

Representations and Experiences of
Women Hard Rock and Metal Fans
in the Imaginary Community

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Abstract

This thesis questions dominant representations of women hard rock and metal fans, and contributes to the undeveloped area of scholarship on women's pleasure in music. I address the questions: how does the metal media represent women fans?; what is the impact of that representation?; and what can a consideration of women's musical pleasure tell us? I work within the fields of popular music, subcultures, gender and metal studies and build upon feminist studies of rock music (e.g., Schippers 2002, Fast 1999 and Wise 1984). The research sits alongside feminist work exploring the pleasures of metal (Overell 2010, Riches 2011), and Brown's work on metal media (2007, 2009). A new framework, the imaginary community, allows a consideration of the gendered ideology of the genre and takes into account private modes of fandom. To establish the ideology I examined letters pages in a key hard rock and metal medium, *Kerrang!* magazine, between 2000-8. Drawing on Barthes' *Mythologies* (1957), I employed a semiotic analysis to expose the representation of women through myths. Using this representation as a comparative tool, I conducted interviews with women fans who liked bands featured in *Kerrang!*. I analysed the discourses mobilised in their responses to questions about their participation in communal and private activities (e.g. magazine reading, concert attendance); their interpretations of the groupie stereotype; and their preferences for particular bands. I argue that women fans are misrepresented as groupies and this impacts upon women's ability to express their fandom. Considering women's pleasure in the music draws out the ways in which women's fandom challenges both the myth of the woman fan as groupie, and the reading of metal as a masculine genre. I conclude that exploring women's fandom can provide fresh perspectives on hard rock and metal: we must be prepared to take women's fandom seriously.

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Author's Declaration

This thesis is based on original research and I am the sole author. It is previously unpublished, although a very early draft of Chapter Four was published in 2010 as “I’m a Metalhead”: The Representation of Women Letter Writers in *Kerrang! Magazine*’ in *Heavy Fundametalisms: Music, Metal & Politics*, ed. Rosemary Hill and Karl Spracklen. Freeland: Inter-Disciplinary Press. Some of my ideas around authenticity were developed in the 2011 article ‘Is Emo Metal? Gendered Boundaries and New Horizons in the Heavy Metal Community’ in *Journal for Cultural Research*, 15, no. 3: 297-315. In 2012 a draft of Chapter Six appeared as ‘Pleasure in Metal: What Women Fans Like about Hard Rock and Metal Music’ in *Heavy Metal Generations*, ed. Andy R. Brown and Kevin Fellezs. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press.

Chapter One: Introduction

I had seen him five times before. At Wembley Arena, in a dingy Munich club and first, most astoundingly and unexpectedly, in a little Leeds club during a night of cocktails with my best friend. But now, after a gap of five or six years, in tiny Fibbers in York, there he was. And not five feet away. Justin Hawkins.¹ With his back to me, talking to a fan. Justin Hawkins. Not now on stage, just in the crowd. Just there. My breaths became shallow and short, my chest felt tight, my knees, oh my knees! Where were they? Gone! 'Go and talk to him!' said Sanja, but oh, no, I couldn't do that. What would he care for me? Nothing to what I cared for him. And then he got up on the stage and rocked my heart. That was the connection I wanted.

This thesis is about women's rock music fandom, where rock music deepens into a range of subgenres. As the research has progressed, many friends and family have assumed I am studying women musicians; I am not. I think these assumptions have something to do with women fans being a demeaned group: why on Earth would you care about them? They don't *really* like the music, do they? So, in this study I take women fans seriously and seek to understand their experiences of fandom in the imaginary community² of hard rock and metal. In this opening chapter I set out my motivations for the study and the research questions that underpin it, outline why the topic is important and the key ideas I develop, and I conclude with an overview of the structure of the thesis.

My motivations

One of my earliest memories is of my brother playing to me one of our parents' old 7" records: The Beatles' 'She Loves You'. I was only four years old, but I was electrified, and this started me off on a love-affair with rock 'n' roll music³ that has lasted until my mid-30s and shows no signs of abating. My passion for rock music has defined my identity since a young age, determining my choice of university (Anglia Polytechnic in Cambridge, home of my number one band Pink Floyd), my choice of friends (sharing a similar depth of musical interest was most important and I joke that David Bowie introduced me to my best friend) and finally choice of my partner (our first date was used to determine that we both

¹ For more information about the bands and musicians mentioned in this thesis see Appendix G.

² Drawing on Anderson's idea of the nation as an imagined community, I develop the concept of the imaginary community in the next chapter.

³ I use rock to write about the music, and 'rock 'n' roll' to write about the music and the culture. The latter has something of *joie de vivre* about it.

liked Van Halen and The Darkness and that music was the Most Important Thing to both of us).

However, being a girl rock fan never seemed as easy as being a boy rock fan was for my brother. He had many friends who shared his music taste, he never had to qualify whether he *really* liked ZZ Top, and he never felt excluded by the way in which rock magazines wrote for a male reader (he was that reader). Indeed the rock media rarely felt as if it was speaking to me: women existed outside the pages of the magazines as punchlines of jokes that aimed to unify the audience as heterosexual male readers engaged in a battle of the sexes. It assumed that women either did not like the music, or were involved in the culture because they were attracted to the musicians. I felt this injustice deeply and worked hard to represent my fandom as one that was as good as, nay *better* than, any male fans'. In this I spoke of my fandom in terms of the music itself and denied any attractions to musicians that were suggested to me (although I felt them). And then I saw that the way to really show myself as an authentic fan, as someone who was interested in the music, was to become a musician. I was lucky enough to be raised in a musical household and my musical ambitions were supported. For many young women this kind of boost is missing, and it made a big difference to me. Becoming a musician, writing songs and performing with a band meant stepping out of the role of fan and also feeling as if I was leaving my femininity behind. Being a musician meant putting the music first. However, in practice aiming for the higher status role of musician meant that my femininity was not forgotten. Instead I had to work even harder to diminish any 'girlish' performance and to be 'one of the guys'. At least I was not a groupie, though.

Feminist ambivalence about rock music

Almost as important to me as my love of rock is feminism, and this too has been a part of my life since I was a child. The two passions have at times been in conflict, whilst at other times they have made perfect sense. When I began this research they were in conflict. I had just completed my MA thesis, which recovered women rock musicians from the 1960s and 1970s that have been written out of the history of rock. I was singing, playing guitar and writing songs in a feminist rock band with a passionate riot grrrl fan. I was reconsidering my musical life and my aesthetic expectations. I was actively seeking out feminist rock music, and I was re-evaluating the classic rock that had formed the backbone of my musical taste since I was a child. Norma Coates' (feminist) article (1997) about the symbolic construction of rock as a hegemonically masculine genre (in which rock functions as a technology of gender to maintain the male dominated status quo [Coates 1997, 52]) had made a big impression on me and I was intellectually aligned with her in understanding my fandom as 'false consciousness' (Coates 1997, 51).

And yet it was not as simple as that. I could not abandon the music I had grown up with – and had not fallen out of love with – and I also could not entirely hear my own subjugation in classic rock music. Something of the way in which the music made me feel powerful was left out in the summing up of the genre as misogynist. In fact, in some ways I felt that the music gave me strength to *fight* sexism when I encountered it. How could this understanding of rock ‘n’ roll fit in with ideas of it as sexist in itself? And didn’t that perspective reduce all rock music to a single monolithic sound, without considering the differences between bands’ attitudes and politics, their images, their lyrics and sounds?

It was at this point that I encountered Sue Wise’s article about her own rock fandom (1984). Wise reflects upon her experiences as a fan of Elvis and on her burgeoning feminism. As her feminism developed she came to understand Presley as a ‘butch god’ (Wise 1984, 391) and cleared him out of her life, along with the detritus of ‘twenty years of accumulated sexist junk’ (Wise 1984, 393). When Elvis died, however, she was unexpectedly moved. This caused her to rethink what it was about the singer that she loved so much. She argues that male writers about rock music had represented Elvis in a particular way and ‘feminist orthodoxy’ (Wise 1984, 391) had adopted that same view. She reflects that *that* Elvis did not mirror *her* Elvis and that feminists, in taking on the rock critics’ version of The King, had neglected women’s own experiences. Rather than an ‘expression of rampant sexuality’ (Wise 1984, 391), *her* Elvis was a ‘teddy bear’ (393), a friend in lonely times. It is through this rethinking of the meanings of Elvis from a personal perspective that Wise is able to offer a critique of men’s interpretation of Presley that presents partial knowledge as if it were an objective and whole account. The question that is central to her article, ‘how is it possible for me to be, at one and the same time, a feminist *and* an Elvis fan?’ (Wise 1984, 391) was almost the same question (with ‘rock’ substituted for ‘Elvis’) that I had been asking myself. Wise raises a challenge for feminists to rethink the common sense views of reality (Wise 1984, 398), claiming that when it comes to rock ‘the feminist reworking [has been] left undone’ (Wise 1984, 398). The article shook me with delight. In her reflexive questioning of her own fandom she made the *orthodoxy* around rock music the central category to be critiqued, rather than whether it was ‘okay’ for a feminist to enjoy the music. Challenging what is thought to be known about the genre and bringing my *experience* to bear meant that I could focus my attention on the ways in which I enjoyed rock music, rather than considering whether or not I suffered from ‘false consciousness’, or was otherwise complicit in my own subordination.

Wise therefore gave me an opening and shone a light on how it might be possible to understand my rock fandom, even if some perceptions of the music might position it as anti-women (for example, Sheila Whiteley argues that a good number of rock songs lyrically reduce women to a few ‘repressive representations’ [Whiteley 2000, 32-43]). It

also set the template for challenging media representations as *male* representations. Susan Fast's article about gender and sexuality in Led Zeppelin (1999) takes up Wise's challenge and she uses her own experience as a fan of the band to guide her to important questions with regards the representation of the band as a misogynistic 'cock rock' act (Fast 1999, 246). Just as Wise counters typical understandings of Elvis by reflecting on her feelings about The King, so Fast challenges most readings of Zeppelin by examining her own passion for their music. Fast's article is important because she takes her own fandom as a starting point and then analyses a large number of survey responses she gained from other Led Zeppelin fans.⁴ The conclusions she draws are staggering in the way in which they complicate notions of what the band and their music mean for the fans:

Under the paradigm heretofore constructed, there is no way to account for these responses: for women who enjoy the machismo images of Plant, who know the repertory as well as their male counterparts, who prefer the 'heavy' songs over the more acoustically based ones, men whose concept of sexuality in the music encompasses tenderness as well as the crude and 'heavy' side, and the messy way in which issues of sexuality and gender are entangled with ideas concerning spirituality, soul, and so on. (Fast 1999, 274)

In my initial planning of this research I thought I needed to challenge ideas about women fans as lacking serious attention to the music. I was concerned to show that we too could be 'authentic' hard rock and metal fans. Fast's article showed me that this endeavour was misguided. It inspired me to engage more closely with the different kinds of relationships that women fans have with the object of their fandom. It signalled there was something wrong with the model of fans as only interested intellectually in the music. That model was based on an idea of what it means to be a music lover that is embedded in the mind/body, rational/emotional, man/woman dichotomy. More important was to investigate fandom from a holistic perspective and to try to uncover the fuller sensual experience of women's fandom. This had to be done, however, with an understanding of the context of the male dominance of the genre, something which Fast does not give a great deal of attention to.

Research questions

My reflections on my fandom and my feminism, the gap in knowledge about the representations of women fans, and the work of Fast and Wise have therefore informed the research questions that underpin the thesis. I ask:

1. How are women fans represented in the rock media?

⁴ Fast also employs close readings of the visual markers of the band and analysis of the music to further parry journalistic accounts of the band as 'simply' masculine.

2. How does this representation impact upon women fans?
3. In what other ways can we understand women's rock fandom?
4. How do these new ways of understanding women's fandom change common sense ideas of rock as a masculine genre?

In order to answer these questions I employ two main methods. I use *Kerrang!* magazine's⁵ letters pages as my source for investigating the representation of women in the rock media. My semiotic readings establish how the magazine creates certain myths about being a hard rock and metal fan. I then draw on interviews I conducted with British women hard rock and metal fans between the ages of 16 and 69 and offer discourse analyses of their negotiations of *Kerrang!*'s representation of women fans. Continuing to work with the interview data I analyse the ways in which they describe their passion for their favourite bands. Using these two methods enables me to examine how the women negotiate their representation by the media, and to refocus understandings of hard rock and metal music.

Why this study is important and what is new

Meeting Sue Wise's challenge

In her article Sue Wise sets two challenges: one is the need to contest male knowledge about rock music; the other is the necessity of examining how feminist orthodoxy has taken on male knowledges without rethinking them. These challenges are important because they open up new areas for reinterpretation that have been hidden. The opacity of these areas means that women who are fans of hard rock and metal have been mis-served by feminism. Furthermore, knowledge about rock music has been left in the hands of male writers who may have some investment in retaining the status quo, or may be unaware that being a fan is in some ways different for women. This was vividly brought home to me at the first international conference about metal that I attended: Heavy Metal and Gender International Congress in Cologne, 2009. Some very good papers opened up the area of metal and gender, but I perceived that the conference also raised issues which were not considered:

1. The most senior academic in the field, Deena Weinstein, stated that she believed that if women were not involved in making metal music it was because they chose not to, not because there were structural problems that hindered them (a position later, albeit briefly, challenged by Rosemary Overell);

⁵ *Kerrang!* is a UK weekly magazine covering hard rock and metal music. I discuss the relevance of the magazine in Chapter Three.

2. In Florian Heesch's summing up he argued that metal is asexual. In spite of the focus on gender there was no discussion of the way in which metal masculinity can be heterosexually attractive for women fans. Women as desiring subjects were therefore excluded from the discussion;
3. Heesch and Weinstein also claimed that metal is inclusive and so women can be participants as long as they are prepared to wear the uniform (jeans, black t-shirt), refrain from desiring metal men, and adopt the same value system. In real terms this sounds very much like it means that women can be metal as long as they are prepared to be more like men.

The summing up of the conference therefore asserted a particular idea about metal as inclusive; it was congratulatory, and it avoided talking about the marginalisation of women whilst reinforcing masculinity as the normal. We cannot keep arguing that metal is inclusive. The genre may offer strength and a sense of community to those who feel excluded from more mainstream groups, but the rules of metal are inflexible. We cannot continue to say that the genre is not sexist or racist or homophobic and congratulating ourselves on metal's potential for inclusivity: one only needs to look around when at a concert or festival to see that metal in the UK is almost all white, that it is majority male, that out homosexual musicians are few and far between. Metal remains an exclusive 'club' and the rules are written by white, straight men. It precludes black people's and women's and homosexuals' involvement in any kind of embodied sense.

Since the Congress in 2009 some things have changed: there has been more attention to women's experiences and questions about metal's Western whiteness are beginning to be asked. Some of the assertions of metal as one big loving community did reappear, however, at the Heavy Metal and Popular Culture Conference in Bowling Green, Ohio, 2013. A panel to discuss metal as a community was formulated, and the first few comments from panel members Esther Clinton and Sarah Kitteringham reaffirmed metal's exceptional inclusivity. However, this was very quickly challenged by members of the audience – Andy R. Brown, Deena Weinstein, Imke von Helden and myself – and the debate soon left the panel and became a wider discussion in the room. There is a sense amongst some metal scholars, therefore, that the orthodoxy of metal as a genre in which anyone can participate is inaccurate. Yet the existence of the panel clearly suggests that the idea still has some important sway that needs to be challenged.

One of those researchers who does consider the way in which the genre marginalises women is Sonia Vasan (2010, 2011). Vasan aims to understand how women can be involved in a genre (death metal) which so deliberately excludes women, and she gains some insight by using a framework of cost reduction. But although Vasan's work is useful, it does do what Wise argues feminists should not do: it accepts the male-written story of

the genre as masculine without engaging with women's experiences of what the music means to them. There are hints, as I discuss in the following chapter, but Vasan clearly makes an assumption about what the music is like and how women hear it.

Current discussions about the representation of women

This thesis gives depth to understandings of how women are represented more generally. As I write this introduction in Summer 2013, representations of women are the subject of high profile debate. Labour leader Ed Miliband argues that there is a 'crisis in representation' (Miliband quoted in Watt 2013) and British feminist groups UK Feminista and Object are running a campaign to have 'lads mags' withdrawn from sales in high street shops (Lose The Lads Mags). Both of these activities are part of a general moral panic around the increasing sexualisation of culture, in particular, children (for children read 'girls'), child pornography and paedophilia. The roots of this panic have not gone unexamined (see for example Renold and Ringrose 2010), nor the impacts unchallenged. However, it is clear to me that the representation of women hard rock and metal fans *is* a sexualised portrayal and that this is a problem. My research shows that women fans object to such depictions because the representations are inaccurate, and I argue that they are also damaging. Empirical research into how these representations are sustained and the impact that they have upon women is necessary and timely. This thesis contributes to that work via detailed and specific examination of how the rock media produces a particular representation of women.

Focus on the experience of music

As I began this research I encountered a good deal of writing about music fans, most of which tended to come under the auspices of subcultural theory (which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Two). However, subcultural theory could not account for my own experiences as a music fan because *the music* was absent. Groups of people who I understood to be united by their similar taste in music appeared in subcultural studies to come together so that they could share similar fashions and articulate their frustrations about their powerlessness. This seemed to be missing the point of participation in such groups because in my experience music had always been at the heart of why we came together. Why was it missing from the accounts? In this study I offer one explanation for the conspicuous absence of musical experience, but more important is to begin to examine the relationships we have with the music we love. David Hesmondhalgh argues that we need to think about the ways in which we experience music and its capacity for enabling what he calls 'human flourishing' (Hesmondhalgh 2012, 364). Finding space to discuss how music is experienced amongst the accounts that focus on subcultural behaviour is becoming an important new area of study. Rosemary Overell's (2011) work on grindcore fandom and Nicola Allett's (2011) research with extreme metal fans are

studies that do this. My research is situated alongside those studies as we work towards bringing music to the fore in sociological accounts.

Key ideas

This thesis makes original contributions to knowledge in four areas. First, I develop a new framework for investigating fans as a group that breaks away from subcultural theory, and I develop this around the idea of 'the imaginary community'. This structure enables the examination of the *feeling* of community that fans report and also how that sense of community is generated within the metal media. Moreover it enables fans' understandings of themselves as part of a community to be treated as valuable, even in light of other fannish accounts that counter the glowing representations of harmony. Secondly, I offer empirical research on the representation of women fans. There are a number of studies that consider how female musicians are represented in the rock media, but very few give attention to the way in which the women who love the music are depicted. Helen Davies (2001) and Mimi Schippers (2002) provide two studies that do this, but neither base their assertions on a strong body of evidence (as I discuss in the following chapter). In providing close readings of textual representations of women fans, then, I provide detailed evidence upon which to build. Thirdly, I examine the impact of the groupie stereotype upon women fans. This is an area that has not been considered in detail. Schippers gives some attention to the way in which women alternative rock fans discuss groupies (in general they are quite nasty) (Schippers 2002, 59-67), but not to the way in which the stereotype affects them personally. In this, then, I offer new evidence for why we need to scrutinise representations. Finally I offer readings of the ways in which women fans describe the music they love. Keith Kahn-Harris (2007) has explored a similar area for extreme metal fans, but found that the ways in which fans were able to describe the music relied upon received terminology and accepted discourses available within the genre. My research engages with the ways in which women fans of a broad genre of hard rock and metal employ language and describe being moved by the music in ways that *do not* utilise terms that tie in with the myths of the genre. This brings new perspectives to our understandings of metal musical experience, and also allows us to begin to think about the genre in ways that challenge it as a masculine genre. Most importantly, this research is original in taking women fans of hard rock and metal seriously as music fans and as desiring subjects.

Chapter overview

The thesis is structured as follows:

In the following chapter, Literature Review: Framing an Imaginary Community, I examine the academic literature around women's rock fandom. It is structured in two main parts. In

the first part I pay particular attention to writing about hard rock and metal and the terminology and/or frameworks used to examine women hard rock and metal fans. I discuss the ways in which representations of women fans have been little considered and outline journalistic writings that have to some extent addressed this gap. I move forward to consider writing about musical pleasure or, rather, the lack of it, and assert that this gap is desperately in need of filling. I argue that the dominant framework for investigating the experiences of metal fans – subculture – is inadequate in that it does not give enough room to consider women’s experiences and that their pleasure in the music remains untheorised. In the second part of the chapter I examine writings on science fiction fan communities and critique the term ‘community’, drawing on feminist writings on the subject. I then outline the concept of ‘imaginary community’, which I argue is a better reflection of the way in which fans report a sense of community, and one which can open up the ideology of the community to an examination of the ways in which particular ideas, traditions or ‘myths’ are deployed to create a sense of cohesion in spite of inequalities and unacknowledged privileges.

In Chapter Three, Conceptual Issues, Methods, Ethics and Challenges: Ideology, Experience, Laughter and Depression, I describe and explain why the methods I employed were most useful, discuss the ethical issues considered, and detail what was successful and what was more challenging. I first discuss which fans the thesis considers (women fans of bands mentioned in *Kerrang!*, or who describe themselves as heavy metal fans). I then engage with the concept of ideology and briefly consider the ways in which it has been deployed by feminists. Following Nancy Hartsock, I determine on using ideology as a method for exploring the representation of women, and then draw on work by Liz Stanley and Sue Wise in my short examination of how the category of experience can be used. I turn then to explore key ethical matters that I took into account in undertaking this research. I next give detailed attention to the two main methods of the thesis: semiotic readings of *Kerrang!* magazine and critical discourse analysis of semi-structured interviews with women fans. Finally I reflect upon some of the personal challenges that I faced in the process of the research, with particular focus on the impact of the research upon my health, contextualising this within Stanley and Wise’s assertions about the need to consider the conditions of the production of the research.

In Chapter Four: Imagining the Community, I read *Kerrang!* as a window into the imaginary community of hard rock and metal fans. I conduct semiotic readings of *Kerrang!*’s letters pages with particular reference to how women fans are represented. I extrapolate that four myths are forged in the letters pages, two that are presented by the magazine as being common sense values of the community (equality and authenticity) and two that are less obvious and that I draw out from the way in which men and women

are portrayed (the groupie and the warrior). These myths work together to depict the imaginary community as ideologically invested in maintaining the masculinity of the genre at the expense of femininity. I argue that the representation of women in the imaginary community renders them as adjuncts to the real members of the community – the men. This is a damaging portrayal, I contend.

Engaging with that representation, in the chapter Encountering the Myth of the Groupie, I scrutinise the impact of the myth on women fans via discourse analysis of the interview discussions. From the fans' responses to questions about the groupie stereotype – for instance, whether they would like to meet their favourite band – I tease out the different ways in which my interviewees respond to the figure of the groupie in their own fan lives. There was a good deal of discomfort in the interview discussion around groupies and all women found ways to negotiate the stereotype without accepting the title. Some women spoke out against groupie behaviour, positing that it was an inferior kind of fandom. Others attacked the representation of women as groupies or the underlying sexism that generated the vilified figure. Still others sought to redefine what 'groupie' meant. In some women's words I saw the impact of the myth in the way in which they defended their sexual and fannish reputations, or in the ways in which they had sought out bands that avoided or spoke out against the positioning of women as sexual objects in hard rock and metal. I also examine the ways in which women *did* express desire for musicians and the complicated ways in which they negotiated the meanings of their sexual interest. I argue that the myth of the groupie exerts pressure on women fans by impacting upon their ability to express their fandom and their sexuality. The problem of the groupie myth is not just about the expectations it places upon women, but also in the ways in which it prevents discussion of more sensual and embodied experiences of musical pleasure.

In the penultimate chapter, Masculine Pleasure?, I examine women's accounts of their experiences of musical pleasure. I analyse how my interviewees described heavy metal and also what they liked about their favourite bands. Some women defined the genre with language that reflected the myth of the warrior, particularly when it came to considering guitars. Others used language that can be associated with the myth of authenticity as they heralded the importance of 'real' instruments, high class musicianship and meaningful lyrics, and they did so in distinction to pop music, relying therefore on a rock/pop conceptual divide. I then draw on the work of feminist writers on rock music to argue that considering hard rock and metal as a masculine genre neglects important aspects of women's fandom. I turn back to my interviewees' words to analyse how some of their descriptions diverge from those dominant myths and complicate readings of hard rock and metal as masculine music.

In the concluding chapter I give a brief summary of the chapters to draw together my argument. I conclude that women fans are still misrepresented as groupies in metal media and that this impacts upon women's ability to express their fandom and their sexuality and also results in a narrow view of what it is to be a fan. Considering women's pleasure as it both fits in with and diverges from the ideological representation of the genre draws out the ways in which women's fandom challenges both the myth of the woman fan as groupie, and the reading of metal as masculine. I then consider the theoretical implications and limitations of my research. I maintain that the concepts of myth and ideology can be useful in unpicking representations and how women live with the dominant ideas. I reflect upon the use of semi-structured interviews and discourse analysis, positing that although discourse analysis was very fruitful, more structure to the interviews would have been preferable. I meditate on how well the framework of the imaginary community has worked and reflect upon other limitations of the research. Turning then to the field of metal studies I position my work within the field and also suggest some areas for further research. Finally I offer some personal reflections on the thesis and my hopes for the future.

In conclusion, my aim is that this thesis will challenge attitudes that position women rock fans as objects of derision, and that it will enable women fans to speak more wholeheartedly about their fandom. I also hope that my conception of the imaginary community will in future prove useful to others seeking a new framework within which to study groups of music fans without being reduced to considering what fans *do* rather than what fans *feel*.

Chapter Two: Framing an Imaginary Community

Introduction

This chapter has two aims. The first is to carefully assess relevant academic literature on hard rock and metal music fans in order to bring to the fore the ways in which studies have used particular frameworks that are gendered. Such studies limit our understanding of the experiences of women fans and also determine a particular gendered definition of 'fan'. Having assessed the value and limitations of existing work, my second aim is to propose a new framework with which to regard women fans – the imaginary community; this concept enables a consideration of women fans' engagement with music as valuable by integrating crucial areas of (women's) experience into the redefinition of fandom. I argue that the dominance of subcultural theory and (to a lesser extent) the concept of scene and the use of a generic notion of 'fans' as frameworks for considering hard rock and metal fans has limited the scope of research; the underlying gendered epistemology of fandom has resulted in a dismissal of women fans or, at best, a systematic reduction of their experiences as fans. Areas that are significant in the experiences of women fans, such as private engagements with the music, the representation of women fans as groupies, and the dismissal of their attention to the music in favour of sexist and narrow interpretations of their fandom, need to be drawn out in order to rebalance understandings of fandom. I argue that a new framework is necessary to accomplish this, and that it needs to take account of a wider spectrum of fannish activities. Moreover, this new framework ought to be able to address the *feeling* of togetherness and shared passion that fans report. I contend that my framework of imaginary community can bring a new perspective to studies of fans.

I begin with an examination of academic studies relevant to women hard rock and metal fans, and attempt to gauge the ways in which particular gendered theories of youth culture have ignored, or skewed, understandings of women's hard rock and metal fandom. Drawing in particular on the work of feminists, I critique the two main concepts deployed in thinking about groups of fans: subcultural theory and the concept of scene. I then scrutinise the effects of these gendered theories on research on fans, focussing on work about women hard rock and metal fans, and discuss the omission of two important areas in such research: representation and pleasure in music. My project is largely concerned with representation – how women hard rock and metal fans are represented and how my interviewees negotiate such representations. To help me develop these ideas, I assess academic work in which the characterisations of women are skewed, or in which women are omitted almost entirely. I aim to redraw the picture of women fans, and, as one of the key arguments in my work is that fan pleasure is under-theorised, I evaluate the

representation of women fans' musical pleasure. Finally I discuss my usage of 'imaginary community' as a new framework within which to study women hard rock and metal fans. I build up my argument by first assessing the use of 'fan community' in work on science fiction fans. I then analyse feminist philosophies of 'community', and draw in the role that imagination plays in the formation of the hard rock and metal community.

The lack of research focussing on women rock fans

In this section I discuss ways in which using subcultural theory and scene as frameworks for studying music fans often leaves women out of the picture, and that merely reinstating women within these theories neglects important aspects of fandom. Key examples of research on music fans that utilise subcultural theory focus on identifiable groups, such as mods and rockers (Cohen 1972); skinheads (Clarke 1976); punk (Hebdige 1979, Leblanc 1999); and goth (Hodkinson 2002). Yet despite the centrality of music in drawing people together into these subcultures, the fannish passion for music is not a focus of the research. Indeed, a number of studies which are not about music fans also use subcultural theory (for example M. Geneva Murray's discussion of roller derby (2012), and Tim Dean's examination of barebacking (2009), and therefore the theory, in spite of its wide adoption in considering music fans, does not engage with music fandom *per se*⁶. Rather it prioritises the sensational aspect of young people's extroverted fandom, and the emphasis falls on clothing, how people group together, and the ways in which the subculture is 'resistant' to the parent culture. Subcultural theory has received criticism from a number of quarters. For example, Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber (1991) and McRobbie (1991) argue that most subcultural studies focus on boys and omit girls (something I discuss further below). Steve Redhead (1990) and Andy Bennett (2002) argue that subcultural theorists had a predetermined theory and read this onto their observations of young people, rather than working from the voices of the young people and reaching conclusions *after* they had spoken to them. As Bennett notes, 'one is left with the distinct impression that the empirical reflections offered by Hebdige are being made to fit into the bigger picture which has already been fashioned at the level of theoretical abstraction' (Bennett 2002, 455). Steve Redhead concludes that "[a]uthentic" subcultures were produced by subcultural theorists, not the other way around' (Redhead 1990, 25). Andy R. Brown (2003) argues that the neglect of metal in British subcultural studies (and he is referring particularly to Hebdige) is due to prejudice and that metal could actually be seen as a subculture. But then Hesmondhalgh reminds us that subcultural theory was never about music anyway (Hesmondhalgh 2005, 31). At the turn of the twenty-first century the theory seemed historic. Yet despite the development of new concepts such as neo-tribes and scene (see Bennett 1999 and Hesmondhalgh 2009),

⁶ There are exceptions such as Paul Willis' study of biker boys (1978).

subcultural theory remains the dominant framework for studies of hard rock and metal music fans (see, amongst others, Gross 1990, Weinstein 2000 [but first published in 1991], Purcell 2003, Araste 2010, Sinclair 2010, Vasan 2010, 2011).

The concept of scene also has been widely utilised for examinations of hard rock and metal fans. For example, Keith Kahn-Harris (2007) uses the concept to explore how extreme metal is experienced around the world; Karl Spracklen (2010, 2010a, 2010b) employs the term to group together black metal fans online. Striking in these studies is the way in which music-making, a key feature in Will Straw's (1991) definition of the term, is absent. When Rosemary Overell (2009, 2010, 2011) denotes the local group of grindcore musicians and fans in Melbourne a 'scene', alongside which she also mobilises the notion of 'belonging', there is some reference to music-making, but in the main the concept of scene as a way of examining musical practice is not really prominent in these studies. In hard rock and metal studies the terms tribe or neo-tribe have not been widely used, and Hesmondhalgh argues that the idea that people enjoy music from a range of genres is not strong enough to sustain the theory (2005, 26). For my purposes, though, there are deeper problems with both the concept of scene and subcultural theory.

Despite the continued use of subcultural theory, I am convinced that McRobbie and Garber's early criticisms remain relevant, and that they are also applicable to the concept of scene in some ways. Their arguments relate to the ways in which subcultural theory ignores the specificities of women's participation in marginal social groups and they make an important contribution to studies of girls' engagement with music subcultures. In their 1978 article they argue that formative and influential researchers using subcultural theory (for example Hall and Jefferson 1975, Willis 1978, Hebdige 1979) theorise the activities of white working-class men in the UK, ignoring or trivialising the roles that women fans play within subcultures, and pointing out that subcultures themselves provide barriers to women's participation. They are concerned that, within the existing research, 'when girls do appear, it is either in ways which uncritically reinforce the stereotypical image of woman with which we are now so familiar [...] or else they are fleetingly and marginally presented' (McRobbie and Garber 1991, 1). Furthermore male theorists describe women in subcultures as, 'dumb, passive [...] crudely painted' (Fyvel quoted in McRobbie and Garber 1991, 1), or in terms of their appearance: 'they [the single women] tended to be scruffier and less attractive than the attached girls' (Willis quoted in McRobbie and Garber 1991, 2). McRobbie and Garber attribute these depictions to the researchers' too-close involvement with the subcultural men they are investigating, taking their 'descriptive language' and adopting it 'unconsciously' (McRobbie and Garber 1991, 2). They question whether the women's responses to the men's questions are a result of the unequal positioning of men and women, or researcher and respondent, or if it is 'the result of the

girls' recognition that "he" identifies primarily with "them" (McRobbie and Garber 1991, 2). The authors argue that Willis, Fyvel and others made no attempt to question the gendered positions of their informants and that these unconsidered biases informed their research in a disadvantageous way. In short McRobbie and Garber contend that Willis and the others do not consider women to be *serious* members of subcultures.

Moreover, this leads them to question whether women are as absent from subcultures as research suggests. They assert that it is difficult to judge from the existing research and from media reports of subcultures, because these accounts emphasise 'male membership, male focal concerns and masculine values' (McRobbie and Garber 1991, 4). Considering the 1950s teddy boy subculture, the authors posit that girls were less visible members because financial dependency and concerns about sexual reputations kept them off the streets and out of the cafés (McRobbie and Garber 1991, 5). Yet they did exist and were involved. They suggest that young women participate in subcultures in their homes: listening to music, reading magazines, wearing subcultural fashions, trying out make up and hair-styles and socialising in their bedrooms (McRobbie and Garber 1991, 5-6). These behaviours are different from those (acknowledged) behaviours of male subculturalists, but because they take place in the home they reduce women's visibility as subcultural members, thus they make an important distinction between on-street and off-street behaviour. In drawing a picture of bedroom culture McRobbie and Garber refer to teenyboppers (young girls who are fans of pop musicians such as David Cassidy). To my knowledge rock fans would not consider themselves teenyboppers, yet having grown up in the 1990s I recognise this depiction as a reflection of my own fandom. My involvement with rock music culture (Britpop and Indie, psychedelia and glam rock – metal was out of fashion) was through listening to music at home and in friends' bedrooms, sharing magazines together, watching music television, dressing up and shopping for outlandish fashions. Going out to concerts and clubs came in our later teens and then added to our bedroom culture rather than replaced it: bedroom culture remained part of our fandom.

Sara Cohen's critique of male dominance and sexism in the Liverpool indie music scene of the 1990s complements McRobbie and Garber's argument, as she discusses the way women music fans' ability to participate in the public space of the scene is limited. The concept of scene focuses on activities that coalesce around public music venues. The concept draws attention to those working in the production of music on a local level and is more particularly about musicians and scene workers, although it does cover fans, to an extent. In a study of fans, the term 'scene' is limited in that typically the focus is neither on the music nor the fans, but on the relationships of scene members, primarily those involved in the production and promotion of the music, and the processes of making music. Thus the experiences of scene members who are fans rather than musicians or

scene workers are rendered less important. In spite of this, a number of studies of hard rock and metal fans use the concept of scene as a grouping category. Cohen's description of the Liverpool scene is a good example of a study of a scene, and she draws particular attention to its gender relationships. However, like subcultural theory, the concept of scene retains the focus on public or visible engagement with music, and this, Cohen contends, is problematic. She argues that such scenes are often male dominated for a number of reasons: men have greater access to money and time to devote to participating in a scene; women face obstacles to participation in scenes due to lack of disposable income, sexism and sexual harassment from male scene members, childcare commitments and the perceived safety implications of late nights in empty town centres (Cohen 1997, 20). Should women wish to become musicians there are further problems for them to overcome, as described by Mavis Bayton (1998) and Mary Ann Clawson (1999) amongst others. Helen Reddington, for example, notes the prevalence of the use of rape by male scene members in the British punk scene of the late 1970s/early 1980s, to attempt to frighten punk women musicians off the stage (Reddington 2011). The problems for women's participation in Liverpool's indie scene that Cohen highlights are in some ways caused by larger societal structures⁷ that limit women's behaviour and allow men to assert dominance and participate in activities that subjugate women. In describing these difficulties Cohen is critical of the male dominance of the scene itself, rather than the concept of scene. Yet I judge that her critique offers valuable insight into why the concept is problematic, and provides some evidence that reveals 'scene' contains some of the same assumptions as subcultural theory.

Because subculture and scene rely upon public expressions of fandom, and, since men are able to move more freely outside the home, the two concepts privilege male fandom, leaving other means of expressing fandom unconsidered. McRobbie and Garber argue that modes of being fans that are undertaken in private houses are more available to women, but the emphasis in work on music fans that uses subcultural theory or scene does not take this into account. Such work therefore structurally ignores ways of being a fan that are more open to women (McRobbie and Garber 1991, 11-14). Indeed, Deena

⁷ For example the prevalence of images and media portrayals that sexualise women, leading to the normalisation of this objectification and thus rendering opposition to sexual representations of women as 'humourlessness'. A further example is the way in which girls are socialised, which prioritises being nice, well-behaved, well-liked and beautiful, rather than able to assert themselves or express artistic or creative talents. There is also the expectation that women will be primary carers of children (and elderly relatives) that is reinforced by unequal access to parental leave so that consequentially women remain primary carers resulting in their returning to work after maternity leave in part-time positions which are generally less well paid than full time, offer fewer promotional opportunities and are accompanied by ingrained expectations that women workers who have children are less reliable than men (they will require more days off without notice to attend to poorly children).

Weinstein's very influential book *Heavy Metal: The Music and the Culture* (2000) is a key example. Weinstein acknowledges that she is describing only a portion of metal fans: young white working class men in the USA (Weinstein 2000, 98) and she has little to say about women fans. She tacitly acknowledges McRobbie and Garber's work, commenting that women fans enact their fandom in their bedrooms (Weinstein 2000, 134), but she does not discuss such bedroom culture. I will discuss *Heavy Metal* further below, but note here that its subcultural framework has set the tone for much later work on hard rock and metal.

When I consider McRobbie and Garber's assertion of the importance of bedroom culture for young women, alongside my own experiences and those of my interviewees (for whom most music listening took place at home, in cars or on headphones: i.e. in intimate spaces), it is clear that private activities are more integral to a passionate engagement with music than has hitherto been theorised. It is apparent that the frameworks of subcultural theory and scene tell a very narrow story about fandom. This means that those who are able to participate fully in the public life of the subculture or the scene become the dominant representation of fans, although there is no *overt* definition of 'fan' which suggests it must be an 'outdoor/public' activity. One useful definition of fan is offered by Rob Walser, although it is significant that he is not working within a framework of scene or subculture. Walser's *Running With The Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (1993) is important in bringing the music to the fore of his account of heavy metal's popularity in the late 1980s/early 1990s. His use of the term 'fans' comes with a specific definition:

The fans I surveyed claimed, on the average, to buy a new metal recording every week, even though many of them have little money. Heavy metal fans are loyal concertgoers, too. (Walser 1993, 17)

For Walser, a fan collects records and goes to numerous concerts or gigs⁸ (Walser 1993, 17). Although this definition retains the importance of public fan activities, it also begins to make a case for private activities (collecting records). However, those private activities are described in terms of consumption, and I would argue that it is the passionate response to the music that makes a fan rather than what they are able *do* in reference to it. My own definition of a fan is therefore somewhat different to Walser's and implicitly recognises the importance of bedroom culture.

⁸ A gig is a musical performance in a small venue such as the backroom of a pub. In contrast a concert is in a much larger venue such as a dedicated concert hall, arena or stadium.

I define music fans as individuals who love music, who have strong emotional reactions to it, and for whom music is very important in their everyday lives. Often the passion is centred upon a particular musical genre and/or band. This is true of rock fans, and they often enjoy music from across the breadth of the genre, although usually focussing on bands within one or two subgenres. For instance, my own record collection contains folk, rock, psych and prog, heavy metal, art rock and a number of other subgenres, but the majority of my records are psych/prog or heavy metal. Being a fan is about more than just owning one or two or even all albums by a band; being a fan is not just about being a consumer. A fan may not own any records by the object of their fandom (although this is probably not the norm). What a fan does have is an intense response to the music, an emotional attachment to it and, in some cases, to the idea of the artist (which may or may not focus on the musicians themselves). A fan may or may not attend performances by the object of their fandom or bands that they wish to hear. My definition, which I write from my own experience of being a fan and from reflecting on my interviewees' descriptions of their fandom, is quite removed from Walser's rather reductive definition, and takes into account activities and emotions which are hidden in research using subcultural theory and the concept of scene. The difference between the two definitions has an important impact on what is being studied and what is being left out, and it has gendered implications.

Gendered implications and effect of subcultural theory and scene on studies of women fans

Using subcultural theory and the scene concept in studies of women hard rock and metal fans has three main effects: (one) they replicate the assumption of a male fan and leave women out (see Weinstein 2000, Purcell 2003); (two) they replicate the assumption of a male fan and attempt to explain women's presence at metal events (see Walser 1993, Kahn-Harris 2007, Gruzelier 2007); (three) they assume that metal events are the primary source of potential pleasure for women fans and do not recognise other sources of enjoyment (see Vasan 2010, 2011).

The books of Weinstein, Walser and Purcell are written in response to a particular moment in the history of hard rock and metal in the United States. In the mid-1980s there was a moral panic that centred on heavy metal music. This culminated in senate hearings at which campaign group the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) gave evidence of the dangerous lyrics in popular songs, especially those by heavy metal bands. These dangers, they asserted, were: provoking suicide, violence, drug-taking, madness, self-harming and Satanism. Musicians Dee Snider, Frank Zappa and John Denver defended the music from these claims and from calls for censorship (more detail on the senate hearings can be found in Weinstein 2000, 237-275). The moral panic also spurred a number of studies in the field of psychology. These projects were conducted with an

assumption of heavy metal as damaging (Prinsky and Rosenbaum 1987, Hansen and Hansen 1991, St Lawrence and Joyner 1991, Rubin, West and Mitchell 2001). Weinstein and Purcell use subcultural theory to provide a more sympathetic viewpoint and do not begin by looking for the ways in which metal damages its listeners. Perhaps because of their positions as defending hard rock and metal from serious accusations⁹ the studies avoid discussing problematic issues in metal such as sexism.

Weinstein's *Heavy Metal: The Music and the Culture* (2000) is criticised by Walser for omitting women's responses to metal (Walser, 1993, 23), although in some ways her book could be considered a woman's response to metal: her love of the genre is apparent throughout. However, she does not seem to think of herself as a woman fan. In her brief discussion of female fans they are very much at a distance and she does not reflect upon her own position as a gendered fan. When women do appear it is within the constraints of a subcultural reading, thus they are at concerts and Weinstein's focus is upon clothing:

Females who do not flaunt their femininity, that is, who dress in jeans and black T-shirts, and who even more importantly display a love of the music, are often welcomed and treated as equals at such events as concerts. Open hostility of various sorts is displayed toward females who do not conform to the dress and behaviour codes. Women who dress in "provocative" attire, such as miniskirts and high heels, are either denounced as sluts waiting to have sex with the band or are ogled as obnoxiously as they might be by the most chauvinistic construction workers. The distinction made by the metal subculture between women who dress and behave according to the masculine code and those who fit feminine stereotypes indicates that it is the culture of masculinity, not biological differences, that is of greatest significance. (Weinstein 1991, 105)

Weinstein suggests here that sexism is based on 'biological differences' and not on socially constructed differences of gender. This is a very limited interpretation which implies that sexism does not exist in the metal community as long as women are prepared to conform to the 'masculine code'. Weinstein does not problematise the culture's attitude towards femininity, nor is there deep analysis of what it is like to be a female fan of a genre that values the masculine and disdains anything 'feminine'. Bedroom culture is only briefly mentioned and, it would seem, not of interest to Weinstein. Reading *Heavy Metal* leaves me with the impression of male fans at concerts and, exceptionally, women, who either aim to be 'one of the guys' or are visually extraordinary and positioned by their sexual attractiveness and availability. In this Weinstein replicates the problems that

⁹ Judas Priest were put on trial for allegedly being involved in the suicide of two fans. It was claimed they had included 'backmasked' messages in their music urging fans to 'do it' (Weinstein 2000, 254-6).

McRobbie and Garber highlight in the studies of Willis, Fyvel and others, by presuming a male participant and by positioning herself alongside those male participants.

Natalie Purcell's book *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture* (2003) does not explicitly state that her research focuses on men (unlike Weinstein) and she does include some data from female interviewees. Yet she neglects the specificity of women's experiences as metal fans. Like *Heavy Metal*, *Death Metal Music* functions as a response to the claims of the PMRC and others that have argued that metal is concerned with Satan worship, violence and pornography. Purcell seeks to rehabilitate American death metal as a useful subculture by considering the offending elements alongside other, less vilified, subcultures (e.g. horror film viewers), and by presenting interviews with death metal fans and musicians who do not come across as aggressive, mad, suicidal or violent. She argues that violence in society has been unfairly and irrationally attributed to death metal: in fact, she suggests, metal musicians can make good role models (Purcell 2003, 192). *Death Metal Music* is of limited usefulness for understanding the experiences of women fans, however. Purcell draws on a psychoanalytic framework whilst using 'subculture' as her chief term of description. There is little engagement with the problems or potentials of subcultural theory, and gender is not considered in any depth ('man' is used as a generic term). In the discussion of pornographic imagery in the music, pornography is equated with gore in horror films, without explanation. She posits that pornography makes the human body grotesque, but does not consider the differences between male and female bodies in pornography. In addition, there is very limited discussion of violence against women in the music. These problems I have identified seem to stem from the defensive position that Purcell takes up: in her desire to reposition the subgenre as a positive cultural force, she omits consideration of the problems that women encounter in the subculture, although she hints at them in her epilogue. Here she reflects on her research experiences and notes the 'sexism' (Purcell 2003, 187) in the death metal community. More suggestively she states that, 'placing trust in the wrong persons and taking risks based on idealistic assumptions about other human beings landed me in more trouble than I care to discuss' (Purcell 2003, 193). How disappointing not to hear more of these sexism and troubles! I cannot help but think that if she had incorporated her experiences into the book that we would have a different picture of fandom. As it is, Purcell positions her own experiences as just one of those things that could occur in any 'group, scene, or culture' (Purcell 2003, 193). Thus, as in Weinstein's account, a male fan experience is assumed as the norm, with women's experiences being sidelined, even in the face of the author's own experiences.

Whilst the women writing about metal (Weinstein and Purcell) in the context of a response to metal's villifiers do not consider the specificity of women's participation in metal, three

male authors do make an attempt to grasp what it means for women to enjoy hard rock and metal: Rob Walser, Jonathan Gruzelier and Keith Kahn-Harris. However, like Weinstein and Purcell they too presume a model of a male fan. I have already discussed how Walser's definition of a fan prioritises consumption over engagement, and how it, too, legitimates a particular kind of fandom, but his book *Running With the Devil* is one of the few non-psychological studies of hard rock and metal that does not use subcultural theory. Nevertheless he replicates the assumption of a male fan as 'normal' and women fans as an exception. The book looks in depth at the cultural meanings of metal, with particular attention to misogyny and madness. Despite Walser's criticism that Weinstein does not investigate the perspectives of female fans, neither does he. Walser attributes the increase of women metal fans that occurred in 1987 to Bon Jovi's *Slippery When Wet* album containing more romantic themes than previous heavy metal albums. In this dismissive view he makes no attempt to think about the complex reasons people have for enjoying a particular kind of music. Walser accepts patronising accounts of women that position love and romance as the zenith of female interest.

This condescending attitude can also be seen in Jonathan Gruzelier's study of the moshpit¹⁰ which draws on Weinstein's book and replicates her use of subculture. In his 2007 book chapter 'Moshpit Menace and Masculine Mayhem', Gruzelier focuses on concert attendance in the 'contemporary' metal scene in the UK. He uses 'male bonding' at concerts as an example of the celebration of masculinity inherent in the metal genre. He discusses women metal fans at some length, but does not significantly update the academic representation of women fans or allow us to hear their voices. He relies heavily upon Weinstein, often repeating her arguments where interrogation would have been more useful, and for all his clumsy attempts at treating women equally, Gruzelier is excruciatingly chauvinistic towards women metal fans; for instance, feeling free to opine of women in the audience at a heavy metal gig he attended that, 'a large proportion of these appeared to be girlfriends of attending males' (Gruzelier 2007, 63). Such judgement is markedly reminiscent of the early subcultural studies of bikers that depicted the men as participating and the women as present to meet or support men. Gruzelier imagines that because a woman goes to a concert with her boyfriend she is there *only* for his sake and is therefore not a real fan or does not love the music. He celebrates the 'sportsmanlike attitude' (Gruzelier 2007, 65) of the moshpit and his belief in women as 'the weaker sex' is key here. Gruzelier claims that women who do participate are brave, as long as they do not expect their boyfriends to protect them. Metal is a genre in which its male fans can be

¹⁰ The moshpit is an area of the auditorium at a heavy metal concert. It lies at the very front of the audience, below the stage. In the moshpit fans headbang (vigorously nod their heads up and down in time to the music), shove and punch each other in exuberant appreciation of the music. Participation in the pit can result in bruises, but it is a site of pleasure akin to the dance floor. For more information see Riches (2011).

heroic and 'noble' (Gruzelier 2007, 65) but, echoing Weinstein, Gruzelier is clear that metal's women fans must be prepared to compete on the same masculine terms. He does not see heroic masculinity as problematic for women, rather he views women fans as a problem for metal. He suggests that, 'men are willing to allow female subscription to heavy metal but only on conditions set out by the masculinist codes of the genre' (Gruzelier 2007, 69). I infer from his use of the word 'subscription' that payment must be made for inclusion and that women must pay with their femininity. Being both a woman and a metal fan is an almost untenable position and femininity must be denounced or discarded. And if not then it represents a serious threat to metal's 'credibility':

Notions of femininity could be seen as a means of usurping the masculinist code and diluting the validity of the genre and what it represents. (Gruzelier 2007, 69)

Building upon Weinstein's assertion of the importance of masculinity in metal, Gruzelier portrays a problem for metal: the genre depends upon a strong concept of masculinity and the almost total exclusion of the feminine. For anyone wishing to see greater acceptance of women in hard rock and metal this is worrying indeed. By so jealously guarding its gender borders the metal community cannot adapt to changes in the demography of its fanbase without upheaval, anger and heartache. It is clear from Gruzelier's article that although he seeks to raise the profile of 'girls in the pit' he is unable to do so successfully whilst he celebrates the 'homosociality' of metal: the two positions are not compatible. The work of Gabrielle Riches (2011) on women's participation in the moshpit suggests that it is not Gruzelier's focus on a public sphere that is the problem in this instance. It is his assumption of the experience of the male participant as normal. Significantly Riches' framework is not subcultural, as I will discuss below, and this leaves space for other kinds of discussion of fan experiences.

Although Gruzelier makes a serious attempt to understand the experiences of women's participation in the moshpit and at the metal gig, he succeeds mostly in irritating his female reader (me) for positioning women fans as anomalies. This positioning is a problem, also, in Kahn-Harris' *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture On the Edge* (2007). He uses the framework of scene and does make an attempt to consider matters of gender (and also race and sexuality) in extreme metal subgenres. The book spotlights the previously little studied subgenres of death metal, black metal, power metal and goth metal, but particularly the first two. He argues that in general women are marginalised within the extreme metal scene, although in the power metal and goth metal scenes women are more numerous because the music is 'more melodic' (Kahn-Harris 2007, 71). Kahn-Harris provides some nuanced discussion of the causes of women's marginalisation, yet underlying this discussion is an undisclosed assumption that men are the 'normal' fans and women fans are adjuncts.

The marginalisation that women face comes from a number of quarters, some of which are based upon women's socialisation as feminine, and some of which are down to the conditions of the extreme metal scene (Kahn-Harris does not always identify exactly what he means by 'scene' at this point). He uses Bourdieu's concept of habitus to explain why women do not like non-melodic music, claiming that where habitus guides what feels 'natural', for women this does not include sounds of power because power is associated with masculinity. Thus 'the sounds and aesthetics of extreme metal' cannot be easily 'incorporated into "the feminine"' (Kahn-Harris 2007, 73). Yet even for women who clearly do enjoy extreme metal and wish to be involved in the scene, there are further obstacles to overcome. One of these impediments is that when they attend gigs they see few other women in the scene, either as musicians or in 'prominent' positions in the scene.¹¹ Those women they do see are 'defined by their sexuality' (Kahn-Harris 2007, 74), and Kahn-Harris posits this reduces their autonomy which is a further deterrent for women (although he does not explain why and there is some confusion about which women he is now talking about if those who are glamorous do not count). Thus women who want to be involved in extreme metal do not have role models (Kahn-Harris 2007, 74). In their interactions with other fans women are often excluded: Kahn-Harris recounts the 'many occasions' on which he has spoken to male fans and never been introduced to their (silent) female partners (Kahn-Harris 2007, 74) so that these women are treated as adjuncts. Furthermore sexism is condoned by other scene members (Kahn-Harris 2007, 160), with the result that men do not actively attempt to include women in the scene. This state of affairs is not helped by the music and imagery of the genre: sexism abounds (Kahn-Harris 2007, 75) in the many pornographic images of women (Kahn-Harris 2007, 74) and in song lyrics of sexual violence (Kahn-Harris 2007, 76). The suggestion here is that this kind of aural and visual misogyny *ought* to put women off the music and the scene, and no doubt it does work to discourage some women (me and Sonia Vasan for instance). But it should be noted that not all extreme metal uses the language of woman-hating, nor are all women deterred by such images.

Kahn-Harris thus creates a sense of the extreme metal scene as hostile to women, which goes some way to explaining why women are not involved in the scene in greater numbers. Yet in theorising women's place in extreme metal, Kahn-Harris himself theorises women as exceptional cases in the scene, thus maintaining that marginalisation he exposes. For Kahn-Harris women are not the same as men, and although he tries to explain this using the concept of habitus, women still appear in the theory as something

¹¹ Kahn-Harris does not explain what he means by 'prominent'. Perhaps he refers to women with specific roles such as promoters or sound technicians, but he may mean fans who are consistent gig-attenders, who are knowledgeable and who have gained the respect of other fans.

mysterious and unusual, like birds flying round the ceiling of the gig room: something to be exclaimed over, but which little can be done about. The assumption that it is a *male* scene is evident.

This is particularly noticeable in the description of the way in which women 'enter the scene' (Kahn-Harris 2007, 74). Because they do so with groups of friends or partners rather than alone, Kahn-Harris claims that women lack autonomy when compared to men.¹² This raises the question of what he means by 'autonomy'. He states that active participation in extreme metal does not depend on attendance at public events (such as gigs) and that it can be done from the home (Kahn-Harris 2007, 74), but when describing entrance to the scene he seems to be talking precisely about concert-going and not about the unspecified home-based activities. What, then, does it mean to 'enter' a 'scene' 'autonomously'? There is the implication that male scene members go to concerts on their own, rather than with friends or partners (although he does not offer any evidence¹³). Given the levels of sexism he describes it is hardly surprising that women fans might not want to enter a venue where an extreme metal band are playing without company, and that this might be something men feel more able to do. If men do go to concerts alone more frequently than women do, then it is men's mode of entry to the scene which is positioned as the normal method in this argument. Further reading brings out the way in which Kahn-Harris associates autonomy with masculinity, for it seems to require that the individual not be 'defined by their sexuality' (Kahn-Harris 2007, 74), a position that is likely to be accessible to men, but less so to women. Autonomy for Kahn-Harris therefore presumes a male subject and to be a participant seems to require autonomy: therefore women in the scene are anomalous. His discussion of women fans, then, treats them as appendages or abnormalities rather than as full members. The latter position of full scene members is available to men, as the archetype is drawn up with the male participant in mind. 'Real' fans are men not only at metal events, but in Kahn-Harris' theory.

Where Walser, Gruzelier and Kahn-Harris attempt to describe women's place in the metal world, but assume a male subject, Sonia Vasan places the woman fan at the heart of her research on the experiences of women death metal fans in Texas, albeit not unproblematically. She employs subcultural theory and scene, somewhat interchangeably, and the focus on the public space of the gig leaves her reading feeling somewhat unbalanced. She argues that death metal is misogynistic and that at concerts women fans must negotiate sexism. This reasoning leads her to focus upon fan practices that are most

¹² There is no definition of 'autonomy', but it is implied that being with friends or a partner limits personal freedom.

¹³ Certainly most men I know still attend concerts with friends, even if this means meeting them at the venue rather than travelling together.

problematic for the women she interviews, and she is not able to consider other facets of their fandom (as I will discuss below). In her short chapter, 'Den Mothers and Band Whores': Gender, Sex and Power in the Death Metal Scene' (2010), Vasan argues that death metal is masculine and misogynistic, and that women in the scene are aware of the sexism around them. Echoing Weinstein, she claims that there are only two identities that women fans can adopt. They can be 'den mothers' and 'dress and behave like men' (Vasan 2010, 72) or they can be 'band whores' and 'behave in a traditionally feminine manner' (Vasan 2010, 72) wearing 'low-cut tops and short skirts' and 'makeup' (Vasan 2010, 72). The chapter is slim on both evidence and analysis, and the timing of the research (prior to more recent work on women fans) means that it is reliant on older sources. Her later journal article (which I shall discuss in more detail below) covers some of the same ground with more depth and evidence, but it is in this first article that the two identities are described most clearly. Interestingly her description of the band whore comes from a woman she describes as a den mother, and as a result the 'band whore' is drawn in a rather uncomplimentary fashion. Vasan's style is forceful and compelling, and she discusses her motivations for the research in a very personable and appealing manner; these are also the driving force behind the research question implicit in her later journal article. The chapter reveals her incomprehension at the enjoyment of death metal by women, a conclusion which implicitly positions death metal as a monolithic subgenre with all the genre's bands producing equally misogynistic music and stage performances. This stance leaves little room for a nuanced reading of death metal. More problematically, the chapter is not successful in understanding women's experiences as fans of death metal because it only considers the public aspect of fandom and because scene and subculture, which underlay her study, presume a male fan.

It is in studies that move away from subcultural theory or the concept of scene that women fans begin to emerge in their own right, in particular in the work of Jamie Patterson¹⁴ and Gabrielle Riches. Patterson (2011) reasons that it is important to consider women's gender constructions in metal rather than focus on the male dominance of the genre, and she draws attention to the ways in which the den mother / band whore constructions are too simplistic. Patterson is working alongside Vasan's 2010 chapter and in many ways her paper successfully achieves what Vasan implies. That is, Patterson provides reasons for women's participation in the death metal subculture. In challenging the den mother / band whore constructions she uses three case studies of women metal fan's gender constructions, one of which is her reflections on her teenage self. Patterson's close readings of the gender constructions prioritise women's passion for the music (unlike

¹⁴ Although Patterson utilises the term 'scene', in my estimation this is a mis-use: she addresses private aspects of women's fandom in particular rather than attending to gig-going or involvement in music-making.

Vasan's research), although this is not her main focus. In her journal article Vasan claims that there are reasons for (benefits of) women's participation in metal, but these are skated over in favour of the costs and how women fans deal with those costs. Patterson looks quite deeply at the benefits of metal for women. Crucially she draws women's metal fandom and metal gender construction into dialogue with their lives outside of the metal community (their work and domestic lives). She argues that extreme metal gives women a space to be themselves so that they do not have to worry about mainstream beauty norms or romance narratives, or it gives them a space to experiment with their appearance in ways that transgress normative beauty ideals (Patterson 2011, 7-8).

