Writing on the Wall

Hypermasculinity in the Online Metal Scene

Written by

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Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and to the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

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This research was conducted on the unceded lands of the Kaurna, Ngarrindjeri, Whadjuk, and Darug Nations.

Abstract

The online metal scene is an innovative site for an investigation into the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic masculinity. This thesis offers a significant and original contribution to knowledge in the field of metal music studies and to sociological enquiries into online social spaces. Through this research, I identify three distinct tropes of hegemonic hypermasculinity: aggression and violence, militaristic organisation, and objectification of women. These tropes, while reminiscent of heavy metal culture generally, appear in the online metal scene to be activated and patrolled in extreme ways. Referral to these tropes in online comments and posts both capture and configure the on-going negotiation of hegemonic hypermasculinity amongst men in the online metal scene. I further posit that the affordances of online communication technology permit the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in a highly visible and permanent writing on the wall of the online metal scene. This writing on the wall remains as a constant presentation of hegemonic masculine ideology – a set of social expectations about behaviour in the online metal scene. In conducting this research, I developed an adaptation of ethnographic research methods which respond to the nuances of online social spaces. My findings hold currency in contemporary debates around masculinities, online social spaces, and metal music cultures.

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Introduction: Heart of Steel

Origins of an online metal journey

Heavy metal music, and a love of music in general, is a gift given to me by my family. I vividly recall the hours I spent as a child after school playing my parents' compact discs, vinyl, and cassette tapes in the living room of our family home. My stepfather introduced me to the speed, resistance, and social connections revealed by punk bands such as The Clash, Sex Pistols and The Pogues. My father surprised me in his later years with his collection of Megadeth, Pantera, and Sepultura albums. My brother, later on, became a musician in a number of successful hardcore and heavy metal bands based in Australia and the United States. My stereo has routinely played various genres over the past three decades, the influence of heavy metal music however, has stuck with me from an early age.

Through this on-going exposure, I developed an understanding of what it means to be a fan of heavy metal – a *metalhead*. Heavy metal has contributed to my identity. I have made many friends through our shared love of music and I have pondered many questions about the nuances of heavy metal culture. Of particular interest to me were the many and varied themes of masculinity which I saw on album covers, t-shirts, in song lyrics, and in the corporeal performance of these themes at shows. Heavy metal seemed mostly a boy's game. As I grew, the population of metalheads I met expanded in gender diversity. Despite this notable increase in gender diversity in metalhead communities it is still patently clear that metal culture revolves around a strictly masculine core.

Although heavy metal first emerged in the 1960s, it continues to enjoy wide ranging popularity in its various incarnations. As such, groups of fans are growing in diversity along lines of age, gender, class and race. Technology has also changed the way people engage with heavy metal

music culture. In the interest of contemporaneity my investigation turned to question what many metal music scholars (Straw 1984; Weinstein 1991, 2016; Walser 1993; Krenske & McKay 2000; Brown 2011; Wallach et al 2011; Scott 2016) have identified as undeniable themes of ultra-masculinity in heavy metal may look like in new and emerging social spaces – *online* heavy metal spaces.

Heavy metal music cultures embraced the development of online social spaces with great enthusiasm. Like many other music cultures, fans and bands saw the immense value in synchronous and asynchronous communication to replace mail order catalogues, tape trading networks, and fan newsletters and magazines (Marshall 2003; Kruse 2010; Curran 2016). This shift was not specific to metal. Fans of rock (Bennett 2011), country (Lee & Peterson 2004) and the Swedish independent scene (Baym & Burnett 2009) among many others took up residence online.

Increasing use of social media has meant that fans engage with each other and with bands with greater frequency and closeness. This interaction takes place across now diminished boundaries of nation state, geography and even temporality. The online metal scene – a deterritorialized and disintermediated digital space – presents a noteworthy gap in scholarly literature. Significantly for this project, there exists little attention to the relationship between social media technology and the emergence and maintenance of masculine gender identities in the online metal scene. As a fan of heavy metal and a user of social media, I have observed a distinctly *hyper* notion of hegemonic masculinity exhibited through interactions online. Such familiarity led to the formulation of the following research question: How does hegemonic hypermasculinity emerge and how is it maintained in the online metal scene? Given the site of this research it was indeed pertinent to follow up with the question: What impact does the technology used to access these online spaces have on the emergence and maintenance of

hegemonic hypermasculinity? Guided by these questions, this thesis presents an examination of hegemonic hypermasculinity; how it emerges and is maintained; and, how negotiations of masculinity are influenced by the nuances of computer technology used to access the online metal scene.

My original contribution to knowledge in this doctoral research is an exposition of the emergence and maintenance of hypermasculine tropes in the online metal scene. Significantly, I offer an innovative understanding the negotiation of hegemonic masculinities in changing and technologically mediated online spaces. Despite the ostensibly limited focus of my guiding question (a focus on online *heavy metal* spaces), this thesis holds currency in wider contemporary debates. I offer a significant contribution to debates around the influence of social media connectivity and subsequent concerns around safety and security. I also make a pertinent contribution to current debates encircling gender and masculine identity and with particular regard to masculine violence in online spaces. I acknowledge that from an intersectional perspective a focus on masculine identity alone overlays issues of race, class, ableism and similar social inequalities. While each of these variables would create a different priority and emphasis in the research, my focus on hypermasculinity offers a frame and foundation for innovative approaches to these issues in future research.

My interest in the emergence of hegemonic masculinity in the online metal scene captures my involvement and interest in heavy metal music cultures and communities more widely. It also reflects a recognition of current trends in social media research. There is considerable evidence that cyberbullying (Martinez et al 2019; Carlson et al 2015), sexual violence (Dodge 2016; Salter 2013) in particular "technology-facilitated sexual violence" (Henry & Powell 2018; Powell & Henry 2018), and social dysfunction (Caplan 2003; Strong et al 2018) are seen as significant social problems of our time. While it may seem that the focus here is the online

metal scene, my findings are also relevant to other online spaces of fandom. There is a thread of current literature which looks to the incarnation of individual keyboard warriors and focuses on encouraging individuals to take steps to protect themselves (Patchin & Hinduja 2012). However, my research suggests that an understanding of how these spaces are mediated by the very technology that creates them is crucial.

Undergirded by a curiosity gained through years of heavy metal fandom this thesis specifically interrogates the online metal scene as what Bennett and Peterson call a virtual scene (2004) that contributes to the creation of individual and collective identities. I suggest that participants in the online metal scene rely on an already ultra-masculine discourse, that surrounds heavy metal culture more widely, within spaces which are influenced by the limitations and opportunities presented by online communication technology. Hypermasculine notions therefore emerge in the online metal scene and manifest in far more permanent and visible ways than ever before. That is, social media technology allows a constant reminder of the expectations around masculine identity to remain visible on web pages, forums, and comments sections of video clips. This is a constant reminder of norms about metalhead identity exclusive to the online metal scene which prompted the second part of my guiding question: what is it about the technology that allows these notions to become so visible and permanent?

This thesis emerges from a point of curiosity regarding what I have observed as metalhead identity grounded in the tropes of hegemonic hypermasculinity. As I demonstrate and shape through my literature review, many scholars have looked to heavy metal cultures for answers to broader societal questions. Heavy metal shares the stage with rap and hip hop as genres which are often the target of assaults from various political platforms. Heavy metal and rap cultures have been positioned as somehow the sole cause of societal concerns and moral panics such as: gun related violence in the United States; youth alienation and suicide; family breakdown;

unemployment and general 'anti-social behaviour'. In response to this continued moral panic, I choose an alternative, more considered position. I propose that there are no significant causal links specific to heavy metal or rap culture and the concerns outlined above. I take the position of Dee Snider from Twisted Sister in his response to the congressional hearing launched by the Parents Music Resource Centre (PMRC) and United States Senator Al Gore (United States Senate 1985) that if one is looking for these links, they will be found in almost any genre.

This thesis argues that the online metal scene is most usefully conceptualised as forming part of what Bennett and Peterson refer to as the 'virtual scene' (2004). That is, a site for the production, consumption and re-production of heavy metal culture. The online metal scene is, unlike what is offered in traditional subcultural theory (Bennett & Rogers 2016), a group of sites that allow participation from individuals from across vast geographical, social, and cultural boundaries. The deployment of 'scene' as a conceptual framework reflects the evocation by James of the 'MEdiaverse' (2013) were individuals on social media become "complicit in the construction of their own experience economy" (2013, p. 388). That is, metalheads on social media produce, consume, and reproduce metal music cultures in a much more involved and dynamic way than was possible prior to the development of online communication technology.

The online metal scene includes spaces where heavy metal music culture, including music, text, imagery, and debate are shared and re-shared amongst fans. I attend to this argument that in the online metal scene there emerges an interesting and nuanced notion of hegemonic masculinity. Typified by three clear tropes, the dominant form of masculinity in the online metal scene emerges as what I have termed *hyper*masculinity. This is a concept outlined previously in theorisations of homophobia (Ward 2006), violence against women (Parrott & Zeichner 2003) and gaming violence (Salter & Blodgett 2012). The particular tropes of hypermasculinity which

I observed in this study revolve around themes of aggression and violence; appeals to militaristic organisational principles; and overt and aggressive objectification of women.

Participation in the online metal scene is framed within and informed by the tropes of hypermasculinity. As participants converse and interact, they necessarily rely upon the language and imagery associated with these tropes to communicate with each other. I propose that this nuanced social space, the online metal scene, is a site of the wider hegemonic struggle which maintains the dominance of patriarchy in Western society. Deploying Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity necessarily relies on an analytically sound interpretation of Gramscian hegemony. Both Gramscian Marxism and Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity are enjoying a renaissance of sorts in contemporary scholarship (Weiner & Barry 2017; Davis 2016; Chess & Shaw 2015). My thesis contributes to this re-emergence.

Hegemony

The term hegemony is derived from Greek origins *hēgemonía.* Appropriately, if ironically, there is little consensus in the formulation of a contemporary definition. Hegemony can connote leadership, dominance, dominion, power, or rule. Gramsci's definition of hegemony undergirded many cultural studies definitions as this theory seemed appropriate in response to political struggles across East and West Europe during the foundational decades of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. As a result of reconceptualisation and semantic discontinuity, a 'slippage' of the term has occurred, even in contemporary theory.

Indeed, Anderson's recent work *The H-Word: The Peripeteia of Hegemony* (2017b) he highlights the many and varied interpretations across the globe. All interpretations rely, in part, on the inherent slippage for their own specific contextualisation. Gramsci was aware of this, as he grappled with the transfiguration of the concept from Russian bourgeois revolution to a more

general term which characterised “stable forms of rule by any social class” (2017b, p.19). As Anderson highlights, Gramsci’s first application of the term hegemony in *The Prison Notebooks*, was to Cavour’s capitalist rule in Italy which occurred through coercion as well as consent.

Coercion in Gramscian terms is most easily understood as the threat of physical violence or controls. In a contemporary Western context, coercion refers to the deployment of police or armed forces with the specific aim of maintaining state power. Legitimated violence, controlled by the state, stands as a threat to individuals who propose to challenge state power. However, in hegemonic systems, this violence tends to remain a threat only. As soon as this violence is summoned and activated, hegemonic power has failed. That is, power that is achieved at the point of a gun is not hegemony (Connell 1987). For hegemony to exist, coercion must remain a threat and the consent of the masses must be sought.

Consent is the core element to the function of hegemony. Gramsci saw “the hegemony of the proletariat as the strategic goal of winning the majority of the peasantry to the cause of the working class” (Anderson 2017b, p. 19). As Connell likewise notes in her adaption of the concept for hegemonic masculinity, “ascendency of one group of men over another achieved at the point of a gun is not hegemony” (1987, p. 184). Rather, it is achieved through consent of those who it serves to oppress. That is, men who occupy non-hegemonic positions consent to their own subordination through internalisation of the ideology of masculine superiority. Hegemonic ascendency thus relies on those in subordinate positions consenting to their own subordination. Anderson notes:

> Ideological dominion [hegemony] must propose a set of descriptions of the world, and the values that preside over it, that become in large measure internalised by those under its sway (2017b, p. 21).

Hegemonic descriptions resonate through ideological statements such as 'boys will be boys' or political slogans like 'build the wall'. These slogans and catch phrases are far from simple descriptions. They carry with them the ideological messages such as the expectation that men will play with violence, take risks, and objectify women. 'Build the wall', as Trump supporters regurgitated *ad nauseam* throughout the 2016 US Presidential election, is an ideological suggestion that societal problems are predominantly caused by those on the other side. The power of these slogans lies in the internalisation by those who consent to its 'truth' and continue to offer support of and submission to leaders who are, by wielding vapid three-word slogans, supposedly protecting us from the very ideological assumptions that underpin them.

Hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene operates through isolation of particular events, phrases and people, and an organisation of the negotiation on and through those nodes. The dominance of the ideology of patriarchy in the online metal scene relies on the sets of descriptions of the scene that are exhibited in the *writing on the wall* – a highly visible and permanent record of hegemonic hypermasculine discourse. As I outline in Chapter Five and Six, the accepted discourse that aligns closely with tropes of hypermasculine aggression, violence, militarism and objectification of women is relied upon, used, and internalised by all participants in the course of their everyday interactions. Furthermore, it is constantly presented and represented in the writing on the wall for all participants to draw on and contribute to.

The maintenance of any hegemonic relationship is, of course, on-going. Messerschmidt's (2008) response to criticism (Beasley 2008) of the concept of hegemonic masculinity has insisted that any notion of hegemonic masculinity is by no means a static and fixed position. Hegemony requires, as Anderson suggests, the "constant presentation and representation of the hegemonic order as the ultimate incarnation of liberty" (2017a, p. 64). Gramsci's conception of hegemony and the subsequent usage by Connell aligns well to my analysis of hegemonic

hypermasculinity in the online metal scene. In particular, and as will be shown throughout this thesis, the writing on the wall stands as the site for the 'constant presentation and representation of the hegemonic order'. Indeed, the writing on the wall consists of a consensual reification of current hegemonic norms and expectations contributed to by all participants.

It is not enough to suggest that hegemony operates via a series of simple consensual transactions. As I will argue in Chapter Six, significant evidence of resistance emerges within the negotiation of hegemonic norms, meanings, and expectations. Gramsci's later work, studied in depth in Anderson's companion study *The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci* (2017a), solidifies the concept through his sketching out of positions within a 'war of position'. The hegemonic war of position refers to an ongoing struggle to maintain power through gaining consent of the subaltern. Those who are subordinate continually offer resistance to the dominant ideology. In response, those who occupy positions of power must continually foster and seek hegemonic consent.

Gramsci's most notable work on hegemony occurred during his incarceration post World War I. His language relied heavily on a discourse of war. This was no mistake. Gramsci held that political struggles were always underpinned by military movement. As Anderson highlights, "his writings were haunted by terms of military origin – 'war of position', 'war of movement', 'underground war' – taken metaphorically and taken literally" (2017b, p. 23). For Gramsci, the war of position would result in an alliance between those opposed to a common threat. That is, an alliance of individuals who engage in the war of position amongst themselves but retain a common interest – for instance, the ascendency of patriarchy. The war of manoeuvre in contrast, refers to action at the moment of revolution.

The hegemonic war of position refers to political persuasion of the masses to consent to revolutionary ideology. Gramsci referred to the United Front as his strategy for the war of position:

> The strategic objective of the United Front was to win over the masses in the West to revolutionary Marxism, by patient organisation and skilful agitations for working-class unity in action (Anderson 2017a, p. 115).

The war of position was the exercise of hegemony over the masses through the constant presentation and representation of ideological norms and values. Perhaps the concept of the United Front may seem somewhat removed from the discussion of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene, but this is precisely the effect of the writing on the wall. While revolution may not be a stated objective of men who benefit from the ideology of masculine dominance the practice of engaging in hegemonic hypermasculine discourse in the online metal scene contributes to the maintenance of consent from those who are positioned as subordinate.

The emergence and constant maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity necessarily relies on an on-going war of position amongst metalhead men. As Connell suggests, the hegemonic position does not necessarily suit all men (2005). There are men who occupy positions of complicity, subordination, and marginalisation. It is, of course, possible for resistance to emerge (I provide an analysis of such in Chapter Six). Guha (cited in Anderson 2017b) suggests that there cannot be hegemony without resistance. He states, "hegemony operates as a dynamic concept and keeps even the most persuasive structure of dominance always and necessarily open to resistance" (2017b, p. 103). As Laclau and Mouffe confirmed, a hegemonic relation becomes possible where "a particular social force assumes the representation of a totality that is radically incommensurable with it" (2014, p. x). As I explain in Chapter Six, the diversity of metalhead identity and the plurality of masculinities in any given space enables the emergence of resistance to hegemonic notions of masculinity. The resistance that occurs in this war of position can be seen in the writing on the wall.

The war of position, in light of the resistance to hegemony, must be seen as a process of negotiation. A point which Levy and Egan (2003) suggest, is key to understanding the maintenance of hegemony. Negotiation is widely recognised as a process of identity construction (Eguchi 2009). As Eguchi states, that "identity negotiation is a mutual communication activity between people" (2009, p. 198). Certainly, links can be drawn to the earlier theorisations of Mead (1934) and others who began to think about gender identity as socially constructed. Connell picks up on this idea of negotiation where she points to "relations among masculinities" (2005, p. 76). The negotiation, for Connell, is between hegemonic, subordinate, complicit, and marginalised masculinities. As Connell states, "new groups may challenge old solutions and construct a new hegemony" (2005, p. 77). These negotiations within the war of position contribute to frameworks of accountability and as such consent to the dominance of hegemonic masculinity.

In this thesis, I am using hegemony to understand the emergence and maintenance of hypermasculine metalhead identity. There are several points to consider in making this claim: First, coercion exists in the online metal scene. Moderators and administrators have the power to suspend or ban participants who do not adhere to the norms of values of the community. The threat of suspension or exclusion exists though is rarely used. Second, consent is continually negotiated through a war of position. Inherent to any hegemonic power relation this war of position takes place in a specific cultural setting – the online metal scene. Third, a key difference is that the ongoing negotiation and struggle to maintain hegemony takes place online and is subject to the affordances of online communication technology. Finally, it is essential to understand hegemonic masculinity as existing not as some static form but being able to accommodate for competing forms of masculinity. In short, the goals are the same (ascendency of men) and the structure of the war of position is the same. What has been observed in the

present study of the online metal scene as a site for the emergence and maintenance of a hegemonic *hyper*masculinity is that this is made possible by the affordance of technology.

Hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene is not a strategy with disparate goals to that of mainstream hegemonic masculinity. That is, I hold that the war of position in the online metal scene contributes to the maintenance of patriarchy more generally. It operates in the online metal scene with the clear goal of maintaining the ascendency of men over women. The process takes place through strategies of coercion and consent. That is, the threat of removal from the scene exists but, predominantly, the ascendency of men in the online metal scene is achieved through the consent of those who maintain subordinate positions. What remains interesting here is that the war takes on a novel and nuanced character. The negotiations of masculine dominance in the online metal scene rely on the discourse of hypermasculinity.

Coercion can be seen in the online metal scene with the militaristic ranking and organisation of members. Moderators and administrators have certain powers to suspend or ban individuals from participating in the space if certain community expectations are transgressed. This is a rare occurrence though not without precedent. It is the threat of suspension or exclusion that draws the line of acceptable resistance to hegemony. Once exclusions commence, power is being wielded through force not hegemonic consent.

Consent, the core strategy of hegemony, exists in the online metal scene. Consent in this space is gained through the dissemination of the ideology of hypermasculinity. The language and imagery that are shared in the posts and comments, the links to imagery and videos that are posted elsewhere which refer to hypermasculine notions are shared openly and accepted by the vast majority. This language becomes a discourse of hypermasculinity which emerges as a

writing on the wall. Within this discourse lies the ideology of hegemonic hypermasculinity, internalised by all participants.

Consent, through internalisation of ideology, is not easily gained. It is negotiated persistently through the war of position. Dominant tropes of hypermasculinity are openly challenged by participants, alternative views are posted either through text or links to videos or images. When hypermasculine aggression and violence, the appeal to militarism, or objectification of women becomes too extreme (by an individual's standards) it may be questioned or openly attacked. However, the "constant presentation and representation of the hegemonic order" (Anderson 2017a, p. 64) in the online metal scene dictates the discourse of hypermasculinity upon which any resistance must rely. That is, even the challenge to extreme hypermasculinity must necessarily take place through referral to the very same ideological discourse. Hegemony, while open to challenge, is maintained.

The final important note here is that hegemonic masculinity is not a static form. Connell and Messerschmidt responded to criticism of the concept of hegemonic masculinity (2005) and offered a suggested framework of local, regional, and global hegemonic masculinities. I do not propose to import this framework here however the very structure of it opens the door for the conceptualisation of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene. I simply position the online metal scene as a site of some significance. As Kimmel notes, with regard to Connell and Messerschmidt's work:

> The patterns of masculinity embedded within these gendered institutions also are rapidly becoming the dominant global hegemonic model of masculinity, against which all local, regional, and national masculinities are played out and increasingly refer (2003, p. 604).

Herein lies the central position of my research. The version of hegemonic hypermasculinity that is played out in the online metal scene replete with extreme appeals to aggression, violence, militarism, and objectification of women is increasingly a source of patterns of acceptable

masculinity in the wider hegemony of patriarchy. Online spaces, such as the online metal scene, are new sites for the continuing maintenance of hegemonic masculinity.

The Writing on the Wall

The core contribution of this thesis is that the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in online heavy metal spaces is shaped and textured by the influence of online communication technologies. I argue, in Chapter Seven, that online communication technology presents several affordances (Gibson 1979; Hutchby 2001; Shapiro 2015) for social interaction in the online metal scene. These affordances contribute to increased visibility and permanence of the processes around the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity. They also contribute to varied levels of anonymity for users who in turn experience variation in perceptions about accountability.

The combination of the affordances of online communication technology and the linguistic nature of social interaction in the online metal scene presents a novel concept of use within a multitude of existing and emerging online social spaces. The writing on the wall, as I have termed it, unfolds in online social spaces as a highly visible and permanent display of hegemonic narratives. That is, comments, images, and 'likes and dislikes' in any online social interaction leave behind the presentation and representation of ideological norms and values. In the case of the online metal scene, the writing on the wall exhibits negotiations of hegemonic masculinities that can be seen in several key hypermasculine tropes. Though masculinity remains the focus in the present study, the writing on the wall is useful in understanding the way internalised and normalised narratives are shared along lines of race, class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity. Indeed, the writing on the wall is similar to what Androutsopoulos might call linguistic landscapes which espouse "recognised social meanings" (2014, p. 2). Others have referred to a perceived 'writing on the wall', though it is in this thesis that I fully

develop the concept to understand social interaction in online metal spaces. McCorkingdale (2010) deploys the nomenclature 'writing on the wall' to analyse the efficacy of online corporate marketing strategies though fails to take the concept any further with an understanding of the affordances of online technology. Shoham et al (2013) allude to notions of recordability of online interactions however, they too fail to extend the analysis to the affordances of permanence and visibility. Throughout my research it was immensely clear that online heavy metal spaces retained the residue of interactions past and that this residue was internalised, reiterated, and relied upon in all social interaction. The writing on the wall left me, every day, with a sense of what was acceptable, what was valuable, and what was desirable in the online metal scene.

The writing on the wall, as I have conceived of it here, has clear links to the act of graffiti on the streets. Indeed, there are several aspects of graffiti that appear to link well with the writing on the wall in the online metal scene. As Brighenti suggests, graffiti in the streets takes place on walls which can easily be conceived of as "the exercise of power on the population" (2010, p. 322). That is, graffiti, especially on council property is resistance against the council and against governmentality. Links can be drawn here between graffiti and the online writing on the wall as a core representation of the hegemonic war of position. Graffiti is itself an act of resistance to hegemonic power (Miladi 2015). Language scrawled on state property challenges the hegemonic power that the state intends to wield over the masses. Graffiti has long been understood to exhibit the discourse of a war of position (Lachmann 1988). The writing on the wall in the online metal scene is, similarly, the residue of a negotiated war of position.

The other link that can be drawn between graffiti writing culture and the writing on the wall in the online metal scene is the theme of brotherhood. Many have highlighted graffiti writers' feelings of brotherhood and camaraderie that come from sharing notes and each other's work

and looking out for each other (Rabiega & Burger 2017; Dar & Hunnicutt 2017; Lasley 1995). Comments in the online metal scene also revolve around the idea of brotherhood. In Gramscian terms this brotherhood is evocative of the hegemonic alliance between the subordinated masses and those who occupy hegemonic positions of dominance. The sense that a group (of metalheads or graffiti artists) must stick together in the face of oppression is one which is shared across both groups. These similar feelings of brotherhood or allegiance are bolstered by the visibility of the writing on the wall.

There remains a difference between these two cultural spaces: intention. The intentional act of graffiti carries with it the intention to deface public or private property as a form of resistance. Graffiti, too, is a *public* art. The intention when creating graffiti is to paint a highly visible message of resistance to hegemonic power. As Li and Prasad suggest the efficacy and power of Palestinian graffiti was increased through its placement on the "very wall erected by their occupiers" (2018, p. 494). The posting of comments in the online writing on the wall, while it may exhibit a hegemonic negotiation or war of position, does not equate to resistance in the act alone. An equivalent writing on the wall in this sense would be that left behind by a metalhead in a non-metal online space. The purposeful trolling of others in spaces not dedicated to the celebration of heavy metal culture.

The writing on the wall is a concept that I develop throughout this thesis. While it has nomenclatural ties to graffiti cultures, in the online metal scene it is more helpful to understand it as an unintentionally highly visible and permanent record of the negotiation of hegemonic power. The writing on the wall is different in online spaces than offline. The emergence of the writing on the wall is dependent upon the technology we use to access it. New technologies have allowed the writing on the wall to enjoy greater longevity and to be added to in more complex and fascinating ways. In the online metal scene, the writing on the wall consists of all

of the comments and posts ever posted. It sets the scene by providing a clear presentation and representation of the hegemonic order.

Nuances of Online Research

A social constructionist perspective frames this thesis and as such my methodology. As my intention has been, from the outset, to investigate the *experience* of participants in online heavy metal spaces, it was imperative that I employed a method that granted primacy to individuals' voices. My core argument is based on findings from the conduct of virtual-ethnographic (Hine 2000, 2017) research combined with thematic analysis (Aronson 1995). This involved an adaptation, similar to Wijaya et al (2017), of traditional ethnographic means similar to those espoused by Hine (2000, 2017) who coined the term virtual ethnography. Over the course of three years, I participated in online heavy metal spaces, fora, and websites observing interactions among heavy metal fans and collecting data from the immense quantity of text-based communication. I observed social interaction through the sharing of ideas via text-based communication which clearly contributes to the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity.

I recognise the qualitative character of meaning and text-based communication in the online metal scene. While virtual-ethnographic methods combined with thematic analysis offered a great deal of insight, it was also necessary to include a process of respondent validation. As Torrance suggests:

> Respondent validation involves research participants responding either to forms of initial data, for example, transcripts of interviews, or observations of activities, in order to check them for accuracy, or to first drafts of interpretive reports to respond, again, to the accuracy (2012, p. 114).

The process of respondent validation that I undertook lasted throughout the duration of the study. This contributed to a more sophisticated understanding of the nuances of interaction in

online heavy metal spaces. Additionally, it contributed greatly to my on-going connection to the social spaces in question.

It was during the initial stages of participant observation that the tropes of hypermasculinity first emerged. I participated in an online metal space, hereafter referred to as *The First Forum,* where individuals discussed all manner of topics related to heavy metal. This forum was the hub of my participant observation. It offered links to other sites such as Facebook and YouTube which I also categorised as part of the online metal scene. It was in *The First Forum* that I first noticed themes of hypermasculinity. The predominantly text-based communication that took place in this forum and in other sites of the online metal scene appeared as a discourse which contributed in no small way to the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity. Discourse, according to Hall (1997), carries meaning within social interactions. As such, I posit that text-based communication, the predominant form of interaction in the online metal scene, contributes the social meanings of hypermasculinity that are realized in the linguistic landscape (Androutsopoulos 2014) of the writing on the wall. However, the writing on the wall does not enjoy a static existence, indeed it would be remiss to suggest that social meanings were at all static. Hegemonic masculinity is open to challenge from men who hold non-hegemonic masculine identities (Connell 2005). Connell's *Masculinities* (2005) and more contemporary discussions it precipitated (Beasley 2008; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; Demetriou 2001; Messerschmidt 2012; Messerschmidt et al 2018; Albanesi 2017) underpin my findings that the writing on the wall exhibits the on-going war of position inherent in the exercise of hegemonic masculinity.

Thematic analysis was employed to develop an understanding of the emergent themes of hypermasculinity within the writing on the wall. As Aronson suggests, thematic analysis is a process that allows researchers to "analyse informants' talk about their experiences" (1995, p.

1). It allows the collection and collation of similar themes through codes that emerge from the data. Thematic analysis has proven an invaluable tool in more recent times for the analysis of online and self-published content (Hall 2016; Kurian & John 2017). Thematic analysis, in this vein, was used as a way of dealing with the large volume of text-based data that emerged as a result of online interactions and respondent validation. Having participated in these spaces and having the opportunity to validate my findings through consultation with participants led to a rigorous and clear interpretation of events and interactions in the online metal scene.

Given the setting of my research – the online metal scene – a departure from traditional offline ethnographic methods was appropriate. While I embrace some of the core tenets of ethnographic research, I present here an adaptation of a mixed method ethnographic approach. That is, an approach which fits most closely with the method of virtual ethnography as outlined by Hine (2000; 2017) – an approach noted recently as part of a wide array of "standard [methods] of knowledge generation and analysis in qualitative research" (Ash et al 2018, p. 29). The process of data collection and analysis will of course be addressed at length in Chapter Four as I discuss my methodology. In short, I employed the ethnographic methods of participant observation and respondent validation. Given the significant volume of data that then becomes available through in online social spaces and via the facility of data recording a thematic analysis was conducted in order to identify tropes of hypermasculinity in the writing on the wall.

Employing such a mixed-method approach, I gathered a significant amount of meaningful qualitative data from which tropes of hypermasculinity emerged. I relied on both my personal recording of interactions as well as the recording and archiving of events through the facilities of *The First Forum,* Youtube*,* and Facebook (such a capability will be discussed at length in Chapter Seven with regard to the affordances of online communication technology). Through

thematic analysis of the resultant text that was shared I reached a point of data saturation (Glaser & Strauss 2017) where the themes of aggression and violence, militarism, and objectification of women (characteristics which comprise hypermasculinity) were consistently appearing in the writing on the wall.

Over the course of three years, I participated in *The First Forum*, which I identified as a kind of hub. This forum was where I would begin my participant observation on most days. I would then follow links to external sources which were usually hosted by Facebook and Youtube. These two social media sites became classified, in this research, as peripheral sites which I would visit when prompted by members of the original forum. I came to know regular participants in *The First Forum* and I developed a strong sense of the expectations around language and behaviour in these spaces. The process of respondent validation, as an on-going activity, clarified and confirmed my assertion that the combination of heavy metal culture more generally and the influence of technology used to access online heavy metal spaces allows for the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity. My methods provided valuable and meaningful data and enabled rigorous analysis.

Chapter Outline

The chapters of this thesis have been set out in a precise manner to firstly background this project with existing literature surrounding contemporary scholarship on masculinity, metal music studies, and the role of technology particularly with relation to the uptake of social media. From this foundation, I then present an outline of my methodological considerations and praxis in the interest of transparency of method. Chapters Five, Six and Seven form the core of my findings and argument. These chapters are set out to present a step by step elucidation of the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity and how online communication technologies contribute to this process. The conclusion of this thesis reiterates my findings in

the context of broader debates surrounding masculinity, metal music studies, and the role of social media technology. I argue, in this final chapter, that my findings are contextually relevant to these debates and that my thesis provides an advantageous position from which to conduct similar research into online social spaces.

Chapter One traces contemporary scholarship surrounding gender and sexuality and hegemonic masculinity. Studies of masculinities arise from feminist and post-structuralist interest in the politics of gender and sexuality. Jackson and Scott highlight that studies of masculinities are actually a relatively new phenomenon (2002). That is, given the invisibility of male privilege it was not until the dissemination of feminist thought around the construction of gender identity as separate from corporeal sex that attention began to be given to masculinity as socially constructed rather than as some natural, normal way of being. Given that my thesis is primarily concerned with the way masculine identities are socially constructed in the online metal scene it is crucial to distance this thesis from outdated notions of gender as a reflection of simplistic sex / gender binaries.

My theorisation of the social construction of masculinities is based on the theoretical trajectory of Raewyn Connell's well-known scholarship. Of particular interest is the development of Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinities (1987, 2005). Connell draws on the Gramscian framework of hegemony to present hegemonic masculinity as a negotiated war of position (Anderson 2017a) amongst men in a given social setting. The concept of hegemonic masculinity, much debated and developed through the 1990s and 2000s is enjoying a renaissance in recent times (Messerschmidt 2012; Messerschmidt et al 2018; Albanesi 2017). During the participant observation phase of this research it became immediately apparent that the writing on the wall reflected this war of position and served to inform a "collective strategy toward women" (Connell 2005).

I will also outline, in Chapter One, how masculinity in heavy metal culture has been addressed in wider metal studies literature. As mentioned earlier, there remains a gap in the literature when it comes to gender in the *online* metal scene. That said, attention to masculinities in heavy metal enjoys frequent attention in metal studies community. Herein I revisit some of the keystone works on gender in heavy metal cultures including Walser (1993) and Weinstein (1991) who reflect on the ultra-masculine character of heavy metal. I extend this review to look at enquiries into gender in heavy metal spaces that employ ethnographic methods as their core research principle. For instance, Krenske and McKay (2000), whose research into the Brisbane metal scene focussed on women's participation in a predominantly masculine environment at metal shows.

I present a second literature review in Chapter Two with a focus on sociological approaches to music and music cultures. There are two key aspects to this review. Firstly, it is important to separate this thesis from musicology. Though it has been recognised that the borders are blurring (DeNora 2003), this thesis is interested in how music cultures operate in the online metal scene, not in the technical aspects of music production as such (Kerman 2009). The second point of this chapter is to outline current scholarship surrounding the understanding of the online metal scene as part of what Straw (1991), Bennett and Peterson (2004), and Shank (2011) have all termed music scenes. This theorisation acknowledges the necessary departure from subcultures theory as espoused most famously by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) (Redhead 1990; Bennett 1999; Bennett & Kahn-Harris 2004). Importantly, such a departure provides an appropriate background for a discussion of how fans and bands come together, crossing vast geographical and social boundaries.

As a third main focus of my review of the literature Chapter Three will address contemporary approaches to online communication technologies. My original contribution to knowledge involves a focus on the influence of technology on the social construction of masculinity in the online metal scene. As such, I will highlight current debates around masculine dominance in technology (Maclaran et al 2004, Ranga & Etzkowitx 2010, and Shapiro 2015). These debates suggest that technology has, more often than not, served the political interests of men and as such privilege masculinity in their design, dissemination and consumption. Though my focus is not on gender imbalances in the online metal scene, I note that *The First Forum's* statistical data based on participants' gender suggests a six to one ratio in favour of men. Such an imbalance is commensurate with literature which highlights the masculine dominance of technology.

This third literature review chapter will also canvass contemporary scholarship surrounding the affordances of technology. Consideration of these debates will preface my findings surrounding the limitations and opportunities presented by online communication technology. I borrow the original concept of affordances from Gibson (1979) and from more recent theorisations by Shapiro (2015) and Hutchby (2001). Of particular interest is Shapiro's work on gender and online social spaces. A review of the concept of affordances offers a platform from which to examine the impact of online communication technologies on the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene.

Chapter Four will present my methodological approach to an analysis of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene. This chapter is divided into three distinct parts. I will firstly, draw links between Bennett and Peterson's conceptualisation of virtual music scenes (2004) and the online metal scene in which I conducted my research – distancing my thesis from the nomenclature 'virtual' in favour of 'online'. It is useful to understand the heavy

metal spaces in which I conducted research as part of an online music scene, especially as Bennett and Peterson position scenes as sites of "production, performance and reception of music culture" (2004, p. 3). Introducing the discussion of *The First Forum* and other metal sites as part of an online music scene at this point will provide a useful background to the remaining methods chapter and an explanation of what the online metal scene looks like.

In this chapter I also provide a further examination of the adaptation of ethnographic methods that underpin a virtual ethnographic method. Much of this adaptation is guided by the work of Hine (2000, 2017) who, amongst others (Kozinets 2012, 2009, 2002; Beneito-Montagut 2011; Androutsopolous 2008; Murthy 2008; Sade-Beck 2008), has recognised the need for reconceptualisation of research methods to suit emerging online social spaces. The decision to employ (virtual) ethnographic methods in this research came not only from the existence of detailed and useful ethnographic studies in similar fields of gender and heavy metal (Krenske & McKay 2000, Dawes 2012) but also from Skeggs' assertion that ethnographic enquiry is:

> One of the most rigorous and important methodologies. It is the impossibility of not being able to avoid the accusations of exploitation, colonial reproduction and the quagmire of representation and ethics that makes for a reflexive and vigilant researcher (1999, p. 33).

Backgrounded by Skeggs' feminist critique and subsequent support of ethnography and detailed accounts of conducting useful ethnography espoused by the likes of Becker (2007) it remained to move to an adaptation of ethnographic methods to accommodate the nuances of online social spaces.

The final part of my methodology chapter presents a detailed outline of the data collection process. That is, the step by step process of implementing the aforementioned mixed method approach. This outline provides an overall context to the data collection phase of my research as well as providing a significant original contribution to an on-going discussion about methodological approaches to emerging online communities. I outline the process of gaining

access to *The First Forum*, how conversations were initiated and how *The First Forum* came to be best understood as a social hub which contained links to peripheral sites within the online metal scene such as Facebook and YouTube posts/pages. This chapter enforces the reliability of my findings with regard to tropes of hypermasculinity in the writing on the wall of the online metal scene.

Chapter Five is the first of three data chapters where I present, in detail my findings. Here I will outline the characteristic tropes of hypermasculinity. This chapter includes a presentation of text-based data gathered through the participant observation phase and supported by the process of respondent validation. From this foundation, I will show how the core themes of aggression, violence, militarism, and objectification of women can be seen to emerge as key tactics in the negotiation of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene. Moreover, I outline the emergence of the writing on the wall as a highly visible and permanent record of the constant presentation and representation of a hegemonic order.

I argue that aggression and violence emerges as a key trope of hegemonic hypermasculinity in three ways. Firstly, participants legitimise metalhead identity through comments that outline their intentions to engage in aggression and violence in particular situations. For example, one commenter, discussing someone who was challenging another metalhead responded with "I would have beaten the shit out of them to be honest". Secondly, these spaces can be seen to support extreme appeals to aggression and violence through participants' celebration of violence. That is, comments that rejoice at stories of disliked musicians or non-metalheads being subjected to violence. For example, a participant suggested that they "loved the video of Danzig getting knocked the fuck out". To love footage of someone being knocked unconscious is, as the writing on the wall confirms, a revered metalhead behaviour. The third display of aggression and violence in the online metal scene can be seen as the use of aggressive language

to indicate approval or affirmation. That is, something positive may be described as ‘badass’ or ‘totally brutal’. Overell (2010) probed the role of the term ‘brutal’ in the Melbourne grindcore scene to configure affective belonging.

The second trope of hypermasculinity that I observed in the online metal scene is that of militarism. Particularly visible in *The First Forum*, militarism underpins the organisation of members of the site. This works in two ways. Firstly, as participants sign up to the forum they are allocated the rank of ‘Private’. As participants contribute to the threads and become more well-known they can earn their stripes as Lieutenant, General, and Commanding General. The ranking of participants reflects the notion, held by some original members, that *The First Forum* was a site for the defence of heavy metal culture and to be the number one metal site. This forum was commonly spoken of as an alliance of metalheads, as one participant put it, “fighting the good fight”.

The second way militarism appears as a hypermasculine trope in the online metal scene is through its undeniable links to militaristic violence. Drawing on military terminology and utilising visual representations of military paraphernalia such as flags, tanks, and trenches reifies the ideology of war. This reflects what Connell has noted as “bureaucratically rationalized violence” (2005, p. 192). Indeed, Connell goes on to suggest that “no arena [other than the military] has been more important for the definition of hegemonic masculinity” (2005, p. 213). In the online metal scene, these ideological links to fighting men, air aces, and war heroes define ideal metalhead identity as espousing strength, violence, aggression. The image of the military metalhead is written on the wall as a significant trope of hypermasculinity.

Similarly, objectification of women in the online metal scene manifests itself in the writing on the wall in two distinct ways. Women are discussed or presented via imagery as objects of

desire. These comments and images often disregard the agency of women and reduce them to objects only for the sexual fantasies of men. For example, one participant from *The First Forum* suggested, in a discussion of a woman vocalist "I only care about how hot she is". Another way in which the objectification of women is established in the writing on the wall is through comments that praise women for being sexually attractive and / or active. For example, another *First Forum* participant who posted a picture of herself elicited the response, "hot pic there, we need more women like yourself in our epic circle of METAL". It must be noted that the objectification of women in any social space is no new formation. Indeed, the United States President and a former Australian Prime Minister have both been recorded uttering objectifying remarks about women in various settings. The objectification of women is a well-known tactic deployed by men to reinforce patriarchy. What is additionally more concerning in the online metal scene is the highly visible and permanent nature of these comments reinforces objectification of women as a desirable community value.

The emergence of hypermasculinity can be seen in the three aforementioned tropes. Chapter Six provides an examination of how hegemonic hypermasculinity is *maintained* by participants. Hegemonic masculinity is not a static measure of masculine identity. Rather, it is the result of a negotiation between men who bear various masculine identities. I show, through reference to Connell (1987, 2005) firstly, how the writing on the wall typifies a version of hegemonic hypermasculinity, and secondly, that this hegemony needs to be maintained through active negotiation. This negotiation is effected through what I have termed policing and resistance.

Policing and resistance in the online metal scene emerges through negotiations within a Gramscian war of position (Anderson 2017a). As Connell suggests, hegemonic masculinity is "achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power in the organisation of private life and cultural processes" (1987, p. 184). The active organisation of

cultural processes in the online metal scene is what I have termed policing. The cultural process of policing hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene is guided by a set of expectations about how participants should behave. These expectations tend, often, to emerge through discussions about what it really means to be a 'metalhead'. Individual users thus generally take care of this policing through posting comments aimed at others that espouse these ideas. For instance, men will be openly attacked and derided if they don't adhere to the archetypical tough, aggressive, and heterosexual, metalhead identity. Similarly, if women transgress boundaries of expected femininity, they too face derision. Furthermore, women who take on active roles (vocalists and band members) will often be the target of comments of disbelief and/or disparagement.

In revealing resistance in the online metal scene, it is important to note that what I am talking about in this thesis is more akin to what Connell calls remaking masculinity (2005). It may even be likened to attempts at "reforming gendered ways of life" (Connell, 2000, p. 205). That is, challenging hegemonic hypermasculinity through the embodiment and expression of alternative identities as an acknowledgement of the undesirability of such hegemonic forms. This resistance is a crucial component of the hegemonic war of position which runs counter to policing as described above. While the intent of resistance is to oppose mechanisms of policing, a key finding of this study is that evidence of resistance in text-based communication actually reifies norms of hegemonic hypermasculinity. That is, while the intention of participants in many cases is to resist hegemonic hypermasculine themes, the linguistic restrictions and, one might say, the success of hegemonic masculinity itself demands a reliance upon hypermasculine discourse. Resistance in the online metal scene, therefore, appears to exemplify a discourse that, though aimed at resistance, perpetuates similar expectations of hegemonic hypermasculine metalhead identity.

