

Vulgar Discourses of Power: The Discursive Construction of Ideal Heavy Metal  
Subjectivity and the Erasure of Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour in Heavy Metal  
Music Culture

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## **Abstract**

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Heavy metal music culture has been a bastion of working-class white masculinity since its beginnings in the early 1970s. Through canonization and Historical documentation, white male dominance has been ensured, obscuring contributions made by white female performers and erasing black, Indigenous, and women of colour (BIWoC) from the genre.

Utilizing feminist critical discourse analysis (feminist CDA) to examine texts by canonized male bands reveals the discursive parameters of ideal heavy metal subjectivity (IHMS). Exploration of texts created by white female performers, including a case study of Arch Enemy vocalist Alissa White-Gluz, isolates the necessity for white female performers to reproduce the discourses of IHMS in order to secure their participation in the culture, further contributing to the erasure of BIWoC performers. However, feminist CDA also reveals transformative potential within these texts to de-centre IHMS as the default subject position and shows white women's agency and resiliency as performers.

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## Introduction

For the first two years of my graduate studies, whenever anyone asked me about my research, I struggled to find a concise answer that adequately captured what I was intending to accomplish. For the longest time, I was not entirely sure what I was striving to uncover but I was motivated to better understand the position of women who perform heavy metal music, having been a fan of the genre since my childhood. I am interested in exploring issues of representation in heavy metal music and problematizing the naturalized position of “masculinity” and “whiteness” within the genre, which directly impacts how women participate in heavy metal music performance. Though reactions amongst my inquisitors have varied from enthusiasm (albeit, somewhat confused enthusiasm) to complete disinterest, the follow-up question I most commonly received was often the same; why does it matter? Why, indeed.

Lack of visibility—or (in)visibilities<sup>1</sup>—has led to respected female metal musicians and vocalists being largely overlooked within the context of heavy metal music history. The creation of a canon of essential albums and bands by fans, journalists, critics, and scholars is distinctly lacking in music written and performed by women.<sup>2</sup> Given women’s sporadic mainstream appearances during metal music’s formative years, it is impossible to excuse the blatant omissions of pioneering work from artists such as Doro Pesch or Girlschool. As irritating as these omissions are, the most concerning aspect is the reasoning behind the erasure of women’s work within the genre.

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<sup>1</sup> (In)visibility is the tendency for cultural discourses to convey ideas that seek to legitimize dominant ideologies (Amaral, et.al. 20). (In)visibilities function to delegitimize women’s participation overall, while simultaneously making white women more visible than BIWoC, through the hierarchy of social stratification (gender, race, class) within heavy metal music culture.

<sup>2</sup> See Walser; Christie; Wiederhorn & Turman

The heavy metal music canon serves as a badge of acceptance within heavy metal music culture and as a yardstick by which subsequent generations of bands are measured. As Will Straw observes in his analysis of the relationship between rock connoisseurship and gender:

As accumulations of material artifacts, record collections are carriers of information whose arrangement and interpretation is part of the broader discourse about popular music... [record collections] provide the raw materials around which the rituals of homosocial interaction take shape. Just as ongoing conversation between men shapes the composition and extension of each man's collection, so each man finds, in the similarity of his points of reference to those of his peers, confirmation of a shared universe of critical judgement (5).

In other words, male space is continuously reproduced within and through the homosocial environment both in a literal sense (male bonding through shared knowledge (Walser 18)) and a figurative sense (the creation of an exclusively male, arbitrarily officiated heavy metal canon). The cultivation of a heavy metal canon, taken on by men with access to a pen (or an internet connection) and an audience, creates a vacuum in which access to the social and creative aspects of heavy metal music making and fandom are dependent upon successful reproduction of a linear and fixed history of the genre's evolution (Hill 283). This evolution, constructed within an almost exclusively male homosocial environment, excludes the contributions of women from the "official" metal music canon.

In more recent years, the solution to women's (in)visibilities in heavy metal music culture has been to create an ad hoc history of women's contributions that is parallel to, but isolated from, the "official" History—a herstory of heavy metal music. Herstories, a concept formed during the second wave of feminism, are ongoing projects that seek to

rectify women's erasure from the arenas of public, academic, cultural, and political life by documenting the achievements of women that have been overlooked by those granted the authority to record History (Mills 1992 118; Kolodny 83-84). Appearing largely in heavy metal (and occasionally, mainstream) media, herstory compilations of the best performers (Top 10 Female Vocalists, Best Female Guitarists, etc.) have been created to appease the demands of female performers and fans (and feminist critics) for equal recognition within the genre. In theory, a herstory of heavy metal music—as with all herstories—is a commendation of the many and varied achievements and contributions women have, and continue to make. Indeed, herstory projects foreground women's productions without the expectation of comparison with their male peers; they are a celebration of women as creators, thinkers, leaders, and survivors.

However, in practice, herstories suffer from continued marginalization, remaining on the peripherals of mainstream culture and isolated from “official” History rather than being successfully integrated into it. As anti-racist feminist scholar Chandra Talpade Mohanty states:

[A]ttempts to uncover and locate alternative histories sometimes code these very histories... [as] isolated and autonomous narratives, untouched in their essence by the dominant figurations. In these rewritings, what is lost is the recognition that it is the very coimplication of histories with History that helps us situate and understand oppositional agency (116).

In the case of female heavy metal performers, these herstories pay respect to their talent but, by isolating herstories from the “official” History of metal music, female performers are celebrated for their successful reproduction of the dominant discourses which define

heavy metal music culture and any radical or transformative properties contained within women's performances are muted and their agency as performers is undermined.

The over-representation of white women in heavy metal music serves to reinforce dominant discourses while simultaneously creating the illusion of inclusivity by feigning gender equality. For white female performers, the ability to appropriate or reinforce dominant discourses simultaneously bolsters their success and acceptance within the genre while contributing to the marginalization of black, Indigenous, and women of colour (BIWoC), whose presence as performers (and fans) has been marginalized to the point of erasure (Dawes Location 503). Reliance upon documentation ensures the continued erasure of BIWoC by re-inscribing dominant discourses and granting those discourses the authority to define heavy metal music culture through exclusion. The effects of marginalization can manifest in various ways and create significant barriers for BIWoC, from the inability to book gigs at local clubs to failing to acquire a recording contract because record executives cannot fathom marketing non-white male metal musicians to a predominantly white male audience (Mahon 66-69). Notions of appropriate cultural practices for specific groups of people, especially those notions built on stereotypes surrounding race and gender, create expectations of who metal musicians should be and fail to represent who metal musicians actually are (Mahon 53-54). My research explores the origins of what I have identified as ideal heavy metal subjectivity (IHMS) in order to address how white female heavy metal performers have utilized the discursive construction of IHMS—the working-class white male—to negotiate their social positioning within heavy metal music culture and, in the process, further contribute to the marginalization of BIWoC performers by legitimizing the discourses of IHMS.

Heavy metal music cultural space is an important microcosm for doing identity work precisely because it is space where working-class white male experiences of disenfranchisement and disempowerment are legitimized, reified, and documented, becoming part of normative discourses, particularly around issues of class and poverty. This has important implications beyond the realm of heavy metal music culture as it produces white male experience as the master narrative, which in turn, buries the experiences of black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPoC), creating exclusions—or more appropriately, (in)visibilities—which have detrimental consequences for racial minorities in all aspects of life, including physical and mental health and educational and employment opportunities.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, the appropriation of IHMS discourses by white female performers, which further marginalizes the experiences of BIWoC, is another site where issues of gender discrimination supersede all other forms of discrimination, elevating the experiences of white women. Discourses of IHMS in many ways are a mirroring of those accepted within the parent culture which cast white male and, to a lesser extent, white female experience as normative and authoritative. As continued anti-discriminatory efforts continue within the parent culture, subcultural spaces, in turn, become a haven for normativity, allowing power to be re-inscribed into normative discourses through cultural production. Cultural productions do not remain isolated from the political and historical contexts in which they are produced. Therefore, it is equally important for anti-discriminatory work to take place within subcultural spaces as well.

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<sup>3</sup> See “Ethnic and Racial Minorities & Socioeconomic Status”.

In my research, I am drawing on Foucauldian<sup>4</sup> arguments of subjectivity in which power exerts influence on everyday life and lived experience, which “categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him” (Foucault 781). IHMS has to be understood as an ongoing project of white patriarchal cultural production in which white male performers are subject to and, to some extent, confined within, the power of that very production which limits individual agency in the process of identity formation.

I approach my research from an intersectional feminist perspective; one which considers the social locations of gender, race, and class as complex and interwoven, in order to identify the structural barriers which continue to compound historical, oppressive, systemic discrimination upon groups of people, while simultaneously creating privileges for those whose gender, race, and class locations are more closely aligned with those that have been normalized (i.e. white, middle-class, and male) (Cho, et. al. 787; Levine-Rasky 239-40). Intersectional feminist theory acknowledges that women experience marginalization, discrimination, and oppression in vastly different ways which relate to the various social locations they occupy. As Mohanty states:

What binds women together is a sociological notion of the ‘sameness’ of their oppression. It is at this point that an elision takes place between ‘women’ as a discursively constructed group and ‘women’ as material subjects of their own

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<sup>4</sup> I want to acknowledge that many feminist theorists (myself included) criticize Foucault for failing to address normativity, which limits emancipatory potential and, thus, the political application of his theory. However, some feminists have argued (again, myself included) that the issues Foucault identifies and criticizes have far-reaching implications for many areas of interest to feminist scholarship and activism and, for this reason, his theories should not be outright dismissed (McLaren 17).



history. Thus, the discursively consensual homogeneity of women as a group is mistaken for the historically specific material reality of groups of women (22).

Rather than assuming a shared, universal experience of discrimination within heavy metal music culture—which has failed to adequately address the absence of BIWoC—an intersectional feminist theoretical framework allows scholars to problematize (in)visibilities where they occur in order to identify the barriers that lead to their creation.

Current scholarship on heavy metal music culture theorizes sexism and racism as separate issues within the genre. It is my contention that a failure to acknowledge the intersections of gender and race, in conjunction with class allows “masculinity” and “whiteness” to remain the normative, discursive parameters of heavy metal performance, granting men (specifically white men) the power to name what is legitimately recognised as heavy metal music culture. Women are expected to “embrace a seemingly one-dimensional and immovable gender position, which is the male position” (Nordström and Herz 463). In other words, where ‘maleness’ is a fixed position for heavy metal performers, female performers are disadvantaged within the genre and must engage in cultural and social negotiations to improve their social positioning.

Furthermore, women’s acceptance into metal music culture is contingent upon “the flow of power enabled by the inherited structure of white family building: *within* racial lines and *across* gender lines” (Carrillo Rowe 299, emphasis in original). In other words, the inability for white female performers to create a homosocial bond with men is rectified through the symbolic structure of the white, nuclear family model. Women, as a group, are understood as generally disempowered. However, the relationship to disempowerment “is contradicted by white womanhood... [white women] are likely to have more resources attached to their social position [identity] and they are likely to have

more freedom to contest, challenge, or define their social positioning” (Levine-Rasky 249). In other words, white female performer’s ability to appropriate dominant discourses within heavy metal music culture—and challenge their default social positioning within the culture—is a direct result of their gender, race, and class positions.

The universalizing themes surrounding female performers have led to the homogenization of women’s experiences within heavy metal music culture. Addressing IHMS and how white women facilitate its perpetuation will create opportunities for discussions on where (in)visibilities have always, and continue to exist. Moreover, exposing the naturalized position of masculinity and whiteness that has been so pervasive within metal music culture, makes it harder to dismiss claims of continuing themes of sexism and racism levied by anti-oppression activists, scholars, performers, and fans.<sup>5</sup> By unsettling the given naturalness of masculinity and whiteness, theorists can then explore and celebrate the ways in which BIWoC in metal music have challenged such narratives and carved out space for themselves within the genre. For these reasons, I feel it is vital for a comprehensive, intersectional feminist investigation of heavy metal music culture to take place. In fact, it is long overdue. My research is beginning the process of bridging the gaps between gender, race, and class in metal music culture with the hopes that other researchers will expand on this foundation. Future enquiries into gender and race in heavy metal music culture need to be approached with an intersectional perspective. Otherwise,

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<sup>5</sup> In her book *What Are You Doing Here: A Black Woman’s Life and Liberation in Heavy Metal* Laina Dawes observes that “[p]robably the most troubling facet of discussing racism in... metal... is that the people who are most affected by racism are the ones criticized for bringing up the issue. Black women fans have a difficult time in sharing their stories... because they fear that their concerns will not be believed or... that they’ll be dismissed (Location 2435).

(in)visibilities will continue to persist and it will be BIWoC performers and fans who will continue to feel the greatest impact.

### **Identifying Intersections**

Previous scholarship has addressed sexism and racism within metal music culture as isolated issues, even though this explanation has not readily explained the absence of BIWoC, nor provided any means of addressing the (in)visibilities inherent within the culture. Moreover, some scholarship would suggest that these issues are relics of heavy metal's past<sup>6</sup> rather than an ongoing and systemic problem (Mahon 147). "Sexism and racism are reproduced," states feminist scholar Sara Ahmed, "by the techniques that justify the reproduction. When these words are dismissed, we are witnessing a defense of the status quo: it is a way of saying, there is nothing wrong with this; what is wrong is the judgment that there is something wrong with this" (157). It is important to question (in)visibilities in metal music where they exist because failing to do so allows for the continued marginalization of artists through discriminatory practices. I am abashed to admit that it took me entering the field of gender studies to recognise that women's presence in metal music is further complicated by discourses of race and class. To truly understand how women participate in heavy metal music culture, we cannot overlook the interconnectedness of gender, race, and class privileges that have helped to bolster the success of white female performers specifically.

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<sup>6</sup> See Hickam and Wallach; Clinton and Wallach.

*Gender*

The order of the categories, “masculinity” and “whiteness” is not a simple matter of alphabetizing, but rather, I argue, it is the order of operations for heavy metal performance hierarchy. If we consider “masculinity” as the primary ingredient for heavy metal cultural acceptance, we are able to account for why so few women were visible within heavy metal music well into the 1990s. Women were, as musicologist Robert Walser states: “essentially mysterious and dangerous; they harm simply by being, for their attractiveness threatens to disrupt both male self-control and the collective strength of male bonding” (118). In other words, women were identified as antithetical to the process of male-bonding (unless they are the objects of male sexual desire, which I will discuss in Chapter Two) which led to the construction of narratives of femininity within the genre that depicts women as threatening to the uncontested homosocial environment of heavy metal music culture.

To circumvent these discourses and secure their participation within metal music, women constructed an alternative to traditional notions of femininity, a form of gender performance that is evocative of the working-class, white masculinity of their male counterparts. “The effect of gender,” according to Judith Butler, “is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles... constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (1990 191). In other words, heavy metal performers, both male and female, engage in a form of gender play, an exaggeration of the gendered identity which has become the discursively constructed and accepted expression within metal music culture. However, the masculinity performed by women is most commonly viewed as an approximation or mimetic form of masculinity that, as queer theorist J. Halberstam states, are assumed to

consist of “the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity”, which serves to lend authenticity to the notion of male masculinity within the male-sexed body (1-2). In other words, the potential transformative nature of female displays of masculinity is undermined by rhetoric that seeks to reject as inferior or inauthentic any display of masculinity which is not produced within a cis-gender male body.

In their study on 1980s heavy metal music culture, Howe and Friedman state: “women in large part got into the scene not by becoming musicians, but by either imitating the appearance and behaviour of the boys, in the case of ‘real’ female metalheads, or by becoming sexual objects for the boys, in the case of ‘glam chicks’ or ‘groupies’ (613). Though women have become more active as performers in metal music over the last twenty-five years, the divide between these two archetypes of women is still observable in modern metal music culture (Vasan 2011 345; Nordstöm & Herz 460). However, these dualistic discourses are not solely upheld by male performers and fans, but by women in the scene as well—“real” female metalheads use difference to position themselves as legitimate members within heavy metal music and culture, establishing themselves as superior to “groupies” (Howe & Friedman 614; Vasan 2011 345). In other words, female musicians and fans legitimize the authority of discourses of “masculinity” in metal music through gender positioning. “The problem”, says Levine-Rasky, “is not who has power, but how power is practiced so as to effect political and social advantage” (245). By supporting a hierarchical structure for women’s participation in heavy metal music and fandom, “real” female metalheads re-inscribe power into the practices and ideologies that support IHMS. In her book, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*, author Ariel Levy observes a societal inability to address successful, powerful women without the use of “masculinist” language: “There is a certain kind of

woman—talented, powerful, unrepentant—whom we’ve always found difficult to describe without some version of the phrase, “like a man” (95). These discourses, prominent in the mainstream or parent culture, bleed into heavy metal music culture, with women being praised for their abilities to play metal music like men (Howe & Friedman 612; Vasan 2011 342; Nordström & Herz 459).

By the end of the 1990s and early 2000s, women’s visibility in heavy metal music was noticeably more apparent; this was a refreshing change from the rather sporadic appearances of female performers that had marked the previous decades. Though trailblazing performers like Doro Pesch, Lita Ford, Girlschool, and Drain STH achieved various levels of success throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, they have represented not only the exceptions to the male-dominated heavy metal genre, but also the exemplars of female metal performers. These artists served as a blueprint for women in metal, having not only proven their talent as musicians, but also their willingness to comply with what Vasan refers to as the “androcentric laws of the scene” (2011 341). In other words, these female performers were able to successfully mimic masculine codes of behaviour and performance which further perpetuated their success. And as male and female fans and performers leave the androcentric codes of heavy metal music culture unchallenged, the imbalance of power between genders has remained firmly intact (Vasan 2011 341). These uncontested codes shape heavy metal music performance, a practice which has continued into the present day and has regimented the ways in which women perform metal music. “Sexism”, observes Ahmed, “...by being accepted as [existing] in the pattern or in the traditions,” of heavy metal music culture, “is rendered not only acceptable but inevitable” (150). When female performers and fans eschew challenging the codes of metal music

culture, these practices are accepted as the truth of participation rather than as patriarchal rhetoric that deserves to be discarded.

The discursive construction of musical authenticity has contributed substantially to the maintenance of IHMS. Preference is granted to equal participation in song writing as well as musicianship. Given that many of the most successful female performers commonly occupy the role of vocalist in otherwise all-male bands (such as Warlock, Within Temptation, and Huntress), authenticity serves to establish a hierarchy within the band regarding musical production and output. Moreover, the position of vocalist within the band allows the audience to objectify a female vocalist as she performs, the view of her body conveniently unobstructed without an instrument in her hand. Musical virtuosity is often denied to vocalists, with the exception being men who possess an extensive vocal range and/or an almost demonic screaming ability, such as Iron Maiden's Bruce Dickinson or Judas Priest's Rob Halford. This exclusivity is important because it serves to elevate the achievements of the masculine position of guitarist within the band. As scholar Mavis Bayton argues: "The electric guitar... is virtually seen as an extension of the male body. This is always implicit and sometimes explicit, as when men mime masturbation with their 'axes'. Heavy metal guitarists unashamedly hold their guitars like a penis... With legs firmly planted akimbo, the guitarist is able to lean back in a parody of sexual ecstasy." (43). The connotations of the electric guitar are further enhanced by the concept of virtuosity, which "has always been concerned with demonstrating and enacting a particular kind of power and freedom that might be called 'potency'" (Walser 76). In other words, the female vocalist who lacks the authenticity supplied by an instrument—especially the electric guitar—becomes isolated, not just as a woman who performs heavy

metal, but also in relation to the value and respect commanded by the male musicians in the band.

