THE SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN METAL AND HARDCORE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

Since the 1980s, metal and hardcore have enjoyed a relationship that has been at times fruitful, at others fragmentary. Metal academia has often underplayed this close relationship, but the resurgence of metalcore alongside new derivatives during the twenty-first century demands academic re-evaluation. This paper begins to consider the symbiosis of metal and hardcore, exploring the notional divide between the genres and how this divide has been used as a creative apparatus for those who support and those who oppose it.

Introduction

Metal and hardcore have, for a long time, been connected through a relationship that can be described as symbiotic. By this, I mean that both genres have found sustenance, support, and inspiration in one another. As with any form of symbiosis, it is difficult, if not impossible, to disconnect one organism from the other, though this is rarely reflected in academic discourse on metal (a theme to which I return). Another facet of symbiotic relationships is inherent conflict (parasitism) and cooperation (mutualism) (Martin and Schwab, 2013). Each organism enters into a relationship with the other in order to survive, to sustain itself; however, since one relies on the other, there must be (at least) a modicum of cooperation to achieve individual goals (Douglas, 2010). I do not intend to construct genres as having conscious minds; rather, like many organisms that enter into and evolve from symbiotic relationships, genres come to be intertwined almost accidentally, over time, and in stages.

In this paper I explore the longstanding relationship between metal and hardcore, noting (some of the) ways in which the two genres have influenced one another. The interactions of metal and hardcore may be characterised as symbiotic insomuch as the development(s) of each genre has, in some way, been contingent upon the other. As I will explain, this interdependence cannot be portrayed simply as metal bands playing hardcore riffs or hardcore fans wearing metal band merchandise. Rather, this literal, explicit, and overt form of confluence is underpinned by a notional, theoretical, and sometimes covert symbiosis between the two genres that promotes and sustains their very existence as distinct but not separate forms. Through the course of this paper, I will show how this symbiosis functions to promote *both* division and unity, to continually redraw the boundaries of each genre resulting in instances of hybridity and 'purity', and how it is this symbiotic relationship that supports the continued development of both genres. Taken from an on-going research project into issues of genre and meaning in twenty-first century metal and hardcore, the paper proposes symbiosis as a means to account for the pluralism emergent from fragmentation (Roccor, 2000).

Central to my thesis, then, is a conception of genre as more than simple categories into which bands are 'placed' by commentators, or banners under which bands position themselves (Holt, 2003). Similarly, the term 'genre' should not be taken to denote purely sonic phenomena, instead referring to a variety of physical and digital artefacts (sonic and visual media, iconography, written discourse, etc.) (Kahn-Harris, 2007) and less tangible perceptions (preferences, opinions, likes, etc.), which are continually being created, maintained, challenged, and transformed. As Waksman observes, '[a]lthough genres are often popularly understood in terms of their *musical* difference from each other, formal musical elements are but a part of genre's overall significance' (2009, p. 8; emphasis in original). These seemingly disparate aspects of genre are brought together by the analysis (academic or otherwise) performed by genre participants (fans, artists, producers, record label execs, journalists, promoters, etc.) that combines sometimes previously discrete elements to form new conceptions of a given (sub)genre and, occasionally, 'new' (sub)genres. It seems clear, therefore, that genres are in a state of perpetual flux; a contention that band *x* are a part of genre *y* is neither fixed nor definite, rather, it is *contingent* upon the often vague criteria against which such a judgement is made, and must be understood as containing properties of value. More so than as fluid (Middleton, 2000) or as discourse (Walser, 1993), conceptions of genre in flux afford and foreground the ever-changing parameters of genre that are observed over time; indeed, it is the malleability of generic parameters that affords their continued existence by allowing participants to *contest* elements of genre.

Metal and hardcore studies

For the most part, metal studies' interaction with hardcore has been fleeting and peripheral, while frequent mentions of hardcore are more prevalent in non-academic texts. Andy R. Brown's survey of metal studies literature (2011) includes only two references to hardcore, both concerning the apparent division between mainstream and underground strains of metal.