In Chapter Seven, I focus on the technology used to access the online metal scene and the impact of affordances of technology (Gibson 1979; Hutchby 2001; Graves 2007; Shapiro 2015). Hutchby, in relation to technological affordances, suggests that, "the social processes and the 'properties' of technological artefacts are interrelated and intertwined" (2001, p. 442). As such, I argue that the concept of affordances is a useful conceptualisation of the limitations and opportunities that are presented within social interactions as a result of the capacities of the technology used to facilitate them. Technologies, depending on the time and space of their deployment, can offer various affordances to particular social settings. With regards to online communication technology in online heavy metal spaces I have chosen to identify three key affordances that appear to affect the writing on the wall in online heavy metal spaces: *visibility*, *permanence*, and *anonymity*.

Though this chapter will treat the three observable affordances separately, the first two: visibility and permanence, are closely related. Firstly, I outline the affordance of visibility as the capacity of online communication technology to allow access to online interactions by large numbers of individuals across vast geographical divides. That is, participants in the online metal scene, through the use of computer technology, are able to observe and participate in social interactions between other members in the space because a computer monitor renders these interactions visible to all who are logged in. This is in stark contrast to conversations which may occur at offline venues where only participants within earshot (often only in close physical proximity) are privy to such conversations. I argue, here, that this visibility, conceptualised herein as 'access by anybody' and 'access from anywhere' contributes to the reach of the writing on the wall.

Permanence, sometimes referred to as recordability (Toma et al 2008; Hancock et al 2007), refers to the capacity of online communication technology to grant access to social interactions

across time. That is, individuals are able to revisit conversations or observe past conversations well after they have taken place. The capacity of online communication technology to record text-based conversations affords these interactions a degree of permanence. Again, this is in stark contrast to offline heavy metal spaces where conversations at venues or in the company of fellow metalheads are no longer observable once they have taken place. It has been suggested by Burton that there exist "cracks and fissures within the veneer of permanence" (2015, p. 57). Burton is addressing the more recent panics about young people self-publishing on the Internet. There are no guarantees of permanence (the disappearance of *The First Forum* toward the end of this project is a case in point) but the visibility of numerous posts from more than three or four years prior to this study suggests it is still a significant affordance of the technology used to access the online metal scene.

Anonymity is the third affordance I observed throughout my research. Anonymity is oft-cited (Papacharissi 2004; Moore et al 2012; Santana 2014; Rowe 2015; Jardine 2018), though it is not conceptualised specifically as an 'affordance' in public debates about Internet safety and security. I am less interested in issues of safety or security than with the affordance of anonymity as a clear contributor to the extremeness of commentary in the online metal scene. I use this chapter to discuss how varying degrees of anonymity allowed by online communication technology enable a kind of 'keyboard warrior' mentality that eliminates recognised consequences for adherence to extreme variations on the tropes of hegemonic hypermasculinity. Typically seen in the policing and resistance, as identified in Chapter Six, extreme referrals to hegemonic hypermasculine tropes of aggression and sexual and physical violence occur in the online metal scene at a much higher frequency than in offline spaces. The affordance of anonymity brings an extremeness which is then exhibited in the already highly visible and permanent writing on the wall.

My conclusions in Chapter Seven are two-fold. Firstly, that visibility and permanence both contribute to access over space and time. Second, anonymity removes perceived consequences for more extreme reference to the tropes of hegemonic hypermasculinity. Of major importance to the overall thesis, this chapter will wrap up the discussion and answer the question: How does hegemonic hypermasculinity emerge and how is it maintained in the online metal scene? Through this research, I contextualise my original contribution to knowledge and to consider opportunities for an extension of this research into the future.

The conclusion to this doctoral research aligns and converges the findings, to reveal the contours of thought that underpin my doctoral thesis. Beginning with an interest in identity formation in the online metal scene I quickly observed a characteristically extreme adherence to tropes of hypermasculinity by many participants. With a backgrounding in contemporary literature regarding masculinities, heavy metal culture, and online communication technology I firstly, sought to demonstrate the emergence of several themes of hypermasculinity in relation to the transferral of heavy metal culture to the online scene. Secondly, I presented a discussion of the language and imagery metalheads use to police and resist hegemonic hypermasculinity – noting that both policing and resistance tended to strengthen the hegemonic order. Finally, I showed that, through affordances, the technology necessary to access the online metal scene provided the opportunities for the manifestation of a hegemonic hypermasculine writing on the wall to emerge, be policed and/or resisted, and remain visible as the definitive metalhead identity.

There are many paths that this thesis could have followed. At the forefront of my mind during this process was the intersection of race and gender. That is, gender does not emerge and is not performed through binary narratives, separated from other modes and forms of identity. As Yuval-Davis suggests experiences of gender and race are indivisible (2006). That is, Black

women not only experience marginalisation through patriarchy but also colonialism. Heavy metal music scenes exhibit overt themes of white privilege (Kennedy 2018) as well as masculine dominance. To address this issue with full attention, hegemonic masculinity is my focus and is the framing limitation on this doctoral thesis. It is however, my intention that this work presents a springboard from which to examine, in future projects, intersections of race and class in online social spaces.

Chapter One: Breaking the Law

From the science of sex to hegemonic masculinity

A key to the argument configured in this thesis is how hegemonic hypermasculinity emerges and is maintained in the online metal scene. It is therefore prudent to establish the theoretical perspective from which I intend to discuss matters of gender and, in particular, masculinity. I will take time here to examine social-scientific and sociological theories that have evolved from earlier essentialist and biological determinist approaches to gender as well as the developments heralded during the structuralist turn of the mid-20th century. In what follows, I outline a key transition in thought about gender from something which is inextricably linked to physical, corporeal characteristics and notions of female and male difference to something based on a social construction. That is, gender must be seen as something which has inextricable ties to social processes rather than an exclusively physiological derivation.

The configuration of gender as socially constructed underpins the theorisation of masculine subjectivity. That is, masculinity refers to the social aspects of being a man and is not tied to a natural biological state or organ. The discussion of gender that I offer in this chapter makes clear the distinction between biological and corporeal sex and subjective masculine identity. Demarcating sex and gender will enable an analytically precise understanding of current literature surrounding masculinities. It is of particular importance to locate gender within the scope of hegemonic descriptions of social norms and expectations. Such an explication will open the door for the remainder of this thesis as I present the answer to the question: How does hegemonic hypermasculinity emerge and how is it maintained in the online metal scene?

The science of sex

While most often dismissed, analyses of sex differences between women and men as part of what Holmes describes as an early 'science of sex' (2007 p. 22) posited that women and men were physical variants of the same sex. As Holmes reminds us:

> In the scientific version of this 'one-sex' model women were supposedly 'imperfect' versions of men, their genitalia were described as being the same as men's, but on the inside rather than outside (Holmes 2007, p. 22).

It is (only) possible to understand how such a conception arose after grasping the rudimentary early Western understandings of human physiology (Ackerknecht & Haushofer 2016). However, more recent interpretations of human physiology presents a much more sophisticated understanding. Significant here though, in this early science of sex, researchers can already see social processes at play. In examining these social processes, a conception of women and men as variations on the one model undoubtedly arose, not simply from a rudimentary knowledge of human physiology, but from the hegemonic power men benefit from in Western society and Western science (Haraway 1988; Ramazanoglu 1992). This conception suits a particular argument around which social processes were (and to a significant extent still are) organised.

Despite a dramatic shift in scholarship over the past century, this structure of thinking persists – though not without drawing critique. For instance, as Johnson highlights, somewhat advanced medical models for student doctor training are still based on the 'universal' male body with interchangeable genitalia (2005). As Holmes highlights, this leads to the conception that men's bodies are defined as representations of the universal 'normal' human while women's bodies are defined as abnormal versions of men (Holmes 2007). The persistence of these ideas about the universal normalness of the male body continues to impact understandings and expectations about women and men. We have however developed a much more sophisticated understanding of the way female and male bodies develop and how this process relates to gender.

In a shift from the one-sex model, scientists began investigating chromosomal and hormonal development. Through the affordances of new microscope technology and scientific research it became possible to observe structural differences in deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) that appeared, mostly, to align with the binary categories of female and male. Money and Tucker (1975) identify the process of female or male physical development as originating on a chromosomal and hormonal level where bodies either develop XX or XY chromosomal configurations and then respond to hormones (either oestrogen or testosterone) throughout their development. The process for Money and Tucker carries on until puberty when girls and boys either become women or men. The focus thus shifts from gonadal differences for women's inferiority to how female and male bodies grow as a result of response to internal chemical reactions. A more sophisticated understanding of human physiology perhaps, however this model is still seated in the quest to highlight differences of ability and role as biologically inherent and based on a simple binary.

Though these advancements in medical research are heralded as breakthroughs toward a more sophisticated understanding of sex differences they hold one thing in common. There is a seemingly willing dismissal of social structural factors which influence the way that women and men are positioned as different in society. The one-sex model resulted in the positioning of women as inferior. Further chromosomal research offered a supposedly more sophisticated scientific reasoning behind these assumed differences. Chromosomal differences which aligned exclusively with 'normal' female and male bodies and apparent genders was a concept challenged by Fausto-Sterling (1993), a biologist, who suggested that chromosomal makeup of individuals is a much more complex process and that humans are not exclusively born XX or XY. That is, there are karyotype variations which depart from the 'normal' such as XYY. Fausto-Sterling suggested that Western culture adheres to a "two-party sexual system in defiance of nature" (1993, p. 21) and that this binary norm is embedded in legal, political, and

linguistic practices. For Fausto-Sterling variations in corporeal sex fall across a spectrum where there are possibly as many as six more common variants. Again, the desire to categorise bodies into a simplistic two sex model appears to be founded in social expectations about 'normal' women's and men's roles and aptitudes.

Psychoanalysis

While attention is still paid to chromosomal constitution to determine foetal sex, psychoanalysis in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries signalled a shift toward more psycho-social aspects of sex differences. This was, at the time, a dramatic shift that "wrecked the notion of natural fixed characters for the two sexes" (Connell 1987, p. 27). Freud introduced most famously the 'Oedipus Complex' (2013). That is, women and men develop their gender identity through a series of conflicts and desires aimed at their parents. Freud's work started to hint that social processes (relationships with mothers and fathers) had some influence in the development of our sexual identities. Though, as Connell highlights, this was most likely not Freud's intention as he maintained that psychology would necessarily find answers in the biological (1987). Nevertheless, Freud's work marked a significant step toward understanding of gender as a social process rather than a fundamental natural order.

Kristeva continued in the tradition of psychoanalysis (1980) and suggested that identity was derived from a relationship between the semiotic and symbolic. The term 'semiotic' for Kristeva was different from what one might associate with Saussurian semiotics (Holmes 2007). For Kristeva the semiotic in relation to identity formation originated in the Freudian pre-Oedipal stage. Kristeva suggests that prior to entering the world of the symbolic (language) we have semiotic drives (2002). That is, our material bodies are constituted through a series of bodily drives that make their way into language. Unutterable desires that influence our understanding of ourselves are translated into (and within the limits of) language. Such semiotic

desires later combine with symbolic ways of talking about our identity and understanding ourselves. It is the interplay which, for Kristeva, contribute to our identity.

Chodorow, like Kristeva, followed the theories of psychoanalysis in her explication of gender and identity. Chodorow's positions was that:

> Each person's unconscious and conscious constructions of [gender and sexuality] cannot be understood apart from his or her psyche as a whole – it's dominant anxieties and defensive patterns, its founding self-other fantasies and internal world (2013, p.120).

Her suggestion is that individuals' construction of gender identity is reliant upon the psycho-social aspects of their upbringing. These psycho-social aspects for Chodorow, and likewise Kristeva, foster drives or desires which are articulated from the perspective of the individual. As Chodorow notes, "everyone is born into a culture, but each person at the same time filters that culture through an individual projective and introjective prism" (2013, p. 120). Important here, the resultant conceptions or constructions of identity are not based on some universal gender identity or position.

Psychoanalysis, stemming from Freud and encompassing theorists such as Lacan (1989), Kristeva (1980) and Chodorow (1974), is a significant step in theorising gender difference as reliant upon social and personal development and internalisation of the culture of gender and sexuality. Kristeva, in particular, was welcomed by feminist theorists for the shift in focus to women's bodies (Holmes 2007). For psychoanalysts, gender identity is formed through a developmental process, a process which is shaped by relationships between individuals, their parents, and their experience of their own bodies. A useful stepping stone in the journey to understanding gender as a social construction rather than a result of biological determinism. Despite efforts by psychoanalysts like Kristeva (1980) and Chodorow (1974) to counter the centricity of male bodies to psychoanalytical understandings of gender development the approach remains flawed. As Jackson (1999) suggested, the tendency to focus on biology and

childhood experiences, not to mention the primacy of male bodies over female often renders psychoanalytical perspectives unhelpful in developing an understanding of gender.

Sex-roles

As Baumgartner (2014) reveals, there are two strands of sex-role theories: Psychoanalysts who remain committed to a focus on biological determinants of female and male identities (Chodorow 1974) and what Connell highlights as cultural elaborations necessarily guided by "general sets of expectations which are attached to one's sex" (2005, p. 22). I should note that I tend not to agree with Baumgartner's seemingly simple dismissal of Chodorow's work. In fact, Chodorow clearly provides crucial foundational thinking for other sociological theories of identity development such as socialisation, which I will discuss later in this chapter. My reason for departure from Chodorow here is simply to move toward a conception of hegemonic masculinity which will form a significant portion of this study. As such, and in order to progress this thesis, I shall briefly examine the latter.

A significant sociological step in understanding *social* aspects of gender came from Parsons and Bales (1956) who posited sex-role theory as a means to analyse the underlying principles of women's and men's gender identities. For Parsons, sex role theory was a functionalist model which relied on the social organisation of bodies along lines of expected roles and behaviours of women and men. That is, in order for society to function successfully women and men would necessarily have to operate in certain ways. The definition of a successful society in this instance was most commonly defined along lines of labour. It was expected that women's roles were in the private sphere providing care for and raising children and men would participate in the more public realm in the workplace (Elshtain 1993). As such, boys would be encouraged to engage in activities which are more physical and aggressive whereas girls would be encouraged

toward activities which were understood to engage more feminine traits such as caring, compassion, and nurturing (Eagly 2013).

Such a conceptualisation of sex-roles only serves to reify taken for granted expectations about women and men's 'natural' dependence and independence. Useful in its incorporation of social expectations about women and men, sex-role theory still relied heavily on assumptions about the ideal American family (Holmes 2007) and the 'natural' status and abilities of women and men. While these assumptions may indeed be social constructions themselves, they are limiting in their utility as concepts for understanding the complexities of gender identity.

The theoretical transition through psychoanalysis and sex-role theories saw a welcome incorporation of social aspects of gender identity. Psychoanalysis relied heavily on assumptions about natural differences between women and men which were learned through childhood. This learning was either through active teaching or through conflicts and desires brought about by 'natural' drives. Sex-role theory shifted the focus to social learning about 'normal' activities of women and men. The ideological descriptions about acceptable masculine and feminine behaviour were starting to be recognised. Both of these theories however, still tended to rely heavily on naturalness. That is, we are born on a trajectory that is inextricably tied to our corporeal existence. The quest to understand how women and men developed their identities was still tangled with assumptions about physiology and female and male bodies.

Mathilde Vaerting in 1923 was one of the earliest sociologists to highlight that the continued search for 'natural' differences between women and men, and in particular the codes of femininity actually facilitated the maintenance of male dominance. Vaerting states that "there is not a single masculine quality which cannot be paralleled as a feminine quality in the history of one race or another" (1923, p. 24). That is, the social organisation of women and men clearly

reinforces the hegemony of men which, through variations in these social expectations about masculine qualities could just as easily be seen as feminine qualities. This advance in thinking was key in moving toward a more sociological understanding of sex and identity.

Many sociologists and psychologists still occupy a middle ground in the nature-nurture debate (Turkheimer 2018; Holmes 2007), to discuss the influence of both biology and society. However, in the face of scientific research which went looking for physiological, chromosomal, and hormonal differences to explain women's and men's perceived inequality sociologists asked: what is it about society that gives us these differences? The sociological investigation into perceived differences between women and men stemmed from two key positions. Firstly, human bodies do not always fit the binary categories of female or male and secondly, the notion that women and men are significantly different only serves to reinforce hegemonic social ideas that women are somehow inferior. In answering the above question sociologists have looked to education, the family, politics, and workplaces to uncover how our bodies become *gendered* (Holmes 2007).

Sociology of Masculinities

Studies of gender, and in particular masculinities, began to gain currency and momentum in the 1970s. Jackson and Scott highlight the "resurgence of feminism that challenged the androcentric view of the world which had prevailed for so long" (2002, p. 1). The reluctance of mainstream science to address gender differences prior to the 1970s can be seen as resulting from rudimentary understandings of physiology. It can also be attributed to power relations presented by patriarchy. That is, a reliance on the fictive naturalness of sex as the defining characteristic of human bodies and human identity serves to reinforce male social power.

In contrast to a 'science of sex', studies of gender emerged from earlier sociological studies of identity. A useful place to start is with the notion of the socially constructed self (Mead 1934). Gender is a social construction, we can see it as something which is created through social interactions, norms, and values rather than strict and limiting binaries of female and male bodies. Importantly, sociologists do not tend to eliminate the influence of corporeality. Morris, who provided the introduction to *Mind, Self and Society* (Mead 1934), highlights that Mead's understanding of identity is in 'biosocial terms' (1934, p. xv). Mead espouses "… the study of the experience and behaviour of the individual organism or self in its dependence upon the social group to which it belongs" (1934, p. 1). In contrast to earlier theories about strict physiological sex differences, Mead suggests that, while there is a biological prerequisite – the 'individual organism' – to social interaction, the creation or understanding of the mind and self is one which is necessarily reliant on external social influences. It is important to note that, as Morris highlights, "Both extremes [social and biological] are avoided by an appeal to an ongoing social process of interacting biological organisms [through which] mind and selves arise" (in Mead 1934, p. xv). Mead's conceptualisation here highlights the emergence of debates of gender identity, and thus masculinity, as socially constructed.

Mead is known as an early proponent of symbolic interactionism. Significant to his contribution is a conception of the self as "something which has a development" (1934, p. 135). That is, the self is summoned through the internalisation or reception of social experiences about how an individual may be achieving or breaching the norms to which society holds us all accountable. While it is not crucial to this thesis to explore the philosophical underpinnings of Mead's work at length here, these points are useful as markers on the path towards a contemporary understanding of theories of gender and hence masculinity. Mead proposed that social experiences take place around the duality of the 'I' and the 'Me'. "The 'I' is the response of the organism to the attitudes of others and the 'Me' is the organised set of attitudes of others which

one himself [sic] assumes" (1934, p. 175). Mead's interplay of attitudes and responses are a result of social expectations that exist in a social setting. What is useful about Mead's work is that we start to see the subjectivity of masculine identity. That is, something necessarily reliant upon social processes.

Socialisation

Proponents of socialisation theory tend also to challenge earlier conceptions of sex and gender identity as exclusively biological. Socialisation theories follow Clausen's insistence that identity is built through a relationship between individuals' and groups' participation in the social order (1968, p. 25). Though Baumgartner suggests socialisation theories tend not to specifically address gender (2014) it appears he overlooks Oakley's consideration (1972) of gendered aspects of socialisation in the 1970s. Oakley's work highlights socialisation as the process by which one learns to be their identity and therefore how ideas of feminine and masculine identities are learned.

Oakley (1972) raises two key points in relation to socialisation theory. Firstly, that socialisation is a process that involves interactions with family members (parents and siblings). Secondly, that these interactions reflect wider social practices that are reflective of expectations about acceptable gender identities. Oakley offered significant work which suggested mothers tend to treat their children differently based on their child's sex. That is, girls tend to be held and comforted more while boys are encouraged to be more independent. Importantly, Oakley later highlighted that these expectations were based on the "fantastical beliefs of Western culture in the 1960s [which] had the effect of preventing women from engaging in men's occupations and not allowing men to enjoy women's" (2015, p. 5). A reliance on these beliefs and social expectations reifies Mead's suggestion that identity is not inborn but is developed through interaction with others (1934). Oakley's work here further highlights the social construction of

gender and the way in which individuals are held accountable to a set of social norms about how to navigate their gender identity.

Usefully, socialisation theory has been applied in more recent times to further develop understandings of masculinity. Though, as may be expected of such a theory, it appears much of this work is on fatherhood. Lamb (2000) highlights the usefulness of socialisation theory in understanding the role of fathers in offering moral and ethical guidance; Bretherton (et al 2005) utilise the theory to understand the role of fathers as agents of socialisation; and, Davis and Wills (2010) who use socialisation to understand how adolescent gender ideologies are learned from fathers. These are all useful contributions, as they begin to observe the internalisation of ideological messages about normal masculine behaviour.

There are two significant criticisms of socialisation theories more generally which render them inappropriate for my thesis. Firstly, conceptions of socialisation theory as espoused by Oakley tended, at least initially, to rely on our bodies as a "blank slate on which we are inscribed various social lessons" (Gatens 1996, p. 4). There is a tendency to take for granted a natural binary sex which precedes our gender identity. A position which has been challenged by many in recent times including Oakley who, in her more recent work, suggested that "even the biological difference lies on a continuum" (2015, p. 5). The second criticism, offered by Holmes (2007), is that human beings are not more alike. That is, "If gender socialisation was as powerful as the model sometimes implies then we would be much more similar" (2007, p. 47).

What many of these theories have in common is that they search for and then analyse underlying physiological or social structural influences on how we come to be women and men. That is, epistemologically they rely on the notion that gender is something which is done to us by fixed structural constraints of femininity and masculinity. That from birth we are blank slates upon

which particular physiological, social structural, and environmental influences act to create our identities. These theories have been criticised for relapsing into essentialist accounts. That is, despite their focus on social aspects of gender construction they rely on assumptions that there would be natural ways for women and men to act according to their gender. More recent theorisations of gender began to ask the question, is gender something that we do?

'Doing Gender' and Performativity

Similar to Mead, Goffman followed a symbolic interactionist bent. Goffman's influential text, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), highlighted the importance of individual interactions to sociological analyses of identity. This work echoes the foundations of social psychology offered by Mead in terms of identity creation through his explication of dramaturgical analysis. Goffman sees the presentation of self in a kind of theatrical sense as he talks about the dramaturgy of acting out our gender. While Goffman offers the dualism of front and backstage acting, delving into those concepts is not necessary here. Usefully for this thesis and in line with the social construction of gender, Goffman suggests that gender is something which is performed and "…incorporate[s] and exemplif[ies] the officially accredited values of the society" (Goffman 1959, p. 53). What is important here is the recognition that there are social and cultural values which influence how individuals are allowed to navigate their gender identity. Far from being biological imperatives, the rules or accountability structures are indeed social constructions that are internalised by individuals.

West and Zimmerman (1987) are perhaps the most well-known scholars associated with the term 'doing gender'. Key to their argument is that gender is conceived of as an accomplishment within given social contexts and in line with expectations. Their ideas are reminiscent of earlier work by Mead which suggests that there is an interaction between individuals (1934); and Goffman's concept of dramaturgy (1959). However, West and Zimmerman disagree with

Goffman that individual actors can display a particular gender identity and have it accepted without question. As they argue, "it does not seem plausible to say that we have the option of being seen by others as female or male" (1987, p. 130). In this sense, doing gender equates to a routine accomplishment: "the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category" (p. 127). This position that gender is an accomplishment in light of appropriate normative conceptions (1987) was ground-breaking and holds particular significance for this thesis. As I discuss later in this chapter, hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005; Messerschmidt 2012) is achieved through internalisation of dominant ideological conceptions of acceptable masculinity.

The idea of doing gender as an on-going accomplishment as offered by West and Zimmerman has been added to by many over the previous three decades (Butler 2006; Wittig 1992). Butler, in particular suggests that to accomplish one's gender identity requires adherence to ideological assumptions around heteronormativity. That is doing gender is predicated upon an individual's assumed sex and therefore assumed heteronormative sex category: either female or male. These constraints of heterosexuality contribute to what has been the source of significant critique of many of the theories I have just described (Holmes 2007; Baumgartner 2014). That is, to rely on underlying notions of heteronormativity tracks very close to essentialist understandings of 'normal' gender identity.

Early theorisations about gender identity provide an understanding of how gender stereotypes can be seen as 'normal'. Mead, Goffman, and West and Zimmerman all base their conceptualisations on the fact that there exists a set of guidelines. For Mead it is social expectations, for Goffman and West and Zimmerman it is accountability or an 'accountability structure' (West and Zimmerman 1987). Butler retains the idea of a set of societal norms when she places gender within a 'rigid regulatory frame' (2006). I wish to proceed with this

understanding as it is clear in many facets of everyday life and in online heavy metal spaces that there exists a set of norms or expectations.

Butler proposes that gender is not just something that we do but also something that is done to us (2006). Her ideas remain central to post-structuralist thought regarding gender and follow Wittig's (1992) ideas to understand gender as based on a fictive naturalness that serves to govern our bodies. Butler writes:

> Gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being (2006, p. 45).

Butler suggests that the regulatory frame or the "terms of a hegemonic discourse predicated on binary structures that appear as the language of universal rationality" (2006, p. 12) are the rules about acceptable gender, the *social expectations* or the *accountability structures*. So, ideas about gender held to be universally rational (i.e. female is equal only to woman or that men naturally hold positions of dominance) in a given space are linked to the language used in that space to create a set of parameters that underpin the 'repeated stylisation'. These universal rationalities are political and set up, in the online metal scene, the heteronormative notion of male, heterosexual dominance.

For Butler, language has the power to ascribe a gendered meaning through its performative affect. This can be seen in many common social situations in society such as the utterance of the phrase 'it's a girl!' in a maternity ward of a hospital or, to borrow Austin's example, the phrase 'I do' at a wedding (1975, p. 5). These are operative utterances that have the effect of ascribing upon one's body or being all the associated gendered meanings of being a girl or a husband or wife. Upon utterance of 'it's a girl!' the meanings held within the rigid regulatory frame of gender identity are enacted upon her body. Family members purchase politically charged gifts that reinforce gendered categories (such as dolls, pink pyjamas and fairy

costumes) and reinforce the ideology of patriarchy. In turn girls will be expected to use specific public restrooms and cover up sexualised parts of their body – in fact the use of the pronoun 'she', as I have done here, is a further performative utterance which enforces meanings of regulated femininity.

A final point from Butler is the case for understanding gender as variable. It is not my position that online metalheads are necessarily all men nor that the discursive production of hegemonic hypermasculinity suits all men in the online metal scene. Indeed, core to the Gramscian concept of hegemony is a negotiation between competing interests – in this case, multiple masculine identities (Connell 2005). Men who occupy non-hegemonic identities, as well as women, participate in the online metal scene through articulations of the very same discourse. I agree with Butler that the language of patriarchy seeks to reify heteronormative dominance however given the fluidity of gender it appears that there is no need to ascertain a clear correlation between heteronormative binaries of female / male with contributions to the online metal scene which deploy hypermasculine language and imagery. As Butler suggests:

> Perhaps a new sort of feminist politics is now desirable to contest the very reifications of gender and identity, one that will take the variable construction of identity as both a methodological and normative prerequisite, if not a political goal (2006, p. 7-8).

My task in answering the question of the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene is predicated on such a variable construction of masculine identity. I do not presume to locate a fixed masculine identity, rather I argue that the online metal scene is the site for the very negotiation of multiple masculinities.

Masculinities

> Gender terms are contested because the right to account for gender is claimed by conflicting discourses and systems of knowledge. We can see this in everyday situations as well as in high theory (Connell 2005, p. 3).

The thread of scholarship around gender and identity has brought researchers to an understanding of gender as separate from sex. From this emerges theorisations of masculinities. Masculine identities are not linked to corporeal physicality. Moreover, masculine identity is not singular. The sociology of gender has permitted a conception of masculine identities as developed through processes which rely on social interaction, cultural expectations and ideological underpinnings. The complexity of these processes determines that a single masculine identity is impossible to pin down. As Reeser suggests, the origins of masculinity "must be thought of as plural, as ultimately unlocalizable in a single relationship of influence" (2010, p. 19). This thesis is primarily concerned with the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity. That is, the processes which underpin the negotiations of masculine identities in the online metal scene.

In order to progress this research, it remains to address Connell's keystone work on masculinities (2005). Of particular interest is her work on hegemonic masculinity. A key contribution which emerged in the 1980s and has been critiqued, (Beasley 2008; Demetriou 2001; Wetherell & Edley 1999) revised (Connell 2016; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005) and defended (Messerschmidt 2008) since. Hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005) is particularly useful for this thesis in its Gramscian understanding of the negotiations between hegemonic, marginalised, subordinate, and complicit masculine identities. Further to the quartet of identity positions offered, Connell offers the important suggestion that hegemonic masculinity is a negotiation amongst men and presents the "currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy" (2005, p. 77). Connell traces a similar trajectory of scientific and sociological thought surrounding gender as I have outlined above. Most usefully, Connell draws our attention to how masculinities are socially constructed through discursive practices (1987, 2005). She emphasises how these discursive practices lead to articulations of acceptable masculine identity with masculine dominance and maintenance of patriarchal social order at its

heart. Given my trajectory towards an explication of the writing on the wall of the online metal scene a theoretical position which places the negotiation of hegemonic masculine identities squarely within discursive practices is apt.

Connell (2005) recognises the history of thought surrounding gender is entwined with the dominance of scientific rationality. As she points out "science has a definite hegemony in our education system and media" (2005, p. 6). It is this hegemony of science which suggests that human biology is solely responsible for apparent differences between women and men. This assumption and the continued hegemony of science in this context culminate in social expectations about men's 'natural' predispositions to violence, aggression, and sexual conquest (Tull et al 2007; Graham et al 2006; Ferber 2007). Indeed, the hegemony of science in Western society tends to underpin the continuing reliance on biological and physiological parameters to explain patriarchal dominance. In what follows I will outline Connell's critique of such contemporary debates around gender and highlight a sociologically sound perspective from which I can build an answer to my research question.

In response to this 'science of sex,' Connell highlights the ongoing hegemony of science in Western society through a discussion of an article in *The Glebe* newspaper in Sydney, Australia (Connell 2005). The newspaper, like many others before and since, tackled the seemingly 'age old' question of why women and men do or do not ask for directions. The point in Connell's discussion is that mainstream media tend to cite biology as the causational factors underpinning gender difference. In response Connell suggests that, "the sociology of knowledge showed, two generations ago, how major world-views are based on the interests and experiences of major social groups" (2005, p. 5). While scientific analyses of human physiology are not without significant benefit, a sociologist must seek to uncover the ideological interest that underwrites its direction.

Connell recognises Freud's contribution to the discussion of gender as "the first sustained attempt to build a scientific account of masculinity" (2005, p 8). Connell praises Freud for his positioning of masculinity as something which develops in relation to others (particularly the parents). Freud offered an understanding of masculinity which acknowledged its complexity and avoided reversion to a fixed biologically determined trajectory. For Connell (2005) this was most usefully offered in Freud's *Wolf Man* study which positions masculinity, although precarious in Freud's account, as a complex construction.

Despite the celebration of this shift toward a deeper understanding of masculinity, Connell (2005) and others (Barrett 1992) also recognise that Freudian psychoanalysis tends to "make rather grand claims about its ability to explain why women and men think and act differently" (Holmes 2007). The problem, as Holmes points out is that psychoanalysis tends, too often, to ignore the influence of social institutions (p. 37). Connell added, that Freud's understanding of the *Wolf Man* crisis, which signalled a shift to social factors in identity development, nevertheless rested on "a cultural exaltation of masculinity and overvaluing the penis" (Connell 1994, p. 15). That is, masculinity is much more than simply the result of some pre-determined, or pre-Oedipal, inner drive with which individuals are born.

In response to sex-role theories Connell suggests that these theories signalled a significant shift from psychoanalysis toward a focus on more social aspects of masculine identity (2005). She notes that the discussion was still often rooted in assumptions about natural differences which, as outlined above invariably led to false notions of natural male dominance. The importance of this shift was how it allowed for social change (2005, p. 23). That is, the male role came to be understood as based in social processes and therefore could be changed through processes of socialisation. Like Holmes suggests of socialisation theory (2007) however, Connell notes that

male-role theory is "logically vague… and … exaggerates the degree to which people's social behaviour is prescribed" (2005, p. 26). Role-theory cannot explain the multitude of masculine identities which exist in various social spaces.

In response to theories that configure gender as an actualized and performed entity, Connell celebrated West and Zimmerman's 'Doing Gender' (1987) as a "beautifully constructed article" (2009, p. 104). She highlighted that, "they produced a convincing argument that gender dichotomy was not so much the foundation of gender practice as its effect" (p. 105). That is, in a shift which retains its significance today, gender can be understood as the *result* of individual and group social interactions rather than the other way around. Important for Connell, and others (Haraway 2001; Fausto-Sterling 2000), was the suggestion that gender was 'done' within a political realm. There were motivations based in social power behind the maintenance of patriarchy and definitions of masculinity. For Connell, the politics of masculinity is embedded in a "dense and active social tissue of institutions and sites, such as families, companies, governments and neighbourhoods" (2012a, p. 1677). This is a point echoed by many contemporary theorists who examine gender relations (Weldon 2006; Kimmel 2017a, 2017b; Poggio 2018). Of particular importance here is the emergence of the Gramscian notion of hegemony. That is, power is not derived through force by individuals who occupy positions of dominance, it is gained through consent of the masses. Hegemonic masculinity therefore relies on the consent of the majority of non-hegemonic men to their own subordination.

Connell also takes note of Butler's performativity. She reflects on *Gender Trouble* (Butler 1990) as a key text which signalled the shift from a "natural basis for women's identity" (2012b, p. 861) to a focus on a "stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 1990, p. 141 cited in Connell 2012b). Connell highlights Butler as having contributed "the most influential oeuvre in contemporary feminism" (p. 861). Butler's work is clearly influential and useful in guiding this Chapter

through a discussion of the emergence of gender theories. A departure is nevertheless necessary given the clear focus of the present study on hegemonic masculinity.

Plurality of Masculinities

Throughout this chapter, I have shown how earlier understandings of gender were based on immovable paradigms of natural physiological traits. That is, the concept of men equated exclusively with maleness and with a rigid, biologically determined frame in which men would necessarily fit. Connell's writing on masculinities acknowledges this history of thought. She suggests that "most discussions of men's gender in the 1970s and 1980s centred on an established concept, the male sex role" (1998, p. 3). Notably though, Connell and others (Kimmel 1987; Jackson 1991; Spector-Mersel 2006; Gough 2018) have highlighted that masculinity must be understood less as a single, static identity and more in terms of a plurality. That is, there exists many changeable masculine identities. A point easily comprehended if we look at the multitude of masculinities presented in Hollywood. Arnold Schwarzenegger in *The Terminator* and Will Smith in *Independence Day* portray muscular, aggressive, and violent masculinities whereas there exist alternative masculine identities such as that portrayed by Hugh Grant in *Notting Hill.* Though not hard and fast the point here is that there are many versions of masculine identity.

In *Gender and Power* (1987), Connell makes a significant point in light of the evolution of thought surrounding gender: That there are 'versions' of femininity and masculinity (1987, p. 183). This is a position which gained great support amongst masculinities theorists at the time as well as more recently (Collinson and Hearn 1996; Jackson 1991; Morgan 1993; Pascoe 2003; Messerschmidt 2018). Connell further highlights that the constellation of masculinities, and indeed femininities, are subject to "an ordering … at the level of the whole society [based on] the global dominance of men over women" (1987, p. 183). So, we have come to a point in the

evolution of thought to where we can see gender as socially constructed, rather than reliant on exclusively biological factors. Within this socially constructed plurality of masculinities and femininities Connell highlights the emergence of "relationships among men that define a hegemonic form of masculinity" (1987, p. 183). It is with this concept of hegemonic masculinity firmly in mind that I proceed with the examination of online heavy metal spaces.

Hegemonic Masculinity

Connell, who is most widely credited (Donaldson 1993; Beasley 2008; McCormack 2013; Messerschmidt 2012) with coining the term, describes the concept of hegemonic masculinity as:

> The configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (2005, p. 77).

A clear parallel can be seen here between Butler (2006), West and Zimmerman (1987), Goffman (1959), and other theorists who suggest society provides frameworks, or accountability structures and Connell's concept. The "currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy" (Connell 2005, p. 77) can be conceptualised as, in a political sense, the "rigid regulatory frame" (Butler 2006, p. 45) which serves to maintain the dominance of men over women through a fiction of a natural gender hierarchy. It is the 'configurations of gender practice' and the political making and remaking (Connell 2005, p. 44) of such to which I wish to draw attention in this thesis.

Importantly, Connell's use of the concept accommodates the existence of multiple masculinities. "Hegemony does not mean total cultural dominance, the obliteration of alternatives. It means ascendency achieved within a balance of forces" (1987, p. 184). The forces which are in balance are the forces of various other masculinities (and femininities) which are rendered subordinate by the discursive processes of hegemonic masculine

dominance. Connell avoids listing masculine types in her work to avoid overlooking the fluidity of gender identity. However, she does offer three "main patterns [other than hegemonic] of masculinity in the current Western gender order" (2005, p. 77): subordinate, complicit, and marginalised. These patterns emerge as the balance of forces that negotiate the hegemonic war of position.

Within groups of men there exist dynamics of dominance and subordination. The most obvious example of subordinated masculine identities, for Connell (2005), are non-heteronormative masculine identities. Connell stresses that this subordination takes place not through simple stigmatisation but through legal, economic, cultural and individual practices (2005, p. 78). The maintenance of hegemony relies on the subordination of non-heteronormative men through threats of physical violence (Brook 2015), through discrimination vis a vis adoption rights (Duggan 2017), and exclusion in schooling and other institutions (McKinnon et al 2017). Much of this discrimination results in the subordination of non-heteronormative men and, not surprisingly, often occurs through a "symbolic blurring with femininity" (Connell 2005, p.79). In order for hegemonic masculinity to maintain ascendency, femininity must be denied and debased on all fronts.

While all men benefit from hegemonic masculinity, not all men occupy hegemonic positions all the time. Connell posits complicit masculinities as those that draw "a patriarchal dividend without the tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy" (2005, p. 79). Complicit masculinity has been identified in relation to expectations of men as 'breadwinners' (Judge 2018); in literature about men's experience of depression (Oliffe et al 2011); and in relation to men's support of women undergoing abortion (Newton et al 2018). In all of these studies the foundation for complicit masculinity surrounds negotiations and compromise with women rather than "naked domination or an uncontested display of authority" (Connell 2005, p. 79).

The concept of marginalised masculinities works outside of the "internal gender order" (Connell 2005, p. 80) to encompass the masculine experiences of individuals who are marginalised along lines of race and class. An intersectional approach to oppression suggests inequalities are not experienced along a linear female / male binary. Indeed, as Harnois suggests:

> Race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and other inequalities shape the resources upon which men draw when enacting masculinity, and they also structure the social contexts in which these performances take place (Harnois 2017, p. 142).

Important here is that marginalised masculinities are involved in the complex process of negotiation of hegemonic masculinity. An extension of the present study into how marginalised masculinities are negotiated in online heavy metal spaces has great potential and will contribute to an emerging body of literature (Brown 2018; Dawes 2015; Clinton & Wallach 2015).

A key point of contention which is cleared up by Connell (1987) and reflects the Gramscian foundations is that hegemonic masculinity does not *necessarily* involve the dominance of men achieved through force. That is, even though threats of physical, epistemic, and economic violence may accompany a "dominant cultural pattern or ideology" (1987, p. 184), hegemonic masculinity does not refer to dominance achieved through the act of physical force. Hegemonic masculinity achieves ascendency through the dissemination of ideological ways of understanding the world (Ives 2004). For example, the abundant representation of white men on Australian morning television exemplifies the normative cultural conception of white maleness as dominant. Physical violence need not play a part in the ascent of hegemonic masculinity – though it often has inextricable causational connections (Kersten 1996).

As we have just seen, not all men exemplify archetypical hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, most men do not embrace or align themselves with hegemonic identities, though all collect a

dividend. “Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it” (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005, p. 832). Multiple masculinities function in a hegemonic war of position (Anderson 2017a). The ideological ways of understanding hegemonic masculine power can be challenged to varying degrees. Hegemony is maintained though, through the “constant production and reproduction of the hegemonic order as the ultimate incarnation of liberty” (Anderson 2017a, p. 64). The ultimate incarnation of liberty, Anderson highlights refers mostly to Gramscian context of political revolution. In a hegemonic masculine framework, the ‘ultimate incarnation of liberty’ is what Connell calls the currently accepted answer to the question of the dominance of patriarchy (2005).

In response to challenges, hegemonic masculinity is maintained through cultural or ideological patterns. Baumgartner refers to this as a type of discursive marginalisation that “challeng[es] particular masculinities and their claim to legitimacy” (2014, p. 24). Like van Dijk (1998) and Fairclough (1992), Connell and Messerschmidt see the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity as occurring through these discursive practices (2005) which are aimed at solidifying the legitimacy and dominance of particular masculine identity over others. “Masculinity represents not a certain type of man but, rather, a way that men position themselves through discursive practices” (2005, p. 841).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity has not been without critique. Beasley highlights the ‘omnipresence’ (2008, p. 87) of the term in studies of masculinities and draws on Kimmel to outline the usefulness of hegemonic masculinity to understand that “all masculinities are not created equal” (Kimmel cited in Beasley 2008, p. 88). Beasley suggests however that in common usage, hegemonic masculinity is subject to a ‘slippage’ (2008, p. 88). This slippage, as Beasley sees it, tends to see hegemonic masculinity becoming synonymous with a sort of fixed dominant masculinity. Beasley suggests a new definitional narrowing of the concept:

> The concept of hegemonic masculinity is likely to retain what I have described as its centrally important concern with political legitimation and promoting solidarity between men by explicitly differentiating it from the study of masculinities associated with actual socially dominant men (2008, p. 94).

Messerschmidt responded to Beasley's criticism (2005) by reifying the necessary distinction between dominant masculinities and hegemonic masculinities and added emphasis on the plurality of hegemonic masculinities. As such, I see Beasley's criticism of the concept as a particularly useful *nota bene* in setting the scene for my examination of hegemonic masculinity in this thesis. As I investigate the emergence of tropes of hegemonic masculinity in the online metal scene, I am careful not to slip into the equation of hegemonic masculinity and socially dominant men. In light of the complexities of the war of position between hegemonic, subordinated, complicit, and marginalised masculinities outlined above, I propose that the separation between hegemonic masculinity and the static position of a dominant type of masculinity is perhaps not possible in a Gramscian formulation of hegemony.

