Heavy Metal as a Subculture

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Abstract

This thesis tries to give an overview of the Heavy Metal subculture which emerged in the early 1980s. The subculture attracts countless members throughout the world. The aim of the thesis is to understand the way of thinking, the mentality of the members and tries to find if there is any evidence for socially problematic ideas like homophobia, sexism or racism. In order to gain data the thesis is based on an evaluation of the main sociological concepts of subculture. The sociological theories counter culture, cool pose, elitism, magical resistance, labeling theory and moral panics will be defined and a general history of Heavy Metal and its sociological attributes will be introduced. Further the thesis is backed by four recorded semi structured interviews with Heavy Metal members from Germany and a field research on a Heavy Metal festival ibid. The field research gave insight in the activities of the attenders and their behavior which was mainly listening to the concert, talking about music and drinking alcohol in a peaceful manner. The results of the research are that Heavy Metal is split mainly into many different subgenres that are then further split between underground and mainstream directions. This makes generalization of the subculture impossible but it was brought in knowledge that the reactionary tendencies can be found mainly in the traditionalist underground directions of the subculture whereas modern subgenres that take on influences from other musical genres tend to be more open and tolerant. However there could be an indicator for such ideas. Further it was learned that Heavy Metal member’s motivation to join the subculture are passion for music, need for a community and escapism. Devotion and dedication are seen as vital components of the subculture and finally there is a big tendency towards elitism, respectively isolation from mainstream society or other subcultures.
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1 Introduction

Heavy Metal is called by Deena Weinstein, an expert on this musical genre “The beast that refuses to die”. (Weinstein, 2000, p. 12) This citation is quite right Heavy Metal which is an extreme form of rock music shocked and provoked the world for lots of decades and is still alive and well. Even more Heavy Metal is increasingly popular around the globe and attracts meanwhile young and old although there were campaigns to censor or even ban this music since its very beginnings.

First of all I chose this topic because personally as an insider I listen to Heavy Metal and know its subculture very well. I started listening to this kind of music when I was a teenager and it did not leave me and remains part of my life. But I was always fascinated by the subcultural aspect of this music as well. Not just that like-minded people listen to the same music, they share often similar interests in other topics as well. Therefore the Heavy Metal subculture could be seen like a community which goes beyond music and offers a unique possibility for people looking for new friendships or groups to spend time with.

Heavy Metal on the first look doesn’t seem like a topic fitting to an academic discussion. On the second look however it provides interesting sociological questions. Why are people listening to this music, why are they forming a group that meets all requirements to constitute a subculture? What is the motivation behind it? What are the structures like in this community is it homogenous or split up in various subgroups? However there are even more concerning questions that have to be answered. Does Heavy Metal offer a stage for dubious ideas like sexism, homophobia or racism? As the lyrics and the outfit resemble a hyper-masculine and warrior-like spirit these questions are justified and should be answered.

To give an answer I begin by defining key ideologies and concepts of how and why subcultures arise. I will give examples of other earlier forms of subcultures that came into being. Then I will introduce the history of Heavy Metal its roots and key factors of their subcultural character. Finally I will conduct four interviews with members of the
Heavy Metal subculture from Germany and give a short review of a Heavy Metal festival in Germany.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Overview

In the literature review, I will introduce some theories relevant to my research questions with particular reference to subculture. Firstly I will give a general explanation of the term ‘counter culture’ attributed by Theodore Roszak (1969), ‘Cool Pose’ by Mac, Ghaill, Majors and Bildson (1994), ‘Magical Resistance’ by Phil Cohen (1972), ‘labeling theory’ by Frank Tannenbaum (1938), then ‘Moral Panics’ by Stanley Cohen (1972) and finally some general sociological literature about Heavy Metal and its subculture by Deena Weinstein (2000), Cristoph Lücker (2011) and Bettina Roccor (1998).

2.2 Key theories

The term ‘counter culture’ was coined by Theodor Roszak in his work The Making of a counter culture (1969), which talked about the social revolution that took place mainly in the western world in the 1960s. He found that such a culture seeks to form an opposition to mainstream opinion, values and culture by adopting a lifestyle that offers an alternative to mass culture. In his work he studied the various countercultures in the 1960s which were made up mainly by Vietnam War protesters or general rebels against technocracy as these were the first forms of such a counter culture receiving a wider audience. Therefore the existence of a counter culture always has a social or political background. (Roszak, 1969) Understanding this definition is important to understand to which degree the Heavy Metal subculture is able to challenge mainstream culture which would make it a counter culture movement.

According to Mac and Ghaill and Majors and Billdson (1972) who conducted a study on black male pupils, the everyday racism in school and society they had to face was responded to by these alienated Black pupils by developing a ‘Cool Pose’ which is a strategy to oppose the school with its low teacher expectations and institutional racism. By this action the black pupils regained status and self- esteem by showing strength,
pride and the capability of survival in spite of their low status according to society. The researchers showed that such accentuated forms of masculinity, which can be called hyper-masculinity are a reaction to oppression or insecurity of a group within the society as the same reactions can be found in the white working class milieu. Subcultural formations usually also have the same notions of regenerating traditional cultural traits like hyper-masculinity mentioned above. In this sense subcultural formation can be seen as logical actions and coping strategies to deal with oppression or being labelled as deviant. (Taylor, et al., 1994) Similar reactions to society can be found in the ideology of elitism where a self-proclaimed elite rejects mainstream society because of their perceived better taste, higher sophistication, higher knowledge or other qualities that they define as being key aspects of their elite group. Those elitist groups existed in the form of youth subculture in the 1950s already and were called hipsters. They reacted to being labelled deviant and excluded by society by adopting an elitist and exclusive approach which is understood only by them. They ridiculed mass culture and developed their own form of art and lifestyle which was seen as deviant by society. (Mailer, 1966) Phil Cohen calls this form of reaction ‘magical resistance’ which in a way tries to create an imaginary superiority towards authorities or society. (Cohen, 1972)

Therefore we can raise the question if Heavy Metal can have its origin in ‘magical resistance’ or elitism as well.

Furthermore it is important to understand what ‘labeling theory’ is in order to gain deeper insights into subculture. In Frank Tannenbaum’s work Crime and Community (1938) he introduced the idea of ‘tagging’ where while researching deviant youth he found that a negative tag or label increased further involvement in delinquent activities. Tannenbaum argues that such a labeling is causing the individual to identify himself with the label given to him so he starts to adopt a behavior corresponding with his label and even includes it into his identity. Although his study is focused mainly on criminals or understanding criminal activity, this analysis helps a lot in finding out how people within society feel alienated from it and therefore create and participate in a sub-society or subculture. (Tannenbaum, 1938)

Howard Becker’s Outsiders: Studies in the sociological of deviance was published in 1963 and is of high importance to understand how groups come into life, that separated
themselves from the rest of society. Becker studied how and why there was deviant behavior in society. Becker was driven by the question of whether deviance is an inherent attribute of a person or if it is a more complex interaction between society and the individual. He defined deviance as a label that is given by the society to people who are not able or willing to conform to certain rules of society. Furthermore deviance is also the rejection of certain rules the society imposes on itself. Therefore he finds like Tannenbaum, deviance in the first instance is created by society, the deviant applies to it. When a group of people share the same deviant labels they start to form a group, or a subculture. Deviance can be generated also unintentionally where a person who lives within a subculture assumes the norms and values of it can be applied generally and thus breaks the social rules of conventional society. Once confronted with this, the deviant tries to neutralize his actions, in order to avoid sanctions. In his further research he found also that usually even conforming people have deviant fantasies or thoughts. His answer to the question why those people are not involved in deviant activity is that the conforming people are usually implemented into a social network which requires self-control in order to maintain reputation. In the case of a deviant life history one has to develop deviant motives and interests. In this case Becker defines peer pressure or influence by more experienced deviant individuals as the key source. Therefore he examined two deviant groups which were marijuana users and dance musicians. In the case of the marijuana users it is at first curiosity that leads to the illegal consumption of the drug, but not the desire to do something deviant. However the effect on the user will lead him eventually to repeat consumption more regularly which would push him into an outsider situation. Therefore this kind of behavior is socially learns, the individual gets access to the drug by someone and learns how to enjoy the drug in order to request to repeat the experience. (Becker, 1963)