Patterson addresses, in particular, clothing in the North American death metal scene. She posits that women use the sartorial style associated with metal fandom to resist the constraints of stereotypical femininity, and reflects upon her experiences as a 14 year old to examine how that resistance works:

I felt freedom [in the metal scene], because for once I could feel invisible, blend into the crowd, not be looked at; I could transcend my body and the world of romance. But in everyday life, I worried with makeup, fixed my hair and constantly experimented with my appearance. I wanted to be seen as "pretty," but I couldn't handle the thought of being judged against some high standard of beauty that I knew I could never achieve. I was particularly uncomfortable with the fact that others could view my body from behind and I couldn't do anything about it. (Patterson 2011, 8-9)

She took to wearing a 'death metal shirt' (a t-shirt with a death metal band's logo or image printed on it, usually of black material and with a gory or shocking picture) around her waist to avoid objectifying looks at her bottom. Within the death metal community wearing shirts around her waist would be seen as 'normal' and a badge of identity (Patterson 2011, 9). Participation in this community thereby enabled her to refuse mainstream constructions of femininity, which she felt were unachievable and objectifying:

When I wore that shirt around my waist, I felt empowered, free to enter public domains on my own terms. I was hiding my body underneath a decapitated head [the image on the shirt], but it was more than that. The body part I had unconsciously replaced with the grotesque image was a part of the anatomy that had been objectified regularly. (Patterson 2011, 9)

The use of the decapitated head shirt is reminiscent of punk girls' use of the tool of uglification to resist hegemonic beauty norms and raise self-esteem (Leblanc 1999, 4). Patterson does not have room to discuss this in more detail, but it is reminiscent of

Leblanc's argument that punk girls use of visually extraordinary punk style as gender resistance. Patterson's case studies are carefully analysed with attention both to the differences between the women and the dominant representation of women in the extreme metal community, and to their non-metal lives. It is this attention to the private and personal lives of fans that allows the women to come forward not as anomalies, but as women who love metal music negotiating their gender identity (and sexism) whilst at metal events and in their everyday lives. Patterson's work is underpinned by the assumption of women as full fans and it is this that enables her to make her analyses.

Similarly, in Riches' work the women's claim to fandom is implicitly acknowledged, which is refreshing after reading other work (Kahn-Harris, Gruzelier, even Vasan). Riches uses neither subcultural theory nor the concept of scene when analysing women's experiences of the moshpit as she seeks to get to grips with the pleasurable experiences that metal offers to women. She argues that in extreme metal the moshpit is a liminal space with specific rules. These rules allow changes in status for participants and mark a difference from the mainstream (Riches 2011, 324). This works well for women as it allows the opportunity to 'resist, challenge and subvert traditional understandings of femininity, and they find pleasure in doing so' (Riches 2011, 319). Being in the pit is *fun* for women *because* it is a male space and because they are challenging traditional femininity, through dress, listening habits, accessories and dance practices (Riches 2011, 322). However, Riches argues that women's entrance into the pit is problematic because it disrupts the unspoken rules of caring for one another, which involves picking each other up, dressing without 'dangerous accessories', being sober(ish), and respecting those outside the pit (Riches 2011, 326). Women's entrance to the pit challenges these rules of care – although Riches is not completely clear how. It is implied that the men in the pit see women as weaker and therefore in need of greater care. This means that men are less likely to continue in their moshing practice in the same way because now some participants – the women – should not receive the same rough treatment. Gruzelier may see this as a difficulty for male participants, but Riches argues that it is a problem for women as well. Women enter the pit in order to share the experience: the dancing, the release of anger, the energy, the liberation (Riches 2011, 326). The pit also provides the opportunity for 'women to challenge their physical abilities' (Riches 2011, 326). If pleasure in subverting gendered notions is also an important part of pleasure in the pit then men's tendency to treat women in the pit differently from male moshers reinforces their feminine gender. Riches' focus on dance also brings attention to the body and the ways the body *feels* in the pit. This means that women and men are theorised as embodied subjects. However, Riches' interviewees are women aged between 18 and 28 years. Her participants are therefore rather youthful and age is not considered as part of the research, which perhaps should have been noted. Nevertheless, the strength of this

article is that it brings the focus to women's experiences, including pleasure in metal. In this way it marks a change from thinking of hard rock and metal as a genre in which the 'normal' fan is male and women are 'added in'.

As Stanley and Wise argue, just introducing women in to existing frameworks is not enough (Stanley and Wise 1993, 17-19). It is important to 'take women seriously' (Stanley and Wise 1993, 18) and to give their experiences consideration. Doing so reveals the ways in which particular truth claims and theories are based on a masculine model. I would argue that aiming to 'add women in' has been precisely the problem with the use of subcultural theory and scene. I can think of only one subcultural study and one study using scene that successfully consider women as present: Leblanc's work on punk girls (1999), and Schippers work on the alternative rock scene (2002). Leblanc begins by refocusing the concept of resistance in order to direct her study to gender and in doing so she draws on her own experience as well as that of her female interviewees. Yet it is not a study of fans and fan engagement per se, as the streets and public life form the main sites of her research. Music and the more private aspects of fandom are hidden. Schippers uses ethnographic microanalysis to explore how gender and sexism are discussed by members of the Chicago alternative rock scene. Ultimately, however, she is not positive about the feminism exhibited by the members of the scene and seems to accuse her participants of a kind of false consciousness. Again the study focuses on the public lives of her participants, with the gig sphere being very important. It is clear to me that a framework of subcultural theory or scene will not work for my investigation into women's rock fandom. My friends' and my own experiences, my reading of *Kerrang!* magazine, and my interviewees' comments all signal that important elements are left out: the impact of male-dominance and one-dimensional representations of women fans on women fans; and also the more intimate ways in which fandom is experienced and enjoyed.

Omissions I: challenging the representation of women rock fans as groupies

When I reflect upon my own fannish life I note two crucial areas of study that have been little researched. One is how women rock fans are popularly represented¹⁵ and how that representation impacts upon those fans. Another is women fans' relationship with the music itself. In this section I examine the former of these two omissions and note the need to turn to journalistic work for a feminist response to the representation of women fans. Mimi Schippers (2002), Helen Davies (2001), Lori Twersky (1981) and Cheryl Cline (1992) claim that women are represented in the rock media as groupies. Fans are the primary target of this representation, but it extends to all women involved in the genre (musicians, promoters, journalists, wives of male musicians, etc.). Schippers defines a groupie as 'one

¹⁵ There is rather more work that addresses the representation of female musicians.

who is sexually accessible to rock musicians, or someone with whom rock musicians have sex' (Schippers 2002, 26). It is obvious from this definition, however, that the representation of all women as groupies is a false representation: not all women involved in rock music have sex with musicians. Furthermore, the representation aligns 'groupie' with 'slut' (Cline 1992, 83) and is used to scorn women.¹⁶ This representation has implications for the ways in which women rock fans see themselves and for how they feel as they enter the public spaces of hard rock and metal. Yet this impact is rarely analysed. Even the work of Vasani and Patterson, which critiques the 'band whore' identity (often equated with 'groupie') attributed to some women fans, only briefly touches on how the identity affects women fans. There are hints in Vasani's quotes from the 'den mother' that the band whore identity is to be avoided, but this is not drawn out. Patterson's interviewee who was identified by others as fitting into the band whore or 'chickapoo' stereotype (Patterson 2011, 2) clearly did not fit this stereotype neatly, yet Patterson does not describe how the labelling affects her. In discussing the way in which the groupie stereotype is reproduced and how it impacts women fans, this thesis makes an original contribution. I build upon Schippers' conceptual framework, which provides a base for the way in which the figure of the groupie fits into the world of rock.

Schippers' *Rockin' Out of the Box: Gender Maneuvering in Alternative Hard Rock* (2002) deals with the alternative rock scene in early 1990s Chicago, and analyses the relationships between scene members. Schippers coins the phrase 'gender maneuvering' to describe how gender is negotiated between individuals, rather than being fixed. She begins with a conceptual look at the gender order of mainstream rock, arguing that the gender order of alternative rock is markedly different. She makes an approximate distinction between grunge (Pearl Jam, L7, Fugazi, etc.) and glam metal (Mötley Crüe, Poison, Warrant, etc): the former speak from an anti-sexist platform, while the latter are distinctly misogynistic (Schippers 2002, 1-6). Schippers describes the 'gender order of mainstream rock culture' (Schippers 2002, 18-39) as reproducing 'mainstream ideas about gender and sexuality' (Schippers 2002, 23), which are based upon binary understandings of gender difference that are hierarchically beneficial to men (Schippers 2002, 23-5). Within rock this binary is reinforced by the relationship between rock musicians and the groupie: the groupie is the complement of the rock musician.

¹⁶ The autobiographical writing of Pamela Des Barres (2005) has done much to reclaim the name of 'groupie' from misogynist interpretations of such women as 'sluts'. She, along with another groupie autobiographer Roxana Shirazi (2010), is working towards the repositioning of the groupie as a sexually liberated woman pursuing her desires with ingenuity and verve.

Schippers discusses how those women who do seek sexual encounters with rock musicians are active subjects who pursue their own sexual agenda and do not see themselves as 'passive objects' (Schippers 2002, 26). A mental slippage is therefore required to see women as the *objects of desire* rather than *desiring subjects*, and that slippage is nonsensical:

In reality, groupies are women (and less commonly, men) acting on their own sexual desire for the musician. Because being a sexual object is inconsistent with masculinity, rock discourse must construct the groupie as the objectified reward for rock success, not the sexual subject acting on her desire. (Schippers 2002, 27)

Groupies are 'an exaggeration of the ideal feminine sexual object (nameless, faceless, and available for inconsequential fucking)' (Schippers 2002, 27) whilst the rock stars who do the fucking have their masculinity reaffirmed in doing so. The figure of the groupie presents a very limited version of women's rock fandom, and values women only in respect of their relationships with men. Any woman who is a fan falls victim to the sexist attitudes that have led to the construction of the groupie stereotype because women are presented as a monolithic group. Schippers argues that '[b]ecause *groupie* is constructed as anyone to whom a rock musician might potentially gain sexual access all women involved with rock music are potential groupies' (Schippers 2002, 27). Furthermore she contends that groupie potential means assumptions are made that a woman is romantically and/or sexually attracted to musicians. This, then, sets all women fans apart from 'real' fans (who are concerned with musicianship, integrity and technical ability). Thus 'real' fans are nearly always men because masculinity (or a form of it) is a prerequisite for true fandom, and a gendered hierarchy exists (musician/fan/groupie) (Schippers 2002, 29). For a woman to be considered a 'real fan' she must stress her interest in the *music* and show no sign of being sexually interested in the musician (Schippers 2002, 28). Schippers' argument is important in theoretically establishing how binaries and ideas about gender difference work alongside male-dominance and sexism to devalue women. Davies' work on the rock media provides some evidence as to how this is achieved.

Davies examines articles and photographs of women musicians and fans in UK indie magazines *NME* and *Melody Maker* at the turn of the century. She argues that they are produced within a sexist environment ('boys club' [Davies 2001, 316]) and with a sexist agenda. This has implications for representations of specific women performers (who, she argues, are sexualised and trivialised), especially feminists and those in the riot grrrl movement. Her discussion of the representations of fans draws four categories: women or girl fans of 'teenybop' music; 'serious music' fans; subcultures; and groupies, which she

describes in some depth. Her discussion of 'serious music' fans and groupies is most relevant here. She argues that according to the music press women fans of 'serious music' are a 'perpetual novelty' (Davies 2001, 313). Women are not thought of as intelligent enough to be serious fans: 'their fandom explained by sexual attraction to a male musician' (Davies 2001, 313). She argues that the term 'groupie' is 'often used by the music press to refer to all female fans' (Davies 2001, 315). Furthermore the assumption that a woman fan is a groupie is extended to those working in the music industry and to the wives and girlfriends of musicians, but 'a man is never called a groupie' (Davies 2001, 315). Whilst I agree with Davies that it is wrong to portray *all* women fans as wanting sex with musicians, I am unhappy about her implicit postulation that groupies are unknowingly exploited, which reduces women who seek sex with musicians to objects and ignores their active pursuit of musicians, as Schippers and Cline discuss. There is an implied assumption that it is a problem when women are attracted to musicians, and tied into this is the supposition that all women are heterosexual, which she does not confront. It is important to challenge the notion that all women are attracted to musicians and that this is their primary interest in the music, but without a discussion of the sexist attitudes towards women expressing their sexuality; the argument is only able to adopt the position that women can be fans of 'serious music' without fancying musicians. Women fans who are attracted to musicians are silenced.

If we compare Davies' assumption with Susan Fast's work on Led Zeppelin fans (1999) then we see an immediate problem. Fast's interviews show that there are a great number of women whose fandom of Led Zeppelin entwines love of the music and attraction to musicians. It is important to question simplistic assumptions made about women's fandom and to rethink the ways in which we can enjoy the music in cerebral ways *and* be attracted to musicians. Otherwise we risk replicating the position of the music press, which holds that any expression of women's sexuality is ridiculous. There is very little academic work on the representations of women fans in the rock music press, so although the Davies article is sketchy and without a firm theoretical basis, it is nevertheless important. I would argue that there are problems with Davies' discussions, but not with her findings. It is this media representation of women rock fans as always heterosexualised and always ready for sex that journalists Twersky and Cline have angrily rebutted.

Twersky, writing for *Trouser Press*, criticises at length the 'inordinate amount of drivel' (1981, 177) written by rock critics about female fans that has led to the expansion of the stereotyping of women as teenyboppers or groupies. She sets out ten points to assist short-sighted rock critics in *really* understanding female music fans. Her points attribute a variety of standpoints and characters to young women: some women fans are interested in people other than rock stars; some do not care who makes the music they listen to;

others wish to *be* the rock star they admire. Two points attempt to change assumptions about women's attitudes more generally: 'a desire for sex shouldn't be confused with a desire to get fucked' (Twersky 1981, 180) and 'a desire for male attention isn't the same as sexual desire' (Twersky 1981, 181). Building upon Twersky's article, Cline's book chapter 'Essays from *Bitch*' contains two articles from *Bitch* magazine, published in 1986, that deal with the subject of women's rock music fandom. Like Twersky, Cline argues that rock criticism consistently represents all women fans and all women who work in the music industry (as musicians, photographers, engineers, etc.) as groupies, but that all women *are not* groupies. She posits that women's attraction to musicians is common and not to be criticised, but that it is met with ignorance and scorn from men. The contempt is based upon a double standard that allows men to objectify women (preferring a woman to be good looking rather than intelligent), but does not allow women to objectify men (Cline 1992, 71). The double standard also allows men to pursue their sexual desires whereas any expression of women's desires means that they are labelled 'slut' (Cline 1992, 83). If all women are groupies, then all women are sluts. She also argues that this representation is a misrepresentation because even when women have crushes on musicians they do not necessarily wish to be groupies: the fantasy of sex with a rock star is often preferable to the reality (Cline 1992, 74). Being a groupie is described by Cline as humiliating and dependent upon a lack of self-respect (Cline 1992, 73), as well as requiring 'money, looks and guts' (Cline 1992, 82). There is a hierarchy amongst groupies, the top of which most girls cannot reach, and those at the bottom are exploited. But Cline argues that these women are not dupes, as rock criticism implies: they participate knowingly (Cline 1992, 82).

Although the way in which the notion of all women as groupies shores up a particular masculinity does not form a large part of her argument, Cline notes that, 'the idea that women rock fans want to be groupies of the most craven sort is a strictly masculine daydream' (Cline 1992, 73). This contention is echoed by Schippers, who similarly suggests that the mental slippage from object to subject must occur for men to reassign the desire in the groupie/musician dynamic. In this way Cline implies that it is men who are living in a fantasy, rather than women. This turning-of-the-tables is done in a particular ironic way which renders the article entertaining as well as powerful. It covers some significant ground in assessing the sexism that underpins the naming of women fans 'groupies', and the pleasure that women gain from their attraction to musicians. It makes an important challenge to the dominant representation of women fans whilst still acknowledging women's sexual interest in musicians. In this she achieves more than Davies, who ultimately silences women's attraction to musicians.

The need to turn to popular sources to assist in the critique of the groupie stereotype is telling. Scene and subcultural theory do not provide a space in which to consider representations and their impacts. Those popular sources that do address the representation of women rock fans take issue with it and raise serious concerns that push forward the need for academic work in this area. Thinking about women fans in relation to the groupie stereotype leads to questioning what pleasure women *do* gain from hard rock and metal music. For, if the premise that women fans are *only* interested in musicians is false then women must find other attractions in the genre. However, whilst there is increasing attention to women fans' experiences as gendered experiences, only a very small number of studies pursue an understanding of women's pleasure.

Omissions II: the lack of attention to musical pleasure

Two studies that do consider pleasure in music fandom are Riches' work on women and the moshpit, and Overell's discussion of men's pleasure in the live experience of grindcore concerts. Riches argues that it is very important that pleasure is brought into the investigation when considering metal. She makes her case in response to previous work that has emphasised the 'violent, aggressive and masculine aesthetics associated with moshing' (Riches 2011, 316). Riches' study positions women as normal subjects at the extreme metal gig and within the moshpit, rather than as exceptions, problems or victims. She does this via a very specific focus on the pleasurable aspect of participation in the moshpit, suggesting that,

Failing to incorporate pleasure into music and leisure discourses obfuscates the ways in which we can explain why women, appearing to consent to dominant and patriarchal practices and expectations, engage in contradictory activities within forms of popular culture. (Riches 2011, 327)

If pleasure is overlooked then the ways in which gender works in the pit cannot be fully examined, nor can we gain a rich understanding of women's participation in the male dominated metal sphere. Indeed, Vasan's article (discussed below) is exemplary of the problems that result from not considering pleasure, whilst Riches' is attentive to the nuances and contradictions of women's participation.

Overell's investigation into masculinity in Melbourne's grindcore scene looks at men's pleasure, but her discussion elucidates how using an alternative theoretical framework – 'belonging' (Overell 2010, 80)¹⁷ – can open up new perspectives. She argues that grindcore might employ many tropes constructed as masculine, yet when considered

¹⁷ Although Overell uses the concept of scene to delineate who she is researching, the concept of belonging, which she nests inside 'scene', is a new approach.

alongside the affect on fans induced by live performance, this assumption of masculinity can be 'troubled' (Overell 2011, 198). Overell argues that much of the imagery, and the fans' discussions of porn and emo, can be perceived as defensive moves designed to protect the male participants from infection by 'feminisation' (which she loosely defines as showing emotions) (Overell 2011, 199). But, via reference to the bodily experience of physically participating in a grindcore gig, Overell shows that emotions *are* present in grindcore fans and musicians. Following Massumi, she argues that affect can be understood as the ways in which bodies are open to one another (Overell 2011, 201-2). She gives the example of one fan's description of herself as 'blown away' by the music, which she suggests results in 'the sense that a cognitized sense of coherent self, and bounded body, evaporates when experiencing grindcore' (Overell 2011, 201). Her interrogation of the meanings of the scene's prominent word of approval, 'brutal', enables deep analysis of that emotional experience. 'Brutal' is coded as masculine, but Overell argues grindcore music cannot simply be read as masculine: in some ways it is disembodied, particularly in the vocal delivery of lyrics. The vocal delivery is characterised as 'all noise' (Overell 2011, 206) with a preponderance of screaming rather than singing; the presence of screaming and the characterisation of it as 'excessive' can be coded as feminine (Overell 2011, 206-7). Overell's discussion of emotional response places pleasure in grindcore centre stage and brings gender into focus. It also begins to attend to pleasures in the music itself.

The work of Riches and Overell demonstrates that thinking about pleasure can offer fresh perspectives on women's fan experiences and on constructions of gender within the social spaces of metal. The pleasures they consider are the bodily pleasures that occur in the concert or gig environment; the music itself, at least from a fan perspective (Overell does briefly discuss the process of making music with a musician) is absent. This is an aspect that Vasani and Kahn-Harris do consider, although neither account is, I judge, successful in producing a rich understanding. Nevertheless, there is something to be learned from their attempts.

In her article 'The Price of Rebellion: Gender Boundaries in the Death Metal Scene' (2011) Vasani's main focus is upon the ways in which women death metal fans accommodate the scene's misogyny, but she also assesses the benefits that women gain from participation. Their involvement allows 'freedom from the constraints of mainstream society' (Vasani 2011, 342), which particularly refers to conformity to normative standards of personal care and to the ability to be 'loud' (Vasani 2011, 342); it provides 'solace' (Vasani 2011, 342), although Vasani does not really explore this except to note that some interviewees had experienced 'psychosocial turmoil' (Vasani 2011, 343) or sexual violence and found listening to songs of 'darkness and anger' to be helpful (Vasani 2011, 343); it is

an outlet for frustrations (Vasan 2011, 342), which again Vasan does not really explore. The 'freedom' offered by death metal is further discussed in terms of providing empowerment and the ability for women to 'be themselves' (interviewee Laina quoted in Vasan 2011, 344), an analysis that is quickly passed over for further discussion of the costs. Vasan grounds her investigation in the assumption that women *should not like* death metal and focuses on all the problems that the genre poses for women. The assumption that women ought not to like death metal is evident through the framing of her article, her emphasis on exchange and cost reduction and her use of language. For example, 'some women are even fans' (Vasan 2011, 334 my emphasis); 'female band manager claimed not to be offended' (Vasan 2011, 336 my emphasis); 'female fans of death metal sincerely value the music and culture' (Vasan 2011, 342 my emphasis); 'most of the women either claimed not to be offended by such lyrics' (Vasan 2011, 346 my emphasis). Vasan suggests women cannot *possibly* be interested or gain anything from the music itself; her stance leads to a glossing over of women's pleasure in music, a disappointing omission, and one that leaves the reader puzzled as to why women participate in death metal.

Kahn-Harris provides more detail on extreme metal fans' enjoyment of the music, but he does not frame the articulation of the pleasures as a very successful endeavour. He describes his interviewees as inarticulate and posits that their lack of eloquence on the subject is because the scene 'offers only limited tools' (Kahn-Harris 2007, 54) for talking about the reasons for their musical preference. The scene itself presents a small number of descriptors ('aggression, brutality, energy, etc.' [Kahn-Harris 2007, 53]) and this limits what is available for fans' use in explaining their pleasure. I raise questions with this argument in Chapter Six, and note here that Kahn-Harris finds that a study of fans' pleasure in music 'does not provide an unambiguous route into understanding what members get out of participation in the scene' (Kahn-Harris 2007, 54). He moves on to look at the pleasures offered by the extreme metal scene through 'tape trading, record labels, concerts, bands, websites, etc' (Kahn-Harris 2007, 55) which he still considers musical experience (Kahn-Harris 2007, 54) (something I would challenge as, with the exception of concert attendance, these are experiences of music *culture* not the music itself). I am uncertain what Kahn-Harris hoped to gain from a study of pleasure in music if he does not value the ambiguity presented to him. In Chapter Six I argue that the contradictory ways in which women talk about their pleasure in the music is interesting in itself, and that it offers novel perspectives on fandom, the imaginary community and the music itself.

Significantly, as I have already mentioned, Vasan and Kahn-Harris use frameworks of subcultural theory and scene. I argue that it is because of these frameworks, with their

emphasis on things and doing rather than feeling and experiencing, that Vasan seems to be unable to focus on musical pleasures, instead being drawn to discuss interactions with other scene/subculture members; and that Kahn-Harris also seems to find it difficult to discuss the ways in which the music moves his participants and he too shifts away from this area to discuss more tangible activities. Stanley and Wise's assertion that we need to take women seriously is crucial here: Vasan acknowledges that her participants found pleasures in the music of death metal, but she more or less dismisses them; Kahn-Harris is looking for some 'unambiguous' truths about extreme metal fans' musical passion but instead finds the 'inarticulateness' unworthy of discussion (Kahn-Harris 2007, 54). It is really only in the work of Fast, which takes women's gendered experience into account, that women's pleasure in hard rock and metal comes into focus and opens up our understanding of women's fandom.

Fast's (1999) essay on gender and Led Zeppelin draws attention to the ways in which listening to women's accounts of their relationships to the music they love can offer new understandings of women's pleasure in music (and also of the music and musicians themselves). This study is powerful because Fast reflects upon her own and others' enjoyment in rock music, and challenges much that is assumed about women's fandom and about gender in rock. A good deal of the current work in the field of metal studies focuses on extreme subgenres of metal. The recent studies I have discussed in this section all concentrate on death, black or grindcore subgenres. There is a danger in situating metal studies as only interested in the more extreme end of the metal spectrum. Death and black metal are certainly the most high status and visibly eccentric of metal subgenres, but to ignore the less extraordinary subgenres suggests that there is one version of metal that is important or more valuable than others. In looking at the work of Fast, I draw attention to the way in which a broader sense of what counts as hard rock and metal can hold a great deal of value for study, something which I discuss further in the following chapter.

Fast argues that conceptions of gender and sexuality as expressed through the medium of Led Zeppelin's music and image have been limited to ideas of 'cock rock' (Frith and McRobbie 1978). The band has been characterised as overtly masculine in a way that reduces women to sex objects, subdued under masculine phallic power. Fast challenges this notion in three ways: (one) by drawing upon her own experiences of listening to Led Zeppelin as a heterosexual white woman fan in North America; (two) by drawing on the responses of a number of fans – male and female – that she accessed through a variety of sources; and (three) by close readings of the images and the music of the band.

Fast describes how she fell in love with Led Zeppelin as a fourteen year old. At this time she did not know what the band looked like, but she experienced the music as

empowering during a lonely phase of her life (Fast 1999, 257). She describes what she liked about 'Immigrant Song':

I had no idea what the lyrics were – I could understand only snatches of them – but that riff, with its crisp octave snap that repeated at about the same rhythm as an energized heartbeat, its timbre so insistent and confident, the bass guitar pounding that rhythm into every part of my body, and Plant's majestic if incomprehensible proclamations: that song was where I wanted to live. (Fast 1999, 257-8)

There is something sexual in the way that Fast describes this love of the music, and she does not deny it. Indeed she claims that her identification with lead singer Robert Plant was due in part to his vocal abilities and in part to her sexual attraction to him: 'I am not sure the two can be separated' (Fast 1999, 258). Echoing Cline's argument that not all women who wish to meet a band or who desire musicians wish to be nameless groupies, Fast contextualises her attraction to Plant in a description of how she would want to meet the band. The description strikes a chord with me: Fast is a singer, as am I, and Fast admires his singing, as do I, and Fast's fantasy is similar to my own. She fantasised about meeting Led Zeppelin as a musical equal with her own success and beauty (Fast 1999, 258): 'my fantasy involved being powerful *and* attractive, and respected for both characteristics' (Fast 1999, 258).

This complicated entwining of sexual attraction with musical and other attractions is a feature of the responses that Fast elicited from women fans. With a large proportion of them describing their musical and sexual (and spiritual, intellectual and motivational) pleasures side by side. One example explicitly links the music to sex:

Every little girl then and now squeals to Robert Plant's sexy sex sounds. I swear that man has a hard on at every concert. Orgasmic. And Jimmy's foreplay strumming accelerating into ecstasy. Yes! Very basic, animalistic sounds – hormonal, you know. (fan quoted in Fast 1999, 266-7)

These responses challenge Davies' assessment of women fans in which she implicitly positions sexual attraction to musicians as not the proper way to be a fan. These reactions also call into question long-held notions about rock music (and Frith and McRobbie's 1978 assertions about cock rock in particular) and reveal a new perspective. Fast's article shows that for some women fans it is not possible to divide love of the music from attraction to musicians, and she concludes that,

Fan responses make it clear that normative gender identities with respect to Led Zeppelin's music – gender identities that have become accepted as 'natural' –

need to be reevaluated. Under the paradigm heretofore constructed, there is no way to account for these responses: women who enjoy the machismo images of Plant, who know the repertory as well as their male counterparts, who prefer the 'heavy' songs over more acoustically based ones, men whose concept of sexuality in the music encompasses tenderness as well as the crude and 'heavy side', and the messy way in which issues of sexuality and gender are entangled with ideas concerning spirituality, soul, and so on. (Fast 1999, 274)

Pleasure in Led Zeppelin, then, proves a useful lens through which to view women's fandom. Fast positions women as the (hetero)sexual subject looking at, listening to, and gaining erotic pleasure from Led Zeppelin, as well as musical pleasure. They are neither solely concerned with the musicians, nor are they shown to be only interested in the music. Erotic pleasure is given an equal position alongside musical pleasure and thus Fast's article works alongside Cline's challenge to assumptions that sexual desire for a musician means that the fandom should be devalued. Fast's theorising is an important rebuttal of the position in which both bands and women fans have been placed in studies of rock music. Fast's ideas are not without problems, though. Although she contends that she is not speaking for all women or assuming a heterosexual position for all her respondents, she does too often assume heterosexuality. Occasionally she suggests that homosexual men may have different perspectives, but these tend not to be explored, nor are the proclamations of attraction to band members by (professed) straight men. Lesbian perspectives are not included as Fast did not receive responses from declared lesbians. The sense is that all female Led Zeppelin fans are heterosexual and very often are attracted to members of the band.

Though a more careful negotiation of differences between women would have strengthened Fast's analysis, her consideration of women's gendered experiences and their pleasure in music is necessary and vital; a breath of fresh air! Through such inferences we can come to an understanding of women's fannish lives, re-draw the representation of women rock fans, and rethink what it means to be a fan. Because the frameworks of subcultural theory or scene do not allow for this enquiry of the more personal elements of women's fandom, I need a framework that allows for an acknowledgement of the position of women fans amongst a larger group of fans, but that also enables a sense of fandom that takes place in more private spaces, such as the home. In the next section I want to draw out a new model within which to discuss women's fandom. I call this framework 'imaginary community'. It moves away from thinking of fandom only in terms of public activities, consumption and a masculine ideal of a fan. It acknowledges the private side of fandom and the way the personal fits with the wider group of fans through the imagined existence of a community. Work on science fiction

fans becomes a useful paradigm here, due to recognition of the personal aspects of fandom and the engagement with the fan-object. I begin by discussing the way in which researchers on science fiction fans have discussed the communities of fans before turning to feminist work on the conception of communities and theoretical work on the role of the imagination in constructing communities.

A new framework: imaginary community

The term 'fan community' is found in studies of science fiction fans, and two key examples are in the work of Camille Bacon-Smith and Henry Jenkins. 'Community' is rarely applied to music fans, although the term 'musical community' is brought into play when describing music-making groups, as outlined by Will Straw in his theorisation of scenes (Straw 1991). Thus, a musical community does not extend to include fans. Bacon-Smith and Jenkins do not define the term 'fan community', but for both it functions as a useful structure for discussing a diverse range of fan activities that do not only occur in public spaces. 'Community', therefore, opens up understandings of groups of fans to allow for ways in which women are fans, rather than limiting the discussion to practices and experiences of fandom that are more open to men.

In 1992 Bacon-Smith and Jenkins both published studies of the American television science fiction fan community, of which they were part. The community that they discuss is female dominated and both authors describe activities such as fanzine creation, fan conventions and filking (writing, performing and recording 'folk' songs about science fiction) and portray the ways that fans share these practices with one another. Although neither author discusses the constituency of this community, its establishment, or even the theoretical underpinnings of their use of the term, they nevertheless draw interesting pictures of that community. Bacon-Smith, in *Enterprising Women*, adopts an ethnographical approach, describing her own journey into the science fiction fan community from novice to full initiate in the 'more esoteric levels of the community' (Bacon-Smith 1992, 81). Similarly ethnographical, in *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins focuses on the ways in which fans use the science fiction artefacts that they love to creatively explore their passions. Both studies are important in refuting previous representations of female fans as passive and duped consumers, but in doing so both paint a rather idealistic version of a community; the tone of both studies suggests a certain kind of defensiveness that seeks to avoid highlighting any existing or potential problems.

Jenkins treats the community as one that is ideal, perhaps bordering on utopic, and a site of positive political resistance which is resistant through its disregard for 'existing systems of power' (Grossberg quoted in Jenkins 1992, 283). As a site of resistance, Jenkins argues that the fan community allows for the articulation of 'specific concerns about

sexuality, gender, racism, colonialism, militarism and forced conformity' (Jenkins 1992, 283). Bacon-Smith, however, contends that discussion of issues that are close to fans' hearts is risky and that using fan fiction as a tool to explore ideas mutes the risk that individual author-fans may put themselves in at the hands of other fans. She gives the following example of:

[...] a fan who may want to talk about sexual relationships. She must choose the potential for personal revelation present at the low level of abstraction in the genres about women in relationships with men or other women, or opt instead for the high-level abstraction of male homoerotic fiction, which carries a high-risk theme – male homosexuality – while providing a correspondingly greater literary distance from the author's own life. (Bacon-Smith 1992, 204)

This reveals a community that does not necessarily allow for the kinds of freedom of speech that Jenkins describes, and that is not always a safe place for the articulation of risky subjects. Indeed it is only in the conclusion to *Textual Poachers* that Jenkins acknowledges that, 'the fan community is sometimes rife with feuds and personality conflicts' (Jenkins 1992, 282). He does not admit of the kinds of larger systematic disadvantages faced by community members that must make participation challenging even within the boundaries of a community that is as committed to 'more democratic values', as Jenkins claims (Jenkins 1992, 282). The fan community is not, therefore, as ideal or as happy for all members as he has presented in previous chapters. Furthermore, whilst he argues that fandom is a space for political resistance, he glosses over difficulties within the community that suggest that some of those systems of power are present within the community too. The problem of who gets to sing at the filksing is a prime example:

Sometimes, there are gaps when no one is ready to perform; more often, several fans want to sing at once and some negotiation occurs. Eventually anyone who wants to sing gets a chance (though fan humor abounds with jokes about the sufferings of those waiting for their more aggressive friends to yield the floor). (Jenkins 1992, 256)

Jenkins passes over the 'sufferings', describing them as problems of different personalities, leaving those problems unanalysed as structural issues. Notably, the filksing differs in its gender make up to the rest of the convention, which is predominantly female, in that 'men and women play equally prominent roles within filk' (Jenkins 1992, 253). Whilst differing personalities will certainly be a factor, I must ask the question, who is likely to be 'more aggressive'? Whilst men, particularly white middle-class men, have the advantage of power and privilege, women, taught to be modest, are less willing to assert themselves and tend to hang back. The most aggressive members of the filksing are likely

to be middle class white men, the shyer members being more likely to be women, thus the problem of who gets to sing at the filksing is one that is not wholly based upon personality differences. A reliance on the utopian view of community ignores these kinds of structural problems and we do not know how many would-be filksingers are excluded and alienated. Beneath Jenkins' bracketed aside is a troubling view of conflict within the community, and by brushing over it Jenkins denies a voice to those who do not find the community as idyllic as he represents it.

Both Jenkins and Bacon-Smith therefore adopt an approach to mapping out the community that does not take into account the problems that occur within it. However, where 'subculture' is limited to visible fans, usually men in their teens and 20s, 'community' *can* include those whose fandom is usually hidden: women, older people (30+) and children. Where 'subculture' focuses upon specific practices on the street and on the bodies of participants, 'community' can encompass other expressions of fandom such as listening to music at home, blogging about favourite bands, engaging in creative activities (such as bandom: writing slash fiction about musicians), or reading music magazines, behaviour which is not limited to, but is more open to, women fans than are public activities. For these reasons, 'community' is a more suitable term than 'subculture' for theorising the experiences of women metal fans. Yet the problems posed in Bacon-Smith and Jenkins' work ring alarm bells that warn that the community may not be a panacea term for the study of fans.

Indeed, the term 'community' is not as straightforward as it might at first seem. Ferdinand Tönnies' theorisation of community – the *gemeinschaft* – as involving 'small-scale face-to-face relations' (Little 2002, 16) is the dominant theorisation, not only in the 'social and political theorisation of community' (Little 2002, 17), but also in the popular imagination. Tönnies' community is modelled against the association – *gesellschaft* – and in this oppositional relationship the idea of rural pre-industrial life based on caring selflessly for others is set against urban industrial lifestyles that are grounded in what can be gained from associating with others. This dualism places a higher value on the pre-industrial community and there are strongly idyllic overtones associated with it. However, as Graham Day argues, this kind of idealistic pastoral existence was already passing when Tönnies was writing (1887), and his theory was grounded in research that celebrated folk cultures: therefore Tönnies' empirical work is already biased as it affirms a particular lifestyle to the detriment of another. So why is Tönnies a reliable source and how can we be sure that *gemeinschaften* ever existed in the idyllic form he represented it at all (Day 2006, 7)? Day highlights a number of theorists (Pahl, Mayo, Williams) who argue that nostalgia for a 'golden age' is fundamental to theorisations of community: 'the expression

bad *gemeinschaft* violates the meaning of the word' (Tönnies quoted in Day 2006, 14). An idealistic vision is therefore embedded within the very concept of community.

In twenty-first century Britain plaintive media cries about the erosion of community tend to nostalgically recall Tönnies' kind of local community, made up of close neighbourly relations, local shops and first name terms with the postman (Friedman, following Young, 1989, 282). Yet, as Howard Rheingold reminds us, we should be wary of wearing rose-tinted spectacles when discussing communities (a thing he fell foul of as he neglected to consider the problems within the online community he wrote about as anything other than easily-solvable 'blips' in gloriously co-operative relations) (Rheingold 2000, 362). Graham Day cautions that "'community" is a highly problematic term, alluring in its promise but to be approached with extreme care' (Day 2006, 2). The term 'community' comes with problems that are inherent in its theorisation, in particular issues of nostalgia, idealisation and obfuscating problems (see Day 2006, 7), as can be seen in the work of Bacon-Smith and Jenkins. Penny Weiss, Marilyn Friedman and Iris Marion Young argue that community has been theorised in distinction to individualism, in which individualism is part of a liberal ontology that presumes the self as 'whole unto itself, separated and bounded' (Young 1995, 237). In this opposition community is situated as preferable because the self is viewed as 'the product of an identity it shares with others' (Young 1995, 237). However, the two alternatives come to define one another (each is not the other) and as Young further argues, the qualities of each are associated with expressions of gender: community is coded as feminine, with its emphasis on relations, whilst individualism is coded as masculine (Young 1995, 238). The communitarians¹⁸, they argue, have relied heavily upon nostalgic visions of groups in which tradition holds great sway. They argue that these understandings of community deny difference (Young 1995, 239), ignore structural disadvantages and inequalities within the communities and, furthermore, that any consideration of communities must include an understanding of the ways in which some groups are disadvantaged whilst others are privileged (Weiss 1995, 167). Friedman argues that traditional communities 'have harbored social roles and structures which have been highly oppressive for women' (Friedman 1989, 277) and that the nostalgic vision of the traditional or 'found' community does not take into account the exclusionary practices and the normalising traditions that make certain power relations appear natural and that normalise the exploitation of some community members. She suggests that the traditional roles of men and women result in the exploitation of women, and that exploitation is naturalised via traditional ideologies of how that community should function. 'Tradition' is thus used to justify the structural disadvantage women face (Friedman 1995, 189). To theorise communities without considering the hierarchies within them is problematic. In

¹⁸ Some of the communitarians they discuss are Michael Sandel, Alasdair McIntyre and Benjamin Barber.

'found' communities difference is often not tolerated as, for the community to work, a sense of togetherness is vital; the community is ill-equipped to deal with dissimilarity.

At this point the term community sounds both promising, for it allows for considerations of a wider range of fan activities, and disheartening, for it conceals the structural disadvantages that women face. Furthermore, communities themselves may not exist at all (Day 2006, 14): the kinds of communities that Tönnies portrays are, Day argues, elusive and implausible. How then can the term for a potentially non-existent thing prove useful? As Pahl asks,

If sociologists have exposed the myths and fallacies of the idea of community ...
[why] does a dead idea refuse to lie down? (Pahl quote in Day 2006, 22)

I argue that even if a 'real' community does not exist, there is evidence in both *Kerrang!*'s letters pages and in the words of my interviewees that a *sense* of a community exists amongst hard rock and metal fans. Between fans, even those who have never met and will never meet or even know of the other's *individual* existence, some sense of common feeling seems to exist. This is apparent in the letters pages of *Kerrang!* as I will discuss in the chapter 'Imagining the Community'. The term community, therefore, is an extremely problematic concept as it naturalises nostalgia and hidden exploitation. Yet a common sense *idea* of community is strong, despite the impossibility of such a perfect togetherness coming to fruition, and regardless of the ways in which such unions obscure inequalities.

Moving away from 'community' a number of researchers working in the field of online fan communities have appropriated Benedict Anderson's concept of the imagined community to fill the gap. Anderson describes the 'community' as follows:

It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. (Anderson 1991, 6)

The concept of the imagined community shifts the emphasis away from the question of whether communities actually exist or not, or what the qualities of communities might be, and places importance in the *feeling* of living alongside others. As Hills puts it, 'communities need to be approached not as real or imagined, but in terms of how they are imagined' (Hills 2001, 151). Thus the key significance lies in the power that the idea of living in a community holds for those who feel themselves to be members. In distinction to traditional conceptions of community, which are criticised for hiding inequalities, the imagined community of nation 'is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived

as a deep, horizontal comradeship' (Anderson 1991, 7). Moreover, inequalities are not hidden by the concept of imagined community, rather the way in which they are hidden by the power of the ideal of community is exposed. This *feeling* of being part of a community comes through the imagining of people 'consuming information simultaneously' (Hills 2001, 152), and Hills' example is of 'thousands of anonymous, unseen and unknown individuals [...] watching the same television programme at the same time' (Hills 2001, 152). Key for Anderson, however, is 'the novel and the newspaper' (Anderson 1991, 25). The novel because it is structured around the idea of 'meanwhile' so that actions of different characters can be written as if they happen simultaneously (Anderson 1991, 25), and the newspaper because it recounts events where 'obviously most of them [the events] happen independently, without the actors being aware of each other or of what others are up to' (Anderson 1991, 33). Nevertheless the events are linked by date and by the reader imagining others reading of the same events on the same day in a 'mass ceremony':

We know that particular morning and evening editions will overwhelmingly be consumed between this hour and that, only on this day, not that. [...] It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he [sic] performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the smallest notion. (Anderson 1991, 35)

Hills argues that the concept of an imagined community does not work for fans because it does not take into account the different 'coincidence' that unites fans: in an imagined community 'temporality of information and consumption' (Hills 2001, 154) is the coincidence that unites individuals in a sense of community that leads to the idea of the nation, whereas for fans it is the 'nonlibidinal affect' (Hills 2001, 147) that brings individuals together; it is the emotional response to an object that is then distributed throughout daily life. Hills' discussion of imagined community comes in the context of his research in online fan communities. To address the affective gap and to account for the particularities of time in the virtual world he is researching, Hills proposes the term 'community of imagination' which he describes as follows:

a community which, rather than merely imagining itself as co-existent in clocked time, constitutes itself precisely through a common respect for a popular cultural representational space. (Hills 2001, 154)

Thus a community of imagination is linked to space, and Hills follows Winnicott by suggesting that imaginary space is not secondary to real space. Hills builds upon this with his example of the alt.tv.X-files newsgroup – thus the imaginary space is a virtual one – and the 'community of imagination' concept is explicitly designed for theorising online

communities. However, this concept can be extended to the study of individual *spaces*: locating the nexus of the community in the affectivity of the object of fans' affections shifts conceptions of a community from the temporal to the spatial. This is promising for my purposes, but there are three ways in which the concept of the community of imagination does not entirely fit. First, metal fans do not only communicate and perform their fandom via a particular website nor even solely online, so there is no single real (though virtual) space through which fans communicate, rather there is an imagined relationship between people across a broad spectrum of media platforms. Furthermore, many of the ways in which metal fans 'consume information' do occur simultaneously: metal clubs, gigs and concerts bring people together at the same time in the same room to experience their fandom together; magazines, especially weekly magazines, are read, if not together, then with a sense that others are reading the same music news at roughly the same time, fulfilling a similar role to that of newspapers in Anderson's theory; television channels such as Scuzz and Kerrang, and metal programmes such as the cartoon *Metalocalypse* (originally aired 6th August 2006 – present)¹⁹ broadcast on cable and satellite television. A theory which is specifically about a particular activity on the web is not, therefore, suitable for conceiving of metal fans as a group.

Secondly, 'the community of imagination is less interested in imagining itself as a community *per se*, than in constantly confronting and refining the relationships between individual fans and the text as object of fandom' (Hills 2001, 154). But for metal fans the way in which the metal media police the boundaries of what is and is not metal is an important part of creating and maintaining a sense of togetherness. For metal fans the sense of community is not only about the objects of the fandom, but also about the relationships between fans. Thirdly, the community of imagination, as a way to theorise online activity and the relationships of fans to the objects of their fandom, does not account for the ways in which communities are always ideologically produced, nor for the ways in which this ideology is played out by and used by community members. Ideology is a key methodological concern in this research and I discuss this further in my next chapter.

Drawing on Hills' assertion of the need for the affective relationship to be considered as central, and retaining the idea of simultaneity that is key to Anderson's imagined

¹⁹ *Metalocalypse* is a 10 minute cartoon about fictional death metal band Dethklok whose universal popularity makes them the most powerful entity in the world. Their fans are represented as being fanatical to the point of suicide, and the band members themselves have little respect for their fans, their shows frequently resulting in the deaths of audience members. It is full of in jokes, such as the fast food restaurant being called Burzum and the name appearing on the sign between two burger buns. Burzum are a Norwegian black metal band.

community, I propose the term 'imaginary community'.²⁰ The imaginary community is idealistic and a powerful concept for its members. In drawing attention to the way it is *imagined* as idealistic, the concept opens up the community to scrutiny of its power structures and relations and something of its ideology, all of which have significant impact on women fans' lives. I use the active form of the verb to take in the way in which the idea and ideology of the community is continually reproduced. In my formulation, the term 'imaginary community' accepts the sense of community that people have, but does not question whether such a community 'really' exists. It acknowledges that this idea of a community is idealistic and nostalgic and exists in contradiction with the experiences of community members so that it portrays an ideal rather than a lived reality. Nevertheless this sense of community is extremely powerful and carries an ideology with it that affects community members' experiences of participation in the imaginary community and also of their own fandom.

I first presented my work on the imaginary community at the Subcultures, Pop Music and Social Change symposium at London Metropolitan University, 15th-16th September 2011. At that time I thought I was working on the concept alone; however, in the same month the special Metal Studies issue of the *Journal for Cultural Research* arrived and featured an article on black metal in Northern England by Caroline Lucas, Mark Deeks and Karl Spracklen, which also used the term. Lucas et al draw on the work of Jean-Luc Nancy (1991) and Anthony P. Cohen (1985), who both focus on the ways in which subjects are created collectively with others. For Lucas et al, imaginary community 'may be contingent with particular localities, but whose membership is bound only by symbolic boundaries, tacit knowledge and shared meanings' (Lucas et al 2011, 281). It emphasises the symbolic rather than the actual membership and construction of the group, and suggests that the views and meanings of the group are not always considered openly. In my theorisation, the application of the term 'imaginary' to the community allows the hierarchies and power relations implied in this 'tacit knowledge' to be laid bare for critique. In my analysis of the myths generated by the metal magazine *Kerrang!* the way in which the imaginary community works to protect the status quo is patently exposed: the values that seem to be held by the community are demonstrably only imagined to exist rather than actually doing so.

²⁰ The ways in which I am using 'ideology' and 'imaginary' here are not quite the same as the ways in which Althusser and Lacan use the terms. Althusser defines ideology as representing 'the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence' (Althusser 2001, 109). Seductive though this conception is, it leaves little room for us to understand how resistance to capitalist structures can occur because everything we think and do is determined by the ideology: there is no way out of it. For me ideology is stronger in its older sense, and I discuss this in detail in the succeeding chapter. I use 'imaginary' to denote the creative act of thinking about the abstract world of other metal fans, literally how fans imagine themselves to be part of a community, not imaginary in the Lacanian sense of the individual's narcissistic self-imagining.

Conclusions

A consideration of the academic work on women hard rock and metal fans reveals a significant lack of research, and where research exists it is often epistemologically flawed. This is due to the use of subcultural theory and scene as research and analytical frameworks, both of which emphasise fan behaviours in public spaces (the gig, the concert, the club, the festival, the street, etc.). This results in the tacit assumption of particular kinds of fans and particular kinds of fannish activities that are based upon a model of male fans. This paradigm ignores the fact that the majority of the most crucial of music fans' behaviours – listening to music – occurs in private (at home, in the car, on headphones) and, as McRobbie and Garber argue, it disregards other kinds of fannish activities that also centre around the home. The use of subcultural theory and scene as frameworks also means that gendered experiences of hard rock and metal fans are neglected. In particular the impact of dominant media misrepresentations upon women fans is omitted, and women's pleasure in the music itself is overlooked. In my review of existing work on fans I have attempted to draw out the inconsistencies and gaps in the studies. This led me to sketch out a definition of a fan that takes into account the more personal and private aspects of fandom, and to argue that focussing on the different ground of women fans' experiences is essential if we are to understand how music moves people, and how women hard rock and metal fans negotiate the ideology of the male-dominated genre. I have established a new framework, the imaginary community, which highlights the symbolic nature of the metal community and allows for the ways in which the ideology of that community espouses specific gender relations and gendered readings of the music itself. It allows me to interrogate the 'community' in order to get at the previously omitted subordinate position of women in hard rock and metal, and it also brings the focus back to individuals' relationships with the music they enjoy, enabling a consideration of fan pleasure.

Chapter Three: Conceptual Issues, Methods, Ethics and Challenges; Ideology, Experience, Laughter and Depression

This research is feminist research. Throughout the process I have tried to conduct the study in ways that are consistent with feminist social science writing on methodology and epistemology. This has meant (amongst other things) acknowledging my own place in the research, minimising the power imbalance between my research participants and myself, and taking care to *listen* to my interviewees. In this chapter I reflect upon these ethical, epistemological and conceptual issues, building upon my examination of theoretical frameworks for studying rock music fans. I assess the various methods I employed to investigate the experiences of women fans, and consider the experience of PhD research, in my case part-time over seven years, ruminating on the influence of the personal and the academic. Stanley and Wise argue that 'feminist knowledge should be accountable knowledge, knowledge which acknowledges and reveals the labour processes of its own production' (Stanley and Wise 1993, 201) and although social researchers, particularly doctoral students, are encouraged to 'reflect on' the research process, such reflexive practice can often follow an acceptable pattern of the learning process of the actual research. I want to move away from this institutionally-sanctioned ideation in order to expose the work and effect of the research upon me as a researcher and the impact this has had upon the creation²¹ of this thesis. Stanley and Wise are adamant that the way in which we as researchers are emotionally affected by our work needs to be brought into the discussion, otherwise the account is only partial:

One's self can't be left behind, it can only be omitted from discussions and written accounts of the research process. But it is an omission, a failure to discuss something which has been present within the research itself. The researcher may be unwilling to admit this, or unable to see its importance, but it nevertheless remains so. If nothing else, we would insist on the absolute reality of this: that being alive involves us in having emotions and involvements; and in doing research we cannot leave behind what it is to be a person alive in the world. (Stanley and Wise 1993, 161)

Therefore it seems to me to be essential, and ethically vital, to include my own experiences of part-time research and of depression, and to indicate how this has affected my research practice. Stanley and Wise ground their argument in the necessity of utilising the radical critique offered by women's perspectives, shifting the focus back onto the researched rather than the researcher, but in *Breaking Out Again* and in Stanley's *The*

²¹ Although 'creation' may seem an odd word here, in the end, understanding this thesis as a creative project has been immensely productive in terms of my enjoyment in writing it and therefore in finishing it.

Auto/biographical I, they are adept at reflecting on their experiences of research process in ways that offer new angles on the subject. The purpose of my deliberations here is to offer a rich picture of the actual process of generating, collecting and analysing my research material, and partly to acknowledge the effect of the research on the researcher.

I will discuss these important dimensions towards the end of the chapter; the earlier parts being given over to the conceptual issues surrounding my epistemological approach and the associated methods I employ in order to grapple with the question of women's experiences of hard rock and metal fandom. I utilised two qualitative methods: (one) I undertook a semiotic analysis of the letters pages of the UK hard rock and metal magazine *Kerrang!* to investigate how women hard rock and metal fans are represented by the magazine's creation of gendered myths; (two) I drew upon techniques of critical discourse analysis to scrutinise the language of women hard rock and metal fans in interviews and assess the impact of the myths upon their constructions of themselves as fans and as women. I use a theoretical framework of ideology throughout the thesis, and explain why this framework, although complex and not widely used at the current time, is important to the research.

First, I ask: who are the hard rock and metal fans considered in this thesis? Next, I justify introducing ideology as a framework; this includes a very brief outline of the feminist debates around using this Marxist concept, and addresses specifically the role of ideology as a methodological tool in this thesis. This leads me into a discussion about the value of engaging with women's reported experiences when such women's experiences are usually undervalued or ignored. Such person-centred work has particular ethical considerations, which I briefly address. I then move on to assessing my two main methods, the semiotic analysis of *Kerrang!* and the discourse analysis of interviews. Finally I reflect on the personal challenges I encountered during the research process, with particular regard for the part-time nature of the study and my depression during the PhD.

Which fans?

First: who are these metal fans, the focus of my research? In this thesis the women fans are those who enjoy the music of hard rock and metal. This genre is very roughly delineated by an emphasis on those bands who feature in *Kerrang!* magazine (and I discuss below why *Kerrang!* is important). The magazine was first published in 1981 as a platform for the new heavy metal bands that were then being excluded from other rock magazines. Brown notes that *Kerrang!* was at one time considered the 'headbanger's Bible' (Brown 2007, 644) and, despite recent challenges to its reputation, it retains its status as a key part of the metal media. However, the music of heavy metal has split into

numerous subgenres, so that what 'counts' as metal has changed over the past 30 years. Punk influences have led to the inclusion of political and emotional themes while pop influences make for more light-hearted melody-driven music. Other subgenres have developed (such as death and black metal) which have a denser and more intense soundscape with harsh, bestial vocals.²² *Kerrang!* gives column inches to bands from across this spectrum, but its inclusion of more melodic subgenres like emo and pop punk has led to its original undisputed status as the magazine of heavy metal being questioned. Thus, focusing on bands who appear in the magazine is not a straightforward measure of the metal genre. Metal's boundaries are frequently squabbled over by fans, and the statuses of bands and magazines are hotly disputed. These disputes signify that there are no clear borders, and are in themselves an integral feature of the genre. In this thesis I use the descriptor 'hard rock and metal' to cover this broad genre without entering into genre arguments, although I am aware that within the debate there is much at stake, and that there are gendered, raced, classed, religious and national aspects that need careful consideration.²³ These debates are outside the remit of this study and I have not the time to engage with the necessary politics in order to delineate my own boundaries of the genre. Thus *Kerrang!* offers a good practical solution to the difficult matter of defining the boundaries of the hard rock and metal genre, although it is not an ideal solution. In seeking participants for interviews I asked for women who either self-defined as metal fans or liked bands featured in *Kerrang!*. In using *Kerrang!* in this way I acknowledge that the magazine presents a particular viewpoint of what hard rock and metal is, who its fans and musicians are, and the values and traditions of the culture. These concepts have gendered notions embedded within that bear examination; and I propose that using the notion of ideology to understand these viewpoints, values and traditions is worthwhile.

Ideology

The concept of ideology as developed by Marx and Engels is rooted in the economic conditions of a society. Adopting a materialist stance, they argue in *The German Ideology* that 'life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life' (Marx and Engels 2010, 656). Therefore our thinking proceeds from our material existence, and the economic basis of our lives determines what we are able to imagine: it controls and shapes the superstructure of culture and politics. However, not everyone is able to create or shape cultural artefacts with the same power of dissemination or status/value. Those

²² There are a large number of subgenres in hard rock and metal; they are too many to list here, but my reader may look at Wikipedia's page 'Heavy metal subgenres' to gain a sense of the way in which the broad genre has developed.

²³ I have dealt with the gendered aspects with regards the emo subgenre in my article 'Is Emo Metal? Gendered Boundaries and New Horizons in the Heavy Metal Community' (2011).

with money and authority thus provide what is culturally and socially valued, and do so in ways that present their own ideas and which serve their own purposes. Thus the culture that is produced by the ruling class validates their rule and renders the appearance of the economic base natural and unchangeable. Culture and politics form a set of ideas that give a narrow perspective of economic and cultural relations that work to benefit the ruling classes: ideology.

In presenting this understanding of ideology I am aware that, as Terry Eagleton discusses, ideology does not have a single definition (Eagleton 1991, 1) and that it is complex, a potential minefield. As Eagleton argues, the term is multi-faceted and has been used in multiple ways throughout the twentieth century (Eagleton 1991, 1-2). Marxism was influential amongst some 'second wave' feminists involved in socialist politics (see for example, Mitchell 1971; Rowbotham 1972), but was also the subject of a great deal of debate and criticism. In outlining these debates Stevi Jackson argues that Marxism was developed to explain men's class relations rather than gender relations: to incorporate the latter it required 'considerable modification' (Jackson 1998, 13). Feminists drew upon Marxism in different ways, either using existing frameworks and fitting feminism in or radically reworking it, particularly in attempts to make room for discussions on the value of housework in an analysis of the capitalist system (Jackson 1998, 13, 16-18).

Postmodernism resulted in Marxism and 'ideology' being largely abandoned in the 'turn to culture' (Barrett 1992, 204), and studies of the material conditions of women's subordination were replaced by analyses of 'process[es] of symbolization and representations' (Barrett 1992, 204). Marxism was seen to have failed to deal with sexuality and subjectivity, and to have brought about essentialist thinking that obscured differences between women, whereas postmodernism was seen to be able to accommodate these needs (Jackson 1998, 22-23). However, Sylvia Walby argues that what is lost in the cultural turn is recognition of the structural ways in which gender, race and class are loci of oppression (Walby 1992, 31). A return to materialist analyses is perhaps underway in British academic feminism, of which this thesis is a part. My focus is on culture, but in my approach I have much to thank Marxist feminism for, even if I am not attending to the larger systems that subjugate women.

Ideology as method

Can the concept of ideology, then, still prove useful? I understand that using such a concept is risky and that I am taking a chance with it: it is not fashionable, and ideology's critics have long since declared it 'obsolete' (Eagleton 1991, xi). And there is the difficult matter of 'false consciousness' to consider (Eagleton 1991, 10-26), which I will do below. Yet, I am inspired by Nancy Hartsock's argument that we can think of ideology as a

method that allows different standpoints to draw attention to the ways in which oppressive ideas are normalised,

Just as Marx's understanding of the world from the standpoint of the proletariat enabled him to go beneath bourgeois ideology, so a feminist standpoint can allow us to understand patriarchal institutions and ideologies as perverse inversions of more humane social relations. (Hartsock 1983, 284)

Understanding different standpoints is essential for a feminist analysis that values women's experiences and challenges knowledge about women as the objects of study (Hill Collins 1990, 206-212; Smith 2008), and I shall discuss this further below. Moreover, in Barthes' reading of ideology, which is advanced through 'myths', he outlines a specific method for deciphering the messages that are produced through the mechanisms of the ruling classes to analyse how they present ideas that are deceptive. Moving away from thinking about ideology as only about class, and conceiving of it as a method through which to consider gender relations, is making a similar shift to the one Leblanc makes when she puts subcultural theory's notion of resistance to work in her analysis of her interviewees' gender resistance. Thus she moved away from class, but retained the method of interpreting marginalised groups' resistance (Leblanc 1999, 14-18). Using ideology as a method can signal how the metal media present a picture of gender relations in hard rock and metal that normalises gender difference. Interpreting exactly how this is done requires tools that can expose the mechanics of that normalisation; reading the representations of women and men in *Kerrang!* for the 'myths' is such a tool.

I use a Barthesian understanding of 'myth' to denote a naturalised tale that distorts meanings with the aim of promoting a particular world view, in this case about women and men in rock music. Coward and Ellis argue that Barthes' theory and system of analysis adds to 'the analysis of ideology which is proposed by Marx and Engels in their early text *The German Ideology*' (Coward and Ellis 1977, 26). In this sense ideology is conceived of as 'a system of ideas, the product of the ruling class, which form the reality of a society' (Coward and Ellis 1977, 26), but this 'reality' can then be contested via a close consideration of the myths presented. There is a tradition in feminist research of delving 'below the carapace of ideology to uncover women's EXPERIENCE, to expose the SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION of gender difference' (Andermahr, Lovell and Wolkowitz 1997, 105, emphasis in original). In this thesis I do, in part, use ideology in this way: there are myths *about women* (and men) that rely upon particular gender constructions, and I seek to reveal those myths (via analysis of *Kerrang!* magazine).

I am not alone in returning to the concepts of myth and ideology: in her 2010 book *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters: The Construction of Trafficking*, Jo Doezema finds both

concepts useful in her analysis of the continuing appearance of the figure of the 'white slave' in contemporary discussions of the trafficking of women. She argues that:

The concept of ideology is important for the study of the myth of white slavery / trafficking for the light it can shed on important questions relating to the origin, validity, function and power of the myth, rather than as an abstract theoretical construct. (Doezema 2010, 33)

Doezema does not use the linked concepts to uncover the 'simple factuality' (Doezema 2010, 32) about trafficking, but rather to explore how particular ideas about trafficking have come to gain a hold in public consciousness. In this way she does not become embroiled in uncovering the 'truth', instead she investigates the ways in which raced, classed and gendered suppositions have shaped the discussions about trafficking women (Doezema 2010, 46).