A final point on the theory of hegemonic masculinity. That is, Connell's discussion of masculinity politics (2005) and the possibility of resistant masculinities. Connell highlights two key aspects of masculinity politics that tend toward resistance to hegemonic masculinity 'masculine therapy' and 'exit politics' (2005, p. 206 – 220). Masculine therapy involves men being encouraged to respond to the limitations of the male role by seeking counselling and attending men's groups. Unsurprisingly, masculine therapy and the men's groups that emerged were focused purely on men themselves. The main goal was to recognise that masculinity held certain expectations about male roles that were damaging for men. Exit politics, on the other hand is noted by Connell as men's contribution to an anti-sexist movement (2005). Recent examples can be seen in men's (not unproblematic) involvement and support of the White Ribbon Campaign. As Connell notes, "there is no mobilisation [of men] here comparable to

feminism" (2005, p. 221), suggesting that while the politics may be ostensibly positive, these movements present no discernible challenge to hegemonic masculinity.

These examples are useful to this thesis because they outline the presence and possibility of resistance to hegemonic masculinity similar to that seen in the online metal scene. That is, there is a recognition by some that the themes and expectations of hegemonic masculinity are in actual fact quite damaging to both women and men. A significant problem lies, however, in the presence of complicity in any masculine identity. As Connell highlights:

> Not many men actually meet the normative standards [of hegemonic masculinity] … yet the majority of men gain from its hegemony since they benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women (2005, p. 79).

Attempts at resistance aimed at hegemonic masculine norms will evoke strong defence from those in positions of power (mostly men).

The conclusion to Connell's *Masculinities* outlines the operation of hegemonic masculinity with regard to broader gender relations. There exists a complex interplay between men and (Western) culture that results in the maintenance of hegemonic notions of masculine identity. Connell notes:

> Men's interest in patriarchy is condensed in hegemonic masculinity and is defended by all the cultural machinery that exalts hegemonic masculinity. … It is enforced by violence, intimidation, and ridicule… Its grip on the metropole is strengthened by celebrations of violence [and is] further sustained by *women's* investment in patriarchy (2005, p. 242).

In this sense, the celebration of violence and themes of hegemonic hypermasculinity as I will discuss in this thesis can be seen as self-referential and self-sustaining. The participation by both men and women in the online metal scene which espouse and reify hypermasculine tropes means that, at least in Connell's view, patriarchy is here to stay. Despite such negativity (and

Connell goes on to counter this position with a degree of optimism), by examining themes of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene, this thesis contributes to the pressure toward social change (at the very least, reflection). The writing on the wall in the online metal scene is the site of the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic notions of hypermasculinity.

Hegemonic Masculinity in Heavy Metal

The application of the concept of hegemonic masculinity to tropes of masculinity in heavy metal is an area which has enjoyed significant attention (Clifford-Napoleone 2015; Spracklen 2015, 2017; Spracklen et al 2014; Weinstein 2016). Spracklen for instance identified alcoholism (2017) and white male identities (2015) as key to negotiations of hegemonic masculinity in heavy metal cultures and scenes. Spracklen et al (2014) deploy the concept of hegemonic masculinity with a focus on how it is socially constructed in particular sites. They suggest that "heavy metal, like sport, is one site of the social construction of hegemonic masculinity" (2014, p. 51).

Though Nordstrom and Herz (2013) draw more on West and Zimmerman (1987) they recognise the constant need to produce and reproduce heteronormativity in order to maintain hegemonic masculinity in heavy metal scenes. Importantly, they recognise the process of negotiation that takes place in the maintenance of hegemony. They highlight that within the negotiation around metalhead identity "men are the ones setting the agenda for when, how and on what terms a person is allowed entrance into the heavy metal group" (2013, p. 459). They identify the war of position amongst men which results in the ascendency of patriarchy in heavy metal cultures.

Vasan provides a particularly interesting usage of hegemonic masculinity in heavy metal spaces. Vasan acknowledges the institutional influence of heavy metal cultures generally. That is, the dominance of men in heavy metal spaces is perpetuated through the expectations that

exist within the organised culture of heavy metal fandom. As Vasan suggests, "institutional genderism and hegemonic masculinity may be observed in the death metal scene" complete with "myths of male power and prestige" (2011, p. 338). Vasan moves towards social exchange theory in her examination of hegemonic masculinity in the death metal scene. As she points out this reflects Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) suggestion that there are costs and benefits associated with the negotiations particularly women must engage with in order to participate in these spaces. While useful in an examination of women's participation, and in examinations of class and race in heavy metal scenes it is not an avenue down which I wish to proceed. Social exchange theory is unhelpful in the present study as my focus is on the emergent tropes of hypermasculinity rather than individual interactions amongst participants.

Choosing to follow Connell's theorisations of hegemonic masculinity is in part because of its usefulness in understanding the emergence of hegemonic hypermasculine writing on the wall. Importantly, the Gramscian foundations to hegemonic masculinity allows for a focus on the negotiated war of position engaged with by all participants and exhibited in the writing on the wall. The dominance of hypermasculine identities in the online metal scene is not a dominance wielded and enforced through physical controls or violence. Hegemonic hypermasculine tropes appear in the writing on the wall uttered by metalheads who do not – and due to the extremeness of the commentary probably cannot – embody the hegemonic standard of masculinity.

Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was manifold. Firstly, it was necessary to distance this research from an outdated confluence of sex and gender. I therefore presented an outline of the evolution of scholarly thought with regard to human sex and gender identity formation. It is clear that early understandings of human identities were closely linked with biological 'science' which suggested that women and men are significantly different physiologically and thus, socially.

Sociologists have rigorously challenged these essentialist assumptions through theorisations of the social construction of gender identity. Furthermore, I have shown that assumptions of difference are more often than not, inherent mechanisms of patriarchal domination based on social processes. That is, they serve to reify falsities about women's and non-heteronormative men's inferiority.

My research question for this thesis is: How does hegemonic hypermasculinity emerge and how is it maintained in the online metal scene? In addressing this question, it was necessary to reaffirm and re-examine the widely held sociological conceptualisation of masculinity as socially constructed. Furthermore, it was pertinent to outline the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005); a concept upon which I base the development of my original contribution to knowledge. Throughout the research and writing of this thesis, hegemony has been reconfigured, reimagined and revisioned. Addressing the literature as I have done in this chapter provides a sound platform from which to understand the complexities of the hegemonic war of position and the ascendency of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene.

The next chapter will extend the discussion of heavy metal music and cultures. I will begin with a positioning of this thesis in regard to two distinct but related disciplinary positions of cultural studies and musicology. Such a distinction will further locate this thesis as an examination of the cultural aspects of the online metal scene that contribute to the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity.

Chapter Two: Youth Gone Wild

Metal music and post-youth cultures

> Popular music is something created, used and interpreted by different individuals and groups. It is a human activity involving social relationships, identities and collective practices (Cohen 1993, p. 127).

Metal studies has emerged as a key area of scholarly interest in recent decades. The interest has come from many directions, particularly from Musicology (Walser 1992; Moore 2001), Cultural Studies and Sociology (Straw 1984; Kahn-Harris 2006, 2011, 2017; Spracklen 2010a, 2010b, 2015, 2017; Hoad 2017; Overell 2014; Hill 2016), and from interdisciplinary perspectives (Heesch & Scott 2016). The emergence of metal music studies reflects a recognition of the strong cultural bonds that exist among metalheads. Core themes in the study of metal music cultures have revolved around collective identity, technical aspects of musicianship and, of course, gender.

It has been noted that scholarly attention to metal music culture arose out of significant concern about the (mis)perceptions of heavy metal by non-metalhead onlookers. Weinstein suggested, in an interview with Brian Hickam (2014), "they were putting metal fans into psychiatric hospitals and that was the last straw" (Weinstein in Hickam 2014, p. 9). The motivation for Weinstein to complete her doctorate in metal music studies was a response to the moral panic in the 1980s surrounding heavy metal music. A panic most often attributed to misinterpretation and scapegoating by the PMRC. It seems many contemporary scholars in the arena of metal music studies stand in defence of heavy metal music and cultures themselves. Niall Scott and Rob Fisher brought a number of writers together for the first major scholarly conference on heavy metal music (Hickam 2014). In October 2014, the scholarly journal *Metal Music Studies* was launched to accommodate this growing scholarship.

The scholarship in metal music circles is interdisciplinary. Musicologists, Sociologists, and Cultural Studies theorists converge, overlap, and collaborate within a complex and fascinating arena typified by shared passion for greater understanding of the direction of metal music as a musical genre, as a culture, and as a noteworthy site of enquiry**.** As such, it is pertinent to distance this thesis from what Louhivouri terms traditional / historical musicological studies (2018). Such a distancing is not an attempt to discount the outstanding academic product of musicology, much of which I have had the privilege of hearing from at conferences such as the *International Association for Studies of Popular Music* in Australia and New Zealand and the (almost annual) *Keep it Simple, Make it Fast!* Conference in Porto, Portugal. Such a distancing of this thesis from musicology is for analytical purposes. My interest in this study is not with issues of technical musicianship. Rather, I am interested in online metal music cultures. That is, the social interactions which revolve around metal music and which offer meaning for metalheads the world over.

The Sociology of Music not Musicology

In tracing the history of sociological theorizing about music, it is relevant to begin with significant considerations of music as a form of artistic expression as well as a site for the construction of identity. It is certainly possible to discuss the creation and reception of artistic forms of expression from Aristotle and Plato, Pliny's *Natural History*, and far older art forms created by Indigenous Australian peoples. However, my original contribution to knowledge in this thesis is to specifically address the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene. As such, I focus on literature which addresses the significant linkages between music as a cultural practice and site for the construction of identity.

The distinction between the sociology of music and musicology is required for analytical precision. The two terms may at times seem easily interchangeable and indeed academic outputs will often overlap, particularly in more recent interdisciplinary spaces such as the relatively new journal of *Metal Music Studies*. However, for methodological reasons, such a distinction is essential in this thesis. Musicology has historically been concerned with the "history of music … from acoustics to aesthetics" (Kerman 2009, p. 11). In academic circles, and as Kerman proceeds to outline, musicology has:

> Come to mean the history of Western music in high-art tradition. The musicologist teaches courses in the music of the Renaissance, in the symphony, in Bach, Beethoven, and Bartok (2009, p. 12).

For analytical reasons I regard musicology as the study of music composition and performance rather than the cultural process behind it. This thesis is interested in the culture of the online metal scene and not so much the technical, musicological account of heavy metal musicianship, genre, and style (Moore 2001). The focus of this study is thus not to achieve a rounded picture of heavy metal music *per se*, rather, it is to offer a significant examination of the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene.

Sociology of Music

Adorno, a classical composer and musician himself, considered emerging trends of music production and consumption in the early twentieth century. An influential member of the Frankfurt School, Adorno was interested in music consumption from a Marxist theoretical perspective. He regarded jazz music, somewhat negatively, as evidence of an emerging culture industry that as he and Horkheimer put it, is "infecting everything with sameness" (Horkheimer & Adorno 1946 [2001] p. 41). Adorno highlights a concern that the culture industry is responsible for the conflation of high and low art, removing the seriousness of both as well as reducing people, the consumers of art or music, to mere cogs of this industry. He wrote:

> The culture industry undeniably speculates on the conscious and unconscious state of the millions towards which it is directed [and] the masses are not primary, but secondary, they are an object of calculation; an appendage of the machinery (Adorno & Rabinbach 1975, p. 12).

The industrialisation of music culture, for Adorno, was a capitalist ruse whereby consumers were duped into the illusory forces of capitalist social control. That is, the culture industry conflated what Adorno considered high and low art to produce a middle of the road product for mass consumption. Adorno's critique of such an emerging culture industry is a useful place to begin with an examination of contemporary thought surrounding the sociology of music as it highlights the *politics* of music and music cultures, rather than technical aspects of musicianship. Moreover, such an examination shows an existing connection, theoretically as well as practically, between technology and music production, consumption, and reproduction.

Contemporaries of Adorno also contributed to the development of a sociology of music. Silbermann declared that to study music "one should permit himself [sic] to speak of music only if he has the courage to be a critic of society at the same time" (1963, p. 4). In this statement Silbermann highlights the inextricable reciprocal link between music and social processes and structures. Like Adorno, Silbermann's work highlights an emerging interest in how music, at once, reflects and contributes social meaning. Such a perspective is more useful for my purposes as we start to see that there is an interplay between music culture, consumers and producers. That is, in asking the question about the emergence and maintenance of hypermasculinity in online heavy metal spaces it is necessary to consider the reciprocal relationship music culture has with wider social and political processes such as gender.

Martin (1996) offers a contemporary account of the role of the sociology of music. He suggests that previous contributors (including Adorno) offered "no very coherent sociological perspective on music … partly owing to their preoccupation with the 'classical' tradition"

(1996, p. x). He suggests that music has been the focus of attention for many theorists as fodder for exercising their individual theoretical interests (1996). What Martin offers in response is the suggestion that a much broader sociological perspective can and should be employed to consider the extensive array of "social contexts in which [music] is created, performed, and heard" (p. xii). Usefully, Martin (1996) draws on later sociological literature such as that of Mead (1934) to suggest that we come to understand ourselves through interactions with others in a given social context and that music forms a significant part of that context.

Music and Identity

> Musical processes take place within a particular space and place, one which is inflected by the imaginative and the sociological, and which is shaped both by specific musical practices and by the pressures and dynamics of political and economic circumstances (Whiteley 2016, p. 13).

In tracing the development of sociological theorisations of music which signals a shift in focus from musicological accounts of musical composition and content (Harap 1937; Middleton 1993), through music as culture industry (Adorno & Rabinbach 1975), it is important to look at how theorists have handled music cultures as sites for the construction of identity (Hawkins 2017; Maus 2017; Kruse 1993; Frith 1996; Bennett 1999, 2017; Redhead 1990; Redhead & Street 1989). This line of thinking is congruent with my position on the social construction of identity within the confines of a hegemonic system and exhibited through the writing on the wall. That is, identity arises through complex negotiations between masculine identities and not due to some natural phenomenon.

There exists a voluminous collection of scholarly literature surrounding music cultures as a source of identity (Bennett 2000; Hudson 2006; Overell 2010; Taylor 2012). Significant contribution to this work comes from Frith (1996; 1998) who positions consumers and producers of music culture as active in the process of identity creation. Frith argues that music

is part of the larger process of the construction of individual and group identity (1996). Frith suggests that:

> Social groups [do not] agree on values which are then expressed in their cultural activities … they only get to know themselves *as groups through* cultural activity, through aesthetic judgement. Making music isn't a way of expressing ideas; it is a way of living them (Frith 1996, p. 111).

Frith's point here about the interactivity of groups of fans and performers of music is a welcome shift from fearful notions of music as some sort of culture *producing* industry. A much clearer account of individual and group agency becomes possible. That is, music at once represents and informs groups and individuals about appropriate and legitimate identities. A useful step – but one which does not go far enough.

While links have been drawn between music culture and identity, it remains a perilous task. Frith recognises the limitations of suggesting that groups would have somewhat singular and fixed identities that align with certain values. He states that, "while we can describe (or assume) general patterns of musical taste and use, the precise fit (or homology) between sounds and social groups remains unclear" (1996, p. 120). Here he is suggesting that links between subcultures and musical styles is not as clear cut as many would have it – A useful point considering I will proceed in this thesis to follow the shift away from subcultures theory.

Frith's later work offers a significant understanding of music that fits well with the present study. He suggests that "music is an effect of a continuous process of negotiation, dispute and agreement between individual actors who make up a music world" (2007, p. ix). Here he identifies the cultural processes that are at play and reifies the importance of studies of music cultures as not necessarily tied to technical aspects of musicianship. Significance also lies in his elicitation of the aspects of negotiation at play within music cultures and my focus on processes of negotiation of hegemonic hypermasculine metalhead identity.

From Subcultures to Scenes

It is necessary, in observing the online metal scene, to distance ourselves from subcultures theory. This is in large part due to the inability of subcultures theory to address an online scene and the various nuances of access and participation afforded by online communication technology. Bennett opposed the taken for granted correlation between subcultures and social structural forces (1999). He offered a shift in thought from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) to a conception of identity within music cultures as socially constructed across various spatial and temporal sites (1999). For Bennett:

> According to the CCCS, the deviant behaviour of … youth cultures or 'subcultures' had to be understood as the collective reaction of youth themselves, or rather working-class youth, to structural changes taking place in British post-war society (1999, p. 600).

Bennett criticised the CCCS's common usage of the concept of subcultures along several lines which remain significant to this thesis. Firstly, he highlights with specific attention to McRobbie (1980), that theorists utilising subcultural theory to understand youth subcultures in post-war Britain tended to ignore or marginalize the experiences of women. McRobbie allows that there were relatively few women participating within these 'subcultures' at the time but suggests the experiences of women either in the scene or at home were omitted (1980). That subcultures theory is criticised for overlooking questions of gender renders it inappropriate for my research.

The CCCS was criticised by several scholars who contributed to the post-subcultural turn of the 1990s. A key aspect of which was to recognise the fluidity of an increasingly individualised consumer society. Hodkinson suggests that:

> A range of scholars queued up to denounce the Centre… [for the] … apparent determinism in the interpretation of such groups [subcultures] as spontaneous expressions of class and

> on the characterisation of such groups as fixed homologous sets of signifiers whose meaning could be interpreted through semiological analysis" (2016, p. 630).

Such criticisms stand as guiding principles of the present study. As individuals gather in the online metal scene they are not bound by homologous sets of signifiers. The online metal scene allows for the participation by individuals and groups from across the globe as well as across time. The participation by individuals not bound by static social and class signifiers is afforded through visibility and permanence which will be discussed in Chapter Seven in further detail.

Redhead is a key contributor to scholarship on post-subcultures and youth cultures. His work, released just prior to the establishment of the Manchester Institute for Popular Culture, underpins my dismissal of subcultures theory. Redhead states:

> Subcultural theory emanated from a politics which designates an 'authenticity' to 'street' – and by implication popular music – styles which, literally, had a point or place of historical origin (1990, p. 47).

Although written nearly thirty years ago, and certainly prior to the emergence of the online metal scene, Redhead's signposting of 'post-subcultural pop' era remains relevant. The emergence of the online metal scene, that allows access by anybody from anywhere reflects exactly what Redhead calls the "changing meaning and contours of rock, pop, and youth culture" (1990, p. 47). The online metal scene cannot be pinned down to any point in time or space. Of course, my study of the online metal scene highlights more recent sites of such 'changing meaning and contours' and serves to reinforce Redhead's remarkable foresight.

In metal music studies, a dismissal of subcultures theory is supported by Kahn-Harris (2004), whose examination of subcultures theory centres on the black metal music scene. Khan-Harris suggests that subcultures theory can only see subcultures as failures. That is, failed in their attempts toward structural revolution. However, as he goes on to suggest, the lens of subcultures theory itself is focussed too heavily on static forms of subcultures and ignores reflexivity

politics. The significant opportunities in the online metal scene for individuals to gather cultural meaning across spatial and temporal boundaries renders Kahn-Harris' critique relevant.

Bennett, in light of criticisms of subcultures theory as too rigid, has offered decades of work which builds an understanding of the character of music scenes as sites for the production, consumption, and reproduction of music culture. Bennett (2011) credits Redhead for the first use of the term post-subculture. In *The End of the Century Party* (1990) Redhead highlights a crucial shortfall in the concept of subcultures theory. For Bennett, Redhead's critique raises a significant question surrounding the legitimate representation of a particular community (2011), particularly in a contemporary globalised marketplace. Bennett and others who contribute significantly to issues of gender and heavy metal music cultures (Bennett & Peterson 2004; Bennett & Rogers 2016; Straw 1991; Kahn-Harris 2004) have shown that music cultures are reflexive communities that occur in local, translocal, and what Bennett and Peterson refer to as 'virtual' spaces (2004).

Importantly here, is the suggestion that music scenes, whether they be local, translocal, or virtual (Bennett & Peterson 2004), are sites for the discursive production of culture and knowledge. Like youth cultures, online metal music cultures are discursively constructed. That is, the online metal scene consists of sets of statements which provide ways of talking and knowing about culture. The discursive formation of the online metal scene takes place via the writing on the wall and operates within a hegemonic framework. As participants enter the online spaces, and indeed as strangers enter the spaces, they are presented with a clear exhibition of acceptable norms and values that are tied to the ideological foundations of hegemonic hypermasculinity.

Importantly, for the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity, Hall suggests that:

> When statements are made within a particular discourse, the discourse makes it possible to construct the topic in a certain way. It also limits the other ways in which the topic can be constructed (1992, p. 86).

This suggestion reinforces the notion that text-based interactions in the online metal scene contribute to the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity. The language that is used in the online metal scene carries with it the meanings or knowledge about the acceptance of aggression, violence, militarism, and objectification of women. The articulations of these tropes of hypermasculinity form the presentation and representation of the hegemonic order.

The conception of the online metal scene as a site for the production, performance, and reception of music culture (Bennett & Peterson 2004, p.3) as discursively constructed will inform my analysis throughout this thesis. It is the most appropriate trajectory to take in that it allows for a focus on the power of language in an environment which relies predominantly, on text-based communication. In light of these assertions regarding the discursive construction of culture (Bennett 2007) and gender (Connell 2005) I can highlight the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity as reliant upon the discourse of the online metal scene.

Music and Gender

Within this broader array of investigations into the social influence of music is an interest in the sociology of music and gender. Like many studies of gender in mainstream (read, patriarchal) culture, early interest arose out of feminist scholarship that deals with, as Koskoff says, the "near invisibility of women's musical activity in scholarly literature" (2000, p. x). Moisala and Diamond highlight that scholarship in the late 1990s had focussed on "gendered

concepts, concepts that may be reflected in song lyrics, performance style, or the discourse about the genre or style" (2000, p. 5). Western constructions of music culture are almost always inextricably linked to gender in one way or another.

Early misconceptions about gender and music were aligned with similar patriarchal assumptions about female and male difference as outlined in the previous chapter. That is, that women would naturally engage with music from within the confines of expected universal female reproductive and sexual roles. Early ethnomusicological literature illustrated cultural assumptions about natural roles for women. Campbell and Eastman wrote about Swahili music acts such as Kishuri that were designed to teach women about the "proper form of hip-rotation associated with sexual intercourse" (1984, p. 472). Other ethnomusicological studies (Herndon & McLeod 1981) reported cultural associations between certain types of musical and dance performance and prostitution.

I note here that I attend to these studies because they illustrate the diversity of ethnographic research into music culture. One must avoid the assumption that it is *only* in non-Western cultures where the conflation of sex, gender and musical practice occurs. In fact, still in many aspects of Western society there are marked links between women's performance in music spaces and assumptions about sexuality and promiscuity (Mulholland 2011). These assumptions continue into the online metal scene. While the above studies were not necessarily based on the concept of sex roles, they highlight the link made in many communities between gender and music. That is, music and spaces that surround the production, consumption, and reproduction of music cultures have often been associated with gender and sexuality. As Koskoff says:

> Music performance can and often does play an important role in inter-gender relations, for the inequalities or asymmetries perceived in such relations may be protested, mediated, reversed, transformed, or confirmed through various social/musical strategies, through

> ritual behaviour, disguise, secret language, or social deceptions involving music (Koskoff 1987, p. 10).

From this perspective, combined with an understanding that gender, like music, is reliant upon social processes and interactions, and not some universal binary category, we can see that music simultaneously informs and is informed by society. The problem with studies such as this, is the attempt to draw some 'missing-link' from anthropological data. As McClary and Walser (1994) suggest, looking at 'other' cultures as somehow embracing music on a more primordial level is unhelpful, and offensive, and that in fact Western society draws on the same responses to music through dance and physical movement as once misguidedly confined to 'less-civilised cultures'. More recent studies have focused on gender in particular areas of music cultures and spaces. Areas of common interest surrounding gender and music include musical preference and gendered rebellion / activism.

Musical Preferences and Gender

The quest to find a link between gender and musical preference has permeated the literature for decades. Many of these articles are based on immovable definitions of gender as inherently tied to sex (as discussed in the previous chapter). Similar to the conception outlined above by Koskoff, many of these studies looked at the way in which music seemed to offer a catalyst for socialisation in various cultures. That is, music was seen a medium for learning sexual positions and sex roles considered to be natural. The assumption thus followed that somehow an individual's gender would influence preferences for some music and not others.

Christensen and Peterson (1988) offered a study of gender and musical preference based on genre. Interestingly, their article signals an early problem associated with subcultures as too static or tied to geography, as they seek to apply work on musical preference to cultures outside of the United Kingdom. Much similar research has focussed on gendered preferences for and responses to various forms of music (Martin et al 1993; Schafer & Sedlmeier 2010) in the last

thirty years. An important suggestion came from Toney and Weaver (1994) who suggest that even though studies have found that there are "substantial differences in preferences for popular music as a function of gender" (1994, p. 567), there are many other factors at play in making choices about musical preference. Importantly, they allude to the fact that one's gender cannot be reliably considered a sole causal factor in choice of music genre. There exists a much more reciprocal relationship between music and listener. As LeBlanc et al suggested caution must be exercised as relationships between gender and musical preference "were involved in complex interactions" (1999, p. 76) that include cultural variables. That is, gender and musical preference is part of a much more complex social process.

Music and Feminism

Wald highlights (1998) rock music as a site for women to openly reject structures of gender inequality. At the outset of her article Wald highlights the lyrics: "I'm just a girl, little ol' me / Don't let me out of your sight" written and performed by Gwen Stefani of No Doubt. Wald discusses Stefani's performance of the infantile, helpless 'girl' on stage before screaming "Fuck you, I'm a girl" as a feminist strategy that at once challenges the marginalisation and oppression of women in rock music and, somewhat ironically, the corporatisation of the music industry selling music to young women across the Western world (1998). Notwithstanding the colourful critique of modern music industry misogyny, this article also highlights the ability for rock music to be a site of resistance. As Wald continues:

> Rock music cultures, especially the cultures of independent rock, provide crucial sites within which young women can negotiate their own representations of girlhood in varying degrees of opposition to, or collaboration with, hegemonic narratives (1998, p. 608).

Wald identifies here the hegemony of patriarchy in music cultures and the way that women must navigate the cultural sites which are aimed more often than not at reducing them, to what Overell states, as "sexualised objects at best" (2011, p. 199).

While it is clear that the links between music and gender identity are inextricable, I suggest that the search for paradigmatic links between gender and musical preference, style, or genre is misguided. Much recent scholarship on gender in music highlights significant support for expression of multiple gender identities and the playing with gender politics through musicianship and fandom across a range of genres (Hawkins 2017; Leonard 2017; Hansen 2016). As I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, of particular interest is the way in which the online metal scene is a site for production, consumption and reproduction of heavy metal music culture and is characterised by a discourse of hegemonic hypermasculinity.

The current literature on music cultures helps to position the online metal scene as entwined with issues of gender and identity. In a post-disciplinary (Anthony & Sherwood 2018) era, these works signal a focus on what might loosely be called the sociology of music as opposed to musicology. This is an important move for my thesis as it backgrounds my focus on the ways in which communities come together to create and shape the online metal scene and the characteristic emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity.

Heavy Metal and Masculinity

The number of studies of heavy metal music has increased over the last thirty years. This is illustrated by the metal music bibliography database published by the *International Society for Metal Music Studies* at the University of Central Missouri (2015). The database shows a total of six publications related to heavy metal music and culture published in the 1980s compared to over eighty publications in the years 2010-2012. This increase in publication and attention to heavy metal music has inspired authors like Brown to ask questions such as: "What is metal studies? And, how has it emerged as a body of academic enquiry?" (2011, p. 213). Brown suggests the first "fully scholarly" (2011, p. 216) work on metal is Weinstein's book *Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology* (1991). This was followed closely by Robert Walser's

musicological enquiry *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (1993). Work on heavy metal did precede these two books (Gross 1990; Straw 1984), though Walser and Weinstein are often viewed, even by participants of the present study, as two foundational authors. Studies of metal culture also reached mainstream media with the ethnographic studies of metal bands and fans offered in the documentary movie *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey* (Wise et al 2006). More recent contributions to the academic field of metal have focused on extreme metal (Kahn-Harris 2006), racism and community identity (Spracklen 2013; Overell 2010; Kennedy 2018; Venkatesh et al 2015), racism and queer identity (Dawes 2015), and a significant body of work on heavy metal and gender (Krenske & McKay 2000; Overell 2011; Hill 2016; Spracklen 2015; Heesch & Scott 2016; Hoad 2017). It is unsurprising that masculinities have been included in much of the contemporary literature considering the links drawn between masculine themes and heavy metal more generally. A significant gap, however, remains and requires an examination of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene.

Aside from emerging literature by more dedicated heavy metal scholars mentioned above, heavy metal music and its fans have historically drawn attention in a much more negative light. Gross highlighted the emergence of heavy metal music in American society as precipitating heated debate among fundamentalist preachers, the PMRC, Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and daytime television hosts (1990). Studies emerging from psychological science appear often to mirror media sensationalism by searching for causal links between heavy metal music and increased youth suicide, alienation, and anti-social behaviour. A Google Scholar search in 2015 with the search terms 'heavy metal music' returned articles with themes such as adolescent alienation (Arnett 1996), suicidality (Scheel & Westefeld 1999), reckless behaviour (Arnett 1991), adolescent turmoil (Took & Weiss 1994), and arousal and anger (Gowensmith & Bloom 1997). All of these articles tend to reflect an assumption that metal

music fandom has a causational link with negative personal and social experiences. Interestingly, many of them were published during the height of a reignited moral panic about metal music and youth suicide and violence – musician Marilyn Manson being a central target.

In particular, I take issue with several points made in the article by Scheel and Westefeld (1999). The questioning of participants about 'Reasons for Living' seems to involve some arbitrariness in the design of the questions. The premise of the study appears to rely on particular moral norms and poses the risk of misevaluating a participant's tendency toward suicide. Further, their suggestion that country music consists of more 'traditional values and greater social acceptability' (1999, p. 267) than heavy metal music is blatantly false. Consider Waylon Jennings' 'Cedartown, Georgia'. Jennings' song includes an evocation of extreme domestic violence as we hear the story of a man who murders his wife in a hotel room. Johnny Cash's perhaps most famous line "I shot a man in Reno / Just to watch him die" from 'Folsom Prison Blues' casually evokes and celebrates gun violence. In response to Scheel and Westefeld (1999) and others writing in a similar vein I would suggest, like Dee Snider of Twisted Sister, that if one is looking for socially unacceptable content and/or links to negative social behaviours it will be found in most musical genres.

There are notable exceptions to the quest for negativity in heavy metal scenes. Snell and Hodgetts (2007) published their research findings from ethnographic observations that examined fashion, dance, and other behaviours and their contribution to the maintenance of shared identities. Snell and Hodgetts preface their paper by highlighting a desire to shift the focus away from negativity. In particular, they dismiss links between heavy metal music and the Columbine High School shootings of April 1999. Significant for this thesis is the suggestion that heavy metal communities "negotiate a sense of community that encapsulates a shared history and identity" (2007, p. 43). Their ethnographic study indicates that meanings and

symbols that are shared and displayed in these communities contribute to the "…co-construction of community values and norms" (2007, p. 431). More recent studies in the wake of the moral panic in the 1980s and 1990s (Brown 2011) have further identified the erroneous connections between heavy metal music and negativity (Rowe & Guerin 2018; Hines & McFerran 2014; Varas Diaz et al 2014). I will transcend the literature surrounding negativity in heavy metal music. Although, I wish to be clear that my position is, similar to Kimmel and Mahler (2003) that attempts at highlighting causal relationship between negativity, suicidality and heavy metal music specifically, are tenuous in many cases.

It is not my intention to embark upon a comprehensive analysis of the heavy metal scene in Australia. Nor is it to dwell on the defence of heavy metal and its fans in response to claims such as those made by the PMRC about youth deviance and delinquency. More important in this chapter, given my online ethnographic approach to research, is to look at how ethnographic studies of heavy metal spaces have taken place in intellectual history. One strong ethnographic account of gender in the heavy metal music scene in Brisbane, Australia was published by Krenske and McKay in 2000. They were interested in gender relations between women and men in the Australian heavy metal music scene in the 1990s. They position heavy metal as a youth subculture that has institutionalised practices of gender that can be viewed through ethnographic research. The authors draw on West and Zimmerman (1987) for definitions of gender and proceed to adopt the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity from Connell (2005). The elucidation of institutionalised practices of masculinity is important here as it shows how, in heavy metal culture, masculine identity is negotiated within similar hegemonic boundaries to the online metal scene.

Krenske and McKay (2000) draw on the work of West and Zimmerman to dismiss biological and essentialist perspectives as well as sex role and socialisation theories of gender to discuss

gender (and masculinity) as a set of institutionalised practices that all of us "do" (West & Zimmerman 1987). They combine the definition of gender that is offered by West and Zimmerman (1987) with the work of Connell (2005) on the way in which gendered notions of power operate in the scene. In particular, they deploy Connell's work to analyse the mechanisms that contribute to the maintenance of hegemonic masculinities and emphasised femininity respectively. While Krenske and McKay highlight West and Fenstermaker's position that we do not just do gender we also "do difference" (1995) my intention is, to focus on the hegemonic order of masculinity in the online metal space rather than look at individual gender practices.

Krenske and McKay's (2000) study used ethnographic methods to conduct participant observation at a Brisbane metal club. The research was conducted at a time when online heavy metal spaces were few – *The First Forum* did not shift to the online metal space until 2000. What Krenske and McKay's study offers in terms of my research is a background to my project. This study of the Brisbane metal scene highlighted some significant data surrounding expectations of gender and masculinities in heavy metal prior to the emergence of online metal spaces. There is however, a larger more recent discipline of metal music studies emerging to which I will now turn.

Spracklen's contributions have often focused on the genre of black metal. In particular, Spracklen suggests black metal can be seen as a site for the construction of white identity (2010b). Though he finds that such an identity is often tied to notions of racist, Aryan and heathen identities. He draws on interview data with black metal musicians and fans to highlight that the portrayal of white supremacy, misogyny, and violence tend to be understood as a performance rather than individuals' chosen identity. While acknowledged that black metal presents a somewhat extreme ideology fans took up an "ironic distance from the seriousness of the genre's ideologies" (Spracklen 2010b, p. 85). A point backed up by Bettez-Halnon who

points to heavy metal's sometimes grotesque realism as offering a playful retreat or escape (2006).

Spracklen's work links with Bennett through the positioning of black metal fans and musicians as neo-tribes. This signals metal studies' further departure from subcultures theory. Such an identification of black metal communities as neo-tribes rather than subcultures appears due to what Spracklen terms black metal's 'individualistic nature' (2010b, p. 91). Spracklen draws on Habermas' concept of communicative rationality (Habermas & Ben-Habib 1981) to suggest that meaning is created within these groups of individuals through discourse and debate. His positioning of black metal as groups of individuals who "exist outside of traditional or modern social structures" (p. 91) also follows the trajectory of post-subcultural thinking.

Much of Spracklen's work offers another background for my study (2010a, 2010b, 2016). He draws on research conducted on the online heavy metal site blackmetal.co.uk. This signals a recent trend in metal studies research toward the online metal scene (Schaap & Berkers 2013; Berkers & Schaap 2015). Spracklen's research is methodologically similar to mine in that he accessed a publicly available website forum. He drew on exponents of virtual ethnography such as Hine (2000) and Kanayama (2003) to "establish how understandings and identities are represented and constructed" (Spracklen 2010b, p. 82). Spracklen highlighted, "the tacit rules of the forum [that] encourage posters to conform to a view of black metal that is elitist, that resists a mainstream defined by inferior people and inferior attitudes" (2010b, p. 84). Spracklen's findings are similar to mine in that he recognises the position of superiority taken up by adherents of the genre as well as by most members of the online space. He draws on Connell to suggest that within black metal communities there can, and indeed is, competing expressions of masculinity (2010a, p. 97). While I do not focus specifically on black metal as a genre, I too draw on Connell's work. There is clear evidence of competing definitions of

masculinity in the online metal scene at the centre of my research. I will address this in Chapter Six with regard to policing of and resistance to hegemonic hypermasculinity.

Kahn-Harris, like Spracklen, shares a significant focus on black and extreme metal. Kahn-Harris (2004) drew on emerging work around metal music cultures and subcultures to address questions around the failure of subcultures. His main point in this work was that youth subcultures had failed in their challenges of dominant macro cultures (p. 97). Useful here is Kahn-Harris' extensive contribution to the concept of 'scene' in metal music studies. Particularly useful is his suggestion that the concept of scene avoids "overdetermine[ing] or homogeniz[ing] the context within which black metal is produced" (2004, p. 98). As I will discuss in Chapter Four, the concept of scene is a far more useful tool in comprehending the dynamics of the online metal scene.

Given the relative infancy of metal music studies as a distinct area of scholarly interest, there exists a significant amount of literature reflecting on the emergence of such scholarship. Recently, Brown et al (2016) highlighted the emergence of metal music as a significant discipline in its own right. *Global Metal Music and Culture* (2016) stands as a significant account of the current themes and trends in heavy metal music studies. What the authors all highlight is that metal music studies is necessarily interdisciplinary. Indeed, Frith and Goodwin suggest that "popular music studies require an interdisciplinary approach [as] in the end sociological, political, and semiotic arguments cannot be disentangled from one another" (1990, p. x). It appears this call has been heeded. Vibrant debate and discussion at conferences and through other collaborations have produced valuable contributions from scholars from many and varied backgrounds.

Walser is often credited by many in the field of metal music studies as being one of the seminal authors of the discipline (Brown et al 2016; Brown 2011; Lucas et al 2011; Spracklen 2010a; Wallach et al 2011; Hill, 2016). Walser's work was not confined to studies of metal music as such – perhaps because of the lack of contemporaries or questions surrounding the worthiness of metal music studies itself. Walser's most significant contribution to studies of metal music is, of course, *Running with the Devil: Power Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (1993). One of the most heavily cited works on metal music and culture. Despite some criticism regarding methodological rigour (Wong 1998) it is praised for its significant contribution to the discipline and stands out as a stepping stone which bridges the divide between musicology and sociology of music.

Weinstein, whose work is also highly regarded as a foundational text on metal music studies, suggests that heavy metal, "embodies a shameless attack on the central values of Western civilisation. But to its fans it is the greatest music ever made" (1991, p. 3). Her book *Heavy Metal: The Music and its Culture*, is also one of the most cited texts of metal music studies. Weinstein's text emerged prior to the shift in metal culture to embrace the Internet and social media. However, it offers a significant background to heavy metal music as a genre and area of scholarly interest. Weinstein describes heavy metal as "not only an arrangement of sound but other aesthetic and signifying elements that support the sound, such as visual art and verbal expression" (1991, p. 22). This is important as it shows the complexity of heavy metal culture and hints at the multiple influences from fans, bands, and other interested parties on knowledge and meanings.

Most interesting for this study is her early recognition that "sex in heavy metal is anything but respectable … [women are] essentially and exclusively sexual beings" (Weinstein 1991, p. 36). This recognition was part of the motivation for this study. Heavy metal has always espoused

masculine dominance. This, of course, brought with it the subordination of women in the associated language and imagery. My thesis builds on this identification of the objectifying influence of hegemonic masculinity and offers a fresh account of how this occurs in the online metal scene.

Many of the early texts surrounding heavy metal music discuss, to some extent, issues of gender (Straw 1984; Weinstein 1991; Walser 1993). However, there is an ever-increasing number of works that focus specifically on gender in metal music studies (Overell 2012; Hill 2016; Hoad 2017; Krenske & McKay 2000). This appears as a response to firstly, the lack of attention to women's participation in heavy metal music subcultures (Hill 2014; McRobbie 1991). Secondly, it has been argued that more women are participating in more recent times (Hoad 2017; Hill 2014, 2016) particularly online (Berkers & Schaap 2015; Hill et al 2015). As Hoad highlights, the emergence of the scholarly journal *Metal Music Studies* responds to the metal community's "commitment to challenging the perception of metal as inherently masculinist" (2017, p. 7).

Overell offered a significant contribution to the study of gender in heavy metal music culture in the Melbourne Grindcore scene (2010; 2011) and across Australian and Japan (2014). Overell's perspective highlighted affective intensities and belonging. That is, she draws on the use of the term 'brutal' in the grindcore scene as not only a descriptor of a space but something more affective and visceral (2011). For Overell, grindcore's brutality is linked to the "scenic expression of affective belonging … and gestures toward both masculinity and femininity" (2011, p. 199). What Overell is suggesting here is that, despite earlier works which have tended to pigeonhole metal music as overly and undeniably masculine, the affective experience and the construction of identity in these spaces is open to challenge and resistance. For Overell, the expression of brutality isn't tied exclusively with notions of masculine violence and aggression

and objectification of women but is encompassing of expressions of both femininity and masculinity. Overell offers a significant contribution to my understanding of metal identity as constructed through discourse. While I tend not to focus on the affectivity of a particular scene, Overell's contribution to identity creation in metal spaces helps to form the basis of my understanding.

Hill's significant contributions to metal music scholarship suggest a timely pause for thought. Hill recognises that much of the literature surrounding metal and gender tends to conflate the notion of masculine dominance with an absence of women in metal spaces. As Hill states, "even if extremely underrepresented amongst musicians, women do participate in rock and metal" (2016, p. 2). Overlooking women's participation in rock and metal has the effect of silencing the presence of women at venues and in the online metal scene. While Hill notes that there is undoubtedly evidence of objectification and subordination of women in metal spaces, women are of course participating in and contributing to heavy metal music culture.

Hoad, more recently, has offered an examination of the heavy metal fan fiction scene as a space for women to negotiate with heteromasculinity (2017). She states that "accounts of heavy metal as both a music and a culture have long hinged on the genre's tendencies towards displays of hypermasculine violence and aggressive heteromasculinity" (2017, p. 17). Her point here is that women's participation in heavy metal scenes is all too often overlooked. Hoad highlights the creation of fan fiction as a site in which women can reassert their presence and challenge hegemonic masculinity. Recognising this ability to challenge heteromasculinity in these spaces is crucial for my study. The fan fiction spaces that Hoad identifies could easily be encompassed within the frame of the online metal scene.

Conclusion

This chapter began with a crucial positioning of this study away from musicology. As I have outlined this was not an attempt to dismiss musicology altogether, indeed Walser's seminal text (1993) sits within musicology and offers a significant contribution to metal studies in general. Such a departure was crucial in the interest of analytical precision. A focus on the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the predominantly text-based communication of the online metal scene requires not a musicological but a more sociological / cultural studies perspective.

In support of such a perspective, I outlined several significant contributions to the field of metal music studies from the past two decades. Of particular interest is that in the recently emerging site of scholarship on heavy metal music cultures there appears to be a more reasoned analysis of gender identities. Much of the work has taken heed of feminist suggestions over the past four decades that the absence of women in scholarship is most often a result of oversight rather than a reflection of women's absence in cultural spaces. A clear finding, particularly in relation to the present study, is that there is a gap in the literature specifically focussed on the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in online metal spaces. Importantly, though, what the majority of this literature indicates is that such a question is a necessary contribution given the trajectory of metal music studies generally.

The original contribution to knowledge of this thesis is nested within contemporary metal studies literature. Scholarship in the field has contributed a significant examination of the emergence of hegemonic masculinity in heavy metal culture generally. With this literature firmly in place it remains to examine how heavy metal culture is handling the transition to the online metal scene. The next chapter will address questions of the technology used to access the online metal scene. Particularly interesting given the story so far is how the relationship of technology and human actors has been addressed previously. Such an understanding will of

course underpin my methodology and the discussion of the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene.

