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# Female Authority and Dominion: Discourse and Distinctions of Heavy Metal Scholarship

*Brian Hickam and Jeremy Wallach*

From its inception, both outsiders and insiders have associated heavy metal with men and masculinity. Some have even maintained that metal culture is hostile territory for women. Despite this, a significant proportion of writers who have documented, analysed, and indeed celebrated heavy metal has been women, from the groundbreaking sociological studies of Deena Weinstein and Donna Gaines, to the recent ethnographic work of Emma Baulch. This article provides a preliminary investigation of this historical phenomenon and what it can reveal about the ever complex, constantly changing relationship between gender and power in metal.

## Introduction

From its inception, both outsiders and insiders have associated heavy metal with masculinity. While heavy metal music and subculture have continually evolved in myriad ways over the past five decades, the majority of musicians and fans has been, and continues to be, male. Some consider heavy metal not just a male-dominated culture, but one that is hostile to women (Cateforis 2007, p. 227). Consequently, it might be surprising to learn that women have played a significant role in heavy metal print culture, including scholarly monographs. This article first surveys the major published works by women on the subject of heavy metal and then concludes with some thoughts on this inquiry's implications for scholarly understandings of heavy metal music and the future directions of metal studies research. We argue throughout that, analogous to the female presence at most metal shows, being in a statistical minority does not entail women authors' exclusion or lack of influence in the metal world.

In 1985, Carol Leggett, Philippe Blanchet, and Philip Bashe (female, male, and male, respectively) published mass-market books celebrating metal and its heroes. The year 1991 witnessed the first three monographs to focus on heavy

metal. Two were by women: Gaines' *Teenage Wasteland: Suburbia's Dead End Kids* and Weinstein's *Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology*. Altrogge and Amann's *Videoclips – die geheimen Verführer der Jugend? Ein Gutachten zur Struktur, Nutzung und Bewertung von Heavy-Metal-Videoclips* (Videoclips – The Secret Seducers of Youth? An Opinion on Structure, Use and Evaluation of Heavy Metal Videoclips) was also published that year. By contrast, it was not until 2010 that the world's first two cookbooks with heavy metal-inspired recipes appeared: *Hellbent for Cooking: The Heavy Metal Cookbook* by Annick Giroux (published earlier as a pamphlet) and Steve Seabury's *Mosh Potatoes: Recipes, Anecdotes, and Mayhem from the Heavyweights of Heavy Metal*. Although documentary film is not technically print culture, it is useful to note that women have been active in documentary films about metal. The first documentary with substantial content on heavy metal culture might be *L'Emotion Dissonante* (1984), from director Fernand Bélanger and producer Jacques Vallée (both male), and distributed by the National Film Board of Canada. In focusing on marijuana-smoking adolescents, it follows some of its black-T-shirt-clad subjects to concerts by their favorite metal bands. Two years later, the notorious documentary *Heavy Metal Parking Lot* (1986; male director, two male producers) was released. Better known, however, are documentary films on punk, hardcore punk, and heavy metal by director Penelope Spheeris. Her 1980 film *The Decline of Western Civilization* focuses on punk and hardcore bands in Los Angeles. Spheeris's *The Decline of Western Civilization Part II: The Metal Years* was released in 1988. More recent examples of documentary films on heavy metal with female directors or producers are: *Full Metal Village* (2007), *Until the Light Takes Us* (2008), and *Such Hawks Such Hounds: Scenes from the American Hard Rock Underground* (2008).

### Women Like Metal, Too!

As evidenced by Leggett's 1985 mass-market paperback *Heavy Metal Bible*, women were acknowledged as fans of heavy metal and the literature associated with it less than two years after Quiet Riot's *Metal Health* became the first metal album to top the *Billboard* 200 chart:

Hot, throbbing, crashing, crunching. Ear-popping, brain damaging, blitzing, explosive. This is what heavy metal is all about ... The look is leather, spikes, chains, tattoos, shag hairdos, and lots of black eye makeup. Metalloid rockers are old, young, and some are disgusting. But we love 'em ... So, boys and girls, get in gear. Get ready to find out the inside dope (and we do mean dope) on the heavy superstars of the metal kingdom. (Leggett 1985, p. ix)

Andy Brown's (2008, 2009) research into heavy metal tabloid magazines and identity also shows that female metal fans are neither new nor resisted by male fans. Women's participation in heavy metal print culture is not surprising

as their contributions to the evolution of the music have been, and continue to be, well received. In October 2010, for instance, the Metal Female Voices Fest held its eighth festival. Also in 2010 was the sixth Women in Rock Festival in The Netherlands. Unlike Lilith Fair in North America, these metal events were attended by large numbers of both women and men. Several websites are dedicated to promoting women's contributions to heavy metal.<sup>1</sup> The *Encyclopaedia Metallum: The Metal Archives* website,<sup>2</sup> which is the largest listing of bands and discographies, includes numerous entries of groups that are all-female or contain female musicians.

Appendix 1 is a chronologically arranged bibliography of books on heavy metal with reference to author gender. This list consists of scholarly monographs and mass-market books which discuss the music or culture of heavy metal, hardcore punk, or related styles. Biographies, books with separate chapter authors, books focused on one band, reference encyclopedias, tablature books, and fiction are excluded. Doubtless Appendix 1 has unintended omissions, and publications in languages other than English, German, French, and Norwegian were not identified. It does, however, represent our attempt to provide a representative bibliography that allows for an assessment of women's contributions to the print culture of heavy music. Hardcore punk publications have been included as the lines between it and heavy metal began to blur decades ago. Hale, for instance, includes some hardcore bands in his 1993 book *Headbangers: The Worldwide Megabook of Heavy Metal Bands*. The *Magazines Download* website describes the UK's *Metal Hammer* magazine as

the UK's only monthly hardcore metal mag. It covers both traditional and contemporary metal bands, hardcore, gothic rock, punk and alternative, reporting on the burgeoning British scene as well as all the latest bands Stateside and around the world. It's loud, it's rude and it makes no apologies.<sup>3</sup>

This website also lists the tags "metal hammer", "music", "hardcore", "rock", and "metal" for the magazine. The inclusion of hardcore books is further supported by the "bridges" formed by subgenres such as grindcore, metalcore, and crust punk.

