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Sex and Gender in the 1980s Heavy Metal Scene: Groupies, Musicians, and Fans Recall Their Experiences

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Abstract Groupies, heavy metal musicians, and highly devoted fans (metalheads) were some of the most salient identity groups for teenagers and emerging adults in the 1980s—the tail end of the Baby Boom and the beginning of the newly emerging Generation X. Met with appalled reactions from conventional society, the heavy metal scene nevertheless appeared to help at least some disenfranchised youth negotiate turbulent times. The present study of 144 middle-aged 1980s groupies, metal fans, and professional musicians used both quantitative and qualitative data to develop insights into the developmental processes of these emerging adults of the 1980s. Metalheads described their childhood experiences, including maltreatment, their sexual and substance use activities in the 1980s, identity issues, and reported on current indicators of adjustment, such as education, mental health, and happiness. The results confirm that youth involved in the metal scene had high rates of substance use, risky sexual behaviors, and especially for groupies, traumatic childhood experiences, as well as drug dependence and sexual violence during their groupie days. However, despite their trauma and risky behaviors, participants were able to thrive and develop healthy adult lives, from which they look back fondly on those 1980s experiences. The richness of these data provide insights into the search for identity for marginalized youth, and provide hypotheses for future research on the understudied developmental processes of such adolescent style cultures.

Keywords Heavy metal · Groupies · Gender · Music fans · Sexuality · Musicians

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Overview

Lyrics from 1980s heavy metal songs by bands like Metallica and Judas Priest were characterized by themes of despair, frustration, sexual longing, and personal failure. These are also feelings not uncommonly experienced by American youth. Adolescence is a trying time for many parents as well, who see their children struggling with multidimensional developmental challenges, from puberty, to social pressure, peer relations, burgeoning sexuality, and the search for identity (Steinberg and Morris 2001). When that search for identity results in an affiliation with fringe or edgy groups, such as hip hop culture, Emo (emotional hardcore rock), Goth, or heavy metal circles, parents often fear the worst. They fear their child will experiment with drugs, have unsafe sex, do poorly in school, or grow up to have few successes (Lynxwiler and Gay 2000). The search for identity is a normative adolescent experience in western cultures and parents often hope their children will develop an affinity for church groups, school clubs, and other socially acceptable milieu. Some research does indeed suggest that teens who identify with such fringe musical genres and subcultures have higher rates of problems such as suicidality and antisocial behavior (Arnett 1996).

While heavy metal music reached the peak of popularity in the 1980s, people who grew up on that music often still listen to it, and recent research found that in the year 2010, over 1/3 of a sample of adolescents listened to heavy metal music regularly (Leung and Kier 2010). Music preferences have been shown to be relatively stable over time (Delsing et al. 2008). Thus, it is of interest to explore the lived experiences of teenagers who gravitate toward such musical genres and the accompanying style culture. The current study focused on adverse childhood experiences (e.g., sexual abuse), youthful risky experiences (e.g., using sex as leverage to get something you want, having multiple sexual partners), and current functioning (e.g., education, income) in middle aged adults who were part of the heavy metal scene (fans), as well as those who committed wholeheartedly to the style culture (groupies and professional musicians). Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to examine the life experiences and current characteristics of now middle-aged 1980s heavy metal enthusiasts.

Historical Background of Current Study

Heavy metal as a genre built upon earlier generations of blues-based rock-n-roll, and was heavily influenced by the guitar and drum sounds of pioneers like Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin. It evolved out of blue collar towns where young men were often rough and tumble, frustrated, and felt marginalized from mainstream culture (Weinstein 1991). Most of these young men were white, poor, and felt a sense of hopelessness and cynicism about the (d)evolution of western culture (Cadwallader 2007; Weinstein 1991). Lyrical themes included concerns about hypocrisy in society, exploitation of the poor, and political corruption (Epstein and Pratto 1990; Gafarov 2011); see for example, Metallica's song "And Justice for All," or Metal Church's song "Date with Poverty."

Walser (1993) argued that “heavy metal is one among many coherent but richly conflicted records of people’s struggles to make sense of the contradictions they have inherited and the tensions that drive and limit their lives” (p. 171). Non-traditional role models such as heavy metal stars provide a sense of belonging and do not judge youth for being outside the mainstream. Instead, they celebrate it. Such subcultures provide alternative behavioral expectations along with instructions for fashion, sexual relationships, and political attitudes (Took and Weiss 1994). Adolescents use such media to discover themselves, as well as to escape from their daily lives; this interaction between the individual and media can be conceptualized as a form of self-socialization (Cadwallader 2007). Could emotionally connecting to heavy metal music have empowered youth who felt disconnected from parents and society at large, or did it encourage further marginalization?

Many parents and politicians in the 1980s were worried about heavy metal becoming overly popular with teenagers. In 1989, heavy metal was the largest selling musical genre (Epstein and Pratto 1990), with top acts selling millions of records and playing huge festivals. Parents and others feared that children were being drawn into Satan worship, drug use, wild sex, despair, and worse of all, suicide. The 1987 Surgeon General C. Everett Koop said that heavy metal’s destructive influence was similar to that of pornography (cited in King 1988). Artists like Judas Priest and Ozzy Osbourne were sued by distraught parents whose children had listened to their music and then committed suicide (Moore 1996). Artists were taken to court and congress heard testimony from many artists, parents, and leaders of the Parents’ Music Resource Council (PMRC), headed by then Senator Albert Gore’s wife, Tipper Gore. The PMRC burned records, made public statements about the harm heavy metal music would cause children, and sought to ban recordings, videos, and other media (Arnett 1991a, b). The lasting legacy of these trials and the work of the PMRC is the “Explicit Content: Parental Advisory” stickers currently found on recorded media, to warn parents that the lyrics or content may not be appropriate for young children.