Chapter Three: Perfect Strangers

Metal culture and online social spaces

The Internet, in its early incarnations, brought with it excitement about connections amongst people and the bridging of geographical distances. I remember the curiosity raised by my friend's father when he first connected his computer to the Internet. The possibility that, through his desktop computer, he would be able to communicate with people from all around the world was an exciting prospect. Years later, when my brother and I received our first dial-up modem, one of the first social connections we made was a discussion with people from the United States about metal music. For a young person in Adelaide, South Australia, connection to the Internet meant new connections to metal culture. These interactions, mediated by slow and unreliable dial-up internet technology, were part of our first significant experience of translocal music cultures and an emerging online metal scene.

A significant concern regarding the increasing use of the Internet in daily life revolves around the question of reality. That is, how real are interactions in online spaces? Can we find an easy line of demarcation between virtual reality and reality? In mid-2018 I was riding in an Uber taxi in Sydney's Inner West. The driver questioned me about my research. After I explained that I was interested in online social spaces he exclaimed that, "cyberbullying and violence online is just not real". He was adamant that online interactivity had no impact on reality. While I tend not to engage in these debates, I spent much of the trip contemplating the reality that, through online connectivity, this guy was giving me a lift home. These questions have been asked and addressed in private conversations and in scholarly literature (Markham 1998; Hammersley 2006; Hampton 2017). In the beginning, a significant portion of literature was dedicated to the question of how research ethics boards would handle the transition to online research (Buchanan & Hvizdak 2009; Markham & Baym 2008; Markham 2006; Cosgrove et al

2017). Others such as Wright (2012) have focused on engagement with politics in drawing on Bhabha's 'third space' (1994) of liminality. Of particular interest to my research is some of the contemporary work done in looking at online spaces as sites for individual and collective identity construction (Chan 2017; Florini 2017; McGinnis et al 2007; Jacobs 2007) and collective action (Gerbaudo 2012).

These questions about the reality of online spaces and our interactions within them is a core consideration in this present study as they underpin my original contribution to knowledge. That is, my study presents an examination of the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculine tropes that are being interpreted, understood, and replicated in the online metal scene. Participation in this hegemonic war of position, through interaction in the online metal scene, has great significance for studies of metal music cultures as well as for the reality of our increasingly technologically mediated lives.

The Real / Virtual Divide

For my Uber driver, there was a not uncommon perception that 'real' life was somehow distinct from online interactions. The ability to switch off a computer or put down a smart phone represented a clear and total disconnect from online social interaction, at least in theory, for my driver. Of course, this is not as clear cut as it may seem to some. A distinction may be necessary for conceptual clarity such as in the case of Richardson's (et al 1999) study of spatial representations of environment, where their entire study is based on testing memory transfer from maps and virtual reality (VR) software to physical environments. However, this study, and those like it, offer ways of interpreting the divide between real and virtual that is not useful for my research. In studies such as Richardson's (et al 1999), it is more useful to understand the VR environment as a kind of reference tool rather than an online social space. Others however, appear to incur significant damage to their argument, or at least their relevance, in making the

distinction. Cutillo (et al 2009), though they stress that participants in online social networks are “real, unambiguously identifiable persons” (p. 2), proceed to make the almost taken for granted distinction between online interactions and ‘real life’.

It might appear to be verging on nit-picking to expose the false dichotomy of real and virtual. I acknowledge that in issues of nomenclature relying on the real-virtual distinction provides a useful tool to separate interactions or events which occur without the inclusion of online communication technology. However, in drawing on such a dichotomy one tends to remove a degree of importance of interactions in online social spaces. These interactions are, in fact, reality for each and every individual who engages with them. Individuals experience real affective and emotional responses as a result of online social interaction (Wise et al 2010). Indeed, the reality of online experience has been of interest to business analysts (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010) who are keen on deciphering ways to capitalise on the rapidly expanding online economy. There is even suggestion that the 2016 United States Presidential Election was influenced by social media (Bessi & Ferrara 2016).

The erroneous conceptualisation behind the real / virtual dichotomy appears to come from an expectation that the Internet would provide a distinctly new and exciting space with hitherto unimaginable capabilities. The excitement of novel technologies was reflected in Parker and Plank’s article, which stressed the “new and dynamic nature of the Internet” (2000, p. 43). Curran also highlights this excitement in outlining the ways some expected the Internet would provide a kind of instant revolution or revival of democratic values across the globe (2012). While the instant revolution, arguably, did not occur, much of the excitement about new and innovative opportunities for global communication is, to an extent, warranted.

That is not to say that the proliferation of the Internet signalled the emergence of a whole new world. Indeed, Brabazon suggests that it is particularly unhelpful to see the emergence of new online communication technologies and their capabilities in this light. Rather, the shift to include online spaces in our social lives is best seen as "an ongoing stitching of self, identity, and community … the continuation of an experiment" (2001). What is particularly important for the present study, is that by viewing online communication as presenting new, distinct, and totally isolated spaces, one must ignore the weight of these interactions in the real lives of individual participants. A dismissal of the reality and importance of social interaction in the online metal scene, therefore, is particularly unhelpful.

Masculinity in / and Technology

It is worth establishing that technology, generally, has always been constructed as a masculine domain. Often thought of as *man*'s taming of a harsh and unforgiving nature, technological development has long been enmeshed with masculinity (Hacker 2017). MacKenzie & Wajcman add that technologies "leave their mark in the very design of tasks and of machines" (1999, p. 46). The 'mark' in technology left by dominance of men through the design process is one which has been paid significant attention in studies of women's participation in science and technology related disciplines (Singh et al 2007; Ranga & Etzkowitz 2010). What has been found is that stereotypes concerning the kind of people or bodies that participate in the development and mastery of technology are mostly given to be masculine (Cheryan et al 2013). In this sense, technological development is much more likely to be aligned with masculinity.

In response to assumptions about technology as 'naturally' masculine, I take a position similar to that outlined by Hutchby (2001) to suggest the equation of masculine prowess and technological mastery is based on a social construction rather than some elemental script inherent in technology itself. The taken for granted notion that technology is a masculine

domain does not stand up to the feminist position that "distinctions of skill between women's and men's work [or technological ability] frequently bears little relation to the actual ability required for them" (Wajcman 1991, p. 29). That is, women's and men's bodies are not naturally – intrinsically – better suited to particular tasks rather, the delineation of types of work comes from social constructions. Because of the dominance of these social norms technology still appears in Western society to be a largely male domain.

There are clear notions of the construction of technology as masculine within online communication technology as well. As Kendall argues "narratives of nerd culture depict expertise in computers as a form of masculine prowess" (2011, p. 505). That is, despite increasing numbers of women in the arena of online gaming (Yates and Littleton 1999; Griffiths et al 2003; and Williams et al 2009) and now a majority of women participating in social media (Duggan & Brenner 2013) these spaces and the associated technologies are still dominated by themes of masculinity. Accordingly, social expectations place men as embodying 'natural' expertise with regard to computer technology.

Masculinity emerged as the dominant gender of computer mediated social spaces – a dominance which continues to this day (Sjogren 2014). This is a notion reflected in a comment by one long-time member of the first forum who, echoing a power metal linguistic style, recalled how,

> [S] long ago five men united to expand the fight of the [forum community] against the would be censors and for metal brothers worldwide (*The First Forum* 2013)

This participant was discussing how a group of men who were previously connected through their shared interest in a heavy metal-based newsletter group decided to move to computer mediated spaces to reach a wider audience. The establishment of an online metal scene reflected

both the dominant themes of masculinity in heavy metal and social expectations about men and their mastery of technology.

Like most technological development over centuries that can be seen to reflect the desire to improve *men's* lives, masculine dominance in online communication technology necessarily precludes feminine dominance (Cheryan et al 2009). In the context of this thesis, technology thus forms part of the collective strategy towards women (Connell 1987). That is, the prevalence of men controlling online social spaces combined with the 'mark' of masculinity left on the technology itself means that women are already at a disadvantage when it comes to participation in the online metal scene.

Masculinity in Online Social Spaces

Early social media took the form of LISTSERVs, Weblogs (blogs), and bulletin boards: information sharing programs that rely on users to log on via terminals or sign up to automated newsletter services. Due to the relative simplicity of technology and Internet connection speeds these media operated outside of real time, or as asynchronous communication tools. Most were entirely text based. An early real-time online communication platform was Internet Relay Chat (IRC) where, through the use of downloadable satellite software, individuals could engage in text-based conversation and file-sharing (Werry 1996). This form of social interaction was one of the first online spaces where users were given the opportunity to declare, for all to see, key personal identifiers such as gender, sex and age. My first experience of discussing punk and heavy metal music with peers from around the globe was in the early 1990s through IRC. Interaction in these IRC rooms often relied on usernames with suffixes that indicated sex and age (e.g. 'username23m' would usually indicate that the user wishes to be identified as 23 years old and male). It is the reliance on the conflation of sex and gender to either male or female and the common chat room question of 'asl?' (Age, Sex, Location?) which highlights a common

concern with gendered identity in online spaces (Concha 2008). Given a need to know someone's gender as a "basic social arrangement" (Goffman 1976, p. 1) and the limitations offered by computer mediated communication at the time, a standard for indicating gender identity was required.

Limitations of text-based communication were overcome, in part, by the introduction of avatars. An 'avatar', originally a Hindu term used to describe an incarnate deity, today refers to "… any form of representation that marks a user's identity" (Lin & Wang 2014). Users would, more often than not, ensure that an identification of gender was clear in the presentation of their avatar. Much research has been conducted into the importance of online gender identity (Palomares & Lee 2009), how avatars' gender identities reify offline gender identity (Herrmann 2007), and how sometimes the two can be actively mis-matched (Shapiro 2015; Herring & Martinson 2004). What is of interest however, is that despite the opportunities for playing with gender identity, there still exists gender politics in online social spaces.

The online metal scene, particularly in *The First Forum*, tends to limit users to the binaries of female / male in the construction of their avatar. Although Facebook has more recently introduced the opportunity for users to elect a 'custom' gender this information is not immediately visible when interacting with individuals in comments sections of posts. The most visible gender indicator in most cases is the user's profile picture, their name (except of course for gender neutral monikers) and their use of language (Palomares & Lee 2009). Once experienced with the use of Facebook and the available gender indicators one can determine others' desired gender identities with similar accuracy as in face-to-face interaction. However, in light of the ability of individuals to actively mis-match gender (Herring & Martinson 2004) the decision to exclude the variable of gender in this research was taken. Knowing individuals' gender identity is unimportant in this research as I do not propose that hegemonic

hypermasculine negotiation is engaged with *only* by individuals who identify as masculine – nor do I suggest that all who benefit from hegemonic hypermasculinity necessarily embrace it (Connell 1995). Moreover, my interest lies in the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the writing on the wall of the online metal scene.

Of particular interest is contemporary research around the construction of identity in online spaces. Research covers individual identity construction, particularly with relation to self-presentation (Shapiro 2015). Given the facility for large numbers of individuals to congregate in online spaces there of course exists a significant body of research around collective identity construction. I will move on, later in this chapter, to address some of the work done by Bennett and Peterson (2004) and others (Straw 1991; Bennett & Rogers 2016; Harris 2000; Spracklen 2010a) regarding virtual, or what I refer to as online scenes. Here, however, I outline the contemporary literature which has shaped the way online social spaces have been understood as sites for identity construction – the negotiations of hypermasculine hegemony.

The Internet has long been held as a space where we can present a version of ourselves with a significant degree of flexibility. Much research has delved into ideas of identity and social connections in online spaces. Jensen et al (2002) look into reputation management in online spaces. They suggest that individuals build links with others who they deem to have similar interests and who they deem not to be a threat. Decisions about who shares similar interests must be made on information provided in others' avatars or account profile. Interestingly Jensen et al identify that this can be a process fraught with danger at times as, what they deem bad behaviour online is allowed to happen "because community standards are more relaxed in these situations" (2002, p. 453). What Jensen et al are pointing to here is the lower perceptions of accountability in many online spaces – a crucial point which will be discussed in relation to the affordance on anonymity in Chapter Seven.

McGinnis et al (2007) work in a similar vein in their identification of 'transnational youth' who gather together through Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) spaces that are "dynamic representational spaces for youth to engage in transformative literacy practices and identity work? (p. 284). This is of particular interest as it supports my assertion that the online metal scene incorporates sites where individuals are exposed to conversations and commentary that aligns to hypermasculine tropes and contributes to the negotiation of hegemonic hypermasculinity. These transformative literacy practices can easily be seen to align with the discursive formations which underpin hypermasculinity in the online metal scene. That is, a set of norms and values, driven by text-based communication, which are visible for all to see as both a record of previous conversations as well as the presentation and representation of the hegemonic order.

Theorising online spaces as sites for the negotiation of individual and group identity contributes to my conception of the writing on the wall in the online metal scene. The bones of the writing on the wall appeared in the early IRC and bulletin boards that I have outlined above. Comments shared, whether synchronously or asynchronously remained on the walls of these spaces, visible to all who entered the space (at least, temporarily). While older technology, satellite software like mIRC (www.mirc.com 2018), relied on short term data storage, usually via participants' Random Access Memory (RAM), more recent online social spaces such as those examined in this research allow for *indefinite* storage of data on third party servers. That is, the writing on the wall, through technological advancement, is evolving as a much more visible and much more permanent record of social interactions.

Music in Online Social Spaces

There has been a significant rise in opportunities for independent music makers to share their music in online spaces. SoundCloud and Bandcamp are but two of the more well-known self-publishing sites for musicians. It is difficult not to see parallels between these sites and tape trading networks of the 1980s and 1990s (Pearson 1987). Larger record companies are embracing online spaces too, although there appears to be disagreement about whether new opportunities such as those offered by Spotify, Deezer, or Rhapsody (now taken over by the once beleaguered Napster) are profitable or not (Wlomert & Papies 2016). However, once the development of technology allowed the exchange of music files (in Australia this began to appear in the late 1990s and early 2000s), online spaces became significant sites for file sharing networks. La Rose et al (2005) interestingly, suggested that this practice was part of a 'college culture', offering an early insight into the online social spaces that music sharing communities began to develop.

Much of the early research into file sharing and music in online spaces was preoccupied with concerns in the music industry about piracy and decreased sales (La Rose et al 2005; Bhattachrjee et al 2003). However, many have suggested that file-sharing networks have not had a significant negative impact (Zentner 2006; Oberholzer-Gee & Strumpf 2007, 2010). As Sag (2005) highlights there were many more factors at play including the global financial crisis; changing musical tastes; and competition from new forms of media. Since these publications, the crisis as observed by the music industry has calmed as producers and distributers have begun to embrace new online technologies such as streaming sites and online marketplaces like Amazon, and the Apple Store.

It is worth noting that these streaming sites and online marketplaces are peripheral to the online metal scene. While they do offer the ability to construct profiles and to interact with others (for example, Spotify allows users to create playlists which can then be shared across social media

and played by other users), these sites don't offer any meaningful spaces in which users can congregate and converse. For the purposes of this research, sites that were predominantly structured around file sharing were not included in my participant observation.

The Internet has offered innovative opportunities for fans of music across genres to congregate and to share music culture from the beginning. As Baym highlights (2007), since the inception of the Internet fans have developed online communities. The earliest social spaces that emerged online, like *The First Forum* in this study, were initially online versions of offline mailing list communities. These communities were originally connected through what Marshall (2003) identifies as tape trading networks and fanzine distribution networks (Hodgkinson 2004). Pearson used a case study of 'Deadhead' (fans of the Grateful Dead) 'subculture' in which tape trading networks would hold a "common stock of social knowledge" (1987, p. 429). In the late 1990s these networks began to move online. The opportunities to gain wider audiences were, of course, a significant attraction.

The online spaces that this shift from tape trading and fanzine networks have produced have been the focus on significant scholarly attention. Baym has spent considerable time analysing how Swedish independent music fans and artists get together in online spaces (2007). Her findings suggest that through collective use of Facebook, MySpace, or Blackplanet fans "generate collective intelligence and affect" (2007). Her later work with Burnett (Baym & Burnett 2009) again considered the Swedish independent music scene and how, in online spaces, fans were organised in "loose and highly distributed ways" (p.436) and that this was actually beneficial to the promotion of independent music on various online spaces. Such a conception of the organisation of music fans in online social spaces shows clear links to the concept of the online scene.

Understanding the online scene

As discussed in the previous chapter, studies of popular music in recent times have contested the CCCS's theorisation of music subcultures. The online metal scene as a site for the production, consumption, and reproduction of music culture also does not fit well with subculture theory. As such, particular attention will be paid to the emerging literature on music scenes. In this chapter I will outline the development of the concept of music scenes, particularly the 'virtual' scene as theorised by Bennett and Peterson (2004) and Bennett and Rogers (2016). I will show how the introduction of the concept of articulations developed by Straw (1991), not only accounted for a globalising marketplace but opened the door to understand new emerging cultural spaces for the production and consumption of music culture.

Bennett and Rogers (2016) have contributed a significant portion of the contemporary literature dedicated to exploring the concept of music scenes. They provide a useful outline of the development of the concept which I draw on to contextualise the online metal scene. Notably, Bennett and Rogers identified the need outlined also by Redhead (1990) McRobbie (1980) to shift away from subcultures as a way of understanding music culture. Subcultures was indeed too static and fixed to notions of class in particular geographies. It was identified that such a concept was unhelpful in accounting for a globalising marketplace and increasing fan connectivity in postmodern times (Straw 1991; Spracklen 2010b; Kahn-Harris 2004). The rapidly increasing complexity of networked individuals who participate in the online metal scene means following such a trajectory is apt.

The early 1990s saw significant changes in the way that music cultures aligned with sport, fashion and technology. Genres morphed. Music cultures and groups of fans were more connected across geographical and social distances. This connection was clearly linked to observed changes in global markets. As Shepherd predicted in 1991, the following year would

"likely become emblematic of a changing power relationship between the expanded European and North American markets" (1991, p. 251). This was not isolated to the music industry. A changing Europe, and rapidly increasing pace of technological advancement, was keeping many on their toes around this time (DeYoung 1989).

As Bennett and Rogers point out, music cultures did not remain unaffected (2016). For them it was Will Straw who first identified the need to reconceptualise the sites of music consumption and production. Bennett and Rogers offer a reflection on Straw's seminal contribution from 1991 in highlighting the dominance of the concept of cultural space (2016). That is, as Straw suggests:

> A musical scene … is that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization (1991, p. 373).

The interaction here is the focus of my research. It is the interaction that is evidenced by the comments posted by participants in all of the online metal scene. Moreover, the language used in these processes of differentiation or more aptly, negotiation, is exactly what I observe as contributing to the hegemonic order exhibited in the writing on the wall. Importantly here Straw also noted that:

> The manner in which musical practices within a scene tie themselves to processes of historical change occurring within a larger international musical culture will also be a significant basis of the way in which such forms are positioned within that scene at the local level (1991, p. 373).

Straw's point is to recognise the impact of globalisation on what were often thought of as static notions of music culture based solely on genre. As mentioned earlier, subcultures theory becomes increasingly unhelpful. It is no surprise that Straw's rethinking of cultural spaces in the face of globalising marketplaces was taken up so readily. There is enormous significance in this line of thinking particularly with regard to the present study. The writing on the wall and

all the evidence of negotiations around identity that is held within it is contributed to by an international cohort of metalheads. The significance of the writing on the wall then is not just for the online metal scene, it can, as Straw suggests, underpin the basis for heavy metal music culture at the local level.

The method of looking at music creation and consumption from such a perspective was taken up by Saldanha (2002) to examine "real and imaginary geographies" (2002, p. 338) that were emerging as part of a wider process of globalisation. Interestingly, studies such as Saldanha's reiterate that these new cultural spaces are not specific to music culture or indeed any singular social phenomenon. Rather, these studies point out influences from larger multinational corporate spread as part of the globalisation project. The 1990s saw the proliferation of MTV across much of the world. The expansion of Murdoch's empire around Asia had a significant cultural impact:

> MTV Asia and Channel [V] brought the flashiness of youth culture into Indian homes. Young people acquired a new cosmopolitan literacy in the syntaxis of the music video, along with advertising, fashion, film, dance (Saldanha 2002, p. 340).

Again, clearly the idea of static subcultures that responded to various local concerns was untenable. A *global* youth culture was quickly emerging as a result of advances in communication technology. As Bennett and Rogers (2016) suggest, the conceptualisation of music cultures as cultural spaces, as outlined by Straw, was widely embraced.

Importantly, the emergence of a global youth culture or more globally connected music cultures was not monolithic. That is, music cultures did not simply welcome a larger participant base while maintaining a singular static culture. One of the more important notes by Straw (1991) was that there were increasingly visible interconnections which result in a more plural and variable notion of music culture. Music cultures, trends, and styles were now open to processes

of production and *re*-production in a kind of negotiation with and positioning within many different cultural spaces.

The terminology of *virtual* scene(s) is now outdated, as I have alluded to earlier in this thesis. Fifteen years is a long time in a digital world. The term 'virtual' in early discussions of the Internet most usefully referred to the outsourcing of bodily action to a technologically mediated environment (Hine 2000). Virtual reality software has been developed to great effect for purposes such as pilot training or for greater immersive experiences in video games (Lin 2017). It even has tremendous relevance in educational settings (Jensen & Konradsen 2018). However, the term 'virtual' often carries with it assumptions about non-real experience. Today, VR remains a key element of the digital gaming and education repertoire. However, the use of the term to denote online social spaces runs dangerously close to overlooking the affective reality of social interactions. For this reason, a conscientious decision has been made to retain much of the theoretical rigor of the concept as offered by Bennett and Peterson (2004) and Bennett and Rogers (2016) but to adopt the term 'online scene' as a more appropriate descriptor.

Scene Articulations

Given the focus of the present study on the social construction of hypermasculinity through discursive formations it is appropriate to turn to the notion of articulations. This idea underpins much of the mechanics of scenes theory and foregrounds the ability to comprehend scenes as "the contexts in which clusters of producers, musicians, and fans collectively share their common musical tastes and collectively distinguish themselves from others" (Bennett & Rogers 2016, p. 22). Said (1990), most famously, used the concept of articulations as a way of understanding a post-colonial critique of literature. He noted:

> [In considering] the way in which the four main western news agencies operate … we not only have in the media system a fully integrated practical network, but there also exists within it a very efficient mode of articulation knitting the world together (1990, p. 8).

Middleton offered a discussion of articulation (1985) which at once highlights a useful distance from subculture theory and continues to explain the borrowing or interconnectedness offered in Hebdige's somewhat appealing notion of *bricolage* (1979). That is, that articulations can mean a kind of reimagining of cultural elements. Middleton suggested:

> The theory of articulation recognises the complexity of cultural fields. It preserves the relative autonomy for cultural and ideological elements but also insists that those combinatory patterns that are actually constructed do mediate deep, objective patterns in the socio-economic formation (1985, p. 7).

The concept of articulations is important for my thesis as it supports earlier dismissals of subculture theory as unhelpful while still incorporating some of the ideas around the borrowing of cultural elements in the construction of style. In fact, articulations, conceptually founded in theorisations of marketplace globalisation, is perhaps more useful in this sense. That is, a wider understanding of the increasingly connected global music cultures can accommodate the interplay between participants across vast and culturally distinct geographical spaces in the online metal scene.

Straw transformed the concept of articulations from Said in order to set the foundation for a post-subcultural rethinking of music cultures. Straw conceptualises music cultures or cultural spaces as 'scene' - a term he borrows from Barry Shank (Straw 1991). Straw's scene is one which involves articulations of cultural elements or what he later terms: "coalitions of musical taste … which value the redirective and the novel over the stable and canonical, or international circuits of influence over the mining of locally stable heritage" (1991, p. 384). Such a conception is clearly not as limiting as subcultural theory which tended to rely on geographically static class-based formations. Straw's ideas sit well within broader thinking at the time. A time when the Internet boom of the 1990s was just around the corner. As highlighted by Bennett and Rogers (2016) this significant contribution to a more post-subcultural theory

paved the way for the further development of the concept of scene to incorporate new and emerging articulations of music culture.

Scenes: Local, Translocal, Online

The most significant rethinking of musical cultural spaces was offered by Bennett and Peterson (2004). That is, the introduction of, and differentiations between, local, translocal, and virtual scenes. These concepts, founded on the idea of articulations in a more global cultural context, set out to provide a deep understanding of new and emerging spaces for the production and consumption of music culture. These concepts of local, translocal, and virtual scenes rejected the static and often class-based constructions of music fans and spaces in favour of postmodern fluidity.

Though the online scene is where I locate my research, it is useful to present the backdrop of local and translocal scenes. In a way, such a discussion highlights the changing nature of music cultures. That is, we can see the need to move from the more geographically contained local scenes, through the translocal, and to the more technologically mediated scenes which become increasingly less reliant on physical geography. As Bennett and Rogers suggest, local scenes "are those that more often correspond with popular journalistic notions of the scene" (2016, p. 25). These journalistic notions of scene are founded in geographical sites of music consumption and production. For example, Krenske and McKay's study of the metal scene in Brisbane, Australia (2000) which had clear geographical boundaries within the city of Brisbane. The translocal scene on the other hand began to encompass the connections that are made across these distances. This was clearly a result of increasing global connections amongst participants. A well-known and oft studied example (Moore 2001; Strong 2011, 2019; Stafford 2018) is the spread of the grunge scene which originated in Seattle, Washington. Though the Seattle grunge scene was indeed a local music scene – perhaps one of the most famous in the Western world

– the spread of grunge culture which followed saw the emergence of an early trans-local scene being embraced in various cultural and political contexts across the world (Levine 2008). This shift culminated in the emergence of a complementary online scene. That is, asynchronous communication that facilitated connections amongst fans who gathered in local and translocal scenes. Online scenes eventually became separate, (but still connected) from local and translocal spaces.

Local Scenes

Studying the local scene is becoming increasingly difficult. The connections offered by communication technology as well as wider process of globalisation and the spread of corporate media, mean that local scenes tend to be indivisibly connected to both the translocal and online scenes. Indeed, it seems local scenes suffer from the same temporal and spatial limitations identified as fatal in subcultures theory (Kahn-Harris 2004). Despite this, much of the research conducted from this perspective has contributed to understanding the broader concept of music scenes today. Other research has looked at the changing nature of music scenes from the local perspective. Varas-Diaz et al (2014) offered a quantitative analysis of community building in Puerto Rican local metal music scenes. Rowe identified the difference between local scenes and translocal and online scenes and suggested that being a part of the latter is a way of "keeping his finger on the pulse" of metal culture (2015, p. 298). These works highlight that while the local scene is not long-gone, there is a dynamic shift towards translocal and online scenes. Moreover, there is increasingly a complementary relationship between local music scenes and the translocal and online.

Whiting and Carter provide an examination of local live music scenes in Australia. Their article stands as a good example of an identification of a local scene. Drawing on the foundational

scholars of the concept of scene in Shank (2011) and Bennett and Peterson (2004) Whiting and Carter suggest that:

> Live music scenes can be understood as those distinct socio-musical practices that occur between practitioners and participants within a defined space that may be local, translocal, or virtual (2016).

Their reference to translocal and virtual scenes here highlights my suggestion that local scenes are difficult to study today. It seems fairly clear that local venues in a geographically defined space or 'place' (Whiting & Carter 2016) in inner Melbourne present a local scene. While they do not elaborate on how these place-based music scenes represent translocal or online scenes their scene is still open to the articulations of music culture based on global flows and networks that Bennett and Rogers later identify in local scene research (2016).

Translocal Scenes

Bennett and Rogers (2016) suggest that it is difficult to examine a scene that does not fit somehow into the category of translocal. In fact, given the ease with which music culture can be shared and transported it is no surprise that Whiting and Carter (2016) suggest that the live music scene in inner Melbourne comprises elements of the translocal. Nevertheless, the notion of translocal music scenes is much broader in definition. For Bennett and Rogers, the study of the translocal was a response to "the changing context of the local" (2016, p. 29) due to the aforementioned spread of global markets. The translocal addresses:

> The everyday activity of music workers and audiences who were increasingly reaching beyond the traditional boundaries of geographic location, more and more without hesitation or obstacle (Bennett & Rogers 2016, p. 29).

It is clear in this conception of translocal scenes, that Bennett and Peterson's (2004) overall concept of scene is moving evermore towards the incorporation of online social spaces as complementary mechanisms for the production, consumption, and reproduction of music

culture. That is, music scenes are increasingly connected across the globe – in no small part, as a result of online connectivity.

Kruse is widely cited for her research on translocal scenes (Hodgkinson 2004; Bennett & Peterson 2004; Futrell et al 2006; Lena & Peterson 2008; Leonard 2017) though interestingly also contributed to the literature on subcultural identity (1993). Kruse echoes Bennett and Peterson's (2004) declaration of the connectedness of music scenes and offers a discussion of translocal scenes as networks. She notes that:

> The social and economic connections and structures of indie music could, in the end, be seen as networks in which musical knowledge, genre, geography, and position in the independent music business located subjects within one or more sets of relations (2010, p. 629).

Online communication networks facilitate the global flow that underpins translocal music scenes. It would seem, ostensibly, that the involvement of the Internet in the facilitation of translocal scenes would render them more usefully as *online* scenes. However, the distinction lies in translocal scenes transgressing geographical boundaries of nation, class, and culture but still remaining bound by geography *en masse*. That is, translocal scenes are more usefully understood as a network of local scenes that keep in touch via "exchange of recordings, bands, fans, and fanzines" (Bennett & Peterson 2004, p. 39). In more recent times these networks may also be facilitated through the use of computer technology. For instance, watching live performances recorded and presented via YouTube, or receiving news and reviews about shows as they occur across the planet. A necessary distinction between translocal scenes which utilise internet communication technology and online scenes becomes essential. Online scenes, though complementary to local and translocal scenes, sit altogether within an online space.

Online Scenes

Concepts of local and translocal scenes are useful in understanding the interconnections that exist in contemporary music cultures. They contextualise the complex networks of fans, bands, and producers among networks of other likeminded individuals across the globe. The third arm of scene research aims to incorporate new spaces which emerge as part of the development of communication technology – 'virtual' (Bennett & Rogers 2016) or online scenes. Anderton et al (2013) highlight that in the last few decades the site and mode of music consumption has undergone considerable change. They suggest, "music is consumed and conversed through blog comments, Facebook feedback and Twitter chatter, and 'played' through the internet, mobile devices, and video and app gaming" (2013, p. 159). Deploying the framework of 'online scene' is crucial to understanding contemporary production, consumption, and reproduction of music cultures in the online metal scene.

Bennett and Rogers underline that much of the research into online scenes has considered the 'virtual' to be an extension of local and translocal scenes (2016). Of course, this follows the position outlined by Brabazon that online spaces are in fact part of "an on-going semiotic stitching of self, identity and community" (2001). In fact, my initial foray into researching metal scenes made clear to me that many participants in local and translocal scenes incorporate some degree of presence in the online metal scene as well. However, as outlined above, it is important to differentiate the online scene as a space in and of itself – a space for the "production, performance, and reception of music culture" (Bennett & Peterson 2004, p.3). The point of being in an online scene is to interact with others who are there for the purposes of sharing and debating music and building a community of like-minded individuals.

Lee and Peterson, who also deploy the nomenclature 'virtual scene' (though I will proceed with *online* scene), provided a highly regarded examination of the *Alt.Country* online scene (2004). They distance online from local scenes through highlighting the openness of these spaces to

people across vast geographical spaces. Online scenes are, of course, available to people who attend shows and venues or record stores and festivals. Yet they remain sites independent of these local or translocal spaces. Participation in this online scene is greater than local scenes – instead of a few hours at a show each week they spend up to 15 hours or more per week participating. They further highlight that the more active participation amongst online scene members is from individuals who tend to have roles in the wider music community. That is, they are actively involved in the production of fan newspapers, radio stations, and booking talent at venues and festivals. Lee and Peterson suggest that this is an indication of the online scene's significant role in shaping the development of music culture more widely (2004, p. 499).

Lee and Peterson also hinted at the permanence of online scenes. I will explore this in more detail later in this thesis. However, they suggest that, "the sites of [online] scenes might continue as Web sites where interested people can turn for information, paraphernalia, and music revival" (2004, p. 497). This is important as it was an early identification of participants' ability to revisit posts and comments that were posted in earlier times. It is understandable that Lee and Peterson did not fully explore the continuance of these Web sites given the time of publication. Their conjecture, however, that these sites would remain as cultural artefacts into the future appears to be highly accurate.

Most significantly for my study is Lee and Peterson's recognition that there exist clear mechanisms of social control. They reflect on social control in local scenes which consists of: "a mixture of ostracism, sarcasm and joking, informal persuasion, and, ultimately, bouncers" (2004, p. 484). They suggest that similar controls exist in the online scene. The social controls that Lee and Peterson identified have significant links to the operation of hegemonic war of position in the online metal scene.

Spracklen has provided some insightful accounts of the online metal scene in his research centred on blackmetal.co.uk – an online black metal forum (2010). He outlines how this online scene is a site that follows and contributes to maintaining the underground aesthetic of the black metal scene more generally. Spracklen identifies the extreme notions of hegemonic masculinity that permeate the black metal scene and identifies the continuance of this online. Spracklen highlights:

> The adherence to norms and values associated with hegemonic, heterosexual masculinities is evident in the language of the forum: bands not liked are called gay, and sexist and homophobic jokes and pictures are often posted (2010, p. 84).

Spracklen identifies themes of elitism and revenge that are evident in the posts on this forum. He draws the link to black metal music culture more widely stating that black metal's links to violent crime and extreme aggression position it as the most extreme and therefore appealing to fans wanting to align themselves with the true core of black metal.

Given the trajectory of both heavy metal cultures and online social spaces it is clear that a conceptualisation of the online metal scene as an online scene is apt. There are sites of overlap between the online metal scene and local and translocal scenes. However, given the guiding question of this research is centred on the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene only, it is not appropriate to follow the connections to local and translocal sites of heavy metal culture in this thesis.

Affordances

Shapiro, whose adaptation of the term 'affordances' I ascribe to throughout this thesis, rejuvenated the concept and applied it specifically to gender in online social spaces (2015). Shapiro's interpretation is useful as it recognises that "it is becoming increasingly routine to come to know others and ourselves through technology" (2015, p. 33). She, like many others

(Latour 1994; Haraway 1985; Bennett & Peterson 2004; Turkle 2011), suggests that knowing ourselves and others in online social spaces necessarily occurs through a process of mediation. For Shapiro, and myself, this mediation is best understood through the concept of affordances of technology.

A term borrowed from Gibson (1979), affordances are understood as the opportunities and limitations offered to social interaction by the technology used to access that space. This concept casts light on how communication technology allows new possibilities for interaction such as access over time and space or with varying degrees of anonymity. Technology can influence a social situation by its very presence. And by extension, online communication technology used to access the online metal scene can influence, through affordances, the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity.

Contemporary usage of the term affordances occurs across various disciplines. Education studies have used affordances to refer to the capabilities of computer technology to increase interaction in classrooms. Day and Lloyd, writing about such usage in education settings note that care must be taken so as not to assume a technical determinist account of technology. They suggest that it is "too simplistic to view learning outcomes solely on the properties of technologies" (2007, p. 17). As Evans et al suggest, one must take a "relational view of affordances" and that, "materiality of technology influences, but does not determine, the possibilities for users" (2017, p. 37). Latour's work on technical mediation supports this position. Latour evokes the slogan of the National Rifle Association (NRA) 'guns don't kill people, people kill people' (2009). He suggests that:

> The gun does nothing in itself or by virtue of its material components. The gun is a tool, a medium, a neutral carrier of human will. If the gunman is a good guy, the gun will be used wisely and will kill only when appropriate (2009, p. 157).

For Latour, the addition of a technology (a firearm) to a social situation presents only possibilities not an unavoidable trajectory. The introduction of online communication technology to social interaction likewise presents *possibilities* but does not determine social outcomes.

The most relevant application of the concept of affordances is that of Bucher and Helmond (2018). They deploy affordances as a way to understand the turmoil faced by Twitter upon removal of the 'favourite' button. In discussing technological affordances, Bucher and Helmond draw on Gaver's (1996) examination of email as a technological affordance. Gaver suggests that "the discontinuities of storage and display inherent in electronic media often effect social interactions that involve them" (1996, p. 120). Technological affordances are not deterministic, but they do influence the social interactions that they themselves enable. Clearly, by witnessing the outrage that Bucher and Helmond highlight around the change to Twitter's user interface, one can see the integration of online communication technology and social interaction.

The concept of affordances is rarely used in literature surrounding heavy metal cultures. Quader (2016) and Kennedy (2018) are two exceptions. While Quader makes use of the concept of affordances, the use is specifically concerned with the influence of economic and cultural capital on participation in metal scene in Dhaka. My recent article (Kennedy 2018) was an application of affordances of visibility and permanence to the emergence of tropes of white privilege in the online metal scene. The findings suggest that the affordances of visibility and permanence allow for messages about whiteness to be heard far more readily by many more individuals. This thesis stands as an extension of this novel approach to the influence of online communication technology and the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene.

Conclusion

This chapter's contextualisation of my research. Of particular interest here has been the existing and emerging scholarly debates around the development of online communication technology to facilitate online social spaces. Initially distancing this research from outdated notions of a real / virtual dichotomy I have promptly moved on to an examination of how issues of gender and music cultures have been accounted for in sociology and cultural studies literature. There are three main areas of scholarship canvassed in this Chapter: gender and (online) technology; online music scenes; and, affordances of online technology.

As we have seen here, gender (and by extension, masculinity) remains a concern in online social spaces. The requirement to identify oneself according to binaries of female or male have been built into the technology and culture of online spaces since the beginning. Various means of identification have emerged over the decades. The shorthand question 'asl?' required others to indicate their age, sex, and location, to others in online chat rooms. Later, the creation of personal profiles and avatars afforded users the ability to recognise others' gender without having to ask outright. More recent scholarship has looked at the way gender is negotiated through language rather than software.

Of further importance to this study is the current work on online music scenes. Music cultures adopted online technology with considerable vigour. Initially, online technology offered alternatives to tape trading and fanzine networks. In more recent times, social spaces have begun to emerge. *The First Forum* in my study is an example of one of these spaces. Bennett and Rogers are credited with significant work to understand these new spaces and have offered the concept of virtual scene. While scene theories had emerged long before (Straw 1991), Bennett and Peterson's work comes to terms with the more recent and changing nature of what

I choose to call *online* scenes which are sites of production and consumption of music culture in and of themselves rather than complementary to local or translocal scenes.

The final significant contribution of this Chapter is the examination of the current literature surrounding the concept of affordances. First offered by Gibson (1979), the term has been used in various contexts (Latour 1994, 2009; Shapiro 2015) to understand the ever-increasing opportunities offered by the development of online communication technology. Affordances as a concept accommodates for the possibilities that are presented by the combination of human actors and online communication technology. In the chapters that follow, I will draw on the literature canvassed in this and the previous two chapters to answer the question: How does hegemonic hypermasculinity emerge and how is it maintained in the online metal scene?

Chapter Four: Metalheads Unite

Online Ethnography in the Online Heavy Metal Scene

> Serious differences among social scientists occur not between those who would observe without thinking and those who would think without observing; the differences have rather to do with what kinds of thinking, what kinds of observing, and what kinds of links, if any, there are between the two (Mills 1959, p. 33).

Methodological choices in social science have significant influence on analytical precision and interpretative style. The social researcher is inextricably part of the space, place, or group in which they are interested. The problems raised by this inescapable fact have been addressed by Mills (1959), Becker (1958, 1967, 2008), and Denzin & Lincoln (2005) among many others. We can proceed with social research by considering 'whose side we are on' (Becker 1967). Acknowledging our biases and our influence on our participants informs the decisions made about participant observation and the gathering of rich meaningful data.

In the previous chapter, I discussed specific research on heavy metal music cultures. In many cases this research appeared to be located in the discipline of psychology with a chief interest in the links between heavy metal music and youth alienation or anti-social behaviour. It is not surprising that such a volume of work on heavy metal exists given the highly vocal antagonism from groups such as the Parents Music Resource Centre in the 1980s and 1990s (Binder 1993). The links made by much of this research tend to take a positivistic approach and appear only to foster pre-existing negative views of heavy metal and of heavy metal cultures. That is, they start with preconceptions of heavy metal as the source of negativity and attempt to forge causal links. My project has employed an epistemological and methodological approach to an enquiry into the online metal scene which shifts the focus to the experience of metalheads themselves rather

than try to make somewhat tenuous links based on outsider opinion. This project, therefore, is an interpretive exercise and the methods of enquiry have been chosen to reflect this decision.

I have divided this chapter into four distinct sections. The first section will paint a picture of the online metal scene for the reader. I will do this by showing how the online metal scene must be understood as an online scene in light of the work done by Bennett and Rogers (2016). Painting a picture of the online metal scene at the beginning of this chapter follows from Becker's (2007) suggestion that, core to ethnographic research, is the aim of telling a story as would a photographer or film-maker. That is, I want the reader to understand fully the experience of participating in the online metal scene. A clear picture of the site of this research and the meanings for participants will further inform the reader and provide context regarding methodological decisions.

In the second section of this chapter I outline the epistemological perspective that I employed in this project and which came from a desire to allow participants' voices to be heard (Ashby 2011; Strega et al 2009). This decision was founded on ethical grounds as well as a desire to gather rich meaningful data from participants whose experiences are at the forefront of the online metal scene. As Becker suggested, "qualitative methods insist that we should not invent the viewpoint of the actor…" (1996, p. 60). That is, the meanings within the online metal scene are created by the participants themselves. It is for this reason that I actively participated in the scene as well as sought validation from participants about my conclusions.

The third section of this chapter addresses my methodological journey from traditional ethnography to an adaptation of Hine's 'virtual ethnography' (2000, 2017). I note here that, like my nomenclatural decision about the term 'online scene' I prefer the term 'online ethnography' to avoid the definitional pitfalls of the term 'virtual'. In this section, I also outline my utilisation

of the tools of thematic analysis and respondent validation. As online communication technology has developed over the past several decades the capabilities, or affordances, have also changed. I have discussed, at some length, the literature surrounding the shift of social groups to online spaces. The same transitions have taken place in the realm of social research. As Lee et al stated, "the Internet has affected research capabilities in all fields of scientific endeavour, but it is arguable that it is of particular importance to the social sciences" (2008, p. 5). I note the effect of new technologies on the online metal scene and as such offer a mixed methods adaptation of ethnographic research in online spaces.

The final section of this chapter is a focus on the actual act of data collection. Here, I outline the process of gaining access as well as the procedural aspects of participant observation in various sites of the online metal scene. I also outline the processes of thematic analysis and respondent validation. As White et al suggest, "written accounts need to explain why particular qualitative approaches and methods were chosen to meet the aims of the research and provide practical detail about how the research was conducted" (2014, p. 377). Such a comprehensive account of the procedural aspects of this research will justify my methodological decisions in light of the research question and reinforce the integrity of my analysis and findings.