In the case of dance musicians it is an interesting fact to know that their behavior in general is not proscribed by law, but by society is still seen as deviant. Furthermore, those musicians form a group of people with their own distinctive way. This, and the fact that the members of such a group feel, that their activities are seen as deviant leads to a situation where groups form subcultures. Becker defines subculture as the following: Since culture and society is a huge accumulation of different individuals not all of them are satisfied with the general rules of society. Actions that are seen as deviant by society may be seen as normal by certain people. So a “homosexual feels his
kind of sex life proper, but others do not” or a “thief feels it is appropriate for him to steal but no one else does”. (Becker, 1963, 81) If there are enough deviants that share their beliefs among each other and have the possibility to interact they are able to form a culture within a culture, therefore subculture, normalizes their activity within this group. In the case of the dance musician, in this case jazz musician, he is in constant conflict between the ‘normal’ music listener whose taste is oriented towards a more conventional or ‘easy-listening type’ of music; and the aspirations of the musician to create a form of music he believes to be proper without taking into consideration the demands of the outsiders. By this the musician finds his followers only within his own subculture. By being a member of such a subculture he is also exposed to the expectations of the other members of the subculture, therefore in order not to lose his respect he is required to maintain the style of music of the subculture he belongs to. In his research Becker finds, that this sharp differentiation to the larger society is a result of the musician feeling himself “special” or “different from common people. According to the findings “the musician is conceived of as an artist who possesses a mysterious artistic gift setting him apart from all other people” and separates himself from the non-musician outsiders by using the terminology ‘squares’ for them (Becker, 1963, 85). Therefore he rejects any influence, criticism or pressure from the outsider, as his competence in respect to the music he plays and his lifestyle is negated. With this attitude and mindset the musician separates himself from the common society, even believing that his way of doing things is superior to the general belief or expectation, which then is not only limited in how he executes his music but all the other aspects of lifestyle. To create an even sharper distinction to the ‘squares’ he starts to adopt an unconventional behavior which is followed by intended deviancy. In his research Becker finds that interviewed musicians are proud of their unconventional behavior that distinct them from ‘normal’ people or: ‘squares’. Not only that, the musician develops an open hatred or repulsion against the ‘square’, which is clueless about the music and the subculture and therefore strengthens his motivation to be the exact opposite of him. However this rather unbound lifestyle leads the musician to the conclusion that no one should force his viewpoint on others, which leads to a quite liberal standpoint, considering behavior. The conflict with the conventional ‘square’ however finds its limits in the fact, that the ‘square’ is able to put commercial pressure on the musician by not visiting his shows. In this situation the musician is torn between his dependence on the paying visitor and his dismissiveness of the lack of insight and understanding of
music. The goal of a professional jazz musician is therefore to free himself from the outside pressure to reach complete freedom in his creative self-expression. In order to solve this conflict certain musicians undergo a more pragmatic transformation in their stance by sacrificing their ideals to reach a wider range of audiences and increase their fame which results in losing their own self-respect and the respect of other musicians. In this situation the musician is forced to conform to a certain degree with the desires of the ‘squares’ although he may not like them. In general however, Becker finds that the self-imposed behavior of isolation and self-segregation is a crucial part in the life of a musician to protect his individual artistic expression and his desired lifestyle from outer interference, especially the conventional society. This isolation is again intensified by an intentional physical barrier or spatial distance to the audience which even results in avoiding established contact or relationship with them which even expands even to everyday life. Furthermore certain cliques of musicians went a step further rejecting all aspects of civil, bourgeois life like business, labor, politics, religion or marriage, only accepting the avant-garde and creating a slang that only they could understand. (Becker, 1963)

This research of Becker gives us a very good insight into how subcultures come into being as a result of social interaction and self-imposed social isolation that is motivated by a development of a new identity that’s values do not have anything in common with the original one. Therefore a conflict arises between the general established society and the newly formed subculture which tries to emancipate itself from it.

The next piece of literature we will explore is titled Folk Devils and moral panics and was published in the year 1972 by Stanley Cohen. In his work Cohen makes research about the Mods and Rockers which emerged in the 1960s and aroused a so-called moral panic within the established society as their juvenile deviance was seen as a threat to traditional values and lifestyles. (Cohen, 1972)

Mods and rockers were two British youth subcultures. The rocker subculture was focused mainly on motorcycling with a corresponding appearance and the mod subculture was mainly focused on music and fashion who were riding mostly scooters in opposition to the rockers. Mods and rockers differed also in their musical taste where rockers mainly preferred rock and roll bands or artist whereas mods preferred soul or rhythm and blues. By having such contrasted attributes mods and rockers had a rivalling
stance towards each other and which resulted occasionally in physical brawls. (Cohen, 1972)

The background of Cohen’s research on this moral panic is a street fight in Clacton in Great Britain in which mostly young people were involved in the year 1964. A barkeeper refused to serve a group of youngsters which resulted in a scuffle in which one pistol shot was fired and a window broke. The police arrested 100 youngsters which was covered in almost all newspapers. Therefore Cohen explains such a moral panic is caused by the media, intensifying the concerns of popular imagination and therefore creating a somehow moralized and distorted perspective on the issue which then leads into mass hysteria. In his thoughts on deviance Cohen argues, that the label of deviancy is not always effective in preventing deviant careers or lifestyles as “the deviant label […] does not always “take”’” because the “individual might be able to ignore or rationalize the label or only pretend to comply”. Therefore Cohen comes to the conclusion that “social control leads to deviance”. (Cohen, 1972, 8) A tool to lead general opinion on what is deviant is identified by him as the mass media. According to Cohen they are determining mostly who will be tagged as a folk devil, by depicting actions or actors in a highly stereotypical way. As this negative exposure of the deviant intensifies his motivation to stay in an outsider position in society in which he is trapped Cohen mentions this process defined by Wilkins as being a ‘deviation-amplification’. The deviant is forced to correspond with his role which affirms his argument on the social control which leads to deviancy. (Cohen, 1972)

In his thoughts on youth subcultures Coen pointed out that the roots of youth culture lie somewhere between 1945 and 1950. Before this mostly only the over twenties were capable of having spending power, which then already was occupied with the family. This then changed when after the second world war the average real wage of the unmarried teenage generation between 15 and 21 increased at twice the rate of the adults which created a situation of economic emancipation but also formed a group of youngsters whose possibilities of recreation were open on unprecedented scale as their stage of development was not ready for the creation of a family. Therefore the industry identified teenager generation as being the new consuming class and started to adopt its products on the desires of them which started to create fashion styles for the youth. This new emerging style was however soon identified by the conventional media and society as being deviant or publicly disapproving values. Cohen finds the first such youth group
being the “Teddy Boys” marking “their symbolic innovation […] with defiance, anger or gestures of separation” (Cohen, 1972, 204). His explanation for such mindset he identifies the classless teenager being alienated from larger society thus he is not embedded in the activities of it or is not even interested and therefore he seeks for an alternative lifestyle. As the demographic situation generated a big number of teenage peers in this time they could form groups sharing the same attitude. (Cohen, 1972)

2.3 Heavy Metal literature

Having outlined some of the general sociological literature which is relevant to an understanding of the Heavy Metal subculture, I will proceed to explore the literature which is specifically devoted to Heavy Metal, some of which contains insights into the historical development of the subculture. The history of heavy metal is explained in the books Heavy Metal – The music and its culture by Deena Weinstein (2000), Das Phänomen Heavy Metal: Ein Szene Porträt by Cristoph Lücker (2011) and Heavy Metal – Kunst, Kommerz, Ketzeri by Bettina Roccor (1998).

