In other words, the accountability structure is the reinforcement of gender role conformity. Because the performance of gender is present in all social interaction, I maintain a framework of gender theory when studying the heavy metal subculture.

I also used the theory of “othering” to guide and inform my research. In Simone De Beauvoir’s book, *The Second Sex*, she formulates the sociological concept of “othering”. She describes how society views women as “the Other”, resonating with the cunning title. Women in society are often seen as second-class individuals. As Simone De Beauvoir writes, “No group ever defines itself as One without immediately setting up the Other opposite itself.... For the native of a country, inhabitants of other countries are viewed as ‘foreigner’” (De Beauvoir 1953). Historically, because the metal scene has been predominantly white, heterosexual, cisgender males, this theory explains how men may naturally view themselves as “natives” and women as “foreigners”.

Literature Review

According to Herz and Nordstrom, heavy metal culture is still predominately white and masculine (Herz and Nordstrom 2013). Herz and Nordstrom (2013) interviewed individuals, as well as groups, to uncover racial and gendered tensions in the heavy metal subculture. Through collection and analysis of qualitative data, they found that femininity is not widely accepted in heavy metal culture. They write, “While gender is a moveable position in general, women move their gender position to a greater extent than men, as they are forced constantly to adhere to the male values of the heavy metal culture.” (Herz and Nordstrom 2013). The environment of hypermasculinity in heavy metal culture works to exclude femininity, imposing its values on women. “If heavy metal is characterised as being male and ugly, then females must ‘ugly down’ and step away from their own gender group and the possibility of upholding classical female features in the eyes of the outside world.” (Herz and Nordstrom 2013) Women in the heavy metal culture are constantly trying to maintain their femininity, while simultaneously existing in an environment dominated by hypermasculinity.

Unlike Herz and Nordstrom, Heidi Rademacher approaches this concept from the opposite angle. She argues that women in the heavy metal scene are “undoing gender” (Rademacher 2015). She analyzes metal songs to reveal hidden sexism against women. She argues that because women in the heavy metal scene are so overtly sexualized, women are purposefully denouncing their gender roles and portraying themselves as more masculine in order to avoid being sexualized themselves. This is the opposite of Zimmerman’s theory of “doing gender.” Rademacher argues that women in the metal subculture are “undoing gender” by actively dressing, dancing, and acting masculine. In my research, I observed a strong disconnect between feminine women and masculine women. I believe Rademacher did not explain thoroughly enough that not *every* woman in the hardcore scene acts masculine. However, at the site of my research, there were more masculine women than feminine women. Rademacher would argue that this is in fear of disdain for sexualization.

Susanna Larsson dives deeper into the performance of gender and the idea of self-image in heavy metal subculture. She explains the tight-knit dynamic of people who are part of the “ingroup.” The ingroup is sociologically defined as a social group to which members psychologically identify (Larsson 2013). In metal subculture, the ingroup is mostly made up of straight, white cis-gender males, usually working-class. Females are rarely included in this context. We can use this finding to explain why women might be more likely to exaggerate their masculine qualities: to be included in the ingroup. Henri Tajfel’s and John Turner’s social identity theory of positive distinctness explains an individual’s desire to obtain membership in the ingroup (1979). Positive distinction theory states that individuals will always strive for a positive self-concept within a group context. Inclusion is necessary for respect. Respect is necessary for power. Power reflects status, image, and self-identity. To fit with the metal

ingroup, masculinity is a necessity. Therefore, women act as a reaction to men's perceptions of them to obtain inclusion.

Likewise, Robert Walser conducted a study on the myriad ways in which women may over-accentuate their false masculinity to be accepted in the metal music scene (2014). Walser explains the power dynamics of men over women in the heavy music subculture. Specifically, in the cultural ritual of hardcore dancing, also known as moshing, women are excluded from the dance floor, also known as the "pit." Walser (2014) focused on heavy metal music and dance in his explanation and observation of gendered power relations. He argues that the lyrics in heavy metal songs are inherently masculine; therefore, it is only natural that all individuals, regardless of gender, will act out in masculine ways (Walser 2014). When the songs promote masculinity through lyrics, masculine dance is expected. However, I would argue that even women who dance aggressively are often shunned, or not treated equally in the context of the mosh pit. Through my observations, I saw women who were dancing aggressively still being positioned on the outside of the pit.

