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”If you don’t like the old Darkthrone records... Fuck  
off!”

- Nostalgia and subcultural capital as gatekeeping incentives in the black metal community

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## **Abstract**

This study uses the concept of subcultural capital and community boundaries to explore which features of black metal from the past that are in peril in the late modern mainstream appropriation of the genre. Through in-depth interviews, this study reveals emotional and cognitive incentives for the gatekeeping practice performed by self-identified black metal fans to resist mainstream appropriation. The mainstream is divided into a strictly musical dimension and an ideological dimension. Fans express concerns about the music developing a less compelling sound and that their live experiences will be affected negatively due to insincere participation. The mainstream ideology, for instance commercial interests and wokeism, will interfere with the genre's transgressive qualities. Black metal gives fans a sense of reality in a society they perceive as dishonest, acknowledges feelings of resentment and alienation, helping them to process their own negative emotions.

**Keywords:** black metal; nostalgia; community boundaries; subcultural capital; authenticity

## **Introduction**

For our second date, I asked my partner to accompany me to a Myrkur concert. Myrkur is marketed as a black metal band fronted by Amalie Bruun, former model and pop music singer. The band combines Scandinavian folk music with old school black metal.

After the show, it struck me how unthinkable it should have been to ask someone unfamiliar with the aesthetics which traditionally constitutes black metal to come along to see a black metal artist. Personally, I have been listening to metal since I was 11, thus acquiring the understanding and liking for the genre the larger part of my life. The countless hours of record listening and attending shows has made the vulgarity, the noise and the other aspects of metal music like second nature to me. Black metal resides within the spectrum typically denoted as "extreme metal" and achieves its extremeness through gory and often sexist imagery, anti-religious thematics and a distinct soundscape many people are repelled by (Kahn-Harris 2007: 5). With her feminine appearance and occasional mild musical passages, Myrkur has achieved popularity and attention in the metal music scene as well as in more mainstream areas. My personal appreciation of Myrkur aside however, black metal fans are not undivided in their

appraisal of this development of the genre; despite her working with successful and well respected black metal-musicians, Myrkur has had to face everything from sexist comments to hateful slander and death- and rape threats online (DF 2016). Clearly, she has struck a nerve among some black metal fans. Being marketed as "the future of black metal" by her label, one YouTube-user comments "This? This is the future of black metal? Bye guys, you can find me in the year 1992!" (Neron Dominus 2019).

So what does 1992 signify for a black metal fan? Why do people spend time spreading hate against artists they dislike online and want to silence bands like Myrkur? These are the questions that came to grow into this study. Using the concepts of *authenticity*, *community boundaries*, *totemic nostalgia* and *subcultural capital*, this paper aims to reach an enhanced understanding of how and which emotions and cognitive processes that are at play as self-identified black metal fans construct and gatekeep notions of authenticity and community.

Since its conception in the 1980s, black metal as a cultural phenomenon has gone through considerable changes in terms of an increase in popularity and recognition, though it might appear in forums and comment sections online like "true" black metal fans are longing for the times when the genre was considered lowbrow and its practitioners and fans treated with suspicion due to anti-social behavior from a handful of prominent bands (Moynihan & Søderlind, 2003). This study contributes to the field by exploring the continuation of this tradition into late modernity. The aim is broken down into the following research questions:

How do black metal-fans feel and reason about their identity and self narratives as fans in relation to what they perceive as the mainstream appropriation of their subculture?

How do black metal fans identify and understand fan-community boundaries and how do they strive to maintain them?

Black metal (henceforth BM) is a musical genre with roots in heavy metal, which is one of the most durable youth cultures in modern times (Wallach et al. 2011: 4). Though it is no longer a *youth* culture per se, recent research find recurrent features similar to those at the initial phase of metal. Frequently misunderstood, heavy metal music has in the last four decades

become "a potent source of meaning and identity for young and no-longer-so-young people across the world" (Wallach et al. 2011: 4). Hebdige, Hall and Jefferson, scholars known from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies based their influential studies on a marxist tradition, suggesting that metal and punk were part of the class struggle against capitalism and elite norms (Hebdige 1991; Hall and Jefferson 2006: 6). Youth culture has been likened to a seismograf, that is to say, a refined instrument in which we can detect movement in the underground (Sernhede in Lindgren 2015: 59). By getting involved with music, adolescents find means to express their views and resistance on their own terms, addressing social issues they have identified as something worth fighting for (Hall & Jefferson 2006: 5). The field of metal music studies is burgeoning as scholars across the world have realized its value, not only artistically but also sociologically and anthropologically. As metal has spread to basically all industrialized countries in the world, it has provided scholars with new questions.

[T]he fact that metal music, fashion and behavior exist in all these places [different parts of the world] does not necessarily imply that they mean the same thing in these quite different cultural contexts [...] metal is embedded in local cultures and histories and is experienced as part of a complex and historically specific encounter with the forces of modernity (Wallach et al. 2011: 4).

For a modern capitalist society dominated by middle class ideals, metal is the voice of the repressed, exposing social conflicts and tensions, and it is up to the researcher to read these tendencies through contemporary cultural expression (Sernhede in Lindgren 2015: 59).

In the following section I will explain why BM is a relevant subject for scholarly research and how it distinguishes itself from other kinds of metal music. This is followed by the theory section and a brief overview of current research and how they are relevant for this study. I then go through the methodological approach used in the study and an overview of material followed by the result which is then discussed in a wider social context and what it may imply in larger extent.

### *Why black metal?*

Moberg states that "metal, particularly in its more extreme forms, is one of the most influential, and contested, forms of contemporary popular music and that it has 'proven to be exceptionally enduring and long-lived in comparison to other popular music genres, and has the ability to garner a level of devotion among its fans that is unparalleled in any other musical sty-

le” (Moberg in Granholm 2011: 103). BM is one of the few truly global musical scenes, supporting a transnational network of fans and artists and it provides people with sets of meaning, practices and world views (Granholm 2011: 535). Metal has been a subculture to represent reality and as its genres has been popularized and commercialized, new genres have emerged in order to go back to the roots, reclaim it from the mainstream and make it authentic again (Kahn-Harris 2007: 3-5). BM put this at its peak, initially erasing the boundary between artistic image and real life personas.

Tetzlaff’s proposition that constructions of authenticity serve to deal with feelings of being commodities, objects, and slaves are especially relevant for the black metal subculture. For black metal, arguably even more so than other subcultures, seems to be driven by an extreme aversion to the dominant values, institutions, and principles of mainstream society. The subculture, which developed in Norway during the 1980s and 1990s out of the heavy metal genre, is well-known for embracing controversial ideologies (e.g., Satanism, Nazism, paganism), appearances (e.g., corpse paint), and crimes (e.g., church burnings, homicides) (Kuppens and van der Pol, 2014: 155).