Monographs with multiple chapter contributors offer further evidence of the openness within heavy metal's print culture. *Metallica and Philosophy: A Crash Course in Brain Surgery* (Irwin 2007) has a male editor, 17 male contributors, and four female chapter authors. *Heavy Metal Music in Britain* (Bayer 2009) is edited by a man and has three female and eight male contributors. In contrast, *La Religion metal: Première sociologie de la musique metal* (Mombelet & Walzer 2005) has a male editor, with all seven contributions also coming from

1. For example, *METALADIES: All-Female Metal Bands* at <http://www.metaladies.com> and *Metal Maidens* at <http://www.metalmaidens.com>.

2. See <http://www.metal-archives.com>.

3. See <http://magazinesdownload.com/category/Metal-Hammer.aspx>.

men. Such instances, however, seem to be more happenstance than discrimination. The book *Metal Rules the Globe* (Wallach *et al.* forthcoming) is edited by three male scholars and has 13 male and three female contributors. Additional evidence of heavy metal print culture's inclusion of women is found in the many female editors, article and column authors, and music and concert reviewers found throughout the history of heavy metal tabloid magazines, fanzines, webzines, and blogs. These publications fall outside the scope of the present survey; however, they constitute a rich source of information for future research.

It is important to note that the dynamics of any print culture are not determined by authors alone. Editors, publishers, retailers, academics, and others influence which topics and perspectives are published. Societal pressures, be they economic, political, or social, influence who becomes an author. Reviewers, anthologists, instructors, thesis/dissertation advisers, and others determine what is recognized, deemed worthy, and canonized. This has particularly salient consequences for women, whose contributions are often devalued. Libraries and archives also influence what is researched and how. Issues of a text's accessibility come into play after its publication as researchers often rely upon such repositories for source material. In the book *Contesting Archives*, Chaudhuri *et al.* (2010) contend that archives are not "neutral", "ahistorical" repositories of information, and that women's voices and texts have often become buried or lost. More specific to music history and teaching as influenced by music archives is Kimberly Marshall's 1993 book *Rediscovering the Muses: Women's Musical Traditions*:

Aspiring young musicians are often greatly influenced by women who serve as role models in their work as performers, scholars, composers, and teachers. Yet when adolescents are asked to name their musical idols of the past, it is rare for a woman to be included among them. This is because their knowledge of the past depends entirely on the choices of historians, who decide which people and events are important and worthy of being immortalized in biographies and musical studies. Since historians in the past have relegated female musicians like Clara Schumann and Fanny Mendelssohn to the margins and footnotes, it is hardly surprising that women's historical contributions to music making are largely unacknowledged, even by students who have been taught primarily by women. (Marshall 1993, p. xv)

As Russ (1983) argues in her book *How to Suppress Women's Writing* – and Sandoval (2000) in *Methodology of the Oppressed* – there are numerous ways that the voices of certain populations have been discouraged and distorted. While various libraries, museums, and archives contain materials on heavy metal, the only known institution that is striving to preserve all international literature on heavy metal is the Music Library and Sound Recordings Archive of Ohio's Bowling Green State University (specifically, the special collection titled "The Heavy Metal and Hardcore Punk Archive"). If heavy metal print culture can be said to be an equitable arena for women, then their publications are

**Table 1** Gender of presenters at the Heavy Fundametalisms and Heavy Metal and Gender conferences (according to the final conference programs)

Conference	Male	Female
Heavy Fundametalisms (2008)	24	9 (27.3%)
Heavy Metal and Gender (2009)	18	9 (33.3%)
Heavy Fundametalisms (2009)	10	8 (44.4%)
Heavy Fundametalisms (2010)	22	14 (38.9%)

just as likely to be archived, since “The Heavy Metal and Hardcore Punk Archive” aspires to identify and obtain any and all relevant publications, regardless of language, era, region, format, or author gender (Hickam 2008).

### Inclusion versus Marginalization within Popular Culture

Reactions to publications are another way to assess gender equity within a print culture. The two most-cited monographs in metal scholarship are those by Weinstein (1991) and Walser (1993). Both scholars have been invited to provide keynote speeches at conferences and contribute to other publications. Since academic conferences play an important role in both scholarly communication and publishing, it should be noted that the second international academic conference on heavy metal was the 2009 Heavy Metal and Gender international congress in Cologne, Germany. The first global conference was the plenary Heavy Fundametalisms: Music, Metal and Politics, held in 2008 in Salzburg, Austria. These two conferences – and the second and third installments of Heavy Fundametalisms – included numerous female scholars (see Table 1).

Another heavy metal conference, held in September 2011, is Home of Metal: Heavy Metal and Place, sponsored by Capsule and the University of Wolverhampton, UK. The Home of Metal project, which celebrates the musical heritage of Birmingham and the Black Country, was founded by two female heavy metal fans in 2007.<sup>4</sup>

Other genres of popular culture have different histories of inclusion. The Riot Grrrl movement resulted in part from the marginalization of women during the emergence of hardcore punk. Dozens upon dozens of punk/Riot Grrrl women published fanzines in order to get their voices heard (see Turner 2001). In “Women in the Men’s Locker Room?”, Messner (1994) discusses the long history of discrimination against women within American sports journalism. Referencing the print culture of the art world, Kim Levin (2010, p. 114) states: “It’s clear that female [Pop] artists of the ’60s were pushed to the margins of art history”. The print cultures of both science fiction (novels and short stories)

4. See <http://www.homeofmetal.com/the-project/about>.

and science fiction fandom (literature, criticism, and art based on science fiction characters) initially blocked their doors to women (Bacon-Smith 1992; Donawerth 1997). In her book *The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction*, Larbalestier (2002, p. xi) notes her surprise "that science fiction's engagement with feminism, sexual difference, and sex and sexuality was not a recent development". She discusses at length how science fiction "had a tradition of *engaging* with these issues" (p. xii). Such engagement makes the marginalization of women all the more intriguing. The heavy metal subculture can take pride in accomplishing something that most other genres of popular culture have not, as its print culture and scholarly arena have not forced women to the periphery.

