



Abstract

The goals of my research are to find out why people listen to heavy metal and what impact it has on them. I will also look at how the media depicts heavy metal and how fans feel about the way heavy metal is portrayed. I expect to find that people who listen to heavy metal do not agree with the media's depiction and that they all listen to heavy metal for special reasons. I will address the topic of judgment by friends or family due to a person's interest in metal. This research will help answer the question, what brings people to listen to heavy metal and how are they impacted by the music?

Introduction

The purpose of my research is to open peoples' eyes to the world of heavy metal. I would like people to understand the true meaning of metal and that not all metal is the same. Heavy metal is a subculture within society and so it should be studied and understood as one. The music is more than just something to listen to. To many, it is a way of life and defines the person that they are. I have interest in this topic because it pertains to me. I am a fan of metal and because of the fact that in the past I did not like it, I understand why some people don't. I have come to understand some of the meanings behind the music and the impact that it has on people, of all ages. My findings will contribute to the knowledge in my field because it will give metal a chance to be explained and seen differently. There is a reason why heavy metal has such a big fan base and I hope to make those reasons clear. My research questions are as follows:

- How do heavy metal fans feel about the news media's depiction of heavy metal in general?
- Do heavy metal fans ever feel like they are the victims of prejudice?
- Are certain feelings generated while listening to heavy metal? Positive or negative?
- Has there been a change in demographic and why?



Devil horns were popularized by Ronnie James Dio of Dio and Black Sabbath

Methods

My methods for this research were qualitative and they included:

- In-depth interviews
- Non-probability sampling
- Participant observation

•My in-depth interviews were with heavy metal fans of all kinds. The in-depth interviews I conducted well suited my research because it gave the interviewees a chance to talk about something they are very passionate about. For most of my interviews I sat in a quiet room making sure the respondent felt comfortable. My interviews turned into conversations which I see as a positive interview because I would end up getting so much more information than I had expected in the first place.



•My sampling methods included non-probability sampling. These methods worked best for my research because they helped me to obtain information that was vital to my topic as well as helping me find more respondents to interview. By using purposive sampling I was able to talk to people with a knowledge of heavy metal and they were even able to give me more ideas and think of different questions that I hadn't previously thought of.

•Participant observation was a big part of my research because it helped me to understand how people act at heavy metal shows. I was able to attend three heavy metal shows in the last month and instead of just listening to the music, I observed the behavior of the fans not only far from the stage but also the fans on the floor (the pit).



Results

•Most of my respondents started listening to metal at a young age ranging from 4 years old-10 years old. Some of my respondents started listening to the music at such a young age because their parents had influenced them. One respondent said the following,

"I was always growing up with very heavy music in my life".

Another respondent said his father was a big influence,

"Every time we went in the car, heavy metal went with us".

•I brought up the personal topic of being made fun of or bullied in school for listening to heavy metal. Some respondents said they were not made fun of at all, that they were accepted,

"People didn't want to make fun of it...maybe people were scared of the aggressive sound."

Other respondents did feel like they were judged at one point in time,

"I felt that way with people I wasn't friends with. People assume that you are an angry person."

There was no real trend that I was finding with this question. Some people could relate and others said it wasn't something they hadn't worried about.

•I asked my interviewees if they had gone to shows and why they like going to them. All of them had been to shows and most of them had been to upwards of 100. I noticed similarities when asking this question. One respondent said,

"I love going to shows, just the intensity, every genre has a different feel to it, I love what they have to bring".

Another respondent had a similar answer,

"It's unlike any other event I can think of, it's very in touch with the music and the fans, it's never the same".

•My observations at New England Metal and Hardcore Festival were very interesting. One thing that I always notice at shows is the pit. It's the place you go if you want to mosh, crowd surf, two-step, or join in on a circle pit. As violent as they may seem to people who do not understand them, there is certain mutual respect the people have for each other and the music. While watching people mosh, I noticed that if someone were to fall down, people would pick them up. One respondent said that following,

"Yes, there is a very high chance that you will get hit or pushed but the major rule to a mosh pit is, if your brother or sister falls you pick them right up. Everyone follows that rule and I've never seen an instance where no one has helped someone out. After a band gets done with their set you go around high fiving, hugging, slap people on the back to show it was all in good spirit. You all leave your emotions in the pit".

Conclusions

•Over the course of this research I have found many new respects for heavy metal culture. It is not just a genre of music, but a lifestyle and a journey. Whether that journey is about overcoming personal issues or believing in the messages given by bands, the fans of metal stay true to their passion unlike anything I have witnessed before. Heavy metal is so different from any other genre of music. The fans are very loyal to the music and the bands are just as respectful and understanding of their fans.

•When asking my interviewees of one word or phrase that could describe heavy metal, these were the responses I received, "Dedication", "Positive lifestyle", "Like no other force on this planet", "Emotional", and "Misunderstood". These bands change people's lives forever and they live for that. Heavy metal is like a community of people with the same interests and followings. It's like when you see someone wearing a metal shirt or a pin with a band name on it, you just know that in some way, you are the same.



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