“Not eager to fit in”

The collective work of creating an alternative cosmology of Heavy Metal

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For the Ladies who brought my spirit back to Heavy Metal.

E., L., S.B.B., S.B.H.

Endless Love.
Abstract

The celebration of a White heteronormative masculinity is vivid in Heavy Metal. This has embodied and discursive consequences that are visible in the domination of Metal spaces or the marginalisation of female, trans* or non-binary musicians, but also in an aesthetics of (hetero- and cis-) sexism and racism that is often apparent. Nevertheless, Metal is still empowering and joyful for those who experience exclusion and marginalisation. They have found ways to react and organise an alternative participation in Heavy Metal. Using a queered approach to Cultural Studies, this study aims at intervening in the continuous reproduction of a normative White and straight Metal masculinity. Collecting data from five ethnographic interviews with queer Metalheads and additional autoethnographic data, it shows how queer Metalheads organise their participation in Heavy Metal and create an alternative Metal cosmology. This study is not only a theoretical intervention. As a result of the interview project, a new community of queer Metalheads was created.
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My first association when thinking about a Heavy Metal show is joy. Pure, unfiltered and ecstatic joy. While many perceive the mosh pit (an area of active bodily engagement in front of a stage) at a Metal concert as something violent and aggressive, for me it has been a place of embodied pleasure. The best Metal concerts are always those that make me smile – no matter how harsh, fast and loud the band is. If I shed tears in a crowd, this is no sign of sadness or fear: it is sheer happiness. But happiness, as feminist scholar Sara Ahmed argues, also "provides the emotional setting for disappointment" (2007: 128). People expect to be effected in a certain way by a particular object. They expect to be happy. This promise of happiness makes us choose certain paths in life (2007: 127). And they are not always the right ones.

It was in September 2015, when I accompanied the (Black Metal) band of (all cis-male) friends of mine to a Black Metal festival in Norway. Black Metal is a genre known for shrieking vocals, fast tempo and sometimes extreme stage acting (including pig heads as stage decoration or self-harming behaviour) – I love it. As some Metal festivals in Sweden are known to be relatively progressive, left-wing and support emancipatory movements in Metal, I anticipated that this would also be the case for festivals in Norway and that the festival would be a place of Metal happiness. However, the complete opposite was the case. I was confronted with an audience consisting of 80-90% cis-male Metalheads in, what I would call, Black Metal uniform: leather jackets with cryptic band shirts underneath, denim trousers, boots, battle vests (a typical and individual denim or leather vest decorated with patches, buttons and pins) and bullet belts. This particular festival is known to be an underground event somewhere in the Norwegian woods, so most of the people seemed to be connected through underground networks. Famous Norwegian Metal musicians and the international underground Metal press would show up as well. All in all, it was a Black Metal elite that gathered at this place. There I was, in the middle of my personal Heavy Metal hell. All alone, because my friends were preparing for their gig and selling merchandise. Without any kind of networks and thus unable to relate to anybody. No happiness, just isolation. Later

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1 When referring to Heavy Metal in this thesis, I use this as an umbrella term. Heavy Metal can also refer to one particular subgenre of Metal, but I use it to describe the whole picture.
2 The term Black Metal is not referring to ethnicity or race, but to the “dark” mood of the music.
that day I would continuously be mistaken for being one of the band member’s “girlfriend”. While I, as I will spell out at a later point, have a little peer group in my hometown Berlin that allows me to be a feminist and a Metalhead, a queer woman in Metal, I was all out of a sudden thrown back to my teenage years: being excluded from networks because of my gender, being “the girlfriend” of someone, being alone in a crowded place. The second day of the festival, I refused to visit even one more concert. I just could not deal with this anymore. I could not correct my feelings, be “affected in the right way” (Ahmed 2009: 3), I just felt a plain and deep disappointment. However, this was not the end of my journey in Heavy Metal. It was the starting point for something very different. I started to wonder, whether there are people out there who “do Metal differently”, in an alternative, a queer way. And I decided to find these people.

This study is about the queer fans and artists of Heavy Metal, the queer Metalheads as they are called. Heavy Metal is often associated with straight, White cis-men and indeed, the celebration of a White heteronormative masculinity is still vivid in Metal. Such a celebration (as I experienced on this festival in Norway) has embodied as well as discursive consequences. They are visible in the domination of Metal spaces and the marginalisation of female, trans* or non-binary musicians, but also in an aesthetics of (hetero- and cis-) sexism and racism that is often apparent. Nevertheless, Metal is still empowering and joyful for those who experience exclusion and marginalisation. They have found ways to react and organise an alternative participation in Heavy Metal. The purpose of this study is to intervene in the imaginary as well as the discursive and embodied politics of the celebration of White straight masculinity in Heavy Metal and show alternative ways of participation. My data collection consists of five ethnographic interviews with queer Metalheads and additional autoethnographic data. Using a thematic analysis, I want to answer the following research question: how do queer Metalheads organise their participation in Heavy Metal and thus create an alternative Metal cosmology? I use cosmos and cosmology in a metaphorical way to refer to an alternative organisation of spaces and practices in Metal (cosmos) and the “Weltanschauung”, the more abstract concept behind it (cosmology).

In this study, I conceptualise Heavy Metal as a bricolage. John Hartley summarises that the concept of the bricolage goes back to Claude Lévi-Strauss who uses it to refer to a cultural assemblage. He contrasts the bricolage (the work of a bricoleur) to the work of an engineer. A
bricolage is not planned or well structured, it creates objects with the materials at hand. Existing materials or objects are recycled and incorporated just like other “bits and pieces” (Hartley 2012: 22f). The concept of the bricolage has been widely used, especially in Subcultural Studies, to describe the appropriation of certain objects by a youth culture and the cohesive change in the meaning of the object (like the safety pin for the Punk youth culture) (2012: 23). Deena Weinstein (1991), in her book *Heavy Metal: a cultural sociology*, transfers Lévi-Strauss’ concept to the case of Heavy Metal. Weinstein understands the Heavy Metal bricolage as a big collection of cultural elements that are loosely connected and entangled by an “aesthetic structure” (1991: 5f; 285). This bricolage of Heavy Metal is never static, it is always fluid and moving (1991: 5f). It incorporates bits and pieces from Beat music, ancient Germanic history and the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche and gives new meaning to leather jackets and working boots. This “wild” combination of material hence allows me to suggest that the Heavy Metal bricolage produces knowledge in a rhizomatic mode. In *Feminist studies* Nina Lykke, drawing from Deleuze and Braidotti, describes rhizomes as “underground plant steams, which move horizontally in all directions and bear both roots and shoots” (2010: 139). That means that in contrast to a knowledge production that is looking for the one objective and universal truth, a rhizomatic knowledge production always remains open and infinite and is not only informed by ratio and logos but also by bodies and affect (ibid.). It does not prioritise any kind of information but is based on a non-hierarchical approach. Rhizomatics are especially viable for this study as they allow me to include embodied emotions in the bricolage of Metal and pay tribute to the variety of objects and materials that contribute to it.

The bricolage of Heavy Metal contains and has always contained countless objects and materials of queer artists and fans that are highly marginalised in the public narration, as a consequence of the celebration of White heterosexual masculinity. Let me explain what exactly I mean by queer fans and Metalheads. When referring to the term *queer* in this thesis, I apply a very broad definition. According to Nina Lykke (who draws strongly from Judith Butler), we are surrounded by a heterosexual matrix that labels heterosexual sex as the one and only norm and is based on a deterministic dichotomy between woman and man. A queer subject is thus one that “resists normatively fixed identities as woman/man, feminine/masculine, hetero/homo/bi and so on and disturbs the smooth running of the discursive machinery, within which the two-gender model and the heteronorm reproduce themselves via an endless series of performative repetitions.” (2010: 60). Translating this to
the case of Metal means that I consider someone a queer Metalhead if they disrupt the celebration of the imaginary of a homogenously straight, White and male Heavy Metal and resist normative Metal identities. A queer Metalhead in this study is thus not necessarily someone that is queer and a Metalhead, but someone that is, by engaging in Metal while being in a marginalised position, queering Heavy Metal. This does explicitly include all kinds of (queer) feminist positions as well as White, straight cis men and women who work against (hetero-, cis-) sexism, homophobia and racism.

I have to add that in this thesis, I understand gender in the sense of Judith Butler’s “gender performativity” as “stylised repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity” (Butler 1988: 520). Gender is in this thesis thus nothing inherent but constructed through a continuous act of repetition of certain social norms and rules. If an individual bends this continuous uniform repetition, they have the possibility to transform gender norms and roles or even the two-gender system (ibid.). When referring to gender performances in this thesis I hence describe one or several actions that construct the gender of a person.

The bricolage of Metal and its history are furthermore strongly tied to working class identities and Metal is often understood as a working-class reaction to the hippie movement. When referring to Metal masculinities in this text I thus mean a normatively White, ableised and heterosexual but classed masculinity. Following Connell and Messerschmidt there is a plurality of masculinities that stand in a hierarchical relation to each other (2005: 832). A classed masculinity is thus subordinate in relation to middle or upper class masculinities. Furthermore, as I can tell from my own experience, working class masculinities are often connected to prejudicial notions of aggression, sexism and homophobia. Any analysis or study that examines oppressive structures in Heavy Metal should thus be aware of this stereotype and that, while oppression and marginalisation certainly are a big problem in Heavy Metal, a class- and gender-perspective should always be included. Uninformed imaginaries of the sexist and homophobic (working class) Metalhead need to be questioned. As a popular quote by feminist author and activist Audre Lorde suggests: “There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives” (1984). Socially constructed categories such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, age, dis/ability or nationality are always in entanglement with each other (Lykke 2010: 50f).
In the very beginning of this thesis, I will elaborate more on my situatedness in the entanglement of societal power structures and my positioning towards Heavy Metal. As I want this text to be as accessible as possible for anyone with or without a Metal background, I will then contextualise the topic. This means that I will outline my understanding of Heavy Metal as a bricolage and provide information about the origin and history of Metal. As a foundation for the empirical part of this study, I will then give a brief overview over the field of Metal Music studies with a special focus on publications and studies that examine Metal in relation to power structures. This overview will also show the need for a study that focusses on strategies of resistance instead of processes of exclusion.

The theoretical framework for this study is a queer approach to Stuart Hall’s Cultural Studies and especially his concept of representation and identification. Bringing in José Esteban Muñoz’ concept of disidentification is an attempt to go beyond the binaries in Hall’s concept and is also a contribution to the queering of Cultural Studies. I will additionally introduce and discuss Sara Ahmed’s notion of the “sociality of emotions” and examine how it can contribute to the queering of Hall’s concept. Based on this queer Cultural Studies approach, I explain why I chose ethnography as a methodology for this study and ethnographic interviews as a method. This will be followed by some comments and reflections on the interview conduction. Here I will also elaborate on the community-building that unexpectedly emerged out of the interview project – a practical outcome of this study.

In the empirical part I will first summarise the five qualitative interviews I have conducted in this study. This will introduce the interviewees and their background. In the second part I will elaborate on their strategies of resistance and subversion in Metal, show how they conceptualise disidentification in Heavy Metal and queer the bricolage. These strategies can be read as a reaction to experiences of exclusion and show how alternative participation can be organised. Finally, in the conclusion I will summarise the research results and get back to the initial research questions.

Before I dive deeper into the context of this project and elaborate on the history of Metal and the field of Metal Music Studies, I want to clarify my position in this endeavour, my (Metal) past, present and future. I not only consider this important for reasons of better understanding, but for reasons of research ethics.
THE STORY OF ME AND HEAVY METAL: POSITIONING

This study has been significantly inspired by my own history as a Metalhead. Autobiographical data together with the conducted interviews are the foundation for this thesis. Accordingly, I consider it crucial to position myself in relation to the topic in order to make clear that I am not, as Lykke calls it in her book Feminist Studies. A guide to intersectional theory, methodology and writing, a “faceless, bodiless and contextless knower” (2010: 4). Instead of pretending to produce objective knowledge, I want to clarify, that I am a Metalhead myself, rooted in Punk and political activism. I want to be visible in my research, spell out my positioning and situatedness and thus be able to “obtain a partially objective knowledge, that is, a knowledge of the specific part of reality that [I] can ‘see’ from the position in which [I am] materially discursively located in time, space, body and historical power relations” (2010: 5). Lykke, drawing mainly from feminist scholar Donna Haraway, calls this practice positioning.

I was born in 1989 in a small town in the South German countryside and grew up in the early 1990s with a part-time working single mother under precarious conditions. The financial situation changed over the years: sometimes for the better sometimes for the worse. We remained a working class household and have had financial issues ever since. I was the first person in my family to attend a gymnasium (which was at that time the only secondary school form in my federal state that led to a University education), which was and still is unlikely for children from working class households in Germany. Accordingly, classism was a hot topic for me throughout school times, often combined with the sexism I have experienced as a cis-woman. Around the age of 14 I became a Punk. My family could not afford the clothes that were cool and up to date and I was frequently mocked for the cheap and used clothes I wore, so I decided to spend time with those kids who would consciously choose to only wear oversized and ripped clothes – and started to dress accordingly.

My Punk friends and I were, as opposed to the kids from my school, mostly from the same kind of social background, so this was certainly also an act of class resistance. I already really liked Punk music at that point – Nirvana had been one of my favourite bands ever since the age of 12 – so fitting in was easy. A lot of my Punk friends also listened to Metal bands like Slayer or Metallica, and that was accordingly my initiation to Heavy Metal music. At the same time my Punk friends also politicised me. I started to do activism for pupils’ and
students’ rights, for the local youth club and against neo-Nazis. Between the ages of 14 and 16 my preferences shifted more and more towards Metal and so did my peer group. I eventually became the partner of a (cis-male) Metalhead and started to nearly exclusively listen to Extreme Metal for about two years. In these years, I mostly was the only woman around but still rigidly excluded from the network, being labelled “the girlfriend” of someone, without having an own interest in the music. However, this was rather something I subtly felt, not something I could name or address.

When I moved away for my studies at the age of 19, I personally and geographically broke with this peer group and finally had the opportunity to reflect upon the exclusion and objectification I had gone through. This resulted in a long break between me and Metal music. I stopped going to concerts and interacting with other Metal fans for about three years. These were also the years when I had my inner and outer come-out as a bisexual respectively queer and started to engage with feminism – both aspects I considered not compatible with Heavy Metal at all.

It was only after my move to Berlin that I, as a White, able-bodied, queer (but passing as straight), cis-woman with a working class background, eventually met Metal fans, with whom I really felt comfortable. They got me back into Heavy Metal. Today I have been in Berlin for about two years and am a more or less active member of certain groups related to Heavy Metal. I have friends who organise Metal concerts and festivals, I have friends who are professional Metal musicians or DJs. I consider my peer group to be rather “underground”, as most of us are not interested in big concerts but rather smaller “selected” bands and gigs. I have to underline that being “underground” in this sense also means “elitist” to some extent, as most of us have a university degree in social sciences or humanities and a rather leftist kind of political perspective, which sometimes creates a gap between “us” and other Metal fans who might not be rooted in Punk. As my peer group consists of (queer) women to a big extent, I feel much more welcome in this group than in other groups of Metal fans. Besides just going to gigs and listening to the music, I also help out at gigs or festivals every now and then and recently started to do Metal DJing.

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3 I use the term “elitist” and not “privileged by class”, because most of us have a university degree, yet especially the artists live under very precarious conditions.
Summarised, my perspective as a Metalhead researcher in this study is not the one of a complete Metal insider – but rather of someone who is, based on experiences of exclusion, somewhat displaced from the core of Metal. I do however consider this a striking advantage. Just as at a concert in a big crowd of people, a standpoint that is slightly displaced, slightly out of the centre, slightly towards the edge of the actual space, might enable one to see better, see more, because one is to some extent detached from the crowd. It is this displacement that allows me to take a critical standpoint in this study.

Additionally, the analogy of a concert can also help to understand why I wrote this thesis. If a person is slightly displaced in a crowd, they might also want to make sure that everybody sees that they are a part of it – to make themselves visible. To make it more concrete: Doing research on Heavy Metal is also a method to re-affirm my own affinity with Heavy Metal and to inscribe myself into it. It is not only a way to find and connect with likeminded people: it functions also as a proof my own involvement and knowledge.

**WHAT IS HEAVY METAL? CONTEXTUALISATION**

Before proceeding to the theoretical framework of this thesis, I will elaborate on what the term *Heavy Metal* refers to, as well as to give a brief overview of the birth and history of modern Metal, as a context for this thesis. At the very beginning of this research, I was anticipating that Heavy Metal, not really a mainstream music genre from my perspective, would be a highly undertheorised field. While this seems to be true for the 1970s and 80s, there is a growing body of literature on Metal from all kinds of scientific perspectives from the 1990s on. Apart from a more general context, I will thus also introduce Metal research with a special focus on publications on Metal and power structures.

**Is this “true”? The challenges of defining Heavy Metal**

When talking about Heavy Metal and its history, there is not only one story to tell. Heavy Metal as a music genre and the term *Heavy Metal* have no specific point of initiation (Clifford-Napoleone 2015: 32, 2015). Instead, one has to trace a genealogy. In *Running with the devil*, Martin Walser underlines that African American blues music was the basic foundation for Rock music in general and Heavy Metal in particular (1993: 8f). According to
Metal scholar Deena Weinstein (1991), the genre must have emerged some when between 1969 and 1972. Many scholars underline that Metal was born out of a working-class resistance against the middle-class hippie movement and its music.⁴ “[H]eavy Metal combined 1950’s rhythms with the industrial and mechanized sounds that permeated the homes of the musicians.” (Clifford-Napoleone 2015: 32). This was also, right from the beginning, mirrored in a style of clothing consisting of denim, leather and working boots (2015: 33). The powerful and sometimes aggressive sound of Heavy Metal can thus be read as an embodied expression of class struggle, as some researchers argue – the frustration of the working class youth wrapped in noisy music (Brown 2015: 190f).

Genre boundaries were blurring – right from the beginning. There were (and are) Hard Rock bands with Metal songs and vice versa and fans are debating, until today, whether Led Zeppelin or Black Sabbath were the first actual Metal band (Weinstein 1991: 14). The same applies to the actual term Heavy Metal. Black Sabbath have claimed that it was coined in an article about their band in 1972, describing their sound as “heavy metal crashing” (1991: 19). Deena Weinstein however stresses that the term was used in a printed form already in 1971 by journalist Mike Saunders (Weinstein 2011: 37). The phrase itself might, as some fans and researchers claim, have derived from Steppenwolf’s epical song Born to be Wild (1968), a song about the US biker scene (1991: 19f). Bikers were a huge aesthetic source of inspiration for Heavy Metal musicians and fans right from the beginning (Clifford-Napoleone 2015: 25ff).

But what do we mean by “Heavy Metal” today and how do we differentiate it from, for example, Hard Rock? As a person who has been into Metal for over a decade, definitions that only focus on a certain set of characteristics in a style of music, or only on a youth or subculture, do not mirror my experience. Metal is more. There are networks, styles, role models, sounds, authenticity, emotions, leather and spandex, sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll, the smell of flower-scented shampoo, sweat and beer in a concert crowd – and a lot of entanglement between each of these elements. As Deena Weinstein puts it: “No single description does justice to the richness of the social dimension of heavy metal. Musicians, audiences, and mediators each grasp the whole in different, often contrasting, ways” (1991: 4).