Although most scholars have observed and analyzed the heavy metal music scene as male-dominated, Brian Hickam and Jeremy Wallach (2011) think otherwise. In their article, Hickam and Wallach (2011) argue that even though the metal scene is predominately male, there are many women in the metal scene that have flourished and should be recognized. By ignoring women in metal, scholars such as Robert Walser are denying the existence of female metalheads altogether. Contemporary research and articles about heavy metal, as we have seen, focus on women's victimization in the heavy metal scene (Larsson 2013, Ziv and Sagi 2008, Millar 2008). Hickam and Wallach (2011) approach this from a different angle, giving visibility to women scholars of metal music and culture. Hickam and Wallach cite women such as Deena Weinstein,

Donna Gaines, and Emma Baulch. These women are not only known in the music scene for their scholarship in the sociology of the metal scene, but are also looked up to as representatives of inspiration, hope, and proof that it is possible to maintain one's femininity while enjoying hardcore music and its accompanying scene. These women are powerful indications that it is possible for the heavy metal scene to include women. Through researching the restraints of gender roles in this context, we can break gender barriers of the heavy metal culture to include all peoples.

Georgina Gregory (2012) agrees with Hickam and Wallace. She argues that women can make the metal scene less hostile by performing in metal tribute bands. By reversing their gender roles, women can be accepted by the male-dominated culture. In this article, Georgina Gregory claims that cis and transwomen alike can resist stereotypes and dominant culture through performance in tribute bands. Because the heavy metal scene values hypermasculinity and enforces a patriarchal substructure within the greater society, cis and transwomen in the scene rebel against gender norms. This can be achieved by paying tribute to popular metal music through onstage performance along with knowledge of metal bands and their history (Gregory 2012). In this article, Georgina Gregory claims that all women belong in the metal scene. She offers solutions and examples of acceptance. I would argue that rather than proving her point, these examples work against her. Citing these instances when women were accepted proves that, rather than organically being immersed in the culture, women are forced to earn the acceptance of men. This is an extra obstacle that women must maneuver to gain equal respect. Because heavy metal is a male-dominated culture, men naturally assume membership to the ingroup (Larsson 2013).

Another reason women are ostracized in the metal music scene is the “metal girl” stereotype. According to Naomi Ziv and Gilat Sagi (2008), stereotypes are often created based on music preference alone. The “metal girl” stereotype is one of high sexual promiscuity, drug and alcohol abuse, and low wages/unemployment. This leads men to hypersexualize women who listen to metal music. Without respect, women cannot fully be accepted in the heavy metal scene. Commonly, they are used as symbols of status for men, but are not seen as “metalhead equals”. Through the use of the female body as a sexual object depicted on album covers, to the usage of women dressed scantily to sell merchandise at concerts, women are used as sex symbols to promote the male agenda. Although promiscuity, drug/alcohol abuse, and unemployment are common factors in the metal scene, the “metal girl” stereotype is detrimental to the inclusion of women in the heavy metal scene. Gilat Sagi and Naomi Ziv (2008) examined stereotypes based on physical appearance and musical preference. Their study showed that music preference shapes the way people present themselves (Sagi and Ziv 2008). Being a member of the heavy metal culture also means presenting oneself as a member of that community. Band t-shirts, leather, and dark makeup are popular in the metal scene. When someone presumes a woman is a metal music fan, they create assumptions about that individual. The “metal girl” stereotype ultimately results in discrimination and/or hostility against women in the heavy metal music scene.

Similar to my approach on the study of metal subculture, Diana Miller (2016) applies a gendered lens to heavy metal social relations. Miller focuses on the gender dynamics. She notes the different gender expectations of men and women in the metal subculture. Men are expected to exert dominance and status in order to compete with other men. This is done through displays of violence and aggression. Meanwhile, women are expected to present themselves sexually and

to dress scantily (Miller 2016). From my observations at heavy metal music venue, I have seen these gender expectations firsthand. These expectations and reciprocatory displays of gender work to maintain and reinforce strict gender roles, resulting in a skewed power dynamic with men at the top and women at the bottom.