The methodological decisions made in designing this project required a combination of ethnographic and thematic analysis frameworks. It is underpinned by what Johnson et al suggest as a pragmatic approach that is interested in understanding multiple viewpoints and perspectives (2007, p. 113). Such an approach is useful for an examination of the online metal scene. Relying solely on either ethnographic or thematic analysis would have been to ignore the nuances of online spaces themselves and disallow a complex understanding of the social interactions that are taking place. My research embraced ethnographic and online ethnographic methods for data

collection and thematic analysis in order to allow themes to emerge inductively from these interactions.

A Mixed Methods Online Ethnography

One early decision made in this research project was to follow a qualitative line of enquiry. This decision was not derived from personal preference. Rather, the choice of a qualitative method was dictated by the character of the online metal scene itself. To investigate how hypermasculinity emerges and is maintained in the online metal scene would necessarily require a rich, meaningful, and descriptive, *qualitative* data set. This is in contrast to a great volume of the literature surrounding heavy metal as mentioned in the literature review of this thesis. A great deal of this research has focused on larger scale questions of population's likes and dislikes regarding musical taste (Arnett 1991) or links to suicide, anti-social behaviour, and alienation (Arnett 1996; Scheel & Westefeld 1999; Took & Weiss 1994). These studies have used predominantly positivistic research to make (often tenuous) links between these ideas. Positivist research is particularly unhelpful in developing a full and meaningful understanding of the online metal scene. As Abbott suggested some time ago, in applying positivistic methods "stories disappear [and] … contingent narrative is impossible" (1992, p. 428-429). Very few studies have employed an interpretive lens to look at the social processes behind meanings that exist for individuals who occupy the online metal scene. A qualitative approach, thus, provides the best way to understand the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene.

Qualitative methods allow a deep insight into the ways hegemonic hypermasculinity is interpreted and maintained in the writing on the wall. As Denzin and Lincoln point out, "qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the researcher in the world" (2005, p. 3). Rather than remaining external to the online metal scene, my qualitative methods allowed me

to participate in and experience the spaces for myself. This experience consisted of learning about and observing specific uses of language, protocols, social norms, and hierarchies and being able to tell a detailed and colourful picture of what it is like to be an active member of the online metal scene. Such a practice allowed for me to relate a story about the experience in detail from the perspective of an insider (Crotty 1998). And, importantly without pre-conceived notions regarding the meanings of the online metal scene.

Inductive research is conducted without such a pre-conceived theoretical framework. The decision to employ inductive methods here reflects my ethical-methodological position on the acquisition of knowledge. As Strega et al point out, "The ontologies and epistemologies of different research traditions are the foundations of how knowledge about 'social phenomena' can and should be acquired" (2005, p. 200). In Western society the academy has been criticised for its application of a *scientific rationality* approach to data (Harding 2016). My application of inductive methods, where themes emerge from the voices of participants, is a strategic move to present as true an interpretation of the experience of participating in the online metal scene as possible.

As the author of final analyses, the social researcher may enjoy immense privilege. For this reason, in the application of a mixed-method ethnographic framework, I strive to maintain an ethic-as-method (Markham 2006) approach. Such a method is espoused by Markham who suggests:

> An ethical researcher is one who is prepared, reflexive, flexible, adaptive, and honest. Methods are not simply applied out of habit, but derived through constant, critical reflection on the goals of research and the research questions" (2006, p. 39-40).

A critical reflection on the goals of this project underpins the decision to employ thematic analysis of the interactions that took place in the online metal scene. An ethic as method

approach also underpinned my commitment to re-visiting with participants during the respondent validation phase to discuss and to clarify my interpretations.

In order to maintain this ethical position, it was necessary to employ a reflexive approach to the conduct of my research. Such reflexivity backgrounds my resolve to recognise ownership of knowledge creation in various social spaces. Heeding the advice offered by Mills (1959) and Bourdieu (in Wacquant 1989), I maintain a reflexive awareness of my position as researcher and citizen in relation to others and to society. As suggested by the quote at the beginning of this chapter, there is a methodological danger associated with assumptions about the value and privilege of certain kinds of knowledge. While I draw on my experiences through an initial (but quickly abandoned) offline ethnographic study as well as my participant observation, thematic analysis, and respondent validation that form the main online ethnographic enquiry, the final stages of analysis reflect the position of Bourdieu's call to "objectivise the objectivising point of view" (in Wacquant 1989, p. 33), through an on-going critical evaluation of my interpretation as a sociologist.

Ethnographic research, a well-established qualitative research method, has a somewhat jaded past worth discussing here. Like much 'scientific' research the relationship between the researcher and participant has too often been one of the dominant and the oppressed. Denzin and Lincoln highlight the history of ethnographic studies as a colonising tool that, through positioning non-white populations as alien, less civilised, and as 'other', enforces white dominance and negatively impacts non-white communities (2005). Indeed, Linda Tuhiwai Smith highlights significant negative impacts of ethnographic research on Indigenous populations. Smith is referring to ethnographic research when she highlights that:

> When mentioned in many Indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is both knowing and distrustful. … The ways in which

> scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonised peoples (Smith 1999, p. 1).

Smith further shows that traditional research methodologies, such as ethnography, inherently privilege the knowledge of the coloniser:

> Research 'through imperial eyes' describes an approach which assumes that Western ideas about the most fundamental things are the only ideas possible to hold, certainly the only rational ideas, and the only ideas which can make sense of the world, of reality, of social life and of human beings (Smith 1999, p. 56).

The central concern of this thesis in not with race, ethnicity, or coloniser / Indigenous relations, although there is certainly room for enquiry into race and heavy metal (see Dawes' auto-ethnographic study of Black women in heavy metal in Canada (2012)). Nevertheless, the critique of "research through imperial eyes", that Tuhiwai Smith (1999) offers, brings to our attention the aforementioned need to employ a degree of reflexivity with regard to implementation of the research method as well as how we handle and respect ownership of knowledge.

Similar critiques to that of Tuhiwai Smith (1999) have informed contemporary scholarly research across a multitude of disciplines (Berkes 2017; Stige 2017; Goodley 2016). In ethnographic research, significant attention is placed on addressing bias (Becker 1967) and, particularly in relation to research with marginalised individuals, to participants' right to knowledge creation or 'giving voice' (Strega 2009; Ashby 2011). Becker declared fifty years ago that, "the question is not whether we should take sides … but rather whose side we are on." (1967, p. 239). For Becker, value-free social research is impossible. That is, as human researchers we are unavoidably involved in the society or community under the spotlight and as such, cannot avoid contamination by "personal and political sympathies" (1967, p. 239). The task of the researcher then is to recognise where our sympathies lie in relation to other parties and be open about this position. Recognizing where political biases may sit is part of ensuring

the resultant analysis does not unfairly mishandle participants' knowledge. Strega et al point out that thematic analysis should "centre on the experience and meanings of those who are the main focus" (2009, p. 46). Ashby adds to this with her suggestion that researchers begin by acknowledging the primacy of participants' voices in interview situations (2011). The combination of recognising researcher bias and privileging participants' voices contribute to the on-going evolution of ethnographic research as a just methodological approach and as such adds to the applicability of ethnographic method to this project.

From Ethnography to *Online* Ethnography

Ethnographic methods are well suited to studies of heavy metal communities and have successfully been used by other researchers in these spaces. Dawes employed an auto-ethnographic method to provide a detailed and much needed story of Black women's experiences of marginalisation in heavy metal spaces in Canada (2012). Closer to home, Krenske and McKay's study of gender in the Brisbane heavy metal scene involved one of the researchers observing interactions in a heavy metal venue as well as a process of immersion in the heavy metal scene through "listening to relevant radio programmes … and examining semiotic structures in lyrics, posters, and album covers" (2000, p. 268). While my study adapts Hine's (2000) 'virtual' ethnography as a core method, both of these studies employ similar epistemological and ethical approaches to knowledge creation and ownership.

Ethnography is a method that allows the researcher to participate in and ask questions about other cultures or other ways of being in order to develop and tell a story from an insider's perspective (Crotty 1998) – A story that Garfinkel highlights is aimed at sharing "common sense knowledge of social structures" (1967, p. 77). This is a method that, with appropriate considerations, can relate the experience of being a member of the online metal scene. Long associated with anthropological research, ethnography is often held to be a holistic qualitative

research method. This is not to say that individual experiences cannot be had or interpreted on their own, simply that a holistic ethnographic method allows a deep understanding of every aspect of the experience of being in a particular social space. Hammersley points out that:

> Ethnography is a holistic, thick description of the interactive processes involving the discovery of important recurring variables in the society as they relate to one another, under specified conditions, and as they affect or produce certain results and outcomes in the society (2017, p. 4).

A description of the interactive processes in the online metal scene required a familiarisation with the acceptable ways of interacting within the space itself. I came to know individuals who were regular participants and could spot the newcomers; I became familiar with the site structure (where to find particular fora or resources); and, I came to understand the acceptable language and expectations about online metalhead identity. In turn, and through my on-going participation in *The First Forum*, members of the online metal scene came to know me and accept me as a legitimate member of the space. As will be discussed later, my participation in the online metal scene was informed by and contributed to the writing on the wall. That is, my participation, contingent upon the already highly visible and permanent record of acceptable behaviour and language, unavoidably, left behind a contribution to the writing on the wall.

Hine (2000) has noted that sociologists and cultural studies scholars have adapted ethnographic methods to suit more directed lines of enquiry. She points out that:

> Rather than studying whole ways of life, ethnographers in sociology and cultural studies have interested themselves in more limited aspects: people as patients, as students, as television viewers or as professionals (2000, p. 41).

This resonates with the current study as my intention was not to embark upon a story-telling adventure covering every aspect of heavy metal or online culture. My proposal for this research from the outset was concerned, in particular, with aspects of the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene.

The Internet has opened up new worlds of possibilities for social researchers. It can provide a digital complement to offline research. It is also a significant site for social enquiry in and of itself. Initially online communication was seen to offer increased efficiency for conducting social research through digital means. The development of computer mediated technology brought with it the ability to conduct interviews or conduct web-based surveys (Murthy 2008) with participants in geographically distant spaces. Interviewing online could be done through asynchronous email correspondence and later in synchronous formats through text, voice and video (Salmons 2009; Berrens et al 2003). The utility of Internet connectivity in this context continues today with online and a-synchronous survey tools available to anybody via SurveyMonkey, Typeform, and Google Forms.

Central to this project, is the notion of online spaces as sites for social research in and of themselves. Online spaces have become "places where culture is formed and reformed" (Hine 2000, p. 9). It makes sense then, when examining the formation and reformation of culture, or the presentation and representation of the hegemonic order in the online metal scene, to employ ethnographic methods. Enter the concept of a 'virtual ethnography' (Hine 2000). Virtual ethnography, or what I refer to as *online* ethnography for both consistency and semantic reasons, differs from traditional ethnography in one discernible way. Online ethnography is the implementation of tenets of traditional or *offline* ethnographic methodology with the aim of interpreting social and cultural interactions in *online* space. As mentioned earlier, this is not the same as research that utilises capabilities or affordances of communication technology to increase methodological efficiency such as dissemination of email surveys. Online ethnography is specifically interested in the social spaces which exist in computer mediated environments. It remains helpful here to view the online metal scene as a site of production, distribution, and

consumption of cultural forms (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). That is, sites of social interaction which provide rich, meaningful, and *real* experiences for participants that are worthy of study.

There are challenges raised by the shift in ethnography to online ethnography; not least, the assumption surrounding the real versus virtual dichotomy. That is, given the Internet's early common usage as a technology to assist with traditional research methods but not as a site of cultural production there has been a tendency to conceptualise online spaces as the antithesis to reality. Beneito-Montagut (2011) echoes Matei & Ball-Rokeach's (2001) suggestion that differentiating between real and virtual is no longer helpful. That "life takes place on the Internet: there is no difference between online and offline interpersonal communication." (2011, p. 717). Despite the apparent disconnect between Hine's (2000) naming of 'virtual ethnography' and such a position, Hine's deployment of ethnographic methods in online spaces retains value for this project. Hine attempts to clear this up by suggesting *virtual* ethnography refers simply to "travel to the field site [as] consisting of experiential rather than physical displacement" (Hine 2000, p. 45). That is, a researcher's physical body may be *virtually* present in the company of others whose bodies are geographically distant though the experience is most definitely real. Nevertheless, I will continue to use 'online ethnography' for the remainder of this thesis.

Online, as opposed to offline, spaces present different limitations and opportunities from traditional ethnography. Some of the differences presented by online spaces for ethnographic enquiry reflect the affordances of technology which I propose in Chapter Seven to affect the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene. For now, it will suffice to briefly look at the nuances of a Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) space and the online ethnographic method. Despite the limitations and opportunities presented by a CMC space for the online ethnographer, the foundations of ethnography remain the same.

That is, online ethnography, like its predecessor, still aims to interpret "common sense knowledge of social interactions" (Garfinkel 1967, p. 76) from within the society or space.

Extensive consideration of methodological approaches that respond to the shift to online social spaces has been undertaken in the past two decades. Much of this attention has addressed how traditional ethnographic methods would be adapted to suit an emerging technologically mediated environment. Kozinets (2009) offers 'netnography', an approach which has a strong focus on ethnographic methods for market research. Various other approaches have been discussed over the past decade such as: Androutsopoulos' 'discourse centred online ethnography' (2008); cyberethnography (Kuntsman 2004); and Murthy's digital ethnography (2008). Core to all of these approaches is a focus on the shifting nature of ethnographic research in light of the development of CMC. A further similarity is that they all note Hine's 'virtual ethnography' (2000) as a useful outline of the methodology associated with online ethnographic practice.

McLelland (2002) conducted a study of Japanese gay culture through the use of virtual ethnography. He, too, relies on Hine's portrait of the Internet as a space which "does not mean the same thing to everyone" (2000, p. 30). McLelland, whose first encounter with the Internet in 1997 was almost purely based on the technology as a conduit for academic research, quickly learnt that it "was itself a social space with its own rules and structures" (2002, p. 388). An interesting point raised by McLelland is that he noticed a shift in discourse around sexuality "to a highly sexualised [online] space where the description and representation of sexual acts is central" (2002, p. 390). Something which stood out for me in a similar sense in the tropes of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene.

Hine highlights a potential obstacle for social researchers in online space. The Internet provides such a wealth of information and vast numbers of links to communities and data that, although a fruitful arena for ethnographic research the project can be faced with seemingly infinite contextual side tracks (2000). With this in mind it becomes useful to define some sort of contextual boundary. In this current project the research question guided the study as well as set such boundaries. Further guiding the methodological aspects of my online ethnographic study of the online metal scene are the core principles of virtual ethnography as charted by Hine (2000, p. 63-65).

The sustained presence of an ethnographer in the field setting leads to ethnographic knowledge (Hine 2000, p. 63). Like traditional ethnography the participant observation phase of this online ethnographic research took place over time and involved my participation in the online environment on a regular basis. Through participation in the online metal scene over time I was able to remain up to date with topics that were relevant. Further to this, it seemed the longer I participated in the spaces the more I seemed to 'fit in'. That is, my familiarity with the specificities of language, etiquette, and common interests meant that I felt much more a part of the space than at the beginning.

Cyberspace should not be thought of as detached from 'real-life' (Hine 2000, p. 64). The use of the term cyberspace, here, raises similar concerns to 'virtual' however I choose to proceed here as Hine's point, despite the inaccuracies of expression, remains valid. The experience of being a member of an online community is part of a legitimate reality. Despite some limited literature which posits online spaces as the antithesis to offline reality (Ben-Ze'ev 2004), more recent studies have highlighted online experiences as having real cognitive and emotional impacts for users (Ethier et al 2006; Chmiel et al 2011). As Hine confirms, online spaces should be "understood as both culture and cultural artefact" (2000, p. 64). This was both embraced as

a virtual-ethnographic tenet and clearly experienced as I participated in the spaces throughout the research. I experienced a range of emotions while actively interacting online as well as through recall of experiences once the computer was shut down. Basic emotions such as happiness, amusement, anger, and frustration were frequently experienced while online. More complex emotions that align with friendship and belonging tended to be experienced when I was recalling my interactions in the online metal scene.

Boundaries are not assumed a priori but explored through the course of ethnography (Hine 2000, p. 64). This initially poses a problem for any online ethnography in that without a defined boundary in time and space there becomes no end point for data analysis. As Hine suggests the decision to terminate the study becomes a "pragmatic decision" within the limits of "the ethnographer's constraints in time, space and ingenuity" (2000, p. 64). In the current project the decision to cease data collection was based on these factors. The first key indicator that data collection was nearing an end was that I reached a point of data saturation. That is, where no new themes were emerging based on the data collection framework (Morse 1995). Another key constraint was the timeframe allocated within the bounds of my doctoral candidature.

Virtual ethnography, for Hine, involves intensive engagement with mediated interaction (2000, p. 65). That is, access to these spaces necessarily requires the use of computer technology. Having been a computer user since the age of ten I was familiar with the introduction and development of CMC technology and the ways in which it mediates access to online social spaces. The mediating influence of computer technology actually became a significant site of interest during the study as it was apparent that the affordances of CMC allowed for increased visibility, permanence, and anonymity as I will discuss in greater depth in Chapter Seven.

Following on from this principle of mediation is a recognition that the mediating effect of technology can also render participants as both present and absent simultaneously (Hine 2000, p. 65). Also closely related to the affordances of visibility, permanence, and anonymity, an experience in the online metal scene can appear to be occupied by participants whose text-based communications are recorded, visible for anyone to view at any point during or after the interaction. Combined with the fact that participants can choose to remain quiet in a space even though they are logged in (sometimes called lurking) adds to the Schrödinger's-cat-like possibility that all participants are simultaneously there and not.

Taking on board these principles of online ethnography allowed for the project to avoid the pitfalls of online research. By considering the boundaries of the online metal scene I was able to set a clear methodological scope for my project. My sustained presence in the online metal scene over the course of several years lead to a deep understanding of the experience of being a regular participant. Further to this, I recognised that the online metal scene, while reliant upon technology for its existence, does indeed carry real weight in the social lives of all participants. Online ethnographic methods that I employed led to a great insight into the experience of being in the online metal scene. In order to answer my research question surrounding the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene, further analysis of the data gathered from the writing on the wall was required.

Thematic Analysis

As Hooley et al (2012) suggest, ethnography cannot be claimed through adherence to one particular method or another. Indeed, it is unlikely that ethnographic research would utilise one single method – participant observation, say. Ethnographic research necessarily involves a multi-method approach (Flick 2002). It was decided, early in this study, that participant observation would be complemented by thematic analysis of the text-based communication

which characterised the writing on the wall in the online metal scene. Observing themes that emerge from these interactions and transcriptions meant employing a grounded theory approach to this study.

Grounded Theory (GT) is a general approach to data gathering which acknowledges the source of data as the source of theory. That is, GT accommodates an *inductive* rather than *deductive* approach to research in that theory is allowed to emerge from the data instead of as part of a pre-determined hypothesis imposed upon the data. As Strauss and Corbin explain:

> Grounded theory is a *general methodology,* for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed. Theory evolves during actual research, and it does through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection (1994, p. 273).

GT is also an ideal methodological choice for an approach which, epistemologically speaking, privileges participants' knowledge as well as the need to check-in with participants about the direction of the analysis: two key tenets of my research project.

Although viewed as separate methodological approaches by some (Goulding 2005; Charmaz 2011), I posit that ethnography is a well-suited research method that lends itself to thematic analysis – an approach based in grounded theory (Tuckett 2005). As Strauss & Corbin suggest, "the sources of data are the same: interviews and field observations" (1994, p. 274). In particular, for online ethnography which has a focus on text-based recordings of interaction, the data is identical to transcripts of interviews which lend themselves to a thematic analysis – a grounded theory approach.

Thematic analysis and grounded theory are two well suited principles of qualitative research. Thematic analysis allows a researcher to develop themes and patterns (Aronson 1995) from the data rather than going in with predetermined ideas about what to look for. This is beneficial for a sociological analysis of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene because it

addresses my epistemological approach to knowledge in these spaces. Firstly, allowing themes to emerge through the data – that is, the language employed and understood by participants – tends to privilege the knowledge of the participant rather than the researcher. Secondly, given this shifting of privilege, when the data precedes the themes it increases reliability and validity of the analysis as the researcher is not trying to manipulate data to fit a predetermined character.

Respondent Validation

Respondent validation satisfies the epistemological tenet in my methodology which requires checking in with participants in order to clarify and confirm my interpretations. Sometimes called 'member checking', it is a simple method of eliminating researcher bias and to "validate, verify, or assess the trustworthiness of qualitative results" (Birt et al 2016, p. 1802). After I had identified tropes of hypermasculinity that emerged in the writing on the wall, I spent over twelve months, during the analysis and writing up phase, discussing the themes with participants. As Torrance suggests, "respondent validation involves research participants responding to forms of initial data … or to first drafts of interpretive reports to respond to their accuracy" (2012, p. 114). The benefit of respondent validation is that the researcher is able to work with participants toward a mutual understanding of the meanings in the particular social space.

Respondent validation is not without criticism. Torrance highlights, a common criticism of the method is that "individuals within a social setting may only have a partial view" (2012, p. 116). While there is merit to this criticism, to privilege an insider's perspective, respondent validation methods such as those outlined here are the best solution to the problem of giving voice to participants. A researcher is often positioned *outside* of the social space looking in and therefore will never be able to offer a true insider perspective. Indeed, by seeking respondent validation the researcher is, at the very least, able to present a valid account of the experience for those who participate in the validation activities.

Data Collection

In terms of validity of research, qualitative enquiry necessarily requires a multi-method approach (Flick 2004). In this section I will outline how I put into practice the joint principles of online ethnography, thematic analysis, and respondent validation to provide a rigorous analysis of the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene. Such an approach follows Denzin and Lincoln's re-imagining of experimental triangulation as a "crystalline form" (2005, p. 7). In qualitative research there cannot be a single 'correct' account. In this sense, a crystalline imagining of triangulation is the "simultaneous display of multiple, refracted realities which provide the reader with new realities to comprehend" (2005, p. 7). Notably, the multi-method approach that I employed (participant observation, thematic analysis, and respondent validation) simultaneously addressed such a triangulation as well as ethical tenets surrounding knowledge creation and ownership.

In what follows, I outline the process of conducting research in accordance with the methodological and epistemological tenets described thus far. I begin with a detailed description of the design and execution of ethnography through participant observation. I then show how I handled the data that was derived with regard to a thematic analysis from an inductive, grounded theory perspective. That is, how I let themes emerge from the data rather than attempting to apply a pre-determined frame upon the data. Finally, I will discuss the process of respondent validation. With these three methods combined I present a case for mixed-method, online ethnographic research which maintains validity of data while telling a story of the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene.

This research initially began in offline heavy metal spaces. The focus, early on, was an ethnographic enquiry into collective ideas of gendered identity in heavy metal spaces. Although such an ethnographic enquiry into *offline* heavy metal spaces was abandoned in favour of an investigation of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the *online* metal scene this offline phase, in no small way, contributed to an understanding of masculinity in heavy metal cultures more generally. As such I include a discussion of the first phase of offline participant observation.

Ethics clearance was granted at the commencement of my doctoral research. An ethical principle which I embraced from the outset was to remove identifying data during the analysis phase. As such, I do not identify the URL or actual website name of *The First Forum.* Nor do I identify individual pages hosted by YouTube or Facebook. The rationale behind this deidentification of sites and individuals reflects concerns raised by Ribaric (et al 2018) regarding participant privacy and increasing levels of surveillance in Western society. In my analysis which follows this chapter I refer to the pseudonym 'The First Forum' and the date that data was first collected.

The Offline Venues

In September 2012 I began attending heavy metal shows in the Adelaide, South Australia as a researcher. There were four venues in town that would regularly hold heavy metal shows. The capacities of these venues ranged between 300 – 2000 people in front of their main stages. Each of these venues had four distinct social areas, the main room with main stage, bar area, backstage (for musicians, guests, and staff only), and outdoor area. With the exception of the smallest venue, I was granted access to all areas as a guest of bands. While my shift in focus to the online metal scene came relatively early in the data collection phase I continued to attend shows throughout this research project. My attendance at these shows maintained my

familiarity with heavy metal music as well as provided connections with individuals who would later be willing to assist with my respondent validation discussions.

All shows were open to the public and I either purchased my ticket via regular outlets or was provided complimentary 'door spots' by band members. In all cases, bands were aware of my role as participant observer. Upon meeting new people at these shows I was open about my role as participant observer and would discuss my interest in issues surrounding masculinity in the heavy metal scene. This type of discussion occurred mostly in backstage areas of venues where crowd numbers were fewer and music volume was decidedly lower than in the other areas.

The results of this brief initial participant observation included two key findings. Firstly, men tended to take on more prominent and active roles in all of the spaces. As outlined in the literature review of this thesis, a significant amount of attention has been given to gender in offline heavy metal spaces. As Krenske and McKay highlighted in their case study of the Brisbane metal scene (2000), women tended to be pushed to the periphery in metal spaces. Something which was confirmed in the spaces in which I participated. The second observation that I made in early stages was that upon meeting new metalheads I was often invited to connect via social media (Facebook or Instagram). This supported the suggestion by Bennett and Rogers (2016) that digital connectivity was often seen as complementary to local and translocal spaces. This frequent request, initially perceived as a useful way to remain in contact with participants, highlighted what was clearly an emerging and relatively un-researched space – the online scene.

At a relatively early stage of this research, two limitations emerged when conducting participant observation in offline heavy metal spaces that were to significantly guide this research. Firstly, conducting interviews and talking with participants about masculinity at heavy metal shows was difficult given high volume levels in most areas at venues as well as participants' pre-

occupations with enjoying themselves. Simply put, it was too loud, and participants were much more interested in the bands. Secondly, I noticed very early on that the offline heavy metal scene was increasingly embracing social media as a means to stay connected and that this shift in social interactions from the offline to online was a site warranting further enquiry.

A decision was taken to shift the focus of my research to the online metal scene. The preliminary research which I had already conducted in offline spaces would continue to inform the rest of this project. Firstly, connections I made with individuals who self-identified as members of the online metal scene during these experiences helped me in seeking participants for the respondent validation component. Secondly, though I ceased active participant observation in offline heavy metal spaces my continuing connections to the heavy metal scene enabled me to observe the function of the online metal scene amongst the wider metal community.

Online Participant Observation

In February 2013, after discussions with participants at metal shows I began my participant observation in the online metal scene. I began by signing up to what I have renamed throughout this thesis *The First Forum*. The process of signing up to this space included answering several questions aimed at testing my metalhead credentials, choosing a username, and providing a legitimate email address. As a fan of heavy metal prior to the conception of this project I was easily able to answer the following questions: "What is (John) Ozzy Osbourne's real first name?"; and, "How do you correctly spell Lemmy's (Kilmister) surname?".

The First Forum was organised around a series of five distinct topics which contained threads of conversation. These threads are distinct online posts that revolve around a particular topic where each individual comment responds to any one of the preceding comments. Participants usually have the option to 'like', 'dislike' or 'reply' to these comments. Threads can address

any topic the participant chooses; however, forum rules require that there should be a clear link to the defined topic. The predetermined topics in *The First Forum* include: 'Metal Chat', 'General Chat', 'Announcements', 'Band / Album Reviews', and 'Band Promotion'. Metal chat involves discussion of content related specifically to heavy metal music and culture more generally. General chat was outlined as a 'metal-free' zone where subjects for discussion included computer software and hardware advice, gaming, cooking, gardening, travel, and other hobbies. Announcements included threads which were most often initiated by members of the website administration to announce upcoming forum events, clarification of rules, and outages. Band / Album reviews was a thread that enabled members to self-publish reviews of metal shows, metal albums (old and new) and other metal related media such as games, movies, and documentaries. Band promotion threads were frequently used by members to promote their own or their friends' upcoming shows and newly established bands. These threads most often included links to YouTube videos and information about shows in various cities and towns around the world.

My first action in this space was to seek permission to remain a member of this forum to conduct research as participant observer. *The First Forum* structured members along militaristic lines. Website administrators and long-serving members were granted titles such as 'Commanding General' or 'Lieutenant' and newer or less-active members were given the rank of 'Private'. I contacted one of the higher ranked members of *The First Forum* via a private message and requested permission to conduct research in the space. In this message I outlined my interest in how masculinity is understood in the online metal scene and explained what my participant observation would involve. The response was prompt and indicated that conducting participant observation in this space was acceptable. The response also pointed out which areas of the forum that I might find interesting.

Despite being given permission by the website administration I was open with all members of the forum about my intentions to conduct research. Such openness was a decision made to avoid 'lurking'. Lurking, as Pempek et al (2009) suggest is where a participant (or researcher) observes online social interactions without offering comment. A practice often frowned upon in the field of online research ethics (Berry 2004). Most significantly, lurking raises issues similar to forms of covert observation along lines of deception and gaining informed consent (Brotsky & Giles 2007). To avoid the pitfalls of lurking I made a point to regularly contribute to the conversation by answering questions that others posted about bands or responding to other participants' comments on questions I had asked.

Incidentally, *The First Forum* presented data related to members' activity in the forum on the right-hand side of every page. This data was live and would clearly show how many members and non-members were connected to the site at any given time. As a member I was able to click on this link and see which members were online and which were not. While this could be seen to expose lurkers in the space, I decided that simply being listed as online was not sufficient for my desired degree of transparency. This was for two reasons: First, it was not available in other sites within the online metal scene. For consistency of method, I decided that declaring my presence as researcher as outlined above was preferable. Second, the information presented on the page regarding members' status was limited to either 'online' or 'offline'. It did not indicate what content the member was viewing or commenting on.

Participant observation in *The First Forum* was the hub from which I would branch out into other sites within the online metal scene. The expansion of my participant observation to encompass other online metal sites such as Facebook and YouTube comments pages initially came from links to these other pages by members of *The First Forum*. In online spaces the best way to refer to something, for instance, a recently released metal album, is to post a (hyper)

link to another page where others can listen to or view it. YouTube, the most popular online video sharing site (Figueiredo et al 2011), and Facebook, the most popular social media site (Junco 2012) were clearly the most common links posted to external content in *The First Forum*. As such, these two spaces, both of which facilitated online discussion through the posting of comments, were included in the participant observation and data collection process of this research.

Capturing Data and Thematic Analysis

During participant observation in the online metal scene it was possible to capture text-based communication data relatively easily. I initially utilised the qualitative data analysis software *nVivo* for this process. This software allowed me to capture all content on each forum page and record it in a single database. I recorded interactions that took place in all sites of the online metal scene that I visited. While this software allowed for easy coding and organisation of data, I found also that the affordances of visibility and permanence presented by online communication technology rendered the online metal scene easily analysable. Indeed, this was a point outlined by Hine (2000, 2017) as one of the benefits of conducting ethnographic research in online spaces.

The affordances of the online metal scene and my preference for more low-tech methods meant that I quickly abandoned the use of data analysis software. I proceeded to record my participation in the online metal scene by using the copy and paste functions and word processing software. The hard, uncoded data was able to be printed out and presented to participants through the respondent validation phase. Also, I was able to print out all data and proceed to code themes as they emerged using coloured pens – a method that appeals to more visual learners.

Over the course of the participant observation phase, I visited the online metal scene between three and five days per week at an average of one to three hours per day. On some occasions I was logged in to *The First Forum*, Facebook, and YouTube while I was completing other tasks in my office. On these occasions I would visit the forums at various moments throughout the day. This immersion in the online metal scene reflects my grounded theory approach and what Charmaz suggests as a "systematic inductive approach to inquiry" (2011, p. 360). Continual and regular participation over a long period of time allowed me to actively engage with the forum environment and observe emerging themes in the conversations.

It followed that once I began to locate and recognize the tropes of hypermasculinity in these spaces I began coding. As I mentioned, I opted for a 'low-tech' approach. I copied volumes of conversational text to word processing documents and de-identified each comment immediately. As mentioned in the Introduction of this thesis, the recording of personally identifying data was unnecessary and so only comments were recorded. Following the grounded theory approach, I began to form codes from emergent themes to apply to this conversational data. Charmaz outlines the step by step process of analysis using grounded theory:

> First, we compare data with data as we develop codes; next, we compare data with codes; after that, we compare codes and raise significant codes to tentative categories; then, we compare data and codes with these categories (2011, p. 361).

Initially, I identified twenty-seven codes that emerged from the text-based communication data that I had captured. These codes were inductive in that they reflected what I saw emerging from the forums and other sites within the online metal scene rather than a set of codes I was looking to apply to the data. I then compared further data to these emergent codes. Over time, these twenty-seven codes began to overlap and form fewer and fewer separate and distinct codes. Three 'significant codes' (Charmaz 2011) began to emerge from the data: aggression and violence; militaristic organisation of participants; and, objectification of women. These are the

tropes upon which the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene are based.

Respondent Validation

The third component of my mixed methods approach was respondent validation. Torrance suggests that participants can be asked about the validity of a researcher's interpretations as "fair and reasonable reflections of the situation as they understand it." (2012, p. 114). This was a method I deployed early in the analysis phase of the project. It reflects my desire to privilege the voices of the participants in all the research I conduct. Furthermore, respondent validation presents itself as a tool to, as much as is possible, avoid misinterpretation of events and meanings.

The process of respondent validation occurred through a series of offline and online discussions with participants who were all self-identified users of sites within the online metal scene. Due to the arrangement of the online sites, I was able to easily ask questions, through forum posts, that sought to clarify small linguistic details or much larger ideas such as my observations regarding emerging tropes of hypermasculinity. Participants in the online metal scene responded with mostly thoughtful and detailed responses to such questions. Often times, participants in online spaces were able to offer links to other websites, articles, and videos that assisted in elucidating their point and confirming my interpretations.

Offline discussions took the form of more traditional informal and unstructured interviews. I had four 'key friends' who were self-identified users of sites within the online metal scene and who were actively involved in the heavy metal community in general. These key friends were recruited through my participation in the offline metal scene. Regular meetings at shows or at other venues occurred over the period 2014 to 2017. These meetings were opportunities to ask

participants whether or not they felt my observations were accurate reflections of the experience of participating in the online metal scene. Toward the end of my analysis I provided three of these key friends with draft copies of my findings regarding the themes of hypermasculinity. These participants provided me with feedback over the following six weeks that confirmed my observations.

My participant observation and respondent validation ceased in early 2017. I still attend heavy metal shows, I enjoy the company of metalheads, and I am still active in the online metal scene. By this stage the data that I was capturing in participant observation was at a point of saturation. As Morse notes, saturation occurs not as a result of frequency of occurring themes but rather as a result of having "heard it all" (1995, p. 148). In my research, the point of saturation was when no new themes appeared to be emerging. Despite the cessation of rigorous ethnographic enquiry into the online metal scene, I still participate as a fan and friend in these spaces and I remain confident that the present study did, in fact, reach such a point of data saturation.

The First Forum unexpectedly (and ironically given my suggestion that permanence is a key affordance of online communication technology) shut down at almost the same time as I made the decision to cease collecting data. Though I had collected data via *nVivo* and word processing software, my decision to rely, in part, on the capacity of web servers to keep conversational data almost proved disastrous. However, the unexpected closure of this forum provided a convenient 'exception that proves the rule'. In Chapter Seven I will discuss in detail the affordance of permanence offered by online communication technology. That is, conversations that take place in the online metal scene are there for all to see in perpetuity. In the case of *The First Forum* this is no longer the case, though only because of what is rumoured to be a lack of funding to support its persistence.

Conclusion

This chapter was presented in four distinct sections and outlines my methodological approach to the question of the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene. Firstly, I positioned the site of my research as part of an 'online scene' in line with Bennett and Rogers (2016) conceptualisation. Secondly, I sketched out my epistemological approach to the conduct of my research – centred on giving voice to participants and telling it how it is. Thirdly, I provided an examination of the methodological principles that underpin my adaptation of online ethnographic research. And finally, I summarised the process of data collection.

I chose to include a discussion of the 'online scene' here because it gives context, not only to the rest of the thesis, but to the ensuing discussion of research methods in this chapter. As referenced herein, Becker (1967, 2007) and other proponents of ethnographic and qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Hine 2000; Garfinkel 1967), stress the importance of ethnographic research that tells a story and provides a detailed, colourful account of the experience of being a member of a particular social setting. Telling the story of online social spaces as comprising the online metal scene was appropriate to this end.

Telling a true and accurate story of the experience of being a metalhead in the online metal scene also required a consideration of epistemology. That is, from the outset of this project I was clear about my understanding of valued or privileged knowledges. I embraced an epistemological approach espoused by Strega (2009) and Ashby (2011) that is centred on 'giving voice' to participants. In all stages of research, I was conscious of the need to listen and take accurate notes and to recognise my own biases. In the end, this approach led to the inclusion of the respondent validation phase of the project as a process of checking and re-checking my interpretations of meaning in the online metal scene.

A further accomplishment of this chapter is the adaptation of the methodological concept of virtual ethnography (Hine 2000). The adaptation of the tenets of what I refer to as 'online ethnography' are not without nuance. The continuing development and influence of computer mediated communication on social spaces necessarily requires on-going evaluation of methods. The adaptation of ethnographic method to encompass online spaces, as discussed herein with reference to Hine (2000) reflects my approach to a study in a space which appears to be changing and developing at a rate that requires a degree of agility on the part of the researcher.

In line with Becker's (2007) suggestion that ethnographic methods require the researcher to tell a story about the experience of participating in a given social space, I presented the final section of this chapter in which I refer to my praxis. That is, I outlined the story of gaining access to spaces, establishing relationships with participants, and reflecting on the experience of participating in the online metal scene. Such a discussion provides the reader with a clear understanding of where and how I gathered data. Noting my coding techniques and the issues that I faced further contributes to the tenet of research instrument repeatability (Golafshani 2003). Moreover, such a comprehensive account of the procedural aspects of this research contributes to the justification of my methods in light of the research question and reinforces the integrity of my analysis and findings.

Given the site of my research, this chapter stands alone as a significant contribution to knowledge. The character of online social spaces is ever changing. When I first connected to the Internet it was through a dial up modem in a dedicated room in our family home. The computer was bulky and expensive. By the time I began my undergraduate degree I had a laptop computer which allowed me to access the Internet on campus or at home. Today, my students access their readings and social networks via smart phones and tablets. A key tenet of my

methodology, particularly in relation to my adaptation of Hine's 'virtual ethnography' (2000), is that these spaces are changing and will require constant reflection upon existing research methods. While I do not further this point here, I propose that my methodological approach stands as a reminder of the need to constantly reassess the efficacy of research methods in light of changing technologies.

In this methods chapter, I have illustrated the context in which I conducted virtual ethnographic research. A mixed method approach that included participant observation, thematic analysis of text-based communication data, and respondent validation has made possible an understanding of the experience of participating in the online metal scene. Such an understanding has enabled me to draw conclusions about the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene. The following three chapters will offer a discussion of the findings from this online ethnographic study as I highlight the tropes of hypermasculinity and the affordances of online communication technology.

Chapter Five: The Chosen Ones

Hypermasculinity in the writing on the wall

This research probes how tropes of hypermasculinity emerge and are maintained in the online metal scene. In order to preface my findings, I will begin with a look at some of the norms of masculinity that exist in *offline* heavy metal spaces. The online metal scene is a digital scene which is informed by the music and culture surrounding heavy metal and mediated by the technology used to access it. I have been a fan of heavy metal since the 1980s. During this time, I have developed an understanding of how to interact with other fans, with band members, and in heavy metal culture generally. It is my position that hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene is reminiscent of masculine dominance in offline heavy metal scenes.

The main body of this chapter outlines three distinct tropes of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene. These tropes draw on ideas of masculinity from offline heavy metal spaces; however, they appear to take a more extreme or hyper-inflated form online. The tropes are aggression and violence, militaristic organisation of participants, and objectification of women. The writing on the wall that arises as a result of text based social interaction in the online metal scene exhibits evidence of both the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity. I show that the themes of hypermasculinity are constructed through articulations (Straw 1991) that contribute a solid and persistent presentation and representation of the hegemonic order that underpins metalhead identity. This chapter will look at the emergence of these tropes while the following chapter shows how hegemonic hypermasculinity is maintained through a negotiated war of position and what I have termed policing and resistance.

Masculinity in heavy metal

You don't find that offensive, you don't find that sexist?

Well you should have seen the cover they wanted to do!

(*This is Spinal Tap*, 1984)

Heavy metal music cultures have an enduring reputation as overtly masculine. Here I outline a brief discussion of existing notions of extreme masculine themes in offline heavy metal music cultures. Noting the pre-existing masculine dominance in metal music serves to contextualise the rest of the discussion in this Chapter. Offline heavy metal has enjoyed a great deal of scholarly attention for its undeniable masculinity (Weinstein 1991). Likewise, non-metal online spaces have attracted considerable attention with regard to the impacts on gender identity for users (Shapiro 2015). The point here is not to trace the transition to the online metal scene in its entirety, rather it is to show the links to broader negotiations of hegemonic masculinity in society generally.

One of the reasons behind this research into the online metal scene is that through my childhood and into adulthood, being a fan of heavy metal music, I saw this scene as a space that looks and feels ultra-masculine. It is a space where women surely participate but, as described by Krenske and McKay, women's participation is strictly on masculine terms (2000). The overall majority of the crowds and musicians – the key players – in this space were men who benefitted from the privileging of masculinity. As a fan of heavy metal, I have understood the production, performance, and reception (Bennett & Peterson 2004; Straw 1991) of heavy metal culture and the messages about masculinity and femininity that have existed in language and imagery in offline heavy metal spaces since my childhood.

Notions of hypermasculinity in the online metal scene arise through what Hall calls a discursive production (1980). Text-based communication in the online metal scene represents what Hall refers to as "articulations of linked but distinct moments" (1997, p. 128) that construct visible

themes. While I am predominantly interested in the way that tropes of hypermasculinity emerge and are maintained in the online metal scene, I acknowledge that these tropes have roots in offline heavy metal scenes.

It is not difficult to see stereotypical images of masculinity in heavy metal music. Themes of aggression, violence, sexual activity, and independence have been pulled out, sometimes erroneously (United States Senate 1985), from heavy metal lyrics and album covers by American parents (Gore 1987), Soviet leaders (Von Faust 2016), and psychologists (Brown & Hendee 1989) for years. Some bands have chosen themes of aggression and war (Bolt Thrower) others have tended toward sexual conquest (Motely Crüe) and others focus on both (Cannibal Corpse). These themes, like them or not, have contributed to a somewhat pathologized mis-understanding of heavy metal music and its fans since Black Sabbath and the birth of heavy metal in the late 1960s. As mentioned earlier, this thesis is not concerned with such pathologisation. I suggest that the links between heavy metal music and adolescent alienation, suicide, and gun violence are tenuous. I do acknowledge that the themes of aggression, violence, militarism, and objectification of women carry negative social connotations however, I suggest that this is a reflection of a wider hegemonic masculinity in society at large.

The dominant masculinity in this space is, however, typically loud, aggressive, violent, and in many cases aggressively sexual. These traits are seen in much of the imagery and music in the heavy metal scene and are echoed in the online metal scene with which this research is concerned. Like Hall (1997), Chaplin notes that representation through images "can be understood as articulating and contributing to social processes" (2002, p. 1). In offline metal spaces these articulations of violence and masculine power flow through lyrics and album covers, associated imagery, and fan interaction at shows.