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⁴ Even though scholars like Brown (2015) underline the influence of middle class culture and the number of middle-class Metal fans even in the 1970s.
6). The same applies to Metalheads with different social positionings. Heavy Metal can mean and include different styles, spaces and bands depending on who one is. Weinstein accordingly does not rely on a static definition for Heavy Metal, rather she conceptualises it as a bricolage: a big collection of a broad variety of elements that are loosely connected and entangled, but never fixed (1991: 5f). I have suggested that this bricolage of Metal is informed by a rhizomatic knowledge production that incorporates “rational” material as well as bodies and emotion. This is a non-hierarchical, infinite process that rejects the idea of the one, true and objective knowledge (Lykke 2010: 139). This concept of Heavy Metal is viable for this study for two reasons.

First of all, one of the things that I remember from my teenage Metal years is, that there have always been authenticity debates in Metal-related groups about what is true Metal and what is not (see also Kahn-Harris 2016: 26). Being Metal as a fan or musician is traditionally not bound to any self-definition, rather it is the fans and magazines who decide (in some sort of public-collective process) whether a band or individual should be allowed to call themselves Metal, whether they are true. This is often tightly bound to static and excluding ideas of what Metal actually is. Danish (self-proclaimed) Black Metal artist Myrkur, for example, who uses a lot of slow and atmospheric, ambient parts in her music (which is not at all unusual in Black Metal), received not only death and rape threats after her first album was released, but it was also questioned whether her music was actually Metal (Excretakano 2015). Accordingly, following Gabby Riches’ argumentation in her work on Extreme Metal scenes as ’Sensory Communities’ “‘being metal’ in the scene means not having to explain oneself, not being questioned about embodying a particular style of dress and engaging in transgressive bodily practices without the threat of provocation” – to just ‘be Metal’ seems to be a privilege that is tightly bound to White, heterosexual masculinity (2015: 265). Subculture scholar Ross Haenfler (2014) considers this debate about someone’s authenticity (“Metalness”) essential for subcultures. As I have spelled out, I consider Metal to be a broader concept than just a subculture, but Haenfler’s finding is nevertheless interesting and relevant: for him authenticity is a constant process of exclusion, labelling Metalness “not an achievement but rather an ongoing negotiation” (2014: 99). Authenticity in Metal is an efficacious construct that seeks to maintain the status quo, to create a shared identity based on the exclusion of others (I will get back to this point in the theoretical framework). For queer Metalheads and musicians the authenticity debate is toxic and often leads to marginalisation. In this study, I do not want to contribute to this practice that only reifies normalised pictures of Metal and
continues to silence other voices. I want to instead open up the term for self Definitions and thus contribute to its queering.

The second reason in favour of the bricolage concept is, that it works with the material at hand and thus gives room to different grasps of Metal. Every Metalhead is continuously contributing bits and pieces and thus transforming the bricolage. Every Metalhead contributes to the rhizomatic knowledge production. This is of special importance in regard to how queer Metalheads conceptualise Heavy Metal. Some of them face exclusion and marginalisation on a daily basis. They might not be able to attend Metal spaces, for example. Instead, any other element of Metal might be much more important to them. Using the concept of the bricolage, Heavy Metal is open and ready for this and creates space for queer interventions that challenge the heterosexual matrix. It also gives queer Metalhead the power to contribute to the continuous change of the bricolage of Heavy Metal.

Consequently, this means that I can and will not define Metal at this point. I assume that it consists of a collection, a bricolage of different elements that is continuously changing and produces knowledge in an open, non-hierarchical rhizomatic mode. In order to still make my personal perspective transparent and briefly sketch what this can mean in more concrete terms, I will shortly map my personal understanding of Metal.

For me Heavy Metal is first of all a certain style of music, characterised more by a feeling than by a sound. Heavy Metal music always has a darkness in its aesthetics and can potentially be dangerous (for a societal order, for those who visit a concert, for those who listen to records). It evokes a whole variety of emotions: fear, joy, desperation, and euphoria (see also Riches 2015). This music can, but does not necessarily have to be created with distorted, down tuned (bass) guitars and a loud and crispy drum set. Good Metal concerts often remind me of performance art, an ecstatic exhibit of power, energy and emotions which transfer to the audience (see also Weinstein 1991: 63). However, for me, music and concerts are only two elements in a much bigger rhizomatic tissue. There are Metal networks of fans, musicians and promotors, there is Metal fashion (including band shirts and battle vests), different Metal identities, spaces where Metalheads gather or concerts take place. All of these elements are informed by a cultural background. From philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche, who inspired Black Metal lyrics, to the BDSM scene that inspired the look of many Metal bands. My personal understanding of Metal is a rhizomatic tissue made from these elements
in a sometimes more, sometimes less, strong entanglement. In direct connection with the understandings/tissues of other individuals, my tissue adds to the bricolage of Metal.

**When fans become researchers – The field of Metal studies**

In the 1970s and 80s only a very small number of publications on Heavy Metal were made, the first one being *Characterizing Rock Music cultures: the case of Heavy Metal* from Will Straw in 1984. Since the 1990s a growing body of literature has evolved (Weinstein 2015: 25f). Not only that an increasing number of articles and books on Heavy Metal have been published, an International Society for Metal Music Studies (ISMMS) has been funded in 2011 (Scott 2012). They organise conferences and meetings and were the funders of the first academic journal on Heavy Metal called *Metal music studies* in 2014.5

Metal Studies, according to Deena Weinstein, one of the first and most long-term contributors to this field, is “multidisciplinary, composed of disparate approaches based in different disciplines, and includes interdisciplinarity and attempts at transdisciplinarity” (Weinstein 2015: 23). She names Musicology, Gender Studies, Anthropology and Sociology as important approaches in Metal Studies. Based on Cultural Studies and Cultural Theory as a theoretical framework, Metal Studies is not limited to academic papers. Fanzines and video documentations can as well contribute to the field, which makes it a vibrant content area (2015: 22ff).

Like Ross Haenfler points out, a strikingly growing part of publications in the field of Metal Studies or Subcultural Studies in general are made by persons who grew up in the respective fields (2014: 13). There is no clear line between Heavy Metal fans on the one and Heavy Metal researchers on the other side. Metal can be more than just a leisure time activity. Metalhead researchers strive for in-depth knowledge, trying to understand the field in a more analytic way - and they know their field of study from the inside. They head banged at concerts, bought rare Iron Maiden records and probably had a pentagram on their battle vest at some point. These Heavy Metal experiences make their way right into the scholarship: the Modern Heavy Metal Conference is an academic conference in Finland, first organised in

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5 According to my research there is only one more journal that focusses on Metal music from an academic perspective. It is called “Helvete” and tries to bridge the gap between academia and subculture in Black Metal.
2015. In 2016 the conference was held during the famous Tuska Heavy Metal Festival in Helsinki. Participants in the conference would get reduced tickets for the festival ("Modern Heavy Metal conference" 2016) and there would even be a shuttle for conference participants to the festival venue. Experiencing live Heavy Metal music became thus a crucial part of the conference experience, and vice versa.

A remarkable number of the aforementioned Metalhead researchers are interestingly female (Hickam & Wallach 2011: 255ff). Out of the 241 dissertations and theses Hickam and Wallach examined for their study on *Discourse and distinctions of Heavy Metal scholarship* a percentage as high as 38.2% were published by women. There seems to be no reliable data on the overall percentage of female fans in Heavy Metal, but Sarah Chaker (2016: 150) suggests a number between 10% and 35% for Black and Death Metal fans in the US and Germany. Even though this can only give us a rough idea, it seems like female authors are well represented in academic Metal music studies. This is not a recent phenomenon. When the first three academic monographs on Heavy Metal were published in 1991, two out of three had women as authors (Hickam & Wallach 2011: 255f) and, as Hickam and Wallach point out: “Additional evidence of heavy metal print culture’s inclusion of women is found in the many female editors, article and column authors, and music and concert reviewers found throughout the history of heavy metal tabloid magazines, fanzines, webzines, and blogs” (2011: 258). While the authors of this study do not offer any explanation, I would again like to stress the analogy of the concert at this point and come back to the picture of the observer that stands slightly next to the crowd. I am certainly aware that women might have other reasons to do research on Heavy Metal than I do. Still, I think that the motivation to inscribe oneself into Heavy Metal, to make oneself visible as a part of the crowd, could also be a motivation for other women to engage with Heavy Metal on an academic level. And the perspective of someone who is slightly displaced from the crowd might not only be useful for me, but also for every researcher who is not a part of the White, straight and male dominated crowd.

The interdisciplinary field of Metal Music Studies discusses a broad variety of topics from philosophical trends in Black Metal and timbral changes in Metal Music production to the

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6 The study certainly has flaws in its method and methodology, as only publications in English, German, French and Norwegian were examined and the Gender of the author was apparently assumed based on a name.
emergence of the Kenyan Metal scene. Within the limitations of this thesis, I cannot give a broad overview over all strands of research within this field. I will thus limit my elaborations on publications regarding Heavy Metal in entanglement with power structures.

Research on Metal and power structures

Two of the very first Metal Studies monographs, Deena Weinstein’s *Heavy Metal. A cultural sociology* (1991) and Robert Walser’s *Running with the devil. Power, gender and madness in Heavy Metal music* (1993), already started a debate on power structures in Metal, taking up the issue of sexism and racism in Metal. Other power structures like sexuality remained however undertheorised. It was only recently that the journal *Metal music studies* and a number of other publications (Brown, Spracklen, Kahn-Harris, & Scott 2015; Clifford-Napoleone 2015; Dawes 2012; Wallach, Berger, & Greene 2011; Weinstein 2015) have started to engage with these topics or picked up older threats of discussion. While I cannot draw a complete picture of all of these debates within the limitations of this thesis, I want to at least sketch the discussion about race and Metal, as well as class and Metal. Due to the focus of this thesis I will then elaborate more extensively on gender and sexuality in Metal and underline the importance of this study.

“A liberating vision of autonomy” – Race & class

An important strategy for many researchers working with Metal and power structures is to pinpoint that the image of the stereotypical straight, White, male Metalhead is not at all accurate. In *Voracious souls: Race and place in the formation of the San Francisco Bay Area Thrash scene*, author Kevin Fellezs (2015) lines out whitewashing in the history of Thrash Metal (the genre of some of the most famous Metal bands like Metallica, Slayer, and Anthrax). He argues that the ethnicity or race of some of the most important actors in Thrash Metal has just been ignored. Fellezs assumes, that even though Metal in the 1980s was already labelled a “White genre”, Thrash Metal had a “liberating vision of radical autonomy” which motivated young people of colour to form Thrash bands. This has certainly to be seen in the light of the repressions young people of colour faced in the 1980s under the Reagan administration (2015: 91f). Nevertheless, the involvement of people of colour in the U.S.-Thrash scene is a more or less unnoticed fact. Musicians like Metallica guitarist Kirk
Hammet, with a Filipino background, Metallica’s Chicano bassist Robert Trujillo or Tom Araya, the Chilean-U.S.-American singer of the Heavy Metal Superstars Slayer, are some of the most famous Metal personalities of our time. Still, the myth of Metal as an all-White genre continues to exist, but, as Fellez points out “Thrash Metal, for all its dark, violent imagery, invited a reconfiguration of the doxa that privileges and centralizes White masculinity within metal music culture” (2015: 101). Metal scholar Magnus Nilsson in Race and gender in globalized and postmodern Metal (2016) additionally suggests, that the picture of Metal as a White genre is also based on a Western-centric picture of Heavy Metal. Most of the fans and actors in regions where Metal has spread in the last decades, especially on the Asian and African continents, are however people of colour and accordingly challenge this normative picture of the White Metal fan (see also Kahn-Harris 2016: 28f; Nilsson 2016: 258ff). Clinton and Wallach (2015: 274) in Recoloring the Metal map even state that the “Latin American Metalhead population may rival Europe’s.” They also draw attention to the fact that it is bands like Japanese all-female band Gallhammer that challenge the image of Metal as a White genre and at the same time the male norm in Metal.

Laina Dawes (2012) in her highly autobiographical book What are you doing here? analyses the situation of Black women in Heavy Metal in north America more in detail. She argues that they are not only excluded from Metal communities, based on the entanglement between racism and sexism, but that they additionally face rejection from Black communities for their Metal fandom (2012: 25ff). As I will explain later, such a rejection from two communities is also spread amongst queer fans of Heavy Metal. Nevertheless, Dawes underlines the importance of Heavy Metal, especially for women of colour, and stresses that Metal music helps her and her interviewees through crises. It empowers and liberates them (2012: 24).

I have mentioned before that the emergence of Heavy Metal has been understood as a working-class reaction to the middle-class hippie movement. Scholars have argued that Heavy Metal is the outlet for the anger, fear and frustration of a working-class youth (e.g. Brown 2015: 190f). And while this, at least party, might be true regarding the historical development of Heavy Metal, Andy R. Brown (2015) in his meta study Un(su)stained class. Figuring out the identity politics of Heavy Metal’s class demographics draws the attention to the fact, that this might also be an assumption to be overcome. Brown quotes a variety of studies from around the globe to show that the working class profile Heavy Metal is actually no longer true. Even in countries, where Heavy Metal is only a recent phenomenon, it is
mostly the “‘new middle-class’ that Metal attracts (2015: 203). A big part of the global Heavy Metal community seems to hold university degrees and be more or less set in a middle-class environment (2015: 191f). Interestingly, Brown argues that the common working class attribution of Metal could partly also be a result of “a decline in the status of skilled manual, routine and minor supervisory non-manual occupations” (2015: 202) in the mid-1970s, meaning that some of the first fans might have actually been middle-class, but lost class privileges in the course of time.

“Abandon all hope” – Classical studies on gender and sexuality in Metal

When it comes to issues of gender and sexuality in Heavy Metal the majority of the work has been done on the position of women in Heavy Metal. 7 Deena Weinstein’s Heavy Metal. A cultural sociology, and Martin Walser’s Running with the devil, two of the first and still most influential works on Metal music, are good examples for a number of publications on the marginalised position women and queers inhabit in Heavy Metal. Weinstein (1991: 64) comes to a very fatalistic conclusion about Heavy Metal artistry, pointing out not only sexist, but also racist, ableist and ageist structures: “The code of the heavy metal star’s physical appearance (…) serves as a selecting mechanism, rejecting individuals who lack the requisite attributes. The advice to those aspiring to be heavy metal artists if they are physically infirm or misshapen, not youthful, people of colour, or women is ‘Abandon all hope!’” At the same time she also renders the Metal subculture generally homophobic and neglects the existence of homoerotic content (1991: 258). Martin Walser (1993) on the other hand focusses more on the construction of a dominant masculinity in the “patriarchal” world of Metal. He stresses the exclusion of female Metalheads as a result of the crucial role of male bonding in Metal. In this world, male bonds are the only valuable social relationship (1993: 114f). In contrast to Weinstein, Walser also examines acts of gender bending in the Metal of the early 1990s. While he argues that the depiction of hypermasculinity in Metal music videos has a high homoerotic potential, he also underlines that the androgyny in Glam Rock or Metal is just another form of male dominance: “Androgynous musicians and fans appropriate the visual signs of feminine identity in order to claim the powers of spectacularity for themselves.” (1993: 128f)

7 I combine these two elements at this point, as the research on sexualities in Metal has, until now, always been combined with research on gender under the umbrella of “queerness“.
While it is certainly important to underline these oppressive structures, a very narrow picture of women and queer fans is drawn here at the same time. They are the passive victims, only able to choose between being a sex object/groupie or “to take on a kind of male essence” (Kahn-Harris 2016: 29). I have identified a number of blind spots many of these publications on (hetero-)sexist structures in Metal share:

(1) They are based on a two-gendered, heteronormative system, that often makes the sheer existence of queer, non-binary, inter or trans* persons in Metal invisible
(2) They seem unable to see that, while exclusion and marginalisation are still very urgent, current and important topics, Metal might also open up discursive spaces
(3) People with a gender other than cis-male (or a sexuality other than heterosexual) are far from only being passive victims in Metal.

In the past two years a number of researchers have contributed to a different body of literature, that tries to fill these blank pages.

“Metal has never been all about the straight boys” – Transgressive work on gender and sexuality in Metal

Sonia Vasan (2015) in her paper on Gender and power in the Death Metal scene argues that “in order to explicate the position of women in Metal, it is necessary to move beyond an examination and marginalization (…) by delving into the lived experiences of female fans” (2015: 263). Drawing from previous research, but also from interviews she conducted, Vasan points out the marginalisation and exclusion women experience in Death Metal, but underlines at the same time the lived experience of liberation for female fans (2015: 266ff). As her participant Laina puts it: “I think as being a woman [emphasis hers], that you, society does not really appreciate, um, or really allow you to really vent out your frustration. I find this music so liberating.” (2015: 266) Apparently, women are eager to navigate oppressive structures because Metal can at the same time liberate them from societal oppression (2015: 273).
Rosemary Luce-Hall (2015) follows a similar path, focusing on the embodied pleasurable experiences women make in Heavy Metal. She criticises that previous literature has labelled women as second-class fans and limited them to their gender while not taking serious their experiences (2015: 278f). Based on her interview study, Luce-Hall underlines how her interviewees’ descriptions of their experiences can challenge the doxa of Metal as a male or masculine genre. The participants emphasise terminology such as “transcendence”, “shared experience” and the language of “romance” when talking about Metal instead of traditionally used and rather male identified terms such as “anger”, “aggression”, “loud”, “hard” or “raw” (2015: 279, 283ff). Luce-Hall renders it problematic that Metal is associated with maleness, but also that these terms are perceived as essentially male, while, for example, “aggression is a human quality not a male one.” (2015: 290) Also working in the field of Death Metal, Jamie E. Patterson (2015) goes one step further and argues that involvement in Death Metal can not only empower women, but give them the strength to bend their gender performances. One of her interviewees describes Death Metal as a space for alternative womanhood, that is rather “evil than pretty” (2015: 253). A space where she does not have to wear make-up, comb her hair or shower every day to be valued as a person. “Her participation in the death metal scene enables her to find spaces where she can gain power through resisting gender normative prescriptions, power she uses in her everyday life.” (ibid.). Other authors like Jenna Kummer (2016) have also pointed out that Metal can potentially create spaces for people of all genders to embody “both masculinity and femininity”, but Kummer as well as Patterson fail to pinpoint the queer potential of this assumption. The same applies to Deena Weinstein’s (2016) piece on gender play (mainly of cis-male performers) in Metal.