As the list of books in Appendix 1 exemplifies, one would be hard-pressed to find evidence of systematic gender-based discrimination. Perhaps this is because the majority of heavy metal magazines and fanzines include many contributions by women. Another explanation might be the nature of the bonds that unite heavy metal fans. Metal fans seem to value the music above all else (Weinstein 1991). As long as the music or writing about the music is powerful or "good", the demographics of musicians and authors do not seem to matter. The fact that the band Arch Enemy is fronted by a woman or that Judas Priest is led by a gay man is relatively insignificant to the vast majority of metal fans. An Indonesian metal bassist Jeremy met during his field research sums up this commonly encountered attitude. A veteran of the Surabaya, Indonesia's underground metal scene, who went by the name Monster, he grew impatient with Jeremy's sociologically oriented questions and finally emphatically asserted that differences in class, religion, and ethnicity were simply *tidak diungkap* ("not mentioned") in the underground. "Look at him", Monster said, gesturing to one of the other scenesters hanging out with them, "he's really rich, this other guy's poor, this guy's Chinese ... it doesn't matter!"

The strong bonds and inclusive nature of heavy metal fans might be because the music and culture themselves have historically been misunderstood and marginalized. From FM radio to academe, heavy metal can be likened to a "black sheep", if not a *persona non grata*. While science fiction was successfully marginalized during the first several decades of its existence and is still somewhat frowned upon in academic circles, it has gained far more acceptance than heavy metal music or heavy metal studies. Perhaps the inclusiveness of heavy metal print culture also stems from the openness of the music genre itself. Metal has demonstrated a remarkable willingness to incorporate different musical traditions and styles. From symphonic black metal to Vedic metal, folk metal, funeral doom, gothic metal, industrial metal, terrorcore or progressive metal (to list only eight), the genre has encompassed innumerable permutations. Conversely, themes *common* to almost all subgenres of heavy music — "fighting the world", unity, and personal strength — may also be key to metal culture's ethos of acceptance, as they emphasize solidarity and steadfast resistance in the face of external adversity.

### Survey of Metal Scholars

In preparation for our presentation at the Heavy Metal and Gender international congress, we surveyed 19 scholars (female and male) who had authored or edited books or chapters on heavy metal. Our goal was to assess their views of sexism and gender issues within the music and subculture, and to ascertain what attracted them to the music and inspired them to write about it. Examples of the 21 questions are: What attracted you to the music (when you first got into it)? What attracts you to the music today? Over the years, have you ever viewed metal as sexist? Over the years, have you ever considered metal to be a male-dominated culture? What originally inspired you to write about heavy metal?

If names were removed from the returned surveys, an observer would be hard-pressed to correctly identify which respondents are male and which female. A female scholar, for instance, wrote that she was attracted to the music as “the [heavy metal] culture was accessible at a local level, genuine, welcoming and fun”. She also opined that metal was not a sexist culture: “Whilst the scene has always been dominated by men, the music it produces is open to everyone.” She remains attracted to heavy metal today due to its “energy, musicianship, and innovation”, adding that the genre “inspires more debate, more passion, more devotion and more criticism than any other genre I know of. It demands talent from its players and an open mind from its listeners.” A male respondent noted that he was originally, and remains, attracted to metal because of “its affective and aesthetic power”. He viewed metal as both sexist and male-dominated, offering: “metal and gender is a complex issue and my views of it are continually developing”. Some of the respondents who referred to metal as sexist also emphasized that such sexism was typically more of a gimmick or “shtick” than sincere. Proof that some women take part in such gimmickry might be found in an all-female heavy metal band from Cali, Colombia, who go by the name Virgin Killer; which is, no doubt, a nod to or play on the sexism of the original cover art for the 1976 album of that name by the Scorpions (see below for a discussion of gendered imagery in metal artwork). In any case, we hope to investigate the survey results further in future publications.

### Role Models within an Often Misunderstood Culture

In addition to the female scholars, journalists, and historians noted above, female heavy metal fans can find powerful role models onstage thanks to a plethora of female musicians. Doro Pesch, Sean Yseult, Angela Gossow, Anza (of Head Phones President), and the four women who comprise the self-proclaimed “witch doom metal” band shEver are but a few of the internationally recognized names who have displayed images of strength within heavy metal. During her vocal workshop at the Heavy Metal and Gender international congress, Angela Gossow related: “When I’m onstage I feel strong. I am strong.”

One of us contends, however, that metal's ability to empower its listeners irrespective of their gender identities is not simply a matter of correlation with the conspicuous presence of performers of multiple gender identities in metal. Back in 1992, in his undergraduate senior thesis on "speed metal", Jeremy wrote:

One of the most gifted and prolific rock critics in the [San Francisco] Bay Area writes under the name "Sadie O.," and proudly tells her readers that she brings her two small children to speed metal concerts. Practically every musical publication that covers speed metal has at least some female contributors, despite the fact that there are no prominent female performers of this music. In addition, I believe it is not a coincidence that the authors of the two best academic treatments of the metal phenomenon, Donna Gaines and Deena Weinstein, are also women.

He concluded:

Despite being somehow excluded from the musician role in the subculture, women make up a sizable part of the metal intelligentsia; they are concerned with evaluating and promoting this style of music for which they feel a strong enthusiasm. (Wallach 1992, p. 28)

The conspicuous presence of women writers in metal culture is, of course, this essay's main focus, and this was clearly already apparent at a time when metal musicians were a nearly all-boys club.

This is not to say that gender is insignificant now that the metal scene has changed so dramatically. No one denies the whiteness and the maleness of the beloved British standard-bearers of the genre – Black Sabbath, Judas Priest, Iron Maiden. But to then argue that all metal musicians (and metalheads) are therefore white males is both fallacious and actively harmful to non-white (see Quinones 2010) and/or women metal performers and fans, especially when academics appear to be making arguments to that effect. Metal musicians exclusively male? Tell that to Angela Gossow, Doro Pesch, Sabina Classen, the members of Gallhammer, the all-female teenage death metalers in Brazil's Valhalla, or the all-female black/death metalers The Pigskins from Turkey (a name that has less to do with American football than with provoking pious Muslims), who endure sexist harassment and vandalism to practice their art (see Hecker 2009; the one recording by The Pigskins in Jeremy's possession, obtained from anthropologist Pierre Hecker, is the most brutal, pummeling track he has heard in years. As for the compulsory maleness of the audience, someone should try telling that to the crazed mobs of teenage girls who surround the members of Iron Maiden at their every tour stop in Japan (see *Iron Maiden* [2009]; see also *Metal* [2005] and *Global Metal* [2008] for vivid portraits of other women musicians, fans, and scholars). I (Jeremy) cannot resist relating one more highly anecdotal piece of evidence: in my college classroom experience in north-west Ohio, it seems for the last three years or so that the

vast majority of metalheads I encounter in my undergraduate classes are women. In fact, I am no longer particularly surprised by this.