Using a framework of myth and ideology is valuable for making a *political* point about the representation of women in *Kerrang!* and for investigating how the representation impacts upon women fans' experiences. Like Doezema I utilise myth and ideology to help me interpret the effects of representations, in my case upon women fans' experiences and their fandom. In order to do this I needed to identify how myths that are prevalent in the rock and metal world present women, and also to investigate how women live within that representative world. As far as I can ascertain, this method is new; a systematic approach to both of these elements has not previously been undertaken in this field, and so this research opens up new perspectives upon women's rock and metal fandom.

I develop Doezema's methods by bringing the myths into focus alongside women's experiences (via interviews with women fans). In doing so I use 'ideology' in two distinct ways. First, when I refer to *Kerrang!*'s ideology it is in the Barthesian sense, that is as a mode of representing 'reality' by an elite group in order to further their own viewpoints. However, this version of ideology is insufficient for my analysis of my interviewees' words because it means that when we (oppressed groups) do not realise how culture is being used to gain our consent in our own exploitation we are suffering from false consciousness, and the concept of false consciousness is not only inadequate in explaining our relationships with culture, it also undermines the integrity of participants. For this reason the second way in which I use 'ideology' owes much to the work of Liz Stanley. Stanley argues that we (feminist social scientists) must go beyond thinking of ideology in terms only of false consciousness (Stanley 1992, 3). She defines ideology as referring 'to a set of ideas often expressed within a discourse of competing voices and which have organisational or other material consequentiality within social life' (Stanley 1992, 18n) and she argues for a consideration of how ideologies affect the way we make

sense of the world and how they impact upon our lived experiences (Stanley 1992, 3). It is within this understanding of ideology that I root my analyses of the interviews; prioritising women's discussions of their experiences is essential to this assessment.

Experience

In considering Samuel Delany's work on the history of gay men in the 1950s, Joan W. Scott discusses the importance of valuing experience where it alerts us to a misrepresentation in dominant knowledges (Scott 2008). Discussing the experiences of those who are perceived as different or 'other', enables a broader understanding of the 'dimensions of human life' (Scott 2008, 272), argues Scott, particularly where this relates to non-hegemonic 'constructions of the social world' (Scott 2008, 273). More than this, marginalised groups can bring new perspectives to institutions and structures that affect our social lives and that are taken for granted. However, experience is a 'contested category' (Andermahr, Lovell and Wolkowitz 1997, 71) and has been used in a number of different ways which highlight different aspects of the category and of existence (for further discussion see Scott 2008, 272-282), and that also have different emphases that impact upon the way in which people are considered subjects in their relationship with their social conditions (Scott 2008, 276). At risk in using 'experience' is collapsing women into a unified category which elides differences between women (not least those of race, sexuality and class) (Scott 2008, 276). Yet, as Stanley and Wise argue, it remains an important concept with which to assess universalised theory (Stanley and Wise 1993, 74-5). I would argue that it is precisely Wise's use of her own experience as an Elvis fan which allows her to challenge dominant *and* feminist constructions of rock music, and which allows me to move forward in re-considering the meanings of rock music for women (Wise 1984). Central to this thesis is a comparison between *Kerrang!*'s representation of women fans and actual women fans, and experience is an important category for assessing this. Therefore in this thesis I use 'experience' to refer to the way in which women described to me things that happened in their lives.

I also relate my own understanding of occurrences in my rock 'n' roll life. My own experience both as a woman rock fan, and my reflections on my friends' experiences, suggested to me that *Kerrang!*'s representation of 'us' was inaccurate: where the magazine presents women fans as hysterical screamers or sexual fodder for male musicians, the experiences I shared with my female friends told me that engagement with the music is often passionate and not dependent on the attractiveness of musicians. It also told me that the groupie stereotype exerted a pressure that meant when I found a musician attractive I could not discuss it. I was at pains to desexualise my fandom in my own and others' eyes, so that I could be understood as someone who was interested in the music first (a 'real fan'). But although such understandings helped me challenge

existing representations, one cannot think about one's own experiences as universal. My experiences are particular, they are constructed by me, infused by my feminism and by my reading of music magazines (and other media), and my experiences with other fans, friends and family. If my experiences are particular to me, would other women report similar experiences or would their situations result in other constructions of what they had encountered? Would they respond to the representation of women fans in a similar way? I felt it was important to ask other women how they felt so that my thesis could be grounded in the understandings of other women alongside my own.

In analysing the interviews I thought of the women's experiences as articulated perceptions. By this I mean that in relating those experiences, the incidents and impressions were given form, in Barthes' sense, and signification through their utterance. The experiences were also mediated by memory, by emotions, by later incidents and by the context of the telling. In treating the interviews in this way I partly draw on Stanley's work on auto/biography, in which she discusses the ways in which we make sense of ourselves and of incidents in our past, putting together events and using fictive devices to construct a self:

Because memory inevitably has limits, the self we construct is necessarily partial; memory ties together events, persons and feelings actually linked only in such accounts and not in life as it was lived; it equally necessarily relies upon fictive devices in producing any and every account of the self it is concerned with.

(Stanley 1992, 62)

Not all of the interview data is constructed via memories; some of my interviewees used hypothetical situations to discuss their fandom. For example, Gwen and Laura both narrated what might happen if they were to meet their favourite bands, and Bert described what it might be like to have a sexual encounter with a band member. These stories were imaginative accounts of what it might be like: fictions that draw on their experiences and their knowledge about hard rock and metal bands and culture. In the process of making sense, imagination played an important role in my interviewees' answers. However, as Stanley argues, the use of fictive devices and imagination in reconstructing events and experiences 'does not mean that the past and its mythologies are not "real" (Stanley 1992, 86). The way in which the selves are imagined and the experiences put together is a real process, and the experiences the women related, re-thought, reconstructed and re-imagined have real meaning in the world. These conceptual issues shaped the research in particular ways, meaning that attention has been drawn to some aspects of women's fandom and the imaginary metal community and not others, and later, as I discuss the methods used for collecting and analysing data, I reflect upon these elements. But first I turn to the ethical matters I took into consideration as I began the research.

Some ethical considerations

In conducting *feminist* research, the scholar should pay specific and caring attention to the needs of participants involved in the project, and to their own position. This raises important questions around power, truth and interpretation. I have discussed some of these issues above and will engage further with them below and at relevant points in my analysis. However, these are not the kinds of ethical questions that the University of York ethics committee requested information about before I began the research. Nor were the psychological implications of undertaking the research for the student, which, in light of the frequency of doctoral students falling ill with depression, is surprising. I suggest that these areas ought to be addressed on the ethics documentation and in more general guidelines and that schemes need to be implemented to prevent students becoming unwell, rather than just responding when they do. The form that, in preparation for the study, I submitted to the University of York Ethics Committee (see Appendix A)²⁴ focussed upon important practical (rather than conceptual) matters and here I briefly consider those ethical dimensions of research involving both *Kerrang!*'s letters pages and interviewees.

Kerrang!'s letters pages are openly published, therefore permission from the magazine's editor and from individual letter writers was not necessary. However, I also wanted to consider the design of the pages, and so I created mock-ups of the layouts to draw out significant aspects (see Appendix B). This proved a useful technique, as I then became extremely familiar with the designs and the elements that made up the pages, deepening my analysis. I have included detailed descriptions of photographs because paying close attention to the images and 'converting' them from pictures to words allowed me to read them in nuanced ways. Under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, quotation of the letters are permitted under the criticism and review exemption (CDPA section 30).

Research involving 'human subjects', however, has more complex ethical factors to be reviewed. As I intended to interview some teenagers, I undertook a Criminal Records Bureau check, but not all of my interviewees were teenagers. I emailed each potential participant with details of the study and assurances of anonymity (for a sample email see Appendix C). I stated that they may refuse to answer any question they were unhappy with; pause or stop the interview altogether at any time; the uses to which the data may be put (thesis, papers, articles, book); and that they would be given pseudonyms to protect their identities. This email included a link to further details of my research on the Centre for Women's Studies webpages, to enable them to make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. Once participants had agreed, I arranged to meet with them at a mutually convenient time and place. At the beginning of the interview I asked them to

²⁴ I was granted permission to begin the study.

sign two copies (one to take away with them, one for me) of an informed consent form (see Appendix D). This form contained information about the study; my contact details; reiterated the relevant Centre for Women's Studies webpage address; gave my supervisor's email address and telephone number; and also provided telephone numbers of helplines and support groups (Leeds Crisis Centre and the Samaritans). I included these telephone numbers after reflecting on Leblanc's interviews. Leblanc undertook rape crisis training to enable her to provide support to interviewees who discussed sexual abuse during interviews (Leblanc 1999, 29). This was not something I felt comfortable doing, but I wanted to provide some support should any interviewees feel disturbed by the interview process. Reading the letters to *Kerrang!* suggested to me that such topics as depression, suicide and bullying may arise and I therefore researched local and national support groups. I also encouraged interviewees to contact me with any feedback about the interview process. Despite my concerns, none of the women appeared distressed during the interviews, and, in subsequent communications with the interviewees none have spoken to me about feeling troubled or upset after the interviews. Indeed, on the whole the interviews were a lot of fun and whilst transcribing I was struck by how much laughter we engaged in.

To ensure my own safety whilst conducting interviews, and with the aim of meeting the participants on neutral ground, I met the majority of my interviewees in public places such as a cafés or pubs, or in semi-public spaces such as place of work or study. The ambiance of cafés and pubs lent a less formal air to the interviews. We chose times and places that would be quiet and sparsely populated or that offered a private room where possible, thus affording privacy should any delicate topics arise. There were three exceptions to this. One of the pilot interviews I felt could be comfortably conducted at my home due to my long-standing acquaintance with the participant. One of my interviewees was a lifelong friend of another long-standing acquaintance, and someone I had known for a number of years; in these cases I felt comfortable conducting the interviews at the interviewees' homes. Throughout the interview process I felt confident that I had conducted the research in accordance with the University's guidelines.

Semiotic analysis of *Kerrang!*

I now offer a detailed examination of my two methods: first the semiotic analysis of *Kerrang!*; then the discourse analysis of interviews. Andy R. Brown argues that magazines are very important in giving focus and identity to the heavy metal community (Brown 2007, 642). *Kerrang!* magazine is a useful object of study due to its place in hard rock and metal culture, as mentioned earlier. As the first and longest running UK metal magazine, *Kerrang!* plays a vital role in giving a unified sense of history to the imaginary community. In respect of the UK music magazine market it holds a special place. *Kerrang!* represents

the hard rock and metal music genre, in distinction to other music weekly magazines, such as *Melody Maker*²⁵ or the *NME*, which tend to focus on indie rock bands. That *Kerrang!* is weekly is important. In *Kerrang!* debates between metal fans take place at a faster pace and articles can reflect more quickly on recent events (concerts, festivals, news) than in monthly magazines. Two monthly metal magazines, *Terrorizer* and *Metal Hammer*, do hold an important place in metal culture. *Metal Hammer* was first published in the UK in 1986, whilst *Terrorizer* is more recent (first published 1993). Both magazines eschew the less intense end of the metal spectrum – *Terrorizer* in particular being a magazine of extreme metal (death, black, grindcore). Other monthly magazines such as *Uncut*, *Q*, *Classic Rock* and *Mojo* also cover rock music, but are aimed at an older audience and the latter two especially have a somewhat nostalgic aspect. In terms of the demographic of the readership, *Kerrang!* is also important because it has a greater proportion of female readers than the two metal monthlies. Brown notes that in 2009 the gender split of the three magazines' readers was as laid out in Table 1: Demographic of magazine readers by gender.

Table 1: Demographic of magazine readers by gender

	Women	Men
<i>Kerrang!</i>	40%	60%
<i>Metal Hammer</i>	36%	64%
<i>Terrorizer</i>	15%	85%

Source: Adapted from Brown (2009, 7), his source unknown.

While Brown found that 40% of *Kerrang!* readers are women, an earlier (2006) report by *Campaign* indicated a higher figure of 53%. Nevertheless both data sets show that *Kerrang!* has a greater readership among women than the UK's other two metal magazines.

My study of *Kerrang!* ranges from 2000 to 2008. Around 2000 there was a resurgence in the approval of hard rock and metal. Sales of *Kerrang!* and other metal magazines began to rise very quickly, as Ian Darby noted in *Campaign*:

Judging by the success of heavy metal titles, rock is cool again. *Kerrang!* is up 11.6 per cent year on year and Metal Hammer 12.7 per cent period on period. (Darby 2001)

²⁵ *Melody Maker* merged with *NME* in 2000 after a steady decline in sales figures, leaving *NME* and *Kerrang!* as the only UK weekly music magazines devoted to rock music.

The timeframe concludes in 2008 in order to keep the research within the bounds of my PhD, but it also proved an opportune deadline, as by this time sales figures for both *Kerrang!* and *NME* had begun to fall, no doubt due in part to the general decline in print media in favour of internet media.

I analysed issues from June each year because during this month major UK metal festivals (Ozzfest and Download) take place at Donington Park. Donington has special resonance as a festival venue. During the 1980s and up until 1996 it was the site of the Monsters of Rock festival, a major one day event of big name heavy metal bands (headliners included AC/DC, Iron Maiden and Metallica). Due to the lull in metal's popularity at the end of the 1990s, no metal festivals were held at the Park from 1997 until 2002, when Ozzfest was held. In 2003 a new three day metal festival was designed to capitalise on the memory of Monsters of Rock: Download. Download is presented by *Kerrang!* as the highlight of the hard rock and metal calendar, although smaller, independent metal festivals such as Bloodstock also happen. It features globally successful bands such as Metallica and Iron Maiden, as well as newer bands. Although there were no major metal festivals during the first two years of my research period, other festivals did occur (June is part of the festival season) and fans discuss their experiences at these other events in the letters pages. June issues, therefore, offer many letters focused on festival-going, and, one clear advantage for this project is that the letters pages present fan dialogues around a specific topic, thus generating a sense of continuity.

In deciding how much of *Kerrang!* (which sections) to study I undertook preliminary research to consider the ways in which fans are represented in articles, reviews and interviews. I found to my dismay that, unlike men, women are often described in ways that foreground their gender. For instance Lindsay Lohan, a rock fan as well as an actress, was positioned as a sexual reward to be exchanged between musicians ('things certainly seem to be going well for Wentz. Lohan might well be his tonight – providing he can get her out of Foo Fighters' dressing room' [Johnson 2007, 27]). Women attending the New York performance of Dir En Grey were described as 'hysterical', 'passing out' and emitting 'high-pitched screams' (Lukes 2007, 16), reminiscent of derogatory reports on Beatlemania. These representations do little to assist our understanding of fans as they see themselves or as they see the bands, magazine and other fans. The letters pages, on the other hand, offer a useful opportunity to understand how *Kerrang!* represents its fans to themselves and to one another. It is a particular window into the way in which hard rock and metal fans are represented: how they see themselves as part of a community of fans, and how the values of that imaginary community are written, re-written and lived by its members. I have therefore focused my attention on this section of the magazine, taking

into account all aspects of the page: layout and graphic design, photographs and artwork and close textual readings of the printed letters.

There is little work on the methodology of studying letters pages, but Anna Gough-Yates in *Understanding Women's Magazines* (2003) writes of the importance of considering the agenda underlying editorial approaches, including identifying the intended reader and taking note of the advertisers. Jennifer Mason reminds us:

Documents, whether visual or textual, are constructed in particular contexts, by particular people, with particular purposes, and with consequences – intended and unintended. (Mason 2002, 110)

Whilst photographs and letters *are* those of actual fans and thus part of the self-representation of those fans, the printed letters are only a small selection of what the magazine must receive. It is also likely that they have been edited as spelling and grammar is generally accurate. Editorial staff make decisions about which letters to print: this self-representation by fans is at the same time the representation of fans by the magazine. The letters are mediated, chosen from amongst other letters and messages sent to the magazine by a variety of means (post, email, text message, online comment on an article, or MySpace message). Therefore, the voices of fans that can be heard have been chosen for specific reasons: perhaps they exemplify an opinion shared by many readers, or they are particularly eloquent, or, as I discuss in the following chapter, they fit in with the impression that the magazine wants to convey. I cannot know for sure. The pages are the primary depiction of hard rock and metal fans by the magazine, and so whilst the letters may be written by real fans, what is published on the page is a representation of fans portrayed in the particular way that the magazine seeks to promote. This particular version gives a sense of fans in dialogue with one another and, as Brown argues, gives focus and identity to the heavy metal community (Brown 2007, 642), but it may not characterise the real experiences of fans, and indeed may contradict the values of some fans (Brown 2009, 8). In this way *Kerrang!*'s letters pages create a sense of a metal community based on an image of fans as having shared values, experiences and feelings. Nevertheless the letters pages have enabled me to understand something of fans' concerns, loves, hates, desires, needs, complaints and debates.

The appearance (design and images) of a page makes the first impression upon the reader and determines whether they stop to read, come back to the page or ignore it completely. Furthermore the page needs to be established by the magazine staff as a safe space for fans to enter through their letter writing and imaginatively as part of the wider community of readers. Layout and design play a vital role in the creation of this space. The specifics of how *Kerrang!* portrays the hard rock and metal community are

different from the way in which, for example, a women's magazine or a football magazine show their communities of readers, yet the *mechanics* of how it is done are the same: the use of particular colours, fonts, types of images, the general layout, the design 'tricks', the choice of photographs and the types of printed letters themselves. These elements are used together to communicate a message, to encourage reader participation, and to both connect with and foster that sense of community.

I considered all the letters on the pages, including those written anonymously and by men, and all of the photographs including those of men and musicians. Drawing upon Stanley and Wise, Mary Maynard (1994) argues that if we are to better understand women's position in a male-dominated society we must be 'prepared to focus on men and masculinity, with the intention of researching the powerful as well as the powerless' (Maynard 1994, 15). This notion proved vital in determining how the figuration of women in *Kerrang!* differed from the typification of men and how these representations then contribute to an ideology that fosters particular ideas about gender and about women fans specifically.

Access to the letters pages over my timeframe was not as straightforward as first appeared. The magazines were held by the British Library in Kings Cross, London and so necessitated a visit to the capital. This in itself was not difficult, but as I suffered from depression during this time, the accompanying lack of energy did impact on my ability to make the journey. At some point the magazines were moved to Boston Spa – a much closer location, but a problem for me as it took many months for the library to transport and store the magazines. At this point I applied to the British Sociological Association and gratefully received a grant to purchase as many of the magazines as were available from a stockist of back issues. The advantage of this was that I then had colour issues with which to work as well as my notes on the photocopies.

To analyse the letters pages I used the semiotic technique of myth reading, established by Roland Barthes in *Mythologies*. Gillian Rose proffers that semiology 'offers a very full box of analytical tools for taking an image apart and tracing how it works in relation to broader systems of meaning' (Rose 2012, 105). Semiotic analysis results in the production of 'detailed accounts of the exact ways the meanings of an image are produced through that image' (Rose 2012, 106). My focus was upon all aspects of the letters pages, including design and text, not just upon the photographs, but Rose's assertions about the usefulness of semiotic analysis hold. Using Barthes' method of myth reading means beginning from 'first principles': identifying the elements of the page; interpreting the everyday meanings of those elements; then analysing the combinations of those meanings to identify the myths that are forged therein; and finally interpreting the messages contained and transmitted via those myths.

Myth works by communicating a message in such a way that it appears obvious or common sense. Barthes argues that 'myth is a system of communication, that it is a message', it is not 'an object, a concept, or an idea' (Barthes 2009, 131). Myth communicates particular ideas under the guise of communicating facts (Barthes 2009, 149). In establishing his theory of myth Barthes builds upon Saussure's semiological system. In the example of a tree, the sign of the tree is made up of two parts: the concept of the tree with our ideas of its roots, bark, branches, leaves, etc. – the **signified**; and the spoken and written word 'tree' that we use to delineate or refer to that idea – the **signifier**. Using this as his first stage, Barthes calls this linguistic system the *language object* (Barthes 2009, 138). In order to establish the second stage he renames 'sign' as 'meaning' and it forms the signifier in Barthes' 'second order semiological system' (Barthes 2009, 137). He calls this new signifier **form** (Barthes 2009, 140). A second order semiological system form can be created by images with texts, rather than just a single item. So for instance in the Conservative Party logo a first order signifier may be the word 'tree', but a second order signifier may be the green and blue image of a tree alongside the word 'conservatives'. The form can therefore be any material such as 'photography, painting, posters, rituals, objects' (Barthes 2009, 137), and it communicates a message: the new signified, which he names **concept** (Barthes 2009, 140). In the second order semiological system, the concept and the form together create the second order semiological system sign, or **signification**. This second order semiological system is called by Barthes the *metalanguage*.

The signification of the myth 'points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and imposes it on us' (Barthes 2009, 140). This is how myth communicates ideology. Barthes gives the example of an image on the cover of *Paris-Match* in which a young, saluting black man is dressed in French military uniform. His eyes are raised to focus upon something outside the frame.

[W]hether naively or not, I see very well what it signifies to me: that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to her detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors. (Barthes 2009, 139)

Barthes differentiates between the form of the image (the man saluting) and the signification of the image (the denial of racism in the French Empire) to show how signification is read from the form, and also to show the immediacy of signification. He indicates that it is difficult to separate the sign from its signification, for in his description of the meaning of the sign he supposes that the man's eyes are 'probably fixed on a fold of the tricolour' (Barthes 2009, 139). Whilst he refers to this as 'the *meaning* of the picture'

(Barthes 2009, 139), he is already reading the myth of the image and the supposition of the flag as an essential part of it. Barthes argues that the form relies upon the sign for its meaning and yet plays a 'constant game of hide-and-seek' (Barthes 2009, 142) so that the concept of the form is easily confused with the meaning of the sign. However, as Barthes explains, that concept is derived from the reader's circumstances of education, of historical context, of habits: 'truth to tell, what is invested in the concept is less reality than a certain knowledge of reality' (Barthes 2009, 142). To untangle the confusion between the meaning of the sign and the myth of signification Barthes argues that we,

Must voluntarily interrupt this turnstile of form and meaning, [we] must focus on each separately, and apply to myth a static method of deciphering, in short, [we] must go against its own dynamics. (Barthes 2009, 148)

The myth reader must work to actively *stop* themselves from reading the signification and applying their culturally learned ideas, otherwise their judgment will be clouded by myth.

It is this systematic process that I adopted as I scrutinised *Kerrang!*'s letters pages. My first readings focussed on descriptions of what is on the page, i.e. on Barthes' first order language object system. In order to delineate the signs of the letters pages I examined the design elements of the letters page, creating mock ups of each different design to enhance my understanding of individual design elements. I wrote detailed descriptions of the photographs, paying attention to the role of the subject, their clothing, hair and make up, posture, gesture and facial expression, the location in which the picture was taken and the props in use. I coded the letters thematically, using themes that arose from the letters. This included subject matter, tone and style. I used the results of my consideration of the language object system of the letters pages to ascertain the forms of the metalanguage system. From this analysis I extrapolated the myths that *Kerrang!* presents about hard rock and metal's fans, musicians and other community members. Recognising these myths allowed me to explore how women are represented within the imaginary community, giving me a strong argument about its ideology regarding women, men and gender.

Lynn Pearce argues that when looking at a text we should know how we are reading and what has precedence in that reading: the author, the text or the reader (Pearce 1995, 81). A complicated problem in reading *Kerrang!* was my ambiguous position as a reader. I am critical of its male dominance and its positioning of women fans, yet I am a fan of a number of bands that fall within the broad genre. The absurdist humour of the genre fills me with delight, and its anti-authoritarian stance is a useful identity to 'put on' in difficult circumstances, but I am quickly enraged by negative portrayals of women within the community. This ambiguous position had implications for my reading of *Kerrang!*. Pearce

suggests that in giving primacy to the text in her readings of pre-Raphaelite paintings she ignored the contexts of their production. This enabled her to reclaim the texts for feminism. However, she could not help feeling that she was not the paintings' intended audience (Pearce 1995, 89). Pearce's response to this dilemma is to argue that in reading we must accept that different texts position us as readers in different ways, and that 'we should admit our *lack of control*' (Pearce 1995, 93; emphasis in original). However, in using Barthes' semiotic system I assert some control over the meanings of the text. 'Myth Today' suggests that somebody makes the myth with the aim of presenting an idea that shores up an ideology as 'natural'. There is an author, in this case the editors and designers of *Kerrang!*'s letters pages, but how far are those pages put together with the purpose of furthering a metal ideology at the forefront of the authors' minds? The question of how much an author *means* to participate in myth making is not considered in *Mythologies*, and is complicated further by Barthes' later work 'Death of the Author'. Here he argues that in interpreting a text the reader should not consider the author's intentions, which are unknowable, and primacy should be given to the text and the reader's interpretations of it (Barthes 1986). Nevertheless, Barthes' theory of myth requires an intended reader who receives the message communicated by the myth. Am I that intended reader?

In reading *Kerrang!* my position is ambivalent. I both am and am not the intended reader. I am excluded by my age – at 27-34 too old (the average age of the reader is recorded by Brown as 15-24 [Brown 2009, 7]); by my gender and my feminism when the magazine positions women fans as sexual rather than serious fans and has at times included advertisements for pornographic phone lines; by my musical taste, which is more eclectic than is catered for by *Kerrang!*. And yet it *is* written for me because it presumes knowledge of hard rock and metal history which I have; it covers bands that do fall within my tastes, though rarely as cover stars or in big articles; by my race – most metal fans in the UK are white; and by my class which is middle class.²⁶ So when I read *Kerrang!* it is both aimed at me and not at me: I am both the recipient of its myth-messages and their critic. Pearce recommends 'greater self-reflexivity' when reading, in order to recognise 'both our "situatedness" as readers and the dialogic nature of any textual encounter' (Pearce 1995, 93). A semiotic analysis of *Kerrang!* using Barthes' 'scientific' technique may at first appear to work towards an objective account of the letters pages. But my readings of *Kerrang!* are informed by my position as a fan and as a sometime-leisure-reader of the magazine. The semiotic technique means that any assumptions about the

²⁶ My upbringing in a middle class suburb, my schooling in that suburb, my university education, my current situation in a well-off suburb, living with a middle class man, with a nearly new car, a full wine rack and a spice rack, plus the economic resources to pursue a self-funded doctorate, all signify my middle-classness.

metal community on which I may have been tempted to draw, have to be laid to one side. The necessity of identifying the elements on the page ensured that I was able to do this. However, my knowledge of the magazine and many of the bands mentioned meant that nuances in meanings that may not be apparent to non-fans were evident to me and informed my readings.

The ideology expressed in *Kerrang!* provides a particular kind of knowledge about women as a group and, despite its 'real letters' from 'real fans', this is a knowledge that is presented from the perspective of the British magazine publishing industry. The magazine's editors during my timeframe were men. Publishing companies Emap and Bauer who owned *Kerrang!* also own a number of other titles. In other words, *Kerrang!* may be presented by its editors as a grassroots zine, but it is one magazine amongst many, designed to make money for the companies' owners. The representation of women by *Kerrang!* is the representation by the dominant media-owning class. Drawing upon Catherine MacKinnon, Sandra Harding and others, Maynard argues that challenging knowledge *about* women is a vital step towards a 'more complete and less distorted knowledge' (Maynard 1994, 1) about women's lives. It was, therefore, important to hear the voices of women fans in a context unmediated by *Kerrang!* and speaking to women fans was the most direct route to this. I decided to conduct interviews in order to address the 'distorted knowledge' (Maynard 1994, 1) about women fans that *Kerrang!* provides, by listening to the stories and experiences of women fans first-hand.

Interviewing women fans

When beginning this research I thought of myself as a shy woman. When I considered speaking to women strangers I felt daunted and so I investigated the best way to discover women's words without becoming overwhelmed by the need to meet a lot of strangers. I read a number of autobiographies by women fans, but these tended to be directed towards relating their experiences as groupies, therefore they did not represent the experiences of the majority of women fans (Fast 1999, 256). I considered asking women to write letters or emails to me. This was an attractive prospect that negated the need to meet any women in person. As a girl and young woman I was a prolific letter writer and enjoyed the intimacy that developed between correspondents. I remembered the joy of sharing and the thrill of my pen running away from me as I told my pen-friend about my week, my dreams and my fears. I saw using letter-writing as a research method as one which offered the opportunity to study writings in an intimate and in-depth style about musical loves. I was inspired by Jackie Stacey's work on film fans (Stacey 1994). This romantic idea of what letter-writing could mean did not take into account the ways in which technology has changed our communicative styles since I was a young woman, of course. Nowadays more written communication occurs across digital media platforms via, for

example, text messaging, email and social networking sites. These modes are rarely used as a direct replacement for the kinds of letters I was envisaging. Messages tend to be much shorter with a much speedier response between interlocutors. Meaning is established between the two (or more) correspondents over a short period of time, rather than put forward by one and received by the other. These changes, I already knew, made a big difference. Letter-writing is perceived as out of fashion, 'quaint', and unnecessarily time-consuming. I reluctantly concluded that if I asked people to write letters to me I was unlikely to receive many responses. I had tried adopting emails as a replacement for letters in my earlier research: for my MA project I had sought emails from strangers. Although I received enough responses to be of use, the method did not fulfil my hopes. Emails were a lot more time-consuming and patchy in terms of results than I had hoped. The problems were, first, that I received few responses, and secondly that in emails people tended to give short responses that required numerous follow-up messages to glean information. Thus the data was sparse and tended to be rather shallow. This was a great disappointment to me.

Reflecting on my MA experience I realised that I would need to ask people questions directly. I was uncomfortable with the idea of using online methods such as Facebook Chat, despite its obvious benefits of requiring no transcription, because I anticipated that I would encounter the same problems of short, shallow answers. The medium did not seem to suit longer and more passionate responses. Further disadvantages in using an online interviewing method would be the way in which inequalities in access to a computer and the necessary technological skills would limit the pool of potential participants (O'Connor, Madge, Shaw and Wellens 2008, 277), and heighten the potential for miscommunication when both interviewer and participant type at the same time (Opdenakker 2006). Even in spite of my shyness I felt I would prefer to speak to women in person so that they could describe their fandom at some length and I could push for meaning in a more natural setting. My decision to conduct interviews was one borne of a feminist imperative to include women as participants in my research, rather than as objects of study (Oakley quoted in Reinharz 1992, 28), and 'consistent with [my] interest in avoiding control over others and developing a sense of connectedness with people' (Reinharz 1992, 20). The decision was also directed by the nature of the research question, which required stories of engagement with music as fans, and reflections upon encounters with other fans. Jennifer Mason argues that interviews are suited to generating data that emphasises 'depth, nuance, complexity and roundness' (Mason 2002, 65), and for this reason conducting interviews is a suitable method for investigating the experiences of women rock fans.

I chose semi-structured face-to-face interviews, rather than focus groups, as I wanted women to feel that they could be open and truthful about their fandom. I was concerned that focus groups may lead into genre debates, a discussion of what metal 'is' or 'isn't', that may alienate some fans or leave them feeling that their tastes or habits were not 'metal enough'. I wanted women to self-define the genre(s) of their fandom, free from the incursions of others' definitions. Semi-structured interviews allow for 'free interaction between the researcher and the interviewee' (Reinharz 1992, 18) and allow opportunities to ask for more information and clarification. Interviews would give participants space to voice their opinions and feelings, and provide the space for them to direct the flow of the discussion, to a certain degree. The interview schedule would be flexible, allowing discussions to arise fairly naturally, but the questions were there to guide me should the meeting not cover the topics it needed to.

I conducted interviews with 19 women who responded to my request for heavy metal fans or for fans of bands mentioned in *Kerrang!* (for mini-biographies of my interviewees see Appendix F). Finding participants was not as easy as I had anticipated. I had intended to approach women at concerts and ask them whether they would be willing to talk to me on another occasion. I did not want to conduct short interviews at the time, partly because I did not think short interviews would give me rich enough data, partly for logistical reasons (how do you hear a recording made with loud background noise?). M. Geneva Murray's research on roller derby fans highlights a further ethical issue: whilst conducting interviews at bouts she found that participants at such events may be intoxicated (Murray 2012, 110). Similarly, whilst not everyone who attends hard rock and metal concerts gets drunk, alcohol is part of the culture and I would not necessarily be able to identify whether a woman who was a stranger to me was sober enough to make an informed decision about consent and about how much to divulge. My initial attempts to approach women at gigs, however, were very awkward and were met with distrust. The women I spoke to were obviously uncomfortable with my advances and not one of the few who gave me their email addresses responded to my follow-up messages. As a result I turned to acquaintance introductions and from there I used the snowballing technique. This made for a rather slow process, but a greater sense of trust on the part of my interviewees when I emailed them, and therefore a greater response rate.

The interviews were conducted in two time periods: the first occurred between late 2008 and spring 2010, and the second in the summer of 2011. Most interviews took place in cafés, but in some cases in private houses (one at mine, others at interviewees' homes) or in pubs during quiet lunch times. Four were conducted in empty University class or study rooms, and one in a small park. The women lived in Leeds, Liverpool, London, Loughborough, Newcastle, Northampton, Rotherham, and York. Whilst I was seeking

interviewees I worked as an administrator at Leeds Trinity University (LTU), and this connection enabled me to meet a wide range of people. My first interviewee (Laura) was introduced to me by a colleague at LTU, and through this initial contact I met three further women who were sisters (Gwen, Bert, Aime). Further interviewees were either acquaintances known to me as metal fans (three women: Patti, Jeanette, Jenny); friends of friends (two women: Ruby, Kimberley); friends of interviewees (two women: Sally, Carol); other employees at LTU (two women: Dolly, Karen); students in the Centre for Women's Studies (two women: Susan, Hazel); and three LTU students who responded to an advertisement I placed on the LTU student intranet (Éowyn, Jessica, Alexa). The final interview was conducted spontaneously during a social meeting with a colleague at the University of Northampton (Aria). As a result of the snowballing technique the ages of my interviewees cluster around early-mid 30s (around my own age). Two of the women were older (54 and 69), whilst five were younger (16-25). I would have liked to have found more older women to speak to, as the two I spoke to had different perspectives both from each other and from the younger women. Both were also adept at looking back at their earlier selves and reflecting on the choices they had made and, although all the women did this to some extent, their stories illuminated how being a fan had changed over time, whilst some things had remained the same.²⁷ I advertised for students at LTU to hear the voices of younger women as the younger women I had interviewed at the start of the fieldwork had different perspectives from the women in their 30s, and I wanted to see if these perspectives were common amongst younger women. But this is not research across the lifecourse and I reflect upon interviewees' ages only where it is salient to the analysis.

Most women did not have children. I asked how their music fandom fitted in with their family life and only two women discussed their children. Some I knew not to be parents at the time of the interview. It is unlikely that any of the women had children and did not mention it: had they been mothers I could reasonably have expected any children to be mentioned in answering questions about family. I would have liked to have interviewed more women who were mothers to hear more stories about how parenthood affects women's ability to continue their fannish lives.

²⁷ For instance, listening practices have changed: Carol described the ways in which as a teenager in the 1970s she could not afford to buy all the albums she wanted to hear, so she and her friends would buy one each and loan them to one another. More recently CD and mp3 albums can be purchased cheaply and copied easily or music can be streamed via a number of websites or internet applications (Spotify, for example), making the ownership of albums less communal: access to music is easier and cheaper and does not necessitate a physical, bought item such as an LP, cassette or CD. On the other hand, the desire to share listening experiences has remained the same: Aime described sitting with her friend in the cinema listening to the same iPod, but with one ear phone each; Carol described social listening to albums at her friends' houses when their parents were out.

All of the women were white, and most British. I did not make a decision to study white women, rather I was introduced to white women or white women responded to my advert. It is generally accepted by British metal scholars that visible fans of metal in Britain are predominantly white, although little work has been done to ascertain this, and it must be assumed that the conclusion has been reached from metal scholars' observations at concerts and festivals. It should be noted that in other parts of the world metal fandom is not the preserve of white people or ex-pats: hard rock and metal has appeal around the globe.²⁸ I would have liked to have spoken to women of other ethnicities, but, with hindsight, my sampling method did have a white bias (friendship groups are often segregated by race). On reflection I wish I had made a greater effort to speak to women of colour. Whiteness in my interviewees' responses is an invisible privilege and not acknowledged.²⁹ Although I did not focus on this in my thesis, race in metal is in urgent need of research. There is a recently published personal account of a black Canadian woman's fandom (Dawes 2012), and some UK work on musicians and whiteness (Lucas 2011, Spracklan 2010b).

I collected demographic data, asking women about their religious views, class identity, age, ethnicity, occupation and where they lived. I did not ask directly about sexuality. Rather, I asked about family, which resulted in responses about male partners and husbands, as well as parents and siblings. I do know the following from the interviews: four women were married to a man or living with a long-term male partner; three had been married to or had lived with a man. In addition to this I knew one woman to be bisexual and subsequent to the interviews she married a man. Another I knew to be heterosexual; and a further interviewee has since formed a long-term partnership with a man. One woman had a boyfriend, and another mentioned a bisexual phase, implying heterosexuality at the time of the interview, although she did not state this. For eight of my interviewees sexuality cannot be inferred. Amber R. Clifford-Napoleone is undertaking a global study of queer metal fans and I refer the reader to her work in the field (Clifford-Napoleone 2009).

Class is a rather controversial area in metal studies: Weinstein argues that the genre is a working class one (Weinstein 2000, 113) and others have suggested that whatever the class make up of the genres' bands and fans in the post 2000s, it remains symbolically working class (Brown 2009, 1-2; Riches 2011, 323). Conversely, it has been argued that for all its working-class roots, in many ways metal is a very middle-class genre. Drawing

²⁸ For more detail about metal fandom in the international context see *Metal Rules The Globe: Heavy Metal Music Around the World* (2011) by Jeremy Wallach, Harris M. Berger and Paul D. Greene.

²⁹ Race and whiteness did not form part of my questioning and so discussions on this could not necessarily be expected.

on Walser's argument of the necessity of high musical standards in metal (Walser 1993, 57-107), Niall Scott argues that to be a successful musician requires musical training and equipment, and the kinds of intense practice and musicianship that are required for classical music (Niall Scott, 22nd October 2012, email to author). This suggests access to the funds that are more likely to be available in middle class families. Published discussions of metal and class have drawn on the known class backgrounds of the musicians but there is little quantitative data on the class backgrounds of fans. In her study of the death metal subculture, Purcell found that 'the majority of respondents were middle class' (Purcell 2003, 108), but her respondents were a mixture of fans and musicians (and fan-musicians). There is, then, no published evidence of the class make up of fans, and no consensus amongst metal scholars, either. There is therefore no reason to *assume* a working class audience for the genre in the UK, and my data bears this out. Those interviewees who declared a class identity were fairly evenly split in giving them as working (four) or middle class (five). Others described their identity in more ambiguous terms that reflected upon their family backgrounds and their childhoods, as well as weighing up their current circumstances. Four described themselves as working/middle class and one claimed the identity of 'ex-working class'. One interviewee did not know her class, three did not answer the question (either because the interview ended hurriedly or because the interview was spontaneous and I did not have my interview schedule with me). No interviewees claimed an upper or under class identity.

Eleven of my interviewees were atheists (either they declared themselves to be so or they expressed themselves in terms which can be interpreted as atheistic: no belief in a god or gods; some added further information – one stating she was Wiccan, one humanist and one that she believed in science); two were agnostic; two were Christian; one said she used to be Protestant but had no religion now without expressing anything else about her beliefs. Information for three women is missing due to a hurried end to the interview or, in one case, the interviewee did not answer the question in my follow up email. I collected data on religion because I suspected that there would be a high proportion of atheism and agnosticism due to the nihilism generally expressed in many metal lyrics. Of known beliefs/non-beliefs 69% of my respondents answered atheist. As a starting point, information on Wikipedia's 'Demographics of Atheism' page (Demographics of Atheism, Wikipedia) states that in a YouGov poll in 2007 49% of British women believe in God. That women hard rock and metal fans show a higher incidence of atheism is fascinating and may be an area of research to take forward.

My interviewees had various occupations. Seven were professionals (teacher, lecturer, charity manager, laboratory manager, bank mediator, accountant and market analyst); four were students (three undergraduates, one MA); two were unemployed having just

completed their studies (one GCSEs, one PhD); three were administrators; one worked in the service industry; one was retired. From this can be seen that there was generally a high level of education amongst my interviewees. Sally, who managed a domestic abuse charity, was in the process of completing her third degree! In some ways this high level of education and the number of professional occupations is symptomatic of the snowballing method of introductions to interviewees, but if this is a trend more generally it is suggestive of hard rock and metal as appealing to listeners with higher educations.

In seeking interviewees I made it clear that I wished to speak to women with a general preference for bands either named in *Kerrang!* or that they thought of as heavy metal. I hoped to meet women who were fans of a range of different bands. My purpose was to explore how fans relate to their favourite music across the hard rock and metal genre. I wanted to elicit stories of passionate engagement from a range of subgenres. Colleagues at the fourth Music, Metal and Politics Conference (Heavy Fundametalisms, Prague, 9th-11th May 2012) suggested that I would not be able to make generalisations about women when my sample included fans of bands from across the hard rock and metal spectrum. However, each woman liked bands from a range of subgenres, and described the feeling of, on occasion, needing to suppress some of these preferences in order to fit in. Aime, for example, minimised her affection for My Chemical Romance and Britney Spears when in the company of her newer friends who preferred Avenged Sevenfold, a heavier band. I argue that the umbrella of hard rock and metal brings together people with common ideas about music more than can be assumed once the research is split into subgenres. In particular the assertion of hard rock and metal music as different to pop music (and *better*) was common amongst my interviewees no matter which subgenre they preferred. This is not to deny the differences between subgenres, but rather to address the fact that whilst there is research on particular subgenres (death metal – Vasan 2010, 2011, Kahn-Harris 2007, Riches 2011; black metal – Kahn-Harris 2007, Lucas 2011; Spracklen 2010, 2010a, 2010b; emo – Williams 2007, Overell 2010; grindcore – Overell 2009, 2011; hardcore punk – Kuhn 2010, Haenfler 2006, Moore 2004, Ensminger 2010; glam – Sollee 2010; grunge – Prato 2009) there are no contemporary studies of the broad genre. *Kerrang!* itself covers artists across subgenres and caters for fans of this broad community, even if its coverage is not even or equally extensive.

The women I spoke to liked music from the following genres: progressive rock, post-hardcore, metalcore, alternative rock, pop punk, emo, alternative metal, nu metal, post-metal, instrumental rock, ambient, stoner metal, sludge metal, Neue Deutsche Härte, doom, melodic hardcore, thrash metal, speed metal, blues rock, black metal and folk rock. There is some crossover between these subgenres and being a fan of one band from one subgenre does not mean liking all bands of that subgenre or that bands in other

subgenres are disliked (see Bennett's work on neo-tribes [1999]). Furthermore, a preference for a band at one end of the hard rock and metal spectrum (if that spectrum is defined by the level of heaviness in the sound) may lead to an exploration of increasingly heavy bands, as it did for my interviewee Sally, who described progressing from Skid Row (glam metal) to Metallica (thrash metal) and to increasingly 'hard' bands.

My Chemical Romance is interesting in this respect: a number of the women liked the band before becoming enamoured with heavier bands (Avenged Sevenfold for example). My Chemical Romance functions as what Brown jokingly describes as 'entry level metal' (Brown in conversation at Heavy Fundamentals, Prague, 9th-11th May 2012). This was acknowledged by Jenny, a fan of sludge and doom. She was not a fan of My Chemical Romance herself, but, in discussing her friend's child's love of My Chemical Romance, she said that there was 'hope for her. She's in vaguely the right direction' (Jenny).

Thinking about hard rock and metal as a spectrum means that strict genre boundaries are jettisoned and that the flow of a band's oeuvre between subgenres (for instance My Chemical Romance moving between emo and Queen-like pomp rock, or Enslaved moving from black metal to prog metal) can be acknowledged. As far as fans go, un-pigeonholing musical taste means that fans may enjoy music outside of the genre altogether yet still hold some degree of identity or allegiance with the hard rock and metal community.

All of my interviewees were familiar with *Kerrang!* magazine, although not all were current readers. Not all declared themselves 'heavy metal fans' and this may have been due to a number of reasons, for example personal preferences for a range of bands, meaning that an assertion of fandom of a single genre did not seem to apply to them; or the difference between which bands appear in *Kerrang!* and which bands they thought of as heavy metal. Another possible reason could have been the gendered implications of being a heavy metal fan which mean that women's validity as fans is questioned by male fans.

In creating the interview schedule I devised questions that I hoped would encourage women to talk about their experiences (see Appendix E). During the interviews I asked additional questions to clarify meaning or allow for expansion as necessary. I undertook a pilot study to establish how well my questions worked and made adjustments as a result. I realised that some of my questions used language that was suited to an academic context, but not to a semi-structured interview. Thus the question 'how do you think that your being a music fan affects you on an everyday level?' was broken down into a number of smaller questions around clothing and opinions. During the pilot interviews my participants expressed confusion and discomfort when I asked them outright for their class. It seemed to cause consternation around being aligned with a definite identity, as well as around where class boundaries sit. I made changes in response to these anxieties. To get around this confusion, I asked if interviewees had any 'class identity'.

This allowed them to say 'no' if they chose, or to say a bit more about their parents' backgrounds without committing themselves to one single class. Class clearly was not a straightforward issue for the women. For example, Dolly described herself as moving from a middle class identity, which she held whilst married, to a working class one as her divorce progressed, resulting in a change in her financial circumstances as a lone mother raising two children. Gwen described herself as having working class pride, but without a class identity. She contrasted her progression from a 'ridiculously working class' (Gwen) upbringing to classlessness with that of the girls with whom she grew up in Telford. She thought of herself as having escaped their fate, which was to have children at an early age and rely upon the Welfare State, because she had received a university education and now had a well-paid professional job. I also introduced a demographic question about religion. In the interviews religion was not spoken of in detail by any of the participants and so I have not discussed it in this thesis. The final change to the schedule was that I re-ordered the questions into logical groupings so that all questions about *Kerrang!* were together, as were questions about favourite bands, family and friends.

The questions in the final schedule focused on participation in activities such as writing to magazines and concert attendance; descriptions of beloved bands and their music; relationships with family and friends; interpretations of heavy metal and perspectives on groupies. Most women were quite forthcoming and answered my questions readily, although some had to think about answers more than others. In general they seemed to enjoy talking about themselves, the music and their experiences. They told me anecdotes, discussed personal matters such as relationships with family and lovers, they reflected on the past and discussed their hopes for the future. Subjects such as politics and world events also came up, but most of the women stuck to answering the questions quite succinctly. Often I thought I knew what my interviewee meant when she gave an answer, but I tried not to assume that my readings were correct and pushed for clarification or further information. Sometimes this meant deviating from the schedule, but it was vital to ascertain precise meanings. This was a particularly useful technique when interviewing Jenny, as she was not loquacious and tended to give very short answers, and also when interviewing Gwen, who was garrulous, but tended to talk around the question and did not always come to an answer immediately. Only one of my interviewees told me that she was shy and that coming to meet me, a stranger, was quite an achievement for her. This was Bert, and she brought her sister and some friends to the café for moral support. They sat at a different table and their laughter punctuates the recording of the interview. Despite her shyness she gave detailed answers and presented her opinions confidently.

On the whole the interviews were marked by a great deal of joy and laughter. Whilst transcribing I noticed that I had made a number of jokes to break the ice and to find

common ground. Sometimes these jokes worked and sometimes not! I tried to keep my comments to a minimum, not to interrupt and to give interviewees time to finish answering the questions. Some women seemed warmer towards me and more willing to answer questions in depth when I shared some of my own experiences and my own musical pleasures. This I would do if I felt that the interviewee was beginning to limit her answers, and it did seem to help them to open up as it more realistically mimicked the process of a natural conversation. Some of the woman not only wanted to talk about the music they loved, but also to suggest to me which bands to listen to and I often came away from interviews with lists of bands to try out. I enjoyed this aspect of gathering information for personal pleasure as well as for academic use. It also aided the flow of the interview, lending the feel of a 'conversation with a purpose' (Mason 2002, 74), as exchanging music between fans has a strong history in hard rock and metal and was discussed by a number of my interviewees (see also Kahn-Harris on tape trading: 2007, 78-80), as well as being an important part of my own fandom. Other women sought guidance from me. Dolly, for example, spoke to me as if I were an expert on the genre, and asked for advice on how to get to know more people with similar tastes. I was happy to provide her with the names of some Internet forums that I knew other fans had found useful in this sense. Dolly was also relatively new to metal and keen to learn about the history of the genre. Although I felt somewhat uncomfortable in the role of metal-educator, I recommended she watch the comedy mock tour documentary about a fictional 1980s heavy metal band *This is Spinal Tap* (Reiner 1984). The film is now a cult classic and much-loved by hard rock and metal fans. Each of the interviews was slightly different and required me to be sensitive to the differing power relations and flexible to find the best balance for each interview.

Meeting the women proved to be a great deal more fun than I had anticipated. I had expected to find meeting strangers in cafés and other public places awkward, but this was not the case. Initial introductions were straightforward, I bought drinks, and then began the interview as soon as possible. I did not want to take up any more of my interviewees' time than necessary and in most cases was able to keep the interviews to around an hour in length. A lot of the women met me in between doing other things, such as a lunch break from their work or studies, or before meeting friends or relatives, and in these cases I kept a close eye on the time to ensure that they did not feel resentful if they thought they might be late for their subsequent meetings.

I transcribed the interviews using Transcriva software, and then coded them thematically. Themes were identified as those topics discussed by a number of interviews, or by forming a response of some sort to the myths I identified in *Kerrang!*. Although I began to code information about musical aspirations, I found that my data was incomplete. This is an area I would like to give attention in a future study. The first stage of the analysis

involved the thematic coding of interview data to draw out specific areas of interest in order to begin close reading. I chose themes that arose as important areas of discussion for a significant number of respondents, and that were relevant to my interest in gender, sexism and attitudes to the music (see Table 2: First level coding of interview data).

Table 2: First level coding of interview data

Descriptions of heavy metal	Reasons for liking favourite bands
Harassment inside metal	Harassment outside metal
Sexism / male dominance in metal	The rock/pop divide
Groupies	Meeting bands
Becoming a musician/playing an instrument	

Some other topics that were raised by many interviewees, such as their relationships with their families, tattoos and piercings, did not have a direct bearing on my main interest areas and these themes were not coded. The coding process involved close-reading the transcript of each interview and pulling out relevant exchanges or responses to questions. I then placed these responses in a spreadsheet with interviewee names in the horizontal and the themes in the vertical. Once this process was completed I was able to cross-reference what other interviewees had said on a particular theme, as well as to see how the response fitted in with the interviewee's responses and comments on other topics.

From this initial coding I began close-readings of each theme and in some cases broke the themes down further. For instance, 'reasons for liking favourite bands' covered many areas and so further themes were drawn from this (see Table 3: Second level coding of interview data).

Table 3: Second level coding of interview data

Guitars	Heavy/hard
Bass/drums	Virtuosity
Non-love Lyrics	Loudness
Not pop	Emotions
Songwriting	Attraction to musician
Different from other rock	Artwork
Other	

In analysing the data I draw upon the techniques of critical discourse analysis. There are many analytical approaches to discourse (Alba-Juez 2009, 15), and Alan Bryman contends that the approach can be seen as ‘an analytic mentality’ (Bryman 2001, 360) rather than a codifiable practice. The analytic mentality does not presume the existence of an ‘external reality’ (Bryman 2001, 360) that is awaiting discovery and presentation. Thus it does not privilege the researcher as someone able to uncover that external reality or ‘the truth’. Language does not have straightforward and apolitical meaning, and the speaker exists within an environment in which differing ideologies are discursively constructed. The language used, therefore, is both affected by the ideology of the speaker, and at the same time constructs that ideology (Griffin 2005, 96). Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk’s method of critical discourse analysis offers specific tools with which to scrutinise the ways in which language is invested. Fairclough examines language use in relation to ‘social and cultural processes’ so that the way in which language constructs reality is interrogated in close detail (Hesmondhalgh 2006, 122). The tools on offer are particularly suited to someone with an English Literature background (like me), as they involve close-readings for ‘the deployment of specific textual features (lexical, grammatical, semantic)’ (Griffin 2007, 9). Some elements that Fairclough considers in his analyses of *This Week* and *Today* are: metaphors, imagery, syntax and clause order, register, vocabulary, colloquialisms, adjectives, pronouns, absences, vaguenesses and alternative words. In his analysis of a *Sun* news article, van Dijk examines: rhetoric, hyperbole, metaphor, register, sentence construction, sentence topic and comment, lexicon, implications, the use of numbers and capitals, jargon and quotation marks (both examples in Hesmondhalgh 2006, 123-7, 130-4). Both these examples analyse media texts to identify the way in which language is used to create a political affect. Although not all of these elements are relevant when analysing interview data (capitals are not recorded, for instance), the technique provides familiar tools with which to

assess what my interviewees said, and allows me to pay attention to the ways in which their language fits in with, or is resistant to, the myths of *Kerrang!*.

Narrative analysis pays similar attention to the ideological production of the language in use, but it does so within the context of the story sequence and thus requires the identification of the sequence of the stories told. This makes for a close attention to the stories and their sequences themselves resulting in the reification of structures (Riessman 1993, 70). My interviewees told stories in their responses to my questions, but in order to understand their attitudes to particular topics, for example, groupies, or the bands they liked, I had to break these stories down, meaning that sequence was not a key dimension for my analysis. In my analysis I examined how the women employed the kinds of language that are associated with the myths that I identified in *Kerrang!* magazine. Their interactions with the discourses of the imaginary community were complex and suggested further ways in which the myths propagated by *Kerrang!* worked, and ways in which the women obviously did not find them compelling.

I tried, in my analyses, to consider the impact that my position as researcher, feminist and fan had. Prior to the interviews I did not state that I was conducting feminist research; however, I did direct participants to the page about my research on the Centre for Women's Studies website. Those who viewed the page may have inferred a feminist perspective from my use of the terms 'male-dominated' and 'ultra masculine'. If they had looked for more information about the Centre they may have seen the homepage description of the Centre as a base for 'feminist and gender-oriented teaching and research'. Yet there are many different interpretations of feminism and whilst my feminism may have raised certain expectations in some of my interviewees, I cannot make claims about what those might have been. Furthermore at the start of the interviews most of the women seemed to view me as a fellow fan, if not of the same particular bands then at least of the hard rock and metal genre. They spoke to me of bands with the assumption that I knew of those bands. For instance, Metallica were mentioned by many women without ever being introduced or described. From this I infer that they would be likely to assume that I had some experiences of going to gigs, reading magazines, and talking about music with others, experience that they may have imagined were commensurate with their own. Thus I think that my interviewees imagined me as a fellow fan, as an *insider*, rather than as a disengaged researcher. I therefore had, in their eyes, an understanding of and investment in what the 'community' is like. However, my position as a feminist and my phrasing on the website may also have led them to believe that I was approaching hard rock and metal in a confrontational way, and that the genre needed to be defended. My role as both insider and outsider eliciting stories will, of course, have affected what the women decided to tell me.

I have noted where relevant when I think my interviewees were telling me something with those positions, particularly those of feminist and researcher, in mind. The impact of my position as a fellow fan is not so easy to identify. Where it has been apparent in the analysis that I did not push far enough for clarification of meaning or where I did make assumptions I have tried to explain what assumptions I was making and how these have affected my analysis. Maynard argues that 'it is not always so easy to reduce the power dynamics that are likely to be present in research and it is unlikely that they can ever be eradicated completely' (Maynard 1994, 16). Some feminist researchers have attempted to minimise the impact by distancing themselves from their academic positions by defining themselves as 'learners and listeners rather than "researchers"' (Reinharz 1992, 29) in order to gain the trust of their participants. Rather than taking this approach I chose to disclose my own fandom of hard rock and metal. Therefore I did not anticipate that there would be significant trust issues around the interview process that would necessitate minimising my academic position. Indeed, to distance myself from that position would have meant being duplicitous, and also ignorant of the power relations that are at work in the interview process. Interviewees therefore always knew me as a researcher from the Centre for Women's Studies.

What I hoped to achieve was a sense of creating a shared representation of women fans, so that the interviewees in my research could be seen as participants (Reinharz 1992, 22). Nevertheless, there is a tension between my desire to feel that I am doing justice to the opinions of the women I spoke to and to see them as my colleagues in making sense of what it is to be a woman hard rock and metal fan, and the needs of the research as an academic study which requires data generation. This tension ultimately puts the power of representation into my hands and, although all of my interviewees signed informed consent forms and understood the purpose of the interviews, they now have little control over how they appear. Reading the final chapter of *Rockin' Out The Box* concerned me because I felt that Schippers was attributing some sort of false consciousness to her interviewees as she described the way in which she believed their project had failed (Schippers 2002, 154-190). This has made me wary of betraying my interviewees' trust by presenting them in a negative light. Yet it is important not to ignore important conclusions that I may want to draw in favour of 'defending' my interviewees. The purpose of the research is not to support their views unquestioningly, but it is necessary to be aware that the women I spoke to do not, on the whole, have a sphere in which they can respond to my claims to the same (academic) audience.³⁰ As I was writing chapters that dealt

³⁰ This tension is discussed by Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002, 116-7) and Reinharz (1992, 27-9) who describe the accommodations some feminist researchers needed to make when challenged by interviewees after publication.

specifically with analysis of the interviews, I sent drafts to three of the women I interviewed and asked for their feedback. These particular women had expressed an interest in reading a chapter or paper. Their responses were positive and they felt that they had not been misrepresented so no further accommodations were needed. One sent further comments on her feelings of pleasurable transgression at enjoying music so often associated with men, but otherwise comments were limited to approval.

In analysing the interviews I anonymised the women, a practice I indicated at the interviews, although a number of interviewees said they were quite happy not to be anonymous, and only one woman made this a condition of participation in my research. A few women chose their own pseudonyms, which I used. For others I chose a name, paying careful attention to the subtle impressions of name meanings so that nuances of class, race, age, gender and location were preserved.

Personal challenges in the process of the research

Conducting all the interviews took a great deal longer than I had anticipated and eventually they occurred over a period of five years. As a part-time student I undertook paid employment alongside the research. This restricted my ability to make plans and meet participants. The working conditions of the part-time job were not ideal, although my employer was generally supportive of the research. The earliest parts of the research were conducted whilst I lived on a shoe-string budget and I would not have been able to continue with my studies without assistance from my partner, my mother and my grandmother. These straitened circumstances meant that I had to work throughout the PhD, initially as an administrator and latterly as an hourly-paid lecturer. This limited the amount of time I could devote to the PhD. The death of my grandmother was a very great blow, but she left me a small legacy which eased my financial straits, although it did not remove the necessity of paid employment. The need to work has impacted upon the amount of time I have been able to devote to my studies, and there have been occasions when my research has not so much taken a back seat as been forgotten in the boot. Nevertheless, the seven years of this project have given me ample opportunity to reflect upon my data, and they have also seen the blossoming of the field of metal studies. The work in this new field has inspired and informed me, and the support of my fellow metal scholars has been invaluable, especially at times when I have been ill.

My stressful employment and financial circumstances compounded depressive periods brought on by the loneliness and insecurity of doctoral studies. In research training a great deal of attention is given to the ethics of working with human subjects; very little is paid to the researcher who undertakes an incredible amount of work and endures a very intense emotional relationship with the research throughout the process. Doctoral-induced

depression is beginning to be acknowledged as not just a personal issue, but symptomatic of particular pressures. While this is now being discussed (Fullick 2011, Price 2012) I would argue that it is also important to recognise and begin to delineate the effect on 'actual' research and its associated outcomes. Depression is common amongst doctoral students: one US study found that 15% of graduate students reported depressive symptoms, and to put this in perspective, a study of the general US population found that 6.4% suffered depressive symptoms (Price 2012). Meanwhile a Canadian study of psychology graduate students placed the figure at 33% (Price 2012). Work by Mongrain and Blackburn draws a direct link between the nature of doctoral studies, including the personality types of students attracted to further study and the incidence of recurrent depression. Factors include perfectionism, financial penury, fears of a weak job market, poor social support and lack of supervisory support (Price 2012). Mellonie Fullick draws on her own experience and the experiences of others to conclude that depression is a 'structural (and *normalized*) issue rather than an anecdotal one' (Fullick 2011). My depression is, then, not unusual and has led to a long period of instability in my mental health which impacted on my ability to conduct my research. I received good support from my supervisor and from the University's counselling service. Nevertheless, this ill-health resulted in a lack of energy and enthusiasm. The interviews took considerable emotional toil to administer: finding interviewees, arranging interviews, and conducting them all took their toll in draining my limited emotional resources. After conducting about half of the interviews I simply 'ran out of steam'. I took time off from interviewing and during this period I worked on establishing the concept of imaginary community, before returning to interviewing with renewed vigour in 2010. The last interview was conducted in spring 2012 after a further gap of six months, during which I transcribed the interviews and began my analysis. The long gap between the two sets of interviews had the positive result that my questions became more focused as I knew better what kinds of information I was looking for. In the Summer of 2011 I undertook a course of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, which has been greatly beneficial by providing strategies to manage my mental health. At this time I was also able to resign from my administrative position and to undertake hourly-paid lecturing, a role I enjoy immensely (despite its own financial worries and stresses). These two factors have led to a great improvement in my health and I am glad to report that the final two years of my PhD have been free from serious depressive periods.