The journalistic histories of metal offered by Christe (2003) and Wiederhorn and Turman (2013) give some space to discussions of hardcore, and position the genre as significant within the development of metal. That said, Christe's discussion of hardcore and crossover is highly historicised, pertaining mainly to the mid-to-late 1980s, and is positioned in direct relation to metal, a stepping-stone on metal's journey. Wiederhorn and Turman provide a more in-depth discussion of hardcore/crossover and metalcore, perhaps reflecting developments surrounding metal in the decade between the two books' releases. These histories, usually compiled from interviews with band members, record label executives, producers, and concert promoters, often follow a similar arboreal model of metal 'evolution', put forward by filmmaker Sam Dunn. First constructed in his feature-length *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey* (2005), explored further in his series *Metal Evolution* (2011), Dunn's 'Heavy Metal Family Tree' includes a section on hardcore, but, once again, it is discussed only in its capacity as metal's sidekick.

Punk and hardcore lack the formal academic cohesion of metal studies, but enjoy a volume of non-academic literature that is perhaps more developed than that of metal. Steven Blush's (2010) comprehensive study into American hardcore during the 1980s rarely concerns itself with metal; like the histories of metal, Blush only mentions the other when it relates directly to the self. One of the few academic monographs pertaining to hardcore is Ross Haenfler's

(2006) auto-ethnography of the straight edge movement. Espousing scene-based analysis, Haenfler mentions metal, crossover, and metalcore as they initially encroached upon and subsequently expanded the scope of straight edge. Matsue (2009) utilises a similar approach in her ethnographic study of underground hardcore in Tokyo, noting the significance of active participation in the production and performance of a scene distinct from 'mainstream' culture.

A recent edited volume by Abbey and Helb (2014) is one of very few texts to place discussion of hardcore alongside that of metal, joined here as a result of their shared proclivity for aggression. By including chapters on metal lyrics and on hardcore attitudes, the book reflects a larger convergence over the course of the twenty-first century that can also be evidenced in online blogs, websites, and magazines. Websites like Metal Sucks (www.metalsucks.net), Metal Injection (www.metalinjection.net), and Lambgoat (www.lambgoat.com), to name only a few, frequently post about metal and hardcore bands, as well as publishing op-ed pieces on the interaction(s) of those genres. Blogs like Stuff You Will Hate (www.stuffyouwillhate.com) and Heavy Blog is Heavy (www.heavyblogisheavy.com) follow a similar model. Steve Waksman (2009), who explicates the relationship(s) between metal and punk, offers a significant academic text on metal and hardcore. His broader focus of metal and punk interaction, primarily during the 1970s and '80s, highlights instances where metal and punk have informed and supported one another. In part, then, the present paper is the beginning of an attempt to update aspects of his research to include the 1990s and twenty-first century, but also to narrow the focus to the complex relationship between metal and hardcore. Whereas Waksman considers hardcore as an offshoot of punk, I conceptualise hardcore as a standalone genre with explicit links to, but not tethered by, punk.

Exploring symbiosis

Though '[o]ften considered in oppositional terms, metal and punk have crossed into one another as often as they have been starkly differentiated' (p. 7), indeed, '[e]arly metal and early punk were, to no small degree, convergent rather than divergent occurrences' (Waksman, 2009, p. 67). Waksman's conception of a 'metal/punk continuum' neatly encapsulates the nature of the 'particularly charged, at times even intimate sort of relationship that has informed the two genres in terms of sound, image, and discourse' (2009, p. 7), but that connection is nevertheless of a different order to that between metal and hardcore. While metal and punk may be positioned in relation to one other on a fluctuating spectrum, the bond between metal and hardcore has become such that one is very difficult to separate from the other (particularly concerning Anglo-American versions of the genres). In other words, the relationship between metal and hardcore is *symbiotic*.

After the initial wave(s) of punk during the late 1970s, hardcore came to the fore as a new, more aggressive offshoot of punk, '1976-80 were the Punk and New Wave years – Hardcore happened 1980-86. If Punk peaked in 1977, then Hardcore's glory days were 1981-82' (Blush, 2010, p. 15). Much like metal before it, what began as a subgenre eventually expanded to become a genre unto itself, albeit heavily indebted to punk: 'Hardcore is a broad genre but began generally as a faster version of punk. During the 1990s the two scenes became increasingly distinct, with their own styles and fashions' (Haenfler, 2006, p. 9). The disagreement regarding hardcore's temporal existence evidenced in the above quotes by Blush and Haenfler serves to indicate how generic boun-

daries surrounding hardcore have changed over time. Of particular interest here is Blush's characterisation of hardcore as having a lifespan of only six years, suggesting that, at the very least, hardcore fell out of favour around 1986 or, more pertinently, that hardcore changed in some way around that date.