### *Race*

“Whiteness” as a secondary social location for performers is an observable phenomenon that allowed men of colour more exposure within heavy metal music much earlier than women. In fact, men of colour have helped shape the history of heavy metal music (bands such as Slayer, Metallica, Sepultura, Skindred, Sevendust, Killswitch Engage, and hardcore/metal crossover band, Bad Brains). Now in stating this, I do not mean to suggest that racism within metal music—or rock music in general, for that matter—has not *always* and does not *still* continue to have a significant impact on men of colour who perform heavy metal. Though men of colour have helped shape heavy metal music, the fact is they still remain distressingly underrepresented. Despite its origins in African-American urban blues, the appropriation of all forms of rock music by white artists has directly impacted the careers of rock musicians of colour and stereotypes of appropriate cultural practice have and continue to influence the ways racially marginalized men perform metal music (Mahon 54,148; Walser 8, 17). However, the naturalized relationship between male biological sex and masculinity serves as a point of entry for men of colour into metal music; a relationship that is considered manufactured in women. As sociologist Deena Weinstein notes:

The barriers confronting women in heavy metal are more fundamental than those encountered by blacks. The predominance of whites in the genre is mostly a historical accident, whereas the bias against women is rooted in the delineated



meanings of heavy metal music. No racist themes match the macho ideology of the genre. (2000 79-80).

Though I argue vehemently against the implication of white men appropriating black musical forms being dismissed as the result of an “historical accident”—more accurately, it was a deliberate re-coding of “black music traditions... as white rock ‘n’ roll attitude”<sup>7</sup> (Mahon 204)—heavy metal music culture as a whole has devoted significant energy into rejecting femininity, while projects of racial homogeneity, and overt racism, have been undertaken within specific sub-genres of heavy metal music, such as national socialist black metal.<sup>8</sup>

“Whiteness” as a secondary social location in heavy metal hierarchy also explains the subsequent increase of white women within the genre in the new millennium. Though I will argue in Chapters Two and Three that white female heavy metal performers present challenges to IHMS, it is important to also address the ways in which their relationship to “whiteness” as a social location has positively influenced their success within the genre. Drawing on Aimee Carrillo Rowe’s arguments on the impact of heterosociality on the success of white women within the academe, I argue that a similar phenomenon has occurred within heavy metal music culture, which has favoured the success of white female artists. Carrillo Rowe states: “The institutional intimacies through which ‘woman’ emerges are conditioned by white... heterosocial modes of belonging as white women

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<sup>7</sup> See Mahon.

<sup>8</sup> More recently, there has been a movement towards a focus on the construction of “heritage narratives” within some branches of extreme metal. These narratives act as a sort of mythology in which artists celebrate masculinity, elitism, and northern European identity. See Spracklen, Lucas, & Deeks. Many national socialist black metal bands have experienced hardship, such as having shows cancelled or being dropped from festivals, due to their association with such extremely divisive political views. See Metalsucks, and Blabbermouth. I make the argument that the shift towards heritage narratives could be an attempt for bands to distance themselves from neo-Nazism while still maintaining the discriminatory practices associated with it.

build familial ties with white men in power... through which possessive investments of whiteness are executed” (298). In other words, the ability for white women to gain entrance into white male spheres is partially predicated on notions of social interactions that mimic the white nuclear family unit and as such, provides some explanation for the near erasure of BIWoC from the genre, for which overt displays of racism alone cannot account.

### *Class*

The construction of white, working-class masculinity in heavy metal music culture is located in the genre’s very origins with pioneering bands Black Sabbath and Judas Priest. As historian Leigh Michael Harrison states: “The socio-economic disconnect between life in Birmingham [England] and the flowery music of the [American] middle-class counterculture [of the 1960s] drove the members of Black Sabbath to create music that reflected their tough, working-class struggle” (148). Given Black Sabbath’s continued relevance in current discussions on heavy metal, they remain an important component of the discursive practices that continue to shape the music and the culture. At the heart of heavy metal’s history is the struggle of the working-class, white male and despite seeing a shift from working-to-middle-class status for both musicians and fans that began during the 1980s and continues into the present (Harrison 152-53; Purcell 100-101), metal music’s past as the anthem for the downtrodden white male has yet to be shaken (Walser 109). In their study on the construction of whiteness, gender, and class relations by university students, Maher and Thompson Tetreault conclude that both maleness and whiteness are perceived as the norm or default position for conceptualizing working-class unity where race and gender are conceptualized as “properties of the “other” leaving...

the working class white and male” (172). By assuming a default white male position for the working-class, the fostering of homosocial bonding within heavy metal music culture is, thus, predicated on notions of sameness that women and racialized groups cannot share.

These foundations in white, working-class male experience have remained the accepted form of discourse within heavy metal music culture, particularly with more prestigious or respected subgenres, including, but not limited to: thrash metal, power metal, progressive metal, doom metal, and death metal as a means of fostering continued homosociality and dominance. For my research, identifying and understanding the pervasiveness of the intersections that support the continued reproduction of IHMS is intrinsic to dismantling these discourses. These fixed signifiers of working-class struggle effectively constrain female performers. For white women, the heterosociality of metal music culture, coupled with their racialized (or, more accurately, when discussing white performers, non-racialized)<sup>9</sup> identity, grants them the privilege to successfully reproduce IHMS discourses and to claim space for themselves within the genre through their completion of the white, working-class familial unit. This leaves BIWoC—for whom the reproduction of working-class, white masculinity is read as incongruous with their racialized, gendered identity—to produce alternative narratives which remain largely ignored, or even rejected, within heavy metal music culture.

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<sup>9</sup> Frankenberg argues: “Naming “whiteness” displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of dominance. Among the effects on white people both of race privilege and of the dominance of whiteness is their seeming normativity, their structured invisibility” (6). Whiteness is often viewed as a non-racialized position and therefore, allows whites to generally consider racism to be an issue that exists for people of colour, in which whites can only be implicated if they hold or practice racist beliefs (Frankenberg 6). To dispel such notions, we must situate “whiteness” as the beneficiary of systemic racism, whether individual or groups of whites are conscious of this arrangement or not.

### **Neutralizing Femininity**

Narratives of femininity within heavy metal music culture align with those of the larger rock music culture which associates women with the domestic (Walser 115). Heavy metal music essentially grew out of the hard rock scene of the mid-to-late 1960s, with bands and artists, such as The Kinks, Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, and Jimi Hendrix helping to lay the musical foundations for what would eventually become heavy metal (Christe 10-13; Walser 9). As a result, rock music and heavy metal music see significant overlaps regarding white masculinist perspectives and cultural attitudes. Rock music was embraced as a form of rebellion from the threat of middle-class values and domesticity and offered male performers independence and sexual freedom (Bayton 40; Coates 2003 67, 82; Coates 2010 185; Walser 110-11). Women's position in rock music has been marginalized, yet dualistic, since the emergence of rock culture in the 1960s (Coates 2003 84). The presence of women has always been required to establish masculine identity, compulsory heterosexuality, and male virility within rock music culture, yet the maintenance of masculine identity simultaneously requires the objectification and subjugation of women, while also ignoring their contributions as performers (Coates 2003 67).

Women's sexuality is a point of contention within heavy metal music culture and narratives of female temptation threaten to unravel masculine control. "The discourses", argue feminist scholars, Ramazanoğlu and Holland, "that constructed women's bodies as unruly and in need of disciplining... [had already produced the feminine] as problematic and naturally in need of regulation" (94). In other words, female metal performers' very physicality is dubious in the context of metal music culture and in need of rigorous social control so as not to destabilize the carefully constructed white, masculine discourse. The

expectation for female performers to present sexual desirability whilst maintaining sexual restraint is employed to thwart the implied threat of their presence (Nordström & Herz 462). Within heavy metal music, lyrical themes on women have included ex-scription, sexual objectification, and blatant descriptions of extremely violent misogynist actions such as rape and mutilation. These sites of discourse foster male bonding, but also function as a form of social control in which women's participation is affected by their willingness to overlook or rationalize these themes, a phenomenon known as cost reduction (Vasan 2011 339-41; Vasan 2016 267, 273). Though attribution of misogynist themes has most frequently been levied at the death metal subgenre specifically, these themes persist in the lyrics of even the most popular and commercially successful metal bands (for example: Korn, Slipknot, Pantera) and are necessary for the perpetuation of IHMS discourses within heavy metal music culture. In Chapter Two, I will discuss discourses of misogyny, specifically as they pertain to the neutralization of the threat of femininity through policing female sexuality, the discouragement of feminine identification in male-dominated subcultural spaces, and how women in the subculture participate in reinforcing these discourses.

### **Scope, Methodology, and Limitations**

My research focuses on heavy metal music produced by bands within North America, the United Kingdom, and western/northern Europe. My main reasoning for narrowing my focus is because the particular expressions of masculinity, whiteness, and class which I am examining are most distinctly embodied in these locations. To approach the topic of global metal music—that is, the effect that globalization has had on metal music and thus, how metal music is produced and performed around the world—with an intersectional

feminist perspective, I would first have to account for different socio-cultural concepts of sexism, racism, and classism in various locations around the world and the subsequent effects on the metal scene in each location, as existing scholarship does not account for these issues. Furthermore, I would need to address the hierarchy of western metal music and metal music produced outside of western countries. These issues, though important and deserving of study, lie outside the scope of this research. I have also chosen to omit discussion of LGBTQ+ issues within heavy metal music culture due to the limited scholarship currently available. A more in depth analysis of the past and current status of LGBTQ+ communities within heavy metal music culture needs to be undertaken. I intend to address this issue in future research, as I believe that an ethnographic study conducted in partnership with LGBTQ+ performers and fans would be more beneficial than a feminist critical discourse analysis of the currently available texts.

I am particularly interested in the discursive practices that create and maintain IHMS. “Discourse”, argues feminist scholar and activist, Yasmin Jiwani, “produces knowledge through language. Yet, particular kinds of knowledge command more legitimacy and are dominant over others... [and] contribute to hegemonic notions about how we see others and apprehend the social world around us” (1). The language and texts of heavy metal music performance have created a stratified social environment that allows for the rejection of those bodies who do not or cannot successfully reproduce dominant discourses. I have employed what feminist scholar Michelle. L. Lazar termed feminist critical discourse analysis (feminist CDA) to begin to deconstruct the historical and present significance of dominant narratives surrounding heavy metal music performance with the intention that doing so will lead to more productive discussions around the issues of sexism and racism within the culture. As Lazar states: “feminist

CDA has the advantage of operating, at the outset, within a politically invested, explanatory program of discourse analysis... [offering] a considered theorization of the relationship between social practices and discourse structures” (144). The politicized nature of feminist CDA allows for a more radical and transformative engagement with the dominant discourses within heavy metal music culture. My intention is, therefore, to disrupt, deconstruct, and ultimately discard the discursive construction of IHMS; to cancel out universalizing discourses that limit or marginalize participation through discriminatory practices.

### *Reading Feminist*

Drawing parallels between the crafting of lyrical narratives and poetry, I employ feminist literary analysis to assist in investigating the narratives produced by female heavy metal performers. As literary theorists Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn state, feminist literary theory is a complex manifestation of “interdisciplinary enquiry which takes gender as a fundamental organizing category of experience” and acknowledges the exclusion of women from the literary canon in traditional scholarship (1). When gender is made a central component of analysis, it not only makes visible the invisible, it also underscores the historical and political contexts in which the text is produced. As feminist literary scholar Toril Moi states: “rather than assuming a neutral and universal perspective, feminist literary theory underlines the importance of situating the specific social and cultural contexts that produce the text” (24). Given that female heavy metal performers are often subject to intense scrutiny and policing, their music, as well as their lyrics, are shaped through the lens of these experiences and thus, a discursive analysis should contextualize women’s cultural productions through that lens.

Analysis of lyrics in music can be tricky business because lyrics alone, as with any other poetic text, are open to multiple possible interpretations. “What creates meaning,” argues English Literature scholar Shira Wolosky, “is the relationship between words, which include sound and rhythm and other material strata, but also the contexts and histories that mark each word” (578). For this reason, my analysis considers the context in which words and phrases are situated within the text and the music, as well as the context of the body writing and performing it.

It is important to consider lyrics, in conjunction with music, visuals, and performance, to assess meaning rather than relying solely on lyrics alone. As Weinstein argues:

The words of a song function for listeners... more as isolated words and phrases than as integral poetic texts. Meaning is obtained from evocative words: “evil,” “black,” “night,” “death.” These utterances are easily distinguishable in the overall sound, are mentioned more than once in a song, and are often more clearly articulated by the singer than other lyrical passages. Creative reading, attending to certain words or passages and ignoring others, is less individualized than it is a function of reading through the metal code (2000 137).

The possibility that meaning can be reduced to a few key words or phrases emphasizes the importance of the melodic aspects of the performance in heavy metal music, such as guitar and even vocals, and also makes passages, choruses in particular, stand out as they often invite participation from the audience. However, the insistence that meaning can be isolated to small snippets of text conveniently aids in dismissing criticisms about lyrical



content by suggesting a too literal reading of the words.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, it undermines the role of the lyricist, diminishing their contributions to the song writing process and complicating their relationship to musical authenticity. In her study on women in death metal culture, Sonia Vasani argues that women would alter “personal values to tolerate or accept the misogyny in death metal, so that her emotional, psychological, or moral pain will be reduced when she hears misogynistic comments or *lyrics*” (2011 340, emphasis mine). In reality, the “metal code” does not render a large percentage of lyrical content superfluous but, rather, it operates as another aspect of dominant discourses within the culture, placing onus on the individual’s failure to properly interpret text (i.e. ignore discourses of misogyny).

### *Constructing Counter-Narratives*

Scholarship on gender dynamics within heavy metal music culture have largely looked at the ways in which female members are marginalized within the genre and how their performances are shaped or rather, constrained, by the discourses of IHMS. I believe it is necessary for scholarship to address the imbalances of power within the genre and until the barriers that prevent equal participation or deny participation based on gender, race, sexuality, disability, and other factors are removed, there is still work to be done on this subject. As Ahmed states:

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<sup>10</sup> Within death metal particularly, the argument is made that, due to the growling vocals, lyrics are unintelligible, meaning audiences would not actually know the lyrics written by their favorite bands and that lyrics involving violent mutilation are relegated to the realm of fantasy (Purcell 31-32). However, lyrics for many death metal bands are made available online or within the liner notes of albums, making them accessible to listeners. Furthermore, the fantasy of extreme sexualized violence committed against women serves as another site for heterosexual white male bonding. The expectation is for women to simply ignore the messages if they wish to be present at death metal shows. See “CANNIBAL CORPSE Drummer Defends Bands Violent Lyrical Imagery”.

We have a way of responding to the arguments that gender and race are not material while class is material, an argument articulated so often that it feels like another wall, another blockage that stops us from getting through. The walls are precisely evidence of the materiality of race and gender; though of course this is a materiality that only some come up against (147).

Barriers become visible when we encounter them and to deny they exist is to deny the very reality that many members within metal music culture face. To deny that these barriers exist is, in fact, an admission of privilege—that you fail to recognize them because you do not have to worry about trying to navigate around or through them.

However, it is reductive and derivative to suggest that female performers are essentially marionettes controlled by the dominant discourses of the culture. Though the parameters of inclusion are rigid, white female heavy metal performers have been carving out space for themselves within the genre, in small ways, for decades. Sometimes subtle, sometimes overt, the counter-narratives crafted by female performers have been steadily chipping away at the foundations of IHMS. This is reflected in the increase of visible, successful white female performers over the last twenty years. Though these counter-narratives have largely benefitted white women, there is reason to be hopeful that, as new generations of performers enter the genre, these counter-narratives will become increasingly more direct and diversified.

Counter-narratives are an act of self-concept building, allowing one to reinterpret dominant discourses that are derived from normative subject positioning (i.e. white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class, etc.) which situate non-normative subjects as deficient based on discriminatory standards. In other words, marginalized groups are constructed as less competent or capable which, in turn, rationalizes and justifies their

continued marginalization. Speaking about the importance of feminist narrative in literature, specifically poetry, Wolosky states: “[a] feminist poetic exposes gender as a social and public formation, with art being among its most powerful representations. The result is a redrawing of the lines between public and private, as well as between other arenas whose boundaries are revised or challenged in the interrelationships that constitute art” (574). Counter-narratives created by non-normative subjectivities that centre gender, ethnicity, race, culture, religion, disability, and other social locations seek to re-tell the story of marginalized groups in ways that challenge the dominant discourses that construct certain social categories as less valuable.

### *Limitations*

When conducting discourse analysis on lyrics it is always important to remember that, as with other forms of literary text, lyrics can be open to multiple interpretations. What I present in this research is a critical feminist analytical lens that seeks to situate the context of the lyrics within the body of the person producing/performing them and consider the socio-cultural impact upon the texts and the performers of the environment in which they are produced. Other critical approaches may yield contrasting or contradictory results.

Furthermore, much of the currently existing scholarship on gender and racial dynamics in heavy metal music culture does not incorporate an intersectionality theory framework. As such, much of the data universalizes the experiences of men and women, regardless of race, ethnicity, class, (dis)ability, gender expression/identification, sexual orientation, and many other factors that directly impact how men and women perform/consume heavy metal music and their experiences of discrimination or marginalization within the culture. It is my intention to begin constructing an

intersectional theoretical framework through which future research may be conducted. However, I acknowledge that the currently existing data has limitations and is, therefore, an incomplete account. Further intersectional ethnographic research is needed to better understand differences in experiences of marginalization and discrimination in heavy metal music culture.

Finally, heavy metal music culture has provided an outlet for many youth to express anger, aggression, and similar emotions (see Vasan 2011; Dawes 2012; Walser 1993; Weinstein 2000). However, it is not the only site through which to express these emotions in productive or positive ways. Other options, such as video games, democratized platforms for cultural production (such as YouTube, TikTok, Twitch, etc.), or visual arts may provide space for women and girls to find expression and release of anger and aggression. Though I stress that this by no means explains the absence of BIWoC from heavy metal music culture, I cannot argue that it is *only* outlet for expressing these emotions and some BIWoC may not find heavy metal music culture sufficient for their needs and purposes.

In Chapter One, I begin my argument by first addressing what exactly I mean by IHMS and the evidence that supports its continued proliferation in metal music culture. I have narrowed my focus to bands that have become canonized within the genre and that span metal music's five-decade-long existence: Black Sabbath, Metallica, Pantera, Slipknot, and Avenged Sevenfold. I will establish how these performers have utilized IHMS as a key component to their identity formation as performers. As Walser states: "Heavy metal, like all other culture, offers occasions for doing 'identity work'—among other things, for 'accomplishing gender' ... notions of gender circulate in the texts, sounds, images, and practices of heavy metal" (109). Bearing this in mind, I have gone

directly to the texts; music, lyrics, vocal performance, and music videos to identify patterns of gender performance that have become synonymous with the sound, image, and culture of metal music. I have sought out patterns; repetition of dialogues, themes, and physicality that connote IHMS. Through these patterns, I establish the dominant discourses that have been reproduced over generations of bands. I do not mean to suggest that male heavy metal performers are exact replicas of their predecessors,—no reproduction could ever be that successful, even if that was the intention—rather, I am stating that the most successful performers have incorporated specific discursive constructions into their performance that connote IHMS. According to scholar Adam Rafalovich, heavy metal texts such as lyrics provide opportunities for male performers to establish individualistic, masculinist discourses, creating a complex persona “of the dominant self [which] depicts the destruction of, or victory over, perceived forces of oppression... [and] describes violence against others or articulates an emergent or galvanized self that ‘rises above’ hardship” (22). By establishing concrete characteristics of IHMS explicit in canonized metal bands, it will allow me to address how female performers’ ability (or inability) to appropriate or reinforce these discourses have disproportionately advantaged white women.