In spite of the personal difficulties produced by the research, the project has been successful and there have been many happy moments. As I reflect upon the whole process of this research, I conclude that the dual-method approach proved to be more ambitious than I had anticipated, and also richer and more rewarding. The semiotic readings of *Kerrang!* took more time than I expected: interpretation of the layers of visual and textual data meant that I needed to return to the same letters pages on a number of

occasions in order to make the deep readings which were necessary to draw out the myths for analysis. Through this in-depth work I produced detailed and nuanced readings of the letters pages, so that the length of time required proved to be well rewarded. Despite my initial reluctance to conduct interviews, and in spite of my mental ill health that prolonged the time over which they were conducted, the interviews themselves proved to be a joyful experience³¹ and produced useful data. Overall I feel I succeeded in encouraging my participants to think about both their fandom and their gender. They provided rich stories and discussions on a range of topics, as well as unlooked-for encouragement and support for my project. The use of myth and ideology as a framework was not a straightforward undertaking, but it enabled me to dig deeply into the ways in which women are represented in key metal media, and to make arguments about the way in which this is a misrepresentation, and to interpret the ways in which that misrepresentation impacted upon women's discourse about their fandom. Bringing the two methods together was challenging, but profitable, permitting me to make a comparison between the representation of women fans in the media and the ways in which women fans viewed themselves. That the two presentations offered up a mis-match meant that the gap between the two was in need of feminist analysis that brought forward the ways in which women are mis-served by the dominant misrepresentation. Using two methods, then, has proven to be a fruitful approach, dovetailing together to provide a rich picture of the representation of women hard rock and metal fans and of the experiences of women fans.

³¹ Once I had learned to touch-type, even transcribing the interviews became a fun exercise, allowing me to relive the time I spent in my interviewees' company.

Chapter Four: Imagining the Community: Authenticity, Equality, Warriors and Groupies

Little research has been published on how women fans are portrayed in the rock print media. Some studies examine the representation of women musicians in the music press (for instance Johnson-Grau 2002, Kruse 2002, Feigenbaum 2005, Collette 2006 and White 2006), but Davies' 2001 article, which looks at how the UK indie press treats women fans (and musicians), is in sparse company and as Davies devotes the majority of the article to musicians, the section on fans is relatively short. She delineates four categories of fans for discussion: teenyboppers; 'serious music' fans; subcultures; and groupies. The section on musicians is backed up with carefully selected evidence from magazines, the fans section less so:

References to [female teenage fans] tend to be snide or ironic comments in reviews of singles, albums and live performances, and for this reason my comments here are largely based on overviews of music writing, rather than on specific examples taken from the music press. (Davies 2001, 311)

Her analysis of the categories therefore relies on generalised reflections across the magazines rather than close readings or content analysis and so it feels flimsier and less secure than the section on musicians. My aim in this chapter, therefore, is to approach *Kerrang!* magazine in a systematic way in order to provide evidence via content and semiotic analysis, for my assertion that the way in which the magazine portrays women fans is as attendants to male pleasure. This message is communicated through complex myths that create an enticing sense of community amongst readers, and establishes gendered roles for its members. I structure the chapter by first introducing *Kerrang!*'s letters pages and returning to consider the epistemological question of how to 'read' them. I then analyse the designs, photographs and letters to consider how two myths of the community – equality and authenticity – are evident, and play a significant role in determining how the community imagines itself.³² From there I move to an analysis of the same elements as they conjure up a further two myths in which the roles of fan and musician are prescribed by gender. Finally I draw these four myths together to examine how *Kerrang!* represents women in the imaginary community, and posit how this representation is problematic in a number of ways.

³² The myths I discuss here are not the only ideas naturalised as truths that I encountered in my myth readings (for example there was also the idea of hard rock and metal musicians as rebels), but they are the most relevant in a consideration of the representation of women fans. I reflect further upon the process of myth reading in this chapter's concluding remarks.

Introducing the letters pages of *Kerrang!*

Kerrang!'s letters page is called 'Feedback'. In this context the title has a double meaning: (one), it refers to the way that the letters are a method by which readers can give their opinions, responses to articles, reviews and other letters published in the magazine; and (two), it refers to the squalling noise made by a sound loop through a speaker and so echoes the onomatopoeic title of the magazine, establishing it within the world of rock 'n' roll. *Kerrang!* readers will almost certainly get the joke.³³ From 2000-8 the title 'Feedback' has remained at the top of the letters pages, although the page itself has changed. Between 2000 and 2003, 'Feedback' covered one and a half pages and was positioned towards the rear of the magazine. By June 2004 it was moved to page 4 and filled the majority of one page. There have been changes in the designs across the nine years, but all designs use bold colours, particularly black and red, but also yellow, and leave little white space. Sans serif fonts and realistic elements such as the graphic representation of a web browser or parcel tape are retained over the timeframe. Alongside readers' letters, photographs of bands, readers' artwork and various items mentioned in the letters are also included. One of the biggest changes across the timescale is in the topics and length of readers' letters. From 2000-4 themes included reflections of live performances, festivals and albums, long on-going debates about issues important to fans (e.g. relationships with other hard rock and metal fans or non-rock fans), and featured a number of humorous elements such as rock lookalikes. From 2005 the printed letters became shorter, perhaps due to the reduced space available, but also possibly due to the increased use of mobile and online methods of writing to the magazine.

Table 4: Modes of writing to *Kerrang!* shows changes in the ways in which the 'Feedback' page directs readers to communicate with the magazine:

Table 4: Modes of writing to *Kerrang!*

2000	post; email.	2005	post; email; text.
2001	post; email.	2006	post; email; text; MySpace.
2002	post; email.	2007	post; email; text; MySpace.
2003	post; email.	2008	post; email; text; MySpace; K! comment forum.
2004	post; email; text.		

³³ However, it is a bit of an 'in-joke' as the second meaning of the word is not so widely understood as the first.

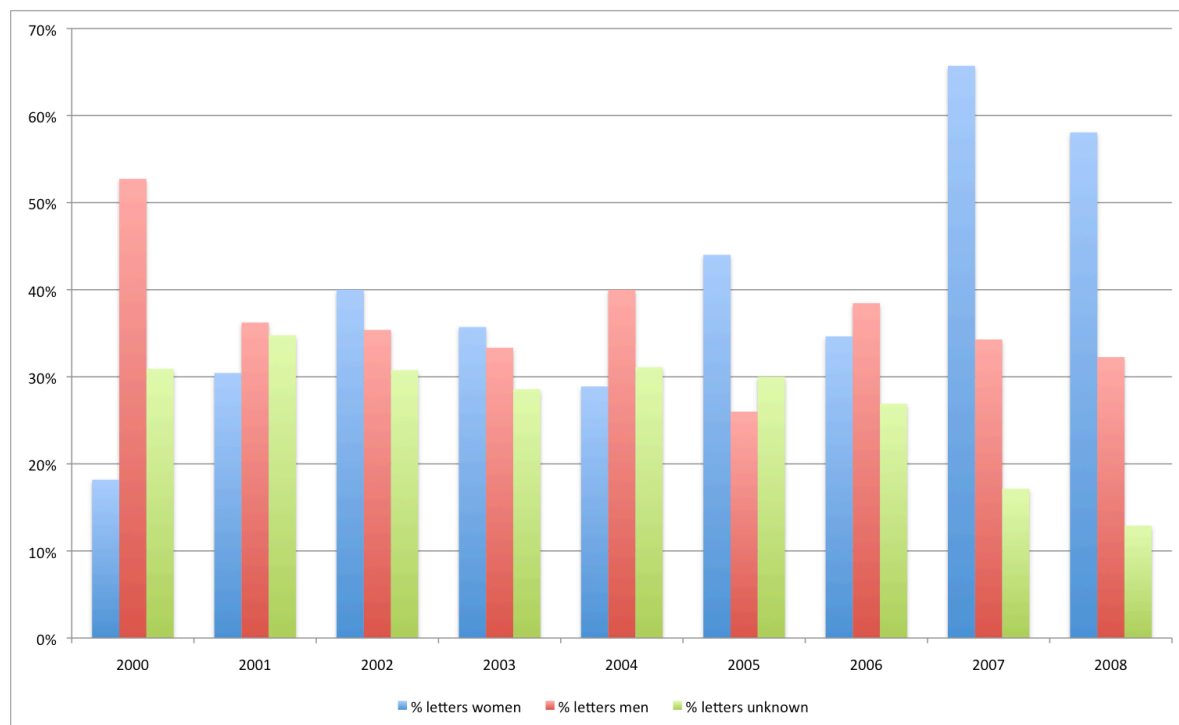
The different technologies used to write to *Kerrang!* play a role in the kinds of things people write about, the language they use, the length of their letters and the intended reader of the letter. Post, emails and text messages are often directed to the magazine's editors: they have a particular intended reader. On occasion letters or emails respond to other letter writers and this is made clear in the text of the letter. On the other hand MySpace messages and especially forum comments have a more open readership. It is likely that those who communicate with *Kerrang!* in this way expect their message to be widely read and discussed by other online readers. It also allows them to take part as the debate unfolds. Likewise a 'letter' may be a response to another comment on the message board and so be contributing to a wider debate. There is, therefore, some difficulty in identifying who messages are aimed at: the 'Feedback' pages only show a small selection of messages from the message boards, which means that comments are removed from their context. Message boards also function in a fast-moving environment. To get a relevant comment on a message board one has to be quick to respond; there is little time to mull over and carefully assess what one might say, unlike when writing a letter, an email or even a text. This means that 'letters' appearing on the 'Feedback' page that have been written and sent using the comment on the forum mode can say very different types of things and in distinct types of voices. All of the communications have been printed on the 'Feedback' page and so *appear* as readers' letters rather than as emails, text messages or comments on a forum.³⁴

On average across the timeframe letters from women and men were published at roughly the same rate (4.06 and 4.04 letters per issue respectively) with letters written by those whose sign-off did not signify a gender being published slightly less frequently (3.09 letters per issue). Figure 1: Average percentages of letters by group shows the proportion of letters from women, men and gender unknown in each year. In 2000 many more letters from men were published, and in 2007/8 this was reversed as letters from women were more frequent. In these last two years, letters with the author's gender disguised were not published as often (although they had remained at a rate of roughly 30% for the previous years). Since, with the exception of 2000, around 35% of letters were consistently signed off by men, it could be that the fall in letters from gender-unknown authors is due to women choosing to write under their own names rather than using gender-neutral pseudonyms. If this is the case then it suggests that women were becoming more comfortable being acknowledged as women in the imaginary community and that perhaps the world of hard rock and metal is becoming friendlier towards women. However, it may also be due to the way in which the magazine was increasingly perceived as a magazine

³⁴ Whichever method a reader used (often noted at the end of the writer's signature) I have referred to the text as a 'letter'.

for girls and as ‘the new *Smash Hits*’.³⁵ In the latter case, the environment of *Kerrang!*'s letters page would perhaps be more comfortable for female authors, but the wider hard rock and metal community may not necessarily be so.

Figure 1: Average percentages of letters by group



Before 2005 debates between letter writers crystallised around themes of relationships between fans and non-fans or around long-running discussions of, for example, the organisation of festivals. After 2004 these kinds of letters became rarer (an exception to this is fans’ responses to the disparagement of emo: this topic ran and ran). Instead, letters tend to focus on the micro-level of fandom, to praise or denounce particular bands and musicians, describe going to concerts and festivals, or tell stories of meeting a musician. The narrative tends to be more self-contained, rather than making links across magazine issues. This change in the thematic scope of the letters means that fans are represented as thinking more about the relative merits of various bands (often in unsophisticated ways, as the brevity of the letters only allows room for one or two adjectives that describe the author’s attitude to the band under focus, e.g. ‘Papa Roach were amazing at Download!’ [Karen 2007, 4]) and less about community cohesion.

Photographs between 2000 and 2004 illustrated aspects of the letters so that bands, celebrities or objects mentioned in the letters were shown (a memorable example is the

³⁵ *Smash Hits* was a pop music magazine. It ran from 1978 – 2006. Its readers were supposed to be teenage girls: ‘teenyboppers’. A number of forum comments reveal this attitude and a small sample can be read at: http://www.kerrang.com/blog/2009/12/kerrang_magazine_02122009.html

use of a picture of a wheelchair to accompany a letter from a young woman who had used a wheelchair when attending a gig) with perhaps a single small fan-meets-musician image in the 'Stalk This Way' section (2001-3).³⁶ From 2005 a greater proportion of the images are fans' photographs featuring the fan with a musician. This change in part reflects the greater ease with which people can take and send photographs whilst at concerts, as cameras have been added to mobile phones. There were also changes in the subjects of the photographs. Figure 2: Average number of people in photographs by group, shows the average number of musicians and fans by gender appearing each year. The gender/status quotient of people appearing in photographs shows the consistently low number of women appearing as musicians against the high number of men and low numbers of both women and men as fans, although men still appear more frequently than women. When women do appear it is more likely to be as fans than musicians.

Figure 2: Average number of people in photographs by group



Photographs of male musicians far outweigh those of female musicians or of fans. The low number of pictures of male musicians in 2003 correlates with a rise in pictures in male fans. In 2007, however, the number of photos of fans had increased significantly, particularly photos of women fans. This correlates with the increase in women readers, reported by the publishers in 2006, and also with the greater proportion from women letter writers.

³⁶ 'Stalk This Way' is a small box containing a photograph and letter sent by a fan. The letter narrates and the photograph illustrates the fan's meeting with a musician.

The change in the subject matter of photographs and letters after 2005 meant that 'Feedback' lost some of its feeling of a fan forum and became more of a noticeboard for snapshots. Even taking these changes into account, *Kerrang!*'s letters pages create a sense of a community in which members speak to each other, debate issues, share their upsets and their thrills.

Reading 'Feedback'

Brown argues that,

The style of the UK's metal magazines owes something to an attempt to translate the defining aesthetics of the genre into a sympathetic textual strategy. This obviously starts with *Kerrang!* [...]. This sense of youthful energy, volume and pushing the sonic envelope is echoed in the textual dynamics of pictures of performing musicians and sweaty, ecstatic crowds. (Brown 2007, 645)

Brown continues by noting the presence of concert reviews and life-on-the-road tales in metal magazines (including *Terrorizer* and *Metal Hammer*).³⁷ If the textual strategy is the translation of the aesthetics of the genre onto the page then *Kerrang!* can be read as one window into the imaginary community of hard rock and metal. Other windows exist (other magazines, as Brown mentions, plus websites, films, etc.) meaning that there are other versions of the imaginary community too. But *Kerrang!* provides a valuable viewing point because it is both iconic and widely read. It shows the imaginary community as holding particular ideals and values as essential and unquestioned by parts of the community, that on close inspection do not stand up to scrutiny. In this sense, these ideals and values can be read as myths: messages communicated by the magazine which promote a particular ideology and that therefore play a constitutive part in how the community is imagined. I have already discussed how myth is communicated and can be analysed. However, in order to establish how *Kerrang!*'s letters pages convey a sense of the imaginary community, a great deal of systematic work across the whole sample of letters pages was required before I could begin the semiotic analysis. This is because whilst Barthes' myth-reading is incredibly inspiring for uncovering connections between common sense ideas and the agendas of the powerful, his analyses are of single pictures or things (the *Paris Match* cover or the Eiffel Tower, for instance), or they are about things in an abstract sense (steak and chips, for example). They are not close textual readings across a large sample, which was what I was intending to embark upon. Mixed methods were demanded. I would need to count images and letters, identify themes, and make decisions

³⁷ I would further argue that these factors all signify the male dominance and exclusionary masculinity of the genre, especially in terms of who the musicians are (men).

about the gender of letter writers and those photographed. Therefore semiotic analysis was preceded by content analysis.

Rose argues that content analysis allows the researcher to be reflexive about the research procedure (Rose 2001, 56), and that ‘using the rules of content analysis forces a researcher to be methodologically explicit (rather than relying on “unconscious” strategies)’ (Rose 2001, 56). In using this method I wanted to be sure that I had identified themes and patterns rather than picking out elements that I *thought* were interesting, and risk ignoring important aspects or over-stating the prominence of others. I coded photographs first by the gender of the people appearing in them, and then by those people’s roles in hard rock and metal: woman/man, fan/musician. I coded letters by the gender of the name (where it was possible to assess) and by topic and tone, allowing both of the latter to emerge from the letters themselves. As I analysed the coded themes of the images and letters, I was able to see patterns emerging in the way in which men and women are portrayed. I was also able to assess what kinds of topics letter writers addressed most frequently. Thus the arguments I make in this chapter are based in part upon evidence from the frequency of particular portrayals of women and men in photographs and in letters, and in part from the close semiotic readings of designs, photographs and letters.

In the letters the themes I chose as forms are laid out in Table 5: Signs in letter texts:

Table 5: Signs in letter texts

Band members are ‘nice’ (or similar term)	Assertions of the need to respect others
Racism / xenophobia / homophobia / sexism / ageism / disablism	Assertions of how the community is believed to be or ought to be (equal)
Rock music as authentic in some way	Denigrating pop music
Attraction to musicians	Defending musicians from detractors

I also identified a number of other themes which I have not considered here (for example that particular bands are amazing, such and such a gig was brilliant/awful, criticising *Kerrang!*, thanking *Kerrang!*, discussions of mental illness). The signs I have chosen to focus on are those that are common and which allow me to explore my research questions. There are letters and photographs that not only do not fit in with the themes I examine here, but that contradict them. For example, a number of letters assert that one should enjoy the music that pleases you without caring about genre boundaries. These contradictory signs are infrequent and buck the dominant trend and so have less of a part

to play in the accumulation of signs towards the establishment of ideas or values imagined as 'true' in the community. The frequent appearance of these dominant signs on the letters pages builds up to form a picture of the community, but, as Rose argues, this tallying cannot necessarily convey as much as we might want, noting,

The inability of content analysis to articulate what compositional interpretation would call the expressive content of an image. It is very hard to evoke the mood of an image through codes. (Rose 2001, 67)

In counting the number of women and men and their roles in photographs, for instance, I can show how the roles of musician and fan are divided by gender, but I cannot explain how the positions and gestures of the subjects also signify a power imbalance. It is to develop my analysis that I then need to examine the signs of the images and letters. This also allows me to regard the designs of the pages in this kind of analysis too.

I follow Barthes in treating "collective representations" as sign-systems' (Barthes 2009, xvii) (in which collective representations refer to images, words and ideas) in order to understand how such representations give rise to ideas that seem to be 'natural' or common sense, although they are, he argues, determined by history (Barthes 2009, xix). In appropriating Barthes' method I offer an 'ideological critique' (Barthes 2009, xvii) of *Kerrang!*'s letters pages, with those letters pages acting as a single representation of the way in which the hard rock and metal community is imagined. Barthes' describes these naturalisations of ideas as 'ideological abuse' (Barthes 2009, xix). It rather raises an eyebrow that Barthes uses the word 'myth' to describe these abuses/ideas, because he begins by using the term in a common sense way:

Right from the start, the notion of myth seemed to me to explain these examples of the falsely obvious. At that time, I still used the word 'myth' in its traditional sense. (Barthes 2009, xix)

In this 'traditional sense' I understand Barthes to mean by 'myth' something that is generally held to be true by many people so that it is not questioned: rather it is accepted and repeated as fact, but that is certainly not the only understanding. The Oxford Concise Dictionary gives four slightly differing meanings for myth: a fable; 'a widely held but false notion'; 'a fictitious person, thing or idea'; 'an allegory' (*Oxford Concise Dictionary* 9th ed., s.v. "Myth"). Thus Barthes begins with a confusing notion of myth, relying upon his reader to have the same common sense idea of myth that he has. All is not lost, however, for he does come to define 'myth' more precisely. In the process of writing the essays in *Mythologies*, he arrives at the view of myth 'as a language' (Barthes 2009, xix). In using 'myth' in this chapter, then, I am referring to the system or ways in which common sense

ideas are communicated. When I refer to ‘the myth of equality’ I mean the message communicated by *Kerrang!* that hard rock and metal fans are part of a community of equals.

In establishing how that myth is communicated I aim to use the technical language that Barthes systematises in his essay ‘Myth Today’. However, this is not an easy task, as Barthes’ essays in *Mythologies* are rather scanty in the use of such language: this means that there are only the two examples in ‘Myth Today’ to follow. However I have tried to be transparent and to use Barthes’ terms in establishing how I am reading the letters pages as communicating particular myths. In order to do this I have included detailed semiotic descriptions of designs and sample photographs alongside long extracts from letters (sometimes whole letters) that exemplify ideas common across the sample. I identify signifiers and signifieds, which I then use as the forms in my reading of the metalanguage of the letters pages.

Four myths

I now set out four myths extrapolated from *Kerrang!*’s letters pages. Two of these are fundamental to the representation of the community’s core values, even as they can be shown to be problematic. The first is that the community is a ‘level playing field’ and that all members hold the same status in spite of differences of sex, race, sexuality, and despite disparities between roles (musician/industry worker/fan). The second is that the community is an authentic culture based on real talent, hard work and genuine appreciation. These ideas of equality and authenticity are frequently discussed by letter writers and they are held as self-evident and taken for granted. Letter writers believe in the equality³⁸ of their community and so they imagine that its members abhor discrimination on grounds of race, sex, class etc. Authenticity is a quality whose value is held high and as obviously ‘good’. It has a number of meanings: (one) for fans, following your own interests rather than being directed by others such as peers or fashions (‘being true to oneself’); (two) musicians maintaining their artistic integrity rather than changing musical direction in order to capitalise on a current trend or to maximise profit (not ‘selling out’); (three) bands or musicians originating in an organic way rather than being put together by a management or record company (not being ‘manufactured’); (four) spending time working hard to build up a fanbase through playing pubs and clubs across the

³⁸ Equality is a complex term. Here I use ‘equality’ to mean ‘accorded equal respect’, and in the letters pages this kind of equality comes across in a number of guises, as I describe below. Letter writers use equality to refer to the idea that all members of the hard rock and metal community are the same because they are hard rock and metal fans. Common musical taste trumps other kinds of difference such as gender, race, age or role. Those that are not equal are people who do not enjoy hard rock and metal music. Equality is therefore akin to sameness based on fan-object (rather than a sense of equal but different).

country, usually in a dilapidated van, sleeping in the van or on people's floors and earning very little money ('paying your dues'). These markers of 'authenticity' are part of the origin stories of a number of bands and the personal histories of fans. It is held as common sense that being authentic is what one ought to be, and so it is a warmly held value for writers to *Kerrang!*. Both equality and authenticity are words with complex meanings that are determined by the contexts of their usage. They are also both politically and culturally charged; battles are waged in their names and both are emotive terms mobilised to establish the goals of the users as morally right or good. In *Kerrang!*, however, the concepts are used as if they are simple and straightforward, ignorant of or omitting the fact that they are contestable notions; this is why they are myths.

Alongside these values, *Kerrang!* presents messages about women and men that assert different roles based on gender, thus creating two more important myths. However, whilst the values of equality and authenticity are discussed by writers to the magazine, these gendered messages remain generally unacknowledged even though, via the photographs on the letters pages, they are visible every week (although it is not only the photographs that communicate the distinct roles). Women are represented as fans who adore male musicians, whilst men are represented as musicians in a way that draws on Viking imagery. I call these two myths the myth of the groupie and the myth of the warrior. They establish as normal that musicians are male and that fans are female. They are mythical because although one *could* say 'oh but women are musicians and men fans too, and nobody's *stopping* women from being musicians', the overwhelming message from the magazine is that musicians are men and fans are women. The two roles are presented as natural, as common sense and as unchallengeable. They are dangerous, for they leave women with no on-stage role models. Thus, the myths reinforce the binary that positions men as active participants in the public sphere and women as passive observers.

In this particular binary male musicians benefit, with access to creative and sexual expression, the power to affect people's lives through their artistic endeavours, and financial rewards, plus status and increased self-worth. The fan's benefit is in listening to and experiencing the music, in sharing it with friends, in the pleasures of private fannish activities, and in identity formation. Public or financial recognition is not usually accorded the fan. Not all fans wish to be musicians or to express themselves musically. However, it is important – a matter of *rights* – that they have access to musicianship and to the rewards of being in a band should they wish it. As things stand, the lack of role models in *Kerrang!* for women who wish to become musicians is a psychic blow, a barrier to be overcome. This is not a thesis about the problems that women face when aiming to become musicians; it is about women fans, but it is also about their experiences in the

imaginary community, and the question of whether they are able to aspire to be musicians in the same way as men fans is a part of this.

In what follows, I take a systematic approach to unravelling the myths, using the results of content analysis where applicable, then beginning with readings of relevant examples, before using these signs as the forms in my reading of the metalanguage. These forms may seem insignificant in themselves, yet it is through the accumulation and the reading of them as a whole that their force appears. Finally, I draw out how these forms and concepts create particular myths and examine the impact of these myths. First, I analyse how the values of equality and authenticity are constructed as important and as existing and essential qualities of the imaginary community. I then explore how the myth of authenticity relies upon gendered notions of rock and pop with the result that it is a quality only really available to men (but not automatically accorded to all men). I then turn to the ways in which men and women are treated in the 'Feedback' pages via designs, photographs and letter texts, and I analyse how the myths of the warrior and the groupie are woven as they present differing roles for men and women. Finally I discuss why these myths are problematic – damaging even – for women fans. As a postscript I reflect on the process and implications of such myth-reading.

Myth of equality

Westen argues that the modern Western concept of equality refers to the like treatment of like people, but that within that definition there is a tautology:

Equality is entirely '[c]ircular.' It tells us to treat like people alike; but when we ask who 'like people' are, we are told they are 'people who should be treated alike.'

Equality is an empty vessel with no substantive moral content of its own. (Westen 1982, 547)

Thus, equality rests on sameness and does not really accommodate difference. According to Westen, this Platonic/Aristotelian idea continues to shape Western thinking and discourse on human rights. It is this concept of equality that is mobilised in *Kerrang's* letters pages. What this equality means in real terms is rather fuzzy; it is articulated as something which *ought* to be accorded to all hard rock and metal fans – at least in terms of respect – but rarely do the letters specify how it is to be played out.

In his theorisation of the nation as an imagined community, Anderson describes the way in which the nation is thought of as a community of equals, and into which real discrepancies or inequalities are not factored. Indeed, this seems to be a crucial factor in naming a group of people; in this case, people living in the same land, as a 'community' (Anderson 1991, 6). Certainly Friedman argues that communities naturalise inequalities

under the guise of traditions so that such discrimination is overlooked or not seen (Freidman 1995, 193-4). She argues that tradition is vital in maintaining a sense of cohesion, and that this requires a feeling of sameness amongst community members. Sameness is thus prioritised to the detriment of differences, which become hidden. In *Kerrang!* the sameness that binds is taste in music. This aesthetic equality reaches across a number of divisions within the community and is a crucial part of *Kerrang!*'s successful creation of a sense of community amongst hard rock and metal fans. Equality refers to two slightly different, but linked, things: to the way in which musicians, fans and journalists are imagined to be of equal status and accorded the same respect; and to the way in which the community is thought of as different from wider society and therefore does not feature the same areas of discrimination. Thus, the hard rock and metal community is imagined to be a society of equals with no one, whether musician, journalist or fan, man, woman, gay, straight, black, white, etc., occupying a higher position than another.

'By fans, for fans': equality between fans and magazine

The importance of equality as a value of the community can be read in the position of the letters pages within the magazine, the photographs, and, perhaps most forcefully, in readers' letters. The title itself, 'Feedback', makes a contribution towards developing a sense of the community of equals. It acts as a kind of imaginary closed circuit between editors and fans, inviting them into the community circle to discuss *Kerrang!*. This kind of solicitation implies that the editorial team *care* about the readers and believe their views to be *at least as important* as those of the magazine staff. The positioning of the letters page has an important part to play in creating a sense of equality, particularly after 2004. Between 2000 and 2003 Feedback covered one and a half pages, and gave a good deal of space to fans' views, art and photographs, but it was placed toward the back of the magazine. This positioning is generally consonant with the placing of readers' letters in newspapers. The repositioning of the pages by June 2004 had a big impact. Although now there was less room for readers' letters, the new position on page 4, straight after the editorial, gives the impression that readers' views carry similar weight to the editors'. This impression is reinforced by the 'stimulants' section at the bottom of the page, a list of staff inspirations while preparing the issue. This includes bands listened to, drinks drunk and internet memes followed. These modes of intimacy put a more human face on the staff, giving the reader a feeling of knowing them as fans. That readers can recognise magazine staff as fans is part of the publishing strategy:

Kerrang! is written by fans, for fans [...] As long as Kerrang!'s view is from down the front of the gig, we'll stay fresh without trying too hard. (Stuart Williams, *Kerrang!* Publishing Director quoted in *Campaign* 2008)

Yet, the 'by fans, for fans' approach is not presented as strategy because it is proffered as if it comes naturally – it does not require hard work. Williams presents *Kerrang!* as being a magazine of the fans – a grassroots publication – but it is a product of an international media company. Therefore it is not just in touch with what its readers want, but its staff are writing what they themselves want because they are *just the same* as the readers. In this way, Williams does not suggest that the writers are taste-makers or have access to privileged information about bands, or are more sophisticated listeners than their readers: they *are* the readers.

Equality between fans and musicians

Where the letters pages produce an imagined intimacy between fans and magazine staff that generates a sense of sameness, the photographs do similar work between fans and musicians. Photographs sent in by fans and showing meetings between fans and musicians are printed in the 'Stalk This Way' section (2001-3)³⁹ and, from 2005 onwards, form a major part of the page, with often more than one image printed. Photographs tend to look spontaneous, like 'snapshots', and are often taken backstage at a concert, but sometimes outside in the street, next to a tour bus, or inside a concert auditorium. Fans in the photographs are women and men, are usually young (late teens/early 20s) and white. Musicians are nearly always men, white and, often, older than the fans. I discuss this gendered distinction in the sections on the myths of the warrior and the groupie. These images record a meeting that is likely to be exceptional in a fan's life. The photograph was taken to record this unique occasion, and yet a number of elements signify a close relationship based on similarity and therefore parity between the fan and the musician.

One example is the photograph sent in by Chloe, with an accompanying letter, about her meeting with Ginger, the lead singer of The Wildhearts (issue 1162, 2011). Chloe is photographed with Ginger inside a dark public room (there is a fire exit sign and other notices behind). She wears a black hoody with the Wildhearts' logo over the breast, a black top underneath the hoody and a silver pendant on a chain. Her hair is long, straight and blonde, with bright red streaks dyed into it and a pink clip to hold it back from her face. She wears dark eye make up. One hand she holds close to her chest, the other is extended behind Ginger as if patting his waist. She looks at Ginger and grins. Ginger wears a black hoody with a white design over a black t-shirt with white text. He has tattoos on his hand and his long ginger dreadlocks are held in place by a band at his forehead and a bobble at the nape of his neck. He looks towards Chloe with a smile, one hand reaching towards her elbow and the other in front of his chest with a slightly raised thumb.

³⁹ 'Stalk This Way' is a pun on the title of the Aerosmith song 'Walk This Way'. The pun gently pokes fun at fans who seek out musicians.

It looks like a happy meeting, possibly of long-parted friends. In these smiles, close proximity and touching, as well as the mirroring of outfits, Chloe and Ginger form the concept of friendly camaraderie, of sameness and of an equal status. This image contains many of the same elements as other fan-musician photographs. Usually both fan and musician wear similar clothes, have similar haircuts, and it is sometimes hard to tell which is the fan and which the musician. The shared style signifies that the musicians remain part of the community and that their musical success has not changed them (i.e. they do not now wear Armani suits): they are still on the same 'level' as the fan. It is common for musicians and fans to stand with their arms about each other's shoulders or to be touching in some way: there *appears* to be no hierarchy or star system here. The suggestion is that metal musicians are just like any other community member: their musical success is down to their hard work and any fan could achieve the same success. Furthermore, the naturalness and the ordinary clothes intimate that success has not changed them – they remain as grounded in real life as ever.

These photographs are often accompanied by letters, and there are further letters that are not attached to a photograph that record a meeting between a fan and musician. Such letters tend to declare the band members as nice, ordinary people: not stars, but equals. Small Hyper Blonde records a happy encounter with musicians:

After the show, even though the band were obviously tired they came outside and talked to the fans. They signed stuff and were actually listening to what the fans had to say. (Small Hyper Blonde 2001, 58-59)

The musicians, as presented by Small Hyper Blonde, respect their fans to the extent that they put their own needs to one side: they delay resting to talk to fans. Furthermore, the band's willingness to listen to their fans signifies the musicians' 'belief' in the importance of fans' opinions. Other letters, too, report an extraordinary event in terms that render it as ordinary: 'such nice guys' (Maddy 2002, 59); 'such a nice guy' (Amber 2008, 4); 'the whole band were down to earth' (Jessie 2008, 4). As with the photographs that often accompany this type of letter, the musicians encountered are presented as unpretentious, down to earth, well-mannered and quite different from some stereotypical representations of stars as prima donnas or 'bad boys'. Indeed, when such self-important stars are encountered, the letters tend to be derisive of the musicians. The portrayal of musicians in photographs and letters as ordinary and as similar to fans, establishes a kind of equality that does not acknowledge difference of role.

Letters maintaining gender and racial equality in the imaginary community

The letters frequently and explicitly assert that the community is equal and not subject to major societal faultlines that affect mainstream society (sex/race/disability/age). These

letters signify that their writers believe equality to be present in the community and in discussion inequality is presented as abnormal and in contrast to the community's values. For example, Emily berates *Kerrang!* for its coverage of Paramore. This American rock band is fronted by Hayley Williams, and Emily responds to an article which, she asserts, focusses unfairly on Hayley's gender rather than the music of the band:

In an industry that claims to be about equality, the article tends to focus on Hayley being a FEMALE asserting some kind of leadership! Shock freaking horror! (Emily 2007, 4)

Emily's use of capitals for 'female' and the expostulation 'shock freaking horror!' signify an ironic tone. The tone highlights the fact that it *ought* to be unsurprising – certainly not shocking – that a woman can lead a band: it should not be treated as something extraordinary. There is clearly a disparity between the article and Emily's perceptions of the industry which, she argues, 'claims to be about equality'. It is unclear which industry she refers to: the music industry in general, the hard rock and metal industry more particularly, the rock press...?⁴⁰ It is also unclear whether industry is the right word at all; she might be referring to the broader imaginary community. I wonder where she has seen this 'claim' about equality? Hard rock and metal and *Kerrang!* do not have a constitution or manifesto, but Emily has imbibed the sense of the community as one that supports equality, imagining it to be the real condition of hard rock and metal.

Similarly, Lisa of Nottingham exposes the divergence between her understanding of the community and the reality of life for disabled community members. She relates how she broke her ankle and had to use a wheelchair and, later, crutches. She still attended gigs, but was treated as an object of fun by other crowd members and subjected to physical abuse such as being sat on and pushed over. Lisa's letter expresses her shock at the behaviour of other fans: 'I think all the rock fans I met in these incidents are hypocrites. I thought you were supposed to see people for what they are – not what they look like' (Lisa 2001, 59). Lisa's surprise signifies that she believed the hard rock and metal community to adhere to the value of not making value judgments based upon people's looks. In this case 'looks' is her disability. In branding her fellow rock fans 'hypocrites' she emphasises that this belief in not judging on 'looks' (which could easily be extended to include sex, race, age, and other visual signifiers of difference) prioritises 'rock fan' as the central category of sameness.

⁴⁰ It is difficult to think of the music industry or music press publishing as being 'about equality'; these industries are about making money, not about resolving problems of inequality.

Other letters assert that musical taste links fans so that differences of race are obliterated. Farhad H describes whispered comments about his skin colour (Farhad H 2002, 67), but in response, nads6666 claims that discrimination is not an intrinsic part of the community. nads6666 writes, 'other rock fans have never commented on the colour of my skin, although I am the only Asian rock fan round my way' (nads6666 2002, 67). In contradicting Farhad H, nads6666 comes across as an authority on experiences of racism in the hard rock and metal community. Because the community is already imagined as one in which racism does not exist, Farhad H's experience is the exception whilst nads6666's shores up the equality of the community. From this perspective the letter from Paleface Fishbone Soldier is exceptional. Paleface asserts that the community is not racist, but that it also needs to work to exclude racism:

I'll admit straight away that I'm not particularly aware of the number of prominent metal musicians who are not white, as I've always tended to appreciate music aurally rather than visually.

But I can't recall seeing many – if any – rock and metal fans that were not white. Does this happen to just be the shows that I've attended, or what? I realize they're out there but they do seem to be in a minority. I recently read a football Fanzine sponsored by the Kick Racism Out Of Football campaign. In it, many black and Asian fans said they avoided football matches because they did not feel safe. In our big metal family I can't believe that's the case. Am I wrong? (Paleface Fishbone Soldier 2001, 58)

Paleface does two particular things that highlight how the idea of sameness based on appreciation for similar bands is translated into an imagined equality. The first is to assert (like the rock fans that Lisa brands 'hypocrites') that s/he enjoys music because of how it sounds rather than the look of the musicians (here 'visually' refers to skin colour). The second is to use a term with echoes of community: 'our big metal family'. Whilst Paleface is clearly invested in the idea of the community as one that treats all members equally, this letter is unusual because it suggests that in spite of the author's belief, there may be problems that go unrecognised; racism is not encountered by white fans when at gigs or clubs because they are the majority and so few non-white fans are in attendance. Where difference is hidden, sameness is normal; equality is thus the natural state. It is remarkable that Paleface Fishbone Soldier (a moniker that echoes filmic representations of Native American terminology for white people) does recognise the potential racism, in spite of their belief in the community's equality.

Metalinguage: signs to myth of equality

All of these signs, with the partial exception of Paleface's letter, can be taken together as the form in my reading of the metalanguage of *Kerrang!*, in which the community is imagined as a level playing field. All of its members, whether magazine staff, musicians or fans, are to be accorded equal respect and their voices to be given equal weighting. This is because, as the letters make very evident, similarity of musical taste is the primary unifying factor of the community. Aesthetic appreciation 'trumps' other lines of similarity such as gender, race or age. This is the way in which the community is *imagined*, but it is mythical for a number of reasons. First, if magazine staff are hard rock and metal fans then no hierarchy ought to exist between staff and readers; the readers are as important as magazine staff and their opinions as valuable and credible, therefore staff and fans exist on an equal footing with one another. For *Kerrang!* to maintain its position in the community it is vital that *Kerrang!*'s editorial staff and writers are *perceived* as fans and that the magazine is 'of the fans', as Stuart Williams comments. That the magazine positions itself as a grassroots publication, 'of the fans', is an important marketing strategy and vital to selling magazines. This does not mean that the staff are *not* fans (at least some of them would seem to be), but that creating a semblance of fandom is the crucial feature in establishing the sense of community.

Secondly, in the photographs and letters depicting meetings between fans and musicians, the fact of the meeting being recorded belies the impression of the sameness of musicians. Almost unwittingly, even as the letter writers write of the ordinariness of the musicians they encounter, the fact of their writing a letter reveals that the meeting is *not* ordinary and that there is something special about the men: they *are* stars. The musicians' higher status is clearly signified when one thinks about the production of the image. Furthermore, those letters that describe musicians as 'such nice guys' and, like Small Hyper Blonde, highlight their respect for fans in front of their own needs, do not take into account the way in which cultivating a fanbase is 'work'. Fiscal and credible success as a band relies upon dedicated fans; a reputation for arrogance or neglect of fans can have an impact, causing fans to lose interest and stop buying records. The relationship between fans and musicians is therefore not straightforward. Whilst some musicians do have genuine and caring attitudes towards fans, there is also a good deal of necessity in creating this image. As with the fandom of the magazine staff, it is not so important whether musicians are actually caring, or not, but that they are seen to be, although it is likely that there is some 'truth' to anchor the myth.

Thirdly, that *Kerrang!* represents the hard rock and metal community as one that eschews discrimination on race, sex or other grounds is part of their marketing strategy. Brown

cites 'brand essence' work undertaken by *Kerrang!* in order to determine how potential readers might see themselves:

Our research painted a clear picture of a world where it doesn't matter what colour you are, what your background is, what you wear, what your sexuality is. A world defined by its attitude to life. In Generation K!, credibility was found to be the key. (Marketing Society Awards quoted in Brown 2007, 648)

Thus, *Kerrang!* aims to appeal to these potential readers by representing the community as already invested in 'attitude to life' (non-discriminatory, rock and metal-loving). The letters that claim that the hard rock and metal community is non-discriminatory are written when something has occurred that challenges the writers' perceptions of the community as equal. They indicate that the community is not actually equal. Indeed they signal that the equality on offer is not only based on the similarity of musical taste, but also on the body of the fan or musician. Semblance to a white, able male body is required for 'equality'. Parity in the imaginary community is therefore a myth: a naturalised idea that serves the needs of the corporation publishing the magazine, the bands appearing in the magazine's pages, and that promotes the white male dominance of the genre.

The idea of the imaginary community as a level playing field is, however, linked to other ideas which are distinctly gendered. Equality is discussed in terms of loving similar music, but on further investigation this 'similar music' has to have qualities in addition to musical semblance: it has to be 'authentic'.

Myth of authenticity

The myth of authenticity works in collaboration with the myth of equality and reinforces the myth of the warrior. Whilst at first glance this myth looks fairly innocuous, it relies upon gendered notions of rock and pop and thereby serves to validate the dominance of men as musicians and the exclusion of qualities seen as feminine. It colludes with the myth of equality because it is through its story of musicians being fans and progressing through hard work and being 'true' to their musical values that authenticity is established. It is linked to the myth of the warrior because it determines who is 'authentic' enough to become a musician. A sense of the community as one that is authentic is established through various aspects of the letters pages: realistic design elements; promotional photographs that give the appearance of capturing real moments; and letters about pop music, or other feminised subgenres, that contrast the genre with hard rock and metal. This idea of authenticity is, therefore, transmitted through the designs, through promotional band photographs, and in readers' letters.

Realism and the authentic magazine

Particular techniques give feelings of realism in a number of the design schemes between 2000 and 2008. For example, between 2000 and 2001 (see Figure 3: June 2000 and Figure 4: June 2001) the letter of the week is set on a pale blue box which is positioned slightly out of the vertical line. Fine lines cross the box horizontally at narrow (approximately 8mm) intervals and the top of the box is decorated with regular white circles, some of which break the top line of the box. These signs both signify and look like notepaper. In 2002-3, a box wider by a third than it is tall displays choice extracts from the *Kerrang!* website's messageboards (see Figure 5: June 2002-3). The box's borders are grey with the top and bottom ones being taller than the side ones are wide. The box has white squares in the top corners, a headline ('WEB CHAT') and horizontal lines in between. Inside the borders, in two columns, text is black on a white background, and sits between two sub-boxes, one white with a black subheading, the lower one black with white text. The text in these two boxes crosses the width of the main white box. These signifiers combine to create the sign of a Netscape Navigator web browser. From 2006-8 (see Figure 8: June 2006-7 and Figure 9: June 2008) drop shadows appear on most photographs. In 2008 this is accompanied by an additional feature on the main photograph: beige-brown rhombus-shaped boxes with uneven edges and bits missing unevenly appear over the corners. These funny rhombuses evoke parcel tape and, combined with the drop shadows, give the effect of the photographs resting on or glued to the page rather than being printed upon it. All of these techniques work to give a sense of the page as being created using paper, scissors and glue rather than on a computer using design software. These techniques, which recall a scrapbook or fanzine, are not exclusively used by *Kerrang!* and can be found in many magazines. However, in *Kerrang!* they do two things: (one) they play a part in establishing a sense of the relationship between the fans and the magazine through suggesting that a paper letter or photograph has been scanned and placed on the page without editorial tinkering, creating a sense of the magazine as a fan creation; (two) they evoke a sense of the history of the genre. The DIY fanzine/scrapbook design resonates with fan practices in the 1980s and 1990s in which bands and fans distributed fanzines and recordings through the post ('tape trading'). This culture was instrumental in swelling metal's fan base, particularly in more extreme subgenres such as thrash, black and death metal (Kahn-Harris 2007, 78-80; Delfino 2007, 237). *Kerrang!* thus builds upon its myth of equality by ensuring its appearance resonates with fanzine aesthetics, and it summons this shared history through such 'realist' techniques, thereby invoking tradition.⁴¹

⁴¹ Although, it should be noted, as Brown argues, that *Kerrang!*'s 'relationship to [its] past is problematic' (Brown 2007, 646) as it seeks to maintain its position as a contemporary magazine.

Musicians going about their daily lives

Reference to the hard rock and metal genre's history and use of realistic elements can signify authenticity for the magazine. Meanwhile musicians are portrayed as sincere members of the hard rock and metal community through the printing of promotional photographs that show them in their rock/metal garb in everyday settings, creating a sense of band members as living a hard rock and metal lifestyle. In this their musical performance is not a gimmick to sell records; their musical passion is genuine and the artists are being true to themselves. For instance, James Hetfield, vocalist and guitarist of Metallica (issue 806, 2000), is photographed in a street. His hair is short and looks naturally blond. He has a small goatee beard and wears a white t-shirt with a gold chain over it. He stands with one arm raised behind his head as if he is half stretching, looking pensively beyond the camera. The band Finch (issue 1061, 2005) loiter next to a wall at the side of the road, appearing as though they are waiting for a bus. Four members stand casually; one sits on the kerb of the grass verge with his arms around his knees. All band members wear blue, either in their jeans, their t-shirts or jackets. Three members have chin-length hair which, within this hard rock and metal world, suggests hair on its way to being very long. One band member has shorter hair that is gelled back from his face, and a further member has his blue hood over his head, but a few strands of fringe suggest his hair is also short. Two band members have small beards on their chins and one a stubbly face. Only the man with the obviously short hair looks at the camera, the others look out of the frame, three in the same direction, emphasising their bus-stop location. The musicians do not look at the camera, implying that the photograph has caught them unawares, going about their business. It is not obviously posed and the band do not look as if they are trying to appear aggressive or 'cool'. These realistic postures, casual clothes and long or growing hair contribute towards an idea of the musicians living the hard rock and metal lifestyle: that this is their normal life. There is no sense that the musicians have dressed up especially for the photo shoot and that when the cameras have gone they will change their attire. In this way the musicians are represented as sincere and genuine members of the hard rock and metal community.

Rock versus pop: situating authenticity in the music

Whilst musicians present themselves as authentic members of the community, they are also drawing upon the way in which the music is positioned in opposition to pop music. This antagonistic relationship is sited within a binary in which pop is seen to be 'manufactured' whilst hard rock and metal is 'authentic'. In readers' letters this belief in the veritableness of hard rock and metal is signified by distinctions between canonical hard rock and metal bands and pop music. For example, The Voice Of The Next Generation argues that British people have bad taste in music:

The British public's taste in music sucks; what with all this boy band, teen-pop shit it's like we're being force fed crap until we grow to like it while the real musicians out there go without any recognition. (The Voice Of The Next Generation 2000, 50)

The Voice mobilises the idea of mass culture as the creation of an elite that is used to dupe the working class and stifle authentic folk cultures. This Marxist position is famously associated with Adorno and Horkheimer, who theorise mass culture as produced with the purpose of subduing the working classes and helping them to adapt to their exploited position in capitalist society, thus reducing the threat of socialist revolution. Those who fall prey to the message are the 'deceived masses' (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997, 133) who love the culture which is sedating them. Adorno's 'On Popular Music' is particularly relevant here. Adorno distinguishes popular music from serious music. He argues that popular music requires no listening (i.e. thoughtful engagement with the music) because popular songs are written within a formula or standard and therefore, for the audience, the standardisation does 'their listening for them' (Adorno 2002, 445). This promotes passive listening, results in dullness and lack of energy and 'keeps the customers in line' (Adorno 2002, 445). I discuss below the way in which rock has been theorised by its critics as 'serious music' (but see also Motti Regev [1994]). 'Force fed' speaks of the public having no choice but to painfully swallow the music, but The Voice argues that the force-feeding has resulted in a preference for the 'boy band, teen-pop shit'. The Voice sets her/himself outside of the group 'The British Public' (even whilst using 'we') by claiming that they (The British Public) do not understand the way in which they have been duped. The letter implies that it takes somebody special or clever to recognise the difference between the 'shit' and the 'real musicians'. The Voice is virulently dismissive of all pop music: it is a genre-based critique, with *all* pop music bad and *all* music discussed in *Kerrang!* 'real' which in the context of authenticity signifies 'good'.

My Chemical Romance and the siting of authenticity in the audience

Pop is not the only music to come under fire for its lack of authenticity, however. One band that receives a lot of criticism for being out of place in a 'metal' magazine is My Chemical Romance.⁴² The letters that are critical of the inclusion of My Chemical Romance are reliant upon making distinctions between which music is suitable within the imaginary community and which is not (what comes to be positioned as 'other' regardless of the sound of the music). I argue that inclusion and authentic status is dependent upon the gender make up of a band's audience.

⁴² The band is also the focus of supportive letters and there is conflict over their reputation, as I discuss in the section on the myth of the groupie.

My Chemical Romance are frequently described as an emo band, and their fans as emos, although the band themselves have described emo as 'shit' (Way quoted in Sowerby 2007). 'Emo' is a contraction of 'emotional hardcore', and the subgenre grew out of hardcore punk. Sarah F. Williams describes emotional hardcore bands as,

Attempt[ing ...] to reconcile the long-established codes of masculinity – musical representations of aggression, pomp, stoicism, misogyny, and determination – with more multifaceted human expressions of heartache, weakness, longing and loss. (Williams 2007, 146)

Some of these ideals are evident in the songs and image of My Chemical Romance. The band also wear make up and dramatic costumes (rather than the traditional jeans and a t-shirt), talk about feminism, and, when I saw them perform at Leeds Festival 2006, they advised their mostly female fans to avoid giving sexual favours to roadies in order to get backstage. As an 'emo' band, My Chemical Romance's position in *Kerrang!* is contested, and the following two examples work together to attempt to push My Chemical Romance out of the pages of the magazine. The two letters from 2007 sit alongside each other and a picture of Slayer:

This whole dark scene of rock is so overrated. Not only is the word 'black'; overused way too much in rock, but there's so much rock nowadays that's all about self-harm, suicide, or death, so it wouldn't hurt to have a few cheery articles would it? (Elliott 2007, 4)

Elliott's letter implicates My Chemical Romance by the use of 'black', which is part of the name of the band's 2006 album *The Black Parade*. It is also the colour of their costumes and the backgrounds in a number of promotional photographs. Furthermore the album is about death (it is a concept album about a man who dies from cancer), whilst the song 'Famous Last Words' hints at suicide (but rejects it). British tabloids have suggested that fans of My Chemical Romance are at risk of self-harm and described the band as leaders of a suicide cult (Sands 2006). This implication is picked up by *Kerrang!*'s letters editor; below Elliott's letter and underneath *Kerrang!*'s headline, 'Stop crying your hearts out' Little Harry Hardcore writes, 'one message to all My Chemical Romance fans: STOP IT AND GET SOME SLAYER' (Little Harry Hardcore 2007, 4, capitals in original). The band Little Harry Hardcore recommends instead of My Chemical Romance is Slayer – a longstanding band with an established place in the canon of hard rock and metal, rather than a newer band. *Kerrang!*'s letter headline may physically divide the letters from Elliott and Little Harry Hardcore, but it also serves to link them. To read through the letters in order, Elliott's words ring in the mind when reading Harry's letter with its capitalised 'STOP' echoing the 'stop' of the headline. It suggests that *Kerrang!* stop focusing on the

'dark scene of rock'. The headline's linking role establishes the magazine as supportive of the view of My Chemical Romance as excessively involved in misery and as recognising the need for coverage of more canonical bands.⁴³ The musical taste of My Chemical Romance fans is called into question by *Kerrang!*, whilst the position of Slayer is affirmed.

Paul Brannigan, editor of *Kerrang!* between 2000 and 2009, reads the contested place of emo as a result of prejudices around gender and age, and a protectionism by older, male fans of more established metal bands (also clarifying that it is not age that gains one respect, but gender: older women do not receive the same level of respect as older men):

Emo fans are the whipping boys of the moment. [...] There's a misogynistic air to it. A lot of the credible metal bands have got an older, very male following and they see teenage girls getting into bands like MCR and think they've not earned the respect to be called a rock fan. (Brannigan quoted in Boden 2006, 53)

'Respect' from male fans of 'credible metal bands' is something teenage girls must *earn*, not something that is accorded automatically as a right. Brannigan puts the lack of respect down to both the My Chemical Romance fans' age and their sex, but also implies that bands 'like MCR', unlike the ones older male fans like, are not 'credible'. So whilst Brannigan seems to condemn older fans' misogyny, he betrays his own disbelief in My Chemical Romance's authenticity. It is apparent that the derogatory comments about My Chemical Romance are in part the result of sexist attitudes towards women fans and the perception of them as inauthentic rock fans or as not serious about music. When all My Chemical Romance fans are perceived in this way (regardless of sex, age, or other musical interests), they have been feminised. Because anything which is associated with women or with femininity – for instance via its large female fanbase – is positioned as suspect, pop and emo, with their large female followings, present a significant danger to the ideology of hard rock and metal as authentic.

Metalanguage: myth of authenticity

The forms in my metalanguage reading are the signs of the realism in the designs, the naturalistic poses and garb of musicians, and the letters that differentiate rock from pop and My Chemical Romance from Slayer. The community is imagined to be authentic in terms of both the production and staff of the magazine (who are represented as genuine fans producing sincere fan media), via its performers (artists who are portrayed as part of the hard rock and metal community and as having real affection for the music at all times) and through the distinction fans make between hard rock and metal music and pop music.

⁴³ Although Slayer are not what you would call a 'cheery' band: 'Angel of Death' is about the Holocaust.

The elements of realism on the letters pages are tied in with the way in which the magazine works to fashion itself as part of a community in which it is a mouthpiece of the fans whilst also invoking particular of the past traditions of the genre⁴⁴ to establish its position as securely part of the history of hard rock and metal. As with the need to establish the magazine as maintaining equality, the creation of authenticity by the magazine capitalises on the representation of the magazine as 'by fans, for fans' and it is therefore part of the same marketing strategy. Brown notes that making links between contemporary bands and bands which are part of 'a revered tradition of metal history' (Brown 2007, 652) is a valuable strategy.

However, the authenticity that the magazine seeks to achieve through its design and through its photographs of musicians has been shown to rely on problematic assumptions and false ideas. Simon Frith argues that attempts to rescue rock from the criticisms of mass culture theory by showing that it is an authentic music of the folk, rely upon the same assumptions as the mass culture theory itself. Hesmondhalgh offers a useful summary of Frith's examination of the various claims for rock as an authentic creation of a community. Of particular relevance are his critiques of community and authenticity. Ideas of rock music as arising from a community have,

Relied on the key assumptions that there was and should be no distance between performers and audience; and that the music spontaneously expresses the nature of communal life, work and feeling. (Hesmondhalgh 1996, 196-7)

This can be seen in the myth of equality, and also in the ways in which male musicians are photographed as if they are going about their everyday lives and these quotidian activities are fundamentally grounded in their role in the hard rock and metal community. In this way the musicians are depicted as real members of the community and the music is therefore made within the community. Yet, Frith, gearing his argument towards teenage fans, contends that rock is not a folk culture of young people, aside from perhaps the hippy movement in the 1960s or punk in the 1970s. Rock has been co-opted (Hesmondhalgh 1996, 197). Where musicians may be presented as authentic members of a community, the ideology of the rock-musician-as-artist is one which is imbricated with romantic ideas of 'bohemianism and hedonism' (Hesmondhalgh 1996, 197) which set the

⁴⁴ It is significant that the magazine references thrash metal rather than the sleeker and more polished glam metal. This was a conscious strategy by the magazine, as one editor, Paul Rees explained to *Campaign*: 'We redesigned last October in a move away from the whiff of spandex. Elements of the design were rooted in the mid-80s and we have repositioned visually and editorially' (Rees quoted in Darby 2002). At that time glam metal was still a subgenre in the doldrums (and it is still not entirely accepted amongst fans of extreme metal) whilst thrash bands like Slayer retained their status.

musician and the audience apart. Frith asserts that this undermines ideas of the musician as an authentic member of the community.

Frith's demolition of the ideology of rock may now be rather old (over thirty years), and it may be accepted in the academy;⁴⁵ however it is apparent that these ideas still have currency in journalistic writing. What Frith did not examine in *Sound Effects* (1983) was the gendered meaning of authenticity, particularly in relation to the audience. It is in the work of Andreas Huyssen (1986) that attention is drawn to the ways in which mass culture and art have been positioned as antithetical and how this relationship is (often not very subtly) gendered. Sarah Thornton (1995) furthers Huyssen's argument as she applies it to subcultures and mainstreams,⁴⁶ and Norma Coates (1997) applies it specifically to rock and pop.

Huyssen offers evidence that conceptions of mass culture have consistently treated mass culture's audience as a feminine 'other', and that high art is defined in opposition to mass culture:

The powerful masculine mystique which is explicit in modernists such as Marinetti, Jünger, Benn, Wyndham Lewis, Céline et al. (not to speak of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud), and implicit in many others, has to be somehow related to the persistent gendering of mass culture as feminine and inferior. (Huyssen 1986, 55)

Women's culture is thus considered inferior to men's art. The gendering of the audience of mass culture has persisted in mid-twentieth century theorists' work: Adorno in *Prisms* describes pop fans quite specifically 'as girls' (Adorno quoted in Frith 1983, 44). The mass culture/high art dichotomy is therefore based upon the duality and attendant hierarchy of feminine/masculine so that the status of *all* women fans is devalued. The objects of their fandom are similarly devalued, and the modes of their fandom devalued too. Thornton notes how members of subcultures, too, create a communal identity defined against a demonised 'other': 'labelling is crucial to the insiders' and outsiders' view of themselves as different' (Thornton 1995, 119) and, in the case of 1990s dance culture, the outsiders belong to the 'mainstream'.⁴⁷ In her consideration of the process of how 1990s dance

⁴⁵ Although at the Heavy Metal and Popular Culture conference (Bowling Green, 2013) it was clear that some metal scholars remain invested in the idea of metal as a community and one which has greater authentic value than pop.

⁴⁶ Although I am reticent to include material that relies on subcultural theory, I do think Thornton's critique of authenticity and its relationship to 'mainstream' remains relevant.

⁴⁷ 'Mainstream' is a label given to the culture that is currently most popular, to the extent of being considered 'the norm'.

culture, initially considered a subculture, came to be considered 'mainstream', Thornton looks at the relationship between theories of high art/mass culture and theories of subculture/mainstream and finds that where mass culture is the foil for high art, so those involved in 'subcultures' treat 'mainstream' as the foil for 'subculture'. 'To some degree the mainstream stands in for the masses [...] derivative, superficial and *femme*' (Thornton 1995, 5), and it is associated with pop music, fashion, herd mentality, passive consumption, and lack of discernment or real taste (Thornton 1995, 99-100). 'Subcultures', on the other hand, are authentic, intelligent, original and independent. Coates too notes that pop music is feminised whilst rock authenticity is associated with masculinity:

Consider, for example, the discursive and stylistic segregation of 'rock' and 'pop'. In this schema, rock is metonymic with 'authenticity' while 'pop' is metonymic with artifice. Sliding even further down the metonymic slope, 'authentic' becomes 'masculine' while 'artificial' becomes 'feminine'. Rock, therefore, is 'masculine', 'pop' is 'feminine', and the two are set in a binary relation with each other, with the masculine, of course, on top. (Coates 1997, 52)

Authenticity is therefore a trait which is bound up with masculinity but set apart from femininity. Indeed, femininity provides a threat to authenticity so that anything which is associated with women needs to be restrained from rock to preserve its authenticity. Frith hints at this in his discussion of the way in which the gender of the audience impacts upon the respect shown the music. His discussion of rock critics' disdain for James Blunt concludes that the contempt shown the musician is intertwined with the status of the fans; he describes how James Blunt CDs are displayed in music shops as 'Perfect for Mothers Day' and that this in itself is enough to deter people from buying them (Frith 2007). Blunt lacks respect, Frith argues, because his target audience is (older) women. Thornton also describes how the subcultural contempt shown for women is summed up in the phrase 'Sharon and Tracey dance round their handbags' (Thornton 1995, 99). She argues that as the dance scene grew in popularity and as women began to move into it, its underground and alternative status was compromised: it became the mainstream and, as such, 'feminized' (Thornton 1995, 100). It should now be obvious how pop music fits into this schema and therefore why the genre is so freely vilified by *Kerrang!*'s letter writers. My Chemical Romance, with its young audience and sympathy for feminine topics, also falls within the 'pop' or 'mainstream' side of the dichotomy, as hinted by Brannigan.