Crossover

During the mid-1980s, some hardcore and metal fans began recognising links between their favoured genres, beginning with the 'outsider' status of the music and its followers, but increasingly in other areas as well. The term 'crossover' was coined to describe the multifaceted mixing of hardcore and metal, though the term later became synonymous with hardcore and, perhaps to a lesser extent, thrash metal. While there were precedents in the compositional similarities and mutual borrowing between metal and punk since the 1970s (Waksman, 2004b, 2009), the depth and breadth of exchange between metal and hardcore took the concept a step further. The melding of compositional, visual, performative, discursive, and ideological elements of metal and hardcore during the mid-to-late 1980s were so extensive as to turn crossover into a (sub)genre of its own. Rather than hardcore guitarists playing metal riffs or metal vocalists singing hardcore lyrics, the notion of crossover as its own entity allowed for a wide variety of interplay between previously defined metal and hardcore concepts. Along with bands, fans of metal and hardcore mixed freely, copying one another's attire (worn iconography), concert etiquette and practices, and attitude. Notions of DIY and independence, initially espoused by punk but reified and central to hardcore, became more common in metal, while a semi-professionalism drawn from metal solidified the commercial viability of hardcore. Bands from each genre began touring with one another and sharing record labels (Hill, 2015).

For Blush and others, crossover signalled a shift away from traditional, 'pure' hardcore (an idea that I explore further below), but to those that conceptualised crossover as a (sub)genre unto itself, the combination of metal and hardcore was relatively short-lived and often favoured one side over the other. Christe notes that some hardcore bands 'began playing more intense hardcore that sounded like a stripped-down amateur take on speed metal' (2003, p. 173), while Waksman asserts that 'crossover came briefly to function as something like a subgenre unto itself, akin to the newly established categories of speed and thrash metal but wearing its punk trappings more on the surface' (2009, p. 239), and Wiederhorn and Turman contend that once 'the foundation for crossover was established, … bands from around the country began constructing their own blends of metallic hardcore' (2013, p. 267). Clearly, then, there remains some disagreement over which 'side' a crossover band was from, even as those sides were (supposedly) being eroded. As ever, depending upon whom you believe, crossover 'had largely run its course by the end of the 1980s' (Waksman, 2009, p. 240) or '[b]y 1992, crossover had hit a critical mass' (Wiederhorn and Turman, 2013, p. 295) and '[b]y 1995, crossover had run its course' (p. 304).

While those particularly loyal to one genre may have dismissed what they saw as the dilution of their preferred genre, the mixing of metal and hardcore benefited both in various ways. After the first hardcore bands had seemingly exhausted the formula of fast-paced, simplified punk, 'metal rejuvenated the urgency of the hardcore punk scene at a crucial hour' (Christe, 2003, p. 179) by offering a new vocabulary for high-tempo playing, exemplified by thrash me-

tal. In turn, when 'metal encountered punk music, fashion, politics, and ethics, a broader sense of identity developed. ... The resulting underground pride influenced the development of metal in the next decade' (p. 180), having a significant influence on later iterations of 'underground' genres like death metal and grindcore.

Metalcore

Related to conceptions of crossover, but gaining currency slightly later during the 1980s, and still a popular genre moniker today, 'metalcore' likely marks a simultaneous point of departure and confluence. Whereas crossover was perceived as hardcore mixing with metal, or vice versa, metalcore's very foundation is an assemblage of metal and hardcore (and other genres) that does not necessarily pride one over the other. Though fans of hardcore may prefer the 'more hardcore' metalcore bands, any value judgements seem to come from outside metalcore, not from within. 'In the late 1980s the territories [of metal and hardcore] were merging to become one and the same' (Christe, 2003, p. 180), to such an extent that it became difficult to discern one from the other. Wiederhorn and Turman (2013) construct a clear lineage between crossover and metalcore, the former given a lifespan ending in 1992, with the latter reportedly beginning that same year. Something of a spiritual successor to crossover, 'it's too simple to describe metalcore as a mere hybrid of metal and hardcore' (Wiederhorn and Turman, 2013, p. 557), since metalcore's primary aesthetic, as has become clear during the twenty-first century, is one of hybridity and acceptance of disparate influences. Crossover enacted a direct influence upon metalcore by removing some of the boundaries between metal and hardcore, undermining the power of the 'other' while keeping intact elements of composition, performance, production, and iconography. These aspects of metal and hardcore survived the crossover years because they were held together by an ideology that fused parts of hardcore's ethos and metal's attitude to create a notion of aggressive music without overt stylistic boundaries that was continued by metalcore.