Sociologically, I am intrigued by potential nostalgia attached to atrocities, bad reputation and ”less civilized” times where people deemed to not fit in were likely to get harassed or battered on concerts by those who were ”true” (Jefferson and Klingberg 2011: 168). Podoshen et al. describes BM as a culture longing for the subversion of the modern society in favor of a dystopia (2014: 210). The desire for dystopia is interesting as much of academic work on metal utilizes Marxist tradition, which does not resonate well with the philosophical and ideological aspects of BM that to a great extent is based on nietzschean individualism which is far away from the socialist vision of Marx (Cordero 2009). BM is consistently drawn to ”’narratives of crime and violence’ which ‘highlights the extent to which violence has become a lynchpin on the mythology and meaning of the genre’” (Phillipov 2012: 155). Last, BM was sprung out of experiencing a blasé welfare society, such as that in Norway.

It’s not enough to just play pinball anymore. They need something strong, and Black Metal provides really strong impulses if you get into it. They’re looking for something more in life than what they have already, and might feel that it’s better to identify with evil than not to identify with anything at all. Black Metal is something strong that gives you respect and a sense of belonging in certain circles (Moynihan and Söderlind, 2003: 43).

In other words, understanding BM as merely working class frustration does not fully capture its function and meaning, nor does it explain its growing global popularity. Underground movements and/or subcultures such as BM exhibit values, emotions and world views and is therefore a good way to understand society at large.

## Previous research

Weinstein (2000) provides an exposé over the heavy metal genealogy, its underpinnings and the common fan: the white, adolescent and blue-collar boy. Previously, heavy metal's cultural status was infamously lowbrow and the fans of the genre was perceived as delinquents, residing in the outskirts of society. The fans didn't mind their outsider status, but rather the opposite. Weinstein call them "the proud pariahs" as they took personal pride in subverting the social norms they resented.

Arnett (1996), researching the claim regarding metalhead delinquency, identified one of the allures with metal being a catharsis as it purged the fans of negative emotions and acknowledged their alienation. An alienation towards a future of mundane family, community, school and religion; powerful institutions which reproduced middle class values and ideals. Weinstein and Arnett's work as influential within the study of heavy metal music and resentment against mainstream society is clearly an important factor to have in mind while conducting research in the matter of metal and emotions.

Society has changed since the murder of Øystein "Euronymous" Aarseth (of Mayhem), the man often credited with creating BM, and the transgressive qualities and shock value of BM has, at least in the global north, deteriorated. The change in media outlet has made "the extreme" into something mainstream, thus making the status of extreme metal as a counter-culture questionable. As "extremity is becoming a normative factor in popular media and culture" extreme metal fans, Allett argues, has begun appropriating the bourgeoisie highbrow connoisseurship (2012: 169). The mainstream appropriation of subcultures has diluted the extreme metal scene in a movement towards 'commodification of dissent' and the corporate cultivation of the 'rebel consumer' (Frank and Weiland in Allett 2012: 168). Allett finds that connoisseurship is used as a strategy for extreme metal fans to define and defend their identities. The extreme metal connoisseur does not only display what he or she likes but also what he or she *dislikes*, thus reinforcing the sense of extreme metal as a counterculture and superior music genre for a select few since it revitalizes the sense of boundaries and membership (Allett 2012: 176). Allett's work is an insightful study which follow up metal music studies as the fans are getting older and more scattered across the social classes while it also acknowledges the commodification of the countermovement and the mainstream appropriation of the once

extreme. All of which are a large part of this study.

In the context of punk, Sklar and Donahue (2021) describes how boundaries are drawn in terms of authenticity and a sincerity between those that are appreciating the culture, history and traditions of punk and those who wears a punk t-shirt for other reasons. The distinction is those who *are* punk and those that are *doing* punk. Even though a slightly different context, the symbolic loss of the uniform in postmodernity is still, I argue, of importance for extreme metal and my study as it captures the in-group solidarity and potential conservatism that are at play as BM gains popularity. In this study, I use Allett's concept of "flaneur" interchangeably with those "doing" BM and "connoisseur" with those who "are" BM.

Kuppens and van der Pool (2014) have researched how BM fans in The Netherlands construct "true" BM in terms of authenticity. As it turns out, authenticity is categorized into four dimensions: sincerity, commercialism, country of origin and extremeness. Interestingly, the interviewed fans, perceive BM bands from the Scandinavian areas as authentic simply because of the genre's origin and traditional, northern thematics. Extremeness is a dimension relevant for this study. It is defined as "dark, controversial, abnormal, derailed, insane and aggressive" (Kuppens & van der Pool 2014: 162). These extreme personality traits are, the authors argue, constructed in order to maintain the boundary between in-groups and out-groups. Extremeness is, by definition, extreme in its position outside of the social norms. Jørn Stubberud, bass player in Mayhem, doesn't think BM has gone mainstream, but has instead observed a change in society: "society is moving, getting more raw. Same goes with music: it's not BM that has become mainstream, but rather the mainstream that has become more extreme" (Fossberg and Audestad, 2015: 111f). Kuppens and van der Pool also notice that BM fans equate pop music with femininity and while rock is perceived as the height of authenticity, a general aversion to the feminine can be observed (2014: 163).

Vasan (2011) suggests that some women are willing to look past the masculinist imagery in extreme metal because other parts of the scene are more valuable to them, such as not having to appear feminine in its traditional form or to avoid feeling the male gaze. In order for a woman to be accepted in the death metal scene, she needs to show devotion to the music, not to her physical appearance.

## Theoretical concepts

This study was inspired by a YouTube-comment, where a user and supposed BM fan expressed a will to go back to 1992, if the future would continue the path suggested by Myrkur. This is clearly a display of nostalgia, or at least a stance for preservationism, a kind of latent nostalgia. "The tradition of the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living" as Marx described his concerns about misuse of history (Bonnett 2012: 38). Nostalgia is, at its core, an emotion of "a yearning for the past, a sense of loss in the face of change" (Bonnett 2012: 5). In his work on "toxic fans", Proctor (2017) coins the term "totemic nostalgia" describing the relationship between emotions of nostalgia directed to something palpable, such as a work of art, that has become a part of an individual's self-identity and self-narrative). By looking for the totemic object, I could identify themes that the participants deem important to protect.

The metal audience often refers to their milieu/collective as a community with shared culture, identification, solidarity and boundaries (Varas-Diaz and Scott 2019). Weinstein deconstructs "The Metal Community", showing that it consists of three entities. The *ideal* community, the *diminished* community and the *mythic* community. The ideal community is derived from Weber's notion of *ideal type*. "The ideal metal community is enacted in this situation because each of the definitional features of a community (shared culture, identification, interaction, solidarity, boundaries) is maximally fulfilled" (Weinstein in Varas-Diaz and Scott 2019: 13). This is however, Weinstein continues, seldom occurring as is the case with ideal types. The diminished community is what is left when one or more of the definitional features are not present, like when musicians are more concerned about making money than music or when past members move on and change their metalhead identity to something else, such as their profession or parenthood. The mythical community only exist in imagination and is basically the perception of the ideal type, when it is, in fact, not fulfilled (Weinstein in Varas-Diaz and Scott 2019: 13-19).