Although the discrimination of women in the metal scene is obvious to outside observers, it is common that people affiliated with the metal scene do not recognize it. Brent Millar (2008) surveyed men and women regarding gender biases in metal music. He found that gender socialization played a role in individuals' misconceptions of equality in the hardcore scene. Although the lyrics were sexist, both men and women denied gender discrimination in metal. This shows the power of socialization and self-identity. Individuals who identify as "metalheads" most likely do not want their musical preference to be referred as "sexist." However, the sexism is clear in the lyrics of metal music.

Hill (2014) argues that because the heavy metal scene disregards women, many female fans consider themselves a part of the "imagined community." Criticizing the breadth of previous research that fixated only on the physical aspect of being involved in metal culture, Hill views community through attributes of emotional and personal identity. Focusing on the female experience, Hill uses a social constructionist approach to explain how females opt out of physically being at metal concerts or events, but still identify as members of the metal community through shared ideologies and interests. Because females feel that the metal scene is a hostile environment for women, many do not feel comfortable being physically positioned in those spaces (Hill 2014). Hill contends that the imaginary community "...enables the examination of the feeling of community that fans report, and also how that sense of community is generated within the metal media" (2014). Hill argues that female fans are not able to express

their fandom publicly, without fear of retaliation, judgement, or sexualization. On the other hand, men are encouraged to be open about their fandom. To fully grasp the true sense of community felt by women, we must look at metal subculture within the frame of imaginary community. Female metal fans may suppress their fandom publicly, but express their fandom emotionally.

Riches (2011) takes a closer look at a common dance ritual in the subculture of metal music: moshing. Specifically, Riches explains how women maneuver around and through this male-dominated practice. She begins by defining moshing. She writes, “Moshing is a ritualized and furious form of dancing which combines physical aggression with collective displays of emotion” (Riches 2011). She argues that women have been excluded from previous studies of moshing. She explains how women use moshing as a tool to be viewed as equals in the subculture. Women often take on masculine traits in their dance moves, slamming into other fans. She argues that this is a way women take power back from this male-dominated space and make themselves visible.

Riches (2011) applies leisure theory to mosh pits. She argues that mosh pits are a space of leisure for men. Men are spatially in the mosh pit or right next to it because they are accepted by the group that is moshing. Meanwhile, women are spatially positioned far away from the mosh pit, showing a sense of non-belonging. Spatial positioning is important in understanding latent attitudes towards individuals by the ingroup. During my observations, this was a common occurrence. There is power in social space. The marginalization of women in the heavy metal community is physically apparent when observing a mosh pit. Men hold the social power in the front row and in the mosh pit. Women are forced to the sidelines, physically reflecting their place within the community.

In conclusion, women must push boundaries to be culturally accepted in the heavy metal scene. Previous studies have shown that discrimination and marginalization of women is apparent. In my study, I will shed light on the gender differences in this culture and bring attention to the sexism and ostracization of women. Through my observation and analyses of the gender differences in heavy metal culture, we can strive for a more inclusive and women-friendly public sphere.

Methodology

For my research methods, I collected data through participant observation and qualitative interviewing. Participant observation is when a “sociologist actually becomes a part of the group they are studying in order to collect data and understand a social phenomenon or problem.” (Loftland and Loftland 2006). The goal of this methodology is to gain familiarity with the members of the heavy metal subculture to deepen my understanding of their behavior and experience. To gather this data, I attended metal concerts at The Catalyst in Santa Cruz, California and took notes of the intricacies of the culture. I began my data collection on February 2nd, 2018. I completed my data collection September 29th, 2018.

Being familiar with the culture, I was already accustomed to the general atmosphere and practices. Therefore, most of my evidence comes from participant observation, which is an extremely powerful tool in social and behavioral sciences. To gain an access point to potential respondents, I dressed to be socially compatible with the members of this community. Every show I attended, I wore the same black jean jacket. Worn patches of familiar band names started conversation easily. The presence of alcohol also made individuals more willing to correspond.

Within the first few observations, I had already made an access point into a group. I obtained my interviews through the method of snowball sampling. I completed thirty participant observations and ten interviews with individuals who identified as metal fans. I interviewed eight females and two males. They ranged in age from eighteen to forty-eight. My observations were from a minimum of one hour to a maximum of five hours. My shortest interview was twenty-five minutes and my longest interview was two hours. I used an open-ended interview guide to conduct my research. For privacy purposes, I changed their names to Respondent 1, Respondent 2, Respondent 3, etc. I conducted an analysis of my findings. In doing so, I found two main themes to my research. The first theme is the ostracization of women in the heavy metal subculture. The second is the sexualization of women in the heavy metal subculture. The underlying connection to these themes is the discrimination of women based on their perceived gender.