In Chapter Two, I discuss the social position of female performers within the genre. I begin by identifying the formation of what I term the subordinate heavy metal subjectivity (SHMS): the “Heavy Metal Goddess”. I break down her discursive construction and the role she plays in the marginalization of BIWoC within heavy metal music culture. I then consider the inherent masculinity of subcultural spaces which are “specifically constructed to be hypermasculine in order to compensate for perceived challenges to working-class boys’ masculinity in mainstream culture” (LeBlanc 107). I

then discuss the significance of heterosociality and the white familial unit in the construction and maintenance of cultural legibility within heavy metal music culture before delving into the complex relationship between rock music and female sexuality. Female sexuality becomes an important site in justifying the subordination of female performers. Moreover, I address the impact negative and discriminatory sexual stereotypes within the parent culture have had in the discrimination of BIWoC within heavy metal music culture. At the end of the chapter, I look at examples of how white female performers have used music to create space for themselves through the construction of counter-narratives that challenge accepted discourses of IHMS and seek to undermine the authority of masculinity within the genre. Though limited in their success, these counter-narratives are evidence that there has always been pushback from female performers against the dominant discourses that have limited their movement within the culture.

In Chapter Three, I conduct a more in depth investigation into the complexities of SHMS in a case study of Arch Enemy vocalist Alissa White-Gluz. I have chosen White-Gluz for several reasons: her status as the vocalist within the band means she occupies a unique space as both the representative of the band but is also at risk of being regarded as a disposable asset. The vocalist's position as a contributor to the artistic development of the band can be complex and vocalists who are responsible for writing lyrics and/or vocal melodies occupy a different position to artistic integrity and authenticity within a band than vocalists who also contribute to song writing. According to Weinstein: "The singer's instrument and role in creating the band's music is, and is felt to be, so distinctly unlike the musicians' that it creates a structural split... the singer, in concert, is the front[person] who greets the audience, introduces the songs and the band, and, in general, mediates the

band and the audience” (2004 324-25). In other words, the vocalist’s position creates a division of labour between band members in which vocalists are considered as contributing less substantial work to the creation of the music and instead are perceived to occupy the less artistically prestigious role of public relations officer for the band. The position of the female vocalist within an otherwise all-male group serves to reinforce the masculine identity of male members of the band by excluding women from the craft of performing the music on instruments, specifically the traditionally masculine roles of guitarist or drummer within the band (Bayton 40-41). In acting as the representative for the band, the reception of the vocalist is an integral component to the band’s success and further complicates the relationship of white women to the genre: questions of heavy metal authenticity arise as IHMS discourses were met by the destabilizing presence of a BIWoC vocalist.

White-Gluz is, in many ways, an exemplar of SHMS. The “Goddess” is a female performer who embodies the toughness of heavy metal music, but also possesses extensive knowledge of the music and social/moral codes of the culture, proving her allegiance to the genre and becoming accepted by her male peers (Nordström & Herz 458-59). The “Goddess” allows female performers a site through which to enter into heavy metal music culture while seemingly creating minimal disruption to the accepted codes and discourses associated with the genre. However, I argue it is in the nuances of White-Gluz’s performance that we can observe instances of resistance to dominant themes in metal music cultural discourse. These instances provide opportunities for her to carve out space for herself as an artist by appropriating white male power and privilege. Relying upon the successful reproduction of discourses that comprise IHMS, the “Goddess” creates potential disruption to the dynamics of gender within the genre, but

does not inherently address or destabilize discourses on race and class within heavy metal music culture.

However, it is important to acknowledge that privilege is what allows performances, like White-Gluz's, to exist within metal music culture with limited rebuke. When considered in this context, White-Gluz's embodiment of the tropes of IHMS is made possible by the benefits afforded through the heterosocial and intersectional frameworks which exist within the genre and support a gendered, racialized, and classed hierarchy. The alterity of women within heavy metal music is tempered when the discourses of working-class white masculinity are either reproduced or supported by white female performers. White-Gluz's performance must be regarded and analyzed through the lens of the privilege afforded by the intersections of gender, race, and class which support the presence and success of white female performers in heavy metal music culture.



## Chapter One: Forging Ideal Heavy Metal Subjectivity

### Introduction

Heavy metal music culture provides space for its members to perform gender in ways that aid in identity formation (Walser 109), and like many masculine subcultural spaces, is intended to valorize the disenfranchised working-class white male (LeBlanc 108; Harrison, 148, 153). The discourses of working-class white masculinity permeate the texts, sounds, and images of heavy metal music and culture and have been produced and reproduced by generations of white male and female musicians who have successfully negotiated their social positioning within the culture. The purpose of my research is to expose the discourses which support ideal heavy metal subjectivity (IHMS) so as to create space for challenging the (in)visibilities that exist within metal music culture. In this chapter, I identify the origin and structure of IHMS which, I contend, is located in the various texts produced by generations of canonized, male performers. I argue these texts—lyrics, vocal performances, music, and music videos—primarily denote IHMS through unmarked representation.

Markedness, a concept found in Linguistics, invokes “asymmetric relations between members of an opposition, such that one member [bears] a positive ‘mark’ either absent or attenuated in the other(s)” (Gair 226). Applied in the context of this analysis, markedness refers to the taken-for-grantedness of “those qualities associated with men and masculinity” and whiteness that “tend to be the default ways of behaving or speaking. They are taken as the norm for all humans and anything that departs from them... are considered different or ‘marked’” (Ahearn 191). For the purposes of my research, marked

representation demarcates subjectivity through the explicit use of named indicators of gender, race, and class.

In contrast, unmarked representation refers to a set of markers of gender, race, and class which are not explicitly named and are accepted or represented as neutral, universal, and normative. As Morris argues, whiteness and masculinity “defines the normal or accepted range of conduct and characteristics, and all other racial” and gender “categories are contrasted with whiteness as deviations from the norm” (952). Any exceptions that may favor non-normative subject positions “disrupt the settled expectations of members of the dominant group—the people for whom these arrangements were designed and who accept them” (Meyers 6). Instead, norms are projected as neutral and universalizing discourses, regardless of the discriminatory realities they create (Anderson, Willet, and Meyers 1; Piper 1). Normative discourses “produce severely discriminatory effects, not because” they target marginalized groups “for ill treatment, but because” they fail “to consider them at all” (Morris 977). Far from universalizing, these discourses create exclusivity where one’s ability to find as much common ground as possible with white male performers determines one’s acceptance within heavy metal music culture.

Normativity not only creates universals that exclude women *generally*; it also plays an important factor in universalizing the experiences of white women *specifically*. The “universality of gender oppression,” argues Mohanty, “is problematic, based as it is on the assumption that the categories of race and class have to be invisible for gender to be visible” (107). This process has made white women highly visible even as they are still simultaneously subordinated, to the detriment of black, Indigenous, and women of colour (BIWoC) performers. And normativity has not just been confined to metal music culture but has been a consistent theme in metal music scholarship as well. The tendency to

address sexism and racism as separate issues within scholarship has hindered progress into understanding how pervasive these issues remain when considered from the perspective of BIWoC performers and fans whose experiences have been ignored within scholarship.<sup>11</sup> As Mahon notes: “Black feminists have observed that ‘women’s’ organizing for rights has been dominated by the interests of white women and ‘black’ organizing for rights has been dominated by the interests of black men... black women typically had to contend with the racism of white women and the sexism of black men” (217). Scholarship needs to stop falling into the trap of normalizing white women’s experiences in metal music culture and acknowledge that gender discrimination is further complicated by race, sexuality, (dis)ability, and other factors.

### **Laying the Foundations**

As outlined in the Introduction, I am employing feminist critical discourse analysis (feminist CDA) to the texts below. The purpose of feminist CDA “is to show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities” (Lazar 142). In other words, I am exposing the discursive elements contained within these texts that have led to the creation and maintenance of IHMS which, in turn, contextualize working-class white male experience as the normative subject position within heavy metal music culture. In the following analyses, I have identified four main narrative tropes that

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<sup>11</sup> Fan, journalist, photographer, and critic Laina Dawes explores the presumptions made about appropriate cultural consumption, ideas of belonging, and marginalization from the perspective of black female metal fans and performers. She also expounds on the liberation that black women fans and performers find in metal music and culture, dispelling notions that there is no benefit for which black women would seek membership in heavy metal music culture. See Dawes.

reinforce unmarked, normative subjectivity in the music of five prominent, canonized heavy metal bands: Black Sabbath, Metallica, Pantera, Slipknot, and Avenged Sevenfold. These bands were chosen for their impact on heavy metal music culture, their massive appeal within the culture (i.e. commercial and critical success), and their emergence within the chronology of “official” heavy metal music History. I observe the repetition of themes and words in the texts, as well as continuities in different performative gestures, such as distorted vocals, all of which demarcate IHMS. Almost unanimously, the “official” History of heavy metal music attributes Black Sabbath as the progenitors of what would eventually be called heavy metal music and so, I feel it fitting to begin my analysis with them.

Legend states that the use of down-tuned guitars—a signature of the metal music genre—was implemented out of necessity, courtesy of an accidental fingertip amputation suffered by Black Sabbath guitarist Tony Iommi (Christe 1-3; Harrison 150).<sup>12</sup> Down-tuning (also known as drop-tuning) leaves the bass strings open, enabling guitarists to quickly transition between power chords—a chord consisting of a root note (the first note of the chord) and a fifth (the fifth note of the root’s scale)—creating a denser and darker sound (Mel Bay) that benefits from the sustained use of distortion. This signature guitar sound, coupled with heavy, driving drums and aggressive vocals, is not reproducible by keyboard instruments, and it has become emblematic of heavy metal music.

Just as important as down-tuning, a vital component to heavy metal music is its subject. The first narrative I explore is that of the fractured male psyche, in which the

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<sup>12</sup> This story has been contested in the media. Iommi began employing down-tuning on Black Sabbath’s third studio album, *Masters of Reality*, partially due to the decreased tension being easier on his fingers, but also because he felt that it gave the guitar a more ominous musical presence (see Divita et al. 2018).

subject and their suffering are self-contained and therefore, no influence from, or interaction with the outside world is able to penetrate their mental anguish and positively affect the subject's experience. The second narrative focuses on war/oppression, which have often been—and continue to be—explored by heavy metal bands. These narratives depict the victimization of the working-class male through class oppression, corrupt authority, and the detrimental human cost of war. The third narrative is of the masculine avenger who triumphs over his would-be oppressors. This narrative has been prominent in metal music, particularly with the emergence of sub-genres like thrash metal (Metallica, Slayer, Anthrax, and Megadeath—"The Big Four" of thrash metal) in the early 1980s. There is some overlap that occurs regularly within these categories as narratives unfold of the exploited, the underdog, or the social outcast: those who are (undeservedly) disempowered and/or disenfranchised. The final narrative is the heavy metal icon, in which the subject explores the importance of music to his self-identity as well as his importance to the genre, offering an opportunity to display his prowess while simultaneously reiterating his musical authenticity. As Rafalovich notes, modern male heavy metal musicians use lyrics to craft self-concepts or identities that either find the strength to overcome their external obstacles or that are unable to rise above their internal struggles (21, 22-23). These identities, crafted through the use of universalizing discourses, rely heavily on the use of unmarked indicators of gender, race, and class, producing discourses that represent the experiences of the normative, neutral subject position: male, white, and working-class.

## Tracing Patterns

### *Fading into Paranoia*

The fractured male psyche has proven to be a popular topic often explored within heavy metal music culture. According to Rafalovich, heavy metal music “provides a forum for exploring devastating psychological conditions that incapacitate the subject and... serve to permanently isolate him from the world” (25). In other words, the subject and his suffering create a self-contained entity, one that cannot be affected by outside influence, whether positively or negatively, reinforcing the importance of the male subject to the narrative: this is *his* story.

These themes can be found in the earliest texts produced by heavy metal bands, beginning with Black Sabbath. Black Sabbath’s origins during the late 1960s in Birmingham, England establish psychological suffering as not just male and white, but working-class as well. One of the band’s most iconic songs is “Paranoid” (1970) from their second album of the same name:

Finished with my woman ‘cause she couldn’t help me with my mind  
 People think I’m insane because I am frowning all the time  
 All day long I think of things but nothing seems to satisfy  
 Think I’ll lose my mind if I don’t find something to pacify (Black Sabbath  
 “Paranoid”).

Performed in the first person, the lyrics focus on futility as the subject struggles to find pleasure or comfort in anything around him, including women. In a deeply misogynist act, the woman, discarded because she fails to perform her one purpose—dragging the male subject out of his crippling mental state (he is, after all, a self-contained entity)—is

not depicted as experiencing the same pain and desperation as the male subject. Her failure as a nurturer and healer leads to her rejection (ex-scription) from the narrative, implying that the subject's dejection and her dismissal from his life has had no effect on her. Psychological suffering is depicted as exclusively masculine, signaling her value to, or rather devaluation by, the subject.

Continuing with the process of ex-scripting, the lyrics adroitly evade delving into contemporary racial tensions. During the 1960s, mass immigration from the Caribbean and Asia into the English Midlands brought bodies to fill factories with workers (Woods). However, in "Paranoid", there is no narrative of the threat of the "Other" who arrives, representing socio-cultural change, coupled with potential job scarcity and financial insecurity for the white, male worker. Nor is there any acknowledgement of the struggles of men of colour who would be facing these same struggles while simultaneously encountering intense racism. The desperation expressed in the lyrics is deeply personal and does not engage with larger social issues. Despite the increasing racial tensions in the industrial centres of England, the song establishes working-class struggle as the exclusive domain of white men.

The music itself provides additional clues about the subject, prominently featuring chunky, distorted guitar riffs and a driving, incessant drum beat, which historian Leigh Michael Harrison states, were "directly influenced by the physicality of the factories" that surrounded the residential areas and schools in Birmingham where the band members grew up (149). John "Ozzy" Osbourne's vocals, a loud and monotonous singing, almost as if he is trying to yell over the music, would be perfectly at home within the confines of a loud factory. As part of heavy metal's origin story, Black Sabbath's "Paranoid" provides the blueprint for future bands to follow.

Building upon the themes of isolation and futility found in “Paranoid”, Metallica’s “Fade to Black” from their album *Ride the Lightning* (1984) takes the exploration of male suffering into the depths of suicidal ideation. Like “Paranoid”, “Fade to Black” is performed in the first person, once again reinforcing the importance of self-contained, male suffering:

Things not what they used to be

Missing one inside of me.../

Emptiness is filling me

To the point of agony

Growing darkness, taking dawn

I was me, but now he's gone (Metallica “Fade to Black”).

The subject longs for a past in which he (named through the use of the pronoun) felt whole or complete, as evidenced by the oxymoronic rumination of being filled with emptiness. Departing from Sabbath slightly, the subject does not speak of a discarded “other” but solely of the “missing one” (the lost self).

Musically, “Fade to Black” begins as a ballad, directing the listener’s focus to the lone guitar melody that carries us through the intro and into the verses, before an accompanying guitar solo joins the fray, sounding as though it is wailing, signaling to the listener that the beginning of this song is a lament. The vocals during the verses are lighter on James Hetfield’s signature growling, with sprinklings of them used only to emphasise pain and frustration, a stark contrast to the anger and destruction toward the end of the song. “To the extent that aggression and aggressive emotionality and expression are associated with masculinity,” says musicologist Florian Heesch, “sounds that are perceived as aggressive tend to be gendered as masculine sounds. Moreover they



are not only rough, but even seemingly loud” (7). Distorted vocals have not only become synonymous with heavy metal music, they are also a sonic indicator of the authenticity attached to the emotions being communicated, in this case, pain and desperation.

Between verses, chunky guitar riffs signal the self-inflicted violence that might transpire, and the intensity of the music grows as the song reaches its conclusion:

Yesterday seems as though

It never existed

Death greets me warm

Now I will just say goodbye” (Metallica “Fade to Black”).

The intense, singular focus of suffering in “Fade to Black” is never contextualised by any other experience but the suffering of the subject itself. Misery is not only solitary, but exclusively male as well, with the use of the male pronoun “he” which grounds the narrative in the male body. Notably, as with “Paranoid”, there is no discernable external source as a cause of suffering, nor does the subject allude to any trigger for his thoughts. Rather, they generate from the subject himself, without provocation. Universality is achieved through the evocation of an internal locus of pain, one that does not account for external experiences, such as sexism and racism, to contribute to the feelings of helplessness or hopelessness.

These texts and others like them (such as “Live in a Hole” by Pantera, or “Gently” by Slipknot) craft discourses of suffering that are centred entirely on the self. Notably, there is little interest in the cause of suffering in these texts, signaling that broader socio-politico-cultural influences have little-to-no impact upon the subject and his mental state. “[D]iscourse is similar to ideology,” observes Jiwani, “which, simply put, refers to statements and beliefs that serve the interests of a particular group and produce

knowledge supportive of those beliefs” (1). By addressing the strategic employment of unmarked indicators of subjectivity, the patterns that emerge indicate a system of discourse that seeks to not only legitimize the experiences of IHMS but also to create a “‘regime of truth’ where its truth claims are naturalized, and where such claims offer specific interpretations of social phenomena” and legitimize the continuation of power imbalances and social stratification (Jiwani 1-2). The exclusion of an external locus of pain is important for maintaining IHMS as it actively protects against the introduction of counter-narratives that could potentially destabilize IHMS by making the parameters which define it less stable, thereby creating more opportunities for inclusion where few currently exist.

### *Dismembering The One*

War/oppression is an oft probed subject in heavy metal music and has inspired some of the most celebrated compositions by respected metal bands such as Iron Maiden, Black Sabbath, and, of course, Metallica. The narrative frequently coexists alongside that of exploitation and/or corruption as is evidenced in the track “One” from Metallica’s fourth album ...*And Justice for All* (1988). A staunch anti-war track, “One” explores the destruction of the male body and its subsequent toll upon the male psyche:

Can't remember anything

Can't tell if this is true or dream

Deep down inside I feel the scream

This terrible silence stops me

Now that the war is through with me

I'm waking up, I cannot see

That there's not much left of me  
Nothing is real but pain now  
Hold my breath as I wish for death  
Oh, please God, wake me (Metallica "One" 1988).

Sung in the first person, the narrative tells the listener that the subject, severely injured in war, has lost his limbs and his senses. He is rendered a prisoner inside his own body, unable to see, to speak, to distinguish reality, to feel anything but the intense physical pain he will experience until his death. The music video features significant footage from the 1971 film *Johnny Got His Gun* and the lyrics of the song tell the story of the titular character from the film, depicting his suffering and the refusal by an unmerciful entity (in this case, the Army, the party which sent him to fight for his country) to free him from his bodily prison (Metallica "One" 2009).

