We bang our heads, therefore I am
Subculture as laboratory of identity
- the case of heavy metal

av

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Abstract


Subculture is a structure against which identities are both created and guarded. These identities are often socially and practically negotiated against an idea of individual authenticity. The thought of nurturing ones uniqueness while striving to fit in is a common duality and a clear cause of friction within subcultures. The forty year old heavy metal subculture is no exception. It has proven an arena for boundary drawing, exclusivity and alienation, but also for fierce loyalty and a sense of self-fulfilment.

This thesis studies how young adults construct their identities in relation to subcultures in general and in relation to the heavy metal subculture in particular. This is brought to the fore in four articles concerned with the construction and reproduction of subjective and intersubjective authenticity, the stigma and self-determination surrounding alienation, the practices of different levels of rituals and the construction of female gender identity in a male-dominated subculture.

The thesis finds that heavy metal fans construct their identity in relation to the subculture through a life story. This life story is spun around a number of arguments on self and identity, which all aim to position the individual as a long-term, authentic, knowledgeable, self-determined and practically involved heavy metal fan. Furthermore, identity is constructed through a number of practices of which the narration of the subculture and the use of instruments exemplify both abstract and concrete rituals. Alienation is an important aspect of identity creation, especially where heavy metal fans, following an initial feeling of alienation, position themselves and their culture in what is considered a self-chosen manner against an outside society. Alienation can especially accompany the experiences of the female heavy metal fan, both within and outside the subculture. However, endurance and knowledge helps sustain a sense of a self-made identity, which can earn her respect from other heavy metal fans.

Keywords: subculture, heavy metal, identity, authenticity, ritual, alienation, gender.

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