The concept of *Interactional Ritual Chains* as formulated by Collins (1981) is highly relevant for this study as it provides a tool for understanding incentives to gatekeep a community in terms of emotions and, importantly, the feeling of righteousness/entitlement to express their views on the behalf of the rest of the BM community. Interaction rituals are everyday events



that, if successful, provide positive emotions and group solidarity (Collins 1981: 206). In other words, certain behaviors are recognized by members in the in-group, thus making the actions legitimate.

As a subculture, extreme metal has been a reaction towards the greater society and a place "For the socially awkward, for those who are not beautiful, for those who could never succeed at sports" and this boundary has been maintained by the use of vulgarity (Purcell 2003: 159). Instead, one accrues subcultural capital and social place through transgressive or mundane strategies. The will to chock and transgress is one of the key factors within extreme metal which require a special kind of humor and mindset to fully appreciate.

In this study, I use the concept of *boundary struggle* as suggested by Fraser & Jaeggi (2018). Regardless of whether these kinds of preservationist strategies are consciously directed against capitalism or the bourgeois elite directly, much of it refers to rebellion and hegemonic ideals. However, as commercialism and moneymaking are often heavily criticized by the community members and the metal dialectics seemingly due to "too much capitalism" and "too little reality" it could be interpreted as countermovement. In this case, capitalism, is represented by the record companies and the allure of making profitable music instead of representation and art for art's sake.

Music can be an important factor for the perception of who we are. DeNora (2004) describes it as "a technology of self" and Hesmondhalgh speaks of music as "a remarkable meeting point of the private and public realms, providing encounters of self-identity (this is who I am; this is who I'm not) with collective identity (this is who we are; this is who we're not)" (2008: 329). Many BM fans feel they are abject and that it represents their status as working class citizens, "needed to fix sinks but otherwise cast aside" and therefore take pride in public, "bearing the mark of the repulsed and revolting" (Podoshen et al. 2018: 119). BM has, simply put, provided a context where it is okay to be different and a sense of mutual disdain: "you don't like us, and we don't like you."

Inspired by Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and the struggle for practitioners to show their acquired skills and knowledge about the given culture, Kahn-Harris (2007) identifies two sorts of subcultural capital: *mundane* and *transgressive*. The mundane sort resembles Bourdieu's original concept of cultural capital, as each member of the metal militia gains ca-

pital by showing vast knowledge in bands and practices. Every individual's capital benefits the group as a whole since it keep the scene more homogeneous. Mundane subcultural capital is oriented towards the possibilities of the collective puissance that is produced as a collective result of the mundane efforts of the totality of scene members. It is a form of capital accrued through a sustained investment in the myriad of practices through which the scene is reproduced, accrued through self sacrifice, commitment and hard work. By having an elitist tradition, where everyone needs to acquire a certain level of knowledge, the group collectively gatekeep less devoted people, perhaps best illustrated by the common question "Oh you like x? Name five of their best y!" (Kahn-Harris 2007).

The transgressive subcultural capital, on the contrary, is accrued by individualism, uniqueness and a lack of attachment to the scene, for example criticizing change, diversity and tolerance (Kahn-Harris 2007: 132-3). The early BM movement was struggling not only with the main-stream but also with other extreme metal genres, which had diluted the original ideals, and this was communicated through underground fanzines and subsequently more established press.

Dead killed himself because he lived only for the true old black metal scene and lifestyle [. . .]. We must take this scene to what it was in the past! Dead died for this cause and now I have declared war! [. . .] Death to false black metal or death metal!! Also to the trendy hardcore people. . . Aarrghh! (Moynihan & Söderlind 2003:60).

BM has a lot of extreme elements, benevolently described as "controversial", or closer to the truth: fascist or sexist. In order for the community to function and maintain the illusion of a consensus and commonality, these controversies are most often ignored and any deviations are heavily criticized. The apolitical is the expressed ideology that keep the sense of a community intact for the BM fans (Scott in Hjelm et al. 2013). Kahn-Harris (2007) has identified the practice and perceived communal importance of *unreflexivity*, *anti-reflexivity* and *reflexive anti-reflexivity*. Reflexivity is "the continuous monitoring of action which human beings display" (Giddens 1984: 8). We constantly reevaluate who we are and what we do and how well it suits our current self-identity. Reflexivity is in a way our conscience, and the way we act cause people to judge us, and if we disappoint someone we "highly regard as a person integrity, we will feel doubly ashamed" (Burkitt 2012: 9). The concepts described by Kahn-Harris thus functions to prevent you from having a bad conscious: The concept of *anti-reflexivity* is

the choice to remain uninformed, a "I won't ask if you won't tell"-situation for your moral compass. "Whereas unreflexivity is founded on an appreciation of the contingent, ambiguous, unintended character of practice, anti-reflexivity is founded on the illusion that the world is simple and obvious". Most common, however, is the *reflexive anti-reflexivity*: "If unreflexivity is 'not knowing better' and anti-reflexivity is 'not wanting to know', then reflexive anti-reflexivity is 'knowing better but deciding not to know'" (Kahn-Harris 2007: 145). This is a concept deeply embedded in the scene habitus in which one are socialized through subcultural capital.

## **Method**

For this study, I utilized semi-structured, in-depth interviews in order to gain an understanding on which emotional and cognitive processes and narratives that are at play among BM fans as the genre gains a broader popularity (Lilleker 2003). The collection of data was executed through 10 online meetings with self-identified fans over a period of time between March-April 2021. Due to a Covid-19 induced shortage of concerts, I reached out for informants through forums on Facebook and those who expressed an interest in participating were sent an introductory questionnaire regarding their identity as BM fans and how they position themselves visavi "the mainstream". In connection to this, they also received information regarding the study's aim, purpose, research questions, their rights as participants and my obligations as a researcher. Some of the answers were later used as inspiration during the interview guide construction. All the informants were sent the questions a few days in advance in order for them to be able to reminisce experiences and reflect upon past and current flows of thought. The interviews lasted between 50 and 150 minutes rendering a total of 15,5 hours of recordings and more than 150 pages worth of transcribed material. The transcription was done at a basic level, meaning that unfinished sentences and inserts was excluded. Four informants had English as their primary language, three interviews were conducted in Swedish, while the remaining three informants had a different primary language. The material was then printed out and coded into distinct themes and categories.

An important discussion within cultural sociology methodology is the relation building practices. As a researcher "going native", one needs to find a balance between objectivity and

establishing/maintaining relationships within the groups. In order to understand a certain culture, one needs to rub with its members, yet without distorting the impartiality (Back 2012). As a life long metalhead and guitarist, I believe that I have the musical knowledge and subcultural jargon to establish trust and to be perceived as a member of the in-group. The preunderstanding has been an advantage during interviews, but it may also prevent me from seeing some subjects and phenomena as objects of inquiry because they appear evident to me. Thus, while in a way I am ‘a native’ as a researcher, I have struggled to estrange myself from the world of BM and approach it with the gaze of the unknowing.