Weinstein gives a very detailed insight in the early history of Heavy Metal: The roots lie in the Rock ‘n’ Roll boom of the 1950s. The mixture of the black and white musical world made this new form of music possible where the biggest emphasis is volume which was unheard of before. Also the basic key elements of instrumentation are defined here: Guitars and drums and the way of presentation as the first more advanced light shows were used that were also very important later in Heavy Metal. In the 1960s bigger developments came into being. It was the foundation of rock music. The blues was integrated much deeper into the sound of Rock ‘n’ Roll which gave it a new depth that was incomparable to the sound of early Rock ‘n’ Roll. Also the 1960s marked a point were all kinds of different genres and experimentations were integrated into the music which gave it not only a big variety but also split it into many subgenres with a different mentality and philosophy. This was a huge step into the possibility of forming many different subcultures as there were many new styles that all had their own uniqueness. In addition Weinstein describes a phenomenon that she calls bricolage where existing forms of subcultures are combined in a way that a completely new subculture comes into existence. In the case of Heavy Metal, elements of blues rock are seen as the fundament which is then spiced up with psychedelic or experimental sounds.
to create the Heavy Metal style. In her research the years 1969 to 1972 are marked as the definite years in which such music as Heavy Metal emerged however she also points out that there is no consensus about the correct year as there are also writers that date the beginning of Heavy Metal to the middle of the 1960s or the end of the 1970s. However it is sure to say that with the releases of albums by Led Zeppelin and especially Black Sabbath, both released in 1969, Heavy Metal as a musical form was invented. However it is very hard in this state to set boundaries for which band can be seen as Heavy Metal and which cannot. As for the term ‘Heavy Metal’ it was first used in the late 1960s to describe any music that had a heavy sound and it were music critics that called certain bands like this to give an impression of the music. In addition Steppenwolf’s 1968 song ‘Born to be Wild’ contained the term ‘Heavy Metal Thunder’ in their lyrics which is seen by many as a definite starting point of this term. (Weinstein, 2000)

Lücker also gives us important background information how this style came into existence. In his work Hillbilly, jazz and blues are the most important roots of Heavy Metal as they are also the roots of Rock ’n’ Roll of the 1950s which then turned into the beat and then into the Rhythm and Blues of the 1960s which is a white rock subgenre. In Lücker’s work also some bands are mentioned that could be seen as the pioneers of Heavy Metal as their sound contained two new features: Heaviness and loudness. These early bands are The Yardbirds and The Who as they were using more distortion and loudness than before. As a founding father also Jimi Hendrix is mentioned who revolutionized the rock scene with his style of playing the guitar, the sound effects and heavy distortion. In the late 1960s then the definite founders of Heavy Metal can be found like Deep Purple, Black Sabbath or Led Zeppelin who were even more radical, raw and fresh then before and whose sound had the most similarities to the music that was later called Heavy Metal. Lücker also mentions a very special mood that was a big inspiration of this sound and style: It was a reaction to the hippie movement of the 1960s which by many young people was seen as a utopian and unrealistic view on life and thus was rejected by some. The heavy rock scene which came from much poorer, working class background was bored of the naïve statements of the hippies and favored a more aggressive, masculine and angry tone towards the system. In the 1970s hard rock bands like AC/DC, Motörhead, Judas Priest or Kiss gained more and more popularity and Lücker dates the ultimate beginning of a Heavy Metal subculture to the end of the
1970s in England where the so called ‘New Wave of British Heavy Metal’ emerged that contained all features that is called Heavy Metal. Later on in the mid 1980s the music industry took advantage of the big popularity of this genre and tried to commodify it by producing Heavy Metal bands fitting to the mass appeal. (Lücker, 2011)

Roccors research also gives us interesting information: The early hard rocking bands were all loud, guitar-orientated and successful because of their live presence and had a male white audience of underprivileged background which shows that these fans did not have the wealth and security like a middle-class or even upper-class teenager would have, but was confronted with the bitterness and hardship with their social status. This demonstrates why such rock bands were successful mainly by performing on concerts. In her work Rocco points out that the development of psychedelic music, especially psychedelic rock was one of the biggest factors for the development of Heavy Metal. Furthermore psychedelic rock in combination with blues rock seems to be the biggest influence and artists like Cream or Jimi Hendrix are seen as the pioneers of heavy music. However Rocco also found out that a scene or subculture hasn’t really existed in that time because the fans were not organized and didn’t even have a particular clothing style that could represent or identify them. The bands also didn’t seem to have a unified style that could be labeled in a way, the only commonness seems to be some sort of heavy sounding and a musical closeness to blues. Heavy Metal as a subculture and identity started after the punk explosion of 1977 where bands tried to combine the raw energy of Punk rock with a more blues oriented and sophisticated approach which then became the ‘New Wave of British Heavy Metal’. Later in the 1980s other genres were invented by combining them with other styles like Hardcore Punk which then became the Thrash Metal, a much faster and rawer form of the original Heavy Metal. With these new Heavy Metal genres emerging, new forms of subgenres were created within the Heavy Metal scene which had a diverging effect on the scene itself. This resulted in the creation of ‘Black Metal’, ‘Death Metal’, ‘Pagan Metal’ and many more new subgenres in the 1990s all with their own distinct style of outfit, sound and subcultural characteristic. With this development the Heavy Metal subculture experienced a huge increase in diversity. (Roccor, 1998)
### 2.4 Sociological attributes of Heavy Metal

The next question would be: What are the defining elements that make Heavy Metal a subculture? What are the key features?

Weinstein argues that the Heavy Metal subculture consist mainly of “white working-class males between the ages of 12 and 22. (Weinstein, 2000, 99) Their fashion and behavior are rooted directly in the youth counter-culture of the 1960s with its anti-authoritarian and non-conformist attitude. Especially the rough and long-haired biker fashion is seen as a very big influence. However there are also hints of certain features borrowed from the hippie movement. The peaceful and utopist festival Woodstock and the wild, chaotic and violent atmosphere of Altamont formed a bricolage in which both elements were borrowed to form the subculture of Heavy Metal and even conservative or preservationist ideals were integrated which is a reason for the extreme need for masculinity and in some cases preferred ethnical homogeneity of this subculture. According to Weinstein concerning the question of hyper-masculinity, subcultures in general tend to be male-oriented as males “tend to form bonding groups with members of their own sex”. (Weinstein, 2000, 103) Furthermore males tend to be more often associated with sports and a big number of them glorify a team in almost religious form. Males meeting at one place often show typically male values like solidarity and comradeship. This could explain also why male individuals participate more often in subcultures, as that environment is a place where the same values have to be exercised as in sports. The bands are the worshiped gods and the audience is a bunch of good friends liking each other. Moreover the spirit of rivalry is also present here and people belonging to other subcultures are seen as rivals or even enemies. However not just masculine values are lived in the Heavy Metal subculture, it is downright masculinist. When compared with other subcultures like the 1970s glam-rock or punk scene or the 80s new wave scene it is obvious that Heavy Metal has more masculine attributes than any other subculture. Heavy Metal therefore doesn’t unite the sexes, it only concentrates on one which is then seen as the non-plus-ultra. The clothing underline these sentiments with their black leather outfits, tight leather trousers and boots. Homosexuals are as well seen as opposing the values of Heavy Metal and are met with hatred and intolerance. However, interestingly girls who dress and act like men are more than welcome in the Heavy Metal subculture. It looks like not the biological sex of females is being rejected
but the attributes of this gender. The reason for this could be seen as a counter-
movement to the hippies with their tolerant androgynous attitude and views that were
seen as too soft and feminine by some males. Especially the decline of the hippie
movement was interpreted as a proof that they were just too weak and girlish to reach
their goals. Furthermore the social background of these young Heavy Metal members
prevented them to reach the free and hedonist lifestyle of the mostly middle-class
hippies, so they were seen as rich and spoiled kids by them who were never faced with
the reality of life. Therefore the ideological roots of Heavy Metal can be found in a
social class that wasn’t affected at all by the social revolution due to economic barriers.
A very big emphasis lies on juvenility which is not just defined by biological youth but
also attitude and mentality. Heavy Metal can be found in the typical ambivalence of
youth where the members are not yet fully independent and responsible but seek for
freedom and independence while idealizing juvenile lifestyle. (Weinstein, 2000)

