Just me and my music – the identity construction of Christian metal fans on the subreddit r/christianmetal

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Kristillinen metallimusiikki on metallimusiikin alagenre, joka syntyi alun perin tavoitteenaan levittää kristinuskon evankeliumia. Tämä genre herättää usein epäilystä ja ristiriitaisuuden kokemuksia ulkopuolisien näkökulmasta. Siinä yhdistyvät hyvin erilaiset arvot, sillä metallimusiikki saattaa toisinaan olla jopa kristinuskon vastaista, kun taas kristillinen metalli rakentuu nimenomaan uskonnon pohjalle. Teemat sekulaarisen metallimusiikin ja kristillisen metallimusiikin välillä voivat olla hyvinkin samanlaisia, joten ristiriitaisuuden kokemus on ymmärrettävissä.

Kaikesta huolimatta kristillinen metallimusiikki on tärkeä osa sen fanien identiteettiä. Tämä tutkimus käsittelee diskurssianalyysin keinoin sitä, miten kristillisen metallin fanit rakentavat identiteettiään internetpohjaisessa keskustelussa. Tarkastelen Reddit-sivuston alasivua r/christianmetal, joka kokoaa yhteen kyseisen sosiaalisen median käyttäjistä juuri kristillisestä metallista kiinnostuneet. Tavoitteenani oli löytää erityisesti ryhmäidentiteettiin kuuluvia elementtejä ja niiden avulla luoda katsaus siihen, mitä kristillisen metallimusiikin fanius merkitsee osallisille. Pyrkimyksenäni oli näin ottaa yksi askel musiikkigenren parempaa hyväksyntää kohti.

Tutkimuksen tulos on se, että kyseisellä alasivulla fanien identiteetin rakentuminen perustuu erityisesti jaettuun mielenkiintoon musiikkiin liittyen. Uskonto sen sijaan oli läsnä harvassa keskustelussa muuten kuin bändien tai kappaleiden nimissä. Kielellisiä yhtenäisyyttä luovia elementtejä – esimerkiksi pronominien käyttöä yhteisöllisyyden tukemiseksi tai yhteistä uniikkia sanastoa – ei yllättäen juurikaan esiintynyt.

Asiasanat – Keywords
kristillinen metalli, identiteetti, kristinusko, metallimusiikki, Reddit, diskurssianalyysi

Säilytyspaikka – Depository
JYX

Muita tietoja – Additional information

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1. INTRODUCTION

Secular metal music covers all the metal music genres with no serious connections to religions. These genres do borrow themes from religion (Moberg 2017), but their aim is not to spread the gospel – rather, they can even be against it (Kahn-Harris 2007: 3-5, as cited in Moberg 2017: 224-225). Christian metal might come across as highly contradictory in its values, or even weird or unnatural. It is a part of a music genre that does not view religion very positively yet is still based on Christianity.

Christian metal emerged as a way of evangelism, and it continues to be strongly religious in its values (Moberg 2008). The musical basis on which it is built – the metal music scene – does not consider Christianity very highly, so there seems to be a contradiction in the values of Christian metal music. However contradictory in the eyes of the outsider, Christian metal is an important part of its fans' lives. Thus, in this study, my main goal is to offer understanding as to how they construct their identity, and to try to spread light onto these contradictions and possibly help in making the genre better accepted.

This study looks into the discussions on the subreddit r/christianmetal on Reddit (https://www.reddit.com/r/christianmetal/). This platform was chosen as the source of the data due to its availability and the fact that the whole platform is based on shared interests and thus it was easy to find the fans on it. Reddit aims at offering communities for anyone. It has a possibility to create **subreddits** that are pages dedicated to certain topics. People can then join subreddits that they find interesting. As they state in their about-section:

> "Reddit is home to thousands of communities, endless conversation, and authentic
> human connection. Whether you're into breaking news, sports, TV fan theories, or
> a never-ending stream of the internet's cutest animals, there's a community on
> Reddit for you (https://www.redditinc.com/, retrieved 3.12.2021)".

Thus, it is important to study how the sense of belonging to a certain group – group identity – is being built. Understanding group identity is important here because the study is done on a community that shares values and beliefs – from the metal music scene, Christianity, or both – and is thus likely to feel belonging to the same group. It is therefore not appropriate to study individual identity construction only, although in this study some attention was also paid to

that aspect of identity, especially from the point of view of religion. The focus was still clearly on the identity of the fans as a group.