## **Material**

Ten men between 25 and 46 years of age, residing in Sweden, Denmark, England, Germany, Greece, Bulgaria, Columbia and the United States were interviewed. Different countries have their own unique scenes as the political and religious power in each country have different stances in terms of freedom of speech and possible repression. Poland is a good example of a western country where BM is repressed by the state in terms of blasphemy laws (Hann 2021) and it would obviously be interesting to compare the views and gatekeeping between free, partly-free or unfree countries, but this was unfortunately not possible for this study. However, from an ontological point of view, a more coherent selection provides more reliable data (Lilleker 2003: 208).

The metal scene was always, and still is, male dominated and I do not want to contribute to this gender based exclusion. However, it would be unscientific to pretend that the scene is more diverse and equal than it is, and since this study is about nostalgia and its incentives to keep the status quo, and female participation is a change, I have chosen to exclude that perspective (see Krenske and McKay 2000; Vasan 2011). I argue that the all-male participation fit this study’s aim and purpose.

In order to protect the interviewees’ integrity and to follow Swedish laws of secrecy, all names are fictitious, band names and other kinds of information that might reveal each identity are left out of the transcribed interviews.

Floyd, Denmark, 25+

Waylon, Germany, 35+

Edward, Greece 35+

Jervis, USA/Bulgaria 45+

Garfield, UK/Columbia 40+

Oswald, Sweden 40+

Victor, USA 35+

Hugo, Sweden, 35+

Harvey, USA 40+

Jonathan, Sweden 30+

Some informants were into the BM scene during the 1990s while others only know this time from stories they might have read or heard. Metal in general has a nostalgic approach towards its own history and some artist, albums or happenings are historical artifacts that virtually everyone is familiar with. The feeling of nostalgia does not require first hand experience. Stories traded through generations and historical artifacts can all create a will to go back into a time perceived as more appealing (Bonnett: 2012).

## **Result**

### *Fan identity*

Metal has evolved in various directions since its modest beginnings with Black Sabbath in 1970 and it can best be described as a perpetual stream of movements and countermovements against commercial forces and mainstream society. Metal has generally been music for people alienated from the ideals of the greater society (Arnett 1996; Purcell 2003). Some of the interviewees tell the story about media constructing the "satanic panic", induced by pioneering bands, and that they felt compelled by the attention it gave them. Waylon was in the search of a context in the outskirts of society even before the satanic panic and admits being drawn to BM because he was fascinated by the abnormalities.

And then, out of nowhere, Black Metal came and crushed everything with their appearance. In music magazines, you saw people in corpsepaint and blood and then you read this from this crazy guy who collected dead animals and inhaled the air of dead birds and then he killed himself and this was like "what the fuck is happening" [laughter] [...] But I was always fascinated by it, and there was a feeling inside of me: I *wanted* to like it. Everything around the music attracted me so much, and I wanted to like it but it wasn't possible until I was...<sup>23</sup> I think (Waylon).

There is a strong consensus among the interviewees that BM is something exclusive. Variations of the theme "it is not designed to be for everyone" is a recurrent theme in the interviews. They are however struggling to pinpoint which people it is for. In the early years of BM, the prominent acts inflated the sense of exclusivity through a mixture of elitism and a rendition of self-aware sarcasm, making a clear stand against the mainstream society. The mythical dimension of BM is in large part the notion that it is not made for everyone and that

only an especially devoted elite can understand and appreciate it accordingly. Kahn-Harris (2007) argues that mundane subcultural capital is accrued by showing the scene devotion and knowledge in order to maintain the functionality. During the 1990s, people deemed unworthy by those high in the hierarchy were harassed and occasionally assaulted (Johannesson and Klingberg 2011: 167-170). The community has previously rewarded gatekeeping in its literal sense, since it has been in the scene's own interest in what could be seen as a strategy to keep the mainstream at a distance, thus avoiding the same undesired change as punk and death metal once went through.

As to the quote above, to most of the informants, BM was an acquired taste. Either they were attracted to the idea of BM due to its perceived extremeness, or they grew used to the sound as they were exploring the metal scene in search for emotional release.

I wouldn't say I was hooked at first. At first it didn't really make sense. *De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas* just sounded like a weird mess with the oddest most horrible vocals I had ever heard. I was very into death metal at the time and other than Dissection which had been my favorite record since, nothing totally grabbed me for probably about a year. It was a relatively cold night, I had snuck out of the house to have a cigarette, put on my discman, and suddenly it all clicked and I was hooked (Harvey).

One of the most distinct patterns in the material collected is the expressed concern that mainstream's burgeoning interest in BM might affect the quality of the music, which initially was a counterculture against the mass- and well produced death metal. The new generation wanted something more raw, unpredictable and original. Evidently, the notion of community elitism has a side of taste snobbism. BM is described to have an inner beauty and complexity similar to classical music as well as jazz in its virtuosity. The aesthetic part of the mainstream, to the informants, have the potential to turn the bigger part of BM into the cookie-cutter style it once reacted against as record companies will try to make the music more accessible.

I don't like them [albums that are "overly commercial and really polished"] because they are too meticulously engineered to sound a certain way and to gain as much appeal as possible and to a certain extent, there is some artistry in that, but it's kind of a shady money making industry rather than art for art's sake. That kind of make me a little sick (Victor).

Allett (2012) has already shown tendencies of the commodification of the rebel consumer and how extreme metal fans in turn have started to adapt a high-brow approach and display of their taste in music. This is a turn from the idea of the proud pariahs to a middle class form of distinction from the mainstream. As BM is getting more popular and diluted, fans show their

commitment and knowledge in order to gain mundane subcultural capital in how they discriminate in their taste.

I do feel like the rising popularity has had some effect though, but I don't think this is necessarily a new thing. You have bands that most people who are into black metal would probably not call black metal, but who are accepted as black metal by people who don't know any better (Victor).

The informants use the BM label as a sign of approval. If an act does not fit their idea of what constitutes BM, they refrain from talking about it as such. That does not necessarily mean that they do not like the music, only that are conservative in their views of what constitute *true* BM. To them, it is not just a question of musical or lyrical content but also that of artistic integrity, originality and transgression. By that definition, BM cannot be inauthentic.

The anti-concept of the whole modern society makes everything that black metal is doing provoking at some point. For some persons, provoking or questioning people, societies and cultures will always be a thing in black and it is very important for the meaning of black metal. I think you hardly will cut out this thing and still say it's black metal (Waylon).

This is an expression of desired authenticity and a boundary making strategy to differentiate between being BM and those who are doing BM. In terms of boundary making, it keeps the tradition intact in its function as a place for subcultural elitism and distinction. In a discussion on Mgła [mgwa], Waylon clearly expresses this traditionalist distinction and boundary making against those doing BM by listening to Mgła, a fairly melodic band with well-engineered records, as opposed to people who *understand* BM.

I know a lot of people who say "Yeah Mgła, but not Darkthrone." This is not cool. That was especially the old albums. But I say "If you don't like the old Darkthrone albums... Fuck off!" Then you don't like black metal because it's so important music. Darkthrone is a band I admire a lot because Nocturno Culto and Fenriz. These guys are showing you what black metal is. They just don't give a fuck. These people are so damn cool. When I see them in interviews and how they act. They are just weirdos but they just do their thing. This is, for me, what black metal is all about (Waylon).