Lücker’s findings try to somehow contrast the aforementioned ones. He claims that
class and generalizations about the background of Heavy Metal members are
unscientific and undifferentiated. He prefers clearly a more individual viewpoint on this
issue as he argues, a time of individualization of members of a society asks for such an
approach. He finds that most Heavy Metal subculture members start their career in their
younger years which could correlate with the sexism problem Heavy Metal is
confronted with as the immature stance towards sexuality by this adolescent age group
could be an influence on the general attitude towards sexuality which then leads to an
overly negative reputation concerning this matter. Furthermore he rejects the accusation
of researchers, that Heavy Metal subculture and music is mostly ‘white’ or focuses
exclusively on white audience as although Heavy Metal in Europe and America is
mainly consumed by a white audience, Heavy Metal can be seen as a global
phenomenon which is spread in almost every country in the world, for example Brazil.
In addition he lists bands that consist mainly of black musicians like Sound Barrier,
Black Death, Stone Vengeance or Living Colour who are successful and respected
throughout the Heavy Metal scene. Concerning the social structure of the Heavy Metal
scene Lückers research finds that it is impossible to find one dominating class members
are coming from, it is mostly mixed and the range of classes goes from lowest to
highest. He finds furthermore that the age structure of the Heavy Metal subculture also
ranges from teenagers to middle aged members as he found that members who joined
the Heavy Metal scene in its beginning, which is the 1980s, usually tend to stay loyal to it, therefore he argues the term youth subculture is not all too precise anymore, as there are many members over 60 years old as well. This big heterogeneity makes the members forgetting their background, argues Lücker, so a welfare recipient is able to talk to a doctor on the same level. The same goes which gender composition which opens more and more to women. Although it is true that Heavy Metal in its beginnings and throughout the 1980s was mainly a subculture consisting of men, this changed over time more and more and nowadays the Heavy Metal scene usually consists also of a big quantity of women which can also be derived from the number of all-women Heavy Metal bands which had an exotic character in the 1980s, whereas nowadays this is no longer the case. However Lücker also has to admit, that female membership varies in certain Heavy Metal subcultures where ‘Gothic Metal’ or ‘Metalcore’ subcultures have a much higher proportion than in ‘Death Metal’ or ‘Black Metal’ subcultures. (Lücker, 2011)

In her research on Heavy Metal subculture, Roccor finds that member variation is very high. Although there is a high tendency for Heavy Metal participants to attend university and have a higher class background, they can be found in almost every class, age and place of living. Especially the age structure of Roccor’s research shows that members far beyond adolescence are not unusual as they tend to stay members of this subculture even after marriage. Roccor finds further Heavy Metal fans are introduced usually in a relatively young age between 11 to 13 years where the individuals get a chance to listen to a Heavy Metal records either with the help of a peer or an older sibling. Once this music appeals to the individual he starts to use the energetic element of Heavy Metal to solve his own problems may they be with teachers, parents or peers to reduce frustration. Roccor finds in this case that this function of Heavy Metal to give individuals a feeling of freedom, independence and strength is one of the main reasons to stick to this form of music. As the listener realizes however that this music is not consumed by everyone around him he starts to look for like-minded people. Thus Roccor finds that a big reason for cohesion is the relatively small amount of Heavy Metal listeners who are happy to find other people who have the same interests. Later they realize that the similar feeling for Heavy Metal expands in similar feelings towards fashion, aesthetics or behavior which then lets the subculture emerge even on the smallest regional scale, where communication between the various subcultures is not
available. Thus one important aspect to understand Heavy Metal subculture is the tendency to develop an individual or collective escapist behavior. Usually the members of Heavy Metal meet and organize to create and live in their own world separated from the usual problems of the everyday life. The emotional attachment to the Heavy Metal feeling and lifestyle is so strong that Heavy Metal members tend to proclaim Heavy Metal as part of their life which is often even centered on it. Therefore Roccor finds also a fanatic factor in this love for Heavy Metal which then results in the expectations Heavy Metal members have among each other. In a usual Heavy Metal subculture extensive knowledge about bands, genres and even traditions of Heavy Metal are seen as a prerequisite to be accepted as a member. Those who fail these expectations are met with contempt no matter how honest their passion for Heavy Metal is.

As Roccor points out the occupation with Heavy Metal is not just limited to the music. Many Heavy Metal members are interested in artistic expression or other creative hobbies that have a certain connection with the atmosphere of the music. They paint or draw pictures or read or even write fantasy-themed novels as many Heavy Metal lyrics contain such topics. In leisure life Heavy Metal members use to go to concerts where they can meet up and listen to the bands they favor or join Heavy Metal fan clubs where they meet up, discuss and share their experiences either with the Heavy Metal universe or their general life. In this subculture the consumption of alcohol is highly prevalent however the consumption of illegal drugs is less common and mostly limited to marihuana usage. Concerning the perception of women in the subculture Roccor can conclude a significant improvement in this field. Whereas in the beginning women were seen as simple companions or even pure sex-objects today they are recognized more and more as equal and enriching members of the subculture and their presence and contributions are met with tolerance and even gratitude. (Roccor, 1998)

3 Research Methods

Now that we have discussed the history and subcultural structure of Heavy Metal it is time to focus on the research questions of this thesis. To formulate my conclusion I will conduct a qualitative research through semi structured interviews with four members of the Heavy Metal subculture and seek to gain insights into the main questions of my research. I chose this research method because compared to structured interviews which
are more straight-forward, semi-structured interviews give me more freedom in gaining information as the interview is more interactive from both sides which increases my ability to get more information out of an individual while interviewing him. Following this I will make a field research on a Heavy Metal festival and describe my impressions. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005)

The questions in my thesis could be answered best by applying qualitative research methods as a large-scale quantitative research would not give me the desired data to answer the thesis in any way. By applying qualitative research methods I can focus on personal and general details which are strongly connected to the topic I want to research. This thesis is mainly centered on the question of what is the personal bond of a heavy metal member to his subculture. Therefore I have to pay attention to his individual connection to it. Qualitative research methods therefore are used in cases when one tried to find out the whys and wherefores of a certain phenomenon. These factors also made me choose semi structured interviews. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005)

Furthermore this research follows an interpretive approach which means I base my research on the interpretation of various factors that are subjective to form a conclusion. Interpretivism is the understanding that objective information is impossible to gather since everything, including the knowledge of reality is a form of social construction. In addition positivist research limits the outcome of my research as it does not allow me to interpret the data I have gathered Therefore in contrast to a positivist approach, data and conclusions will be interpreted by the researcher to process a conclusion which is more flexible. That means the focus is not to start with q priori concepts but to gather my data and analysis during my research and interpret the data collected to form a conclusion. By applying this interpretive method I will also visit one Heavy Metal festival in Germany and observe the event. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005)

According to Savin-Baden and Major’s Qualitative Research, semi-structured qualitative interviews belong to the most common research methods to generate qualitative data. In this method the researcher has a framework of themes or questions that in contrast to structured interviews are allowed to divert in order to create new information that was not in the mind of the researcher yet. Therefore the structure of this research method is open which allows the researcher or the participant to interact better with each other. Furthermore during my research a big number of open questions
arose which would be helpful to discuss further, therefore a structured set of question would perhaps not give me the desired information. Lastly the participant could misunderstand or not understand at all the point of one of my questions which in a structured interview could be problematic. For this research I will prepare about 19 questions split into two main categories, personal and subcultural questions. While conducting the interview I will record it with my laptop’s microphone in the German language. (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012)

On the ethical side I will hand out a sheet of paper to my participants which they sign before conducting the interview. It contains informed consent about anonymization of their personal data. Furthermore at the beginning of every interview I will inform the interview participants of their anonymity. I will conduct my research in accordance with the code of ethics by the international sociological association, therefore I will use false names for the participants interviewed and not their real names to ensure anonymity. (ISA Executive Committee, 2001)

**4 Discussion**

**4.1 Introduction**

I recorded four members of Heavy Metal subculture in order to find out more about their viewpoint of this issue and if my researches coincide with their opinions. All of them come from Nuremberg, which is a city of about 500.000 inhabitants in Bavaria, Germany. As they only speak German I conducted the interview in German language. I will give them false names so I will introduce my participants as follows:

Daniel, 24 years old is coming from Nuremberg, student of molecular science in Erlangen. He is doing his master degree right now. His economical background is the middle class, both parents have good jobs however they don’t come from an educational background. “They didn’t put me under pressure to study”, he describes his way to university.

