

# Who listens to metal and why?



## I. Misconceptions

- There are many stereotypes about people who listen to heavy metal. Some academic literature portrays fans of metal as:
  - Apathetic.
  - Having poor educational commitment.
  - Forming delinquent peer groups.
  - Sexually aggressive.
  - At risk of poor mental health and development issues.
- No *meaningful* evidence to support these hypotheses has been found.

## II. Who listens to metal?

- Rowe (2016) interviewed 28 metal fans living in South Australia about their early metal identity formation in high school.
  - All participants reported that they experienced some form of social exclusion at school by dominant peer groups.
  - Feelings of being an “outsider” were reported on a range of having been outright bullied to simply knowing one “just didn’t fit in.”
  - *“Nobody wants to be the weird kid, you just somehow end up being the weird kid and can’t figure out how you got there. And metal is like that, except it’s all the weird kids in one place.”* - Rob Zombie

### III. Why do people listen to metal?

- *The listening experience:* the importance of listening to metal for enjoyment, but also for getting in touch with feelings, alleviating frustrations, coping with difficult emotions, and feeling solidarity with others.
- *A sense of belonging and acceptance:* feelings of being accepted by and belonging to a global community of like-minded people with shared tastes and experiences.
- *A sense of social protection:* feeling able to withstand rejection by popular peer groups, and creating a social space or barriers to keep social threats or the “wrong people” away.

### III. Why do people listen to metal?

*“It [school life] was definitely better when I got into metal, cos I’ve never been the most confident person, I’ve always been quite nervous, I always hold back from things, and I think metal just gave me that extra confidence. I guess I was always an outsider, like at parties and stuff during school, but I definitely felt a lot more confident in metal shirts, definitely...as soon as I was metal I thought I don’t have to prove anything to anyone, sick!”* - Alex (metal fan)

## IV. Community

- Metal community can be understood as a collective identity and a perception of shared status. It does not *require* direct interaction with other individuals.
- *“I kind of felt part of the metal community before I even knew anyone.”* - Danielle (metal fan)
- Before the rise of digital technologies, individuals would have to physically seek out music within a distinct “scene” but this is no longer necessary due to the internet.

## IV. Community

- The community sometimes plays into negative stereotypes to keep the “right” people in and “wrong” people out.
- *“There’s that toughness element in metal, where people view it and think, ‘Oh, I’m not gonna fuck with that guy cos he listens to metal.’ Their general idea of it is a lot different to what it really is, and that works in your favour at school, definitely.”* - Tim (metal fan)
- Young people use metal to create their own space and put a safe distance between themselves and those they perceive as being a threat to their well-being.

## IV. Community

- Metal helps resolve a complex social dynamic between individualism and community.
- Common statements from metalheads include *“metal saved my life,”* *“metal was always there for me,”* and *“metal was the only thing that got me through school.”*
- Reported benefits of listening to metal include feelings of increased confidence, attaining respect, developing self-esteem and self-worth, establishing a sense of self empowerment, and increased resilience.

## References

- Rowe, P. (2016). We're in this together and we take care of our own: Narrative constructions of metal community told by metal youth. In N. Varas-Diaz & N. Scott (Eds.), *Heavy Metal Music and the Communal Experience*. (pp. 79-98). Lexington Books.