The music starts slowly and quietly with gentle guitars signifying the subject slowly returning to consciousness after sustaining his injuries. As the bass and drums join in a slow melody, Hetfield begins singing, in the first person, from the perspective of "Johnny". The video opens with shots of the band members, clustered together in a bare-bones rehearsal space (an abandoned factory, perhaps, or warehouse, returning to working-class imagery) around Lars Ulrich's drum kit (Metallica "One" 2009). The music takes on a much heavier tone during the chorus as "Johnny" begs to die and in the final minutes of the track, there is an explosion of distorted guitars and stampeding drums as "Johnny" realizes he will be trapped in his body until he expires naturally. "One" depicts war and those who wage it as the exploiters and destroyers of the ostensibly white (the character in the film is played by a white actor), male body (and by extension, his mind), rendering it impotent and discarding it when it is no longer useful.

Jumping forward twenty-five years, Avenged Sevenfold examine war/oppression from an historical perspective in the title track of the album *Hail to the King* (2013):

Watch your tongue or have it cut from your head

Save your life by keeping whispers unsaid

Children roam the streets now orphans of war

Bodies hanging in the streets to adore.../

Hail to the king, hail to the one

Kneel to the crown, stand in the sun (Avenged Sevenfold “Hail to the King”).

The track eschews the first-person narrative allowing the vocalist to act as an omniscient narrator.<sup>13</sup> In this way, vocalist Matthew “M. Shadows” Sanders establishes his social position as the keeper of knowledge, like an historian recording the events that unfold for posterity—emphasizing the importance of history and those who are granted the authority to tell or document it.

The lyrics quickly establish a dichotomy between social classes. The bodies adorning the streets are adored (though we are not told if it is the peasants or the defeating army who is adoring them), suggesting that these are the bodies of the fallen soldiers who fought to protect their home from invasion. The lyrics are evocative of classical masculine tropes of the revered, heroic warrior and/or the coveting of emasculated male bodies that are the trophies of war. The lyrics establish that the new power entering town

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<sup>13</sup> The omission of first-person narratives occurs in other heavy metal songs that tackle the historical past, such as Iron Maiden’s “Run to the Hills”, a track which explores the colonization of North America and the genocide of Indigenous communities, and features both second and third-person narration. Though “Run to the Hills” does explore the destruction and exploitation of Indigenous populations at the hands of the colonizers (from both perspectives), it is addressed as an issue which is isolated in history rather than an ongoing process within North America. It is also noteworthy that Iron Maiden (a British band) choose not to identify colonization as a project whose roots are deeply connected to British history rather, the culprit is the “white man” who came “from across the sea” (Iron Maiden “Run to the Hills”).

promises death and destruction to those who would disobey, narratively maligning the ruling class as a destructive and oppressive presence.

Musically, “Hail to the King” is anthemic, with the intro featuring a fast, alternate picked guitar riff triumphantly announcing the arrival of the new power. Next the drums begin, followed by rhythm guitar, and finally the bass to join in a slower march, like an army advancing upon its target. The video is a combination of band performance interspersed with narrative imagery, telling how immeasurable power can be wielded as a corruptive tool as the King’s henchmen are prepared to dole out punishments to disobedient subjects:

There's a taste of fear

When the henchmen call

Iron fist to tame the land

Iron fist to claim it all” (Avenge Sevenfold “Hail to the King”).

At the end of the video, the king is shown sitting on his throne, nothing more than a charred skeleton, implying that his corruptive power ultimately led to his own demise (Avenge Sevenfold “Hail to the King” 2013 *YouTube*). The imagery in the video suggests that those in powerful positions ultimately self-destruct due to their own hubris. This, in turn, ennobles the peasantry (the working-class) who are seen as survivors in the face of incredible strife.

In these and other narratives of war/oppression (such as Black Sabbath’s “War Pigs”), heavy metal bands foreground discussions of corruption within the powerful elite and the destruction of the working-class male body. The descriptions of the misuse of the working-class male body parallels those of sex work, in which the body is coveted for consumption by, in this instance, the military industrial complex, crafting narratives of

exploitation, objectification, and emasculation, all experiences which threaten masculine domination and control, which are centric to heavy metal music culture (Walser 116). Furthermore, as with narratives of the fractured male psyche, there is no use of marked indicators of gender and race, establishing normative discourses that centre white working-class male experience as universal. However, war and oppressive rule is often associated with extreme sexualized violence, especially towards BIWoC. Rape and sexual violence against black female slaves during American slavery or against Vietnamese women during the Vietnam war were employed to demoralize women and actively break their will to resist their oppression (Davis 23-24). Despite the extreme and violent exploitation of BIWoC that is directly correlated with acts of war/oppression, the narratives above (and many others like them) depict these issues as the exclusive experience of the white working-class male.

### *Liberating the Madness*

Narratives of the masculine avenger, often seeking justice for perceived wrongs at the hands of mainstream society in general, or more specific personal antagonists, are littered throughout heavy metal music. As Rafalovich observes, the narrative of the “dominant self is often cast in an omnipotent light, espousing in various ways the ability to whimsically control and destroy the world” (26). This phenomenon is represented in the track “Seek & Destroy” from Metallica’s debut album *Kill ‘Em All* (1983):

Scanning the scene in the city tonight

We’re looking for you to start up a fight

There’s an evil feeling in our brains

But it’s nothing new, you know it drives us insane (Metallica “Seek & Destroy”).

The song begins by creating a scene of urban conflict, a struggle between two distinctly different groups of people, establishing cultural boundaries between them.

Despite the attempt to evoke a sense of camaraderie with the use of the second person (“we’re”), the vocals on the track almost exclusively feature vocalist James Hetfield’s voice in solo, with the only backing vocals used to punctuate the last words of the phrases in the bridge. Throughout the track, Hetfield’s voice is electronically echoed, letting us know that, though what is transpiring is presented as a collective action, there is a singular subject leading the charge. Moreover, the echo effect enhances this concept, giving the impression that Hetfield’s voice is so powerful, his outrage so righteous, it thunders off of surrounding structures and fills the space in which the conflict takes place. Interestingly, it is not the subject who is the initiator of the conflict but rather the other:

There is no escape and that's for sure

This is the end, we won't take anymore

Say goodbye to the world you live in

You've always been taking and now you're giving” (Metallica “Seek & Destroy”).

The second verse introduces the subject as reaching the end of his tether—this is an ongoing antagonization initiated by the other party in the narrative. Rafalovich states: “these foes are usually nameless, described generically as ‘you,’ and can take the form of any entity that is perceived as a threat, whether a parent, teacher, bureaucracy, or society as a whole” (27). The use of generic pronouns further establishes the push towards universalizing narratives, leaving no room for a nuanced discussion that centres a more specific confrontation.

The final line of the verse implies that this conflict is a revolution, an uprising that will forever change the social landscape of the unnamed city. However, there is a

hollowness to this revolution when the other party, against which the revolt is targeted, has been so vaguely contextualised. By crafting an antagonist that has been so loosely defined, the lyrics create the potential for any individual or group (dominant or marginalized) to fulfill this role. Moreover, we are never made privy of the motives of the antagonizing party: they were simply there. This problematic structure creates a situation in which the subject is never unjustified in his actions toward their antagonist and the antagonist is presumed to always be in the wrong.

The problematic relationship between subject and other is the focus Pantera's "5 Minutes Alone" from the album *Far Beyond Driven* (1994). The song continues the trend of the generic "you" as the antagonist, though in this instance, the song was written about a real and very specific incident.<sup>14</sup> As the song opens with the jarring intensity of the lone drums, the guitar comes to life with a powerful riff that eventually joins Philip Anselmo's vocals in a monotonous tirade against the other party:

I see you had your mind all made up

You group of pitiful liars

Before I woke to face the day

Your master plan transpired.../

My song is not believed?

My words somewhat deceiving? (Pantera "5 Minutes Alone" 1994).

The lyrics describe a planned attack against the subject. In this confrontation, Anselmo decries the other as liars, exposing their wrongdoing and leading the listener to align themselves with the subject. The other party questions the subject's role as a musician

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<sup>14</sup> Surviving members of band contextualised the track in a 2014 interview with *Rolling Stone*. See Grow 2014.



and his authenticity, a decidedly direct path to getting on a musician's bad side. Anselmo implicates jealousy as a motivator and implies the other party suffers from some symbolic impotency:

Can't be what your idols are

Can't leave a scar

You cry for compensation" (Pantera "5 Minutes Alone" 1994).

Instead of granting the demand for compensation, the singer makes a demand of his own: "just give us... 5 minutes alone" (Pantera "5 Minutes Alone" 1994).

The song then takes a complicated narrative turn, exposing the possibility of racially motivated hostility:

I read your eyes, your mind was made up

You took me for a fool

You used complexion of my skin

For a counter racist tool" (Pantera "5 Minutes Alone" 1994).

The evocation of the intensely problematic reverse racism<sup>15</sup> claim attempts to make Anselmo, a white man, the victim of a racially motivated attack and the lyrics present the argument that he has faced undue discrimination because of his whiteness.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the word "counter" implies an attack that is made in response or retaliation, yet, the lyrics do not reference any other racially motivated grievances prior to the events being

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<sup>15</sup>As Rousell, Henne, Glover, and Willets outline, reverse racism "is the idea that the Civil Rights Movement not only ended the subordination of communities of color in all aspects of social life but also simultaneously led to a similar subordination of Whites. This idea is primarily supported by Whites who perceive gains in racial equity as losses in White status" (E6). Reverse racism has been debunked as there is no historical structural inequalities built into systems of government, justice, education, healthcare, employment, etc. which impacts whites *because* they are white.

<sup>16</sup> Anselmo has faced considerable criticism in recent years about possible ties to white supremacy, as well as racist outbursts at concerts. See Grow (2016), and Dawes (Location 2249).

described. The song fails to acknowledge how the other party, whom we can deduce is not white, may have experienced discrimination prior to the conflict being described due to their racialized identity. In her book, *What are you Doing Here? A Black Woman's Life and Liberation in Heavy Metal*, photographer and journalist Laina Dawes states that “sexual and racial stereotyping and threats of physical harm can limit the participation of black women fans... sometimes you can become so uncomfortable at a show, owing to the tension there, that you want to leave” (Location 200). The potential for metal shows to become hostile spaces for racially marginalized groups is not acknowledged in Anselmo's lyrics. Instead, he presents himself as being outnumbered by a group who were intent on creating a conflict, yet he is supported not only by the other members of his band, but also the predominantly white male audience who only hears his side of the story.

Similar to “Seek & Destroy”, the subject constructs an antagonist with whom the listener cannot align their sympathy. Instead, depicting himself as the innocent party, the victim of another's racially motivated abuse, his musical retaliation is justified by his assumed mistreatment. Furthermore, the song fails to acknowledge the power imbalance created by Anselmo's position within metal music culture due to the (ongoing) popularity of Pantera. Anselmo is provided a public platform through which to air his grievances—his antagonist has no means of communicating his side of the story, especially in a time prior to social media. The microphone and the stage are powerful tools for the creation of metal music icons as well as white male victimhood.

The accompanying music video for “5 Minutes Alone” focuses on the band's musical prowess. Rather than seeing displays of violence, we see the band in their element, performing their song with effortless virtuosity with occasional shots of an adoring crowd. The camera lingers on the instruments, particularly guitarist “Dimebag”

Darrell Abbott's hands as they play up and down the fretboard. The video establishes the dominance of the musicians by showing how the guitar strings bend to Abbott's will. At one point, as drummer Vincent "Vinnie Paul" Abbott plays, his drumsticks are literally on fire. Anselmo is shot behind a chain link fence, screaming into his microphone or glaring at the camera menacingly, willing to challenge anyone who would question his musical authenticity or his established place of privilege within heavy metal culture (Pantera "5 Minutes Alone" 2009).

Slipknot's track "Only One" from their self-titled debut album (1999) focuses on the subject's determination to conquer his adversaries:

I'm not the second coming, I'm the first wave  
 Better get an army, 'cause the fire left me unscathed  
 You betcha bottom dollar I'm the top of the shit pile  
 So stick around 'cause I'll get to you in just a few.../  
 Entire legion of me, totalitarian

The one and only motherfucker, top of the world man (Slipknot "Only One").

The lyrics establish the subject as inherently invincible. Here, it appears the subject has initiated the confrontation, though we appear to be joining the action in the middle of the narrative and are, therefore, missing relevant information. The legitimacy of white male anger is important to narratives of the masculine avenger. In his intersectional study of American mass murderers, scholar Eric Madfis argues: "white, heterosexual male entitlement fuses with downward mobility, subordinated masculinity, [and/or] other disappointing life course events in a way that drives some anguished individuals to retaliate in true hegemonic masculine form through large-scale acts of retaliatory violence and murder" (68). The narrative of the masculine avenger indulges the fantasy of revenge

against a world that has denied him his entitlements (and allows white male fans to bond over these fantasies) without the ensuing legal consequences that would come with acting on these impulses.

The song starts with a high-pitched synthesizer wailing irritatingly, almost as if this noise is meant to simulate the incessant chattering imposed on the subject by his antagonist. Then, his fury explodes as the drums begin pounding and the guitars start their auditory onslaught. Vocalist Corey Taylor's voice viciously screams out the first lines then dissolves into a blurringly fast rap (this is nu-metal, which incorporates other musical styles, including rap)<sup>17</sup> as if he has too many enemies to encounter and not enough time to deal with them all. The final thirty seconds of the track sees the music accompanying Taylor's chant, "Only one of us walks away" (Slipknot "Only One"), in perfect rhythm, creating the sense of impending doom as the subject advances upon the generic "you" to deliver the finishing blow as the song comes to an abrupt end.

Each of these examples establishes the legitimacy of white male anger through the use of normative discourses that establish the subject as the victim of an unidentified oppressive or threatening force. Unlike the previous narratives of the fractured male psyche and war/oppression, narratives of the masculine avenger foster the notion of universal accessibility not only through their reliance on unmarked indicators, but the intentional construction of an ambiguous, immaterial antagonist. Materiality, as Ahmed argues:

is about... something real that blocks movement, which stops progression. But this something is not always something that can be apprehended. It might be an

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<sup>17</sup> The appropriation of musical genres other than rock music by white musicians is regrettably outside the scope of this research project. See Middleton & Beebe.

arrangement of things, a social as well as physical arrangement, that stops something from happening or a body from passing through... It might be a force of momentum that... picks up more and more things, so that more and more weight is acquired, so that things tend that way, bodies lean that way, almost independent of individual will (142).

The immaterial antagonist never truly represents a threat because they do not occupy space, they do not impede movement, which is unique to white male subjectivity for which there is no systemic, oppressive entity or institution that directly challenges or threatens their social position. Instead, narratives of the masculine avenger rely on the righteousness of white male anger, coupled with the security of white male privilege, as the subject acts as judge, jury, and executioner within his own power fantasy, eliminating his intangible oppressor. When your oppressor is the very socio-cultural practices found within heavy metal music culture, which seek to limit your movement (Dawes Locations 2086 & 2098), or potentially eject you entirely, those power fantasies become far less universally accessible.

### *Heavy Metal to the Core*

The final theme is that of the heavy metal icon in which the white male performer crafts his identity as an authentic heavy metal musician through the evocation of his dedication to his craft, his musical authenticity, and the connection to his fellow bandmates. Though their mainstream popularity had been climbing steadily with each album, it was the release of Metallica's 1991 self-titled effort, colloquially known as the *Black Album*, that cemented their status, both in heavy metal music and culture but also mainstream culture. However, mainstream success can also leave a band vulnerable to the

dreaded “sell-out” label. The track “Wherever I May Roam” was the band’s love song to life on the road as a hard-working, passionate, dedicated, and *authentic* heavy metal band:

And the road becomes my bride  
 I have stripped of all but pride  
 So in her I do confide  
 And she keeps me satisfied  
 Gives me all I need.../  
 And my ties are severed clean  
 The less I have the more I gain  
 Off the beaten path I reign  
 Rover, wanderer, nomad, vagabond

Call me what you will (Metallica “Wherever I May Roam” 1991).

The depiction of the road as his “bride” implies intimacy, a long-standing relationship of trust that is marked by the inherent servitude of the road to the subject. The road is likened to a groupie in that it is there for the purpose of granting all of his needs, while simultaneously bolstering his sense of self-importance. However, the act of stripping everything but pride also implies that life on the road is difficult, draining, a sacrifice that is made willingly out of love for the art.

The act of severing ties adheres to clichés about the lifestyle of touring musicians and the willingness to sacrifice all other meaningful endeavours and relationships for the sake of the music. The subject inherently rejects the idea of rampant consumption, drawing parallels to the lean early days of musicians who must sustain themselves on barebones essentials while they pursue their dreams. The invocation of terms such as “rover” or “vagabond” draws comparisons to long-haul trucking, a profession that evokes

images of working-class white masculinity and romanticization about the freedom of life on the road.

Narratives of the heavy metal icon rely heavily upon the insistence that factors such as fame (or lack thereof) and age have no influence on musicians who remain dedicated to their craft. However, as Weinstein notes: “Few artists are able to continue being enamored of Dionysian vitality and pleasure [heavy metal/rock musician’s life] indefinitely. But since their sound and lyrics must conform to the heavy metal code, they become inauthentic. Singing words that once expressed oneself but no longer does puts the heavy metal star in a compromised state” (103 2000). These narratives are an act of discursively denying claims of inauthenticity as much as they are a celebration of the male ego.

The music begins with a gong and a sitar-like guitar playing the main melody, an intentional enactment of Orientalist tropes which, 1) heightens the sense of wonderment around the touring musician, the adventurer seeking to conquer distant lands, and 2) to further emphasize Metallica’s global success, connecting the music with the title of the song. Drawing on an historicized—and inherently racist—cultural stereotype, when the full band chimes in, conquering the peaceful tones of the intro, it suggests that their music is taking over the world—as if they were rescuing South Asia from cultural antiquity. This sentiment is echoed in the lyrics of the chorus:

But I'll take my time anywhere

I'm free to speak my mind anywhere

And I'll redefine anywhere

Anywhere I roam, where I lay my head is home” (Metallica “Wherever I May Roam” 1991).

Privilege and ego are inherent in the lyrics describing the white man, who is free to do things at his leisure, opine without censure, and create new meaning in any space he occupies.

The music video for “Wherever I May Roam” shows the band as they embark on a world tour. Screaming, adoring crowds are interspersed with shots of the band travelling, rehearsing, and hanging out. The band performs to an empty stadium (simulating a sound check) before the scene seamlessly blends into that night’s performance, the crowd hanging on every note. These clips signify the band’s connection to their music, their fans, and each other, creating the imagery of brotherhood and mutual sacrifice (Metallica “Wherever I May Roam” 2009).

Brotherhood is the prevailing theme in Slipknot’s “Til We Die” from their fourth album *All Hope is Gone* (2008). Here, the focus on the band as a unit is the fundamental factor in remaining authentic:

Our friends are all hurting from moments and regrets and charity laced with a lie

Still, we keep hoping, to fix all the defects and strengthen these seminal ties.../

My last true confession will open your eyes

I've never known trust like the nine

Let it be spoken, let it be screamed, they'll never ever take us alive (Slipknot “Til We Die”).