The next participant is named Leopold, he is 19 years old and works at a kindergarten in Nuremberg and makes an education for becoming an educator, which is the profession of his mother, whereas his father is a graphic designer. His economic background he
describes as “actually always good, with an own house, middle class I would say”. Furthermore he would characterize his family having an educational background.

The third participant is called Pedro, he is 24 years old and studies mathematics in Erlangen at master level. He never got to meet his father because he left the family as soon as Pedro was born, except for one short occasion when he was 12 years old. Because of this he was raised only by his mother. His economical background he would call middle class as his mother is employed in public service.

The fourth and final interview partner is called Hans, he is 24 years old, and doing his master studies in material sciences. He would define his economic background as upscale middle class. On the paternal side his father was the first member of the family with an academic degree, therefore he built up the economical background of his family. His mother he explains is having a higher status background as well therefore his background can be described of having an educational one as well.

4.2 Personal Questions

My first question in the category personal questions was how my interview partners came into touch with heavy metal.

For Daniel his first contact with this kind of music began quite early when he was in kindergarten as his father listened to this music, so he listened to bands like Rammstein or Marilyn Manson already when he started school. However his life was not centered too much around music until he was 14 years old, rather he was occupied with video games. With 14 his interest in music started to awaken however for softer music at that time. From 15 to 16 he developed interest in 1970s and 1980s music, and finally his interest in Heavy Metal started at 18 which was rather also oriented towards the dark wave or the emo scene. Therefore he listens to a wider spectrum of genres from gothic metal to general metal bands.

Leopold’s contact with music comes from the fact that he started playing drums at an early stage when he was three years old. In later age while practicing his skills he got in contact with harder music and finally found Heavy Metal at 11 years old and started to listen to it actively.
Pedro’s first contact was through a class mate in school who gave him a Heavy Metal CD in 2004 and a Heavy Metal song that he heard in the radio. He started to listen to this Heavy Metal radio show regularly, which he calls is the starting point of his interest in Heavy Metal.

For Hans the first contact was in about 2003 when he discovered the band Metallica from a friend but for long time he was not interested in music at all. However when he finished high school his interest for Heavy Metal increased to such a degree that he started to join the Heavy Metal subculture.

As a next issue I wanted to know if my participant’s intention to be part of the Heavy Metal subculture is rebellion, what feelings it prompts in them and how this differs from other genres or subcultures.

Interestingly none of my interview partner’s motivation was to rebel. For Daniel rebellion plays a small role in Heavy Metal but it is not essential, however he explains that he wants to delimit himself from the mainstream society and superficiality. For Leopold we can see a similar pattern: the basic idea is not rebellion but to be different from the others, however he points out to question certain social issues as his main motivation is the sincerity within the Heavy Metal subculture rather than rebellion. In the case of Pedro he definitively never wanted to rebel at any time, it is rather a deep emotional experience and the bond of the Heavy Metal community that motivates him, however he also claims to question certain aspects of mainstream society like the media and mass culture. Hans argued that rebellion never came into his mind at all it is the sound of this music that he adores, although he explained that he tried to coquet with rebellion but he realized that it opposed his character.

The emotional aspect was rated also quite similar by the participants. Daniel feels that Heavy Metal is increasing his self-confidence, it gives him strength in life and he favors strongly the profound lyrics and the big variety of subgenres within Heavy Metal which induce different emotions to him. Leopold answered similarly by letting his emotions drift through the variety of subgenres Heavy Metal has to offer. Pedro’s feelings are characterized by happiness and positivity and he appreciates the talent of the musicians. He added that the solidarity within the Heavy Metal community and the authenticity of the members give him a very positive feeling as well. Hans described his feelings covering the whole spectrum from anger over calmness to deeply touching. Other
genres or subcultures were perceived similarly by the participants as well. Daniel misses the variety of subgenres, profound lyrics and dark aesthetics Heavy Metal has to offer and points out other musical subcultures are rooted more deeply in the mainstream. Leopold explains that in contrast to other subcultures Heavy Metal “doesn’t give any constraint to appeal to anyone, it is just what the members want to do, there is no conformation” and as a special attribute of Heavy Metal subculture he describes the constant development and creation of new subgenres as an important factor that can’t be seen in other subcultures on this scale. Pedro states that he can’t see the same solidarity in other subcultures “usually everyone is for himself, there is just less interaction” and in other genres of music he can’t find the same degree of sophistication. Hans just doesn’t like other kinds of music, they mostly don’t appeal to him and he doesn’t favor the sound.

Another question I wanted to know if the participants use Heavy Metal for escapism, to create their own reality in a way to escape reality

Of all my participants Heavy Metal’s music or subculture is used for escapist purposes. Although Daniel doesn’t want to isolate himself from society he uses the music to switch off from everyday problems. The same goes with Leopold who claims to listen to music all the time. “In my everyday life I listen to music all the time or I sleep”. Pedro appreciates the unique and intimate feelings while listening to Heavy Metal and uses it to reduce aggression. Lastly Hans creates his own Heavy Metal universe together with his friends on concerts or festivals who he sees as like-minded family members unlike people who are not part of the Heavy Metal community.

Next I wanted to know if my interview partners listen to music that is somehow related to Heavy Metal like 1970s Rock music or other genres of rock and if they also listen to music that is not related to Heavy Metal at all like Disco, electronic music or Rap.

This time there is an interesting variety of answers of the participants. Daniel listens to rock related music which can be categorized as ‘Alternative Rock’ like ‘Stoner Rock’ or ‘Space Rock’ and ‘Dark Wave’ genres like ‘Gothic Rock’ music. Music that has not relation at all to metal he listens less often to certain genres of electronic music, but he points out to be “open for everything”. In a similar direction Leopold listens to “absolutely everything” music has to offer from pop to rock and has no fears of contact with different genres of music. Pedro and Hans have a completely different approach.
Both listen to metal related music, like 1970s Hard Rock or Blues Rock but they absolutely don’t listen to anything not metal related, they point out it doesn’t appeal to them at all.

In my next question I wanted to know from my interview partners if a Heavy Metal outfit is necessary for them and what they think if Heavy Metal is just music for them or something more, like a real subculture on its own.

In this case my participants answered very similarly on the outfit issue, but their answers on how they perceive Heavy Metal differ which reflect their personal character, therefore answers vary in an interesting way. For Daniel it is important to be recognized as a Heavy Metal person, as this expression is an inherent part of the Heavy Metal scene for him. However he points out as well that a uniform clothing style is impossible to define because of the big variety of subcultures. Leopold does not dress like a Heavy Metal person during work time but in his leisure time he always dresses as someone who can easily be recognized as a member of Heavy Metal, although he also states that it is not obligatory as there are people who are not dressed in a Heavy Metal way at all but are still fully accepted in the community of Heavy Metal. Pedro is also very tolerant in this aspect as he admits for himself dressing like a Heavy Metal person everyday but he would not force this to other people who still want to belong to Heavy Metal. In addition Pedro points out that for him it is also important not to be mixed up with people of other subcultural styles, therefore an unambiguous clothing style is important for him. Hans looks at the Heavy Metal outfit as a very important aspect of being part of Heavy Metal and enumerates all his dress parts like jump boots, cowboy boots, band shirts, leather jackets and his jean vest with metal band patches on it.