The current study intends to build upon the early research on these topics, which began in the 1980s, in that we also focus on risk-taking and potentially dangerous behaviors (drug use, heavy metal clubbing). However, earlier work focused little on gender or sexuality issues, which are included here.

Early Research on Heavy Metal Music and Adolescent Development

Early psychological research provided some evidence that teens who preferred to listen to heavy metal were more disturbed than other children (Arnett 1996). They were more aggressive, took more risks (e.g., drinking and driving, sex with many partners), had more psychiatric problems, were higher in sensation-seeking, suicidality, drug use, family dysfunction, were less optimistic, more impulsive, less conforming, and did more poorly in school (Arnett 1991a, b, 1996; Martin et al. 1993; Scheel and Westefeld 1999; Schwartz and Fouts 2003; Took and Weiss 1994). “Metalheads” were found to be more manipulative, cynical, and Machiavellian than non-metal fans (Hansen and Hansen 1991). They displayed disrespect

for women, machismo, and little interest in intellectual tasks (Hansen and Hansen 1991). In one experimental study, when male college students listened to heavy metal, even songs with Christian lyrics, their levels of gender stereotyping and negative attitudes about women increased. Interestingly, though, these youth found classical music more sexually arousing than metal (Lawrence 1991). In another study, those who listened to soul music had more sexual partners than those who listened to metal (Verden et al. 1989).

Arnett (1993) posited that perhaps alienated youth gravitate toward music with dark themes, which gives them avenues for expressing their pent-up frustration with adults and society. Metal provided an outlet for his sample of male metalheads, allowing them some sense of catharsis for their frustration. Similarly, Wooten (1992) found that while those who were mentally ill or substance abusers preferred metal music more than other genres, this music calmed them down and made them more attentive. In another study, listening to heavy metal positively affected metalheads' moods (Scheel and Westefeld 1999).

Moreover, several studies noted that metalheads got *better* grades than other teens. Such students discussed the complexity of the music, the intensity of the lyrics, and the high levels of talent and skill of the musicians as variables that attracted them to the genre (Arnett 1991a, b; Cadwallader 2007; Singer et al. 1993). Cadwallader (2007) found that gifted metalheads used the music to cope with being intellectually superior to, and thus separate from, their peers. They also reported having troubled family relationships and low self-esteem.

Such contradictory research findings, combined with the fact that those who wrote about both the negative and positive influences of heavy metal were often writing personal opinion pieces not supported by data, made conclusions difficult. For example, in his book *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, Walser (1993) described metalheads as friendly and enthusiastic, not negative and cynical. However, his book is an obvious homage to the genre, comparing the complexities of the chord structures and guitar solos of metal to the sheet music of Vivaldi's works. Moreover, he stated that, in contrast to the oft-cited misogyny of the genre, much of heavy metal music exalted the sanctity of women and professed that they provided solace for weary men. Unfortunately, he provided no data to support his claims. In addition, since most of the early empirical research was conducted with boys, even fewer conclusions could be made about female metalheads.

Gender and Sexuality in Heavy Metal

There have been few attempts to examine gender issues in heavy metal (HM). The handful of studies that began in the 1980s raised more questions than they answered. For example, Arnett (1991a, b) found that female metalheads were more likely to engage in antisocial behavior and that they had lower self-esteem than non-metal fans. However, Selfhout et al. (2008) found that heavy metal preference predicted externalizing behavior problems for boys but not for girls.

Judith Butler (1990), the famous feminist rhetorician, writing at the same time that HM reached its peak in popularity, argued that gender is fundamentally performative in nature. Both women and men “do” gender and either reinforce or break social norms through performed gender presentations. The current study seeks to examine the 1980s HM population by using such a gendered lens to conduct a preliminary investigation of self-identified 1980s HM groupies, musicians, and fans.

In his pioneering book *Metalheads: Heavy Metal Music and Adolescent Alienation*, Arnett (1996) found that female metalheads felt that “glam” or “hair” metal was misogynistic but “real” metal bands (e.g., Iron Maiden, Judas Priest) did not objectify women by showing them scantily clad in their videos or focusing on sex and partying in their lyrics. Female fans of “real” metal often dressed like boys. Their masculine appearance moved them away from traditional stereotypes of women as weak, fragile, objectified, or victimized. They felt empowered by slam dancing with men in the mosh pit while donning black jeans, concert t-shirts, and leather jackets (Vasan 2010). They, like male metalheads, enjoyed the ferocity of the lyrics, the powerful guitar chords, and the themes of social criticism. Judas Priest’s 1982 song “Screaming for Vengeance” characterizes this trend in HM:

Hey listen don’t you let them get your mind
 Fill your brain with orders and that’s not right.
 They’re playing at a game that draws you closer
 Till you’re living in a world that’s ruled by fear.
 Always takin’ baby out that’s o.k.
 What they’re givin’ maybe it’s out of phase with me.
 Told you once you’re never gonna win the race
 Same old no tomorrow kicked in the face.
 We are screaming, screaming for vengeance
 The world is a manacled place.