I also analyzed the inconsistencies within my research. There were a few interview questions that received contradicting opinions. There were also inconsistencies as to what I observed (as a relative outsider) and what I was told by my inside informants. These inconsistencies are possible foundations for further research. They offer possible discovery of attitudes that were latent in my analysis.

Analysis

Theme 1: Ostracization of Women

In my interviews, I found that individuals who perform as women felt like they needed to assert themselves in order to be accepted into the “ingroup”. There was an overwhelming attitude that

women were automatically considered outsiders. I asked respondents: “How does a woman gain acceptance in the heavy metal culture?” One female respondent stated that “[As a woman,] they’ll all assume you’re a poser. You really gotta know what you’re talkin’ about.” This feeling of needing to “prove” authenticity was echoed by many of my female respondents. In my interviews and observations, I noticed that females resided in an air of constant scrutiny by male metal fans. There is a presumption that their presence is tied to a male member of the community. Either the female is a poser and is pretending to listen to metal music to lure male attention, or they are sexually involved with a male metalhead.

Another female respondent gave me advice: “know your bands, know your history.” This was a common piece of advice given to me during my interviews. Many females reiterated to me the idea that to be recognized as a true member of the metal scene, women must prove themselves. Men continuously pressured women to assert their authenticity through knowledge of metal musicians and albums. Men, however, were not pressured in this way. This double standard emphasizes to females that they are outsiders in the community.

This is known as epistemological gatekeeping. Epistemological gatekeeping is “testing the knowledge of group members to ensure that they belong or can gain access to that group” (Helrich 2017) In the male-dominated metal scene, this is a method of discrimination against female metal fans. Men challenge female legitimacy through questioning and disbelief. This clearly dissuades women from identifying as a member of the heavy metal subculture.

I asked a male respondent: “How does a woman gain acceptance in the heavy metal culture?”

Respondent 5 (male): “She just gotta show up and not be annoying, I guess (awkward laugh)”

Through my participant observations, I recognized a pattern in this idea of “female annoyance.” There is a strong double standard in what is acceptable for women to do and what is acceptable for men to do. Women are regulated by strict social rules, while men are not. For example, there was a woman in the front row at one of the concerts I observed. She was jumping around and pushing, just like all the men that surrounded her. However, the men around her were visibly annoyed, backing away from her and giving her dirty looks. Meanwhile, the men around them were doing the same exact thing with no repercussions. This is how hypermasculinity utilizes social control to police women’s actions.

Social control is “the system of devices whereby society brings its members into conformity with the accepted standards of behaviour.” (Ross 1925). In other words, societies pressure individuals into conformity. Hypermasculinity exercises informal means of social control in the heavy metal culture to establish male dominance and regulate women. This informal social control is implemented in various ways. Through participant observation, I noticed light informal sanctions as a means of social control, such as disapproving facial expressions and negative body language. I also witnessed harsher means of social control, such as ridicule, mocking, and blatant discrimination based on femininity.

For example, many times I observed that when women sing lyrics loudly at concerts, men get irritated quickly. But when men yell lyrics loudly, there is no negative reaction, from males or females. In one instance, I saw a woman in the front row screaming lyrics during the concert. A group of men beside her start complaining to each other about her and shooting her dirty

looks. Then the friends start pushing each other into her repeatedly, harder and harder, until she is forced to the side of the stage. This is a great example of men disapproving of the equal participation of women in heavy metal culture. By exerting their physical power over the female fan, they are simultaneously exerting their social power.

Another finding from my observations was the spatial positioning within the context of a heavy metal concert. There is power in social space. Within the environment of heavy metal concerts, the social power resides in the mosh pit and directly in front of the stage. At concerts, men control the front row and the mosh pit with rare female presence. The sidelining of women to the outskirts of the mosh pit is a physical reflection of the culture's marginalization of women. This non-representation of females in the spaces of social power is a symptom of gender-based inequality in the heavy metal subculture.