Crossover established both the figurative and literal space in which metalcore could exist. Instead of striving to be either metal or hardcore, metalcore bands could be both and neither. Twenty-first century metalcore bands in particular have shown a penchant for leaning one way or the other, while remaining intrinsically linked to the notion of hybridity. The constructive nature of metal and hardcore's symbiosis is evidenced by the continued popularity of '-core' genres, such as deathcore and mathcore. It is unsurprising to note that deathcore and mathcore bands frequently share the stage with metalcore acts.

The notional metal/hardcore divide

A notional divide between metal and hardcore has been a source of creativity for numerous musicians, producers, promoters, record label execs, and journalists related to both genres since the early 1980s. Whether or not such a divide exists literally, the perception of a division between metal and hardcore has provided a creative impulse for many. Indeed, the notion's appeal is likely as a result of the tension between those that support a separation between metal and hardcore, and those that seek to combine the genres. In this respect, a crucial aspect of metal and hardcore's symbiotic relationship is the tension inherent in such a relationship; that is, metal and hardcore rely upon one another for continued influence and inspiration, while also fighting for their independence to ensure their individual survival. Constructions of a divide

between metal and hardcore can therefore be understood in two ways: a divide to be overcome, and a divide to be maintained.

Constructed to be overcome

As I have explored, the subgenres of crossover and, later, full-fledged genre of metalcore were based upon surmounting a supposed divide between the genres of metal and hardcore. Despite the prior mixing of early heavy metal and punk, some metal and hardcore bands (and fans) during the 1980s perceived something of a separation between their musical cultures. From this perspective, those participants who attempted to mix metal and hardcore knowingly put themselves at risk of being chastised by their community. However, the narrative of opposition is constructed precisely in order to portray those participants as struggling against prevalent, possibly 'sacrosanct' generic norms. Founding member of New York crossover band Carnivore, and later founder and vocalist of Type O Negative, the late Peter Steele contends that '[t]here was almost no crossover [between genres]. ... We had trouble, because metal kids saw Carnivore as outdated and image-heavy, and the hardcore kids didn't accept us because we had long hair' (Christe, 2003, p. 179). In spite of this apparent resistance, Steele and his bandmates valiantly continued their mission to fuse aspects of metal and hardcore. Carnivore's inspiration to play crossover music, then, was predicated on a perception of some metal/hardcore divide that needed to be overcome.

If one conceptualises metalcore, a de facto amalgam of metal and hardcore, as the spiritual successor to crossover, a conscious attempt to 'cross' metal and hardcore boundaries, then surely the work of bands like Carnivore and Stormtroopers of Death successfully altered the parameters of genre relationships. Previously, a band was either metal or hardcore, but from the early nineties onwards, a band could be both. While it is accurate to assert that crossover changed the boundaries of metal and hardcore – each genre taking aspects from the other to call its own – the notional divide remained evident. Every Time I Die vocalist, Keith Buckley, suggests that '[t]he whole metalcore thing started [in the late eighties and early nineties] with bands like Earth Crisis, Deadguy, Converge, Coalesce, and Cave In' (Wiederhorn and Turman, 2013, p. 557; square brackets in original), but Ross Haenfler disagrees, contending that 'Victory Records artists Strife (CA), Earth Crisis (NY), and Snap Case (NY) paved the way for a more metal-influenced hardcore in the 1990s' (2006, p. 16). The construction of Earth Crisis as metalcore on the one hand and hardcore on the other highlights the fluidity of genre boundaries, but Haenfler is nevertheless clearly of the opinion that Earth Crisis are a hardcore band, *not* a metal band.

Brian Fair (vocalist of Shadows Fall) and Mike D'Antonio (bassist of Killswitch Engage) employ similar rhetoric on Killswitch Engage's *(Set This) World Ablaze* DVD (2005). Discussing Overcast, a band they both played in during the 1990s, Fair and D'Antonio mention the struggles of being accepted by audiences when combining elements of metal and hardcore, 'There was a mentality of "keep your metal out of my hardcore", and it was like "keep your chocolate out of my peanut butter"' (Fair), 'That was sorta how we got our sound, just kinda pushing the envelope' (D'Antonio). Again, the supposed tension between metal and hardcore is used as a key point within a narrative of initial resistance being overcome by determination and skill. The geographical location of Overcast is also a significant factor in this discussion: hailing from western Massachusetts, they may not have been exposed to the developing metalcore sound

in New York, though this does not account for another comment on the DVD from God Forbid (NJ) guitarist Doc Coyle, 'Overcast were, like, kinda considered to be the original metalcore band'.