Amber Clifford-Napoleone (2015) points findings like these more into a queer direction. She argues that Heavy Metal creates a space for a whole variety of gender performances, especially varieties of masculinities, for all Metalheads, for example through the use of band shirts and cargo pants or leather and fetish wear. In her study a cis-male gay participant underlined that, in contrast to queer spaces, Metal spaces would allow him to be “a man”, to live masculinity. A butch-identified female fan stressed that Metal finally was a space for her where she would not have to “femme up” (2015: 58f). Clifford-Napoleone draws the conclusion that Metal is not per se a space where binary heterosexual gender norms are confirmed. Rather she, using the example of Metal musicians who draw from an even bigger variety of gender performances, including sparkly make-up, military clothes or studded bracelets, argues that Metal artists have the possibility to destabilise “gender and sexuality in
the temporality of a metal performance” (2015: 65). The author creates a radically new picture of Heavy Metal, questioning even the cornerstones when arguing that “metal is not, and has never been, all about the straight boys” (2015: 3). Tracing evidence like the obvious entanglement between the queer or BDSM scene and Heavy Metal, when it comes to leather and fetish wear, she makes a crucial observation:

How interesting that Metal is constantly portrayed as a bastion of straight and disenfranchised White males when it’s very foundations sit on a queerscape of gay performers, queer leather culture and the influence of queers as promoters, performers and especially fans (2015: 26f).

By queerscape, she means the “overlapping space between two margins”, in this case between the marginalisation as a queer individual in Metal and as a Metalhead in queer spaces (2015: 18). While I think it is important to find a theoretical frame to analyse these spaces of entanglement, I find the concept of the queerscape questionable in this particular context, especially the juxtaposition of queerness and Heavy Metal fandom as equivalent margins. While it is certainly true that both factors might imply the exclusion from certain spaces, there is and has been in most countries, no jurisdiction that threatens the human rights of Metal fans. In certain countries Metal music or Metal concerts are forbidden, but there is no such thing as, for example, the limitation of reproductive rights for Metalheads. This is why I believe the juxtaposition of these two elements is not viable. Clifford-Napoleone also brings in the concept of disidentification by José Esteban Muñoz, which I consider more viable in this regard, as I will spell out in the empirical part of this thesis (2015: 19). All in all I consider her work crucial for the scientific as well as the everyday perspective we have on Heavy Metal. Still I find it a bit too optimistic and not all of her conclusions are entirely convincing. Her findings that less than 1% of the queer participants in her study have experienced violence in Metal contexts and only a handful have been assaulted might for example (as my own research rather suggest) not necessarily mean that Metal spaces are safe for queer people (2015: 53f). It might just pinpoint that they do no longer attend Metal spaces or perform a straight Metalhead in Metal spaces.

Keith Kahn-Harris (2016) has a much more pessimistic view on the situation of queer (in this case homosexual) Metal fans. Based on what he calls the “metal identity triad” (2016: 27f) meaning the constant celebration of White, heteronormative masculinity, Kahn-Harris (2016: 29f) argues that homosexuality would be the “‘hard case’ of heavy metal difference”. While, according to him, female actors and actors of colour benefit from a certain progress in the Metal community, the fear of coming out for homosexual fans would still be enormous
I consider the model of the “metal identity triad” problematic, (1) because it contributes to the erasure of other dimensions of difference (e.g. class, dis/ability) and intersections and (2) because I find it elementarily wrong to create a hierarchy between different forms of oppression. Still it is important to point out that, in regard to queerness, the perception of Metal can vary from Clifford-Napoleon’s optimistic to Kahn-Harris fatalistic approach. What is apart from that very interesting is Kahn-Harris’ explanatory model for why prominent and openly gay Metal musicians like Rob Halford from Judas Priest or Gaahl from the Black Metal band Gorgoroth never faced a big homophobic backlash after their coming out (even though Metal is, according to him, a heterosexist place). The author argues that a deviation from the metal identity triad can be well accepted if the person coming out is “metal enough”, just like the “metal god” Rob Halford. In that particular case, according to Kahn-Harris, Metalness is more important than the deviation from the norm (2016: 33f).

What becomes apparent in all of the summarised studies is, that the doxa of the White, straight, male working-class Metal fan is only one side of the story. If we trace a genealogy of Heavy Metal, we discover discontinuities in the narrative, but also the structural silencing of certain strands of history. How can this thesis contribute to this strand of literature? While Amber Clifford-Napoleon has lined out the academic field of queer Metal studies as well as given it a new twist with a very positive attitude, I want to have a look at the implications for Metalheads in everyday life. How do they participate in Heavy Metal? Also I consider it crucial to cast a queer feminist perspective on the topic, broadening the definition of queer Metalheads from lesbian, gay and bisexual people to everyone who makes an effort to queer Metal.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Queering Cultural Studies

While this thesis thematically is located in a space somewhere in the intersection between Metal Music Studies and Gender/Queer Studies, I understand its theoretical framework in the tradition of Cultural Studies and Stuart Hall. Cultural Studies is, according to Hall (1996a) rather a discursive formation than a typical field of study. He characterises it as an umbrella term for a growing and open number of discourses and formations, transgressing the borders
of academic disciplines (Hall 1996a: 263f; Lykke 2010: 27). What makes this umbrella so viable for this thesis and for the studies of real life experiences in general is that it is not born out of an academic discourse but, just like some of its authors, has its roots in the non-academic adult education movement (Hall 1996a: 263; Winter 1999: 36). This is not only very sympathetic to me as a person with a working class background, it sees also most viable for a bricolage like Heavy Metal that has some of its roots in the working class. This background does also have a significant influence on the definition of culture in Cultural Studies. Culture, in the sense of Cultural Studies, “includes both meaning-making practices (which point toward semiotic – textual and visual – approaches) and everyday life practice (which refers to ethnographic and social anthropological approaches)” and is defined by shared values and meanings (Lykke 2010: 27).

Cultural Studies pinpoint that there is never only one culture in a society but that societies and cultures have fissures along the lines of (constructed) difference like gender, race and class (Winter 1999: 47). Fuelled by the influence of feminism/Feminist Studies and anti-racist activism/Postcolonial Studies, Cultural Studies have a strong focus on power structures and their intersections (Hall 1996a: 268f; Lykke 2010: 80f). While Cultural Studies are therefore, in their most current form, feminist and anti-racist, they are, not (yet) queered. A queer approach to Cultural Studies, if we follow a Butlerian agenda, has to resist “biological determinism and cultural essentialism that insist upon a deterministic and culturally normative connection between biologically sexed bodies, the gender identities ‘woman and ‘man’ and the heterosexual organisation of sexual desire” (Lykke 2010: 59). It has not only to be aware of and make visible racist and/or sexist structures, but also to consciously counteract the heterosexual matrix.

At this point I shortly want to underline that I locate this study in the field of Cultural Studies, but do not consider Heavy Metal a (sub-)culture but rather a bricolage, as I have mentioned before. Subcultures are often understood as related to countercultures or youth cultures, subcultural belonging often even being bound to a certain age (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, & Roberts 2006: 7f). Neither of these are however accurate for Heavy Metal. The bricolage of Heavy Metal contains cultural practices and artefacts, but also moods and emotions. This is a broader, less static approach and can still be examined under the framework of Cultural Studies.
Apart from the general concept and framework of Cultural Studies in Hall’s sense, I will in this study strongly draw from two of his key concepts in the field of cultural studies: 

*representation* and *identity/identification*. For Hall, *representation* is a central element in his concept of culture. He refers to culture as a system of shared meanings. Representation, in turn, is “the production and circulation of [this] meaning through language” (Hall 1997: 1). A representation embodies abstract concepts, but in form of more concrete signs that can be communicated (1997: 10). Language, in this concept, is a vehicle for the creation and transmission of meaning, it is a system of representation. In order to create meaning, the interacting elements have to share a common language (1997: 1). It is clear in Hall’s definition that meaning is nothing inherent. Instead meaning is “constantly being produced and exchanged in every personal and social interaction” (1997: 2). These meaning-making behaviours he calls *signifying practices*. In this study, representation is a framework to understand how personal or social behaviour in relation to Heavy Metal can produce a certain meaning and thus contribute to a certain concept of Heavy Metal. It explains why an individual action (signifying practice) in a certain context can contribute to change. It also underlines the importance of a common reference frame, a shared Metal language, in a meaning-making process.

Both the concept of representation and the importance of signifying practices are also crucial for Hall’s concept of *identity* and *identification*. Hall understands identity as a construct that is produced by “different, often intersecting and antagonizing discourses, practices” (1997: 4). Identities *stand for* something; they are representations of something but never sufficiently referring to the subject itself (1997: 3). This is also because we do not just have one fixed identity from the day of our birth, but that this is rather a process of continuous change. When I attend a concert with my peer group on the weekend, I might identify as a Metalhead and show this identification through signifiers like a leather jacket or heavy boots. When I go to work in the office on Monday morning, I might identify as an employee and colleague, dressing up in a buttoned-up shirt. This also means, that identities are always highly specific, “produced in specific historical, and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies.” (1996b: 4) And these identities are also fractured. Society’s power structures are highly influential on people’s identities. Identification, the continuous and never ending process of producing an identity, accordingly works along the lines of power dimensions and stands in contrast to the picture
of unified identities (like national identities, or “the” Metalheads) that are often celebrated (1997: 5). It functions as a signifying practice for the representation of identities.

One of Hall’s key points is that identity is mainly based on difference, on stating what I am not. This does also include the creation of boundaries or binaries and accordingly results in exclusion, as Hall critically points out. I want to shed some more light on why this process is so problematic (1996b: 2ff):

1. If we understand identity as something that is based on binaries, this means that we continuously create “others”. Binary oppositions like man – woman, nature-culture, mind-body are not only reductionist, excluding everything that is located in the sphere in between, they are also hierarchical, labelling one element “the norm” and the second one “the other”.

2. If we understand identity as something based on difference and boundaries, this means that we divide into being inside and outside of the boundary (another binary opposition). Accordingly, this results in processes of exclusion. Exclusion of the ones that are an “other” to myself/us, that are outside of the boundary. I have already mentioned that the authenticity debate in Heavy Metal is a vivid example of this mode of identification. An (group) identity is constructed by neglecting this identity to others, by deciding who is Metal and who is not. Hall is very critical about these processes and uses his concept of identity strategically to make visible othering and exclusion. At the same time, he is however limiting his concept of identity to either identification or counteridentification (e.g. not identifying) and reinforcing the binary, even if only for analytical purposes. This study is based on a queer feminist approach and thus works against binary oppositions instead of reifying them (Lykke 2010: 100, 111). While I consider Hall’s approach important and viable for this study, I still see a necessity to queer it.

So what can we add to Hall’s theory of identification in order to base it less on a binary? José Esteban Muñoz’ (1999) concept of (queer) disidentification seems like a viable addition.

Disidentification is “a third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it.” (1999: 11). Disidentifications are accordingly located in a space between identification and counteridentification (1999: 22). Muñoz describes disidentification as third mode of identification but also a resisting survival strategy, a reaction to (hetero-)sexism and racism/White supremacy in a „phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not
conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship” (1999: 4f). Just like Stuart Hall’s idea of identification, disidentification is a process (1999: 25). The resisting strategies are characterised by the simultaneity of resisting and confronting, of “work[ing] on and against dominant ideology” (1999: 11, 28). This is a meaning-making process that is both making visible universalisation and exclusion in a certain context and at the same time consciously using this context’s codes to empower individuals who do not confirm the norm (1999: 31). Queer Metalheads who disidentify with Black Metal could, for example, embrace the anger and the radical expression of emotions in Black Metal, embrace the androgynous and gender bending performances and the queer desire that is so clear but homophobically repressed. They could make visible this potential and use it for empowerment. But at the same time they would resist any nationalist and racist views that are sometimes present in Black Metal. Queer Metalheads are hence a part of it, but still have some kind of distance.

Disidentification is also very present in the body of literature in Metal Music Studies, it has just never been addressed using this particular term. If Amber Clifford-Napoleone (2015) reads a queer element between the dominant lines of the narrative of heterosexual masculinity and the leather jacket, or Kevin Fellezs (2015) makes visible people of colour in Thrash metal – these are classical disidentificatory strategies (cf. Muñoz 1999: 28). A strategy of identifying with Metal, but not with the dominant doxa of it. Muñoz’ concept thus bends the boundaries and binaries in Hall’s concept of identification. It opens up the discourse for instead of exclusion and for multiple and hybrid identifications instead of a reductionist binary.

In the very first section of thesis I have already elaborated on my personal emotional and embodied reaction to Heavy Metal, the evoked feelings of happiness and my wish to throw myself into the mosh pit. Emotions and other embodied reactions are however often left unnoticed or untheorised, also in Cultural Studies. They function as a binary opposition to thought and reason that are traditionally associated with science and research, unlike emotions. Nevertheless, I consider them extremely relevant for this study of Heavy Metal. They are the immediate and unfiltered embodied reaction to this bricolage and help to understand people’s love and passion for Heavy Metal, the affiliation with it. My theoretical framework will thus be completed by Sara Ahmed’s concept of the “sociality of emotions.” Ahmed’s concept is based on the assumption that emotions are always embodied, that they effect bodies and objects and are at the same time effected by them (Ahmed 2004: 5ff). According to her it is the sensual engagement with an object that evokes certain emotions in
us, hence our bodies and our emotions can only be analytically separated. The emotions evoked in the encounter with an object are also relational. Depending on what kind of emotion we are encountering (joy or happiness, anger or fear) we move towards or away from an object. Ahmed’s key insight is what she calls the “sociality of emotions”. For her, emotions are nothing that is purely inside or outside of us, instead she conceptualises emotions as cultural practices that construct the boundaries between the in- and the outside, the social and the individual, the I and the We. Ahmed’s concept is another valuable addition to Cultural Studies. It allows me to bend the binary between emotions and thought, the private and the public, and to conceptualise and analyse the use of body and emotions in my analysis. It thus also contributes to the queering of Cultural Studies in so far as it transgresses the norm of objective, bodiless, and rational academic knowledge.

**Using ethnography to research Heavy Metal: Methodology and methods**

Now that I have elaborated on the theoretical framework of this study, what are the methodological implications, and how do I approach the data collection? Cultural Studies scholars Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (2006) in their ground-breaking book *Resistance through rituals* on subcultures in Great Britain argue that a suitable methodology for data conduction can give participants in a study an agency, empower them instead of only using them as a source of information. They suggest approaches that allow a focus on lived experiences and make visible power structures (2006: viii, ix). Ethnographic approaches as well as participant observing are lined out as the two methodologies that were and are “significant for a Cultural Studies approach to subcultures” (2006: x). I have already mentioned that I do not consider Heavy Metal a subculture in this study. However, I do acknowledge the remote closeness of the traditional concept of a subculture and the concept of Heavy Metal as a bricolage and share Hall and Jefferson’s concerns for a viable methodology. As a Metalhead researcher it is important for me to be able to bring in the lived experiences of the informants, e.g. through interviews, but also to be able to use my own experience in the field as valuable data. Additionally, the research process has initiated some kind of Metal network – an observation that I will spell out at a later point, but should also be considered in the research process. Following Hall and Jefferson the methodology that is most viable for this endeavour is ethnography.
Charlotte Aull Davies (2008) in her book *Reflexive ethnography* defines ethnography as “a research process based on fieldwork using a variety of mainly (but not exclusively) qualitative research techniques but including engagement in the lives of those being studied over an extended period of time” (2008: 5). Ethnography aims at exploring, understanding and explaining social realities and tries to reach this goal using tools that allow the researcher to come very close to the field and individuals they aim to interact with. What characterises Davies’ approach in particular is her focus on reflexivity in ethnographic work, which, she claims, is necessary exactly because of the close interaction between individuals, researcher and informants in this kind of study. This closeness to the field per se and the individuals in it should however not prevent the researcher from paying close attention to broader societal contexts as well (2008: 4ff).

Davies’ approach translates well into the reality of the research project. I have already provided a context, an overview over previous research on Metal and power structures. Due to the personal involvement in the scene, fieldwork and engagement with the realities of the participants come just naturally. This is knowledge I have already acquired – this is a field that I already move in. Davies also introduces autobiography as a possibility to collect additional ethnographical data in case of a personal involvement (2008: 216ff). Even though I want to lay the focus in this study on the participants, I have at some point taken the chance to bring in own memories, especially when it comes to giving a background, a context for certain narratives.

My personal approach to ethnographic interviewing is concept-wise mainly inspired by Davies. Semi-structured or ethnographic interviewing describes a way of interviewing that to some extent relies on a certain set of preparations. Researchers usually prepare a list of questions or topics they want to talk about in the conversation. The elements on this list are usually not fixed in terms of order or concrete wording. Questions or topic can be added in the course of the interview (2008: 95f). The connection to the interviewees is usually slightly more extended than in a fully structured survey interview. Interviewer and interviewee might have known each other before or might stay in contact. The role of the interviewer is also a rather extended one, as they might add own experiences or narratives to the interview (2008: 101f). Semi-structured interviews are interactive, they require action, narration and questions from both sides. As a result of this open and close relationship between interviewer and
participant, research ethics need to be taken very seriously in regard to ethnographic interviews.

**The interview project as “collective work”: Research ethics**

As Ramazanoglu and Holland point out in their 2002 book *Feminist methodology*, the researcher has the power to define the relationship between themselves and the informants. They have the power to decide which voices will be heard and which data will be included (2002: 107ff). One partner will always be the one that makes the final decisions, gets the academic credit for the work and eventually publishes something. Even if there is currently no way to completely deconstruct this binary opposition between the researcher and the researched, I still see a clear necessity to counteract it as much as possible. I consider this also a contribution to the queering of the ethnographic interview, to bend the underlying binary. In practical terms this means that I (1) have to take into account my own privileges and power in the research process and (2) that I perceive the participants as subjects that I interact with instead of only objects as a source of information (Davies 2008: 99f; Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002: 112). This is also why I, in the following will refer to the participants as *interview partners*. I understand them as accomplices in this endeavour.

As regarding the first point, Ramazanoglu and Holland underline that feminist researchers, just like every other scholar, are entangled in power structures which define their position regarding the research topic and their research/interview partners (2002: 120). The sheer acknowledging and celebration of these differences do not, however, challenge power structures in any way. Instead, the “radical resistance” against these structures in terms of feminist research “lies in identifying power and injustice in relationships of difference“ (2002: 110). In order to reach this, they propose the concept of “reflexivity” as part of feminist methodology, by which they mean that researchers need to reflect upon and spell out power relations that are present in the research process, but also how power might have been exercised during the research (2002: 118). This study thus also contains a reflexion on my positioning as well as power structures in the research process. The second point has broader implications. Understanding the interview partners as equal partners in this endeavour means to involve them as much as possible in the research process and give them power over the information they provide me with.
In her work on Female Sexualisation, Frigga Haug (1980) introduces an alternative approach of conducting research and gathering knowledge, which I consider a big inspiration for the work with the interview partners. Haug’s main aim is to use a collective work process to make shared knowledges visible and accessible. In her case, this does for example mean that the participating women produce (individual and shared) knowledge through constant interaction and discussion and even engage in a common writing process (1980: 6). The core of this concept is the idea to erase the binary of research subject/researcher and research object, to make research objects actual researchers themselves (1980: 9f). The individuals in these research groups work with their everyday experiences and theorise them (1980: 12). It is not only the collection of data that is a collective effort but the whole research process.