In contrast, glam/hair metal was a less heavy, more pop and radio-friendly form of HM, personified by bands like Poison and Warrant. Bands of this genre often dressed in satin, lace, and spandex, while sporting big hairdos and feminine make-up (Densky and Sholle 1992). They made videos replete with sexual images and party themes. Glam metal musicians exhibited gender fluidity in their presentation while still maintaining male hegemony. They presented with a female appearance while their song lyrics contained pervasive hypermasculine themes (Sollee 2011). Warrant’s 1990 song “Cherry Pie” is illustrative:

Swingin’ to the left
 And swingin’ to the right
 If I think about baseball
 I’ll swing all night yea

 Swingin’ in the living room
 Swingin’ in the kitchen
 Most folks don’t ‘cause
 They’re too busy bitchin’
 Swingin’ in there ‘cause

She wanted me to feed her
 So I mixed up the batter
 And she licked the beater

I scream you scream
 We all scream for her
 Don't even try 'cause
 You can't ignore her

She's my cherry pie
 Cool drink of water
 Such a sweet surprise
 Tastes so good
 Make a grown man cry
 Sweet cherry pie oh yea

Vasan (2010) stated that “metal replicates and intensifies androcentric codes of...society” (p. 72). Live concerts served as masculine power rituals for asserting male power, wherein musicians would play in front of giant stacks of Marshall amplifiers, played powerful solos in front of booming pyrotechnics, and even beheaded, raped, or put women on a Medieval-style rack in their stage shows (Arnett 1996; Densky and Sholle 1992). The male rock star image included destroying hotel rooms, sleeping with hundreds of faceless, nameless women, getting into fights, and engaging in high levels of substance use. At the same time, they engaged in homoerotic antics such as mock fellatio on stage during guitar solos, and exhibited almost gang-like camaraderie with fellow band members, who were always prioritized over any relationships with women (Densky and Sholle 1992).

Glam lyrics, music videos, and rock star lifestyles clearly illustrated that women were expendable and useful only for bringing men pleasure. Glam metal was thus a “resistant parody of straight heterosexuality...by taking the feminine into itself, disavow[ing] the need for women, thus overcoming the fear of exercising desire [for women]” (Densky and Sholle 1992, p. 47, pp. 54–55). In contrast, during this same period, Walser (1993) argued that women served as “salve for the wounded man recuperating from the brutality of industry and commerce” (p. 169). Songs from the era illustrate the validity of this viewpoint as well (e.g., Ozzy Osbourne’s “Mama I’m Coming Home” and Guns-N-Roses’ “Sweet Child O’Mine”). Thus, gender presentations were complex, fluid, and contained elements of both traditional heterosexual love and misogyny.

Heavy metal was a male dominated business. Thus, the few female bands of the time (e.g., Vixen) were often viewed as sexy but untalented. Because HM was a male-dominated industry, women in large part got into the scene not by becoming musicians, but by either imitating the appearance and behavior of the boys, in the case of “real” female metalheads, or by becoming sexual objects for the boys, in the case of “glam chicks” or “groupies” (Krenske and McKay 2000; Tyner-Owens 2007; Vasan 2010). There was often tension between these two groups of female metal fans.

“Real” female metalheads felt disdain for sexy video vixens and groupies, whom they viewed as cheap and brainless. Groupies wore mini-skirts, lace bras, fishnet stockings, stiletto heels, heavy make-up, and elaborate long hairdos. However, Walser (1993) argued that these hypersexualized female fans were actually using metal men to empower themselves and break free from traditional gender roles and sexual oppression. For example, girls might hang posters of shirtless metal musicians on their bedroom walls, expressing their own erotic desires. They felt an emotional connection to the lyrics and often wanted to give sexual pleasure to those who had brought them pleasure through the music. In this way, women actively constructed presentations of gender by using hypersexuality to bring male fantasies to life, in order to reap social, psychological, and sexual benefits for themselves (Passanisi 2010; Vasan 2010).

Feminist writers, reflecting on groupies from the 1960s and 1970s, asserted that rock music could never have reached its meteoric level of popularity without the support of rabid female fans and groupies (Coates 2007; Kerr-Fenn 2002). Without women’s sexual desire for rock stars, millions fewer albums would have been sold. Groupies in those early days were making social statements, bucking the system of traditional womanhood and chastity. They were advocating sexual freedom for women, rejecting the need to strive for marriage and motherhood.

Former groupies (e.g., see the writings of Pamela DesBarres) talk about the music meaning as much to them as to the musicians. They supported the musicians by providing fashion, hair, and make-up assistance, transportation, access to drugs, and invitations for sexual intimacy. Groupies then and now are often sought-after by media, fans, and the rock stars themselves, due to their intelligence, insights into popular culture, and insider ability to introduce people to music industry professionals. Groupies serve as emotional support for touring musicians, sexual comfort during long tours, and muses for the music itself. Many rock stars have written songs about and have even fallen in love with and married their groupies (Coates 2007; Kerr-Fenn 2002).

These assertions are supported by work on other types of groupies as well. For example, groupies for both the rodeo circuit and minor league baseball often support players, helping them with transportation, laundry, and dealing with the stress of being away from home. They help them cope with life and provide emotional and material support, in order to allow the cowboy or the athlete to perform optimally (Forsyth 2007; Gmelch and San Antoni 1998). At the same time, baseball players will often invite teammates to view their sexual liaisons with groupies, a part of the masculine homoerotic experience commonly found in male-dominated industries, similar to the behaviors of rock musicians. Both baseball players and rock stars disavow their homoerotic presentations of sexuality by expressing outwardly homophobic attitudes and by using women as sexual objects (Gmelch and San Antoni 1998). In turn, women gain a sense of self-worth by being chosen over all other candidates for sexual experiences with famous or nearly famous talented men (Krenske and McKay 2000). However, hegemonic masculinity often trumps women’s attempts to wield power to do gender on their terms. Thus, heteronormativity in sports and in HM can become as constraining as the hypocritical society both male and female metalheads purport to rebel against (Spracklien 2010).

Beyond reductionistic typologies of HM enthusiasts and the accompanying philosophical social commentary, there are limited data examining gender and the sexual experiences of 1980s “glam chicks” or “groupies” as people of interest in their own right. Krenske and McKay (2000) argued that women in general gravitate to metal music to escape stressful or dysfunctional home lives. In contrast to metal serving a cathartic purpose, however, Martin et al. (1993) found that female metalheads often felt sadder when they listened to metal. The current study aimed to clarify some of these issues by presenting the lived experiences of metalheads in their own words.