Except for the musical properties of the old Darkthrone records, described as "rabies infested punk with vocals that resemble the beginning of a torture session" by Fossberg and Audberg (2015: 115), the BM seal of approval is given to those people that are true to themselves, which is part of the BM ideology. Floyd, Edward and Waylon actually give credit to Myrkur, as she "does her thing" despite the hate she has received. Darkthrone was also a part of the Norwegian bands that defined what BM is perceived to intend and to sound like. The "necro-

sound” is a large part of BM and if you don’t care for it, you are a flaneur who does not understand it and will eventually have a negative effect on the community. To the interviewees, commercial BM is an oxymoron and this goes in line with earlier studies (See van der Pol 2014).

I believe it attracts the wrong crowd in my experience. In essence, black metal was never intended for the larger mass, but rather for an incredible niched kind of following. And the problem that will occur when Karl-Johan, 15 years old have heard *We Rode On* on the radio and have bought *The Wild Hunt*, which is considerable more polished than Watain’s other albums, before and after, and attends a show and then get a liter of rotten pig’s blood thrown in his face, he will go online and.. that will have consequences (Hugo).

One of the gatekeeping incentives is the passion for the music. The raw sound of the uncommercial BM provides a listening challenge and a perception of honesty. This honesty is also empowering for the interviewees. The connoisseurship, the high subcultural capital, works as a community boundary. A continuation from the elitist boundary of the 1990s. Oswald and Garfield are, on the contrary open for a broadening in audience and a change in music. They both see it as natural, evolutionary process.

Who can decide what constitutes a poser? [...] You can’t dictate black metal. Black metal is huge. People can’t control it. It’s like those people trying to stop the language from changing. GOOD LUCK WITH THAT. It’s a pointless fighting with windmills as far as I am concerned (Garfield).

### *The authentic transgression*

Which narratives of selves are at play concerning BM? What subcultural qualities could be important to protect from outsiders and could be seen as totemic objects in the eyes of BM fans? While none of the informants express any worries about ”teenage ruination”, they do tell stories of the importance of BM for the persons they have become. Waylon admits that he sometimes takes it personal when people make fun of anything related to BM since it is a considerable part of his identity, and Hugo shows a distinct resentment towards bands that market themselves as black metal ”without showing any kind of respect for the genre”.

BM has helped the interviewees to process divorce, homelessness, bullying and everyday stress. The unfiltered hatred and anger have forced them to get in touch with their own emotions, which has helped them to handle negative feelings, while the empowering discourse of individualism and personal strength found in the music have provided them with confidence and energy to make, in their views, positive changes in their lives and personalities. This is a



distinct pattern found in the material and seemingly something worth protecting, rendering a totemic object.

I think metal has made me better at handling anger and sadness. Those are the two main emotions that are hard to handle for the most people. I think metal helps me to be in touch with it by triggering them often [...] It makes it easier for me to live in a world that I mostly dislike by helping me live with that emotion [...] I think I am a great person at discussing and arguing because I'm good at not letting my temper and aggressiveness get away with me, because I am very in touch where it is and how to handle it, and I think metal has helped to develop that (Floyd).

One of the main features in BM is the transgression and the blunt questioning of social structures and standards. Arnett (1996) concluded that the American adolescents in the 1980s were into metal partly because of their alienation and what the middle class ideals provided for their expectations on life. Things appear provocative because they reject social norms and the informants tell stories of how this provocation - the questioning of the status quo - has helped them develop a critical stance and to question hegemonic ideals.

Metal ads to your character [...] If it weren't for black metal, I would probably be a stupid christian conservative, because maybe black metal is like a backdoor that leads you to a very good place [...] Because it is something mind opening, you could elaborate of the stuff and end up with something good. For me, and who I am today, like ideologically, I like it very much and black metal helped me to get here [...] Black metal provoked me and made me study up on christianity and made me question it (Edward).

Evidently, BM has meant a lot for the participants personal development. The nostalgia, the sense of something that has been lost, is the provocation and danger aspect once affiliated with BM. Media does not stigmatize it any more and as the informant Garfield puts it: "every one knows a nice metalhead".

Jonathan, Hugo and Waylon describe how they were picked on or bullied because of their otherness. They grew up in smaller societies in Sweden and Western Germany and were "the only metalhead in town." Victor was part of a small group - "with the other poor kids" - that listened to metal. This was the years around the Columbine shooting in 1999, and they were treated with suspicion from their peers as well as from the faculty. Victor did not (and do not) care about the danger aspect, but rather wanted a place where he and his friends could be left alone, and neither does Jervis:

Music should be a catharsis. Not killing people. Whatever a band sings, the band sings. Don't be beating up people and killing people, or burning churches. That's ridiculous. Cause it's art. Not violence (Jervis).

Floyd recites Gaahl (of Gorgoroth, God Seed and Gaahl's Wyrð<sup>1</sup>): "Black metal used christianity as a language to speak to a christian world" pointing out that the world is getting less christian, and the defamation of God is not provocative to people that do not believe in him.

I think [the catholic church] are more worried about the boys walking around believing they're named Susan. It's been like that since the pedophile scandal within the catholic church. That really was a loss for their credibility. "You're a satanist!". "YOU'RE A FUCKING PEDOPHILE!" They are in a different place now. People didn't have to burn the churches, they just needed to give the pedoes some more time (Oswald).

Some of the participants speculated that some of the national socialist BM bands use their anti-semitic or fascist approach as a mean to provoke and stir up reactions rather than a sincere dedication to those beliefs, as those are some of the values society generally gets offended by. Although slightly divided in their views, the transgressive qualities of BM are described as something worth preserving because they have contributed to positive personal life stories for the fans making it a totemic object in Proctor's sense (2017).

### *Community boundaries*

The informants vary in their views on how the impact of the mainstream has struck the BM aesthetic. The importance here is that what is considered "mainstream" can be divided into two parts: the aesthetic dimension and the ideological dimension, meaning the tendency to politicize the scene, a scene which expresses the fundamental ideal of the apolitical. As discussed in the earlier section, there are explicit concerns regarding the musical qualities and there are also worries about the possibilities to maintain the rather *non*-political tradition of the scene.

One of the major concerns explicitly expressed with a mainstream audience for BM is connected to habitus. What is a large part of the shared nostalgic view of the past, important for the community and explaining the opposition towards change, is the live experience. There is an evident pattern in which the informants explain an aversion towards "normal-", or "party people" behaving in ways not accepted in the BM subculture. One prominent code of conduct was distinctly suggested by Euronymous in the early 1990s as his Deathlike Silence

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<sup>1</sup> Gorgoroth is one of the pioneering Norwegian band of the early 1990s.