Even though I want to conduct this study in the spirit of Haug, I cannot, due to limitations of time and resources, follow her approach in detail. Translating her “collective work of memory” to the study, to “a collective work of creating an alternative cosmos of Heavy Metal”, thus rather means to strictly counteract the binary of researcher and research object. It also means to try to make this process as collective as possible. This is, for example, mirrored in how I developed this study and thesis. The actual starting point, apart from a rough idea for the topic, were the interviews. I decided to let the interviews guide this thesis and me as a researcher instead of approaching the topic with a fixed framework. Hence the interview partners also guided me, sometimes in a more metaphorical, sometimes in a more concrete way, on the way to the theoretical framework. I consider it a big advantage to give the interview partners such a big influence on the work, not only to use them as “sources”, but rather to interact with them, to make this work as collective as possible. Again, I also consider this an act of queering the interview process, of subverting the binary opposition in terms of redistributing power in the research process.

A collective work in the sense of Haug is however not simply one that subverts the dynamic between researcher and participants. The term collective suggests that all of the individuals involved have some kind of relationship with each other. The researcher is “one of them”. In the study this was echoed in the unexpected creation of a loose network of queer Metalheads as a result of the interview project, as I will explain more on detail soon.
INTERVIEW CONDUCTION

I started the interview process in February 2016 when I did a test interview with a Swedish Heavy Metal fan and feminist/anti-racist activist in Sweden. This unstructured interview is not used in the analyses, but was very fruitful for the overall concept of the study. The conversation was an eye-opener, reminding me of the different concepts or bricolages people have of Heavy Metal, bringing my own pre-assumptions back to the consciousness. The interview helped me to overthink the, at this point, rather narrow questions, to open up the catalogue and leave more space for the narration of the interview partners.

Back in Berlin I made a draft for the study design and took the decision not to interview persons from my own Metal groups and networks, but rather reach out to other spaces. This was supposed to avoid only interviewing persons with the same set of attitude, values and beliefs. With the help of a fellow student, I managed to spread the advertising (see Annex) via Facebook and Tumblr to get some direct contacts. As I had a number of last-minute cancellations, in the end I had to ask some of the interview partners for other contacts, even though I initially did not plan to work with this kind of snowball system. It is an easy way to find new interview partners, but there is also a high risk of sticking to only one social group. In this case however, it seemed viable, as the recommended persons were not too closely related to the interview partners.

The initial idea was, in the spirit of Haug, to create an atmosphere, where the interview partners are the experts and the researcher is the one that learns from them. This prerequisite influenced the interview setting as well as the process. The interview partners had the choice to choose between their own homes, a neutral place or my place for the interview. Four out of six interviews were conducted at the interview person’s home, two in a café (Zia and Abigail). Two interview persons offered me beers (Marianne and Dracena), also with a reference to the connection between drinking beer and listening to Heavy Metal. Of course the setting of the interview influenced the whole atmosphere, being much more intimate at people’s homes. Two of the participants had German as a mother tongue, two American English and one French. Two interviews were thus conducted in German (which is also my mother tongue) and three in English.
Before the beginning of the interview, I gave the interview partners the choice to neglect the recording of the interview (which did not happen with any of them), and told them about the project and the idea of an interview partnership, considering them the experts. I stressed that the participation was voluntarily and anonymous and that no question had to be answered. In addition, I explained that the interview could be stopped at any time, which was a precautions measure for persons who might want to tell traumatic experiences. The idea was to give the interview partners as much power over their own words as possible and let them be in control of the data I conducted.

As aforementioned, drawing from the experience in the test interview, I prepared a catalogue of questions (see Annex). The questions were the same ones in every conversation and I tried to ask each question in every interview. There was however no particular order I would follow. Apart from these questions, just like Davies suggests, I added additional questions whenever it seemed appropriate (2008: 101f). This was in order to get to know more about a certain topic, to open up a new strand of discussion or to refer to something I had seen or heard. I also shared personal experiences or memories whenever it fit in, in order to create some kind of common foundation for the interview, make it more dynamic and interactive and make it easier for the interview partners to open up or remember. I also tried to encourage the interview partners to take over the lead of the conversation. This only worked to some extent, which was probably also the result of the interview partners’ anticipation of a classical interview situation which would only require them to answer but not to ask question or get into another, deeper kind of interaction. Additionally, as an attempt to engage a bit more with the material itself, I also asked every participant to play their favourite Metal song and describe their emotional and bodily reaction to it. Some of the interview partners seemed rather surprised by this and responded rather restrictedly.

The spirit of the empowered interview partner also influenced the further handling of the interviews. It was important to me that the interview material was validated and verified by the interview partners. This was on the one hand an ethical concern, on the other hand also a practical one. As more than half of the interviews were conducted in English, which is not my mother tongue there was a risk for me getting things wrong. Also, one of the interviews conducted in a café was in parts very hard to transcribe because of the background noises and initially had a lot of gaps. I thus decided to provide the interview partners with the transcriptions of the interviews and ask them, in case they wanted to and had the resources to
do so, to read the manuscript and adjust it, if needed. Three interview partners chose to read the manuscript and make some minor changes, corrections and fill in gaps (Zia, Marianne and Abigail).

My analysis process followed what Braun and Clarke (2006) call a *Thematic analysis*. Thematic analysis is an analytical method for “identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (2006: 79). The authors claim that they make explicit a method that has been frequently used in qualitative research but not yet been theoretically described. The method by Braun and Clarke follows six steps, which I followed more or less accurately. The method starts with (1) the process of getting familiar with the data (for example through the transcription of interviews), then (2) the researcher identifies initial and preliminary codes and in the following (3) searches for themes/patterns. In a fourth step, Braun and Clarke suggest to review these themes (for example to merge two similar ones into one bigger theme) and then to (5) define and name the final patterns. The sixth and last step is the production of the report, including the extraction of examples for every theme (2006: 90ff). In my case this also meant to translate the extracts (see Annex). I used *MaxQDa*, a software for the analysis of qualitative data, to transcribe, re-listen and re-read the transcripts. The program also enabled me to mark significant codes and themes. Key themes or patterns, in thematic analysis, are not dependent on “quantifiable measures – but in terms of whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question” (2006: 83). In my case these “themes” I identified were thus the thematic clusters of strategies of resistance I describe in the analysis.

**Unexpected side-effects: Community-building through an interview project**

I have already mentioned that this interview project has initiated some kind of a loose network, a community of female and queer Metalheads. This was an unintentional but nonetheless welcome side effect of the research. In several interviews the participants would ask me about the other participants in the study, probably trying to find out if there was an existing network in Berlin, if there were likeminded people out there. As I promised all interview partners anonymity, I could not give any details about the study group, but rather a more or less general overview. As I mentioned that all of the interview partners were musicians, one person actively approached me during the interview as she was looking for a
female/queer bass player. Indeed, another participant was a bass player and I could initiate a contact between the two of them. After the end of the study, I would involuntarily become some kind of a central contact person in a newly evolved though still very loose network. Former participants would approach me when they were looking for band members or engage me for an LGBT* Metal DJ Gig. Some have also uttered the wish to meet up with the other participants and get to know each other, to tighten the network. Even though I have not yet had the resources to organise such a meeting, I aim at doing this at a later point. I am sure there still is a lot of potential for future meetings and exchange in this network.

What is important to note is that it was not me, in the role of the researcher, that initiated this community, it was the participants themselves who asked to be connected with the other interview partners and thus took over the control over the interview project. It was them who initiated a queering of the ethnographic interview method. A method that does not stop after the interview conduction but goes beyond that, a method that sometimes subverts the role of the researcher and the participants. Here, the participants bend the underlying binary opposition in an interview project and actively take over the power. In the end it is hence not only the researcher that benefits from the project, it is also the empowered participants who benefit from the newly established network, which again bends the binary of giving and taking in the interview project. I understand this community-building very much in the spirit of Frigga Haug’s collective work. By building this community, the participants (1) extend the actual research process beyond the interview conduction and thus (2) strengthen their own role in it, taking control over the course of the process and thus the lead. They thus conceptualise the research process as a fluid construct with a shifting lead. The researcher, in the end, becomes some kind of tool to initiate a contact, a central figure but only in terms of structure not in terms of hierarchy.

**Reflexions on complicity, interview partnership and power structures**

In my positioning I have already reflected upon my own involvement in Metal in terms of this study in general. I will at this point in particular account for my position in the interview conduction, as suggested by Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002: 110ff). As the reflection of one’s own situatedness and my positioning in the interview situation was an essential part of the preparation for this study, I was extremely aware of it. I knew that my own involvement
would give me some credibility and possibly open up doors that would otherwise have remained locked. At the same time, I wanted to make clear, that this was still an interview situation, so that the partners would be reminded to explain a bit more, to not rely on our shared common knowledge, but to spell out things and maybe also to involve a reflective level.

In the interview situation I tried to integrate these two sides of my persona – on the one hand the scholar with a research interest, on the other hand the person interested in Metal music and networks, looking for likeminded people. I would, for example, use my Metal knowledge and refer to any kind of Metal news or posters in the room to create some kind of complicity – to proof that I am “one of them”. As I also wanted to learn more about the participants’ emotions and embodied experiences in Metal, I tried to refer to commonly known bands so I could also describe my feelings towards them and thus encourage the accomplice to tell me more about themselves. At the same time, I did consciously not dress up in any kind of Metal outfit, but rather stuck with neutral clothing. While at the time of the interview I just had a vague feeling that I would not want to ingratiate, I do now also read this as an expression of my own alternative concept of Metal. Referring to Metal codes while being dressed in jeans and a buttoned up shirt can be understood as a way of drawing a new, less narrow picture of Metal – and this is just what I expected the interview partners to do in one or another way. So, while it might at first suggest the complete opposite, not dressing up in a Metal related style might also have been an expression of complicity. Overall there was a great feeling of We, somehow sharing a same background, having a shared nerdy interest, that “no one” understands. Still I, mostly managed to keep some kind of a professional distance or at least postponed clearly private talks (e.g. about upcoming concerts) to the end of the interview. This was a measure to keep the focus in the interview and to not get lost in a private conversation.

As regarding the exercise of power in the interview situation I have already outlined that I tried to reduce any kind of hierarchy in the conversation. Still, societal power structures were of course effecting the interview as well. While all of the participants including me were privileged in terms of race, I was certainly privileged in terms of able-bodiedness, cis-gender and passing as straight in regard to other participants. Due to my studies and my previous experiences with research ethics, I was aware of these power structures and tried not to reinforce them in the interview situation.
EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Interview summaries

Before engaging with the actual analysis, I will provide some context about the participants. This seems necessary, in order to draw a more complete picture of these individuals, but also to have the chance to stress the respective foci of the interviews and refer to some of the topics, that did not make it into the analysis, but still seem important to spell out. Not all of the interview summaries contain the same information as regarding situatedness, but also childhood, adulthood, etc. This is due to the aforementioned fact that I only had a certain, limited set of questions for my interview partners and in general gave them the freedom to define and identify themselves. I can however sum up, that all of the interview partners are privileged in terms of race and nationality (Germany, France, United Stated of America). This might on the one hand be the effect of a lack of visibility of people of colour in Heavy Metal. On the other hand, it could also be related to a tradition of objectifying people of colour in (feminist) research in general or of me addressing a certain non-racialised audience.  

In addition, all but one interview partner were in my own age (23-29) and lived in Berlin at the time of the interview. I consider this mainly the effect of the recruiting strategy (networking via a fellow student also living in Berlin). It was a coincidence that all of the participants turned out to be Metal musicians themselves. I could thus also include questions on the act of producing and performing music. All of the following names are pseudonyms the participants have chosen for themselves.

Abigail

Abigail was born and raised in the United Stated of America, in the area of Philadelphia. She grew up in a middle-class home and started listening to Heavy Metal when she was nine or ten years old, when a friend first introduced her to this kind of music. She stresses that her mother was always very supportive regarding her taste in music. They would listen to Metal in the car and she would accompany her to concerts, even if that meant a three to four-hour

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8 I tried to intervene and especially reached out to people of colour in my advertising post. However, the only person considering themselves “of colour” cancelled the interview last minute for personal reasons.
drive to the location. Still, Abigail is used to the experience of being one of the only women in Metal spaces, which, as she states, she has always been.

As a child Abigail would start to play the drums in her parents’ basement and soon became a drummer in different bands. She always felt empowered making music together with other women. At the age of 15 she played her first gig with one of her bands, many more were to come. Even back then she realised that the world of Metal musicians is a world of men. That is why she stresses the importance of female role models in Metal. She has had the experience that if there are female musicians on stage, there will be more women in the audience as well. She also claims that seeing women on stage empowers her and motivates her to produce music herself. Even though she currently plays in four different bands with mainly other women, she underlines, how hard it sometimes can be to find other female musicians to play with and how frustrating it can be, to consciously not look for cis-male band members to play with. Abigail is a professional drum teacher, who mainly reaches out to women, trans* persons, non-binary people and queer people of all ages.

Dracena

At the time of the interview, Dracena is a 46-year-old filmmaker. She was born and raised in Germany. At the age of ten she started to be interested in music. She was not a Metalhead right from the beginning, but rather active in Punk spaces. After her studies she moved to Berlin and this is where she first met people who were into Punk but listened to Metal at the same time. Dracena considered Punk music too boring after a while and was very thankful when she met a female Punk friend who only listened to Metal and became some kind of role model for her. Today, as she claims, 70% of the music she listens to is Heavy Metal.

Dracena underlines that she only visits leftist and/or Punk-related Metal spaces, as she is aware of how, as she says, politically right-wing Metal spaces can often be. The exclusion or alienation she feels in Metal networks and spaces is less based on gender or sexuality, even though she considers this a part of it, but more on a general political attitude. Moreover, the topic of the body and embodiment came up several times in our talk. Dracena started to play the guitar when she was 18, but soon lost interest. It was then only a few years ago, that she decided to learn it again and started to play in a Metal-fuelled Punk-band for three to four
years. However, when the band started to go more in the direction of Black Metal and the guitarists had to bring all of their energy into the guitar playing, Dracena got a chronic inflammation of her wrist and all out of a sudden had to stop playing her instrument. At the time of the interview, she was looking for a new band to join as a singer.

Marianne

Marianne was born and raised on the French island of Corsica. When she was 19, she moved to Marseille on the French mainland for some years in order to experience something new. She then spent two years in Finland before moving to Berlin only some months prior to our talk. Unlike any of the other interview partners, Marianne got into Heavy Metal on her own, starting with the Beatles, proceeding to Led Zeppelin and then to Heavy Metal bands. Basically until her move to Finland, she had no friends who would listen to the same kind of music. In Marseille, she said, there was a Metal scene, but she was only engaging with Punk people and only present in the Punk spaces. Her decision to become an au pair in Finland was more or less based on the wish to finally meet people with the same interest in music, which is an indicator for how important Heavy Metal is in her life (and, as she tells, she was not the only au pair with that motivation in Finland).

At the time of the interview, Marianna plays bass in a Metal band. Just like Dracena, Marianne went on playing an instrument even after having severe health problems. Just after she decided to learn the guitar, she had an accident resulting in a severe hand injury, which disabled her to use one of her hands for months and forced her to relearn how to use it. Even until today, she does not have the same tactile sense in this hand. Still, she wanted to learn an instrument, so she decided to play the bass instead, which was easier for her to play (only four strings, much thicker than guitar strings). For almost ten years she only played the bass alone at home. Only after her move to Berlin, she found an advertisement by a band looking for a bass player and made the decision to take this opportunity. Even though Marianne plays the bass in a band, she does not consider herself a bass player.

What was striking for me in the interview with Marianne was, how much Heavy Metal means to her. Not only does she make life decisions based on her taste in music (like her move to
Finland) and her need for fellow Metalheads, also her description of what happens to her and her body on concerts is very vivid.

Pia

Pia is 29 years old, born and raised in Germany, and in most contexts identifies themselves as non-binary. They have been into consuming and playing music ever since they were a child, learning to play the guitar and the bass and later also learning how to sing. Pia started listening to Metal music when they were about 15 years old and continue doing so until today. In contrast to the other interview partners however, Metal is only one of many genres they like. They also engage in the electronic music and techno scene and listen to synth pop. As a queer person, they have the experience of being excluded from the Metal scene, but also vice versa to be rejected from the queer community when they identify as a Metalhead. Their aim is to merge their different identities and thus show people, that one does not have to just fit into one box, that one can be a queer Metalhead and still listen to synth pop.

In our talk, Pia also stressed that they have a clear vision for Metal spaces that would make them and other queer Metalheads feel safer. They imagine to have a little queer Metal scene in Berlin, but also to organise a small queer Metal festival in the city, with only queer and female bands playing and a welcoming, separatist audience. Most of the inspiration for these plans or ideas came from their stay in the United Stated of America, where they visited such a festival and for the first time had a feeling that a queer Metal crowd is nothing utopian, but that queer Metalheads exist. You just have to find a way to bring them together.

Zia

Zia is 26 years old (at the time of the interview) and was born and raised in the United Stated of America, in the area of San Francisco. Both her parents are classical musicians. That is why she tried to learn many different instruments when she was a child, but she never stuck with anything. When Zia was 13, her father gave her a record that was recorded by one of the

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9 Pia identifies as a non-binary person and is accordingly correctly addressed as „they“ in English, yet “sie” [she] in German.
biggest American Metal bands, together with the symphonic orchestra he played for. For Zia this day changed her life. Ever since this day, she says, she has been a Metal fan. In high school she made the experience of being excluded for being “the odd Metal fan” and had no friends with a similar interest in music, but when she moved to Los Angeles for her studies, everything changed. She became a part of the Los Angeles Metal scene and started doing show reviews and interviews. At that time, she also started to play the guitar. It was however only several years later that she actually started to play in a band. Before that, just like Marianne, she was what she calls a “closet guitarist”, lacking the confidence to show her skills to the public.

Zia is a very good example of how helpful and strong Metal networks can be – if you happen to be a part of them. She built a writing career out of writing reviews for Metal concerts and interviewing Metal musicians. Today she works as a freelance writer. What was striking in the interview was that for Zia Heavy Metal seems to play a major role in every part of her life – not only when it comes to music, but also regarding friends and even professional networks.

Queer participation and the alternative cosmos of Heavy Metal: Interview analysis

What struck me first in this interview analysis was the love and passion every single interview partner expressed for Metal music. For all participants, Heavy Metal seems to have a precious and special place in their heart, to put in romantic terms. Still, as I have mentioned before and will also show, many of these individuals have faced obstacles, exclusion and marginalisation in Heavy Metal that make it hard for them to unconditionally love this bricolage.

In the first part of this analysis, I thus want to shed some light on how the interview partners position themselves towards Metal. As I will show, many of them do not fully identify with it. One reason for this are probably the experiences of exclusion they have made. I will hence also give room for these narratives. Using this as a foundation, I will in a second step take a closer look at how queer Metalheads participate in Metal - with a strong focus on disidentificatory strategies in dealing with emotions, networks, music and spaces. I will carve
out how disidentification in Metal is conceptualised and an alternative cosmos of Heavy Metal sketched.