The Current Study

No previous empirical studies have tracked male or female metalheads into their adult years. Bennett (2002) argued that previous research on such style cultures either offers an uncritical glorification of a given scene or the writing is infused with a sense of smug superiority over the research participants. Bennett stresses the need to present the actual lived experiences and language of the participants in the scene and to tie together qualitative data thematically. Researchers should strive to publish the narratives of the fans themselves because research so far has been a “privileged validation of the identity projects of intellectuals” (Brown 2011, p. 69). Furthermore, there is a need for qualitative research using content analysis to allow for a full understanding of a given social scene (Gafarov 2011).

Despite many cultural stereotypes about heavy metal fans, groupies and performers, and the topic’s potential importance for understanding healthy adult development, there is a dearth of contemporary research on this topic. The following analyses of perceptions and outcomes two decades later will provide some insights into the HM style culture and the ubiquitous challenges adolescents face as they search for their identities amidst challenging sociopolitical, sexual, and gendered pressures.

Method

Participants

This study examined the childhood and youthful experiences and current functioning of 144 adults (64 % female). Mean age was 43.6 years. Seventy-eight percent of the sample was European-American. The majority of the sample was heterosexual (89 %) and middle class (mean income \$46,268). However, 13 % of groupies identified as bisexual. The sample was broken down into 1980s HM fans (“fans,” $N = 99$), HM groupies (“groupies,” $N = 24$), and HM professional musicians/band members (“PMs,” $N = 21$). See Table 1 for demographics. About 70 % of the sample came from the Los Angeles/Hollywood 1980s metal scene, with others stemming from New York, Australia, Chicago, Minneapolis, and other locales.

Table 1 Demographic information for all groups

Variable	1980s Groupies (N = 24)	1980s PMs (N = 21)	1980s Fans (N = 99)
Gender			
Male	0 %	90 %	33 %
Female	100 %	10 %	66 %
Ethnicity			
European-American	83 %	91 %	74 %
Latino/hispanic	4 %	0 %	6 %
Mixed/other	13 %	10 %	18 %
Mean age	41.4	46.9	42.5
Sexual orientation			
Predominantly heterosexual	83 %	86 %	91 %
Predominantly homosexual	4 %	5 %	5 %
Bisexual	13 %		2 %
Education level			
Finished high school	13 %	29 %	12 %
Some college	38 %	29 %	39 %
College graduate	21 %	29 %	29 %
Graduate degree	21 %	5 %	13 %
Marital status			
Married	55 %	43 %	38 %
Single	17 %	29 %	23 %
Cohabiting	13 %	5 %	14 %
Divorced	8 %	19 %	18 %
Married 2+ times	58 %	14 %	17 %
Employment status			
Full time (35+ h/weeks)	54 %	5 %	60 %
Part time (1–34 h/weeks)	21 %	67 %	17 %
Not employed outside home	17 %	5 %	5 %
Mean annual income	\$43,462	\$98,482	\$44,951

Totals may not equal 100 % if there were missing data or participants checked more than one box
PM professional musicians

PMs' diverse experiences ranged from regularly playing paid gigs at small clubs in Hollywood to touring the world and playing stadiums, selling between several thousand to several million albums. Forty percent of PMs had been signed to a major record label but none reported currently receiving more than a few hundred dollars per year in royalties.

Procedure

The study protocol was approved by the first author's university IRB. Participants were recruited online using Facebook groups and a snowball sampling procedure.

Groups related to 1980s heavy metal, groupies, musicians, and 1980s Hollywood metal clubs were approached electronically with a general call for participation in a scientific study examining 1980s metal enthusiasts. They were encouraged to invite their contacts and friends to participate. Participants were provided with the invitation text and the survey link that they could forward to their friends.

No identifying information or computer IP addresses were collected. Surveys were anonymous and were completed using Survey Monkey. Participants could enter a drawing for \$20 iTunes gift certificates, even if they chose not to complete the survey. Sixty such certificates were awarded using a separate email account set up for the drawing. Email addresses were drawn at random from the inbox and issued the gift certificates electronically. Participants were informed that the survey would take about an hour and that they could not log out and back in because the surveys were anonymous and they could not save any information to help them log back in. However, they were free to cease participating at any time with the knowledge that whatever data they completed might be used in the study.

Upon logging in, participants were asked to read the informed consent sheet and click on yes or no if they agreed to participate. If they clicked on “no,” they were logged out of the survey. There were questions specific to the groupie and PM groups, but similar questions about life experiences were posed to all groups.

Upon being routed to the survey, participants were asked their favorite type of music between the years 1980 and 1990. Their choices were: new wave, hard rock/heavy metal, pop, rock/soft rock, or other/no favorite music. Examples of bands from each genre were provided. Those who chose anything but hard rock/heavy metal were not used in the current study. Those who chose hard rock/heavy metal were taken to a page asking to clarify whether they were fans, groupies, or PMs. Groupie was defined as someone who “followed bands with such enthusiasm that I would do almost anything to see them, meet them, or be with them, including having sexual relations with them and/or their entourage.” PMs were defined as “I regularly got paid to play my music. I played at clubs, auditoriums or stadiums on a regular basis. I may or may not have been signed to a major record label.” Fans were defined as “I loved hard rock/heavy metal. I may have played in a garage band for fun or may have followed bands enthusiastically, but I do not fit the above descriptions of groupie or band member. This category also applies to those who worked in the music industry.” Survey Monkey then routed each type of participant, using skip-logic, to the questions that were worded specifically for their group, though most questions were similar for all groups.

Data collected from anonymous Internet participants have advantages and disadvantages that should be considered during interpretation of results. For example, the anonymity may allow people to be more honest and open than they may otherwise be. However, people who are taking surveys online may be of a higher socioeconomic status or be better functioning in general than those who either have no access to the Internet or those who decline to participate and share their stories (Sue and Ritter 2012).