The Christian metal music scene has been studied, but the focus has been on the bands and artists. Moberg (2008) did look at the fans of Christian metal music, too, when they inspected the Christian metal music scene. The fans were not, however, the focus of their study, but rather they were a part of Moberg's goal of understanding the Christian metal music scene as a transnational phenomenon – that is, a phenomenon that is not tied to any single geographical location. My study's focus on identity construction thus differs from their work. Jousmäki (2015) has studied the identity construction in Christian metal, but from the point of view of the bands and artists. In this study, I approach the identity construction solely from the point of view of the fans, thus aiming to fill a gap in research on Christian metal fans' identity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Christian metal music

Religious themes and values have always been present in metal music (Moberg 2017). However, utilizing these themes does not make the music **religious**; as Jousmäki (2015: 38) states, most of the time the metal lyrics are not even meant to be taken literally. Often the discourse of secular metal could even be considered Satanic or anti-Christian; this is the case especially with such genres as black metal and death metal (Kahn-Harris 2007: 3-5, as cited in Moberg 2017: 224-225). Religion is not something that is to be taken seriously in secular metal music – it is only a source of themes and symbols for the artists and bands. For an example of Satanic and anti-Christian death metal bands, see Deicide, Acheron and Akercocke, as suggested by Moberg (2017: 226).

Although heavy metal has diversified greatly since its beginning, there seems to be certain core themes that are continually used in most of the heavy metal genres (Weinstein 2000). According to Weinstein (2000), the core themes in heavy metal are **Dionysian** and **chaotic**. In the following citation, Moberg aptly summarizes these categories:

"While the Dionysian category primarily includes themes such as ecstasy, sex, intoxication, youthful vitality, male potency and power, the category of the

'chaotic', by contrast, includes themes such as chaos, war, violence, struggle, alienation, madness, evil and death (Moberg 2017: 225)".

As has been mentioned earlier, religious themes are often used in metal music. Out of these two it is in the category of chaos that these references are found (Weinstein 2000: 39).

Christian metal music, also known as white metal, on the other hand is strongly connected to religion and its core values, not just through the borrowing of themes and symbols. The genre first developed in the USA in the 1970s and has remained a genre of metal music ever since, although it has mainly remained confined to northern Europe and North America (Moberg 2008: 89-90). Its initial goal was to spread the gospel in a new, fascinating manner (Jousmäki 2015). According to Omoniyi (2010: 3) the popularization of religion "makes [it] attractive to youth"; this was behind the creation of Christian metal music as well, as can be seen in Jousmäki's dissertation (2015).

Although there are differences between Christian metal and secular metal, there are still surprisingly many similarities, too. When using the term **secular metal**, I am referring to the secular metal scene that has no religious connections; a useful source for comparison when studying Christian metal. Jousmäki (2015) has introduced an analysis of Christian metal bands' online communication that points out how many of the same resources both secular and Christian metal bands use: especially visuality and sound are very similar. Thus, the main thing that makes Christian metal differ from secular metal is the lyrics (Jousmäki 2015: 23). This probably has its roots in the fact that Christian metal was initially created to spread Christianity, and the lyrics were an effective tool for doing that (Moberg 2008: 90). Although the lyrics are important for the genre, my study will not analyse them. For understanding the fans' process of constructing identity it is important to pay attention to their communication instead of the lyrics.

2.2. Identity construction

Identity and identity construction are topics that have interested researchers, and they have been studied in several fields of study (e.g., Asano 2005; Erduyan 2018; Wearing 2011). My approach to identity is based on social constructionism, a theory that sees identity as being built in social action instead of it being "a given [or] a product" (De Fina et.al. 2006). As De

Fina et.al. (2006) point out, this theory has helped to direct the attention of the researchers to social action instead of psychological constructs. In this study, this sort of approach is appropriate, given that my main idea is that language functions as the tool for Christian metal fans to build their identity online.

As researchers have established (e.g., Eriksen 2004: 306), categorising the world is natural for human societies, and it is central in constructing group identities as well. By categorisation I am referring to the ways in which we organize the world and the people in it (De Fina et al. 2006). This is a way for different groups to differentiate **us** from **them**. In Christian metal, it is quite possible that Christianity and/or secular metal will serve as a point of comparison and help to create a sense of community.

Although the identity of a Christian metal fan is still a somewhat new aspect of identity to study, the identity of Christians has been under scholarly discussion for a long time. As Campbell (2008) states, Christian identity is a somewhat complicated issue given the diversity of backgrounds Christians come from – for example ethnic backgrounds, gender, or social status. However, attempts have been made to establish a holistic understanding of Christian identity.