Thus authenticity, like equality, is dependent upon a sharply marked difference between what is seen as feminine and what is recognised as masculine. Authenticity requires the feminine to be expunged, and this highlights the way in which the concept is mythical, because if it were a real or natural quality of hard rock and metal then contact with any

amount of femininity would not damage it. As fans of hard rock and metal (or, indeed, as musicians), then, women's place in hard rock and metal is precarious, and, even as authenticity is a key attribute that is imagined to be a backbone of both the music and the community, for women fans any claims they may make to authenticity will always be challenged.

Letter writers discuss the notions of equality and authenticity as values that the community embodies and that are axiomatic. This is in spite of their sometimes contradictory experiences at hard rock and metal events and in reading the magazine. However, even if 'real life' does not always live up to the idealistic community brought into being in the letters pages of *Kerrang!*, that does not (necessarily) make the community and the values it holds less real for the letter writers. I would argue that the myths are so powerful that they work to make incongruous experiences seem like exceptions in an otherwise virtually cloudless sky.

The myths of gender

That is not quite the case with the messages that *Kerrang!* delivers about gender. The myths of equality and authenticity are held to be self-evident by letter writers in *Kerrang!*, but the messages delivered by the myths of the warrior and the groupie are not transmitted through open discussion of the roles of men and women. They are communicated through the visual elements of the letters pages – the design and the photographs – and through the topics and tones of, in particular, women's letters. This means that they are 'obvious' in a different way to the oft-mentioned values of authenticity and equality that appear in the letters themselves, because it is about what women and men *appear as* rather than what they *say* the community ought to be. The myths tell us that women and men play distinct roles in the hard rock and metal community: women are fans, men are musicians, and those roles have values that are attached that mean that they are different and do not hold equivalent value. Women fans are constructed as groupies (and women musicians are portrayed as sexually available), while men musicians are depicted as warriors. This is achieved through photographs that show men as musicians in aggressive poses, women as smiling fans in close physical proximity to musicians, and women musicians in ways that are reminiscent of other sexualised images of women. The designs of the letters pages play their part in creating a visual landscape of danger, war, blood and death in which to site the warrior-like musicians. Letters from women defend favourite musicians from detractors and describe their sexual attraction to musicians. The most obvious way in which the distinct roles are displayed is through the photographs.

The main gendered signs in the photographs are that men appear as unsmiling, cold, aggressive musicians, whilst women appear as sexualised musicians (albeit rarely) or as smiling, happy young fans. Whilst the photographs send an immediate message about the roles that women and men play in the imaginary community, further ways in which these roles are entrenched can be identified through close readings of photographs, the design of the pages and the letter texts. The roles are conservative as they hark back to a romanticised past when, it is supposed, 'men were men' (strong, dangerous and uninfected by femininity) and 'women were women' (in the background, cheerleading and camp following). I now examine those forms of the letters pages that generate these naturalised roles as gendered, looking first at the myth of the warrior and then at the myth of the groupie.

Myth of the warrior

Two factors in the promulgation of the warrior myth are the design of the letters pages, and the photographic images of musicians. Both designs and photographs signify war in order to render the expulsion of the feminine (which is necessary for authenticity) *natural*: a quiddity of hard rock and metal. War is valuable and useful in achieving this because in common sense understandings of a battle situation femininity is unwanted, a liability. The rendering of warrior masculinity in *Kerrang!*'s letters pages as essential makes it unchallengeable.

War, blood, death

In the designs of the 'Feedback' pages, the colour and font choices play a large part in transmitting this message. In 2000 (see Appendix B Figure 3: June 2000) the title of the page, 'Feedback', appears in white lettering on a black background. The background is shot through with white to give the impression that the title has been written on black paper, scrunched up in a fit of rage and smoothed out again. The crumpled paper effect conveys passion and disrespect for neatness. Underneath the headline, the text 'Your say on the issues that matter' appears in white on a red box. In 2001 (see Figure 4: June 2001) the design renders the title as appearing on a ticket stub, referring to the importance of gig attendance to hard rock and metal fans. Red is gone, but the black background is retained and the letter headers now have black backgrounds too. In 2002 and 2003 (see Figure 5: June 2002-3) the red was reinstated, although in a minor way. It contributes a shock of colour amongst the harsh black and white. In 2004 (see Figure 6: June 2004) the letters page was given a design overhaul in which the interplay of red and black was now the dominant motif in the design scheme. This theme was used fairly consistently with minor changes until 2008 (see Figure 7: June 2005 and Figure 8: June 2006-7). By 2008 (see Figure 9: June 2008) the red and black theme had been dropped in

favour of a distinctive yellow and black scheme that gives some different meanings, as I will discuss below.

Red is used throughout the nine years of my study, with the exception of the 2001 design. There are tiny splashes in 2000 and 2008, and it is more dominant in 2005-7. Black is heavily used in every design, but at some points (2002-4 for instance) it is the dominant colour and makes a significant impact upon the eye. The two colours are used in combination with striking effect between 2005 and 2007. This combination makes reference to the prevalent colour scheme in the hard rock and metal genre more generally. Red and black frequently appear on album artwork, t-shirts and in music videos.

These colour schemes are resonant with the signifiers of a version of westernised masculinity. In the UK in the twenty-first century, both red and black have strong connotations. For example, red signifies blood, sex, debt, Satan, Communism, danger, fire, aggression, confidence while black signifies death, funerals, apocalypse, war, evil, nights, fear (Dabner 2004, 35). When used together (e.g. in the Nazi flag, on poisonous or dangerous animals, on Beano characters Dennis the Menace and Minnie the Minx's jumpers, a roulette wheel, a pack of cards) these forms are drawn upon and create new meanings in a British cultural context. The signified meanings are risk, danger, amorality and evil, but also forbidden pleasures and freedom from societal constraints. They also signify 'rage and intensity' (King 2001, 16) and as such reflect the anger and intensity of the music. In the frequent use of the colours in combination, the forms become attached to the community and the concepts are warning, bloody battle, violence and death. The use of yellow alongside black in the June 2008 letters pages continues the theme of danger (animal colours: wasps, tigers; hazard logo; radioactivity). The signifiers here are around poison and warning (Dabner 2004, 32). In addition both yellow and red are 'associated with warmth and speed' (Frost 2003, 135). This again links to the pace of the music and the strong emotional (often angry) content. Yellow alone signifies sunshine and happiness; however, in combination with black the overruling signification is of danger and warning.

The colours in use in *Kerrang!*'s letters pages therefore prominently signify danger, death, war and gore. The fonts also carry signifiers that work alongside the colours to produce a particular signification. Throughout the letters a sans serif font⁴⁸ has been used for the main texts of the letters. Sans serif fonts are modern (Frost 2003, 92) and signify youth and newness, whilst serif fonts can appear more traditional (Frost 2003, 92). They are also 'more authoritative' (Dabner 2004, 83). Frost describes the difference between sans

⁴⁸ A serif font (e.g. Times New Roman) includes ornamentation on the characters, while a sans serif font (e.g. Arial) does not.

serif and serif fonts as like the difference between 'shouting and talking' (Frost 2003, 94) and, as with the use of reds and yellows to imply aggression and speed and thus reflecting the music, so the 'shouting' sans serif fonts mimic the loud, aggressive vocal delivery of many hard rock and metal bands. Using the language-object signs as forms in a reading of the metalanguage of the designs reveals that the forms are linked to concepts of death, blood, war, warning, sex, authenticity, speed and high volume. This gives a general sense of danger, and also connotes masculinity whilst *not* implying femininity: there are no soft pinks (except for the HMV logo) and no curly fonts. There is no graded shading: colours are bold with hard edges and no soft lines. There is little white space as the pages are full, creating a visual onslaught. The designs thus create an immediate visual impression and form a dramatic backdrop against which images are placed.

Musicians as warriors

Photographs of musicians are generally photographs of men. They tend to signify strength, masculinity and aggression. Musicians wear black, hair is often long, and beards and tattoos are in evidence. The look is strikingly different from the neater, short-haired and clean-shaven ideal of contemporary masculinity.⁴⁹ These photographs use postures, costumes and facial expressions that signify anger, aggression or intimidation in some form. Different kinds of aggressive and intimidatory miens and gestures appear across the period. For instance, Abbath wear fearsome corpse paint (issue 906, 2002); Fall Out Boy's Pete Wentz wears military costume (issue 1112, 2006); Kai Dodson of Army of Freshmen makes a beastly snarl (issue 1164, 2007). Machinehead's Robb Flynn (issue 1214, 2008) is a particularly good example. His imposing massiveness fills the page. He is pictured against a background so dark that his black hair fades into it. His t-shirt is black, his beard is black and his eyes are black. His hair is in a centre parting with a few blond strands falling down either side of his face. His beard grows only on the underside of his chin. His arms are tattooed and he looks unsmilingly into the camera. Indeed his eyes are a little sad and this goes some way to relieving the intense aggression that Flynn's

⁴⁹ Not all photographs show hard rock and metal musicians looking like warriors: different fashions can be seen over the nine years of my study. In the early years of the century, many images show very short cropped hair on nu-metal artists. The concept of aggression remains in the challenging and threatening looks cast at the camera, and black clothes are prominent. In the later years of my study, when fashions became associated with emo, the fearsome and aggressive looks decline: women and men's hair at this time falls in straightened 'floppy' fringes, often black with streaks of blond, and they wear eyeliner. This more polished appearance, which requires daily maintenance of hair and make up, is associated with women's beauty regimes and signifies femininity. Photographs showing this kind of fashion sit amongst images of more 'old skool' metal musicians in which the long hair and angry look remains. However the meaning of the feminised sign of emo fashion is contested and receives gendered criticism, reinforcing the angry long-haired fashion as hegemonic.

blackness, his massiveness (he is very muscular) and his unsmiling look imply. His nose is pierced through the septum and a ring hangs in it, reminiscent of a bull. This implies that he is dangerous, virile and in need of careful handling.

When militaristic postures, gazes and attire are not present, other indications of 'hardness', bravery and power are visible. Many musicians have tattoos (a marker of the ability to withstand pain, a sign of lack of care for convention, a symbol of confidence in identity as tattoos last forever, and a sign of adherence to the aesthetic values of hard rock and metal culture), male musicians show off their muscular frames by baring their chests or exposing their upper arms in vests, such as in the images of Agnostic Front (issue 807, 2000) and Iron Maiden (issue 958, 2003). The long hair worn by Iron Maiden and many others is a sign of defiance of conventional gender roles that allow only short hair for men. Long hair is a tradition in hard rock and metal and is used to signify difference from and defiance of authority. It is also reminiscent of older cultures such as the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings, both of which are crystallised in the English imagination as invading forces wielding bloody axes on a murderous rampage.

Some musicians employ gestures and expressions that make them look like popular images of sociopathic, psychotic or monstrous characters. These images evoke representations of villains in horror films and seem designed to shock and to strike fear into the viewer, although of course seasoned metal fans will *not* be afraid. The real people who these images are intended to shock are some unnamed group outside of the hard rock and metal community that might comprise authority figures such as parents, teachers, employers, police, the church or the government: a group which might in rock culture be roughly designated 'The Man'. For example, Slipknot (issues 804 and 805, 2000) wear grotesque masks that reference horror films such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (directed by Tobe Hooper, Vortex, 1974), *Motel Hell* (directed by Kevin Connor, United Artists, 1980), *It* (directed by Tommy Lee Wallace, Lorimar Productions and DawnField Entertainment, 1990) and *Hellraiser* (directed by Clive Barker, Cinemarque Entertainment BV, Film Futures, Rivdel Films, 1987). The film characters that the masks evoke are murderers, unearthly torturers and predators and they terrorise (and often kill, sometimes eat) the films' protagonists. Unearthliness is also signified in the image of Marilyn Manson (issue 859, 2001): the musician wears contact lenses that colour the irises of his eyes white and thereby disconcert the viewer due to its un-human-ness, suggesting an alien body. Ozzy Osbourne (issue 806, 2000) wears a long black coat, his head is tilted to his left, his arms held stiffly at his sides and with palms forward his hands and fingers are stretched out. The comportment, particularly the closely buttoned long coat and the awkwardly held arms and hands, is reminiscent of the early film portrayal of a

vampire in *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* (directed by F. W. Murnau, Film Arts Guild, 1922).

In the early years of my material, the 'gangster' was a common motif in photographs, and is achieved by different musicians in differing ways. For example the image of Korn⁵⁰ (issue 805, 2000) suggests an American ghetto-gangster style similar to that displayed by some hip hop artists. This is signified by the long neck chains worn by all members of the band (some wear multiple chains), by the large rings on their fingers, by the positions of their heads (tilted to one side as if sizing someone up) and by their unsmiling direct glances. With them are two very shiny and expensive-looking BMX bikes and two bull dogs. Jonathan Davis, the lead singer, sits on a throne with the four other members of the band arrayed around him and the dogs in front, as if he is a Medieval king and these men and dogs his personal bodyguard. Davis holds his fist towards the camera as if requesting fist bumps. Whilst there is something Medieval about the image, the jewellery, bikes, sunglasses (worn by four band members), baseball hat (worn by one) and the intimidatory gathering around one member are all reminiscent of images of gangster rap musicians. In the same issue gangster rap group Wu-Tang Clan are pictured arrayed around a single member, some wearing baseball caps, their heads tilted quizzically and long chains in evidence.

Metalanguage: myth of the warrior

The signs of the blood and warlike designs, the bold and shouting fonts combined with the aggressive and intimidatory poses are the forms in my metalanguage reading. Musicians are imagined to be male and to embody 'hardness', strength, power, aggression and the will and capability to hurt in a context of war, on a bloody and gore-strewn battlefield. It is an image that affirms the masculinity of the genre of hard rock and metal and its musicians. Now, where the previous myths could be 'troubled' via showing where they were constructed rather than based on actual or real values, this myth is more *troubling*. Because it is communicated primarily by design and images, it is more immediate which, I argue, means that it is less easy to mount a critique of it. In this, its message is dangerous. The hard rock and metal musician is produced as necessarily masculine, a distinction that results in the de facto situation of the maleness of virtually all successful musicians in the genre. This masculinity is particular, and draws on the image of the Medieval Nordic or Germanic warrior, but the Vikings are the more significant reference point, as Trafford and Pluskowski also contend. They argue that the popular cultural representation of the Viking has been prevalent in heavy metal since its inception and forms an important motif in both lyrics and artwork (Trafford and Pluskowski 2007, 59-60).

⁵⁰ Korn are a nu-metal band and the subgenre was supposed to blend metal with rap.

The use of Vikings (rather than other images of warriors such as chivalric knights) is important because it means that particular attributes can be attached to the hard rock or metal musician and these qualities bolster the masculine status of the musician. Trafford and Pluskowski identify the following characteristics of Vikings: 'bloodthirsty and rapacious attackers'; 'barbarian disrupters of civilized life'; 'hyper-masculine'; energy and dynamism; physical (and military) strength; and they are unlikely to 'submit [...] easily to any acknowledged authority' (Trafford and Pluskowski 2007, 58). So whilst the Vikings are dangerous, they are also regarded as strong and independent: traits that are still valued within the context of contemporary Anglophone masculinity. Warrior masculinity is therefore something to which men have greater access and which also works to exclude the feminine. The myth thereby functions as a barrier to women's participation in the genre as musicians, resulting in fewer opportunities for women fans. I am not arguing that women cannot utilise warrior masculinity in order to be successful musicians, rather that women's feminine socialisation and the ways in which women's femininity is regulated on a day-to-day basis places them at a disadvantage when seeking to become successful musicians. Of course not all women desire to take to the stage and wield an axe⁵¹ on the battlefield of rock, but they should feel able and have the opportunity to express themselves musically if they wish.

Myth of the groupie

In *Kerrang!*'s letters pages the representation of men is as the authentic hard rock and metal musician. Women are not portrayed in the letters pages as frequently as men, but when they are, the dominant depiction is as fans: this can be seen in the Pandora cartoon, in photographs and in letter texts. In photographs women are primarily shown as fans, not musicians, and fans' letters are written by women as often as men. Photographs of women fans show meetings with (usually) male musicians. Meanwhile, women musicians are not depicted in the same ways as male musicians; most commonly they are depicted in ways that draw upon sexualised images of women in popular culture and signify their heterosexual attractiveness. Women are therefore determined by their role as sexual partners for men in the imaginary community. This reinforces the myth of the warrior and delivers a message about women in the imaginary community: women are groupies.

Pandora

One of the most striking ways in which women are positioned as fans is in the comic strip, 'Pandora', that appeared on the 'Feedback' pages between 2001-3. The strip follows the exploits of a female metal fan called Pandora, who makes a mean cheese and pickle sandwich. She is sometimes accompanied by her aunt, Auntie P (the initial suggesting that

⁵¹ 'Axe' is rock 'n' roll slang for a guitar.

she too is called Pandora and that there is a continuum of women fans), who is older, has wrinkles and chain-smokes. Aunty P is a veteran of the glam metal era, denoted by skin-tight clothes, big hair and make up, and the suggestion of sexual hedonism and fast living. Aunty P and Pandora both have large and perky breasts, their extreme cleavages usually offset by the word 'bitch' on their tops. In an image of Pandora (issue 1011, 2004) that is included amongst the photographs of musicians, but outside of her usual comic strip, she is pictured in mid-shot against a bright yellow background. She looks to her left, her head turned slightly, mouth open and her left arm is raised, possibly pointing at something out of the frame. Her right arm hangs by her side. Her long unnaturally red hair is in high bunches, but some strands have strayed and fallen down the sides of her face and over her shoulders. She wears an eyebrow piercing and her ear is pierced many times. Her eyes are heavily made up to her pointy Vulcan eyebrows, and her full lips are coated in thick dark red lipstick which has a white spot on it to signify glossiness. Around her neck is a spiked dog collar and she wears a tight black t-shirt that is ripped at the neck and arms. It bears the words 'bitch alert' in red across her breasts. The 'hardness' signified by the scowls and nasty words of both Pandora and Aunty P, by the word 'bitch' and by the cynicism and bitterness of Aunty P, signals a resemblance to the warrior-musicians. Yet these two women are never depicted playing music or involved in other creative pursuits: they 'hobnob' with musicians, engaging in banter or making them cheese and pickle sandwiches. Pandora is sometimes drawn naked or with breasts or pubic region exposed (on the toilet, masturbating, in bed where she sleeps without nightclothes): the artist accentuates her large, high breasts, her rosebud mouth and big eyes so that she is drawn to fit into modern ideals of feminine sexual attractiveness.⁵²

Women fans meeting men musicians

Pandora is one recurring artistic representation of a woman fan, and photographs of women fans also appear very frequently, often depicting meetings between women fans and men musicians. Although photographs of fan-musician meetings show the way in which the community is imagined as equal, those that portray female fans meeting male musicians also signify something else about those women fans. Of these fan-musician meetings, the majority of women fans are pictured smiling and happy. Three example snapshots depict happy, smiling women alongside taller, older men who frequently touch the younger women.

Female fan, Sarah of Wakefield (issue 855, 2001), is photographed in a busy Leeds record shop, posing next to Roger Manganelli of Less Than Jake. Manganelli wears a

⁵² When I was speaking at a Kent school to teenage boys about representations of women in rock and metal one confessed, with some embarrassment, that he was attracted to Pandora.

black jacket over a grey t-shirt. His hair is short and dark. He towers above Sarah, leaning in towards her. His gives a Johnny Rotten-esque stare. Sarah wears a fluffy grey jacket over a white and red Less Than Jake t-shirt. Her light brown hair is tied back with a centre parting and she looks directly towards the camera. She looks to be aged around 15 years old, and to be quite happy to have met Roger, although she is not beaming. Behind them music fans queue for concert tickets. In a later issue (907, 2002), the colour photograph of women fans meeting Jordan Pundik of New Found Glory is taken outside a public building with shops or a pub in the background. The musician is a head taller than his four female fans. His hair is short brown and quiffed. He wears an earring and a dark top, and his arm is draped around one of the fan's shoulders. He smiles slightly, but his body is turned away from the camera and he is leaning back a little suggesting that perhaps he wants to be elsewhere. The four fans stand grinning in front of him. They are around 15-17 years old. The girl on the left wears a white New Found Glory t-shirt, and her brown hair is chin length and parted in the centre. The girl to her left also wears a New Found Glory t-shirt, this time black. Her long brown hair is tied back and she is stretching upwards as if she is standing on tiptoes. The girl second from the right also has her long hair tied back. She holds her hand up to her throat as if trying to contain her excitement. The girl on the right also holds her hand up, but to her chest. She wears spectacles and a beanie hat from beneath which two plaits poke out. The four girls stand close together and all look elated. Elly Sams (issue 1214, 2008) is photographed with Shaant Hacikyan of Cute Is What We Aim For in a dark room with UV light that makes their t-shirts and Sams' hair glow. Hacikyan wears a tight bright yellow t-shirt with large black text reading 'BELIV[...]'. His long hair falls to his neck and his eyes are wide open showing a lot of white, and his mouth pulled open and sideways making him look a bit crazed. Elly Sams leans her head against his chest. She has dyed blonde hair falling from a right side parting to her shoulders. She wears a blue t-shirt and smiles sweetly.

Women defending musicians

This sense of women's passion for their favoured bands is also evident in their letters that defend the bands from detractors. Little Pink Pixie⁵³ writes to question *Kerrang!* writer Don Kaye's review of Smashing Pumpkins:

Will you please stop slagging off the Smashing Pumpkins. Okay, I understand, Don Kaye didn't enjoy their recent gig in New York, but that's hardly a good reason to call it a, 'New York Nightmare'. It seems to me that since 'Adore', you refuse to accept anything that either Billy or the Pumpkins do. Why? Some of the

⁵³ I think Little Pink Pixie is female from her use of three feminine signifiers in her pseudonym. At the least I can infer that the writer identifies with a feminine subject position.

lyrics on 'Adore' are amazing, unlike some of the shit Limp Bizkit and Cypress Hill come out with. (Little Pink Pixie 2000, 51)

Little Pink Pixie opens her letter with a statement of understanding, aiming to open a well-mannered debate. However, she quickly moves to incomprehension, positioning Kaye as someone who is not prepared to listen to new Smashing Pumpkins songs with unbiased ears. Her defence of the band therefore implies that if Kaye were to listen to the band without prejudice he would hear much to enjoy. The band's music can stand for itself, as long as the listener is prepared to be open-minded.

Letters that condemn the My Chemical Romance or the emo subgenre, such as those from Little Harry Hardcore and Elliott, mentioned above, fall in with a wider trend of denigrating emo and My Chemical Romance as leaders in the subgenre. A number of women letter writers respond supportively of the band, such as Becca In Norwich, her letter printed a fortnight⁵⁴ after those aforementioned letters. Becca draws on her own experience to position the band as misunderstood:

Thank you so much *Kerrang!*. You've opened up my eyes to good music, which has changed my life. It has helped me through so much, like bullying and depression.

I became more confident in myself, and the fuckers who made my life a misery saw that, and the bullying gradually became less and less serious. [...] And you know what? One of those bands who helped me through this are MCR. They had been through so much as a band, and they pulled through it all. Their lyrics have such hope, they hold one important message, to keep going, whatever it takes. So people who brand their music as 'depressing' and the band as possible leaders of a 'suicide cult' can shove it up their... well... you get the point! (Becca in Norwich 2007, 4)

My Chemical Romance were also the focus of an organised defence by fans when *The Daily Mail* linked the band to the suicide of emo fan Hannah Bond in 2008. Issues from May of that year include articles and letters supportive of My Chemical Romance while a protest by fans outside The Daily Mail offices is covered in June (issue 1214). The picture illustrating this demonstration is remarkable as a document of hard rock and metal fans: the majority are young women.

⁵⁴ Two weeks is the usual lag time between letters appearing and responses being printed.

Women desiring musicians

Emotional attachment is evident, too, in the letters that express sexual desire for musicians. These letters fit awkwardly into the letters pages amongst virulent arguments about the relative musical merits of bands and descriptions of concert and festival experiences. Somehow by bringing forward the person of the musician and declaring a desire for an intimate relationship with them these women letter-writers are *different* to the other letter writers. Those writers are content to retain a respectful and impersonal relationship with their favourites. These women are not. In issues from 2000 the letters pages included a box for a photograph and text called 'Gagging for a Shagging'. This box is a space for readers' requests for images of favourite musicians. It is unclear to me who is 'gagging', whether it is the letter writer or (it is suggested) the musician. In June 2000 this section is included in only three issues, the final issue's page being devoted to a defence of the oi! subgenre of punk.⁵⁵ In those three issues two of the musicians are men and one a women. The first, a man, was requested by 'A Girl With Taste'. Her declaration of desire is tempered by an appeal for permission to be a sexual pedagogue and to move beyond the realm of fantasy and into reality:

Please could you put the delicious virgin Daryl Palumbo from Glassjaw in Gagging for a Shagging. I would love to pop his cherry! Go on. Pretty please? (A Girl With Taste 2000, 51)

Palumbo's virginity is something of a novelty in hard rock and metal, in which sexual conquest is a vertebrae in the backbone of rock mythology, and that, A Girl With Taste seems to state, needs to be rectified. The necessity of asking permission positions the writer's desire as contained and unable to be acted upon. The second letter is from 'White Pony'. *White Pony* is the name of an album by the band of the musician in the 'Gagging for a Shagging' box: Chino Moreno of Deftones. It states, 'he can ride me around in the fields whenever he wants' (White Pony 2000, 51). *Kerrang!*'s response to the image of a woman, Paz Lenchantin, the bassist of A Perfect Circle, assumes a man made the request despite no gender identifier being published (I discuss this letter and image further below). The 'Gagging for a Shagging' box normalises the heterosexual relationship between musicians and fans, in which fans are always positioned as desiring musicians. However, female artists are obviously sexualised for a male audience in a way that is not echoed in the images of male artists (see below).

⁵⁵ Oi! developed from punk in the late 1970s and is particularly associated with working class and Cockney music-making. It drew on contemporary punk and 1960s mod. The letters in this issue of *Kerrang!* came from musicians, promoters and label owners involved in oi! music, and contested a review that had appeared in the magazine which flippantly stated all oi! music was racist. The letters challenge this view, arguing that oi! musicians were involved in a great deal of anti-racist activity.

Millie also writes to express her attraction to a musician:

The pictures of Biffy Clyro in last week's issue (K! 1159) are absolutely gorgeous. Did it take long to wash all those inky equations off of Simon Neil's delicious body? (Millie 2007, 4)

She calls Neil's body 'delicious', an adjective that is often used in relation to food and so signifies mouths, tongues, lips, taste buds and oral sensuality. Letters such as Millie's reveal that women fans gain a good deal of pleasure from their attractions to male musicians. They also position women as potential willing participants in sexual activity with musicians. This is evident from A Girl With Taste's letter and, assuming a heterosexual female letter writer, White Pony's too.

Heterosexualised female musicians

Whilst female fans are represented as desiring, loving and protecting male musicians, and whilst men musicians are photographed in ways that signify the fearsome warrior, women musicians tend to be formally posed in ways that signify heterosexual attractiveness. This is evident in the images of Paz Lenchantin, the bassist of A Perfect Circle (issue 805, 2000), and Christina Scabbia, vocalist in Lacuna Coil (issue 960, 2003). Paz Lenchantin is the woman in the 'Gagging for a Shagging' section. The photograph of her is a black and white head shot in a slightly soft focus. She is looking up, away from the camera, her hair dark and falling wispily over her face. Her lips are full and slightly apart, her skin smooth, as if made up with foundation, and her eyebrows are sculpted. Behind her the lapels of her bandmates can be seen, but they have been cropped from the photo so that her face alone fills the photograph. In this image the position of her eyes, looking up and towards the top of the frame rather than directly out at the viewer, signify coyness and this is a common way in which female models, actresses and singers are photographed. Slightly parted lips are frequently used to suggest sexual readiness. In conjunction with the other signifiers, Lenchantin's tousled hair can be read as 'sex-hair' – not yet brushed after sexual activity has ruffled it. Make up and eyebrow-sculpting are part of a beauty regime that is not part of the preparation that male musicians undergo before a photo shoot. The letter alongside the image further sexualises Lenchantin:

GOD DAMN, that baby from A Perfect Circle is one hot mama. I would appreciate it if you would forward her phone number and address to me... or maybe just a 10ft poster of her grabbing her breasts. What a babe! (Someone else 2000, 50)

Someone else's desire is markedly more active in tone than either White Pony's or A Girl With Taste's. The author, who *Kerrang!* addresses as 'sir', uses three common monikers for attractive women: 'baby', 'babe' and 'hot mama', all of which refer to bodily

attractiveness. He (assuming *Kerrang!* is correct) then exercises his male privilege as the sex which can make unsolicited advances towards the object of their affections without sanction (it is *normal* for men to approach women, but when a woman approaches a man she is subject to judgements about her sexual reputation and expectations about activities that she may engage in) by asking for her contact details. Failing that, he requests a larger-than-life poster of Lenchantin in a primarily sexual posture.

Christina Scabbia often appears in the 'hottest chicks in metal' sections of metal magazines (Brown 2009, 13). She is therefore already positioned as a heterosexually attractive woman. She is photographed in mid-shot leaning on a wall. Her long dark hair flows over her shoulders and she wears dark eye make up and lipstick. She wears a sleeveless top that has a plunging v-neck and a high waist so that her midriff is bare above her jeans. She is tanned and finger armour adorns her right hand. In this hand she holds a cigarette between the ends of her index and middle finger. Her thumb and other fingers are extended and her hand hovers close to her mouth, as if she were in the process of taking the cigarette away from her lips. Her head is slightly dipped so that she must look up towards the camera. The pose is reminiscent of a 1950s *film noir* actress. In drawing on the visual markers of *film noir* Scabbia is signified as beautiful, tempting, dangerous in a particularly gendered way: she will make you fall in love with her; you will break the law at her behest; she will break your heart ('you' is a man). In this image Scabbia is the *femme fatale*.

Metalanguage: myth of the groupie

Drawing these different elements together to use these signs as forms in the metalanguage, we can read the concept of these images as a certain kind of relationship between the depicted women and men. The photographs of women fans meeting musicians show something different to the relationship between Chloe and Ginger mentioned above: this is an unequal relationship. The men musicians touch the fans around the shoulders or with the chest, or they lean in to close proximity: the musicians encroach upon the young women's bodies and space. They are physically more imposing – taller, wider, older – and with facial expressions that sometimes reveal an odd attitude towards the camera: staring, tight-lipped and 'playing-up'. They are obliged to have their photographs taken whilst the young women are the ones who desire to have the meeting recorded. Meanwhile the women are smaller in size, often stretch up, lean into or look up at the musicians. They smile or grin. The musicians' reticence and discomfort is in discordance with the women's pleasure: the women are more interested than the musicians in the meeting and the photography.

The defensive letters generally champion the music of all-men bands, and women are signified to be protectors of their musical, and in some cases personal, reputations. The letter writers are emotionally invested in their favoured bands' value, and their own identity is tied in with this. These defensive letters are the forms of the concepts of women as guardians of favourite bands, loving them seemingly unconditionally and without requitement. An unbalanced relationship between women fans and male bands is therefore signified, and the form is also evident in the desiring letters, in which women are desirous of relationships with their favourite bands, stating that they *love* them and that they will act on their behalf. This relationship does not work both ways; individual fans are not of interest to bands: it is the *number of fans*, and so numbers of record, ticket and t-shirt sales, that matter. The musician is always special to the fan, the individual fan rarely special to the musician. Thus the relationship between musicians and women fans is shown to be an unequal one.

Because representations of women in *Kerrang!*'s letters pages are primarily of women as fans, this marks a gender divide in the roles members of the imaginary community can play. *Kerrang!*'s message about women fans is communicated through signifiers of an adoring, desiring and protective attitude towards male musicians that transforms those male musicians into objects of worship. Women are placed in the role of camp followers and cheerleaders. This gives those musicians a symbolic *carte blanche* whilst the women are symbolically willing in whatever their favourite musicians wish of them. Those women who are fortunate enough to cross the barricades and become successful as musicians, are not represented in a way similar to male musicians (as warriors). They are heterosexualised for a male audience and although men musicians are also sometimes positioned as objects of desire, they too appear primarily on the page for a male viewer: as a warrior to be admired and emulated. The signification of these forms and concepts is that women in the imaginary hard rock and metal community are there to service heterosexual males who are musicians and/or magazine readers. What this amounts to is a myth of women as always willing and always in a subordinate position to men. This imagery draws on the cultural understanding of women who participate in rock music as the reward for male rock stars' travails on the road. It thereby echoes what Cline and Twersky describe as the ways in which any woman involved in rock music, whether as fan, musician, journalist or wife, is referred to as a *groupie*. I call this the myth of the *groupie*. It is mythical because not all women musicians or fans are *groupies*, nor wish to be and, more importantly, because it defines all hard rock and metal-loving women by their availability for male pleasure. This message, along with the myth of the warrior, establishes distinct and hierarchical roles for women and men that are rooted in understandings of women as subordinate to men.

Pamela Des Barres repositions the groupie as muse (Des Barres 2007, x) and I think this rethinking of what 'groupie' means is important work that still needs to be done within academic feminist understandings of rock music. Certainly I am not corroborating here the vilifying way in which *Kerrang!* positions women fans as groupies: I fully agree with Des Barres that it is a problem when women who want sex with musicians are condemned (Des Barres 2007, xiii). We should be able to pursue our desires without facing disapprobation because we are women. I also want to make clear that it is necessary to acknowledge some women's desire for some musicians, and I will discuss this further in the chapter 'Encountering the Myth of the Groupie'.

However, when all women are represented as groupies this is a problem. The myth of women fans as groupies is not only inaccurate: it is dangerous. Hall effectively argues that cultural meanings are 'not only "in the head". They organize and regulate social practices, influence our conduct and consequently have real, practical effects' (Hall 1997, 3). Representation produces meanings that affect social practices because 'they define what is "normal", who belongs – and therefore, who is excluded' (Hall 1997, 10). The myths in *Kerrang!*, then, play a crucial role in determining how the community is imagined. In creating a sense of what is normal or natural, *Kerrang!*'s rendering of women fans has consequences for those fans (and for men musicians) outside of the magazine's pages. I am furious about this representation of women fans as *groupies*. I am a woman fan. My passion for the music I love may incorporate aspects of sexual desire for the musicians who make the recordings, but it is not limited to it, and nor should it ever be assumed to be present. When thinking about music fandom I argue that we should always seek to understand what an individual loves about the music, not fall back on simplistic readings that rely upon an assumption of difference along gender lines or that take gender as the most important factor. Furthermore this representation relies upon the idea that particular sexualities flow from particular bodies, a notion that enforces heterosexuality. In doing so it asserts that women are ruled by their (heterosexual) bodies and their 'base' desires and cannot appreciate music in a cerebral or intellectual manner, as Davies also argues (Davies 2001, 313). That kind of understanding depends upon the man/woman and mind/body binary so that women's pleasure is first and foremost a bodily delight and this kind of fleshy gratification is devalued. Proper appreciation of music is supposedly intellectually 'pure' and occurs only in the mind, untainted by corporality. This means that women fans are not – cannot – be taken seriously as music fans because their appreciation of the band is first determined by their feminine crushes on the musicians: it is seen as fortuitous if they like the music as well, but even then the enjoyment is 'suspect' (Davies 2001, 313). And women who are musicians are only involved to get close to the real musicians (men).

In her article on the representation of women in *NME* and *Melody Maker*, Davies is critical of this media representation. She draws attention to the double standard in which men (specifically male journalists) are able to express their heterosexual desire for female musicians, but women are never able to express their desire because they have 'to prove that they like male artists for the 'right' reasons' (Davies 2001, 316). What Davies does not discuss is the way in which the myth of the groupie has implications too for women who wish to meet musicians and may be attracted to them. Women fans who do seek to meet their musical loves are put in a position in which embarking on a sexual encounter with the musician is normal, natural and somewhat expected (yet simultaneously excoriated). They are assumed to be sexually willing and consent is presumed. This puts women fans in vulnerable positions in which there is an unequal power relationship that is ripe for exploitation. For men musicians exploiting sexual opportunities is necessary for their status as musicians, and therefore also expected. As Rebecca Forrest has argued,

Groupies and their sexual exploits, like the myth involving Led Zeppelin, the groupie and the mud shark, played an integral part in the construction of and the mythology and the persona connected to metal rock gods in the early days of heavy metal. (Forrest 2010, 136).

The 'groupie and the mud shark' refers to the incident in which Jimmy Page fished from his hotel room window and then used his catch to rape a young groupie who was tied to the bed (Forrest 2010, 140). Forrest highlights the way in which a violent and disrespectful attitude towards women's sexual autonomy is actually a valuable asset for musicians aiming to achieve 'rock god' status. The roles of groupie and musician are therefore not just complementary, but they are actually a necessary part of the culture. Rock is founded on the basis of this contempt for women, as can also be seen in the myth of authenticity. By representing women fans' pleasure in hard rock and metal as determined by sexual attraction to musicians, or by representing women musicians as only valuable for their heterosexual attractiveness, hard rock and metal retains its status as a masculine genre in which men make music for men. Its homosociality is affirmed whilst threats of homosexuality are headed off with excessive heterosexual activity.

Kerrang!'s message about women fans is that we are sexually available and musically frivolous. We can never be really serious about the music we love because we are only really interested in the band because we fancy the singer/guitarist/drummer/bassist. This myth is the 'normal' way to understand women fans and must have an impact on women fans; it certainly does on me and, as I discuss in the chapter 'Encounters With Myths', also on my interviewees. In their discussions of the figure of the groupie, Davies and Schippers (in particular) express rage at the portrayal, but do not consider in depth how the myth affects women fans. In passing they describe some effects: Davies mentions the need

women fans feel to 'prove' that they are serious fans (Davies 2001, 316); Schippers refers to women becoming musicians to gain respect (Schippers 2002, 28) (although if this were straightforward we would see a much greater number of women as musicians); and Fast describes her fantasy meeting with Led Zeppelin in which she is a highly respected musician (Fast 1999, 258). Hall asserts that the meanings created by representations have real world effects, and in the next chapter I engage with my interviewees' responses to my questions about groupies, aiming to examine the impact of the myth of the groupie upon women fans.

Conclusion

The semiotic approach I have taken, even as I have drawn upon content analysis, and the myths that I have read from *Kerrang!*, has been informed by my standpoint as a (white middle class British) woman and a feminist. Hartsock's assertion that 'a feminist standpoint can allow us to understand patriarchal institutions and ideologies' (Hartsock 1983, 284) has provided this epistemological framework with which to interpret *Kerrang!*'s letters pages as imagining a community in which women are designated as heterosexual bedmates rather than taken seriously as fans. So whilst the community is imagined as equal and authentic, it actually represents women as groupies and men as warrior-musicians. The reifying of authenticity and of male musicians is predicated on the diminishing of the feminine so that woman cannot be full community members, either as fans or as musicians. They have a role, and that role is to provide an adoring mirror (and maybe more) for male musicians. *Kerrang!*'s myths ultimately bolster the male-dominance and the subordinate position of women in the imaginary community.

Myth-reading is about drawing out the dominant messages of the text. I have aimed to write about the myths I have extrapolated in an orderly manner. However, myth-reading is not a simple process, and involves many layers of analysis. In writing this chapter I have made decisions about which designs, photographs and letters to select for closer examination. This means that a lot of close textual analysis is not visible in this chapter, but it nevertheless contributes to the significations about authenticity, equality, warriors and groupies that lead me to establish these tropes as myths. Rose notes that questions have been raised about the representativeness of selected images in semiotic readings (Rose 2001, 97), and I have tried to make it clear that the examples in this chapter are typical. Moreover, there are other messages and significations in the letters pages of *Kerrang!*: there are letters and images which do not fit into the myths. The myths I describe here are the dominant messages, not the only messages, and in reading and writing them it was necessary to smooth out the creases. This means that elements such as the way women letter writers employ devices that can be associated with the warrior myth, such as flying and sounding, have been excluded here (but see Hill 2011 for further

discussion). The use of these techniques suggests that women letter writers are able to access masculine forms of address, although I would argue that these kinds of letters are overwhelmed by the defensive and celebratory letters that are more typical of women letter writers.

Additionally, this reading does not acknowledge that others may interpret the magazine differently: after all, there are many different approaches and possible readings of any text. Some of those readings may be resistant or parodic (Rose 2001, 96). Indeed, myth-reading has required me to ignore any polysemic readings in favour of pinning down a particular and dominant meaning. I feel discomfort with this – but only up to a point. It is important for a feminist critique of the way in which women are perceived in the imaginary community to be clear and to assert what that dominant representation is and how it works. Yes, there are letters and photographs that paint different pictures of the imaginary community, but when it comes to the way in which women are positioned and treated it is most definitely different and subordinate to the ways in which men are. Women are always outside and need to fight for their place, whilst men are making hard rock and metal music for one another as standard. In this way the male experience of hard rock and metal is assumed by *Kerrang!* to be the normal experience; women are there to enhance the male experience, not to share in it.

This reading of the ideology of hard rock and metal through the window of *Kerrang!* is pessimistic in its consideration of gender relations and change within the imaginary community. I ask now, how do women fans live within this ideology? How does this structure of gender relations impact upon their rock and metal lives? How do they feel about the representation of women in this genre?

Chapter Five: Encountering the Myth of the Groupie

Introduction

Many of my interviewees shared *Kerrang!*'s view of the community as equal, and recounted that at hard rock and metal events they were less likely to encounter gender-based prejudice than at mainstream events. Only a minority described hard rock and metal as fundamentally sexist. But in my estimation a powerful form of sexism exists in the myth of the groupie and is evident in *Kerrang!* although it is not widely discussed in the letters pages. The lack of discussion by women letter writers about how they feel about being positioned as groupies serves to reinforce the myth. In order to understand how the idea that all women fans are groupies impacts upon women fans, I turn to the analysis of my interviews and examine how my interviewees discussed the myth.

The dominant representation of women fans in *Kerrang!*'s letters pages is of women who adore musicians and who are keen to meet them in the flesh. The result is that women and men are represented as fulfilling particular gendered roles in the imaginary metal community, roles that are dependent upon one another. For a woman that role is of the groupie, and for a man it is musician. The two representations work as myths which say that *all* musicians are men and *all* women fans are groupies. This division along gendered lines serves to ensure that the high-status role of musician is reserved for men and also provides those men with women to bolster their egos and cater for their heterosexual wants. Indeed, the concept of the rock musician is predicated upon the heterosexual division of labour, and the woman fan is thereby naturalised as heterosexual. To be a lesbian fan of a male musician does not make sense in the imaginary community because women's fandom is inextricably tied to an assumption of their heterosexual interest in the male musician.

To be a woman fan, then, is to be assumed to be sexually attracted to musicians and, if not actively seeking sexual contact with a musician, at least desiring it. Thus, whilst not all women *are* groupies, all women are seen to be potential or actual groupies. In 1986 Cheryl Cline asked in *Bitch* magazine 'are female fans the same as groupies?' (Cline 1992, 76). After reading 'too much Rock criticism', she argues 'that there is no difference. *Everybody* [all women involved in rock] is a groupie' (Cline 1992, 76), and that the term is:

Used more or less synonymously with 'girl Rock fan', 'female journalist', and 'woman Rock musician'; it's used to mean anyone working in the music field who isn't actually a Rock musician; it's used as an all purpose insult and a slur on one's professionalism; it's used as a cute term for 'hero worship'; and it's used interchangeably with 'fan'. (Cline 1992, 77)

The rock music media in general thus propagate a distinction between men and women in music, but not among women: all are groupies. In her discussion of groupies at the birth of heavy metal in the late 1960s, Forrest argues that the media construct groupies as 'sexually indiscriminate, submissive, naïve, childlike and in need of protection from themselves', a construction that is maintained by the 2001 film *Almost Famous* (directed by Cameron Crowe, Vinyl Films, 2000) (Forrest 2010, 139). From the letters pages of *Kerrang!* it is clear that this representation of women as groupies continues.

What is wrong with being represented as a groupie? Rock's most famous groupie, Pamela Des Barres, has, in her autobiography and edited collection of 'backstage secrets' (Des Barres 2005; 2007), made an effort to reclaim 'groupie' as a feminist concept, arguing that 'I still considered myself a true feminist in the early days of women's rights because I was doing exactly what I wanted to do. I loved music and the men who made it' (Des Barres 2005, 12). Roxana Shirazi's autobiography presents her groupie experiences as a sequence of sexual adventures in which she explores her own sexuality. She opens with 'a few thoughts on the word "slut"' (Shirazi 2010, 2):

Quite simply, slut means an individual (although the word most commonly refers to females) who frequently engages in sexual activity with a lot of partners. [...] A male who frequently has sex with a lot of partners is patted on the back, looked up to with admiration because he is *merely carrying out a role that is assigned to him as a man*. It is seen as a progressive step toward the development of *masculinity*. It is celebrated and encouraged. It is the equivalent of childish misbehaviour and being naughty.

With females, however, the disapproval is taken to the realm of stigmatization.

A female's pursuit of sexual pleasure and sexual adventure is still seen as a negative characteristic, somehow making her a *bad* human being. A female is not defined in terms of her humanity, but in terms of her sex life. (Shirazi 2010, 2, emphasis in original)

Shirazi and Des Barres position themselves as sexually liberated feminists, and although I find elements of their stories problematic, it is clear from their narratives that groupie femininity can be joyful and sexually exciting – a choice freely made rather than an exploitative relationship. The tales are not about the exploitation of women's bodies (unlike Jenny Fabian and Johnny Byrne's *Groupie* [1969]), but about free sexual expression and passionate engagement with music and musicians. Nevertheless, for most women music fans who do not wish for sex with musicians, groupie is used as a stick to beat women with, synonymous with 'slut'. Additionally, as Shirazi notes, slut is still used to

moralise about and police women's sexual behaviour. 'Slut' may be the focus of some reclamation (e.g. Shirazi entitled her book *The Last Living Slut*; the slutwalk movement), but it remains a derogatory term in its common sense usage.

Also problematic is that the term 'groupie' prioritises women's sexuality (or assumptions about it) over their musical interests. The groupie is thought to be more interested in the person of the musician than in the music. This disparagement of the seriousness of women's interests should not, perhaps, come as a surprise: after all mass culture theory denigrates both the cultural products and the audience of those products when the audience is feminine. The devaluing of women hard rock and metal fans is part of the same misogynistic thinking. The result is not only that they are not accorded respect for their musical tastes, but they are also denied other roles and face derogatory comments from other community members. In short, they suffer a lower status. Furthermore, any sexual pleasure that they may gain in addition to musical joy from their fandom is treated as a lesser form of fandom and not taken seriously.

In this chapter I examine the impact that the myth of the groupie has upon women fans in order to understand how they negotiate the media representation of them as groupies. I ask the questions, how did my interviewees understand the portrayal of women fans as groupies; what impact did it have on their fandom; and how can we understand women's music fandom when it *is* linked to desire? The women's discussions of sex, sexism, music and musicians are contradictory and show clearly that women fans' experiences of being hard rock and metal fans cannot be reduced to simple interpretations. I argue that women hard rock and metal fans are powerfully affected by the myth of the groupie and there is a necessity of finding ways to negotiate it. For some women this meant positioning the groupie as extraordinary, for others it meant contesting the validity of the concept, and for still others it resulted in rethinking the meaning of 'groupie'. The myth impacted directly upon the women in differing ways: it caused some to seek out bands that did not rely on ideological notions of femininity; it meant distancing themselves from their favoured bands; it caused them to carefully position their pleasure in the music as asexual. Finally, in spite of the discomfort that many of the women showed in discussing the concept of the groupie, a number did express desire for musicians. This desire was complex and bound up with the music. I posit that because women fans are sometimes attracted to some musicians (although they may not all want sex with them) the myth alienates women from free expression of their music fandom. This alienation is entrenched because women are already marginalised in hard rock and metal in a number of ways (see Kahn Harris 2007, 73-77) and so avoiding the denigration of groupies is vital to preserve their reputations and self esteem. Consequently, it is important that in order to challenge negative portrayals of women fans we need consider the pleasures that women gain from fandom

that are visual and sexual, as well as aural. First, I return to ideology to briefly deal with how I read the women's comments, tiptoeing around false consciousness as I do so, before engaging with the women's responses to my questions about groupies, meeting band members and where the source of their preference for particular bands arose. I focus on how the women discussed (one) the representation of women in the genre and the concept of the groupie; (two) the things that they do in order to negotiate the myth; and (three) their understandings of their own desire for musicians.

Ideology and myths

In *Mythologies*, Barthes' concept of ideology is rooted in the Marxist concern of why proletarian revolution had failed to materialise despite the exploitation at the heart of the capitalist system (Barker 2008, 61-2). The study of ideology is the study of how the ideas of the ruling class are disseminated and used to ensure the maintenance of the status quo by furthering the fulfilment of the needs and wants of that class. Ideology in this sense is a process in which the proletariat are 'hoodwinked' into working for the benefit of the ruling class, thereby perpetuating their own exploitation (Barker 2008, 62). This is called false consciousness. The idea of false consciousness underpins the job of deciphering myths in *Mythologies*:

Holding as a principle that man in a bourgeois society is at every turn plunged into a false Nature, it attempts to find again under the assumed innocence of the most unsophisticated relationships the profound alienation which this innocence is meant to make one accept. The unveiling which it carries out is therefore a political act: founded on a responsible idea of language, mythology thereby postulates the freedom of the latter. (Barthes 2009, 184)

The job of the mythologist is to uncover the truth beneath the myths and to liberate language from myths' bonds. This is the approach I have taken in deciphering *Kerrang!*'s letters pages, but then in attempting to understand my interviewees' thoughts about the myth it became clear that they were not simply labouring under 'false consciousness': their thoughtful responses were much more complex and needed a deeper kind of analysis. Nor does everyone accept that false consciousness is necessarily hand in glove with ideology. In 1992 Stanley argued that, with some exceptions,

Feminist social science remains in a timewarp [...], treating ideology as false consciousness and the work of those analysts concerned with taking its products seriously as naïve imperialism. (Stanley 1992, 3)

Feminist research should do more than just identify the ways in which ideology propagates 'false' ideas: it should ask questions about how that ideology does or does not

operate in people's lives. The ideology of the dominant class is not something that can be completely dispensed with once it has been identified: it remains a powerful force, not just in our everyday practices, but in thought processes too:

Cultural politics sees the material and ideological as symbiotically related, recognising that ideas have a material origin and that the ideological has importance through the expression of ideas in concrete material practices.
(Stanley 1992, 3)

The ideology of hard rock and metal has a part to play in women's lives as it creates their expectations and colours their understanding of what happens to them – their experiences are created by this collision of things that happen and ideology. Rather than focussing on false consciousness then, I want to treat the women's responses as stories of experiences that are formed through their remembering and retellings of what has happened to them, and the way they make sense of that within the ideology of the imaginary community (and other competing 'world views' such as feminism and socialism). This meaning is to be treated as important and as 'real', because the structure that serves the purposes of the genre's male dominance has real effects upon their lives.

Talking about groupies

Only one of my interviewees made reference to being anything other than heterosexual. Because I did not ask my interviewees to define their sexuality, I do not want to assume that this means the majority *were* heterosexual; however, most of the discussion around love lives and sexual attraction did place men in the role of sexual partners. The one exception was Hazel, who said she had had a 'bisexual phase', and I discuss this below. The ideology of hard rock and metal positions all women fans as heterosexual, and this *may* have resulted in some women being reticent about discussing other kinds of sexual feelings they had.

My analyses focus on women's responses to the three questions that follow, and in some cases responses to other questions:

1. Have you ever met your favourite band?
2. Do you know what a groupie is?
3. Would you call yourself a groupie?

In the interviews, approaching the subject was a little awkward. Given the diminished status of the groupie, asking outright if this was something women considered themselves to be felt somewhat offensive. The semi-structured nature of the interviews, however,

meant that I did not always have to present the questions in such a forthright way, as their answers became apparent in their responses to the previous questions. In response to questions about groupies, my interviewees expressed discomfort with the representation of women fans, and none took on the moniker 'groupie'. On the whole the topic remained a little difficult, with my respondents seeming somewhat uncomfortable in the discussion. For example, Patti, my first interviewee, responded to my question about why she liked Coheed and Cambria with a detailed description of the musical elements that engaged her, and then finished with,

[Patti] I do quite fancy Claudio Sanchez. That's not true, but I like him very much indeed.

[Rosemary] Do you fancy him or not? I'm a bit confused...

[Patti] Yes I fancy him a lot, Rosey, yeah. (Patti)

Patti's self-contradiction exposed the complicated thinking behind whether or not to disclose her attraction. The degree subjunct 'quite' moderated the verb 'fancy' so that it is implied that although Patti had some attraction, it was not strong. She used the singer's full name with the effect of constructing him as a character viewed from afar. Then she commented on her previous statement: 'that's not true', contradicting herself and qualifying her meaning. 'Like' does not have the sexual connotations of 'fancy' and changed her attitude to one of non-sexual admiration, perhaps more for his musical and lyrical abilities. Yet this affection for Sanchez was heightened with the adverbial 'very much indeed', causing my understanding of Patti's real feelings to become confused. I asked her to clarify and she candidly did so in a very direct manner, with two affirmatives, 'yes' and 'yeah', stating 'I fancy him a lot'. This reaffirmed and built upon her initial statement of fancying the singer, and at the same time disqualified her previous comment. She addressed me with my familiar name, 'Rosey', and this, along with the directness and specificity of her answer, signified finality in the discussion, preventing further questioning. Patti's discomfort with a discussion of attraction to the musician is evident in the way in which she changed her mind about telling me of her desire. In her initial response to my question her reasons were musical reasons. The retraction of her statement of the sexual pleasure she gained suggested that she viewed the musical pleasure as the more important kind of reason, that physical appeal was not suitable for discussion. Patti's unease is typical of the responses of my interviewees when discussing the concept of groupies and their own attraction to musicians.

The concept of the groupie

Cline argues that women rarely claim the groupie title (Cline 1992, 78), and, given the media representation of the groupie as someone with little agency or self-respect, it is

perhaps unsurprising that this was the case with my interviewees: none accepted the title. In general there was an age split in how groupies were discussed, but all positioned them as women distinct from themselves. Some women were critical of what they understood to be groupie behaviour. However, this was not because they perceived the groupie to be a 'slut': *that* kind of criticism was not prominent. Dolly's description of a groupie sets the tone for most of my interviewees' ideas about groupies (although not all, as I discuss below):

[Dolly] I'd say that a groupie's usually female, who kind of hangs round dressing rooms and, er, goes on, follows them round on tours and tries to get behind the scenes, maybe I'm wrong I don't know, but I wouldn't class myself as one.

[Rosemary] When you say get behind the scenes are you hiding anything in that term?

[Dolly] Well basically just behind the scenes to sleep with the band, that's what I mean really.

[...]

[Dolly] I don't think it's a fan as such I just think it's somebody, yeah a fan of course they have to have an interest in the band, but just somebody who wants to hang on every word they say and sleep with the band and I would class that as a groupie.

[Rosemary] You're saying groupie quite, it sounds like you don't approve...

[Dolly] [pause] No maybe not, maybe I don't, I don't know why I don't, I just think, could you be bothered? To spend your life just following somebody around, it's a bit stalkerish to be honest, yeah I'm not into that. (Dolly)

Terms such as 'hangs round', 'follows them', 'tries to get behind the scenes', 'wants to hang on every word', 'could you be bothered' and 'stalkerish' all evoke a sense of desperation and self-abasement. In particular 'stalker' suggests the stereotype of the fan who is unhealthily obsessed with their idol. It is reminiscent of the character Alex Forrest in the misogynistic *Fatal Attraction* (directed by Adrian Lyne, Paramount Pictures, 1987), whose sexual desire turns to murderous mania. Dolly's depiction of a groupie is of a woman who finds meaning in her life via her interaction with musicians, but it is not a complimentary portrayal. Dolly does not tell me why she views groupies disapprovingly, but there is the implication that this kind of fandom is less worthwhile. Her phrase 'I don't think it's a fan as such', although she corrects herself, is suggestive that perhaps the reason is groupies lack pleasure in the music.

Music first

Like Dolly, Bert and Sally understood 'groupie' to mean a woman who seeks sex with band members and they too were critical of the groupie's desire to sleep with musicians. That criticism was explicitly underpinned by an understanding of the women as more interested in the person of the musician than the music itself:

I think in a way that it's kind of sad, it's like you're missing out on something pretty big there all because you want to [...], you know, they're famous, in this band. It may be that they [like] the band but it's still, [you] sleep with that person and then what? Then what? It's like what's gonna happen then, you're either gonna, cos they're not gonna really be with you, they're not gonna have a relationship with you cos that's so unlikely. You know. It's, they're either gonna sleep with you and [...] not call you, you know 'your cheque's in the mail', kind of, 'bye!', and you're gonna feel really bad and then probably lose that music cos it's not gonna have the same effect on you anymore; you've ruined it by sleeping with this person, or you're not gonna sleep with them and you're gonna be disappointed and ... you may not even listen to the music then. Either way you know you're kind of... really sad for them because they're laying [...] down on something there and it's... yeah. (Bert)

Bert used negative epithets such as 'sad', 'unlikely', 'really bad' and verbs that express loss and ruin: 'missing out', 'lose', 'ruined' and 'disappointed', thus she describes sex with musicians as a damaging experience. She repeated the rhetorical question 'then what' and said it again in a modified form ('what's gonna happen then') signifying her incredulity that anyone would want to sleep with a musician. Of her three suggested answers a relationship is 'unlikely', and so the two alternatives that followed were left as the only options. Both of these were presented in negative terms ('lose that music'; 'be disappointed') so in desiring a musician Bert presented no positive outcomes. She was critical of the groupie's activities because in her opinion music comes second for the groupie, and this meant missing a particular experience of the music. Furthermore, she positioned the groupie as someone with false expectations of a romantic relationship with the musician and who was exploited by the band: 'your cheque's in the mail' implies that the groupie has been treated as a prostitute, paid for services rendered, rather than enjoying a sexual experience in which her satisfaction has been given attention. She therefore presented the groupie's motives as deluded and the groupie herself as unable to make a free, informed choice about who to sleep with. The groupie here is the 'dupe' caricature of rock journalism (Cline 1992, 71). So whilst Bert did not devalue the groupie's desires directly, she did negate her ability to make an informed choice. This sense of the groupie as having unrealistic expectations is something Cline is critical of. She confers

some truth on the tales of sexual exploitation by bands; however, she argues that women who do become groupies are *not* uninformed about what awaits them. Quoting Herman she argues that in the lower ranks of the groupie hierarchy are,

The “totally disposable” girls who provide “room service or ‘in-flight entertainment’ – ready and willing to be used or abused as the fancy dictates.” This is the more realistic description of the groupie’s lot, and girls know it. (Herman cited in Cline 1992, 82)

Sally was not quite so worried about the potential exploitation of women fans, but she shared Bert’s concern about preference for the musician over the music:

[Sally] I think of them as women or girls that erm rather [than] listen to the music are more interested in getting in with the band really and probably rather than listening to the actual music trying to get in backstage and hanging at the backdoor trying to get in.

[Rosemary] Do you think they like the music then?