Measures

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Child Maltreatment

A modified version of Felitti's (Felitti et al. 1998) ACE intake form for Kaiser Permanente health providers (Family Health History; <http://www.cdc.gov/ace/questionnaires.htm>) was used to assess ACEs, such as having an alcoholic or incarcerated parent. Individual ACEs were examined separately and then a composite measure of Total ACEs was created to give a summed score of ACEs. Chronbach's alpha reliability for current sample for Total ACEs summed was = .75.

Maternal neglect and sexual abuse were assessed using Bifulco et al. (1994) Childhood Experiences of Care and Abuse (CECQ-Q2) measure, which has demonstrated good inter-rater and cross-reporter reliability (Moran et al. 2002). The various items representing maternal neglect (e.g., "my mother was not there for me when I needed her") were summed to obtain the maternal neglect score. If participants answered "yes" to at least one item asking about childhood sexual abuse on the ACE, the CECQ-Q2, or the current authors' "background questionnaire," they were counted as having experienced childhood sexual abuse, which was coded as a simple yes/no dichotomous variable.

Past and Current Functioning and Qualitative Data

The first author constructed a "background questionnaire," which assessed many life history variables (number of sex partners, using sex as leverage to get something they wanted, etc.). It also included brief essays, which allowed participants to answer questions in either 100 or 250 words. These essays explored their experiences "in the 1980s." All metal groups were asked why they liked heavy metal over other genres. There were specific questions for groupies and PMs focusing on their unique experiences, and general information was gathered from all groups, such as what misconceptions they thought people had about their group. They were asked about happiness levels and sex drive both in their youth and today. Thematic analysis was done for all open-ended responses, with common themes being identified and labeled. Then the percentages of each sub-sample who mentioned the top three most common themes were calculated for each question. The full survey can be obtained by contacting the first author. Since this is the first study of this kind, this questionnaire was developed specifically for this work and has not yet been examined for psychometric properties. Because each question takes a different form and is on a different topic, it was not possible to calculate Cronbach's alpha levels for the questionnaire overall.

Results

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Maltreatment

There were no significant group differences on individual ACEs such as having divorced parents, living with an alcoholic or criminal parent, or domestic violence

Table 2 Means and (SD) for variables in statistically significant ANOVAs

Variable	Groupies (N = 24)	PMs (N = 21)	Fans (N = 99)
Total ACEs	1.8 (.57) ^a	.13 (.46) ^b	.14 (.26) ^b
Maternal neglect	16.5 (1.5) ^a	11.7 (1.7) ^b	16.2 (.8) ^a
Sex partners lifetime	39.5 (30.2) ^b	313.1 (47.5) ^a	42.1 (20.2) ^b
Sex partners past year	1.3 (1.4) ^b	3.82 (11.5) ^a	1.38 (1.4) ^b
Sex drive 1980s	80.05 (23.4)	91.71 (16.5) ^a	76.14 (21.0) ^b
Annual income \$	43,462 (12,583) ^b	98,482 (13,396) ^a	44,951 (5,951) ^b

Groups with different superscripts are significantly different from each other, $p < .05$

Table 3 Percentage of each group responding “yes” to each variable used in statistically significant Chi square analyses

Variable	Groupies (N = 24)	PMs (N = 21)	Fans (N = 99)
Sexually abused as child	5.0	1.2	15.4
Drug problem 1980s	50.0	25.0	27.0
Sexually coerced 1980s	25.0	15.0	6.0
Used sex as leverage	47.6	33.3	11.0
STIs in 1980s	16.7	36.8	8.2

between parents. However, when the composite variable was created summing up each group’s total ACEs, ANOVAs with LSD post hoc analyses revealed that groupies experienced more total ACEs than the other two groups ($F [2, 85] = 3.60$, $p < .03$, $\eta^2 = .078$), which did not differ from each other. See Table 2 for means and standard deviations.

There were also significant group differences in the amount of maternal neglect experienced ($F [2, 120] = 2.98$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .047$). LSD post hoc analyses revealed that groupies and fans experienced significantly more neglect than PMs, and did not differ from each other.

Chi square analyses indicated that there were significant group differences in experiencing sexual abuse as children ($\chi^2 [2, 140] = 29.38$, $p < .000$, $V = .39$), with fans having the highest percentages of sexually abused participants (15.4 %). Only 5 % of groupies and 1.2 % of PMs reported being sexually abused as children. See Table 3 for all Chi square percentages.

Past and Current Functioning

There were no statistically significant group differences regarding whether people had attempted suicide in their youth, their age at first sexual experience, whether they had a serious problem with alcohol in their youth, how many days of work they missed in the past month due to mental or physical health problems, their level of sex drive today on a scale of 1–100, how happy they were in their youth or how happy they currently rated themselves on a scale of 1–100.

Groups did differ on current annual income ($F [2, 105] = 6.95, p < .001, \eta^2 = .117$) with PMs making significantly more money than the other groups, which did not differ from each other. There were also significant group differences in the number of sexual partners over their lifetimes, with PMs having more partners than the other groups ($F [2, 119] = 14.19, p < .000, \eta^2 = .193$). They averaged over 300 lifetime partners, compared to just under 40 for the groupies. On a scale of 1–100, PMs also reported the highest level of sex drive in their youth but LSD post hoc analysis revealed that this only reached statistical significance in comparison to fans ($F [2, 130] = 4.03, p < .02, \eta^2 = .058$). They were only marginally significantly greater in sex drive than groupies ($p < .08$). PMs also had the greatest number of sexual partners within the past year than the other groups, averaging 3.82 partners in the past year, compared to 1.3 for the other two groups. This analysis was only marginally significant ($p < .08$), with the LSD post hoc analysis revealing that PMs were significantly different from fans ($p < .03$) and only marginally different from groupies ($p < .07$). See Table 2 for means and standard deviations.