Can metal, then, be construed to be pro-woman? We would not go as far as Andrew Cope (2010, p. 137), who claims that metal is "anti-patriarchal", but we agree wholeheartedly with his conclusion that metal can and should be separated from hard rock. Furthermore, the general absence of themes of heterosexual conquest, so important to the latter, causes most metal songs in the core tradition (originating with Black Sabbath and exemplified by Iron Maiden, Judas Priest, and almost all extreme metal) to by and large eschew misogyny. Cope argues persuasively that the decisive parting of the ways between misogynist Led Zeppelin-inspired hard rock and Sabbath-inspired heavy metal in the 1990s created a non-sexist space that allowed the rise of women performers in the metal universe of the 2000s (Cope 2010, pp. 136-138). That said, as a feminist, I (Jeremy) would insist that only cultural forms which deploy explicit feminist critique merit the label "anti-patriarchal".

While space does not permit further detail here, we suspect the reason Cope is comfortable characterizing metal's critiques of the dominant society as "anti-patriarchal" relates to differences between class and gender politics in the UK and the USA. Put simply, in the former it is much easier to conflate patriarchal (gendered) power with other forms of power (state, religious, capitalist, etc.). While in the UK hegemonic masculinity is allied with ruling-class culture, in the USA, masculine authenticity is resolutely blue-collar (and thus allied with metal's emphatically working-class positionality). This attachment to a proletarian masculine ideal (which likely arose in contradistinction to the figure of the British gentleman) is exemplified by the feminization of central British upper-class rituals in the USA, such as the tea party, museum-going, and attending the theatre. (Lest our British readers believe that this leads to a salutary anti-elitist cultural democratic attitude among men in the dominant class, we hasten to add that it more often leads to a contemptuous attitude toward *all* expressive culture as decadent and trivial, an irrelevant distraction at best from the serious business of making money or defending the nation.) Further consideration of the ways metal can be compatible with feminist thought is far beyond the scope of this essay. Perhaps such an investigation would be doomed from the start anyway, given the considerable diversity of both feminisms and metal enthusiasts and the inherently limited usefulness of all such labeling exercises.

### Gendered Imagery in Heavy Metal

Book covers, album cover art, concert flyers, and posters contribute to representations of women within heavy metal. Garry Sharpe-Young's (2008) encyclopedia *Death Metal* features vocalist Metallic Kitty on the cover. Kitty's act of flailing her long hair whilst headbanging onstage is generally viewed by metal fans as a display of power. The magazine *Metal Hammer* puts out a series of

compilations on compact disc under the title *Battle Metal*. Work selected as cover art for two volumes in the series offers evidence of the multifaceted nature of symbolism within heavy metal. *Battle Metal VIII: The New Blood*, for instance, features a female barbarian warrior.<sup>5</sup> She is very attractive, has Barbie doll proportions, and is nearly nude. She also holds a bloodied sword and the severed heads of two male warriors. In the background are two skulls and another decapitated head impaled on spears. This female warrior displays war-paint on her face as she kneels over one fallen male warrior while a second fallen male warrior lies dead in the background. One interpretation of the scene is that the woman was stronger in battle than her male adversaries and she is clearly the vanquisher. Another interpretation is that such covers are instances of the sexualization of women. Since heavy metal's iconography is often full of double entendre, both interpretations could apply to a given example. With its frequent references to warfare and world mythologies, it is likely many heavy metal images have roots with the various goddesses associated with the hunt or war.

Other examples of metal cover art illustrating female warriors are less blatantly sexist. Matt Dixon's illustration titled *Battle Metal* was also used for a compilation in the *Metal Hammer* series of the same name.<sup>6</sup> It shows equal strength and ferocity between a female warrior and her larger male foe. The viewer is left to ponder who will win the battle. Humor, sexism, and contradictions, however, seem to be firmly embedded into heavy metal culture. Another series of compact disc compilations, titled *Great Metal Covers*, frequently features semi-nude female warriors in its cover art. Some of these warriors are symbols of strength and conquest (such as volumes 1, 17, and 28); others have less clear implications other than titillation.<sup>7</sup> It might be surprising to those less familiar with heavy metal and associated genres to learn that some all-male bands use images that associate women with strength.<sup>8</sup>

### Suggestions for Further Research on Heavy Metal Print Culture

This article offers a perusal of the evidence more than a systematic analysis, as the latter would be more appropriately addressed at monographic length. All the same, we have argued that there have been few, if any, patterns of exclusion of female voices within heavy metal print culture. In fact, women's contributions are surprisingly high. Nor at present does there seem to be evidence of systematic attempts to belittle or disregard women's contributions to the music and culture. The percentage of female fans and concert promoters seems to be growing. People who are surprised to learn that a significant

5. See <http://winnipeg.kijiji.ca/c-ViewAdLargeImage?AdId=157184229>.

6. See <http://www.mattdixon.co.uk/g05.htm>.

7. See <http://rateyourmusic.com> for images of these releases.

8. See, for instance, images of concert posters for the metal/southern rock 'n' roll band Killcode at <http://www.myspace.com/gaggleofcocks>.

percentage of heavy metal's global fan base is women might also be intrigued to learn of other breaks with societal stereotypes. A National Public Radio series entitled *The Hidden World of Girls* included a story of young women in the USA who enjoy hunting:

Looking at Magan Hebert in her orange-and-blue cheerleading uniform, you'd never guess that she could shoot a rifle and kill a deer with a single shot. Her hair is teased up and pinned back into a pouf. Her cheekbones and eyelids are defined with bold, colorful sweeps of makeup. Magan, 15, of Wayne County, Miss., defies the typical image of a hunter — a man wearing camouflage, holding a gun. But an increasing number of girls now hunt. According to the latest data from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, there are some 300,000 female hunters under the age of 16. From 1991 to 2006, the number of girls who hunt in this country nearly doubled. (Keith 2010)

An understanding of women and heavy metal, then, must include analyses of the various pressures that societies exert to influence gender roles. Further research into women and heavy metal print culture should take into account dissertations, theses, journal articles, and conference papers. Of the 241 dissertations and theses on heavy music identified in researching this article, approximately 92 (or 38.2%) appear to be by women. As mentioned previously, research into popular media needs to be undertaken as well.