Production's slogan was clear in its position: "No Mosh<sup>2</sup>, No Core, No Trend, No Fun." (Patterson 2013: 155). Not quite as dogmatic in their approach, those informants still attending shows tell stories about being bothered by outsiders, interfering with the musical experience:

We were in Warsaw a few years ago and saw the last Batushka did before they split up, and then people began to mosh. That honestly irritated me, and it didn't get better when one of those goddamned retards approached me after the mosh and threw up on my shoes (Hugo).

One incentive to gatekeep the community is to maintain the dedication since it enhance the live experience. This goes hand-in-hand with the notion of connoisseurship. Those that do BM, the flaneurs are attending the shows to consume music and to have a fun movement while the connoisseurs are *listening* to the music in a more appreciative way. Several interviewees mentions how outsiders annoy them by moshing at shows.

Every time I encounter these people, they are like 15 year olds getting drunk and the behavior is like... Very loud and childish. They need to record everything with a fucking smartphone, which I really dislike, the smartphones at the venue. This is a sign, for me, for deep disrespect regarding the musicians [...] I think that the biggest difference in attitude is the seriousness from black metal people. Normal metal people are used to get on to a concert, getting drunk heavily and then act lite teenagers again. Black metal guys get drunk heavily and enjoy their music. They just want to fucking enjoy the music and not to get annoyed by other people (Waylon).

Contrary to stories from the beginnings, where BM fans to a large extent resorted to violence and other kinds of harassment to keep the scene exclusive and devoted (see Johannesson & Klingberg 2011), the informants suggests that authentic BM fans are the peaceful ones nowadays. Yet there are stories in which fans have resorted to violence or arguments with party people in order to teach them about how BM is supposed to be.

We went to see Iron Maiden, a mainstream band, for all accounts. We had just gone out of the car, then there were guys sitting in the back of a pickup truck, and I will never forget: 'Eeeeee faggot, what's with that hot chick with you?! Blah, blah, blah' [...] They were all there - at an Iron Maiden show. Back in 2003. All the short haired guys, like me, business men go out and start trouble at these shows. But if you go to a black metal show: never (Jervis).

For Jervis, people attending BM shows are there for the music, while mainstream music listeners (that looks like him) goes to shows rather as an excuse to get drunk and start trouble. The early day's violence had the same self-regulative function as subcultural capital has, and

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<sup>2</sup> A mosh-pit refers to a sort of group dance that takes place in front of the stage [...] which often leave the exponents kicked, bruised and exhausted, [this is ]read by band members as a form of audience appreciation (Krenske and McKay 20101: 289-290).

it was also a part of the subcultural capital practice. Either you accrued more subcultural capital or you stopped going to shows due to the risk of getting in trouble. There is an obvious difference in views between Jervis' notion of blame worthy behavior in the live setting, and the following interesting change in narratives.

Go to any recent show in Chicago and it's all guys with their girlfriends and they all have very nice vests, with very nice patches and it all looks expensive and clean, and they all have well kept hair, and clean shoes, and everything feels very, very safe, and very nice, and like we've all gone from being feral cats to indoor cats. No one can mosh or move around because you might break someone's cellphone or hurt a girl (Harvey).

One sense of loss for Harvey is evidently the danger aspect and the rawness, the kind of ugliness that early BM practitioners used to distance themselves from the polished and commercialized thrash- and death metal scene. The scene seems to have been civilized in terms of getting cleaned up and safe, which are steps away from the dangerous and dirty aspects that constituted the working class representation, towards more middle class standards with status symbols and beauty standards which was something the early bands worked against. The devaluation of BM symbolism and how the distinction between those that *are* and those that are *doing* BM is made, described by Sklar and Donahue (2021), is addressed by Hugo:

If you come to a Watain show wearing a Takida-shirt, you reckon to get some mockery, and if you go there wearing a certain Dissection-shirt, like the Midsummer Massacre one, there might be some questions asked that you better be able to answer, in order to prove you didn't buy it of Ebay and that you have some sincere commitment to it. In that regard, I think that the black metal-movement in general takes a greater responsibility than other genres. You want the right people in the circuit (Hugo).

In Hugo's experience, there is still a coherent community that does its best to gatekeep and maintain a certain pathos within the scene, making a distinction of belonging. It is a matter of commitment in terms of real appreciation, effort and respect. The apparent devaluation of BM's inherent counterculture symbolism is exemplified by Burzum t-shirts by three informants. In the 90s, newcomers in the then small scene "who suddenly had become BM" got beaten up (Johannesson & Klingberg 2013:167). On the matter of Myrkur, this commitment expectancy might be one of the reasons she has raised such controversy.

My friend that I was talking about before. He HATES [Myrkur]. In every way. And I think that people who are that passionate about keeping black metal in a certain way have a hard time to accept that she comes from something completely different and just enter this domain [...] Especially in the underground-scene as I have experienced it, the one who want to keep it old-school. They want you to stick to the genre and that you don't screw around with it, or have a past of something else (Jonathan).

The sense of loss appear to be the fan base and the dedication. Throughout the history of BM, the scene has been policing itself through the practice of subcultural capital, but the genre has broadened beyond what dedicated fans can manage. My interviewees recognize the loss of BM symbolism and of the communicative aspect of band-paraphernalia. The community was based on the idea of its members sharing the same interest and devotion but as metal flaneurs increase in the ranks, the sense of coherency and subcultural belonging begins to fade. This is arguably a matter of preserving the ideal community. The community might not be diminished in the sense described by Weinstein (2000), arguing that many metal fans get new identities and priorities, but rather that flaneurs dilute the subcultural affinity:

[W]hen you see a poser wearing a Burzum t-shirt for example, it makes you.. Not *despise*, but you feel some bad emotions connected to that [...] I don't take it personal, but if it happen to be a conversation with the guy and I find out that he doesn't know what he is talking about, I just assume he is an idiot, but I won't hate him [...] There is no reason to wear a t-shirt with a band you don't understand. The reason t-shirts should exist is for communication only. I like Burzum. You like Burzum. We see each other and can be the best of friends in the world because we have something in common (Edward).

Edward expresses feelings of resentment towards people who puts on t-shirts they do not fully seem to understand. The totemic object to Edwards appear to be the communicative aspect of BM symbolism.

### *The anti-reflexivity strategies*

Kahn-Harris (2007) describes how nonreflexivity strategies are used within the extreme metal scene in order for it to be able to proliferate and for people to get along. BM, in its transgression of hate, violent imagery and controversies are often perceived as offensive. "It is hard to know how to respond to lyrics dealing with murder, sexual assault and violence. Even harder to understand how to treat instances of flirtation and sometimes outright embrace of fascism and racism" (Kahn-Harris 2007: 7). The anti-reflexive strategy is seen in the discourse of "keeping politics out of BM" which has kept the scene functioning. Murders, assault and national socialist views are not topics to be debated as it will obfuscate the sense of community and positive atmosphere.