The song outlines the struggle to maintain the integrity of the band, which operates as a relationship: these are not just co-workers, they are family. The use of the term “seminal” here both reinforces the importance of the relationship between band members for the future of the band and its music but also the relationship to masculinity, brotherhood, and even sex. The rejection of women from the narrative helps establish a fantasy in which



the idealized relationship is that between the band members, creating a strong homosocial bond that verges on romantic (Walser 110). The intimacy described in the lyrics mirrors that which is typically found in romantic relationships. The “confession” of trust is vital to the inner workings of the band, “the nine” referring to the nine members of Slipknot. Conveyed in the lyrics is the sense that what makes the band and their music special is the nine and the band cannot operate without all of its parts.<sup>18</sup>

The romanticization of the road allows heavy metal bands to craft the image of the dedicated, hard-working, self-sacrificing musician, one who casts off the trappings of domesticity, responsibility, and comfort for the sake of the band and the music. The rejection of meaningful relationships outside of the band, coupled with the use of romantic imagery, creates an intimate connection between the male musician and his art. The imagery is self-indulgent, almost masturbatory, and serves to bolster the male ego. Many heavy metal bands are formed between groups of friends in their youth and as passion and skills grow, they may then attempt a career as musicians. However, this can occasionally result in the dismissal of members in favor of those whose talents, appearance, or connections in the industry may further aid the success of the band (Weinstein 83-84). Reality usually does not live up to the fantasy but the need to maintain the illusion of cohesion of the band as a unit and disguise disillusionment with the life of a touring musician is necessary for discourses of authenticity to remain legible.

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<sup>18</sup> Ironically, this would be the last album to feature the original lineup that had appeared on every studio album up to this point, following the death of bassist Paul Gray in 2010, the departure of founding drummer Joey Jordison in 2013, and the departure of percussionist Chris Fehn in 2019. Slipknot released their fifth studio album *.5: the Gray Chapter* in 2014 and their sixth studio album *We Are Not Your Kind* in 2019 with new members.

All traces of female presence are erased entirely or subsumed in metaphor, which is vital to establishing and maintaining the strong homosocial environment. The freedom the subjects possess is also exemplified through their established success not only domestically but abroad as well and grants these bands the ability to make a global impression. Almost an act of musical colonialism, their global success allows these bands to shape the very genre through their influence. Unlike the other narratives explored, the narrative of the heavy metal icon seeks to eliminate universality. This is not about shared experience but the maintenance of status and authority within heavy metal music culture.

### **Discussion**

The above analyses show that IHMS is the product of careful contrivance and negotiation: a conscious crafting of an idealized subjectivity who has the power to successfully conquer any foe, who rallies against his exploitation, is always justified in his rage and retaliates accordingly, and whose suffering is paramount. As new bands emerge and rise to prominence, the boundaries of IHMS have remained resilient, stretching only insofar as to accommodate the continued exploration of working-class white male experience. “To claim that patriarchal gender ideology is structural,” argues Lazar:

is to say that it is enacted and renewed in a society’s institutions and social practices, which mediate between the individual and the social order. This means, therefore, that asymmetrical gender,” racial, and class, “relations cannot merely be explained by individuals’ intentions, even though often it is individuals who act as agents of oppression (147).

Though I am discussing individual examples within my analyses, these discourses are not unique to these specific songs and artists but rather, these are merely a handful of representations of an ongoing discursive project that seeks to legitimize the continued valorization and proliferation of IHMS.

Utilizing both named and unnamed markers to create discourses, heavy metal performers have crafted a subjectivity that encompasses the appearance of neutrality and universality but fails to recognize its own specific and privileged social position within heavy metal music culture. The resilience of these discourses can be attributed to the circumstances that led to the genre's creation: the search for an outlet for working-class white male anger and disenfranchisement. Heavy metal's political awareness, when it is present, has remained skewed towards the interests of white working-class men, leaving the experiences of marginalized members of the heavy metal community unexamined, which keeps discriminatory practices within the culture intact.<sup>19</sup>

As I decry the proliferation of dominant discourses, I am not suggesting that discourses need to be contextualised to such an extent that they are applicable only to those who write and perform them. Rather, I am arguing for the wider inclusion of discourses that decenter normative subjectivity and allow for more nuanced discussions around themes of isolation, anger, destruction, and exploitation as connected to larger social issues, such as sexism, racism, and classism, without "Othering" these discourses and relegating them to the periphery or outright denying the existence of counter-narratives entirely.

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<sup>19</sup> The resistance to the concerns of marginalized groups in heavy metal music culture is often dismissed by other members of the community as beyond the scope of the music, with claims that metal music should be and remain apolitical. See Mills (2019).

In Chapter Two, I look at the complex dynamics of gender and race that have shaped heavy metal music culture up to this point in history. I identify the subordinated heavy metal subjectivity (SHMS)—the “Heavy Metal Goddess”—and her importance to the continuation of dominant discourses within heavy metal music culture. I address the anxieties over the presence of women, the ways in which female musicians have been limited in their performances by men within the culture, as well as the erasure of BIWoC from discussions of sexism in metal culture due to prevailing racist stereotypes around female sexuality and appropriate cultural production. I then begin identifying the ways in which white female performers have challenged their social positioning within the culture through the construction of counter-narratives, made possible through their appropriation of IHMS.

## Chapter 2: (De)constructing the Goddess

### Introduction

Although heavy metal music and culture is still the domain of white men, it was not able to remain a boys' club indefinitely and so, metal music culture eventually had to extend a hesitant and conditional welcome to female performers. In doing so, a subordinate heavy metal subjectivity (SHMS) was created: the 'Heavy Metal Goddess'. In this chapter, I discuss the various ways in which women's participation both as performers and as fans is shaped by dominant discourses and how female performers appropriate ideal heavy metal subjectivity (IHMS) to secure their participation within the culture. Appropriation is defined as taking something that does not originate from you or your culture and passing this production off as your own ("appropriation, n."). In other words, white female performers are utilizing the discourses of IHMS to make their music and performances legible to other members of the culture, granting them legitimacy as performers and creators. It is through appropriation that white women are able to negotiate their social positioning within the culture, granting space for constructing counter-narratives to IHMS, a practice that is becoming more observable with newer generations of female artists.

Furthermore, I will address how discourses on both IHMS and SHMS have marginalized black, Indigenous, and women of colour (BIWoC) performers so effectively as to render their contributions and even participation from the History and herstories of heavy metal music invisible. I address the discourses which have created significant barriers for BIWoC to successfully appropriate IHMS. Black female metal performers are marked as "doubly outside of rock 'n' roll's white male club. Like white women they are

intruding in male space and like black men they are treading on white territory” (Mahon 208). This process of doubly labeling (marking) BIWoC as outside metal music culture is fueled by damaging stereotypes around appropriate cultural production, problematic sexuality, and maintenance of cultural legibility.

Though it is my intention to establish the contribution white women have made to the continued marginalization of BIWoC in metal music culture, it is crucial to remember that the deep-seeded nature of these discourses and their continued perpetuation make it difficult for artists to openly defy them without risking rejection from the culture entirely. As Weinstein observes: “Heavy metal is not an equal-opportunity employer. Who you are, in the sense of ascribed characteristics over which you have little if any control... help determine whether you will make it to the big stage... the requisite body image—serves as a selecting mechanism, rejecting individuals who lack the requisite attributes” (76-77 2000). For this reason, it is important not to look to white female performers as a scapegoat for the marginalization of BIWoC but, rather, as another factor of a complex and systemic code which contributes to the erasure of difference. Even as heavy metal’s influence is felt all over the world, the genre is still rigidly guarded by notions of gender, racial, and class hierarchies that regulate, limit, or deny participation to any group(s) that could destabilize dominant discourses.

### **The Discursive ‘Heavy Metal Goddess’**

What I have termed SHMS emerges as a performative archetype with the first female metal performers at the beginning of the 1980s. Performers and bands such as Doro Pesch, Girlschool, and Holy Moses vocalist Sabina Classen crafted their careers utilizing the discourses of IHMS. From screams and growls to black leather and devil horns, many

of the performative tropes that became assimilated into heavy metal music culture through their prolific endorsement by male performers are littered throughout the performances of female performers as well. The term “Heavy Metal Goddess” is often employed to refer to female metal performers in the media, as the less favorable “female-fronted metal” has recently become problematized in heavy metal music journalism (notably, by female journalists).<sup>20</sup>

The “Goddess” figure serves as the point of entry for female performers into the misogynist world of heavy metal music culture and is an amalgamation of IHMS and male sexual fantasy. It is important to note that the term ‘Heavy Metal Goddess’ is not entirely misogynist in intention but, rather, it is a contradictory term that both flatters and objectifies female performers. Many of the female performers who are emblematic of the culture are praised for their talents as much as they are their beauty. However, the term is notably reserved primarily for vocalists that receive the most attention, especially in media coverage, and there is a significant lack of racial diversity in the application of this title.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the “Goddess” serves as the female counterpart to male performers, often referred to as ‘Gods’ (such as Rob Halford or James Hetfield), yet another example of heterosocial parallels between male and female performers. Possessing the power, prowess, and swagger of IHMS, coupled with her objectification, the ‘Goddess’ plays a vital role in making the discourses of IHMS legible.

The continued maintenance of IHMS is contingent on the reproduction of dominant discourses around gender performance not so much because this is an accurate descriptor of the current state of heavy metal music culture—diversification is slowly

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<sup>20</sup> See Cownley.

<sup>21</sup> See Hartmann; Ms. Mojo.

becoming more common amongst audiences, at least (Walser 120; Purcell 92, 100)—but rather it is familiar and, therefore, non-threatening. As Halberstam observes: “[A]lthough we seem to have a difficult time defining masculinity... we have little trouble in recognizing it, and indeed we spend massive amounts of time and money ratifying and supporting the versions of masculinity that we enjoy and trust” (1). The disruption of dominant discourses creates anxiety through the destabilization of IHMS and, with it, the ability for members to claim power through these discourses. “Like opera,” states Walser, “heavy metal draws upon many sources of power: mythology, violence, madness, the iconography of horror. But none of these surpasses gender in its potential to inspire anxiety and to ameliorate it (109). Discourses of IHMS are as much about relieving (male) anxieties as they are about the maintenance of domination.

It is not merely the visually performative that is reproduced. Female heavy metal performers construct their identity through the various texts they create. Many of the narrative themes identified in Chapter One are present within the narratives produced by female heavy metal musicians, including those of the dominant avenger (for example, “I Fear No Evil” by *Chastain* or “Vengeance is Mine” by *Arch Enemy*) and the fractured psyche (such as “Nemo” by *Nightwish* or “Beautiful Tragedy” by *In This Moment*). Another common and more conflicting narrative performed by women explores internalized misogyny and/or (self-)objectification.<sup>22</sup> These themes are important in the construction of SHMS as female performers seek to establish legitimacy through

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<sup>22</sup> This is not to say that narratives of the sexual objectification of women are not present in texts written and performed by men—these texts exist in abundance and were particularly prominent during the 1980s hair metal scene. More often than not, texts about sex and love, written and performed from a male perspective function as a method of bonding between men within the culture and serve to reinforce the social pecking order. See Walser 116.



differentiating themselves from groupies but, in doing so, reinforce their subordinated position within heavy metal music culture.

However, there is a distinction to be made between sexual desirability and sexual availability. Bolstering masculinity is the foremost objective for female performers, either by appropriating masculine discourses or supporting it through their performances. Female sexuality is accepted insofar as it helps to establish and maintain the hierarchy between male and female members of the culture. The male vocalist is coveted for “the spectacle of male potency” created by his performance<sup>23</sup> (Walser 115) and male fans are able to vicariously embrace that potency, reifying the male performer into a working-class white male power fantasy. Though female vocalists may be respected for their talent, they are either coveted as an object of white male sexual fantasy or perceived as a threat to the white male power fantasy.

### **Counterfeit Culture**

As I have discussed previously, heavy metal music culture places significant emphasis on the creation and maintenance of authenticity as a crucial feature of inclusion (Dougher 194-95; Harrison 153; Nordström & Herz 458-160). “Authenticity,” Mahon states, “is far from natural. We construct authenticity and we depend on it to evaluate the quality of art and the integrity of people” (10). Potential members are required to produce credibility through the reproduction of the master narrative of the music’s “official” History, conforming to the social etiquette of the culture, and by showcasing their musical skills.

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<sup>23</sup> Walser argues that it is possible to deconstruct these displays of male potency through the lens of Queer Theory. From this theoretical perspective, gay male fans can appreciate and celebrate “the homoeroticism that is latent in such displays” of masculine virility and male bonding (115). Such counter-narratives further destabilize IHMS through objectification of male performers for their potential sexual desirability rather than their position of power.

Male members of the community take it upon themselves to establish the rules for participation, initiating interrogations to potential members to determine their knowledge of and, therefore, commitment to heavy metal music culture. As Nordström and Herz noted in their case study, these interrogations are more grueling for potential female members as the men “are the ones setting the agenda for when, how, and on what terms a person is allowed entrance into the heavy metal in-group” (459). Without the stamp of approval from their interrogator(s), potential members who fail to reproduce the appropriate (i.e. white male) appreciation for the music, are quickly dismissed as “fake fans”, thereby undermining their authenticity (Nordström & Herz 458-59).

Where men dictate the rules and conventions of the culture, women’s ability to determine their participation is hampered. Considering that, as heavy metal music culture was emerging, the second wave of the feminist movement was flourishing, “one should not dismiss the idea that these subcultures have a [gender] defensive nature” (Weinstein 117 2000). If heavy metal music culture is, at least, partially a reaction to the increased social, political, and economic power of women within the parent culture (i.e. the infiltration of traditionally male spaces by women), seeing women begin to push for space within heavy metal music culture would predictably be met with resistance.

Male control over subcultural inclusion is not unique to heavy metal music culture. As sociologist Michael Brake argues: “subcultures are male-dominated, masculinist in the sense that they emphasize maleness as a solution to an identity otherwise undermined by structural features” (Brake 163). In other words, subcultures are masculine by default as a means for men to eliminate structural barriers that inhibit their access to power—or potential emasculation—within the parent culture by creating an alternative culture which valorizes their masculinity. This creates barriers for women in

male-dominated subcultures, such as heavy metal music culture, because women are then expected to adopt masculine codes of behaviour or be refused membership. In her book, *Pretty in Punk: Girls' Resistance in A Boys' Subculture*, Lauraine Leblanc notes, the “constructions of gender [within subcultures] are neither complimentary nor inversions of one another, for male-dominated subcultures support masculine identification in boys, while challenging feminine identification in girls” (105). The issue is not biological difference—women serve a vital function in preserving masculinity within male homosocial spaces, as I will discuss below—but rather, the fear of potential feminization of the culture that creates hostility towards female members.

The overt misogyny of anti-feminine identification within heavy metal music culture is unsuccessfully disguised—or rather, deflected—through the use of universalizing and normative discourses. These discourses create the illusion of unity or sameness between members of the culture and are presumed to create accessibility across gender, racial, and class divides. However, in attempting to reconcile disparate subject positions, these universalizing discourses create homogenization, leaving non-normative subjectivities on the periphery by prioritizing normative (i.e. white masculinist) narratives. Regarding homogenization in heavy metal music culture, Walser states:

I have observed and interviewed female heavy metal fans who dress, act, and interpret just like male fans... particularly at concerts of bands like Metallica—bands that avoid references to gender in their lyrics, dealing instead with experiences of alienation, fear, and empowerment that may cut across gender lines. Elements of rock music that had been coded as masculine, such as heavy beats, are negotiable, insofar as female fans are willing to step outside traditional constrictions of gender identity (Walser 132).

For women who feel constrained by traditional femininity, heavy metal music culture may provide relief by allowing them to cast off (to an extent) certain expectations associated with female gender roles. However, observations such as those above demonstrate the apparent and illusory erasure of gender division, ignoring or denying marginalization and minimizing the impact that gender, racial, and class positions have on how heavy metal music texts are consumed and reproduced. Furthermore, there is no acknowledgement of the *necessity* for women to conform to and reproduce these discourses in order to participate within the culture as both musicians and fans, nor is there an acknowledgment of the specific form of masculinity (white and working-class) which women must successfully reproduce. Framing the adoption of dominant discourses in heavy metal music culture by white women as a choice rather than a necessity ignores the ways in which white male performers have and continue to dominate discourses and control participation within the culture.

Furthermore, universalization does not address the obvious lack of racial diversity in heavy metal music culture, particularly the absence of BIWoC. As Mohanty argues:

If relations of domination and exploitation are defined in terms of binary divisions—groups that dominate and groups that are dominated—then surely the implication is that the accession to power of women as a group is sufficient to dismantle the existing organization of relations... The crux of the problem lies in that initial assumption of women as a homogenous group or category (39).

The collapsing of women into a single category obscures (in)visibilities, as white women continue to receive increasing attention within the genre, glossing over the non-existence of BIWoC. Furthermore, the presence of men of colour (though sparse, at best, throughout the history of the genre) seems sufficient enough for some to put charges of

racism to bed (Christe 206-9). The monolithic category “women”, coupled with the presence of a few prominent men of colour musicians, has proven remarkably successful at disguising the absence of BIWoC in heavy metal music culture.

Rock music in general, as a cultural production, has largely been coded as “white” culture, with black artists being predominantly noted in the canon at the emergence of rock music’s History and becoming less frequently noted as time progresses. As Mahon observes:

Rock ‘n’ roll music, a quintessential American form [of cultural production] is American precisely *because* of its mixed black and white (or African and European) roots. Historically, however, African Americans and African American culture have been constructed as outside of the U.S. nation and society. This is true despite their impact on “American” culture (13).

Arguments that seek to ameliorate concerns of racism in heavy metal music culture by exaggerating the presence of the few prominent black men within the genre, such as former Killswitch Engage vocalist Howard Jones or Sevendust’s Lajon Witherspoon, rely more on tokenism<sup>24</sup> rather than pointing to a general move towards more widespread inclusivity.

### **All in The Family**

Women’s participation within predominantly masculine spaces is navigated through heterosociality, the spectre of (hetero)sexualized relationships between men and women (Morgan & Martin 108). Women’s predilection towards heavy metal music culture is

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<sup>24</sup> Tokenism is defined as “[t]he practice or policy of making merely a token effort or granting only minimal concessions, esp. to minority or suppressed groups” (“tokenism, n”).

often presumed to be subsumed by their romantic interest or attachment to men already within the culture (Nordström & Herz 459; Vasan 342 2011), a reductive supposition that seeks to link women's participation in the culture to domestic desire, that from which heavy metal music culture is supposed to offer relief. This can result in speculation about the legitimacy of their presence within bands, implying that female performer's connection to the music is superficial and/or that they are undeserving of their position as performers. These potential sexual/familial bonds tend to favor women whose racial and class positions are analogous to the men who dominate these spaces. As Carrillo Rowe observes: "The legal structures that organize family building, such as marriage and inheritance, enable whites to accumulate and exchange property within the intimate site of the family. This family structure extends beyond the white domestic sphere to mediate workplace intimacies" (298). In other words, white women build relationships with white men in professional settings, both protecting and strengthening the predominance of whiteness within that setting while simultaneously emphasizing white women's subordinate position to white men, as constructed through the nuclear family dynamic.

The white, nuclear familial unit is also read as a means of preserving cultural legibility and purity—the values and codes of the subculture are preserved and reinforced through these heterosocial alliances between white men and women. In "Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual" Judith Butler argues that this is a flawed attempt to delegitimize that which challenges or threatens what is familiar and recognizable:

If one does *not* want to recognize certain [cultural productions] as part of the humanly recognizable, then one has *already* recognized them, and one seeks to deny what it is one has already, in one way or another, understood. 'Recognition' becomes an effort to deny what exists and, hence, becomes the instrument for the

refusal of recognition. In this way, it becomes a way of shoring up a normative fantasy of the human over and against dissonant versions of itself. To defend the limits of what is recognizable against that which challenges it is to understand that the norms that govern recognizability have already been challenged (112-13 2004, emphasis in original).

In other words, the fierce maintenance of cultural boundaries is ultimately a struggle to maintain an exclusionary fantasy of cultural purity against that which may render culture unrecognizable to those who feel most entitled to name and define it.