### Gender and Power Re-Revisited

Power, power everywhere,  
And how the signs do shrink.  
Power, power everywhere,  
And nothing else to think.  
(Sahlins 2002, p. 20)

We would like to conclude with a consideration of some larger implications of the preceding study. First, an anecdote: at a dinner party I (Jeremy) was attending in Media, Pennsylvania, in early November 2010, the head of the women's studies department at a nearby university, after she heard I was working on a volume on the global spread of heavy metal (Wallach *et al.* forthcoming), asked me what the devil (so to speak) people around the planet found so appealing about this music.

"Well," I started, "all over the world the music's fans appear to find the music to be a source of power."

Her nose wrinkled in disgust. "So you mean it appeals to little fascists, then?"

"No, not at all, I..."

"I'm serious."

I was, too. I replied that serious questions demanded serious answers and proceeded to supply one (even though it was a dinner party, and I was in a somewhat inebriated state). The answer I gave eventually helped me to write these words. I started out with the story of Professor Dr Annette Kreutziger-Herr. She was the leader of the History/Herstory project which co-sponsored the 2009 Heavy Metal and Gender international congress in Cologne. A middle-aged academic, she was hardly a metal fan going into the planning of this conference (which both authors of this article attended and whose presentation there was the origin of this article). Yet, when she gave her opening remarks on the first day, she mentioned that listening to bands like Crippler, Holy Moses, and Arch Enemy had changed her mind, and that she had really come to appreciate this style of music. (It helped that these three bands are fronted by women, of course, but the extraordinary influx of women performers into extreme metal, particularly since 2000, is, as we have said, only part of the story.) I then suggested the following (though, in all honesty, not quite so succinctly) to my dinner party colleague: metal's aggressive stance, while meant to intimidate, is not really intended to be about fighting, but fighting *back*. Around the world, it is music that resonates for the embattled and the disempowered, *not* the already-powerful. In other words, metal is about the need to assert subjecthood and defend oneself from attack and coercion. "Strength", then, might be a better term than "power" as it is less gendered, less associated with masculinity, and has less of a connotation of patriarchy. While it is true that some hostile outsiders find the music offensive – and that, admittedly, is part of the fun – the music's primary aim is *defensive*, to shield from assault, to provide the strength to endure and prevail.

### Classic Metal Narratives of Power: Iron Maiden's "Aces High" and "2 Minutes to Midnight"

In order to illustrate the above, let us briefly consider two masterworks of the heavy metal canon. While a great deal of researchers' attention has focused on the global extreme metal underground, it is worth noting that traditional heavy metal is also more popular than ever. Iron Maiden, one of the most celebrated of the classic metal groups, embarked on a massive world tour in 2008 that included playing to packed stadiums across Europe, Australia, Japan, and the Americas, and a first-time stop in Bangalore, India, where the band attracted 30,000 rabid spectators. In 2010, the band's tour of North America, during which they played little of their classic 80s material and only one song from their new album, which had not yet been released, was their largest ever. Thus, Iron Maiden, "they of the purest metal hearts" (Bond 2009, p. 96), despite the fact that they eschew tritones and a handful of other anomalies, could well be the quintessential metal group. The following discussion focuses on the first two tracks from their celebrated album *Powerslave* (1984).

The album's opener, "Aces High", is a "powerful, meticulously crafted song" that tells the story of the Battle of Britain from the point of view of a daring Royal Air Force (RAF) pilot (Bond 2009, p. 96). When played in concert (and included on live recordings), the song is introduced by a historic Winston Churchill speech proclaiming the UK's resolve to defend itself against Axis aggression, which could also be a declaration of the heavy metal ethos: "We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be ... We shall never surrender! [music begins]". The first line of the song describes the siren sounding the warning of an impending German air raid as the RAF scramble to face the coming attackers. The transition from Churchill's weary but defiant expression of his country's resolve to fight and never give in to the opening guitar riff of the song is a "goosebumps moment" – a quintessential example of the heavy metal sublime. It is so because it is a reminder of the imperative to stand strong in the face of threats, intimidation, assault, and dire misfortune – an exhilarating reminder to never surrender.

While valiant self-defense in the face of great odds is valorized in metal compositions, wars of aggression are generally narrated from a coldly neutral standpoint (a common device in death metal) or, more often, in a condemnatory fashion that decries the senselessness of the slaughter – perhaps admiring the courage of the often doomed foot soldiers but excoriating the power lust of the politicians and generals "gathered in their masses". *Powerslave*'s second song, "2 Minutes to Midnight", is also about war; but, like Black Sabbath's "War Pigs" before it, instead of praising those who defend their island, it decries soldiers of fortune and the greedy, bloodthirsty governments that employ them and divert resources which could have been used for humanitarian ends to developing new and deadlier weapons technologies.

Misunderstandings of metal's rhetoric of power are ubiquitous among the music's many detractors. On one level, this is quite understandable. Certainly, the premodern warrior cultures celebrated in metal, such as Vikings (see Clinton 2011), samurai, and Tang Dynasty aristocratic warriors (Wong forthcoming), not to mention metal's controversial appropriation of twentieth-century fascist and militarist iconography, would strongly suggest to outsiders that metalheads share these sources' glorifications of violent conquest, triumph in battle, and merciless rampaging fury. Metal may appropriate the aesthetic but, as we have seen, even a cursory examination of canonical metal compositions reveals a great deal of complexity and ambivalence with regard to the issue of aggression.