In the question about Heavy Metal being something more than just music, the individual perception of my participants shines through. For Daniel, Heavy Metal means primarily the music itself to him which is simultaneously the most important part of that scene. He recognizes that a further big aspect of Heavy Metal lifestyle is to delimit itself from the mainstream culture but for him, Heavy Metal is not uniform enough to name one certain way of lifestyle that is binding for all. Personally for Daniel it is more important maintaining his individuality than subjugating himself in a category. Leopold sees far more than music, as this music is shaping peoples way how to dress and to behave, however also for him it is hard to define a certain mentality for Heavy Metal people
because the variety of members and subgenres is too big. However he states that he would always prefer a Heavy Metal member over any other person as they are closer to him. Pedro explains Heavy Metal is at least music but it is fair enough to talk about a life style as members are connected with each other through festivals concerts and common music listening. At festivals or concerts new friendships arise that came into being because of Heavy Metal. Those friendships he describes as very honest and loyal. For Hans Heavy Metal is also a way to express his hedonism and wish for freedom. “On a concert there is no one to teach you how to behave, I felt this freedom nowhere before”.

My last questions concerning the personal questions were if the feelings of my participants towards the Heavy Metal music changed over time, if interest and passion eventually decreased and if they can imagine themselves staying faithful to it when they are older.

All of my participants were very clear here. Their passion for Heavy Metal stayed the same and for some it even increased. Daniel discovers more and more subgenres which further increases his interest, Leopold claims to be more open since his first contact with metal but has the same passion. Pedro said he was on his “best concert ever, three months ago and gave all my energy into the show.” Hans’ passion even increased in the years.

Concerning their imagination of the future, all of them answered that they could definitely see themselves in the Heavy Metal scene in many years. Daniel could imagine himself liking a bigger variety of music genres but still be a recognizable part of Heavy Metal. Leopold answered this question with a single: “definitely” and Pedro agreed as well but he noted that it depends on his professional and economic status. Hans can’t think of an occasion that could change or stop his membership to Heavy Metal.

4.3 Subcultural questions

The second part of my interview concerns more about the participant’s perception on Heavy Metal subculture as it is in their perspective. Firstly I wanted to know what their general impression is and if Heavy Metal has something like a uniform habitus or type of behavior.
These questions were answered in a similar way as all the members found common things in Heavy Metal like alcohol or diversity within the subculture but there were interesting individual perceptions as well. Daniel finds, Heavy Metal people are very sympathetic to him as they also share the same music taste. However he experiences that Heavy Metal people are usually only tolerant with people of the same subculture and tend to reject people from different subcultures. As a common habitus that Heavy Metal members share he would call the tendency to be interested in profound lyrics and the preferred consumption of alcohol, however he points out it is hard to generalize Heavy Metal in this way because it depends on the subgenre as a more uniform subculture is found more within the traditional Heavy Metal subculture that is influenced by the 1980s scene and modern Heavy Metal subcultures are much more diverse. Leopold also notices the “many different groups that split from each other”. He further notes that Heavy Metal is just a very rough and inconsistent term for a phenomenon that has no real common habitus. However he still would define consumption of alcohol and the importance of live music or even playing on an instrument as a common habitus. Pedro says “alcohol always plays a role and big parties with great passion”. Furthermore “the tone is always very rough and on such a Heavy Metal party, people are allowing themselves things that usually are seen negatively by normal people”. I asked him if Heavy Metal could have a problem with hyper-masculinity but he said the behavior comes rather from alcohol consumption. “Festivals and concerts are places where Heavy Metal fans get to know each other”, as Pedro explains. He met all his friends on such events and would not know them otherwise. Hans as well explained that generalization is impossible as the scene is very differentiated with a big variety of characters and influences which even try their best to delimit themselves from each other, but alcohol consumption and the typical Heavy Metal outfit he clearly defines as common habitus.

As a next question I was interested if elitism plays a big role in Heavy Metal, if Heavy Metal is eventually narrow-minded and if it tries to isolate itself clearly from other subcultures. Further I wanted to know if my participants see themselves as elitists.

These answers are probably the most important ones as they show us that there is a certain gap between traditionalist and modernist Heavy Metal members. All of the participants can identify a connection between elitism and favoring traditional forms of Heavy Metal. Daniel says concerning elitism, that it depends on the subgenre.
Subgenres that are mixed up with all kinds of non-metal related genres like rap or electronic music are more tolerant and open. Those are the modern variants of Heavy Metal music, therefore old-school sections of Heavy Metal in the style of the 1980s or Black Metal that is more in the vein of the 1990s he characterizes as “extremely elitist”. He adds, that individuals or groups belonging to the underground are attracted the most to elitism. The subculture in general has certain connections with related subcultures like Gothic or Punk, but is still interested in differentiating itself as a separate subculture. Leopold sees that Heavy Metal on the large part clearly has elitist tendencies where people have the mentality “who listens to this music is good, who doesn’t listen to it is bad”, therefore the community is not cooperating with each other like it should. He explains that people who listen to Heavy Metal for a longer time tend to develop a form of elitism, as they are proud of their long membership, experience and knowledge. Further he says that traditional Heavy Metal music that is oriented towards the 1980s usually does not develop, respectively does not take on new influences and has the higher tendency towards elitism whereas subgenres that modernize and develop usually are not affected by this. Pedro also noticed “there are people or groups who see themselves as the absolute elite, who listen only to certain bands or genres and look down on people or bands who don’t agree with them or don’t share the same behavior”. He noticed that everything that comes from the 1980s is generally praised and is expected to be talked about positively whereas modern influences in Heavy Metal are heavily criticized. However he points out that this behavior can be found almost exclusively in the underground stream of Heavy Metal. On the isolation issue he answered: “There is almost no Metalhead that wants to have anything to do with Hip hopers for example, we just avoid each other however there are some crossover genres and subcultures that established communication between subcultures”. Hans also sees the same tendencies as he argues that in the history of Heavy Metal the members always isolated themselves from the mainstream or other subcultures, but he can observe an even higher form of isolation and elitism within the traditionalist scenes of Heavy Metal. On the other hand he admits that Heavy Metal’s diversity is still wide-ranging from tolerance and openness, which he sees belonging to the mainstream and pure elitism which he would categorize as underground stream.

On the other hand the participants answered very differently on my question if they see themselves as elitist. Daniel says it plays a certain role in his life and he finds it useful
to maintain his identity as a part of the Heavy Metal community but there is a limit for him which begins when this elitism is turning into intolerance. Leopold does not number himself along elitists at all. He says he has no use with something like this. Pedro would not call himself as an elitist, he just listens to the music he likes and this could be another genre of music as well: “if the music is good I don’t have anything against it no matter which genre”, he would also never look down or be rude to someone with a different musical taste. Hans on the other hand would characterize himself as an elitist and points out that Heavy Metal doesn’t need any development in any direction at all and favors a clear separation of the traditional scene of Heavy Metal from the modernist scene.

The next question is again a controversial one as I wanted to know if masculinity is somehow an important aspect of Heavy Metal subculture, if there are any tendencies towards sexism and if female members are accepted on the same level as male ones. Furthermore I wanted to know if they can observe any form of homophobia, xenophobia or racism.

My participants gave varying answers on these issues. Partly they can observe forms of sexism, hyper-masculinity or even racism in the Heavy Metal community but they mostly play down the role of those phenomena. Mostly they argue that for example sexism if existing is meant solely as a joke with no serious background. Racism they say is apparent in some cases but only in the form of jokes as they never experienced ethnic or racial exclusion or violence towards minorities. Probably these unconscious reactions to sexism or racism could be an indicator of such a mindset in the scene.