One of the tables was a NS-label. And I was looking at records next to him, and I saw this kid in the corner of my eye and he said, 'hey, this is for you, to the guy running the table, and it was one of the auto-

graphed Ice-T<sup>3</sup> pictures. And the guy at the NS-table looked at it, looked at the kid and said 'get the fuck out of my table before I kill you.' They didn't want trouble, but it was the young kid that was starting the trouble. Neither did Ice-T. Everybody stayed at their corner. The underground scene... Even when they don't like each other, they won't start trouble, at least not at shows. Everybody's literally there for the music [...] There aren't any problems because people won't let it. Whereas at a mainstream show, there are fights, girls getting their asses grabbed and stuff like that (Jervis).

The observation about sexual abuse is congruent with Vasan's study on female death metal fans, that even though some of them admit being offended by the occasionally overtly misogynist imagery of death metal, choose to participate in the scene because they still perceive it as a sanctuary from general society's treatment of women. The apolitical discourse in BM have a similar approach. Vasan (2011) uses the concept of social exchange theory to assess how women weighted pros and cons with the metal scene in order to reflect how their conviction as feminist women could legitimize their participation in a masculinist environment. One of the informants, Garfield, admits being ambivalent regarding many "concerning" things already as a teenager, and that he stopped listening to bands because of their political views, and so does Floyd, whereas other informants are less categorical. Victor expresses a clear anti-reflexive stance:

Black metal is often associated with... let's say 'right wing political views'.. and that's the *opposite* of me. I'm a liberal left wing college professor, the fucking stereotype. And so, I feel like if I really focus on what goes on in the scene - what the philosophy is - I think it might be less enjoyable for me. It's like you go out to a restaurant and you order soup and it's really delicious and then it will be less delicious if you find out that the waiter had put his dick in it. And that's kind of why I like to stay out of the philosophical aspect of it. But I do try to avoid stuff that is blatantly NSBM (Victor).

Just as vulgar imagery functions as a boundary keeper for the death metal scene as suggested by Purcell (2003), BM takes it one step further in terms of "controversial" standpoints. The right wing political views Victor mention are referring to NSBM or bands affiliated with fascist views.

I don't necessarily like the idea of moving towards the mainstream. There's more guys out there wanting black metal to be acceptable. It's not designed to be acceptable [...] it is meant to be underground and it's meant to be transgressive and it's meant to be extreme. It's not meant to be acceptable (Jervis).

Jervis is a church going christian who admits being offended by overtly anti-christian lyrics, but still, he is attracted to the music as it functions as a catharsis for him. He simply enjoys

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<sup>3</sup> Ice-T is the frontman of Body Count, a rap metal group, well known for its socially aware lyrics and thematics, such as gang violence and police brutality.

the music and he acknowledges the BM ethos in that it is *supposed* to be unacceptable, and expresses a concern about the risk of it becoming acceptable. To him, it is as offensive and wrong with anti-semitism as it is with anti-christian or anti-islamic views.

I'm leaning towards the right, and I have a bunch of friends that are leaning towards the left, but that isn't a problem for us. I won't make him change his mind and he won't change my mind. Then we can come together through the music instead (Hugo).

The mainstreaming of BM, or the BMing of the mainstream, inevitably gives BM more attention, and even though the initial satanic panic and moral panics well before that all have been subject to the Streisand-effect. There are expressed concerns about the mainstream views on politics, in BM circuits often referred to as "political correctness", "wokeism" and/or "cancel culture", will have a negative impact on the scene and its attractive ideological/philosophical qualities in terms of authenticity and transgression. The quintessential practice of anti-reflexivity conserves the scene and keeps it running as intended, because the "true" members are emotionally invested in it. Wokeism, the noun of "being woke", refers to companies and people displaying a will to be socially good as it is considered to be profitable (Whiteout 2017). Cancel culture is a fairly new term, rooted in social media and is described as a "norm enforcement tool" (Solove 2007: 87) Since BM is a countermovement against these norms, it is reasonable to infer a boundary struggle between the two poles, particularly as "wokeism" is described as the new religion.

It's basically just my general disgust for what I've watched my country become. I had sort of a progressive dream of what my country would become but I've watched everyone fuck it up and the good guys become the bad guys. All the shitty Karens in the churches left there and are now progressives who put up pro Black Lives Matters signs and pro gay marriage signs up in front of the 350 to 500k homes with walls to keep the black people and gay people out (Harvey).

There is an outspoken concern that cancel culture might make vulgar/controversial artists accountable by imposing boycott sanctions towards them. Swedish BM band Marduk got a concert cancelled in Oakland, USA, in 2017, due to accusation of national socialist sympathies (Divita 2017). To the fans, wokeism and the ideological policing might affect the honesty/authenticity of the genre, which to them acts as a stable and reliable ground in a world they perceive as dishonest and deceitful.

It obviously doesn't feel as nerve tingling dangerous as it did when you're 15 reading about people burning down churches that as a kid, in a world full of lies, felt like at least there was one real thing in the world, even if it was destructive (Harvey).

The majority of the interviewees express a leftist/liberal stance in their political views, but most of them still use the reflexive anti-reflexivity strategy to legitimize their consumption of politically extreme artists. The sincerity, one of the dimensions of authenticity accounted for in Kuppens and van der Pol (2014), legitimizes this as the unfiltered hatred and anger expressed works as a catharsis, purging them of negative emotions as described by Arnett (1996). Just as Harvey felt that the violence of the 90s was real, so is the hate:

**So you feel like your anger is validated?**

I do. And it helps me to cope with the society we live in in a more constructive way. People are angry, bitter and sad. You have everything inside you, and this is a way to channel it.

**Is that why black metal feels so real?**

Yes. Partly at least, that it has a much, much more constructive way to cope with these extreme feelings inside you (Hugo).

The extremeness does not only provide a physical community, but also a sense of not being alone with feelings that we have been socialized to suppress. The emotional outlet provides validation of frustration, resentment and alienation.

I think that society as a whole can relate to black metal, in more ways than they are comfortable to admit, and I think it makes them even more uncomfortable with it. I keep coming back to nihilism and stuff like that, but I think that many people can relate to these themes of despair, hopelessness and hatred, well all the very least the sense that the universe is benignly indifferent and everything is fucking terrible (Victor).

Oswald, however, have a firm belief that the cancel culture, through its policing could benefit the BM scene. To him, the will to keep the scene apolitical (or rather anti-reflexive) might force it to find new strategies to make it exclusive.

You have to have a counterweight and for everyone that disagrees with the woke culture, they will look for something that rebels against that. Black metal has always done that. That is a platform for black metal, to get the cancel culture and woke culture [...] it will send it back underground and keep that culture there [...] I think the best days are still to come. I think we can have high expectations (Oswald).

Jonathan, Garfield, Waylon and Floyd all express a positive view in incorporating feminism in BM. Arnett (1996: 148-149) argued that adolescent girls have more reasons to feel resentment and alienation towards the general society as it reproduces conservative/middle class standard notions of patriarchy. One can therefore see the feminist entry in the scene as something inevitable, as girls have even more things to be angry about than boys.



There is a feminist kind of rebellion movement in the whole world, I think. And it's something here that has been in still for a long time and it's a rebellion against the catholic thing and they're rebelling against the latin macho oppression on the society (Oswald).