Of course, critics commonly point to the rise of racist, fascist, and neo-Nazi metal and claim that heavy metal does, in fact, share fascism's bloody infatuation with aggressive violence against the innocent. In truth, as any metal fan knows, these subgenres attract a small minority of metal musicians and fans in the global scene. Despite the fact that they constitute a *significantly smaller* minority of metalheads worldwide than queer metalheads, metalheads of color, or certainly women seriously into metal, metal's detractors somehow still manage to argue that such groups represent the "true" essence of metal

culture. Meanwhile, the latter, considerably larger groups (which, of course, overlap) somehow do not count when assessing the metal phenomenon. This is, in our view, utter nonsense. We suspect that there are even metal scholars out there who have unwittingly bought into the essentialist logic of the detractor position. So, allow us to reiterate: *metal fans who are female and/or queer and/or people of color constitute far less of a deviation from the metal norm than white, straight, male fans of hate metal* (a category in which we would also include porn grind and other virulently misogynistic subgenres). Abundant empirical research has shown that for millions of people around the world, metal is *not* an outlet for the antisocial rage of the angry, white, straight, Anglo male. Instead, heavy metal is music that celebrates freedom through strength to a worldwide audience, and everyone is invited.

### Justified Anger

That metal music provides its enthusiasts with the strength to withstand, persevere, and fight back may be why the genre, against all expectations, is attracting a growing constituency of fans from “aggrieved communities” (to use George Lipsitz’s term) traditionally studied by sociologists. It also explains why metal has *always* appealed to folks whom social scientists often neglect: alienated suburban loners, burnouts, victims of parental and/or institutional abuse, and all manner of dead-end kids with legitimate reasons to be angry. This anger is not the stereotypical “white male rage” of Michael Douglas’s character in the movie *Falling Down* (1993), who is unable to comprehend or tolerate the reluctance of women, non-whites, and even children to show him deference. It is the rage of those who are hassled by cops, written off by teachers, harassed by peers, and misunderstood by parents and other adult authority figures.

One sociologist who famously did not overlook metal’s traditional adolescent fan base is Donna Gaines, a member of the “Unholy Trinity” (with Deena Weinstein and Robert Walser) of early metal studies pioneers, even if she tends to be the least celebrated member of that power trio (the Alex Lifeson, if you will). The world her research consultants inhabited was one which frustrated and suppressed them at every turn, which sought only to control and pacify them, never to value their humanity, their uniqueness. It was also a world where the potent punk–metal hybrid known as thrash metal was rapidly gaining in popularity. Gaines herself was not a metal fan when she started her research. However, she became one when she saw how it empowered and provided solace to her “burnout” research consultants. Gaines writes how the new thrash subgenre combined metal’s apocalyptic thunder with punk’s moral outrage “and after a while everyone started writing songs about the real things that threatened kids: drug pushers, Army recruiters, spiritual isolation, nuclear holocaust, child sexual abuse, mental hospitals” (Gaines 1991, p. 203). For her

research consultants, metal music and culture provided a crucial source of meaning and strength in a hostile milieu.

What exactly do fans get out of the *music* of heavy metal? We would argue that simplistic concepts like catharsis or “a group cry” are inadequate as they fail to connote the concept of healthy rage. Anger is better externalized than internalized. It is healthy when it is externalized in a manner that causes no harm to oneself or others. Heavy metal is not an outlet for antisocial rage. It encourages the expression of healthy, even *justified*, anger. This is something metal shares with rap, punk, hardcore, and other angry music genres with which it often comes in contact. I (Jeremy) am going to go way out on a proverbial limb here and say that metal to me has always seemed less nihilistic, less hopeless than other angry genres of music; and one outgrowth of this, I would argue, is the extraordinary cohesion and communal energy, built up over an extremely short period, that characterizes the emerging field of metal studies.

### Metal Studies: The Way Forward

In most academic fields, 40 is the age of a neophyte. In metal studies, it practically makes us elders. And so, from that exalted position, we have a few things to say in closing about the future directions of the field. In October 2009, when this essay was a conference presentation (and when we were only 39), we closed in much the same way, and quite a vigorous discussion ensued.

We believe that the metal scholar should be like a Japanese tea master, who must master many arts, including ceramics, architecture, gardening, calligraphy, painting, incense, and flower arranging, in order to become a virtuosic practitioner of the intricate rituals of the tea ceremony (Kirkpatrick 2009). The future metal scholar should strive for substantive knowledge of the fields that have contributed to metal studies. Metal scholars should also move beyond the mere acquisition of such knowledge. The Japanese tea ceremony has been recognized for its impact upon the Zen Buddhism that originally influenced its very formation and development (see Pitelka 2003). Instead of simply asking what philosophy, cognitive science, ethnomusicology, queer studies, sociology, archival studies, gender studies, leisure studies or media studies can contribute to metal studies, we must also be asking: What can metal studies contribute to those academic disciplines?

Given heavy metal’s longevity, adaptability, and function as a portal to understanding the human condition at a primal, visceral, and piercing level, such contributions are probable. Given the many approaches and methodologies that have been applied to metal studies, and the multifaceted nature of gender roles within heavy metal music and culture, future scholarship promises to be sophisticated, innovative, and fruitful. We believe, however, that at this early point it is more important to paint in broad strokes on the subject of metal and gender, and fill in the details later. Our central point is that we should not

overemphasize the determinative force of social categories on musical preference; instead, we wish to underscore the ability of human agents to take control of the aesthetic forms that compel them, regardless of for whom they were originally intended. The story of metal and gender in the twenty-first century is the story of, in the words of James Hetfield, "boundaries overthrown". As academic chroniclers of the music's continuing development, we would do well not to be overly reverent of those boundaries ourselves.

### Acknowledgements

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## Appendix 1

Mass-market books and scholarly monographs with significant discussion of heavy metal or hardcore punk

*(Biographies, books focused on one band, books with separate chapter authors, reference encyclopedias, tablature books, and fiction are excluded. Certain authors use the term "punk" in reference to "punk rock" and "hardcore punk")*

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Bashe, Philip (1985) <i>Heavy Metal Thunder: The Music, Its History, Its Heroes</i>	♂
Blanchet, Philippe (1985) <i>Heavy Metal Story: La bible du hard rock</i>	♂
Leggett, Carol (1985) <i>Heavy Metal Bible</i>	♀
Altrogge, Michael & Amann, Rolf (1991) <i>Videoclips — die geheimen Verführer der Jugend? Ein Gutachten zur Struktur, Nutzung und Bewertung von Heavy-Metal-Videoclips</i>	♂ x 2
Gaines, Donna (1991) <i>Teenage Wasteland: Suburbia's Dead End Kids</i>	♀
Weinstein, Deena (1991) <i>Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology</i>	♀
Cossart, Axel von (1993) <i>Heavy Metal/Hardrock/Punk: Evolution und Trend-Bands</i>	♂
Stock, Manfred & Mühlberg, Philipp (1993) <i>Die Szene von Innen: Skinheads, Grufties, Heavy Metals, Punks</i>	♂ x 2
Walser, Robert (1993) <i>Running with the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music</i>	♂
Arnett, Jeffrey J. (1996) <i>Metalheads: Heavy Metal Music and Adolescent Alienation</i>	♂
Lahickey, Beth (1997) <i>All Ages: Reflections on Straight Edge</i>	♀
Moynihan, Michael & Søderlind, Didrik (1998) <i>Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground</i>	♂ x 2