Sometimes ethical issues have been considered the basis of Christian identity, as Campbell (2008) discusses, but it should not be viewed as something quite so straightforward. There are many aspects to the identity of a Christian and the ethical approaches differ greatly, even from one Christian to another. Especially in the case of Christian metal fans, it might not be the most applicable to talk about ethics, since there are likely to be different people involved: quite devout Christians, as well as people who have a weaker connection to the religion – if any. I will now shortly introduce some aspects worth taking into account in approaching Christian identity.

One central thing in Christian identity is the importance of the community, or a sense of unity with fellow Christians. This can be noticed well in the book by Bush and Due (2015), in which they introduce God and Christians. The overarching theme seems to be that of community in Christ. The following extract is a good explanation of this part of Christian identity:

"As partakers of the same Spirit, believers are the members of Christ's body and thereby – and only thereby – members of one another. This means that true Christian community is community in and through Christ alone […] (Bush and Due 2015: 107)".

Thus, the main aspect in creating community or constituting a group identity for Christians is the common object of faith.

Context should always be considered something that affects identity construction – especially if we are looking at it from the viewpoint of discourse analysis. The same applies to developing an understanding of Christian identity. Campbell (2008: 1-2) points out that "Christianity did not originate in a historical and cultural vacuum but was always contextualised in diverse situations". Therefore, it is important to approach Christian identity **in context** and be prepared to change the previous conceptions of it. Christian metal music is a good example of the importance of reshaping the concepts, so that they fit the present context in the best possible manner – the genre is a rather new and different branch in Christian music, and Christianity more generally.

The identity of a secular metal fans must also be touched upon here. There have been some studies on identity in the heavy metal scene, for example on gender and sexuality (Heesch and Scott 2016). For this study, however, it is especially the study by Kahn-Harris (2002) that must be introduced shortly, since it has similar methodology as this study, along with looking at one genre of metal music. Kahn-Harris studied Israeli extreme metal fans and the construction of a "marginal identity". In this piece of research, they studied the discourse practices of the fans based on mainly interviews, but also other symbolic material created by the fans. Several discursive practices were used to distinguish the identity as separate, including antagonism and nationalism, for example. In conclusion, it was important for the fans to distinguish their identity as separate from other Israeli people. In similar manner, my aim was to understand how the fans of Christian metal separate their identity from that of other Christians and secular metal fans.

The religious themes present in heavy metal (Moberg 2017) are rarely mentioned in studies on identity construction of secular metal fans – religion is included in the genre as themes and symbols, but the fans do not mention them as a part of their own identity. Therefore, it can be

supposed that religiosity is not a part of the identity of a secular metal fan. In analysing the communication of Christian metal fans, I tried to understand their relationship to religiosity as well as other elements that are used in establishing their identity.

2.3. Online contexts

Online contexts have become a central part of our everyday lives. We communicate more and more with people who are geographically far away from us by using different social media, for example. Because of this, it is important to study online discourse, or computer mediated communication (CMC). As Herring (2004: 1) puts it: "CMC is communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers". This is precisely what I am studying in this thesis.

Online contexts have an important role to play regarding the Christian metal music scene. **Scene** is a term used in popular culture studies, that considers more areas of cultural phenomena, including for example any habits or communication, than the more locally bound term **subculture** (Moberg 2008: 82-85). Because this study will be looking at online communication as a form of building Christian metal identity, I find **scene** a useful term – it does not require any concrete (or real-life) practices or communication, since the term is not connected to any geographical location but can be situated online and be global. The partakers on the discussion forum analysed are likely from different parts of the world, and thus the forum is not local to any one place on earth.

McCulloch (2019: 157) points out that one of the most central things missing from a discussion online – that is, discussion done mainly in written format – is the body. In face-to-face discussion people use their bodies to convey messages as well, for example in the form of gestures or facial expressions. In written text these elements are not in use, but there are some features that aim to replace the missing body in online discussion. These are called multimodal elements, and the situations in which they are used are "communicative situations […] which rely upon combinations of different 'forms' of communication" (Bateman et al. 2017: 7). In these situations, images and videos might be combined with written language, for example.

To include emotions or add meanings, typographical elements are used, too. These elements include, for instance, using capital letters or punctuation to deliver a tone or a feeling (McCulloch 2019). One of the most used and probably most effective means of expressing emotions and gestures in written text, however, must be emojis. There is a wide variety of these graphic symbols, ranging from emojis indicating a set emotion (e.g., 😊) to an object (e.g., ⚽). They function as a way of adding physical space and gestures into written communication (McCulloch 2019: 192-193). Even though multimodal elements are used, the written forms of discourse still play a key role in communication. On Reddit, links and images are common, but a lot of the interaction still takes place in written text.

3. RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTION

In connecting Christianity with metal music that is often characterised by elements that do not take religiosity seriously, Christian metal is in an interesting position – in a crossfire between religious and non-religious values. I conducted a discourse analysis on a subreddit for Christian metal fans, with the aim of answering the following question: **How do the fans of Christian metal build their identity on the subreddit r/christianmetal?**

My main inspiration was the work of Jousmäki (2015). Although my study has a very similar starting point, it differs due to its viewpoint; whereas Jousmäki describes the ways the bands themselves construct their identity, my interests lie in the fans and their linguistic practices.

4. DATA AND METHODS

4.1.   Data

The data for this study consisted of 16 discussion threads on the subreddit r/christianmetal. The data mainly included text, but some links and images were also embedded in it. Multimodality is strongly present in most of the social media, and thus it is important to consider in analysing discussions on Reddit as well. These elements can complement the text with meanings that would not come up in the written language and are thus important to study alongside written text.

4.2. Data collection

The initial idea was to concentrate on unblack metal, that is Christian black metal, but since the discussions on the available forums dedicated to that genre were not that active, I chose to look at Christian metal more generally. The subreddit r/christianmetal was relatively active, so it was easy to find discussions for analysis from it, and therefore I chose it to be the source of my data. There are 2,900 members, and the subreddit has been in use since 2010 (https://www.reddit.com/r/christianmetal/, retrieved 20.4.2022). I am aware of the possibility of the fans being more active elsewhere, but since there were nearly 3,000 members and some posts almost daily, I came to the conclusion that the site was suitable for my purposes.

I chose a time-period from which to take the discussion threads from and studied all the discussions from that period. This way I made sure that my agenda would not affect the discussions chosen, but the data would represent the discussions more neutrally. The topics ranged from discussion on the best Christian death metal bands to discussing whether it is acceptable for a Christian to listen to certain secular metal bands, for example. Once the discussion threads were chosen, they were saved as screenshots on my computer. Links to the discussions were also saved to make sure that the data would not be lost.

Due to research ethics, I chose not to state the time-period that I studied. The data is not attached, or directly quoted in this thesis either. Because Reddit is freely available to anyone online, directly quoting the data or attaching it to the appendixes would result in the reader being able to find the discussions in question. My aim is thus to protect the online identities of the people involved in the discussions studied.

4.3. Method of analysis

The method of analysis in this study was discourse analysis. The term **discourse** means "actual instances of communicative action in the medium of language" (Johnstone 2018: 22), and its analysis includes looking at it with a focus on structure and function (ibid: 24). It is a broad term that can refer to both theory and method used in several different disciplines (ibid.) – in this study it is used as a method of analysis. Discourse analysis is suitable for my study, since it offers a broad approach to language use, and considers language and reality

intertwined. Therefore, studying language use with a discourse analytical approach helps to connect it with wider phenomena, in this study identity.

The discussion threads were read closely and analysed as thoroughly as possible. This included looking at contents, functions, and meaning, for instance, as well as looking for topics that are not directly discussed but still present in the language use. Multimodal elements were considered, too, by looking at other forms of communication than written language, for instance images and emojis.

My aim was to go into the data without setting strong expectations as to what the results might be. By doing this I tried to stay objective and not look for cues connected to only the expectations I had, which might easily happen. For this kind of qualitative analysis, an open mind is required to obtain as wide a variety of information as possible.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Next, I will move onto presenting the findings from my close readings of the discussions. The structure of this chapter is the following: first, I present the contents of the posts and what was most prominent alongside with a short look into **upvotes** and what they indicate about the importance of the topics covered; then, I look into the concept of group identity; and lastly, I consider religion and its role in the language use in the subreddit.

5.1. From promotion to questions – what do the discussions cover?

After familiarizing myself with the threads chosen for analysis, I decided to create categories for the different posts. This would help in understanding which topics are clearly most common, and which of them are mentioned only occasionally. To my surprise, all the threads fell easily into the following three categories: promo-posts, Q&A-posts, and link-posts. I will now present each of these categories and discuss how many of the 16 posts studied represented each of them.