Jonathan and Floyd do not express concern about any potential problem with mainstream political views changing the scene, mostly because they do not think BM is of interest for "that kind of people". In terms of women or feminism, they feel comfortable with a larger representation. Speaking of Myrkur, Floyd expresses his view of the perception of metal being something inherently male and masculine.

People call it "girl metal" and I find that weird because I don't connect metal to gender at all. I think that if you use extreme metal to express your masculinity, you have a problem with your masculinity (Floyd).

Female participation does not seem to be perceived as a problem associated with the gaining popularity of BM. The interviewees see a feminist potential embedded in the transgressive qualities of the genre and they also recognize patriarchy as a source of female alienation. As long as they are angry and honest, women are deemed authentic and therefore welcome in the community, which goes in line with the findings of Vasan (2011) but contrary to Kuppens and van der Pol (2014) where femininity is considered inauthentic.

## **Conclusion**

This paper's aim was to reach enhanced understanding of how and which emotions and cognitive processes that are at play as self-identified BM fans construct and gatekeep notions of authenticity and community. By interviewing self-identified BM fans, patterns indicate that the anticipated perils with mainstream's appropriation of BM are manifold.

How do BM fans feel and reason about their identity as fans in relation to what they perceive as the mainstream appropriation of their subculture?

The BM fans I have interviewed clearly expresses the idea that BM is not for everyone. They do however describe BM as a subculture most people should be able to relate to, because it is a counterculture against the world as it is and the hegemonic ideals they resent. The main-

stream is constructed as two dimensions by the fans; the ideological and the aesthetic. Though provoking and critical as it may be, BM expresses its resentment in a manner in which many people can find offensive and this is a part of the fans perceptions of self. Being a BM fan has historically placed people into the fringes of society, and the fans like to be standing outside of the society they resent. There is a slight worry that the new institution of power, often referred to as "political correctness" might interfere with the established subcultural norms. The transgressive qualities of BM has had a substantial impact on the lives of the interviewees as they have provided them with personality traits they take pride in, such as the ability to make sound argumentation, think critically and to handle their own negative emotions. They relate to the inherent hate embedded in the BM genre, which provides a catharsis for them, and acknowledges their resentment against society and its power structures.

In the aesthetic aspect of the mainstream, the informants express concern about the musical qualities. To them, mainstream music equals easily assessed, boring and non-original music, most often produced with profit interests rather than artistic ditto, rendering the music dishonest. BM is supposed to be an acquired taste, providing an intellectual challenge for the listeners.

How do BM fans identify and understand community boundaries and how do they strive to maintain them?

BM has been viewed as an exclusive and elitist music oriented subcultural phenomenon. The interviewees acknowledge this and share the view that it is not for everyone. There are however inconsistencies in terms of people and changes that are deemed acceptable. Since the 1970s, the genealogy of heavy metal is a constant dialectic between commercialism and the metal authenticity. The violent history, transgression and hate are perceived as honest and real in a capitalist, cruel and hypocritical world. By letting more people in, this otherness and stance against the general society will dilute the sense of honesty. Even destructive political views such as national socialism and homophobia are overlooked to some extent because it is perceived as honest and a display of a raw, unfiltered emotion. The BM community has relied on its members to refrain from political debates in order to work, and a wider audience with

mainstream political views and a lesser dedication to keep the status quo, might either dissolve this practice or force the scene back to the underground.

The interviewees all seem to be convinced that BM has the potential to attract virtually everyone and that BM has lost large parts of its shock value. Mainstream society itself has become more raw and mainstream culture is constantly getting more violent and sexually explicit. BM is getting more popular and since commercial forces are appropriating rebellion and since the genre starts to dilute, just as the genres it once rebelled against once did, the construction of subcultural capital is accrued through a practice of connoisseurship. The most prominent pattern is the aversions toward subcultural flaneurs during the live setting. Sincere BM fans are supposedly more dedicated and pay more attention (and respect) to what happens on stage, rather than filming with their phones, getting too intoxicated and party/start a mosh-pit.

Another distinct tendency I have noticed conducting this study is how the interviewees use the label "black metal" as a sign of quality. This serves the purpose of making them stand out as knowledgeable and authentic to other connoisseurs and to keep the BM status quo. Bands cease being BM if they develop into something deemed inauthentic, thus keeping the genre, in principle, unsullied. Interestingly, BM is most often virtually being reified, and any interference is described as "against the nature of BM". The interaction rituals as described by Collins (1981) seem to have been internalized; gatekeeping appears to be righteous because of the *genre*. "It is not for for everyone" is an imperative stipulated by the genre, rather than a construction worth changing, even though most interviewees recognize the positive effects embedded in the music and the community. Ironically, the attractive features of BM make it more popular which eventually will make it less attractive.

Looking through history one might assume the BM fight against commercialism is a lost battle, but just as there is uncommercial punk today, there will be sincere metal bands that work against commercial interests. It is easier than ever before to produce and distribute music on your own. An expressed sense of loss is the work required to get access to the music, as opposed to today's streaming possibilities, you once had to put effort into your passion and there was a tape trading community that shared new, obscure bands with each other through post and fanzines.

There is an apparent paradox in the BM genre and ideology. BM is based on a resentment towards the greater society and a feeling of exclusiveness, upheld through controversy and vulgarity. This transgression it seems has an allure that more and more people can relate to. BM is a soundtrack for the despair caused by climate change, social exclusion and injustice. It is a voice for the voiceless and its apparent qualities have made it a pervasive global phenomenon.

Has BM become mainstream or has mainstream rather become BM? There is an apparent allure for violence and gore (abject) and mainstream society tend to ease up on these notions. Black Sabbath no longer raises much controversy and Mayhem just received an honorary award from Spellemannprisen, the Norwegian Grammy's (Braveworlds 2021). BM, according to most of my interviewees, is not supposed to be acceptable and has therefore painted itself into a corner. This could implicate that BM's hotspot will change to areas where it is still controversial and transgressive. A simultaneous development is the so-called cancel culture and wokeism. As an institution, its neo-moralism, often perceived by BM fans as equally hypocritical and destructive as was the church during the 80s, wokeism has the potential to re-align BM, perpetuating its emotional and social relevance for new generations.

Findings in my study point to interesting aspects concerning the construction of authenticity. I find the shift from the proud lowbrow pariah as an authenticity marker to the BM connoisseur fascinating. It adds to the understanding of cultural taste, distinction and who decides which culture is to be ranked as high or low quality. In the traditional metal settings, praise came as "brutal", "insane" and "dirty", which are to be derived directly from the industrial working class man (Weinstein in Heesch and Scott 2019). The BM connoisseur, in contrast, conceptualizes a middle class approach to fandom, embracing middle class, intellectual displays of taste. This may lead to a schism within the scene, and boundary struggles between working class and middle class' interpretive precedence.

I suggest future research to look further into the relationship between extreme metal and the woke culture. The informants in this study differ a lot in their predictions and views of what can and will happen. Will wokeism make BM ugly and dangerous again or will it provoke more secrecy? Does the mainstream even care about black metal?

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