[Sally] Erm [pause] I don’t think they dislike it, but I don’t think it’s possibly their motivating factor [laughs]. (Sally)

Sally set up a dichotomy between what was a valuable fan activity, ‘listening to the actual music’, and what was not: ‘getting in with the band’. The repetition of ‘trying to get in’ and ‘getting in’ alongside ‘hanging at the backdoor’ signified desperation: access was not automatically accorded to women fans and they must wait for entry, which was dependent upon a gatekeeper. For Sally, waiting outside the stage door to meet musicians was pathetic. Her tentative comment clauses ‘I think...’, ‘I don’t think’ worked with the modal adverbs ‘probably’ and ‘possibly’ to signify that she was not referring to ‘real’ groupies, but rather to the idea of what groupies do. She also said she had not seen any groupies and suggested that they are ‘an American phenomenon’. Thus her understanding of groupies was one that must derive from second hand sources, such as the rock and metal media, rock biographies or films. Therefore it is reasonable to accept her understanding of ‘groupies’ as derived from a male-dominated media.

Sally’s interpretation of the groupie as desperate was echoed by Hazel. Hazel’s initial description of a groupie was made with some venom: ‘I think a groupie is someone who follows the band round everywhere in the vain hope that they’ll have sex with them one day’ (Hazel). Hazel’s description evoked pathos for the groupie as it highlighted the hopelessness of her situation which she herself could not see: in ‘follows the band round everywhere’, ‘vain hope’ and ‘one day’ the groupie was presented as a tragic, unknowing figure who would never achieve sex with the musicians she desired. However, this heart-

breaking (if scathing) assessment of the groupie was later complicated by Hazel's assertion that there was something 'lovely' about such enthusiasm:

I just think it's lovely to be enthusiastic about something, but not to the point where you just become obsessed with who's the biggest fan and how other people aren't true fans and stuff like that. (Hazel)

The contrast of 'lovely' and 'obsessed' lent irony to 'lovely', but also suggested that there was a fine line between the appropriate level of enthusiasm for a band and when that enthusiasm escalates into something problematic. The trouble for Hazel was that a hierarchy of fans and competition between groupies would develop. It was implied that there was an appropriate level of fandom, and that it was reached before the obsession turns away from the band as its object and onto the nature of the fandom, developing into competition between fans. Groupiedom was for Hazel an arena that brought fans into contact with each other in a potentially contentious way.

Bert, Sally and Hazel's depictions of a groupie imply that love of the music is the most valuable kind of fandom. This works to create the groupie as inauthentic because she is aligned with feminine pleasure, and, as discussed previously, women's pleasure has been consistently maligned. All three women therefore position their own fandom as authentic because they place value on musical pleasure, untainted by sexual attraction. This careful negotiation around fandom is symptomatic of the vilification of groupies (and other female fans such as teenyboppers [Davies 2001] and older women [Frith 2007]) and of the way in which all women fans' motives are questioned in the light of the groupie myth. Distancing themselves from a mode of fandom they regard as inappropriate is a mechanism to ensure that their own fandom can be regarded as authentic. This serves to create a division between different kinds of women and different kinds of fandom. It reinforces the cleavage between musical pleasure and other kinds of pleasure that we may experience as fans.

Critiquing the representation

A small number of women made the *concept* of the groupie the focus of their ire, interpreting it as a sexist representation that was damaging to women; they did not challenge the way the concept split their fandom. Laura and Gwen's censure was based upon the way in which the stereotype was used to demean *all* women fans. And since they were fans, they were angry about how the concept reflected badly upon them. Gwen maintained that the stereotype of the woman fan as groupie was one propagated by the music industry and that this resulted in the institutionalised sexist treatment of women fans as consumers:

It ties into this idea that, I suppose, like society and especially record labels have of women as fans who, and they, it's the reason why boy bands get created and everything because it's the idea that girls don't [know] what the music's about, they don't care what they're listening to, they only care that they're looking at somebody pretty. Whereas guys, you know, well they're actual fans they care about the music and what it's like and everything and it frustrates me more than anything cos it's like it's tying into this stereotype of women as not being important as consumers because all women want to do is buy shoes and look at pretty guys. And it doesn't matter what they're singing as long as they look pretty while they're doing it. (Gwen)

Gwen made a comparison between 'girls' and 'guys' as separate groups, but when she used 'girls' with 'they' this signified that she did not recognise the record label's representation of 'girls'. She adopted a sarcastic tone with the introduction of the comment clause 'you know', in which Gwen asked me to understand what she was saying as a universal truth. Gwen's anger about the situation can be read in the lack of stops or pauses in her speech as she broke her sentences ('I suppose', 'and they') and used the terms 'and everything' and 'it's like' which functioned as placeholders, giving her time to think. When she described the way record labels think of 'guys' she used a tricolon to emphasise her point, but she was so worked up by this point that the final item in the list was 'and everything'. It was another placeholder that served a rhetorical purpose rather than giving new information. She then used the relative comment clause to explain her own feelings 'it frustrates me more than anything'. This was emphasised by the extraposition at the beginning and middle of her first sentence and again when she says 'it's tying into this stereotype'. 'It' was not clearly defined and I was assumed to know what 'it' referred to because, it was implied, it is common sense. This was a symptom of her anger and worked with her breathless delivery in which she had not time to weigh every word. Thus Gwen linked the sexism she saw in the music industry to the way in which women are generally treated as consumers. She called herself 'frustrated' by this relationship, but her tone, lack of punctuation or definition and the superlative 'more than anything' all imply that she was actually very angry.

Laura uses the same emotive lexis as Gwen to characterise her feelings about the assumptions made about women fans: 'frustrates'. Laura was much more careful in her argument and in her speech, however; so whilst Gwen's use of 'frustration' came across as understatement, Laura's emotion is not vividly evident in her response:

[Rosemary] So often assumed that women like a band because they want to meet them and probably sleep with them.

[Laura] Yeah and that I find so offensive and [...] I like the fact that bandom,⁵⁶ well erm the bandom I'm involved with, that's kind of [...] thoroughly are aware that people look at us and assume that we want to [...] you want to marry Gerard and that [...] that [...] really not the case and frustrates me. (Laura)⁵⁷

Laura used a number of terms that imply objective truth to give a sense of her response as one that has authority: 'finds', 'the fact', 'really', 'the case'. This language is offset by reference to the emotions 'offensive' and 'frustrates', but which buttresses the sense of these emotions as justified. Through 'us' she conjured a sense of a community of people writing bandom who understood the way in which outsiders perceived them. The turn to 'you', however, asked me to identify with the position, to put myself in their shoes, and to agree. 'Marry' states that those outside of bandom thought insiders wanted a romantic – and unrealistic – relationship with the singer, rather than a sexual one. Both Gwen and Laura were critical of the sexist ideas held about women's fandom and they contrasted it with their own experiences of being women fans.

Attacking the underlying sexism

Although Gwen in particular dissected the way in which the groupie concept demeaned all women fans, neither she nor Laura made any defence of the groupie herself. Criticising a stereotype is one thing, but perhaps it is not the figure of the groupie herself who should be the focus of these evaluations. Susan, my eldest interviewee, and three of the younger women, Alexa, Jessica and Éowyn, all sought to rethink what it means to be a groupie.

Susan had been a *Spare Rib* reader in the 1970s and holds an MA in Women's Studies. She said she would never use the term 'groupie' to describe a woman because it had 'very sexist overtones' and was 'tantamount to calling them a slag' (Susan). However, it was the term itself she objected to, not the actions:

I think probably I wouldn't, I'd never use, I never use the phrase. I don't think I've ever used it, and I think that's probably because it's got very sexist overtones to it which, so it's probably a term I'm really uncomfortable with. [...] When you read things in the press about groupies that would sleep with any member of the band deda deda deda but I, it's not something I really wanted to get into because I would think more of, they could sleep with whoever they wanted to, it was their

⁵⁶ 'Bandom' is a form of slash fiction: instead of focussing on television or film characters, the protagonists of bandom fiction are musicians. In this case she is discussing Gerard Way, lead singer of My Chemical Romance.

⁵⁷ My transcription of the interview with Laura has some gaps as the venue was very noisy and Laura softly spoken. I could not distinguish all of her responses.

choice anyway so it's not a big deal for me so I think it's probably not something I've ever really thought about other than to try and counteract if it's come up in any conversation what people normally consider, you know if I've ever heard anybody in, in, I'd probably challenge the term. [...] It always seems to me a right wing press term, a *Daily Mail* term. (Susan)

Susan's repetition of the absolute 'never' implies that the term was utterly outside of her linguistic canon. Although the subjunct 'probably' would seem to introduce some ambiguity her response, I interpreted it as symptomatic of the fact that she used the term so rarely that she needed to think about what she was saying. The way in which 'groupie' was outside her idiolect was also suggested in her deployment of 'it's not something I really wanted to get into'. This emphasises the discomfort the subject brought up and the choice she made to avoid it. 'Get into' implied that there was 'something', getting into which might be messy and difficult to extricate oneself from. This sense of discussions about groupies as producing social turmoil – conflict – was echoed in the use of 'try and counteract it' and 'I'd probably challenge the term'. To Susan the term itself was underpinned by misogynistic ideas about women's sexuality. Her euphemism 'sleep with' signifies a gentler attitude towards women who pursue sex with musicians, and does not suggest the kinds of exploitation detailed by Bert and Hazel in their more scathing depictions. She used comment clauses ('I would think', 'it always seems to me') to highlight the ways in which her views ran counter to dominant representations of groupies, and the eponym of '*Daily Mail*' was used to shape her meaning. *The Daily Mail* is a tabloid known for its right wing and gender-conservative views, and it serves as a shorthand for explaining how 'groupie' is used to propagate and naturalise misogynistic ideas about women.

These criticisms vary in strength, but all rely upon feminist understandings of women's experiences running counter to hegemonic representations. Whilst Gwen and Laura defended women as able to be fans without reducing that passion to wanting to sleep with musicians, Susan defended women from accusations about their sexuality by arguing that women could 'sleep with whoever they wanted to'. All three argued that women should be able to act without being subject to sexist interpretations of their behaviour.

Reinterpreting 'groupie'

Not all of the women I spoke to believed that being a groupie was fundamentally associated with sex, however. All of the women over 25 defined a groupie as a woman who was seeking sex with a band, but the younger women did not define it either as gender specific or necessarily about sex. In fact Éowyn, Jessica and Alexa all interpreted the term in a positive way, seeing 'groupie' as something that women or men could be in a

way that heightened the pleasure in their fandom. For these three women (and for Aime), being a groupie involved going to gigs in other cities (not just local gigs), wearing all the 'merch' (merchandise: t-shirts, belts, etc with the band's logo or artwork), attempting to meet the band, and maybe, but not necessarily, sexual activity with the band. In this sense 'groupie' was about pleasure in the music, travel, friendship, the experience of the gig, as Alexa made clear: 'I think it's just enjoying a band and following 'em cos you like 'em, enjoy going to the gigs' (Alexa). In Alexa's tricolon definition of a groupie she utilised 'you' and 'just' to imply that these activities were what anyone might do: the subject was unspecified and the activities are simple; i.e. they had no further significance and were not in need of long discussion.

Both Éowyn and Jessica said that 'groupie' did have sexual connotations, but only in other people's interpretations:

[Rosemary] Do you think it has any sexual connotations?

[Éowyn] Groupie itself, no not really. The word itself is fine I think it's just, you know, people's interpretation of it. (Éowyn)

Éowyn clarified my question, 'groupie itself', by ensuring that it related to the term 'groupie' rather than groupie activities, and answered immediately. Like Alexa, she used 'just' to indicate that 'groupie' could be simply read, and used the comment clause 'you know' to evoke the common-sense-ness of the understanding. However, this simple reading of the term was then compared to 'people's interpretation'. She did not say which people, so they were an indefinite 'them'. Not Éowyn and not me, it was implied; we understand the common sense meaning of the term (as not sexualised), the 'truth' of the matter. Éowyn did not make a link between words' meanings and their interpretations: for her words had real meanings outside of the different ways in which they might be used.

Jessica, too, accorded the blame for the groupie's poor reputation to the media, and also had an idea of what a 'true groupie' is:

[Rosemary] Do you think there's a sexual element to it, the term groupie?

[Jessica] I would say 'no', but I know that a lot of people do perceive it as that, but I, I don't think a true groupie, as it were, would, it would then be anything to do with sex, I think that's just, I think that's something the media's influenced rather than people themselves actually being like that. Erm and like, in books and stuff in fiction books, you might, there's a lot of times they'll sort of make a perception of them that is a sexual nature, but I don't think it is to be honest, in my opinion. (Jessica)

Jessica uses a content disjunct, 'I would say no', to indicate that she recognised her attitude was not the only one and, like Éowyn, invoked the indefinite subject 'people' to compare her views to that of an unspecified other (the second usage of 'people' is more directly, 'those who might be called groupies'). She used a number of tentative comment clauses and disjuncts ('I don't think', 'as it were', 'I think', 'sort of', 'to be honest', 'in my opinion') to signify the difference between her opinion and what she understood to be more commonly held beliefs. They also highlighted her knowledge of herself as holding an unconventional opinion. She therefore perceived that there was a dominant representation of groupies, and positioned her own views in opposition to it.

Both Éowyn and Jessica were critical of the way in which groupies are *perceived* as wanting sex, but they did not believe there was any truth in this. Furthermore they did not understand 'groupie' to refer exclusively to women. Rather 'anyone could be a groupie' (Éowyn). It seems incredible that the term that has been used to powerfully denigrate women fans could lose both its sexual *and* its gender meanings. Perhaps it is not the common sense interpretation of the word that is changing, but rather it is these young women's *informed decision* to understand the term differently and that thereby reveals feminist sensibilities. Both women were politically active in left-wing campus politics, and Éowyn described herself as socialist and was an NUS women's officer. Both expressed other feminist ideas through the course of the interviews and were clearly aware of the disparities between representations of women and women's experiences. Susan's understanding of a groupie's behaviour may not have been similar to the younger women's, but they shared the interpretation of the media usage of the term to sexualise and undermine women. It is significant that all three retained the belief that women fans should not be defined in a sexual way when they expressed their passionate engagement with the music, whether that be via sex with band members or travelling to watch gigs.

These young women's reinterpretations of 'groupie' were quite different to the way in which Des Barres reclaims 'groupie' as 'muse'. The young women sought to reappraise groupie to take in ordinary fan activities. The behaviour fits another of my interviewees, Kimberley, who with a friend travelled round the UK to watch Young Guns on tour. Significantly in the interview with Kimberley I did not dare to ask her whether she considered herself a groupie. Although I regret this now, at the time I was extremely uncomfortable with suggesting that she may have been sleeping with the musicians because I was afraid I might offend her. However, I recognise the activities in the redefinition from my own experience: I have travelled around the UK and once went to

Munich to see The Darkness.⁵⁸ Yet I would not call myself a groupie, even in the non-sexual sense that the young women outlined. The activities of the 'groupie' defined by Alexa, Jessica and Éowyn look to me more like the behaviour of very keen fans, and perhaps there is an age gap between our understandings. For Des Barres the rethinking is around what musicians gain in the musician/groupie encounter. But it is also about removing underlying sexist notions that denounce women who have many sexual partners (Des Barres 2007, xiii). Susan's argument had more in common with Des Barres' attitude, and perhaps these ideas are more commonly found amongst women who grew to adulthood during the late 1960s and early 1970s, i.e. when the women's liberation movement was growing in influence.

The impact of the groupie myth

Although there was criticism and re-interpretation offered by some of the women, a number of the women, some the same as critiqued the concept, described differing ways in which the myth of the groupie impacted upon them. They made negotiations around the myth by positioning themselves as asexual, by attending to their reputations as *music* lovers, and by choosing to listen to bands who they knew did not endorse the ideology that led to sex with groupies.

Asexual activities

Carol's responses to my questions about groupies were carefully oblique. She said she 'made it her business' to speak to members of bands she loved, but was horrified when I asked if she was a groupie:

[Carol] [slightly offended] Absolutely not! I'm not interested in having sex with these people because they're too young for a start ha ha!

[Rosemary] So being a groupie means having sex with the band?

[Carol] Yes to me that is exactly what it means and it always has done.

[Rosemary] And that's not something that's appealing to you?

[Carol] No. I don't want to have sex with rock musicians.

[Rosemary] So erm are you attracted to them physically?

[Carol] Sometimes yes.

[Rosemary] And that's as far as it goes?

[Carol] Sometimes yes! (Carol)

⁵⁸ The German visit was unusual and came about because my good friend who also loved The Darkness lived there. It was my birthday so I justified the expense of seeing the band abroad by making it a holiday-birthday treat.

Carol's response was more direct than some of my younger interviewees'. She did not euphemise 'having sex' and she then distanced herself from the musicians by calling them 'these people'. The indefinite object introduced an intimation of disdain for the musicians. She laughed to offset the harshness of her comment. The shortness of her responses and her precise degree adverbs, 'absolutely', 'exactly', quashed any thoughts of debate: Carol knew her mind ('what it means to me') and there was no room for discussion. However, ambiguity was introduced in her repeated answer 'sometimes yes' when I asked directly about attraction. This was teasingly and playfully vague, but reinforced her unwillingness to discuss the matter in detail. Her guarded comments about sexual relationships with musicians revealed just how much she believed to be at stake when negotiating her status as a female fan. 'Groupie' was something she was *not*, and in order to maintain that position it was necessary to deny the possibility of sexual activity.

Not only were the women distancing themselves from expressing sexual desire for musicians, they were distancing themselves too from being seen to be sexual by male audience members at gigs. Jeanette reined herself in when discussing attraction to audience members:

[Jeanette] We actually occasionally joke that we wouldn't mind a bit more attention, but there you go.

[Rosemary] What do you mean?

[Jeanette] Oh no [laughs] the men, honestly the men are there for the music. (Jeanette)

Jeanette's comment 'we wouldn't mind a bit more attention' placed the responsibility for making heterosexual connections upon men, so that men gave and women received attention. It implied that it was important that women do not show desire. Jeanette's sententia, 'there you go', summed it up as a general truth that hard rock and metal-loving women could do nothing about; it must be accepted. The comment clause 'oh no' clarified her statement, and her stylistic disjunct, 'honestly', reinforced the earlier sententia that this was just 'how it is'. There was a disjuncture between Jeanette's desire for male attention and what happened when at concerts, but she felt powerless to change the situation. At the time of the interview I got the sense that Jeanette was drawing back due to Carol's presence, as if to admit desire would be somehow letting the side down.

Aria, the one woman I spoke to who had achieved success as a musician, felt it was important to avoid sexual encounters even when she was attending gigs as a fan:

The reason I was there wasn't to meet people, I was there because of the music. And because the UK death metal scene was relatively small it's the same people

at all the gigs. So you go there and you're 'alright, how's it going?!' So it was never really, never really about that. And if anybody did try and sort of crack onto me they got a very terse comment back and then they'd leave me alone. (Aria)

Aria used an inversion coupled with a rhetorical counter clause to draw attention to the fact that meeting people was *not* the reason for her attendance at gigs and concerts. She mobilised the smallness of the scene to explain why meeting people was not important, implying that one could meet friends at the concert so one did not need to seek out company. I also inferred from the context that the size of the scene meant that for Aria protecting her sexual reputation was important, because in a little scene gossip was likely to be rife.⁵⁹ The reported direct speech introduced me to the friendly relationships that she had developed with other people in the scene: when she used 'you' she was specifically referring to someone who was a regular gig-goer and who had developed friendships with other fans and musicians of death metal. She repeated the phrase 'never really' to enforce her postulation that attendance at concerts was specifically *not* about developing heterosexual relationships. In her hypothetical scenario 'if anybody did crack on to me' she used the Australian colloquial 'crack on' to indicate a sexual approach, in contrast to Jeanette's 'more attention'. 'Crack on' has negative connotations: the metaphorical undertone of 'cracking a nut' places women as in need of being 'cracked' and makes sex into a challenge. This negative attitude towards male sexual attention at concerts was reiterated in the final phrase when Aria stated, 'they'd leave me alone'. In this those men who *had* approached her resembled irritating flies and their attention was clearly unwanted. Like the men that Jeanette encountered, Aria went to gigs for the music. Thus she positioned herself as a 'real fan' rather than a groupie.

Protecting reputations

Laura and Gwen were aware of the negative portrayal of women in the concept of the groupie; nevertheless they showed they were affected by it when it came to wanting to meet their favourite bands. Laura would like to meet My Chemical Romance, but,

I would have to think very carefully about what I would want to say cos at the end of the day I'm not going to say 'I really like your music, thank you for making good music; please continue to do so...' I don't really want to have the thought of [...] 'oh I love you' erm [...] yeah. (Laura)

⁵⁹ Here I am drawing on my experience as a musician in the small Cambridge indie scene in the early 2000s: stories of people's sex lives were fodder for pub-talk, and this gossiping did have an impact upon my decisions about who to sleep with.

She drew up a hypothetical situation in which the opportunity to meet My Chemical Romance had arisen, and she positioned herself as having to think rationally about whether to go. She adopted the cliché ‘at the end of the day’ to give a sense of her response as expected and predictable. Yet taken literally Laura’s metaphor can be read as meaning that such a meeting might take place at the end of the day, after a concert as evening turns to night. In this context the band’s hypothetical misinterpretation of her motives, that all that would be heard would be ‘oh I love you’, chimes with the myth of the groupie and it is *sensible* for Laura to ‘think very carefully’ about her decision. Whilst there was exasperation in Laura’s response to my question, there was also comedy in her ideas of what she would not say to the band. She used a tricolon to build up a sense of the meaninglessness of the meeting in which she had no effect upon the band: ‘I really like your music, thank you for making good music; please continue to do so’. The comic effect comes from the epistrophe of the first two clauses which is then unmatched in the final clause, creating a disjuncture between what is expected and what occurred. Meanwhile the inconsequentiality of the terms verged upon the asinine. If the meeting would seem to be meaningless there must be other advantages in a meeting that Laura had to ‘think carefully about’, but that she did not specify.

Gwen would not take the opportunity to meet Panic! At The Disco because of the way all women fans are perceived as groupies:

It’s one of the things I sort of think about female fans is that female fans are very often seen as only there because they fancy the band and that really frustrates me cos if I went to meet Panic! At The Disco, even if I was there saying I love the music, I love the fact that [it’s] different, and all the things I’ve said to you about why I love their music, ‘this drumming in this one song just makes me kind of go wow!’ you know all that would be heard would be ‘hi, I really fancy you’. And I really hate that and so I would not go and meet them for that reason. (Gwen)

As in her critique of the groupie stereotype, Gwen’s response was characterised by a lack of pauses and stops as her fury overtook the sentence. She repeated the emotion ‘frustration’ and returned to the way in which women are ‘seen’. She began by using the passive voice so that the subject – who is doing the seeing – was missing and I was assumed to know to whom she referred. I supposed that it was the same subject as earlier, the record labels. Just like Laura, Gwen drew up a hypothetical situation within which to explain her feelings about meeting Panic! At The Disco. She used anaphora, ‘I love...’, before running out of things to describe and directly reporting her earlier speech to me, highlighting this with an adverbial comment clause (‘I’ve said to you’). The comment clause ‘you know’ indicates that what she is saying is common sense: everyone knows that when a woman is describing how she loves the music, that the band will infer

that she wants sex with them. Gwen returned again to direct reported speech, this time to the mishearing of the band, 'hi, I really fancy you'. She used a powerful emotion verb and adverb ('really hate') to indicate the strength of her feelings, and, with the conjunct 'so', delineated a causal relationship between her emotion and not meeting Panic! At The Disco.

In the previous chapter I asserted that one of the ways in the myth of the groupie worked was to construct male musicians as heterosexual and exploitative, in which they are expected to have sex with female fans. This perception of male musicians plays its part, just as the idea of the ever-willing fan has a role in Gwen and Laura's ideas about what might happen if they met their favourite bands: they imagined the musicians as always interpreting women's fannish passion as sexual in nature. Therefore being seen to *not be a groupie* in the eyes of their favourite musicians was important to both women as they aimed to position their fandom as authentic. They thought the concept of the groupie was damaging to women fans, and they understood that moniker to be so powerful in the minds of their preferred musicians that it would discredit their fandom. They were careful to sidestep the appearance of adhering to the groupie stereotype, and in doing so they hoped to avoid its implications and to maintain a sense of themselves as 'real' fans. Stressing this kind of authenticity is reminiscent of the ways in which Bert and Sally portrayed groupies as missing out on the pleasure of the *music*, and as an inauthentic fan (perhaps not even a fan).

Preferring bands that eschew misogynistic representations

Hazel became disillusioned with the genre specifically because of its representations of women. Nevertheless she did not stop listening to heavy music altogether, but rather she sought out music that did not endorse these attitudes:

My favourite metal band might have been Tura Satana which, [...] then became My Ruin. I thought that was really good because they had such a strong positive frontwoman and I liked bands which had a frontwoman rather than a frontman because I found that the woman, I could relate to the woman's experience rather than the man's experience. And sometimes I found heavy metal to be quite sexist. Just the idea of women as sex objects pretty much and the whole idea of going out, getting drunk, taking drugs, having sex was a bit erm, that's something that I didn't like about hip hop and it was infiltrating into heavy metal music.

(Hazel)

Hazel referred to her younger self as she described her favourite band, Tura Satana, in distinction to the general culture of metal. She said 'found' in her assessments of both the band and metal generally, implying that she had researched and these were her findings.

It was a scientific way of terming her musical preference and this added weight to her argument about metal having a sexist culture. Hazel's terminology drew upon particular feminist ideas: 'sex objects', 'strong positive front woman' (rather than 'girl'), 'woman's experience'. In utilising this language Hazel positioned the rationale of her musical preference in her political beliefs and produced Tura Satana specifically as a band that a feminist could enjoy safely. She defined the band's lead singer, Tairrie B, as a 'strong positive frontwoman' without explaining further, relying upon me to share her feminist understanding of the adjectives 'strong' and 'positive'. Hazel knew me as a feminist before the interview and so she was drawing on a sense of our shared politics, and so was I, since I did not ask for clarification.⁶⁰

She moderated her argument about metal's sexism with the subjuncts 'quite', 'pretty much' and 'a bit' so that she was not making an absolute statement. However her use of asyndeton (the omission of conjunctions between clauses) when she described the culture (present in 'whole idea') suggested that there is a problem with the culture itself: 'going out, getting drunk, taking drugs, having sex'. Asyndeton implies an incomplete list and so there is a culture of hedonism that is characterised by excess, reflected in Hazel's rhetorical device. The repetition of 'the idea' and 'the whole idea' created a link between the way women are portrayed as 'sex objects' and the hedonistic lifestyle. This link had the effect of creating the real women who were indicated in 'having sex' (because musicians are constructed as male and heterosexual in the ideology), as sex objects. Hazel associated these qualities with another (often vilified) musical genre: hip hop. Here her reference to the genre was matter of fact and there was no doubt about hip hop's objectification of women. Her use of the verb 'infiltrating' evoked a sense of sexism seeping from one genre to the other. It also resounded with negative connotations of spies undermining the home ranks. Even as Hazel felt betrayed by the genre in general, she still thought that rock *ought* to challenge gendered expectations and sexism, thus her appreciation of Tura Satana came about because the band worked within that counter-cultural ideology without using sexist imagery.

Unlike Hazel, Laura did not assert what rock or metal *ought* to be, but like her she identified the genre as one in which women are mistreated. However, these were not her own analyses (although her comments about groupie culture show that she was well aware of problems of sexism in the genre), but they were the criticisms of My Chemical Romance singer Gerard Way. She noted Way's tirade on the subject of musicians who use their power to sexually exploit young women:

⁶⁰ I can imagine a Madonna fan may well also describe the singer as 'strong' and 'positive', but have different ideas of what the words mean.

There's a [...] DVD that they have, like, life on the road concert DVD and a two hour tour diary and one of the stories that they tell in that is about them touring with some other band [...] pushing them to go into the crowd before the show and tell girls to show their tits for backstage passes and Gerard Way got really angry about that because he went on a whole rant during the concert about stupid rock kids [...] who think they're great [...] and there's [...] a number of examples of him getting really annoyed about the way women are treated in rock music. (Laura)

Laura began with an inversion to signify that she was providing evidence of Way's attitude: 'there's a DVD that they have'. 'Some other band' indicated that the name of the band was unimportant, indeed it could be any other band, such is Way's diversion from standard rock attitudes. The unnamed band were positioned as villains, driving a culture of the sexualisation ('tits') of young women ('girls') fans. 'Pushing' intimated that the band made roadies into unwilling accomplices in this objectification. 'Tits for backstage passes' indicated that an exchange took place, but the object of the sentence is 'girls' and, in connecting the two ideas, Laura positioned the young women as vulnerable victims in an unfair exchange. Laura's focussed argument then became confused as she introduced the 'stupid rock kids': who are these kids and how are they related to the way in which women are sexualised? She did not say. The implication was that these 'kids' are juvenile, ill-informed and that they base their identity on their musical allegiance without thinking about what that means. Laura implied that they accepted the bad treatment of women without challenging it. In this way she positioned Way as going against the grain of rock culture in a personal manner. 'Whole rant' was suggestive of a long and angry monologue, and he got 'really annoyed'. Laura applied these emotions to convey Way's authenticity as a feminist, and she used the vague clause 'there's a number of examples' to suggest evidence stacking up in favour of Way's argument.

What is fascinating about this is that Laura (also a fan of Queen and U2) used the words of a rock band to make clear her own concerns about rock and metal's gender politics. The ideology of the genre might be one that is sexist, but *she* had found a band who did not endorse that and were openly critical of it. Indeed, just as Hazel sought out Tura Satana, who differed from the dominant gender make up and politics of hard rock and metal, so Laura's preference for My Chemical Romance was due specifically to the singer's declared feminism:

I admire Gerard Way very much. And he's a feminist. I enjoy the music, but, a large part of my enjoyment is [because of his feminism]. (Laura)

Laura used measured tones in her expression of her liking for the band ('I admire', 'a large part') rather than passionate language. The passive voice of the final clause added to the

sense of her describing her preference rationally. In her admiration for Way she made clear that the reason was defined ('and he's a feminist'), and this reason was an intellectual one. She did not find him physically attractive or particularly like his voice or his lyrics: it was about his politics. In this the music, unusually, played only a minor part in her preference, and her pleasure was termed 'enjoyment'. This implied a moderate amount of delight rather than anything that moved her in deep ways. Her careful terms all reinforced the sense of Laura's preference as an intellectual one rather than an emotional one.

Both women were very critical of the negative treatments of women in hard rock and metal. For Hazel this had led to disillusionment, for Laura, Way's comments mirrored her own concerns. Despite being quite aware of sexism within the genre, then, they still found music that they enjoyed, that did not endorse negative attitudes towards women, and that went some way towards challenging the latter.

Desire

Although there was discomfort in discussing the figure of the groupie, as well as criticism and negotiation, a number of women did express attractions to musicians. For Hazel and Gwen this was quite a straightforward physical attraction, but for Aime in particular desire was described in ways that rendered it complex.

Attraction to musicians

Hazel described her feelings for Tura Satana singer Tairrie B, and also made an aside about Manic Street Preachers bassist Nicky Wire. The two desires were not quite the same, and Hazel's attraction to Tairrie B was specifically linked to the way the singer broke out of traditionally subordinate femininity to take on a 'dominant role':

[Rosemary] When you say that you were attracted by [Tairrie B], what, in what way were you attracted?

[Hazel] I liked her look, I liked the way that she was there to lead the band rather than just be eye candy.

[Rosemary] So it wasn't, or was it like a sexual attraction? Or was it a mixture of things?

[Hazel] Well at that time I was going through my 'I might be bisexual' phase, which I think most alternative music fans go through, and it was almost like a sexual attraction because I just thought 'wow this woman's stunning and and she's taking such a dominant role'. (Hazel)

Hazel used 'look' in the singular rather than the plural 'looks', implying clothing style and accessories rather than particular facial or bodily characteristics, and this sense of Hazel

as attracted by personality was compounded by 'she was there to lead the band' and later 'she's taking such a dominant role'. Hazel positioned the source of her attraction as the way in which Tairrie B was different from other women singing in bands, who she described as 'eye candy'. The colloquial metaphor implied something sweet but without substance, easily devoured and quickly forgotten. Tairrie B was *not* like this. Hazel contextualised her attraction with reference to everyday understandings of sexuality ('bisexuality') and also understandings of what it is to be an 'alternative music fan'. Her aside, 'which I think most alternative fans go through', caused her own attraction to be normalised within that musical context so that a woman falling for a woman, described as a 'phase', was not out of the ordinary. This also gave a sense of Hazel as 'normally' heterosexual and her desire for Tairrie B as out of kilter with her usual sexual self. The implication of this particular attraction as unusual was further strengthened by her use of simile and the subjunct 'almost' to define her attraction: it was 'almost like sexual attraction' states that actually it was not a sexual attraction. This added to Hazel's assertion that her attraction was part of a 'phase' reaffirms the heteronormativity of the hard rock and metal genre, rather than raising a significant challenge to it. However, the ambiguity of whether Hazel's attraction to Tairrie B was sexual underlines the complexity of the ways in which our fandoms are constructed in ways that do not only rely upon musical appeal.

This is apparent also in Hazel's aside about her desire for Nicky Wire, made during her critique of the groupie-fan-obsession: 'not that I would turn down a night of passion with Nicky Wire of course' (Hazel). At the time it seemed incongruous that she would be critical of groupies and yet admit to wanting sex with a Manic Street Preacher. However, Hazel's initial exasperation with groupies was down to their desperation and inter-fan competition. In this aside, the inversion gave prominence to the first part of the first clause, 'not that I would', and so emphasised the *offering* of a night with Nicky Wire rather than her needing to seek out the musician and request or make her own offer of sex. The 'night of passion' romanticised the sexual encounter in a way that her previous comments about groupies could not. Rather than seeking out the band 'in the vain hope they'll have sex one day' (Hazel) the offer would have to be made *to* Hazel. In this Hazel suggested that it was the quest for bands that was to be disdained rather than the sex itself. This was stressed by her final content disjunct 'of course'. This disjunct judged that taking up the offer of a 'night of passion' with a preferred musician was a reasonable course of action (anyone would do it!) and so it normalised the desire for musicians.

Despite being critical of the groupie concept, Gwen, too, said that there was at least one musician with whom she did wish a sexual encounter, but she was quick to manage this

desire with the assertion that it was the music that was important and physical attraction a bonus:

The drummer of Panic! At The Disco I would happily take home 12 times a day. [...] I listen to this music and the fact that the people in the band are attractive or not attractive doesn't change for me the enjoyment I get from it. Like, I actually prefer My Chem's music because Panic's music, even though there's nobody in My Chem that I find attractive and there is in Panic. So yeah, for me it's not about what they look like, that just happens to be something that is there. (Gwen)

Gwen's initial inversion – placing the object of her sentence, 'the drummer', before the verb phrase 'would happily take home' – placed the emphasis of the action on this particular drummer so that what was important was her attraction to *this* musician and not to any other. It also de-emphasised the verb phrase so that it was the musician and not the sexual encounter that was the focus of the sentence. She then used a euphemism alongside what I construed as gentle hyperbole, 'take home 12 times a day'. This romanticised the encounter because 'take home' suggests a close bond and is reminiscent of 'take home to meet the parents'. It also highlighted her attraction in a comic manner: if taken literally, 'take home 12 times a day' brings an image of Gwen and the drummer running in and out of the front door between the house and the concert venue, like an episode of *The Benny Hill Show*. She used an exemplum to reinforce her assertion that she was attracted to particular musicians, comparing between the two bands she liked and using nicknames ('My Chem' and 'Panic'). But her attraction to some musicians did not govern her passion for the bands: her attraction was 'just something that happens to be there', which minimised the importance of the physical admiration by implying that her attraction to the musicians was a fact that had no bearing on her enjoyment of the music.

Gwen may have been quick to negotiate the groupie stereotype and what it meant when a woman declared a sexual attraction to a band member, but actually she and Hazel were the only women who explicitly declared that they would sleep with musicians, although others expressed attraction.

Aria had described her dismissive attitude to male sexual attention at concerts, but later in the interview, I introduced the topic of physical attraction by reference to the pleasure I gain from *Metacalypse* character Skwisgar Skwigelf. Aria shared this attraction and began to discuss the appeal of the warrior image more generally. There was clearly a difference between the face she presented in her local scene, and the one she felt able to present to me, a fellow fan, feminist, musician and young academic:

[Aria] For my personal taste in men I find the warrior type very very attractive.

[Rosemary] I was on the radio and Laurie Taylor said to me, 'do women actually find these men attractive?!'

[Aria] Yes! Yes they do! Tall, broad shoulders, long hair, or just some kind of hair, beard. Nice chunky forearms. Very sexy. Absolutely. And I kind of put it akin to, I don't know whether it's something in me, I just find the warrior type very very attractive and I think there's a lot of, irrespective of metal, I think there's a lot of women find that attractive. (Aria)

Aria mobilised mainstream romance discourse in her opening sentence: 'for my personal taste in men' and 'warrior type' (which she repeated). These worked within the context of the common sense understanding that people have a particular 'taste' and 'type'. This language is familiar, and it established Aria as a woman who knew what she wanted from life, and her taste and type are a matter of fact. The repetition of the phrase 'I find the warrior type very very attractive' and the exclamative 'yes!' embedded the idea of her self-knowledge. Her repetition formed an answer to Taylor, and echoed 'them' implied in his 'women actually'. The description of her type was a list of attributes that was not preceded by 'I like' or anything similar. This presented her 'taste' as having a list of criteria so that there were physical attributes a man must have to be her type. The short sentences, 'Very sexy. Absolutely' reinforced the matter-of-factness. She then began a new sentence, but changed tack, and thoughtfully mused whether it was 'something in me'. This suggested that she thought there was something different about her from others, although this was countered somewhat by the comment clause 'I think there's a lot of women...'. This changed her sense of herself from unusual to ordinary, which worked with her use of 'personal taste' and 'type' to position her alongside other heterosexual women in a romantic framework. Aria's sexual identity was therefore bound up with her musical identity so that the 'warrior type', constructed as hegemonic and allied to the representation of musicians in *Kerrang!*, was for her very attractive.

Although the complementary position to the warrior musician is 'groupie', Aria was also a musician and for her warrior type may not only have been attached to the male bodies of musicians, but also to male fans. Schippers argues that when women are the musicians this has the potential to destabilise the musician/groupie dichotomy (Schippers 2002, 66). Although I think this evaluation can be useful, I do think that she misses an important point. Disparaging the binary leaves those women who do describe their attractions to musicians as voiceless and 'in the wrong'. I argue that we need to think about the ways in which women's musical pleasure is formed not through their ears alone, but also through their visual and erotic pleasure.

Mixing music and desire

Aime's attraction was mixed up with her appreciation of her favoured musician's musical ability:

I fancy the balls off them! [...] Er... yeah [both laugh]. They're not necessarily good looking guys in a way, I mean the main singer yeah he's obviously sort of good looking and so is maybe Zacky, but the drummer, he's not good looking, not that good looking. He's actually quite weird looking! But it's almost the way he plays his instrument, the way he talks, the way he sings that attracts me to him and it's just the different things, it's not necessarily how they look, which is what most people usually go for. (Aime)

Aime began with a metaphor within an exclamation. The metaphor was nonsensical (her attraction could not make the musicians' testicles fall off), but it created a vivid picture of a voracious desire and appetite. This was followed by a sense of discomfort, 'er... yeah', and we both laughed to break the tension. The awkwardness of discussing sexual attraction (and Aime was only 16 at the time of the interview whilst I was in my late 20s) was further indicated in her repetition of the phrase 'good looking'. In describing the members of the band she appealed to an objective measure of handsomeness, using terms such as 'obviously' and 'actually'. This kept her own desire contained as she did not then need to build upon her initial metaphor for her attraction, but could rely on the reiterated phrase and its links to an objective judgement. However, this appeal to an external evaluation, along with her uncertainty about how such judgements are made (apparent in adverbs 'maybe', 'not necessarily', 'quite' and 'almost'), rendered her own attraction more genuine than that of 'most people'. It was implied in the comparison that 'most people' subscribe to the objective standard of beauty ('how they look') and therefore they do not decide for themselves. In describing her attraction to Zacky (for whom she used his first name only, connoting intimacy), she used anaphora ('it's the way') within the tricolon list format, building up to a tetracolon climax ('it's just the different things') to enumerate what appealed to her about the musician and to make a case for her attraction. In her declaration Aime maintained that her kind of attraction is not like that of other people. Thus she constructed her sexuality as one that was sophisticated rather than shallow, and where physical attraction to musicians was almost the closest thing to having sex with the music.

This echoes Schippers' findings in the Chicago hard rock scene in the 1990s, where a fan may state an attraction to a musician, but would then claim that attraction as due to musical ability so that both the musician and their musicianship were sexualised (Schippers 2002, 59). However, Schippers accounts for this by positioning it as a strategy

that fans would engage in so that they were not being perceived as a groupie in a scene that was radically anti-sexist (for a rock scene) and defiantly against the 'girls, girls, girls' culture of the preceding popular hard rock and metal subgenre, glam metal (Schippers 2002, 60, 62). This strategic re-designation of desire seems to me to force sexual significance on to music and musicianship, and it does not resemble Aime's depiction of her attraction, which is more spontaneous and does not apologise for the physical desire.

For Aime desire was mixed up with musical pleasure in complex ways. Her attraction was to the musical performance of a particular musician, and this enabled her to overcome his 'weird looks'. On another level, it also suggests that we need to try to understand musical joys in ways that acknowledge pleasures other than aural or intellectual enjoyment. This argument is also made by Fast: she describes a similarly complicated relationship between women's love of Led Zeppelin and desire for the musicians. She positions women as the (hetero)sexual subject looking at, listening to, and gaining erotic pleasure from Led Zeppelin, as well as musical pleasure. They are neither solely concerned with the musicians, nor are they only interested in the music. Erotic pleasure is given an equal position alongside musical pleasure. Importantly this reinstates women as subjects so that they cannot be thought of in terms of passive sexual objects ready and willing to be exploited by careless musicians.

Conclusion

Returning to Stanley's assertion that rather than only identifying how ideology produces 'false consciousness' we need to consider how ideology operates in people's lives, I hope I have been able to show how the ideology of hard rock and metal works in women's lives. It is clear to me that they do not accept the dominant representation of women fans as groupies, and that many are very aware of the unfairness of the representation, and how damaging it can be. The myth of the groupie has an impact upon the ways in which women fans understand their own fandom. It has to be negotiated so that the implications of excessive sexual desire and frivolous fandom do not 'stick' to them. For some women this meant downplaying their passionate desires and attempting to construct their sexuality as one that was neither promiscuous nor drew attention from their serious engagement with the music. I posit that the power of the myth of the groupie is that it distorts the ways in which women hard rock and metal fans feel able to express their fandom and their sexuality. Damage is done to women fans' sexual reputations (when 'groupie' means 'slut') and to their status as music fans (when 'groupie' means 'not serious'). Cline has unpicked the misogyny that has led to the term's usage as a way to demean all women fans (Cline 1992, 76-77), thus potentially liberating women fans from its yoke, and my younger interviewees redefined the title. However, I am not totally won over by their renewed version of 'groupie', as the impact of the denunciation that women

fans face is clear in the ways in which it affected my other interviewees. The power of the myth of the groupie means that women fans still feel they must negotiate the negativity of the stereotype and position themselves as serious or authentic fans. In claiming, or aiming to claim, the position of the 'real fan' they step outside of the fan-role that the ideology of the genre prescribes for them (or at least imagine that they are able to do so). They do not see themselves as groupies and they reject the positioning of their sexuality as easily readable (that as a woman fan they are *naturally* attracted to the musicians in their favourite bands, and that this sexual attraction *exceeds* their intellectual engagement with the music) within the heterosexual world. They are determined not to be sexually or musically positioned 'simply' because of their gender. This negotiation and repositioning of their status as women and fans, however, is not a simple or safe manoeuvre. For some it requires the suppression of any desires for musicians and other community members that they may have, meaning that they are unable to express themselves freely.

If we do not consider our embodied and sexual experiences of music we limit our understanding of our fandom. If we continue to think of there being a right way to be a fan that assumes a rational and intellectual musical appreciation then we repress or deny a large part of our pleasure because it does not fit in with that norm. As Rosemary Overell's 2011 work on grindcore shows, that goes for men fans as well as women fans. We need to bring sex into our questioning of hard rock and metal fandoms in order to better understand the complex ways in which we make connections to particular musics.

Chapter 6: Masculine Pleasure?

Introduction

In the last chapter I discussed how my interviewees negotiated the representation of women fans as it is articulated in *Kerrang!*'s letters pages. The magazine's dominant representation of women fans as groupies exerts considerable pressure upon the fans I interviewed. I found that they discussed the figure of the groupie in a number of ways, but they always rejected the title for themselves. In their descriptions, women placed the emphasis of their fandom upon the music. If this were a study of male fans, this would not be an extraordinary statement, but to think of women fans as interested in *music*, rather than the persons of the musicians, is to counter the common sense understanding of women fans. In this chapter I analyse the ways in which women metal fans describe the music they love. In doing so I diverge from much of the existing work on women fans, which tends to stay within the limits of subcultural studies, exploring women's relationships with other fans in the public spaces of the gig, concert and club. Hence it constitutes one of my original contributions to the field of research of women as popular music fans, specifically as fans of hard rock and metal. I note, however, that in this discussion of *music* I am not aiming to elevate my interviewees' reputations to 'authentic fans': I am taking their engagement with the music seriously, but with the aim of showing how notions of the 'authentic fan' are inadequate in understanding women's fandom.

Leblanc's study of punk girls is one example of a study of fans that omits the music (Leblanc 1999). She focuses on the ways in which young women punk fans construct femininity, deal with sexual harassment from within and outside of the punk subculture, and negotiate their public performance of punk. The fans' pleasure in the music is absent. This is the case, too, in Vasan's article (2011) that hints at the pleasures that women derive from their engagement with the music, but does not explore them in depth. Her focus is on the ways in which women engage in 'cost reduction' mechanisms in order to reduce the personal impact of the misogyny at gigs. Whilst this is of course important work, the emphasis on sexism results in it being difficult to understand why women would enjoy death metal. The allusion to pleasure serves as a tantalising glimpse of some other story, but this is not told. Kahn-Harris' work is exceptional on this point; however, his discussion of pleasure in music is brief and focuses on how fans are, perhaps purposefully, inarticulate about what they like (Kahn-Harris 2007, 51-4). In the main, Kahn-Harris' discussion of women death and black metal fans focuses on their marginal status. He describes the way in which black metal's ideological prioritising of the music eschews discussions of politics, and so prohibits challenges to sexism in the scene (Kahn-Harris 2007, 155). However, I argue that focussing solely on problems of access that

women fans face does an injustice to those fans. Vasan and Kahn-Harris' theses sell women fans short by not considering how women too love the music 'for its own sake', because female fans are always positioned by their gender. Thus loving the music whilst taking their gender for granted becomes a position that is only open to male fans and such a fandom is presented as 'normal'. This is reminiscent of Monique Wittig's argument that the only gender is the feminine; masculinity is assumed to be the normal state and so it is not understood as a gender:

[...] there are not two genders. There is only one: the feminine, the "masculine" not being a gender. For the masculine is not the masculine but the general. The result is that there are the general and the feminine, or rather, the general and the mark of the feminine. (Wittig 1992, 60)

I posit that Vasan and Kahn-Harris' theses are both underpinned by an assumption of the male hard rock and metal fan as the norm, and this assumption produces women as extraordinary so that the ways in which they are *different* becomes the focus of study, rather than any potential similarities. Women's engagement with the music is therefore forgotten or treated as if of lesser importance. Perhaps those authors think it is more valuable to sort out the practical matters of women's marginalisation before we can discuss musical pleasure. I do not. I think the problems of access are part of the way in which women are positioned as second class fans. Therefore considering how women enjoy the music of hard rock and metal is a necessary aspect of challenging women's marginalisation.

In this chapter I aim to prioritise women's experiences of the music and examine how they discuss the pleasure they derive from their favourite bands. I continue to employ discourse analysis in order to consider the language that women use to describe hard rock and metal music, alongside my understanding of the myths of the warrior and of authenticity. This chapter, then, primarily focuses on the musical pleasures of hard rock and metal fandom. When the women fans' language is considered, a complex picture of women's pleasure in hard rock and metal emerges. I argue that although women do use language that echoes the ideas underlying the myths of the warrior and authenticity, they also use unexpected and creative language that challenges understandings of the genre as only enjoyed as a masculine pleasure. In paying attention to women's linguistic constructions of the music a fresh picture of hard rock and metal emerges that challenges its common perception as 'masculine' and suggests that this particular gendering is reductive and limiting.

In the first part of this chapter I address my interviewees' descriptive terms that resonate with the myths that assert hard rock and metal's masculinity. Adjectives such as 'fierce'

and 'loud' that are applied to the genre 'heavy metal', and references to electric guitars echo the aesthetic inherent in myth of the warrior. The reliance on a conceptual rock/pop divide, in which hard rock and metal is seen as 'authentic' and pop is seen as 'manufactured' is firmly in line with the myth of authenticity. In the second part of the chapter I draw attention to the ways in which the genre is considered as masculine with the result that women's pleasure in rock music has been the subject of criticism. I discuss why this viewpoint is a problem and assert the need to move away from thinking of women's rock fandom as 'false consciousness'. Finally I examine my interviewees' descriptive language that diverged from those characteristics usually considered masculine, and I consider how this broadens our understanding of women's passionate engagement with hard rock and metal music.

Hard rock and metal as a 'masculine' genre

Kahn-Harris' brief examination of the pleasure extreme metal fans find in the music focuses on their preference for aggression and energy (Kahn-Harris 2007, 52-3). He describes the energy in the music as having the power to "stir[...] up" the body' (Kahn-Harris 2007, 52), but he does not explore how this is achieved. Like Arnett (Arnett 1991) he positions aggression as having a cathartic effect, allowing fans and musicians to cope with their own anger at their experiences in daily life (Kahn-Harris 2007, 53). Ultimately Kahn-Harris concludes that fans are 'inarticulate' (Kahn-Harris 2007, 54) when it comes to describing their feelings about extreme metal. He argues that they have limited language available to them, and that the lexicon they do use is bounded by the extreme metal scene which values 'aggression, brutality, energy, etc.' (Kahn-Harris 2007, 53). The fans that Kahn-Harris spoke to struggled to explain their listening pleasure, relying upon the descriptive constructions available within the scene. The brevity with which he considers their words suggests that he does not feel it is very important to reach a greater understanding of that pleasure, and he moves on to consider other aspects of extreme metal fandom. I do not think, however, that we should leave our understanding of musical pleasure to rest with such fans' words as 'I just liked it' (interviewee quoted in Kahn-Harris 2007, 54). The opaqueness of this speech proves an obstacle to greater understanding and 'just' works to foreclose any follow-up questions. But, when considering women fans, we cannot afford to allow such a wall to remain in place. To do so leaves open the potential for relying upon stereotypes of the woman as rock fan, stereotypes which, as I have already discussed, are damaging. It is therefore very important to try to reach a deeper understanding of women fans' pleasure in hard rock and metal.

In my interviews with women fans I began by asking them to describe heavy metal, then enquired about their favourite band that featured in *Kerrang!*, and followed this with: "what do you like about them?" Far from being inarticulate, I demonstrate that the women were

able to describe both heavy metal and their reasons for favouring a particular band in quite eloquent terms; and I assess the ways in which some of their descriptions shed light upon how fandom intersects with the ideology of hard rock and metal and with gender, and some do not. Like Kahn-Harris, I found that the ideology of the genre did in some ways mean that the women described their pleasure in ways that echoed notions of warrior masculinity and ideas of authenticity. However, I also ascertained that where Kahn-Harris found that the discursive limits curtailed fans' descriptions, my interviewees were not so restricted.

Defining heavy metal: using the language of the warrior myth

On the whole the responses to the question 'what do you think heavy metal means' differed from what I had expected, which was a list of instruments and band names. Some women did give such a description, but others depicted sounds or atmospheres. Still others talked of how the music made them feel. Karen's response was particularly excited and in her enthusiasm she encapsulated one or two of the main ideas that most of my interviewees described:

Oh! That's really difficult isn't it! Erm it's loud – life is loud, *Kerrang!* – no it's, it's loud, I wouldn't say it's aggressive, how would you describe it? It's just great! Lively! It's not boring! R'n'b is so dull! God, heavy metal's got, it's got oomph about it! And to be fair there's the odd band that doesn't and the odd song that doesn't, but generally it's got oomph. There. That's how I'd describe it: it's got oomph. (Karen)

Karen used a number of exclamations ('oh!', 'that's really difficult isn't it!', 'it's just great!', 'lively!', 'it's not boring!') which demonstrated her passion for the genre in general. Her 'isn't it' in her second exclamation asked me to agree with her, as she sought words to define the genre. Her thoughtfulness was evident in her comment clauses ('no', 'I wouldn't say'), her stop after the opening of the statement 'heavy metal's got', and in her rhetorical question 'how would you describe it?'. Karen did not have an immediate answer in mind and as she spoke thought over what it was that defined heavy metal. In order to come up with an answer she first used 'loud' and realised in doing so that she was echoing the tagline on the cover of *Kerrang!*: 'Life is Loud'. She then hunted for a more original response and moved next to counter sometime descriptions of metal as 'aggressive'. She then made a value judgement ('It's just great! Lively! It's not boring!') and compared the genre to a more mainstream one (r'n'b). With these exclamations Karen drew closer to what she wanted to say and used 'god' to express her exasperation at not being able to find the precise words. Finally she turned to the onomatopoeic 'oomph', which described the feel of the music and the impact it had on her. Using procatleipsis ('to be fair') to

admit a counter point to her argument, she clarified that not all bands and not all songs have the quality of 'oomph', but the finality of her last comment clause, 'that's how I'd describe it' established that 'oomph' for her was the determining factor in heavy metal.

Karen was the only woman to use the word 'oomph' (although Susan's description of the vivacity of Led Zeppelin had a similar feel, as I discuss below) and most women were more measured in their tones. However, in comparing the genre to a more mainstream one (r'n'b), in emphasising the volume of the genre ('loud') and determining that it was 'not boring' Karen drew on the same sort of language as a large proportion of my other interviewees. Most women used some of the words in the following list, or associated terms: 'loud', 'heavy', 'hard' 'severe', 'raw', 'power', 'grunty', 'strong', 'faster', and expressions related to anger or aggression such as 'fiercer' and 'angry' were also employed. These were by far the most frequent adjectives in descriptions of metal. Kahn-Harris found that his interviewees used the language that was available within the scene to describe the music (Kahn-Harris 2007, 53), and the terms I heard do indeed fall within the discursive framework of hard rock and metal. These are all qualities that can be associated with the myth of the warrior as they connote masculinity in its furthest position from femininity: high volume and fast speed were evident in the designs of the letters pages; 'severe' and 'hard' have a part to play in developing fearsomeness, and they were indicated in the photographs of musicians; 'strong' and 'power' describe physical prowess and endurance and are reminiscent of the stances of musicians that emphasised their physical strength. 'Heavy' refers to the low sound of the music and is complicit in the strength and power as something difficult to move. 'Raw' signifies an open wound and suggests cries of pain and anger, such as might be heard on a battlefield. 'Grunty' is an animalistic quality and its use here is a reference to the death growl vocals, which are a low roaring sound and perhaps not dissimilar to a battle cry. These descriptors are consonant with *Kerrang!*'s warrior imagery, in which glaring faces and intimidating poses are *de rigueur* for metal musicians, and can be described as gendered as masculine. This language therefore echoed the visual and audible qualities of the music and emphasised the symbolic masculinity of heavy metal.

Eleven women referred particularly to guitars in their descriptions of heavy metal and what they liked. For some women it was the guitar solos, for others the riffs, and for some their simple presence. For example, Hazel said, 'I like anything that has an electric guitar in it, I like the sound, I like the noise. The noise is pleasing to my ears' (Hazel). For Hazel the importance of the music lay in its 'sound' and 'noise'. The unspecified 'sound' implied that there was not a particular style of playing that she liked, and 'noise' suggested that the sound she valued was neither beautiful nor especially melodic. It did not particularly *exclude* those qualities, but it also included the kinds of sounds that some people may

call, in a derogatory sense, 'noise' rather than 'music'.⁶¹ Hazel's anaphora as she repeated 'I like...' built up to the last short sentence to give a feeling of distance which was in marked contrast to Karen's obvious delight. Hazel's 'pleasing to my ears' was an archaic sort of phrasing and, despite describing the music as 'pleasing', there was little sense of the music moving her any further. As the interview progressed she also used more emotive language, and later it became apparent that Hazel did not like just *anything* with an electric guitar in it, but the presence of the guitar caught her attention and allowed her to discriminate between bands who used the instrument and those who did not.

That the women describe electric guitars and not acoustic guitars is significant. The electric guitar is iconic and popularly romanticised and personified – both as a woman's body to be made love to, and as a man's penis to be masturbated through the guitar solo to orgasm. Queer readings are possible, but dominant readings of the symbolism of the guitar announce the guitarist as male. Drawing on Ruth Oldenziel's historical work on technology, race and gender, Monique Bourdage considers the way in which technology has been masculinised, and in particular, how the electric guitar has been masculinised (Bourdage 2010, 2). She argues that through the electrification of the guitar women musicians have become alienated from the instrument. Bringing forward Steve Waksman's analysis of the electric guitar as 'technophallus', she argues that of the use of electric guitar as a phallic symbol by such genre-defining musicians as Jimi Hendrix has resulted in the dominant cultural understanding of the instrument as one which is intrinsically wrapped up with maleness:

In terms of rock 'n' roll performance, the electric guitar takes on a role that Steve Waksman (1999) has termed 'technophallus'. Through body positioning and flamboyant physical displays, players like Jimi Hendrix fortified male dominance over the electric guitar with a large dose of phallic symbolism. Male electric guitarists often handle their instruments in ways that recall sexual acts or emphasize the phallic symbolism of their guitars. Although the guitar is most easily and comfortably played when held somewhere between the player's chest and waist, many rock guitarists play low-slung guitars held below the waist. Such positioning of the guitar makes it a much more obvious phallic symbol. Many fans and players have come to regard low-slung guitars as the only positioning that looks right. Therefore, even on women, the instrument appears as an extension of the male body, reinforcing the idea that the guitar should be left to male hands. (Bourdage 2010, 3)

⁶¹ This may include atonal or distorted sounds.

The symbolism of the electric guitar distinctly connotes masculinity in its association with aggressive, phallus-waving sexuality. Acoustic guitars, on the other hand, are 'feminine-coded' (Bourdage 2010, 7) and they are associated with singer-songwriters such as Joan Baez and Joni Mitchell (Bayton 1997, 38). Women guitarists are expected to play acoustic rather than electric guitars (Bayton 1997, 39). The use of acoustic guitars in rock usually occurs in ballads or slower sections: songs about love and romance that are introduced in the concert setting as 'this one's for the ladies'. Acoustic guitars are feminised instruments.

The electric guitar, then, is a musical instrument that has been constructed as masculine and symbolises the penis. In its masculinity the symbolic use of the electric guitar works alongside the myth of the warrior to reinforce the masculinity of the hard rock and metal musician. Moreover, the guitar is also linked intimately with the myth through its nickname. As noted earlier, the colloquial term for a guitar within hard rock and metal is 'axe'; throughout Seb Hunter's humorous metal memoir the author uses 'guitar' and 'axe' interchangeably (see, for example, Hunter 2004, 43). 'Axe' in this case signifies the weapon rather than the household tool as, within the context of the warrior imagery and language, an axe resonates with understandings of Viking invaders fighting with axes (rather than swords). It connotes powerful, dangerous and frightening masculinity.

My interviewees' frequent references to guitars therefore indicate the sound of the genre and the symbolic construction of its musicians as masculine, and this echoes the way in which musicians are depicted in *Kerrang!* as warriors. The invocation of the guitar as a characteristic of heavy metal, therefore works within the recognisable ideology of the genre and alludes to the mythical representation of the genre's musicians.