Promo-posts consisted of posts the aim of which was to promote a band, either the writer's own or just any band they thought was good and worth promoting to others as well. These posts were the ones that were the most prominent in the subreddit: out of the 16 discussion threads studied, six fell into this category. It could, therefore, be argued that for the fans the

main thing uniting them – and also the main factor about their identity as Christian metal fans – is the shared interest in music and knowledge of different bands within the genre. This is something to be expected due to the nature of the social media in question, Reddit; as pointed out earlier, its main goal is to bring together people with similar interests.

Q&A-posts (question and answer), consisted of threads that ask other members something, as the name suggests. The topics of these questions differed somewhat, but most of them were about music: suggestions or discussion on whether it is fine to listen to certain bands as a Christian. Music clearly dominated the themes on the Q&A-posts, similarly to the promo-posts. Only one of the five Q&A-posts clearly differed from this theme; it asked other members about their nationality. There was no interaction with this post whatsoever, so the nationality must not be of great importance to the fans, at least on this particular subreddit. However, this might be the case otherwise as well – as Moberg (2008) has found, the Christian metal music scene is transnational. Thus, within this kind of a global community, it might not be necessary to state where one is from.

The posts in the final category, link-posts, led onto other websites. The links in this subreddit, under the time-period studied, led mostly to music-related videos. There were five of these types of posts, the same number as there were Q&A-posts. These posts were similar with the promo-posts, since they point out interesting content for others to look into, sometimes including bands. The categorization was done with careful consideration, but these overlapping themes might mean that some posts could also be placed in another category.

Although the content mostly consists of written language, visual elements also play their role in the threads. Most of the visual features come from the link previews, but there are also some images attached to the posts on the subreddit. The colour-scheme includes dark and red colours, and the images are similar to secular metal bands – they portray hell and evil, for example. This finding is in line with Jousmäki's (2015: 23) work on Christian metal bands and their identity construction. Religiosity does not show in the images. As for emoji as a part of online communication's visuality, on this subreddit they seem to have a small role. The feelings are expressed through words, exclamation marks and other typographical elements, instead of utilising the resource of emoji.

As in many other social media platforms, Reddit has a possibility to **like** a post – in this context, it is called an **upvote**. Since upvotes are a part of the communication on the site that depict positive emotions of a post, I thought it would be reasonable to shortly study their role, too. On this subreddit, the promo-posts presented earlier were clearly the ones with most upvotes. These posts were also part of the biggest category out of the three created, although just by one more post than the other categories. It is still likely that sharing content they have enjoyed, along with interacting with the suggestions from others, is an important part of being a fan of Christian metal – at least in this specific context. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the link-posts were mainly about sharing enjoyable content with others, too, making this kind of content cover 11 out of the 16 posts.

In conclusion, the topics include promotion of bands and videos alongside with discussion openers in the form of questions. These seem to fit well into the social media platform's purpose. At this point I would argue that the main thing binding the fans together – at least in this context – is the shared interest in music instead of religion. Faith is not explicitly stated although it is present. I will present my findings related to religion and its presence on the subreddit in subsection 5.3.

5.2.   The lack of community markers

In the discussions there were almost no linguistic community markers to support the group identity. These community markers might include pronouns to distinguish the community as a separate one, or specific vocabulary, for instance. Based on the readings I had done before, I knew that for both Christians and metal fans the sense of community was important (Bush and Due 2015; Kahn-Harris 2002), and thus it was surprising to find out that the language did not include many elements the function of which was to create a sense of community. Additionally, based on the description of the goals of Reddit – communities for everyone – I suspected that there would be many different strategies for creating a sense of community with the other users of the same subreddits.

The clearest sign of the lack of community markers is the fact that the pronouns used mainly include **I** and **my** – people use these when telling others about the things they have come across, or the bands they really enjoy, as well as react to others sharing their favourites. The pronouns that would indicate a sense of togetherness or community, **we** and **us**, are present

only in some instances. In comparison to the individualistic **I/my**, these are used clearly less. Reddit is an American platform, so it could be the case that its users come from countries that are individualistic, meaning that the community is not number one priority, but rather the individual's own goals and ideas are in the forefront.

The site is also based on shared interests, so it might also be the case that the people on it feel no need to create a community – it already exists since all the participants are part of the Christian metal fandom, a transnational phenomenon (Moberg 2008). But it is important to stay aware of the fact that I am not myself familiar with many different subreddits. It might thus be that this is just one form of subreddits. This is quite likely because there are so many different subreddits and thus they also include different people with different goals. Here the goal is clearly to create a platform for sharing bands and other music-related content, and to maybe then craft a sense of community based on that.