Theme 2: Sexualization of Women

Another theme that was common in the qualitative data present in interviews and observations is the sexualization of women in the heavy metal subculture. Sexualization is when an individual's body is seen as a mere object for one's sexual desires. Uncoincidentally, the sexualization of women is also a form of ostracization. Simone De Beauvoir (1953) writes, "So, as the woman is objectified, she becomes the Other." The "othering" of women in this way is specifically dangerous, both psychologically and physically. Sexualization can lead to sexual assault. It leads to low self-esteem and low levels of confidence. Sexualization was a shared theme among both men and women respondents. Men did not directly admit to sexualizing women, but still made sexist comments. During my observations, I witnessed many instances of

objectification, and was even subject to it myself. The negative attention women receive from men happens everywhere, but it is specifically prominent in the heavy metal subculture.

Women in the heavy metal subculture are also sexualized as symbols to promote bands. In my observations, all of the people selling bands' merchandise were women dressed provocatively. This suggests that women were used as sex symbols to sell items. Bands also often showed up with "groupies." Groupies are people that follow the band around and are a part of the band's inner circle. Most of the groupies were women, much younger than the males with which they were associating. They often wore heels, dressed risqué, and performed suggestive mannerisms, such as sticking out their tongues and dancing sexually. This contributes to the "metal girl" stereotype, and leads to the disrespect and marginalization of all women in metal music scene.

In my interviews, many respondents shared their personal experiences of sexualization at metal shows.

Question: "Have you ever experienced sexual assault at a show?"

Respondent 2 (female): "The worst is the groping. When there is a tight crowd, people take the opportunity, ya know?"

This was the most common act mentioned by respondents. I would argue that this act stems from sexualization, but the groping itself is a form of sexual assault. When asking respondents about sexual assault in the metal scene, women were vaguer in their answers than men. Men seemed to answer quickly and women were hesitant to respond. Although, no formal admittance of sexual assault occurred. this may stem from a lack of trust with me as a researcher.

During one of my observations, a band with a female vocalist was performing. In between songs, she began talking about their upcoming album. While she was speaking, a man in the audience yelled a sentence that contained obscenity, telling the woman to show the crowd her breasts. The audience laughed; although, as a social scientist, I did not find this humorous. This situation exemplifies the lack of respect for female metal artists, as well as the blatant sexualization of women.

Because this subculture stems from heavy metal music as a genre, it is important to point out sexism in the music itself. To protect the privacy of the subjects of my research, I will not disclose specific band names or song titles; however, it is significant to identify the themes in the music and performance. Many songs that were played contained lyrics that were sexually explicit. These lyrics degraded women and portrayed them as sexual objects. Some songs spoke about sexual violence and sexual assault. Three of the bands I saw perform during my research centered their entire persona around violence against women. The misogyny in metal music works to reinforce the concept of female objectification.

The sexualization and ostracization of women in the heavy metal subculture are the main themes drawn from my research. These analyses offer insight into the gender dynamics of the metal subculture. This research has created new avenues of further research, specifically involving sexual assault at metal shows. The topics of gender and sexual violence are important to study for knowledge and prevention.

Conclusion

I have shown through previous studies, social theories, and my own research that hyper masculinity carries a bipolar nature regarding women. Generally, either women are

hypersexualized or ignored completely within hypermasculine environments. The dichotomy between substantial sexual attention or no attention at all demotes women to second-class participants in the heavy metal subculture. Inclusion is necessary for respect. Respect is necessary for power. With power imbalance comes injustice. The power imbalance in the heavy metal culture results in injustice for women. Lack of inclusion creates a hostile environment that can lead to psychological, physical, and sexual abuse. It is possible for metal culture to include women, but we must break barriers. Highlighting injustice is imperative to obtain inclusion for all people in the heavy metal subculture, regardless of gender.

To create a more inclusive environment for women, we must acknowledge this discrimination when we see it. We must challenge sexism and refuse to be bystanders of bigotry. I call on men, especially fans of heavy metal, to become allies for women. I call on journalists and musicians to use their platform to speak out against sexism in the heavy metal community. Including marginalized voices in this regard will lead to growth. Adding a new set of different perspectives to the heavy metal discourse will only make it stronger. This research makes original contributions to the existing scientific knowledge in this field.

