Why metal music does not create violence in teenagers

Sociology, Violence

Loud, aggressive, and fast, metalmusichas been accepted worldwide as an acceptable genre of music. Yet, some people cannot comprehend a genre of music that thrives on being the horror movie of music, and purposefully creates controversy at nearly every turn. " The media has irresponsibly finger-pointed" (Sterngold). One of the most recent examples of metal being blamed for a national tragedy was in the shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords. Here, a song by Drowning Pool was blamed as the sole motivator for the shootings.

However, the most prolific example of the media irresponsibly finger-pointing at metal music has to be the case of Columbine. After the Columbine shootings, the authorities placed sole blame on Marilyn Manson and his music for the shootings suggesting that Manson's music, or his fans, inciteviolence(Sterngold). The only problem with their claims was the fact that the two shooters did not listen to, nor where they fans of, Manson's controversial music. This brings the question of whether or not the claims placed on metal music for leading to violent behavior are true and can be supported.

An example of what those who think metal has a direct correlation to violence say that Manson's music promotes " hate, violence, death, suicide, drug use, and the attitudes and actions of the Columbine High School Killers (D'Angelo). However, the other side of the story can be best stated by Slayer drummer Dave Lombardo when he said, " We're telling stories. It's not actions-it's just music. It's fantasy stuff, just putting thoughts on paper, that's a crime? " (Considine).

Although metal is dark, heavy, and often times inappropriate, it does not have a negative effect on an otherwise normal and productive listener, especially teenagers, because metal is just a different genre of music, meaning that its lyrics do not have a negative affect on an otherwise normal listener. To begin, artists are too often misinterpreted and bashed with claims that are stretched to the point of lies, creating the opinion that all of their listeners can be stereotyped into a select, violent, group.

One case of this can be with the band Slayer, one of the most popular thrash metal bands of all time. Slayer has been sued multiple times and is one of the most controversial bands in history. The band was sued twice by California parents who claimed their daughter was murdered in a ritual inspired by Slayer's music, yet both suits where dismissed (Considine). It also really frustrates the musicians who work so hard to make music, only to see themselves harmed because of it. As Lombardo says sarcastically, " If they take my drums away, I guess I can't play any more.

But I don't see that happening, unless I'm living in a Communistculture. " (Considine). It also agitates the fans who feel that they are misconstrued and all used as inferior examples of what music can do to people. Slayer's fanbase contains more MENSA members than any other metal band (Considine). At this point in time it is also safe to say that people know what they are getting into and what to expect from a band named Slayer. No, this is no band for virgin ears, but this does not give reason for it to be said that they immediately turn everyday human beings into monsters.

Slayer knows that where they go, controversy will naturally follow, and this for years has been a successful marketing tool (Considine). Although Slayer is only one example, this idea spreads all the way to people trying to explain violence, and finding scapegoats throughout the media with similar attributes to metal. Also, violence in the media has often been exaggerated, and statistics are often inaccurate to the point where a consistent thesis is no longer possible. According to James K. Fitzpatrick, a formerteacherat a Catholic school, his former students who listened to metal went on to lead successful, calm, lives, which in his opinion, proved that the lyrics of songs do not have long term effects on the listener. It also brings to mind exactly why kids in anenvironmentlike this would choose metal, when it is certainly not condoned or accepted. It can be inferred that they chose this because of the idea that it would offend adults and others in their lives. According to Fitzpatrick, perfectly normal kids listen to " shock rock".

There are certain types of kids who like being associated with music that offends some adults (Fitzpatrick). There is an emphasis with Fitzpatrick that lyrics are not detrimental to listeners in the long term and that they are in the end generally meaningless in the quality of a persons life. He states that " I have seen fans of other rock groups that caused greatanxietyto parents in the 1980s…mature in a similar way. " (Fitzpatrick) Another reason for the explanation of why violence is often exaggerated can be the fact that violence is so often overstated since we see so little of it. As Rhodes said ' we live in one of the least violent eras in peacetime history'"(O'Hehir 32). Our society has surely changed in the way we view violence since we are

exposed to so little of it. Out society has also changed because of the way we deal with violence. It used to be that we ensured we avoided it all times. Now it seems like we almost react positively to certain types of violence. By viewing violent entertainment individuals will leave with pent up tendencies gone, and anger released (Sparks 115).

It seems as though times are truly changing and that in fact violent lyrics do not make mad men, and violence can in fact do some good for certain people. Next, is the fact that metal music is often scapegoated for events where people's emotions run high, and accusations fly because people feel a need to know a reason. Metal is often first blamed but a majority of these claims are false and without proof. A majority of these claims stating that metal lyrics lead to long term mental problems have been biased, in-conclusive, or accurate.

AsHarvardphysiologist Steven Pinker wrote, " Media violence research has been flawed and in-conclusive at best, and a great funding scam at worst. " (O'Hehir 25). These claims are strong, and his claims have been backed up by other sources fighting against the claims of others. MIT Professor Henry Jenkins observed that the idea that violent entertainment had consistent and predictable effects on viewers was " inadequate and simplistic. " (O'Hehir 27). Another reason for the increased blame put on metal is the rise of the digital age, and with it the rise in metal music videos and horror movies.

Some would go as far to say that these videos alter the mind producing a mentally unstable person. Yet, as others would claim, media depictions of

violence are inherently attractive to the masses, only truly affecting a few people, and are never the sole reason for any mental instability. This is called the Aesthetic Theory of Vandalism or The Aesthetic Theory of Destruction. The theory states that the same things that account for the enjoyment associated with socially acceptable experiences are similarly responsible for the pleasure associated with acts of destruction.

Not to mention the fact that from what limited televised media there was in the 1950s and 1960s, a majority of it was uncensored, and unregulated. 50s TV was profoundly routed in guns and gunfire, to a degree that would provoke outspread outrage today (O'Hehir 31). The explanations for blaming metal are not true and barely factually based. Furthermore, metal does not have an affect on the mental stability of a listener, and the there have yet to be a definitive solution to explain that it does.

In short, it becomes apparent that there is no correlation between metal and violent behavior, and in fact anger can released when listening to metal. It is also true that metal being blamed for social problems can be generalized into the topic of media violence being blown out of proportion when in fact, our society is generally less violent and more regulated than in previous generations. The question becomes, what can be done about it? The gap between the fans of metal and those against it has always been a large gap, and one that has rarely attempted to be bridged.

First, it takes understanding that it is not okay to generalize fans and bands into a group of " evil" people, and understand also that a majority of the

listeners understand that indeed the music they listen to is offensive, and that they enjoy that aspect of it. Certain people who want to listen to this music will, and if they like it, obviously they will continue (Fitzpatrick). It is also important to truly know the person, and never assume that something like listening to a genre of music immediately translates into apersonalitycharacteristic or flaw. People like violent in your face things in spite of, not because of, violence only in rare circumstances where the media itself is too good for the violence to negatively affect the experience. ” (Sparks 115). When debating the human psyche it is important not to let emotions, biases and judgments interfere with rationale. It is important to listen, and look at facts, proof, and remember that those who appear like a “ metalhead” would, are very different people than you may think.