In Chi square analyses, there were significant differences in reporting having had serious problems with drugs in their youth, with 50 % of groupies reporting such problems, compared to about one quarter of participants in the other groups ($\chi^2 [2, 144] = 5.15, p < .05, V = .19$). Also, groupies and PMs reported using sex as leverage to get something they wanted (e.g., to get backstage, to meet important people, to get drugs, to get a job, etc.) at higher rates than fans (47.6 and 33.3 %, respectively, compared to 11 % for fans), $\chi^2 (2, 144) = 15.77, p < .000, V = .36$. One quarter of groupies reported being sexually coerced or raped during the 1980s compared to 15 % of PMs and 6 % of fans ($\chi^2 [2, 144] = 10.55, p < .018, V = .24$). PMs reported the highest rates of sexually transmitted infections in their youth, with 36.8 % reporting such incidences (compared to 16.7 % of groupies and 8.2 % of fans), $\chi^2 (2, 140) = 11.31, p < .003, V = .28$. Between 71.4 and 75 % of all groups reporting using alcohol regularly in their youth and the groups did not differ from each other. See Table 3 for all Chi square percentages.

Qualitative Results

For each open-ended question, thematic analysis was conducted on all responses given by the three groups. Common themes were identified and then the top three most common themes were tallied to identify what percentage of each group reported the most common responses.

Family Characteristics

When asked to describe their mother, 36 % of groupies but only 7 % of PMs and 5 % of fans said she was mentally ill. Twenty-nine percent of groupies described their mothers as good, great, and loving mothers (compared to 85 % of PMs and 51 % of fans). No PMs said their mothers had drug/alcohol problems but about 14 % of groupies and 12 % of fans did. Interestingly, 34 % of fans said their mothers were emotionally unavailable, controlling, mean, or abusive toward them, compared to 14 % of groupies, and 0 % of PMs.

When asked to describe their fathers, 27 % of groupies, 46 % of PMs, and 31 % of fans said they were good, great, and loving. Another 54 % of PMs said their dad was “a typical dad,” but no groupies or fans reported this characteristic. Fully 69 % of groupies reported their fathers as engaging in domestic violence, drugs, or alcohol, or that they had abandoned them and were emotionally unavailable. Similarly, 57 % of fans reported these characteristics but no PMs did.

Sexual History and Experiences

Groups did not differ in their age at first sexual experience (mean age was 16). The vast majority of participants had their first sexual experience with a committed boyfriend/girlfriend. Two band members, two groupies, and 14 fans reported that their first sexual experience occurred during sexual abuse. Recall that about 25 % of groupies also reported experiencing sexual coercion and/or rape during their groupie days. Groupies had their first groupie experience at a mean age of 14.9, with a range from 13 to 20 years of age.

Groupies recounted 48 specific trysts with famous rock stars. Ten percent of these trysts involved members of the glam metal band Warrant. Twenty-three percent were collectively accounted for by members of Warrant, WASP, and Poison. Parenthetically, the singer of Warrant, Jani Lane, died of alcoholism in 2011. The most famous rock stars groupies named as sexual partners included Jon Bon Jovi, Gene Simmons of KISS, David Lee Roth of Van Halen, Billy Idol, Nikki Sixx of Motley Crue, and Ted Nugent.

Fifty-four percent of groupies reported having longer term relationships with rock stars, lasting anywhere from 2 months to twenty-five years. The mean length of these longer-term relationships was 4.86 years. Forty-two percent of groupies reported that their famous musician partners had cheated on them and 21 % reported cheating on their famous partners. Only 28 % of groupies felt that band members used them and 72 % reported they did not feel used. Some representative comments include,

They used me for sex...for a place to stay, for food, for transportation;
They used you for drugs...wore your clothes...your jewelry;

In contrast, the majority of groupies reported statements such as,

We all knew what we were doing...we had no strings attached;
Everyone kind of used each other...everyone was young, having fun...I never felt used or even disrespected.

Similarly, 22 % of groupies reported that they used band members, but 78 % said they did not. Comments included,

I used them for fame, to get in free, to be cooler than other chicks, for self-esteem, for special treatment;
I got a thrill being with men that were hot on stage but I genuinely cared about all of them, if not loved them;

I can honestly say I was attracted to all of them and enjoyed just being part of their world;

Groupies reported an average of 20.41 non-famous sexual partners in their lifetimes, with a range of 1–100+. Their longer-term relationships with non-famous people lasted on average 9 years (range 5 months–23 years). One third of PMs reported having longer term relationships with groupies, which lasted on average 2.7 years (range 6 months–5 years). Only 16 % of PMs felt they used groupies while 84 % said they did not. A representative comment of the former includes,

I could not have lived without them...I made them buy me alcohol, drugs, and food. And smokes, and pay my rent. And equipment;

However, the majority of PMs made statements like the following:

The sex was awesome and the variety was fantastic without any strings attached;

The girls did what they wanted to do. No meant no, even back then. They gave us gifts and food by their own doing. I do not feel bad for them, they were having as much fun as we were;

They were there for the same thing I was...they wanted sex as much, if not more, than we did; I did not feel used...none of the girls I was with did either; There was an equal exchange of use. Everybody knew what they were getting into...they were huge fans.

Experiences in the Heavy Metal Scene

When asked why they liked HM over other genres of music, about 30 % of metal participants across the three groups said it was due to the heavy guitars, drums, loudness, and hard/fast rhythms. About 25 % of each group reported that it was due to the sexy musicians, good looking artists, or women/men in the scene; about 15 % reported that it was about intense personal beliefs, questioning authority, rebelliousness, and a sense of identity. Some typical fan comments included,

The music always seemed to be exactly how I felt...the lyrics were awesome and the sounds were hard;

It touched my soul, it spoke to me;

I enjoyed the freewheeling, independent lifestyle.