Instructional Assignments Chart

#1: Self and Social Awareness

1a: As a social scientist, I am constantly questioning my position in the context of my social surroundings. Individuals in human society are categorized into groups. With categorization comes a level of ranking. Hierarchy between social groups results in an indifference of power. This leads to discrimination of some groups and privilege for others. As humans, we are constantly fielding questions about our identity. How do we define ourselves as individuals? Which is more important, our appearance or our beliefs? I argue that appearance and beliefs are interconnected. Our appearance affects the way we maneuver through society and therefore, helps form our beliefs. Our beliefs affect the way we maneuver through society and therefore, helps mold our appearance.

1b: Following the diversity wheel, I am a young, white, able-bodied, cisgender, heterosexual American female. This identity has designed my life and the way I view the world. Using the sociological imagination, I can picture how life would be different if I woke up as a different ethnicity. If I woke up as an Indian-American, I would most likely have a lot more money. I would live in a nice house. I would be financially stable and most likely have attended a prestigious university. Being financially stable would be positive. However, there could also be negative effects. People may discriminate against me if I live in an area with very few Indian-Americans.

An example of observing someone demonstrating their power and privilege based on gender is when I was playing beer pong at a party a couple of weeks ago. I was partnered with a male. We were winning, and I made most of the shots. The other team continually kept

congratulating him saying “Wow, this guy is really good!” and observers saying, “he must practice!” Meanwhile, I had made more cups than him. When we won the game, everyone gave him the credit for the win because he is a man. I am a woman, so I received no recognition. He benefitted from my talent.

Privilege comes in many forms. We must understand that other individuals’ experiences are different than ours. In sociology, privilege is a set of apparent advantages that are expected to be obtainable based on one’s status. The term is usually used in the context of social inequality, particularly regarding age, disability, race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion and/or social class.

#2: Service and Social Responsibility

2a: As humans, we are social beings. We have social needs that must be met. Often, individuals attribute their identity to the membership of a specific group. Our well-being depends on our inclusion to a group. Per my research, when an individual identifies as a member of the heavy metal community, they feel an urge for acceptance. When women specifically are rejected from the ingroup (comprised of males) in the heavy metal culture, their self-image is damaged. Certainly, this psychological damage can result in lower self-esteem or self-worth.

2b: When one contributes to a group, community, or society to which they belong, it enhances the connection between the microlevel and macrolevel of societal relations. In general, humans feel a sense of duty to the society to which they belong. From a cognitive standpoint, how do we view our responsibility in society? As social scientists, we must question what importance community service has on society, and why some individuals feel a greater sense of social responsibility. Community service does not necessarily have to come from a sense of

social responsibility. It may stem from force or coercion. I would argue that when one contributes to a group, community, or society to which they belong, it enhances the connection between the microlevel and macrolevel of societal relations, and that the emotional results from community service are the same regardless of cause. At my service learning site, Monterey County Food Bank, many of my fellow volunteers were court-ordered to complete community service hours. However, the connectedness to each other, as well as the people we were serving, was palpable. Social engagement offers individuals a feeling of necessity and purpose. Service to society affects both the individuals' wellbeing and the population being served.

2c: Given the above statement, civil engagement can be negative or positive. This leads to questions of ethics. Part of our social responsibility is approaching our fellow man in a moral context. Through service learning, I gained knowledge about the effects my actions had on others. In my service learning, I was careful not to make the food-insecure individuals feel less than myself. In my research, I ran into various ethical questions. An individual has a right to their intellectual property. When I was conducting my interviews, especially when I asked questions about sexual assault, many respondents were hesitant. Although I was eager to obtain data for my research, it is unethical to push others to give me their intellectual property. In essence, it would be knowledge-robbing. Most ethical questions can be answered with the fundamental concept of respect for others. I discovered this through my service learning, in addition to my own research, because I was attempting to understand one's actions and their consequences on others' wellbeing.

#3 Community and Social Justice

3a: Freedom, agency, and fairness are the fruits of social justice. The goal of critical social theory is human emancipation. As an admirer of critical social theory, I view the world through this framework. Hence, during my service learning, I examined the inequalities of the patrons of the food bank through a macro socioeconomic lens. The majority of this community was Hispanic. All of them were low-income poor. I saw their lack of access to resources as a reflection of a society that had failed them. Of course, gender, race, and age compounded their low-class status. Through providing these people with food, we were offering them a sense of overall wellbeing, a safe place to eat, and energy for their day. When an individual is concerned about where their next meal is going to come from, there is little else of greater importance. In a nation as affluent as the United States, it is ethically wrong to let these people go hungry. Food security for all is social justice.