Lyrics in heavy metal music have a reputation for focusing on these themes. From the crisp and extremely loud vocal efforts of Iron Maiden front man Bruce Dickinson to the sometimes incomprehensible deathcore vocals of Thy Art is Murder, the lyrical content tends to revolve around masculine violence, sexual conquest, and militarism (Hansen & Hansen 1991). Heavy metal album covers and band merchandise too have gained a solid reputation for drawing on imagery related to masculine violence, sexual conquest, and militarism. As Straw suggests "masculinist values" are typical of heavy metal album iconography (1984, p. 117).

Despite the fact that not all heavy metal bands and fans adhere to these tropes of masculine dominance they remain typical of heavy metal culture. These themes carry over into heavy metal culture at live events. Circle pits involve a style of dancing that finds its roots in early punk and ska pogoing and moshing. However, at metal shows the circle pit and occasionally the 'wall of death' tends to be more violent and participants can often expect to finish with some degree of injury. A circle pit for I Killed the Prom Queen in Thailand involved a 'fire-tornado' where rubbish was set alight in the middle of the pit while fans moshed around it, the event labelled 'hardcore shit' by one participant of this study. A member of the same band once bragged to me that three dislodged teeth had been found on the floor of the venue after a show. This, I was informed, was a new record and a source of some pride.

This understanding and open acceptance of violence is a theme which can easily be seen to continue into the online metal scene in which I participated. In fact, as Connell may argue the performance of this type of violent dancing can be seen as one of many, '…practices that exclude and include, that intimidate, exploit and so on', (2005, p. 37) and in doing so reinforce the dominance of men over others in the space. During my research and as noted by others (Krenske & McKay 2000) this style of dancing has the effect of pushing women to the periphery 'outside of harm's way' in the offline heavy metal spaces. The language that is used in the

online metal scene reflects, in many ways, these understandings of male dominance, aggression and violence that exist in heavy metal more generally.

The Online Metal Scene

The origins of the online metal scene lie in the tape trading networks and fanzine communities of the 1970s and 80s. The point of these networks was to share merchandise, recordings, band information – tour dates, album releases, new acts – amongst a community of likeminded individuals. The shift to online space carried a lot of this type of information with it. As I outlined in the previous chapter, *The First Forum* had threads dedicated to promotion of new bands and tour information. Other sites within the online metal scene offer merchandise for sale and the ability to share or view recordings of concerts and albums. A lot of the imagery and cultural artefacts of the online metal scene are carried over from the offline metal scene that has existed since the 1960s. The tropes of masculinity in the offline metal scene are also carried over. Images and language associated with the tropes of aggression, violence, militarism, and objectification of women are rife. What is interesting, and part of my original contribution to knowledge in this thesis is that in the online metal scene the appeals to these tropes are much more extreme or *hyper*masculine.

[image has been removed due to copyright restrictions]

Norwegian metal band Exeloume's album *Fairytale of Perversion* (ViciSolum Productions, 2011) shows the sexualised bodies of four women tied up and restrained for the enjoyment of the man in the image and arguably the male heavy metal fan who purchases the album. The images of gendered relations of power are rarely recreated in offline heavy metal spaces as overtly or to such extremes as this image suggests. However, it is the discourse that this image draws upon which contributes to an expression of hegemonic hypermasculinity. This thesis

argues that as these norms shift into the online metal scene the hyper-inflated messages about masculinity and the apparent acceptance of violent objectification of women becomes more extreme.

Hypermasculinity in the Online Metal Scene

This research is primarily concerned with the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene. After an initial abandoned offline ethnographic participant observation, I turned my attention to a variety of online metal sites. The sites that I examined were a combination of online heavy metal fora, Facebook pages and comments sections of YouTube. What I found is that a hyper-inflated form of masculinity exists in the wider online metal scene. This is what I have termed a hegemonic *hyper*masculinity. In the online metal scene, I observed how hegemonic hypermasculinity appears more intense and is constructed and maintained through articulations facilitated through social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and *The First Forum*. While a discussion of how the maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity is achieved will follow in Chapter Five, the remainder of this chapter will address the emergence of three significant and observable tropes of hypermasculinity in the online metal scene. The tropes are: aggression and violence that find roots in heavy metal in pre-online space are shared among most participants; militaristic organisation of participants and space; and, objectification of women.

The tropes of hypermasculinity in the online metal scene are visible within the writing on the wall. These are not fleeting discussions that dissolve into thin air once uttered. The comments and posts that all participants contribute become visible and permanent on the walls of the online spaces. These comments, in their adherence to hypermasculine tropes, form part of what Anderson calls the "constant presentation and representation of the hegemonic order as the ultimate incarnations of liberty" (2017a, p. 64). That is, these tropes are adhered to by most

participants and are subsequently disseminated through the writing on the wall as a framework for acceptable metalhead identity. They contribute to the emergence and maintenance of the hegemonic ascendency of masculinity.

Aggression and Violence

The first theme of hegemonic hypermasculinity that I observed in the online metal scene was aggression and violence. This theme, like all three I will identify, is constructed through articulations (Straw 1991) located in communication that forms comments pages of YouTube and Facebook sites and text-based interaction in *The First Forum*. Firstly, participants tend to engage in a kind of narrative that tells the story of how they would wield violence in certain situations. Such a tendency toward violence and aggression appears desirable for legitimate metalheads in these spaces. Secondly, there appears to be a celebration of violence for violence's sake seen in participants' appraisal of offline and online acts of violence. Third, and in a more general sense, articulations of metal culture and identity are framed by a standard of language, slang terms, and colloquialisms that paint an overall picture of the acceptable masculinity in these spaces. That is, use of terms like 'Brutal' to describe something legitimately 'metal' (Overell 2010). While all of these interactions have roots in the language and imagery of offline heavy metal scenes, they take on an amplified, hyper-aggressive and violent form in the online metal scene.

Connell discusses the use of violence as a means to reify hegemonic masculinity. She highlights two ways violence works in these situations that are visible in the online metal scene. Firstly, the threat of violence is used by members of the dominant group to sustain their dominance (2005, p. 83). This could involve the use of intimidating verbal assaults as well as threats of physical violence. The second utility of violence in the online metal scene is as "transactions among men" (2005, p. 83). That is, violent discourse is drawn upon to wage a war of position

amongst men who occupy various masculine identities. This negotiation culminates in an exhibition of acceptable metalhead identity in the online metal scene. If you are a 'true' metalhead you will understand and value violence in this social setting.

The online metal scene offers a comfortable platform for individuals to air their opinions about others in some extreme ways. I posit that the degree of anonymity that exists tends to allow for the 'keyboard warrior' to unleash a kind of 'next level' fury through the use of aggressive and violent language that is aimed at cementing the position of men as dominant – Connell's 'collective strategy' (1987). The ability to contribute to conversations in the online metal scene through a hypermasculine discourse based on aggression and violence maintains acceptance in these spaces. As such many instances of the use of violent imagery and language can be explicitly seen as a mechanism for setting up the hegemonic hypermasculine order. These instances can take many forms and be sparked by all sorts of events. On many occasions the unleashing of such fury is offered as a means of supporting other men (and sometimes women) who are perceived as members of either the online or offline heavy metal community. The following conversation is a response to a video of a woman questioning a fellow metalhead's legitimacy as a father and contributing member of society:

This video which evoked the following interactions was taken on what appeared to be a smart phone by the partner of the man in the video. The man is pushing a trolley through an American supermarket check-out and is accompanied by a young child. A woman in the line leans over to her child and is heard to say 'see this is why you go to school, so you don't end up like him'. A heated discussion ensues surrounding the man's legitimacy as a father and as an American citizen.

[D] Fire up the chainsaw, hack her fucking head off!

> [B] I would have beaten the shit out of them tbh [to be honest] idc [I don't care] what gender they are just because they have a vagina does not make them precious unicorns.
>
> [R] If you're a girl that can fight like a guy, then you best be prepared.
>
> (*The First Forum* 2014)

This video was posted in *The First Forum*, and comments were posted in response over the course of several months. The conversation also included less extreme views about how one might theoretically handle a similar situation. It is worth noting that while there are less extreme comments here they are almost exclusively in support of the more extreme views held. While these comments might be intended to support a fellow metalhead, they have the effect of reifying the hegemony of hypermasculinity through intimidation of women and reliance upon tropes of aggression and violence (Connell 2005).

These aggressive comments were offered in support of an individual who was chastised by a stranger and not directly to the woman in the video. It is as if these comments are actually offered up to the online space itself rather than toward any particular individual. This type of exchange paints a picture of acceptable behaviour and privileging of certain identities in the online metal scene and is there for all to read and re-read. In response to an outsider challenging hegemonic masculine norms of fatherhood and male independence the language here has the effect of celebrating male violence against women and against any *body* who dares challenge the ability of a young man and fellow metalhead to provide for his family.

This *hyper*-aggression and violence is characteristic of the online metal scene. The two people in this video argued over the politics of welfare and freedom of speech and the man responded with phrases like, 'deal with it bitch' and 'I don't care about you lady, just shut the fuck up'. These phrases are violent and aggressive but at no time did anybody in the video produce a

chainsaw or engage in any physical combat as suggested by the posts in the online space. The man in the video can clearly be seen wearing the merchandise of death metal band Cannibal Corpse whose lyrics are arguably some of the most extreme in heavy metal. One Cannibal Corpse song 'Hammer Smashed Face' contains lyrics like, 'Violence is now a way of life\ The sledge my tool to torture\ As it pounds down on your forehead\ Eyes bulging from the sockets\ With every swing of my mallet\ I smash your fucking head in, until brains seep in\ Through the crack.' Even though the man is a fan of music that includes such aggressive and violent lyrics like this his propensity for violence in offline space seemed, at least in this case, to be relatively moderate in comparison to the hyper-inflated extremes of the online metal scene participants.

Not only is there an extreme appeal to violence in the online metal scene aimed at, in this case, protection of fellow metalheads and the metal scene in general there is also a celebration of violence and violent acts more generally in the online metal scene. Acts of violence that have occurred in videos, in anecdotes about individuals' experiences in offline space and in heavy metal generally appear to be celebrated positively as essentially metal, as tough, and occasionally as humorous. While this celebration clearly exists in offline space as well, it contributes to the more visible writing on the wall and is more inflated in the participants' comments in the online metal scene. These comments all contribute to the representation of a hegemonic order in which aggression and violence is celebrated.

> [D] I love the video of Danzig backstage, getting knocked the fuck out! Lol.

> [T] This release features 2 of the UK's finest and upcoming black metal acts both with a different take on the genre. The Infernal Sea are crushing and violent with evil lyrics to Old Corpse Road with folk metal leanings with epic tunes focussing on British folklore.

> [D] Aw, see, now I'm blushing. That's not very metal of me. Quick! I need to punch something!
>
> (*The First Forum* 2015)

These comments were recorded as part of my participant observation in *The First Forum*. They clearly demonstrate an inflated celebration of violence in the online metal scene. Of course, there exists a normative celebration of violence and aggression in heavy metal music more generally. Motley Crüe's song 'Girls, Girls, Girls', celebrated as one of 'two righteous tracks' by one individual includes the opening lyrics, 'Friday night and I need a fight\ My motorcycle and a switchblade knife'. Again, this reference to violence and aggression tends not to be repeated or enacted in offline spaces. In many of the offline spaces in which I participated, fans were renowned for relatively positive behaviour. An individual who spoke to me about this research as part of my respondent validation noted that owners and operators of music venues in South Australia had remarked that heavy metal shows were a preferable line of business for them because of fewer fights and incidents of property damage at the venue. Noting here that the apparent violence and aggression in circle pits is, in a sense, consensual – participants expect to be hit and pushed and clearly desire this type of physicality. Again, it appears that the celebration of violent acts and extreme appeals to hypermasculine tropes of aggression and violence are more frequently articulated and recorded in the *online* metal scene.

The above examples show conversations which create a narrative of violence. These comments are usefully understood as articulations of accepted hegemonic hypermasculine metalhead identity. In a similar way to that identified by Spracklen et al (2014), these conversations, permanently displayed in the writing on the wall, contribute to the construction of metalhead identity. These participants are talking about acts of violence in which they would *theoretically* participate in order to protect fellow metalheads or the metal scene more generally.

Another way in which the theme of aggression and violence can be seen in the online metal scene is through language use more specifically. That is, choice of words, colloquialisms and slang terms that are being used in the online metal scene. This language is often based around the trope of violence and aggression even though it might not contribute directly to a narrative of violent acts. Overell highlights this appropriation of various terms as representative of "intertextual understandings" (2010, p. 84). This language is most visible in nods of approval between users that rely on terms such as kick(s) ass, brutal, savage, and badass. As noted by one offline participant and supported by Overell's article (2010), the term 'brutal' "is a word used to describe something as good, as genuinely metal." This can be seen in the commentary offered in response to heavy metal videos shared between participants on spaces like YouTube and Facebook.

> [I] Brutal.
>
> [K] BRRUUUTTAALLLL
>
> [T] … Never seen someone try to so hard to play the tough/badass guy and look like such an idiot…
>
> [P] This song is 80% badass 20% guitar solo.
>
> [J] Listening to their whole album. Very badass, melodic heavy riffs, screams and change in pace at all the right places
>
> [Q] If you don't like this kick ass piece of metal then put Biebers wiener back in your mouth! And shut the f up! Wow!!!!
>
> [S] AMMIH and this song were already soul-taking.

(YouTube 2015)

These posts are all in response to a death metal band's video clip posted on YouTube. The terms brutal, badass and soul-taking all have the effect of praising the video clip and the performers. Moreover, these articulations can easily be seen as representations of the hegemonic order in the writing on the wall. They position legitimate hegemonic hypermasculine metalheads in opposition to the non-heteronormative, non-brutal, non-masculine other.

The use of aggressive themes is just as common and visible in other sites within the online metal scene such as *The First Forum*. One of the more enlightening comment threads started by a participant in *The First Forum* was a thread entitled: 'I am so metal…'. The idea was to stimulate discussion amongst peers about what the personification of metal might look like.

> [D] I'm so metal I jack off with a steelwool pad and I cum like a hellfire missile.
>
> [J] I'm so f***in metal that I killed Dorothy with my axe and her little dog toto.
>
> (*The First Forum* 2015)

The responses to the thread also reflect the trope of hypermasculine aggression and violence. They are characterised by violence and aggressive sexuality, such as killing Dorothy and her dog. These comments prompted me to pose a question to some of the participants on a separate thread in *The First Forum*. I asked: What does metal look like to you? The respondents did not significantly differ in their opinions of what metal music was. Many of the responses included the same colloquialisms and slang-terms as I highlighted above.

> [P] Metal is in your face brutal honesty and as a result, so is the majority of the imagery.

> [B] It still tends to range from really elaborate scary costumes to simple T-shirts and jeans. But everything revolves around a dark feel.
>
> (*The First Forum* 2015)

The existence of these terms in most of the online metal scene contributes significantly to an overall understanding of the dominance of hypermasculinity. As mentioned earlier, these articulations form part of an on-going narrative, they paint a vibrant picture of acceptable metalhead identity in the online metal scene. As evidenced in the above comments, it is acceptable, desirable even, to be 'brutal' or 'badass'. It is acceptable for heavy metal music to be 'soul-taking' and 'kickass'. It becomes compulsory to maintain this hegemonic discourse of aggression and violence in order to participate comfortably in the online metal scene.

The hegemonic discourse of the online metal scene can be seen to construct a clear understanding of the norms about metalhead masculinity amongst fans. The language is used to defend fellow members and, in a less purposeful way, to paint a larger picture of the hypermasculine metalhead. That is, the posting of comments is part of a cultural process of presentation and representation of the hegemonic order (Anderson 2017a) which reinforces metalhead identity and patriarchal dominance (Connell 1987). Language based on aggression and violence gives fans a clear avenue for affirmation of identity at the same time as setting up the terms of the war of position. That is, us (hypermasculine, aggressive, violent metalheads) and them (everybody else).

Militaristic Principles of Organisation

Militaristic organisation of people and space in the online metal scene is another hypermasculine trope I observed during this research. It has been noted there is a link between military discourse and traditional norms of masculinity including violence and power (Hinojosa 2010 and Sasson-Levy 2003) as outlined in the literature review. This section is aimed at

highlighting the ways in which reliance on military hierarchies and language formed the basis for the organisation of participants in *The First Forum*. This forum demonstrates how an established and continued referral to military language and imagery reifies the hegemonic order in the online metal scene as hypermasculine.

There are two ways in which militaristic language and hierarchies are adopted in the online metal scene. First it is through the structure of the forum itself, the way that members are organised in ranks and with different levels of power based on perceptions of seniority and merit. Second, participants' language and shared imagery tends to promote a sense of militaristic camaraderie and fraternity (Wadham 2013) under flags, tanks, and mutual motivations to protect the space through violent action.

The organisation of participants and space along lines of militaristic ideology clearly contributes to the reification of hegemonic hypermasculine order in the online metal scene. As Anderson points out Gramsci refined the concept of hegemony during a period of incarceration. "His writings were haunted by terms of military origin – 'war of position', 'war of movement', 'underground war' – taken metaphorically and taken literally" (2017b, p. 23). The emergence of militarism in the online metal scene signals the meeting point of Gramscian notions of coercion and consent. That is, the threat of military-like force serves to define the boundaries of hegemonic power. Of course, coercion, for Gramsci, "does not overwhelm consent but appears to be *backed* by the consent of the majority" (Anderson 2017b, p. 20 emphasis added). The arrangement of members of *The First Forum* along military ranking order and the use of military paraphernalia (flags, tanks, and a discourse of war) contribute to the emergence of this second trope of hypermasculinity in the online metal scene.

Similar to the theme of aggression and violence already discussed at length the military organisation of the online metal scene draws on existing appeals to military motifs in heavy metal more generally. According to metal-archives.com there are approximately 280 known heavy metal band names that contain the word 'war' (only 24 that contain the word 'love'). Bands such as Manowar from the United States, War Cult Supremacy in Portugal, Iron Maiden (a machine for torture), and Battleaxe who both hail from the United Kingdom all show heavy metal's clear links to war and militarism. The language of war can also be seen in lyrics. Australian metalcore band Parkway Drive also draws on militarism in their song 'The Sound of Violence': 'This is the sound of violence \ These are the songs of war \ We are everything you fear". This song also shows how military styled lyrics in metal reinforce the sense that there is a constant battle between the masculine righteous metalhead – the 'we' who are 'everything you fear' – and the non-metal other. As Connell notes:

> Violence on the largest possible scale is the purpose of the military; and no arena has been more important for the definition of hegemonic masculinity in European / American culture (2005, p. 213).

The appeal to militarism and the associated violence in the online metal scene can therefore be seen as key to the maintenance of collective solidarity (the Gramscian alliance) and hegemonic hypermasculinity.

Not only is there evidence in band names, lyrics, and album covers that militarism has existed in heavy metal for years there is also the idea that metalheads as a collective are participants in an overarching war for the betterment of the heavy metal scene generally. In discussion with fans of heavy metal the most commonly cited source of such appeal to militarism is the 'fight' against those who decry the value of heavy metal music and position it as a societal evil. This theme of war and fighting is a response to the marginalisation of metalheads during the 1980s and 1990s when Tipper Gore founded the Parents Music Resource Centre in an attempt to censor heavy metal music (through the 'Parental Advisory' stickers commonly seen on album

covers) on the grounds that it was poisoning the minds of American youth. In an act of defiance, incidentally, the well-known label 'parental advisory explicit lyrics' has now been adopted (on t-shirts and stickers) by fans and some bands as a source of some pride.

The fight to defend heavy metal and the appeals to war and military violence have been carried over to the online space and are reflected in the language and imagery of online heavy metal spaces in a more extreme and visible way than is witnessed in offline spaces. One of the clearest examples of the deliberate organisation of a site within the online metal scene to reflect notions of militarism and the associated masculine metaphor of power, aggression and violence is *The First Forum*. The space is set up to reflect principles of military organisation such as ranking, fighting, and flag flying (or claiming space). The forum was originally set up in the early days of Internet communication and relies heavily on the link between heavy metal and military. This community's 'mission' according to the home page was to create 'a fortress that still stands today'. This site, over time, grew alongside developments in Internet communication technology and at the time of my research had over 5000 active members. The site clearly has a militaristic overtone in its modus operandi and use of language such as 'mission' and 'united front' (though they do not specifically acknowledge the Gramscian link). This theme of militaristic organisation can also be seen in the forum's use of military style medals to celebrate individual contributions and camaraderie and the ranking of individual participants in line with military ranks such as private, lieutenant, and commanding general. This organisation shows how the online metal scene gives rise to a more overt reliance on the militaristic organisation of members than would be available in offline heavy metal spaces – where ranking systems and medals are rarely used (vests with sewn on patches having a degree of similarity). I asked one participant about the organisational model of the forum and he noted,

> [M] every forum we've been on has allowed assigned names or levels for each member's specific post total. Private thru Commanding General just seemed more metal than Noob

> thru Senior Member. And also, the military ranks allowed for graphics that matched each rank.
>
> (*The First Forum* 2013)

The militaristic organisation of the online metal scene as a contribution to the fight for metal is one which is easily adopted by many members of the space. This has a two-fold effect: at once it justifies and reifies the reliance on aggressive and violent language which fits hand in hand with military action and it contributes, in no small measure, to the setting up of the positive hypermasculine metalhead and the non-metal other. This is a dualism which Wadham identifies as typical of military forces (2013). This us-and-them dichotomy can be seen in the language used by participants with whom I discussed the militaristic organisation of the forum during this research. Members referred to fierce competition amongst all online metal forums and a war against censorship as key to creating an identity for the forum and its members. A participant who had been around since the forum made its transition to online space spoke about the military organisation of the space:

> [S] In the beginning, competition with other metal boards was fierce, a war to be #1 (which we won long ago, btw). The banners back then featured [*The First Forum]* mascot, which was a grey tank conquering the competition. Also, [*The First Forum]* was founded to wage war on censorship back in the 90's. So early on there was an atmosphere of warfare.
>
> (*The First Forum* 2013)

The link between heavy metal and militarism has been highlighted by (LeVine 2008) and this is clearly seen in the articulations of metal culture in the online metal scene. There is an undercurrent of militarism in the language in the online metal scene that relies on military concepts of camaraderie and fraternity. These comments often take the form of reverence for individuals who have links to offline military activity. More generally the language used in this

commentary tends to reference individuals as 'brother' or 'comrade' or other similar militaristic moniker. In *The First Forum*, two participants shared some old photographs of themselves in military uniform with weapons that elicited the following responses:

> [T] 'Now that's metal, bud!'
>
> [W] 'Oh so metal. It's great to have good hard metalhead men serving in the military. Doing us proud brother'
>
> [M] 'So (dare I say VERY) metal, brother.'
>
> (*The First Forum* 2015)

These comments show the developing of camaraderie and fraternity (Wadham 2013) around a shared goal of defending the community space. The comments above, albeit brief, highlight the reverence offered to members of the metalhead alliance who demonstrate their capacity for military violence. As Connell notes, "something has to glue the army together and keep the men in line" (2005, p. 214). She goes on to suggest that such exemplars of masculine violence are crucially important to the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity (2005). That is, hegemony survives because all men consent to the alliance formed in light of the hegemonic order.

Objectification of Women

The third trope of hypermasculinity that emerged in the online metal scene is the objectification of women. The objectification of women is also a part of what Connell refers to as the collective strategy for the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity (2005). As outlined in much feminist literature, the objectification of women and control over women's bodies can generally be seen to cater for the patriarchal requirement that women be pushed to the periphery, outside of

executive space and to the site of reproduction (Walby 2013; Federici 2012; Wajcman 1991). This is a trope that is reflected in much of the literature surrounding heavy metal culture generally. Even as Hoad and others suggest the participation of women in the metal scene is increasing, it still remains a masculine dominated space. And as Krenske and McKay have suggested earlier (2000), it is still the case that women tend to participate on men's terms.

Similar to the themes of aggression and violence, and the militaristic organisation of participants the undercurrent of women's objectification is consistently deployed in heavy metal culture more generally. Language and imagery in heavy metal bands' albums, artwork, and lyrics and in heavy metal media contribute to such a positioning of women's bodies in these spaces. It is worth noting, as DiGioia & Davis rightly declare, "Metal music is not inherently masculine" (2018, p. 28). They suggest that notions of masculine dominance, sexism, and indeed racism, enter heavy metal cultures from broader societal norms around patriarchy and whiteness. Nevertheless, discourses of feminine subordination continue to appear in the language and imagery of heavy metal music.

The birth of heavy metal music is widely credited to four men, Tony Iommi, Geezer Butler, Ozzy Osbourne, and Bill Ward in a working-class neighbourhood in Birmingham in the late 1960s. Although heavy metal music now is not so tied to working-class audience and performers (one of the reasons subcultures theory is unhelpful as an approach) it continues to maintain the masculine characteristics of sexually dominant men. The type of masculinity that heavy metal tends to reinforce, privileges white men through language and imagery seen in lyrics and album cover content. Lyrics from Black Sabbath's 'Dirty Women': 'I see a man, he has takeaway women for sale, yes for sale\ Guess that's the answer, 'cause takeaway women don't fail' highlight women's bodies as commodities for sale and with an ability and single purpose to satisfy the sexual desire of the male purchaser. Another Black Sabbath song 'Digital

Bitch' from the album *Born Again* seems to suggest anger at a woman's independence through wealth: 'She sings her life to a different song\ She needs a loving and dominant master'. This positioning of women as subordinate has been rife in heavy metal culture over the past four decades. This type of understanding, in language and lyrics, of women as objects for sale or to be unworthy of positions of power and wealth reflects much of the characteristics of hypermasculinity in heavy metal more generally and serves to reify patriarchy.

It is worth noting here that I chose the term 'objectification' as opposed to 'dehumanisation' or 'degradation'. As McKee highlights the terms have been used somewhat interchangeably by researchers at times (2005). I tend to refer to McKee's position that objectification is a useful term above all the others as it "allows researchers to pay attention, in a systematic way, to a variety of behaviours beyond violence" (2005, p. 279). That is, the trope of objectification of women that plays out in articulations in the online metal scene manifests in a variety of ways which do not always and immediately suggest acts of violence.

Objectification of women in the online metal scene does not necessarily rely on overt violence or physical acts. Rather it can be seen, most often, to take the form of semiotic violence. That is, the "transmission of messages in the collective cultural world to the individual as a label … is made part of an individual's identity" (Abbey & Valsiner 2005, p. 92). An example was found in one participant's sharing of an advertisement for Randall guitar amps in *The First Forum.* The shared image featured a woman in a one-piece swimsuit leaning on a set of stage amplifiers. The question was posed, 'Do Randall Amps give you a boner?' The question, levelled at the users of this page, relies on compulsory heterosexuality (Connell 2005). That is, the subtext of this question presumes a male, heterosexual, sexually dominant audience. The use of women's sexuality to sell amplifiers as well as the secondary sharing of the image by participants reinforces metalhead heteronormativity. It also forms part of the presentation and representation

of hegemonic order. That is, women are objects of desire and the acceptable masculine identity is necessarily bound to heterosexuality. Such a post elicited comments which revolved around this woman's legitimacy as a sexual partner. All of the comments which label women's bodies as sexual objects contribute to the semiotic objectification of women. These types of comments have been heard to occur in offline heavy metal spaces during this research however the big difference here is that these three commenters and many more have provided an overt, recorded articulation in the metal scene.

> [M] they look pretty sturdy
>
> [T] Even if I didn't know who she is, who fucking cares? I only care about how hot she is
>
> [P] No, but that full-figured Titan of a woman sure does. Every time.
>
> (*The First Forum* 2016)

Ignoring for a second the homoeroticism exhibited in metalheads stories about their shared sexual arousal, these comments show an outright objectification of women. They illustrate men's mechanism for "self-conceptualisation as positively male" (Bird 1996). I suggest that the objectification of the woman in this image is an example of a presentation and representation of the hegemonic order – the hypermasculine trope that metalhead men are heterosexual and prefer to position women as sexual objects. Though this type of image has appeared with a degree of regularity in offline heavy metal magazines for decades. (*Revolver* and *Decibel* have both released issues of their magazines dedicated to 'hottest women in metal' and glamour shots of women band members.) It is, however, the online metal scene that makes these types of images much more visible and positions them as part of the hegemonic discourse of metalhead identity where once they remained more hidden in the bedrooms and lounge-rooms of heavy

metal fans. This positioning of the imagery at the core of social interaction has greatly increased opportunity for people to talk about and record ideas about the objectification of women.

There exists a more pervasive example of the way hegemonic hypermasculinity is negotiated through the objectification of women – through everyday conversation in the online metal scene. Often when women contribute to discussion in the online metal scene the conversation soon regresses to commentary regarding her legitimacy as a woman in the heavy metal scene generally or to sexual innuendo and requests for sexual favours, dating, or nude and semi-nude pictures to be shared. As De Vries and Peter remind us, "Girls and women frequently experience objectification as being valued predominantly in terms of their physical attractiveness" (2013, p. 1483). They go on to suggest that the nature of social networking sites is such that women are often encouraged into self-objectification (2013). This type of treatment of women contributes to the emergence of the trope of objectification of women which typifies hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene.

This is an activity participated in by both women and men in the online metal scene. Throughout this research there were several occasions when this type of conversation took place in the forums and more public spaces. In a conversation, previously mentioned in this chapter and as part of a thread titled 'I'm so metal…' the comments were initially concerned with notable aspects of heavy metal music and heavy metal fans. By the sixth page of comments a participant who identified as female entered the space and the conversation quickly turned sexual.

> [M] I'm SO METAL I could shield your "pole" from radiation.
>
> [N] hot pic there. We need more hot women like yourself in our epic musical circle of METAL

> [H] I can't imagine a cute girl whos (sic) into heavy metal being single, someones (sic) going to be lucky.
>
> (*The First Forum* 2015)

The way in which both women and men participated in this conversation above shows that there is a clear understanding of the sexualised position of women in these spaces which leads to DeVries and Peter's assertion that women participate in self-objectification (2013). This reversion back to comments about women's bodies as sexual objects and about sexual acts is common in the online metal scene. Many comments which appear to have emerged from men are concerned with how sexually attractive a woman is and how valuable this then makes them to a metalhead community.

Through the sharing of advertising and other imagery of anonymous women's bodies the online metal scene allows the emergence of objectification of women to remain at the core of conversations in online heavy metal spaces. This objectification of anonymous women's bodies comes from an understanding of the dominant masculinity in these spaces and effects acceptable ways for men and women to interact. While there are opportunities for women to actively participate in the online metal scene in non-objectified ways, the visibility of objectification in these spaces in the writing on the wall of the online metal scene maintains hegemonic hypermasculinity which continues to push women to the periphery of the space.

It is crucial to note here that despite the participation by women in these objectifying conversations, the objectification of women in the online metal scene is still a trope within the negotiation of hegemonic masculinity. That is, the hegemonic expectation that men will engage in the objectification of women is presented as the ideological norm in the online metal scene. There are men who choose to resist this behaviour and of course there are men who choose to play along even if they do not necessarily agree with it. Therein lies consent. The objectification

of women, like aggression and violence, and the militaristic organisation of participants, is a social expectation built on the currently accepted answer to hegemonic masculinity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined some of the ways that tropes of hypermasculinity emerge in the online metal scene. It is important to stress that the tropes of hypermasculinity that I have outlined here and the on-going negotiation of them as hegemonic expectations contribute to the writing on the wall – a highly visible and permanent record of hegemonic hypermasculinity. Through interaction with others in the scene, every participant is contributing to the ever-growing writing on the wall. As one enters *The First Forum* or logs on to watch metal videos on YouTube these tropes are presented in the writing on the wall as a clear hegemonic discourse.

The accepted expressions of masculinity through the themes of aggression and violence, military organisation of forum members, and the objectification of women in the online metal scene all contribute to the maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity. The forms they take may overlap at times but as Connell suggests in relation to stylised masculinity, "their interrelation is centred on a single structural fact, the … dominance of men over women" (1987, p. 183). That is, a masculinity that favours heterosexual men and their dominance over women and the non-metal 'other'. Indeed, this non-metal other encompasses men who maintain marginalised masculinities (Cheng 1999). This defence of masculinity against the other can be clearly seen through the use of militaristic language and organisational principals. The hypermasculine tropes in the online metal scene are clear, they are constantly reified through participants' text-based interactions with each other and with the space itself.

This chapter has shown how the online metal scene exhibits some extreme views about acceptable masculinity, though it is worth noting the work of Bettez-Halnon (2006) who

suggested that this scene relies on the concept of a 'grotesque carnival'. Bettez-Halnon suggests that the reason why individuals participate in this type of behaviour and contribute to the construction of the hypermasculinity is for individual freedom in the heavy metal space where everybody tends to feel the same. A Gramscian view would suggest that participation in this grotesque carnival is evidence of consent to the hegemonic order. That is, there may be an awareness that this type of grotesque behaviour is damaging outside of the online metal scene but the masses consent to its dominance – all benefit from it.

This chapter has outlined how the online metal scene exhibits a clear set of expectations of individual behaviour based on a hegemonic masculine order that privileges white, middleclass men. I have highlighted three tropes of aggression and violence, militaristic organisation, and objectification of women that all paint the larger picture of hypermasculinity. This type of masculinity while drawn from existing offline norms in heavy metal more generally are amplified or inflated in the online space through the affordances of online communication technology. The next part of my research question requires an examination of maintenance. The tropes of hypermasculinity which characterise the hegemonic order are open to challenge and resistance. Consent to hegemonic power is gained through a war of position. That is, a complex push and pull between hegemonic, subordinate, complicit, and marginalised masculinities (Connell 2005). The next chapter will outline the process of gaining consent as well as identifying the opportunities for resistance to hegemonic hypermasculinity.

Chapter Six: Caught in the Middle

Policing and resisting hegemonic hypermasculinity

This chapter draws on the tropes of hegemonic hypermasculinity that I identified in the previous chapter. I have established that tropes of hegemonic hypermasculinity can be seen to emerge in the writing on the wall in the online metal scene. Also, that the writing on the wall is constructed through text-based communication. I will use this chapter to further expand on my original contribution to knowledge by outlining how interactions in the online metal scene that rely on text-based communication *maintain* the hegemonic ideology of hypermasculinity. I show here that the hegemonic war of position involves both policing of and resistance to hypermasculine tropes and that the emerging discourse is retained in a highly visible and permanent writing on the wall.

In the previous chapter, I summoned and analysed comments offered in the online metal scene that demonstrated tropes of hypermasculinity. I further established that, in line with Connell's suggestion that "hegemonic masculinity is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women" (1987, p. 183) that the tropes reflect the negotiation of the hegemonic order amongst men. I progress this position here to suggest that within the text-based communication of the online metal scene there are active mechanisms through which the maintenance of the hegemonic order occurs – policing and resistance. Again, it is worth stressing that, like the emergence of these tropes outlined in the previous chapter, policing and resistance occurs amongst men as bearers of multiple masculinities.

The act of policing hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene is not conducted through physical violence. Connell noted that ascendency achieved "at the point of a gun … is not hegemony. Ascendency embedded in religious doctrine and practice, mass media content

… and so forth is" (1987, p. 184). The policing in the online metal scene is similarly, not 'at the point of a gun'. The hegemonic order is maintained through, as Anderson notes, "the constant presentation and representation of the hegemonic order as the ultimate incarnation of liberty" (2017a, p. 64). That is, the language used to participate in or to police the online metal scene carries ideological descriptions of a taken for granted hypermasculine norm. That is, the hegemonic discourse in the online metal scene relies on the tropes of hypermasculinity as outlined in the previous chapter as a framework for accepted ways of being.

Policing in the online metal scene has clear intentions to deride individuals who do not appear to exhibit hegemonic notions of hypermasculinity in their own commentary. Such derision establishes clear demarcation between hegemonic hypermasculine metalhead identity and the non-metal other. Again, such policing is not at the point of a gun, rather the text-based communication used to police participants in the online metal scene contributes to a writing on the wall which exhibits social expectations about masculine dominance. The moderators or administrators of the site may have the power to suspend or ban members of the space – that is not hegemony. The maintenance of the hegemonic order, the policing that I describe herein, takes place through the constant presentation and representation of hypermasculine tropes by those who, by adhering to these social expectations, consent to their own subordination.

Policing of the hegemonic order in the online metal scene occurs in two contexts: policing non-hegemonic masculinities and policing femininity. While it is a foundational tenet of this thesis that the category of participants' sex or gender be dismissed at the outset it is important to see the reliance by participants on the binary of women and men in the policing of hegemonic notions of hypermasculinity. It is worth noting that Connell confirms that it is possible for both women and men to hold masculine and feminine identities (2005). Policing non-hegemonic masculinities in the context of the online metal scene occurs through overt verbal attacks and

derision of others, calling into question their legitimacy as hegemonic hypermasculine metalheads. The policing of femininity, on the other hand, is aimed at what Krenske and McKay have called repositioning women towards the periphery in heavy metal spaces (2000). That is, policing is aimed at reaffirming women's position as an illegitimate other in the realm of music creation, mastery, and fandom. Moreover, the policing of women in this space remains a negotiation amongst men. That is, the view that women ought to remain at the periphery in the online metal scene is a trope of hegemonic hypermasculinity – men hoping to identify in accordance with hegemonic hypermasculinity are required to contribute to the constant policing of other men, and women.

Connell suggests that alongside hegemonic masculinity lies emphasised femininity (2005). This is a point of departure from Connell's work which focussed more specifically on masculinities. Paechter more recently (2018) challenged the lack of attention to femininity in Connell's theorisation of hegemony. Paechter's concern lies in the way that emphasised femininity tends to be seen as a side project that is concerned only with the bolstering of masculine dominance. Indeed, emphasised femininity does contribute to the dominance of men and is inextricably tied to it. However, there are also relations or negotiations among women that underpin a notion of hegemonic femininity. For Paechter:

> Hegemonic femininities have to be thought of as local phenomena. Which forms support the traditional gender order is dependent on local circumstances, including (and reciprocally) local hegemonic masculinities (2018, p. 124).

Given the increasing participation by women in the metal scene (Hoad 2017) it is more appropriate to work with Paechter's suggestion around hegemonic femininity. There are acceptable norms and expectations for women in the online metal scene that form the basis for policing of femininity. However, I retain the crucial caveat, offered in Paechter's conceptualisation, that women's negotiations of hegemonic femininity is still only taking place within the wider framework of hegemonic masculine dominance.

In the second section of this chapter I turn to instances of resistance to hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene. With reference to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), it is clear that not all individuals in a given space adhere to notions of hegemony and not all bodies benefit from the reification of masculine dominance. Hegemonic masculinity, as Connell suggests, "does not mean total cultural dominance and the obliteration of alternatives" (1987, p. 184). The exclusivity of hegemony which encompasses only a very few individual identities in the online metal scene unsurprisingly, leaves the door ajar for the emergence of alternative identities and resistance.

In *Masculinities* (2005) Connell draws on several men's biographies in order to unpack resistant masculinities. While she acknowledges the challenges from homosexual masculinities and masculine behaviour embraced by women, resistance to hegemonic masculinity is located along lines of rethinking and remaking resistant identities. That is, men who actively attempt to subvert hegemonic masculinity through openly challenging dominant tropes. Connell signals this "moment of separation" where "the project [for some men] was to separate themselves from the mainstream masculinity" (2005, p. 130). In the online metal scene and the accompanying writing on the wall similar challenges to dominant tropes remain visible.

Resistance, like policing, takes place through comments and images posted in the online metal scene. These comments challenge hegemonic hypermasculinity through both attacks on those who appear to be policing non-normative bodies, as well as through unsolicited comments of support for marginalised individuals. Again, resistance in the online metal scene reflects Connell's notion that not everybody adheres to hegemonic masculinity (1987). Resistance occurs in the online metal scene as part of an on-going war of position between allied individuals (metalhead men) who occupy dominant and subordinate positions in the scene.

A key finding in this research was that through identifying mechanisms of both policing and resistance it appeared that there are, in actuality, very few differences in the type of language used. As this Chapter will show, the language of resistance necessarily relies upon hegemonic ideology. Resistant commentary is clearly aimed at challenging hegemonic hypermasculine tropes. The constant presentation and representation of the hegemonic order in the writing on the wall however, means the language available is necessarily restricted to the very same language that maintains hegemonic hypermasculinity in the first place.

Policing Hegemonic Hypermasculinity

Hegemonic masculinity does not have an easily identifiable, tangible, and static form. Likewise, hegemonic hypermasculinity which I identify in the online metal scene is fluid and changing over time. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) stress this fluidity of hegemonic masculinity in their response to criticism of the concept (Beasley 2008) by highlighting the fact that one cannot pin down a singular, universally applicable form. Because of the fluidity and the open-endedness as well as the everyday contestations and historically changing constructions of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987, p. 184) the project of maintaining masculine dominance thus involves mechanisms of policing and resistance.

Policing of masculinity in the online metal scene has been given very little attention. Krenske and McKay have looked at the maintenance of masculinity in a local offline heavy metal scene. While their study tended not to use the term 'policing' as such, they highlight heavy metal's "distinctive signifying practices … as an aggressively heterosexist formation" (2000, p. 266). While their attention was drawn to practices of stage diving and moshing as ways that men would maintain accepted norms of hegemonic masculinity my attention moves on from this to the online metal scene where social interaction takes place through a technologically mediated

social media platform. That is, (text-based) policing of the online metal scene, which contributes to the writing on the wall, exhibits a similar 'aggressively heterosexist formation' in line with the tropes of hegemonic hypermasculinity.

It is my position that the tropes of hegemonic hypermasculinity foreshadow a set of normative ideologies of acceptable masculinity in the online metal scene. These norms include understandings such as: metalheads will fight; metalheads will look tough (metal-like); and, metalhead identity is heteronormative. The themes of hegemonic hypermasculinity are also the source of some generally agreed upon norms for women, whose identity as metalheads in the online metal scene is often contested. As such, expectations are that women will remain peripheral to the domain of men. That is, women are challenged if they exhibit strength, power, and independence. Part of this challenge will involve language that tends to reinforce women's position as objects of sexual desire for men.

Policing does not always take the form of overt condemnation. In most cases policing in the online metal scene can be seen as inherent in the language and text-based communication offered by participants as they interact with each other and the space. Policing, in a Gramscian frame, operates as a mechanism of education (Steedman 2004). That is, policing in the online metal scene has the goal of maintaining the alliance of dominant and subaltern groups. From shared language and imagery emerge covert (and sometimes overt) meanings which shape a set of acceptable metalhead identity markers. These markers emerge in comments and posts that contribute to the writing on the wall thus creating a blueprint of expectations to which all participants consent. In line with the tropes outlined in the previous chapter, these expectations suggest that metalheads will be prepared to fight; they will look and act tough; and women will be positioned as subordinate, sexual objects.

Metalheads can fight. Violence and masculinity have long been seen to be inextricably linked. (Messner 1990; Connell 1987). Moore, in her discussion of cowboy culture in the nineteenth century, shows that violence is a "clear marker of masculinity", useful for men to show "equal worth" with other men and to "maintain social hierarchies" (2014, p. 29). A more contemporary examination was offered by Melzer who highlighted the link between fighting and manliness when he showed how backyard fight clubs in the San Francisco Bay Area provide opportunities for men to "restore a sense of masculinity and control" (2013, p. 28). The imagery and lyrics that abound in heavy metal circles are often concerned with violence and particularly violence perpetrated and celebrated by men against men and against women. It is my position that the use of violent rhetoric in the online metal scene similarly maintains the status quo of hegemonic hypermasculinity.