Defining heavy metal: using the language of the myth of authenticity

A number of the women I spoke to maintained a frosty intolerance towards music they described as manufactured or 'pop'. For example Dolly claimed 'a poppy song is nothing', whilst Kimberley described attending a Westlife concert to please her sister: 'there are some things we can do for our sisters and that was the most severe one I've had to do' (Kimberley). For a large number of my interviewees pop music was not only something they disliked. Many women placed hard rock and metal in an oppositional relationship to pop: the instruments used were more 'real' than in pop, the quality of musical ability was greater, the lyrical content was more meaningful. In this sense the symbolic relationship between rock and pop played an important role in thinking about and enunciating musical preference. Nine of the women made a distinction between the music they liked and 'pop' music, which they characterised as 'manufactured' in some way. For example, Sally

described hard rock and metal musicians as 'poets' and drew a contrast with 'stuff in the charts' (a very loose definition of pop):

Whereas stuff in the charts, it's much more manufactured and it's all a set formula and it's all very samey, whereas there's a lot more sort of change of tempo and you know the music fits the lyrics better and things like that. (Sally)

In the tricolon beginning 'it's', Sally represented pop music as a single unified genre without internal differences (the repeated 'it's all', 'samey'). 'Set formula' implied that the music was made without thought or creative passion, it was just constructed within a particular framework. This developed her use of 'manufactured' to give the sense of the songs being mass-produced like a pair of shoes or a McDonald's meal: i.e. no love had gone into the generation of the product. The second conjunction 'whereas' signified the comparison she then made with hard rock and metal: she had referred to the conditions of pop's production and she compared this with the quality of hard rock and metal *music*. The term 'sort of change of tempo' signifies that metal has more dynamic range and Sally implied that this was what made it better, although she did not explain why.⁶² The phrase 'fits better with the lyrics' was vague and seemed to refer to some intangible way in which when we listen to a particular kind of music we expect to hear specific sorts of lyrics. In Sally's 'you know' there was a sense of this as reassuring. I think she was implying that when music and the lyrics are 'manufactured' separately there is little emotional synchronicity between them. She alluded to the expectation that a hard rock or metal band would write lyrics and music which would therefore provide a better emotional 'fit' (as if it were an automatic relationship). In the metaphor of hard rock and metal musicians as 'poets' Sally implied that the quality of the lyrics was better, with more beautiful phrasing and word choice, and a more serious perspective on the world. In establishing what pop is (manufactured, prosaic, routine and formulaic) hard rock and metal easily slipped into an antagonistic relationship with it: hard rock and metal becomes everything that pop is not.

The use of particular instruments is a powerful motif in hard rock and metal and part of the mythology that divides the genre from mass-produced music, signalling it as 'authentic'. Referring to the instruments that are used in the music, in particular bass, drums and guitars, as *real*, and contrasting their use with music made on computers or using synthesisers, was a common theme amongst my interviewees. For instance, in describing what she liked about the genre, Jessica emphasised the *realness* of the instruments:

I consider metal to be, it has to be real metal for me, like they have to play their own instruments and it's not, it can't be all computerised cos that's just not real

⁶² And of course change of tempo could be part of the 'formula' for pop!

music for me.

[Rosemary] What sorts of instruments?

[Jessica] Erm guitars mainly, but that's, I play myself so that's something I have a passion for and it has to be real drumkit and it has to be a real, their real voice, not autotuned or anything like that. (Jessica)

Jessica established her own definition of metal ('I consider', 'for me', 'for me') and explicitly likened it to the use of particular instruments and the musicians' ability to play them. In 'real metal' she implied that there was some metal that was not 'real', and she went on to articulate certain qualities that she considered to be mandatory ('they have to', 'it can't be', 'it has to be', the latter was repeated three times), and all of these values are about the production of the music and the performance of the musicians, rather than the sound of the music. 'Own' here did not necessarily mean ownership of specific instruments, rather it referred to the musical parts appearing on the songs and to the roles that musicians had with regards these. She repeated 'real' five times in this short response and, although Jessica did not define precisely what she meant by the word, it was placed in contrast with music made using computers ('all computerised', 'autotuned'), suggesting that it was a particular use of technology that was problematic in her estimation.⁶³ This clearly linked the definition of the genre to the ability of the musicians, but it also reinscribed the binary between what was metal ('real') and what was not ('unreal'). Why is it important that a drumkit be made of metal, wood and skins (or synthetic skins) rather than a machine? Why should a traditional manner of playing (with sticks and brushes) be valued above a skilled musician using a synthesiser kit and programming a drum line in to a computer? Why does it matter how a song is made? Although I pose these rhetorical questions, for the majority of the women, the way in which the music is created was crucial. 'Realness' was set against pop music, but also other kinds of music: genres such as electro/electronic, dance or hip hop, in which the music is made using synthesisers, keyboards, samplers and computers rather than on traditional rock instruments of guitar, bass and drums. Such modern technological means of making music are associated with the manufacturing of songs because they are understood as more easily mastered than traditional instruments. Making the distinction with pop music was consonant with the ideology's stress upon authenticity and a key element in proving that authenticity.

⁶³ In the digital age nearly all music-making utilises computers in some way during the recording process. In his discussion of recording drummers, metal record producer Mark Mynett has debunked the idea that metal musicians always play their own instruments. He argues that expectations of drum parts have become so high that many musicians cannot actually play the parts that appear on the records: these parts have been created using computer software (Mynett 2013).

The quality of the musicianship, particularly of guitarists, was highly valued, as Aime revealed in her description of Synyster Gates' guitar playing:

When he was little he taught himself to play it, his dad's guitar, upside down but he wasn't left-handed, but he taught himself to play it upside down but he, er, then when his dad bought him a guitar he played that and then flipped that upside down and then learnt his dad's guitar so he can play it both ways and upside down. (Aime on Synyster Gates of Avenged Sevenfold)

Aime introduced Gates as a guitarist from a young age, 'when he was little', implying that he was naturally drawn towards the instrument. The use of 'taught himself' signified Gates had a 'good ear' and natural aptitude. The use of the conjunctions 'then' suggested a process of learning, of gaining new levels of understanding, and also of desire to learn, a voracious appetite for ability to play the instrument. The verb 'flipped' suggested a quick and easy process of fast, almost immediate learning, emphasising the supposed naturalness of his skill. Aime's use of the repeated 'taught himself', 'he played that', 'then learnt' and 'he can play it' all omitted any teacher in the learning (his dad merely provided the instruments and there was no mother in Aime's tale), further reinforcing the sense of the guitarist as an autodidact with natural ability. Aime drew attention to Gates as an unusually skilful musician by repeating his particular skill, 'upside down', four times and linking it to 'both ways' so that it was clear that Gates could play both left and right handed guitars. This multiple-playing ability connoted a high level of musicianship that is above the usual standard for guitarists. This description stood in for a more technical discussion of his ability which might have drawn on musical terminology, but nevertheless indicated the value she placed upon his skill.

Ruby's discussion of Howard Jones' vocal talent was similarly devoid of technical language, instead emphasising the effect it had upon her:

It's a little bit like opera, [...] but when you do see just the power that comes out of somebody's body, sort of voice, it makes the hairs stand up. And it's kind of a similar thing really. (Ruby on singer Howard Jones of Killswitch Engage)

Ruby used a simile, 'like opera', to draw a comparison between Killswitch Engage and a high art form that is well-known for the incredible singing of its performers. She described seeing the band at a festival so her choice of 'see' (rather than 'hear') was related to this, and her use of 'when you do see' invited me to seek out the band so that I could share her experience. 'Power' implied strength and force, suggesting that his voice was loud and confident, but the word also connoted that he had control over the audience. Unusually she referred to both Jones' singing body and her own listening body, so that he is

conjured as also having bodily power as well as vocal power. This was echoed in her rough descriptor 'sort of voice' so that it was not only his singing that was causing such an effect, but the body too. The power he had was to cause her body to react, 'the hairs stand up'. 'The' rather than 'my' brings the experience back to me as I listened to her, and asked me to put myself in her shoes at the festival, thinking also about seeing the band. Jones' voice gave Ruby a visible physical reaction in her body so that the music moved her in a very deep way. It was not possible for Ruby to explain this reaction further except to liken it again to opera. Thus she connects her somatic reaction to the music to the power of the singer's voice, and uses the incident at the festival as an exemplum of his musical ability.

Many women commented upon the ability of the musicians in their favourite bands. Drummers were 'amazing' (Gwen, Bert, Aime), 'fearsome' (Carol), 'phenomenal' (Aria); singers were 'amazing' (Bert), 'powerful' (Ruby), 'great' (Karen); guitarists were 'amazing' (Bert) 'fantastic' or 'magnificent' (Carol); bassists were 'amazing' (Aime). Although the women only used a limited language to describe the impression that musicians made upon them, that so many *did* refer to musicianship is significant. These descriptions of musical performance highlight the extraordinariness of the musicians: as men who are determined and have the perseverance to practise hard; who are autodidacts; who can play their instrument in a variety of (unconventional) ways; or who can make sounds that produce physical responses in the listener. These musicians are, for their admiring fans, above the ordinary musician in terms of their ability. They are *virtuosos*, and, in knowing the difference between good playing and virtuoso playing, the fans separate themselves from those who cannot tell the difference.

Walser discusses virtuosity as a key attribute of heavy metal, particularly in the context of the influence of classical music (Walser 1993, 57-107). Virtuosity clearly holds meaning within hard rock and metal fandom; Walser identifies it as part of macho culture:

It should come as no surprise that such an eruption [as heavy metal's appropriation of classical music's virtuosity], propelled by the social desires and tensions of patriarchy and capitalism, reinscribes familiar constructions of masculinity and individuality. (Walser 1993, 107)

The appreciation of virtuosity fits in with the ideology of hard rock and metal, in which the guitar solo holds a defining place, and in which high-quality musicianship is generally valued (in comparison to, for example, punk, in which it is energy and politics that are

valued).⁶⁴ Riesman argues that an appreciation of virtuosity is something that is associated with the 'minority' of 'more active listeners' (Riesman 1991, 9), a group which is defined in opposition to the 'majority' who are 'undiscriminating' (Riesman 1991, 8). Identifying the genre as one in which virtuosity is valued therefore reinforces the dichotomy between rock and pop and the concomitant authenticity.

Lyrical content was another area in which hard rock and metal was described as contrasting to and, importantly, *better than* pop music. For Hazel this meant that the lyrics dealt with themes she perceived to be more serious than the romantic lyrics typically found in pop songs:

[Hazel] I always preferred the lyrics to say the lyrics to pop songs because they were less frivolous and they had more to say.

[Rosemary] What do you mean by frivolous?

[Hazel] Well it wasn't all about, just like 'oh I want a boyfriend, I love my boyfriend' and it was... you know, cos I happen to, I'm not a love song person, I'm not a mushy sort of sentimental person at all. (Hazel on Tura Satana)

Hazel characterised all pop as 'frivolous' due to its preference for lyrics about romance. She described pop songs as referring to wanting a boyfriend, which, in the terms of heteronormativity, feminises the singer. Her tone as she mimicked the imagined song lyrics was scoffing: 'oh' implied that the singer was daydreaming whilst the repeated 'boyfriend' suggested the reduced scope of the singer's life. Hazel showed further derisiveness towards pop lyrics through her use of the adjectives 'frivolous', 'mushy', and 'sentimental'. The latter two words implied the expression of emotion not felt (false emotion), whilst the former signified that the subject matter was not serious or worthy of concern. This was emphasised in her contrasting description of hard rock and metal songs having 'more to say' (although on what topics she did not define). She put her dislike of pop lyrics down to a personal preference for songs that were not about love, because she identified herself as not a 'mushy' person. In dismissing romance themes she echoed the ideology of hard rock and metal as it seeks to diminish the feminine and to raise the music up as more serious.

Bert described how the concept album format used by Avenged Sevenfold was preferable to an album of unconnected songs:

It had a story throughout the whole of it and you can listen to [it] from beginning to end and know what that exact story is just from listening to the songs. And I

⁶⁴ In punk, the DIY ethos means that it is important *not* to value musicianship because that would contradict the message that anyone can get on stage and express themselves.

love that; I love that you can go completely out there, yeah? And sometimes it doesn't work, sometimes it does, but it's just always amazing that you can do that, because if somebody did that in pop people would be there just 'oh my god' you know, they just wouldn't get it. (Bert on Avenged Sevenfold)

Bert used the term 'whole' and the phrase 'beginning to end' to signify that the album had been well-crafted so that each song told a part of the story. It was also suggestive of high-quality song-writing ability of the band: that they could write song after song, that they were so skilled that they could create a large number of songs. 'That exact story' followed by the subjunct 'just' implied that for listeners the story was easy to fully understand because it was so well told, and that listeners would not get it wrong. This too added to a sense of the band as master-songwriters.

She then turned the 'you' from the listener to the band so that when she said 'you can go completely out there' she was referring to the way in which the band could experiment and explore new territory so that going 'out there' became like space exploration. She asked me to agree ('yeah?') and then placed the emphasis of the skill of the musicians on the experiment itself: 'sometimes it doesn't work, sometimes it does'. This may have seemed to contradict her earlier statement about how they could tell stories so that the listener could interpret them 'exactly'; however here, rather than working as procatleipsis, its function was to reinforce the bravery of the musicians as well as their ability to be progressive. Hard rock and metal was then constructed as the genre that permitted experimentation ('you can do that'), rather than pop, because pop fans would be flummoxed. Bert's 'people' and 'they' were the indiscriminated mass of pop fans and she directly reported what she imagined they were thinking, 'oh my god'. This was an expression of disbelief, disdain and unwillingness to try to understand due to their repudiation of non-conformity. Her final phrase, 'they just wouldn't get it', signified that Bert believed the 'people' to not be bright enough understand the concept of the album and the point of the experimentation.

For Bert, being able to appreciate a concept album was a sign of a hard rock and metal fan because the concept album would not be understood in pop. Pop fans' appetite for three-minute-hit songs, perhaps interspersed with 'filler'⁶⁵ when placed on an album, means that the story needs to be told within the confines of a single song. A concept album tells a story or explores an idea over an album of, perhaps, 45 minutes, and, maybe ten songs. Bert suggested that genre expectations of pop fans prevented them

⁶⁵ 'Filler' is a derogatory term used to describe the songs in between the singles on an album which are of lower quality and whose purpose seems to be to ensure the album is of sufficient length.

from understanding other ways of storytelling in music, hinting that, because pop fans do not 'get it', they lack sophistication in their music fandom.

Some other lyrical themes that the women discussed were death (Bert), Bipolar Disorder (Jessica), sexism, racism and homophobia (Alexa). These preferences are marked by the way that they are thought of as 'universal' and as being of interest to anyone, regardless of gender, race, sexuality, age, etc. Love and romance, in contrast, are not thought of as universal: they are a woman's interest alone. Drawing attention to the difference in the themes of lyrics compared to the lyrics in pop songs was not a neutral 'different but equal' judgement: it meant placing a higher value on the lyrical themes of rock and metal and asserting them as more valuable because they were more serious. These kinds of descriptions of pop music echo the language of the myth of authenticity as, in disparaging pop lyrical themes, the women relied upon the dichotomous construction of rock and pop.

Such terminology is parallel with the mythological framing of hard rock and metal, and, in particular, the myths of the warrior and authenticity. By referring to objects and positions that are commonly represented as masculine (love of the guitar, virtuosity, the disparagement of pop music) there appears to be a rejection of femininity which is due to the relationship with pop music. This appears to be problematic: by asserting rock's value to the detriment of pop, culture that is associated with women is positioned as being less valuable and women as producers, artists and enjoyers of culture are seen as less important. Thus the idea that only men have something important to say, be it artistically or politically, is maintained and this then feeds into the endurance of women's subordination despite the rhetoric of equality. Furthermore it positions women fans as involved in the disparagement of their own gender as they align themselves with a masculine culture that writes out the feminine. However, this is a simplistic reading that does not take into account the more complex ways in which women understand their relationships with the music they love. Any assertion that women who like hard rock and metal are traitors to their gender needs to be challenged.

Problems in understanding hard rock and metal as only masculine

Walser characterises heavy metal as masculine music due to its 'virtuosity and control' (Walser 1993, 108); articulation of 'a dialectic of controlling power and transcendent freedom' (Walser 1993, 108); 'vocal extremes, guitar power chords, distortion; and sheer volume of bass and drums' (Walser 1993, 109). Common sense understandings of hard rock and metal as masculine owe much to the way in which certain sounds are *construed* as 'masculine'. However it is important to remember that 'masculine' sounds are only 'masculine' because they have been understood as such: they have no inherent

masculine qualities. In his description of metal as masculine, Walser clarifies his position by asserting that the description is not due to any essential gender qualities of the music:

Underpinning all semiotic analysis is, recognised or not, a set of assumptions about cultural practice, for ultimately music doesn't have meanings; people do. There is no essential, foundational way to ground musical meaning beyond the flux of social existence. (Walser 1993, 32)

In ascribing these qualities to masculinity Walser makes clear that these meanings are constructed rather than inherent (Walser 1993, 113), a perspective shared by Susan McClary. In the foundational feminist musicology text *Feminine Endings* (1991), McClary investigates the way in which music has been divided along gender lines so that, for example, major keys are linked to the masculine and minor to the feminine (McClary 1991, 11). Throughout traditional musicology she finds that gendered binaries abound (McClary 1991, 10). Whether or not composers are consciously choosing to musically construct femininity or masculinity, the gendered codes are 'taken to be "natural"' (McClary 1991, 9), even by those composers. Moreover it is clear from McClary's examples of musicologists' analysis, that they are *heard* as natural by the listener too. Gendered interpretations of music therefore affect our understandings of and pleasure in the music, our thoughts and feelings about musicians and about fans. This is clear from women's descriptions of music that use language which emphasises the masculinity of hard rock and metal. Their gendered hearings of the music were part of their experience and part of their pleasure. However, that pleasure has not been treated as neutral and has been politicised by groups of non-fans.

Hypermasculinity and virulently misogynistic lyrics in rock and metal have led to criticism of the music from some conservative quarters, particularly in the USA,⁶⁶ and also from some feminists in the early days of the Women's Liberation Movement. Some feminists in the 1970s assumed that rock music was 'bad for women' and contributed to our oppression via negative representations of women, sexual objectification, images of women as deserving victims of male violence or as out to deceive and harm innocent men, or as sexually passive (for an overview of these 'repressive representations' see Whiteley 2006, 32-43). In her introduction to the compilation of the Chicago and New Haven Women's Liberation Rock Bands' recordings, Jennifer Baumgardner states that there was a general feeling of rock as a problem:

⁶⁶ For example the Parents Music Resource Centre in the 1980s. See Weinstein for some discussion of this (Weinstein 2000, 249).

Rock was part of the revolutionary language, and feminists were squeezing out the sexism there too. They were challenging the Rolling Stones – or at least talking back to their lyrics – She’s “under your thumb”? Oh, yeah? Screw you, sexist pig! (Baumgardner 2005, n.p.)

This was reflected in a comment made by a friend of Susan’s in the 1970s. He was confused that as a *Spare Rib* reader and feminist she could enjoy the music of Led Zeppelin and other heavy metal bands:

I can remember having a conversation with a friend who said, ‘you know I find it really uncomfortable that you like this sort of music’. A male friend. [...] Yes, he said ‘because it seemed to me to epitomise everything that you stand against’.
(Susan)

Susan invoked ‘conversation’ to denote that she and her friend were having a rational discussion, not an argument. ‘Friend’ connoted that the criticism was not done with malice, and worked with ‘conversation’ to imply a civilised exchange of viewpoints. The use of direct reported speech suggests that although the conversation had occurred in the 1970s it had stayed in Susan’s memory and had made an impact upon her. The friend began with ‘you know’, requesting Susan’s understanding, that she see his point of view. The friend was careful in his phrasing and rather than asking Susan outright why she liked the music, he phrased it in the passive ‘I find it really uncomfortable’. This adds to the sense of an exchange taking place, rather than a disagreement. The friend referred to ‘this sort of music’, meaning that he was not making distinctions between what different bands might be like: all were equally culpable. Susan emphasised that this was ‘a male friend’, and this was clearly important. His maleness might have implied that he was unhappy about Susan’s rock fandom because it is a ‘man’s thing’. However, Susan clarified with further reported speech. When he used ‘epitomise’ he amplified the sense of rock music as one uniform genre and suggested that it be something Susan ought to resent. His use of ‘stand against’ was suggestive of political beliefs and battle lines. The speech had the effect of placing Susan in an awkward position of needing to justify her love of the music or it challenged her to abstain from rock for the sake of her beliefs.

More recently Vasan’s feminist research is underpinned by incomprehension, causing her to,

Ponder why women are drawn to death metal in general: why women choose to associate themselves with a male-dominated and overtly misogynistic subculture.
(Vasan 2010, 70)

These kind of criticisms place women who enjoy hard rock and metal music despite its sexism in a minority amongst feminists, and have led to criticism of those who want to make rock music (Baumgardner 2005, n.p.), or listen to it. Sue Wise is vague about where the feminist criticism of rock music in the 1970s was coming from, stating that, '[o]ccasional feminist references to rock music in general invariably pointed the finger at the Rolling Stones and Elvis as epitomizing the male-dominated, woman-hating bias of rock music' (Wise 1984, 394). She felt pressure from feminist friends to drop her fandom of Elvis, as if being an Elvis fan and being a feminist were incompatible. Liking Elvis was a state of false consciousness to be rejected (Wise 1984, 394). I too have felt pressure to reject the music I love, when in my feminist rock band my love of classic rock was viewed with confusion by one of my band mates and by other feminist musicians. It seemed to me that liking Led Zeppelin or Black Sabbath was *out* because of what the bands stood for in terms of the bands' perceived misogyny.

Coates draws attention to this problem when considering her own attachment to The Rolling Stones:

A feminist fan of the Stones and rock like myself is faced with an immediate conundrum: if indeed it is the phallic power of the sound that draws me to it, then I am complicit in my own submission to that power. I accept and at the same time reinforce it. Some might say that when I describe the Stones' sound as sexy, I am operating under 'false consciousness', simply accepting and reinforcing hegemonic tropes of male and female sexuality. This is an unsatisfactory explanation. (Coates 1997, 50-51)

Coates moves on from her experience as a rock fan to discuss the category 'women in rock' and the focus is then upon musicians. False consciousness may be an unsatisfactory explanation for her Stones fandom, but she does not offer another. Coates' argument is rooted in the construction of rock and pop as dichotomously oppositional, which results in a cyclical relationship: thinking of metal and rock as 'masculine' means thinking in ways that are compelled to hang upon the gender binary.

In order to move beyond the women's-hard-rock-and-metal-fandom-as-false-consciousness argument it is vital to consider the other ways in which the women described their musical pleasure. For, whilst the language of masculinity and the ideology of hard rock and metal was prominent in their descriptions, it was not the only language in use. However, as long as social understandings of the genre give primacy to their masculinity and represent women fans' musical passion as incongruent with their gender, there is little room for a consideration of the ways in which that fandom is enjoyed which do not reify the genre's masculinity.

Interpreting metal as masculine misses out some of the more interesting aspects of the genre, such as the queering discussed by Whiteley (Whiteley 2006, 257-9). Furthermore hard rock and metal is thought of as 'masculine' so that its more 'feminine' attributes are hidden. The high voices of bands like Led Zeppelin and Budgie; the make up of, for example, My Chemical Romance and many glam metal bands; the ubiquitous long hair. When these elements are considered the heteromascularity of hard rock and metal looks more complicated, as Sheila Whiteley discusses, arguing that,

In essence, metal is about men being manly, and while Walser relates this to the codes of misogyny, exscription and the fraternalistic culture of bands and fans, problems arise when connecting the sweaty gods to their often androgynous images – the long hair, mascara, spandex, and leather. (Whiteley 2006, 257).

Whiteley makes an important point about the dangers of interpreting metal *only* as masculine: certainly the genre is more open to gender play for its male musicians than Walser admits, and this needs to be taken into account.

Fast, too, finds a good deal to worry about in conceptions of rock music, and Led Zeppelin in particular, as masculine. She argues that in leaving the masculinity of rock assumed and unquestioned an opportunity is missed to engage with the ways that both female and male fans make sense of Led Zeppelin's music (Fast 1999, 246-7). She writes that in the assumption of the masculinity of the music and the fans there is no place for her own fandom of the band (Fast 1999, 246). Similarly, the identification of Elvis as 'butch god' by feminists did not correlate with the Elvis beloved of Wise (Wise 1984, 395). Wise argues that this macho Elvis rejected by her feminist friends was the Elvis of 'men who depicted this phallic hero as having worldwide cultural significance' (Wise 1984, 397). This resonates with my reading of the representation of musicians as male in *Kerrang!*'s letters pages in the myth of the warrior, and also with my reading of the representation of women as groupies rather than as serious fans. As Fast argues in her discussion of how the 'masculinity' of Led Zeppelin and their music has been maintained, the key players in the media and academia who have contributed to this reading are male (Fast 1999, 247).⁶⁷ Representations of hard rock and metal music are written and sanctioned by men (music journalists, the musicians, editors) or by those whose job it is to ensure the ideological perspective of the genre is maintained (female *Kerrang!* staff or musicians). For this reason, Fast argues, it is vital that women's perspectives on rock and metal be considered

⁶⁷ She also argues that women academics working on rock and metal have little personal engagement with the music, citing Weinstein as an example. My reading of *Heavy Metal* is that Weinstein is most definitely a fan. This is signalled by her intimate knowledge of the metal genre and also by her defensiveness from claims of racism and sexism (Weinstein 2000, 112).

(Fast 1999, 246). Picking up on Coates' notion of the gender binary of rock/pop and the effect of interpreting rock as masculine, she writes, '[i]n reading these words I felt enormous sorrow that her pleasure had been compromised by an essentialist view of how gender might work in music' (Fast 1999, 252). Considering hard rock and metal as exclusively masculine eclipses women fans' own interpretations that may well challenge the notion that the genre is just an arena for hypermasculine posturing which excludes or demeans women. For this reason I now consider how my interviewees described their pleasure in hard rock and metal in ways that did *not* fit in with the ideology of the imaginary community as represented by *Kerrang!* magazine.

Articulating pleasure in music

When describing their enjoyment of their favourite bands, only five women used the same kinds of language employed in descriptions of heavy metal. More women invoked 'dissimilarity' between the music of their preferred bands and others. In addition, my interviewees also used quite novel and imaginative descriptors, so that they were able to articulate why their favourite bands moved them in language that often contrasted sharply with the sort of terminology that is associated with hard rock and metal and that they had offered in descriptions of the heavy metal genre. They described the music as allowing transcendence, as challenging, as enabling shared experiences and as vibrant, and also in romantic terms, whilst two women discussed their simultaneous love of pop musicians alongside their hard rock and metal fandom.

Transcendence and transportation

Three of the women articulated the ways in which the music allowed them to transcend their immediate surroundings. For instance Aime described Avenged Sevenfold's unusual musical choices in order to elucidate her listening experience:

In 'Beast and the Harlot' they go verse chorus solo verse chorus chorus so that's weird: I found it weird that they put the solo within the first half of the song and that's how they experiment. And it's like one of the greatest riffs of all time and they don't just do the riff, they do things in the background which makes it even more interesting. You're listening to it and the bass is different; it's not just going along with the chords and it's an adventure to listen to in a way. (Aime)

At first Aime was specific about the construction of the song, giving me definite information. She determined the format was 'weird' in order to emphasise the difference between this song and more traditionally constructed songs, and in 'they don't just do the riff' she implied that other bands did 'just' (meaning 'only') do this. Aime further emphasised the way the song was 'different' through reference to the bass and the

background. What I found most intriguing, however, was her use of 'adventure' to describe her listening experience. Listening to the band was akin to going on a journey. Sections of the song led her through the musical landscape: the positions of the instruments and other effects in the mix meant that there was much of interest to experience each time the voyage was made, and the unusual bass melody meant that the passage was an extraordinary one in comparison to other musical journeys. 'Adventure' does not just mean 'journey'; it also connotes excitement, quests and tasks to be accomplished, with potentially the thrill of meeting wizards and the risk of encountering dragons! 'Adventure' is romantic and in describing 'Beast and the Harlot' in this way Aime created a sense of the song as able to transport the listener to another world that was more exciting than everyday life in 21st Century Britain.

Jeanette described seeing her favourite band, Red Sparowes, and the effect of the political images of China that they were using as the backdrop combined with the music:

[Red Sparowes] actually have, erm, visuals behind them [...] it was visually absolutely stunning, but it was also very disturbing images at the same time. Together, combined with extremely melodic, beautiful music in front of you, so it transports you as well. I mean I certainly didn't, during that show I didn't think political thoughts, but makes you think very creatively, erm. Yes, it just opens up, erm, it lets your mind flow. (Jeanette)

Jeanette's use of 'visuals' and 'together, combined' give a sense of the concert as more than simply an aural event; it was a fuller sensual experience. The strong adverbs, 'absolutely', 'very', 'extremely', 'certainly', all signify how powerful the effect of the concert was for her. 'Stunning', taken literally, means that she temporarily lost consciousness. This was not what happened, but the term suggests that Jeanette was momentarily unable to think about anything else. However, after the initial short lapse, the beautiful music had the impact of allowing her mind to 'flow' in ways that she considered to be creative. Hard rock and metal is not generally thought of as allowing space for *thinking*. As I infer from Overell's work on the way in which grindcore 'blows away' its listeners (Overell 2011, 202), the genre is often thought of as allowing the listener some sense of obliteration. Hard rock in particular is not associated with the intellect. Rather it is often associated with the life of the body: sex, drugs and alcohol. This attitude is epitomised in Hebdige's off-the-cuff denunciation of 'heavy metal rockers' as being distinguishable by their 'idiot dancing' (Hebdige 1979, 109, 155) in which the movement of bodies in time to the music is the notable characteristic. In Jeanette's remarks (the music 'makes' her think and 'lets' her mind 'flow') there was an impression of images crossing her consciousness as if in a meditative state when images arise without being purposely thought. There was the sense that for Jeanette this kind of creative thinking was not the kind of thinking she

could access easily in her daily life. Red Sparowes' music and imagery enabled this kind of thinking and this was extraordinary and central to her pleasurable experience.

Furthermore, Jeanette used 'melodic' and 'beautiful', all words that are not usually associated with hard rock and metal. Hard rock and metal is not typically thought of as 'beautiful': common sense understandings of the genre by non-metal fans sometimes interpret the music as harsh and ugly. The density and pace of the songs can make listening a difficult experience for new listeners and in these cases they may not hear a melody at all. Furthermore, these terms do fit into the ideological language of the genre as they do not refer to speed, heaviness, hardness or aggressiveness; in fact they are more associated with femininity and with art.

Susan described listening to Led Zeppelin as enabling a feeling of being different from normal when normal is 'mundane':

It lifts you out of the mundane. I mean cleaning or ironing can't be anything but mundane can it? So a well-chosen piece of music just lifts you above that. (Susan)

Susan used the verb 'lifts' to describe the way in which music can affect someone doing housework. In this she implicitly placed cleaning and ironing in the position of bringing one down, i.e. that such tasks are depressing. 'Mundane' means 'worldly' and this lent an air of transcendence to the way in which music functions. In the rhetorical question 'cleaning or ironing can't be anything but mundane can it?' Susan assumed my agreement that housework is dull and therefore that I would also understand the way in which music could function.⁶⁸ This presentation of music as enabling transcendence of boring tasks is a view shared by Lawrence Grossberg. Grossberg argues that rock enables young people to find some sense of empowerment in their adolescent powerlessness (Grossberg 1984, 228), but Susan's description of the way music 'lifted' her was rooted in her experience of being a single mother with young children. For Susan it was not powerlessness that needed to be overcome, but the boring and endless task of housework. As a former *Spare Rib* reader Susan may have interpreted the ironing and housework as a form of powerlessness, but she did not discuss this with me. Susan was not alone in finding that hard rock and metal music helped with housework: Ruby found that energetic metal helped her with the gardening, and Jessica said that it aided her in the cleaning. However, for Susan the music's power to 'lift her above' the mundane was not just to motivate her to engage in house or garden work, rather it meant that she could feel outside of the tasks.

⁶⁸ I did understand and we discussed the ways in which Pink Floyd particularly worked in this sense for both of us.

Musical beauty was credited with the power to expand the women's minds, enabling them to think more 'creatively', lifting them above mundane employments, or taking them on a journey into a fantasy land. All of these descriptions give an impression of pleasure in hard rock and metal that is quite different from those pleasures characterised as masculine, or from the pleasures described by Kahn-Harris. Where Kahn-Harris found 'aggression, anger, violence and brutality' (Kahn-Harris 2007, 52), elements he describes as 'negative' (Kahn-Harris 2007, 52), my interviewees described positive elements that enhanced their thinking and meditative lives.

Shared experiences

Susan and Jenny both enjoyed their favourite bands because they could hear that in the making of the music there was great pleasure for the musicians. Susan's language is reminiscent of Karen's use of 'oomph', but she is more directly relating to the musicians:

To me it's got something of the aliveness – if there is such a word – of improvised jazz, traditional jazz, when people are playing like that together it, I, it doesn't feel like manufactured music. It sounds as though there's a bit of joy there in creating it. And now when you've seen all the splits in these bands it's obviously not so, but that's the, I just get this feeling of exuberance which is... I really think that's important. (Susan)

Although Susan distinguished hard rock and metal from 'manufactured music' (as many of my interviewees did and as discussed earlier), her other terms are uncommon in descriptions of the genre. She began 'to me', intimating that this was a personal experience of the music, and indeed it was so personal that the word she chose to describe it, 'aliveness', was one she was not sure existed, but that suited her purpose. She compared the genre to the way in which jazz musicians play together and the effect that this had of creating something unique (not 'manufactured') that sounded joyful. 'There's a bit of joy there' was shown to be understatement by her later use of 'exuberance' which connotes great excitement and more than 'a bit' of joy. Procatalepsis headed off any challenges that the joy might not have been genuine, because, Susan argues, using 'just' to simplify matters, whether the musicians' pleasure was real was unimportant. The transference of 'aliveness' to the listener was what was 'really important'. The 'exuberance' she heard was important, as if it were transmitted to her.

For Ruby it was not so much the musicians' ability to transmit emotions to the listener as sharing those emotions or experiences. She enjoyed the way in which they could relate to what the musicians were singing about.

It's an affiliation. [...] when I got divorced [laughs, but a little forced], probably a bad example, er, but obviously it was a highly emotional time, I think, you know, that a lot of, a lot of the metal music I listened to at the time was, especially with Killswitch Engage, was about heartbreak and sorrow and it kind of makes you feel like you're not the only person in that situation. It's almost like having a heartbreak buddy there on your iPod, but as well it kind of, it gives you a bit of a burn inside, if that makes sense, it, it, it kind of swirls your emotions up inside and I think enables you to get them out, even if it's running round the house kicking and throwing things erm it kind of gives you that little bit of fight to get emotions out, for me anyway. (Ruby)

I did not understand Ruby to be using 'affiliation' in the sense of aligning herself with the band as an organisation, rather I inferred that she meant something more like a sense of sibling-love and friendship. This was signified also through her use of 'not the only person', 'buddy' and 'there on your iPod', all terms which worked to create a sense of how Ruby felt about the music at the time of her divorce: that the music could provide intimacy, friendship and stability in a time of difficulty. Ruby's vocabulary – which is readily found in pop music – brings forth the question of to what extent does vocabulary cross genre boundaries. Ruby called Killswitch Engage her 'heartbreak buddy' as she found that the songs resonated with her own feelings at the time of her divorce. She felt that she was not alone, even when she was alone with her iPod headphones.

She also ascribed to the music the quality of giving 'a bit of a burn'. This odd metaphor connotes feelings building up until they are so painful that they feel as if they are burning from the inside. This image of emotions having physical form (here: fire) was emphasised by her use of the verb 'swirls' where emotions were transformed into a liquid that needed to be shaken. Both the fire and the water were described as damaging and needing to be expelled from the body. The sorrow of the songs had a cathartic effect upon her, enabling her to express her own feelings in a dramatic, but obviously necessary manner. Kahn-Harris' discussion of catharsis centres upon extreme metal's ability to help get angry emotions out, but for Ruby the emotion is pain and heartbreak. Lyrical and genre differences may impact upon the kinds of emotion that the music enables the listener to expunge. The image of a broken heart is not in accord with the myth of the warrior, for the warrior ought to be independent and strong. A broken heart implies dependence and weakness. Where the catharsis for Kahn-Harris' extreme metal fans is catharsis from anger, for Ruby it was catharsis from heartbreak and vitally it is the fact of the pain being shared that enabled that catharsis.

For Susan it did not matter whether the 'exuberance' of the music was a result of genuine affection between band members, but Jenny gained happiness from what she saw as the

enthusiasm and enjoyment of the band, in this case in the gig environment when she went to see/hear Slabdragger:

Really like enthusiasm and commitment and energy. And particularly if their lead singer's got that, I mean I don't necessarily make out the words they're singing, but I like commitment, and that respect and they played really well as a band, you could really see they were all enjoying themselves and it's nice when it works both ways. (Jenny)

Jenny ascribed her affection for Slabdragger to the merits of the band in performance. The way in which she omitted 'I' and 'the' (i.e. 'I really like the enthusiasm...') and the tricolon brought the emphasis to the three qualities and away from her own personal feelings. The three were not musical merits, rather they were about the attitude of the performers. She then referred to the lead singer's personality and added a comment clause to clarify her meaning, although it was not clear to me at the time why being able to hear the words was important (perhaps she thought that hearing lyrics was a way to make out commitment). For Jenny the enthusiasm was combined with what she interpreted as the commitment of the band and 'that respect'. She did not elaborate on either of these terms and so a question remains over who respect and commitment is paid to: is it to their band mates, their music or their audience? Or all three? Whilst this may be opaque, there is a clue in her phrase, 'it's nice when it works both ways'. The audience gain pleasure from hearing and witnessing the band's performance, and the band too gain satisfaction and enjoyment from their own performance. In the words 'both ways' Jenny intimated that the band's joy was also inspired by seeing their audience's enthusiastic response.

Both Susan and Jenny made the suggestion that bands can convey their own feelings of exuberance and enthusiasm to fans: that music has the power to transmit emotions. This idea of joy in the performance implies that there are times when bands are unable to enjoy the music they perform. On these occasions the performance itself may be note perfect, but there is some *je ne sais quoi* missing. The joyous performance is therefore very important, and where Kahn-Harris sees 'negative' emotions I would not characterise these in that way. It is happy, communal in the shared element, and overwhelmingly positive. This brings to the fore ideas about music as a communal experience that allows for personal feelings to be explored in musical companionship. These pleasures do not necessarily fit in with the language that echoes the ideology of hard rock and 'metal in, particularly, the myth of the warrior, but they do provide some insight into how the myth of equality has the appearance of a natural truth. However, the women were not describing a whole-community experience: Ruby and Susan in particular were feeling a quite personal communion with the band.

Romance language

Aime told me that her first encounter with Avenged Sevenfold had been via music television. This occurred after having just read a review of the band:

It was just a review of a gig, and I thought, 'oh that gig sounded cool; [I] might go on YouTube and have a find out a bit' and er just before then I was watching Kerrang! on TV and I flipped over the channel and just that second a song of their's came on and it was this kind of like husky bit where he sings and I was like ah! It was just I felt [breathy] that moment and I was like, it was really nice, it was kind of like a fairytale. (Aime)

Aime began by saying 'it was just a review', where 'just' ascribes little importance to her encounter with the piece (it came to have more significance later). She reports her thoughts directly of the impact the review had. 'Cool' is so ubiquitous that it tells us more about Aime's attitude to the concert than about the concert itself: she thought it was something that if she were to investigate it would add to her sense of self. The informal 'have a find out a bit' suggested an active process of pursuing knowledge about the band. The synchronicity of reading the review and then seeing the band on television seems to have suggested a magical or romantic relationship between herself and the band, as indicated by her use of the word 'fairytale' (she seems to have forgotten that she was intending to 'go on YouTube' where she may very well have chosen to watch the same video). The romance came from her somewhat erotic response to the 'husky' quality of the singing. 'Husky' is associated with throatiness and can be read as 'sexy', particularly if used about women (rather than 'hoarse' which does not have the same connotations). Aime struggled to put her response into words, using instead 'ah!', sighing breathily and intimating a short time of arousal, 'that moment'. The use of 'fairytale' with Aime's narration of the story, which presents it as an encounter like love at first sight, relying on magical synchronicity, work within a discourse of romance language. Furthermore 'fairytale' is reminiscent of the way in which Aime also used 'adventure' and so bolsters the sense of Aime's musical experience with Avenged Sevenfold as a romantic one.

Although Aime's story-telling might well work to bolster the myth of the groupie by ascribing a romantic relationship to her attitude towards the band, I do think her response is more interesting than that. It is important to recall her comments about her attraction to the music that I discussed in the previous chapter. Aime's love for Avenged Sevenfold is not as 'straightforward' as a passion for particular band members, rather it is a relationship with the music *and* how she imagines the musicians. It is a complex affection that intertwines her intellectual musical pleasure with her erotic musical pleasure and with her imaginative thoughts about the band.

Upheaval at the pop/rock divide

As discussed above, many of my interviewees made generalisations about pop music and its fans that contrasted the genre unfavourably with hard rock and metal music and its fans. Most did not describe the ways in which pop music and rock music can both defy their ideological construction as separate spheres. Yet although the women tended to be invested in the notion of difference between rock and pop, ambiguity remained in delineating that difference. Thus the rock/pop dichotomy impacted on their thinking in some ways, but not in others. For instance, Gwen insisted that she rarely knew the name of songs or the bands who were singing them, thereby showing little interest in the accumulation of band-related knowledge so important for demonstrating 'real' fandom. Nor was she uncomfortable about this lack of cultural knowledge. Similarly Dolly carelessly swept aside any pretensions to putting the music first by responding to my question of what she liked about Lostprophets: 'the hair' (Dolly). Dolly would have been very aware of the ideology of rock and pop, having been a rock fan for a number of years. For me her willingness to be honest about what she liked was very refreshing and her straightforward response quite delightful.

Two women, Alexa and Aime, both spoke of their passion for pop singers (Adam Lambert and Britney Spears respectively) and acknowledged how this was unusual. Alexa said she felt slightly guilty about her passion for Adam Lambert and I asked why. She responded:

I don't know, I think it's just because, with him being erm, like an *American Idol* runner up and loads of people are like, 'oh it's all manufactured and it's not real music, it's just processed'. I think that's the problem with it that a lot of people have, but I think he is actually one [of] the few that has defended his position and he is quite unique and original from it and he does actually sing live and put on a good show [laughs]. (Alexa)

Alexa answered with a tentative comment clause, 'I don't know, I think' and she began to answer with factual reasons ('American Idol runner up'). She then moved with the subjunct 'loads' and the unspecific 'people' to direct reported speech. The use of 'people' implied that this speech came not from a specific source, but was an imagined response. It was perhaps based on some conversations she had had, or possibly, and indicated by her 'I think', generated by her own understanding of the ideology of hard rock and metal. The terms in the reported speech very much fit in with ideas of a rock/pop divide ('manufactured', 'not real', 'processed') and Alexa summed up that it was these set ideas that others have that caused her guilt: 'I think that's the problem'. In acknowledging these criticisms of Adam Lambert Alexa deftly positioned herself outside of such concerns. Her defence of the singer may in some ways have paid homage to ideas about what 'counts'

as authentic music ('unique', 'original', 'sing live') but Lambert remains a pop musician. In openly discussing her love for his music and in challenging stereotypes about pop she shook the divide between pop and rock. Perhaps not to its foundations, but certainly with the effect of worrying its 'truth' claims.

For Aime, also, liking hard rock and metal *and* pop was not always easy:

You don't often find someone like me [...] who, I like such a massive group of bands and different types of music and stuff like that and I suppose I'm just a part of a lot of communities in a way, depending on who I'm going to see. Avenged Sevenfold it's all moshers and then I like erm Britney Spears. I love Britney Spears, I got her album on my phone and [My Chemical Romance] and then both get criticism and I'm like 'oh I feel bad now!' but I like the bands or the singers so they can get over it. (Aime)

She posited herself as unusual and explained that a wide range of eclectic tastes marked out her out as different. 'You' implied anyone would find her odd and the following, 'don't often find', suggested one would have to look hard for someone as unusual as Aime. When she said she liked 'such a massive group of bands' it was unclear how many bands and 'different types of music' she meant, but her emphasis on both implied that she understood her wide tastes as out of the ordinary. In 'stuff like that' she was rather vague, and this was compounded by the fact that the examples she gave were not that different: they were all popular music in the pop/rock sense (she did not mention genres such as jazz, classical or folk). Nevertheless, to her and within her peer group, Aime's taste was clearly unusual. In her tentative comment clause 'I suppose', she thought about her position, implying that it was not fixed. This was further suggested by the use of a 'lot of communities'. 'Communities' connotes warmth, friendliness, a sense of togetherness and unity; however, 'a lot' signified that Aime saw herself shifting between them. 'Depending on who I'm with' continued this theme by indicating Aime had a fluid identity which was linked to her friendships and associations. Like her wide-ranging musical preference, this fluidity was used as a mark of her difference. When she described Avenged Sevenfold as 'it's all moshers' they are described as having fixed identities as 'moshers', whilst 'all' suggested that there was no room for individual differences between them.

Her 'erm' implied some tentativeness about naming Britney Spears, but then she announced confidently that 'I love Britney Spears'. As an exemplum of her passion she added that she had 'got her album on my phone'. She carried her phone with her everywhere, so this indicated that the album was always available to listen to. This reminded her that she also had a My Chemical Romance album on her phone, and also the way in which both bands were critiqued by her friends the 'moshers'. She used a

direct reported exclamation, 'Oh I feel bad now!' to express how this made her feel, although 'bad' is not specifically defined. Did she feel hurt by friends' criticism, or guilt or shame for liking the 'wrong' bands? It was unclear. However, when Aime found that others could not understand her genre-crossing, she employed a rock 'n' roll 'fuck you' non-conforming attitude to fend off criticism and bolster her wavering self-esteem. So whilst she enjoyed music from the 'wrong' genre, the 'right' attitude made sense of her tastes.

These young women transgressed the boundaries of rock and pop so that they were able to enjoy the music they chose. In the early 2000s a number of letters to *Kerrang!* would contain an ethos of 'just like what you like', meaning that one should not feel bounded by genre classifications and one should feel able to enjoy any music. This worked within a framework of authenticity and equality in which being true to musical taste was valued whilst equality translated into respecting other fans. In practice, however, the letters pages demonstrated numerous occasions when fans *did* denounce other fans for genre-crossing musical pleasures. These squabbles over preference and genre work to reinforce the myth of authenticity because ultimately enjoying pop music marks out a hard rock and metal fan as not really an authentic fan. That these women broke through the anti-pop prejudice was remarkable and indicates the straitjacket that the ideology of hard rock and metal places fans in, particularly women fans who are more in need of proving their fandom. For a woman hard rock and metal fan to admit to enjoying pop music was to lay herself open to criticism from other fans. In speaking openly and without (much) shame about their preferences, Aime and Alexa challenged the myth of authenticity.

Conclusion

Coates describes herself as experiencing false consciousness in her Rolling Stones fandom, an assertion that Fast finds problematic. In this chapter I have shown that women's fandom cannot be reduced to understandings of women hard rock and metal fans as cowed by the music or as 'betraying' women or feminism. In moving beyond simplistic readings of women's fandom as investment in their own subjugation it is clear that the concept of ideology can only take us so far in our understandings of how culture impacts upon us. Deeper consideration of women's pleasure in hard rock and metal music is a vital component in challenging the myths of the genre. Kahn-Harris notes that extreme metal fans, when describing or explaining their love of the music, use language that is limited by the scene itself. I too find that amongst women fans, the use of language that fits neatly within the ideology of the genre *is* prominent in their descriptions of their musical pleasure. This language emphasises aspects of the music that are allied to the myths I identified in *Kerrang!*'s letters pages: the myth of the warrior and the myth of authenticity. Terms such as 'fierce' and 'heavy', the emphasis on noisy electric guitar, the love of virtuosity and musical ability, and the comparisons to pop music which stressed

hard rock and metal's authenticity against pop's manufacturedness, all position hard rock and metal pleasures as ones which fall within that ideology. Such terminology is intrinsic in the way in which hard rock and metal music is understood as symbolically masculine. When particular qualities are ascribed a gender, the male dominance of the genre is maintained via the reification of male-associated qualities and the denigration of those linked to femininity. The result is the alienation and exclusion of women from the genre and the presumption of an underlying male norm for musicians and for 'real fans'. When only these 'masculine' qualities are taken into account, metal appears to be 'naturally' associated with men; this is evident in Vasan's unease and questioning of why women should be interested and in Kahn-Harris' assumption of a male fan model as normal.

However, where for Kahn-Harris' interviewees the language was restricted to 'negative' terms around brutality, anger and violence, my interviewees' language was not limited by these conventions. Where he describes the fans as inarticulate, I found that my interviewees were able to extend their descriptive lexicon beyond those conventions in unusual and persuasive ways. Descriptions of the music as beautiful, as allowing transcendence and the opening of the mind, interpretations of musical performances as joyous, and feelings of companionship between musicians and fans all challenge notions of hard rock and metal fandom as a reification of warrior masculinity. Moreover the pop fandom of some women undermines the rigid boundaries and assumptions that underpin the myth of authenticity. My participants' expressions move our understanding away from a strict notion of the genre as 'masculine' because they highlight how pleasure is also found in aspects of the music that are not associated with masculinity, and some of which are linked to what is considered feminine. This wider consideration of women's pleasure in the music draws attention to the fact that when qualities are ascribed a gender this is a social process: the qualities that are associated with masculinity are not 'essentially' masculine (and similarly those linked to femininity are not 'essentially' feminine). Therefore when hard rock and metal is thought of as masculine this is the result of constructed understandings of gender, not the cardinal qualities of the music. The importance of considering these elements, therefore, is not just a matter of giving a fuller picture to women's rock and metal pleasure. It is necessary in order to challenge the orthodoxy of the genre as masculine and therefore the naturalised hierarchy that places men upon the stage and in the position of the 'real fan' whilst women are relegated to the subordinate role of the groupie.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

Introduction

I began this thesis by reflecting upon my own experience as a woman rock music fan. I explained how rock music media rarely felt as if it was written for me, how representations of women within those media had felt to me to reinforce assumptions about rock as a genre for men. I described how this kind of representation had impacted upon me and my own fandom, causing me to avoid my demeaned feminine status by becoming a musician and by disavowing any attractions to musicians I had. I also explored my own ambivalence about being a feminist and loving music that seemed to purposefully exclude me as a listener. These personal motivations informed the research questions that underpin this thesis:

1. How are women fans represented in the rock media?
2. How does this representation impact upon women fans?
3. In what other ways can we understand women's rock fandom?
4. How do these new ways of understanding women's fandom change common sense ideas of rock as a masculine genre?

I was inspired by the work of Wise and Fast, who argued that the portrayal of rock as a solely masculine genre was the work of a media with an agenda to create male fantasy figures for emulation (Wise 1984, 392; Fast 1999, 247). These representations did not reflect Wise's experiences, nor Fast's, and they did not mirror my own fandom. With these crucial challenges and reflections in mind I set out to explore how rock *means* for women fans and what this meaning can tell us about how women understand rock music, and about rock music itself. In order to do this I undertook a study of *Kerrang!* as part of the hard rock and metal media, and also of women's accounts of their fandom. I examined these within my innovative framework of imaginary community (Chapter Two) and by invoking a method which drew on concepts of ideology (Chapter Three). In Chapter Four I examined how *Kerrang!* communicates messages about the imaginary community and about women fans in particular. In Chapter Five I placed the words of my interviewees in discussion with the media representation of women to examine how the portrayal impacts upon women fans. Chapter Six turned to the ways in which my interviewees described the music they loved in terms that in some ways derived from the ideology of the genre, and in some ways did not, in order to rethink what kinds of pleasure they took in hard rock and metal fandom. In this final chapter I pull together the strands of the study in an attempt to answer my research questions. I argue that women hard rock and metal fans are represented as groupies and that this depiction impacts upon them by necessitating

careful negotiation of their sexual desires as part of their fandom. I further argue that closer consideration of women's musical appreciation – the pleasure they derive from their favourite bands – exposes the way in which the understanding of hard rock and metal as a masculine genre is restrictive and neglectful of other pleasurable meanings. I also contend that using ideology as a methodological framework, in tangent with the concept of the imaginary community, has allowed for a closer examination of the gendering of metal, in three key ways: (one) how the genre is represented as 'naturally' masculine; (two) how that masculinity is used to undermine women's position as fans; and (three) how the representation does not match up to women's experiences. Some difficulties around ideology remain, as I will discuss, but I hope that the concept of imaginary community will prove useful for other scholars of popular music fans.

In this, my concluding chapter, I first synthesise the main findings of the thesis as they correspond to my research questions; secondly, I consider the theoretical implications of the concept of ideology, and I reflect upon the limitations of the work; finally I engage with the position of this thesis in the new field of metal studies and outline the areas of further research that the study and its methodology indicate.

Synthesis of findings

Imagining the community: how are women fans represented in the rock media?

Although Davies (2001) maintains that women fans are represented in particular ways by the rock press, i.e. as groupies and as teenyboppers, she provides only a general overview without examples. In this chapter I set out to provide detailed analysis of the rock media to determine to what extent Davies was right, and, if she was, to unify the argument about the representation of women. Davies considers four aspects of the media's portrayal of female fans (teenyboppers, groupies, subcultures and 'serious music' fans), but these are not consistently presented as individual vignettes. The first two are, but the second two are discussions of groups in which women are involved that feed into the first two (the figures of the groupie and the teenybopper), thereby adding further evidence for her argument about the two figures. Without a systematic analysis of the rock media's representation of women fans we are unable to make solid claims about why it is important to consider women fans in distinction from more general studies of fans. Nor is it possible to examine the impact of such media portrayals upon women fans and on understandings of the genre. An empirical study was therefore necessary, and in this thesis my undertaking of such a study forms one of my original contributions to knowledge about the representation of women in the music media.

In Chapter Four I presented my analysis of *Kerrang!* with regards to its representation of women and also to elements of the letters pages which did not immediately seem to relate

to the portrayal of women fans. In analysing the magazine's letters pages I used ideology as a methodology, following Hartsock's recommendation that it can work as 'an epistemological tool for understanding and opposing all forms of domination' (Hartsock 1983, 283), allowing me 'a particular and privileged vantage point on male supremacy' (Hartsock 1983, 284). Understanding hard rock and metal fans as imagining themselves to exist as part of a community of other fans (incorporating musicians and other industry workers) was essential for bringing forward the ways in which the ideology represented by *Kerrang!* makes certain claims about 'community' whilst simultaneously and surreptitiously upholding contradictory ideas and values. Drawing on Barthes' *Mythologies*, the method of myth-reading enabled me to identify the ideas that the magazine put forward as qualities of the community valued by fans. It also permitted the consideration of the ways in which these qualities were undermined by other ideas.

I found that the magazine presented fans as invested in ideas about the equality of all community members, based on the similarity of musical taste. This was achieved through photographs of fans meeting musicians, through the positioning of the letters pages, and via letters declaring that hard rock and metal lovers do not discriminate on grounds of sex, race, ability, etc. Nevertheless, the letters pages were full of examples of incidents in which equality was *not* afforded to all members. Furthermore the photographs showing meetings of fans and musicians, whilst ostensibly representing musicians and fans as on the same level, stood for exactly the opposite: the presence of the photographs signified that musicians *do* have higher status than fans.

The letters pages' claims about what counts as hard rock and metal are strongly aligned with the symbolic divide between rock and pop that fashions rock as an authentic genre. The authenticity of the imaginary community was repeatedly reinforced by design elements such as the use of realism; through the photographs of musicians in ordinary hard rock and metal fashions and photographed in ways that suggested that they were not posing for the camera, that they had been caught unawares; and in the letters that condemned pop music and less heavy subgenres (emo in particular) in order to reify hard rock and metal. The rock/pop divide and ideas about authenticity rely upon understandings of pop and the mainstream as feminised. The defence of the genre on such grounds, therefore, is a resistance to infiltration from feminine elements in order to protect the masculinity of the genre. This need for maintaining hard rock and metal as 'authentic', in spite of evidence that it is in many ways as much 'manufactured' as pop (see, for example, Frith 1983), shows that the genre's 'authenticity' is fabricated.

I outlined the ways in which these two myths were supported by the depiction of different roles for men and women. These roles were represented through the photographs: women were almost always portrayed as fans, and very rarely as musicians; men were

depicted as both fans and musicians, but most commonly as musicians. Furthermore, the styles of the photographs of musicians (clothing, posture, expression, accessories) signified musicians as warriors. This representation was enhanced by the designs of the pages, which connoted war, death and danger. Thus a particular kind of masculinity was fashioned for the musicians, constructing them as exclusively male, white and warrior-like. The idea of musicians as warriors develops the myth of authenticity to uphold the masculinity of the genre. This masculinity is reinforced by the representation of women as the complement of warrior-musicians.

Women are portrayed as the complements of male musicians through the many photographs of women meeting (male) musicians and via their letters which express admiration for and defence of musicians. The photographs depict women as fans and almost always smiling, smaller than the musicians and in close physical proximity to them, often touching. These images sat alongside letters from women fans that demonstrated desire for intimate relationships with musicians, and that defended the reputations of the musicians. Women musicians were photographed in positions, make up and clothing that were reminiscent of the representations of women as heterosexually attractive in other cultural portrayals, such as film actresses and models. These photographs seemed, therefore, to have been placed upon the page for the male readers' pleasure. The photographs of women fans and musicians alongside the letters signified that women are represented in *Kerrang!* as a second class of fans, a sexualised group who are the ever-ready sexual partners of male musicians. The way that the community is imagined with a division based upon gender fundamentally confutes the imagined equality of the genre: it means that women's fandom is assessed as of a lesser quality and based on sexual desire rather than on musical engagement.

The representation of women in *Kerrang!* does, therefore, correspond to Davies' assessment of the rock media's portrayal of groupies, but I did not find that the magazine portrayed them as teenyboppers. 'Groupies' was quite enough! I argued that the portrayal of women fans as groupies is damaging because it entails a prescribed role for women in which they are expected to be willing to engage in sexual activity with musicians. It also ignores any passionate engagement with the music that women may have, in favour of a one-dimensional assessment of their sexual desires and a guess, based on stereotypes, of the motivations for their fandom. The representation of women's fandom relies upon ideas about women as guided by their bodies, and unable to make reasoned judgements: it is based upon ideas about women as distinct from men and relies upon the discredited mind/body man/woman binary.

As mentioned above, Fast and Wise argue that the stories told about rock are dominated by men (Wise 1984, 392; Fast 1999, 247). Wise quotes a number of male journalists who

are writing retrospectively about the impact of Elvis on sexual mores in the 1950s. Fast refers to Frith and McRobbie's 1978 article on cock rock, and journalistic writing of Jon Savage in *Facing the Music* and Reynolds and Press in *The Sex Revolts* (Fast 1999, 249-253) that encodes Led Zeppelin with rampant and misogynistic masculinity. I think it is clear from my chapter on *Kerrang!* that, where women are represented as groupies, men as warriors, and the community of hard rock and metal as authentic and equal, the genre is vividly portrayed as one that is thoroughly masculine. This is accomplished through the diminishing of anything feminine (what Walser would call the 'exscription' of the feminine [Walser 1993, 110]), including women fans. By representing women fans as adjuncts whose primary value is sexual, the genre's dominant symbolic gender is maintained.

Encountering the myth of the groupie: how does this representation impact upon women fans?

Women are, thus, represented in *Kerrang!* as sexual participants rather than as music lovers and this creates a sense of the hard rock and metal genre as exclusively made for and important to men. As Wise argues, this kind of male-generated knowledge about the meanings of rock is only a partial account, but it is presented as 'an objective account of the world as it truly is' (Wise 1984, 396). Indeed, this is how Barthes argues that myth works: it applies particular meanings to things and presents them as common sense or natural (Barthes 2009). Feminists, argues Wise, ought to be bringing these orthodoxies into dialogue with 'personal and subjective experiences' (Wise 1984, 391) and asking questions of how 'true' those accepted accounts are. Once I had identified the ways in which *Kerrang!* imagined the hard rock and metal community, and women's place in it in particular, it was clear that I needed to foreground women's experiences in order to question the masculinity of the genre. In Chapter Five, therefore, I investigated the impact of the myth of the groupie upon women's views of their fandom. This is an area of study that has not been explicitly explored and so in my investigation I contribute further original knowledge to the area of women's fandom.