3b: The cardinal issue I focused on during my service learning at Monterey County Food Bank was hunger. The food bank is located in Salinas, California so my research and service specifically targeted that community. According to a study conducted by California Food Policy Advocates, Monterey county underutilizes federal food assistance programs while simultaneously having high rates of poverty (2003). This begs the question, “Why?” My hypothesis is that many people in poverty in Monterey do not have transportation to get to office of government resources.

#4 Multicultural Community Building/Civil Engagement

4a: The demographics at my service learning site were mostly low-income Hispanics. I, myself, am Caucasian. This granted me an opportunity to interact with individuals from another culture than me. Beyond that, I am middle-class, and I have been my entire life. Interacting with

people that live in very low-income homes has given me insight into the culture of poverty. Through speaking with others at the food bank, I realized that while most people think of the cycle of poverty as generational, it is important to view the cycle of poverty from a microeconomic standpoint. I made friends with the people that came to the food bank weekly. I made friends with an elderly woman who I gave a ride home when day after I saw that she had missed the bus. While dropping her off, she told me her car had broken down the week before and she didn't have enough money to fix it. Because she didn't have a mode of transportation to work, she lost her job. Because she didn't have a job anymore, she had no way to fix her car. This is the cycle of poverty.

4b: When I entered into my service learning, I consciously did not want to perpetuate injustice or judgement. I did not come there to "help". Helping implies that the people at the food bank are weaker than me or needy. I did not come to fix these people or their circumstances. This is a heightened sense of superiority and ultimately selfish. I did not come to rescue them. This is an act of self-righteousness and a chase for limelight. I came to serve these people and my community. Serving implies a connection between "me" versus "them". It is a horizontal line of power and works to dismantle the hierarchy of the volunteer being above the constituents of the community to which they are servicing. Throughout my service learning at Monterey County Food Bank, my goal was to share my social power and invest in the community's social capital.

4c: Drawing from my experience with the people at the food bank, the food banks and homeless shelters in Monterey County are misplaced. The majority of the homeless and at-risk people in Monterey County live in King City. However, the majority of the homeless shelters and food banks are in Salinas. These two areas are about 50 miles away. This does not offer many of the people in need access to necessary resources. Many of the people I spoke with at the

Food Bank had to relocate to Salinas from King City to obtain access to shelter and food banks. They were forced to leave their friends, family and community because Monterey County has focuses their efforts on the homeless population in Salinas, while disregarding King City. To promote greater equity, Monterey County should allocate funds to set up homeless shelters and food banks in King City.

#5 Role of Technology in Service to the Community, Community Building, Civic Engagement and Service Learning

5a: At Monterey County Food Bank, cell phones are not allowed. The supervisor explained that it was because we were there to volunteer, not to be on our phones. However, even during break we were not allowed to look at our phones. Some volunteers and I speculated that this might have been to prevent people from posting to social media.

A trending phenomenon on social media is to perform an act of compassion towards the low-income or homeless population and take a video. People then post the video of them doing something kind for someone poor, so viewers will applaud and think highly of them. This act, however, is exploitative and insincere. These people use the homeless as a symbol of shame and misfortune and post videos of them on the internet in an air of pity.

I support the Monterey Food Bank for their ban on cell phones and their avoidance of social media. Homeless people are a vulnerable population and pictures/videos of them are often posted without their consent.

Appendix

1. Age:
2. Race:
3. Sex:
4. Gender:
5. Describe the environment at a heavy metal concert.
6. Describe the heavy metal culture.
7. Do you think gender affects the level of difficulty in being accepted? If so, how?
8. How does a woman gain acceptance into the heavy metal culture?
9. Do you consider the heavy metal culture to be male-dominated? If so, in what ways?
10. Have you ever seen/experienced discrimination based on gender at heavy metal concerts?
11. Have you ever seen/experienced sexual assault at a heavy metal concert?
12. Is there any more information you would like to share?

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