The decentralised and localised nature of early hardcore had integrated with metal first during the 1980s (Waksman, 2009), but the network of distinct yet connected scenes (Haenfler, 2006) that afforded these differing perspectives on metal and hardcore continued throughout the following decade. While the notion of metalcore may have crystallised on the US east coast, by the end of the 1990s, bands on the west coast were finding new resistance to their continued hybridisation. Formed in Orange County, California in 1998, Atreyu 'fought relentlessly to win over metalcore fans with vocals that were alternately acerbic and syrupy, and guitars that combined elements of thrash, post-hardcore, and eighties metal' (Wiederhorn and Turman, 2013, p. 594). Just as earlier metalcore bands had found difficulty in convincing fans of metal or hardcore that they could be fans of both, Atreyu encountered trouble when combining the 'wrong' types of metal and hardcore. Whereas crossover had stuck quite rigidly to merging thrash metal and hardcore punk, the ostensible metalcore ethos had been to unite metal and hardcore, but, it would seem, only certain strains of metal and hardcore were acceptable. Here, then, the metal/hardcore divide returns *from within.*

According to Christe, metal has 'kept itself vital by accepting new influences' (2003, p. 335), but that acceptance is rarely all encompassing. Rather, there is a cycle of initial resistance, followed by integration and, later, acceptance, finally crystallising into a recognisable form into which some may attempt to bring new influence(s). Characterising the burgeoning metalcore genre during the early 2000s as in opposition to more commercially viable metal styles like nü metal and (in his estimation) hardcore punk styles like pop punk, Christe notes that '[t]his is a mirror reflection of when heavy metal first turned to hardcore influences in the mid-1980s' (2003, p. 373), reinforcing the notion that when parts of metal become too popular, some participants turn to 'the underground' for inspiration.

Constructed to be maintained

Despite the best efforts of some crossover and metalcore bands (and related genres like grindcore), the narrative of differentiation and tension between metal and hardcore remains prevalent. While those in metalcore continue this narrative in order to claim subcultural capital (Thornton, 1995), positioning themselves as fighting to bridge the metal/hardcore divide, some bands in hardcore and in metal seek to reinforce the divide, promoting themselves as fighting *against* a melding of the genres. This ideology is arguably most overt within hardcore bands, especially those emerging after crossover and metalcore. The resistance to non-hardcore styles is evidenced in everything from composition (avoiding breakdowns in favour of beatdowns, exclusion of overly virtuosic solos), to performance practices (stage-diving rather than walls of death, smaller venues), and merchandise design (simple logos sometimes accompanied by a lyric excerpt).

The significance of hardcore lyrics and 'the message' that they are commonly understood to communicate is also critical to those seeking to maintain a division between metal and hardcore (or between hardcore and everything else). Unlike metal vocalists who may utilise a range of clean and distorted vocal styles – singing, screaming, growling, roaring, etc. – hardcore vocalists frequently employ a vocal style closer to a shout or yell, sometimes intercut with

exasperated speech (spoken word). Nominally, this different approach to vocalisation is based on the premise that hardcore lyrics must be easily understood by the audience in order to most efficiently communicate 'the message', but this style has also found a home in metalcore. Unlike older, more traditional versions of metal that used fantastical imagery and allegory, hardcore lyrics have long been concerned with the everyday, mundane lives of its participants. In isolation, these unwritten hardcore 'rules' may have become constraining rather than useable guidelines for creativity, but set in a narrative of constant (mis)appropriation by metal bands and fans, these hardcore principles are perceived as something worth defending. Crossover bands in the mid-to-late 1980s made use of the direct imagery and articulation of hardcore lyrics and vocals, and by the turn of the twenty-first century, metalcore bands were fusing hardcore vocals with metal-inspired lyrics and/or metal lyrics vocalised with a hardcore shout (Hill, 2015).