"I like to be unpopular and a bit nerdy" - Queer and hybrid positionings towards Heavy Metal

In a first step, I want to examine how the interview partners position themselves towards Heavy Metal. How close or far are they from it, in how far are they attached or alienated? It is obvious that for this study I have only interviewed people who do, at least to some extent, identify with Heavy Metal. Heavy Metal as a term was named several times in the advertisement, and I clearly referred to the idea of interviewing Metalheads in it as well. What I did not take into account is that some people who listen to Metal do counteridentify with this bricolage or label. Like Abigail pinpoints: “Here and there, there will be friends who won't identify as Metalheads. Like there is this amazing Metal band, [Talking about the singer of the band], she listens to this Algerian traditional music and she is like ‘Here is this awesome Black Metal’. So like Metal is a lot of people’s secret guilty pleasure.” According to her, some people chose to hide their affinity with Metal and refuse to identify with this label. While there is certainly a whole number of reasons for this (e.g. the unpopularity of Metal in the queer scene), Abigail underlines that it might also be related to the public image of Heavy Metal: “Because there is this part of Metal, that is still underdog, you know. The outcast.”. Getting back to Stuart Hall’s concept of representation, “the production and circulation of meaning through language”, the dominant, public image of Metal for these persons probably represents something (produces a meaning) they do not want to identify with, like being cast out from society (Hall 1997: 1). It produces a meaning they cannot or do not want to refer to. Abigail in contrast strongly identifies with what Metal represents in the public: “I like to be unpopular and a bit nerdy. Bad temper. Not eager to fit in.” What is interestingly intrinsic in Abigail’s narration is the reference to Metal as a working class rebellion. She refers to the “underdog”, “a person or group of people with less power, money, etc. than the rest of society” (Cambridge University Press 2017). Following her argument, class is accordingly still important in the public perception of Metal. Here, Abigail uncovers that the rejection of the term Metalhead can also be based on an unwillingness to be associated with the working class, or even classist prejudices. For Abigail, however, this working class appeal is apparently rather dragging her towards Metal.
It is striking in the interview material that many of the interview partners, unlike Abigail, have problems referring to themselves as *Metalheads*. They cannot or do not want to fully identify with Metal nor counteridentify with it. Instead they locate themselves in a place somewhere in between identification and counteridentification. For Zia this is, again, connected to the public image of Heavy Metal, what Metal (supposedly) stands for:

I identify as a Metal Head, but at the same time, I don't really. That comes with a lot of stereotypes, I feel. Because the public wants to peg Metalheads as to be in a certain way and the media has done that. And I don't of course follow all of those stereotypes, whatever they are. But I have no problem saying 'I am a Metalhead' (Zia).

In contrast to Abigail’s friends, Zia is still very much attached to Metal and she hence also identifies with it to some extent. At the same time, she counteridentifies with the common doxa that Metal represents. Zia might at this point mostly refer to the masculine norm in Metal, the strong, male and aggressive Metalhead, but if the public image of Metal is still a classed one, like Abigail suggests, this could also refer to an underlying working class character or masculinity.

Dracena, to name one more example, is sometimes identified as a Metalhead by others, but cannot refer to this kind of identification herself: “I would not necessarily call myself a Metalhead, but people call me that sometimes (laughs). Because I have a leather jacket and a battle vest and these patches and because in the meanwhile 70% of the music I listen to is Metal.” I have already elaborated on the authenticity debate in Heavy Metal and how *Metalness* is constructed by the exclusion of others, mainly those who do not confirm the normative picture of a Metal masculinity. It seems thus progressive that Dracena, a queer woman, is recognised or labelled as an “authentic” Metalhead. She has the “right” patches and shirts, listens to the “right” music. Nevertheless, Dracena rejects this label. She argues that she prefers hybrid identities instead of identifying with just one group. This is certainly also a result of the alienation she feels in Metal, mainly based on her left-wing political beliefs. Still, Dracena’s act of refusing to be “awarded” the label of Metalness is a radical intervention. In Heavy Metal, it is constructed a privilege to be called a true Metalhead. To not accept this “award” also means to deny its importance and to transgress this narrow construct. While Metal plays a crucial role in her life, Dracena does not want to be *the Metalhead*, she does not want to overly identify with one label. Instead she wants to have a hybrid identity that allows her to be active in many scenes.
Pia, in contrast, state that they identify with Metal, but that in Heavy Metal, many could probably not identify them as the person they are: “I know that people in the Metal scene would not understand that at all and would not read me accordingly, I think. They would read me as cis-woman, probably even as a straight cis-woman.” Stuart Hall’s concept of Encoding and Decoding (Hall 2001) is a suitable foundation to understand what happens in this narrative.

Introducing an alternative to the traditional sender/message/receiver-model, Hall uses the example of a television newscast to exemplify his framework for understanding processes of communication. He argues that after an actual news event has happened, a message is constructed based on this event. In the example of the television newscast, it is the journalists who produce this message based on societal and technical discourses (2001: 92). “At a certain point, however, the broadcasting structures must yield encoded messages in the form of a meaningful discourse” (2001: 93). The product, in this case the news programme, is realised and transferred to the audience. The viewers then appropriate the messages and give them a meaning based on the discourses they move in (ibid.). The decoded message and/or meaning can then result in a social practice. The reference codes used for encoding and decoding a message are, however, not always symmetrical. This can lead to misunderstandings (2001: 93f). Such a message does not always have to be a spoken or written one. When Pia appears at a Metal show, they embody a message of gender identity or performance (e.g. through clothing, make-up). In an environment with a similar reference code this message would be understood and translated into a certain meaning (“This person is probably non-binary or genderqueer.”). However, the reference code in a Metal environment is a completely different one, hence Pia assumes that people in such a space could not decode their performance in the correct way – they speak another language. Accordingly, as I sum up, Pia does not feel that they really have a place in Heavy Metal – and hence also only identify with it only to a certain extent. Still, as an act of resistance and subversion, they use the label Metal or Metalhead to refer to them self. This is on the one hand interesting in regard to the authenticity debate. Pia does not really seem to care if others would “award” her the label Metal. They thus, just like Dracena, undermine the constructed importance of this label. On the other hand, if a non-binary person calls themselves a Metalhead this does also queer the notion of this term.
What is interesting in Pia’s case is that they also experience rejection towards guitar music and especially Metal in the queer scene. Hence, for Pia it is within certain limitations (see above) important to represent a Metal identity in queer spaces and a queer identity in Metal spaces.

Right now I am really interested in combining this with other contexts, especially with the queer scene, because I am so annoyed by this fixation on electronic music of the queer scene. (...) I think it is a pity that guitars are so scorned and that Metal is extremely scorned generally. It happened to me a couple of times at OkCupid dates or something [laughs] when somebody said ‘What do you listen to?’ and I say something like ‘Metal’ and then people laugh and are like ‘But that is such a silly shit music. That’s only dudes’ music’ (Pia).

Consequently, Pia has created some kind of a hybrid identity for herself that more or less emerged out of a disidentification with Heavy Metal as well as the queer scene:

When you look at queer people in the Punk and Hardcore-Scene, most of them are somehow Masculine of Center-people [performing a queer, masculine gender] and I actually consider being femme [performing a queer, feminine gender] and somehow being Metalhead or something like that, I consider this an interesting combination and I want to represent something like that somehow. Especially in order to (...) challenge clichés of Metal. Also in the queer scene. To say: ‘Yes, Metal is hot! I don't mind if you think it's all dudes, because that is not accurate’ (Pia).

Instead of understanding a queer identity in combination with a Metal identity as a contradiction, Pia aims at creating a hybrid (dis-)identification and thus bends normative (binary-based) ideas of Metalness and queerness. What is striking in this narration is Pia’s positive attitude towards this challenge, their strong will to live this hybrid life, to irritate people and hence pinpoint a lack of awareness in terms of music or gender/sexual diversity. This is also an embodied act of informing the respective communities about queerness or Heavy Metal, to take elements of a queer identity into Heavy Metal and vice versa. It is also important to note that for Metalheads like Pia who identify as queer and do have a connection to the queer scene it seems to be a struggle to find a home base. They face rejection from both sides or might have to hide certain aspects of their life if possible (like their passion for Metal music or their queerness), which is another reason for why the loose community that evolved out of this interview study is of such an importance.

Dracena shares a very similar finding about the queer scene: “I am very disappointed by the mainstream taste in music in the queer scene and I think that is a pity. I am queer and I am into women, but I miss the rock ‘n’ roll women (...).” Dracena’s reaction to this status quo is, just like in Pia’s case, the creation of a hybrid network of (dis-)identifications: “I switch between the scenes and that is why I like Berlin quite a lot. Because you can be active in the
queer, the Metal and in the Punk and in the anarchist and in the fetish scene at the same time and this does not mean that you have to fully identify with one of these groups.”

What is continuously present in these narratives is the construction of a sphere of disidentification like Muñoz (1999) describes it. A sphere of the in between, somewhere along the lines of identification and counteridentification. Instead of feeling the urge to choose one side, the queer Metalheads in the study shape their own Metal world and thus subvert and deconstruct the unwritten but efficacious binary of being or not being a Metalhead. It is the cosmos of disidentification in Heavy Metal. Disidentifying with Metal, as I have shown, can also mean to resist the authenticity debate in Metal, to queer the notion of the term Metalhead or to refuse to be labelled Metal. For an alternative Metal cosmology this means that it is based less on group identity and instead, pays tribute to manifold identifications. It has to acknowledge self-definition and be based more on shared meanings and passion and less on the exclusion of others. Experiences of exclusion are, however, still an intrinsic part of the bricolage of Metal for my interview partners. I will thus also shed some light on narrations of marginalisation I have conducted.

"Girls are taught to be groupies and shit" - Experiences of exclusion

I have already lined out at the very beginning of this text, that in this study I do not want to lay the focus on experiences of exclusion queer Metalheads have made, as this has already been spelled out in other studies. Nevertheless, I consider it crucial to give at least a short overview over experiences the participants have told me about. Interestingly, these narratives of marginalisation and exclusion were all related to gender. Oppressive structures in terms of race, age, dis/ability, or class have not been taken up explicitly, which might be due to the fact that most of the interview partners are privileged in regard to these dimensions.

The participants have experienced exclusion in different forms. For Pia, Metal is a crucial part of their life. But they feel that Metal spaces are barely safe for them.

I actually have the feeling that I do not want to move in the scene’s bars or at parties. Because I don’t feel so safe and not so comfortable somehow. (…) And well with G. [a friend], we recently went to a show and that was great. But we were at the same time constantly checking that we were safe. That was a part of it. And G. is also experiencing transphobia so that is another story as well (Pia).
The situation Pia is describing is a very vivid and drastic example of an exclusion of queer Metal fans. It is not only that they and their friend are not a part of the crowd at this concert, that they are not a part of the big We. They are constantly in fear of being harassed or even attacked. It is not the concert experience that is central in this narration: it is the fear for their safety. In Pia’s case this fear does (luckily) not seem to be based on a previous negative experience but rather on a certain meaning Metal represents for them, a certain construction of a Metal audience that is cis- and heterosexist. Following Hall it can be a variety of signs and signifying practices that construct a certain meaning (1997: 5). Pia’s concept of Metal, or the audience at a particular Metal concert, might thus be informed by signifying practices like facial expression and gestures other people use, by texts they might have read in a Metal context, by Metal lyrics and maybe also by the public doxa of the heterosexist Metalhead. What I want to clarify here is that, even if Pia’s concept of Metal is not based on previous experiences of violence or harassment, it is still informed by a variety of signifiers. Sara Ahmed in The cultural politics of emotion states: “The display of queer pleasure may generate discomfort in spaces that remain premised on the ‘pleasures’ of heterosexuality” (2004: 165). It is thus this (heterosexual) distress or the reaction to it that the two queer people, who express pleasure in this Metal space, fear. As a consequence, Pia visits concerts or Metal spaces only on very rare occasions.

Other participants experience oppressive structures in a subtler way. Abigail pinpoints for example that there is a significant underrepresentation of women in Metal bands. With her first Metal band, she played more than fifty shows in the US. However: “There were maybe five times when there were other women playing at the shows.” Abigail argues that this could be the effect of a marginalisation that already starts in women’s teenage years: “Girls are taught to be groupies and shit. To like the boy that is playing the guitar.” Zia, who is a Metal musician herself adds another explanation: “Because Metal is so male dominated, I mean it's a men's world, really, if there is a woman on stage, you will be looked at more. You will be almost judged more based on your playing, because people are naturally going 'Okay, there is a woman, can she play like the rest of them?'” For Abigail and Zia, writing and performing music are central signifying practices (meaning-making processes) that communicate and construct meaning in the world of Metal and are, to a big extent, exercised by cis-male artists.

10 At an earlier point in the interview, Zia states that she has not faced marginalisation or exclusion in Heavy Metal. She does however still contribute narratives that, from my point of view, take up these topics.
Following Hall’s argument this also means that cis-men dominate the representation of Heavy Metal. A woman on stage, like Zia, thus interrupts this dominant meaning-making process and offers an alternative representation – one element in the alternative cosmos of Heavy Metal. In this cosmology the representation of Metal is shaped by every contributor, female and queer voices are clearly visible and disrupt normative ideas of Metalness.

Unlike the other participants, Marianne has never had the feeling of being excluded in Heavy Metal. “We are maybe a bit less, but I never felt like, well, at least anybody made me feel like 'You are not welcome here, because you are a woman.' Lucky me.” When she adds “Lucky me” it becomes however obvious that for her, Heavy Metal still represents sexism. That exclusion and marginalisation are a part of the meaning she attaches to Heavy Metal. Marianne attributes it more to luck than to non-oppressive structures that she has never faced exclusions.

What is interesting is that Pia and Marianne both attach a certain (cis-, hetero-) sexist meaning to Heavy Metal that is not based on a personal experience, but draw the most different consequences. While Pia barely visits concerts or Metal spaces, Marianne is not restricting herself at all. Cis-Women, as I can tell from my own experience, certainly face sexism in Heavy Metal, but they still confirm a two-gendered system. Metal fans like Pia, who is non-binary, and their friend G., who is trans*, with their sheer existence at a Metal concert challenge this binary and create discomfort (Ahmed 2004: 165). Accordingly, they fear a rigid reaction to this queer intervention in a Metal place. Following Hall who states that meaning is “constantly being produced and exchanged in every personal and social interaction”, this is not only an act of queering a place but of queering the representation and meaning of Metal (1997: 2).

**Queer participation in Heavy Metal**

In the first part of this analysis I have shown how the interview partners position themselves in regard to Heavy Metal and carved out what Metal represents for them. It has been clarified that the interview partners mostly refuse to choose between an identification and counteridentification with Metal. Instead they create their own sphere, a disidentification with
Metal and at the same time lay a foundation for an alternative cosmology of Metal. As Muñoz underlines, disidentification is however not a static status, it is a process and, according to him, refers first and foremost to strategies of resistance and survival. These strategies are a tool to subvert excluding and universalising spaces or practices (1999: 4ff). If we want to understand how these queer Metalheads conceptualise disidentification in Metal, we do thus also have to have a look at these strategies they have developed. In the following I hence want to pinpoint and explain the interview partners’ survival strategies in Heavy Metal, their geographies of disidentification, and show how they, by using these strategies, “reconstruct the encoded message” of Heavy Metal (1999: 31). I have identified five main clusters of survival strategies in the interview material: strategies concerning the interview partners dealing with emotions, their use and building of networks, their strategies related to music and musicianship and their strategies of visiting and using spaces. These clusters or categories are no closed entities but rather analytical divisions and are strongly entangled, as I will show. It is with these strategies my interview partners organise their participation in Metal and eventually also contribute to an alternative and queer cosmology.

Heavy Metal as a "meditation" - Subverting emotions in Heavy Metal

Heavy Metal is a place of unfiltered embodied emotions. In a society that favours the restriction especially of negative or uncontrolled emotions, Metal can sometimes be the safe island for a free expression of any kind of feeling. As have spelled out in the theoretical part of this study, Metal has its roots in the working class youth and the connection between the frustration of blue-collar kids in the 1970s and 80s and a free expression of anger and aggression in Metal seems obvious. Unfiltered negative emotions in Heavy Metal can until today be read as a representation for the anger and aggression classism produces. However, for society this unrestricted embodied outlet of emotion has always had a threatening character, and Metal has several times been accused of leading to a fatal loss of control. When two young men committed suicide at a local playground in Nevada (US) after drinking alcohol, using drugs and listening to music in 1985, their families accused the Metal band Judas Priest of being accountable (Giles 2015). They argued the band would have hidden subliminal messages in their music that would have encouraged the two men to kill themselves. A similar trial had been lead against Black-Sabbath singer Ozzy Osbourne just one year before (ibid.). More than ten years later, when two students murdered 13 people and
then killed themselves in what would be known as the Columbine High School Massacre, the media would again hold Metal musicians, like Rammstein, accountable (Powers 1999). While I certainly defy the idea that music can cause a murder or suicide, what is present in these historical cases is that Metal represents a threat to society. Taking a closer look at these cases the fear of people losing control over their emotions once they have been set loose by Heavy Metal becomes apparent, just as the underlying assumption that Heavy Metal causes aggression, anger and violence.

The participants in the study, however, draw a completely different picture: “It is also a kind of in-your-face full-on way of dealing with aggressive impulses, supplement these aggressive impulses”, how Abigail stresses. Metal music helps her to cope with negative emotions instead of evoking them (see also Dawes 2012: 24; Vasan 2015: 273). In order to explain this a bit more in detail, I will get back to Stuart Hall’s concept of encoding and decoding. When Abigail stresses that Metal helps her to reduce negative emotions, she decodes the Metal message in an alternative way. As Hall (2001: 101ff) points out, a message can be decoded into a meaning from three different positions. The dominant-hegemonic position or code uses the same code for decoding the meaning that was used for encoding it; the negotiated position or code mixes “adaptive and oppositional elements” depending on the particular situation the decoding happens in (2001: 102); the oppositional position or code decode the message in “globally contrary way” (2001: 103). Here, Abigail decodes the meaning of Metal from an oppositional position as compared to the public opinion that Metal causes aggression. She decodes Metal music in a contrary way, reading it as a relief from negative emotions. Marianne describes a similar mechanism, when talking about Metal concert experiences. For her, it can be a “relief” to see a band live. I understand “relief” in this sense as a loss of (negative) tension. Zia goes one step further and defies the picture of the angry Metal fan that needs a relief: “I don’t really listen to Metal when I am angry. Which is actually kind of against what a lot of people assume Metalheads are like. They assume Metalheads are these angry people, so they need this loud, angry music to cope with life [inc.]. I don't think so.” Here, Zia explicitly refuses to represent the “angry Metalhead” she considers a stereotype. Instead she tries to change the meaning of Metal music from something that helps aggressive people to cope with life (or something that makes fans aggressive) to something that is open for Metalheads in any kind of mood.
But aggression or anger, as the interview partners stress, does also contain a certain (if even negative) kind of power and energy. While most of them defy the negativity that is often attached to Metal, many of them can still make use of this power. Like Dracena puts it: “Metal is simply very powerful and I just like things that blow you away”. Both Dracena and Pia stress that Metal gives them a powerful push. Dracena even underlines that Metal pushes her to places she would otherwise not even reach. Nevertheless, power cannot only mean energy, it can also be used in the sense of might, like Pia underlines: “It gives me some kind of energy-boost [‘Energy-Push’ in German]. (…) And I also think some feeling of power/might [Machtgefühl]. It definitely pushes you somehow.” For Pia the boost she gets when listening to Metal does not only derive from a certain energy that is set free in her. It is also a feeling of might, of being in charge, being in control that gives her strength. Both Pia and Dracena thus challenge the dominant set of emotions that Metal is supposed to represent by using an oppositional code to decode aggressive, angry or simply powerful Metal music. Instead of following the dominant reading, they re-interpret it to something empowering and positive.