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## Appendix 1. (Continued)

Roccor, Bettina (1998) <i>Heavy Metal: Kunst, Kommerz, Ketzerei</i>	♀
Baddeley, Gavin (1999) <i>Lucifer Rising: Sin, Devil Worship and Rock 'n' Roll</i>	♂
Berger, Harris M. (1999) <i>Metal, Rock and Jazz: Perception and the Phenomenology of Musical Experience</i>	♂
Tandecki, Daniela (2000) <i>Nachtsaiten der Musik: Grauzonen und Braunzonen in der schwarzen Musikszene</i>	♀
Ambrose, Joe (2001) <i>The Violent World of Moshpit Culture</i>	♂
Andersen, Mark & Jenkins, Mark (2001) <i>Dance of Days: Two Decades of Punk in the Nation's Capital</i>	♂ x 2
Schäfer, Frank (2001) <i>Heavy Metal: Geschichten, Bands und Platten</i>	♂
Wehrli, Reto (2001) <i>Verteufelter Heavy Metal: Forderungen nach Musikzensur zwischen christlichem Fundamentalismus und staatlichem Jugendschutz</i>	♂
Diaz-Bone, Rainer (2002) <i>Kulturwelt, Diskurs und Lebensstil: Eine diskurstheoretische Erweiterung der Bourdieuschen Distinktionstheorie</i>	♂
Konow, David (2002) <i>Bang Your Head: The Rise and Fall of Heavy Metal</i>	♂
Nolteernsting, Elke (2002) <i>Heavy Metal: die Suche nach der Bestie</i>	♀
Bossius, Thomas (2003) <i>Med Framtiden i Backspeglar: Black Metal- och Transkulturen: Ungdomar, Musik och Religion i en Senmodern Värld</i>	♂
Christe, Ian (2003) <i>Sound of the Beast: The Complete Headbanging History of Heavy Metal</i>	♂
Hein, Fabien (2003) <i>Hard Rock, Heavy Metal, Metal: Histoire, cultures et pratiquants</i>	♂
Purcell, Natalie J. (2003) <i>Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture</i>	♀
Taylor, Steven (2003) <i>False Prophet: Fieldnotes from the Punk Underground</i>	♂
Hunter, Seb (2004) <i>Hell Bent for Leather: Confessions of a Heavy Metal Addict</i>	♂
Mudrian, Albert (2004) <i>Choosing Death: The Improbable History of Death Metal and Grindcore</i>	♂
Thompson, Stacy (2004) <i>Punk Productions: Unfinished Business</i>	♂

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## Appendix 1. (Continued)

Dornbusch, Christian & Killguss, Klaus-Peter (2005) <i>Unheilige Allianzen: Black Metal zwischen Satanismus, Heidentum und Neonazismus</i>	♂ x 2
Poblet, Fernando Galicia (2005) <i>Espíritus rebeldes: El heavy metal en España</i>	♂
Weindl, Dina (2005) <i>Musik und Aggression: Untersucht anhand des Musikgenres Heavy Metal</i>	♀
Akoto, Philip (2006) "Menschenverachtende Untergrundmusik?": <i>Todesfaszination zwischen Entertainment und Rebellion am Beispiel von Gothic-, Metal- und Industrialmusik</i>	♂
Blush, Steven (2006) <i>American Hardcore: A Tribal History</i>	♂
Friend, Lonn (2006) <i>Life on Planet Rock: From Guns N' Roses to Nirvana. A Backstage Journey through Rock's Most Debauched Decade</i>	♂
Glasper, Ian (2006) <i>The Day the Country Died: A History of Anarcho Punk 1980-1984</i>	♂
Haenfler, Ross (2006) <i>Straight Edge: Clean-Living Youth, Hardcore Punk, and Social Change</i>	♂
McNeil, Paul & Divola, Barry (2006) <i>M Is for Metal! The Loudest Alphabet Book on Earth</i>	♂ x 2
Petrarca, Marissa (2006) <i>Straight Edge: The Subculture Redefining Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'n' Roll</i>	♀
Tucker, John (2006) <i>Suzi Smiled ... The New Wave of British Heavy Metal</i>	♂
Wood, Robert T. (2006) <i>Straightedge Youth: Complexity and Contradictions of a Subculture</i>	
Baulch, Emma (2007) <i>Making Scenes: Reggae, Punk, and Death Metal in 1990s Bali</i>	♀
Culat, Robert (2007) <i>L'Âge du metal</i>	♂
De Los, Michael (2007) <i>The Metal Duology: Fire, Metal, Blood and Money/True Metal</i>	♂
Ekeroth, Daniel (2007) <i>Swedish Death Metal</i>	♂
Guibert, Gérôme & Hein, Fabien (2007) <i>Les Scènes metal</i>	♂ x 2
Kahn-Harris, Keith (2007) <i>Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge</i>	♂

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## Appendix 1. (Continued)