In this respect, participants of crossover and, perhaps to a greater extent, metalcore are perceived to be 'diluting' hardcore values and appropriating them for their own (seemingly nefarious) ends. Against such a backdrop it is unsurprising to see hardcore band Madball make frequent explicit reference to hardcore in their lyrics, song and album titles: 'Hardcore Still Lives!' (*Demonstrating My Style* 1996), *N.Y.H.C. EP* (2004), and *Hardcore Lives* (2014). For over decades, Madball appear to have been compelled to reiterate their allegiance to hardcore, their status as a hardcore band, and, significantly, the continued existence of the hardcore genre. While one could interpret Madball's mentions of hardcore as self-aggrandising, it is equally valid to suggest that the band are doing so in order to reinforce a notion of hardcore as autonomous, as distinct from metal. In a less overt manner, Terror's 'Keepers of the Faith', from the 2010 album of the same name, positioned the band as defending the validity of hardcore while also serving as a rallying cry for their fans – not coincidently, merchandise bearing those words is very popular amongst Terror's fans. Like Madball, Terror seem to take a pro-active approach to promoting hardcore as its own genre, separate from metal. That these declarations of division have sustained for so long indicates that for those who feel 'proper' hardcore is being encroached by metal, the struggle is ongoing. Rather than mere paranoia, this notion is congruent with an understanding of (sub)genres as continually in flux, their boundaries being tested, permeated, and redrawn over time.

Even as hardcore bands restate the metal/hardcore divide in the twenty-first century, metal and hardcore continue to influence one another both implicitly and explicitly. Hardcore in the 2000s and 2010s is a far more professional affair than that of the 1980s; production values, touring schedules, management, and even technical musicianship are all of a higher quality in the new millennium. Festivals like Hellfest (US) and the New England Metal and Hardcore Festival, as well as festival-tours like Sounds of the Underground, were founded on the basis of mixing metal and hardcore bands. While these developments may have given hardcore access to a larger audience, some hardcore participants also see these as evidence of hardcore 'weakening' its tough, oppositional posture. Twenty-first century hardcore band Hellmouth's creative impetus 'comes from a disdain with the contrived notions of the music community … the group espouses a mentality of resistance and destruction to the contrived norm' (Abbey, 2014, p. 169), clearly positioning themselves against the mixing of metal and hardcore, supporting the notion of hardcore as autonomous.

A similar attitude can be found in resistance to more recent hybrid (sub)genre trends. In the mid-2000s the term 'deathcore' came to be used for a number of bands that were mixing elements of death metal with metalcore and hardcore. Although death metal had always been an influence on metalcore, especially European melodic death metal (Wiederhorn and Turman, 2013), deathcore artists frequently employed blastbeats, tremolo-picking riffs, growling, and death metal-inspired imagery. Bands like Whitechapel, Suicide Silence, and Job for a Cowboy gained an international following under the banner of death-core, but almost as soon as their popularity peaked voices from within death metal were accusing deathcore bands of stylistic misappropriation. Of course, deathcore did little to diminish the popularity of death metal – it may well have done the opposite – but the perception remained that death metal, like hardcore, revelled in its exclusivity, in its oppositional, underground status. For death metal and hardcore, brushes with 'mainstream' popularity threatened the sanctity of the genres and, therefore, had to be combatted by reaffirming and restating the 'core' elements of their genres.

Conclusion

The symbiosis between metal and hardcore serves as a primary example of the creative and transformative potential of genre. Perhaps more than casual listeners realise, genre directly affects everything from the way in which one listens to how one interprets what they hear. Metal/hardcore symbiosis is marked by instances of conflict and cooperation, spurring creative efforts from each side and ensuring continued vitality. The notional metal/hardcore divide serves as a creative apparatus for those who oppose it *and* those who support it. Crossover and metalcore bands recognise the potential for metal and hardcore to join forces, to make explicit links that have existed since the earliest days of both genres, to remove what in their mind is an imaginary barrier between one genre and another that seem to share so much. For those that count as primary the 'purity' of either hardcore or metal, the divide between them is to be reinforced. These participants place significance upon differences between the genres, strongly reaffirming them in the face of what they perceive as homogenisation. A principal focus of this paper is the notion that (musical) genres can be and are used *actively* and *creatively* by participants to shape their experience(s) of culture. To this end, genre is actively engaged in the construction of meaning for metal/hardcore participants and should be considered more thoroughly and positioned more centrally in reflexive studies of metal and hardcore.

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