Using the oppositional position to decode emotions in Heavy Metal seems to be a very common strategy for the interview partners. They do indeed mostly attach positive emotions to the music. Metal as a source of joy, pleasure and happiness. As unusual as this might maybe sound to people who have never listened to or liked the music, these are certainly emotions that the interview partners vividly talk about - and thus contribute to an alternative cosmos of Metal. Zia, for example, explicitly states that Metal “feels right to me and it makes me happy” and Marianne adds: “It really cheers me up”. I personally share these emotions – especially when it comes to a concert experience. I love being in a concert crowd or in a mosh pit just because this is where I get this feeling of complete, ecstatic joy. This is where I share my embodied pleasure with others. This is where I sometimes cry overwhelmed with happiness. Unlike what many people think about Metal mosh pits, for me they are no places of violence (even though violent people are present), they are places of unfiltered emotions, and these emotions can be decoded into a positive meaning.

What is present in my personal narrative but also in those of the participants in the study is that these emotions are embodied. That is especially visible at concerts, where people raise their arms in euphoria, yell or scream or jump into a mosh pit. As Sara Ahmed argues, it is the bodily contact with an object that creates a feeling. Emotion and sensation thus are
necessarily always entangled (2004: 7). This is mirrored in the concert experience where the bodies in the audience and the bodies of the musicians on stage as well as the music as an object of desire all come together and evoke a feeling. For Dracena, Metal is not only the expression of a positive embodied emotion. It does also have a dimension of bodily desire: “It is for sure slightly sexy with the devil and the darkness.” Dracena also states that a part of her general attraction to Metal in the very beginning were the long-haired Metal-musicians on stage. Metal music as well as concerts thus become an embodied pleasurable experience.

Following interview partners’ argument, Metal does also seem to have a potential to calm people down, to ground them. Pia stresses when talking about Doom Metal, a very slow but powerful music genre, “It is so calming, almost meditative.” Interestingly, Marianne uses exactly the same term when referring to her Metal concert experiences: “It is like meditation. You feel fucking relaxed and good after it. (…) You feel exhausted, but in a good way, of course.” Heavy Metal becomes some kind of a spiritual experience (a term that Dracena also refers to), a meditation. But for Zia this is not only a meditation that calms one down: it is a meditation that can also take you somewhere: “This sort of escape and you can just turn on your headphones and you are kind of somewhere else for a little bit.” What is clear in this quote is that Metal comes to represent some kind of protection in the form of an escape from reality. Dracena describes something very similar. Heavy Metal gives her some kind of invisible protective shield. “It can be dark, but you still feel secure in it somehow. (…) It is really just like a protection from the world. You go out-, or when you listen to it in the car and you think ‘fuck you!’ , but not in a negative sense. I don’t think this is negative, it is like when you have some kind of [second] skin around you.” Again, the interview partners refuse to read the message that is transferred through the embodied music experience from a dominant-hegemonic position that would probably associate Metal music with people flipping out. Instead they transfer the message into a meaning of spiritual calmness and protection using an oppositional code.

What becomes very clear in this section is that Metal, as Abigail puts it, allows “a full range of expression” (see also Riches 2015). The normative set of emotions that Heavy Metal is supposed to evoke (like sadness, anger and aggression) is questioned by an oppositional decoding of Metal messages. In the beginning of this study I have introduced Sara Ahmed’s concept of the “sociality of emotions” in which she conceptualises emotions as cultural and social practices (2004: 9). I thus suggest that emotions can and are in this case strategic and
that allowing a certain emotion to be evoked by a certain object can be an act of disidentification. In the way the interview partners conceptualise it here, disidentification in Metal can thus mean to consciously use emotions and work against oppressive structure in Heavy Metal. To seek protection, become empowered or to feel pleasure becomes a disidentificatory strategy of resistance. Disidentification in Metal is hence constructed as a concept that subverts the dominant attribution of meaning in Metal. Following Hall, the act of using these emotions (as a social interaction) also changes meaning-making processes in Metal and thus subverts the representation and the bricolage of Heavy Metal (1997: 2). In an alternative Metal cosmology, music gets to represent the full range of emotions – positive just as negative ones.

“Heavy Metal has helped me in pretty much all aspects of my life” - Metal networks

While disidentificatory strategies in terms of emotions are a rather abstract concept, I will now shed some light on more concrete strategies. Networks between different actors in Heavy Metal, like fans, musicians, promoters, bar owners, roadies or merchandise sellers, are vital for the actors themselves and the bricolage of Heavy Metal. They all contribute to the big picture of the bricolage and their connections and relations are a crucial part of the rhizomatic entanglement in Heavy Metal. Metal scholar Robert Walser (1993) has stressed the importance of male bonding in heavy metal, being rendered the “only important social relationship” (1993: 114f). Accordingly, Metal networks, private and public ones, are strongly cis-male dominated. While there are a lot of female and queer Metal fans (some of them also being Metal musicians) out there, promoters and roadies, for example, are in many cities exclusively cis-male, as I can tell from my own experience. In this section I will examine how the interview partners construct their networks and thus disidentification in Heavy Metal in terms of communities.

First, it is important to note that having a Metal network (which can also just be a network of fans or fans and musicians) seems to be of vital importance for the interview partners. Marianne, for example, used to work as au pair in Finland. And that was not a random choice: “I actually choose Finland because of the Metal scene, because I heard a lot about it. And I knew there was a lot of bands coming from there. And I don't regret moving there, it was just great. Lot of good concerts and there I really met a lot of people who were into the
same music as me.” Marianne had never had Metal friends before she moved to Finland. She felt isolated and lonely in this regard. It was her attachment to Metal that made her take this step and move from France to a country she associated with Metal. Zia has had a very similar experience to what Marianne describes. After being a rather isolated Metalhead in high school, she finally found likeminded people when she moved to another city for her studies, and this was a key experience for her: “It was really the best years in my life, just discovering that ‘Oh wait, there is a whole bunch of other people out there, that like the same stuff, that I do.’” What becomes apparent here is that for both Marianne and Zia, Heavy Metal is community-based. The exchange with likeminded Metalheads is an essential part of Metal – without a Metal community there seems to be no full Metal experience.

For Zia, Metal fandom is such a unique feature that she has built an extensive and worldwide network over the years: “Wherever I have lived I usually stay in contact with the Metal community, because we always have things to talk about. So people back in L.A., the ones that I am in contact with the most, are the ones that I can share music with and talk to about what is going on with my band or they can tell me about the projects they are working on.” Zia is not selective in terms of dimensions of difference when it comes to her networks: she just bonds with fellow Metalheads she has a sympathy for. I do however suggest that private Metal networks like this are based on more than just sympathy: They are based on a shared Metal language.

Let us have a closer look at how people become a part of Zia’s network. When telling the story about how she became a member of the band she plays in, Zia refers to a fellow Metal fan she once by chance met on a plane to a festival in the Netherlands: “We were both wearing black and I looked over and was like ‘You must be going to the same festival as me’ and then we talked and she was like ‘I know some people who are looking for a guitar player’ and then she introduced us and the rest is history.” Apparently Zia and the Metalhead she met first communicated through the language of style (as a system of representation). The other woman was using her all-black clothes as a sign to represent a certain meaning (“I listen to Metal”). Zia decoded this message using the language of Metal styles and accordingly understood its meaning and relevance in that certain situation (“We are probably going to the same festival.”). The shared code and attribution of meaning (as a part of their shared Metal language) resulted in an immediate interpersonal connection which caused an active exchange of information about their respective networks and the respective inclusion in the
network of the other person. I conclude that it is essential for Metal networks to speak the same language of Metal, to attribute the same meaning to signs and signifying practices.

What is striking in Zia’s case is the significant role her Metal networks plays in her everyday life: “I love being around with other people, who are interested in it. (…) It has really gotten me to a place where I can, like, exist financially independent. Because I mean, following that passion of Metal has helped me in pretty much all aspects of my life, I guess. With friendships, with job opportunities, with music opportunities, everything.” Her Metal network helped her to write her very first concert reviews and, as she states, got her jobs offers as a freelance writer until very recently – even though she no longer writes about music related topics. Zia conceptualises Heavy Metal as a bricolage that comprises the most crucial parts of her life. This is not only Heavy Metal fandom, she more or less designates her life to Metal.

Pia, in contrast, rather creates what Muñoz calls a separatist counterpublic, that means “communities and relational chains of resistance that contest the dominant public sphere.” (1999: 146). As Pia point out: “It is also always cool when I somehow meet people who are queer and interested in Metal, because this does not happen so often, and I always try to stay in contact. I do, for example, have a friend in San Francisco, who is really into Doom Metal and we always send each other things.” Pia’s counterpublic is a network of people who, again, speak the same language. In contrast to the language that connects Zia’ network, this network is also informed by the queer language. These queer Metalheads are able to decode Pia’s gender performance as non-binary but also her band shirt as Metal style. Pia would still prefer to extend their network especially on a local level: “It would be nice if there would exist a little scene in Berlin at some point. And, I don't know, I could also imagine organizing events and invite bands or something like that.” Even though Pia already has a global network, it is mostly limited to the exchange of music. What they additionally are looking for is a network that allows them to become a more present actor in a local queer Metal network, to make the counterpublic more visible and thus to strengthen the queer influence in Metal.

Pia’s counterpublic is held together by a disidentification with the public concept of Heavy Metal. It does provide, just like Muñoz suggests, on the one hand a space, a sphere for queer Metalheads. On the other hand, it challenges the public representation of Metal (e.g. through future concerts). The alternative cosmos of Heavy Metal is not only in the hand of women; it is also in the hand of queers.
When taking a closer look at the interview with Abigail, it is very clear that personal Metal networks, especially selective networks of people with a similar experience in Heavy Metal, are not just created by chance or coincidence. Having these networks and staying in touch with the individuals in it can actually be hard work:

I had a teacher (…), she was a really bad ass rock drummer and I would travel all the way to Brooklyn, which was often a crazy journey for me, because if I wasn’t I driving, I was taking like two trains and a bus and another train, you know what I mean? I mean like a four or five-hour expedition to find her and have a two-hour drum lesson and then I would track home the same day (Abigail).

In order to stay in touch with and learn from her drum teacher - up until today a key person in her network - she, back in the United Stated, took day-long trips to Brooklyn several times per year. Abigail seems to have a special commitment to having these teachers and role models in her life. In order to come and stay in contact with one of her role models, she even followed her band on tours:

Also with the drummer from the band whose shirt I’m wearing, they have a female drummer, who's in her fifties. (...) And she was kind of my mentor, in Philli. Going to shows all the time, kind of their roadie, their like little follower, as a teenager. But totally, every time I would see her, that would fill me with power. It would give me fuel to continue doing my thing and to continue seeing women out there (Abigail).

Having these drumming heroines in her network is so crucial for Abigail that she is ready to dedicate big parts of her time to staying in touch with them. Why is that? I suggest that these drummers produce an alternative meaning for rock music. One that includes or is essentially made by women. Abigail shares this alternative representation and gets a lot of empowerment from people who make this a signifying practice.

Zia, Pia and Abigail all change the game of the homosocial cis-male Metal network by building their own communities. As I have pointed out, their networks and counterpublics seem to be based on a shared language, a shared construction of meanings. It has become clear that in this alternative cosmos of Metal, the ones in control over their networks are women and queers. They seek to challenge the meaning of Metal networks from something excluding to something including – a Metal home. This alternative approach is also clearly mirrored in the community or network that was born out of the interview project. I suggest that the assumption behind the initiation of such a community is that participants in a study like this most likely share a similar Metal language and or (dis-)identification with Heavy Metal. The underlying idea is that women and queers are both effected by similar structures
of oppression as a symptom of the continuous celebration of White, straight masculinity in Heavy Metal and thus share certain experiences and narratives. As both Pia and Marianne have pointed out that they have not found a suitable network for them in Berlin yet, this interview project and the people involved function as a missing link between them and a potential network. While it is at this point not yet clear whether this rather loose connection will develop into a fully grown long-term community its establishing is still a queer act of taking control.

“It’s about taking space and expressing yourself” - Strategies of listening to and performing Metal music

The embodied pleasure of listening to Metal music is central in Heavy Metal for many fans. However, for those with an awareness for oppressive structures, some bands or lyrics can sometimes be difficult to deal with. Some Metalheads even go one step further and become Metal musicians themselves – they enact Metal and make this a signifying practice. Nevertheless, there again, queer Metalheads face obstacles hidden in music, lyrics or the backstage room. In this section, I want to examine how queer fans participate in the fields of music and musicianship and how this makes visible their conceptualisation of disidentification in Heavy Metal.

Before we dive deeper into strategies of listening to and disidentifying with Heavy Metal music, I want to examine how we can conceptualise this practice. I understand listening to music as an embodied process of communication. A message is encoded by a group of people (the band, the producer and other people involved) in the form of a song. This song is then transmitted using a certain medium like vinyl, cd or digital data. It is played in a specific context (e.g. in a personal living room, at a party) and then decoded by the listener(s). As I have already spelled out, the listeners do not necessarily have to decode the message using the same reference code that was used for encoding. In fact, as the encoding and the decoding often happen thousands of kilometres apart and without a (broad) shared reference frame, it is likely that the message that is decoded in the end significantly varies from the one that was encoded. But listening to music, as I conceptualise it, is more than just a mechanical act of decoding and encoding. It is an embodied practice. Sound waves enter the body through the ear and provoke a bodily reaction which can range from the experience of an embodied
emotion over finger tapping to head banging. But active listeners do not only passively react to sound waves, they incorporate them and thus make them their own. The act of actively listening to music means to embody and appropriate it. But what if you are confronted with music that you do not want to fully incorporate?

Some of the interview partners have developed strategies to handle this kind if Metal music. While three of the participants do not seem to have any particular strategy when it comes to listening to Metal and just enjoy whatever empowers them, Dracena and Pia reflect a lot about their listening behaviours and the political backgrounds of the artists they listen to – what they represent. Both have created a certain set of rules or reference points that help them to map out and find a way through the big landscape of Heavy Metal’s music and genres. Pia as well as Dracena are mostly concerned either with sexist lyrics or with Nazi-Metal, especially NSBM, National Socialist Black Metal. While the first concern is rather self-explaining, the latter one needs some context.

Black Metal, this extremely fast, loud and shrieking kind of Metal, has been associated since the early 1990s with neo-Nazi structures and ideology. While Black Metal and its early artists are clearly inspired by Punk music, the early 1990s Norwegian Black Metal scene (at that time mostly consisting of teenagers and youngsters) especially loved to provoke with Satanism, nationalism and racism. While it is clear today that this was, for most of the musicians and fans, a cheap trick of provocation, Black Metal has ever since attracted a big number of fascists and neo-Nazis. Black Metal still loves provocation so the lines between those who just want to provoke and those who really have a right-wing political attitude are blurring even in today’s Black Metal. Deena Weinstein reads Black Metal and its aggressive sound music as a working-class reaction to modernity (2011: 41ff). Indeed, in 2010 Black Metal legends Darkthrone on their album Circle the waggons issued a track called I am the working class including lyrics like “21 years of minimum wage. Got no problems with manual labour” (Darkthrone 2010).

Both Pia and Dracena love Black Metal as a genre, despite its right-wing background. Interestingly, they are not alone with this. In the study by Amber Clifford-Napoleone (2015), Death and Black Metal were “the most popular genres of heavy metal among surveyed queer fans”, even though these genres were at the same time considered strikingly homophobic and sexist by the same people (2015: 116f). I suggest that these notions could also be influenced
by the apparent working-class spirit in Black Metal together with prejudices against working-class masculinities. Clifford-Napoleone suggests that the sometimes rather androgynous or gender-less appeal of Black Metal might attract queer fans, but she also states: “What could be more extreme than listening to music that threatens you?” (2015: 117) Still, as she also points out, consuming Black Metal as a queer fan requires an active avoidance of certain lyrics. Accordingly, all these queer Black Metal fans need strategies for participation. Dracena and Pia have given me examples of how these maps or strategies could look like.

Dracena has what seems to be a very strict and rigid approach when listening to Black Metal. She does not want to take a risk at all: “This is important especially when it comes to Black Metal, so I do not simply listen to the music, but I google every band to see whether there is any Nazi-connection.” (Neo-)Nazis stand for fascist, nationalist, racist but also (hetero-)sexist ideologies in Metal. What is important for Dracena, as I suggest, is that she does not want to share signifying practices (for example the act of listening to a certain band) with these people: she does not want to engage in a common meaning-making process or incorporate this music. Accordingly, she has to make a background check for every band she listens to. As oppressive ideology is so frequent in Black Metal, the pure pleasure of listening has to take a step back and give way to a reality check. But things are changing, even in Black Metal, and, as Dracena points out, if one has the right networks, know the right people and labels, this facilitates the critical consumption of Black Metal a lot: “There is this label in Berlin for example (…) they do Hardcore, Doom Metal and Black Metal and that is so nice because through them, for example, I always get to know new bands (…) and there you can be absolutely sure, because they are from the left-wing scene, that the bands they promote and introduce and invite for their concerts, that they are Nazi-free.” So at a first glance, Dracena has a very separatist resisting strategy here: doing research about a band and their political background and deciding accordingly about whether listening to this music can create pleasure, whether this promise of happiness can be fulfilled. However, she admits, she is not always radically following her own theoretical approach.

I mean, I don’t listen to Burzum [a famous one-man band project by Varg Vikernes who later openly announced to be a racist and fascist] for hours or days but I have listened to it, because I need to know what it is about at least. (…) I am not like ‘Don’t touch this, oh God! You listened to this, oh God.’ (…) It doesn’t make me a sympathiser just because I clicked it once on YouTube (Dracena).

Dracena considers herself old enough to be able to listen to, for example, Burzum without throwing all of her principles overboard. If she is aware of the ideology behind this music,
she can, as she claims, make a conscious decision not to include this band or music in her meaning-making process and representation of Metal. This mirrors my theoretical framework for listening to music: a concept in which Dracena incorporates and thus appropriates the music by listening to it. She is thus in control of the decoding process and uses a negotiated code for it. She accepts and acknowledges the dominant reading of Burzum (as a band with a racist songwriter) but at the same time refuses to be affected by any racist meaning that could possibly be transferred. However, this particular strategy, as I suggest, is also based on Dracena’s privilege in terms of race. For a racialised Metal fan, it could be difficult to connive the racist background of an artist.