Klepper, Stefan de, Molpheta, Sophia, Pille, Simon & Saouma, Reem (2007) <i>Cultural Heritage and History in the Metal Scene</i>	♀ x 2	♂ x 2
Klypchak, Brad (2007) <i>Performed Identity: Heavy Metal Musicians between 1984 and 1991</i>	♂	
Langebach, Martin (2007) <i>Die Black-Metal-Szene: Eine qualitative Studie</i>	♂	
Walzer, Nicolas (2007) <i>Anthropologie du metal extrême</i>	♂	
Wilson, Scott (2007) <i>Great Satan's Rage: American Negativity and Rap/Metal in the Age of Supercapitalism</i>	♂	
Alberola, Jerome (2008) <i>Anthologie du hard rock de larme, de bruit et de fureur</i>	♂	
Aoki, Noriaki (2008) <i>The Heavy Metal Family Tree, vol. 1</i>	♂	
Bechtold, Gernot (2008) <i>Die Heavy Metal Kultur in bildender Kunst und Musik: fachwissenschaftliche und fachdidaktische Aspekte</i>	♂	
Benard, Nicolas (2008) <i>La Culture hard-rock: Histoire, pratiques et imaginaires</i>	♂	
Beste, Peter & Kugelberg, Johan (2008) <i>True Norwegian Black Metal: We Turn in the Night Consumed by Fire</i>	♂ x 2	
Forster, Jason (2008) <i>Commodified Evil's Wayward Children: Black Metal and Death Metal as Purveyors of an Alternative Form of Modern Escapism</i>	♂	
Grubbs, Eric (2008) <i>Post: A Look at the Influence of Post-Hardcore 1985-2007</i>	♂	
LeVine, Mark (2008) <i>Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam</i>	♂	
Matsue, Jennifer Milioto (2008) <i>Making Music in Japan's Underground: The Tokyo Hardcore Scene</i>	♀	
Nedorostek, Nathan & Pappalardo, Anthony (2008) <i>Radio Silence: A Selected Visual History of American Hardcore Music</i>	♂ x 2	
O'Connor, Alan (2008) <i>Punk Record Labels and the Struggle for Autonomy: The Emergence of DIY</i>	♂	
Poultidis, Dimitrios (2008) <i>Heavy Metal-Journalismus: Musikjournalismus im Heavy Metal-Genre und seine Ausprägungen</i>	♂	
Wallach, Jeremy (2008) <i>Modern Noise, Fluid Genres: Popular Music in Indonesia, 1997-2001</i>	♂	

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## Appendix 1. (Continued)

Bond, Jaclyn (2009)		♀
<i>The 100 Best and Absolute Greatest Heavy Metal Albums in the World, Ever</i>		
Cabot, Jean-Sylvain & Robert, Philippe (2009)	♂ × 2	
<i>Hard 'n' Heavy, 1966-1978, Sonic Attack</i>		
Daniels, Neil (2009)	♂	
<i>All Pens Blazing: A Rock and Heavy Metal Writer's Handbook, vol. 1</i>		
Frederick, Martin (2009)	♂	
<i>Eunolie legendes du black metal</i>		
Glasper, Ian (2009)	♂	
<i>Trapped in a Scene: UK Hardcore 1985-89</i>		
Lilja, Esa (2009) <i>Theory and Analysis of Classic Heavy Metal Harmony</i>	♂	
Moore, Ryan (2009)	♂	
<i>Sells Like Teen Spirit: Music, Youth Culture, and Social Crisis</i>		
Peterson, Brian (2009)	♂	
<i>Burning Fight: The Nineties Hardcore Revolution in Ethics, Politics, Spirit, and Sound</i>		
Sabouret, Jean-Pierre & Terrasson, Pierre (2009)	♂ × 2	
<i>Hard Times: L'âge d'or du hard rock, 1968-1993</i>		
Schöwe, Andreas (2009)	♂	
<i>Wacken Roll: Das größte Heavy Metal Festival der Welt</i>		
Waksman, Steve (2009)	♂	
<i>This Ain't the Summer of Love: Conflict and Crossover in Heavy Metal and Punk</i>		
Walzer, Nicolas (2009)	♂	
<i>Satan profane: Portrait d'une jeunesse enténébrée</i>		
Brewster, David (2010)	♂	
<i>The Stylistic History of Heavy Metal Guitar</i>		
Cabot, Jean-Sylvain & Robert, Philippe (2010) <i>Hard 'n' Heavy, 1978-2010, Zero Tolerance for Silence</i>	♂ × 2	
Cope, Andrew L. (2010)	♂	
<i>Black Sabbath and the Rise of Heavy Metal Music</i>		
Daniels, Neil (2010)	♂	
<i>All Pens Blazing: A Rock and Heavy Metal Writer's Handbook, vol. 2</i>		
Elflein, Dietmar (2010)	♂	
<i>Schwermetallanalysen: Die musikalische Sprache des Heavy Metal</i>		
Giroux, Annick (2010)	♀	
<i>Hellbent for Cooking: The Heavy Metal Cookbook</i>		
Hannon, Sharon M. (2010)	♀	
<i>Punks: A Guide to an American Subculture</i>		
Joppich, Jan-Georg (2010)	♂	
<i>Jugendgefährdung durch Musik? Eine Analyse anhand der Musikgenres HipHop und Heavy Metal</i>		

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## Appendix 1. (Continued)

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Kajzer, Jackie, Lotring, Roger & Weiss, Mark (2010) <i>Full Metal Jackie Certified: The 50 Most Influential Heavy Metal Songs of the '80s and the True Stories behind Their Lyrics</i>	♀	♂ x 2
Kanger-Born, Marie (2010) <i>Confessions of a Chicago Punk Bystander</i>	♀	
Keller, Irina Elisabeth (2010) "Mein Geist entflieht in Welten, die nicht sterben": Epochenbezüge zur Christlichen und Schwarzen Romantik sowie zum Expressionismus in den Texten deutschsprachiger Gothic- und DarkMetal-Bands und Bands der Neuen Deutschen Härte	♀	
Kuhn, Gabriel (2010) <i>Sober Living for the Revolution: Hardcore Punk, Straight Edge, and Radical Politics</i>	♂	
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Rettman, Tony (2010) <i>Why Be Something That You're Not: Detroit Hardcore 1979-1985</i>	♂	
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Schmenk, Holger & Krumm, Christian (2010) <i>Kumpels in Kutten: Heavy Metal im Ruhrgebiet</i>	♂	x 2
Seabury, Steve (2010) <i>Mosh Potatoes: Recipes, Anecdotes, and Mayhem from the Heavyweights of Heavy Metal</i>	♂	
Wagner, Jeff & Wilson, Steve (2010) <i>Mean Deviation: Four Decades of Progressive Heavy Metal</i>	♂	x 2
Weiermann, Ursula (2010) <i>Heavy Metal: Entstehung und Entwicklung</i>	♀	
Travis, Tiffini & Hardy, Perry (forthcoming) <i>Skinheads: A Guide to an American Subculture</i>	♀	

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