Using discourse analysis I analysed my interviewees' descriptions of their feelings about the groupie stereotype and also how they felt about potentially meeting their preferred musicians. I found that none of the women viewed themselves as groupies. *Kerrang!*'s representation, therefore, stood in stark contrast to women's experiences of their own fandom. Furthermore, many of them were critical of the way in which the concept of the groupie was read onto female fans, whilst still others attacked the underlying sexism and implicit controlling of women's sexuality that underpinned the concept. Some of the younger women I spoke to sought to redefine the term, but even this was a knowing attempt to rebut the hostility and malevolence that the figure of the groupie received at the hands of the media. The impact of the myth was apparent in the ways in which the women

talked about their own fandom and their own sexuality in relation to the music, musicians and other fans. Some took care to place engagement with the music as the most precious kind of fandom, and in doing so gave their own fandom this quality. Others protected their reputations as fans and *not* groupies: they stated that they would not wish to meet their favourite musicians or bands because they could not trust the performers' reactions. And some settled on a preference for bands who either actively spoke out against rock's sexism, or who were led by a woman. Although the majority of the women I spoke to did not wish to be associated with the figure of the groupie and took steps to avoid such a link, some women did talk happily to me about their attractions to musicians and to the warrior aesthetic itself. Furthermore, one woman described her passion for her favoured band in ways that meant her musical pleasure could not be extricated from her sensual desire, and vice versa.

These women did not describe experiences of sexual encounters with musicians. *Kerrang!*'s representation of women fans, therefore, did not reflect their feelings about their own fandom. Yet that did not mean that their fandom was entirely based on intellectual musical appreciation: they also found pleasure in their sexual attractions to musicians. When music fandom is based only on the sound of the songs, a model of fandom that excludes other sensual experiences and also underplays hearing as a bodily sense is evoked. This kind of musical pleasure relies upon binary thinking that demeans the body and sensual pleasure, in order to raise up the mind and spiritual pleasures, a dichotomy that through association elevates 'male' ways of knowing. This chapter is therefore part of a much broader feminist argument about the inherent problem of dualistic thinking that subordinates women. The desire that my interviewees spoke of must not be dismissed as the 'wrong' kind of fandom. I argued that we need to take seriously the ways in which women's fandom is a more multi-faceted sensual experience, and that to think of musical pleasure as only intellectual is a limited understanding. By valuing women's erotic musical pleasure as well as their intellectual pleasure this dichotomy can be blurred.

Masculine pleasure?: in what other ways can we understand women's rock fandom?

My interviewees' understandings of their fandom could not be reduced to an either/or (music/musicians) relationship: their self-representations in relation to the figure of the groupie, to meeting musicians and to their erotic and musical sensations were more complex than that. Fast argues that we need to listen carefully to fans' voices in order to 'probe' musical meanings more deeply (Fast 1999, 294), and she recommends treating fans' experiences 'more delicately' (Fast 1999, 294). My aim in Chapter Six was partly to show how subcultural and scenic accounts of music fans, in particular those of Vasan and Kahn-Harris, do not fully engage with their participants' experiences of the music. I aimed

also to draw attention to the ways in which considering musical appreciation *can* allow for more nuanced understandings of the music itself, as well as women's position as fans in the imaginary community.

Continuing my discourse analysis of the women's descriptions, I first examined the ways in which they adopted language commonly associated with the genre, and that bore close resemblance to the myths of the warrior and of authenticity. This involved analysing references to electric guitars, to the ways in which they described hard rock and metal as 'real' in contrast to 'manufactured' pop music, to the virtuosity of preferred musicians, and to the emphasis placed on serious lyrical topics. As Kahn-Harris argues (Kahn-Harris 2007, 53-4), this kind of terminology is rooted in the culture of the genre. However, I argued that in only considering these elements, ideas about the genre as 'masculine' were reinforced and women's fandom could only continue to be misunderstood as 'false consciousness' (as described by Wise 1984, 394, and Coates 1997, 51). I therefore turned to the other ways in which women described their love of favourite bands, modes that did not fit in with the received ideology of the genre. My interviewees used language that signified transcendence and transportation, where the music allowed them to feel and to think beyond the limits of their immediate surroundings. They enunciated the ways in which they felt a shared experience with musicians, as though the music was able to transmit emotions to listeners and to communicate something of the musicians directly to them. I explored the surprising way in which one fan used the language of romance to describe listening to music as a fantastical adventure and an erotic moment. Finally I discussed the ways in which the women broke out of the strictures of a rock/pop divide and found their own pathways to musical pleasure.

These kinds of depictions of hard rock and metal fandom challenged the notion of the genre as one invested in masculinity. They brought the focus to the pleasure that women find in the music they love. This enjoyment is not restricted to admiring the masculinity of the warrior myth, or to defending the stultifying myth of authenticity. Whilst some significant thrill may have been gained from those mythical aspects, they were not the only aspects of women's hard rock and metal fandom that mattered. Alongside the discussions of women's desire for musicians, these other understandings of pleasure allow us to think about musical appreciation in a more holistic sense, as it engages the intellect, the body and the imagination. Fast writes that,

It is much easier always to begin from the premise that the music and images are sexist and macho because not only is it a comforting notion that this kind of semiotic stability might exist, but it simultaneously locks out the dangerous possibility of woman as sexual and powerful. (Fast 1999, 294)

Fast's assertion, I think, partly explains why women's fandom is reduced to a sole concern with sex with musicians, and why the figure of the groupie is so maligned. When Des Barres argues that she was doing exactly what she wanted in her groupie activities, and that those actions were informed by her passion for the music *as well as* the musicians she is asserting a formidable active presence. The women I spoke to were not interested in pursuing sex with band members (although the idea of the sex itself was appealing to some), but nor were their engagements with the music limited to appreciations of intellectual masculine pleasures. Indeed what they gained from the music had more to do with giving them a sense of freedom, of companionship and of fantasy or romance.

How does this change common sense ideas of rock as a masculine genre?

In this thesis, then, I argued that women fans of hard rock and metal are not all groupies, and in fact are rarely interested in pursuing such behaviour. However, it is not my aim to present them as 'authentic' or 'real' fans. Nor am I seeking to denigrate those women who do sleep with musicians or may consider themselves groupies. What I am attacking is the way in which the ideology of the genre is set up to exclude and diminish women, even whilst it creates a sense of a community held together by the equality of musical taste. This equality is clearly a myth. However that does not mean that women *are* always excluded. Indeed even whilst the hard rock and metal media portray women as having only one kind of fandom that is rooted in desire for the person of the musicians, women's actual engagement with the genre is much more complex. It involves both expected kinds of engagement, such as those that fit in with understandings of the genre as masculine or that are associated with the groupie (sexual desire), but also unexpected engagements where the emphasis is moved to a more imaginative sphere of shared emotion, of travel in the mind and of friendship with the performers. By exploring these elements of women's fandom we can begin to re-read hard rock and metal as a genre that has something to offer women fans, that is not a music only concerned with male fans and promoting masculinity.

My interviewees *did* use language that is embedded in the myths communicated by *Kerrang!*. This language has a part to play in shoring up understandings of the genre as 'naturally' masculine because it reinforces the myths. However, the women also expressed themselves in ways that went beyond the ideologically expected terminology and that showed up those understandings of the genre as masculine as inadequate: there is much more to women's musical pleasure than those elements. This new consideration highlights how calling the genre 'masculine' is meaningless and misjudged because it relies on strict ideas of what masculinity and femininity are: gender is socially ascribed. The community's male dominance and denigration of the feminine are maintained when gendered meanings are ascribed to musical qualities, instruments and ways of enjoying.

Furthermore the music has many meanings which go beyond those that have been called 'masculine', including some which are labelled 'feminine'. If only the 'masculine' qualities are considered (as in the work of Kahn-Harris and Vasan) women are not imagined as full participants in the community, nor are they seen as engaging with the music in ways worthy of being taken seriously. Their fandom can only be read as existing against the grain, as breaking boundaries by listening to 'men's' music. They are always to be considered exceptional and their presence questionable. In this sense women can never be perceived as hard rock and metal fans in the same ways as men because they are always only transgressive and listening in spite of their gender. Fast and Wise argue that to understand women's pleasure in rock music we need to rethink the orthodoxy that hears the genre as 'masculine'. We need to consider the ambiguities in women's fandom: without doing this, 'male ideas' about rock music are left unchallenged (Wise 1984, 397-8). I hope that here I have succeeded in rethinking understandings of hard rock and metal as a masculine genre to enable a more sophisticated understanding of women's fandom, and of the musical genre of hard rock and heavy metal itself. The genre is not quintessentially masculine: it is much more interesting than that.

Theoretical implications and limitations

Ideology and myths

The use of ideology as a method for getting 'underneath' the representation of community and gender in *Kerrang!* has proven very useful. It has allowed for detailed analysis of the ways in which the magazine works to maintain a sense of the genre as masculine. This was aided by the use of the tool of myth-reading which enabled me to draw defined pictures of the community and gender as imagined by *Kerrang!*. Defining myths, however, was a precarious employ. In order to establish the dominant messages, much of the other detail of *Kerrang!* needed to be put to one side. Whilst looking at the dominant messages presented by the magazine, it was necessary to ignore the ways in which letters and photographs did not fit the hegemonic story. This meant that letters that outright challenged ideas of the community as one that was equal, for example, have been omitted (although I have discussed some of them elsewhere: see Hill 2011). Also women's very spirited arguments on the benefits of My Chemical Romance fandom, in the face of vituperative condemnation from the mainstream press, do not receive as much attention as I would have wished. These are certainly areas that would provide richness for further studies, and so in this sense the method of myth-reading has limited the focus of my analysis.

Ideology was not so constructive for engaging with women's discussions of hard rock and metal music, particularly when it came to descriptions of pleasure. Stanley's assertion that we need to consider the ways in which ideologies are lived within (Stanley 1992, 3) is not

such an easy project. I intended to show in the two chapters (Four and Five) that deal with women's language about their hard rock and metal fandom how the ideology of the imaginary community is lived within and without, but I would have liked to have been able to draw further conclusions from this detail. For example, what can be said about the ideology of the genre if a number of fans reject it? In what sense is that rejection a thoughtful and active process or is it a more 'instinctive' choice? When women do employ the language of the ideology does this mean that they support the ways in which it excludes women (*are they complicit*)? These are questions that remain for me and would be interesting for further study, but that there are still areas of curiosity does not mean that ideology is not a useful method. The way in which it enabled me to excavate the genre's gender politics (although not an easy process) is, I argue, evidence of the efficacy of the concept.

Semi-structured interviews, discourse analysis

On the whole the semi-structuring of the interviews worked well: it created a sense of conversations flowing between two music fans, and this helped to put participants at ease. One limitation, however, only became apparent after transcription as I began to code the interviews. This was that because the interviews had been fairly free-flowing, I had not been consistent in the ways I phrased questions and some questions had been forgotten or purposefully omitted (for example, I did not ask Kimberley about groupies for fear of offending her). This was particularly problematic when I came to assess the impact of the groupie myth upon women's musical ambitions: I just did not have enough data to draw on because I had omitted to ask a number of my interviewees about it. This missing information about musical ability and ambition was a disappointment and certainly an area I think would be valuable for further study. In future research I will consider more structured interviews in order to avoid the omission of questions. Discourse analysis, however, was a fruitful analytic approach, providing very rich pictures of women's fandom both in terms of content and emotion. I was able to assess a number of facets of my interviewees' fannish lives and to draw out both how they felt about the music and the 'community': I was able to get some sense of the pleasure that they gained from the music.

Nicola Allett's 2010 working papers on how to use music 'elicitation' to draw out people's relationships with music were too late for me to be able to use her example methodology. Her approach is, I think, exactly the kind of direction that would have been useful in my research. It became clear to me as I was writing Chapter Six that a more involved method – such as the shared listenings Allett recommends – would have been a valuable mode of eliciting immediate and passionate responses to the music.

The framework of imaginary community

In the second chapter I outlined a new conceptual framework within which to study women fans as group, and to replace previous concepts such as 'subculture', 'scene' and 'fans'. With regards the discussion of the way in which *Kerrang!* represents fans on its letters pages, this framework was apposite. It worked to express the way in which fans discussed a sense of community, the qualities and values of that community, and where they fitted in relation to it. Moreover it also allowed me to draw attention, through myth-reading, to the ways in which the community did not 'work' in the ways it was posited to. In analysing women's discussions of groupies this sense of what was imagined to be happening in other people's lives and minds also proved to be a valuable concept that enabled sharp analysis of the nuanced ways in which my interviewees described their experiences. Furthermore, when it came to analysing the ways in which the women described 'heavy metal' and why they liked their favourite bands, it was evident that their descriptions of the genre used terms that were appropriate to the way in which they imagined the community more generally. When it came to their own fandom, these qualities held as important were less crucial for their own pleasure. 'Imaginary community', then, has turned out to be a concept that provides space for acknowledging the ways in which women imagined the community, their depictions of their place within it, and their relationships with the music. As a concept I hope it will also prove useful to other scholars seeking to explore the relationships between fans and popular music and between individuals and unnamed others who like similar music.

Other limitations

This thesis could have been more embedded in research on sexuality, although it would have been then a different thesis. This is not a study of sexuality, per se, but further attention to this area would have enabled deeper analysis and closer engagement with the ways in which women are positioned as heterosexual. It is a shame that my sample of women fans did not include any women who claimed a lesbian, bisexual, queer or asexual identity. These would surely have led me to draw interesting conclusions about the way in which the ideology of hard rock and metal heterosexualises women fans. However, research being carried out by Amber R. Clifford-Napoleone will hopefully add to this important area of study. I would have liked, too, to have been able to draw some conclusions about class: since class is a contested area in metal studies, being able to say something more about the differences and similarities of music fandom based on class would have been a valuable addition to the literature on metal fandom. In actuality, in this research there were few differences between women's depictions of their fandom that noticeably correlated to class that it could be argued that for my interviewees music fandom is a similar experience in spite of whether the woman listening is working or

middle class. However, further research that explores the issue and definitions of class would really be needed to make any claims with full certainty. Similarly race, I feel certain now, *ought* to have been given more attention when I was planning the research and finding participants. This thesis can only make claims about white women's experiences. Race is an area that needs further investigation, particularly as hard rock and metal in the UK is a white-dominated genre. In order to discuss the topic of race in hard rock and metal I am organising a symposium on the subject with Dr Caroline Lucas and Gabrielle Riches. We hope this will illuminate where research is being carried out and where more attention is needed.

The field of metal studies and areas for further research

My aim in 2006 as I started this research was to fill a gap in the knowledge about representations of women's rock fandom and to counter derogatory representations from the rock media and unspecified feminist sources. Since women's pleasure in rock music was rarely explored in depth elsewhere, the primary objective was to consider the ways in which the music moved women. Since 2006 metal studies has arisen as a new international field of study with conferences being held in Europe and the USA, and research being undertaken in Australasia, Asia, North and South America and also Europe and the Middle East. I am aware of European and North American scholars undertaking studies of metal in Africa and am sure it is only a matter of time before African scholars too enter the field. This is therefore an exhilarating time to be writing about hard rock and metal, and my research is in the vanguard of writing about women's fandom. Excitingly there is other research discussing other niches of women's fandom, as I have discussed here (for example, Vasan 2010, 2011; Riches 2011; Patterson 2011, 2013). However there is still work to be done on exploring the enjoyment of the music itself. This study feels like it is just at the beginning of such an endeavour. It contributes to the field of metal studies by building upon Andy R. Brown's research on the metal media and *Kerrang!* in particular. Where Brown argues that the magazine adopts the aural aesthetics of the genre in a visual form, but provides little empirical analysis (2007), I have delivered detailed analyses over a particular time frame. This deepens our understanding of how the metal media seek to root themselves within the culture and to provide a forum that fans will consider 'authentic'. This research is also part of a movement by feminist metal scholars to seek to understand the pleasures and emotions associated with metal fandom. I refer particularly to work by Rosemary Overell on the emotional impact of grindcore (Overell 2010, 2011), and Gabrielle Riches on women's participation in the moshpit (Riches 2011). This area is only just beginning to open up and my study indicates that more research into the pleasures afforded by music is vital. Hesmondhalgh argues that in order to give a 'richer account of the role of culture in people's lives' understanding the emotional experience of music is a much needed area of study (Hesmondhalgh 2012,

366). This thesis is part of the movement that Hesmondhalgh calls for and indicates that there is yet much to learn about emotional engagement with music. What Hesmondhalgh does not consider, I think, is the ways in which music appreciation is not limited to an aural experience, but can also include other sensual and imaginative encounters. This is an area that will benefit from more serious consideration to ensure that such a project does not become mired in gendered assumptions about what it means to be a fan that result in the reification of the masculine model of fandom.

I also situate the study alongside feminist writings on rock music. I build particularly upon Wise's reflection on her fandom of Elvis Presley (1984), to further engage with the subject of women's different experience of being a rock music fan. Wise's article is now nearly 30 years old, but the challenge she poses remains largely unmet. I have sought to show both how the genre is positioned as masculine, and also how women's experiences tell a different story about the gender of the genre. Fast's work on Led Zeppelin goes further than Wise in detailing the experiences of a wide range of fans as well as reflecting on her own experience. My work broadens this perspective by considering a range of subgenres and by making a distinction between the kinds of language women used (what fell in line with mythical representations of the genre and what did not). What I have not done is taken Fast's model of interviewing both woman and men; an important area for further study would be to speak to men to understand their experiences of the music, for comparative purposes. Do they too make connections to particular musicians? Are feelings of transcendence equally present? Do they also step outside language that is associated with warriors and authenticity?

Discussing how women feel about the myth of the groupie is here just a beginning. I have drawn upon the brief attention given by Davies and Schippers, and much more work is needed to explore the matter in detail. Important questions remain around the ways in which women fans' sexuality is structured around their musical taste. Furthermore, it is a great disappointment to me that I have not had enough room to consider the ways in which my interviewees talked about sexism from male metal fans and in mainstream venues. A chapter's worth of material was written and very reluctantly discarded. In brief, the majority of the participants described metal clubs and concerts as places where they felt safer from harassment from men than non-metal clubs and concerts. These were not straightforwardly unsexist, however, and a number of the women also talked about hard rock and metal-loving men being more 'chivalrous'. Questions remain, therefore, over how the ideological masculinity of the genre translates into gendered experiences when interacting with the hard rock and metal media and with other fans. I hope to produce a journal article that considers this question, as it is an important aspect of women's fandom that ought not to be too long neglected.

Some personal reflections

I did not set out to write a thesis about the groupie stereotype. I intended to assert that women were more interested in musical pleasures than usually given credit for in the hard rock and metal media. The rocky path has taken me on a different route, so that my initial intuition that women's fandom needed *authenticating* clearly became a contradictory and downright *bad* idea. It was a surprise to me to unlock my feelings of passion for musicians, some long hidden, and to allow myself to believe it was okay. So when I found myself five feet from Justin Hawkins at Fibbers music venue in York and my knees gave way it was with a rush of delight to be able to enjoy the experience instead of pretending it was not happening! Despite the difficulties of the thesis' production, which I discussed in Chapter Three, creating this thesis has been a labour of love, for rock music and for my fellow female fans. Taking women music lovers seriously is long overdue and I hope I have been able to address some of their attentions to the music and well as their concerns about the stereotyping of women fans. This second matter is clearly of great importance to women who love rock, as Patti said recently to me, 'I don't want to come across as some cock-hungry groupie' (Patti). I hope this thesis will go some way to initiating changes in the way we think about women's relationships with music and musicians so that Patti no longer has to worry about whether it is a good idea to mention her attraction to Claudio Sanchez.

Appendix A: Ethics Form

Centre for Women's Studies

Graduate Student Research Ethics form

Section 1, for completion by the student

Students should complete this form after discussion with their supervisor(s)^{69[1]} and submit it to Harriet Badger for checking by their supervisor and CWS Ethics committee.

Name: Rosemary Hill

Supervisor: Dr. Ann Kaloski-Naylor

Degree for which registered: PhD Women's Studies

Provisional title of dissertation/thesis

Women metal fans' experiences of fandom and the metal community

Give 300 word description of research project in the space below, covering aims, scope and methodology in the space below.

This thesis poses the question: how do women heavy metal fans experience their fandom? Heavy metal music and its fan community have hitherto been renowned in academic and popular discourse for being male dominated (Weinstein 2000, Gruzeliier 2007). From the mid-2000s, however, increasing numbers of women have begun reading UK metal magazine *Kerrang!* making this a fascinating time to investigate their experiences in this ultra-masculine community. My subsidiary questions are: how is women metal fans' fandom represented? How do women metal fans participate in the metal community? And how does their fandom interact with their everyday lives? To examine these questions I take a dual approach to my methodology: I offer close readings of letters pages in *Kerrang!* to assess how women fans are represented by the magazine's male editors and how the women use the public arena to represent themselves. I follow up my observations from this analysis by interviewing women who read *Kerrang!* or listen to bands featured in the magazine. The interviews will extend my textual research by assessing fans' self-representations and their portrayals of how their fandom influences them on an everyday level by eliciting stories of their interaction with family, friends and other metal fans. My main theoretical framework is anti-dichotomous and post-subculturalist, underpinned by feminist work on women music fans by theorists such as Lauraine Leblanc and Sarah Thornton. From my research so far I tentatively conclude that women are represented as defensive of their idols; that women use the letters pages to participate in the metal community, sometimes as a means to disseminate ideas to effect change in the metal community; and that women's heavy metal fandom has much further reaching impacts on family life, friendships and everyday life than has previously been theorised.

Ethics Checklist 1.

	YES	NO
1. Does the study involve human subjects	✓	
2. Does the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent (e.g. children, people with learning difficulties, people particularly vulnerable to official surveillance)?	✓	
3. Will the study require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the groups or individuals to be recruited (e.g. school students, members of support group, residents of a home or closed community)?	maybe	
4. Will the study involve the use of private archives/collections for which permission needs to be sought?		✓
5. If undertaking textual work, are you dealing with living authors or authors with living descendants?	✓	
6. Will any covert methods be necessary (e.g. observing/interacting with people without their knowledge that they are subjects of research or without their knowledge of the nature of the research)?		✓
7. Will the study involve discussion of sensitive issues (e.g. sexual practices, drug use)?		✓
8. Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?		✓
9. Will the study require additional ethics approval (e.g. if it involves the recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS) or criminal records checks (e.g. if working with children)?	✓	
10. Does the study entail meeting unknown respondents off university premises?	✓	
11. Is the study likely to require copyright clearance for the use of images, text or tables?	✓	
12. Are there any other ethical issues you consider important?		✓

If you have answered ‘yes’ to any of the above questions, please attach to the form an account of how you intend to deal with the relevant ethical issues.

Ethics Checklist 2.

I confirm that I have considered the following:	Yes	N/A
1. Responsibilities to participants	✓	
2. Responsibilities to gatekeepers	✓	
3. Responsibilities to the academic community	✓	
4. Intellectual property rights	✓	
5. Protection of data	✓	
6. My own personal safety	✓	

Signed:**Date:**

Please send the completed form and attached statement, if any, to Harriet Badger who will pass it on to your supervisor/TAP members

Section 2: To be completed by the supervisor

I confirm that the ethical issues entailed in this project have been discussed with the student and (in the case of MPhil/PhD students) with TAP members and that:

- The student has read and understood the Centre's policy on ethics and the ethical guidelines of the relevant professional bodies (ESRC, BSA, Royal Historical Society etc.)
- That having taken ethical concerns into consideration the project is viable
- The student has the skills to carry out the research
- Where relevant, procedures for recruitment and obtaining access and consent are appropriate
- Participant information sheets and consent forms, where needed, are appropriate
- Procedures for obtaining any necessary copyright permissions have been considered

Brief Comments:

Signed:

Date:

Name:

Section 3, to be completed by the CWS Ethics Committee

I confirm that this form and supporting documentation has been scrutinised by the Centre for Women's Studies Ethics Committee. The following has been agreed:

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| The project has been approved | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The project has been referred back to the student and supervisor for further consideration | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The project has been referred to the Social Science Ethics Committee | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The project requires specialist ethical clearance (e.g. NHS) | <input type="checkbox"/> |

(tick as appropriate)

If further ethical scrutiny is deemed necessary, please explain why (attach separate sheet if necessary)

Signed on behalf of the CWS Ethics Committee:

Date:

1. The study involves human subjects

Prior to the interview I will give potential participants as much information about the study that they will need to make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. This will include: that they may refuse to answer any question they are unhappy with, pause or stop the interview altogether at any point; the uses to which the data may be put: thesis, papers, articles, book; and that in the write-up they will be given pseudonyms to protect their identities. They will then sign an informed consent form which I will keep.

Difficult topics such as depression, suicide, abuse, violence, or bullying may come up. I will provide telephone numbers of helplines and support groups for participants to take up if they wish.

2. The study involves vulnerable participants: children

My study will require some interviews with teenagers. I have a CRB check for the Researchers in Residence project which I can transfer. I will also seek parental approval. I will employ two methods to find young participants and gain parental approval. One will be to speak to parents of teenagers first, tell them about the research, ask if they would permit me to speak to their child and if they think their child would be interested in being interviewed. Two will be to discuss the research generally with young people in a school whilst being a researcher in the Researchers in Residence programme, and sending home a consent form for parents to sign with interested teenagers. On the forms' return I will arrange interviews.

Given young people's positions as being under authority most of the time, it will be doubly important to reassure them that they need only answer questions they feel comfortable with, and that they need not tell me anything they do not want to.

3. The study may require the co-operation of gatekeepers for initial access to young people.

If I am unable to find participants at concerts or via Researchers in Residence it may be necessary to approach my old high school for assistance. In this case I would speak to the head of sixth form, with whom I am on good terms, give him as much information about the study as possible and request his assistance in finding participants. I will approach him initially by letter, sending with it as much information as I think he will need to make an informed decision, then make an appointment to discuss any areas of concern he may have and how participants will be found. I will also discuss how to make my work accessible to the participants.

5. I am undertaking textual work and the authors are living

The authors of the letters are living, but rarely provide enough information for them to be identified. I will not (knowingly!) approach any authors or their descendants.

9. The study will require additional ethics approval: a CRB check

Transferred from Researchers In Residence.

10. The study entails meeting unknown respondents off university premises.

To ensure my own safety and to reassure the participant, I will meet interviewees in public places such as a café, pub (in the case of older participants) or library.

11. Is the study likely to require copyright clearance for the use of images, text or tables?

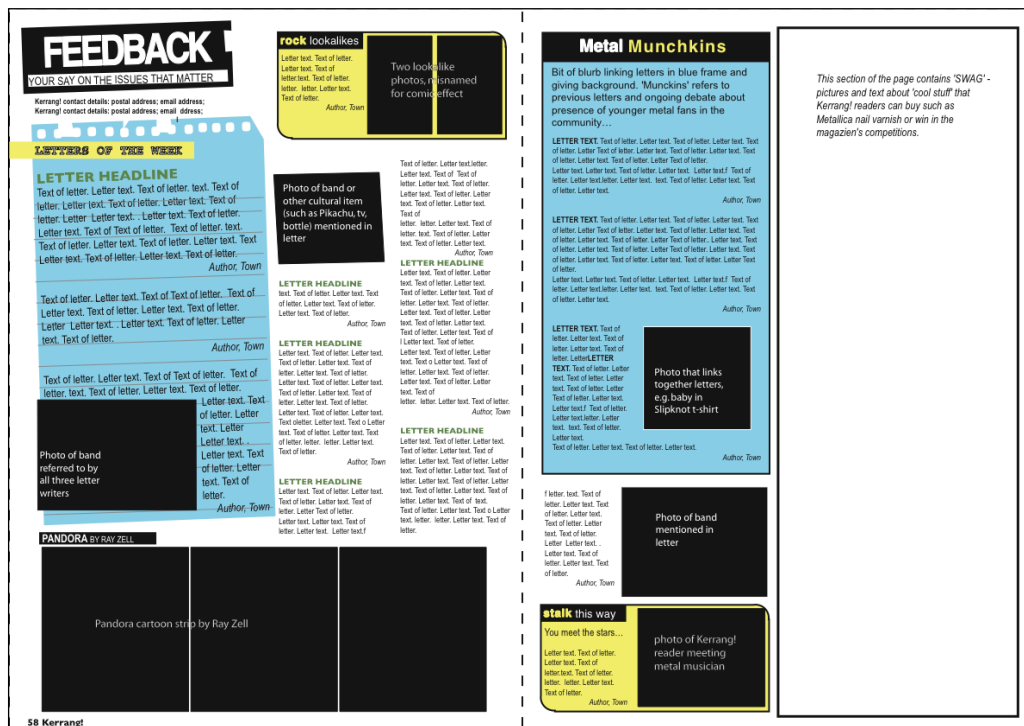
Images from Kerrang! may be required. I have the name and email address of an ex-York University student who works for the magazine's publisher who may be able to assist with this.

Appendix B: Design Mock Ups of Kerrang!'s Letters Pages

Figure 3: June 2000



Figure 4: June 2001



Appendix B: Design Mock Ups of Kerrang!'s Letters Pages

Figure 6: June 2004



Figure 7: June 2005



Figure 8: June 2006-7

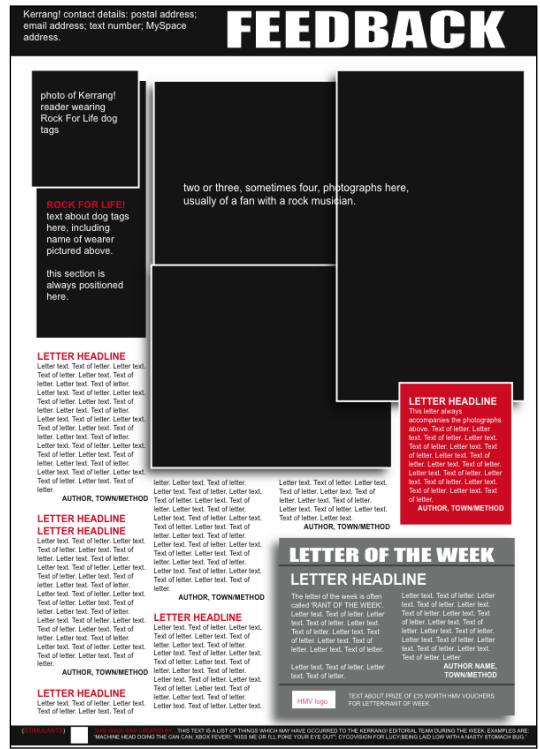
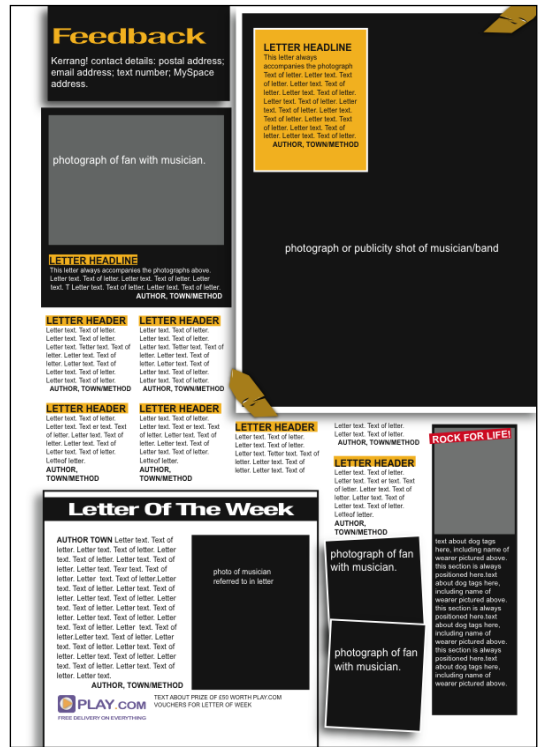


Figure 9: June 2008



Appendix C: Email to Potential Participants

Dear [Participant Name],

Your friend [Name] passed your email address to me as someone who may be willing to be interviewed for my PhD research. I am investigating the experiences of women who like metal or bands that are often featured in Kerrang! magazine, and as part of my study I am conducting interviews.

Would you be willing to be interviewed? It would take about an hour and we could arrange a time and a place at your convenience. You will be free to decline to answer any questions you don't want to, and to stop the interview at any time. In the write up I will not reveal your name or other identifiable characteristics to anyone else, and will use a pseudonym for you.

There's a bit more information here:

<http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/cws/researchst/roseyh.htm>

If you want to know more just ask.

I will be extremely grateful for your help, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,

Rosemary Hill
Centre for Women's Studies
University of York

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

Rosemary Hill (07986 532043 rh504@york.ac.uk), Centre for Women's Studies, University of York.

I am researching the topic **women metal fans' fandom and experiences of the metal community**. This PhD project involves participants answering questions in a semi-structured interview about their enjoyment of metal music, their experiences of participating in the metal community (going to gigs and clubs, reading and writing to magazines, sharing their experiences with friends and family members), and their experiences of the wider society. The results will be used to assist in the understanding of women's fandom of a male-dominated music genre. A little more about my research can be found at <http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/cws/researchst/roseyh.htm>. If any of the participants are upset or effected by this research, please contact Leeds Crisis Centre 0113 275 5898 or the Samaritans 08457 90 90 90.

My supervisor, Dr Ann Kaloski-Naylor, can be contacted on 01904 433671 or at eakn1@york.ac.uk.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research. Before we start, I would like to emphasise that:

- Your participation is entirely voluntary
- You are free to refuse to answer any question
- You are free to withdraw at any time

The data from this interview will be kept strictly confidential. I will remove the digital file from my phone as soon as I have transferred it to my computer, which I will do as soon as I get home after the interview. Anything you have told me will be used for the purposes of research only. When I come to write up my research I will remove all identifying characteristics including your name. When the research process has ended I will destroy the mp3 file.

Please sign this form to show that you have read the contents.

(signed)

(printed)

(date)

If, after the interview, you want to give me any feedback about the interview process (good or bad!) I will be very grateful.

Appendix E: Interview Schedule

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed.

1. Introduce self
2. investigating the experiences of women heavy metal fans, esp. bands in *Kerrang!*.
3. Lack of academic work
4. your views are really important
5. record on mobile phone
6. flight mode
7. not play the recording to anyone else
8. remove it from my phone after interview
9. purposes of research only
10. pseudonym
11. only I (and my supervisor) will ever know your real identity
12. destroy mp3
13. don't answer any question you are uncomfortable with
14. stop the interview at any time
15. Some questions are about your family and friends. If you would prefer that I don't ask you these questions then please say now.

Thank you very much, and now... on with the interview!

General Questions

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Can you describe heavy metal to me?
4. Would you describe the music you enjoy as heavy metal?
5. Would you call yourself a heavy metal fan?
 - a. Why/not?
6. Do you read *Kerrang!* magazine?
 - a. Why/not?
 - b. Do you read other music magazines?

Questions about fandom

7. Of bands that feature in *Kerrang!* magazine who do you like?
8. Which one if those would you say you were a fan of? Let's talk about them.
 - a. How long have you liked them?
 - b. What were your first impressions of the band?
 - c. How did you start listening to them?
 - d. What do you like about the music?

- e. What do you like about the musicians?
 - f. Do you have friends who like them too?
 - g. Have you seen them live?
 - h. Can you tell me about a particular time you remember when the music moved you or helped you in some way?
 - i. Do you do any other “fannish” things like write a fanzine, speak to other fans on message boards, draw pictures, or anything like that?
 - j. Have you ever met them?
 - k. Would criticism of the band upset you?
 - l. Do you think you’ll always like them?
9. Has being a fan influenced your political affiliations?
10. Has being a fan influenced the way you dress?
11. Do you have any musical ambitions that you would say were influenced by being a fan?
12. Do you know what groupies are?
- a. How would you describe them?
 - b. Would you say you were a groupie?

Questions about community

13. Do you read the letters people write to *Kerrang!*?
- a. What are your general impressions of them?
 - b. Why do you think people write to the magazine?
 - c. Do you have any thoughts on why the editors pick some letters to print and not others?
14. Have you ever written to a music magazine?
- a. Can you tell me why/not?
 - b. What did you write about?
 - c. What did you hope to achieve by writing?
 - d. How you felt when your letter was/wasn’t published?
15. Do you feel part of a community of metal fans?
16. Do you think you can tell what music someone will like from the clothes they wear?
17. Have you ever encountered any problems in being a woman fan? e.g. being belittled, sexual harassment, denied access to certain things, physical injury
18. How do you feel about the overt celebration of masculinity?
19. Do you get on with male metal fans?
20. Do you think they treat you differently from or the same as:
- a. other male fans
 - b. other women non fans?

21. Do you ever get in the pit at gigs?
22. Have you ever got into arguments with other metal fans about bands you like?

Questions about friends

23. Do your friends like the same music as you?
 - a. Are you friends because you like the same music or did they introduce you to the music after you'd become friends?

Questions about family

24. Does your family like the same music as you?
25. Has your fandom ever caused any problems or, conversely, helped in bonding with your family?
26. Is there anything you'd like to add?

I just want to ask a few quick questions to finish off, but as with all the previous questions, you don't have to answer them if you don't want.

27. What is your occupation?
28. Where do you live?
29. Would you say you had any class identity?
30. What is your ethnicity?
31. What is your religion?

Thank you very much indeed for your time. I really do appreciate it. I just want to give you this slip which has got a bit of info about my research and my contact details should you need to get in touch with me again.

Appendix F: Mini-Biographies of Participants

Aime

Aime, aged 16, was my youngest interviewee. She was the younger sister of Gwen and Bert and we met at a Leeds comic shop café. She described herself as white English and upper middle class. She was an atheist and declared a belief in science. Like her sisters she lived in Leeds and was currently unemployed. On the day of the interview Aime was trialling the wearing of high heel shoes. Aime's passion was for Avenged Sevenfold, and she also liked Britney Spears, My Chemical Romance and Green Day. She said she was 'definitely' a metal fan and that,

I always have been - I never kind of knew it but when I was younger I kind of grew up with a girl called Allanna, she was all - she was a fan of it and she kind of almost made me a fan of it and it's just stuck. (Aime)

Alexa

Alexa was 20, a psychology student and from Rotherham. She described herself as white, atheist and said she had no class identity. She was a *Kerrang!* reader and named her current favourite band as Leftover Crack, and she also discussed Taking Back Sunday, Black Flag and Adam Lambert. She had played keyboards when at school, and wanted to take up drums. Her parents instead bought her a guitar, but this was not a success.

Aria

My interview with Aria was spontaneous and so I did not have an interview schedule with me. Nevertheless we covered most of the topics on the schedule. Aria was a death metal guitarist who had performed across the country and her band had had a recording contract. In this she was different to my other interviewees whose primary link to metal was through fandom: Aria's was through fandom and musicianship. Aria was aged 35, lived in Northampton and was a University lecturer, about to embark on a PhD in gender studies.

Bert

Bert was the elder sister of Aime and aged 22 at the time of the interview. She was white British, atheist, and called herself middle class. She worked as a telephone helpdesk operator. The main band she talked about was Avenged Sevenfold, and she also mentioned My Chemical Romance and Fall Out Boy. The interview took place in the same café of the comic shop. Bert confessed herself shy and brought her sister and friends to the interview for support, although they sat separately so that the interview could be

conducted privately. Luckily she felt at her ease during the interview so that her shyness did not manifest itself as taciturnity.

Carol

Carol was 54, had no religion and was a working class accountant. She discussed High On Fire, but she had been a fan of rock and heavy metal since her teenage years, having been introduced to the genre by a friend who took her to see Ten Years After, Blodwyn Pig and Stone The Crows in concert. She was a frequent and affectionate contributor to an online stoner rock forum and used the site to make new friends. Carol was particularly embedded in the community, having donated money to help others attend festivals, and, now unemployed, being helped in return.

Dolly

Dolly and I sat outside a bar in a small town on the outskirts of Leeds. She was on her lunchbreak from her job as a university administrator. At the time of the interview she was 38 and had two teenage sons. She was white English, working class and agnostic. Her favourite band was LostProphets and she also talked about Metallica and Foo Fighters. She was 'definitely' a metal fan, although she had been an indie fan. She had become disillusioned with indie:

I started off, kind of, I was an indie fan. And then I realised that that wasn't enough and it became, there were too many bands like The Hoosiers who thought that they were indie and it was too 'oh for goodness sake here we go singing pathetic songs' and then I moved on to things like your Foo Fighters and I quite liked emo music, that sort of thing. (Dolly)

She was keen to make new friends to attend gigs with, in the meantime her main gigging companions were her teenage son and her brother in law.

Éowyn

Éowyn was 19 and originally from Watford. She was white British, a Psychology student and described herself as working class to middle class. She was a Christian. She described herself as a 'soft metal' fan. She did not have a favourite band, but was just starting to listen to Rise Against and so we discussed them. She also liked the music of Avenged Sevenfold and Within Temptation. Éowyn had played guitar in a band with her schoolfriends, playing 'wizard rock' – a genre based on Harry Potter.

Gwen

Gwen, the eldest sister of Bert and Aime, was aged 28, a white British bank mediator who described herself as having no class identity, but class pride due to her 'ridiculously working class background'. She was 'staunchly atheist', believed in science and was spiritually Wiccan. The band she discussed with me was Panic! At The Disco, but she also discussed Avenged Sevenfold, My Chemical Romance and Fall Out Boy. She said that the names of bands or songs was never something that particularly interested her and this had caused her to be snubbed by a fellow student and metal fan in her friendship group at university. This fellow student was the only other woman in her friendship group. The interview location was in the café of the Leeds comic shop.

Hazel

Hazel was 26 at the time of the interview and studying for an MA in gender studies. She lived in Newcastle, although the interview was conducted in York. Hazel was white. Unfortunately the interview was conducted under difficult circumstances in a noisy environment and with time pressures that meant I was unable to gather class, nationality, or religious data. The band she discussed was Tura Satana, although she also loved the Manic Street Preachers and named them as her favourites.

Jeanette

I interviewed Jeanette and Carol together in a quiet London pub, where they both lived. There were some issues caused by the recording device not working and parts of the interview needed to be re-done. I interviewed them separately and then together. Jeanette was 36 at the time of the interview. She was white and now British, but she had been born and raised in South Africa. She was a working class atheist, she said, and named her favourite band as Red Sparowes. However, she discussed a large number of other bands, some of whom were: Tool, Black Sabbath and Cult of Luna. Jeanette had used the stoner rock forum to find a friend to accompany her on a road trip of America, and she had later married that new friend.

Jenny

Jenny lived in Croydon and was part of the same group of music fan-friends as Jeanette and Carol. She was, at the time of the interview, 35, and we met in a small North London park. She was white British, a lab manager, an atheist, and described herself as middle to working class. Jenny tended to give short answers and was not particularly garrulous. The band she wanted to discuss was Slabdragger, and we also talked about Grand Magus, Deep Purple and Kylesa amongst other bands.

Jessica

Jessica was 19 and a Psychology student. She too was white British, an atheist and called herself working class. Her hometown was Grantham. She positioned herself as a metal fan, but saw that this was not straightforward:

[Rosemary] Would you call yourself a metal fan?

[Jessica] I would yeah, some people would consider me one of the rock fans, [...]

I think it's, they're sort of intertwined and they sort of, there is a lot of overlap in the two, whereas like, I did like Meat Loaf and things like that, but I'd consider that more rock than metal, but I listen to both really. (Jessica)

The main band that she discussed with me was Avenged Sevenfold, and she also mentioned Within Temptation and My Chemical Romance. Jessica was a singer and guitarist, and was thinking about joining a new band.

Karen

Karen was a 36 year old Rammstein fan. She was white British, a market analyst, middle class and an atheist. The interview was conducted in a side room at the University in Leeds where she had been employed. Her enthusiasm for Rammstein was so contagious that I subsequently booked tickets to see them on their tour, something I would not have done had I not met Karen. I was not disappointed. She also loved Metallica and Nine Inch Nails and frequented a Leeds goth nightclub.

Kimberley

Kimberley was 30 and lived in Liverpool, where I interviewed her in her home. She defined herself as middle class, white European and an atheist. She worked as an administrator. The band she enthused about was Young Guns, but this was one band amongst many: she also talked about Lostprophets, Fall Out Boy and Green Day as current favourites, and Pantera and Slayer as older favourites. The Wildhearts were her all time favourite, and she also loved Metallica and Guns N' Roses. She had a best friend in another city and together they would go to as many gigs as possible, often staying overnight in other cities.

Laura

Laura was 29. A white Finnish national, she lived in Leeds and had recently completed a PhD in English Literature. She was seeking work as a lecturer in the UK. The band she discussed with me was My Chemical Romance (her favourite) and she also professed a liking for U2 and Queen. Her introduction to My Chemical Romance was through the slash fiction culture around bands (bandom) such as My Chemical Romance and Fall Out Boy.

Laura did not call herself a metal fan, but described some of what she liked as heavy metal:

[Rosemary] So you wouldn't call yourself a heavy metal fan then?

[Laura] No.

[Rosemary] Rock music?

[Laura] Yeah and heavy metal would be a part of that, but the particular bands that I listen to I wouldn't call heavy metal. I think with My Chemical Romance that [...] the guitarist plays like he's in a heavy metal band regardless of what anyone else is doing. (Laura)

The interview took place in hotel bar on a busy shopping day before Christmas, meaning that the recording was not clear in places.

Patti

Patti was 29 at the time of the interview, white, and British. She was a special needs teacher in Leeds, described herself as middle class and atheist. Her favourite band that featured in *Kerrang!* was progressive rock/metal band Coheed and Cambria, but she also declared a preference for Neil Young. Despite enjoying the music of a number of metal bands (Led Zeppelin, Tenacious D, Rammstein) she did not call herself a metal fan:

I would describe myself as a fan of some classic rock that errs towards metal. [...]

I would consider myself to be a fan of many different kinds of music. (Patti)

The interview took place in my home and Patti seemed at first to feel somewhat uncomfortable and shy about being recorded, although this eased towards the end of the interview.

Ruby

Ruby and I met in a York convent's café so the interview was conducted to the background of singing nuns. Ruby was 35, white British, agnostic and a civil servant. She did not know what her class identity was. The band she discussed with me was Killswitch Engage. She had first started listening to metal as a teenager, to bands such as Skid Row and Guns N' Roses. Indeed she and her friend had seen Guns N' Roses in their heyday, had met guitarist Slash's brother and been invited to party backstage with the band. They refused as Ruby had to sit a GCSE exam the following day.

Sally

Sally was the friend with whom Ruby saw Guns N' Roses. She lived in Loughborough, but the interview was conducted in a café in York, as Sally was *en route* to a music festival in

the North York Moors. She was white British, employed as a charity manager and Christian. She described herself as in between working and middle class. She did not have a favourite band so we discussed those bands that she had been listening to recently: Limp Bizkit, Skindred, Metallica.

Susan

Susan and I met at her home in York. She was 69, white British, retired and felt that in her life she had moved from working to middle class. She described herself as an atheist or humanist. We discussed Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd (her favourite band), and also a number of other bands such as Deep Purple, Black Sabbath and Rush. She did not consider herself a 'proper fan':

Erm what is a proper fan? I think proper fans, well if they've got more musical knowledge than I have will talk about particular riffs and particular tones of drums and which particular drums are being played erm and how one artist supports another and I tend not to hear it like that. (Susan)

Appendix G: List of Bands and Musicians Mentioned in the Thesis

Band		MySpace genre (according to band MySpace) ⁷⁰	Wikipedia genre	Location	Years active (from Wikipedia)
Abbath	Δ	no information	black metal, heavy metal, viking metal, death metal, thrash metal	Norway	1988–present
AC/DC	Δ	hard rock	hard rock, blues rock, rock and roll	Sydney, Australia	1973–present
Aerosmith	Δ	hard rock, heavy metal	hard rock, blues rock, heavy metal	Boston, Massachusetts, USA	1970–present
Agnostic Front	Δ	New York hard core	hardcore punk, crossover thrash	New York, USA	1980–1992, 1997–present
A Perfect Circle	Δ	alt-metal-fused-with-art rock	alternative rock, alternative metal	Los Angeles, USA	1999–2004, 2010–present
Army of Freshmen	Δ	no information	rock, power pop, pop punk	Ventura, California, USA	1997–present
Avenged Sevenfold	*	alternative / metal / rock	heavy metal, hard rock, metalcore (early)	Huntington Beach, California, USA	1999–present
The Beatles	Δ	rock	Rock, pop	Liverpool, UK	1960–1970
Biffy Clyro	Δ	loud combinations of pop/rock	alternative rock, post-hardcore, new prog, indie rock, experimental rock	Kilmarnock, Scotland	1995–present

⁷⁰ Prior to the relaunch of MySpace in spring 2013, there was a space for bands to include their own genre name. After the relaunch the site did not include a specific space for the band's genre, so I have taken the genre from the description. This description is usually written by someone who is, as far as I can tell not associated with the band, and likely to be a journalist.

* Information gathered 14th September 2012

† Information gathered 23rd September 2012

Δ Information gathered 22nd June – 22nd July 2013

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Black Flag	Δ	hardcore punk	hardcore punk	Hermosa Beach, California, USA	1976–1986, 2013–present
Black Sabbath	Δ	heavy metal rock	heavy metal	Aston, Birmingham, UK	1968–present
Blodwyn Pig	Δ	progressive/ blues rock	blues rock	no information	1968–1970, 1990s
James Blunt	Δ	melodic contemporary soft rock	pop rock, rock, folk rock	Ibiza, Spain	2003–present
Bon Jovi	Δ	pop metal	hard rock, glam metal, heavy metal, soft rock	Sayreville, New Jersey, USA	1983–present
David Bowie	Δ	glam rock, avant pop, plastic soul, rock	rock, glam rock, art rock, pop	born London, UK	1962–present
Budgie	Δ	metal	hard rock, heavy metal, progressive rock	Cardiff, UK	1967-1988 1995-1996 1999-2010
Burzum	Δ	black metal, industrial, electronic, and dark ambient music	Black metal, folk metal, dark ambient	Bergen, Norway	1991–1999, 2009–present
David Cassidy	Δ	no official profile	pop	New York, USA	1956–present
Coheed & Cambria	*	alternative / rock	progressive rock, alternative rock, new prog, post-hardcore	New York, USA	1995–present
Cult of Luna	Δ	no profile	post-metal, sludge metal, progressive metal	Umeå, Sweden	1998–present
Cute Is What We Aim For	Δ	emo-pop	pop punk, power pop, alternative rock	Buffalo, New York, USA	2005–2009, 2012–present
Cypress Hill	Δ	hip hop	hip hop, latin hip hop, West Coast Hip hop, hardcore hip hop, rap rock, rap metal, psychedelic hip hop	South Gate, California, USA	1988–present

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The Darkness	Δ	late-'70s hard rock	glam metal, hard rock, glam rock, heavy metal	Lowestoft, Suffolk, UK	2000–2006, 2011–present
Deep Purple	Δ	progressive rock, heavy metal	hard rock, heavy metal, progressive rock	Hertford, UK	1968–1976, 1984–present
John Denver	Δ	country-folk	folk, pop, Western, Country	Roswell, New Mexico, USA	1962–1997
Deftones	Δ	heavy rock	alternative metal, experimental rock	Sacramento, California, USA	1988–present
Dir En Grey	Δ	gothic rock, death metal	experimental metal, alternative metal, progressive metal, death metal, nu metal, hard rock	Osaka, Japan	1997–present
Enslaved	Δ	black metal	progressive metal, black metal, viking metal	Haugesund, Norway	1991–present
Fall Out Boy	†	no information	pop punk, pop rock, alternative rock, emo	Wilmette, Illinois, USA	2001–2009 (hiatus)
Finch	Δ	emo rock	post-hardcore, alternative rock	Temecula, California, USA	1999–2006, 2007–2010, 2012–present
Foo Fighters	†	no information	alternative rock, post-grunge, hard rock	Seattle, Washington, USA	1994–present
Fugazi	Δ	no information	post-hardcore, art punk, noise rock, indie rock, experimental rock, punk rock	Washington, D.C., USA	1987–2003
Glassjaw	Δ	progressive hardcore	post-hardcore, progressive rock, experimental rock, alternative metal	Long Island, New York, USA	1993–present
Grand Magus	Δ	hard rock, stoner rock	heavy metal, doom metal, stoner metal, gothic metal, power metal	Stockholm, Sweden	1996–present

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Green Day	†	alternative / punk	punk rock, pop punk, alternative rock	Berkeley, USA	1987–present
Guns N' Roses	†	metal / rock	hard rock, heavy metal, blues rock	Los Angeles, California, USA	1985–present
Justin Hawkins (lead singer of The Darkness – see above)					
High On Fire	*	metal	heavy metal, stoner metal, sludge metal, doom metal	Oakland, California, USA	1998–present
The Hoosiers	Δ	indie pop	pop rock, synthpop, alternative rock, indie pop, indie rock	London, UK	2003–present
Iron Maiden	Δ	heavy metal	heavy metal	Leyton, London, UK	1975–present
Judas Priest	Δ	heavy metal	heavy metal, speed metal	Birmingham, UK	1969–present
Killswitch Engage	*	hardcore / metal	metalcore	Boston, Massachusetts, USA	1999–present
Korn	Δ	cathartic alternative metal	nu metal, alternative metal	Bakersfield, California, USA	1993–present
Kylesa	Δ	sludge metal	sludge metal, psychedelic rock, stoner rock, crust punk (early)	Savannah, Georgia, USA	2001–present
L7	Δ	punk	alternative metal, grunge, punk rock	Los Angeles, California, USA	1985–2001
Lacuna Coil	Δ	ambient/goth	gothic metal, alternative metal[6]	Milan, Italy	1994–present
Adam Lambert	†	twostep	pop, pop rock	no information on MySpace or Wikipedia.	2009–present
Led Zeppelin	*	classic rock / rock	hard rock, heavy metal, blues rock, folk rock	UK	1968–80
Leftover Crack	*	death metal / punk / ska	punk rock, hardcore punk, anarcho-punk, ska punk, crust punk, squatter punk	New York, USA	2000–present

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Less Than Jake	Δ	ska-inspired punk	ska punk, punk rock, pop punk, reggae	Gainesville, Florida, USA	1992–present
Limp Bizkit	*	alternative / metal	nu metal, rap metal, alternative metal	Jacksonville, Florida, USA	1994–2005 ;2009–present
Lostprophets	*	no information	alternative rock, alternative metal, post-hardcore, nu metal	Pontypridd, Wales, UK	1997–present
Machinehead	Δ	heavy metal	groove metal, thrash metal, nu metal	Oakland, California, USA	1991–present
Madonna	Δ	pop	Dance, electronic, pop, rock	New York, USA	1979–present
Manic Street Preachers	†	alternative / indie / rock	alternative rock, hard rock, glam punk	Blackwood, Wales, UK	1986–present
Marilyn Manson	Δ	gothic	industrial metal, industrial rock, alternative metal, glam rock	Fort Lauderdale, Florida, USA	1989–present
Meat Loaf	Δ	rock opera	hard rock, rock, rock and roll, rock opera, heavy metal	Dallas, Texas, USA	1967–present
Metallica	*	metal / rock	heavy metal, thrash metal, hard rock, speed metal	Los Angeles, California, USA	1981–present
Mötley Crüe	Δ	hair metal	heavy metal, glam metal, hard rock	Los Angeles, California, USA	1981–present
My Chemical Romance	*	alternative / metal	alternative rock, post-hardcore, emo, pop punk	Newark, New Jersey, USA	2001–present
New Found Glory	Δ	punk-pop	pop punk, punk rock, alternative rock, melodic hardcore	Coral Springs, Florida, USA	1997–present
Nine Inch Nails	Δ	industrial	industrial rock, industrial metal, alternative rock, alternative metal, dark ambient	Cleveland, Ohio, USA	1988–present
Ozzy Osbourne (lead singer of Black Sabbath)	Δ	heavy metal	heavy metal, hard rock, blues rock	Los Angeles, USA and Buckinghamshire, UK	1967–present

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Panic! At The Disco	*	alternative	pop punk, alternative rock, emo pop, baroque pop	Berlin, Germany	2004–present
Pantera	†	metal	groove metal, thrash metal, heavy metal, glam metal (early)	Dallas, Texas, USA	1981–2003
Papa Roach	Δ	punk- and rap-influenced, hard rock, strong heavy metal leanings	hard rock, alternative rock, alternative metal, nu metal (early)	Vacaville, California, USA	1993–present
Paramore	Δ	emo-pop and slick, anthemic rock & roll	alternative rock, emo, pop punk	Franklin, Tennessee, USA	2004–present
Pearl Jam	Δ	riff-heavy stadium rock of the '70s with the grit and anger of '80s post-punk	alternative rock, grunge, hard rock	Seattle, Washington, USA	1990–present
Pink Floyd	†	rock	progressive rock, psychedelic rock	High Wycombe/London, UK	1965–95, 2005 (one-off reunion)
Poison	Δ	pop-metal	glam metal, hard rock	Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, USA	1983–present
Elvis Presley	Δ	rock 'n' roll	rock and roll, pop, rockabilly, country, blues, gospel, R&B	Tupelo, Mississippi, USA	1953–1977
Queen	†	classic rock / rock	rock	UK	1971–present
Rammstein	*	no information	neue deutsche härte, industrial metal	Las Vegas, Nevada, USA	1994–present
Red Sparowes	*	experimental / indie / progressive	post-rock, noise rock, post-metal, instrumental rock, ambient	Los Angeles, California, USA	active 2003–present
Rise Against	*	alternative / rock	melodic hardcore, punk rock, hardcore punk	Chicago, Illinois, USA	1999–present

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The Rolling Stones	Δ	rock 'n' roll	rock, blues rock, rock and roll, rhythm and blues, hard rock, blues	London, UK	1962–present
Johnny Rotten (lead singer of The Sex Pistols, Public Image Ltd and Leftfield)	Δ	no information	punk, post-punk, alternative rock	no information on MySpace or Wikipedia.	1975–present
Rush	Δ	hard rock	hard rock, progressive rock, heavy metal	Toronto, Ontario, Canada	1968–present
Skid Row	Δ	hair metal	heavy metal, hard rock	Toms River, New Jersey, USA	1986–present
Skindred	*	alternative / punk / reggae	alternative metal, reggae, reggae metal	UK	1998–present
Slabdragger	*	blues / jam band / metal	no wikipedia entry	London and South East, UK	no Wikipedia entry, but MySpace member 2008-13, and currently active Facebook account
Slayer	†	no information	thrash metal	Huntington Park, California, USA	1981–present
Slipknot	Δ	nu-metal	heavy metal, nu metal, alternative metal	Des Moines, Iowa, USA	1995–present
Dee Snider (lead singer of Twisted Sister)	Δ	glam rock	heavy metal, hard rock	Oyster Bay, New York, USA	1972–1987, 2003–present
Smashing Pumpkins	Δ	alternative rock	alternative rock	Chicago, Illinois, USA	1988–2000, 2005–present
Britney Spears	†	no information	pop, dance	Beverly Hills, California, USA	1992–present
Stone The Crows	Δ	progressive soul	blues rock	Glasgow, UK	1968–1973

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Tenacious D	†	acoustic / comedy / rock	comedy rock, heavy metal, hard rock, acoustic rock	Los Angeles, USA	1991–present
Ten Years After	Δ	blues rock	blues-rock, British blues, rock and roll, jazz rock	Nottingham, UK	1966–1974, 1983, 1988–present
Tool	Δ	no official profile	alternative metal, art rock, progressive metal, progressive rock	Los Angeles, California, USA	1990–present
Tura Satana	*	metal	alternative metal, nu metal	Los Angeles, California, USA	1993–1999
U2	†	alternative / pop / rock	rock, alternative rock, post-punk	Republic of Ireland	1976–present
Warrant	Δ	pop-metal	hard rock, glam metal, heavy metal	Hollywood, California, USA	1984–present
Pete Wentz (lead singer of Fall Out Boy)					
Westlife	Δ	ballads and club-worthy pop songs	pop	Sligo, Republic of Ireland	1999–2012
The Wildhearts	*	metal / pop punk / rock	hard rock, punk rock, power pop	UK	1989–1997 2001–2005 2006–2010
Within Temptation	Δ	goth metal	symphonic metal, symphonic rock, doom metal (early)	Waddinxveen, Netherlands	1996–present
Wu-Tang Clan	Δ	hip-hop	hip hop	Staten Island, New York, USA	1992–present
Neil Young	*	classic rock / folk	rock, folk rock, country rock, experimental rock, hard rock	California, USA	1960–present
Young Guns	*	no information	alternative rock post-hardcore	London, UK	2003 – Present
Frank Zappa	Δ	rock 'n' roll, jazz, complicated	rock, jazz, classical, experimental	Baltimore, Maryland, USA	1955–1993
ZZ Top	Δ	blues rock	blues rock, hard rock, boogie rock, Southern rock, electric blues, Texas blues	Houston, Texas, USA	1969–present

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