5.3.   Religious or non-religious subreddit?

After studying the contents more generally, I went into the data with the goal of understanding religion's role in the discussions. This is important because the aim of this thesis is to see which elements are central in the identity of a fan of Christian metal music. Since the music has already come up in the analysis of contents earlier in this chapter, I wanted to dedicate this part solely to religion, that has clearly been less dominant on the subreddit. These two elements – religion and metal music – together make up the genre in question, so it is important to study both of them.

As stated, Christianity or religiosity was much less present in the discussions than music. In the discussions themselves it was present in one of the sixteen studied in an explicit manner. This discussion was about the morality of two bands, asking whether it is acceptable to listen to them as a Christian. The people answering to this query clearly stated that the bands in question are not evil or Satanic. There was also a participant instructing the person to study the bands' lyrics and image otherwise to find out whether they are good for a Christian to listen to. In other words, they were supportive and wanted to help the person best they could.

Other than this one thread, the only instances in which religion was present was in the names of genres and bands, or their songs. Examples of this could be **Christian metal**, naturally, or

Crucified, a band name possibly referring to Christ's crucifixion. Although these are the instances in which the genre's connection to religion is most clearly present, it must be pointed out that it does not necessarily make them much different from secular metal bands. As Moberg (2017) points out, religious themes are a central part of any metal music genre. They have been utilised to a great extent and continue to be in this position. The topics used in both secular and Christian metal – in the names of bands and songs – include the darker sides of religion, for example, death, crucifixion, and evil. These themes easily fit the metal music's thematic category of chaos by Weinstein (2000). The lyrics of Christian metal do differ from this, but the band names **Crucified** or **A Hill to Die Upon** do not really tell an outsider whether a band is a representative of secular or Christian metal – rather, without further exploration, they could be both.

The finding that, in the discussions, religion is mainly present in the names of the bands, their songs, and genres more generally, supports the work of Jousmäki (2015). According to them, the main issue that differentiates Christian metal from secular metal is its lyrics that clearly speak of the gospel of Christianity. Thus, it is understandable that in a discussion forum that does not focus on the lyrics, there are very few connections to Christianity.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the fans of Christian metal seem to construct their identity mainly through shared interest in the music genre instead of based on faith. It is important to share interesting bands with the others, and to react to others' suggestions. Because religion was not clearly present in the discussions, it might even be the case that some of the participants are not Christians, but rather just interested in the music. It seems like the community is not created surrounding Christ, as Bush and Due (2015) suggest for Christian identity, but rather surrounding the bands and the genre. Music seems to be more central than faith.

The contents of the posts were the main element through which the fans seemed to be constructing their identity. This finding was not something I was expecting, since I believed that in an online community, like a subreddit, there must be some signs of community in the language itself, for example in the pronouns, or a specific vocabulary used. However, I could not find many indicators of language functioning as a tool of identity construction, and thus came to the conclusion that the fans base their group identity on the shared interest in the

music genre. The discussion itself was highly individualistic, emphasizing one's own experience and ideas instead of those of the community.

There were several weaknesses to my study, that I recognize well. Firstly, the study was a small-scale one, as only 16 threads from one forum were studied. The forum is also chosen based on my consideration only, and thus it might not be the place in which the fans are the most active. One of the weaknesses of this study is also the fact that I am unable to use quotes from my data – that would have made it much easier to present my findings and to justify my conclusions. Had I asked permission from everyone involved, it would have taken much time and I would not have been able to complete my thesis in the given time-period.

This study can still function as an important step towards the understanding of Christian metal's importance to its fans. Christian metal is not always accepted straight-away amongst either Christians or the secular metal scene (Moberg 2008: 86, 88). By studying the ways in which the fans of Christian metal construct their identity, I aim at providing an insight into what it is like to be a fan, and how the music scene is a part of their identity, thus maybe making it more understandable for those doubting it. The community is important for the fans as any (music) community is for people, so it is important to understand it as a normal phenomenon, even with its initially contradictory values.

Since I had limited time as well as other resources for conducting this study, there is much that still would need a more in-depth look. Even taking a longer period from which to pick the data would help in offering more detailed information about the topic. What I suppose would be reasonable to do in the future, would be to study several different platforms and to do a cross-comparison of those. In order to be able to choose the platforms that are really used among the fans to a great extent, it might be helpful to combine the discourse analysis with a short questionnaire about the platforms that the fans like to use the most. I would not include other questions to keep the study on the chosen field, but that might also be worth considering.

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