Dracena made it also clear in the interview that she would not publicly speak out about this. There seems to be a fracture between her private listening strategy and the public image she represents. Speaking from my own experience, the affiliation with groups or communities in Metal are often based on preferences for a certain band, style or genre – “What you listen to is what you are”, one could say. What Dracena is referring to when naming Burzum is a big number of bands in the so called grey zone. Their lyrics might for example not be fascist or racist, but it is known that the musicians in the band follow this kind of ideology. Sometimes it can also just be enough to play on the same festival as another grey zone or NSBM band to be labelled a grey zone. Accordingly, listening to Burzum, if even only out of curiosity, could be understood as an act of letting the villain in, of engaging in a meaning-making process together with Neo-Nazis or fascists. It seems like Dracena thus experienced some kind of guilt, that she gets pleasure from the “wrong object” and is alienated by her own happiness and accordingly makes this fracture in her listening practice a guilty pleasure (cf. Ahmed 2009: 3f).

Pia is theoretically and practically less rigid in their listening strategy as compared to Dracena – even when it comes to grey zone bands. For Pia, it is less the political background that counts – it is the sheer content. “I don’t think that political content is transferred by the music itself. And you don’t really understand Black Metal lyrics, so that is kind of irrelevant. If I would understand it, that would be something different. (...) [I]f the lyrics would be openly fascist; I would never listen to that.” For Pia, the abstract political background of musicians is not of major importance. It is rather the meaning that is transferred when they decode a message that counts. Pia, just like Dracena, incorporates the music they listen to, appropriates
it and is thus in control of it. Only if this literal meaning is a fascist or racist one, they cancel the communication process.

When it comes to countering sexism in Metal music, Pia, compared to their strategy when it comes to Black Metal, has a rather separatist approach: “I actually try to only listen to and find new bands with women, because I actually don't want to only listen to all of these dudes (…). I recently made a lot of research about female-fronted or also all-female Doom Metal bands and there actually is a lot out there.” When it comes to female and queer artists, Pia tries to strategically involve them in their concept of Heavy Metal, in their meaning-making process. They only listen to new artists with female or queer band members and thus challenge the normative signifying practice of listening to Metal. Their bricolage of Heavy Metal thus gets predominantly to represent artists that are not cis-male. In this new order or cosmology of Heavy Metal, bands with female, trans* or non-binary band members are the foundation. However, as I have mentioned in the very beginning of this study, all-male bands are still the rule in Metal, so it is not always easy to completely avoid them. Indeed, Pia admits: “Mötley Crüe are sexist assholes as well and I still like to listen to them, but, for example, ‘Girl, Girls, Girls’ is rather funny and I think ‘Oh God, these idiots!’” So while we can still see a fracture here, a gap between the theoretical avoidance of all male bands and the practice of still making exceptions, the act of listening to Mötley Crüe from a queer perspective is still subversive. Pia is decoding the song “Girls, Girls, Girls” that is so clearly addressed to straight cis-men, using an oppositional code. The desire for “girls” in the song is no longer a heterosexual one, it is subverted into a queer desire.

Although Dracena and Pia both conceptualise a new order of Heavy Metal with a queer, female and anti-fascist foundation, their practical strategies have fractures. Both say that they listen to music that does not comply with this new order. In both cases an ambiguity of wanting and refusing a certain experience or pleasure becomes visible. There is a desire to embrace the forbidden, to cross the line, to visit the dark side. Or simply to not be restrained in the listening experience. At the same time there is a refusal to be part of an anti-humanist ideology and network, a refusal to contribute to this. Amber Clifford-Napoleone has similar findings in her study and comments: „If the music sounds good and if the music makes you feel power and release, then the oppressive lyrics are simply consumed as the decorative garnish for the musical main dish“ (2015: 118). Nevertheless, there are clear limits for Pia
and Dracena. Neither of them is willing to listen to music with outspokenly fascist or racist lyrics. In contrast to sexist lyrics that can be read with an oppositional, subversive code, fascism and racism are a red line. These limits are, as I suggest, also bound to personal situatedness in regard to power structures.

Getting back to the conceptualisation of listening to music I introduced, Pia and Dracena show how this act can be queered. Queering the listening practice means to appropriate it, to be in control, to make active decisions. It means to politicise listening to music, to create an awareness for oppressive content in the music itself or oppressive ideologies that might be embodied by the encoders. And it can also mean to use a negotiated or oppositional code for decoding and thus subvert an oppressive message. A queer way of listening to (Metal) music also includes practices that challenge the normative celebration of White men in Metal, just like Pia’s strategy to only listen to bands with female, trans* or non-binary band members.

But what about those, who decide not only to consume Metal, but to become an artist, a performer themselves? I have already spelled out that, by chance, all of the interview partners are or were Metal musicians at some point. For some of them, this is not only a leisure time activity, it is a strategy of participation in Metal. Pia explains that it can be an act of resistance to just be on stage at a Metal show: "What is also important somehow, is to be present in such a genre as a female person and to make such music. I actually think even to play the guitar and make this professionally and go on stage with it, is actually still relatively resistant, especially in a Metal environment.” And Abigail confirms: “It's about taking space and expressing yourself. And music is that tool for it.” Indeed, as Sara Ahmed claims, spaces are appropriated by pleasure and enjoyment (2004: 165). The pleasure of performing on stage becomes a political act of claiming the stage. Performing on stage can also be conceptualised as signifying practice that can potentially challenge the public doxa of Metal as a “men’s world”. Additionally, the stage is turned into a place of mutual information of queer and straight Metalheads. Here, messages can be exchanged, meanings negotiated.

For Abigail it is thus important to have as many queer and female Metalheads on stage as possible: “I have been searching for a bassist (...) and it is really hard to find, I really want a female bassist. I mean I could find like that [snips with her fingers] a male bassist to just be ready to play the material.” Abigail strives for a counterpublic on stage, an artist community or at least a few bands that resist the dominant public representation of Heavy Metal. Hence,
Abigail states several times that she keeps very close contact to queer Metal musicians all around the world in order to connect them with each other. She combines disidentificatory strategies of networking and strategies of performing Metal in order to promote change in Heavy Metal.

But performing on stage is not only a resisting strategy. It can also, again, be subversive. Just like Zia describes when talking about musicianship: “To perform and to be involved in something like that is definitely a confidence-booster.” Even though female or queer Metal artists are clearly excluded and often marginalised, they can get empowerment from their shows. Participation in Metal accordingly can also mean to perform this music on stage and through this pleasurable signifying practice change the public dominant meaning of a Heavy Metal show and claim space. An alternative cosmos of Metal is nourished by and nourishes a variety of artists of all genders, races and sexualities. It is informed by creative output like stage performances, lyrics and music and gives back acknowledgement and empowerment.

"We have our own party and just don't give a shit" - Navigating Metal spaces

Heavy Metal is a very physical bricolage. The embodied experience of a concert or festival plays a crucial role for many Metalheads. It is not only the experience of being physically present in the same room as one’s favourite band, of the adrenaline that pumps through the veins when the first chords of a song are played and the body starts to move in the rhythm of the bass. Metal concerts and especially festivals are also happenings. They are meeting places where people see old friends or make new ones, marketplaces for records and merchandise and an opportunity to discover new bands. It is however mostly those who represent a White, straight Metal masculinity that feel comfortable in these spaces.

Pia’s narration about a concert where they were constantly worried for their safety has shown that queer Metalheads need strategies to safely navigate Metal spaces. While Pia is less strict when it comes to listening to Black Metal and theoretically listens to anything that is not explicitly fascist or racist, their strategy is a slightly different one, when it comes to visiting concerts: "I would, for example, not go to a concert of bands, of whom I know that they are problematic. Then I don't want to do that, because I then I think that the crowd will also be shitty and then I do not feel safe there neither." When referring to “problematic” bands they
denote bands that are located somewhere in the grey zone. While Pia would theoretically listen to such a band at home (in private), because there they still have the control over how to decode the music and make a meaning out of it, this is something very different in a concert situation (in public). There, as I suggest, meaning is made in interaction between audience and band. Once the meaning is constructed through the entangled signifying practices of performing on stage and the active embodied engagement in the crowd, this newly constructed meaning is represented by both the band and the audience. Pia would first of all not want to be a part of this meaning-making process that might involve (people who follow) a right-wing ideology. Secondly their resistance against this process of meaning-making (e.g. through a resisting code that includes a certain style) might make them stick out, which could be a potential threat for Pia. As I have already pointed out earlier, Pia’s policy when it comes to Metal concerts is thus to mostly avoid them, if they do not take place in an explicitly queer (feminist) environment. Pia resists to be present in a space that is threatening to her and that potentially represents a meaning of Metal that she does not agree with at all. In such a space they cannot be happy or feel pleasure, at the same time they cannot appropriate the space as the normative domination is so strong.

When it comes to visiting Metal spaces, especially Metal shows, Dracena, at first glance, has an approach that is rather similar to her listening strategy for Metal music: "That very moment, when I actively engage in this and give those people money, that is where the fun stops. (…) Or to just be there, when they are on stage and to be a part of this crowd, where there are a lot of people with whom I would otherwise not want to be in a room with." In similarity to her listening strategy and also to Pia’s strategy for visiting Metal spaces, “the fun stops”, when it comes to a shared signifying practice, a shared meaning making with people from the grey zone sphere. However, what is vital for Dracena as well is the embodied pleasure of a Metal show – especially, when it comes to some of her favourite bands. So, again, we can see fractures in her strategy:

It was twice that I was on a festival where there were bands in the line-up-, or where the organisers did not really care about politics. It was Black Metal, both times, and both times there were bands that I absolutely wanted to see and I felt like it. (…) I wouldn't go there if it was, for example, in Poland somewhere in the woods, where I don't know anybody or in Thuringia. Seriously, I wouldn't do that. But this was in Friedrichshain [a district of Berlin] both times. I was there with a group of people who were also aware of that, but a great line-up: 'We do this!' And with that kind of awareness: 'Yes, there will be assholes, we don't think that's cool. It's an environment where people do not care if there are Burzum patches around and we have our own party and just don't give a shit this weekend (Dracena).
When it comes to special bands that fill her with joy and pleasure, Dracena is willing to make an exception from her set of rules and attend a festival which, as she anticipates, attracts an audience from the grey zone sphere or even has grey zone bands playing (this is not entirely clear in her narration). As a woman with a rather radical left-wing political point of view she is however concerned with her safety at such a place. Using two strategies, she still manages to make this space safer for her. First, she makes sure that an actual safe space is near. This particular festival happens in her hometown Berlin, so safe spaces like her apartment are close and easy to reach. Secondly, it is important for her to have people around that create a safe space at the actual festival. As Dracena points out, she visits the festival with a group of friends that share the same Metal language, that construct the same meaning around Metal as she does (in contrast to what she expects of most of the other attendants). In that way, they create a metaphorical safe space within the material space of the festival, a space in which people share the same reference code of an anti-fascist Heavy Metal. Still, when Dracena refers to having their “own party” it is also clear that the focus is not to subvert or contest the dominant representation of Metal at this event – this is not a counterpublic. What is more important is to create a space in a space where everyone in Dracena’s group can still enjoy the festival experience.

Before narrating this story, interestingly, Dracena reassured herself that the interview was anonymous. Just like when it comes to her listening strategy that sometimes involves listening to the “villains”, when it comes to visit the villains at “their” festivals (even though it is the heroes hat she actually wants to see), discretion is extremely important. Visiting a certain concert can apparently have a similar effect on what kind of Metal one represents as listening to certain bands has, it can also be read as making a common cause with them.

It is striking in both narrations that when it comes to Metal spaces and the interaction with other Metal fans who represent a dominant or right-wing Metal, both Pia and Dracena feel vulnerable and fear for their safety. As a result, they only visit Metal concerts within certain limitations – a mutual information of queer Metalheads and those who represent the norm does, in this physical form, barely happen. An alternative cosmos of Heavy Metal must thus include spaces that are safe for everyone or at least separatist spaces for queer Metalheads as a temporary solution. Using their separatist strategies, both Pia and Dracena construct disidentification in Metal as a concept that relies on metaphorical or physical safe spaces for queer Metal fans. This could mean a queer feminist Metal concert or festival (like the one
that Pia envisions) or just a group of friends that make a concert safer for their community.
Even though both of these strategies avoid the queer information of the Metal scene, they still
change the meaning and representation of the big bricolage of Heavy Metal by just being
present and resisting to go along with the dominant decoding of Metal, or by creating
separatist spaces and making visible the queer side of Metal.

Summary

The empirical analysis of the interview material has shown how queer Metalheads position
themselves towards Metal. Most of them, based on experiences of exclusion they have had,
choose not to identify or counteridentify with Heavy Metal. Instead, they bend the binary of
being or not being a Metalhead and conceptualise a place of their own: disidentification in
Heavy Metal. I will in the following summarise how the interview partners have constructed
disidentification and used disidentificatory strategies to participate in Metal.
In general, disidentification in Metal seems to be a place of resistance, subversion and
change. Using resistant strategies of encoding and decoding (like decoding from an
oppositional position), the interview partners have challenged the dominant set of emotions in
Heavy Metal. They have shown that Metal is more than anger, aggression and frustration. It
can also be joy, relaxation and protection. Indeed, Metal gives them the strength to resist
oppressive structures as well as the stereotype of the White, straight male Metalhead. I have
argued, following Sara Ahmed, that these emotions are cultural practices and that the
interview partners use them strategically to queer Heavy Metal and disidentify with it.
Following the interview partners’ narrations, disidentification can also mean to queer the
structures that exclude people. As I have shown, they have developed strategies to create and
maintain their own Metal networks that are often based on a shared Metal language. These
networks are in the hands and under the control of queer Metalheads. While the Metalheads
benefit from these structures in many ways (even in professional careers), they exist first and
foremost for mutual support and empowerment. This applies also to the loose network that
evolved out of this interview study.
In regard to producing and consuming Metal music, disidentification is conceptualised as a
place where listening to Metal music is strategic and performing Metal music is political. The
participants in the study have developed subversive strategies to avoid oppressive content in
Metal music and to use concerts as empowerment strategies or a strategy to challenge the public representation of Metal. However, these strategies have fractures, as we have seen. Some participants listen to music or artists that represent a sexist, fascist or racist world view. However, as they argue, they appropriate this music and are thus in control of the attached meaning making process. This accordingly prevents them from being affected by this ideology.

Fractures are also visible when we take a look at how these queer Metalheads resist or subvert Metal spaces. Sometimes the urge to see a certain band is bigger than the unwillingness to visit certain spaces. Some of the interview partners mainly create or visit physical or metaphorical safe spaces. It is in Metal spaces where the embodied physical confrontation between the celebration of the White, straight male and the Metal bodies that do challenge this norm takes place. This is also why the interview partners expressed concerns with their physical safety and prefer to withdraw into their own spaces instead of openly resisting.

What makes these resisting strategies work? Drawing from Stuart Hall’s theory of representation, I argue that what the interview partners seek to do here is to change the meaning behind the common public representation of Heavy Metal; the celebration and domination of White, heterosexual men. This is what I would call the dominant cosmos of Metal. A rather static concept that is defined by ex- rather than inclusion, by unifying rather than diversifying. This is the Metal world that many Metalheads around the world still submit to. The interview partners however seek out to change this representation.

According to Hall, representation is the “production and circulation of meaning through language”, so what the interview partners describe in their narrations is the subversion of meaning and language in Heavy Metal – as an act of redefining and appropriating (1997: 1). They do this by subverting signifying practices (that construct meaning), by consciously using networks of only queer Metalheads or by listening to Black Metal from a queer perspective. They also contribute to the change of language through which meaning is communicated. With their sheer presence they can add alternative gender performances to the vocabulary of this language and thus contribute to the change of meaning and consequently the cosmos of Heavy Metal.
“NOT EAGER TO FIT IN” – CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The aim of this study was to show how queer Metalheads organise their participation in Heavy Metal and thus create an alternative Metal cosmology. The literature review has shown that while there are studies on exclusion and marginalisation and also on the theoretical queering of Heavy Metal, there is a lack of studies that map out everyday queer life in Metal and focus on empowerment. I have already summarised disidentificatory strategies and modes of queer participation in Heavy Metal. I have shown that my interview partners often meet exclusion and marginalisation with a defiant resisting attitude. If they are excluded from networks, they build their own. If they are marginalised on stage, they will be even more present. If they feel not welcome in a Metal space, they create one of their own together with their friends.

As a conclusion I will shed some light on the picture of an alternative, queer cosmos and cosmology my interview partners have created. This cosmos is an alternative to the dominant cosmos of Metal. A cosmos that sees White, straight, cis-male Metalheads as their past, present and future. A cosmos that is static and in a private-public process dominantly decides about what and who is Metal. The queer Metalheads in my study make themselves subjects in an alternative cosmos of Metal. They are active listeners and musicians instead of passive fans and objects of a heterosexual desire. This cosmos has its own heroes and heroines and celebrates them instead of normative Metal masculinities. Here, the term Metalhead is not a privilege one is awarded, it is a self-definition. Metal spaces, in this world, are safe spaces for queer fans. Generally speaking, this cosmos, its spaces and practices are in the hand of queer Metalheads. But this cosmos is not only a utopian dream. The participants in my study have made a first step to make this a reality. Not only have they, with their disidentificatory strategies of resistance, contributed to a queering of Heavy Metal, they have also built a real, if even loosen, community. This is a community that enables them to share experiences and inform each other about strategies of resistance and empowerment, but also a community that has the capability to become a Metal counterpublic, a “relational chain of resistance that contests the dominant public sphere” (Muñoz 1999: 146). Let me, at this point, also return to Frigga Haug and underline the importance of the community building in this project. For Haug, collective work (like this interview study) produces knowledge but is at the same time a process that collectively develops new ways of living (Haug 1980: 17). Once the interview
partners have the chance to read all of the interviews, to get together and share the knowledge they have produced, this could become a community that changes ways of (inter-)acting in the world of Heavy Metal.

The framework for this alternative Metal cosmos is an alternative, queer cosmology of Metal. I understand this cosmology as an open and fluid construct. It is based on a diverse genealogy of Metal, including the stories and contributions of those who have been silenced in the dominant narration of Metal history. In analogy, the representation of Metal is constructed based on the contribution of those who have traditionally been silenced and thus disrupts the celebration of the White, straight Metalhead. In this cosmology, the community of Metalheads is not held together by the exclusion of others. Instead, it is based on a shared passion and pleasure and opens up for diverse and hybrid identifications. Metal music thus becomes a tool that empowers the ones that have formerly been marginalised or excluded, a tool that helps to fight and overcome oppression.

The purpose of this study was to intervene in the imaginary as well as the discursive and embodied politics of the celebration of White straight masculinity in Heavy Metal. The alternative cosmology of Metal that the interview partners have outlined in this study can be understood in terms of a discursive intervention that interrupts the normative image of a homogenous White, straight and male Metal audience and the resulting practices of exclusion and marginalisation. It also contributes to the queering and subversion of the discursive politics of Metal as well as Metal history. Finally, the alternative cosmos of Metal and the newly evolved queer Metal community are a direct and practical intervention in the embodied politics and practice of Heavy Metal and a way to make visible Metalheads that challenge normative ideas of Metalness.

When having an outlook on which questions still need to be answered and which new perspectives have opened up in this study, I consider it important to follow-up on the newly evolved community, to see if and how it develops and whether a collective learning process might set in. In general, it could be rewarding to examine if this separation into a queer Metal community actually leads to change or if it is only a home for those who are excluded from the dominant cosmos of Metal. Are messages exchanged between these two worlds or is this only a theoretical assumption? Finally, this study has shown that the question how queers navigate bricolages that are dominated by the celebration of a normative masculinity is a very
rewarding one. Further studies that examine similar bricolages or the bricolage of Heavy Metal in different contexts should follow.