Though some recent studies highlight possible challenges to masculinity's often inseparable ties to violence (Kimmel 2017) and a potential swing toward gender equality (Connell 2016), the celebration of violence and fighting continues in a highly visible way in the online metal scene. Such a celebration is seen in the text-based communication which contributes to the writing on the wall. Of course, physical acts of violence cannot be transmitted through online spaces however, the effect of online violence remains real (Hinduja & Patchin 2007). Comments that are shared in these spaces often illustrate, in somewhat graphic detail, acts of violence that are desirable or simply rely on themes of violence to illustrate a point.

In response to a video of a fight breaking out at a show in the United States many participants offered their commentary on what was seen as unwelcome behaviour. Interestingly, and as I will return to when I discuss resistance masculinities, the reliance on violent rhetoric and fighting is even used as a mechanism to challenge unwanted violence from those who are positioned as outsiders.

> [T] I would have knocked that dickhead out. The pit is about the music not about starting on each other.
>
> [S] That guy got fucked up. I would have smashed him if he kept on going. I go into the pit to show the band respect for their music. They should have stopped playing. I bet [band member] would have fucked them up!!
>
> (Facebook 2016)

This type of rhetoric that relies on violence to police the online metal scene is even offered towards other members of the online community. One member posted a short review of a new release by death metal band Obituary. The debate quickly turned into an all-in assault on each other.

> [Th] how can you fucking dislike this album??!!! Go fuck urselfs (sic) assholes…
>
> [D] One death metal fan would take on a hundred BFMV [Bullet for My Valentine] fans and smash the shit out of the little bitches.
>
> [H] hey fuck you! Any thrash band would kick their ass into tomorrow
>
> [W] Obituary still kicking ass \m/
>
> (YouTube 2016)

These comments both highlight the celebration of violence and the acceptance of violent acts within the online metal scene as well as contribute to the legitimacy (through enjoying violence or being prepared to engage in violent acts) of the men who are posting the comments. As one participant suggested: Punching 'smashing the shit out of someone', 'kicking ass', and being

able to ‘knock someone out’ are all signalled as desirable characteristics for passable metalhead masculinity. To offer another tack in such a situation would be to invoke disapproval from fellow metalheads.

The appeal to violent acts in the online metal scene reifies the hegemonic order characterised by hypermasculine tropes. This appeal reflects the theme of aggression and violence in the online metal scene. The use of violence, or the reference to possible violent acts (such as, ‘I would have beaten the shit out of them’) is often made in relation to defending the status quo of heavy metal culture generally. That is, it appears that individuals celebrate the use of violence in defence of the brotherhood or camaraderie that exists in these spaces too. Again, the defence of heavy metal culture and the ‘brotherhood’ is a key mechanism of the presentation and representation of the hegemonic order and the gaining of consent among the allied masses. This is supported by Connell’s work which suggests that violence is a “symbolic definition of masculinity” (2005, p. 192) and a means to maintain the primacy of hegemonic masculinity. When one participant discussed winning the battle to become the number one online metal forum it was not through actual physical violence though it was still talked about around a discourse of violence and war.

Metalheads look or act tough – like metal. There is an expectation that metalheads have a certain look that is acceptable; a look that is generally based on the aforementioned notion of hypermasculine aggression and violence. The link between heavy metal music and toughness is one which has been elucidated by Weinstein as she traces back the emergence of heavy metal to an era of deindustrialisation (2016). Heavy metal was born in 1960s Britain where “dirty, rough, and muscular work that defined masculinity” (2016, p. 15) had dried up or been replaced through a process of industrial automation. Connell’s work supports this position by highlighting that, “heavy manual work calls for strength, endurance, a degree of insensitivity

and toughness, and group solidarity" (2005, p. 55). Heavy metal music was a significant outlet for the frustrations of Western masculinity and an opportunity to compensate for the increasingly precarious male breadwinner role.

It is not uncommon for commentary in the online metal scene to overtly reify what it means to be 'metal', perhaps highlighting an unspoken recognition that masculine identity occupies a position of some precarity. Often these conversations draw a large number of respondents who appear to be vying for the most metal description of metalhead identity. During this study participants discussed what it meant to them to be metal.

> [S] I'm so metal, I don't eat cereal in the morning, I eat rusty nails
>
> [Gl] Most Metal thing to eat for breakfast? Razorblades and roses
>
> (*The First Forum* 2015)

This comment does suggest something about the toughness required of a heavy metal fan even though the intention is somewhat jovial. What these comments also demonstrate is a clear outline of what is *not* acceptable as a masculine metalhead identity. As one forum member commented,

> [S] If the front man of a death metal band looks like Kip Winger, he's not gonna be taken very seriously.'
>
> (*The First Forum* 2015)

This comment could be seen as a reference to Mike Judge's attack on Winger through his television show *Beavis and Butthead*. According to a 2010 interview with Winger (VH1, 2010) the band, and the front-man in particular bore the brunt of ridicule aimed at 1980s hair or glam

metal where many band members assumed much more traditionally feminine looks. A key component of the policing of hegemonic hypermasculinity is to call out non-adherents and position them as feminine. As Connell suggests, the ideology of homophobia – at play in the positioning of Kip Winger as feminine and therefore not a serious archetype of metalhead identity – blurs the boundary between masculine and feminine where gay men are believed to be more easily aligned with femininity (2005, p. 40). As Connell further highlights, these comments are not simply assaults on others, they also have the effect of "drawing social boundaries, defining 'real' masculinity by its distance from the rejected" (2005, p. 40). The rejected, non-masculine archetype is epitomised in the writing on the wall as a measure of social expectations.

The utilisation of homophobia as a mechanism for rejecting non-hegemonic masculinities and reifying the hegemonic order is also reflected in the ideology of heteronormativity in metalhead identity. If metalheads stray from the norm of hypermasculine aggression and violence, don't appear to be toeing the militaristic line, or support bands that are deemed less masculine they will invoke policing from others. Other members of the online metal scene are quick to defend what they believe is true metal. This more often than not takes the form of questioning of a metalhead's legitimacy as the hegemonic heterosexual male.

> [Q] If you don't like this kick ass piece of metal then put Biebers wiener back in your mouth! And shut the f up! Wow!!!!
>
> [L] 'Cause that isn't metal just a bunch of fagots trying to be metal
>
> [I] If you listen to bitch-rock, you're probably a limp wrist closet homosexual with tunnels wearing your sister's jean.
>
> (YouTube 2016)

If we ignore for a second the reference to class in the third comment here, these types of comments are common and contribute greatly to the policing of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene. Again, these comments exemplify "straight men's hostility to gay men as a real social practice" (Connell 2005, p. 40). While these comments are not aimed specifically at men who have outed themselves in these spaces, they illustrate homophobia and homophobic remarks as tools to continue the oppression of gay men and the dominance of hegemonic masculine metalhead identities. As Herdt and Van De Meer point out, 'Anti-gay violence [homophobia] is a mechanism for the control of manhood' (2003, p.100). The threat of violence in the online metal scene is a method of setting the boundaries of the war of position. That is, the negotiation between dominant and subordinate masculinities from which consent to hegemonic power arises.

The rules about how metalheads should act and look, about which bands they should admire and support, and about their contribution to upholding masculine norms in the online metal scene are aimed at reifying hegemonic hypermasculinity in these spaces. The negotiated character of consent in a hegemonic relation of power necessarily requires continuous positioning and repositioning of the non-masculine other as subordinate (Connell 1987). As Connell suggests, the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity also necessarily involves a strategy aimed at the marginalisation of women (1987). In the online metal scene there are rules about women's behaviour that contribute to the positioning of women in that subordinate position. Again, not all men will adhere to or approve of these values, however, all men in the space consent to such a hegemonic order as they all benefit from the subordination of women.

The first position in relation to women and femininity is that women are subordinate. It is, through participants' use of language in the online metal scene that women are continually

placed in a position of subordination. Women are generally welcome in the spaces and indeed participation by women in many facets of heavy metal culture is increasing (Hoad 2017); however, there are clear boundaries outlining rules for women's participation. One of the most visible norms regarding women's participation in heavy metal and the online metal scene surrounds the legitimacy of women as band members, especially as vocalists. In many genres of heavy metal, vocals are characterised by deep, guttural, loud, aggressive and violent sounds. In the online metal scene, many believe this is exclusively the domain of men and as such women who enter this realm are met with seriously aggressive and violent reactions – policing – from many participants.

As discussed in relation to the objectification of women in the online metal scene there are few legitimate avenues for women's participation outside of being highly sexualised through hegemonic discourses. Although there are ways in which women can legitimately contribute to heavy metal spaces it is not uncommon to see violent rhetoric aimed at forcing women back to the periphery. There are a number of bands in various genres of heavy metal that include women in various active roles: Arch Enemy, Lacuna Coil, Tristania to name just a few. These bands often get referred to as girl-bands, chick-bands or as one participant dubbed it 'bitch-rock'. The categorisation of these bands as chick-bands or 'bitch-rock' highlight the awkwardness that exists in the online metal scene surrounding women taking active roles in creating metal music. In the more public spaces (Facebook and YouTube) in the online metal scene there exists an alarming amount of negative rhetoric about the legitimacy of women in these roles. The following comments were recorded in a discussion about Arch Enemy's change of vocalist from Angela Gossow to Alissa White-Gluz:

> [F] Woman with a voice like this… DISGUSTING… KILL IT WITH FIRE

> [R] Ouch! Her voice is like a man. I hate it. Is she really woman?

[W] Wtf is this.. a shemale …

[H] When I first heard this I thought singer was a man. The band would be legit if they had a male singer

[Ra] Whats this? Theres apparently girl but singing with a “heavy” voice, so… Is this… real? Is a man dressed like a girl? Is a joke

[D] they might need another singer but how many pretty girls can sing like this?

[L] Yeah, kind of a peripheral observer of this band, but I remember their sound being different than this? Clicked on it randomly because I forgot about them and got a cheap metalcore with the obligatory female vocal to pull in the pimply faced teenagers who can't get girls.

(YouTube 2016)

The commentary here notably focusses on the legitimacy of women as capable vocalists in the death metal genre. While there are large numbers of participants who support the vocalists mentioned above in various online and offline spaces these opinions are common in conversation in the online metal scene about bands with women as vocalists. What these comments highlight is that Gossow and White-Gluz pose a threat to the hegemonic order. Their very presence challenges the expected norms surrounding hypermasculinity in the online metal scene inasmuch as they have attempted to take on the role of the powerful, dominant, vocalist more commonly reserved for men. This type of policing is clear in its challenge to the legitimacy of women as active participants of the online metal scene. Further to the overt attacking of women who participate in the creation of metal music there are more thought-out comments which are not as aggressive, however, are still underwritten by a feeling that

women's participation as vocalists only serves to attract men. This appears to echo findings by Sasson-Levy about women's participation in the military as "challenging the dichotomous patriarchal gender regime" (2003, p. 458). That is, the intrusion of women's femininity into the hegemonic hypermasculine realm of metal band membership is a challenge which *must* be policed – in this case through a discursive positioning of the bands and vocalists as illegitimate and / or as sexual objects.

As outlined in Chapter Five, the language of the online metal scene is often associated with the objectification of women. The maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene therefore involves the policing of women's bodies as sexual objects. One participant noted how women need to be sexually attractive in order to be taken seriously:

> [K] Women are held to higher standards in bands. Unless you're a helluva good singer, people don't forgive ugliness, heaviness, etc…'
>
> [T] Even if I didn't know [who she is], who fucking cares? I only care about how hot she is
>
> (*The First Forum* 2016)

According to Connell, this objectification of women contributes as much to the collective strategy towards women (1987) as it does to reinforcing the sexual prowess of the hegemonic hypermasculine metalhead. A study by Stankiewicz and Rosselli found that "images or articles that show women being put, or putting themselves, *back under control* … may function to compensate for images of women's increased independence" (2008, p. 587). That is, the challenge offered by women's participation in the online metal scene is countered as part of a collective strategy to reinforce hegemonic hypermasculinity. It is important to reiterate that, even though these mechanisms of policing are targeted at women's bodies, the discourse that emerges in line with the tropes of hypermasculinity is clearly core to the negotiations amongst

men. That is, in order to adhere to hegemonic social expectations a legitimate masculine metalhead will celebrate the objectification and subordination of women.

The objectification of women is seen in the advertisement for Randall Amps and the comments that were linked to the post. It is also seen in the forum through the decline of the conversation to the exchange of sexual innuendo and reference to women as sexual partners as opposed to active members of the online metal scene.

> [M] I'm so metal my *sheath* could shield your pole from radiation…
>
> [B] chicks who like metal rule. Your bf is a lucky guy
>
> (*The First Forum* 2016)

When it comes to policing this position, members of the online metal scene rely on overt attacks and sexual innuendo to re-position women out of active roles in heavy metal. In a discussion about women participating as lead vocalists and band members several participants offered the following:

> [S] Women in metal have always sucked, and not in a good way
>
> [Z] A Bitch but is good at Guitar
>
> [H] … she's pretty hot, despite the 10 inches of make-up on her face. She's ultra hot…
>
> [SD] Although, I must admit, the females look a whole lot better doing any of the above… IF you know what I mean

> [R] Arch Enemy – the band knows very well that they need a hot female vocalist to remain relevant because their music is certainly not gonna help them in that aspect.
>
> (YouTube 2016)

Even when the commenter is not explicitly attacking the quality of a woman's musical ability the comments still tend to reify the expectation that women should be confined to the realm of sexual acts.

> [G] damn! I love angela and im loving Alissa too. They both should do a song together! … and a video… if you know what I mean XD
>
> (*The First Forum* 2016)

These comments are indicative of policed expectations for social interactions in the online metal scene. The comments are not always aimed at women participants or vocalists. However, like most of the language that is posted and remains in the online metal scene today, these comments contribute to the maintenance of a hegemonic hypermasculine order that privileges men and positions women in these spaces as subordinate sexual objects. As Connell outlines in regard to relationships of desire, "whether they are consensual or coercive … have become sharp questions about men's position of social dominance" (2005, p. 74-75). In this way, the thread of commentary that refers to sexual acts and desires upholds the hegemonic dominance of men in the online metal scene.

The policing of the online metal scene can most easily be seen in the aggressive and violent attacks launched at individuals who transgress unwritten boundaries of masculinity. It can also be seen in the types of language participants choose to use when talking about women or men in heavy metal. This policing is aimed at exerting control over the negotiation of metalhead identity in line with the hegemonic hypermasculine order in the online metal scene. As Connell

is clear about in her discussion of complicit masculinities (1987), these comments all contribute to a broader understanding of acceptable hegemonic metalhead identity. What is interesting about the maintenance of the hegemonic order in the online metal scene is that the aggressive and violent attacks occur through the posting of comments which solidify as the writing on the wall. The broader understanding about acceptable norms and expectations of behaviour in the online metal scene then ends up as a highly visible and permanent reminder of the hegemonic order.

Resistance

In the previous chapter, I discussed how hypermasculinity in the online metal scene has its roots in the language and imagery of heavy metal culture more generally. Resistance in the online metal scene too, draws on notions and habits of resistance in the wider offline history of heavy metal. It is not the mission of this thesis to trace the history of resistance, but it is important here to identify the roots of resistance in heavy metal. This connexion is significant because the literature and heavy metal fans themselves position heavy metal *as* resistance and this is different to the notions of resistance within the negotiation of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene.

The notion of heavy metal music as resistance is openly understood in much of the literature and within the heavy metal community (Scott 2016; Levine 2008; Deyhle 1998). One of the earliest appearances of heavy metal music was Black Sabbath in late 1960s Britain who produced lyrics for anti-war songs such as 'War Pigs' (1970). Like other metal bands, they portrayed resistance to issues faced by working class neighbourhoods in Birmingham and across parts of the western world. As Levine suggests the fans, too, shared a kind of desire to drop out and engage in 'resistance to a society from which they felt increasingly estranged' (2008, p.11). This echoes ideas of resistance to 'the system' that can be seen in all sorts of heavy

metal, punk, and rap music that followed such as Rage Against The Machine's 'Killing in the name' and Sepultura's 'Refuse / Resist'. This culture of resistance to the status quo that can be seen in wider heavy metal culture paves the way for themes of resistance to hegemonic hypermasculine tropes seen in the online metal scene.

Resistance in the context of this study is, precisely, resistance to hypermasculine tropes exhibited in the online metal scene. The Gramscian war of position clearly accommodates for this resistance. A war of position, in a hegemonic masculine framework, is a struggle for dominance between groups and individuals who assume various masculine identities. Hegemonic power is derived through consent gained as a result of the on-going negotiation amongst men who occupy these various masculine identities. As Connell notes, not all men assume the hegemonic masculine identity (2005). Men who occupy other positions such as, subordinate, complicit, and marginalised masculinities consent to hegemonic dominance. However, as the process is an on-going war of position, there of course exists opportunities for resistance within the framework of the hegemonic order.

Hegemonic masculinity therefore, does not stand as unchallengeable. Connell and Messerschmidt highlight that hegemonic masculinity may be "open to challenge … from women's resistance to patriarchy and from men as bearers of alternative masculinities" (2005, p. 846). Hegemonic hypermasculinity does not suit all participants in the online metal scene. As such, there are clear examples of individuals who resist or challenge these themes.

Similar to policing, resistance can be seen to emerge through text-based communication amongst participants in the online metal scene. A useful addition to Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity is offered by Wetherell and Edley who suggest that:

> It would be more useful analytically to see complicity and resistance not in either/or terms. It is probably more useful to reposition complicity or resistance as labels to describe the

> effects of discursive strategies mobilized in contexts as opposed to labels for types of individual men (1999, p. 28).

This suggestion clearly supports the findings in my study. That is, it is difficult to identify comments as either complicit or resistant to hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene. Resistant comments, in the case of the online metal scene, are most often also complicit in their effects of reinforcing hegemonic hypermasculinity as they necessarily rely upon the very hegemonic discourse of the social setting.

The mechanisms of policing that emerge in the online metal scene through the sharing of text-based communication, not unexpectedly, inspires resistance to the underlying themes of hegemonic hypermasculinity. In this section I present the evidence of resistance to the hypermasculine tropes of aggression and violence and objectification of women the online metal scene. Interestingly, I found very little evidence of resistance to the theme of militaristic organisation. One reason for this could be that active resistance to militarism would result in a fracturing of the hegemonic order. The war of position would become the war of manoeuvre (Anderson 2017a) – where consent is withdrawn and violence is deployed, hegemony has failed. Adherence to militaristic tropes in the online metal scene is a constant reminder of the threat of physical violence. Hegemonic power requires that the threat of this violence, while legitimated through consent is not actually required. While the trope of militarism remains important in understanding the emergence of hegemonic hypermasculinity I do not include it in the discussion of resistance here. The militaristic organisation of the online metal scene will be revisited in Chapter Seven as I discuss the affordances of online communication technology.

As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) note, hegemonic masculinity does not affect, through force, its own dominance. That is, hegemonic hypermasculinity is maintained through the consent of the masses to the hegemonic order. As Reeser (2010, p. 29) suggests, hegemonic masculinity can be observed in the text-based communication, or discourse, that typifies a given

social space. The dependence on such discourse to define interactions in the online metal scene therefore requires that resistance, by whatever means, is left with no choice but to draw on the same language and imagery that it is trying to dismantle. In this way, resistance in the online metal scene appears to, at once, resist *and* reinforce notions of hegemonic hypermasculinity.

Resistance often takes the form of retaliatory attacks on individuals or groups of commenters in defence of marginalised individuals. In the online metal scene these attacks are often levelled at (possibly) anonymous others and tend to reflect the theme of aggression and violence and, apparently inadvertently, objectification of women. The following comments are part of a discussion about a woman who had posted a video of herself playing covers of heavy metal music from her bedroom. These comments clearly challenge the articulations of policing shown earlier in this chapter and as such typify resistance to hegemonic hypermasculinity. The participants who posted these comments are responding to a number of derogatory comments that attempted to position the woman as illegitimate as a musician and valued member of the online metal scene.

> [K] This is a video about a girl with an amazing talent. For those who have a problem with the way she dressed, fuck you.
>
> [W] The amount of people hating on her because her voice only proves she surpasses them in multiple ways. All they can do is sit at home and troll or type illogical things online to irrelevant posts or videos to them pathetic…
>
> [Mg] What sort of sad little cunt do you have to be to downvote this? Shes quite clearly really good. If you did that purely because shes female you are one sad motherfucker.
>
> (YouTube 2016)

There is a clear attack on the negative commenters through labelling them as ‘pathetic trolls’ or by the use of the simple pejorative, ‘fuck you’. These comments show resistance to the tropes of objectification of women and the privileging of men in the online metal scene. The ‘trolling’ and ‘illogical things’ refers to a preoccupation with the musician’s clothing and feminine appearance and illegitimacy in the space. As mentioned by one participant ‘women are held to a much higher standard than men in metal’, a tenet of the dominance of masculinity in the online metal scene which is actively challenged and resisted through these types of comments.

These quotes above were directed at the participants of the comments page linked to one video. Resistance is also be found in comments that are targeted more broadly at the online metal community.

> [H] I’m putting a serious question out there. Where the fuck did musical respect in the metal community go? I don’t want to hear some flamer excuse that this isn’t metal. Sorry junior, it’s is. Want to trash mainstream pop, go for it … What is with all the retarded “They are only famous because she sucks cock! … and various verbal diarrhea..
>
> [A] Too many people who say “oh calm down” while still saying inflammatory things
>
> (YouTube 2016)

These commenters highlight resistance to hegemonic hypermasculinity in the writing on the wall of the online metal scene. This occurs through a likening of some comments to ‘verbal diarrhea [sic]’ and recognising the inflammatory and aggressive nature of many of the comments.

The following commenter’s aim is to defend the legitimacy of a woman vocalist for a death metal band. Notably, the commenter relies heavily on the themes of aggression and violence

and objectification of women. Wetherell and Edley identified, when looking at how men negotiated hegemonic masculinity, that resistance "trades on the hegemonic values of autonomy and independence" (1999, p. 350). This example ideally depicts a similar trading on tropes of hegemonic hypermasculinity.

> [L] What is with these comments?, you guys are probably jealous that this woman is more of a man than you. In fact your lucky your behind the safety of a computer screen, if you said it to her face she would fuck you into the dirt and make you her bitch.
>
> (YouTube 2016)

Another effect of this comment lies in the assumption that individual commenters might be 'jealous that this woman is more of a man' suggests that the only legitimate body in the online metal scene is male and that women's legitimacy is reliant upon an ability to achieve masculinity. This reliance on oppressive language is further exacerbated as the commenter continues to suggest the woman in the video would 'fuck you into the dirt and make you her bitch' – a somewhat extreme reference to sexual violence and subordination.

What is significant is that these comments adhere to themes of aggression, violence, and objectification of women. However, they are undeniably intended to defend marginalised individuals within the online metal scene, in particular, women. These comments highlight that resistance in the online metal scene emerges through an individual's adherence to themes exhibited in the writing on the wall. So, while the intention of many of the commenters is clearly to resist dominant tropes of hypermasculinity the text-based communication still contributes to the presentation and representation of the hegemonic hypermasculine order in the writing on the wall.

Another way in which resistance manifests in the online metal scene is through direct comments of support aimed at targeted individuals. In this instance a woman wearing a hijab and playing a cover of a Lamb of God song which she posted in a public online metal site was targeted with commentary which called into question her legitimacy on the basis of her perceived religion and her gender:

> [R] i can't thought a muslim girl can play metal music !!!but it's true
>
> [Fr] i'm a guitarist, but she plays better than me.. So sad
>
> (YouTube 2016)

In this same space there were countless responses in support of this young woman:

> [R] Some really disgusting comments here and these kind of comments are not what we are about. You have an amazing talent, stick with it and be as creative as you can.
>
> (YouTube 2016)

The ‘disgusting comments’ that this contributor refers to involve deriding the woman for her religion with comments that create links with terrorism, violence and oppression and the Islamic faith as well as claims that a woman or a young girl is not metal enough to be playing this type of heavy metal music.

> [X] that’s really nice metal played by a young pretty girl. Two thumbs for you, girl…..!!
>
> [J] Rock On Sista! that was fucking awesome!
>
> (YouTube 2016)

These comments, many of which exhibit religious or anti-religious connotations, also borrow the language of the themes of hegemonic hypermasculinity. They express shock that a young Muslim girl would be able to play metal music as well or better than many men. As mentioned earlier, even the resistance adds to the writing on the wall by making reference to a woman's 'youth' and 'prettiness' in her defence.

The take home point of my discussion of resistance is that while there are clear intentions to defend marginalised individuals, such resistance simultaneously reifies hegemonic hypermasculinity. This is a core feature of Gramscian hegemony and Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity (1987). That many of the comments of resistance also contribute to the hegemonic order is a result of the consent of the masses to the dominance of hypermasculine hegemony. By using language like "fuck you into the dirt and make you her bitch" one is signalling consent to the tropes of sexual violence, aggression, and objectification. Hegemonic power relies on this consent. The negotiation of hypermasculine metalhead identity offered through the comments outlined in this chapter, even though the intent may be to resist, further contribute to the writing on the wall. As Lorde quite famously suggests, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde 1983, p. 27).

Conclusion

The previous chapter outlined the emergence of hypermasculine tropes in the online metal scene. This chapter examined the second part of my research question: the *maintenance* of hegemonic hypermasculinity. My research identified clear linguistic mechanisms of policing and resistance used by participants when interacting in the online metal scene. The language used to police hegemonic tropes of hypermasculinity reflects extreme aggression and violence and overt sexualisation and objectification of women. Moreover, instances of resistance also

tend to reflect similar extremes. That is, there is not that much difference in the effect of policing or resistance *vis a vis* the maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity.

The similarity of policing and resistance can be seen in the requisite referral to hegemonic discourse. I suggest that participants who choose to resist hegemonic hypermasculinity are left with no choice but to deploy the very same discourse which typifies the hegemonic order. The continued dominance of hegemonic hypermasculinity relies on the "constant presentation and representation of the hegemonic order as the ultimate incarnation of liberty" (Anderson 2017a, p. 64). Members of the online metal scene consent to this hegemonic order and the characteristic hypermasculine tropes as desirable social expectations. In order to participate, as a resistor or not, the available discourse is always one which aligns with hegemonic hypermasculinity.

As James reminds us, core to our being in online social spaces "is the constant representation and reinvention of our personal past and present biographies" (2013, p. 388). Many participants in the online metal scene may not overtly agree with the extreme tropes of hypermasculinity shown in this chapter. However, the language at their disposal and the constant reification of hegemonic ideology, and of policing and resistance, leaves behind a writing on the wall which highlights all participants complicity in the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene.

It remains, in this thesis, to examine the influence of technology on the negotiations of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene. I have shown that hypermasculine tropes emerge in the online metal scene through text-based communication. These tropes align with notions of aggression, violence, militarism, and objectification of women. I have also shown how hegemonic hypermasculinity is maintained through a war of position in the online metal scene which takes place through mechanisms of policing and resistance. A significant

finding of this research is that both the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity are reliant upon discursive processes and are recorded and exhibited in the writing on the wall. The next chapter will outline the technological affordances which contribute to the existence of the writing on the wall as a highly visible and permanent record of the hegemonic hypermasculine order.

Chapter Seven: Speed of Light

Technological affordances of the online metal scene

The online metal scene presents a significant site of enquiry as a technologically-mediated reality. A reality just as tangible and affective as offline spaces. Events in online spaces often both reflect and affect our offline lives – a possibility that arises through affordances of computer technology. Just as reading glasses render the world of literature accessible to the reader, computer technology allows metalheads to operate in the online metal scene. The use of technology to access the online metal scene is clearly an obligatory part of the interaction and one which similarly alters information as it renders real the experience for the user. That is, the technology used to enter the space simultaneously and inescapably filters the experience based on its capacities and capabilities or *affordances*. This chapter will show how the affordances of online communication technology offer possibilities for the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene.

The importance of this research lies in the *reality* of online communication for all participants. As Markham suggests, for some "online communication is integral to *being* and is inseparable from the performance of self, both online and offline" (1998, p. 20). If our encounters are continually filtered through, sometimes extreme, hegemonic hypermasculine tropes there is a clear danger in this inseparability. The poet, Agnes Torok, highlights, most powerfully, the torrent of misogynistic vitriol that faces women in online social spaces. The comments she highlights are decidedly similar to the types of aggressive, violent, and objectifying content seen in the online metal scene. Optimistically, Torok identifies this violent backlash from men as the last violent struggle of a dying patriarchy. Indeed, a Gramscian perspective on hegemony might suggest that Torok has correctly identified the systematic fracturing of hegemonic power and an increasing shift toward deploying force. I offer this present study as an original

contribution to an on-going examination of the existence of such vitriol in online spaces with the hope that through a more in-depth understanding we may be able to move past such unpleasantness.

The online communication technology that allows the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity involves three key affordances: *visibility, permanence,* and *anonymity*. Firstly, in the online metal scene, text-based communication that forms the writing on the wall is more highly visible than in offline spaces. More people have access to conversations in these spaces because of the affordances of online text-based communication. Secondly, text-based communication is recorded by the technology in these spaces. This lends a degree of permanence not seen in offline spaces. That is, conversations between participants remain visible long after the conversation has taken place. Finally, when participating in the online metal scene users experience varying degrees of anonymity – through both the sheer number of participants as well as the option to not identify one's self in any meaningful way. This chapter will conclude that the affordances of technology contribute to a writing on the wall that encompasses a persistent, highly visible, and extreme account of both the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity.

Affordances of Technology

As outlined in the literature review, there have been many approaches over time to examine how humans and technology interact. Latour (2009) and Haraway (1985) have both contributed widely on the topic and propose useful perspectives on the ever-increasing inter-reliance of human and non-humans with machines and with each other. Useful as they are in providing a background to the human social interactions with technology in this instance, I will use them as just that, a background, to move on to an understanding of technological affordances in the online metal scene.

Latour proposed that the combination of human and technology – in his case (2009) human and gun – would most likely result in a *translation* of goals. He suggested that, given a gun, someone who once wished to merely harm or upset another person would now have the opportunity to kill. That is, in adding technology to a human agent one introduces new possibilities. Latour suggests that his use of the term 'translation' "means displacement, drift, invention, mediation, the creation of a link that did not exist before and that to some degree modifies two elements or agents" (1994, p. 32). Clearly, Latour isn't chasing technological determinism; rather, he suggests the combination of technology and human actors open up a range of possible outcomes. This view is not without merit however it is not appropriate here. My thesis is not concerned with the general expansion of interconnected technology-human relations, my primary concern here is the affordances of technology specifically in the online metal scene.

Haraway takes a feminist theoretical approach to the combination of technology and human beings via the notion of the cyborg. Worth noting here is her identification of the "leaki[ness] of the distinction between human-animal and machine" (1985, p. 11). She points out, in line with my earlier discussion of in-built masculinity, that technology, once a "caricature of masculinist reproductive dreams … is now disturbingly lively" (1985, p. 11). That is, technology is increasingly contributing to meaning making in our everyday lives. Haraway's cyborg concept has gained great momentum over the past few decades with regard to developing human-technology interaction (Lupton 2014). As Lupton suggests "we are more cyborgs than ever before" (2014, p. 165). That is, our lives increasingly incorporate technology into even the most ordinary daily activities. Consider a smart phone which contains GPS trackers, step-meters, Internet connectivity, video camera, a digital personal assistant 'Siri', and of course a telephone and text-messaging function. To examine this increasing influence and involvement that technology has in our lives the concept of the cyborg human still holds

significant currency. In the case of my enquiry though, I look more closely at one aspect of a technologically mediated environment, the online metal scene. As such, it is worthwhile moving away from the concept of cyborgs to answer the question specifically: what is it about online communication technology that allows the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene?

An approach that follows on from both Latour and Haraway's stance and is particularly useful in this study is that of Shapiro (2015) who summons Gibson's concept of affordances to show that technologies *offer* something complementary to social interaction in a given space. Gibson, who is widely credited with the first explication of the concept (Greeno 1994; Norman 1999; Shapiro 2015) suggests "the affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either good or ill" (1979, p. 119). This is precisely how I interpret the term 'affordance' when I use it to describe the influence of technology in the online metal scene. This study is interested in what limitations and opportunities are offered by the technologically mediated online metal scene.

The concept of affordances has been applied to computer technology with regard to identity work in online spaces by Shapiro who sees affordances as "…all the possible actions a particular technology allows" (2015, p. 122). Possible actions that Shapiro highlights of computer technology include "text-based communication, searchability, and permanence" (p. 122). These three affordances, in some ways, resemble the affordances that I have identified in the online metal scene. However, in this study, I chose to take Shapiro's conceptualisations of 'text-based communication' and 'searchability' out of the spotlight. Instead, I focus on what I observed to be three key affordances specific to the online metal scene that contribute to the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity: visibility, permanence, and

anonymity. These three key affordances were chosen because their influence became increasingly obvious throughout the research.

Technological Affordances in the Online Metal Scene

In order to preface a discussion of affordances in the online metal scene I return to the example of the video of a young metalhead who was confronted about his legitimacy as a father whilst at a supermarket checkout. The video showed a woman pointing to this metalhead's use of food stamps and his choice of clothing to draw conclusions about his class status and social standing as well as his legitimacy as a father. The content of the video is not as important here as the interaction that took place once the video was shared in the online metal scene. The affordances of visibility and permanence provide the possibility that this video, and the comments that it prompted, could remain visible in the online metal scene. Moreover, the comments, as a result of the affordance of anonymity, tended toward much more extreme appeals to hegemonic hypermasculinity.

Firstly, online communication technology afforded increased *visibility* when the video was shared online. That is, without filming and posting online the interaction would only have been witnessed by those present in the shopping centre. It would, most likely, not have been an interaction that elicited comments from many around the world. Secondly, the video and related comments are still available, thus highlighting the *permanence* of interactions in online spaces. Finally, the individual who posted the video initially as well as those who comment in spaces surrounding the video enjoy a degree of *anonymity*. That is, participants can remain anonymous because of the vast number of other participants in the online metal scene and because there exists no compulsion to identify oneself. The posting of this video is one example of how technological affordances affect the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene. Though I chose only a few examples, all of the

comments and all of the social interactions that take place in the online metal scene are affected by these affordances.

Visibility

The affordance of increased visibility in the online metal scene relates to the location of participants' interactions in a relatively public forum. A key feature of the online metal scene is the ability for large numbers of individuals to participate in chat rooms or forums. *The First Forum* had approximately 5000 members at the time of my research. All members had access to the threads on the forum and could equally contribute and observe conversations that were taking place. Participation in other forums and comments sections are much more difficult to quantify. For instance, a music video from a band such as Cannibal Corpse might elicit between 1,000-10,000 comments and have between 2.8 – 7.8 million overall views. Metallica's 'Enter Sandman' however had 154.3 million views and 25,000 comments in 2017. Radio and television since the MTV "obsession" (Tannenbaum & Marks 2011), which began in 1981, have most definitely spread heavy metal music to more individuals across the planet. Online communication technology goes a step further and allows participants to be a part of the discussion – a discussion that becomes visible to millions of other people.

Individuals in the online metal scene are much more active in the production and consumption of heavy metal culture. The increased visibility that I observed reflects the findings of Bennett and Peterson (2004) and Straw (1991) that the online scene emerges as part of the forces of market globalisation. That is, the online metal scene allows articulations of heavy metal culture across political, cultural, and geographical borders. This contribution is plainly visible to all others that log on to view comments or to contribute themselves. Visibility is an affordance which enables many more people to observe the hegemonic hypermasculine writing on the wall.

The visibility of these spaces, in this context, can be broken down to two areas: access over distance and access by anybody.

Access over distance

One of the main purposes of technology is to accomplish tasks for us that would otherwise demand greater physical effort. Ostensibly, the main purpose, or at least a valued affordance, of online communication technology in the online metal scene is the ability to disseminate the writing on the wall across geographically vast distances. DIY and tape-trading communities served a similar purpose but often relied on the physical presence of members at shows or the postal service for dissemination of material. This process was either expensive or time consuming or both and was gradually superseded in the 1990s by increased Web connectivity (Kahn-Harris 2011). There are only so many tapes and newsletters that can feasibly be produced, carried, and distributed. Email and bulletin boards were quickly adopted as means of disseminating information amongst members and bridging physical distances between individuals. This is a point noted by several members of *The First Forum* – that going online meant they could reach more people. The rapid development of online communication technology is increasingly pushing the boundaries of what can be shared. In the second year of this research *The First Forum* held its inaugural live-streamed general meeting where members from geographically distant places were able to participate in real time through use of a camera, microphone and live video.

Technology used to access the online metal scene, through the affordance of visibility, shrinks the distance between participants. *The First Forum* is an online version of a metal organisation that began with newsletter sharing across the relatively close geographical distance between Philadelphia and New Jersey (approximately 100 kilometres) in the United States. In 2012, through the use of my desktop computer and from nearly 17,000 kilometres away, I was able

to easily view current and past conversations amongst members of the forum. In contrast, at a metal show in my initial offline participant observation it was difficult to interpret any conversation outside of my immediate vicinity. The affordances of online communication technology allow for the easy traversing of geographically vast distances through comfortable use of a personal computer. Everybody who has a simple connection to the Internet almost anywhere on the planet can now be a part of the online metal scene where they are exposed to text-based communication that espouses the tropes of hegemonic hypermasculinity.

What such visibility means for the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity is that the writing on the wall is now accessible across vast distances. The text-based communication shared by participants in the online metal scene is shared in forums and comments sections which many more people have access to through online communication technology. In offline heavy metal spaces utterances are shared by friends and acquaintances and not necessarily received by others outside of the immediate space. The affordance of visibility means the writing on the wall, replete with the tropes of hegemonic hypermasculinity, can be viewed from almost anywhere on the planet.

Access by anybody

The spaces in which I conducted my research were all publicly available websites and social media platforms. Password protected access was a requirement of some spaces, including *The First Forum,* however this was generally accepted to be for the purposes of moderation of the forum content rather than as a means of ensuring exclusivity of the space. One participant, in discussing the rules of *The First Forum*, suggested that through any individual's log in details "moderators could check logs to assess their offense". The presence of moderators and the requirement to create a user name was evidently not aimed at creating exclusivity. All of the sites within the online metal scene were readily accessible by any Internet user who wished to

join and participate in line with some simple rules. Compulsory user accounts did however appear to affect perceptions of anonymity, which is to be discussed later in this chapter.

In the online metal scene, any Internet user can visit and read all of the comments and interactions that have been going on in that space. The process of gaining access to *The First Forum* required a user to sign up for an account if they wished to be able to actively participate. To sign up, one selects a user name, enters a valid email address, and answers one or more questions related to heavy metal. Ostensibly, these questions were to ensure that only true metalheads were signing up. As confirmed by two participants of *The First Forum* however, the presence of gatekeeping questions was most probably aimed at eliminating 'bots' – malicious software that has been known, historically, to plague Internet Relay Chat (IRC) environments (Goebel & Holz 2007) – rather than maintenance of exclusivity in the forum. If you know, or can search via Google, that John 'Ozzy' Osbourne and Lemmy Kilmister are two highly revered heavy metal musicians you are eligible to sign up to the forum. Facebook, similarly requires that a user create a password protected account, though there are no restrictions on who can and cannot participate. YouTube, the third site of interest in this study, allows users without current accounts to access most videos and read most comments. The ability to contribute to the commentary on any video, however, requires the user to create an account. Like *The First Forum,* account creation in both Facebook and YouTube appears to be part of mechanism of content moderation rather than exclusivity.

The affordance of visibility allows access to interactions in the online metal scene by anybody. The online communication technology enables anybody to witness conversations that occur in online space combined with the option to become an active or passive participant. One of the clearest examples of this was seen in the comments sections of heavy metal videos hosted by YouTube. At times during this project, I watched videos and observed conversations taking

place in comments sections in a passive role. All comments were visible (unless deleted for not adhering to community standards) to everybody in these spaces. In much the same way as access to content over distance, this visibility contrasts with the lack of 'visibility' at shows and in other offline spaces. That is, in the online metal scene, through the affordance of visibility, a participant can be party to most conversations taking place. At a show, in offline heavy metal spaces, participation in conversations is often limited to those taking place within close proximity, at the bar, or outside the venue.

These points, access across distance and access by anybody, are two key aspects of the affordance of visibility and the associated maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene. Because more people have access to the shared content, the tropes of hypermasculinity presented in the writing on the wall have greater reach. In online space one can witness others' conversations without being an active participant and can have access to these conversations without being physically present. That is, the video of a metalhead father at a shopping centre and the associated comments which depict extreme appeals to hegemonic hypermasculinity are not just visible to those in the shopping centre. Through the affordance of visibility potentially millions of individuals are privy to the hypermasculine writing on the wall.

Permanence

The affordance of permanence in online communication technology follows from visibility and has evolved over the course of several decades of technological development. In the context of the online metal scene, permanence allows the writing on the wall to remain visible over time. Early IRC software would allow conversations to remain temporarily visible during the encounter but not save them for future reference. That is, text-based conversation that took place in a 'chat room' or private chat space could be reviewed by those who were party to its initial posting as long as the user kept the chat room window open. The data was stored only

temporarily in a computer's Random Access Memory (RAM) unless one chose to copy the text and save it to a Hard Disk Drive (HDD). The main difference between early IRC and the online metal scene is that the data produced in the space – the writing on the wall, replete with the tropes of hegemonic hypermasculinity – is now automatically stored away from any individual's desktop computer on a host server as well. Data is now being recorded by technology rather than at the individual user's request. This involuntary storage of all comments and posts by a third party contributes to what I have called the affordance of permanence in the online metal scene.

The effect of the affordance of permanence in the online metal scene, is that conversations and posted data (text, photography, and videos) now remain accessible long after the interaction has taken place. As visibility provided access across geographical space, permanence, as an affordance, provides access across time. If we revisit the case of the video of the metalhead father described earlier, we can also see the affordance of permanence. The video was posted, presumably, not long after the incident occurred at the shopping centre. The video is still visible in the online metal scene today. In fact, the video is often shared by new members or participants who have only recently become aware of its existence. This further highlights the import of permanence in the online metal scene. That is, the video does not become some tale of a forgotten era, as it were, told and re-told through individual memory. It is permanently available in the same form as it was when it was first posted. While it is clear that such permanence offers a wealth of information for the ethnographer in online space it too contributes to the maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity. That is, the writing remains on the wall for future encounters.

The affordance of permanence has several consequences for hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene. Interactions between participants at offline shows are temporally

fleeting. Once a conversation is over, the only remaining trace is often in the minds and memories of the individuals who were party to it. It can be re-called and even repeated to others; however, often not with the exact clarity and inflection as the very first interaction; not with the same background sights and sounds; and not with a visible and permanent writing on the wall consisting of related comments and posts. When conversations or other interactions are recorded by technology, as they are in the online metal scene, they remain accessible in the online space. Moreover, they remain juxtaposed alongside all related comments that have been posted over time.