The creation of the nuclear, heavy metal family protects the working-class white male discourses which define the culture and maintains legibility, both to other members of the culture as well as those outside of it. The continuous reproduction and preservation of IHMS culture is potentially at stake with the introduction of women. It is through their subordinated position within the genre that white female performers help maintain the integrity and legibility of the music culture through their symbolic familial status to white men.

### **No Groupies Allowed**

The resistance to femininity in heavy metal subculture is not absolute—the goal is not to extinguish all traces of the feminine from female performers. Rather, it is to preserve those aspects of femininity that reinforce hypermasculine subjectivity within a male-dominated environment while simultaneously eliminating all aspects that threaten to undermine masculine power and control. Female metal performers are expected to maintain a balance between “being metal and male in their *actions*, while being metal and feminine in their *appearance*” (Nordström & Herz 462, emphasis in original). The

reconciliation between maintaining a feminine appearance and masculine performance is a delicate balancing act that female heavy metal performers must learn to successfully negotiate. As Weinstein notes: “The presence of women in metal bands, either as the lead singers fronting male instrumentalists... or in all-female groups, does not mean that the macho image of the metal artist has been subverted.... The female metal artists do not transcend their primary role as sexual objects” (81 2000). The objectification of female performers is not only a site for male bonding but also serves to protect against emasculation by opposing narratives of homosexuality within metal music culture (Walser 116). However, women’s desirability and sexuality can both reinforce and potentially dismantle masculine power. To lessen the threat, women’s sexuality within heavy metal music culture has, and continues to be, heavily policed.

The tumultuous relationship between women’s sexuality and metal music culture (and rock music culture in general) has largely come down to the distinction between “woman-as-artist” and “woman-as-groupie”.<sup>25</sup> To prove the validity of their relationship to the former, female performers must vehemently reject and oppose the latter (Howe & Friedman 614; Nordström & Herz 459-60; Vasan 344-45 2011). Denouncing groupie subculture serves not only to strengthen the power of masculinist codes of behaviour but also seeks to undermine the potentially transgressive nature of groupie subculture in which women advocate for their sexual freedom, becoming the sexual aggressor and pursuer of male musicians. As Howe and Friedman note:

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<sup>25</sup> The conflation of female musicians with groupies began during the 1960s rock ‘n’ roll scene and is employed as a means of “marking them as somehow outside of authentic and legitimate rock and roll” (Coates 2003).



...hypersexualized female fans were actually using metal men to empower themselves and break free from traditional gender roles and sexual oppression...women actively constructed presentations of gender by using hypersexuality to bring male fantasies to life, in order to reap social, psychological, and sexual benefits for themselves (614).

The narrative of mutual benefit between musician and groupie, which suggests not only a potential sexual and social equality but also the commodification of the male performer, threatens male dominion over rock music culture and reduces the male performer to the status of object, an effectively feminized and, therefore, subordinated position. To heal bruised egos, a pejorative and reductive narrative of groupie subculture was crafted which restored the social pecking order. Scholars credit the infamous *Rolling Stone* magazine “Groupie Issue” as the pivotal moment where groupies were discursively constructed as both pitiable and malignant, intent on the consumption of male rock musicians.<sup>26</sup>

The threat of female sexuality is further complicated by prevailing and damaging stereotypes surrounding women’s sexuality which exist within the parent culture as well as heavy metal music culture. White women are perceived as sexually subservient and non-promiscuous and these notions define the parameters of acceptable female sexuality within both the parent and heavy metal music cultures (Baker 14; Mohanty 55). These stereotypes facilitate white male bonding through sexual conquest (or, at least, the fantasy of sexual conquest), further emphasizing male virility and potency (Walser 116-17).

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<sup>26</sup> Published on 15 February 1969, the “Groupie Issue” had a massive influence on how groupie culture and those who participate in it were, and still are, perceived. Featuring interviews with groupies, as well as prominent contemporary male rock stars, the issue has been criticized by feminist scholars for its framing of groupie subculture through masculinist perspectives that serve male sexual fulfillment and the reductive construction of groupies as “bad girls” who use male rock stars to bolster their position within groupie subculture. (See Rhodes 2005).

White female performers represent an idealized version of femininity and sexuality which has been deemed palatable (i.e. non-threatening) within heavy metal music culture, provided female performers accept their subordinated role.

In contrast, prevailing sexual stereotypes within the parent culture that surround black and Indigenous women in particular, are in direct conflict with the image of the passivized sexual fantasy of male members of the culture. Black women's sexuality has been constructed as promiscuous, aggressive, deviant, (Baker 14-16; Frankenberg 75) and always available (Mohanty 55). Both male and female black bodies are deemed excessively masculine which places black women in direct conflict with white men for dominance (Halberstam 2). Debra Merskin speaks about the lingering legacy of the derogatory term "squaw" and its use to describe Indigenous women by their genitalia as well as its connotations to sex work (348). Such stereotypes are based in racist, colonial discourses used to justify the types of extreme violence inflicted upon black and Indigenous women for centuries (Davis 23-25; Mohanty 55). These discourses surrounding black and Indigenous women's sexuality stand in direct opposition to the representation of appropriate female sexual expression and are a significant factor in the marginalization of BIWoC within heavy metal music culture.

When female performers reproduce the sexist and racist values regarding women and female sexuality found in the dominant discourses of the culture, they help to enforce a form of sexual subordination as women must be available to be consumed, at least visually, by male performers and fans alike. Furthermore, such narratives undermine the potential for camaraderie and collective support between women as they are pitted against each other to prove their worth and their commitment to heavy metal music culture. These misogynistic discourses operate as a public denouncement of unacceptable conduct

for female heavy metal performers, with female members policing female sexuality almost as rigidly as men, setting a standard that deters deviation through the threat of ostracization. Finally, these discourses alienate BIWoC by marking them as inappropriately sexualized and inadequately feminine. As Mahon notes:

Maintstream American media representations construct black women as inadequately feminine—either oversexed or not sexually attractive at all. Generally, black women’s complexions, facial features, hair, and body types diverge too much from European-centered beauty standards... [and it is assumed] that white male rock fans would not... want to be them or be with them (216).

Perhaps it would be prudent for me to return to the beginning of this chapter and change the order of operations as it appears the “Goddess” is primarily coveted as an object of sexual desire and secondarily respected as a performer.

### **Putting Theory into Practice**

Throughout my research, I have delineated the constraints placed upon female heavy metal performers. However, what is also important to emphasize is the ways in which women have crafted resilient counter-narratives to dominant discourses which challenge the misogyny of heavy metal music culture. Counter-narratives serve an important function in repositioning marginalized groups through the act of reclamation: the ability for marginalized groups to tell their stories, stories which influence how they are defined in the world and subsequently effect how they may move in the world (Godrej 116).

Too often, scholarship has focused on the constrictive nature of the culture on female performers, creating a narrative of passivity and victimhood without acknowledging the agency of female performers to actively resist these restrictions through their own

discursive practices. By employing a feminist lens to the texts produced by female performers, I illuminate the ways in which, by appropriation of the discourses of IHMS, women and discussions of femininity are repositioned, challenging conventional gendered constrictions.

Appropriation of IHMS is necessary to the construction of counter-narratives as it demarcates what is or is not culturally legible. Utilizing the themes of metal music culture relies on the recognition of the “metal code” (Weinstein 137 2000), the linguistic signifiers of IHMS. “Language...,” states Wolosky, “is by definition social and inherited. No one invents the words he or she uses, which are embedded in context, situation, a history of usages. But this is not a barrier to personal creativity or expression” (577). Female performers do not have to transgress cultural legibility to challenge their social positioning, rather they co-opt the discourses that currently exist, shaping them into counter-narratives that seek to realign women’s position within heavy metal music culture.

The intention here is to highlight how female performers create space for themselves as artists, not to suggest an intention to displace and replace male domination. As Mohanty notes: “If the struggle of a just society is seen in terms of the move from powerlessness to power for women as a group... then the new society would be structurally identical to the existing organization of power relations, constituting itself as a simple inversion of what exists” (39). The purpose of counter-narratives is not to invert current gender power relations—to subjugate the subjugators—rather, they seek to challenge prevailing discourses about women, not only so women can challenge their social positioning, but to shift how women are viewed within the culture as well.

*Mother Machine, Do You Think They'll Like this Song?*

In Delain's "Mother Machine", industry is at the centre of vocalist Charlotte Wessels' narrative, revisiting the theme of war/oppression and its exploitative effects on the working class:

Incomplete, cast in the concrete

Walk the city streets

Granite sky

My machine built the factories

Feeds the worker bees

Get in line (Delain "Mother Machine").

Wessels, acting as both lyricist and vocalist, comfortably situates the listener within the normative context of IHMS; the urban, working-class experience. The industrial sounds that open the track bring the listener back to the landscape of post-war, 1950s' Birmingham. Wessels' clean, smooth vocals are measured, rhythmic, and largely monotonous throughout the verses, making everything sound structured, automated, detached, especially when coupled with the chunky power chords of the guitars and the bursts of the bass drum. Additionally, by identifying the Mother Machine as maternal, Wessels aligns the feminine with the dangerous "other"; that which threatens the working-class white male. The introduction of the spectre of the maternal brings with it the threat of the domestic from which rock and heavy metal music culture is meant to provide relief.

Wessels has situated us comfortably within the realm of IHMS, but we do not remain there for very long and, it is in this familiar territory that Wessels constructs her counter-narrative. The identification of the "Mother Machine" as the progenitor of

industry rather than nature departs significantly from the passive and nurturing concepts that are associated with motherhood. Instead, the maternal has been linked with cold detachment. Transforming the threat of domestic life (family, motherhood, etc.) and aligning it with the processes of industry disrupts notions that domesticity is solely about nurturing or care-giving. Rather, domestic life is intimately tied to industry, technology, economic production, and consumption. Instead of intimate emotion connected with family life, what little emotion contained within the song is associated *with* industry:

Round and round and round

The wheels come down

Dreaming of the steam

The pounding sounds...

Won't you electrify my soul

Intensify it all (Delain "Mother Machine").

Additionally, there is an obvious parallel being made between the process of production being described above and the experience of being in a metal band. The endless process of song writing, the monotony of life on the road, coupled with pounding noise (which could be stage set up, the sound of a tour bus engine, or the sound of drums), and finally, electrification—the thrill of live performance! The "Mother Machine" is the creative effort, from inception to execution, that is then provided to the masses and gives the performer purpose. In this song, the craft of song writing and performing is linked to motherhood, again drawing motherhood out of the domestic sphere and placing it within the process of heavy metal cultural production. Wessels crafts a powerful counter-narrative that takes the ultimate "threat" of femininity and reimagines it as an inherent part of metal music performance and cultural production.

*Welcome to Your Nightmare*

Since female sexuality has a significant impact on how women participate in heavy metal music culture, it is not surprising that female performers contribute to the discourses surrounding sexuality. In the track “Bloody Creature Poster Girl” by In This Moment, vocalist Maria Brink outlines the kind of female sexuality which is accepted within heavy metal music culture—the heavy metal pin-up girl:

Your sweethearts need their princes

Flattery and filthy pearls

Barbie, don't mess with the Marilyn kisses

Your original material girl

But I'm not like those other types, baby

I'm your bloody creature poster girl (In This Moment “Bloody Creature Poster Girl”).

Brink’s subject expresses disdain for women whom she implies are consumed with the pursuit of materiality. The connotation of the filthy pearls implies that this trinket was ill-gotten, disparaging women whom she views as selling their bodies to men. Describing these women as “Barbie” implies they themselves are material, fake, transforming themselves into the ultimate male fantasy through manipulations in their physical appearance. Brink seeks to create a distinct boundary between her subject and the so-called “material girl”. Either the groupie, searching for fame or the girlfriend seeking commitment, the “material girl” is a representation of emasculation through commodification or the threat of domesticity.

Brink’s subject is the antithesis to such discourses and is a mashup of horror movie aesthetics and heavy metal prowess—the ideal fantasy for male members of the

culture, a similar description to the kind of male sexual fantasy found in Rob Zombie's "Living Dead Girl". By establishing herself as a "poster girl", she effectively fulfills her role as a sexual object without the threat of dismantling male power or control—she exists as the fantasy through which male bonding occurs, immaterial and untouchable.

The piano at the beginning of the track, coupled with Brink's affected, hyper-sexualized breathy, Betty Boop-ish voice sounds intentional in its contrivance. Rather than creating the illusion of submission, the listener is anticipating the change in narrative from the description of the vacuous women depicted in the first verse. When the music cuts out and Brink's voice transforms into an ear-piercing scream as she completes the phrase "bloody creature poster girl", the guitar emphasizes this shift as we are launched into the chorus and Brink describes her embodiment of the ideal heavy metal sexual fantasy:

Make you crawl, make you beg, make you plead...

Make you want, make you hurt, make you bleed...

So toxic,

Psychotic,

Chaotic,

Bloody creature poster girl.

Make you laugh, make you cry, make you need every little slasher

Fuck the father's sweetheart, bloody creature poster girl (In This Moment "Bloody Creature Poster Girl").

The description of the "Bloody Creature Poster Girl", rather than being appropriately sexually submissive, is domineering, sadistic, and by her own admission, psychotic.

Brink's subject openly rejects her own objectification, the process by which a person is



treated as a body or specific body parts rather than a whole being (Flynn et al. 164). Rather than sexualizing herself, Brink's subject instead discusses what she will take from her admirer that will give her pleasure. This song is a powerful act of counter-narrative construction, in which Brink appropriates the discourses of sexual subordination to reimagine herself as the powerful agent. "[T]he very process of constructing the self," states Godrej, "has an irreducibly shared and public nature. It requires collusion between the shared, public sphere of dominant discourse and the private sphere of one's consciousness where stories from public discourse are translated by internal interlocutors into private messages about one's own worth" (114). Brink has taken the discourses that construct her as the male sexual fantasy and perverted them to create a power fantasy of her own. The listener is essential to this creation and to legitimize her power by willfully submitting to it. The male participant (the listener) is emasculated, nay, eliminated by his own fantasy.

Unlike the women depicted in the first verse, the "Bloody Creature Poster Girl" will not be bought but rather, is motivated solely by her desire to see her target destroyed:

Baby, you can keep your diamonds

You can burn all your fancy things...

Darling I don't need no princes

I'm no damsel in distress

The only thing I'm needing is for you to be bleeding

From my homicidal kiss (In This Moment "Bloody Creature Poster Girl").

Brink's reversal of gender roles, placing the male object in a submissive position, seeks to disrupt the practice of male bonding by turning male sexual fantasy into a nightmare and rejecting her position as the objectified party. Furthermore, Brink's narrative aides in

deconstructing discourses of threatening female sexuality by transforming male sexual fantasy into the true threat—where male sexual fantasy becomes the architect of male anxieties.

Though there is tremendous potential for deconstructing dominant discourses evident within these narratives, by situating subjectivity comfortably within the confines of IHMS and/or heterosocial alliances with white men, the transformative properties of these narratives are limited to the benefit of white female performers specifically. As Wolosky notes: “Gender introduces a fundamental dimension into any art composition, implicating speaker and audience, imagery, and a wide range of representations of the body, of sexuality, of gender-specific experiences or locations, as these have been historically defined” (572). In other words, the introduction of counter-narratives that reposition white women’s relation to white men are unable to equally address and reposition BIWoC who are subordinated not just by men in the culture, but by white women as well. For this reason, gender alone fails to adequately encompass the experiences of BIWoC. These counter-narratives may represent progress but by failing to acknowledge the unmarked racial position of the authors, their ability to dismantle dominant narratives is hindered, leaving racial and class positions undisturbed.

## **Discussion**

Heavy metal music has proven to be resilient, outliving many of the musical trends that have come and gone through rock History and still maintaining cultural relevance over its fifty-year existence. However, it is clear that heavy metal music culture is still clinging rigidly to patriarchal notions of gendered behaviour and stratified social hierarchies that privilege white male working-class experience. Though white women have made

significant strides in challenging the gendered boundaries of the culture, their participation is still heavily constrained by the dominant discourses of the genre, leaving their contributions to the musical canon largely ignored. Furthermore, white women, in appropriating the discourses of IHMS have inadvertently strengthened these discourses even as they actively craft counter-narratives to create space for themselves, creating (in)visibilities in the process. The doubly “othered” position of BIWoC in relation to heavy metal music culture means that, without more direct challenges to dominant narratives which decentre white working-class male experience, they will remain on the periphery.

In the following chapter, I conduct a case study of Arch Enemy vocalist Alissa White-Gluz, discussing how she reproduces specific discourses of subordinated heavy metal subjectivity—how she embodies the “Heavy Metal Goddess”. I will examine how her adherence to specific vocal styling (i.e. death growling) and the reproduction of common themes found in heavy metal lyrics contribute to the reinforcement of SHMS. Furthermore, by examining her appropriation of IHMS and the “Goddess” persona, I show how she is able to utilize these tools to construct counter-narratives that pose significant challenges to the idea that normative subjectivity is the only appropriate foci of heavy metal musical discourse. I illuminate how she is able to effectively decentre narratives that favor white working-class male experience by crafting discourses that challenge IHMS through a focus on non-normative experience. It is my contention that White-Gluz is representative of a new generation of female metal performers that could help to transform the genre, weakening and exposing the dominant discourses that have created exclusions within the culture.

## Chapter Three: Gospel of the Goddess

### Introduction

Throughout my research, I have discussed the multiple and intersecting ways in which women are marginalized or simply erased from heavy metal music culture. (In)visibilities within the culture have not only actively erased the presence of black, Indigenous, and women of colour (BIWoC) and diminished the contributions white women have made to the heavy metal music canon, but have also contributed to the reification of white working-class masculine discourses. As Ahmed states:

When we talk about white men, we are... describing an institution... a persistent structure or mechanism of social order governing the behavior of a set of individuals within a community. So when I am saying that white men is an institution, I am referring not only to what has already been instituted or built but the mechanisms that ensure the persistence of that structure (153).

In other words, the issue is not the presence of white men, or even of discourses that centre white working-class male experience, per se. Rather, the issue is in the construction of institutions of white male power that seek to not only erase the experiences of others, but also create socio-cultural hierarchies in the process.

In this chapter, I look at the discourses of subordinated heavy metal subjectivity (SHMS) through a case study of Arch Enemy vocalist Alissa White-Gluz. I have chosen White-Gluz because it is my belief that she is an exemplar of the emerging generation of female performers that both embody (and benefit from) the appropriation of IHMS and yet, in successfully appropriating these discourses, have crafted counter-narratives that have transformative potential for heavy metal music culture.

In the following analysis, I discuss the importance of Alissa White-Gluz's dynamic vocals. Her use of growling vocals situates her as a performer within the dominant discourses of the death metal subgenre and mark her performances as culturally legible to Arch Enemy fans. However, White-Gluz's defiant introduction of her clean singing voice marks a departure for Arch Enemy as a band and provides an opportunity for her to claim space for herself as a performer. Furthermore, her choice to introduce narratives which depart from the normative discourses prominent in death metal music (death, violence, mutilation, etc.) are another site of direct opposition from dominant discourses within heavy metal music culture in general and death metal culture in particular. I am interested in the ways in which White-Gluz's counter-narratives represent potential instances of feminist critique of the discourses of IHMS and her politicization of personal narratives. As Vasani states: "while men (and women) may exist in the death metal scene who espouse nonsexist or even feminist *attitudes*, those attitudes may not necessarily result in nonsexist or feminist *behaviors*. Without corresponding behavior, such attitudes are insufficient to combat the dominant ideologies of the subculture (270 2016 emphasis in original). It is through the conscious expression of counter-narratives that female performers such as White-Gluz are able to create space for themselves to challenge dominant discourses and work to destabilize the naturalization of white working-class masculinity within heavy metal music culture.