On masculinity Daniel answered that mostly beard, long hair, a so-called ‘Viking-aesthetic’ is an important aspect in Heavy Metal, on the other hand however he can see that in the more modern subgenres of Heavy Metal, looks and masculinity is attenuated in favor of a more androgynous, metrosexual gender attitude. On sexism he said, women are respected only when the members see that the devotion of the female member is serious. “When they see that a woman is just the girlfriend of someone and comes to the concerts and meeting only because of the boyfriend, usually they don’t respect her”. Leopold had similar observations as he explained that hyper-masculinity in Heavy Metal depends on the subgenre. However he adds that although there may be music lyrics glorifying masculinity and sexism, women on Heavy Metal parties are
never treated like sex-objects or relegated “unlike at Techno-clubs where a woman is almost stripped on the dancefloor by five guys”. In the Heavy Metal scene Leopold never saw any sexism as he explains further women are usually treated the same way as men. He adds however, that he can observe women usually trying to prove themselves being more extreme and wild than the men. Pedro told that 80% of the Heavy Metal members are male and he could explain this only to the fact that women are quenched by the hyper-masculinity of the men. On the sexist side he heard that some people made jokes about women but he said women members of Heavy Metal are usually not offended by this and don’t take it seriously. Women who take the membership seriously are accepted on the same degree as men, however women who can be identified as groupies or unserious are excluded on the long-term. Hans also says the traditional men picture is still very dominant in Heavy Metal. He knows many female members in the Heavy Metal community, but personally he has problems taking new female members seriously, wanting to be part of it, as he never knows how seriously they mean it. Once accepted however, women are on the same level as men and are treated the same.

Homophobia is seen by all as something completely non-existent. Daniel says usually the members don’t like to be called homosexual as they use this word as a swearword for someone who is weak or feminine but he never experienced any exclusion of homosexuals within the scene. Leopold sees homophobia as a problem belonging to the past where it was a general problem in society which is non-existent today. Pedro never observed any homophobia in the community and notes that the singer of the Heavy Metal band Judas Priest is homosexual as well and is accepted by everyone in the community. Hans said that although homosexual is used as a swearword towards each other, homophobia is not a problem in the Heavy Metal community and if yes then it is a general problem in the society as a whole.

On xenophobia, respectively racism the observations were also very interesting. Daniel said it depends on the subgenre as there are subgenres with a more left or right-wing attitude. I asked Daniel if on a general metal concert or festival it is tolerated to make racist remarks. He said: “If the opinion or comment is not too extreme it is usually tolerated. There is a racist and national-socialistic subgenre called ‘National Socialist Black Metal’, but there are also left-wing subgenres with the idea of racism and nationalism being the enemy, Daniel explained. Leopold said racism or xenophobia is widespread in certain subgenres, especially in the ‘National Socialist Black Metal’ one,
but generally speaking not very common. Pedro observed nationalistic tendencies among members in the Heavy Metal community. He would define the general community as being rather right-wing than left-wing on the political scale, but the more extreme forms like racism or xenophobia can be found rather in certain ‘Black Metal’ scenes or on underground concerts. However he would not call the Heavy Metal scene as generally racist as he points out that there are many Heavy Metal bands and musicians from different continents and of various races that are all accepted and worshipped if their musical quality is accepted. Hans knows people who are far right and far left-wing. He would say that the whole spectrum of the political scale is covered in the Heavy Metal scene and it is impossible to generalize the whole community in these terms. He has never seen any ethnic exclusion of ethnic minorities because of racism or xenophobia. However he admits that racism or xenophobia is apparent indeed in the subgenre of Black Metal.

My last questions in this interview were what the main goals of this subculture are, if there is any main purpose Heavy Metal wants to reach and if Heavy Metal was falsified or distorted in contrast to its beginnings.

In these questions my participants gave various but similar answers on the first one, but on the second question some of them complained about a certain tendency towards a commodification of the subculture an the music. As a main goal Daniel defined the community itself being an important goal, to know like-minded people, to share the same interests, to go to concerts together, so “they all feel like one big family”. He does not see any political or social goal which the subculture wants to reach in any form, it’s “mainly about the music”. Leopold would not speak about one clearly defined goal, as Heavy Metal is not bound to one specific class, background or ethnic group, he would rather speak of many different goals, as the creation of new subcultures root in different political and social interests which strongly differ from others. Pedro rather explains that the main goal in Heavy Metal is “to live for the music”, to meet on concerts or to organize concerts, “to do something for Metal, to be present in the community”. For Hans the main purpose of Heavy Metal is to live out a certain hedonism, to have an ease in life, be unconcerned and have “as less responsibility and as much fun as possible”. Further he recognizes a so-called ‘outlaw-flair’ which means the goal of Heavy Metal is to be rebel against certain norms in society.
On the question whether Heavy Metal is still faithful to its beginnings, the participants give the following answers: Daniel doesn’t see any adulteration of Heavy Metal, rather an expansion on the whole, he would argue it is still the same as only the number of different subgenres increased. Leopold does not see a big change, he sees new developments and secessions, but no extreme change. However he can observe that some members are not the same like earlier and that commodification of the music increased, big labels are signing Heavy Metal bans to transform them into commercial rock stars with more mass appeal. Pedro can see a change in the background of the members. In the 1980s Heavy Metal members were largely coming from working-class families which had a much lower economic status than the middle class. They were mostly teenagers who found to this music to distract from their hopeless prospects. However today the large part of Heavy Metal people come from wealthy and middle class backgrounds, therefore this shift in economic background has an impact on the subculture’s values and ideals. As an example Pedro says that in the early days there were more people having passion and enthusiasm for the subculture. In addition he can see that certain new subgenres of Heavy Metal are too far away from original Heavy Metal and he can observe a form of commercialism as well as clothing brands and fashion brands try to sell Heavy Metal styles to the mass, as they recognize that Heavy Metal is more accepted by the society than earlier. Hans complained about the digitalization that reached Heavy Metal music production. He explains that recordings are produced mainly on the computer which is “killing the live-element of Heavy Metal”. He argues that this new method is “sterilizing” the music, making it less authentic. He adds however that In the underground scene of Heavy Metal these methods are avoided in order to create the same Heavy Meta experience as in the beginning. Therefore he would argue that the ideals of Heavy Metal are corrupted in the mainstream section of Heavy Metal but there is still an underground community that tries to uphold the old values and ideals that Heavy Metal defined in the 1980s. Commodification he sees as a big problem in Heavy Metal as well, as he argues that there are mainstream Heavy Metal festivals that are “just about making a big party and having fun, but the music is not so important there”. Therefore he would see underground and mainstream Heavy Metal as two totally different subcultures.
4.4 Field experience

On 30 January 2016 I used the opportunity to visit such a Heavy Metal festival myself. This festival was called Metal Assault, it lasted for one day and was held in Würzburg, Germany. The bands that played there could be classified belonging to the traditionalist underground section of Heavy Metal, as there were mainly 1980s bands as main act and young bands playing in the style of the 1980s. The atmosphere was very friendly and relaxed. The major part of the visitors were inside the hall listening to the concert. They did not dance but were rather faced towards the band and listened carefully to the band. Almost all of the visitors were dressed up in a typical Heavy Metal outfit like leather jackets, boots or jeans vests and had long hair. Noticeable on this festival was the proportion of visitors of higher age between 40-60 years old but younger aged visitors were present as well. Women were present as well at the festival. Many of them were accompanying their boyfriends or husbands but there were also a big number of women coming on their own. Outside the hall people were smoking and talking mainly about Heavy Metal music or discussing the concert they were just experiencing. Alcohol consumption was on a very high level and drunkenness very common which increased as the evening went on but I didn’t notice any violence or aggression at all. (Anon., 2016)

5 Conclusion

Thanks to the interviews we have gathered interesting and helpful information that answered a lot of questions we had in the beginning. All of the participants were very passionate about their subculture and gave me detailed answers to any question I asked them, although they were quite different in their approach. Daniel was rather open-minded towards everything but Hans was a real purist. However, what connected all these participants was their passion to the subculture to which they belong to and all of them could imagine themselves staying faithful to the subculture even at later age.

Therefore the things we learned in the literature review were quite accurate. Heavy Metal members tend to devote their life and energy to their subculture. Escapism as we noticed plays an important role in choosing the Heavy Metal-lifestyle, perhaps for individual reasons, such as coping with problems in their everyday life or to seek the
collective attachment by celebrating together and that way forgetting the problems and sorrows. Clothing and passion for the genre are important factors in their lives as active member of the subculture and it is important for them to be identified as Heavy Metal members. The motivation behind joining this subculture is the passion for the music and its aesthetics. A very important aspect of the participants was the community feeling, the common experience of being like-minded. Both the field research and the interview participants proved that hedonism and alcohol consumption were also quite important aspects in this subculture.