Typical PM comments included,

The dark lyrical content, thoughtful insights, the way it moved the audience, mysterious imagery;

The power, the volume, the theatrics, and the chicks!

Some representative groupie comments include,

First and foremost, the music. I feel like I am in love with the songs so the closest thing to having sex with the music is to have sex with the

musician...plus it gives you an ego boost to know you were chosen when they could have anyone;

I really liked the androgynous look...allowing me...to enjoy both sides...most musicians had larger than life personas that are very appealing;

They were beautiful, magical, and could enthrall thousands of people from the stage. It was intoxicating being a part of that. Loving them, caring for them, meeting their every desire was like giving back to them.

All groups were asked to describe some of the strategies they used or the most memorable experiences they had regarding trying to get back stage or gain access to musicians or venues. About 30 % of each group reported using personal networking skills to get back stage or into concerts. One quarter of fans, 20 % of groupies, and 19 % of PMs reported just hanging out in the right places and making friends with the crew. About 20 % of each group talked about being sexy, looking the part, acting like they belonged there, or dressing like rock stars as a common strategy they used. Fans reported often hiding out in venues, sneaking in, breaking in, and driving hundreds of miles to camp out at the venue. PMs also said they often waited in long lines or drove long distances, jumped over gates, snuck in through back doors, or pushed their way in while musicians were walking in. Groupies often mentioned providing oral sex to people (roadies, managers, band members), dressing in revealing clothes, flashing the band while they were playing, etc. However, they were much more elaborative in their answers compared to the other two groups, often relaying full stories about their experiences. Some examples include,

I gave a famous rock star a blow job on his bus and he gave me a backstage pass;

I had kinky sex with a rock star;

I had a foursome with a musician;

I was a paid mistress to a world famous rock star and was held on retainer.

When I was called up on stage and he gave me a kiss in front of the whole crowd of girls, it was incredible.

All participants were asked about whether they had any regrets about the 1980s. Forty-eight percent of fans, 57 % of groupies, and 63 % of PMs said they had no regrets at all. Among those who did have some regrets, they often mentioned getting into fights, doing too many drugs, getting into dangerous situations, and people dying (car crashes, drug overdoses).

They were also asked about the three best and three worst things that happened to them in the 1980s metal scene. The most common “best” experience for all groups was meeting friends they still have today, meeting boyfriends/girlfriends, and going to concerts. About 30 % of each group also mentioned free sexuality as one of the best things. Several groupies listed “fucking rock stars” as one of the best things they remembered. All groups repeatedly mentioned that the 1980s metal scene was very unique and that they felt this was a special time in history. They were witness to greatness as so many bands from their local clubs became famous. One groupie captured this sentiment in her comment,

Being present, up close and personal, during an amazing time in music history with some of those who helped shape it...

Another groupie reported,

Unless you lived it, you will never understand it. We were not a bunch of sluts or guys with gender identity issues...we were part of a social movement...we could feel this frenetic energy in the air...just being in the moment, hedonistic, wild, and free!

Fans stated,

It was a time for discovering ourselves, expressing things in a different way; The '80 s was a look, a style, a voice to many painful things...it was the best decade ever!

PMs said,

It was the last time this nation had fun. Sex was still fun and not dangerous. You could be crazy and not fear breaking the law. You were not a misogynist if you had sex with lots of girls. Today, we are uptight; I look back on those days and still feel it was magic...it brought us together, a brotherhood of like-minded people.

The three worst things that happened to PMs primarily involved not making it in the music industry, not being more committed to making it, having bad management, and so on. Groupies discussed being sexually coerced and raped, being left places alone, and betraying their friends to have sex with people. Fans were the only group that mentioned being mocked or teased for looking like a metalhead, having no money, and getting jumped or beaten up.

All groups were asked to describe their weekly substance use in a typical week in the 1980s. Most respondents reported mainly using substances on weekends, at parties, or at concerts. However, 20 % of fans, 24 % of PMs, and 54 % of groupies reported daily use. The most common drug reported was cocaine. They also mentioned LSD, mushrooms, crank, speed, heroin, and crystal meth. As discussed above, about 75 % of each group used alcohol regularly during the 1980s. Fans describing the scene said,

The friggin' Rainbow, or 'the blow,' as it was known...drunken shenanigans, piles of coke in the upstairs room;
The 'metal mix' was heroin, meth, and cocaine all mixed together. We would always do cocaine.

The final question on the qualitative measure asked each group to explain what they thought were common misconceptions about their particular group. The most common fan response included people thinking metalheads were shallow, Satanic, stupid, ignorant, losers, and had low IQ. One telling quote stated,

We weren't the Neanderthal mouth breathers that we looked like!

Another fan said,

I think too many people believe that metalheads are all vapid, shallow, one-dimensional simpletons...there were a great many intelligent people who found their own personal relief in rock.

Groupies reported that people thought they were sluts, useless, were being used, that they had low IQ, and had no future. One groupie reported,

Being a groupie is about loving the music, it's not about the sex...that just happens naturally when you hang around with bands that you love. A real groupie knows the music as much as the band does.

Another groupie said,

I think they assume groupie equals slut when in fact most groupies probably sleep with fewer people because we are holding out for rock stars.

The most typical comments from PMs were about the complexity and virtuosity of metal performers not being appreciated by the general public. One PM said,

They lump us all together, don't understand the complexity of metal, the talent required, the creativity involved.

Interesting, only in the PM group did anyone say, "I don't care what people think!" (18 % of PMs stated this).