### **Born with the Gift of an Authoritative Voice**

Over the last sixteen years, Alissa White-Gluz has been proving her mettle as a vocalist, first with Canadian metalcore band The Agonist before moving on to front the Swedish melodic death metal band Arch Enemy. White-Gluz is a versatile vocalist, employing

growling, distorted, and so-called “clean vocals” (i.e. singing) throughout her career. Her vocal versatility has allowed her to transcend genre boundaries, often collaborating with other metal and hard rock bands and artists. However, White-Gluz is primarily known as a growler, most often utilizing a form of voiceless screaming known as a fry scream (Zimmer 2019b) and much of her musical output with both The Agonist and Arch Enemy has extensively featured her growling.

White-Gluz’s adherence to the vocal tropes of death metal is important to dissect for two reasons. Firstly, it establishes her literacy of the codes of metal music performance, particularly death metal, comfortably situating her performance within discourses of IHMS. As discussed in Chapter Two, an important component to the construction of SHMS is knowledge of the History of the genre, as well as the reproduction of the performative tropes that have become associated with the music. For White-Gluz to depart from such a recognizable performative feature in death metal music would make her performances illegible and, therefore, dismissible as not authentically death metal.

Secondly, it establishes White-Gluz’s position within the hierarchy of death metal music, as a female performer utilizing a masculine-coded vocal style, therefore, allowing for her to be overlooked canonically. Despite the relative consistency of growling as a vocal performance—performers are praised for their mastery of technique rather than innovation—the gendering of aggressive vocals as masculine, coupled with the on-going project of canonization effectively erases female growlers or reduces their performances to the status of imitation. Thus, female growlers such as White-Gluz can be praised for their skill, but that skill is always considered secondary to that of their masculine counterparts.

Traditionally, death metal, including melodic death metal, has eschewed clean vocals in favor of distorted ones, primarily growling. According to YouTuber and voice coach Mary Zimmer, this vocal style is typically (and safely)<sup>27</sup> achieved by utilizing one of two methods: the false cord scream or the fry scream. The false cords refer to the vestibular folds, “a pair of thick folds of mucous membrane that are located in the supraglottal space in the larynx” (Zheng, et al. 625) which sit directly above the vocal folds (cords) (Zimmer 2019a). According to Zimmer, the false cord scream is a voiceless scream achieved by moving air through the vocal folds without creating compression<sup>28</sup> (i.e., the vocal folds remain open). By generating a significant amount of air velocity, the false cords and other tissues in the throat and sinus are vibrated, creating a rattling, roaring sound known as false cord screaming (Zimmer 2019a). The fry scream is another form of voiceless screaming created by achieving vocal cord compression without vibration. Similar to the false cord scream, the tissues of the throat and sinus are rattled as breath is forced between the compressed vocal folds, creating a distorted screaming sound (Zimmer 2019a).

These voiceless screaming techniques, though most commonly associated with death metal, are rather universally employed in heavy metal music today with vocalists from varied metal bands, such as Corey Taylor (Slipknot, Stone Sour), Max Cavalera (Sepultura, Soulfly, Cavalera Conspiracy), and Floor Jansen (After Forever, Nightwish) regularly incorporating voiceless screams into their performances. This style of

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<sup>27</sup> If proper techniques are employed, false cord and vocal fry screams are considered to be safe and minimise potential damage to the vocal folds and the larynx. Improper techniques can result in pain, hoarseness, and injury (Zimmer 2019a).

<sup>28</sup> In order to create sound, our vocal folds compress and vibrate or undulate against each other to generate pitch. This happens in both voiced singing and speech (Zimmer 2019a).

vocalization is important for the maintenance of IHMS in that it 1) adheres to long established conventions within metal music, particularly within death metal and, 2) the intensity with which growls and screams are delivered lends a sense of emotional authenticity to the vocal and lyrical performance. “In Anglo-American rock culture,” states musicologist Alexandra Apolloni, “the kind of vocal sound that has been privileged is one that... has grain: something that marks it as interesting, unusual, and authentic, an audible trace of the lived experience of the singer” (149). Additionally, screaming and growling has long been connoted with masculinity in many genres of music, including metal (Heesch 1).

The association of aggressive vocal styles, such as screaming and growling, with men has largely obscured female growlers, especially within the hypermasculine death metal subgenre, well into the twenty-first century. This gendering is not just a matter of attributing vocal aggression to men but is also a product of the on-going project of canonization (Heesch 4). Pioneering female growlers and screamers are not readily celebrated nor are they incorporated into the musical canon. When music media and fans speak of vocalists in metal they almost exclusively praise the attributes of prominent male growlers such as former Cannibal Corpse and current Six Feet Under vocalist Chris Barnes or Obituary vocalist John Tardy (Heesch 4). Both men and women have the same physical capacity for growling as the false cords have little variance in size between men and women (Heesch 6). In other words, there are no physical limitations upon female growlers and screamers to successfully create these sounds but rather, female vocalists experience hostility, specifically from male members of the community, when they fail to adhere to expected modes of feminine vocalization (i.e. “clean singing”) (Heesch 6). Hearing masculine-coded vocal patterns, such as screaming and growling, coming from



female performers creates a dissonance for the listener as the voice does not match the perceived notions of the body producing it (Frith 194).

Despite its connotations with masculinity and the conscious omission of female growlers from the heavy metal music canon, there is a caveat created by voiceless screaming: it can afford female vocalists the ability to obscure their gender from a listening (though, not viewing) audience. Thus, female growlers are presented with an opportunity to circumvent some of the barriers which exist by first introducing their mastery of skill to the listener through recordings. “To the degree that her voice must serve as a faithful sonority of her body...,” states Women’s and Gender Studies scholar Diane Pecknold, “[h]er voice becomes the mechanism by which the purportedly natural materiality of her body can be objectively known, obscuring the way systems of knowledge work on and through the body to put the [female vocalist] in her social place” (82). Due to their voiceless nature, these screaming techniques create overtones, rather than distinct notes or pitches (Zimmer 2019b), erasing the limitations (or rather, expectations) of physicality and preventing the immediate gendering of vocalists upon initial hearing.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the vocalizations are centred prior to gender allowing for criticism to be directed primarily at the vocalist’s abilities and (in theory) lessening the initial impact of gender discrimination. As media scholar Jennifer Fleegeer states: “To discard or despise [the mismatched woman, one whose voice appears to defy the logic of her physical body] a second time [after affirming her talents] would be to validate the conditions by which women’s capabilities are judged by their appearances... Once we

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<sup>29</sup> When White-Gluz’s predecessor, Angela Gossow joined Arch Enemy in 2000, replacing founding vocalist Johan Liiva, the band chose not to disclose her gender until the release of the album *Wages of Sin* in 2001 (Cid).

become aware of the rules barring outcasts from participating in the cultural sphere, the logic of the system falls apart” (192). Accusations of sexism and racism would be undeniable were this the case. If only dismantling the discourses of IHMS were so simple.

Of course, withholding gender identity is rarely available for most female vocalists as the primary means for establishing an audience and procuring a recording contract is through live performance (and, more recently, other platforms such as YouTube). As with the introduction of *Music Television (MTV)* in the 1980s, continuous technological innovations and now, reliance upon social media for self-promotion, have served to further unify the sounds and images of performers. Reliance upon physical appearance—the image—of musicians further perpetuates the notion of authenticity within heavy metal music culture. “Many listeners take for granted that the sound of a voice is a faithful testament to a singers’ lived experiences,” states Apolloni, “timbre is understood as biographical, as a sign of hardships and experiences that grant the singer authority and sincerity. A youthful, beautiful—and feminine—sound may not communicate the sense of realness valued in rock” (149). Moreover, obscuring gender only favors individual female performers who growl as their primary form of vocalization, leaving clean-singing vocalists further marginalized for their failure to successfully embody IHMS, leaving the dominant discourses within heavy metal music culture firmly intact. By incorporating both clean-singing and growling into her performances, White-Gluz creates a strong counter-narrative against discourses within death metal that reject clean-singing as an inauthentic form of vocal expression, making space for herself and potentially others in the process.

## Storyteller

During her tenure with The Agonist, White-Gluz was an active contributor to the song writing process, penning the band's lyrics and vocal melodies. Though her role as a lyricist is now shared with her bandmates since joining Arch Enemy in 2014, White-Gluz has still wielded the pen on some of the bands most popular tracks on their last two albums. As previously mentioned, credibility and authenticity as a metal musician is intrinsically tied to composition, largely because song writing allows performers to display their understanding of the elements of heavy metal music and the continuation of musical tradition (Nordström & Herz 459-60; Straw 9-10; Weinstein 73-75 2000). In essence, an artist is given the opportunity to display their knowledge of the "official" History of heavy metal music through the craft of song writing, not just through song structure, but through the use of lyrical themes or cues that have become normalized within the culture. As a lyricist, White-Gluz has displayed her knowledge and has reproduced the narratives that have become accepted as authentic expressions of both IHMS and SHMS respectively. However, a feminist discursive analysis of the texts reveals that, in many ways, some of her seemingly least disruptive narratives—from a dominant discursive perspective—also provide subtle challenges to her subordinated position within the culture by attempting to redirect the focus of the narrative by changing the subject position to that of the female performer. However, it is important to note that, "[t]o replace one truth with another suggests that the historical problem is simply one of omission, that once the error has been corrected the story will be 'straight' ... this does not account for the reasons *why* certain issues become part of an accepted story, and others fall by the wayside" (Hemmings 119). In other words, a more direct challenge to the

dominant discourses and the continued naturalization of masculinity within heavy metal music culture is needed to address discriminatory practices which marginalize or erase the contributions of women, especially BIWoC. The linguistic and textual markers of IHMS “are organized around particular social rules and conventions to naturalize and legitimize dominance of one group over another” (Jiwani 1). Co-opting these discourses does not erase the legitimacy of their power to demarcate what is or is not recognized as heavy metal music culture; therefore, limiting the transgressive potential.

*And You Will Know Her Name*

The masculine avenger is an important image in the iconography of heavy metal music culture and acts as a symbolic reclamation of power for those who feel oppressed and/or disenfranchised. White-Gluz appropriates this symbol of male potency in what is identifiable as the feminine avenger, who, in notable ways, represents a departure from the masculine counterpart.

In the song, “Everybody Wants You Dead” from The Agonist’s third album, *Prisoners*, White-Gluz rages about her unnamed oppressor as she prepares for their final confrontation:

You did me wrong! Yeah, you screwed me

But guess what? I win, you lose

How funny, what you show when you’ve got nothing left to prove...

Everybody wants you dead

But I want you right here

To see your face when you’ve got no one left (The Agonist “Everybody Wants You Dead”).

White-Gluz's avenger seeks to decimate rather than eliminate, an amplification of rage that transcends beyond the need to be victorious. This discourse is not about establishing dominance, it is about revenge. The departure from the masculine narrative occurs in the object's isolation. The feminine avenger specifically waits until the object of her rage is at their most vulnerable to strike. Similarly, in Arch Enemy's "Avalanche" from the album *War Eternal*, the feminine avenger again takes her revenge when her enemy is at their most vulnerable:

What did you expect?

Wait and see

Cry yourself a lonesome creek (Arch Enemy "Avalanche").

Again, the focus is on isolating the object of her rage. The listener is not privy to the events that initiated the confrontation and instead, we are introduced to the subject who has already gained the upper hand and is ready to take her revenge.

However, the theme of isolation serves another function in this narrative in that it strips away some of the omnipotence found in the examples of the masculine avenger and establishes the hierarchy between the two. The introduction of isolation into the narrative acts as a stratification of access to power. The discourses of the masculine avenger often focus on an object that is seemingly so vast, so indomitable, that it elevates the sheer force of the masculine avenger when he is victorious. In contrast, White-Gluz's subject waits for the perfect time to strike, when her enemy is at its most vulnerable. This shift in the discourse re-establishes the pecking order within heavy metal music culture, establishing the masculine avenger as ultimate and unstoppable. Though White-Gluz is able to appropriate the legitimized rage of IHMS, its potency is diminished by the need for her foe to be stripped of their own potency to ensure her victory. In other words,

White-Gluz's avenger, tremendously powerful in her own right, is never able to achieve the magnitude of the masculine avenger. The heavy metal 'Goddess' is still overpowered by the 'God'. In this way, White-Gluz's narrative situates her position within the heavy metal hierarchy—the subordinate to the masculine avenger.

However, further attention to the narrative reveals that the feminine avenger may not take pleasure in the destruction of their foe, but perhaps, in witnessing and reveling in their fall from power. The masculine avenger is noted for his omnipotence, his ability to transcend even the limits of human physical strength to overcome his adversary(s) (Rafalovich 26-27). The desire for such a fantastical level of strength is not merely located in a desire to avenge a wrong, real or perceived, but in becoming the embodiment of sheer physical potency itself—to become, or more accurately, to usurp the power of God(s). Within White-Gluz's narrative, the female avenger does not seek quite such lofty (or unrealistic) ambitions. Rather, her power comes from seeing the source of her torment lose their god-like status—she survived to witness their fall. "Reclaiming self-understanding," states Godrej, "is in part about liberating [the] consciousness from its propensity to judge itself through the lens of the dominant group, to speak *to* itself and *of* itself in the voice of patriarchy" (12). Rather than projecting the image of the masculine avenger onto her subject, White-Gluz, has crafted a female avenger whose potency is in her ability to withstand her tormentors and still emerge victorious in the end.

The generic "you" is once again employed to express the universality of the subject's experience—this song is applicable for everyone's situation, simply cut-and-paste your grievance here and we will rage together. Similar to the examples in Chapter One, the overreliance on a generic "villain" offers the illusion of a group catharsis for both performer and audience—a synthetic and illusory bond formed between individuals

who, based on their gender, racial, and class positions, may have wildly differing experiences of oppression. Furthermore, the attempt to create an homogenised experience of oppression ignores the very social dynamics of heavy metal music culture and the hierarchies that exist amongst members based on their social position (or their ability to negotiate it).

The expressions of diminished power and desire for revenge expressed by White-Gluz's subject are perhaps best read as a representation of the experience of the female performer in a subgenre of heavy metal music (death metal) that is still overwhelmingly populated by white men (Purcell 100). The isolation of her enemy being a necessary component within these discourses, mirrors the isolation of the female vocalist in an all-male band (and death metal subgenre) within heavy metal music culture. However, the unwillingness to name the object of her rage and instead reverting to use of the generic "you" lessens the impact of her rage, mitigating the potential disruption of an overt feminist critique of heavy metal music culture as a whole and legitimates her rage within the discourses of IHMS.

It is important to acknowledge the potential backlash that could accompany a direct feminist critique. According to Vasani, female members "may feel reluctant to impact the scene... by creating feminist subgroups; they may feel that subgroup formation would lead to a separate subculture (as with punk and Riot Grrrl) and have no wish to be separatists; they may be subject to the external (group) and internal (individual) pressures toward group uniformity that emerge in the face of dissent" (Vasani 268 2016). Even for female members who command influence and respect within heavy metal music culture, such as White-Gluz, they may not possess the cultural power

necessary to prevent their rejection from the subculture (Vasan 269 2016) should they attempt to bulldoze through established boundaries.

The omission of an overt feminist perspective within lyrics is important to discuss for two reasons. First, a feminist critique would undermine the universalizing intention of the lyrics, locating the source of oppression or disenfranchisement within a non-normative subject (in the case of White-Gluz, white, ethnically/culturally “othered”, and female) and acknowledging the subordinated position of women, not only within the parent culture but also within heavy metal music culture. The white working-class male would no longer be viewed merely as the victim who overcomes his subjugators but rather, as an oppressor; thus, undermining his own denouncement of *his* oppression. The IHMS is the victim of oppression by a parent culture that refuses to recognize his authority and grant him social, political, and economic power. It is in heavy metal music culture that the IHMS is able to create the ultimate power fantasy and have that power legitimated in the adoration of the audience who continuously reinforces his cultural (and potentially, economic) clout. If heavy metal music culture is the haven for the downtrodden, the disenfranchised, would IHMS cease to be located in white men and instead be located in white women if an overt feminist critique were introduced? Moreover, if the IHMS is no longer the victim but, rather, the perpetrator of oppression, can heavy metal music culture as a whole continue to reject claims of ongoing discriminatory practices?

Second, drawing attention to the social hierarchy within heavy metal music culture would prevent white women from claiming the privileges of SHMS. In order for female performers to appropriate IHMS, they must be complicit not only in their own subjugation but also in the erasure of BIWoC. By virtue of heterosocial ties to white men,



white women are able to access the privileges afforded male members with less resistance as both groups work to maintain and strengthen the dominant discourses within heavy metal music culture (Carrillo Rowe 294). To call attention to the considerable restraints placed upon female performers would require female performers to reject these discourses and, in doing so, reject the olive branch extended to them via the heterosocial dynamics of the white familial unit. As Frankenberg observes: “when white people... look at racism, we tend to view it as an issue that people of color face and have to struggle with, but not as an issue that generally involves or implicates us” (6). In failing or refusing to disrupt the status quo or acknowledge the ways in which they benefit from the existing social hierarchy, white female performers refuse to address the ways in which they are complicit in acts of discrimination against BIWoC in heavy metal music culture. “When you speak as a feminist,” says Ahmed, “you are often identified as being too reactive, as overreacting, as if all you are doing is sensationalizing the facts of the matter; as if in giving your account of something you are exaggerating, on purpose or even with malice” (21). The potential for feminist engagement with heavy metal music culture is possible but, without collaborative action, it is largely left to individual women to lead the charge, which would likely lead to their rejection from the culture entirely.

### *Feeding the Machine*

Narratives of war/oppression play a significant role in the creation and maintenance of IHMS and many performers have mined this rich vein for lyrical inspiration. The discourses of the downtrodden within heavy metal music culture have ostensibly focused on the exploitation of the white working-class male and are rarely complicated by the discourses of race and gender. On the track “The Race” from Arch Enemy’s *Will to*

*Power*, White-Gluz attempts to bridge this gap through the imagining of a past utopia in which sexism, racism, or agism did not exist:

I heard there was a place

Where we're all one race

Colour, gender, age never could dictate (Arch Enemy "The Race").

The evocation of colour-blindness,<sup>30</sup> gender equality, and anti-ageism in the opening lyrics departs from dominant discourses of oppression within heavy metal music culture in that there is acknowledgement of the disparities in the lived experiences of people based on their subject position within society. As Mohanty observes:

The central issue... is not one of merely 'acknowledging' difference; rather, the most difficult question concerns the kind of difference that is acknowledged and engaged. Difference seen as benign variation (diversity), for instance, rather than as conflict, struggle, or the threat of disruption, bypasses power as well as history to suggest a harmonious, empty pluralism. On the other hand, difference defined as asymmetrical and incommensurate cultural spheres situated within hierarchies of domination and resistance cannot be accommodated within a discourse of 'harmony in diversity'(193).

