

HEAVY METAL MUSIC AND COMIC BOOKS

Or: That time Archie met Gene Simmons

By Dr Dave Snell



INTRODUCTION

- Acknowledgement: Colin McKinnon
Independent Researcher in Switzerland
- Upcoming edited collection:
Heavy Metal and Popular Culture
- Similarities between Heavy Metal fans and Comic Book fans
- Examples of where Metal meets Comic Book
- What does this all mean and why is it important?



COMMUNITIES

- Concept of community has shifted from that of geographical neighbours providing support and cups of sugar
- Shifted more towards communities of interest – whereby groups coalesce around a shared aesthetic taste or hobby. Out of this come friendships and support networks.
- Seminal work of Obst et al (2002) who looked at the sense of community experienced by science fiction fans at conventions
- Respondents reported experiencing phenomena typically associated with communities i.e. a sense of belonging, connectedness, and feeling that they had a 'voice'.
- Such communities have far reaching impacts with the advent of new technologies. Geographic communities rely on location and proximity. Communities of interest span geographical boundaries through email, fan sites, and social media like Youtube and Facebook.

IDENTITY

- Identity typically thought of as ideas in heads that include attitudes, personalities, and other internal elements.
- The relational self – who we are is in who we hang out with, what we do, and the things we own.
- Think of aspects of your identity that are ‘material’ or ‘things in the real world’. For example:
 - Photographs depicting people at events
 - CD or Book shelves
 - Items of clothing
- It’s also in collections of things – Noble (2004) looked at not only what individual items say about who we are but how the collection of things indicates the total person. Dave Snell the boyfriend, son, brother, geek, Bogan, academic, gamer.

FANDOM

[A fan] is somebody who is obsessed with a particular star, celebrity, film, TV programme, band; somebody who can produce reams of information on their object of fandom, and can quote their favoured lines or lyrics, chapter and verse. Fans are often highly articulate. Fans interpret media texts in a variety of interesting and perhaps unexpected ways. And fans participate in communal activities – they are not ‘socially atomised’ or isolated viewers/readers.

- (Hills, 2002)

FAN AS OBSESSED WEIRDO

- Typically a fan is portrayed as the insane football hooligan, the socially awkward D&D player, the reckless Bogan vandal.
- A key theme is that fans are disconnected from 'normal' society and any collections of fans are viewed as a grouping of individual weirdoes rather than a social community discussing and representing a shared interest.
- While ComicCon is a little more accepted now and attracts a range of 'mainstream' companies and exhibits, it's still distanced somewhat from the norm by jokes about cosplayers and furies.



COMICS ARE BAD

- Supposedly a refuge for adolescent, white teenage males
- Comic books stigmatised as corrupting youth – key text psychologist Dr Frederic Werthams book ‘Seduction of the Innocent’ in 1954
- Thought to encourage crime, promiscuity, violence, drug taking (among others)
- Senate enquiry as well as the banning and even burning of comic books in the late 1940s.
- Comics Code Authority established to appease US Senate. Resulted in comic book producers going out of business. Resulted in heavily sanitised books that didn’t involve excessive violence or even a disrespect of authority figures.
- Even in modern studies, typically with pseudo-science methods, comic books are viewed as influencing anti-social behaviours. E.g. Male comic book readers perceive ambiguous situations as containing ‘harmful intent’. (Amusingly Archie and Friends was considered a ‘mildly violent comic book’).

PARENTAL
ADVISORY
EXPLICIT CONTENT

HEAVY METAL IS BAD

- Supposedly an expression of frustration from alienated, white, suburban, male teens. For example The Rock's ad of "Heavy Metal: Helping skinny white guys get laid since the 80s".
- Heavy Metal categorised as corrupting youth – seminal texts of King (1985) 'Heavy Metal: A new religion' or Tipper Gore (1987) 'Raising PG kids in an X-Rated Society'
- Senate hearing where musicians like Frank Zappa, John Denver and Dee Snider testified. Dee Snider commented that a Twisted Sister song was about his friend's dental surgery and he couldn't help it if Tipper Gore had a 'dirty mind' (interestingly We're not gonna take it was targeted as one of the 'Filthy Fifteen').
- Blamed for suicides and homicides – yet Metal can actually be a very positive thing.
- Resulted in the Parental Advisory Stickers that we're all so fond of – this was a measure volunteered by recording labels.
- Also the victim of pseudo-science in lab conditions. E.g. a study concluded that Heavy Metal caused aggression because people who listened to Heavy Metal poured more hot sauce into someone's drink

METAL EGG-HEAD BANGERS?

I was the editor of the school magazine!

THE FUN STUFF – HEAVY METAL COMIC CROSS OVERS

TODD MCFARLANE AND KORN

WHEN ARCHIE MET KISS

HEAVY METAL COMICS

MY PERSONAL FAVOURITE – THE KISS SPORTS ILLUSTRATED URBAN LEGEND

SO FAR SO GOOD SO WHAT?

- Hypodermic needle approaches to media reception is dangerous – villifies and scapegoats.
- What people do with media – not what media does with people.
- Reinforces gender, ethnic, and age related stereotypes – women can't be comic book fans or heavy metal fans? Māori can't listen to Pantera? Once you get to 24 you suddenly don't listen to Slayer? How can millions of people listening to a genre of music be considered rebellion? Comic books were around before The Big Bang Theory.
- Psychology traditionally doesn't like the working class. I personally love comics, violent video games, action movies, Heavy Metal, gambling, drinking, tattoos, dressing in black, and going to concerts. That doesn't make me a bad person or a maladjusted person. All of these things are social activities.
- Pseudo science lab experiments remove everyday experiences from fans lives and end up doing more harm than good.
- Combinations of Heavy Metal and comics highlight how media make up part of the back drop or fabric of everyday life – they involve complex interpretations and insider knowledge and are interwoven with our daily interactions and friendships.