Discussion

In support of early work on metalheads (Arnett 1991a, b, 1996; Martin et al. 1993), as well as popular conceptions of this population, participants from these metal enthusiast groups did live the risky "sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll" lifestyle. For example, all groups reported regularly using alcohol in their youth. Also, the PMs had significantly more sexual partners in the past and currently than groupies or fans and also contracted higher numbers of sexually transmitted infections. PMs and groupies also reported regularly using sex as leverage to get what they wanted in the 1980s. In addition to using sex as leverage in their youth, fully half of the groupies reported significant problems with drugs in their youth. One quarter of groupies were sexually coerced or raped during their groupie years and PMs reported significantly higher sex drives than typical fans.

In support of previous research and theorizing on women in the metal culture, groupies experienced high numbers of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and perhaps gravitated toward the style culture to find a sense of purpose or identity (Krenske and McKay 2000; Walser 1993). For example, they experienced more ACEs than the other groups. Groupies also experienced higher levels of maternal neglect than PMs. In fact, metal fans also experienced higher levels of maternal neglect than PMs. Interestingly, PMs had very low levels of ACEs and maternal neglect in their histories, suggesting a fruitful avenue for future gendered analyses

of the groupie and musician subcultures. Contrary to what one might expect, groupies and PMs both reported lower rates of childhood sexual abuse than fans did.

All analyses were conducted again breaking up the fan group into male and female fans, in order to assess whether any interesting gender differences emerged on any of the dependent measures. Most results remained the same except for two noteworthy trends. First, female fans reported having a lower sex drive in their 1980s youth compared to all other groups. These group differences were only statistically significant in comparison to male fans and PMs, however. Thus, men in general reported higher sex drives in their youth than female fans, but not significantly different from groupies. Second, male fans reported significantly lower levels of happiness in their youth compared to groupies and PMs. Moreover, female fans reported being less happy in their 1980s youth than groupies. So it seems that those most enmeshed in the metal style culture felt significantly happier than general fans, regardless of gender.

These results support previous research from the 1980s and 1990s that metalheads engaged in risky sexual and substance-related behaviors, and that metalheads, and groupies, in particular, came from troubled families characterized by turmoil, abuse, and neglect. Qualitative data suggest that groupies found solace in the music they loved and the sexual intimacy they found with musicians. Likewise, fans and musicians alike felt a kinship in the metal community, and a way to experience heightened emotions and intense connections with like-minded people, which seemed to contribute to their eventual positive identity development. This supports earlier theorizing (Arnett 1993; Scheel and Westefeld 1999; Schwartz and Fouts 2003).

Today, these middle-aged metalheads are middle class, gainfully employed, relatively well-educated, and look back fondly on the wild times they lived in the 1980s. In an article comparing metalheads to two cohorts of comparison participants (Howe, Friedman, Alcazar, Vazquez, Becker, and Murphy, under review), the metalheads were not more likely to attempt suicide or have sex at earlier ages than other youth, nor were they more likely to miss work due to physical or mental health problems as adults, which contradicts the expectations that grew out of previous work (e.g., Arnett 1991a, b). In fact, their middle-aged comparison non-metal cohorts were *more* likely to seek psychological counseling and reported having a less happy experience growing up as youth in the 1980s. These findings suggest that fringe style cultures can attract troubled youth who may engage in risky behaviors, but that they also may serve a protective function as a source of kinship and connection for youth seeking to solidify their identity development (Arnett 1993; Schwartz and Fouts 2003).

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Work

The data from this study are self-report and partly retrospective, so they embody all the interpretation caveats commonly found in such studies. The participants were volunteers who had access to Facebook and wanted to tell their stories anonymously to researchers. Thus, they may be higher functioning than other metalheads who may have died early, declined to participate, or experienced problems in employment, relationships, and so on, as they grew up. Also, sample sizes were

not large enough to conduct more complex analyses such as examining whether ACEs, risky behaviors, or other early experience variables predicted later functioning in terms of educational and marital success or other outcomes. Nevertheless, detailed descriptive data from groupies, fans and performers two decades later provide a rich source of themes and hypotheses to pursue in further detail. Clearly, in certain ways, many metalheads had beneficial experiences or developed resilient pathways, confirming the mixed picture of fringe groups speculated upon decades ago.

Future work should follow youth involved in distinct style cultures longitudinally so that developmental trajectories can be more clearly mapped out. There has been no research on 1980s fringe style cultures that followed youth into adulthood, and the current study is the first to examine such an adult sample. In addition, future research should employ larger samples of professional musicians and groupies so that more definitive conclusions can be made. The current small sub-samples of PMs and groupies raise interesting questions for future researchers to examine in more depth, especially in regard to the divergent experiences of each gender joining edgy cultural sub-groups. Because the 1980s metal scene was particularly male-dominated, it is important to examine more modern music cultures. Do women in more contemporary genres use sex less as leverage to gain power, privilege, and intimacy? Are groupies and PMs relating in different ways after the AIDS epidemic and the end of the 1980s “Me” generation? With the explosion of social media, how do activities such as sexting, and Skype-based intimacy play into the relationships formed in modern music cultures?

Because the metal style culture was traditionally European-American and working to middle class, the current sample reflects this. Similar studies should be attempted with diverse youth style cultures such as hip hop or rap enthusiasts, in order to assess whether, indeed, all youth struggle with and sometimes benefit from the same issues of the search for identity and meaning, as the groups here reported. Are those who affiliate with such groups a danger to themselves or others (Fried 2003; Took and Weiss 1994)? Boer et al. (2011) suggest that cultural identity in terms of music preferences reflects shared values which lead group members to emotionally bond with each other. And one of the most common findings in the psychological literature is that social support, such as that found with similarly musically inclined companions, is a crucial protective factor for troubled youth (e.g., Ungar 2011).

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