By situating oppression as a universal experience, White-Gluz ignores the specificities of struggle that directly relate to the various social locations that different communities, groups, and individuals occupy. This could potentially have significant consequences within heavy metal music culture as universalizing narratives can undermine the

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<sup>30</sup> The notion of colour-blindness is deeply problematic in that "it proposes an essential human sameness to which 'race' is added as a secondary characteristic. This assertion of a distinction between selfhood and racialness makes it possible for white women [and men] to claim they do not see the color, or race, of those with whom they interact, but rather see 'under the skin' to the 'real' person beneath" (Frankenberg 147-48).

discriminatory practices that exist within the culture by rendering them invisible and, therefore, dismissible.<sup>31</sup> Though White-Gluz seeks to increase the scope of suffering, to make it inclusionary and shift the focus away from the normative subjectivity within heavy metal music culture, she inevitably falls into the same universalizing themes that have proliferated throughout the music.

### **Her Dulcet Tones Sang Us To Sleep**

As discussed above, growling vocals are a seemingly ubiquitous component within death metal music. White-Gluz, who had occasionally featured her singing voice with her previous band, The Agonist, had abstained from doing so on her first album with Arch Enemy. The reasons behind this are complex—both previous Arch Enemy vocalists are exclusively growlers and deviating from an established formula might alienate long-time fans. Furthermore, Arch Enemy’s older fan base (the band formed in 1995, approximately nine years before White-Gluz would begin her career) may be more rigidly defensive of the discourses of IHMS, putting pressure on White-Gluz to adhere more closely to the conventions of death metal subculture. As Heesch notes: “singing, meaning singing melodies with a clear voice, is the most established musical practice of women in history... At the same time, cultural masculinity is more easily associated with non-singing, because this is what the majority of boys tend to perform after the change of their voice in adolescence” (7). Though the presence of female growlers should contradict the notion of distorted vocals being gendered, the discourses which uphold the masculine connotations of growling simultaneously uphold the feminization of clean singing.

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<sup>31</sup> Racism in metal music culture is regularly explained away by focusing on elements of the music, with suggestions that the hybridity of metal music (read: appropriation) makes it inherently non-racist. Or that an inherently racist music genre is not a thing, or that metal music is incapable of being racist because fans of all races exist all over the world (Clinton & Wallach 274-75).

In *Mismatched Women: The Siren's Song through the Machine*, Jennifer Fleegeer discusses the existence of so-called “mismatched women” whose voices and musical talents are produced through bodies which defy conventions of gender normativity. As Fleegeer states:

[The] containment of women's stories within a larger masculine framework underscores the circumference of the traditionally feminine private sphere. Mothers tell stories in their own homes to their own children. Mismatched women, on the other hand, have no such boundaries. They can tell stories and they can appear in other people's stories... they constantly remind listeners of a place outside that story, where this woman makes music that defies the tale we've all been told about the limits of the female body (14).

Similar to Fleegeer's non-maternal “mismatched woman,” female growlers are defying the presumed limitations of the female body by appropriating masculine-coded vocal styles through which they convey their narratives. “When particular qualities are ascribed a gender,” states women's studies scholar Rosemary Lucy Hill, “the male dominance of the genre is maintained via the reification of male-associated qualities and the denigration of those linked to femininity” (290). Growling serves the function of not only maintaining cultural legibility, it also serves to reinforce and stabilize the discourses ascribing masculinity to growling as more female growlers emerge within the death metal music scene.

### *Singing Out*

On Arch Enemy's most recent album, *Will to Power* (2017), White-Gluz deviated from vocal convention on the song “Reason to Believe”. Lyrically, the song is not particularly

noteworthy, featuring elements of the fractured psyche explored in Chapter One. Where it deviates is that, rather than singing about her own experiences of suffering, the subject is speaking from the perspective of one who has overcome their psychological pain and is now guiding another through this process:

Self-hatred I know it well

It's dragging you down

Listen to me now...

Always keep on fighting my friend

There's a reason to believe (Arch Enemy "Reason to Believe" 2017).

The accompanying music video, a compilation of behind-the-scenes touring footage and live performance, seeks to establish a narrative of band camaraderie—the idea that life on the road can wear you down but we have each other and we have our music (Arch Enemy "Reason to Believe" 2018). The distinctive feature of the song is White-Gluz's vocal performance.

The song begins as a ballad, with an opening guitar melody by lead guitarist Jeff Loomis, with rhythm guitarist and lyricist Michael Amott joining in with a complimentary melody on the ninth measure. As Amott's guitar recedes into nothing, White-Gluz begins singing, a quiet, sombre melody which gives the impression that she is a confidant for the person to whom she speaks, offering words of encouragement and understanding. As the first verse gives way to the bridge, the guitars abruptly become distorted, the drums begin their relentless pounding, and White-Gluz's voice raises, becoming more urgent in tone, with a little distortion, but still melodious before finally breaking into a full-blown growl during the chorus, her voice is layered to give the impression that she is one of many who have faced their demons and won.

The act of departing from the normative practices established, not only within death metal music culture, but also within Arch Enemy in particular, operates as a counter-narrative—as White-Gluz utilizes the versatility of her voice, each variation in singing causing a shift in emotional communication: “[T]he range of behaviours considered appropriate to men begin to alter considerably in the seventeenth century. From this moment on in Western history, men are encouraged to stifle their feelings, while women are expected to indulge in emotional expression” (McClary 50). Traditionally, death metal largely focuses on aggressive emotional range (Heesch 7), so White-Gluz’s choice to utilize her singing voice to express non-aggressive emotionality is a significant departure—it also disrupts the dissonance her growling can create by making her voice appear more conventionally (read: stereotypically) appropriate within her body, while simultaneously disrupting the notion of a gender-less—or rather, normative gendered position—for the vocalist. As her softer voice during the verse soothes it also speaks of the memory of pain and of empathy for the one who is still struggling. The addition of distortion into her melodic singing during the bridge suggests desperation—a fear that she may not reach the object to whom she speaks in time to save them as she implores them to “[l]isten to me now!” (Arch Enemy “Reason to Believe” 2017). Finally, the use of growls during the chorus, and the layering of her clean voice into the melody, is a powerful rallying cry; we made it through our psychological torment and you will to—“there’s a reason to believe, again” (Arch Enemy “Reason to Believe” 2017).

By refraining from limiting her vocal expressions to the growls that have become synonymous with death metal music culture and Arch Enemy, White-Gluz constructs a powerful counter-narrative to limitations of emotionality, as well as the reduction of her talents to a singular function. As Godrej states: “Counterstories can alter the oppressed’s

perceptions of themselves, by featuring certain details and moral ideas that the dominant story ignores or underplays and retelling the story to invite conclusions that are at odds with the dominant ones” (116). Rather than deny or underplay the mastery of her voice, White-Gluz has celebrated it in defiance of the restrictions inherent within heavy metal music culture.

*Passed on through Generations*

Though White-Gluz shares lyrical responsibilities with Michael Amott in Arch Enemy, she has contributed some of the band’s most poignant recent offerings. White-Gluz turned her gaze inward on the song “First Day in Hell” from the album *Will to Power*, which was inspired by the stories told to her by her grandparents, both of whom were children during the Holocaust and spent a part of their childhoods in concentration camps.

In sharing her grandparents’ experience through her lyrics, White-Gluz is not merely discussing a horrific historical event, the Holocaust, but the legacy of trauma that this event imprinted on the generations of her family that followed:

Day one: No sun

Stripped of our names

Now we are merely numbers

Permanently inked in the flames” (Arch Enemy “First Day in Hell”).

The act of stripping human beings of their names, assigning them numbers as if taking inventory, is a profoundly damaging and dehumanizing experience. As White-Gluz recalled in an interview with hard rock magazine *Revolver*: “I remember seeing these tattoos on my grandparents. Literally the only crime that these people were guilty of was just being of a certain religion” (*Revolver* 00:01:19 – 00:01:29).

Though not speaking of her own experiences directly, White-Gluz, who was raised Jewish but now identifies as an Atheist, acknowledges the impact of her grandparents' experiences upon her with use of the second person: "Stripped of *our* names"(Arch Enemy "First Day in Hell", emphasis mine). "For survivors of trauma, the gap between generations is the breach between a traumatic memory located in the body and the mediated knowledge of those who were born after" (Hirsch 71-72). Though White-Gluz is sharing the narrative told by her grandparents, that information is filtered through temporality: she is sharing memories of witnessing loved ones relive their trauma. For groups and communities that have experienced tremendous violence historically, there always lingers the threat of future violence that is equally or possibly more devastating than that which has already occurred. Furthermore, the sentiments that ignited the historical violence do not disappear: anti-Semitism still thrives in Western society. The very act of exploring her experiences through the historical realities of her grandparents' childhood places White-Gluz's narrative outside the boundaries of normative discourse: anti-Semitism is a rarely discussed political issue within heavy metal music.

White-Gluz continues her narrative by drawing attention to the pseudo-judicial nature of the Holocaust, the conviction of innocent people over their religious and cultural practices. Lyrically, there is outrage at the inherent injustice displayed:

Sentenced before *conviction*...

Their gavel is the end of a gun" (Arch Enemy "First Day In Hell, emphasis added).

This is mirrored in White-Gluz's vocal performance, as her growls take on a spitting quality and the overtone rises on the word 'conviction'. As White-Gluz states: "Sentenced before conviction, as in, they're sentenced before they're convicted of a crime but also,



they're sentenced before their convictions, their Judaism" (Revolver 00:01:55 – 00:02:04). White-Gluz is able to play with phrase length because she utilizes fry screaming, allowing for better control of breath due to vocal cord compression (Zimmer 2019b). For this reason, she has more freedom to put additional emphasis on certain words or hold a particular syllable for longer duration which gives her growls a more emotive and dynamic quality. She is able to change the interpretation of the lyrics by changing which words she emphasises. Furthermore, unlike other death metal vocalists, White-Gluz is able to create evocative growls and screams without sacrificing diction, meaning the lyrics are intelligible through the performance (Purcell 31-32). This makes her narratives all the more important within the context of the music as the listener experiences the meaning of both lyrics and vocals simultaneously.

According to White-Gluz, her aim was to intentionally probe the personal nature of this narrative:

We have to remember that this kind of genocide occurred very recently. Like, some people that survived this genocide are still alive today. This was my grandparents, this wasn't my great-grandparents, it wasn't my ancestors. I knew these people and I heard these stories *from* them. And I thought it was about time to just take this, um, personal weight that I had in this historic event and translate it through into a song (Revolver 00:04:30-00:05:07, emphasis in original).

As White-Gluz articulates, she felt there was a need to convey her personal narrative through her music; thus, introducing a non-normative subject position and a decidedly non-universalizing discourse. White-Gluz, acting as the narrator of the events depicted, opts for second person narration and situates herself as an experiencer of oppression through the transmission of intergenerational trauma—this is a part of her family's

history. Unlike dominant discourses within heavy metal music culture, where the speaker situates themselves with IHMS and seeks to overcome their oppressor, White-Gluz is intentionally drawing attention to the fact that this narrative is a deviation—she is speaking from the experience of a culturally/religiously marginalized group, one that still faces discrimination today and still must live with the devastating legacy of the Holocaust. “Groups who are seen as different and whose difference is negatively valued and perceived as inferior tend to be cast as outside... or offered a marginal, conditional sense of belonging... where there is an entrenched history of racism, individual or systemic, racialized minorities will tend to be excluded” (Jiwani 3). By utilizing the discourses of IHMS—specifically, growling—White-Gluz has appropriated IHMS for the purpose of centring the experiences of non-normative subjectivities within heavy metal music culture.

### **Discussion**

In this chapter, I examined the performative and discursive practices of Alissa White-Gluz, to more closely examine the appropriation of IHMS by a white female heavy metal performers to reveal the connections between IHMS and the construction of SHMS or the “Heavy Metal Goddess”. Of specific importance to her performance of SHMS is her capacity for growling, a voiceless screaming technique that is nearly ubiquitous within death metal subculture. White-Gluz’s ability to growl firmly grounds her performance within the discourses of IHMS due to the coding of distorted vocals with masculinity as well as the emotional authenticity they supply to the narrative (Apolloni 149; Heesch 7). Through her vocal performances and her use of common discursive tropes, such as the avenger and war/oppression, White-Gluz has produced discourses that help maintain

IHMS. In this way, White-Gluz, like all white female performers, helps to further marginalize non-normative discourses by reinforcing dominant narratives that seek to erase difference.

However, the subordinated position of white women to white men must be taken into consideration when addressing white women's participation in the marginalization of BIWoC in heavy metal music culture. For this reason, instances where White-Gluz uses her privileged position within heavy metal music culture to introduced counter-narratives that decentre normative subjectivity provide evidence that not only do white female performers seek to challenge their own subject position within heavy metal music culture but, that they can do so in ways that create opportunities for other women, including BIWoC to do the same. White-Gluz's powerful personal narrative in the Arch Enemy song "First Day in Hell" highlights the transmission of intergenerational trauma within families of Holocaust survivors. By sharing her narrative, and doing so in a way that allows her to speak from the perspective of one who lives with the legacy of violent oppression, White-Gluz centres non-normative subjectivity, and instead draws attention to the horrors of anti-Semitism and genocide from the perspective of a third generation survivor. By conducting a case study of Alissa White-Gluz's appropriation of IHMS, I am able to address the privileges that make her success within the genre possible. But, more importantly, I am able to draw attention to the transformative counter-narratives that she introduces in her music that undermine the authority of the very discourses she appropriates.

## Conclusion

Throughout much of its existence, heavy metal music culture has been described as a refuge for those who feel ostracized from mainstream culture and society—a place for the powerless to reclaim power, to gain a voice and speak out (Walser 110; Dawes Location 60; Vasan 2011 344-45). However, there are limitations on who has access to that power, that voice, and when and how they may utilize it.

In my research I have argued that participation within heavy metal music culture is significantly impacted by the complex intersections of gender, race, and class with white men maintaining dominance and, therefore, normalizing the experiences of working-class white masculinity in the discourses created by successful, canonized bands. Discourses, states feminist scholar and activist Yasmin Jiwani, “position us as subjects; they hail us or... they interpellate us as subjects. In this sense, the discourses make sense to us. Through our participation in making meaning, we, in turn, perpetuate those discourses” (1). Discourse is the process by which we understand ourselves and the world and discourses continue to persist through our continued participation in reifying them. Discourse becomes universalized through the process of removing indicators of gender, race, and class, creating an unmarked subject position—what I refer to as ideal heavy metal subjectivity (IHMS). Discourses of IHMS marginalize discourses created by female performers, especially those of black, Indigenous, and women of colour (BIWoC) performers, by marking these experiences as non-normative and, therefore, outside the parameters of cultural legibility within heavy metal music culture.

Discourse has and continues to play a significant role in the subordination of female performers through the canonization of male performers who have reproduced the

discourses of IHMS over generations of bands. This has necessitated the need for female heavy metal performers to appropriate those discourses in order to secure their participation in the culture, which led to the creation of what I identified as the subordinated heavy metal subjectivity (SHMS), commonly referred to as the “Heavy Metal Goddess”. White women’s successful appropriation of the discourses of IHMS further marginalizes BIWoC performers, for whom the appropriation of IHMS is less successful as they are marked as doubly outside of metal music because of their gendered and racialized subject position (Mahon 208).

Concepts of cultural legibility further fuel discriminatory practices within the culture by rendering discourses that cannot easily be categorized as IHMS as not belonging to heavy metal music culture, therefore, justifying their rejection. Along with cultural legibility, anxiety over female sexuality has placed a significant emphasis for the need to control women’s participation through the policing of women’s sexuality by both male and female members. However, prevailing offensive sexual stereotypes have further marginalized BIWoC as being too threatening to male dominance.

In my Introduction, I revealed that inquiries about my research often concluded with questions about why this type of research matters. Despite the limitations placed on women’s creative and cultural participation, female performers have and continue to create powerful counter-narratives that challenge their subordinated position within heavy metal music culture. Rather than simply appropriating and reproducing the discourses of IHMS, they, in fact, often utilize these discourses to create space for themselves as performers and to challenge the misogynist rejection of femininity within heavy metal music culture.

All too often, research into the gender dynamics in heavy metal music culture sheds light on women's subordinated status without recognizing and celebrating the love that female performers have for the music. As women's studies scholar Rosemary Lucy Hill argues:

Focusing solely on problems of access women fans [and performers] face does an injustice to [them]... by not considering how women love the music as well, because female fans [and performers] are always positioned by their gender. Thus, loving music, while taking their gender for granted, becomes a position that is only available to [men], to the extent that male [experience] is presented as 'normal' and 'general' (278).

In turn, this standpoint reflects back into the culture, justifying the continued reification of dominant discourse, further subordinating not only the experiences of female performers (and fans), but also the counter-narratives they create, thus, perpetuating the (in)visibilities that continue to persist.

For black female performers, this issue becomes compounded by notions of cultural legibility and appropriate cultural production for black musical artists—perpetuated not just by whites within heavy metal music culture, but also by blacks outside of it (Mahon 53-54; Dawes Location 1278 & 1300). It becomes important to understand why, if you face marginalization, discrimination, and even erasure, within subcultural spaces where participation is optional, would you choose to pursue membership? As Dawes argues:

The loud, and sometimes angry music let us vent our frustrations, yell and scream and express emotions that are not exactly acceptable to express in the public sphere.

The music also helped us channel our anger into something positive, and our insistence in not letting people deter us from being active in our chosen music scenes is an example of how we've shaped our own individuality by doing what we want to do (Location 175).

The importance of the music and culture for fans and performers—who typically start out as fans—has to be considered whenever we wish to investigate the gendered, racial, and class dynamics within heavy metal music culture. Otherwise, we forget to address an important reality—the resilience of BIWoC to continue the work of creating space within subcultures that would prefer for them to remain (in)visible.

Some promising changes have taken place recently as progressive metal band Oceans of Slumber, whose vocalist and primary songwriter Cammie Gilbert is a black, clean-singing performer, have been gaining positive critical and commercial attention, after signing a recording contract with prominent metal label Century Media Records in 2015. However, that does not mean that the discriminatory practices that permeate the culture are not still firmly intact. As Gilbert states:

There are stereotypes and perspectives that people [in the culture] don't realize that they have. But any time someone of colour would get into it and tell you [white members of the culture], 'This is what I've experienced', everyone would go, 'No no, in this culture (metal), everybody's welcome.' But that doesn't always seem to be the case... If you're ever new in forging a path it's lonely. We're [the band] not doing it for the sake of doing it [having a black, clean-singing female vocalist], this is just what we've put together and what feels right for us. It's cool but it makes it really hard for us to get people to understand what we're doing and find tours that fit and festivals that want to accept us (Leivers).

Though progress is slowly being made, Gilbert's experiences signal that there are still significant barriers for BIWoC performers in terms of touring opportunities and prejudices regarding cultural legibility. Research that seeks to problematize the perpetuation of white male cultural space matters because fifty years into heavy metal music's existence musicians, fans, journalists, critics, and scholars are still arguing about whether or not sexism and racism remain issues to be resolved in heavy metal music culture, even when confronted with direct evidence of ongoing discrimination.

Further research is needed to understand the complex relationship between race and cultural legibility, with particular attention to the double standard that invites discrimination of BIWoC in traditionally white male cultural spaces (such as heavy metal) when the same discrimination is not met by white men in traditionally black cultural spaces (rap or jazz, or even rock, for that matter). Additionally, further ethnographic study of how BIWoC have claimed creative cultural space for themselves within heavy metal music culture is needed to not only gain a deeper understanding of the barriers that exist and how BIWoC artists challenge these barriers, but also to continue to bring greater awareness to their musical output and to acknowledge their achievements.



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