Consider the following case. A thread that had begun prior to my entry to the online metal scene asked participants to describe the shirt they were currently wearing – the (mostly correct) assumption is that metalheads wear band merchandise most of the time. This is a common request in many of the forums and appears to serve the purpose of reifying members' commitment to the alliance. The thread elicited several hundred responses from members who would either post the band name associated with their shirt, post a picture of their shirt, or comment on whether others' posts legitimised their metalhead identity or defamed them. One member of *The First Forum* who was well known to many participants posted a picture of herself wearing a shirt from Norwegian Black Metal band Kovenant. This post was initially met with praise for her choice and her awareness of the band. Over the period of the next couple of months the responses had turned to blatant requests for photographs of this woman and others in various stages of undress. A request, incidentally, never made of the men who posted photographs. While this participant did not comply with the request, the evidence of this conversation and its appeal to the hypermasculine trope of objectification of women remains visible in the online metal scene.

The affordance of permanence in this case renders visible the objectification of women across time, long after the initial interaction had taken place. Individuals who visit this space now will see objectification of women as a social expectation in the online metal scene. Not only that, but new members, and old, are still able to add to and engage with these posts. The objectification of women, of one woman in particular, is recorded indefinitely. Online communication technology used to access the online metal scene has presented the affordance of permanence through the use of external servers to store data created as part of online social interaction. As such, not only are these types of appeals to hegemonic hypermasculinity visible to many across space but they *remain* visible and continue to reinforce the hegemonic order over time.

The two affordances, visibility and permanence, that I have discussed so far are of similar significance in the online metal scene. The emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity occurs in accordance with the possibilities offered by the affordances of visibility and permanence. Firstly, themes of aggression and violence, militaristic organisation, and objectification emerge from interactions which are no longer private as they may be in offline spaces. The visibility of these interactions and the content increase their availability to all participants and contribute in a much more tangible way to an illustration of the hegemonic hypermasculine order in the online metal scene. The permanence of content in the online metal scene, too, contributes to the persistence of hypermasculine norms and values over time.

Anonymity

The third affordance of online communication technology that contributes to the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity is anonymity. In short, technology presents participants with the choice to identify themselves to others or not. The complexity of anonymity and tendency towards extreme referrals to hypermasculine tropes arises in relation

to perceived accountability and consequences. I suggest that perception about social accountability is related to feelings of group membership. Smith et al highlight that "individuals will act in the best interests of their group when a group membership is salient" (2007, p. 254). *The First Forum* is an example of a group within the online metal scene which has a significantly close group membership. Facebook and YouTube, on the other hand, tended to offer spaces that were more individualised, with little or no prior connection between participants.

While affordances of visibility and permanence provide the writing on the wall about the rules of the online metal scene, the affordance of anonymity contributes to the extremeness of participants' adherence to the hegemonic hypermasculine order in their interactions. By 'extremeness' I refer to what might also be called "rampant incivility" (Santana 2014, p. 18). That is, comments in the online metal scene often tend to embrace extremely aggressive, violent or sexualised content. This is evident in my data and appears reliant upon degrees of anonymity afforded in each online metal site.

Feeling anonymous in online spaces is a common phenomenon and is closely linked in much of the literature to levels of accountability (Singer 1996; Crump 2003; Smith et al 2007; Santana 2014). Omernick and Sood highlight the Internet user population size by posing the question: "how would you feel walking in to a party of two billion people?" (2013). In a space with that many other participants, individuals possess a degree of anonymity and interactions are vastly different from those in small offline groups or in private chat rooms. The effect of anonymity on the conversation in these spaces is that there becomes "no apparent social hierarchy to submit to" (2013, p. 526). That is, in the online metal scene, heightened anonymity tends to equate with the removal of perceived accountability and therefore increased referral to extreme notions of aggression, violence, militarism, and objectification of women.

My research showed that where there appeared to be increased anonymity, and thus fewer consequences, comments tended toward the extreme in their adherence to hegemonic hypermasculinity. In cases where participants knew each other and formed more familiar relationships, anonymity decreased and consequences for extreme behaviour became more noticeable. What this indicates is that participants knew that extreme appeals to hegemonic masculine traits including aggression, violence, militarism, and objectification of women were undesirable – as Connell suggests, the current hegemonic masculine identity does not in fact suit most men (2005). However, when afforded opportunity through anonymity to remove perceived consequences they would carry on regardless. This was confirmed during the process of respondent validation. One participant noted that it was common to see extreme appeals to aggression and violence in the online metal scene where there was a perception of anonymity.

There are differences in the extremeness of comments posted in the online metal scene which can be aligned with the affordance of anonymity. I observe sites in the online metal scene as either *open* or *closed*. Open sites are freely accessible and tend to have lower levels of group solidarity. That is, sites like Facebook and Youtube where participants are able to come and go as they please. Participants in open sites tend not to have pre-existing ties outside of the specific comments page in which they are participating. Open sites also tend to include individuals who do not specifically identify as metalheads. Closed sites, for my purposes, are online forums such as *The First Forum* where access tends to be moderated by senior members of the space. *The First Forum* is an example of what Smith et al call sites with "salient group membership" (2007, p. 254). Participants appear to have closer ties and often discuss their lives outside of the forum. All participants in these types of spaces are self-identified heavy metal fans and the discussion largely revolves around heavy metal music and culture.

Throughout this research I moved back and forth between open and closed sites, a movement that is not uncommon when participating in the online metal scene. Participants in *The First Forum* would point me in the direction of links, videos, and other websites that they thought might be of interest or simply that they thought were interesting. Observing both open and closed sites showed the difference in anonymity and related perceptions of accountability. A key discovery during my participation in the various open and closed sites was that more anonymous and open sites presented lower levels of accountability. That is, fewer direct consequences for participants who engaged in extreme aggression, violence, and objectification of women. Closed, less anonymous, online metal sites in contrast tended to have recognised consequences for more extreme comments. The difference in consequences or accountability across these spaces correlated with shifts between overtly aggressive and violent policing and resistance and more passive and thoughtful control mechanisms.

The comments sections of videos on YouTube epitomise the more anonymous and open sites of the online metal scene. They tend to have vastly more intense and venomous arguments and accusations about legitimacy that draws on the framework of hegemonic hypermasculinity.

> [M] Jesus Christ yeah thats it little boy! Like I said you little gay wads and your "safe spaces" "crying rooms" and temper tantrums would not last 5 minutes! i could take out an entire screamcore audience by myself
>
> [T] ... Here's an idea: shut the fuck up
>
> [Cr] It drives me crazy how much hate there is within the "scene". Some of you act like the most elitist douchebags I've ever seen. Go fuck yourself.
>
> [E] Fuck you. People are all entitled to their opinions bitch

> [T] suck a giant cock bro i have different taste from you so get the fuck out
>
> [J] hopefully he drinks himself to death and you negative cunts can fuck off and let fans enjoy the band
>
> [S] kill yourself you unfunny retarded piece of shit
>
> (YouTube 2016)

All of these comments were observed in open online metal sites. Most of the conversation in these spaces tends to revolve around a reasonably fierce debate about which particular sub-genre of metal music most accurately exemplifies archetypal heavy metal – of course it's a matter of taste, as one commenter crudely pointed out and there is no definitive answer. Nevertheless, the use of pejoratives such as 'fuck you' or 'shut the fuck up'; threats to 'take out an entire screamcore audience'; or inciting suicide in other commenters are typical of the extremely negative comments that contribute to the maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in more open online metal sites. The way this conversation plays out can clearly be seen to show what Santana calls rampant incivility (2014) and occurs in the open online metal sites where group membership is far less salient (Smith et al 2007).

Conversely, discussion in closed sites tends more often to exemplify thoughtful and considered debate with a great deal more customary respect between participants.

> [D] Blood Duster is horrible. Maybe it's just me because I'm not much of a grindcore person. Blood Duster is only interesting live because of their energy and absurdity of the stupid shit they sing.

> [J] I am really enjoying the Wormphlegm demo and wish I could see them at the Ashes To Ashes Dust To Dust festival. I doubt I've ever heard more tortured music in my life. They make Khanate look like pussies.
>
> [M] most grindcore just sounds like noise (i.e. agoraphobic nosebleed) job for a cowboy made good use of pig squeals
>
> [K responding to M above] no dude, don't say it. Please listen to napalm death or birdflesh and change your mind. All grindcore bands that I know are pretty original and singular.
>
> (*The First Forum* 2016)

These comments clearly elucidate the more thoughtful and considered opinion and respectful dialogue between participants in closed online metal sites. It is clear that there is greater accountability in *The First Forum* where the salience of group membership is increased (Smith et al 2007). These comments are part of a discussion about the merits of grindcore. Grindcore is a subgenre of death metal typified by "screamed, guttural vocals and fast, loud guitar riffs" (Overell 2010, p. 82) and remains at the centre of much debate in the online metal scene. Notably the commenters still embrace the tropes of hypermasculinity in their language. Given the apparent familiarity between participants however, (these four participants met regularly in *The First Forum* during this research) the discussion is clearly not as extreme in tone or as aggressive towards each other.

In the more familiar and closed sites, where anonymity appears to be lower, humour is also used more frequently. The point of humour here is to maintain close reference to the themes of hegemonic hypermasculinity while also avoiding consequences for extreme behaviour in an online metal site with a significant level of cohesion.

[T] Quite a hard one to find. I assume you downloaded it... if you didnt, I'm going to have to come over there and kill you for it ;-)

(*The First Forum* 2016)

Interestingly, the above commenter, talking to someone who they are familiar with, includes the winking smiley face emoticon ;-) at the end of their comment about killing their friend to indicate the joviality of the comment. During respondent validation, participants who use such text-based mechanisms to relate sentiment confirmed that the emoticon's purpose was to ensure the recipient receives the comment as jovial while still adhering to the hegemonic order of hypermasculinity in the online metal scene.

The following two commenters were discussing a newcomer to *The First Forum*. These two knew each other quite well in this space and had participated in conversation together in other threads previously.

[P] I hate him already, although I do agree on a couple points. (It's alright, he'll hate me too.)

[Ch] I agree on all his points. And I like him.

[P] But he probably thinks you're irritating and boring as shit. What's the point in agreeing?

[Ch] Come on, I don't want to fucking marry him.

(*The First Forum* 2016)

The use of aggression and violence is, by far, less extreme than in open online metal sites. What stands out in the closed sites is that the language, even when references to violence and

aggression are utilised, tends to be much more respectful of other participants. The increased accountability operating in *The First Forum* would prohibit more overt aggression. The consequences for transgression would be ostracisation from the group or deactivation of their account by moderating members. The conversation tends to create a clear feeling of familiarity amongst participants. Nuanced smirks and grins, references to previous encounters, and a sense of knowing each other exists in these spaces. There is a greater acknowledgement in closed sites that there are significantly more consequences for transgressive behaviour.

As can be seen in the different comments offered in open and closed online sites, the affordance of anonymity tends to affect how individuals embrace the tropes of hegemonic hypermasculinity in their comments. In open, more anonymous, sites where there is a lower chance that individual commenters will be otherwise acquainted, comments tend to be more extreme. In closed sites where anonymity tends to be lower and members appear to have closer online and offline ties comments are more respectful and considered. Both configurations of online metal sites still embrace the tropes of hegemonic hypermasculinity. As I have shown however, comments in closed spaces tend to employ humour through emoticon use and other linguistic mechanisms to indicate a much more playful referral to extreme hypermasculinity.

Conclusion

Much research has been done in recent times into how individuals handle the experience of existing online. As Lupton points out, the rapid development of technology means that more and more aspects of our lives are being included in a digital world (2014). It is too late to assume that online social spaces, facilitated by Internet communication technology, are somehow removed from real life. Online spaces, including the online metal scene, are increasingly available as spaces of real and meaningful social interaction. Our offline selves at once affect and are affected by the writing on the wall. That is, the hegemonic hypermasculine order,

presented and represented in the discourse of the online metal scene emerges and is maintained via the affordances of online communication technology.

The online metal scene is facilitated by technology which affords a significant degree of visibility. As Requena and Ayuso state "Internet relationships broaden social experiences in a way that permits people to access much more geographically distant communities than face-to-face relationships alone (2018, p. 1). Such a visibility renders the ideas, norms, rules, and regulations accessible by anybody from anywhere in the world. The present research was conducted using desktop personal computers at both my University and home offices as well as through mobile technology such as iPad and iPhone. Geographically speaking, without the affordance of visibility offered by these types of technology, I would have been prevented from accessing the community with such ease and frequency. I would not have been able to see other people's comments or contribute to the on-going conversation. Requena and Ayuso proceed to suggest that such visibility has a significant impact on "how people connect with each other and can affect every aspect of social life: at work, with family, with friends, or during leisure activities" (2018, p. 2). This is of great significance for my findings. The writing on the wall, afforded by technology and contributed to by the text-based negotiations of hegemonic hypermasculinity sets out, in a highly visible way, the rules of engagement for social interaction, with family, with friends, and so on.

Conversations in the online metal scene tend to remain visible through the affordance of permanence. The affordance of permanence, combined with the affordance of visibility, means that not only can conversations be observed by anybody from anywhere in the world, but they can be accessed across time. There are recent studies which contradict my findings (Burton 2015) and (Green et al 2016). Burton suggests that self-published data is not as permanent as many would have it. Green (et al) suggest that while self-publication of data is permanent there

is always the option for more "socially anxious individuals" (p. 212) to actively remove old posts. Both are valid points. There are ways that posts get lost or deleted either through servers and sites closing down or through individual choice. However, neither of these positions has a significant impact on the present study as there still exists voluminous permanent contributions to the writing on the wall replete with the discourse of hegemonic hypermasculinity.

Anonymity allows for the themes to manifest themselves as extreme appeals to aggression, violence, militarism, and objectification of women. Anonymity is perhaps one of the more well-known and discussed affordances of technology (Berghel 2018; Nelson 2016; Nagel & Frith 2015). Much of the recent literature has addressed the issue of trolling and anonymity. As described in this chapter, the lack of consequences for offensive and violent behaviour becomes more evident as anonymity increases. Computer technology affords a degree of anonymity that reduces perceptions of accountability which facilitates the posting of material that demonstrates more extreme notions of hegemonic hypermasculinity without fear of punishment.

I have already established that hegemonic power operates through "the constant presentation and representation of the hegemonic order as the ultimate incarnation of liberty" (Anderson 2017a, p. 64). In the online metal scene, hegemonic hypermasculinity emerges and is maintained precisely in this manner. The writing on the wall is the site for this constant presentation and representation. Contributed to by all members of the community, the writing on the wall grows ever larger and perpetually presents an updated version of the ideological expectations of metalhead behaviour and identity. The affordances of technology permit this to occur.

The affordances of online communication technology are the aspects of technology that permit extra meaning to be created and interpreted in social interactions. Each affordance (visibility,

permanence, and anonymity) individually offer new potentialities for participants in the online metal scene. Moreover, these affordances combine to facilitate a highly visible and permanent writing on the wall which exhibits the tropes of hypermasculinity and sets out the expectations for all metalheads. This Chapter has shown that the social expectations in the online metal scene require interaction along hegemonic hypermasculine lines of aggression, violence, militarism, and objectification of women. These expectations are not maintained through force, "at the point of a gun" (Connell 2005), but through the constant reification of a metalhead alliance guided by the ideology of hegemonic hypermasculinity.

Conclusion: Through the Fire and the Flames

When I began this research, I was interested in collective masculine identity in the online metal scene. Through my personal fandom and participation in the online metal scene prior to my research I had noticed a different, more extreme referral to tropes of masculinity. This was within a community which I and many others had already perceived as predominantly masculine (Weinstein 1991; Walser 1993; Straw 1984). Indeed, the perception of metal music culture as masculine is pervasive (Brown 2014) though not unquestioned (DiGioia & Davis 2018). What I have found is that it is not possible to pin down a static notion of online metalhead identity, collective or not.

In canvassing the literature on heavy metal music and culture, as it has emerged over the past four decades, it appeared that there had been significant authorship that tended to focus on two key areas. Chronologically speaking, early scholarly interest in heavy metal music tended to revolve around negative linkages and appeared to respond to various moral panics on the 1970s and 1980s. Most famously, the Parents Music Resource Centre in 1985, labelled by Gordon as the "frenzied protectors of public decency" (1989, p. 120), prompted congressional hearings into the content of heavy metal music. The claim, mostly levelled at heavy metal musicians, was that their lyrics contained explicit violence, sex, drug use, Satanism, and that this type of music was responsible for increased teen pregnancy and teenage suicide rates in the United States (United States Senate 1985, p. 11). A large volume of scholarly literature, particularly in the psychological sciences, seemed to address similar negative links. As I state in Chapter Two though, these links are often reliant on outsider assumptions about heavy metal music and attempts to draw causational links between heavy metal and teenage pregnancy and suicide are tenuous at best. In fact, the attack on heavy metal music culture by the PMRC appears to have

spurred significant backlash from metalhead academics and fans alike. Since the 1990s, heavy metal music has enjoyed far greater interest and broader examination from cultural studies and sociology scholars.

More recent scholarship on heavy metal culture has focussed, more reasonably, on issues of communities, local culture, and shared identity (Rivera-Segarra et al 2018; Varas-Diaz & Scott 2016; Venkatesh et al 2015; Snell & Hodgetts 2007; Levine 2008). Of particular interest in this thesis are the accounts of community in metal music culture. As Varas-Diaz and Scott highlight, the idea of a heavy metal community is more complex than often thought. They suggest that "for some individuals enmeshed in particular subgenres the notion of community seems like an uncomfortable contradiction" (2016, p. x). While there exists 'communities' of metalheads, the online metal scene being one of them, it is important to also note that individuality remains highly valued. Connell reminds us that masculine identities are non-static negotiations (2005); likewise, metalhead identity cannot be described with any degree of linearity.

Avoiding completely any attempt to pin down static metalhead identity markers, I turned to the writing on the wall. That is, a multitude of comments and posts, ever-growing through on-going text-based communication. The writing on the wall records the emergence and maintenance of the negotiation of hegemonic hypermasculinity. My intent here is not to suggest that all metalheads who participate in the online metal scene assume the hegemonic hypermasculine identity. As Connell suggests, notions of hegemony rarely reflect the actual beliefs or values of individuals in a given space (2005). My suggestion is, however, that the writing on the wall is a constant presentation and representation of the hegemonic hypermasculine order (Anderson 2017a) in the online metal scene.

A Gramscian concept of hegemony is an on-going process. The exercise of hegemonic power requires the active consent of the masses to their own subordination. Consent is gained through an acceptance of widely disseminated descriptions of hegemonic ideology. Hypermasculine tropes are presented and represented in the writing on the wall of the online metal scene. The ideology of metalhead aggression, violence, militarism, and objectification of women is accepted by participants through their on-going participation. These tropes represent hegemonic hypermasculinity, they do not represent alternative masculinities and those who are subordinated, yet they remain as the generally accepted answer to the question of the ascendency of male metalhead identity.

The constant presentation and representation of hegemonic hypermasculine tropes through the writing on the wall is shaped by online communication technology. Contrary to the seemingly fleeting interactions amongst fans in offline metal scenes, the writing on the wall is subject to significant limitations and opportunities, or what I choose to call affordances, provided by the technology that must be used to access the online metal scene. Through the necessary use of online communication technology, the interactions and the record of interactions in the writing on the wall become highly visible, permanent, and exemplify more extreme referrals to aggression, violence, militarism, and objectification of women.

As I conclude this thesis, it remains to contextualise the concept of the writing on the wall. I reiterate that my original contribution to knowledge highlights the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity within the online metal scene. I will also revisit my adaptation of the concept of affordances to outline the influence of online communication technology on building and maintaining the writing on the wall in the online metal scene. Finally, this conclusion will confirm the position of this thesis in a broader sociological context and offer a trajectory for future research in light of my findings. The concept of the writing on the wall and

the related theorisations surrounding affordances of online communication technology hold significant value in wider sociological debates. We are increasingly connected for purposes of social interaction, news gathering, political action and governance and well as for leisure (gaming, dating, and shopping). The increasing prominence of social media technology requires us to critically examine the ways in which our relationship with technology is influencing our social lives. While my original contribution to knowledge lies in the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene, I further contribute, with this thesis, to these on-going discussions of social interaction in online spaces.

Contextualising this Thesis

In backgrounding my research, a three-pronged review of current literature was required. Such an approach involved, firstly, tracing the development of thought in the field of gender studies which saw an understanding of masculine gender and power manifest in the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987). Secondly, I offered a discussion of the emerging body of literature centred on heavy metal music cultures, subcultures, and scenes (Weinstein 1991 Walser 1993; Straw 1984). Finally, I reviewed the current literature surrounding the convergence of online technology and social interaction. Such an approach contributes to the contextualisation of my research question: How does hegemonic hypermasculinity emerge and how is it maintained in the online metal scene?

Masculinity

Establishing gender identity, and thus masculinity, as a social construction was a necessary first step in this thesis. As my findings suggest, meanings of masculinity which can be read in the writing on the wall are socially constructed. It was important to my investigation that I distance myself from early thought which tended to rely on the conflation of the terms sex and gender. West and Zimmerman usefully deconstructed these terms to establish that gender, as separate

from sex, is a managed achievement in light of social norms that surround sex categories (1987). This is useful as it highlighted that the emergence of hegemonic hypermasculine tropes is linked to gender identities and not to corporeal sex categories.

An examination of the literature surrounding sex and gender lead to a theorisation of gender as something which we do and which is done to us in accordance with societal norms. Butler's significant contribution that "gender is a repeated stylisation of the body … within a hegemonic discourse" (2006, p. 12 & 45) takes gender as a social construction founded in hegemonic negotiations of power. Backgrounding my research with such a contribution underscored the negotiated character of the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene.

As my research question was concerned primarily with how hegemonic hypermasculinity emerged and was maintained in the online metal scene, it was, of course, prudent to follow closely Connell's decades of scholarship on the concept (2016, 2012a, 2012b, 2005, 1990, 1987). Hegemonic masculinity, for Connell, is the "configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of patriarchy" (2005, p. 77). That is, hegemonic masculinity – or in the case of the present study, hegemonic hypermasculinity – is a "political making and remaking" (Connell 2005, p. 44) of masculine norms that reinforce the dominance of hypermasculinity in the online metal scene. Connell famously followed a Gramscian conception of hegemony in developing the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Of greatest significance is the notion that the maintenance of hegemonic masculine dominance is not simply taken for granted, it is reliant upon constant negotiations amongst men. The emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity takes place through a negotiation which is recorded and represented in the writing on the wall.

Music

The first step in reviewing contemporary literature on music was to separate out sociological approaches to music and culture from musicology. As I noted, this was not to dismiss the validity of musicology, rather it was a step taken toward analytical precision. Musicology as Kerman suggests (2009), is often conceived of as primarily concerned with technical aspects of musicianship. I do recognise that the emerging body of literature surrounding heavy metal music is increasingly interdisciplinary, and as such often includes musicological accounts. However, the departure from musicology is simply a reflection of the significant interest, in this study, in the cultural aspects of the online metal scene.

The second task of my review of music literature was to address the shifting theoretical paradigm of subcultures theory to a post-youth conception of scenes. The primary concern with subcultures theory, as outlined by its detractors (Redhead 1990; Bennett & Kahn-Harris 2004; and McRobbie 1980), is the fixed character of genre, style, and class. That is, subcultures theory, a significant output of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, is unable to accommodate changes in market relations and technology which results in the emergence of new forms of local, translocal, (Bennett & Rogers 2016) and online music scenes. Locating my research within the online metal *scene* reflects the significant accounts of youth and music cultures as functioning in a more globalised world (Bennett & Peterson 2004; Straw 1991; Redhead 1990). To answer my guiding question about the influence of online communication technology on the online metal scene, such a move was vital.

Finally, in this review of metal music literature, I outlined recent work around music and gender. Of course, it is no huge task to observe gender relations in music cultures generally. I traced briefly, the literature that exists around the binaries of music preference where, mostly early studies sought a connection between gender identity and musical preference. Like the

search for clear links between metal music and suicidality, the links were often tenuous. Of interest however was the significant attention that has been paid to masculinity in heavy metal scenes. Some texts (Walser 1993) were so widely renowned that participants in *The First Forum* pointed to them as sources of information for me as a researcher.

The focus on masculinity in heavy metal culture has developed considerably over the past three or four decades. Initial forays into metal cultures by researchers looked for explanations of undeniable masculinity (Weinstein 1991). An increasingly voluminous body of work in metal music studies currently highlights the complexity of gender and masculinity at play within metal cultures (Clifford-Napoleone 2015; Hoad 2017; Heesch & Scott 2016; Hill 2016; Overell 2011). Of considerable interest to the present study were recent accounts of gender in *online* metal spaces. Karl Spracklen's (2010) analysis of discussions about sexuality in the online metal forum blackmetal.co.uk signalled the emergence of the online metal scene as a site for enquiry, particularly along lines of gender. This thesis stands as an original contribution to knowledge in this field.

Online Spaces

The task of Chapter Three was to present the transition of social interaction, particularly in relation to masculinity, to online social spaces. The first dilemma to be resolved was the dichotomy of real / virtual experience. The import of this thesis surrounds the fact that social experiences in online spaces are indeed real, affective experiences. It was important to discount the (nowadays not so common) misconception that simply being able to switch off a computer or mobile device renders online social interaction somehow less real. The question of such a dichotomy has been discounted by many (Bessi & Ferrara 2016; Wise et al 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein 2010; Ybarra & Mitchell 2004; Campbell 2005). My decision to rely on nomenclature

such as ‘online ethnography’ and ‘online scenes’ as opposed to the term ‘virtual’ reflects my conscientious rejection of the real / virtual divide.

A significant contribution in Chapter Three was a discussion of masculinity and technology. I outlined how technology has always had solid ties to masculinity. Though I adhere to the suggestion by Hutchby (2001) that the assumptions regarding masculine technological mastery are based on wider social assumptions about patriarchal dominance. That is, there is no ‘natural’ difference between women and men that preclude women from mastery of technology. The assumed divide only serves to reinforce gender inequality. The assumptions about masculine aptitude for technology have influenced men’s dominance in the field of Internet technology also – the online metal scene was, of course, no exception.

A review of the literature surrounding music and online spaces was another important contribution of Chapter Three. Scholarship on music online has focussed on two key areas. Firstly, there has been considerable attention to the impact of online communication technology on the sharing and dissemination of music (Anderton et al 2013; James 2013). That is, software like Napster in the 2000s signalled a major shift in the global music industry. The development of similar software and streaming sites (Spotify, Pandora, and Bandcamp) has increased opportunities for recording industry corporations as well as individuals with regard to self-publication.

Of greater interest in this thesis, however, are the opportunities presented by online communication technology for the emergence of the online metal scene. That is, sites for the production and consumption of metal music culture. Of great importance, particularly with regard to the affordances of technology that I identify in this study, is the opportunity for individuals to congregate across political, geographical, and cultural boundaries. The extensive

scholarly attention to these new configurations of music scenes (Straw 1991; Bennett & Peterson 2044; Bennett & Rogers 2016) backgrounded my examination of the importance of the online metal scene as a social space which had, many years ago, undergone the transition from a tape trading and fanzine network in North America to an online space for the production and consumption of music culture.

Methods

The first task of my methodology Chapter was to establish what the online metal scene looks like in the theoretical context of an online scene. In Chapter Two I began with a discussion of online heavy metal *scenes* (Bennett & Peterson 2004; Lee & Peterson 2004; Bennett & Rogers 2016). While 'virtual' was the term preferred by others, I preferred the nomenclature, 'online' so as to avoid reintroducing a debate about the real / virtual dichotomy. A discussion of online scenes was located in my methods chapter as it provided a solid foundation from which to understand the online metal scene in the context of wider metal communities. Moreover, positioning online metal spaces as scenes allows an understanding of the spatial and temporal articulations of shared investments in music (Bennett & Rogers 2016, p. 4).

The remainder of my methods chapter stood alone as an application of an online ethnographic method based on Hine's 'virtual ethnography' (2000; 2017). In outlining my methodological framework, I discuss firstly, the importance of maintaining solid foundational tenets of sociological enquiry surrounding ethical and reflexive practice. Second, I outline how I conducted this research employing a mixed method ethnographic approach that included online participant observation, thematic analysis, and a process of respondent validation. In embracing these new opportunities for social research presented by online social spaces it was still appropriate to maintain the basic tenets of qualitative and reflexive research practice. In line with Denzin and Lincoln's suggestion that "qualitative research is a situated activity that locates

the researcher in the world" (2005, p. 3) I used this opportunity to observe and learn about uses of language, social protocols, and norms in order to provide an interpretive picture of the experience of being a participant in the online metal scene.

Once I had established such epistemological foundations for this research, I presented a detailed outline of online ethnographic research adapted from Hine (2000). I follow closely Hine's explication of 'virtual ethnographic' methods prefaced by Beneito-Montagut's (2011) verification that online spaces offer a very real experience for all participants. Hine's principles of 'virtual ethnography' focus on the reality of social interaction for all participants; new boundaries offered in digital worlds; and the mediating influence of online communication technology (Hine 2000, p. 63-65). Most useful to this research is the accommodation of the mediating aspects of online communication technology.

I chose to deploy thematic analysis of text-based communication to complement an online ethnographic enquiry. As Flick suggests, ethnographic research generally involves multiple methods (2002). My use of thematic analysis reflects a grounded theory approach to data gathering which acknowledges the source of data as the source of theory. That is, an inductive method which allows theory to emerge from the data (Strauss & Corbin 1994). The use of thematic analysis from a grounded theory perspective catered for my desire to acknowledge participants' ownership of knowledge as well as allow the respondent validation process to yield a deeper understanding of the experience of being in the online metal scene.

In underscoring the usefulness of recent scholarly attention to the rise of online spaces as sites for social research my methodology Chapter stands alone as an original contribution to knowledge. I suggest that on-going evaluation and re-evaluation of online research methods is required in order to accommodate for rapid development of online communication technology.

Herring (et al 2004) noted the marked increase in opportunities to reach respondents through online social media. The work of Hooley (et al 2012), Markham (2006) and Buchanan (2011) combine to remind us that questions of ethical and methodological concern must be reflexively addressed throughout the research process as online communication technology presents new and innovative ways in which to conduct research. More recently, Flick (2018) and Markham and Stavrova (2016) have suggested that the Internet has emerged not only as a tool for conducting social research but a social site in itself. My research contributes to this on-going discussion.

Hypermasculinity

While the dominance of masculinity reflects heavy metal music culture more widely (Weinstein 1991; Walser 1993), I suggest that in the online metal scene a hegemonic ideology of hypermasculinity emerges. Chapter Five sketches out three significant tropes of hegemonic hypermasculinity visible in the online metal scene: aggression and violence, militaristic organisation of participants, and objectification of women. These three tropes signify the *emergence* of hegemonic hypermasculinity – the first key component of my research question. They emerge through text-based communication which contributes to the writing on the wall – the highly visible and permanent display of the hegemonic order. I draw on examples of text-based communication that was shared through the research to highlight the reference to these tropes by participants in the online metal scene.

Metalheads in the online metal scene draw on aggression and violence in response to various situations. I highlight comments that refer to beating the shit out of someone or use of chainsaws to hack into non-metalhead bodies. Comments like this show a propensity for violence and aggressive acts that at once defend metalhead identity and legitimise individuals' metalhead credentials. Aggression and violence is also exhibited through what Overell refers to as

"intertextual understandings" (2010, p. 84). That is, language which borrows terms usually associated with violence and aggression to indicate positivity and approval. These tropes characterise a hypermasculine discourse. They reflect aggressive and violent themes in heavy metal culture more generally however, they tend to take on more extreme incarnations in the online metal scene.

The theme of militaristic organisation, likewise, draws on existing notions of militarism in heavy metal music culture generally. *The First Forum* was organised along clear lines of traditional military ranking systems. That is, more senior members and prolific posters are seen to be more committed to the cause and gain titles such as 'Commanding General' or 'Lieutenant' as opposed to newer or less frequent posters who are given lower rankings such as 'Private'. The forum itself also borrows from masculine notions of camaraderie and fraternity (Wadham 2013; Hinjosa 2010; Sasson-Levy 2010) under flags, tanks, and mutual motivations to defend the space from the perceived, non-metalhead enemy. This theme can be seen to manifest in the way the online metal scene is organised as well as through references to military action in text-based communication and the writing on the wall.

The final trope of hypermasculinity which emerges in the online metal scene is the objectification of women. Like the others, tendency towards objectification of women reflects norms in offline heavy metal cultures. As noted by Krenske and McKay (2000) and Weinstein (2016) women are, of course, free to participate in heavy metal music scenes though there are often pushed to the periphery. In the online metal scene objectification of women emerges in the writing on the wall through comments that focus on the value of women as sexual objects.

Chapter Five outlined the emergence of hegemonic hypermasculinity. As Anderson notes hegemonic power relies on the consent of the masses to their own subordination (2017a). The

tropes of hypermasculinity as they are presented and represented by all participants in the online metal space serve to gain such consent. The language and imagery that aligns with these hegemonic tropes sets up reference to aggression and violence, militarism and objectification of women as acceptable, desirable even, social norms and values. Under these tropes, an alliance of hypermasculine metalheads emerges.

Maintenance

Chapter Six followed with an examination of the *maintenance* of hegemonic hypermasculinity – the second key component of my research question. I drew on Connell's adaptation of Gramscian hegemony to position policing and resistance as "the play of social forces" (1987, p. 184) that seek to maintain the ascendency of hegemonic hypermasculinity. That is, in the hegemonic war of position, there must be a push and pull between hegemonic and non-hegemonic positions. In the case of the online metal scene, this push and pull is clearly visible in the writing on the wall.

I positioned policing in the online metal scene as occurring through comments that had clear intentions to deride individuals who do not appear to exhibit hegemonic notions of hypermasculinity. The intent of this was to establish a clear separation between the hegemonic hypermasculine metalhead and the non-metal other. Of course, this policing was not at the point of a gun, rather the text-based communication used to police the online metal scene contributes to a writing on the wall which reifies the hegemonic order. The maintenance of the hegemonic order, the policing that I describe herein, takes place through the constant presentation and representation of hypermasculine tropes by those who consent to their own subordination.

As Connell notes, hegemonic masculinity is open to contestation (1987). As such, I outline resistance to the tropes of hegemonic hypermasculinity that is observable in the online metal

scene. Instances of resistance tend to be exhibited in one of two ways: firstly, in the form of overt attacks on perpetrators of violence, aggression, and objectification in defence of marginalised individuals. Secondly, comments of support for individuals who have been targeted by those actively policing the online metal scene. Part of my original contribution to knowledge is that both policing and resistance have the same effect of reifying hegemonic hypermasculinity through their reliance on hypermasculine tropes. They both present and represent the hegemonic order in the writing on the wall.

Affordances

Chapter Seven, the final chapter of my data analysis, is where I address the question: how does online communication technology influence the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene? In response to this question, my research uncovered three significant affordances of online communication technology: *Visibility, permanence,* and *anonymity*. The concept of affordances here is an adaptation of that offered by Shapiro (2015) and is useful in understanding that online communication technology offers possibilities for social interaction. These affordances contribute to the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity and the efficacy of the writing on the wall as indicative of the hegemonic order.

The affordance of visibility refers to access to the writing on the wall. That is, once participants have offered comments, they are visible for all other participants to see. The affordance of visibility offers the possibility that articulations of metal culture can cross political, cultural, and geographical borders – anybody can access these spaces from anywhere they can connect.

The affordance of permanence is connected to visibility as it also refers to access to the writing on the wall. Permanence allows participants access to content produced in the online metal

scene across time. In offline metal spaces, if fans had met, watched a show, and discussed a show at a venue, that interaction is no longer observable. In the online metal scene, through the affordance of permanence, these interactions are recorded indefinitely. The writing on the wall contains evidence of interactions through text-based communication for anybody to observe long after the initial interaction has taken place.

The third affordance of online communication technology which I discuss in this thesis is that of anonymity. It has been noted by many (Santana 2014; Omernick & Sood 2013; Singer, 1996) in examination of online social spaces that anonymity contributes to a perception of fewer consequences for transgressive behaviour. An examination of two types of online space within the online metal scene illustrated the effect of the affordance of anonymity. In some spaces where social ties were weak and perceptions of anonymity were increased, more extreme appeals to hegemonic tropes of hypermasculinity were apparent. Conversely, where social ties were stronger (where participants were more likely to know each other outside of the online metal scene or have a shared and lengthy history of online interaction) these extreme views were tempered with more thoughtful and considered social mores.

In canvassing the literature as I have outlined above, I identified a significant gap. The fields of gender studies, metal music and post-youth cultures, and studies of technology have all enjoyed degrees of interest over recent decades. However, it appears that significant attention to the emergence and maintenance of hegemonic hypermasculinity in the online metal scene is an area that is relatively uncharted. This thesis offers an original contribution to this field of enquiry which seeks to encompass new and emerging avenues for identity creation through online social media.

Original Contribution to Knowledge

At the outset of this conclusion, I confirmed that there was no definable, static collective identity that could be configured to encompass the experience of being a metalhead in the online metal scene. What I have uncovered in this thesis is a complex interplay between individual participants, heavy metal culture, and technology. These findings, while limited in this doctorate to the case of the online metal scene, have wide reaching implications for further research. Metal culture has swiftly and enthusiastically embraced social media and online spaces as they have emerged over the past four decades. Metal culture, however, is not anomalous in this sense. The findings (and methodology) of this thesis hold great currency for further research into other communities that are rapidly embracing digital platforms.

A core finding, and part of my original contribution to knowledge, in this study is the writing on the wall in the online metal scene. The online wall remains a highly visible and permanent record of social interaction afforded by and through the technology used to access digital spaces. The significance of the writing on the wall is best illustrated through consideration of a brief scenario. You walk into a venue in Adelaide, South Australia. You are there to see a metal band and you recognise a few faces. The setup is familiar: merch booth, ticket office, bar, stage and pit at the front, and seating up the back. You know this band well. You own several albums and you have seen them once before in Sydney, Australia. All of this familiarity with the scene provides the cultural capital to be able to participate in an acceptable manner. You are familiar with pit etiquette and know what to expect. However, all this familiarity is based on your own memories of past events. As verified by the spilt blood of the occasional circle pit novice, there is no written explanation of acceptable behaviour in the venue (though there are of course various social controls). If your experience of live music scenes is confined to sit-down recitals by visiting fellows of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra you are likely to be unfamiliar with the vastly different expectations at an Architects show.

In the online metal scene, the writing on the wall outlines precisely and in great detail acceptable norms and behaviours for participants. These expectations are exposed through all the text-based communication that has been generated over the entire history of the space in question. Moreover, the generation of content occurs through the medium of digital technology which allows a degree of anonymity or pseudonymity. Comments that are, through degrees of anonymity, extreme appeals to violence and aggression likewise contribute to a written and visible record of acceptable metalhead identity. What I have uncovered in this thesis is that the constant presentation and representation of the hegemonic order (Anderson 2017a, p. 64) is recorded in the writing on the wall of the online metal scene.

The affordances of online communication technologies have indeed had significant impacts on metal bands too. One of the bands that participated in this research, I Killed the Prom Queen, from Adelaide, South Australia in 2018 announced they would reunite with past members for a one-off performance at a small metal festival in Victoria, Australia. Within the week it came to light that former front man Michael Crafter had, years earlier, allegedly posted an array of misogynistic and violent tweets which did not align with the festival organisers' social bearings. The band and organisers agreed that it would be unwise to proceed, and they were removed from the line-up. The writing on the wall, as Crafter discovered, was indeed highly visible and permanent.

There are other cultural pursuits which have, in recent times, ventured into online spaces. Online gaming and the rise in sexual violence is a site of significant enquiry (Fox & Tang 2017; Tosh 2017; Zimmerman & Ybarra 2016). #Gamergate was a well-publicised series of violent altercations centring on sexual violence and women's participation in the online gaming scene (Chatzakou et al 2017). As Gray (et al 2017) have observed, until recently the focus on violence in gaming culture has been on the in-game violent content. They suggest though that in more

recent times, and in light of #Gamergate, it is pertinent to shift the focus to violence that occurs in the online communities in which games are now played. These online communities in many cases also contain a writing on the wall as a highly visible and permanent reminder of the extreme appeals to aggression, violence, and the objectification and sexualisation of women. My thesis stands as a significant methodological and theoretical insight to further examination of such communities.

Dating sites have also attracted recent scholarly attention (Van Ouytsel et al 2018; Borrajo et al 2015). In this field there is interest in how violent behaviour in the online dating scene might carry over into offline cohabitation spaces (Marganski & Melander 2018; Theobald et al 2016). While the concept of the writing on the wall may not offer as much in online dating research (interaction on sites such as Tinder, Grindr, eHarmony tends to be more one-on-one rather than community based), my treatment of affordances of online communication does. That is, online communication technology allows for degrees of anonymity or pseudonymity and permanence. Conversations held between newly-met couples can be stored in a devices memory for indefinite periods affording individuals the opportunity to revisit potentially violent and damaging comments and posts.

My findings also stand as an original contribution to the emerging debates around the more recent uptake of online social media by mainstream media outlets, politicians, and social commentators. As Rauch notes, the line between alternative media and mainstream media is becoming increasingly blurred (2016). Trump is running the United States' first Twitter presidency in an effort to bypass mainstream media outlets (Ellis 2018; Farnsworth 2018). Social and political commentators from all sides of political spectra are engaging in activism around the clock (Bonilla & Rosa 2015). Trump's relentless use of Twitter to outline his visions for the United States now stand as a kind of Presidential writing on the wall. As we increasingly

adapt our lives to online communication technologies the maelstrom of social and political debate in social media is rapidly contributing to a writing on the wall for many of our lives.

As Anderson suggests (2017a), Gramsci wrote under adverse conditions in prison prior to and during the Second World War. What emerged from the prison notebooks was disjointed as a result of fascist censorship. It has taken decades for scholarship to address the disarray of much of this work. All along, Gramsci's works have been received and or dismissed in various social and political arenas. Today, as we witness a new revolution in neo-fascism emerging on a global scale (Brexit, Trump Presidency, and Australian border panics) Gramsci's work and the works of those such as Anderson to revise and sharpen the censored prison notebooks has never been more appropriate. Understanding hegemony is critical in imagining politically and socially progressive and just alternatives to human rights violations. Gramsci, highlighted that hegemony existed in the sites of production, consumption and distribution of mass media (Anderson 2017a p. 26). This thesis has looked at the emergence of hegemony in the online metal scene. The value of this study lay in the applicability of my methodology and findings to much broader, novel online social spaces in which tomorrow's hegemony will emerge and be maintained.

Even as I complete the final edits and proof reads of this doctoral work, Melbourne, Australia is coming to terms with the death of another young woman at the hands of a young man. It is alleged that this man had been following the women for some time and had used social media to, somewhat cryptically, announce his intentions to harm her. My findings here, it is hoped, can contribute to the conversation about extreme violence, aggression, and objectification of women in online spaces. Perhaps, with a deeper understanding of the nuances of social media technology we might in the future comprehend how references to such violent crime can go seemingly unnoticed on social media.

The significance of this thesis, therefore, lies in my contribution to contemporary debates about social life online. Heavy metal music aside, there is a significant interest in the way people interact via online communication technology. As outlined in this conclusion we are increasingly connected through social media sites, workplace software, various forms of telephony, and online dating. With this increase in online participation comes a considerable task of better understanding the impacts of technology on these interactions. This thesis stands as a valuable contribution to such a discussion.

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