Finally, this study has also permanently changed me and my positioning towards Heavy Metal. It helped me to understand that my love and passion for this bricolage are certainly based on my own working class background. I have also learned that I am not the only one struggling with the dominant cosmos of Heavy Metal. We, the queer Metalheads, have to build networks and communities to empower each other and make the alternative cosmos of Metal a reality.

REFERENCES


Advertisement

This add was published on my Tumblr account as well as distributed on Facebook. The picture used in the add was retrieved from http://bloximages.chicago2.vip.townnews.com/auburnpub.com/content/tncms/assets/v3/editorial/d/4b/d4ba8f65-0b08-5245-a063-ec97228cb53e/51dcc140d51bf.image.jpg and depicts the band Judas Priestess.

[Caption: A picture of the Metal band Judas Priestess consisting of the five female band members, all dressed up leather and spikes. The texts reads: “Metalheads* wanted!”]

BERLIN: METALHEADS* WANTED!

Für meine Masterarbeit möchte ich gerne mit Menschen sprechen, die sich Räume im Heavy Metal erkämpfen und/oder Widerstand leisten. Das kann heißen, dass du Aktivismus machst, Musiker*in bist oder Konzerte veranstaltest. Das kann aber auch heißen, dass du Fan bist,
Musik hörst, dich empowern lässt und Konzerte besuchst. Widerstand kann in diesem Sinne (aber nicht ausschließlich) feministisch, queer, anti-rassistisch, anti-ableistisch, anti-ageistisch und/oder auch anti-klassistisch sein. Ihr müsst nicht studiert haben, um teilzunehmen.


Meldet euch gerne (auch mit weiteren Fragen) unter lissc037@student.liu.se

Kurz zu mir: Ich bin 26 Jahre alt, weiß, ableisiert, identifiziere mich als queere Cis-Frau und bin seit etwa 12 Jahren in Heavy Metal Kontexten unterwegs.

BERLIN: METALHEADS* WANTED!

As a part of my master thesis, I want to talk to persons fighting for spaces and/or doing resistance in Heavy Metal. This could mean that you do activism, are a musician or arrange concerts. It could however also mean that you are a fan, listen to music, become empowered and/or visit concerts. Resistance in this sense can (but does not necessarily have to) be feminist, queer, anti-racist, anti-ableist, anti-ageist and/or anti-classist. Academic education is not required!

Tell me your stories! I would especially like to talk to people whose voices are often silenced, like People of Colour, trans*people, non-binary people, non-ableised people/people with disabilities, bisexual people, older people and people without academic education.

If you are interested (or have more questions), please contact me on: lissc037@student.liu.se

About me: I am 26 years old, White, ableised, identify as a queer cis-woman and have been around in Heavy Metal for about 12 years now.

**Interview questions**

*In no particular order.*

- Would you please introduce yourself?
- Can you tell me the story of you and Heavy Metal?
- What does Metal mean to you today?
- Are you active in Metal spaces or groups?
- Do you have friends with an interest in Heavy Metal?
- Is Metal a part of your identity?
- Is change happening in Metal?
- Do you engage in Metal in one or another way?
- What is your first association with Metal?
- What is Heavy Metal, actually?
- Do you have a favourite Metal song and can you play it for me? What happens to your body and mind when you hear it?
- What are some of your favourite Metal artists and your newest discoveries?

Translation of interview extracts

Interview extracts of the interviews conducted in English are not listed here.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Original text</th>
<th>English translation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dracena</td>
<td>Also, ich würde mich jetzt nicht unbedingt als Metalhead bezeichnen, aber ich werde manchmal so bezeichnet (lacht). Weil ich eine Lederjacke und eine Kutte habe und halt solche Patches und weil ich schon, glaube ich, mittlerweile 70% der Musik, die ich höre, ist Metal.”</td>
<td>“I would not necessarily call myself a Metalhead, but people call me that sometimes (laughs). Because I have a leather jacket and a battle vest and these patches and because in the meanwhile 70% of the music I listen to is Metal.”</td>
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<td>“(…) also das trennt mich irgendwie auch von der Queerszene. Ich bin ich vom Massengeschmack in der Queerszene von der Musik ziemlich enttäuscht und ich finde es auch total schade. Also ich bin schon queer und stehe auch auf Frauen, aber ich vermisse so halt die Rock ’n’ Rollerinnen (…).”</td>
<td>“That separates me from the queer scene. I am very disappointed by the mainstream taste in music in the queer scene and I think that is a pity. I am queer and I am into women, but I miss the rock ’n’ roll women (…).”</td>
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<td>“Also ich wechsele so zwischen den Szenen, deshalb finde ich Berlin auch ziemlich gut. Weil man halt gleichzeitig in der Queer- und in der Metal- und in der Punk- und in der Anarcho- und Fetisch-Szene unterwegs sein kann und das muss nicht nötigerweise so eine volle Identifikation mit einer von diesen</td>
<td>“I switch between the scenes and that is why I like Berlin quite a lot. Because you can be active in the queer, the Metal and in the Punk and in the anarchist and in the fetish scene at the same time and this does not mean that you have to fully identify with one of these groups.”</td>
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<td>Gruppen sein.</td>
<td>“Metal is simply very powerful and I just like things that blow you away”.</td>
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<td>„Und natürlich ist das ein Bisschen sexy mit dem Teufel und dem Düsteren.“</td>
<td>“It is for sure slightly sexy with the devil and the darkness.”</td>
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<td>„Und es kann düster sein, aber man fühlt sich trotzdem darin irgendwie geborgen. (...) es ist wirklich, wie so ein Schutz um die Welt, dass man so raus geht oder, wenn man das im Auto hört und denkt so 'Fuck you!' so, aber gar nicht so negativ, ich finde das nicht negativ, das ist wie, wenn man so eine Haut um sich rum hat.“</td>
<td>“It can be dark, but you still feel secure in it somehow. (...) It is really just like a protection from the world. You go out-, or when you listen to it in the car and you think ‘fuck you!’ , but not in a negative sense. I don’t think this is negative, it is like when you have some kind of [second] skin around you.”</td>
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<td>„[B]esonders bei Black Metal spielt das eben so eine große Rolle, dass ich dann nicht nur einfach nur die Musik höre, dass ich bei jeder Band im Internet google, ob es da Nazi-Bezüge gibt. „</td>
<td>“This is important especially when it comes to Black Metal, so I do not simply listen to the music, but I google every band to see whether there is any Nazi-connection.”</td>
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<td>„(...) gibt zum Beispiel dieses Label in Berlin (...) die bringen grade total viel neue Platten raus. Machen Hardcore, Doom Metal und Black Metal und das ist halt total schön, weil über die komme ich zum Beispiel auch immer auf neue Bands, jetzt gerade in den letzten Monaten, und dann kann man halt absolut sicher sein, weil die aus der linken Szene kommen, dass die Bands, die die promoten und vorstellen und auf ihren Konzerten einladen, dass die eben Nazi-frei sind.“</td>
<td>“There is this label in Berlin for example (...) they do Hardcore, Doom Metal and Black Metal and that is so nice because through them, for example, I always get to know new bands (...) and there you can be absolutely sure, because they are from the left-wing scene, that the bands they promote and introduce and invite for their concerts, that they are Nazi-free.”</td>
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<td>“Ich meine, ich höre jetzt nicht stundenlang, tagelang Burzum am Stück, aber ich habe mir das auch mal angehört, weil ich muss ja wenigstens wissen, um was es da geht (...). Also so bin ich jetzt nicht, so 'Don't touch this, oh Gott! Du hast das gehört, oh Gott!' (…) Das macht mich jetzt nicht sofort zum Mitläufer, weil ich einmal auf YouTube da draufgeklickt habe.”</td>
<td>“I mean, I don’t listen to Burzum [a famous one-man band project by Varg Vikernes who later openly announced to be a racist and fascist] for hours or days but I have listened to it, because I need to know what it is about at least. (...) I am not like ‘Don’t touch this, oh God! You listened to this, oh God’ (…) It doesn’t make me a sympathiser just because I clicked it once on YouTube.”</td>
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<td>„In dem Moment, wo ich da aktiv</td>
<td>“That very moment, when I actively engage</td>
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<td>Teilnahme und eben noch Geld an die Leute gebe, da hört der Spaß in dem Moment schon für mich auf. (...) [O]der da zu sein, wenn die da auf einer Bühne stehen und dann eben Teil dieser Crowd zu sein, wo dann eben so andere Leute sind, mit denen ich sonst nicht in einem Raum sein möchte.“</td>
<td>in this and give those people money, that is where the fun stops. (...) Or to just be there, when they are on stage and to be a part of this crowd, where there are a lot of people with whom I would otherwise not want to be in a room with.”</td>
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| „Es ist so, dass ich schon zweimal auf Festivals war, wo halt Bands im Line-up waren oder wo der Veranstalter sich jetzt nicht besonders um politische Inhalte gesorgt hat. Und beides Mal war es Black Metal und beides Mal waren auch Bands dabei, die ich unbedingt sehen wollte und ich hatte einfach Bock da drauf. (...) [I]ch würde nicht dahingehen, zum Beispiel in Polen irgendwo im Wald, wo ich keinen kenne oder in Thüringen. Jetzt ohne Scheiß, aber das würde ich nicht machen. Aber das war halt beides Mal in Friedrichshain. Ich war mit einer Gruppe von Leuten da, denen das auch bewusst war, aber geiles Line-up, geben wir uns. Und mit so einem Bewusstsein halt: 'Ja, da sind jetzt Arschlöcher, finden wir nicht cool. Es ist ein Umfeld, denen das egal ist, dass da Burzum Patches sind und wir haben halt unsere eigene Party und schießen da dieses Wochenende bitte darauf.” | “It was twice that I was on a festival where there were bands in the line-up-, or where the organisers did not really care about politics. It was Black Metal, both times, and both times there were bands that I absolutely wanted to see and I felt like it. (...) I wouldn't go there if it was, for example, in Poland somewhere in the woods, where I don't know anybody or in Thuringia. Seriously, I wouldn't do that. But this was in Friedrichshain [a district of Berlin] both times. I was there with a group of people who were also aware of that, but a great line-up: 'We do this!' And with that kind of awareness: 'Yes, there will be assholes, we don't think that's cool. It's an environment where people do not care if there are Burzum patches around and we have our own party and just don't give a shit this weekend” |

| Pia | “(...) also weiß ich, dass das in der Metallszene, glaub ich, Leute gar nicht verstehen und auch mich nicht so lesen würden. Die würden mich halt einfach als Cis-Frau, als straigte Cis-Frau wahrscheinlich sogar lesen. “ | “I know that people in the Metal scene would not understand that at all and would not read me accordingly, I think. They would read me as cis-woman, probably even as a straight cis-woman.” |

| „Das interessiert mich momentan total, das auch mit anderen Kontexten zu verbinden, nämlich vor allem mit der queeren Szene halt, weil ich das-, diese ganze Elektro-Fixierung von der queeren Szene mich nervt. (...) ich find’s irgendwie total schade, dass | “Right now I am really interested in combining this with other contexts, especially with the queer scene, because I am so annoyed by this fixation on electronic music of the queer scene. (...) I think it is a pity that guitars are so scorned and that Metal is extremely scorned generally. It
Gitarren so verpönt sind (lacht) und dass Metal generell super verpönt ist. Also, ich habe schon total oft, so bei irgendwie OkCupid-Dates oder sowas (lacht) dann, ja, kam dann irgendwie so "Ja, was hörst du so" und dann sag ich irgendwie so "Metal" und dann lachen die Leute und sind irgendwie so "Das ist doch auch irgendwie voll die alberne Kackmusik, so. Das ist doch nur so Mackermusik”

happened to me a couple of times at OkCupid dates or something [laughs] when somebody said ‘What do you listen to?’ and I say something like ‘Metal’ and then people laugh and are like ‘But that is such a silly shit music. That’s only dudes’ music.’”

“(…), wenn man sich so die queeren Leute in der Punk- und Hardcore-Szene ankuckt, dann sind das meistens halt auch Masculine Of Center-Leute irgendwie und, ich finde halt irgendwie femme sein und irgendwie Metalhead sein oder so, finde ich eine interessante Kombi und will ich schon auch irgendwie so mitrepräsentieren auch. Und auch grade umso Sichtbarkeit von-, von irgendwie so-, oder so Klischees von Metal auch zu brechen. Also auch in der queeren Szene so. So zu sagen, ja, Metal ist geil so. Ist mir egal, ob das-, ob du denkst, dass das alles Dudes sind, weil das stimmt nämlich nicht.“

“When you look at queer people in the Punk and Hardcore-Scene, most of them are somehow Masculine of Center-people [performing a queer, masculine gender] and I actually consider being femme [performing a queer, feminine gender] and somehow being Metalhead or something like that, I consider this an interesting combination and I want to represent something like that somehow. Especially in order to (…) challenge clichés of Metal. Also in the queer scene. To say: ‘Yes, Metal is hot! I don’t mind if you think it’s all dudes, because that is not accurate.’”

“Und ich habe eigentlich das Gefühl, dass ich mich so szenenmäßig jetzt ins Bars oder auf Partys eigentlich nicht bewegen will. Weil ich mich da eigentlich nicht so sicher, nicht so, also einfach auch als nicht so angenehm empfinde irgendwie. (…) Also das ist halt mit G., wir waren irgendwie neulich bei [Band] und das war auch total geil, aber es war schon auch die ganze Zeit so ein Bisschen so, dass wir schon auch uns umgeguckt haben, so, dass wir safe sind. Das hat da auch mit reingespielt. Also das ist ja dann bei G. dann nochmal irgendwie-, sind dann auch noch von Transphobie betroffen, das ist dann nochmal eine andere Geschichte, ja.”

“I actually have the feeling that I do not want to move in the scene’s bars or at parties. Because I don’t feel so safe and not so comfortable somehow. (…) And well with G. [a friend], we recently went to a show and that was great. But we were at the same time constantly checking that we were safe. That was a part of it. And G. is also experiencing transphobia so that is another story as well.”
„Euphorie. Irgendwie. Das gibt mir so einen Energie-Push. (lacht) (...) Ja, ich glaube auch so ein Machtgefühl, irgendwie. Das pusht halt irgendwie so auf jeden Fall.”

“It gives me some kind of energy-boost. (...) And I also think some feeling of power/might. It definitely pushes you somehow.”

“(…) das ist so beruhigend, fast schon meditativ.“

“It is so calming, almost meditative.”

“Ja, es ist auch immer total toll, wenn ich irgendwie dann Leute treffe, die queer sind und sich für Metal interessieren, weil das einfach nicht so oft vorkommt und da halte ich auch immer den Kontakt. Ich habe auch zum Beispiel in San Francisco eine Freundin, die sich, ja, sehr vor allem für Doom Metal interessiert und so und dann-, wir schicken uns auch immer noch Sachen hin und her”

“It is also always cool when I somehow meet people who are queer and interested in Metal, because this does not happen so often, and I always try to stay in contact. I do, for example, have a friend in San Francisco, who is really into Doom Metal and we always send each other things.”

“Ja, also ich fände es schon schön, wenn es in Berlin irgendwie so eine kleine Szene irgendwann geben würde. Und, weiß nicht, ich könnte mir auch vorstellen, zum Beispiel Events zu organisieren und Bands einzuladen oder sowas.“

“It would be nice if there would exist a little scene in Berlin at some point. And, I don't know, I could also imagine organizing events and invite bands or something like that.”

“Aber ich finde nicht, dass sich politische Inhalte in der Musik alleine übertragen, so. Und den Text versteh man ja eh nicht bei Black Metal, das ist sowieso egal. Also, wenn ich den jetzt verstehen würde, wäre das, glaube ich, nochmal was Anderes. (...) Also wenn die Texte irgendwie offen faschistisch wären, würde ich mit das auf gar keinen Fall anhören.“

“I don’t think that political content is transferred by the music itself. And you don’t really understand Black Metal lyrics, so that is kind of irrelevant. If I would understand it, that would be something different. (...) If the lyrics would be openly fascist; I would never listen to that.”

“[I]ch versuche aber eigentlich nur Bands zu hören und zu finden, wo Frauen drin sind, weil ich jetzt eigentlich so keine Lust hab, so nur diese ganze Dudes mir anzuhören, ja. (...) [I]ch hab halt total viel research gemacht in letzter Zeit also so zu female-fronted oder halt auch all-female Doom Metal Bands und da gibt’s eigentlich erstaunlich viel.“

“I actually try to only listen to and find new bands with women, because I actually don't want to only listen to all of these dudes (...). I recently made a lot of research about female-fronted or also all-female Doom Metal bands and there actually is a lot out there.”

“Also ich höre zum Beispiel auch, also Mötley Crüe sind ja auch sexistische

“Mötley Crüe are sexist assholes as well and I still like to listen to them, but, for
Artschöler und trotzdem höre ich mir das ganz gerne mal an und finde zum Beispiel "Girls, Girls, Girls" aber so auch eher witzig eigentlich und denke mir so "Oh Gott, was für Idioten!“

| "(…) was natürlich auch schon irgendwie wichtig ist, ist irgendwie als weibliche Person sich in so einem Genre zu bewegen und auch irgendwie so eine Musik zu machen. Also ich finde alleine auch Gitarre spielen und irgendwie das auch ernsthaft zu betreiben und damit auf die Bühne zu gehen ist schon an sich auch tatsächlich immer noch relativ-, also gerade im Metal-Bereich ist das irgendwie recht wiederständig“ |
| "What is also important somehow, is to be present in such a genre as a female person and to make such music. I actually think even to play the guitar and make this professionally and go on stage with it, is actually still relatively resistant, especially in a Metal environment.” |

| "Ich würde zum Beispiel nicht auf Konzerte gehen von Bands, wo ich sowieso schon weiß, dass das problematisch ist. Da habe ich dann keine Lust drauf, weil dann denke ich auch die Crowd ist schieße und dann fühle ich mich da auch nicht sicher, so.“ |
| "I would, for example, not go to a concert of bands, of whom I know that they are problematic. Then I don't want to do that, because I then think that the crowd will also be shitty and then I do not feel safe there neither." |
The celebration of a White heteronormative masculinity is still vivid in Heavy Metal. This has embodied and discursive consequences that are visible in the domination of Metal spaces or the marginalisation of female, trans* or non-binary musicians, but also in an aesthetics of (hetero- and cis-) sexism and racism that is often apparent. Nevertheless, Metal is still empowering and joyful for those who experience exclusion and marginalisation. They have found ways to react and organise an alternative participation in Heavy Metal. Using a queered approach to Cultural Studies, this study aims at intervening in the continuous reproduction of a normative White and straight Metal masculinity. Collecting data from five ethnographic interviews with queer Metalheads and additional autoethnographic data, it shows how queer Metalheads organise their participation in Heavy Metal and create an alternative Metal cosmology. This study is not only a theoretical intervention. As a result of the interview project, a new community of queer Metalheads was created.