Therefore my observations of the Heavy Metal festival confirmed this picture. The visitors to this festival mainly listened to the concerts or talked about the music outside, almost all of them were dressed up typically for the scene and were in the state of drunkenness.

On the more problematic issues like sexism or racism we learned that Heavy Metal is partly permeated by reactionary ideas. Due to the inherent focus on masculinity sexism plays more or less a role in Heavy Metal, which however does not reach an extreme level since female members are also active members of this subculture. However we learned that women have a harder time entering this world than males which is proven by my interview partners which showed a certain skepticism and distrust towards female members in Heavy Metal. On the other hand long-term members are treated the same way as men, which is a positive development. Racism is as it seems hard to trace as all my participants argued that due to the big spectrum of subcultures it is nearly impossible to find a single political view that could define the standpoint of Heavy Metal in this issue. Nevertheless a certain sympathy or tolerance towards right-wing politics can be found in cretinous nationalistic or xenophobic remarks. On the other hand there is a subgenre which is called ‘National Socialist Black Metal’ that seems to be devoted to such ideas. However the participants confirm the same points of Roccor that a modernization process is happening in the Heavy Metal subculture concerning gender and race issues which is causing more openness and tolerance in the general.

Therefore we learned that is almost impossible to make generalizations as Heavy Metal is split up into various subgenres that are very different from each other. Still there can be found two main contradicting elements that is concerning the whole subculture: the first one is underground versus mainstream and the second is modernists versus
traditionalists. It can be seen easily that these two conflicting ideas are polarize the subculture in the strongest way. Furthermore it is easy to see that traditionalist ideas belong mainly to the underground which has narrow-minded approach trying to keep Heavy Metal as it is, and mainstreamers try to modernize Heavy Metal and expand it with new influences and ideas. My research showed that those problematic reactionary ideas are mainly found in the underground traditionalist camp whereas modern forms of Heavy Metal do not share these views. In brief I would say that although Heavy Metal does not support or articulate those ideas directly there is low readiness to delimit from them.

In our studies on deviancy and subculture we could raise the question if Heavy Metal transformed its negative reputation into ‘Magical Resistance’. My research however showed that the younger generation does not have the intention to shock or rebel so much anymore. This can be explained by the increasing acceptance of Heavy Metal by society and its commodification and its increasing appeal to middle class youth. Rather than rebellion we found a strong tendency towards elitism in this subculture where the members seek to differentiate themselves from the mainstream society and from other musical genres which in the latter case depends on the respective subgenre of Heavy Metal.

I would note that all of my participants had a middle class background, so it is fair to ask what results I would get if I had interviewed young working class Heavy Metal members with a low education living in an area of high employment with many immigrants. Therefore I would consider the thesis as a pilot study – a probe into the research field – a more extensive study would need focus on different class groups. Further it would be interest what female Heavy Metal members think. Also as there are now pensioner Heavy Metal members it would be good to see if there was a change in views according to age.

Finally I would conclude this thesis by pointing out the key findings of my research as follows: Member’s motivation for the music and subculture is mainly rooted in a strong passion for the music and a community feeling that makes every single member an integral part of the subculture. Heavy Metal does contain reactionary ideas in its aesthetics and views but they belong to a smaller part of the subculture rather than the bigger part which is the mainstream scene and has gone through a process of
modernization. Rebellion does not play such a big role anymore because members of today’s generation come from a middle class background so they usually don’t experience social exclusion rather they distance themselves automatically from mainstream society as they have a tendency towards elitism.
Bibliography


Appendix

Interview questions (In German language first and translation in English):

Personal questions

1. Erzähle ein bisschen von dir, was ist dein Alter, Beruf, Werdegang und ökonomischer Hintergrund
   Tell a bit about yourself, what is your age, profession, career, economic background?

2. Wie bist du zum Metal gekommen?
   How did you come to Heavy Metal?

3. a) Wolltest du mit dem Metal nur rebellieren zb gegen Lehrer oder Eltern oder hattest du ein tieferes Erlebnis?
   Did you want to just rebel with Heavy Metal against teachers or parents or did you have a deeper experience?
   b) Welche Gefühle weckt Metal in dir und wie unterscheiden sie sich von anderen Musikrichtungen?
   What feelings does Heavy Metal prompt in yourself and how do they differ from music of other genres?

4. Hörst du Metal um der Realität zu entfliehen oder Sorgen um dir dann eine eigene Welt zu erschaffen?
   Do you listen to metal to escape from reality, from worries, in order to create your own reality?
5. a) Hörst du Musik die mit Metal verwandt ist zb. 70er Rock oder andere Rockstile?

   Do you listen to music that is related to Heavy Metal like 70s Rock or other rock genres?

b) Hörst du auch Musik die nicht mit dem Metal wie zb. Techno, Rap oder andere Musikstile?

   Do you also listen to music that is not related to Heavy Metal at all like Techno, Rap or other music styles?

6. a) Legst du Wert auf ein szenespezifisches Aussehen?

   Is a scene-specific outfit important for you?

b) Ist Heavy Metal nur Musik für dich oder mehr, wie eine eigene Subkultur?

   Is Heavy Metal just music for you or something more like an own subculture?

7. a) Haben sich deine Gefühle für diese Musik seit deinem Erstkontakt mit ihr verändert? Zeigst du noch die selbe Begeisterung oder hat sich das gelegt?

   Have your feelings to this music changed since your first contact with it? Do you show the same passion or has it subsided?

b) Kannst du dir vorstellen dieser Musik bis ins hohe Alter treu zu bleiben?

   Can you imagine yourself staying true to this music when you are older?
Subcultural questions

1. a) Erzähle ein bisschen was über deine Eindrücke von der Metalsubkultur
   
   Tell me a bit about your expressions of the Heavy Metal subculture
   
   b) Würdest du sagen, dass diese Subkultur einen einheitlichen Habitus oder Verhalten hat?
   
   Would you say that this subculture has a uniform habitus or behavior?

2. a) Ist Elitärismus ein großes Thema im Metal? Ist der Metal engstirnig?
   
   Does elitism play a big role in Heavy Metal? Is Heavy Metal narrow-minded?
   
   b) Grenzt er sich deutlich von anderen Subkulturen ab? Würdest du dich persönlich auch als elitär einordnen?
   
   Does Heavy Metal try to delimit itself clearly from other subcultures? Would you consider yourself as elitist?

3. a) Ist Maskulinität ein wichtiger Teil des Metals? Gibt es Tendenzen zum Sexismus und werden weibliche Metaller genauso respektiert wie männliche?
   
   Is masculinity an important aspect of Heavy Metal? Are there tendencies towards sexism? Are female members equally respected as male ones?
   
   b) Was ist dein Eindruck ist Homophobie ein Thema im Metal? Wie verbreitet sind Xenophobie bzw. Rassismus?
   
   What is your impression is homophobia an issue in Heavy Metal? How common are xenophobia respectively racism?

4. a) Was würdest du als allgemeines Ziel im Metal betrachten?
   
   What would you define as a main goal in Heavy Metal?
   
   b) Denkst du der Metal wurde im Vergleich zu seinen Anfängen verfälscht?
   
   Do you think Heavy Metal was falsified in contrast to its beginnings?
February 21 2016

Dear participant:

I am student in the BA program of Sociology at the Corvinus University of Budapest. I am conducting a research study for my BA thesis titled “Heavy Metal as a Subculture”.

I am requesting your participation, which will involve a semi-structured interview with the duration of 40-50 minutes which will be recorded. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty and will not affect my grade. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. The attached questionnaire is anonymous. The results of the study may be published but your name will not be known.

There are no risks of the study. The potential benefits of the study, includes insight into the subculture of Heavy Metal.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at 0157 80449333 or e-mail me at psbernitz@hotmail.de

Signing this sheet will be considered your consent to participate. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Patrick Bernitz
psbernitz@hotmail.de date / signature participant